

Wind-up Mice

ISSUE ONE: CARNIVAL



featuring :

AN INTERVIEW WITH ALASDAIR MACLEAN
OF THE CLIENTELE

AUTUMN 2021

Wind-up Mice

an art & literary journal that aims to capture whimsy in everyday life. the beauty within the mundane. we want the soft and sweet, the darkness, the light.

www.windupmicepress.com

Co-Founders & Editors-in-Chief
Ashley D. Escobar & Penelope Bernal

Poetry Editor
Megan Loreto

Prose Editor
Kia Heryadi

Visual Arts Editor
Tyler Lee

Book Designer
Jackson Mello

Copy Editor
Emerson Lee

Poetry Reader
Lauren Caldwell

Wind-up Mice acquires First Serial Rights to written works. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means without written permission of the publisher.

Copyright © 2021 *Wind-up Mice*

Submissions

For submission guidelines, please visit windupmicepress.com/submit. Please specify poetry (up to four poems), short prose (up to four pieces, 1000 words each), and/or art (up to three pieces.) Send all submissions to windupmicepress@gmail.com. Accepted contributors receive a complimentary copy.

Inquiries

For all other general inquiries, including interviews, contact us at windupmicepress@gmail.com.

Social Media

Instagram & Twitter: @windupmice

Donations

Donors who give \$10 or more receive a complimentary copy. To donate, go to www.buymeacoffee.com/windupmicepress or use Paypal @ windupmicepress for more generous contributions.

Patrons

Benjamin Anastas, Emily Moore, Horolsuren Dashdorj, Leslie Glick, Manuel Bernal, Maria Cabildo, Marta Pavone Vasquez, Monty Cime, Robert Escobar, Ruth Liebendorfer, Vicky Cabildo

Cover Image: Ashley D. Escobar

Contents

Letter from the Editors 4

Letters to the Editors 5

FUN & GAMES 6

Melissa Martini, “Blown Out Blush” 7

Jaqi Holland, “Sticky Kisses” 9

Eva Baudler, “Dying in the Baseball Field” 9

Shannon Barringer, “Carnival” 10

Nori Rose Hubert, “The mice are really running the circus” 11

Luke Valmadrid, “Which Funnel Cakes” 12

Mel Cort, “Skeeball Solicitation” 12

Ron Tobey, “Three Little Calves” 14

LJ Ireton, “The Oracle” 14

Ruth Liebendorfer, “Carne Vale” 15

Caroline McDonald, “Pink Moment” 17

Jaqueline Brown, “The Sky Says Hello” 17

REFRESHMENTS 18

Edward Obuszewski, “Not a Shopping List” & “Vienna” 19

McCaela Prentice, “Sunburn Sanctorum” 19

David Mitchell, “Pluto Pup” 20

Kaisa Saarinen, “Hothouse Camellia (for a girl of celluloid)” 20

Solan Rodriguez, “Cross Roads” 21

Thea Valmadrid, “Carnival” 26

Monique Quintana, “Cold Stars” & “You’re Not My Pumpkin” & “Toy Caves” 29

Kate Cameron Dooley, “Northern Californian Girlhood” & “Lunch Hour” 29

Jillian Fantin, “Portrait of the Artist as a Clown” 31

Jody Rae, “Counterclock Wise” 33

Interview with Alasdair MacLean 33

Rachel Cromwell, “Held at the Lights” 35

Jessica June Rowe, “The Wheel” 36

Nolita Jackens, “Letters o` Summer” 36

Monty Cime, “The La Ceiba Carnival” 40

MELANCHOLY CLOWN 41

Sofia Aguilar, “The Pier” 42

Damien Posterino, “Under Repair” 44

Lauren Thorn, “Depth Perception” 45

Josephine Gawtry, “Desi Girl Wants to be a Circus Freak” 46

Lucia Gallipoli, “The Difference Between Gravity and Intimacy Is That One Lasts Forever” 47

Alyssa Asaro, “Fun House” 47



Letter from the Editors

Dear Reader,

Wind-up Mice came to us in a fever dream during a trip to an oral surgeon's office for a wisdom tooth removal that got postponed and a fifteen-minute break from an unpaid internship. We wanted to intersect our affinities for notebook doodles and invigorating writing in a manner that feels beyond closed bedroom doors. The process of creating this magazine has been a carnival of its own right—the anticipation, the late nights reading your wondrous and colorful work, all the fun playlists we shared with you. Thank you for your patience.

Schoolyard carnivals and county fairs are an integral part of our childhoods. Inspired by The Clientele's "Carnival on 7th Street," *Carnival* relishes not only the fun and games found at carnivals but the undercurrents. The shadows that come to play when day turns into night. "If a shadow falls across the moon / Anybody could be you." We even have an interview to share with The Clientele's Alasdair MacLean. You're invited to the strangeness—cotton candy sheep, circus freaks, popped balloon darts. Warped vision and salty musk from the sultry heat. Decadence and fleetingness.

We're excited to share these pieces with you. You might ask yourself, *How much can I actually read about carnivals before I get sick of Ferris wheels and cotton candy?* Carnival is beyond the typical motifs—alongside the childhood memories, we also have the failures and regrets. We have everything from a short story involving a crying clown to an essay about the La Ceiba carnival in Honduras.

This magazine would have never been made without you, the reader. Thank you for picking up a copy. Welcome to the festivities!

Love always,
Ashley D. Escobar & Penelope Bernal



Letters to the Editors

Sugar? Yes, please!

Dear *Wind-up Mice* Editors,
Carnivals are not carnivals without cotton candy - fluffy and shocking pink. Carnivals are a reminder of the days when life was simpler and your only worry was choosing between a cotton candy and a deep-fried Oreo. They fill you up with the childlike wonder you felt looking up at the humongous roller coaster above you and the explosion of lights and colors enveloping you.

The best time to visit a carnival has to be just before the sun sets. Everything is showered with pure gold and feels magical. You can see the sky turning from bright orange to the softest pink from atop the Ferris wheel. On the horizon, you see the evening star daring to shine just as brightly as the lights on the carousel. The exhilarating music from the accordions makes your heart sing and the heady fragrance of fried dough satiates your soul. And in that moment, anything is possible.

Love always,
Sneha Diwan

Dear *Wind-up Mice* Editors,
carnivals were like recapturing bittersweetness of freshly squeezed lemonade in our summer palate / stuffed unicorn prizes & jelly bracelets packed with pink vanilla hues; nowhere to be found / a zephyr of silent screams escaping soft hearts / we resist the weightlessness sensation as a flock of passengers float through the roller coaster's three-sixty degree loop / mushroom shaped kernels swimming like buttery clouds across cinnamon nostrils / mellow yellows fade into scarlet skies / we could already taste the half-melted cotton candy lingering the warm breeze / the ferris wheel spinning & spinning like humidity twirling in sugar / scattered fireworks flowering mid-sky / trembling fears on a merry-go-round are now dark chocolate; coated with paradox

Love always,
Laiba Yousuf

Dear *Wind-up Mice* Editors,
Each year, as the carnival and the circus rolled around in a nearby town, merely twelve kilometers away, I'd be bug-eyed and ready to take it all in. I'd think of it as taking on the world. A little girl



enticed by big helium balloons and colorful plastic flowers. At that moment I was a princess, and this was my promised land. The neon signs, with big funky letters. Donuts, cotton candy, big blue bubble blowers, princess hats, and spider-man masks. The big red carousel placed on the outskirts of town, blaring early 2000s pop music, and the ticket seller seated on a plastic bucket smoking his cigarette past the filter. I saw magic in all of it, a promise of something more coming.

I remember wearing a grey dress with a big blue bow on the back, sitting on the concrete steps in front of a donut stand, waiting. My grandma held her purse tightly to her chest as she slowly unzipped her wallet to give the vendor money for my box of gooey chocolatey donuts. They smelled of stale powdered sugar and burnt chocolate. They were burning hot and I'd eat them immediately, making my tongue blister, and my mouth hurt. Sometimes my grandma would buy me a pink and blue slushy in a princess cup. She would put her pale hand on my back and push me through the crowds, while I slurped my sugary ice, waiting to be taken somewhere else. Maybe she'd take me to one of the "WIN BIG PRIZES" stands, where knocking over two plastic bottles would cost her too much money and a lot of patience. And I would swing my little twig arm, trying my hardest to make them fall over. And maybe I would win something small, grinning with my two front teeth missing, hugging the plush toy which smelled of latex and dust; my grandma shaking her head, telling me not to let it touch my face until we wash it.

And even as I'm writing this now, I can almost taste the donuts and smell the toys, as if no time has passed and I'm still waiting on the concrete steps, hoping my grandma will let me ride the big red carousel placed on the outskirts of town.

Love always,
Iva Sopta

FUN AND GAMES



Blown Out Blush

Melissa Martini

Antonietta gently lifted the teaspoon in front of her, holding it up as a mirror to survey her reflection. Her tight coral coils sprung against her fingers as she fondled them, separating the curls one by one.

“Must you do that at the table?” Madeleine waved her own teaspoon at Antonietta, the remnants of her tea dribbling off it in tiny droplets. One drop landed in her teacup, two on the rose tablecloth. She dabbed at the wet spot with her napkin, off-white and frilly. She placed the spoon down next to the saucer, sitting atop a thick paper doily, one of its lace edges inevitably slightly torn. Madeleine replaced the spoon with her teacup, fingering the porcelain handle and lifting it to her lips.

Antonietta’s tea set was white with details in various shades of pink—each flower was delicately drawn on, petals pink and positioned to wrap around the curve of each cup’s lip. Golden bands accented the cups, matching the teapot that sat in the middle of the table. The milk jug was shaped like a miniature cow, similar flowers painted on as a crown atop its head. A piece of pink string hung from its neck, a golden bell at the end. The sugar bowl was ordinary, not much different than the teacups.

“I’d have done it earlier,” Antonietta started, letting her teaspoon fall to the table, clanking when its neck tapped her saucer, “but you like to show up unannounced.”

Madeleine should have known better: they both had naturally curly hair, albeit Madeleine’s was a dark red, harsh in comparison to Antonietta’s exaggerated strawberry blonde. When they worked together, they spent hours in front of the mirror together, fluffing each other’s spirals with picks and drawing each other’s face paint.

Antonietta was the more artistic one out of the two, dipping her makeup brushes into different shades of red until she concocted what she called “Clown Candy,” a color not far off from a candy apple shell. She painted Madeleine’s cheeks Clown Candy Red in small circles, quarter sized and centered. When she applied Madeleine’s blue eyeshadow, she incorporated shimmering silver shades, her eyes popping beneath.

