

the plum creek review



summer 2021

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elliott diaz

Homesick/Tír far Thóinn

ursula hudak

Tonight I walk out to the field
and slip a hand under the land
to crawl underneath.
Deeper and deeper I travel
until a hill above me rumbles, adjusts,
then settles quietly,
sighing like a dog once it's curled up to sleep.

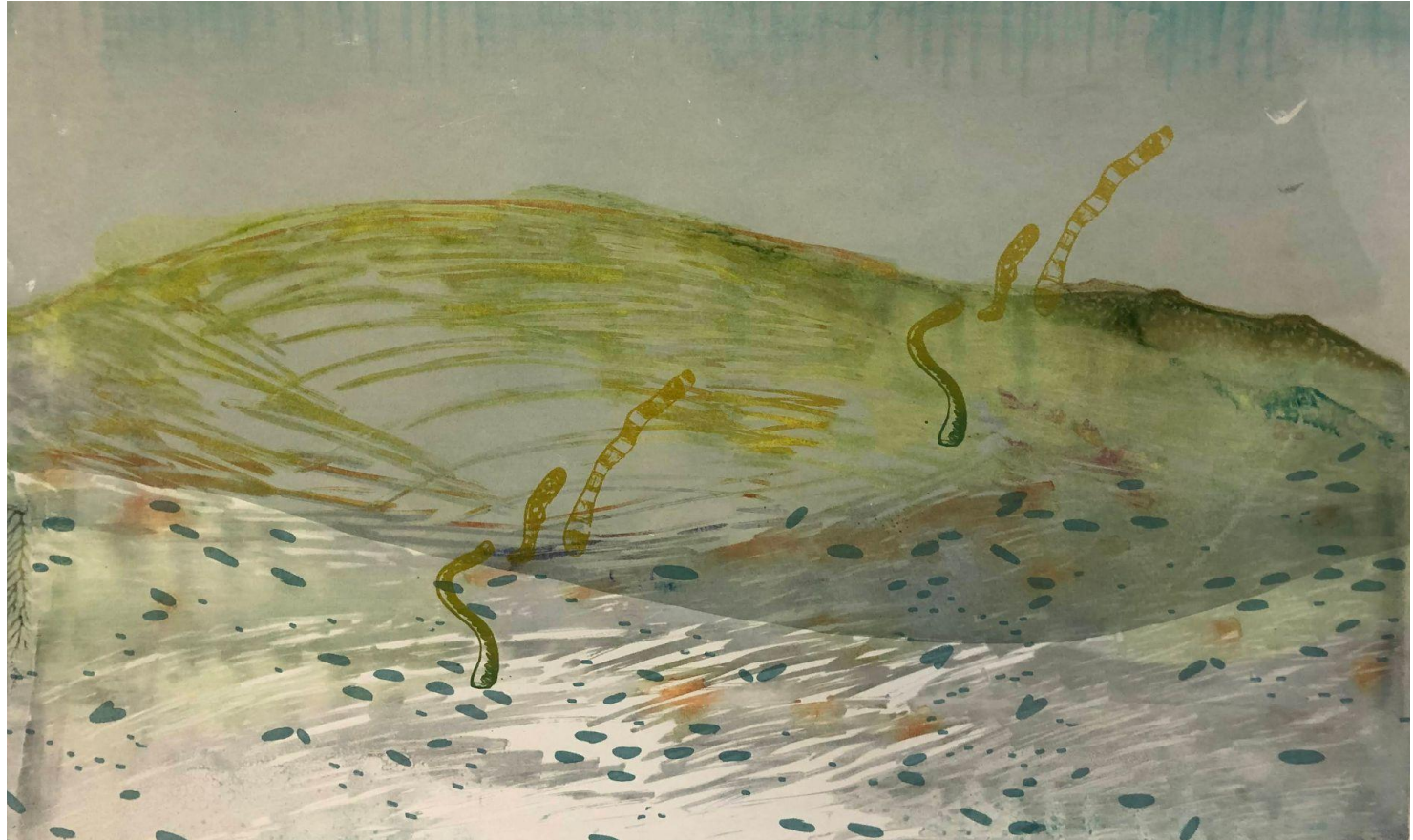
I am safe here.
I feel like I did when I was five
and my mother slept between me
and the door.

