

Totem 2016

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Musical composition “Radiant Imperatrix” by *Lydia Kivrak* can be heard at totem.caltech.edu.

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PETER BUHLER

The Noon and Stars

The universe is largest in the shadows of the night
In endless leagues of emptiness
An infinity of spite

The heart can hardly bear it
The fragility, the fright

No.

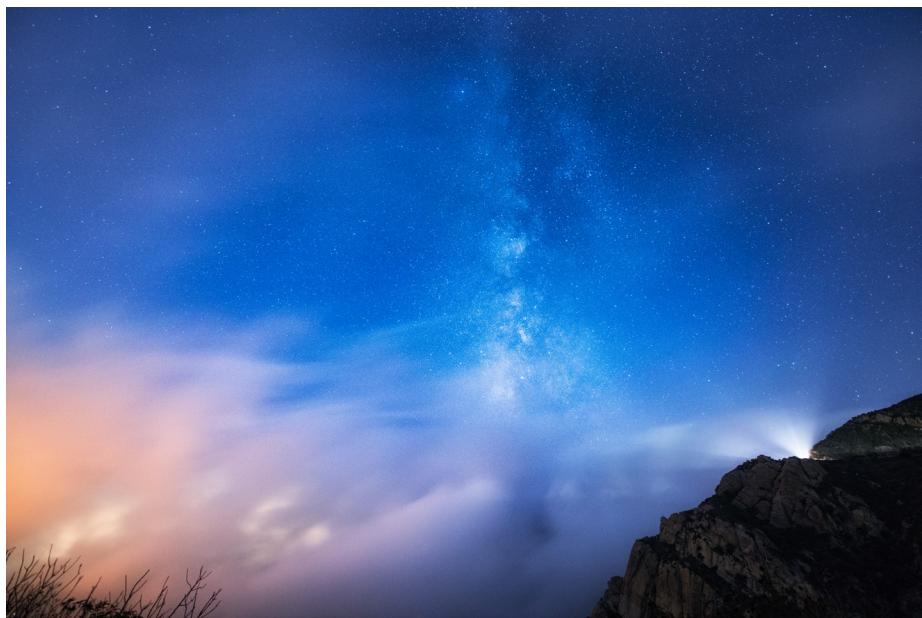
Look up into the daytime,
See the noonday sky
The stars are all still shining
Though the sun has made them shy

The universe is no less big
And she is no more bright
Standing in the dark
Or standing in the light

Will you consider all the hidden things?
Or will you only trust your sight?



DINGYI SUN | Tree of Life | Digital photography



DINGYI SUN | Beacon of Hope | Digital photography

KER LEE YAP

All Words Have Lives

All words have lives.

Broken words are born crippled by nervous tongues
or stuttered breaths,
but they inhabit still the mind and are birthed
from lips to ear to ear to lips.
Loud words are fertile, and spawn bastard child --
the bundles that storks don't drop
but eaves do oblige.

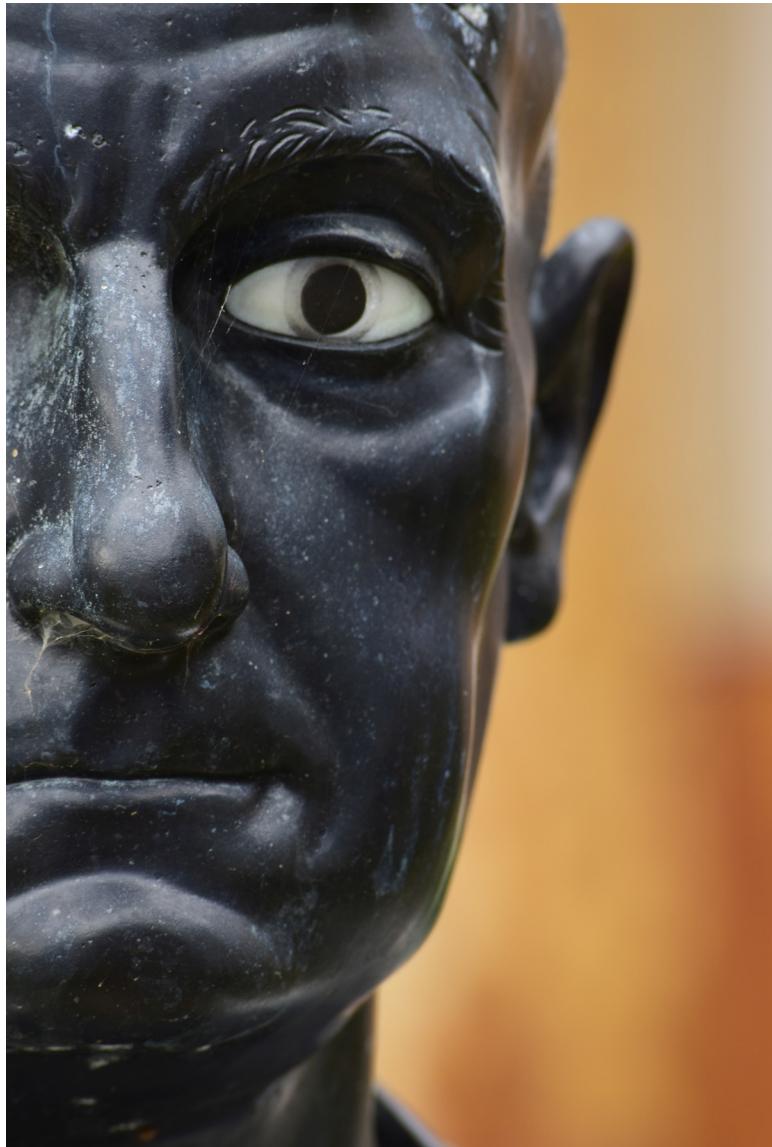
All words have lives.

