

the  
totem

2004

12:15, and a teacup slowly drains itself beside a sprawling notebook,  
the dregs of summer clinging to the faded sidewalk umbrellas  
as the tea leaves hug the porcelain in her hands.  
She sits in the rays of the sun –  
two sugars, not three –  
with her eyes to the clouds,  
and the blue, blue sky.

She taps her pen with a rhythm only she can hear,  
blue sleeve against the tabletop,  
pages of her thoughts fluttering in the breeze.  
Her mind drifts with the tip of her pen,  
floating between the lines  
(and wandering over the edges)  
as she dreams and schemes  
beneath a blue umbrella.

Tea turns to coffee –  
mocha sweet with chocolate –  
and her finger traces the memories of nonexistent glass rings  
along the table surface  
that were wiped away that afternoon,  
lost like letters drowned in tea,  
ink that bled black in watered-down ginger.  
Tea-stained pages sit beside cold coffee  
beneath the full moon;  
but even in that mystical moment  
as the clock chimes three by four  
and she stares down at the moonlit page –  
the words still don't come back.

And long after the cup has been left in the bottom of the sink,  
when she tosses and turns,  
clinging to her white marshmallow pillow,  
she dreams of that world  
(of vanilla castles and chocolate towers)  
and remembers that tea and coffee  
aren't always bitter.

We could stand in the same desert and be in different worlds  
We could sit side by side and both be alone

A speck of color in a drab place  
But this yellow flower wasn't meant for me

Last night we did, and we talked  
I can't tell if she ever felt the distance the way I did  
Or if she ever wanted a way out of solitude  
Why did she come here with me anyway?  
Why not somebody else?

A whisper of music caught by the wind  
But that bird's laughter wasn't meant for me

Does she want anybody else?  
A tired look.  
A sigh.  
"There's no one like you."  
What did she mean?

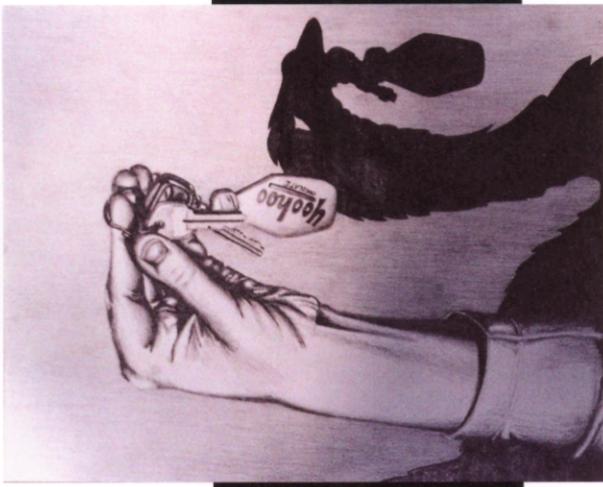
She's at home in the mountains, but they're cruel to me  
My lungs are greedy for their air  
My legs protest each step  
From the top I just see higher peaks  
Brutal, and too beautiful to even remember clearly  
So I turn and stumble back down

We left each other for the last time in a dark place,  
With few words, and tears that refused to flow

