



the plum creek review

fall 2016

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fall 2016

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table of contents

- 1 **Palm Trees in the Sunlight**
Mia Silvan-Grau

- 2 **Beets**
Lydia Moran

- 5 **Net**
Gabriel Hawes

- 6 **train poem**
Talia Rodwin

- 7 **Untitled (For Brian Yates)**
Zachary Vaughn

- 8 **Untitled (temporary)**
Zachary Vaughn

- 9 **Regret**
Mimi Silverstein

- 10 **Untitled**
Nia Owen

- 11 **At 2 in the afternoon**
Mia Silvan-Grau

- 12 **Untitled**
Lillian Jones

- 13 **a River**
 Samuel Fishman
- 14 **Dust Bowl in the Fairy Garden**
 Mimi Silverstein
- 17 **Kite flying at Doran Beach, Bodega Bay 2016**
 Zachary Vaughn
- 18 **Untitled**
 Lillian Jones
- 19 **Krousher**
 Russell Jaffe
- 20 **Untitled**
 Jim Ross
- 21 **Untitled**
 Jim Ross
- 22 **My Needs are Met**
 Elliot Bailey
- 24 **Dinner Prep**
 Jacob Roosa
- 25 **Softness**
 Gabriel Hawes
- 26 **Brown Girl**
 Ananya Gupta

28	Wish You Were Here Nia Owen	
29	Lost Boy I Nia Owen	
30	Rot Russell Jaffe	
32	Beach Jacob Roosa	
33	Gansevoort Street Sophia Fishman	
34	Untitled Sophia Fishman	
35	Penumbra Davis Sawyer	
36	Untitled Zachary Vaughn	
37	yep, it's a stye Liam Russo	
Front Cover	No. 6, from 100 Faces of Jordan Zachary Vaughn	<i>digital photography</i>
Back Cover	No. 71, from 100 Faces of Jordan Zachary Vaughn	<i>digital photography</i>



Palm Trees in the Sunlight

Mia Silvan-Grau

35 mm color film

Beets

Lydia Moran

1.

When I write about beets, what I am really writing about is color. Or his sister, light. Or their grandmother, dirt.

2.

This is something he said to me: When a beet is ripe you can tell because of its color. It won't be red or pink, but the color of the roots on your molars. We were sitting on the porch overlooking the small field and the wide expanse of crops beyond that. It metered and fell, as if the land itself was moved by the sweet breeze.

3.

When my grandfather was my age, he worked in a canning factory. He canned corn, carrots, peas, not beets. He is the boy who ran up the conveyer belt to the control tower anytime a female employee screamed in response to a dead mouse caught on the machinery. Then they would stop the whole operation and resume only when the carcass had been disposed of out the window. My grandfather held every mouse by its skull, never tail.

4.

My father told me when we were walking through the big city that my grandfather used to come here and look up and say to the buildings: that could sure hold a whole lot o' hay.

5.

When my mother met my grandfather for the first time, she was stricken by his hands. They were filthy, caked with dirt and worms, they grew out from the stubs of his arms like knots of a tree. He ate everything with a fork, even french fries. I believe he did this as a courtesy to her.

6.

My grandfather never went to the war. He went to Canada and came home with my grandmother. This is something they never told me. What they did tell me is that the first thing he wanted when he returned was a beet.

7.

When I was little I used to play in the high stalks of corn with him. He'd run a little ahead and disappear behind a cluster. Me and my small fists pulling at the leaves, leaves slicing my soft skin, sun slicing the leaves. He'd yell and I'd laugh. I'd fall down even if I didn't have to. I'd always get dirt on my knees.

8.

When I was eight I lost my first tooth at my grandfather's house. My grandmother was asleep and it was dark outside. We pulled it out over the kitchen sink and I didn't scream. He threatened to put it in the leftover stew. "It's the same color," he said.

9.

When I write about beets, what I am really writing about is blood.

10.

This is the truth: my grandfather died before I was born. He wasn't a farmer, he was a teacher. I do not know if he went to war.

11.