Some words may triumph mute,
and walking among pages and bindings and covers, inscribed.
Yet still, these words are cheated,
blame failing fibers and flimsy marks torn
by the erasure of time.

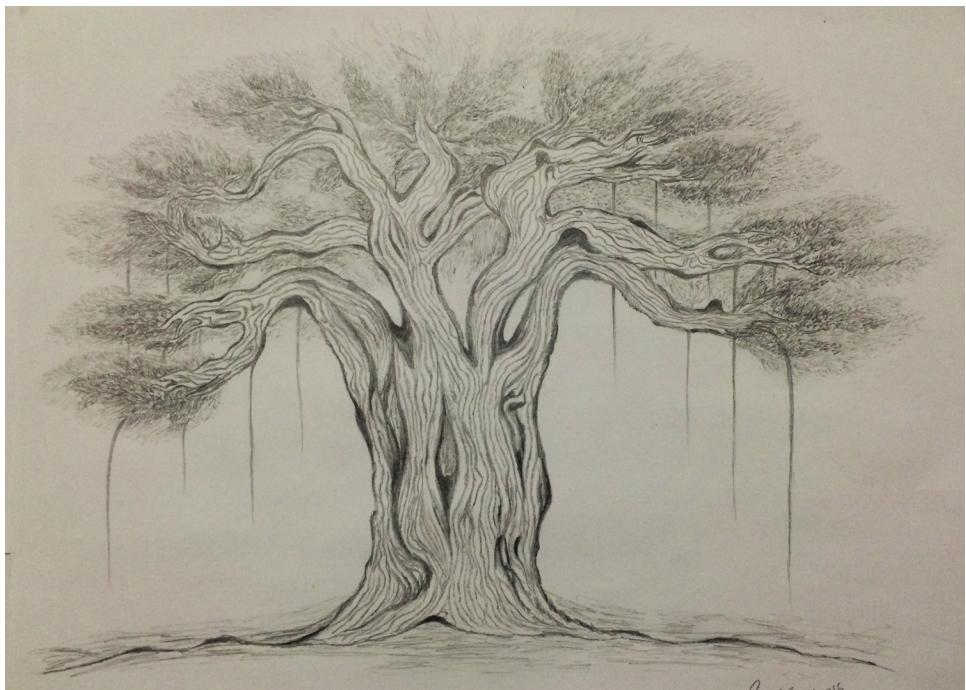
All words have lives
so all words must die.

But

there's some comfort knowing
the stupid ardent-drowsy words that pitter pattered in blue-white light --
those that pilgrimaged oceans and the architected cliffs of time
those that slipped past orange street lamps where we no longer live --
float
in some elusive ubiquitous dimension of webs and clouds
in some permanence
of an afterlife.



EMILY BLYTHE | The Relic Philosopher | Digital photography



SRIPRIYA RAVINDRA KUMAR | An Imperfect Being | Pencil

An Imperfect Being

A mindless poet struck with randomness of life
Distinguishing cultured from uncultured
Carving out perfection out of imperfection
Chiseling through every detail of a tree trunk
Being blind to the surroundings
Being blind to yourself.

AGNE SKRIPTKAITE

White Raspberries

A little white raspberry fell into their hand. They stopped for a short moment of wonder. It was the greatest honor: little curious things, while abundant, were generally quite elusive. They lifted their eyes with a playful smile, but there was nothing there except a grey five-legged creature lazily tightroping on a thin icy fence. They looked up just for a second, but the raspberry was gone when they glanced back. Suddenly, a corner of their eye felt uncomfortably full and an unconscious blink released a warm drop of salt water, which, politely obeying laws of nature, fell on their shoe. They lifted their eyes to the sky this time, their hands still in front, supporting each other.

A little white raspberry fell into their hand. They didn't notice. They saw them appear from the gray mist above and descend. More and more raspberries formed until the sky became a uniform raspberry factory, churning them out throughout its volume as if boiling. The gray creature hurried towards the house using its fifth leg, the one awkwardly sticking out from its back, as a balance, but they didn't notice that either. They kept walking forward, eyes darting through the three dimensional moire patterns, a dance of little white raspberries. Soon the music caught up: the rhythmic groan coming from beneath their feet, as if an old wooden floor was assembling itself right under them, complaining about the uneven surface.

A little white raspberry fell into their hand... Dinner is almost ready. White plates and silver cutlery are greeting the oak table with usual sharp clinks. It seems that the sound is piercing through the sweetness of golden roasted potatoes and the dark green aroma of dried parsley rushing out of the kitchen. A grey cat is falling asleep in front of the fireplace, small drops of water evaporating from its fur. The family looks out the window, minds infused with determined patience and compassion, but not understanding.

White raspberries do not exist.