This beauty was never mine to keep



blue // anonymous

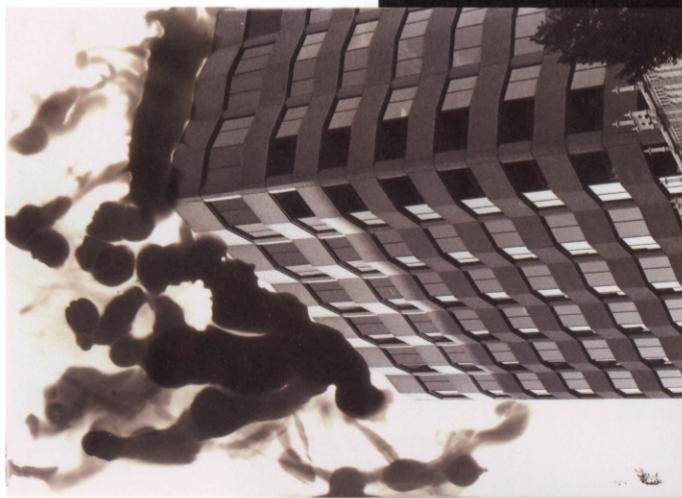


a turkey hand // royal renecke

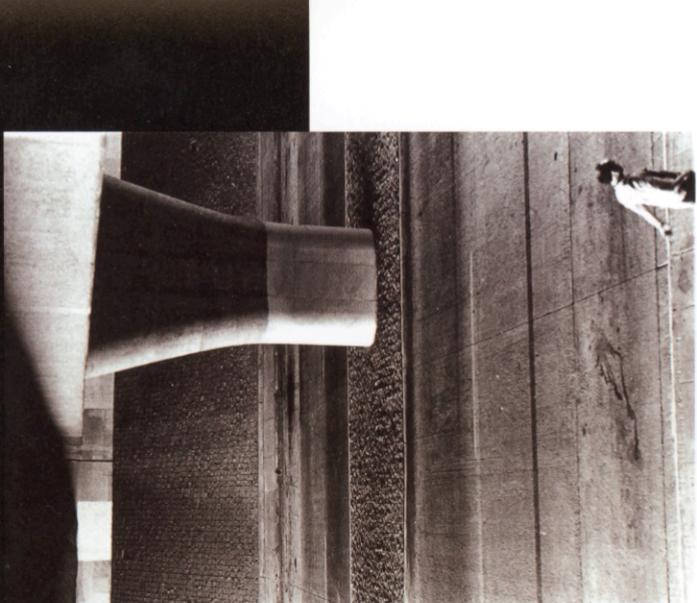
She reads her life  
from fortune cookie fragments  
tracing letters of her own through the crumbs  
with her pinky.  
She keeps them all –  
little white banners  
with her lucky numbers  
tattooed across the back  
folded once along the middle  
and dropped  
for safekeeping

into a small metal tin  
beside a plastic jar that once held peanuts,  
or maybe some of those little paper-wrapped hard candies  
that she never bites because she isn't supposed to.  
Now it comprises the unhappy home  
of three hundred and twenty-seven paper cranes –  
all brothers and sisters of variable colors,  
and the same size if not the same age,  
who will never ever see their six hundred and something missing siblings.

good fortune, bad fortune// elizabeth reed

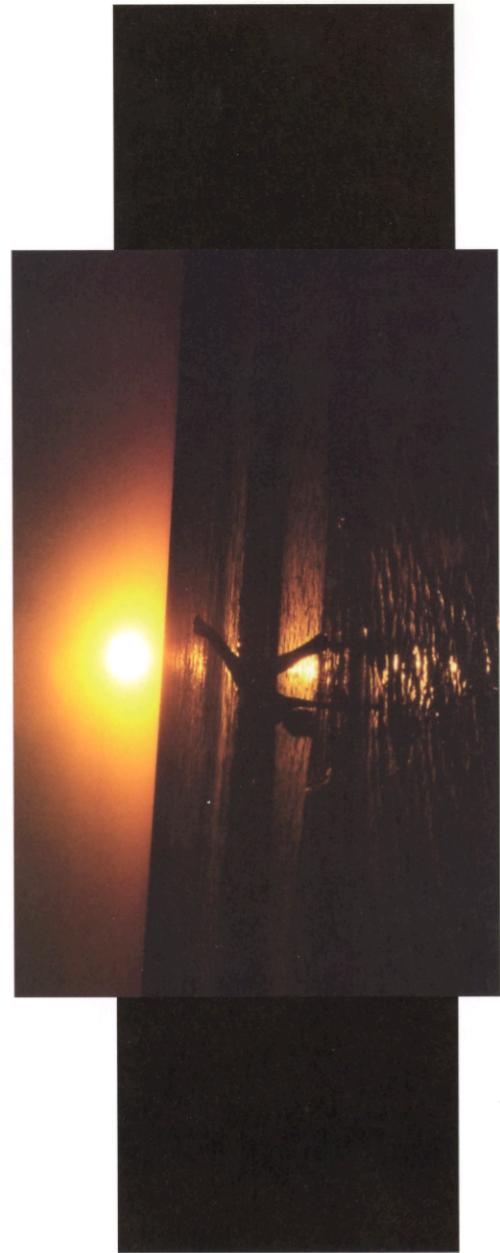


987 1366 // e kelsic



911 1311 // e kelsic

happiness in california // jason yosinski



untitled // emilio castano graff



death and god // isaac hilburn

"Anyone can stop a man's life, but no one  
his death a thousand doors open unto it"

