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ArtAscent

Art & Literature Journal 58 April 2023



FEATURE:
Journey





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Journey

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Foreword and Artist Profiles

Cinzia Franceschini is an Italian Art Historian specializing in History of Art Criticism, with a second degree in Communication and Sociology. She works in museum education departments and as a freelance writer. She writes about contemporary arts and social sciences, mostly about them at the same time.

Magdalena Riegler holds a bachelor's degree in Theater, Film, and Media Studies. In 2019/20, she did an exchange year in Berlin, Germany, at the Freie Universität where she focused on film studies. Magdalena is currently living in the Netherlands, working on her master thesis, and obtaining a second Bachelor in Circus and Performance Arts at the Fontys University in Tilburg (NL).

Oleksandra Osadcha is a freelance art historian, art critic and art exhibition curator living in Kharkiv, Ukraine. She earned her Master of Art degree in art history at Kharkiv State Academy of Design and Arts, where she is also currently researching her doctoral thesis.



On the Front Cover

Impression

by Jana F. Jaros



On the Back Cover

Tree Tops

by Santford Overton

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ArtAscent
Art & Literature Journal

Showcasing outstanding
artists and writers from around the world



journey

Foreword

It was 1891 when painter Paul Gauguin sailed from the port of Marseilles, heading to fascinating places on the other side of the globe.

He desired to get far away from France, perceived as an increasingly artificial and uninspiring environment. First, Tahiti, followed by the more remote islands of the Polynesian archipelago, Gauguin reached places with unbelievably lush vegetation and warm colours. It was unclear to him where Paradise was, but it was certainly elsewhere than Paris.

Gauguin is just one of many artists who sought inspiration in distant lands. Travel has often been a tool of discovery, sparking new insights to pour onto the canvas, driven by the aesthetic pleasure of seeing exotic landscapes, the curiosity to learn about distant cultures, and the thirst for adventure.

In some cases, travel represented an authentic necessity, a genuine urge to meet different rhythms of life to put one's existence in perspective. Psychological needs and desire for escape drive physical moves, but socio-political circumstances also compel journeys. They force some to escape to find new life opportunities, leaving behind a bitter homesickness and the melancholy of departure.

They could be intercontinental or take place within a few miles. The Italian painter Giorgio Morandi painted everyday objects in his house, always staying close to his birthplace, Bologna. His attention to the familiar things of his life always revealed unexpected details and imperceptible changes.

However, travel is not only literal. Imagination can lead to inner journeys of self-discovery and mental explorations. A meaningful journey is not only about discovering new places but perceiving reality through new eyes.

In the 58th volume of *ArtAscent Art & Literature Journal*, you will discover the selection of sharp-eyed artists and writers who have found inspiration in journeys. Their works tell of different forms of travel and are themselves special tools for travelling like windows opened to unveiled destinations.



Olivia-Patricia Terrell O'Neal

www.pterrelloneal.com

The Immigrants LA 1984

Oil on plaster panel | 81.3 x 101.6 x 7.6 cm



Each work of art by Olivia-Patricia Terrell O'Neal feels like a journey between metaphors. Her paintings are realistic and truthful, yet they resonate with archetypal power. The mother, the daughter, departure and uprooting are canvases filled with symbols.

In Olivia-Patricia's artistic production, the subject of travel loses its elements of pleasure and takes on mysterious connotations. A metaphysical silence hovers over the canvases. The paintings capture the viewer emotionally: mother and daughter separate in an intimate and painful embrace. A family departs, projected into an unknown future, leaving shadows of a hazy past in the background. Diverse faces of immigrants tell of individual suffering, like different stories intersecting in the same compressed space. Olivia-Patricia delineates powerful scenes. It feels like watching the frame of a film projection. They are paintings that are open to stories. We do not know what happened before or after, but we can imagine it.

Olivia-Patricia's figurative narratives open up questions about the destinies of her subjects. Where are *the immigrants* headed with their bulky bags and suitcases? And where is *the family leaving from*? Or where is *the prodigal daughter* going, a famous biblical reference morphed into the feminine? The destinations are journeys into the unknown. We perceive the emotional aspects: the weight of distance, separation, and future expectations.

The emotional element gains even more value through the skillful use of colours. The painter uses a limited colour palette of dark tones: ultramarine blue deep, burnt umber, white, and possibly yellow ochre, enlivened by symbolic touches of colour. The painter's technique is also a creative process open to intuition.

Her motifs take shape in different steps, changing from brushstroke to brushstroke. Olivia-Patricia creates her paintings from various charcoal sketches, capturing the magic of inspiration thanks to this rapid technique. From this starting point, she continues to elaborate, letting the flow dictated by the painting guide her. Her creative process is itself a journey of imaginative discovery.

The intuitive aspect is primary in the painter's practice, so much so that among her most relevant references is the experimental painting of the 1960s, capable of radiating a spiritual force. Foremost among them is painter Jay De Feo, whose vast and rough surfaces reveal celestial connections. Olivia-Patricia is a figurative painter, not an abstract artist like Jay De Feo. Still, her works are multi-layered with meaning and embodied energy from the mere canvas.

Raised in Tennessee, Olivia-Patricia Terrell O'Neal graduated with an MFA degree from the New York Academy. She works in the United States, Mexico and France, where her works are part of a permanent collection at Chateau St. Philippe. She has collaborations with solid international galleries to her credit and 14 solo exhibitions, and she doesn't stop: the journey is a foundational component of her subjects and artistic process.

By Cinzia Franceschini

Olivia-Patricia Terrell O'Neal

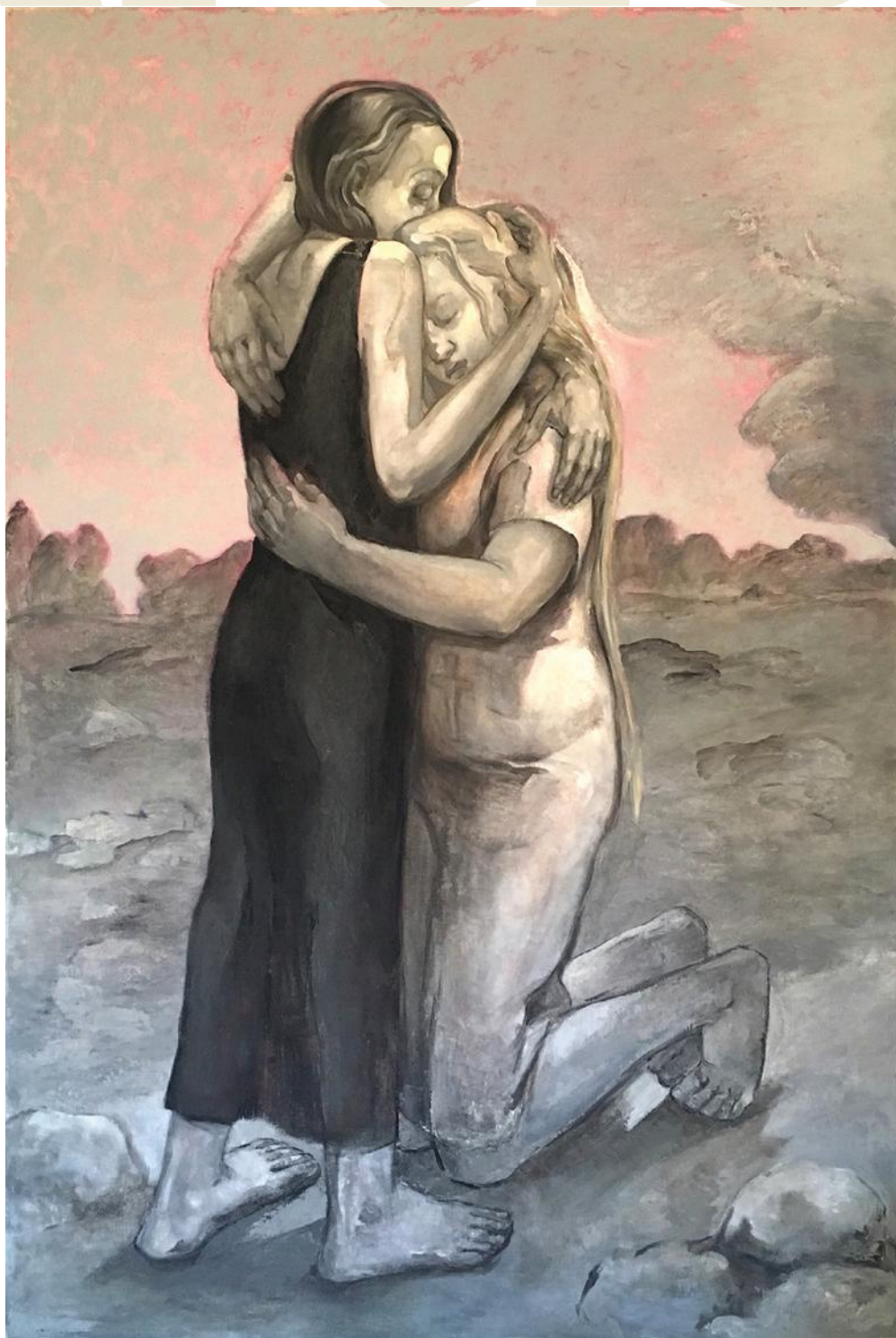
The Family Leaving

Oil on linen | 157.5 x 127 x 5.1 cm



Artist

Departure of the Prodigal Daughter
Oil on linen | 243.8 x 164 x 5.1 cm



GOLD

Imagine an escape across Europe and a secret to hide. The story by Christopher O'Meara is a cat-and-mouse chase in which the protagonists follow, hide, and lose track of each other, only to find themselves, finally, in an anonymous café.

The journey traced by Christopher has the connotations of a detective story, revealing clues through hermetic dialogues. The plot unravels little by little, gradually dissolving the mystery. It comes to mind that the journey is not only undertaken by the characters in their chase across Europe but also by readers, who slowly connect the pieces of the tale. By joining the dots, they reach the solution, the final destination of their literary journey.

Hush Hush is a story to be read in one breath but paying attention to revealing details. The plot is simple: a detective pursues a suspect on an exhausting road trip from Norway to Spain. The journey connects distant corners of the continent, but the story focuses on the final part of this ride. The two protagonists meet for a showdown in an unidentified café: the fugitive is trapped. However, the conversation, setting, and characters are deliberately vague. Who is the narrator thief? Why is detective Lawson looking so desperately for him? Who has he abducted?

In Christopher's story, the abducted go beyond a typical narrative framework and seem especially alive, embodied in a unique reality. The girl is wrapped in a quilt, and her haunting gaze is mesmerizing, shining like her pearlescent earring. The second kidnapped character almost makes a noise: his scream is more penetrating than most.