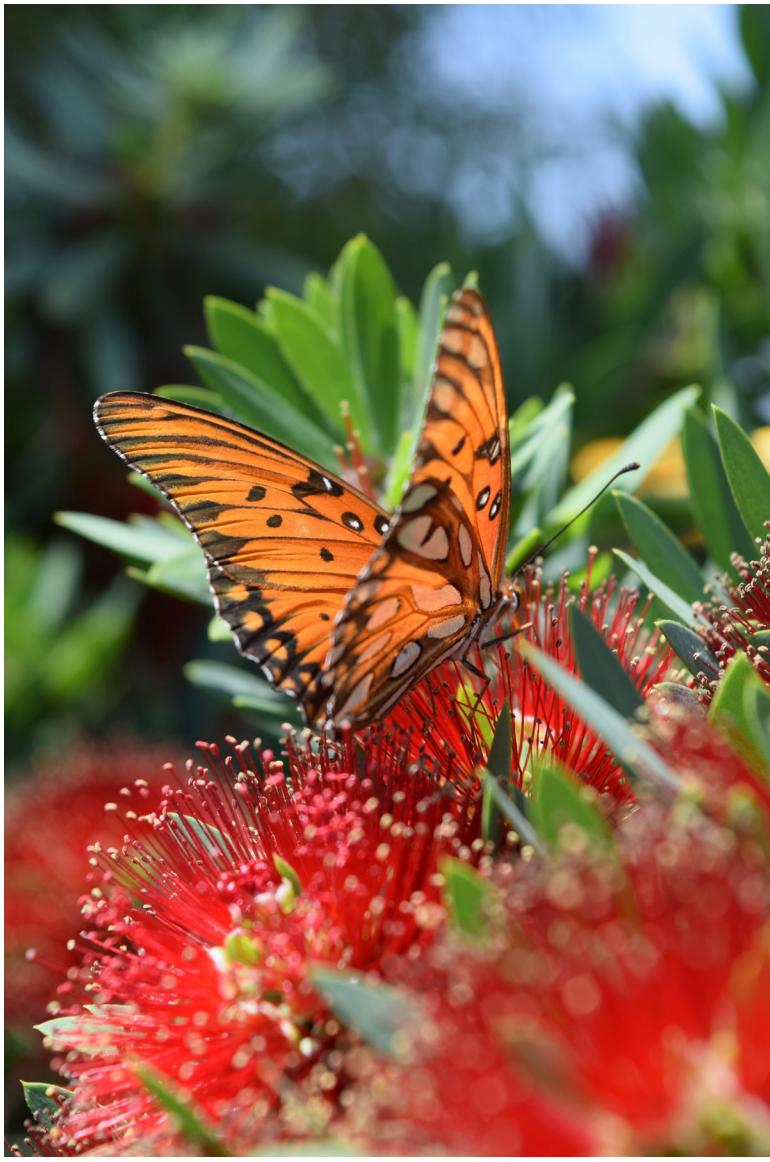
ANITA CHEN
Untitled

After thinking long and hard
I've come to terms with my inner bard...
Confess, 'tis not; nay, poetry write
My feelings down 'fore they escape my sight
Archetypes be yet fit they not
Emotions with whom my heart besot
Entangled for the lasting year
Are structured at last? Pray lend thy ear

So thou mayst hear the struggled song
Of my heart's great woes for eons long
Lament, lament the red walls cry
The tears flow fast as time pass by
Sharp-pierc'd briars, my feelings burned
Yet away from that was I unturned
Instead rememb'ring what feelings were
Brought greater anguish than previous bore
As affection's well in deeper I fell,
Not understanding, though under a spell.



JENNY | ghosts and angels | Digital photography



EMILY BLYTHE | Diminutive Regalia | Digital photography

ANONYMOUS
u n t i t l e d

moods embossed on a coin
in simultaneously purple & green
hues
orange & yellow ocean waves
calm & motionless
reflect teal light from a low sun
as a sphere embodying the essence of
magenta - a fluorescent glow which must be
observed peripherally
~ a e s t h e t i c a l l y ~
most importantly
blue divine outlines the time
perceived through
unknown highly saturated indigo senses

this
when viewed
(this scene seen) as
stale hi-8 camcorder footage filmed
by a cellphone and
projected through stale summer air
onto a powerless crt tv receiving the
day's last ray
glare prevents complete visual
c o m p r e h e [] n --
reminds one of the 90's fireball
yo-yo returning home to the palm

ANONYMOUS

encounter

a single exchange
or maybe a few
a swapping of words and ideas
and of views
there're the usual questions
cliche at best
tired and old
they still pass the test
of prompting glazed eyes
and should be condemned
for conversational murder
among many decent men
or perhaps if you're lucky
these niceties are passed
you move straight to the heart
with these questions asked
what's your favorite record?
or your favorite band?
if you could live anywhere
would it be in the sand?
or maybe you ask something
zany and stupid
with both fingers crossed
and while praying to cupid

the arrows are fired
the guns are unloaded
you sit back and wait as
the show starts unfolding
you sit back and wait as
the answers start rolling
and the words you relate to
are abundantly showing
that this might be the start
of no ordinary pairing
it's not apples and oranges
more like pickles and herring
with these thoughts in your mind
you depart with a smile
give a pat on your back
you could run a whole mile
and then later that week
you pass by that old friend
or maybe acquaintance
it's not really clear then
relationship aside
your eyes happen to meet
exhibit no recognition of that
fact and look away



JENNY | cafe reflections | Digital photography



DINGYI SUN | Hello | Digital photography

DENISE SCHMITZ

The Loveliest Vision in This Dark World

She was born in the sea.

Between two forks of coral was an egg that was soft and lumenescent and made of jelly. Days passed, and the speck inside the egg grew and ebbed. Weeks passed, and it became a translucent feathery rosette. Then feathers became fins, and the jelly melted away, and she emerged into the salt and the currents of the reef.

As she matured, her fins grew strong, and she became a part of the sea. Her reef bloomed, a lacy frame about a small cropping of rock that burst upwards from the foamy surface of the water. There were fish and crustaceans that flocked among tiny forests of anemones. The sea was warm. At night, the stars danced.

She learned to laugh and to turn in circles and to swim races with the fish. She learned to pull herself up through the coral with her arms and rest on the rock, watching the seafowl above. She learned to breathe air. Her skin became deep blue and speckled with small silver bubbles, and her fingernails were made of white stones made smooth by tumbling through the waves.

The sun was just dipping below the surface of the sea in the distance, and the moon was suspended gleaming in the sky, and as she slept, she dreamed of a face.

It was a face unlike her own. The skin was smooth and bright and slightly speckled, like the shells of the hermit crabs that lived in a cave beneath the rock. Surrounding the face was a beautiful shiny fan of hair that moved just slightly as the mouth breathed, gently, asleep. Then the eyes opened, and to look into those eyes was to look into the sea.

She awoke then, but for many days afterward she was in a dream.