My mother stopped visiting my father's family after they divorced. This made sense to me and in a way, I was thankful. We ride in cars together alone now, past miles and miles of corn and beets. I can still remember the first time I cut one open.

12.

It was like scratching behind my ear on an early June evening, and then holding my hand in front of my face. Astonished at the red clumps of blood on my fingers. Astonished only because of the color. It's the gnats, my mother says, and tells me to wash my hands.



Net

Gabriel Hawes

digital photography

train poem

Talia Rodwin

- 1) Countryside, quilted as if by a mother's moving hands. Spread thin, spread lush.
- 2) Two little boys whisper to each other, make pig faces, then forget it as soon as it happens (with the memories children have)
- 3) the old stone church rearing up
- 4) then the next and the next. Each town blessed. Each village brought to grace
- 5) A little girl whispering "Regarde! Regarde!" to her Papa at the sighting of the tiniest fairy (a lone horse, an old tree, a singular yellow slope)
- 6) And finally, the cows lying down, signaling the rain, what will come and wash this whole scene away in mush, leaving a raw new countryside

Untitled (For Brian Yates)

Zachary Vaughn



digital photography

Untitled (temporary)

Zachary Vaughn



digital photography

Regret

Mimi Silverstein

I will come to you at night like fear
Soot faced
On the back of a dream owl with wings as vast as the space between worlds

Give me your bread, give me your dreams
For I have been starved for a generation, for a childhood

Let me sit in your mind's pocket
I am as small as a thunderclap
And I belong with string and dust and other such mind pocket things

I am the ghost of you
Back alley washed up hopes smudged on my face

Sit with me
Under empty apple trees
And speak of the ghosts that live inside half eaten apples
Soft and dull as old sweaters

Untitled
Nia Owen



color film

At 2 in the afternoon

Mia Silvan-Grau

At 2 in the afternoon
if the lights are off
the sun will come in
and
give the tiles
an almost pleasant
quail-egg hue

If the water is warm enough
the steam will caress you
and under the water-fall,
as it changes pressure
and drips slightly.
you are likely to look at yourself,

As the sun-beams spill through
from under the curtain
at 2 in the afternoon
only if the lights are off
will the tiles become
a pleasant shade of quail egg blue

Untitled
Lillian Jones



oil on canvas

(a)

a River
Samuel Fishman

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Dust Bowl in the Fairy Garden

Mimi Silverstein

“And we had to set the table like this, with the plates all turned over so the dust wouldn’t get in!”

Lucy threw out her arms like a magician after a trick. On the little picnic table were cups and forks and plates, all different colors, all turned the wrong way over. Some of them were the yellowing china her mother hadn’t been able to sell in the thirties, some of them the bright plastic dishes she’d bought for the kids in the sixties. At Madeline’s place she’d put her Snow White plate, the colors all muted so Snow White’s pink cheeks and her yellow dress looked the same color.

“That’s weird, Grandma,” said Madeline, turning her plate over the right way.

“It was weird!” Lucy chuckled and helped turn over the rest of the plates. “And we had to eat the weirdest foods too! We had ketchup sandwiches!” Madeline wrinkled her nose. “Gross.”

“Wouldn’t you like to have some for dinner tonight?”

Madeline shook her head wildly, so it looked like a spinning top.

“I guess we’ll have to do the backup then. Spaghetti and meatballs!”

Lucy had never been much of a cook, but when her daughter Daphne had called the night before Madeline’s arrival to rattle off bedtimes, how many episodes of *Rugrats* were allowed, and favorite meals, Lucy had painstakingly recorded every detail down to how much grated cheese Madeline liked on top.

She had dug out Freddie, her old stuffed cat with dirt and dust and something that might have been decades old maple syrup caked in his fur, and placed him on Madeline's bed with a pink teddy bear she'd bought at Toys R Us. She'd gone on her hands and knees in the basement, searching through boxes of old books, *Nancy Drew* and *Stuart Little*, until she'd found them, her fairy books. The pages were worn as old hands, and smelled like the years. The jewel bright covers, painted winged girls perched on tulips and irises that matched their petal dresses, had dulled with settling dust. She had gently placed each book in a brand new box and tied it with a purple ribbon.