Amidst the shifting soil drift bones like mine.
With a touch, I understand they came
before and after me.
Everything is fine. No one has died.
I fall asleep again under the sea.

A Mind's Landscape

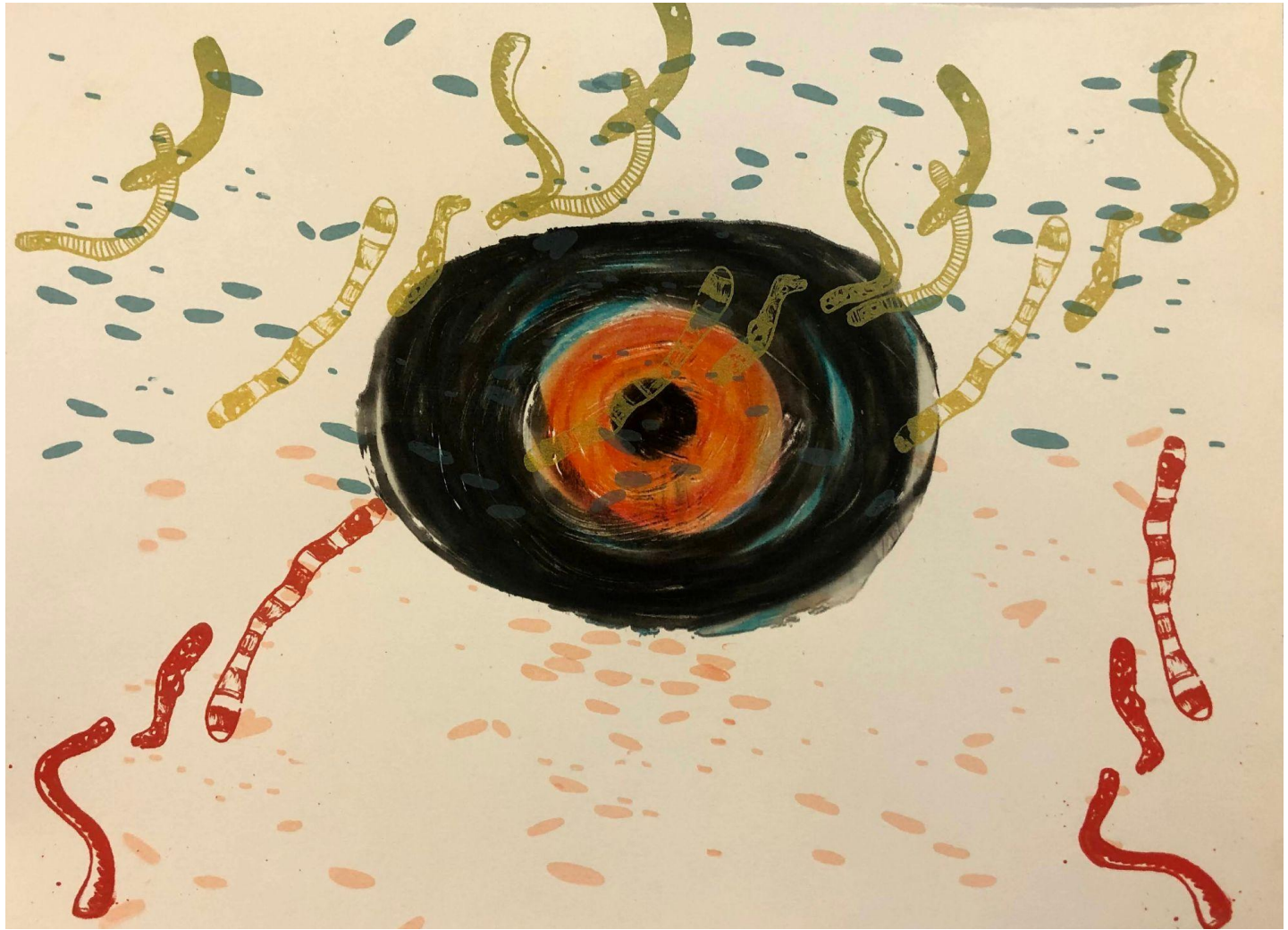
genevieve kirk













Home Place in the Butternut Valley

eva paddock

I think of it as a green place, but really it is all the colors. Orange with brown speckles newt in the leaf litter. Tiny, tiny wild strawberries, red! in the warm straw. Muddy crawfish, muddy frog. White antler and bone, the only time you'll see a deer up here. Mushroom pink red orange. And then green in every shade. The creek is green. Moss clings to the slate and the shale. It's in the bottom of a ravine which is green. And cool. Trees hanging low. Falling in. There are old things down there. Rust red brown. The model T that someone pushed over the edge sometime in the last century. The spool of metal cable for winching logs over the water. There are even older things down there too. Fossils. Mostly little shells, imprinted in the stone. We've pulled out hundreds. There are thousands more.