-Seneca, *Phoenissae* 1. 152

"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God"

-New Testament, Hebrews, ch. 10, v. 31

The lovers eyes met in the caress of  
A bombmaker's fingers. Fragments of an  
Afternoon. And the children stare falling  
From heaven, and they swear at God. I love

My father. I love my mother. But there  
Is no such thing as love, anymore. An  
Embrace cross mind wires with the hand, clutching  
And to grab, hold, and never let go, till

The face is whiteless, paleless, and or rage  
In a distant parabola. But that is  
No excuse. One cannot say of this  
Thing, 'yes, that is my woe.' Why is no doubt

No external arc, but an inside clutching  
Grasping for the one who expelled, but does  
Not exist.

"For all the happiness mankind can gain  
Is not in pleasure, but in rest from pain."

-Jon Dryden, *The Indian Emperor*, act IV, sc. 1

bare feet. And, oh, the feel of grass. Of plush carpets, and glass fragments. Ballerina in a boiling cauldron, a wall dripping, dripping till the fluid runs down my ear with sounds of people laughing. I knew laughter, but I'm better now. I have possession. Me! Me! Me! Me! Four walls and an outdoor park, wrapped about each other like a laugh turned inside out. Like fingers tracing softly over exposed skin. Like fingers dragging softly over exposed skin. Laughter tracing softly each thought to its word. Till the mechanical. Till the divine, though divine never has or had. And some sense of peace is derived. And some sense is tapered off, like a leaving.

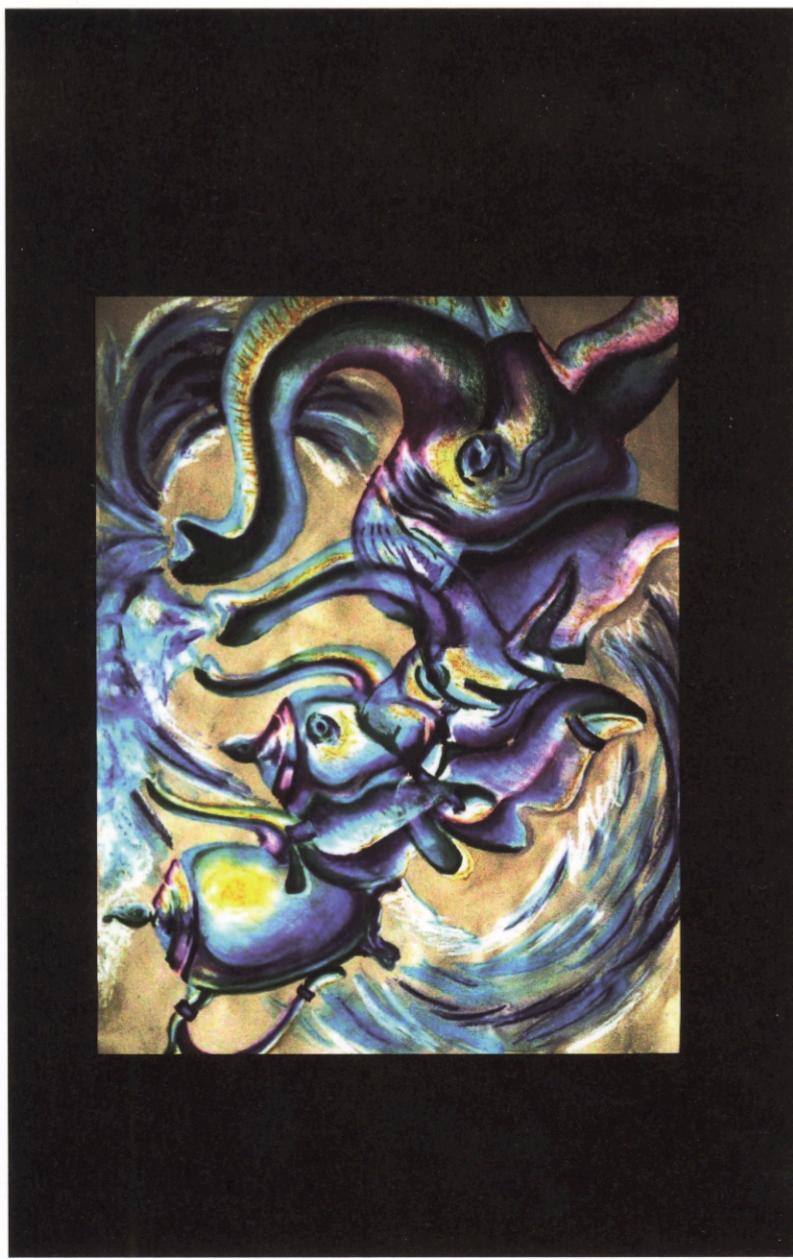
bare feet. Bare without ornamentation or improvisation. Just the simple all jumbled that way, like bed sheets. Can one make art without intent? Can one call it art or love or— He had hands. Each one did, actually. Surprise is not the appropriate emotional response at this time. Time has gone mad, like hands and sheets. It wasn't planned. But there is the familiar. But there is the frantic. Open sky and an outdoor park with no connection whatsoever. Insert witty comment here. Words, with no connection whatsoever.