Christopher specializes in stories set in the past, approaching with *Hush Hush* contemporary storytelling and crime. He often recreates a working environment that stimulates him to bring his characters to life: music, candles, and the subdued atmosphere help him outline mysterious scenarios. Tight and ambiguous dialogues that create suspense characterize his style, which is very close to the best-selling thriller novels by journalist Paula Hawkins. Like Hawkins, Christopher adds a psychological component in delineating his protagonists, which subtly seduces the reader.

Christopher O'Meara is a freelance writer from New England with a nonfiction education and a degree in journalism from Suffolk University. His stories combine the faces of iconic works of art and the trajectories of the two protagonists in a physical and mental road trip. Artworks in Christopher O'Meara's writing become activators of inspiration, a visual stimulus that leads to imagining ever-changing stories. And we readers follow him on this journey, discovering how art and literature may intertwine on a written page.

By Cinzia Franceschini

Writer

Christopher O'Meara

www.christopheromeara.com



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ArtAscent

Hush Hush

"Oslo, Rotterdam, Madrid," the detective says, "you've had me on quite the road trip, I must say."

I meet Detective Dawson's gaze and can tell he's exhausted. His lids are heavy, their flesh the colour of bruised fruit. He's overweight by more than a few stone and could be easily outrun. But running would be suspicious. Running would get me caught. And there's no reason to run. He has no solid evidence, nothing beyond some antiquated surveillance footage that puts a vague silhouette of me, along with a thousand others, at the scene of the crime.

"So tell me," Detective Dawson says, "where exactly do you intend this journey to end if not jail."

"I suppose that all depends on you now, doesn't it." I stifle a smirk and sip from a cracked mug of coffee. It's weak, the kind of watered-down mud that pubs serve just before closing, and cooled considerably since my last sip. Detective Dawson stares at me intently, no doubt attempting to put some half-assed body language training course to good use.

"I think you know what happens next depends on your willingness to come clean."

"Oh, what for?"

Hush Hush (continued)

"You can cut the bullshit," he shouts, slamming a fist down on the table, the aftershock of which causes a wave of attention from the resulting clatter of plates and cutlery. Detective Dawson shifts uncomfortably in his chair, no doubt perturbed over the lack of discretion for which he's at fault. I welcome the unwanted attention fully, anything to take the spotlight off of me. "I know you have the girl."

He's right. I have her. She's wrapped in a quilt, bound with rope, in the back of my van along with the others.

"Detective, I can assure you I have no idea what you're going on about."

He laughs, shaking his head in disbelief.

"I have you on bloody film!"

I laugh right back. "All you have, detective, is some grainy video that may or may not put me at the scene of the crime. If that's enough to arrest me then here," I force my hands in his direction and wait for the cuffs I know aren't coming. Instead Detective Dawson removes his tweed cap and scratches at what little hair he has left. This case, his last from what I've learned, is unravelling him.

"You're lying, damnit," he says with a tinge of defeat, "how about you spare me the chase and just tell me where I can find you next."

"I guess once the jet lag wears off I'll let you know."
I smile, placing what little quid I carry atop my folded napkin to pay. "Well—"

Before I can finish, Detective Dawson's mobile rings. He excuses himself to a remote corner of the cafe. I take the opportunity to slip out, but not before eavesdropping just a bit. I can't make out much, but I hear a few muffled words escape from his lips: Another! Missing! Where?

It feels good to get outside again. The air of early spring awakening a sense of relief in me that I hadn't felt sitting in that cafe. I turn a few corners, snake through a few back alleys, and find my van parked just where I left it.

I open the trunk doors and find my latest acquisition screaming at me, their hands framing the sallow flesh of their ghoulish face.

"Hush, hush, we don't want to make any noise or scare the girl."

I reach further into the trunk, gently freeing her from the ropes and quilt keeping her safe. She's rather small without her frame and far less majestic. But those eyes. They're haunting. More gorgeous than the lone bauble that hangs from her lobe, the moonlight catching its pearlescent surface briefly before I wrap her up once again.



Cassie Shao

www.karasucassie.com

Silver

Explosion Water

Mixed media (digital and acrylic on canvas)



Artist

Cassie Shao's art engages with different perceptions, peering around the corner into circles of fog that guide and disappear into a future of new understandings. Cassie strangely and wonderfully creates entrances that let us dig deeper into our personal imagination and life experience.

Her work *Explosion Water*, *On the Train* and *Volcano Under Hood* throws the audience into a utopian field of reality. The unexpected imagery creates the opportunity to look closer and discover unseen moments and mirrors of self. Cassie's images are marked by human and otherworld characters, guiding us deeper into the artwork (*On the Train*). At other times, framing and centering nature's spectacle (*Volcano Under Hood*), or allowing us to turn, twist and levitate over familiar but unknown landscapes (*Explosion Water*).

Cassie's artworks feel like falling into a daydream of conscious inspiration. Thoughts and images flood our eyes and show the way to an effortless walk around nature surrounded by soft daylight and the freedom to let thoughts and memories travel along. They inspire us to think further and sense new ways of approaching and living our daily life. With each step, we can increasingly fly and reflect on past happenings, present emotions and future aspirations.

Immersing ourselves in Cassie's art form exploration echoes visiting a complete exhibit. Her designs open doors and paths to various ways of perceiving

concepts. These works of art have an aura of unbridled playtime, and they evoke the free-fall ideas only a child's or forever young's mind can have.

Cassie brings graphic design, 2D animation, 4D motion design and mixed media skillset to her art. Cassie's way of merging digital and analogue material tricks us into looking outside our common perspectives. She enjoys creating unexpected forms of wonder and new concepts of doing and seeing art. Her mutely coloured images sparkle brightly, yet they bring a profound stillness, allowing us to celebrate our united uniqueness and respect each decision—precious to every life path.

Cassie Shao is an animation director currently based in Los Angeles. She graduated from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and the School of Cinematic Arts at USC. She works in independent films, music videos, explainer videos, experiential installations and advertisements.

By Magdalena Riegler

Silver

Cassie Shao

Volcano Under Hood

Mixed media (digital, acrylic on canvas, and acrylic on celluloid)



Artist

On the Train

Mixed media (digital, acrylic on celluloid, and acrylic on paper)





Anna Belleforte

www.annabelleforte.com

Bronze

Untold Depths

Acrylic and paper collage on canvas | 150 x 100 cm | \$2,900



ABelleforte

Artist

One may be surprised to find among the submissions for the Journey issue artwork dedicated to architecture. We're so used to thinking of a journey as a process that we forget it actually has a destination. And Anna Belleforte reminds us of that.

The very concept of journey is connected with movement and dynamism. Overused by coaches of all sorts ("life is a journey"), it became almost an equivalent of flow and fluidity. It isn't easy to think of something more opposite to this notion than the solidity and stasis of architecture. Anne suggests a different view, perceiving architecture as a means to "reach" (that is where some travelling metaphors are showing up) the image of the desired world.

The "paper architecture" resonates the most with the idea of (re)constructing the inner dimensions of our personalities and the cultural contexts in which we live. "Paper architecture" is the term coined for visionary, idealistic building projects, the improbability of which limits their existence only to sketches and designs. Anne uses the overpainted paper strips from old maps and books as the material for her pieces, making this wordplay even more poignant. The coherency of images disintegrates as we approach them closer and start to see the collage surfaces of the compositions.

The architectural subject and patchwork-like technique fuse the creative approaches of two artists. Firstly, Christopher Pratt, with his attention to a place in the fullness of its ordinary existence, and secondly, Chuck Close, with his optical tricks.

Anna creates an equal balance between literal and surreal, with a notably isolated atmosphere. This secluded feel is no surprise since she made these pieces in response to the realities of social distancing during COVID. Indeed, it was when, restricted in our possibility of moving around, we all had to limit our social connections with those already entangled in the places we lived. And though travel restrictions have been loosened, the pandemic has only amplified the tendency that defines the contemporary mode of life as we set off on lone virtual journeys.

Anna Belleforte is a visual artist based in Soest, the Netherlands. She received her BA in Art History and Fine Art from the University of Western Ontario, Canada. After that, she continued her training in Architectural History at Queen's University, Canada, and Architectural Conservation and Heritage Planning at the University of York, England. This educational background has largely shaped her artistic practice. Anna devotes most of her attention to architectural forms and how they can convey stories of human culture and individual psychological impulses. She has exhibited internationally since 2013, with her works on display at shows in Canada, the USA, the Netherlands, Germany, and Hungary.

By Oleksandra Osadcha

Bronze

Anna Belleforte

Living Large

Acrylic and paper collage on canvas | 30.5 x 30.5 cm | \$300



Artist

Uncharted Island

Acrylic and paper collage on panel | 70 x 90 cm | \$1,900





Alexandra Kader Herrera

Naches (2022)

Photography | 22.5 x 30 cm | NFS



She Was Ready (2022)
Photography | 22.5 x 30 cm | NFS





Andrew Elsten

www.andrewelsten.com

Nocturne's Autumn

a candle flickers silently at the corner of my desk
a pen tip rolls between my fingers
warmed by the flame, quieted in dark

I keep myself from nodding off
perhaps this time I'll dream
in shifting shadows on the walls

evening hours perform their labour
without protest,
passing quickly into night

and moths' wings hum with sodium lights in shadows
ticking clocks and deadlines past
a fluttering nonsense, trivial panic

of passing time and pheromones
of wing dust, and silence
the crows surrounding stop their busywork

and scuttle into dark
while leaves both browned and faded
hang, dropping to the ground

landing slowly without sound
and without echo

autumn steps in carefully over lifeless leaves
and stirs them in twists of wind
as one by one the houses sleep

porch lights give way to mist
snowflakes spin in tiny circles
lunettes reflecting dappled light and lunacy

their glittered splinters flitter downward
frostbitten remnants
summer's end
crashing nearer
softly nearer

empty stadiums rest in lamplight
the amber casts lengthened shadows
as nights grow ever longer

lovers saunter down empty sidewalks
not knowing yet their numbered days
are passing too in autumn's wake

where children no longer play by streetlight
october's end no longer gives
with trembling hands or quivering lips

and hasn't breathed "I love you" since

And still we peer out pictured windows
looking for some sign of life

while people around us go on living
we count the hours passing by

down emptied streets the remnants flitter
shifting in and out of sight,
to dust a city's endless walkways

hours prior occupied
in flickered lights and little candles
vision thins itself again