In the summer, the whole hill smells like wild thyme. When it rains the hill smells like wild thyme in the rain, like earth and forest. Slate, dark and slick with water. Greens turned shining emerald. I didn't know that you could smell a color.

You could stand in the front room to watch the rain come in. Stand there with the big old clock ticking in the corner and the green paisley wallpaper on the walls. If you're not paying attention you might crush a little of my grandmother's christmas cactus into the carpet. Stand there anyway, because through the window is the valley.

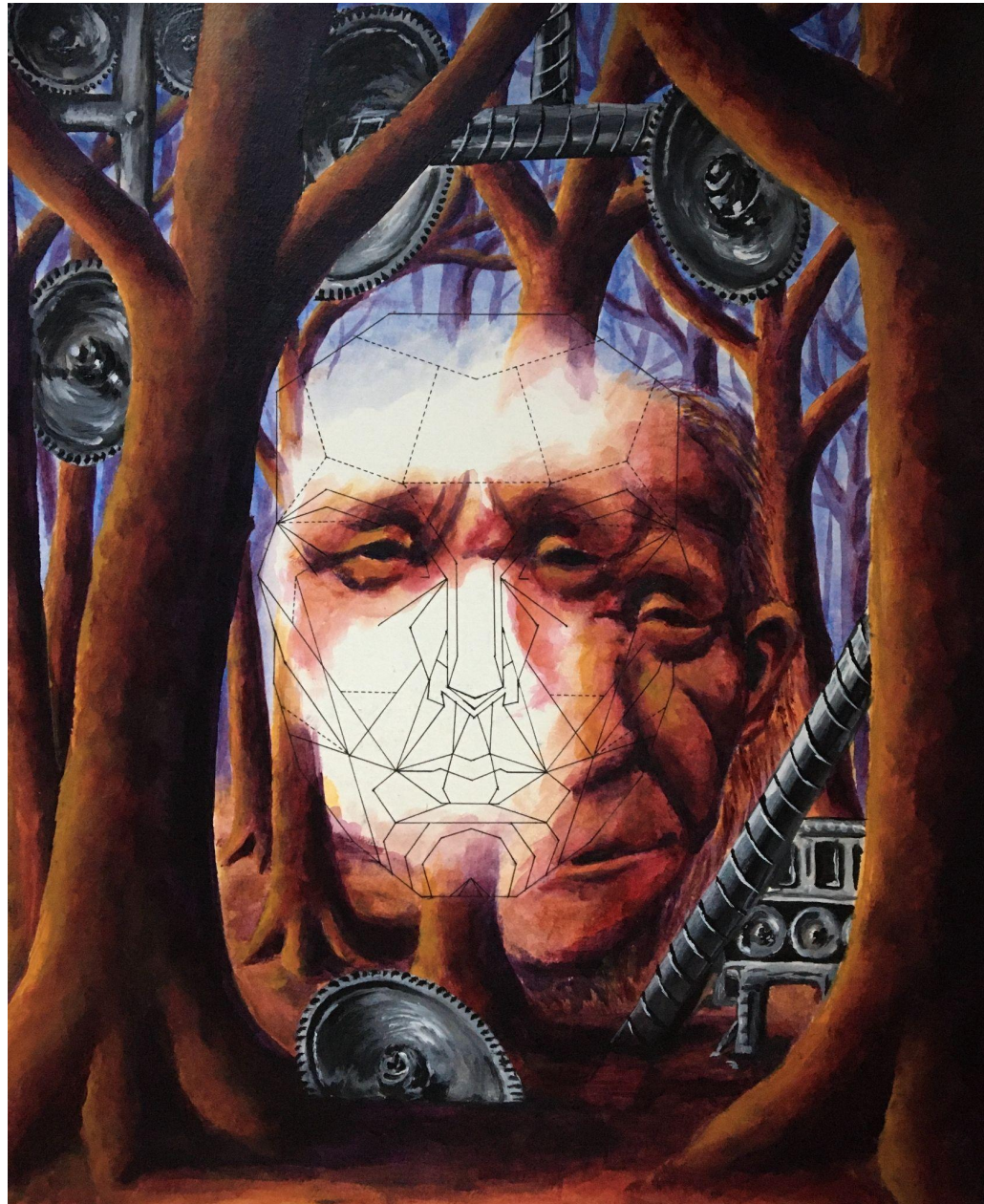
You're looking at the field once filled up with arrowheads, now filled up with corn and sometimes deer and sometimes men who want to shoot the deer. And you're looking at the other side of the valley, the hills in the distance. You can watch the rain come in. You can listen to the clock.
And later, you can go for a walk.