“I wouldn’t have to show up unannounced if you answered my calls,” Madeleine snapped, letting her tea sit in its saucer again with a rather rough landing. The tea was rooibos, Madeleine’s favorite, which Antonietta would claim she wasn’t aware of—a lucky guess. Antonietta’s cheeks were flushed magenta, the circles less precise and more blown out, blended until they faded into her natural skin color. Her eyeshadow was golden, less dramatic, but performance ready, nonetheless. “I see you’re still... clowning around?”

Antonietta hated the phrase, but they’d used it playfully in the past—ironically, to poke fun at themselves. “Of course. I’m not like you. If I love something, I stick with it.”

Madeleine hesitated. The words hit her like a tomato on stage - something that, despite her doubts, actually happened to her once: after a rather poorly delivered joke, Madeleine received little to no applause, a child in the front row fingering his lunchbox sandwich until he was able to pull out a thinly sliced piece of tomato. In one hefty fling, the tomato slice slapped Madeline in the face, sticking for a moment before falling to the ground. It smeared her Clown Candy Red cheeks.

She cried after the show, Antonietta consoling her backstage. She rested her head on Antonietta’s chest, her fingers running through Madeleine’s frizzy curls. She helped Madeleine remove her makeup, gently rubbing away the face paints and foundation with a

makeup wipe, dabbing her damp eyes with a tissue. It happens, she had said, to the best of us.

“It’s not that I didn’t love... it,” Madeleine hesitated, softly stirring her tea despite the sugar cube being long dissolved. “You know that.”

“... You just found something better.” Antonietta sighed and looked away, fiddling with her teaspoon. “Why are you here, Maddie?”

No one called her Maddie anymore, just like no one called Antonietta ‘Annie’ anymore. Together, they were Maddie and Annie, but when they separated, their nicknames lost their whimsy. “Because I miss you, Annie.”

“I missed you too,” Antonietta started, pausing to glance back at Madeleine. Her hair was straightened, tucked behind her ears. While her lips were painted pink, her cheeks were bronzed and contoured, any hint of a blush hidden. “But we’re in different worlds now.”

“We don’t have to be,” Madeleine insisted, reaching across the table to take Antonietta’s hand, but she quickly pulled away.

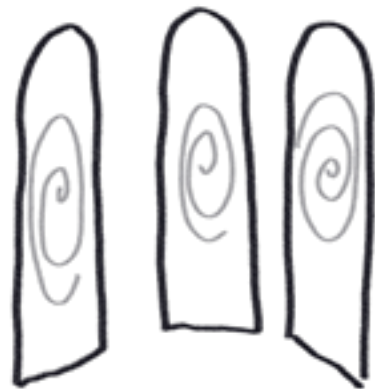
“We didn’t have to be,” Antonietta corrected, a pained look on her face. When Madeleine left, Antonietta watched her pack her bags, neatly folding her polka dot vests and frilly rainbow skirts. She wore red plaid overalls atop a tee shirt, the closest thing she could find to ‘normal’ clothes in her wardrobe, and the only outfit she deemed appropriate to leave in. Antonietta didn’t let Madeleine see her cry, because she’d want to console her, hold her, and that was her job, not Maddie’s—and so she let her go, watched her walk away.

They used to dip cookies in their tea, plain biscuits dusted with sugar, but as Madeleine and Antonietta stared at each other, their past dissolving in the air between them, they knew any cookies they brought to their mouths to bite would taste burnt, bitter, and beyond repair.

“I have a show tonight,” Antonietta said after a few moments of silence. “You’re welcome to watch.”

“I’ll be there,” Madeleine pursed her lips as if she had more to say, but no other words spilled from her mouth. Instead, she stood, cutting their tea party short.

She did attend Antonietta’s show that night, finding a seat in the front row, noting the bright red circles drawn on Antonietta’s cheeks, atop the blown-out magenta blush. Their eyes met as Antonietta juggled, but she didn’t drop any balls, and Madeleine threw no tomatoes—she simply watched: intently, patiently, and nostalgically.



Sticky Kisses

Jaqi Holland

The pair stands shoulder to shoulder, as short and squat
as the children flanking them in line for ice cream,
the carousel calliope playing
In the Shade of the Old Apple Tree and *Turkey in the Straw*.

Sixty summers ago, on a day not unlike today—blue palette sky,
clouds puffed like cotton candy bouffants on paper cones—
he, in apron dappled with peppermint and strawberry,
extended a cherry cone to a fair-haired girl in a flowered frock,
their eyes sparkling like sugar cubes.

His hair gray now, short and tight, hers a pouf, a swirl,
hands intertwined, skin supple as soft serve.
He picks chocolate, she licks a twist.
His drips faster than he can keep up.
Yet, he lets the chocolate trickle down his sugar cone,
wrist,
handkerchief—
worth it to hold her hand—
while she makes quick work of the sweet treat.
He looks at her with the same devotion
she’s bestowing on the twist,
which is to say
the pure pleasure of eating ice cream on a summer day
with the one person you wanted
then and now
to kiss your sticky face.

Dying in the Baseball Field

Eva Baudler

Frozen firecrackers against denim shorts, a red murmur
on the cusp of sin. We eat winter under a lilac sun,
when the sweetgum lizards come to greet your kneecaps.

Play make-believe in the clover, toothaches and sunshine
caught between bathroom violence and construction paper.
I forgive our happiness and the ribbon you left inside of me.

Goodbye looks like dirty dishes, burning holes into our calcium,
fracturing your good hand, consuming riverbeds. One day
we will destroy galaxies, parents—most importantly, ourselves.

Carnival

Shannon Barringer

Wait til dusk
 listen to the whistle of
 a steam calliope
 the melody leaps across the entryway
 it's a dizzying gallop
 as each note billows
 the tempo swells
 you think surely we've heard this tune before
 in dreams
 accompanied by the creak of tracks
 the undercurrent of
 screams
 We're enchanted by the swirling rides
 how the marquee lights begin to blur
 a country kaleidoscope
 charm of bulbs burning brighter than stars
 Let's buy a ticket to the Tilt-a-Whirl
 hold my hand on the Ferris wheel
 this is all I ever wanted
 kiss me if you dare
 it's a game of chance
 a ping pong ball thrown into a fishbowl
 But there is no carnival
 yellow tape blocks the entryway
 No frogs jump in Frogtown
 the fate of Miss Saddletown hangs in the balance
 there's no kissing booth
 no funhouse mirror to warp our image
 we can finally see ourselves clearly:
 two strangers in an empty field



The mice are really running the circus: nonsensical carnival haikus

Nori Rose Hubert

bottle caps, popcorn
 kernels gathered by small hands
 the best seats in-house

long curly tails and
 velvet ears, bringing the show
 to the cracks in-between

plush beasties swing-sing
 chorus of polyester
 and childhood dreams

teacups spin splish splash
 just like goldfish, bright as stars
 under a ringed moon

mirrors twist and bend
 time itself into a myth
 like faded face paint

I taste soft-served songs
 of confetti eggs and string
 still, now, in my mouth

growing up does not
 mean the show cannot go on
 in these dusky dark days



Funny kids, Irina Novikova

Which Funnel Cakes

Luke Valmadrid

You loved those funnel cakes. Not funnel cakes. THOSE ones, the ones sold behind the faded baseball diamond, very much in sight of that thicket of trees next to the tilt-a-whirl where people who rode that tilt-a-whirl spilled their guts. And you loved that like you loved sprinkling powdered sugar like an artisan painter trying to hide a failed work under a blank canvas, an artisan painter who then talks about the layers and how the layers are more important than anything, and you loved the strawberries in syrup and sweet peaches, which had long ceased living, which had been torn from their roots at a young age in an older time, and were still sweet. And even if I had known any of this at the time, I was your best friend, and I loved that one weekend every summer, and I loved those funnel cakes too. I also thought metaphors were pointless, that writing didn't change the experience, and that analogies had no utility at all.

Skeeball Solicitation

Mel Cort

I work in skeeball.

Not the guy at the booth, enticing you with sweet-talking and plush prize promises, nor the one who rubs residue off the balls, with a lysol covered rag, at the end of the day, but the one who throws his arms up wide underneath the PVC tubing of the score holes, as your ball comes hurtling through, grabbing it to a stop before running it back to the receptacle, all before the next toss even leaves your fingertips.

I work in skeeball.

It's an age old game, before advanced mechanics could spit globules back to your waiting hands.

You might think gravity comes into play, but sometimes all the machine needs is a bit of real elbow grease.

It was my father's gig long before mine, catching and running, but he's long retired now - choosing to shine the quarters that slide through the slot at the beginning of each game and ticking the scoreboard up, up, up after each toss. We're dignified creatures, proud of our work, and sure that it could never be said that our tidy machine ate your pocket money.

A humble request, however, from a hardworking guy.

I know you're just trying to have fun.

We're doing our best to make that happen - but please, for the love of Joseph Fourestier Simpson, lighten your toss. I promise - no girl will be impressed when you bounce off the backboard, besides, the noise of the metal shaking scares my poor pops.



I Haven't Eaten My Cake Yet, Irina Novikova

Three Little Calves, A Cautionary Tale

Ronald Toby

Three little calves went wandering the other day,
 jump and slip through a fence in their way,
 out for adventure and a little play,
 in summer pastures they would not stay.
 The grass looks greener
 to youthful eyesight keener,
 though thickets of brush and briar
 cloak nearby fields with bitter mire.
 Hiding in the tall gold grain stalks
 they ignore my sweet imploring talk
 while around the field searching I walk,
 at my urging to come home they balk.
 But out of the corner of my eye
 twitching black Brangus ears do I spy
 and quietly do I discover their full black hides.
 I pause then and do not rush them home
 as I recall a favorite Robert Frost poem.
 I leave my calves in their new found freedom
 to find their way to their cows on their own,
 hoping this decision
 would make all the difference
 to little calves who obey no fence.



Animal Friends, Raezel Aquino

The Oracle

LJ Ireton

The tent was French fondant pink
 Iced around with white doilie trim -
 The feline fortune teller inside
 Had a fancy for these things -
 She wore lace herself,
 A graceful train that covered her tail.

She pawed at the purple crystal ball
 Halting it as a flap of wing
 Sent dangling diamonds swaying
 And a flustered goose, smoothing her feathers
 Hurried in, questioning her future,
 Of course.

Gold in her claws, the teller
 Stared at the orb,
 But the goose only at the
 Cat's glowing eyes, knowing eyes
 Deep onyx magic was flowing there,
 Not in a glass on the table.
 Suddenly inspired
 To know her own mind,
 The goose waddled out
 Having found a sparkling oracle,
 Satisfied.

The feline blinked slowly -
 It worked every single time.

Carne Vale

Ruth Liebendorfer

Flesh, farewell!