as slumber overtakes its movement
and the clicking of a pen

Crow
Water crayon and coloured pencil on paper | \$500



Evan Loiterman

Iris
Water crayon on paper | \$500



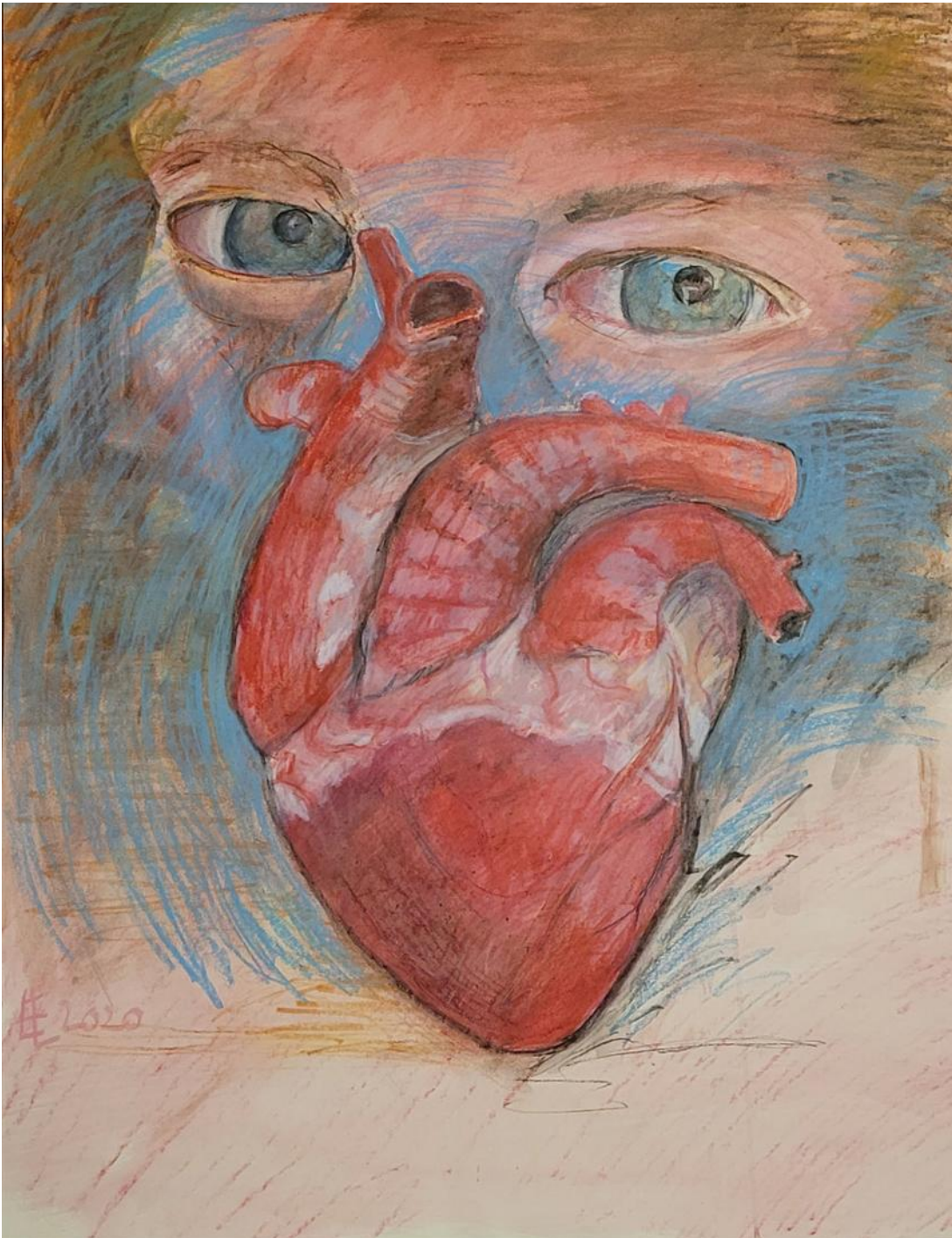
Raven
Water crayon and coloured pencil on paper | \$500



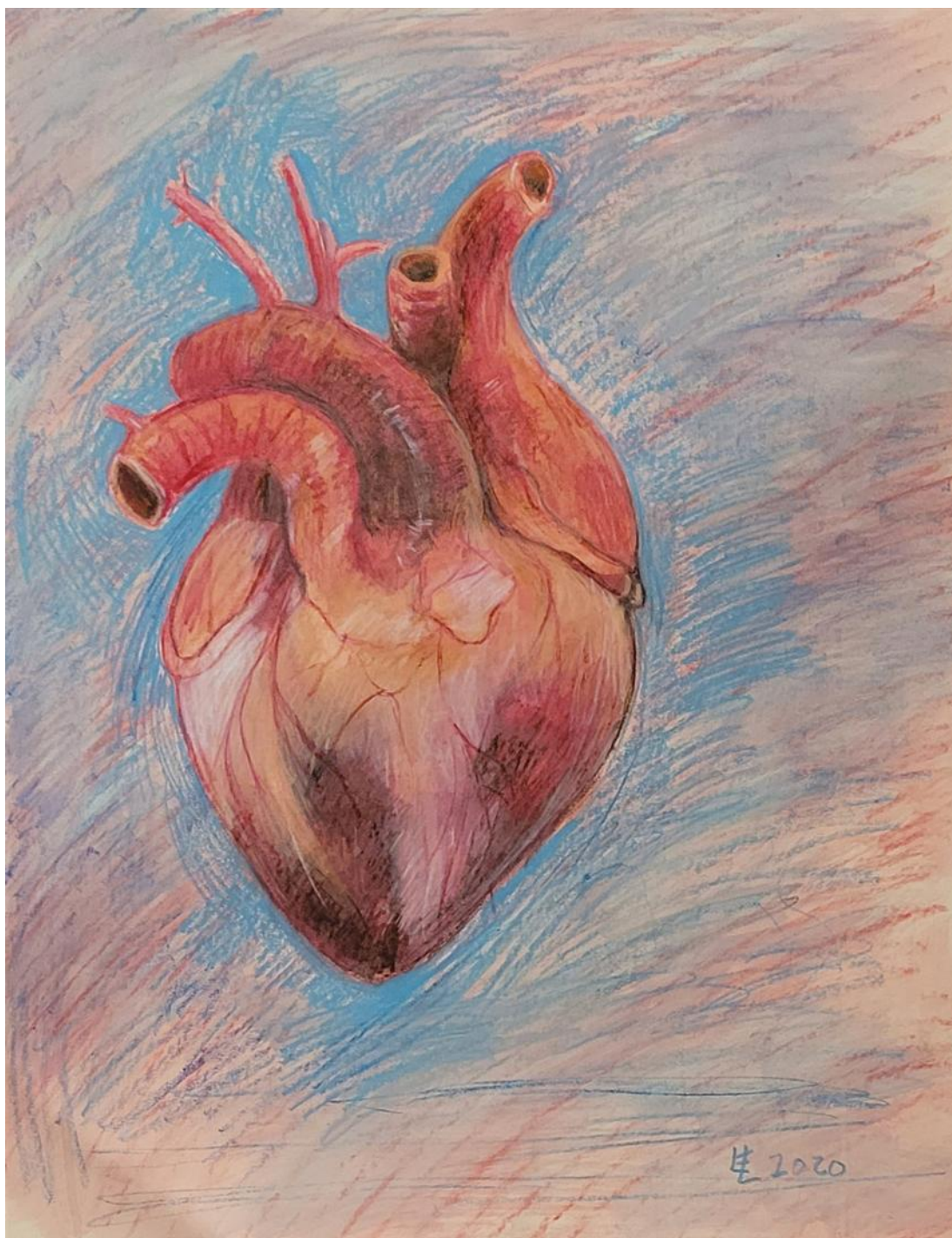
Evan Loiterman

Ayin

Water crayon on paper | \$500



Heart
Water crayon on paper | \$500





Louise Eastin

www.louisemoses.com

Tuesday After Consultation and on My Way to Your Room

sand flattened by tide
stranded starfish form a line
morning beach is clean

white jars with glass lids
labels too faded to read
worn wooden table

lavender candle
empty chairs, empty tables
doorknob does not turn

unremembered scent
muffled footsteps drawing near
drapes whisper and close

whippoorwill hides
light fails

Trees are slender,
tall and straight

canopy darkens
stars guarded from sight

moonless night
Fireflies tease

fear my eyes will fail
frown, stumble, have no center
balance disappears

water has poured
metal basin warmed, ready
spirit father son

I dip my cloth,
wipe your face, your neck, your hands,
hold to my lips,

stillness fills the room
all has been assigned away
blue black fly will buzz



The Truth About the Path
Colour chalk and watercolours on birch wood | 60 x 121 x 3.8 cm | \$15,000





Moti BAZAK

www.motibazak.com

My Place

Digital photography



My Way
Digital photography





Susan Nickerson

Mile Markers

MM 10

Daddy is screaming and I wonder which one of the boys is in trouble now. I tiptoe down the stairs staying extra quiet. I listen for the unbuckling of Daddy's belt. Whatever they've done can't be too bad. No hitting.

"It wasn't me."

"I didn't do it."

"It was Suzie."

My heart sinks. Already I start to cry, and I don't even know what I did.

"Suzie," growls Daddy. "Get in here right now."

When I see Daddy's eyes, I know he has turned. Monster father won't care if I did it or not. Monster father just needs to yell. Mom says monster father is in such pain that he can't help himself.

"Did you do this?" the monster demands, pointing to the wet toilet seat.

"No," I squeak and flash him my honest eyes.

"Clean this mess up then go straight to your room," he demands with his 'I mean business' eyes.

I can hardly see the stupid seat through my tears as I wipe off the enemy's pee. I mostly cry because Daddy is sick and my enemy brothers don't stick up for me.

I tiptoe upstairs to my room, open my closet door, and take out my Raggedy Ann suitcase. I take my sad feelings and icy terror and stuff them deep down inside. Zip, zip, zip them all up and shove them in the closet.

MM 15

Through the haze of heavy smoke, I notice the clock on the wall reads ten-thirty. Better start clearing them out before my mother gets home from work. Not that it mattered. They'd just come back and climb through my bedroom window later on. I've lost count of how many times she's thrown her sons out. They never really leave.

Ever since Dad died, she sleeps downstairs on the sofa.

The stereo is booming with all the latest music. My brothers just walk into Ted Cole's Music Shop and take whatever they want. The watchful eyes of the police are always turned towards our house, like the Eye of Mordor seeking the ring of power.

The Hawthorne Drugstore was broken into recently. I was the only one home when two officers banged on the door. My brothers figured at fifteen years old I was mature enough to guard the evidence. As keeper of the stash, I had an important job. The jugs full of pills were hidden in the best location. Tuinol, Amytal, Seconal; all the different containers of coloured pills were lined up on shelves like jelly beans in a candy store. Adding machines, medical supplies, or the many cartons of cigarettes would never be found on my watch.

"C'mon guys, you gotta get up."