The creek is behind the house, up the hill and down again into the ravine. That's all, not far. It's cool up there, and green.

There are so many details of this place I'd like to tell you. Serpent stone and elephant temple. Butternut and black walnut. Gooseberry patch abandoned, wild blueberry. Woodchuck by the barn. Echo the young ghost, RABE the old ghost. Mimeria shimmera and all the rest. Allis-Chalmers the orange tractor, bookbookbookbookbook. The Endangered Hellbender Salamander. Dixie cups of port in the afternoon.

Really though, it's all green hills and cool ravines. Gray slate and forest. And it smells like wild thyme and tiny, tiny strawberries in warm straw.

well oiled
chloe casdagli



myth

sophie bransfield

How do you describe a Body that is
Color Feel Taste Touch, that is
skin and veins and toes, that is
so Body that you almost can't see it in this
lighting,
it's too Body for this Body, by which I mean
the Earth.
(*Body?*)
Anyway, I will try...

their fingers are thick as tree roots
the grannies who come to weave
on the Ridge between
Yesterday and Tomorrow.
their nails are as broad as shells,
all the better for picking threads.
they don't sit in a room
they don't enter
they never take their seats
(but surely if they did there would be

elbowing and love-touching Galore)

you could find them everyday
(if you looked)
on the Ridge, which is
a tall brown thing, a
small round thing,
gentle and coarse, full of
weeds, feet in the ground
legs around it
spirular and
knobbled
-thing.
definitely not Clean.

the Ridge is what comes
before Tomorrow and after Yesterday
the Ridge is just a Ridge
it was never not There
(here.)

they speak no known words to each other--
What are Words? Words go left-to-right.
these grannies are inside-outside--

song-in-your-chest--
breath-momentum-movement-dancers.
you might think they'd speak in riddles if they
did. speak in words
that is.
but no, they wouldn't.
they really wouldn't have
much to Say.

they have no ways describe
themselves or each other,
they speak through sounds,
a language minus system and decree;
just how they like it.
they weave because that's the Word I have
for it. (if I could sing to you here I would show you
otherwise...)

maybe you would call what they do prayer,
though they pray to no one but themselves
and the muscles in their arms.
they have no personal ambitions
and they try not to make Art
for hanging up and looking at.

maybe you could call it scaffolding--yes--
scaffolding--enveloping a space
with structure and rhythm and fiber
so that there is something to take away
so that you can see what is
left.

your eye catches on its expansion.

nothing ever starts or ends
it's always being Woven.

the grannies in all their colors
are each different:
some have long nose
hairs and twenty nipples and
eyes as big as the Sun.
some look like you two minutes ago,
while others look like me right now.

their arms dance through each other
as they tilt over the Ridge.
their threads are of course, so beautiful
and strange and

full of knots.
their hands perpetually tired, achy,
loving,
tender, hopeful,
sorry.

Change is the only present friend
at their shoulders.
what is built is torn down
what comes, goes, and
what goes comes back,
pulsating,
leafy,
asking to be touched
Again.
so it is on the Ridge.

the grannies know your myth of *time*
and often chuckle--a good joke--
their chin hairs bobbing
as they weave.

in their tapestry Everything is
yet-to-happened, spiraling:

warp vultures perpetually descending on
weft field mice always escaped;
warp-torn Earth cries out
for careful hands to
again weftly patched
it back together;
weft Power renders warped profit;
a soft touch wefts down
a warped, hand-held heart;
spring shoots warp the
weft winter landscape;

Love enters Our weft Body,
warped it into something New.

the rhythm of their arms bounces the Ridge,
spooling and unspooling thread in great
puddles.
patterns sometimes emerge.