It was nice knowing you,
 But now you must go.
 Yes, I am allowed to stay—
 Not you.
 Arise, dear skin, dear fat, dear meat— Relieve me of your weight!
 Take heed of the ceiling fan on your way out;
 I left the skylight open, just a crack.

Without flesh, I am weightless.
 I can dance, a ramshackle shimmy of bone
 And lungless tongueless breath.
 I can dress in glitter
 And arrive in style.
 No lids to shut my eyes;
 I meet every bit of gaze for half a mile.

The rope is tight,
 The net is there,
 And the weightlessness
 Can only fathom gravity.

Jump! says my phantom flesh,
 As if I needed inspiration.

I dive!
 Elegant!
 Ghastly!
 Vacant!
 But,
 When I hit the net,
 It's over.
 Even as they applaud,
 I'm over.

The next day, like always,
 The bloody tapestries of my body return;
 The seams undone now reconvene;
 The fascia, not missed, interrupts my emptiness,
 With little hesitation;
 All the while, I sit—
 No taste of lightness left—
 And heave with the loss of my loss.



A game, Irina Novikova

Pink Moment

Caroline McDonald

Holding onto the past means pressing candy wrappers between pages of a notebook, a poor substitute for the memory of your torn cuticles and rigid smile. Leaving means my hometown is left to passing-through-people, my trolley stop is the new photo booth, my coffee-shop is the new corporate meeting center, my life no longer an observable spectacle. A performance. I am scared the pink light of winter will be gone when I come back.

Freedom is the moment your high school parking lot becomes only a parking lot; when the deep stare out your childhood window is no longer a promise, nor an act of rebellion. What vision do you have for the future? I love the rain, the reflection of dusk streetlight upon asphalt, the sun upon the ocean, the moon open to the corners of your eyes. I am asking: how much time do I have? Maybe my fears of a waterlogged world are farce, maybe I will wake up to a future where we sit atop the roof and watch the neon of New York flow across the current of the grid.

And now all the things I dreamed about do not exist. I am trapped on the carousel of a credit-card hologram, sparkling and dying, starving for the weight of a hand/head/heart upon my shoulders, for fingers through my hair, pulling me down from the scalp. I am about to float away, to drown, refusing to forget how certainty felt. Searching and searching for the truth, only finding halves. Waiting for the feeling of security. Since when did a memory become a promise which can never be fulfilled? Since when did this become life?

The Sky Says Hello

Jacqueline Brown

lying on the gingham blanket
 while the wurlitzer hums somewhere far behind us
 I think about Joni Mitchell
 and if the fireworks will reach the clouds
 you hold me tighter
 before the first burst of colour rises

REFRESHMENTS



Not a Shopping List

Edward Obuszewski

A loaf of bread to feed the ducks.
 A few balloons to celebrate luminous things.
 Bananas.
 A box, I'm saving my worries.
 Dividers, to rank my problems according to severity.
 Condoms.
 A ream of paper, there's a need to construct.
 A comb, to put a halt to negative first impressions.
 Fabric softener.
 A 4-pack of Bic pens, they help me to remember.
 Some olives.
 Plain yogurt.
 A bottle of Elmer's, I have a few memories which are broken.



Vienna

Edward Obuszewski

she sliced one piece
 then another
 &
 served them to her
 guests on crackers

everybody complimented
 the hostess on how
 tasty they were

except one guy
 who had too much
 to drink

he simply stated,
 "this tastes like
 shit!"



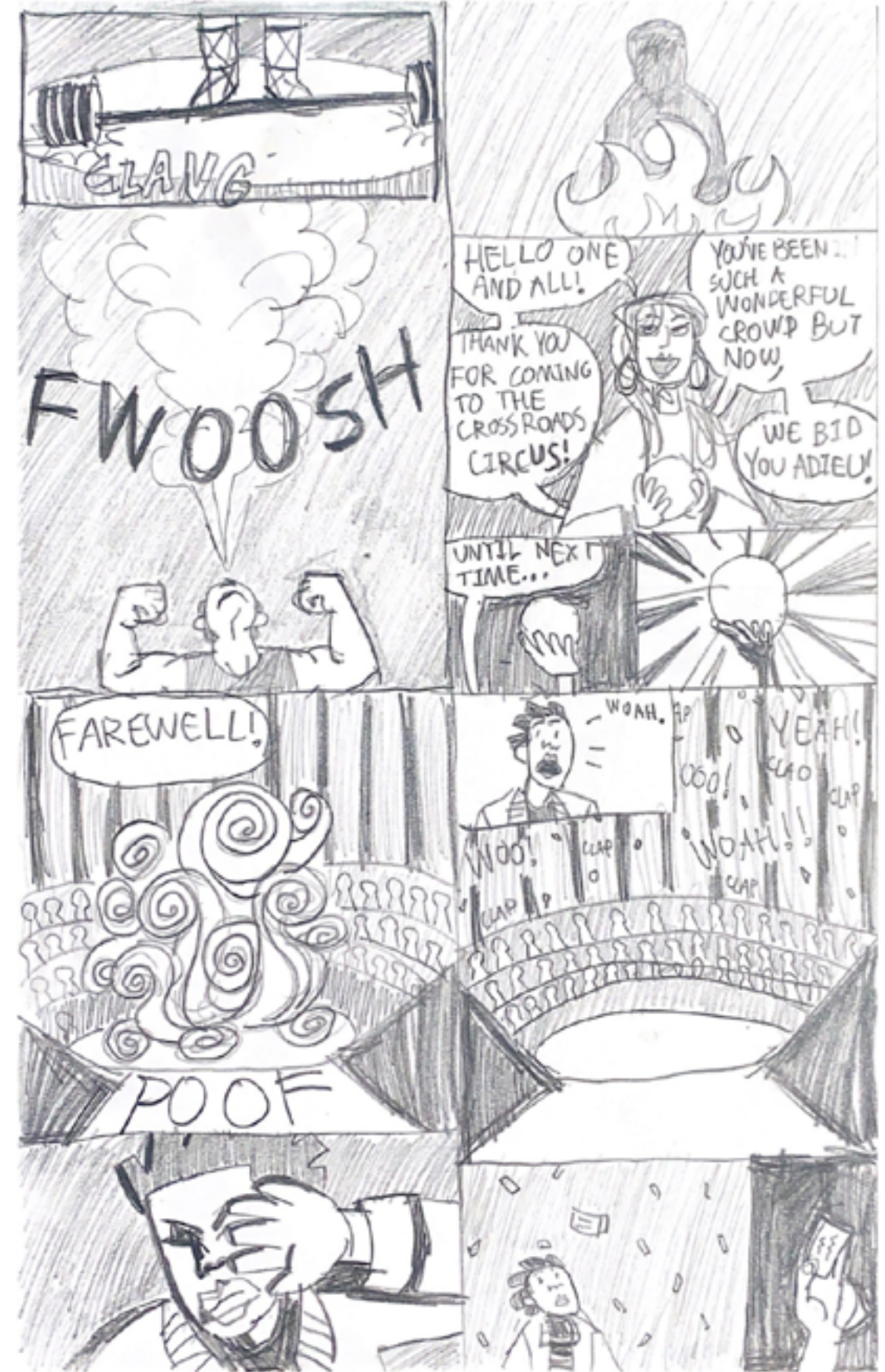
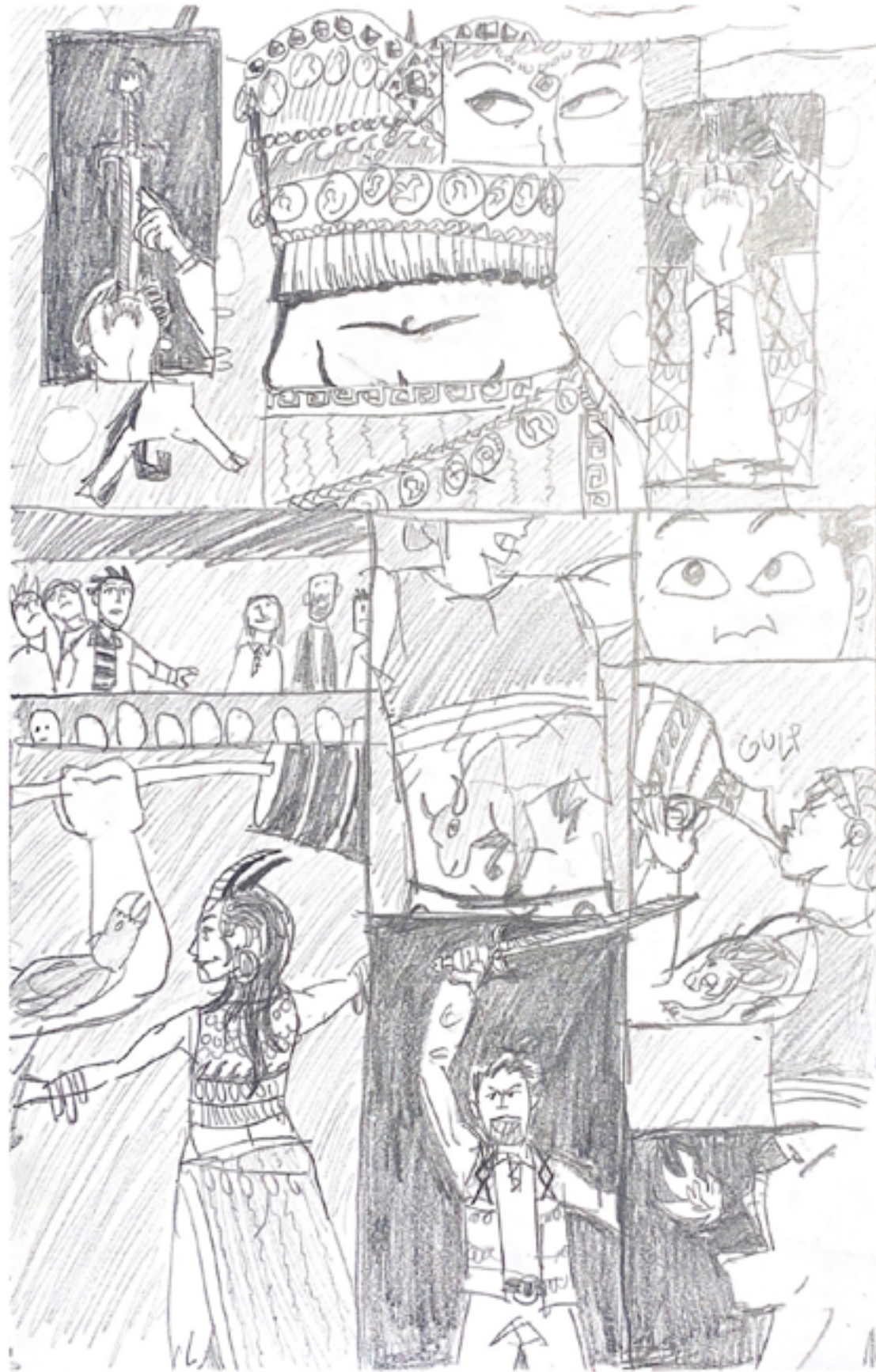
Sunburn Sanctorum