Her days were lazy. She glittered and swam and sang. The fish were free and flying, and they were good company. Great groups of them

moved in rippling fabrics through the seaweed and the waves. They bred. They laid their cloudy glass eggs. Generations of fish lived and died and lived again. Sometimes she would see a fish that she favored, and she would kiss it gently on the top of its head, and it would not die. In this way she collected a small flock of fish that adored her and loved to follow her through the water, surfing the little vortices in her wake.

She dreamed often now. When the sun was out, the water twinkled, green above, hard clear blue below. When clouds draped across the sky, the rain made the tide swell and the waves were icy and grey. And when night came, she saw the face of her lovely creature with eyes that twinkled and swelled with the many moods of the sea.

And so she kissed her fish goodbye and went out to where the sea was deep and her rock vanished behind the horizon.

She had never seen land before. It emerged in front of her and grew to fill the entire world with sand and plants standing on posts. She traced the coastline and found it covered in creatures. In her path she found vast reefs populated by unfamiliar colors and shapes of coral, cliffs that seemed to reach the clouds themselves, fish with iridium skin.

She travelled farther and the water chilled. The coastline became white and surrounded her in loops and ripples. Pieces of ice floated all around, showing timidly above the surface. Birds dived into the water and turned their fluffy feathers sleek. She felt smooth skin against her arm and saw a great whale that looked as though it had been cut from ice, and she swam with it, sprinting, and it smiled at her.

But in all her travels to the far corners of the sea, the creature with gems for eyes appeared only in her dreams. She imagined soft wavy hair reflecting the sun's light and she dreamed of shimmering folds of cloth wrapped about slender limbs in place of fins. She knew that such a creature was born on land and was not of the sea.

So she longed for her home and found herself once again amid the crystalline webs of her reef. Fish circled and leaves waved gently in the current as she lay on her rock, watching a ship balanced delicately on the horizon.

She sang now, and the song in her heart was sorrow and the loss of what she had never known and the knowledge of what she had never

had. No voice of the land or the sky or the sea was the equal of hers. She was magnetic and she compelled the distant ship toward her like a tributary pouring into a great river.

Her song grew hopeful as she imagined this ship carrying her beloved. She sang of warm soft lips like coral and eyes like gems and the embrace of the gentle arms that she could almost see, waving the sails in a smiling greeting. But the ship grew nearer and she saw that it teemed with creatures, like hers, but not like hers. They were rough and their voices were deep and loud, and they worked frantically to sail nearer. They could not resist her song. She cried out in anguish as their ship struck her rock, and she despaired of ever being united with her love.

She saw ships often and sang to them always. But always her heart broke newly as she saw that the creatures aboard were not the one she was seeking. They drove their boats to explosion on the rock in their frenzy for the song that was not theirs. Her reef became a derelict garden of splinters.

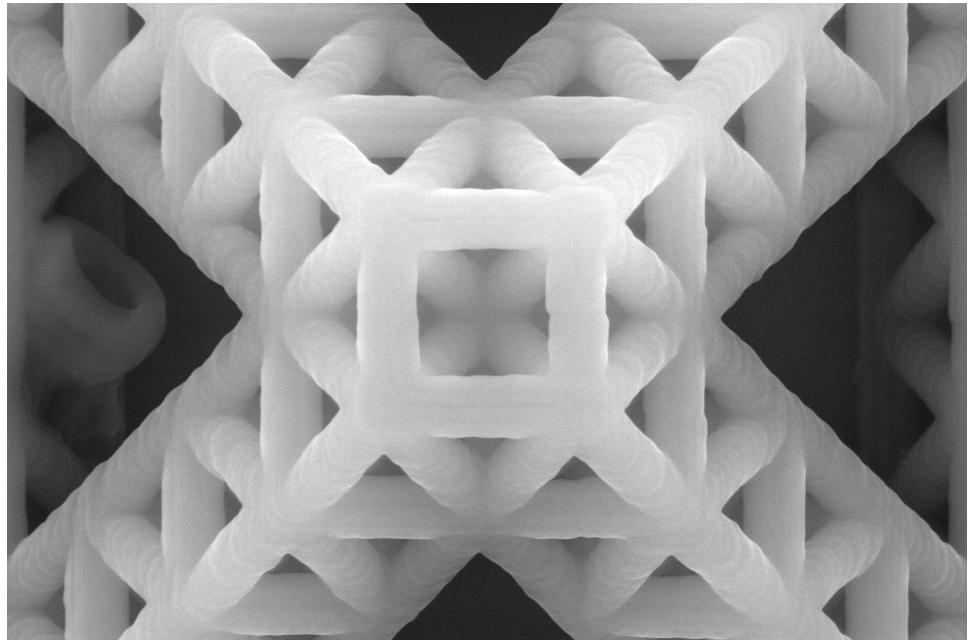
The approaching ships grew fewer, for her voice was death to them. But she sang, and her voice grew still sweeter as she sang of longing and mourning and the one she could not bear to be without. Her soul ached. Ripples of fish brushed against her face and twirling jellyfish swam all about her in rhythmic motions.

A lone ship approached one day and passed her by. The sailors had learned to fear her, and she saw them working with their ears sealed, safe in their silence. She saw their leader straining against broad twists of rope that bound him to his ship. He alone heard and was driven to mad agony by her song, and she knew his pain when he fought as she had fought her own heart's bindings.

The days were too long, now. Each day she longed for the night.

And as she dreamed she saw the sea in a pair of eyes and heard a voice as lovely as her own calling out, balanced on tiptoe on a spindle high above the deck of a sailing ship with hair flying in the wind and cheeks like the setting sun and lips like coral.

And she opened her eyes and saw a ship raising its flag just above the horizon, and her heart thrilled, and she sang.



ARTURO MATEOS | Architected Octopus | Scanning Electron Microscopy (SEM)

Micrograph of a hierarchical nanolattice made of octet unit cells. Nanolattices take advantage of architecture and size effects to create strong, lightweight materials. The beam diameter is one micron.