bare, bare, bare. Till I'm raw inside. Till the rain stops and they let the children out to play in the sun. Ever been on a swing set drunk? At night the sky blends with the ground and you need no self. At night the eyes close, the breathing slows — we wake next morning. Mist has a hidden agenda, the way water drops touch your skin. There is a cold sensation, and the sweat is washed away. Two feet running, and the grass is washed away. From the towers, they call to worship in the desert. And the ground is baked hard. From the towers God is invoked, and re-invoked. The ground is baked hard. And we may not believe. Indeed, we may choose not to believe. There will be an awakening. There will be an awakening.

effloresce // stephen travis bannerman



teapot elephant // royal reinecke





Each time I lean in close, the scent overpowers me. Irresistible. So clean, and with just a hint of strawberries coming from her hair. Intoxicating. I inhale deeply and brush back the sweet curls as our lips meet.

Face to face. Mouth to mouth. The taste—salty, warm, and wet. She knows what this moment means to me. The only time I lower all the defenses. I used to wonder which was better: someone who understood me whom I couldn't trust, or someone I trusted who didn't understand me. With her there are no compromises.

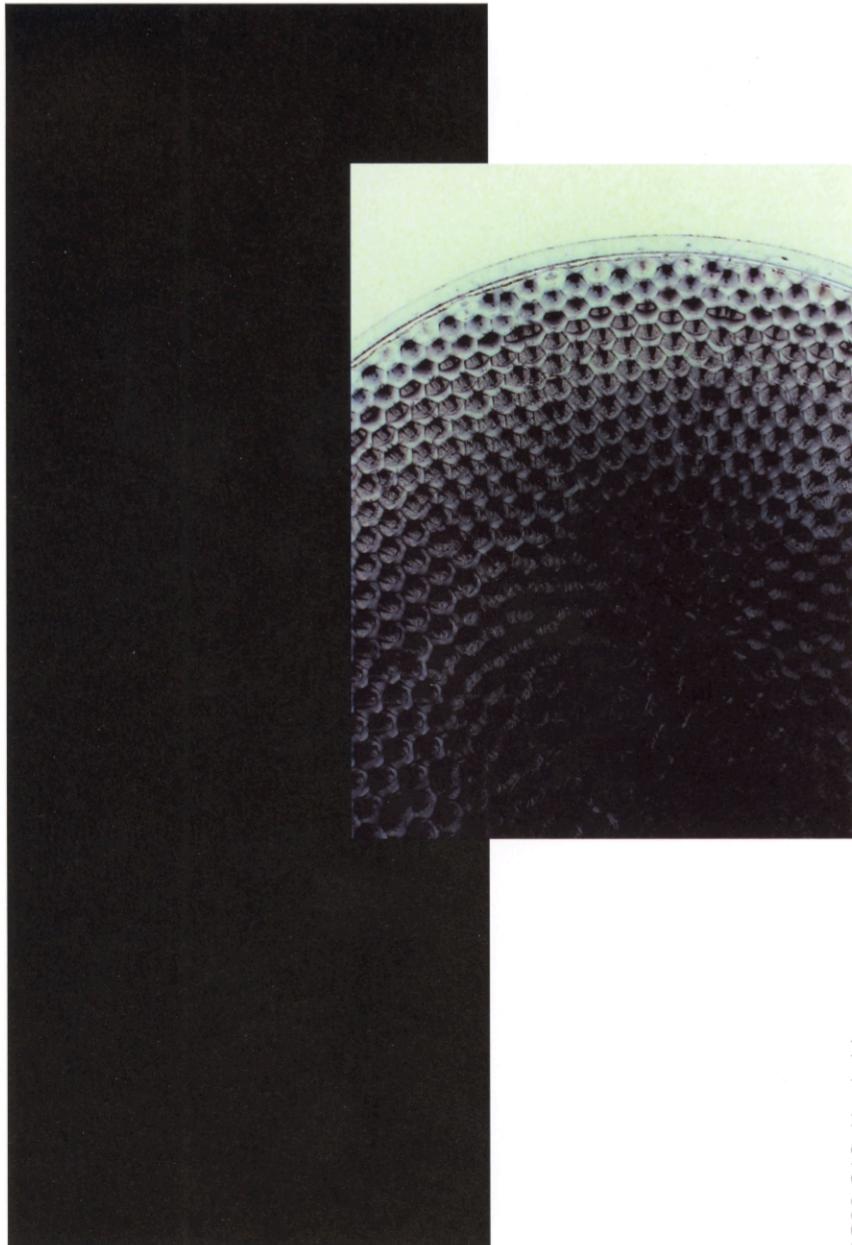
Every part of me feels more alive as she lifts the weight of the world from my shoulders. All this time and her embrace still has this effect. I pull her closer and warmth surges through me. A siren blares in the distance as the temperature between us rises, and I have to smile.

You need three elements to make a fire: heat, fuel, and oxygen. Take away one and the fire is gone. But even without oxygen, the heat and fuel can still burn. There's a name for this, and she taught me long ago why poets always describe the passion between two people as smoldering. With her arms wrapped around me and her lips locked firmly onto mine, she makes me forget to breathe. And then we burn.