"Madeline, would you like to see a really special secret before dinner?" Lucy asked her granddaughter.

Madeline considered. "Okay."

The small girl in pigtails tied with little plastic baubles followed the older woman out the back screen door. Past the trampled grass, past the little mosaic tiles that Daphne had made with bits of glass. Lucy knelt before a small garden. The flowers sparkled with a soft light, *Wizard of Oz* Technicolor against the grayish yellows and browns of the backyard.

"Here's the fairy garden," Lucy whispered. "Can you see them?" Madeline's eyes narrowed. "I don't believe in fairies. I'm hungry."

When the black blizzard hit, Lucy's father held her tight while her legs moved like an out of control bicycle.

"The fairies will make it through, Lu, they've got magic."

"They can't! They're going to drown!" She screamed the last word, screamed it over the sound of the rushing waves of dust, over the violent rattling of the windows and the cupboards. She bore her teeth into her father's arm as hard as she could. He cursed and loosened his grip and she shot out the door.

They were drowning. The prairie was a black hourglass and all the fairies were trapped inside. They tried to fly up, towards where they remembered the sky must be, but their wings trembled and collapsed. Lucy saw their tiny bodies falling with the dust, falling into the dust.

Her father seized her from behind and pulled her inside.

After the storm she found their limp bodies, like insects on a windowsill, in the skeletal remains of their garden.

When Madeline left, Lucy undid the purple ribbon and took her fairy books out of the brand new box. She opened the one with the fairy in the red dress on it and breathed in the years. Then she let them out again, years of TV remotes and hair ties and plastic cups. As she read, she was back again, in the house that stood through the dust storms, in the moments when the sky cleared and the fairy garden began to grow again.

Kite flying at Doran Beach, Bodega Bay 2016

Zachary Vaughn



digital photography

Untitled

Lillian Jones



mixed media

Krousher
Russell Jaffe

I once read that an eye
Could be removed from its socket,
The optic nerve still attached
And functioning.
How much care would it take to do that?
I imagine a white coat surgeon—
A doctor, perhaps,
Steady hands lovingly twisting the scalpel and pin,
Circles onto circles onto circles,
Lens onto iris onto pupil,
All comes scooping out.
The sound would be like
Rubber balls squeezing
Through cracks on a wooden floor.
I want to know
What the eye can see after,
Unable to close or turn away,
What do we miss in the space between blinking?
What would it show us,
A tethered, bulbous orb,
Slowly shriveling dry and red
As molten rubies bleed through the cracking veins.

Untitled
Jim Ross



digital photography

Untitled
Jim Ross



digital photography

My Needs Are Met

Elliot Bailey

Except for the fifth time last night a couple of really–doing–well people kicked my box with their nice shoes. And I was just in there thinking about my own self.

This whole thing's been showing up in my dreams. I talked with Al at the library about it the other day. I dream there are like 50 really–doing–well people all kicking my box with their nice shoes. Their shoes are so nice, I was telling Al.

My box rattles with the niceness of the world outside.

And since I'm so tall, my legs stick out in these recurrent episodes of violence, and get all kicked up until I imagine it'll be hard to walk tomorrow.

I shout down my body toward my feet, out the opening where they extend onto the sidewalk. I wish I could pull up inside, but I'm so tall I don't really fit in the box, this slumping prism, rained-on, once full of a miniature car revealed at Christmas to a child.

My legs get kicked up pretty bad. But for the most part I'm safe in there. Definitely safer inside than outside.

But I kind of want out of the box. I'm pained being inside where the world shakes but doesn't let me out, you know, with all the feet, I'd get kicked up. It'd be a mess—I'm always thinking in the dream.

Al at the library asked me why they even bother knocking if they weren't going to pull me out and kick my ass properly on the sidewalk.

When he said that, I was done with dumbass questions, so I told him where I'd be later and walked outside.

The sun was too much and the flowers coming up in front of the library made my nose run.