ANONYMOUS

dry bones and an inevitable exit from a high speed cocoon

tears have passed from
dry wells
jets
wet from condensation
from some magnificent
cold
i pilot
straight down
from the sink faucet
you ran all night :::
so it wouldn't freeze again.
i cr ash into every *
other :::::::::::::::::::::
©%[| ≈:::(({¢
droplet :::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::
all these jets :::
people splashing into
nothingness & i carve
my face into stones
& buckle them into every
goddam seat
and then i bail ::::°:::
(like always) :::::::':::
water engages my
senses — twenty øne cars
jolt me from near sleep
simultaneously
i'm in my bed now awake
(like always)
my bed a blade of grass—
a single dew drop dangles :::::::
drops & is för gatan

PETER BUHLER

Umbrella Child

Once, long ago, when the earth was flat and littered with mysterious and secret corners, Hideki and his wife, Maso, lived in one such small, forgotten place in a meager, salt-encrusted shack, surrounded by the sea at the very tip of a little, rocky peninsula in the very south of Japan. They shared a deep love and, although poor, were happy for many years. But as they grew older, Maso began to say in the evenings when Hideki returned from fishing, "Oh, if only we could have a child. I would hold him and care for him, and he would grow up to be a great fisherman, just like his father!" Hideki also longed for a child, but as much as they prayed and hoped, they had no children. Fifty years passed in this way, until Hideki and Maso despaired of ever having a child, and learned to be at peace in their old age.

One day, however, as Hideki fished from the barren cliffs overlooking the sea, he saw a speck out on the waters, which he supposed was fish or bird. He watched it for some time, and as it floated closer he saw that it was an umbrella. Hideki thought, "It is not often that pieces of the world find their way to us. What a shame it would be for such a lovely umbrella to go to waste." So, he climbed down the cliff and swam out to fetch the umbrella.

To his surprise, when he took hold of the umbrella, it let out a small cry. "What a peculiar umbrella," thought Hideki, but brought it back to shore anyway. When he reached land and examined it properly, he received another surprise. Curled up inside the umbrella was a baby girl!

Hideki was filled with great joy and, taking the child tenderly in his arms, he carried her up to the shack to show Maso the miracle. They named the girl Nami, which means 'Wave,' since she had been carried to them by the waves. The little shack was filled with joy, and Hideki and Maso raised the child well. Nami became a strong and intelligent girl, thoughtful and kind to her parents, and Hideki and Maso were happy.

Now, it so happened that, twelve years after Nami had washed ashore, a great storm fell over all of Japan for many months and, at that time, a shrewd businessman manufactured a vast quantity of umbrellas,

which were loaded onto a large boat in Nichinan and sent to the market in Kochi. The boat was well-built and equipped with a seasoned captain and a sturdy crew, but shortly after leaving port a typhoon struck the vessel and all was lost to the bottom of the ocean, except for a dozen large crates of umbrellas, which floated out of the storm's reach and into the mysterious fingers of the tides. And it pleased the tide to guide the umbrellas to a certain secluded peninsula on the southern coast of Japan.

On New Year's Day, when the tempest finally blew itself out, and Nami became thirteen and Hideki and Maso became ninety (for in those days, it was the custom that every person would add one year to their age at the turn of the New Year), Nami went out fishing with her father on the cliff, as had been their daily practice before the storm. Nami stood tall and stretched toward the sun, felt the salty breeze on her face, and put her hand over her eyes to look out to sea, where she saw several dots on the horizon. She watched them all afternoon, sometimes visible and sometimes falling out of sight.

"Father, what are those dots on the horizon?" Nami asked. Hideki was silent, and he thought about the day he had seen Nami for the first time, floating in the ocean.

When Nami saw that her father was deep in thought, she decided it was better to let him ruminate and not to ask again. So they passed the rest of the evening in silence and then, at sunset, Hideki pointed to the eastern horizon, where the moon was just rising out of the water and to the western horizon, where the sun was settling into the ocean to sleep. "Nami," he asked, "Who are the mother and father of the sun and the moon?"

Nami thought about Hideki's question until the red-orange blood of the sun had drained out of the clouds and they were bathed in the silvery glow of the full moon, but she could not come up with an answer. "Who?" she asked finally.

"No one knows," replied Hideki with a sigh. Then he turned abruptly to head back to the shack, "We should hurry back, for I am sure that your mother has made a delicious dinner!" Nami gathered the equipment and the day's catch and followed her father.

When they returned the next day, the dots were again on the horizon, only this time they were a little larger. Nami asked Hideki, "Fa-

ther, why did you ask me about the sun and the moon yesterday?" Hideki was again silent and stared out over the water, and Nami contented herself with watching the little dots bobbing on the ocean. Finally, as they were preparing to head home, Hideki turned to Nami and spoke, "Nami, the sun and the moon are your brother and your sister." Then he told her about the day he had found her floating in the umbrella.

For the next month, the dots on the horizon grew larger and larger, until one day Nami could see that they were large wooden boxes. The day after, the boxes washed up on shore and Nami and Hideki walked out to inspect them. They were full of umbrellas! Hideki laughed, "Perhaps we should see if your cousins are in there." Nami laughed, too, and pulled out some of the umbrellas to examine them. They were beautifully crafted, in all the colors that one could imagine, and more besides, all embroidered with scenes of battles, ships, mountains, wild animals, and flowers. Nami grinned at Hideki, holding an armful of umbrellas.

"Ah! We do not have enough space for all of those in the house! Choose your favorite and we can bring it back to show your mother," smiled Hideki. Nami contemplated the umbrellas before choosing a deep blue one embroidered with delicate silver silk constellations and scurrying to follow Hideki home.