McCaela Prentice

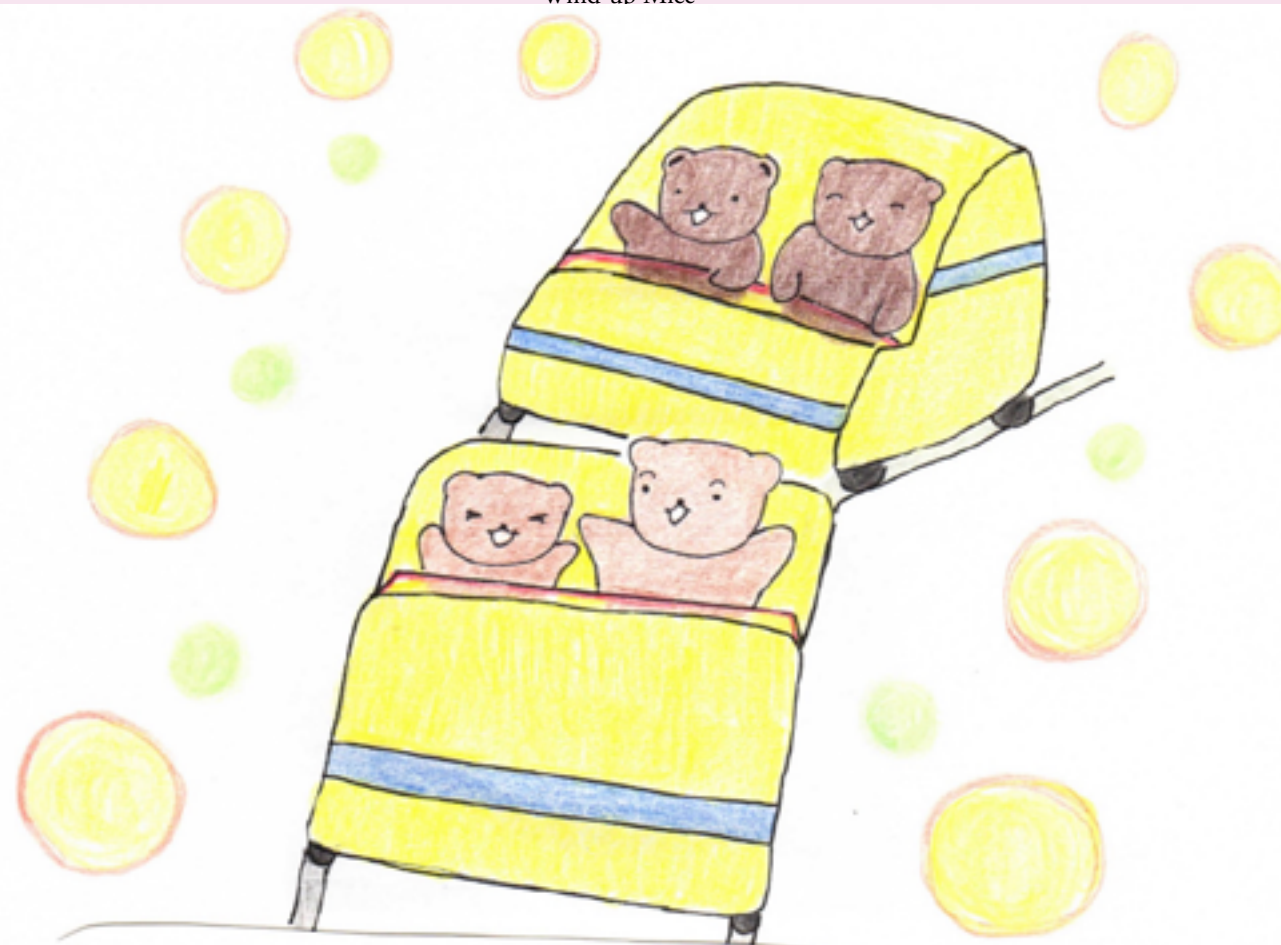
the wasps will nest where they are not welcome
 under the lattice or along the roof where we
 poor mead and feel like Midas in the first hour
 looking sundown blush and hard at nothing.

I will only be golden while my skin is flush
 with my baked blood- while I wear my warmest shade
 of eyeshadow. come dusk I'll hang
 over the fire escape- I'll melt into ozone
 and catch your smoke rings by their helix.



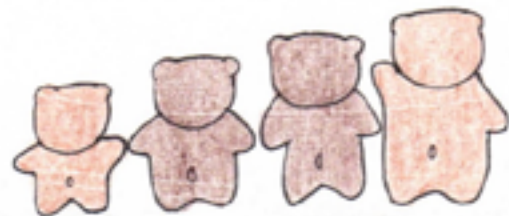






But we always made sure to go on her rides too

It's always more fun
together!



Jan
3/2021

Cold Stars

Monique Quintana

If I could win you a million cups of goldfish, I would. We'd place them at the foot of our bed so they'd glow like candles at night, and we would never sleep again, and sadly, we would grow tired of each other.

You're Not My Pumpkin

Monique Quintana

When I was a girl, I won second place in a craft store Halloween contest. I made a TV gourd that played all my favorite old cowboy movies in its core, except they were all populated with my family and the boy I loved, despite his inclination towards angels, not ghosts, like me.

Toy Caves

Monique Quintana

Knowing what I know now about saints, I make one out of a balloon, but she comes out tiger-shaped, and she resents me for grounding her to this earth, her maw making meals of the sun.

Northern Californian Girlhood

Kate Cameron Dooley

I'm new in the city
meaning I'm allllll pink fluff
meaning—I want to be your city clown.

can I make this place all fascination?
half-brilliance, half-body.
on the overwrought pavement, the girls'
will be left dancing, and the spectators admiring,
even though the blue weather makes them sleepy.

for now, though, it's getting late.
but it's summer, and the sky has been waiting
to play tricks for those left wanting.

come, the street magician beckons—
I'm falling for it all, I sputter half-heartedly
and yet, for nothing in particular.

my white-hearted cheeks turn tangerine with the sunset
call it *las grande puissance*, or
circus feelings

because I'm spinning beneath
different lights—
which happens when I have spent the last
few days of forever believing in tenderness
and little magic.



Photo Booth, Chiko Kato

Lunch Hour

Kate Cameron Dooley

if I stay in my body long enough this time,
I want to paint the walls a shade of drugstore bubble-gum.
all headrush,
mouth-watering, rosy spit
and a mess of softness.

it's time to pour the clouds into the bathtub and soak.
the afternoon is reserved for floating and spectacle dreaming.
please make yourself comfortable, reader. the day stretches on,
I am stretching, too. take my hand. leave your coat at the door
and jump into this frothy sea with me.

I am levitating at the surface, practicing presence. imagining
tightropes strung from your palms to mine. my acrobats carefully
take a few hesitant steps. they plunge and the water waves.

the ripples wreath around our soapy bellies. you applaud.
please make this place middle-of-nowhere,
stranger than ever, all dream
until I wake up.

Portrait of the Artist as a Clown

Jillian Fantin

after Walt Kuhn

i'm carrying
candy-striped canvas
a cannoli cream
circus

the tree twists
round my chalked neck

*don't forget
the conviction*

Austin Powers'
blue velvet
teeth dare Invisalign
*exorcise swingers
& gender alchemy*

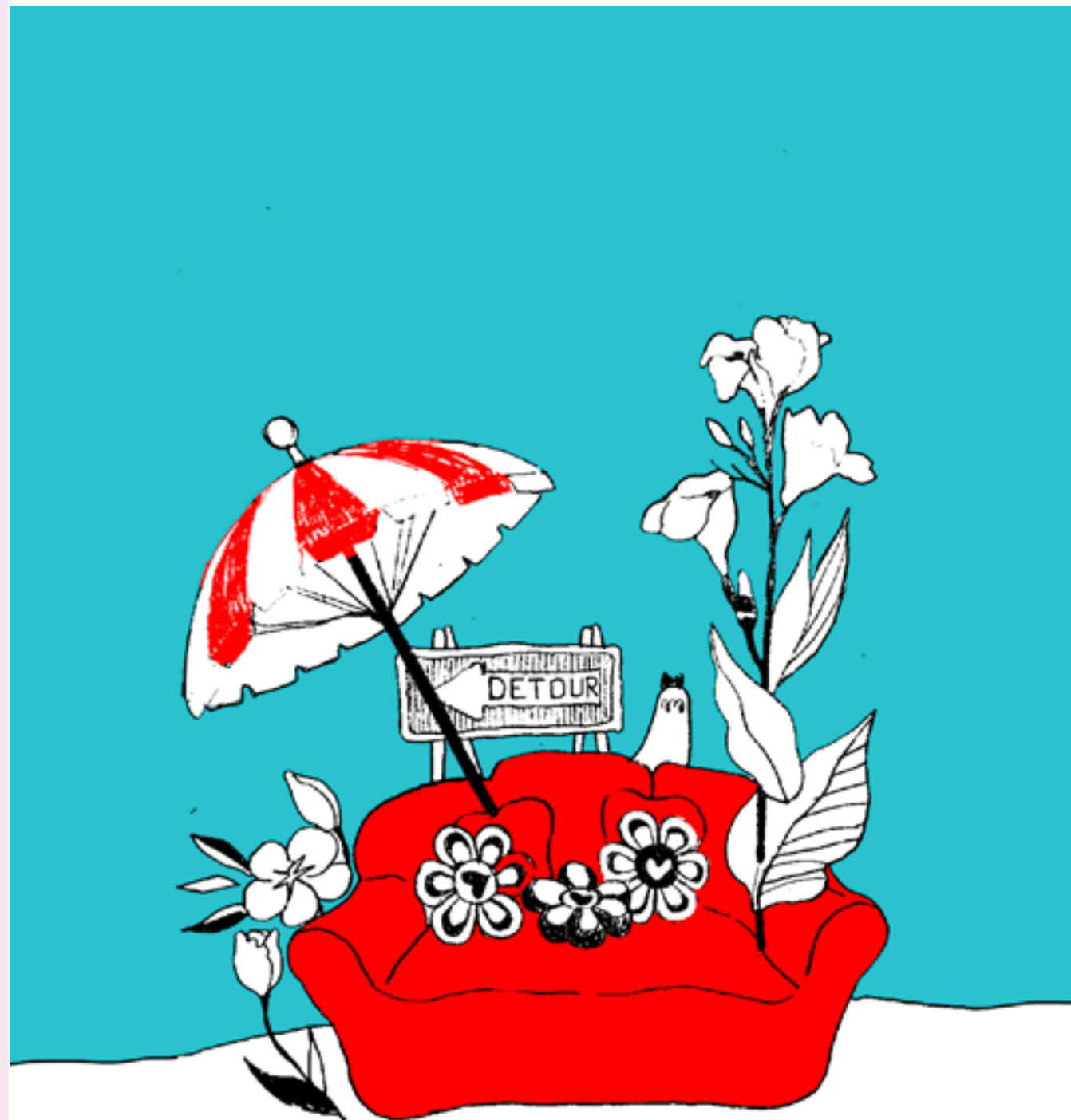
make man
fearing not
Dior foundation
stitch pre-sequin
from herringbone

i'm carrying, carrying on
(hunky dory hucklebabbles)—

can dogs, dogs with butterflyed ears still
be dogs gouache eyebrows still be eyebrows
Pierrot still be Little Peter, My Little Peter
With The Big Blue Eyes, Little Peter Always
Making Your Mother Laugh Even Though
Your Soul Weighs Old As Noah's Pudding

i'm carrying, dragging this circus
dragging Mother's Circus
and Mother's Circus Animals
Pink-n-White-Frosted,
Mother's Frosted Carousel Horses

as two hands sprinklecrunch—
*when people fall asleep do paintings lose their
meaning*