I coughed twice in my elbow. A lady walking with her son leaned over so her mouth was kind of by the kid's shoulder and said to him, "that's why you never smoke cigarettes."

She was a good-looking woman, well done up, very nice-looking, but in the eyes of her I saw a blunt sense of you-v.-me, politic, of active resentment. Fuck you, I called her in my head.

Her kid's shoes were nice. New, not beat up. He was also like that. And her shoes were definitely nice and I was looking at them trying to remember them so I could tell Al about it later.

And then this lady looked at me with the eyes again.

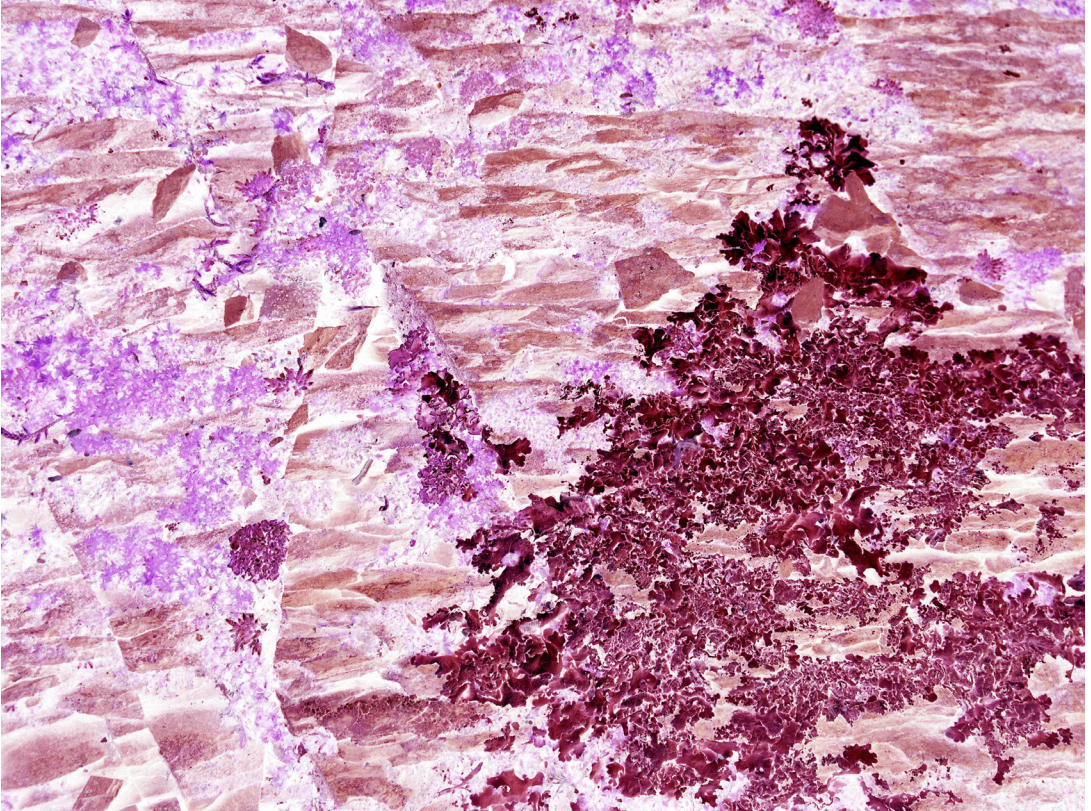
And this lady's world, which I wanted so badly, seemed volatile, as if it desperately was and always had been trying to spurn me.

Dinner Prep
Jacob Roosa



found art collage

Softness
Gabriel Hawes



digital photography

The Brown Girl

Ananya Gupta

I am the object of your jealousy, sometimes.
I'm the tan you spent a few thousand dollars on,
the stain that smudges your luscious
White
towels.

I am the vowels you alter with a certain twang,
sang my exotic memories onto the tourist tapestries on your walls,
imbedded my spice into the very core of your light pink tongue
to see it swell and throb fuchsia like mine does
every time you're afraid to come too close to me.