That night, Hideki and Maso passed away from old age. Nami mourned and buried them and was left alone. After a few days, as she contemplated the graves and the desolate land, she thought about what Hideki had said, "The sun and the moon are your brother and sister," and turned over in her hands the umbrella she had found on that last day on the beach with Hideki. Then she had an idea.

She went down to the beach where the umbrellas were sitting and began to sew them together, making a beautiful rainbow sail. Then she took the containers apart and built a boat from them. When the boat was big enough, she attached the sail, gathered food and water, loaded them on board and sailed toward the horizon to search for her brother and her sister.

Onward she sailed for many months, past the farthest islands of men, past the angels and demons of the deep, past the last roils and waves of the ocean, to the place where the waters of the earth meet the waters of the sky in a gentle froth of heavenly ether. All was silent there, where the stars shower down, mingling with the rain, where the

galaxies roost among the fog, and the planets rock to sleep on the tranquil tides of perpetual sapphire dusk.

There the boat ran aground upon the gauzy shores of eternity and the child disembarked, her feet sinking ever so slowly into the warm and sleepy celestial foam. She took with her the deep blue umbrella, spread its indigo canopy of silver constellations and golden memories above her head, and walked into the ethereal twilight to find her siblings, sending the subtle ripples of her footprints out to tickle the universe.



PETER BUHLER | Umbrella Child | Digital art



PETER BUHLER | Stair Jumping | Digital art

DAN GLEESAK

workplace akathisia

I'm antsy. I can't wait. to shield my tender watery eyes from the sharp rays of fluorescent bars blaring above. to unshackle my pathetic wrists from the hot plastic of the laptop, sticky with sweat. to escape the crushing weight of my own body that pins me to the ratty fabric of an office chair

fingers trembling as their puppet limbs are forced to dance some dance that isn't a dance but a mania of flurried appendages clumsily tapping and tripping and clacking. the frenzied flailing gives way to exerted floundering, gives way to pitiful limp squirming.. this will not do, will not do at all...

gulp. and down burns the office sludge, rattling my heart along the way

first unsteadily quivering then with renewed youthful vigor, heartbeats step, stamp, tramp on and on. their insistent march echoes in my head, bashing the inner walls of my skull with their rhythmic precision. head throbbing, pulse thudding, hands shaking, eyes blurring

I struggle to raise my shriveled aching hands up, up to my head, struggle to keep the stabs of pain from bursting out, struggle... pale withered fingers tangled in greasy black hair make poor supports for the sinking, sagging corpulent weight of the skull. the dull skull full, full of writhing grey-pink worms pulsating, thrashing their gruesome slimy bodies against worn and resigned bone.

out of the hunched mass and behind the shaggy black curtain, a hand shoots out towards the laptop, hesitates, and delicately considers the device. then lid is flung closed.

the snap of a screen kissing keyboard. the frantic carpet-muffled beating of steps. the staccato of a door slamming shut.

an empty chair spins lazily



KELSEY BOYLE | Untitled | Polymer clay on wood, photographed by Emily Blythe and Andy Zhou

HEIDI KLUMPE

If GFP Were Emeralds

There are days, when science seems like a man behind a curtain, whose personality is elusive and almost disingenuous in its mystery. A Wizard of Oz of sorts.

My dad said physics would make me feel alive, but physics makes my brain feel deficient, that it was not formed fully. I want to run freely in the creativity of science, the berry, thorny field of ideas and experiments, but there is a lameness to my thoughts. Rather than light and airy, my experiences at seminars are subterranean, where wave upon wave of vocabulary and phenomenon I never quite remember learning seem stacked to the height of the Marianas Trench, standing on my shoulders. Not really like Atlas. More like Newton remarking, “You know, I really can’t see that far.”

I couldn’t see that far either, just the yellow brick road and nothing beyond it. Nobody told me to take this road; there were sidewalks, bike paths, and even a boat without oars in the middle of a field, but I felt certain I wanted to get somewhere magical, and well, the boat would have to be my own magic. These yellow bricks and this green city, no doubt made of jellyfish proteins and lasers, that could be truly something.

Yes- something. What was it I was looking for again? I can’t remember. I do remember hours in the microscope room, all the lights off, with the click.... click... click of the shutter. Some days the cells lit up. Most days they didn’t. Every day it was science. There was a naïve, self-inflicted terror of messing up, this constantly harassed feeling that I needed to accumulate meaningful hours of research if I were going to do anything, to be anybody, to get over that next rise in the yellow brick road. I think I was meant to love this thing, but it was equally far to go back as to go forward, so what is there to be done? I decided I needed different science.

There were bacteria, more tractable, genetically labile, a uniquely creative and imaginative space to play in. A femtoliter volume is just the right kiddie pool to splash around in. Get your feet wet. Get excited again. I had a stack of petri dishes, taller than me, to show for it at the end. Eventually laid to rest in an “open source journal article,” which I’ve been told is non-ideal. Is that where ideas go to die? Shivering in the fetal position behind paywalls or an insubstantial citation record,