The squeak of leather vests and the clink of silver chains was a sure sign of life.

"C'm on, wake up. WAKE UP!"

I take a cigarette out of a stranger's fingers before it burns his flesh. Everyone is moving but him. I give his arm a push and he slumps to the floor.

"Something's wrong!" There's panic in my scream as I sound the alarm. That's all we need, another overdose. I have no idea where to put this fear. I push, push, push it down, as my muscles strangle me with anxiety.

The evidence, the drugs, and the fear of death get stuffed into my imaginary baggage. I place the call for an ambulance. The sirens scream. The lights flash. Over and over and over again.

Mile Markers (continued)

MM 25

Work-work-work. Forty, fifty, sixty hours, it doesn't matter. As long as I don't have to look at my baggage. When I finish up with my work, I work some more.

Climb the ladder rung by rung, more responsibility leaves little time to dwell. A wonderful husband, new home, island-hopping in the Caribbean. No one would guess where my roots are buried. No one would guess how hard my body and mind work to blot out the past. Keeping it locked up takes a certain skill and I had it mastered.

"Your brother's here to see you," a co-worker announces. Having a cup of coffee with my Clean and Sober brother still feels odd. Eight years now and we are just getting to know each other without the haze of a high.

"There's no easy way to say this," he says, keeping his eyes averted.

I brace myself as I always do and wonder who's going to prison or who died.

"Favourite Brother has tested positive for HIV."

The rest of the world has suddenly gone silent. Clean and Sober's lips are moving but I hear nothing except my own mind screaming and pleading, *NO! Please no!*

"He wanted to tell you himself, but word is already out on the street, and I didn't want you to hear it from someone else."

I am stone-faced. I manage to blink but cannot breathe.

"It'll be okay, don't worry. I'm going to be there to see him through. No matter what lies in front of us. I'll be there. For you and Mom. I believe Clean and Sober. It would be the first and the last time in my life. Eight months later, I got the call.

"I don't know how to tell you this," my oldest brother says, "but Clean and Sober died."

"How?" I whisper into the phone. I am at work surrounded by people.

"He choked on his vomit," Older Brother says and I know at once. Heroin overdose.

I don't cry. I get right to work. I take charge. Where is everyone? Where should I meet you? Should I stop at the store for anything? How's Ma? Clean and Sober's wife? His kids?

"Oh, excuse me Mrs. So-And-So. I'm sorry but I have to leave early. My brother died."

Standing at Clean and Sober's grave, I stare at the ground and try not to think about burying my dad. When I look up, I make eye contact with Favourite Brother. It is at that very moment that the grim reality sinks in. We will do this exact ritual for him. The gut-punching pain and deep understanding in both our eyes cannot be described.

MM30

Five years after the death of Clean and Sober, Favourite Brother lost his battle with AIDS. It was excruciatingly painful to watch such a horrific disease whittle him right down to his marrow. The unresolved, childhood grief, stemming back to the death of my father, rose up from the depths of my soul. My well-protected baggage was spilling open everywhere, spewing my secrets out like dirty laundry. I tried so hard to clean it up and stuff it back in but everywhere I turned, another bag opened up and I would trip and fall over it.

Back at work, my veneer started to crack, but somehow, I was strong enough to hold myself together. I multitasked my way through the rubble, juggling the job while holding on to all of my baggage. *Look at me. I am normal. I am strong.*

The true, deeply buried grief had yet to surface because I didn't know which family member to grieve. I didn't know which bag to open first. The baggage was so mixed up that I needed help sorting it all out.

Picking up the phone and making the call to a therapist saved my life. Opening up the heavy, well-worn baggage and showing the contents to another human being was terrifying. She encouraged me to dump the contents out and we would sort through the dirty laundry together. Half the time, I couldn't speak.

"If the words are too painful," she said, "write them down."

So I did. I wrote. I typed. I cried. Then I wrote some more. I hated those words. I ripped the pages up, lit them on fire, stomped on them until I was limp with exhaustion, but still I wrote. Then one day those words became my voice, and my voice became strong. And now I write my story, sharing my voice, my words and my tears with those who've not yet found their voices.



David E. Neely, JD, Ph.D

Prison

Mixed medium and found object (auto radiator)



Jana F. Jaros

www.janafjaros.crevado.com



Limbo

Acrylic on canvas | 51 x 51 x 3.8 cm | \$870





Geninne M Woods

Butterfly

My predisposed demeanour of alchemy envelops my destiny without choice,
this questionable stage of my existence I did not ask for.

No sight of understanding I've gained yet on this process of life,
but blindly and bravely, I continue to believe in its goodness.

The unknowing of such awe look not at me twice-
Easily dismissed I am as ordinary,
but the journey ahead tugs at my optimistic nature.

There's an ineffable magic I keep but know not where it will take me,
I trade my trepidation for patience and find comfort in whispers of intuition.

My dreamy state offers subduction and collects my energy as toll,
without a glimmer of attention except for my own,
I become friends with my spirit.

Encased in darkness but incredibly aware, I realize it is only by eye
that others first detect change.

No transparency surrounds me as the hard work of solitude carries on-
Fervently protecting the un-veil with due time.

And effortlessly one day like waking from a long abstraction,
I was me on the outside now, as my heart beauty-fully unfolded on my sleeves.

Utopia
Digital | 14 x 22 cm | NFS



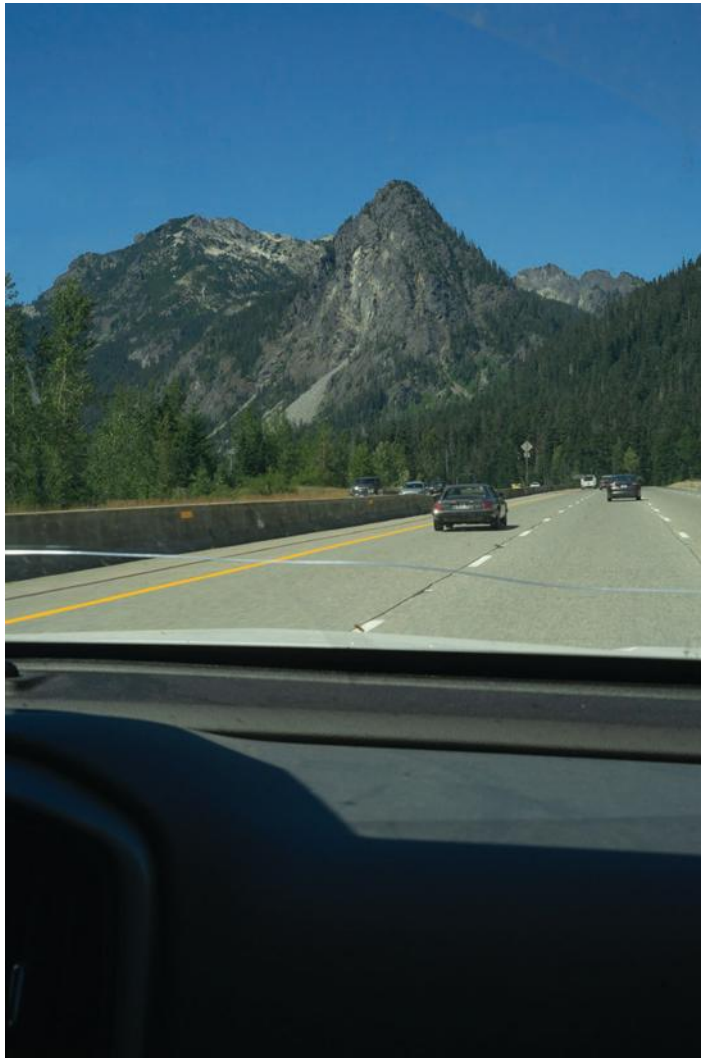


Stephanie Dobson

www.stephaniedobson.myportfolio.com

Mountains Unknown

Colour print | 27.9 x 33 cm | \$98



Familiar Roads
Colour print | 33 x 27.9 cm | \$98





Kesja Dabrowska

Crossroads

The moon is shining so brightly tonight
like the night we first held hands together,
Raising them to cup each other's faces
wide grins reflecting the whites of our teeth
It was the summer of our senior year
and we both were going to the same uni
Thinking we'll conquer the world, hand in hand
Well, look at us now,
The same moon is welcoming the dark sky,
it's summer night again
With the soft breeze ruffling your curls,
but our hands no longer caress one another's

That's what happens when we grow up,
we start to realize that our journeys weren't meant to
be walked together
There comes a day when you have to stand at the
crossroads and face the other,
say it as it is
We grew apart and now we must make own choices
And while I'll be treading my miles, I'll turn back in your
direction ever so often,
and think back to that first summer night
When I held your warm hand in mine,
placed a kiss on your chapped lips
Dreaming of a life in each other's arms

Farrah (AKA Jiaqi)