See the kohl in my eyes like a coalmine about to explode,
Expect me to solve your codes of hypocrisy,
Because for some strange reason you think I'm into engineering.

I'm the falling short girl.
Hidden in the throng of your tall white superiority,
note that this resting bitch face is a defense mechanism
because the last time I smiled at you,
you took it as consent to plant your flag on my body.

Swept my treasures into your glass confinements boasting theft,
shoved your language down my throat till I couldn't regurgitate anything else,
today I strap my body in dynamite;
instill fear in you, for how else, can I teach you to respect me?

It's true; I'm not the deepest shade of brown.
Not burnt sienna, unfamiliar with the burn of bone deep oppression.
I've had keeps and havens and shade from giant trees,
steeped in the green that isn't leaves,
I'm the crème of the Nescafé, scooped to safety by softer lips...
Perhaps in this duplicity I can blend with you.

I want to pose as the caramel drizzled over your creamy vanilla,
that thick sugar, that coats your savage teeth,
sheath your venom infused tongue in my chocolate, brown.
So gently, that you don't feel yourself drown.

Wish You Were Here

Nia Owen



color film

Lost Boy I
Nia Owen



color film

Rot

Russell Jaffe

I learned about the dog from my mother's journals after she died. As a kid, my brother had been lonely without any siblings, and before I was born, he had adopted a stray puppy named Daisy that he loved more than anything in the world. They played together every day when he came back from daycare, but one day, he was too rough and accidentally snapped her neck while they were wrestling in the backyard. He was only six at the time, so I'm sure he was quite upset, but he didn't tell my parents. Instead, he quietly hid the body on a large, white rock in the middle of the local woods. Since she was just a stray, my parents figured that Daisy had just run away, and my brother seemed happy enough without her, so they never brought it up. What they didn't know was that every day after daycare, he hiked out to the woods to play with her.

She was easy to find on the rock where he had left her, and despite her small size as a puppy, no animals in the area were large enough to move her. Her body was still rotting though, and I heard that even from the first day, hundreds of blowflies writhed within her fur, laying countless eggs in the flesh that were already starting to hatch in maggots.

The games were different now. My brother would no longer run around with Daisy and play fetch, but he would still hold her, caress the bloated patches of fur and sometimes even talk to her. I don't know how he could stay so close while the corpse was putrefying—the filth gave him a fever on multiple occasions, and even the insects started to stay away when the flesh liquefied into a frothy pink. Eventually, after only a few months, all that was left were chalk-white bones and a stain on the surrounding rock.

Sometimes, mother used to yell at my brother as she cleaned his clothes. She was never able to understand how he always got so dirty, but he was just a child, so she rarely thought much of it. One day however, her curiosity got the best of her, and she decided to take one of her few sick days to secretly follow his trail into the woods. When she found him, he was holding the skull, kissing and whispering to it with a smile as wide as the dog's crooked jaw.

Together with my father, she buried the bones and sent him to therapy. I was born not too long after that, but nobody ever mentioned the dog.

Beach

Jacob Roosa



found art collage

Gansevoort Street
Sophia Fishman



color film

Untitled

Sophia Fishman



black and white film

Penumbra
Davis Sawyer

Then one day you think of suddenly
disappearing the way light back-breaks
and sometimes bends around corners
like matchsticks mirroring your own lanky
arms and legs. In this house, memory gathers
in the shade, pulses patiently in corners,
like the inner most chamber of a heart
cluttered with names that mean nothing.
You wonder how long it would take
to fit between the floorboards.
You were taught to make yourself a man
or even something less,
to be a knife
that teaches loss to soft things.
Somewhere else the tracks lead deeper into the woods.
The willows purr softly behind liquor store sconces.
You want to forget but some part of you
races out into the darkest part of the night.
The woods catch it and send it back.
You try to remember when you began
treating your body like an object
bounded and exhaustible
instead of a branch of the infinite
like an orchid or emerald,
so bruisable
and plummeting.

Untitled

Zachary Vaughn



digital photography

yep, that's a stye
Liam Russo



black and white film