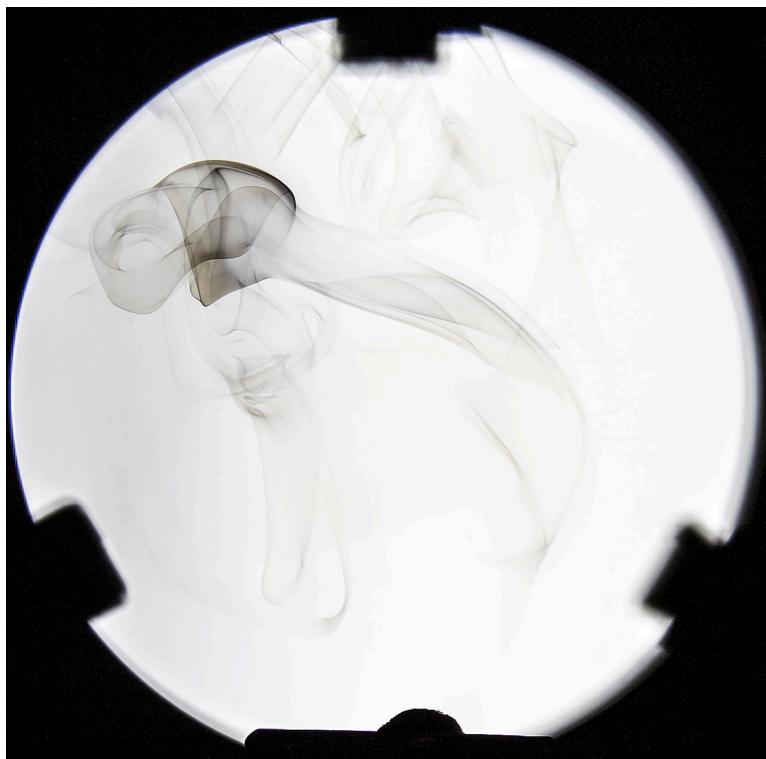
too thin to keep them warm?

I did make it to the emerald city; in fact, they pay me to live here! What a privilege! But everything is backward: there are wizards on every street corner, and I still do not know who the man behind the curtain is. Everyone knows how easily he is made larger. Apparently, his hot air balloon is merely his head, inflated with the hot air of ideas. He flies over the city and all the wizards laugh at his large mouth, knowing that around the countryside there will be talk of UFOs and time travel, but it was just an old man out for a walk.

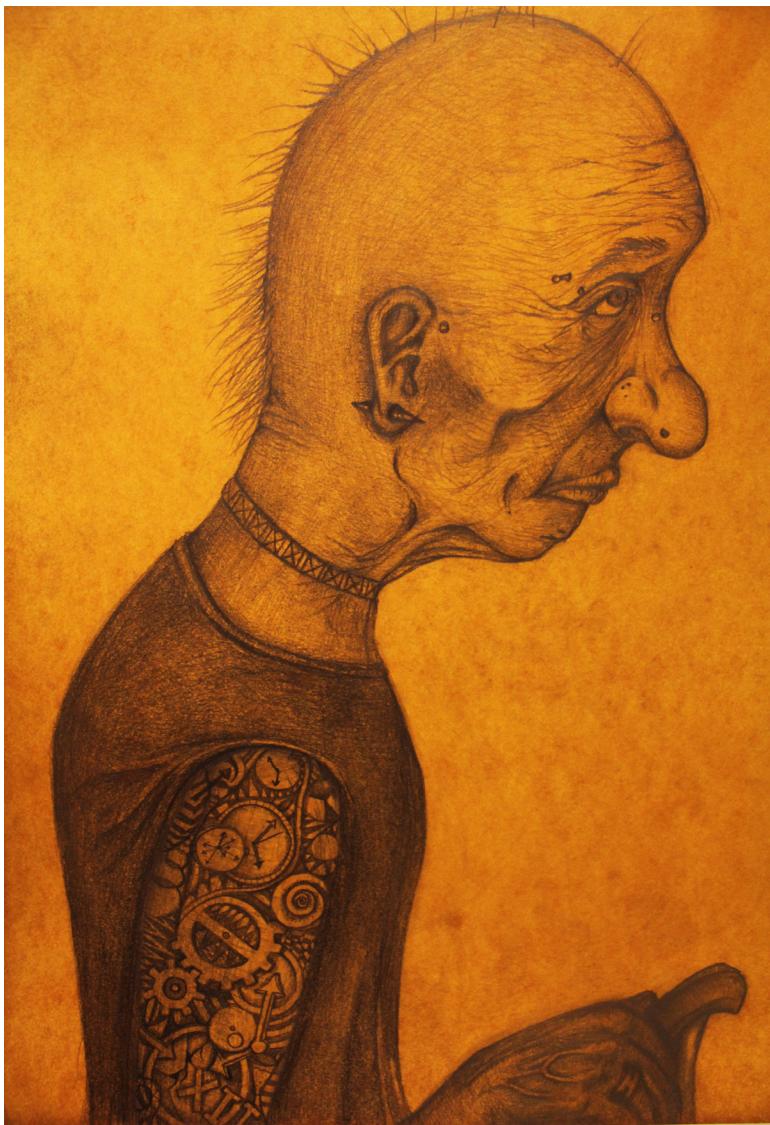
To be a citizen in the emerald city is different than at home. Everyone is expected to be fluent in mathematics; when you do not speak the language, you will not understand your assignments or your mid-terms, even if they are not language exams. In general the wizards are kind and do not mean to make you feel small. They were just born tall and that is why they are always looking down at you. There is nothing wrong with asking them what they see, when they can see farther than you. We are all looking, trying to find what there is to be excited about, what there is to be a workaholic for, what will be the thing that makes me great or makes me happy. Anyone looking for something different must eventually leave. It's not that they are asked to leave; those who leave are always asking themselves why they stay.

But doing science can make you feel more at home here, more like a citizen. Shape your soft palate around the polysyllabic Creole of your field. Wear gloves and a lab coat. Do your mouse and jellyfish science, nanotubes and polymer science, laser and lens science, or entirely imaginary science of elaborate keyboard patterns.

Does this help to explain what science is? Or, who he is. Who she is? And who that makes me. One day I will meet the person behind the curtain and perhaps they will tell me. They will carve out a niche in the emerald wall, and say, "Sit there. It is shaped for you especially." Or maybe they will gesture to a wall of niches and say, "Take any of them. You'll probably fit into most of them, but they all get cold at night." Or maybe (as I've always imagined with hope!), this person will pull back the curtain, and there is a door, through which I find the like-minded and excitable, who need an extra set of hands with something like my mind attached. Nothing brilliant, just willingness. And the only rule is to make sure it matters, to you or to someone else. The man behind the curtain will already have gone and closed the door. He will not bother you anymore.