I need vacation

I Need Vacation, Chiko Kato

Counterclock Wise

Jody Rae

Cooling sand tries to swallow our bare feet but we escape by diving for volleyballs and landing in heaps. Our hoodies and jeans and cargo shorts trap grains of sand to remind us tomorrow that we existed yesterday, out there somewhere. Flip-flops tossed in a pile off to the side, someone keeps score. Play-to-twenty-five-now-switch.

We squint against the setting sun. A lime green frisbee ring sails extraterrestrially overhead, inches from our outstretched fingertips, navigating its own path. Someday we will, too. We could start now, if we really want to.

The seabreeze sings in our ears and tendrils of salt mist wrap our necks. We zip up our hoodies. Pelicans commute back and forth, indifferent to our scores and our shouts. They flap their wings above and below each other, traveling a seashore highway at rush hour: The southbound lane heading to the Lost Boys train trellis; the northbound lane heading to the set of Us. Neither one is our destination, so for now we just play.

At dusk, we shuffle towards the boardwalk ticket counter and absentmindedly scrape gum from our soles while waiting in line for rides. We take turns between rides to hold the volleyballs, and we commune with each other through screams and shouts, hollers and rules. Fasten-your-seatbelts. We smile for the cameras and check afterwards to see if it is worth buying a print. It never is, but we look every week just in case.

Don't walk directly under the sky glider this time of day, they'll drop trash, spit on you, or worse. Don't look up, is all. Look straight ahead or you'll bump into someone, maybe the wrong someone, so watch out. Arms-and-legs-inside-at-all-times, unless you ride the carousel, and then it's arms flung wide, reaching for a brass ring. It's supposed to be good luck, so why do we always wind up right back here? Right here, since 1911, it's every person for ourselves as we lean too far off a butt-polished saddle, trying to become a stranger in a strange land, straddling this bobbing horse and hoping it breaks free in any direction and carries us toward our real destiny, the one where we aren't distorted in mirrors and camera flashes and sunsets and a shower of kicked-up sand. Where we won't be strapped in, screaming, at the mercy of a single person hitting the start button. We'll hit our own start button, out there somewhere. We'll howl at the rising moon and gulp the cold air as we gallop toward our destination.

But for now, we'll wait for the spin and the music to slow, to wind down. We'll cling to safety bars until we're ready to let go.

Interview with Alasdair MacLean

what is your favorite or strangest memory from a carnival?

There used to be carnivals in Fleet, where I grew up, every year. I will never forget one summer aged 13, I tried to throw a 2p coin onto a float with a bunch of elvis impersonators. I mis-threw the coin, and watched with horror as it veered away from the float and struck a nearby motorist directly in the face, just under the eyebrow. He didn't know who'd done it and came out of his car spoiling for a fight. I kept my eyes on the floor and after shoving a few people he eventually went away. Then an old man tapped me on the shoulder and told me I should be ashamed of myself.

What is your favorite carnival food?

Hot dogs

what song best captures the carnival feeling?

Between Clark and Hilldale by Love



Untitled, Rose Degefa

Held at the Lights

Rachel Cromwell

On the way to church, we are held at the lights. Our somber, shrouded procession momentarily paused. Leaving us trapped in these long black bubbles. Huddled, hiding behind darkened windows and stale tears. Tense, disbelieving anyone would dare halt our progress this way. And we wait.

Wait by the prom that is alive today, really alive. Jumping and sugarcoated with the pastels of toddlers and their discarded candy-floss.

Jeweled and dripping with happy drunk lovers, dodging the old folk on their holiday parade. The neons are dancing their crazy sequence, each one screaming 'Pick me, pick me. Come dance on my grave.'

Without thinking I crank down the window, that squeals softly as if reluctant, ushering the acrid smell of hotdogs and burning onions into the car. Inviting it to seep and settle on the immaculate upholstery, on the soft carpet beneath my feet. No one winds down these windows, not on a day like today.

I open my mouth, taste it, breathe it in—ignoring the horrified face of your black-coated mother—stiff and silent across from me. I concentrate on chasing away the taste of today.

I lean forward, straining to hear. Trying to shift through music, gulls, abandonment and laughter; desperate to touch the sounds of the sea.

The red light stays red.

Around the car, I feel the pulse, the human surge of life. The beat of everything both pure and ruined, treasure and trash. All that is excess, all that is pleasure. All gleaming, all glaring in this one stolen, spiteful sunshine-bathed day.

With one gloved hand, I touch the door, with the other I finger the collar of my blouse, pulling it from my neck. I exhale slowly, close my eyes; fighting the temptation to step out of the darkness and into the star-spangled, kiss-me-quick, glitter ball light.

Instead, I scan the crowd. From each face, I take some heart, a single splintered piece of magic.

Then I look ahead and try to will it forwards. To roll it along to you.

You, just up there, riding ahead.

One car ahead.

Sleeping in a sea of flowers.

Alone...

I hope, I pray, I have one last chance to get the message through.

Because no one really dies by the seaside.

Do they?

The Wheel

Jessica June Rowe

What no one told you is that the ferris wheel is also a clock. Time resets when you buy our tickets. You slide your credit card back into your wallet and then slide your hand back into mine but loose enough so that our perspiring palms don't constantly touch; the sun has set but the heat lingers, stifling, leaving us dripping. You pull me forward and there's a moment where our arms are slack then yanked taut, elbows locked, and there: that's when the countdown begins. We are living on borrowed time, you and I, and only I know it. Above our heads there's a groan of metal as the coaster wheel inches forward and several cars slide loose along their rails. A child screams and you exhale *Oh shit* over the top of my head, your breath as sweet as the caramel apple you dug your teeth into earlier. I rewind time to hear it, the dull cracking of crisp skin, and then step back into the present to wrap my arms around your waist and hold on as long as I can. But no one told you the truth, so you inhale *It's too fucking hot* and push me away and our sweat-drenched skin slips apart so easily and there: the clock ticks faster. We wait at arms length until the ferris wheel car scoops us up and the sun-warmed edge of the seat cuts us down at the knees. We curl over the lap bar to watch our feet leave the ground for the last time; gravity begs us to come back but there's no stopping us now. The wheel turns and our car tips back so we're staring at the twilight sky and you laugh nervously *okay this isn't so bad*. I want to relive the last time you laughed like that but I'm stuck, locked in this seat and this moment, and those memories are already fading. We finally reach the top of the wheel and in the brief stillness you notice my silence. You ask *Are you scared?* and I want to ask *if the horizon can stretch forever, why can't time?* but all I say is no. You take my hand anyway and promise *I won't let go* and even though I know it doesn't matter I hope you mean it. I squeeze your hand, but it's too late: the wheel turns and the car slides loose and now, at the end, we begin our descent.

Letters o` Summer

Nolita Jackens

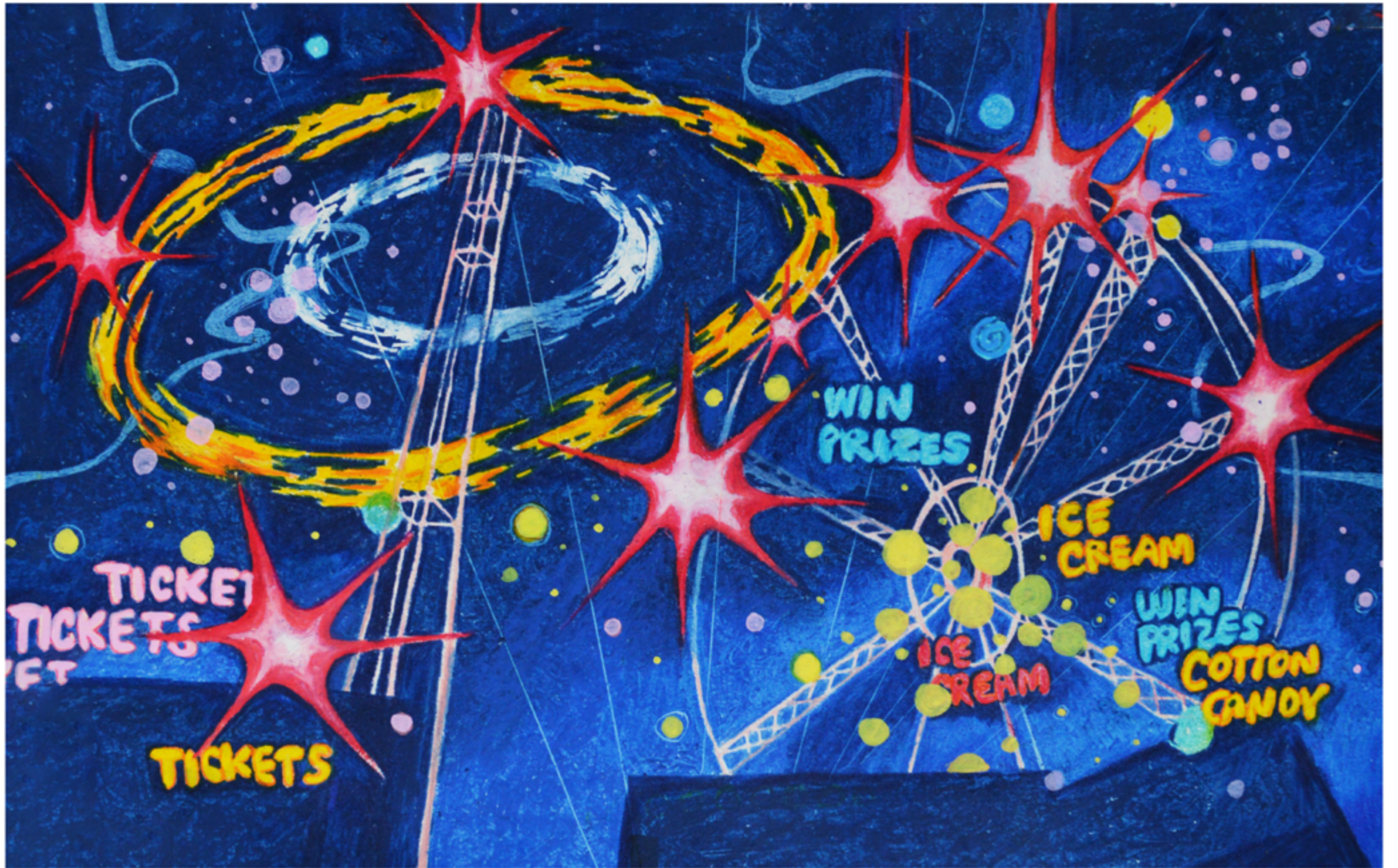
Dear thee who has stumbled upon this letter, My, what wonderful things I have to share with you! It starts with a story of getting lost in a garden, following a huge, black butterfly to a secluded isle. There, to my left, were fish the color of caramel swimming in murky blue and, all around, rows of hydrangeas whispering good wishes and words of hope. I saw in the distance an enormous, ancient library with some rooms completely empty, others filled with art instead of books. On the way you could see clearings in the grass, large statues alone in the center seemingly made of gold. Alas, there were absolutely no other people except for glimpses into tucked-away gazebos and distant chatter intermittent with links of champagne. I swear I saw dragonflies the size of airplanes drift far above! And then I found an easel set next to the pond—painting unfinished, artist missing. I felt as though I was being watched but by someone who cares for me. Soon, I noticed the missing books from the library wedged in tree branches and started to feel rather uncomfortable in this humid air, which was thick with the smell of spun sugar. Even less comforting were the multiple wanted posters for a Fool in black and white polka dots. Their visage grinned maniacally from every which way, as the posters were on many trees near the easel. Eek! I snatched a bottle of ink from it and made off, only to realize it wasn't ink but marked "love potion." The rays of sunlight suddenly began to feel very cold. I kept trying to go towards the sounds of a festival but never found it. Up in the sky there was the glowing image of fireworks without a single sound to be heard, would you believe it?