Making a
mess?
No, not a mess.

I'm sorry if this isn't the story you've heard before.

you plead:
*the Apocalypse will never Happen,
nothing will Change,
it is always as it will be
and/or
the Apocalypse will someday Happen, on this
day, in that
year, to those
people.*

Are you starting to understand?

*Apocalypse: When all the dams crash open
and the water murders forth in
great lunges of filicidal hatred.
Apocalypse in--Where
has my Body gone? It was here
one moment Ago.
Apocalypse, which comes with great noises
unheeded, after years of the many hands
of God smacking the Earth with open,
hungry palms.*

you assume Apocalypse is destruction

to what is being Woven.

let me introduce you to the tightness
in your chest:
your faith in
Endings and Beginnings.

the grannies
do not deal in slights of hand
and other petty parlour tricks
designed to fool you of our
atomic composition.
they dig their fingers into the Ridge
and rip out what is there,
a painful harvest.

in that space left by their weaving
the utter blankness behind the Ridge
the one you'd rather not talk about,
you feel blindly for the seed
of what you already know:
the Apocalypse is Now and always Has Been/Will Be.
and
Love is Now and always Has Been/Will Be...

they encourage decomposition
between their hot hands,
rest, and reuse.
the weaving never ends
because it never started
it just Was.
nothing is ever wasted,
or thrown to the side
like a bone for some lesser dog.
every thread is loved on,
dampened with sweatysweet
Body Magic.

This is an invitation to You.

Consider this tapestry I give you uncertainly,
free of charge, with a hug
and offer of meal.

my prayer:

May you be safe

May you find faith and comfort in your body

May you share in strength and wisdom

May you look for courage

May you find hope

May you work toward self-healing

May you fight for collective Enoughness, Justice, and Joy

May you rest

May all this sustain you.

public image
chloe casdagli



Instructions to the Executors of My Will

ursula hudak

When I die I want you to bury me everywhere:
with my parents, my grandparents,
with my dogs and cats,
by that diner I love, by the gas station where we waited when the car broke
down.

I want you to bury me in my grandma's yard
(even though it isn't hers anymore),
in road-side phone booths and hot dog stalls,
in a defunct carnival ride,
in the Newark IKEA off I-95.

I want you to bury me where you grew up,
and by that house I always thought I'd buy one day.
Sprinkle me in a gust of air
outside your car window on the way to California.
Take me to Canada, I've never been.
Bury me on ferries, on boats,
dust me on the airplane runway,
on the soles of the shoes of strangers.
Take me everywhere. I want every ashy particle of me

to laugh in delight.

Finally, once you've done all these things
I want you all to snort me like Keith Richard did with his dad
or eat me maybe, on some fresh chopped tomatoes
on toast,
or even better, mix me in with your coffee.
Why? Because I want to enjoy and be enjoyed.
I want to live forever.