www.farrah-jiaqili.com



Here Comes the Ladder
Installation | NFS





Yifan Li

Sound of Oughtibridge

Printed photo | 127 x 102 cm | \$500



Street Corner
Printed photo | 76.2 x 76.2 cm | \$200





Kelly O'Neal

www.kellyoneal.com

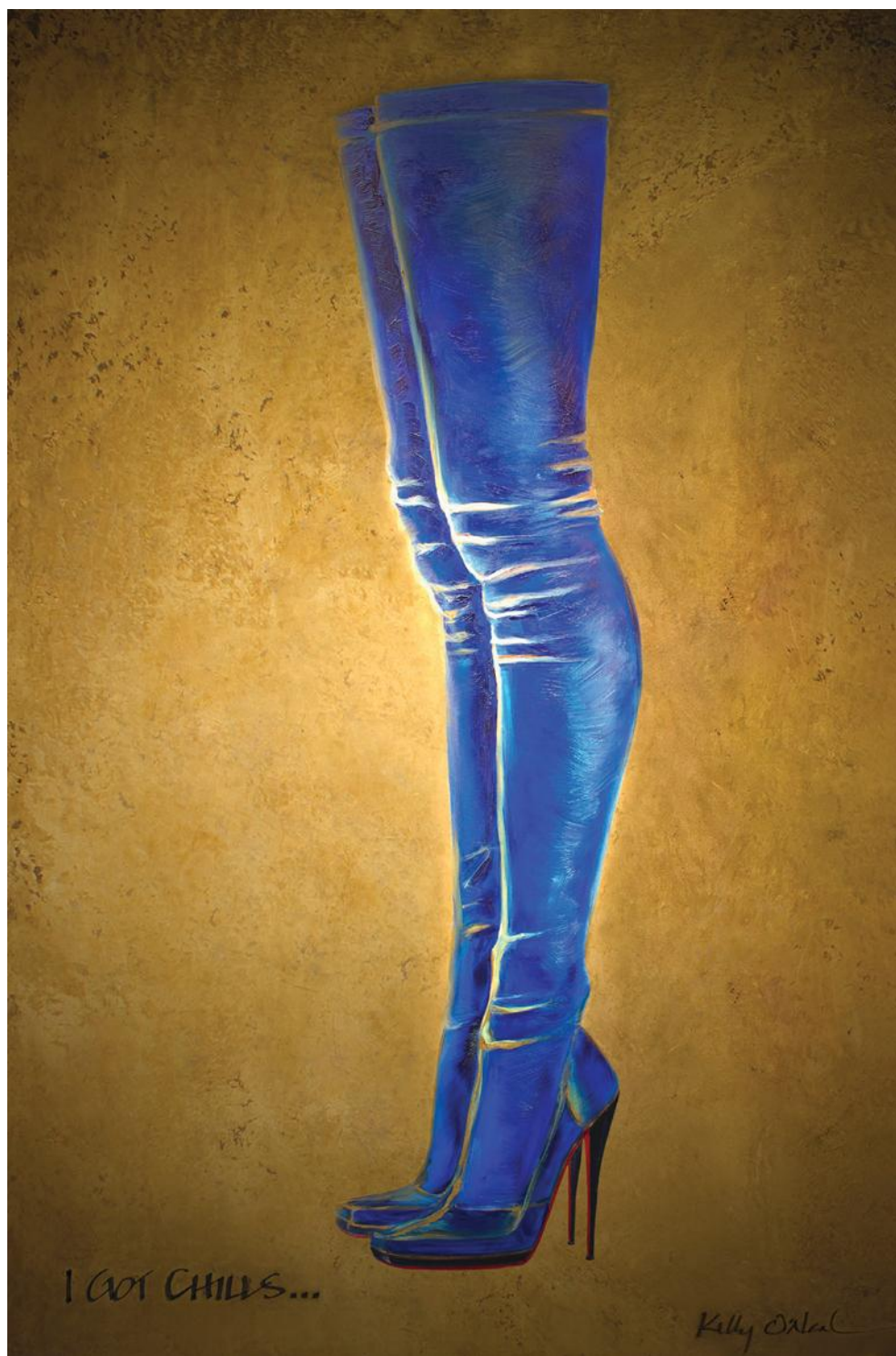
If You've Got It — You've Got It

Oil on plexiglass | 76.2 x 96.5 x 0.6 cm | NFS



I Got Chills

Oli on plexiglass | 76.5 x 38.5 x 0.6 cm | NFS



Kelly O'Neal

I Know the Way

Oli on canvas | 76.5 x 76.5 x 7.6 cm | NFS



Jan Creelman

www.jancreelman.com



Tumbling

Wax and dyes on fabric | \$1,800





Kalliope Kione Mediciano

Drunk Woman Done, Come Sang Truth

Heard a lady in a juke joint one rainy night, singing a blues-like country song. Her name was Saline Perry. I tell you, this woman had soul.

Saline sang the old way, low country style, deep and guttural. Similar to the way sharecroppers' lined back in Antebellum days. The juke joint, called *Lonely Hearts Commerce and Exchange*. Was on Route 1111, down a dirt road, away from town. The motto over the juke joint door read, 'we all get a turn taking chances on love.'

It's why I came tonight. Found the place advertised in a wanted ad for honesty.

Saline stood out in fallen grace begging for healing mercy. Wearing a tight, backless, silky, red dress. The fabric hugged her curves while Saline swayed her hips to the music. At her feet, were dangerously tall heels. Saline must have put on every piece of costume jewelry she owned.

Standing on stage with the house band like a diamond set in rhinestone affordability. It was a sight to see.

"Excuse me y'all," Saline drawled starting her set, "I'm broke, overdressed, and don't give a damn no more.

Her down-home husky voice baptized all of us patrons, with the Holy Spirit of brokenness, knee-deep in a storm. Saline sang out her sins with no god in sight. Her faith was stirred, shaken and gone; over a man with a rusty pickup truck

"A grown man, wearing his daddy's old blue jeans!" Saline drawled.

"Go to hell, Earl Damn-Your-Hide Simmons!" Saline continued singing, "Earl's Daddy so lost, he's trying to get with me now too." She cackled into the microphone. The crowd in the juke joint tittered.

"I must be looking like the last piece of chicken in his mama's house y'all." She belted out.

Draining ablations in cup after cup of dark heavy brew, Saline sang steadily. Her heart, mind, body, and soul playing for keeps. She stood on that dusty juke joint stage sweating her life away under the weight of misplaced grief.

"Might as well be gone," she sang, flinging liquor onto the stage, "old Earl Simmons got me good y'all. My mind is gone!"

Saline sang with her head held high throughout her song. With the pride of a woman who didn't have a pot to piss in any damn way. The judgments didn't hurt anymore. Stamping her foot hard on the stage like a country tent revival soprano; deep in revelations of her own lover's lane misleading. Confessing sins to each one of us watching, like the good book said.

"It sure felt good when I had it." Saline chorused with a lusty look of obsessive desire on her face. Singing low, reaching out; beseeching us to witness her blinded-eyed walk.

Saline ended a stanza of the song with, "Earl with the rusty truck, stay away from me, please. My heart can't take no more!" Closing her eyes and pushing out as if to force him and the world away. I felt tears sting my eyes.

Saline paused, tears coming down her weary angelic face. Frozen in her mind, eyes closed; she nodded over and over to herself. We all watched the pain of emotions that crossed Saline's face. Seeing for ourselves this lady had had enough.

She sang on about how she'd misjudged Earl with the rusty pickup truck. She let him in too fast. Not seeing the red flags, ignoring the warnings of friends and family. Changed forever, now she wears red. All to remind herself of the wrong that occurs when Earl pulls up with that nasty, rusty pickup truck.

"These days," Saline sang, "Earl rides around with his dog, his old flame Sheryl, and the case of shiny plastic-covered cheese on the dashboard. Ready for the day I take him back home. Cheese is the last thing I told Earl to bring on his way."

"That sorry fool ain't made it home yet!" sang the backup singers.

"I know that's right!" yelled the enthralled bartender as she swayed seductively against the body of her latest male prey to the music.

"Must be the loving y'all, 'cause it sure ain't the meat and potatoes I prayed for," Saline called out, wiping her face with a handkerchief.

I watched as Saline took off her wig and fanned herself with it. It was evident she loves Earl despite him not knowing what he wants.

"Lord bless her heart, Saline drunk again," a patron behind me commented. I turned and shushed him for interrupting.

Saline confirmed in the song that Earl's dog, "Ole' Roy knows what he wants, poor thing howls and rides in the far back on the passenger's side now. Earl eyeballs him in the rear-view; afraid ole' Roy is gonna jump."

We, patrons, shook our heads. The band laughed. Saline kept singing.

"Earl's old flame, Sheryl knows what she wants. That chick has been riding high in the truck next to Earl. She's been seen with a .38 and a little dog in her lap. Sheryl's got that gun pointed straight at Earl, daring him to leave her again." Saline ended that part by sipping her red cup like it was hot tea, side-eyeing the crowd knowingly.

All of us patrons breathed, "damn shame," at this part of Saline's song.

Her eyes were full of shame and tears. This beautiful woman looked soul-deep broken on stage. The entire juke joint held onto every word, eyes opened to her tragic, messy love story.

Drunk Woman Done, Come Sang Truth (continued)

Still, this once invincible woman named Saline Perry; was haunted by a man that'd done her wrong more times than Eve told Adam, "not tonight."

Her backup singers sang out in proper old country gospel form, "You see how we all ended up, 'cause of that." We patrons sucked air and nodded, agreeing to disagree.

Old Earl wasn't all that terrible; he was just hurt badly by the right one. That was a hard lesson Earl fraught, having to see the woman he hurt every day. Saline's tears had to be the worst part of all this.

Earl was known for tipping and going around town telling tales of hearing a woman crying his name at night. Damn near drove Earl insane! He's been spending every night since trying to make right his wrongs. Earl Simmons found out a week ago he was dying, no time was left.

Earl did all the things to make Saline see him. Yet not once had the man just: come to the door, heart in hand, mind in order, ready to be there.

The drummer hit the snare as if knocking on a door. While the bass guitarist strummed a doorbell. Saline and the backup singers looked around as if searching for Earl. The band stopped playing, suddenly.

Saline turned left and right, repeatedly slurring, "What am I loving, me or him? I can't tell anymore dammit!"

She stood stock still at a crescendo and pointed like a soothsayer with her wig into the crowd. Her face was so twisted in bitterness, I never want to see a woman like that again.

"I won't speak till that bastard does right!" yelled Saline, eyes wide as she fanned her wig across the crowd. Holding her cup and the mic in the other hand as she did it.

I got scared, cause she sang it like a curse. No one in the juke joint moved.

Saline's song confused me. She still won't accept his calls after all that. Even after singing her soul over for this man in some dusty juke joint?

She was the most beautiful woman there! Singing her woes into one mic between three other women like Botticelli's graces. I couldn't take my eyes off her. Her honesty hit back too hard.

These women gathered singing in unison, "Earl can't even love himself."

I swear a pearl dropped out of Saline's mouth after that. We patrons, got chills reminded of the last thing our true loves' said to us when they left.

Saline miraculously imprisoned us patrons mentally, with flashbacks of our own war-torn love stories. I saw the last time I held my ex-husband. My nostrils filled in remembrance of his smell. Saline's song took us juke joint patrons through a heart-wrenching emotional upheaval at a 2-drink minimum, with no cover charge.

Saline fell out and came too after one of the backup singers plied her with alcohol. The singer's name was Tammy.

Tammy closed her eyes singing, "I tried to tell her just come on home. Even took the journey across 3 states to get her. She couldn't leave Earl Simmons. More scared of formed dust, than she is of the higher power!"

Saline threw up in her cup and started singing again. Her hands shook the mic stand as they held tight to her broken love song. I got angry. Earl and that stank rusty truck brought Saline low and hard; in front of people that respected her.

I shook my head in disgust as Saline tried to drink the contents she'd vomited in her cup. The backup singers forcefully took it away, handing Saline the bottle as appeasement.

"Oh Lord come by here, please help her," a woman in the back of the juke joint said in raised hand prayer.

In the last lyrics of Saline's song, we heard she can't let go of that good old boy. No matter how many of her girls sang with her; holding her up and over. Taking her in, the late-night calls with mystery marks, a couple of dollars here and there.

No matter how many bottles Saline lined up, they don't clean her of Earl. No matter how many trips to rehab it took, on her mama and daddy's hard-earned savings. Earl had her soul; it is what it is.

Saline sang of the men turning her head long enough for Earl to get jealous and come ready to fight. Then it's back to him again and again, knowing full well he won't do right.