Take utmost care of yourself and write back soon!

Sincerely,
?



All Ages, Marta Pavone Vasquez



The Bright Carnival Lights, David Pietras

The La Ceiba Carnival

Monty Cime

Every year in La Ceiba there is a carnival dedicated to the patron saint of the city, Saint Isidore the Farmer—known for his piety to the poor. My mom tells me the stories of what growing up in La Ceiba, Honduras in the 70s was like—the political strife of a deeply stratified region, Central America, created tension in which everyone thought Honduras, like Nicaragua, Guatemala, and El Salvador—would face revolution. Yet, every year, the carnivals continued.

It's such a big source of pride for the locals that the most famous Honduran musician of all time, Guillermo Anderson, born and raised in La Ceiba, wrote a song about it that encapsulates the joy that the hurly-burly of floats, school bands, Afro-Indigenous dance troupes, equestrian displays, and musical acts bring. It's one of the rare moments, where, for a short period of time, despite the worsening conditions of a city that used to be described as "Honduras's girlfriend" because of the economic prosperity of La Ceiba, the general population can enjoy themselves. While there's a big push to clean the city for the event, trash litters the streets at every corner. It's been like this for years. When a hurricane hits, a torrent of filth ravages people's homes. They say the stench can persist for months after the last drop of the hurricane dries. You get used to it.

A similar story of deep poverty could be found in Nicaragua, especially after the earthquake of 1972 that left two-thirds of the capital, Managua, displaced; facing food shortages and diseases, humanitarian aid never made it into the hands of the common people affected by the earthquake, most likely because the Somoza regime had stockpiled it. By 1975, the Sandinistas had begun organizing under these pretexts. At the forefront of Nicaragua's revolution was the concept of liberation theology. The idea that the Church, in the Global South, was morally obligated to assist the poor, which came as a direct response to the poor government response.

In 1976, the La Ceiba Carnival had finally expanded from beyond its initial simple scope as a float parade to a fully-fledged Carnival. This was, according to my mother, supposed to be the best one yet—it was where she first had cotton candy and sugar daddies, treats previously unfamiliar to Honduras, and my mother's palette, entirely. Nearly fifty years later, whenever she gets a chance to try either of them, she sports the sanguine smile of our broken homeland. For a brief moment, she is a young child again. Initially being held in the Barrio Mejía, and despite nationwide political unrest following the ousting of the then-Honduran president, the inaugural carnival would be one to remember.

The year after, Carlos Mejía Godoy, bard of the Sandinista revolution, would compose a song that would eventually win the OTI—an international music festival not unlike Eurovision but for Iberia and Ibero-America—of that year with "Quincho Barrilete," a song that would capture the anti-Somoza fervor brewing in Nicaragua and put it into song, declaring nothing short of a revolution backed by Jesus and being fought for the pueblo. My mom watched this year's OTI intently. The next year, said revolution began. The next year, the carnival still took place, just as it had the year prior. Every year, the carnivals continued.

Saint Isidore the Farmer, patron saint of La Ceiba, would no doubt be flattered by these carnivals. I just worry what he would think after the carnival ends, and he sees the misery of my people as they normally are. I want him to be proud of us. I know he would be proud of what the Nicaraguan Revolution dogmatically set out to accomplish. But I also don't think that these two events that my mom lived through and tells me about are so dissimilar. A carnival is not unlike a revolution, after all. You have explosions, you have drums, you have marching. Sometimes, you even have guns.

MELANCHOLY CLOWN



The Pier

Sofía Aguilar

The clown showed up over an hour late to my third birthday party, somehow both teary-eyed and pissed. She'd gotten lost, confused by Mamá's directions, stuck between the 10 and a strip mall she'd seen advertised on one of those freeway-adjacent signs erected to tempt drivers toward the exit. By the time she arrived, before cake but after I'd broken the piñata with my dad's generous swing guiding my grip on the stick, we hungered for multi-colored merriment: face painting, balloon animals, those tricks where handkerchiefs and flower bouquets appear out of sleeves.

Of course, when my head was no more than a soft dome of fuzz, my ears the same just-opening-up shape as dried figs, I don't remember what she looked like. But sometimes I imagine her surrounded by swarm, seas of hands pulling on her clothes, demanding as currents, six layers up to her neck even though it was August. See the curls of her costume hair frizzing in the sun, beads of sweat forming above her wide red-lipped mouth, skin painted a cheap ghostly white, already peeling around the eyes, and wonder if she's still working as a children's clown.



My toes dig themselves into the sand, drying out against the grains. Mamá sits beside me, earphones in and eyes squinted to see the small text against the pages of her book. While birds scatter like poppy seeds above us, two teams of shirtless white boys play a game of volleyball, their friends on the sidelines keeping score. My eyes catch on the outline of ribs peeking through their skin, strangely delicate against the rest of their bodies, toned and hardened, no doubt, from years of hitting ferocious spikes over nets.

Meanwhile, dogs pull on leashes through the sand, tails curled into the last breath of an S and collar tags jingling like bells, prompting Mamá to stare every so often with her mouth pursed into a long thin line. No dogs allowed on the beach, I hear her thinking like she swallowed the warning sign in the parking lot.

I turn away. From where we're sitting, the pier, with all its carnival fun, is no longer than my finger, protected by river-like waves of heat, shore-bound, shivering.

Wanna go? I ask, pointing with my chin.

She grunts, glancing up again to re-affirm we're the only ones within a five-mile radius wearing masks. She shakes her head, stiff. Briefly, I see the boardwalk the way she does, consider the crowd, the way bodies here are always sticky or sweaty or sandy or sick even without a pandemic.

Let's go for a few minutes, then come back, I try, and finally, she agrees.

Walking parallel to the ocean, I try to remember the last time I went to a carnival, been anywhere without masks and felt okay. Since May, I'd gone to farmer's markets but it wasn't the same, all fresh produce in reusable bags and vented berry baskets made of the same material as egg cartons. Sometimes there'd be kettle corn, hot enough to melt the bag, but I wanted pink cotton candy lips, dizzy drop rides, the win of a stuffed bear. That feeling in your stomach when a rollercoaster car dipped low and it was like someone had scooped out your insides with a spoon. A summer, in short, that since last year had never really been mine.

I'm about to ask Mamá if she's okay but when we arrive and walk past a man yelling obscenities to passerby, the words die on my tongue—the first moment I know we made a mistake. The second's when we finally face the pier and realize we'll never get to the end of it.

It's so packed I can barely see the ocean on either side. There are migrations of people behind us, in front, pushing so hard my body keeps knocking back. A thousand smells hit me all at once from vendors hawking turkey legs, hot dogs, chopped fruit in disposable cups. Though a carousel stands empty, horses frozen in mid-gallop, lips agape in a neigh, a half-bellied yellow rollercoaster car zips over our heads along its track, while its neighboring Ferris wheel turns with persistent slowness and passenger screams. Everywhere, tight spaces, shouting, restaurants and stands lining the edges like a way to choke or cave us in, and no one wearing masks.

Mamá moves as though to turn back but I pull on her hand toward the Bubba Gump Shrimp gift shop, pretending to look at a set of decorative plates while catching our breath. The world between my nose and mouth grows hot, and even though no one is looking at me, much less demanding something of me, I think of the clown. Wonder if she sought my eyes above the toddlers at her knees as though asking permission to leave. How often I too have felt suffocated, by Mamá's incessant questions, her rules, her expectations, but now, defying her, ignoring the way she was

right, the feeling hasn't changed. Nor the crowds that, despite proving how big the world is, have always made me feel small, a beetle beneath someone's about-to-drop shoe.

*

The drive home is silent. Sunburned, salivating, sand everywhere but where it belongs on the beach, I turn up the AC to its highest setting, cooling my skin until Mamá finally grows irritated, opening the windows to save gas. I'm too tired to snap. Instead, I lean back, tuck my hair behind my ears in protest against the onslaught of wind. Face her knuckles turned to bone against the steering wheel, eyes staring hard at the ribbon of freeway unspooling itself free across desertland.

I ask, only half knowing why, What was her name? The clown who came to my party that time? Remember?

She doesn't look at me, biting her lip, and I know that for once, she's not hiding the answer.



Untitled, Smile (Xiao) Ma

Under Repair

Damien Posterino

We were walking past
the same spot
we first fell in love
all those years ago;
and failed to recognize it.