Wind Walkers

dasha klein

we wait and wash the dishes in the morning

fiona warnick

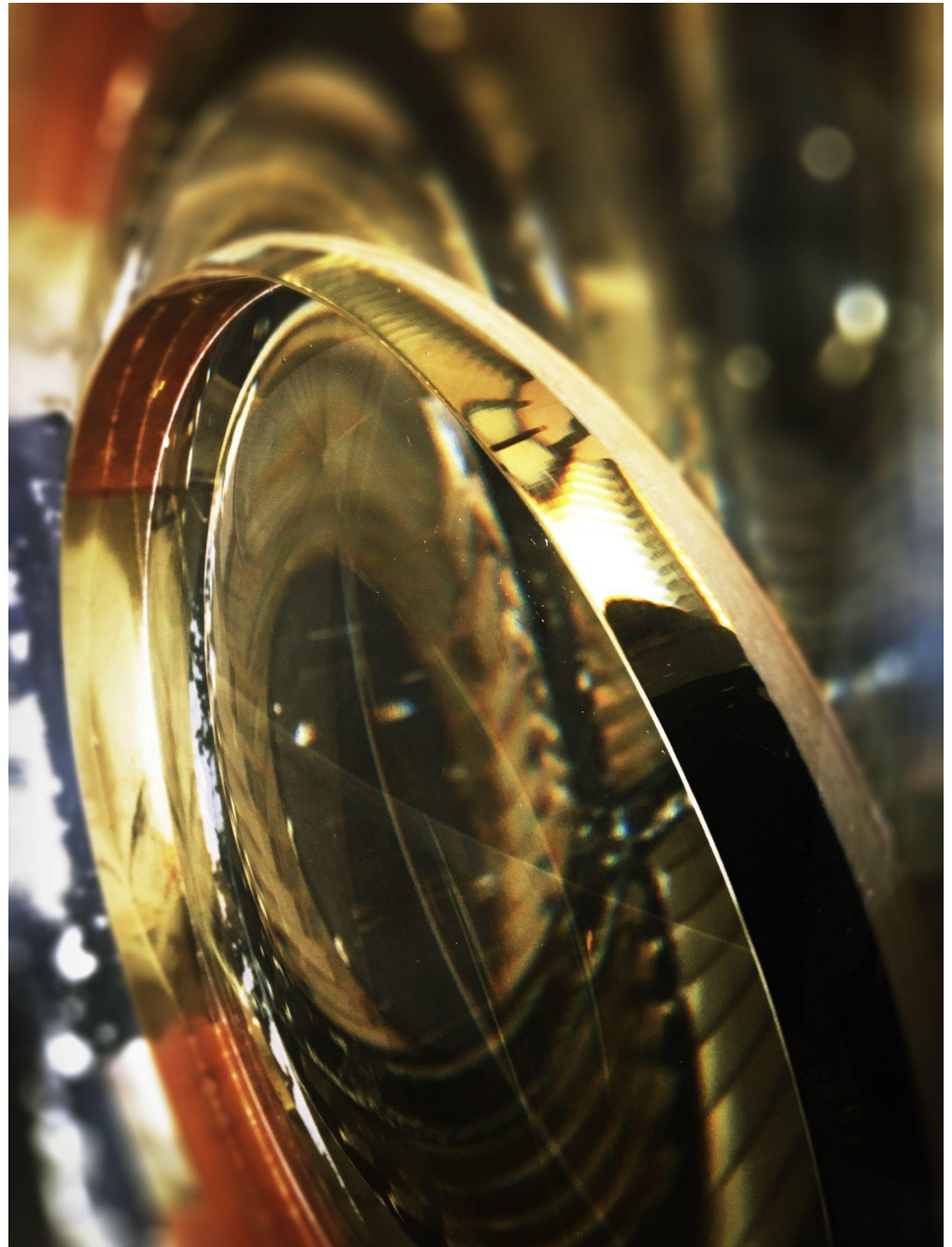
The kitchen sponge—yellow underbelly
up, bare of bristles. Ferry me across
the fjords / find a follicle and
yank. My kidneys
are clattering around, saying “Are we
there yet?” I don’t feel un-pretty
or un-loveable, just unlucky. We all
want to know if everyone else
pees in the shower, too. Gardenias and
goggles and a yogurt container containing
a firefly. Are we there yet? (A soap bubble
is a firefly for the daylight.) In the attic
there are watercolors—and I don’t think
the purple minds when you use the yellow.
There’s only cause for jealousy
when the dandelions are on the canvas
and you’re still deciding. It’s a rule

about fans, or about the inner elbows
of a sweaty night, that they never point
in the right direction. Reams of earlobes,
rolling through the printer. I want to forget
I ever learned somersault
wasn't spelt like the season. Tiredness
is a shoe rack. Kindness is just saying
yes or no
when faced with a bunch of lilacs.