Saline came to this juke joint to sing her truth. Earl Simmons was in her blood and their love bleeds true. Saline knows she's the only one that will ever truly see Earl and love him for it.

"I loved Earl Simmons hard through each one of his sins. Like a good wife, that's my testimony!" Saline held up her wedding ring in defiance saying dejectedly, "this all the prize I got."

We patrons, aghast by her honest vulnerability breathed, "oh."

Saline finished singing and fell out. Collapsing to the floor in tears, face down in moaning prayer. She was carried off the stage by the drummer. Who's face said I've seen it all already, poor man's tears mixing with hers.

I reached my hands out to assist, finally seeing the cigar smoking had stopped. The juke joint was empty. Looking around seeing it had been just me the whole time; singing drunk at home, thinking too much.

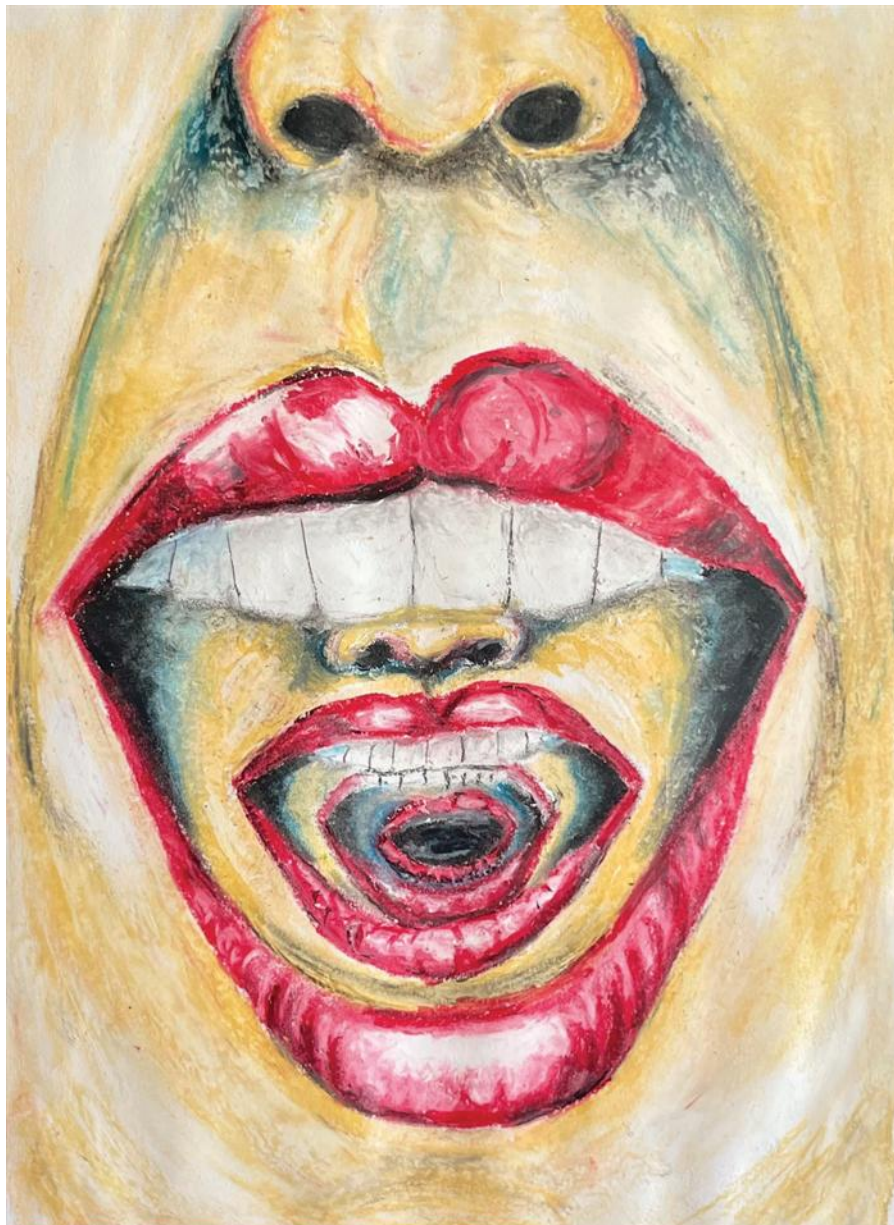


Tiyana Jovanovic

www.tijanaj.com.au

Finding My Voice

Oil pastel on paper | 19.2 x 24.5 cm | NFS

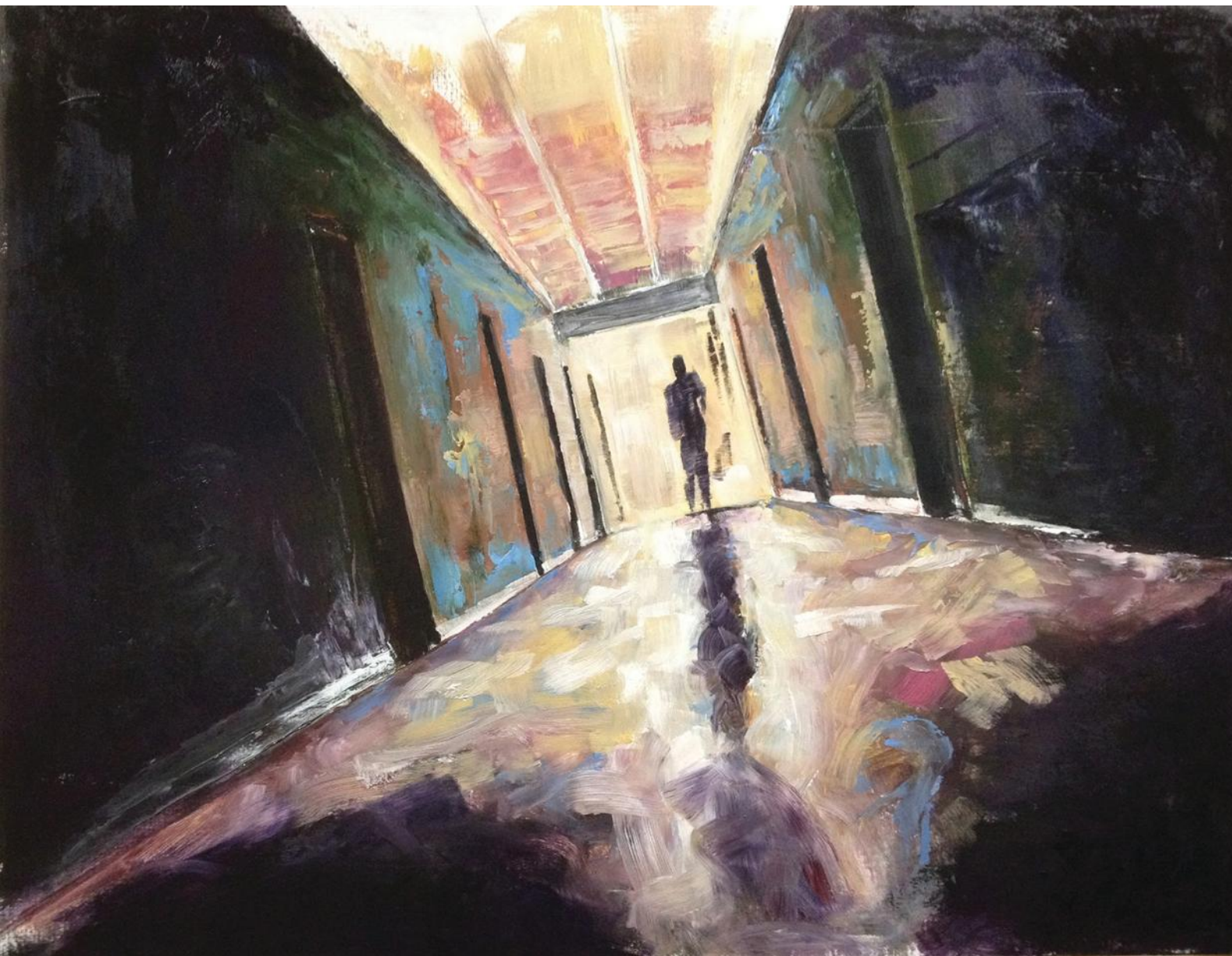


Aaron Krone



The Door

Acrylic on canvas | 81 x 101 cm | NFS





Karla Linn Merrifield

www.karalinnmerrifield.org

Diptych: Journeys Through the February Night Sky

I.

This eve I will bind the sweet
influence of the Pleiades

and loose the bands of the Great
Hunter to startle your pleasure

in the heavens of my body.
I will come to you ungirded, my guard

down to your tender ankles. I will
kneel and promise I will not gaze

across great distances. This once
I will not stand cool light-years

afar from your human heart.
Tonight I will let you take hold

of my naked Bellatrix and lean
into me. You will tightly grasp

my ruby Betelgeuse as I drape
you in most opulent pearls:

Alnintak, Alniham and Mintaka.
Woman, you will swirl, enrapt,

having a nebula for our bed.
It shall be our star-cradle.

This night we are on our own.
I answer you,

you answer me,
and we answer to no god,

there at the hour of the wolf
and the newly waning moon.

When we wake, you shall be
as the Morning Star, aglow, come

to herald a new meaning of sacred.
Floating on a tidal river

like a shining lily blossom freed
from the back eddies

of brightest time and darkest space,
you will flow downstream

to the bay just before dawn.
All those on shore who see

that moment come to pass
will recognize how it was

between us: I, Orion, giant
of a man, and you, my Venus:

our love on Earth as it is.

II. This I Know

You are a young soul
and I am the oldest soul
you have ever known,
older than the last poet
you knew, and the one before
who made of you: a specimen.

If you came from Proxima Centauri,
if you were the Centaur
in John Updike's story,
if you were Chiron himself,
I would take you to my breast.

I, too, bear angel wings
between my thighs
and a lustrous pearl of pleasure
in a pose for la Circe.

When I undress for you,
or you undress me,
urgently I peel away, we peel
away the final scrim of metaphor.

Down to the soul.
Down to the body.

This lifetime. Our journey. Now.