MAYSAM SHAMAI, CHRISTOPHER DOUGHERTY, SIDDHANT KUMAR, TATIANA ROY | Separation | Digital photography



HYEJOON LEE | Rewind: Dreams Almost Lost | Pencil

DENISE SCHMITZ

The Flea Market

It wasn't her idea to go to the flea market. She had acquiesced out of boredom, nothing more. "Maggie, honey," her mother had said, "your father and I are going to go look for an ottoman for Granddad's apartment, to go with his armchair. Do you want to come along?" Now the sun was glaring at her and she was wishing she had stayed home and played Nintendo instead. She didn't know what an ottoman was, but there were too many of them here. She left her parents behind in the forest of furniture and shuffled off in search of something that wasn't upholstered.

Actually, Maggie had to admit, the rest of the market was a lot more interesting. Adjacent to the furniture section was a veritable labyrinth of clothing racks hung with lacy shawls and retro pant-suits and old wedding dresses. Maggie buried her face in a fur coat and wondered what it would be like to be the elegant lady, or perhaps the agile creature, who once wore it. She slipped her hand into the pocket and retrieved a quarter, a button, and a cap long since separated from a lipstick tube.

Once she had gotten bored of the clothes, Maggie wandered over to the next vendor, whose tables were stacked haphazardly with boxes of papers and postcards. She picked a box at random and started flipping through it. Most of the images were of sunsets and vaguely pastoral landscapes, but one postcard showed a castle with archers stationed along the battlements. She imagined an army bearing the enemy flag advancing from just outside the borders of the card. She paid for it with the quarter from the fur coat and slipped it into her backpack.

But it wasn't until she had drifted away past the postcard seller, past another imprecise array of chairs, past heaps of gold plated jewelry gleaming harshly under a thick veil of sunlight, that she finally saw something that made her glad she had come. Under a canvas tent staffed by an old man nearly dozing was a collection of musical instruments arranged in a circle, padded in velvet with their cases hanging open. Maggie dipped one foot carefully into the circle, then the other, and bent down in front of a clarinet to trail her fingertips through its imperceptible film of dust.

That was where her parents found her fifteen minutes later when they walked up carrying an ottoman with ornate bronze feet. She was aware of them speaking in low voices to the sleepy old man. Then the clarinet was purchased and she drifted away with her parents as they admonished her to do more chores around the house if they were going to buy her nice presents like this. She could barely hear them. She was focused on her clarinet as she hugged its case to her chest and felt that she could almost hear its chalumeau song swelling in tempo with her heartbeat.

They were on their way to Granddad's now. They got out of their car and walked in the door, pressed the button, and the elevator came shuddering down to the lobby to retrieve them. Maggie had always been a little afraid of this elevator.

They reached the apartment on the fifth floor and Maggie's mother opened the door with her copy of the key. They found Granddad at his kitchen table with sunlight falling on his newspaper at an angle from the narrow window blinds. As they put down the ottoman, he got up to pour tea for Maggie's parents from a delicate blue and white porcelain teapot that looked out of place in his simple kitchen. Then Mom and Dad and Granddad sat around the table and Maggie lingered off to the side with her arms still wrapped around her clarinet.

"Nice to see you, Margaret." Granddad turned towards her.
"What have you got there?"

She offered it to him on the palms of her outstretched arms and he unlatched the lid and removed the pieces one by one, twisting them together, examining the smooth dark surface of the wood and the cool shining metal of the keys that wrapped around the body. He placed the reed in his mouth and secured it flat at the top of the instrument.

And then there was a low velvety note in the air and it grew and twirled in slow circles and then jumped upwards, skipping and shrieking, and it wobbled and wailed and compelled Maggie to dance. And she danced, sweeping her toes along the floor, and soon she was spinning and laughing amidst the sounds of the clarinet. It was plaintive, but there was joy too in its melancholy. Her parents were smiling quietly, and Granddad concluded his song with a high vibrato and a wink, and she bowed with a flourish.

She couldn't imagine why she hadn't wanted to go to the flea market.



ANONYMOUS | Blue-n-White | Digital photography



ANONYMOUS | Winter Tale in Red | Digital photography

EUGENE BULKIN

when

when the inside of my eyelids come alight,
when my mind's projector hums alive. that's
when every color explodes in flashes bright,
when my bed becomes a vehicle of the night.

when her face shows every different emotion,
when they all come together at once,
when our bodies contort in hazed distortion,
when the colors swirl in back and front,

when I shift my shape in one clock's tick,
when I jump from place to place,
when the world comes crashing on me quick, that's
when the hues will flush my face. but

when the universe starts to crumble,
when the clouds cease to soar, or
when the ground begins to rumble,
when I wake up, I'll still want more.



JANICE JEON | empathy | Ink & color pencil



ANONYMOUS | The Edge of Fire | Digital photography

CONTRIBUTORS

PROSE & POETRY

anonymous
anonymous
Peter Buhler
Eugene Bulkin
Anita Chen
Dan Gleesak
Heidi Klumpe
Denise Schmitz
Agne Skripkaite
Ker Lee Yap

ART

anonymous
jenny
Emily Blythe
Kelsey Boyle
Peter Buhler
Christopher Dougherty
Janice Jeon
Siddhant Kumar
HyeJoon Lee
Arturo Mateos
Sripriya Ravindra Kumar
Tatiana Roy
Maysam Shamai
Dingyi Sun

TOTEM

EDITORS

Janice Jeon
Bianca Ray Avalani

LAYOUT

Nehaly Shah

WEB

Ioannis Filippidis

ADVISORS

Kevin Gilmartin
Susanne Hall

STAFF

Anita Chen
Stephanie Hong
Sandra Ning
Madelyn Wang



CALIFORNIA
INSTITUTE OF
TECHNOLOGY

totem.caltech.edu