evening sun
chloe casdagli



mirrors and light
chloe casdagli



Pretty Things

chloe casdagli

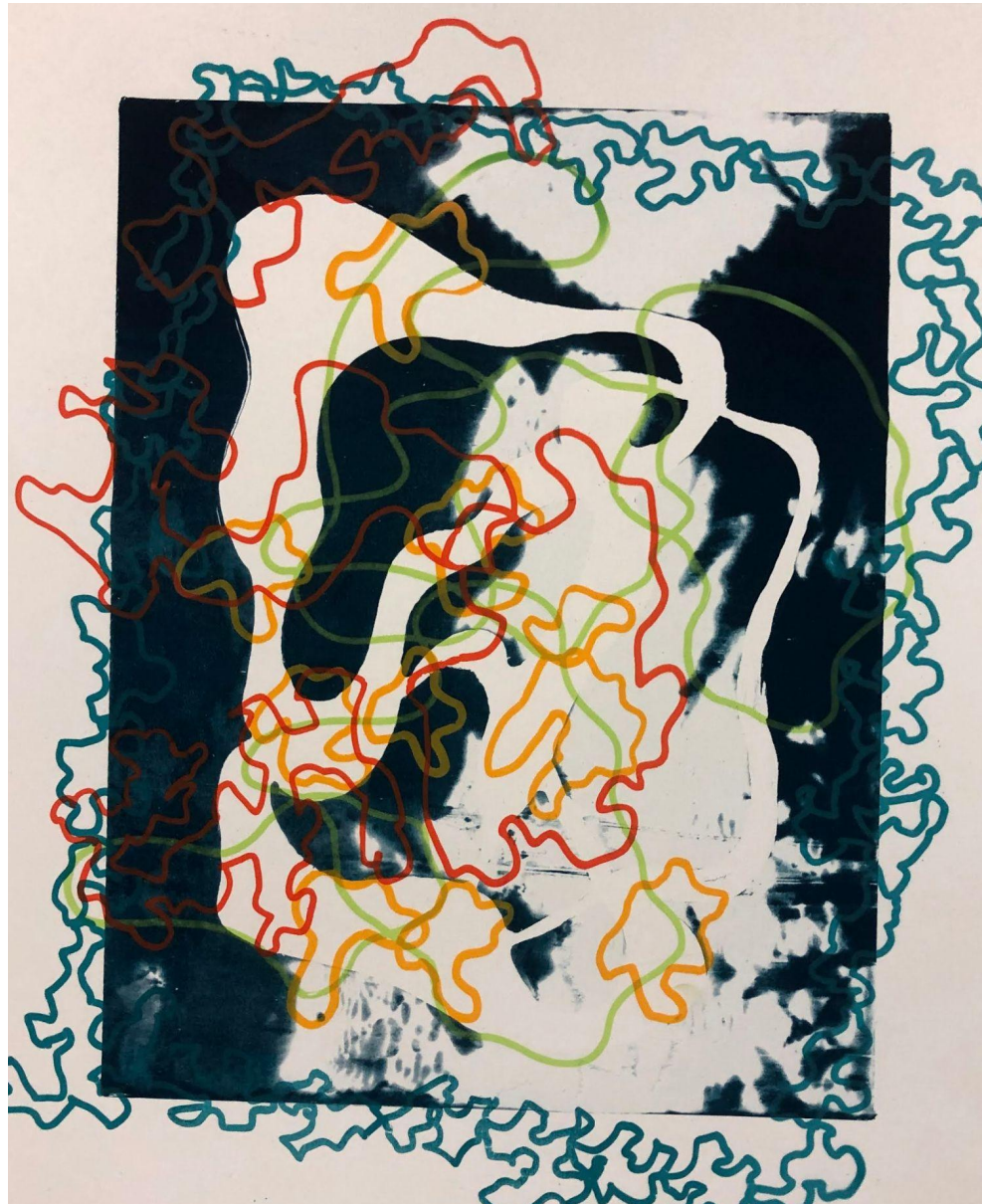
My grandma's life
was full of songbirds.
Soft, embroidered pillows, paintings
on a lonely wall, plastic replicas
in vases. Jewels of gold
and diamond-white wrapped in linty washcloths,
rolled out on my mother's floor.
Silver shadows,
pins, and carvings. Blue beaded rosaries
my mom held with a practiced hand. Packaged
in plastic bags, simple cardboard
boxes, holes poked in the lid
with a damaged
pair of scissors.
My grandma's love
of songbirds, leaves, pretty
things collecting dust
and light.

Transverse Reactions

genevieve kirk











the skunks

fiona warnick

I'm taking the trash out—coffee in hand, ungainly plastic bin-on-wheels in the other— when I first see the skunks. I guess most people probably leave their coffee inside when they take out the trash. I'll blame Muriel. She gave me this travel mug with sailboats on it. It's not the mug's fault the only travelling I do is to the end of my driveway.