Margaret Wasiuta

www.margaretwasiuta.com

Keeps Me Whole

Acrylic on canvas | 61 x 61 x 1.5 cm | \$1,950



Deep Down

Acrylic on canvas | 61 x 61 x 1,5 cm | \$1,950





Gail Marten

www.gailmarten.com

Exodus

Watercolour | \$225



Costa Copra
Acrylic | \$250



Hidden Forest
Acrylic | \$450





Sensitivity
Photography | NFS



NEXT SPREAD: *Lion Pride*
Photography | NFS















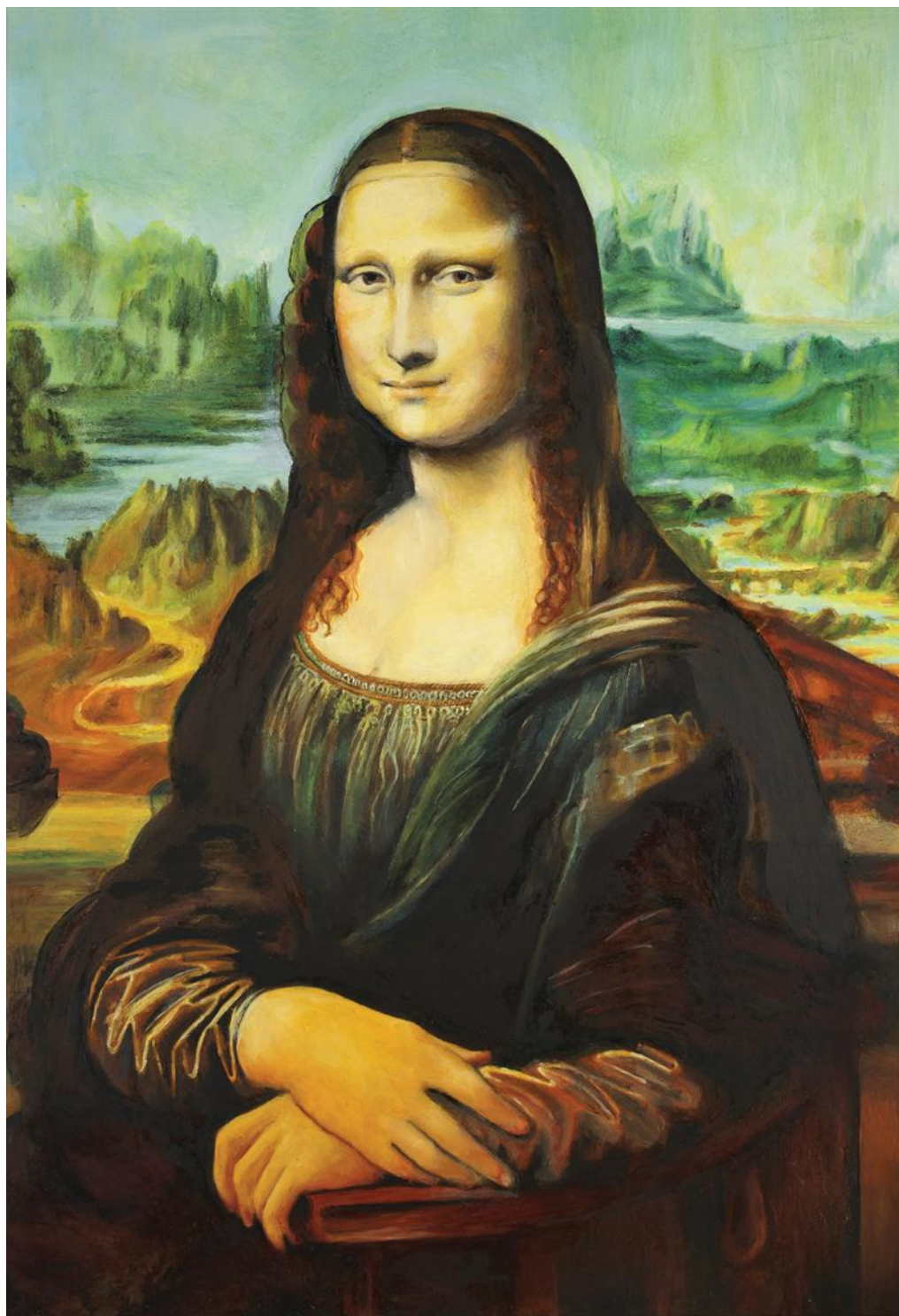
JOHN MARSHALL

www.mylastleonardo.com

SALVATOR MUNDI, after Leonardo da Vinci
Oil on walnut wood | 66 x 45 x 1 cm | NFS



MONA LISA, after Leonardo da Vinci
Oil on poplar wood | 77 x 53 x 1 cm | NFS





Krystle Vermes

The Night Hawk

The metallic taste in his mouth startled him awake. He found himself lying in the fetal position on tile flooring, cool against the side of his face. The bright lights above him were difficult to ignore. Once his eyes adjusted to his surroundings, he realized he was in what seemed to be a public restroom. Despite his confusion, the adrenaline from his state of panic was enough to jolt him into standing upright. He grabbed onto a porcelain sink for balance, and then took a look at himself in the mirror.

His attire was unrecognizable to him, but he knew it had to be some sort of military garb. The cap and neck scarf gave him the impression that it belonged to a sailor, but one of a different era. In an utter state of shock, he ran the faucet and splashed cold water onto his face. Before taking another look in the mirror, he vigorously rubbed his eyes. When they opened, his hope of waking up from this nightmare quickly faded in the reflection.

Before opening the door to exit the restroom, he took a deep breath. Around the corner, he could see a hawkish waiter in white, reaching for something beneath a wooden counter. Cautiously, he walked into what he realized was some sort of diner, and the waiter was not alone.

In front of him was a man in a dark suit, hunched over the bar on a stool. To his right, a white mug idled while a newspaper rested under his opposite arm. At the other end of the bar, another man was seated with a cigarette in one hand and his eyes locked on the waiter. His ironed suit and stiff fedora melded seamlessly with his steady demeanour. A woman in red with a fiery mane sat on a barstool to his left. Her eyes were fixated on a finger sandwich she was holding in her right hand, but hunger appeared to elude her.

As he walked further into the diner, he tried to keep his footsteps quiet—and that's when it struck him. Standing no more than a few feet from the man with the newspaper, he realized that all four of them had yet to glance in his direction. In fact, he hadn't seen any of them move or utter a single word.

Carefully, he moved his hand in front of the face of the man with the newspaper. First, he shook it slowly. Then, he screamed with his head pointed toward the sky, releasing his unmitigated terror.

Everything remained the same, a moment lost to time.

As he rounded the corner of the bar, he glanced at the front page of the man's newspaper. The headline read, *Japan Wars on U.S. and Britain; Makes Sudden Attack on Hawaii; Heavy Fighting at Sea Reported*. His eyes shifted to the other suited man's cigarette. It had no ember, and a dried coffee stain marked the bottom of his mug. While cutting across the waiter's line of sight, he almost expected words to spill from his mouth. He felt a pang of disappointment when nothing occurred.

Upon approaching the woman in red, he came to a stop. Her beauty made the complete stillness of the room seem more bearable, if only for a moment. It was when he looked into her eyes that he realized—despite her fixed gaze—that she likely had nothing on her mind. He could tell the feelings she once had left her body long before she entered the diner, and his heart ached when he remembered the moment that he lost his own ability to love. Now, he wanted nothing more than to tell her she was not alone.

As he moved to place his hand on her shoulder, everything went black. What seemed like an eternity passed before he opened his eyes to find himself gazing upward at a ceiling. He was lying on his back on a hardwood floor, surrounded by nothing but silence and darkness. Once he sat up, he patted himself down, immediately recognizing his museum uniform. A few minutes went by before he was able to stand and shine his flashlight around the gallery. When loneliness began to seep back into his body, he shut the door on his psyche and went back to the patrol he knew would never really end.



Yvette Young

All Aboard!

Acrylic on paper | 25 x 25 cm | NFS



Cependant — the Coral Trekker
Acrylic on paper | 25 x 25 cm | NFS





John Laue

Sandy's Covid Travel Urges
Photography | 20 x 18 cm | \$200



In the ICU
Digital photography | 20 x 20 cm | \$250





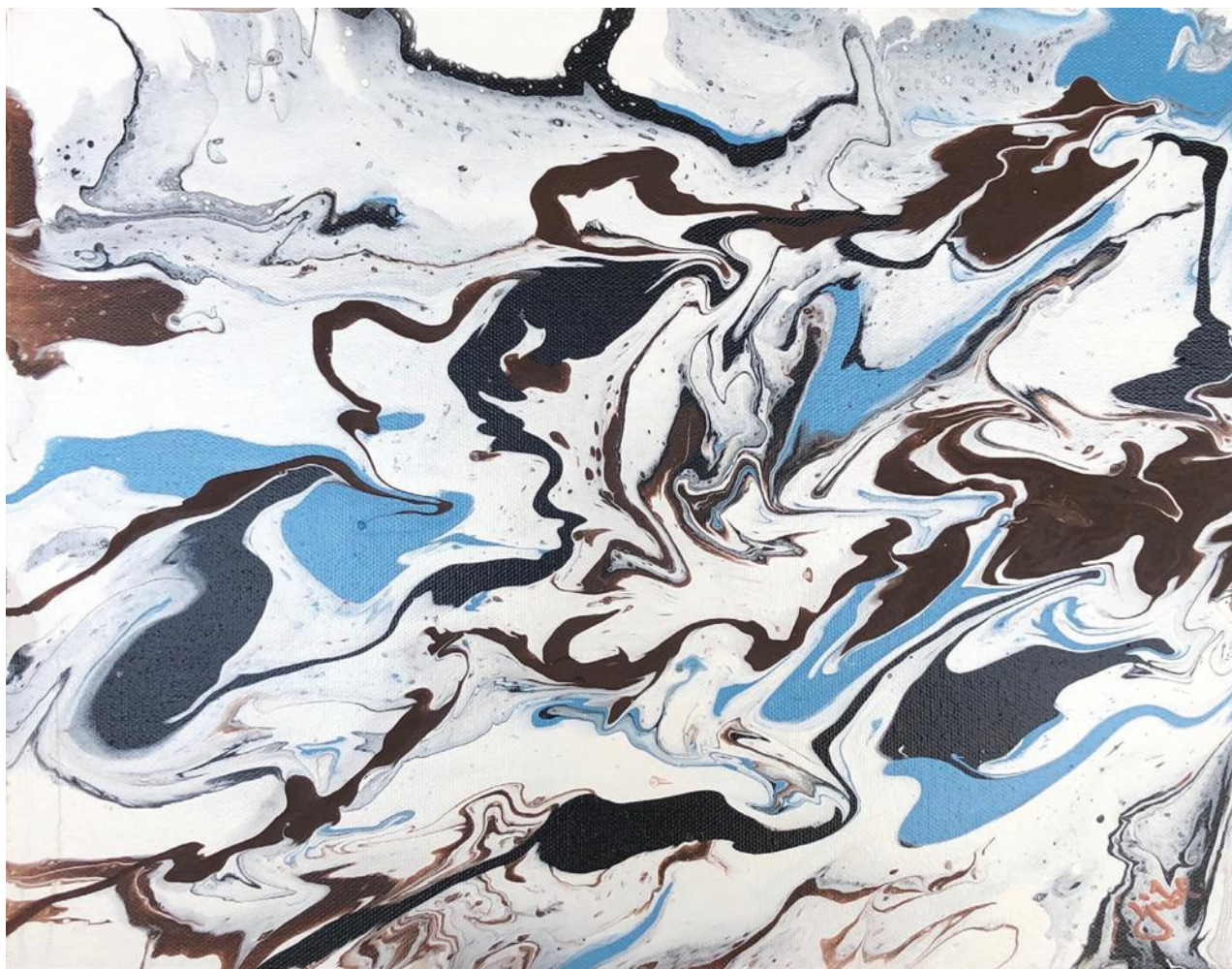
Ljubica Simovic

Sailing Away

Acrylics | 38 x 76 x 3.8 cm | \$350



Rough Sea #2
Acrylics | 35.6 x 27.9 x 3.8 cm | \$175





Barb Carr
www.barbecarr.com

Pink Dresses

Oil on canvas | 30 x 40 x 2 cm | NFS





A Short Walk with a Small Child

She holds out her collection for me to see; three snail shells, a white seashell, and a peach pit. Here is her world of small things. Nothing escapes her big brown eyes.