A middle aged busker
sang a song we both knew
and distracted us;
He was wearing one of those
dinner jackets from the 1970's,
but he looked tired
like he had run out of ideas

We threw some copper coins
into his creased hat
and it reminded us
of that wishing well
inside the amusement park
we used to go to.
The park closed after its
roller coaster broke and
was never fixed;
We missed it for a while,
then got used to watching
old movies at home.

That was the same time
our favourite restaurant closed,
or did we just stop going?
I can't even remember.
I tried hard
to recreate the meals at home
but we couldn't find the
ingredients and the taste
was never going to be the same;
You tried to make an
Old Fashioned cocktail for me
but always put too much sugar
and the ice was all wrong.

Now, we're walking home with
that busker's song in our head;
It's funny how things like this
just get stuck.



Clowning Around, Melissa Martini

Depth Perception

Lauren Thorn

Every year, in the fall, the carnival comes to town. They hide it away behind the mall, where the ducks paddle their feet in drain-pipe puddles and mango-flavored smoke dances in the air. You can drive for circles around the Forever 21s and the chain bar and grills and miss it, hearing only the faint yelps and hollers of excitement ringing out in the distance. But, if you're a local, you'll know it by the smell of popcorn and sleaze, and you'll recognize the way the sun reflects off of the rusty metal of the Ferris wheel.

I'm scared of Ferris wheels. I've always been, since my hair was only a few whispers upon my skin and my fingers were soft and uncalloused. It's not the height, I know that. I have swung my legs off of Colorado cliffs and crawled up towers of rocks and felt nothing but the sting of my scraped knees. The height doesn't scare me, for all my girlhood crushes were 6'4" and I've never felt happier than I was when my dad picked me up with my feet flying in the air. It could be the sound, that slow metallic moan creaking out from below the seats. It makes me feel precarious, makes me crawl into the corner balanced on my shaking arms. It could also be the smell. Metal smells an awful lot like blood.

When I walk into the carnival, I am fourteen. My hair is done in Marilyn Monroe curls and I am unwisely dressed in a skirt and high heels. I tug at my button-down, and its calico fabric slides harshly against my skin. My sister is teasing me about my outfit, and secretly, I share her feelings. This does not stop me from blowing raspberries in her direction and stomping on her Converse. Forgetting her, my arm juts out of my sleeve, pointing at a nearby booth.

"Why don't we play that?" I ask. I'm pointing to a rather dilapidated mass of tarp, white with saccharine purple stripes. Inside of it stands a pile of neon-colored rings and bottles lined up in rows. I'm not looking at these, though—I'm looking at the giant plush animals hanging from the ceiling. And really, I'm only looking at the plush pug, with door-shaped blue eyes and a lolling tongue. I want him desperately, his cheap felt fabric and his shoddy embroidery. He is the kind of thing that only appears in clearance sections and garage sales and thrift store corners. These things are special: you can't find them anywhere else.

"Hey, blondie," says the man at the booth. I'm really regretting my outfit now, how I left the top button by the collar undone. I take my hand to my cheek and wipe off my blush, streaking my fingers with red. I'm wishing my lipstick wasn't cherry-bright, my eyeliner smeared and smudged. If only the curls hanging from my head would fall into my usual ratty shocks of straightness.

When I throw the rings over the bottles, I let out little squeaks, high and feminine. I want to silence myself, to reach inside my throat and choke the voice out of me, because I know the man is watching, memorizing the way I sound.

My sister wins the pug, and I hate her for it. We visit some more booths, and my feet drag along the gum-stained ground. *What I would do for a piece of chewing gum.* I would chew it up until it got real sticky then spit it back out at that leering carny, blinding him to me and my undone buttons. Maybe with his eyes stuck shut he would see I was still only a girl, still starstruck by giant pugs and scared to death by Ferris wheels.

I don't win any prizes. I have a weak throwing arm, and my depth perception is horrible. I always think things are further away than they are.

As closing time approaches, my mom looks at me with a mischievous smile. "I think we should do the Ferris wheel," she smirks. I protest weakly, with the limp sound of defeat quickly entering my voice. My shoulders sag, my arms sulking down at my sides. I am laying it on thick, acting as if I am being dragged off to war. Truthfully, I want to ride the Ferris wheel. I want to know if it still scares me.

We pay the man for our tickets, then pile into the car. It's a rotten old pink, the pink of broken down Cadillacs from decades past, the pink of my lips when they are chapped in the winter. When I sit, I am looking up, studying the machinery. I know very little about engineering, but I know the way that rust saws and grinds, growling with age. I know the way it grates on my ears, the way it makes the hair on my arms stand stiff and my skin swell into terrified goosebumps. I know it so well, the fear. I have almost become comfortable with it.

But when the wheel begins to turn, the hairs of my arm lay flat. I don't long to crawl into my mom's arms and hide myself away. I don't want to shut my eyes, to will away the time until I am safe on the ground again. I don't feel scared at all. I only feel bored. I stare out at the orange sky, dull with clouds.

I sigh. I always think things are farther away than they are.

Desi Girl Wants to be a Circus Freak

Josephine Gawtry

it was June when you got pizza grease on your high school diploma and you thought it was ironic But really you just didn't want to go downstairs To get a plate and have to see your Father who made you. You instead wanted to run away with the Circus that went through town 80 years ago, you wanted to run away to 80 years ago, you wanted to be Ugly and poor, but instead you're ugly and Rich as rich can be.



Shadow Play, Teagan Moon

it was July when you had an admission to make. You kill your plants on purpose to piss off your Father. The best part about running away with the Circus would be pissing off your Father. That and the Vaudeville strongmen who I'm sure would want you. You would bat your eyelashes and tell him the real meaning of Desi just like you told me, even though I already thought I knew. That would be your Circus trick, telling people things They didn't know.

it was August when you gained 28 pounds and decided that meant something, you cried because your Father said so I suppose, you have been taught things that don't leave easy but really I thought you looked just beautiful, the vestiges of Roses seemed implanted in your dark cheeks. You really couldn't have passed for a Circus freak then. If I'd have seen you at the Circus I would laugh out loud and then make love to you in a closet just like I know you want.

The Difference Between Gravity and Intimacy Is That One Lasts Forever

Lucia Gallipoli

Some of my first brushes with intimacy were the fragments of time when bored teenagers strapped me into the body of a metallic green dragon that imbued my five year old frame with just enough adrenaline.

I spun around the sun seven more times and by then if my stomach didn't lurch, I wasn't doing it right. From the way my head tipped back and based on the laughter I forced from my diaphragm, you might have even thought I enjoyed the feeling of precarity, but I was really just performing joy, like any clown or seventh grade girl on the clock. I was falling with the weight of quickly assembled metal parts that would disappear within 24 hours, although that isn't how it felt when I rode it out.

Limerence carried me into the summer, and then fall, and then winter, when he kissed me in the same corner of the field where I would sit on an upside down Ferris wheel later that spring. Both moments felt the same.



Fun House

Alyssa Asaro

I turned to see faces in the basement
Of the house I grew up in
All with broken noses
Missing teeth
Glaring at me
For bringing another one to take something else from me
The one with the mask gets to leave
So, you set up your swing
At all the people I used to be
Just so you could hurt all of me
Just so you could take control
Of the person I was then and the one I am now
I raise my hand
It's made of the glass
I look to you
You're walking back
Wearing my smiles
Taking on my name
This newer version
Is not the same
You're much more jaded
You're far too curt
You lost the innocence that made me
Love you first

Sofia Aguilar is a Latina writer and editor originally from Los Angeles. Her work has appeared in *Latina Media*, *Melanin Magazine*, and *The Westchester Review*, among other publications. An alum of WriteGirl, she has received the Andrea Klein Willison Prize for Poetry and the Spencer Barnett Memorial Prize for Excellence in Latin American and Latinx Studies. Additionally, she is a two-time recipient of the Nancy Lynn Schwartz Prize for Fiction, a three-time recipient of the Jean Goldschmidt Kempton Scholarship for Young Writers, and a finalist for the Academy of American Poets College Prize. You can find her at sofiaaguilar.com.

Alyssa Asaro is a writer and editor based in Chicago, IL. Her works have been published in *Neuro Logical Literary Magazine*, *Unlimited Literature*, *Beir Bua Journal*, *Small Leaf Press*, *The Remnant Archive*, and *Second Chance Lit*. She can be found on Twitter @rambleshewrote.

Raezel Aquino is an artist and writer based in San Diego, California who attends San Diego State University.

Shannon Barringer is a poet from Charlotte, North Carolina. She is one-third of the arts collective known as Tuesday University, who recently published a collection of poetry and photography titled *Invisible Vacations*. She is currently finishing her chapbook, *Attachment Wound*. Her writing can be found in *Sanskrit Literary Arts Magazine*, *Perhappened Magazine*, and *Capsule Stories: Isolation Edition*. She shares her home with her son Niko and their two cats, Button and Merle.

Eva Baudler is from San Gabriel Valley, affectionately nicknamed “The 626.” Her fields of interest include resistance writing, mass atrocities, and family history. She has launched a number of digital public history projects about topics such as disability in Nazi Germany and Tibetan sovereignty. Her creative works touch on childhood and growing up close to death, her biggest inspiration coming from James Baldwin, Richard Wagamese, Claudia Rankine, and Chanel Miller. At a carnival, Eva usually goes for the food or swing ride first.

Jacqueline Brown is an Irish-American studying at the University of Pennsylvania. Her work has previously appeared or is forthcoming in *Catchwater Magazine*, *The Madrigal*, *Cypress Press*, *Fish Barrel Review*, the debut issues of *Friday Nights Forever*, *Prickly Pear Magazine*, *Truffle Magazine*, and *The Initial Journal*, and elsewhere.

Rachel Canwell is a writer, reader, and blogger who is working on her first novel, whilst falling in love with flash fiction a little more every day.

Monty Cime is a writer and musician most known for their role as the vocalist and songwriter for the indie band Costco Boyfriend. The son of an immigrant from Honduras, they love to write about the history of their homeland as well as Latin America in general.

Carol Camp was born in São Paulo, Brazil, and spent the last six years studying and working in Los Angeles. Her work discusses themes such as the passing of time and the unforgiving ephemerality that our reality is built upon. Using a mix of blacks and vibrant colors, Carol looks for the transient truth hiding in every moment. She finds that truth by disintegrating images, combining them, or designing their soul from scratch—and she registers that moment because she knows it might never come back.

Mel Cort is a full-time student at Mercersburg Academy, where they study literature at every opportunity. They are a multi-published and award-winning poet, including recognition from the Columbia Scholastic Press Association and the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards. You can find them performing in plays, making art, and befriending cats.