There are three of them, the first time. I've never seen a baby skunk before. It reminds me of that children's book about the ducklings. They keep to such a straight line. And there's something aquatic about their fur—like it's designed to shed water.

The trash can is thunder on the pavement, maybe because it's so empty. I don't produce much waste—a few ice cream cartons, the orange mesh from a bag of clementines, some tampons. The bumps echo around inside the extra space, recycling themselves on the way to the landfill.

I stop moving. I don't want the noise to bother the skunks, even though logically the noise has been going on already, and they don't seem bothered.

They waddle across the dewy grass and disappear under the bushes by the porch steps. I watch them the way you watch a sunrise, or the bubbles in the teakettle before it's come to a full boil. The word "skunk" doesn't enter my head until later.

Back inside I open a notebook and write: *A baby skunk is a grownup in miniature. No pimples or wrinkles to mark time. Scale is the only variable.*

Then I write: *I don't know very much about skunks.*

I tear out the page and stick it to my refrigerator.

At 10:02 the next Saturday morning, I'm at the public library typing "skunks" into the search box on the chunky computer by the information desk with the "f" and "j" worn off from so many fingers.

There's a book about a skunk having a birthday party, and another about a family of skunks who have trouble remembering to say "please." I start feeling like they—not just my skunks, but the whole species—don't exist. From a search results perspective, they have more in common with unicorns than biology. All the skunk books have pictures. All the skunk books have call numbers that direct me to the Young Readers room.

I end up choosing the "please" book. It's the only one with a character who is specifically a baby skunk rather than a generic skunk. Baby Skunk has two older siblings: The Skunk in the Middle, and Linette. I can't figure out why Linette is the only one who gets a name. The protagonist is the Skunk in the Middle, and Baby Skunk is the comic relief. Maybe a name is a consolation prize for having no personality or narrative purpose.

Back home, I flip through the pages again and again. It's like the dream where I'm in the middle of the supermarket, realizing I've forgotten my shopping list. Something in the story is wrong.

At the library, I'd thought it didn't matter—the lack of nonfiction about skunks. The internet held more information than any book could.

I learn that some people keep them as pets. It's possible to remove the glands that produce mercaptan, the stuff that smells bad (though this removal has been illegal in the UK since 2006). There's a song about a dead skunk in the middle of the road. There's a plant called skunk cabbage that grows in wetlands. Skunks can be housebroken. Nothing helps. It turns out information is hard to access without the right question. What is the word for needing to know why I stood so long in my driveway that my coffee got cold?

In fourth grade, to learn how to write a paragraph like a burger, we had to write essays about an animal of our choice. I did red pandas. I can't remember what my brother did.

I end up in the attic, opening boxes. It turns out I'm wrong—the paragraph is gone, but his diorama of a naked mole rat remains. Pink, shriveled.

I call Muriel. Sometimes saying things out loud helps. I try to explain that the skunks in the book are different from the ones in my yard.

Well, she says, *ceci n'est pas une pipe*. Also there is fiction and there is reality. Also fictional skunks talk. Also fictional skunks want to teach kids a pedantically naïve moral and real skunks want to survive.

I don't mind the moral, though she's right that it's naïve. I can suspend disbelief. For ten minutes, I can have anything I want if I ask nicely.

She'll be in town next week, as planned. Should we put in the order with the flower shop now, so there's no chance of them selling out of white gladioli? Do I want to get breakfast before or after the cemetery?

Real skunks want to survive.

Sunday isn't trash day, or mail day for that matter. I sit at the kitchen table for a while, trying to come up with an excuse to go outside. Maybe I have an important envelope that needs to go in the mailbox before I forget. Maybe I am a jilted lover who needs to watch the sunrise.

The cold of the porch steps goes right through my jeans, presses itself against my sit bones. I should go grab a hat. Instead I hold my travel mug up to one ear, then the other. The sail boats don't say much. If you filled a conch shell up with coffee, could you still hear the ocean in it?

I said "the first time I saw the skunks" as if there was a second. Maybe the word for this is manifesting, but I must have used it incorrectly. They haven't come back.

Shivering on the steps, though, I figure it out—the problem with the skunks in the book. They're all different ages. Real skunks come in litters. And there's an evolutionary reason for litters: skunk siblings keep each other warm, which means they keep each other surviving.

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