As we walk a half-mile path through a field of tall grass, she stops a dozen times to inspect small, winged creatures and delicate flowers perched on the tip of weeds. My height and long stride propel me forward too quickly to appreciate all the treasures she finds along the way, so she calls me back to each new discovery, wrestling me down on one knee so I can smell the sun-baked soil.

Here are zebra-striped butterflies that reveal themselves only when their wings are extended in flight. Iridescent blue and green beetles that gather around the exposed roots of a tree move balls of wet earth toward some unseen monument they've been commissioned to build.

She discovers an oak tree, which at certain times of certain days, is alive with the buzzing of bees. Her grandmother says she knows the tree well, and that it is about to bloom.

She spies the perfectly intact shell of an insect that has outgrown its own skin. Its pinchers still clinging to the tall blade of grass where it finally decided that enough was enough. She counts and recounts its spindly legs and wonders at the tiny incision down its back from which the insect has escaped its too-small life.

She imagines what life was like for the snails that once inhabited her three shells and decides that they were friends who were discovered by her grandfather. He brought them home to her grandmother who baked them in butter and garlic and served them with fresh bread. "Poor snails," she sighs. "But oh, what pretty brown shells!"

The long white seashell, the size of her diminutive pinky, is evidence that the mountain top where we now stand was once the ocean floor. This is too much for her to imagine—tectonic plates and receding oceans. So instead, I offer her another peach, which she finishes in silence. She sucks the pit clean and adds it to her collection, telling me that she will soon have an orchard full of juicy peaches.

And then she moves on, leaving me silent in the wake of her world.

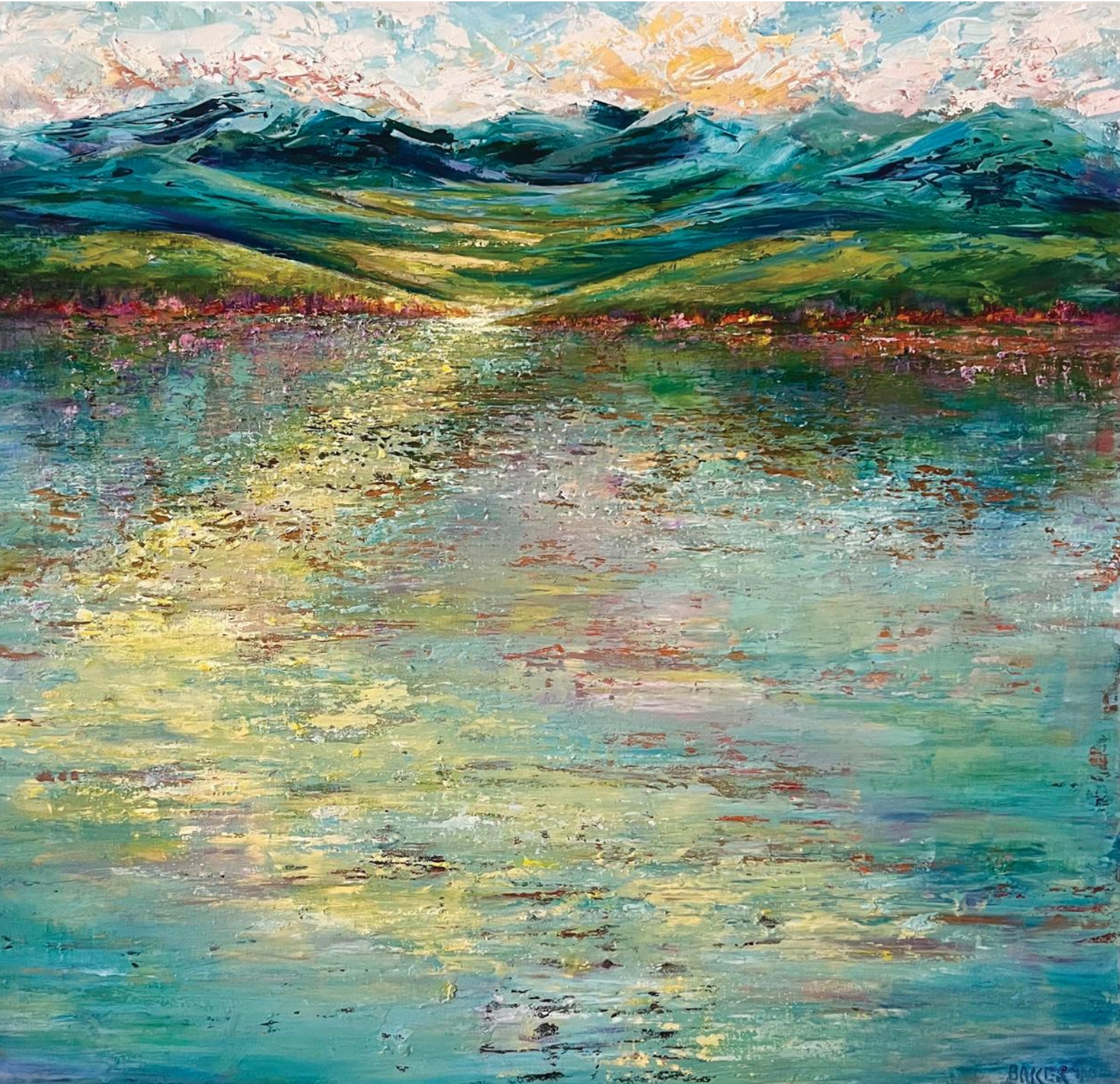


Christie Baker

www.christiebakerart.com

Limitless

Oil on canvas | 76.2 x 76.2 cm | \$1,100



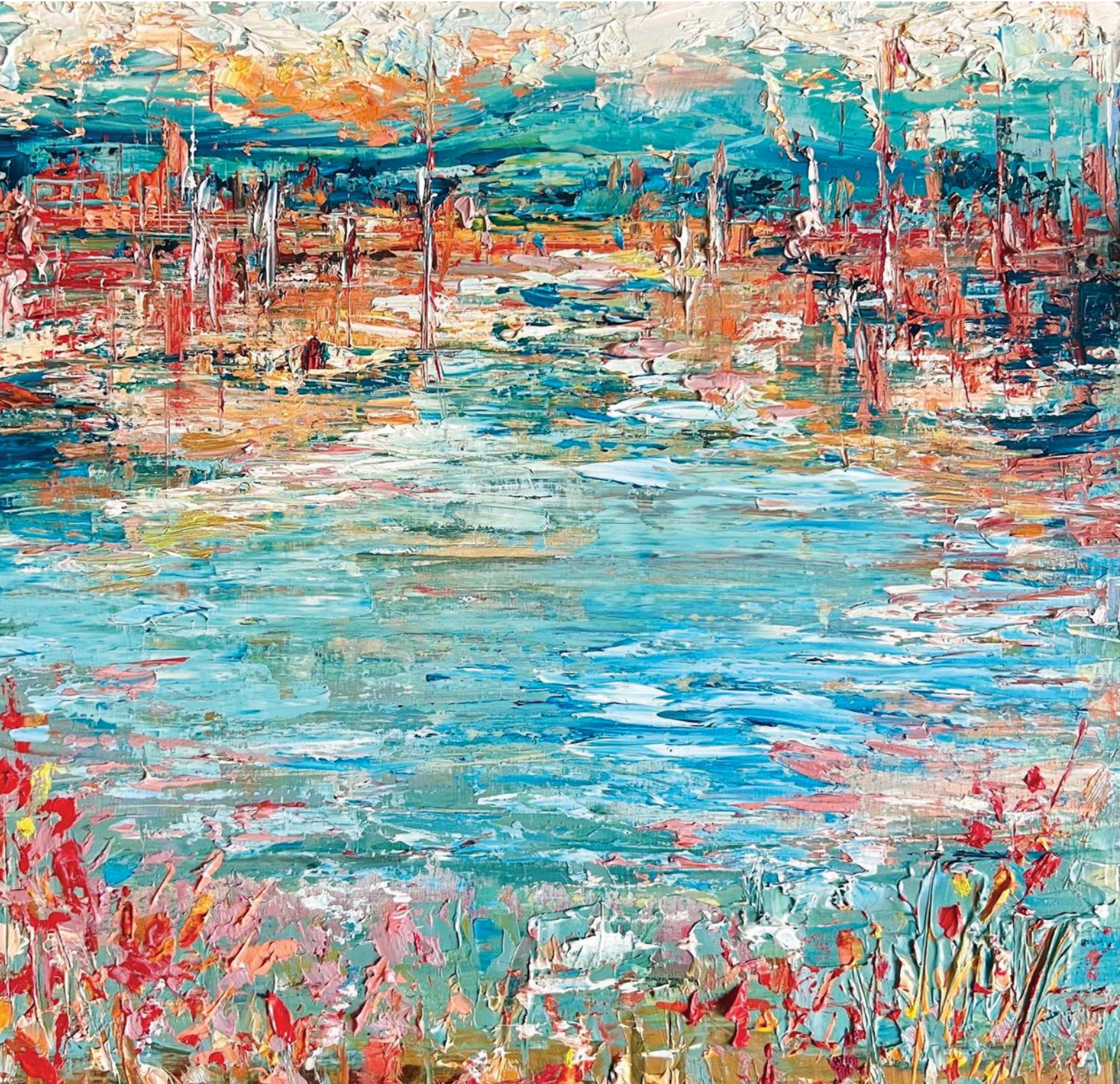
Meet Me at the Lake
Oil on canvas | 30.5 x 70 cm | \$350



Christie Baker

Remains of the Day

Oil on wood | 25.4 x 25.4 cm | \$200





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