Rose Degefa is a junior graphic design student. She loves making magical art and world-building through various mediums. She thrives on being mysterious and adoring cats at any chance she gets.

Sneha Diwan works as a data scientist in the San Francisco Bay Area. She loves all things related to art, music, and literature.

Kate Cameron Dooley hails from the Colorado mountains, although she has spent the last few years meandering her way down the West Coast from Vancouver to San Francisco. She is both a soft-hearted Pisces and a clown with flowers. Her work has been published in *OUT FRONT Magazine*, *SAD Mag*, and *EVENT Magazine*.

Jillian A. Fantin is an MFA candidate at the University of Notre Dame. They received a 2021 Poet Fellowship from the Martha's Vineyard Institute of Creative Writing, and their poetry has been published in *The American Journal of Poetry*, *Sprung Formal*, *TIMBER*, *Entropy*, and elsewhere.

Lucia Gallipoli is an undergraduate student concentrating in sexuality, love, and art. Her role models are Mitski and Melissa Broder. She can be found on Instagram @TenderPages.

Josephine Gawtry is an undergraduate student studying literature at Bennington College in Vermont. Originally from Virginia, she is the winner of the Mirabella Prize and her work has been featured by publications such as the *Tupelo Press* and *JONAH magazine*.

Jaqi Holland is a writer living on the North Shore of MA, who enjoys whimsy, ice cream, and sticky kisses. Her work has appeared in *The Christian Science Monitor*, *The Ekphrasis Review*, *Brevity and Echo*, and *Plenty Magazine*.

Nori Rose Hubert holds an AA in Creative Writing from Austin Community College and a BA in English from UT Austin. Her creative work has appeared in *The Rio Review*, *Feminine Inquiry*, *Musings of a #LonelyFeminist*, *Hothouse*, *Gingerbread House Literary Review*, *Corvid Queen*, *Coffee Table Coven*, *Mookychick*, *The Freque*, *The Elephant Ladder*, and the digital feminist anthology *The Medusa Project*. She is the co-founder of the e-zine *Crown & Pen* and teaches a digital workshop on writing contemporary faerie tales for grown-ups. When not writing, she enjoys baking with flowers, collecting tattoos, stitching subversive cross-stitch patterns, and being bossed around by three cats and a Bourke's parakeet. Follow her on Instagram and Twitter @norirosewrites.

LJ Ireton is a poet from London. She has a First Class B.A. Honors in English Language and Literature from The University of Liverpool. Her historical poetry was published in the April 2021 Marble Poetry Broadsheet. Her nature poems have recently been published by *Minnow Literary Magazine*, *Eucalyptus & Rose Literary Magazine*, *Chasing Shadows Literary Magazine*, and *Green Ink Poetry*. Her fantasy poetry will be published in July by Noctivagant Press. Twitter: @literaryvegan & IG: @thepoetryoffj

Nolita Jackens is an artist from Los Angeles living in Tokyo. Preferring words as her medium, she also experiments with the visual arts and has a deep affection for skeletons. She is currently studying at Emerson College online for her MFA. You can keep up with her posts on confettibastard.com or follow @confettibastard on both Twitter and Instagram.

Ruth Liebendorfer has been writing poetry since the age of seven. Outside of writing poetry, she enjoys horseback riding, traveling, and quality time with her family, friends, and animals.

David A. Mitchell lives in Sydney, Australia. He writes fiction and poetry. His reviews of opera and music appear on the Classical Music Daily website. In 2020 he participated in Writing NSW's Year of the Novel with renowned Australian novelist Emily Maguire.

Teagan Moon is a visual and performing artist from Portland, Maine who is currently studying in the mountains of Vermont at Bennington College. Compelled both by thoughtful existential drama and comic-strip comedy, they explore themes of nature, gender, perception, and reality.

Irina Novikova is an artist, graphic artist, and illustrator. She received an art degree from the State Academy of Slavic Cultures and a degree in design from the Moscow Humanitarian and Technical Academy. She works in art criticism and graphic design. Her first subjects were fantastic birds and animals. She loves experimenting and mixing different materials.

Smile (Xiao) Ma based in Suzhou, China, is currently studying literature and visual arts at Bennington College. Smile's understanding of love is what led her to create art; her work offers a narrative and photographic exploration of love through observations of human interactions, emotions, and social events.

Melissa Martini received her master's degree in English with a focus in Creative Writing from Seton Hall University. Her fiction has previously appeared in *Zanna Magazine*, *Jalada Africa's "Bodies" anthology*, *Camas Magazine*, *Analogies & Allegories*, *Pretty Owl Poetry*, *Bandit Fiction*, *Heartland Society of Women Writers*, *Warning Lines*, and *Dime Show Review*. Her poetry has appeared in *The Confessionalist Zine*, *Zanna Magazine*, *Wrongdoing Mag*, *Gutslut Press*, *Mixtage Mag*, and *The Daily Drunk*. Her photography & artwork have appeared in *HolyFlea! Lit Mag*, *Analogies & Allegories*, *Gutslut Press*, *Wrongdoing Mag*, and *In Parentheses*. She currently serves as founder and editor in chief of *Moss Puppy Magazine* as well as prose chapbook editor, prose reader, and newsletter creator for *The Winnow Magazine*.

Edward Obuszewski says: “I’m trying to get my work out there. Let my voice be heard. Have a degree in graphic design—try not to let that get in the way. Creating poems is the road I most often walk down.”

Damien Posterino is a poet currently writing full-time. Damien is Melbourne-born but has also made London, Bangkok, Singapore & Mexico his homes at different times. His poetry explores themes of characters, commentary, and capturing moments in time. He has been published in recent editions of *Fiery Scribe Review*, *Neuro Logical*, *Analogies & Allegories Literary Magazine*, *Abergavenny Small Press*, *BOMBFIRED*, *Jupiter Review*, *Fairy Piece Magazine*, *Poetic Sun Journal*, *Green Ink Poetry*, *JFA - Justice For All*, and *Zero Readers*. You can find him on Twitter @damienposterino.

David Pietras is a multimedia artist and designer from New Jersey. His mixed-media artwork “The Bright Carnival Lights” uses oil pastel and colored pencil to explore the sensory experience of a fair, through a child's eyes. The bright, saturated colors, simple imagery, and shifting signs are used to evoke the wonder and magic of a carnival at night.

McCaela Prentice is currently living and writing in Astoria, NY. She is trying to catch a Snorlax. Her poetry has previously been featured in *Hobart*, *Perhappened*, and *Ghost City Review*. Her first chapbook, *Junk Drawer Heart*, was published with Invisible Hand Press.

Monique Quintana is from Fresno, CA, and the author of *Cenote City* (Clash Books, 2019) and the chapbook *My Favorite Sancho and Other Fairy Tales* (Sword and Kettle Press, 2021). Her work has appeared in *Pank*, *Wildness*, *Winter Tangerine*, and other publications. You can find her book reviews and artist interviews at *Luna Luna Magazine*, where she is a contributing editor. Her writing has been supported by Yaddo, the Sundress Academy of the Arts, the Community of Writers, and the Open Mouth Poetry Retreat. You can find her on Instagram @quintanadarkling and moniquequintana.com.

Jody Rae's creative nonfiction essays appear in *The Avalon Literary Review*, *The Good Life Review*, *From Whispers to Roars*, and *Red Fez*. Her short story, "Beautiful Mother" was a finalist in the Phoebe Journal 2021 Spring Fiction Contest. She was the first prize winner of the 2019 Winning Writers Wergle Flomp Humor Poetry Contest for her poem, "Failure to Triangulate." She has pieces forthcoming in *Sledgehammer Lit*, *RESURRECTION magazine*, and *Change Seven Magazine*. Her work can be found at criminyakesalive.com.

Solan Rodriguez is a San Francisco-based artist at SFSU pursuing archaeology and storytelling. He enjoys adventure time, comics, tarot, and The X-Files!

Jessica June Rowe is an author, playwright, editor, and perpetual daydreamer. She is on the editorial board of *Exposition Review* and has served as both editor in chief and fiction editor. A Best of the Net nominee, her fiction has appeared in *Okay Donkey Magazine*, *Gigantic Sequins*, *Atlas and Alice*, *Pidgeonholes*, and *Timber Journal*, among others, while her short plays have been featured on multiple stages in Los Angeles. One of her poems is stamped into a sidewalk in Valencia, CA, where she currently lives. She also really loves chai lattes. Find her on Twitter @willwrite4chai

Kaisa Saarinen grew up in the Finnish countryside and escaped as quickly as possible. She studied environmental politics and now works as a research analyst in London. Her writing is published or forthcoming in *Miniskirt*, *Bitter Fruit Review*, *Sledgehammer*, *Superfroot*, and elsewhere. @kuuhulluutta

Iva Sopta is a sophomore in college, where she studies politics, works at the library, and instantly listens to the same two playlists. Her work often reflects the nostalgia she feels toward her childhood and hometown, how troublesome it is to find a place where someone truly belongs, and the love she feels toward the small and big things in life.

Phillip Thompson is a photographer and writer who teaches English to speakers of other languages at CUNY. Some of his work can be found in *-algia*. Recently he also started a personal museum loan program in which participants exchange images of their ancestors to be displayed in someone else's home.

Lauren Thorn is a writer and artist based in Southern California. She has been writing ever since she was a little girl, though her early works are not exactly masterful. When she is not writing, she can be found screaming along to Fiona Apple lyrics, drawing and painting, or playing with her three dogs.

Ron Tobey lives in West Virginia, where he and his wife raise cattle and keep goats and horses. He is an imagist poet, grounding experiences and moods in concrete descriptions, including haiku, storytelling, and recorded poetry, and in filmic interpretation. He occasionally uses the pseudonym, Turin Shroudedindoubt, for literary and artistic work. He has published in several dozen digital and print literary magazines, including *Truly U Review*, *Prometheus Dreaming*, *Broadkill Review*, *Cabinet of Heed*, *Punk Noir*, and *The Light Ekphrastic*. His Twitter handle is @Turin54024117

Luke Valmadrid is a rising M1 studying on the west coast. Outside of writing and his current studies, he enjoys cooking tofu, playing video games cross-country with friends, and preparing for the restart of chamber music.

Thea Valmadrid is a sister, friend, and bear admirer. She greatly enjoys capturing nostalgia, wandering thoughts, and encouragement in her illustrations. Outside of drawing, Thea likes running on hilly paths and testing her sewing skills.

Marta Pavone Vasquez, very literal, but loves expressing herself through art. Searching for interesting ways to share a story. Art is therapy, providing a visual voice. Inspiration is all around, take a moment to look for it.

Laiba Yousuf is a 14-year-old South Asian poet. When she's not writing, you can find her overthinking or reading.

Chiko Kato studies graphic design in Japan. She has loved drawing illustrations since she was three years old.