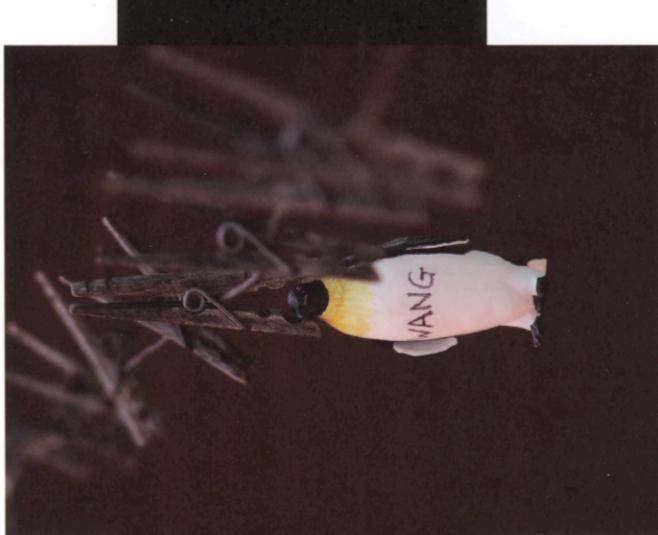
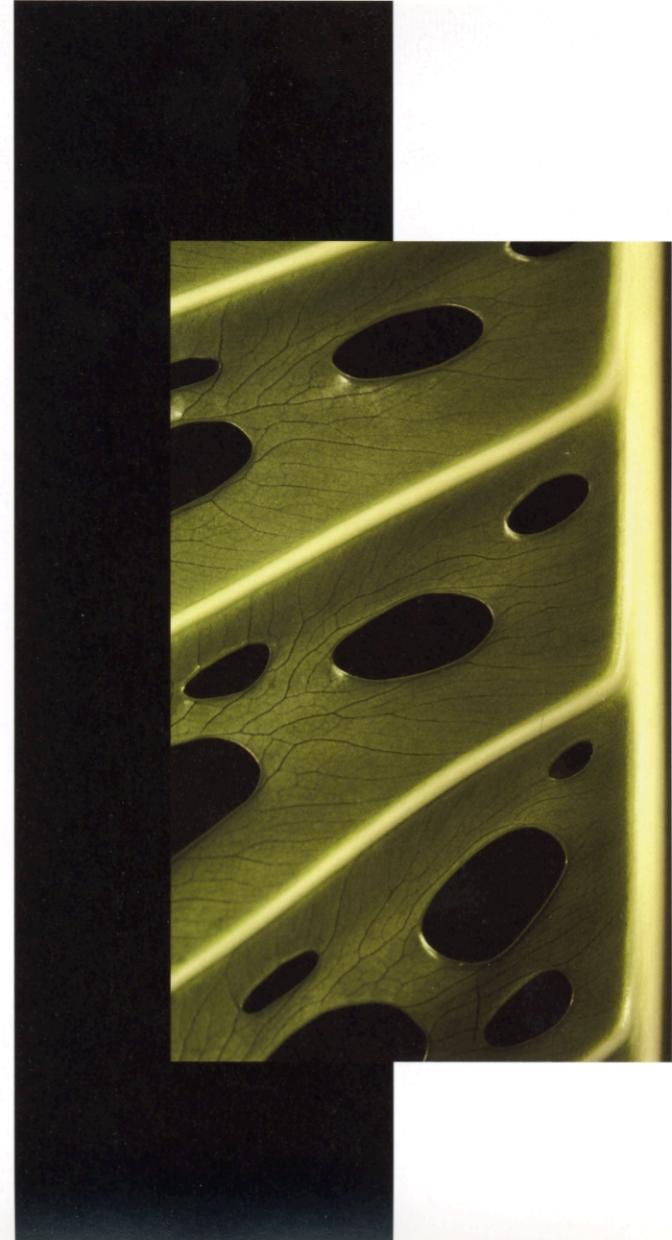
She reaches down and we lock our fingers together. There are bones in the human hand but no muscles. The movements are controlled entirely from the arm. When we touch, our hands are only puppets serving the will of the souls pulling the strings. She expresses her will by taking my hand and clasping it to her chest. Bone, the hardest substance in the body, nestled lovingly against the softest.

Her heartbeat pulses through my fingertips, pounding the rhythm for the dance of our lips. Her taste, her touch, her scent—I begin to respond in the most primal way and know what must come next. I move my mouth to her ear and whisper...

"Good night."



untitled // will hetsley



clothesline // stephen travis bannerman



untitled // dorota korta

"The Lord said to Moses, Make a saraph and mount it on a pole, and if anyone who has been bitten looks at it he will recover." Numbers XXI, 8

Through a crystal desert I have followed  
A pillar of fire by day, and in all  
The cold, windy, starless nights, one of cloud;  
A glass plateau I have found at first light  
Caked in manna, every dawn the blessing  
Returns.

I have tired of the day's climb:  
Every ledge sprouts a jagged crystal spur  
And in every smooth face a prisoner  
Looks at me with longing. I once thought that  
In the depths of the earth the dead lie still  
But now I see their tears and hear their sighs  
Echo.

Each time I lean in close and kiss  
His cracked, quivering, mercury lips, I  
Leap back, as down the foggy window slides  
A viper. the Trapped One, he too, in flight  
Descends and finds the next silver portal—  
Leaps back and descends, leaps back and descends.  
Bottom.

Alone again, and the pillar  
Now is gone; atop a powdery self  
Nearby I see an unremembered sight  
I ascend and the meaningless wind stops  
And in awe I stare, for in the shiny  
Bronze at the top of the pole, I see no  
Reflection.



**The Totem would like to  
thank the people who made  
this issue possible:**

**editor in chief**  
**neda afsarmanesh**

**business editor**  
**ye li**

**assistant layout editor**  
**leo stein**

**staff**  
**emilio graff**  
**dorota korta**  
**kevin lui**  
**alejandro meruelo**  
**xiao peng**

**ASCIIT**  
**Words Matter**  
**Campus Life**  
**MOSH**  
**Caltech Y**  
**GSC**  
**Public Relations**  
**Student-Faculty Programs**  
**Archives**