



LIFE IN THE TIME

BORDERSENSES
2021







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EDITORS' NOTE

“We write to taste life twice, in the moment and in retrospect.”
— Anais Nin

When 2020 rolled in, who would have thought the entire world—from Australia to Zambia—would be interconnected entirely by a virus that would introduce into the lexicon terms such as pandemic, Covid-19, social distancing, and masking. Life would become isolated for everyone, and the only communication would be using tools such as Zoom for work and play. We would be enveloped by illness and death; misery and sadness would be the prevailing mood.

The ubiquitous world of Covid-19 produced a transformed society with no certainty of how long it would last. We felt that this unique time needed to be documented. And thus, *Life in the Time* was born, with the express intent of capturing stories, poems, and arts to document the profound sorrows, uncertain surprises, and little successes.

The last major epidemic was 100 years ago, when millions of people died during that period. Unfortunately, there is not enough documentation of the impact this had on people's lives back then. Given the advancement of technology, we are in a better position to harness this documentation for posterity.

With the support from EPCC, we secured funds to create a print publication. Here, we have art and photography, and stories and poems in English and Spanish from contributors—established, emerging and spoken word artists from all walks of life. This book is intended to be a time capsule of this particular period of our border's history. As we recover from this pandemic period, we hope that *Life in the Time* will serve as a reminder of our shared humanity of the border and our ability to live life, love one another, and move forward. ¡Adelante con ganas!

AMIT K. GHOSH, El Paso, TX
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ART EDITOR'S NOTE

“Most of our lives we live closed up in ourselves, with a longing not to be alone, to include others in that life that is invisible and intangible. To make it visible and tangible, we need light and material, any material.”

—Anni Albers, *Material as Metaphor* 1982

During these strange days, a lot has been said and written about the importance and necessity of art amidst this COVID-19 crisis. Yet, many artists still live in unknown deep job insecurity.

Undoubtedly, art has a lot to say these days. Artists are able to assemble and disassemble, to dream in order to achieve answers and questions that are beyond the one-dimensional view of what it is to be human right now.

Artists can be an antidote in times of chaos, a roadmap for greater clarity, a force of resistance and repair, creating new records, new languages, and new images.

This virus is an opportunity to listen to the voices of people we typically ignore. At the same time, it is important to recognize and protect the work of our artists. The fact that the arts are not clearly useful is not an argument against their value but an argument in favor of taking care of them and protecting them. Art is an essential tool to provide us perspective. These times show us more strongly than ever that the artists' job is to make the art that only they can make, right now in the times we are living.

It has been an honor to curate the submissions of work from the artists who have contributed to this publication. These artists from the binational community of the southwest borderlands of New Mexico, Texas, and Mexico are from varying backgrounds, experiences, using different mediums—all hard at work through this pandemic era. Yet, they have been kind enough to share their creations with us, keeping us connected and reminding us of our humanity through trying times.

ISADORA STOWE

Las Cruces, NM/El Paso, TX



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QUARANTINE (SPONTANEITY)

8.

POET KHAN

El Paso, Texas

I remember spontaneity

9 pm phone calls discussing plans for the nightfall.

I remember the city.

The lights,

the cars,

the stars,

the star on the mountain.

Do you remember The Fountains?

Now, that was shopping.

I remember enjoying shopping

bar hopping, be-bopping on the microphone.

I remember the stage,

the joy of achieving congregated laughter,

what a disaster we have become.

I remember denying the opportunity of the church door

being too tired,

naked,





too hungover.

I remember children in the playground's sand,

immigrants being Americans

A confidence in a Constitution,

a hope for retribution.

I recall a melodic melody meant to maintain my sanity.

I remember hope for humanity,

What I would not do.





KENTUCKY CLUB

STEVE YELLEN
El Paso, Texas



ENCIERRO

11.

FERNANDA AVENDAÑO

Cd. Juárez, Mexico

Conozco muchas formas de nombrar el encierro
se abultan en mi garganta
se enredan,
me atan.

cuarentena
 jaula
 tumba
 prisión
 ghetto
 toque de queda
“la noche es peligrosa”
 “no salgas con esa ropa”
 “fuera llueve”

Pero llegas y vibras libertad
Gracia divina
Gracia insolemne
Y sonrías viento fresco
y todas las ventanas
de todas las casas
de todas las ciudades
se abren de par en par.

Y el dentro se hace afuera
donde las estrellas parten de tus ojos.
Y tu carcajada es el movimiento
de las hojas del árbol que planté con mi abuela.

Luego te pido “no me hagas hablas de tus pestañas
porque su vaivén me ha traído al desierto
la brisa del mar
que me sabe salada
porque has llorado.

He conocido todas las palabras para nombrar el encierro
y las desconozco ahora porque tú estás llenándolo todo.



GAZING AT THE WORLD TURNED UPSIDE DOWN

FRANK RIMBACH
Las Cruces, New Mexico





WILTED WALLPAPER

13.

PATRICIA OROZCO

El Paso, Texas

I caught myself staring at the same flower in the wallpaper.

It's petals ripped from the grip off the wall, trying so desperately to remain with its roots.

I almost forgot the sensation of life outside these four walls when time didn't bother to turn its hand to the right anymore.

I almost forgot what the arc in our lips was meant for...

If you told me before that I'd breathe in a world that trembled at the idea of a touch of hand, I'd remind you of the fables our grandparents told.

Yet there I sat, the limbs of my legs tucked into the bones of my shoulders, staring at the same flower on the wall.

Phrases filled with "can'ts" and "don'ts" became the scripture to guide our days.

Tell me, did the lapse of sunset and sunrise make a difference in the shadows of your home?

Did the fear cemented on the sidewalks we walked on make the voyage beyond the front door nearly unbearable, almost hopeless?

I looked to my wallpaper when the decay of sprouting flowers was all that could be heard as the sun still shined but leaves kept falling.

Tell me, did a flower in your vase pass away as well?

Did you ask the dirt beneath your feet to take this pain away?





THE ETERNAL GAZE

GIBEL AMADOR
El Paso, Texas





FAMILIA DESTROZADA

15.

CHRISTIANE WILLIAMS-VIGIL

El Paso, Texas

In my family, we say
when you are about to die, those who
passed before you
return.

All this sickness has taken many.
Alone they laid in cold rooms
to wait for the end of their world.
Who came for them?

Through my fingers slip my family
like rushing water.
Torn apart by the silent microbes
that shredded their lungs into
warm piles of flesh.
Sickening was the speed of their
departure.
Chests cave and never rise again.

I clench my fist in desperation.
I cannot lose one more.

Still the tides are roaring
and the fevers climb.
I scream into the storm
but am drowned out by the sounds
of hospital alarms
blaring.

Dizzying are the months
that blur into nothing.
Wrap their souls around me
because the dreaming stopped
the minute they were gone.
At my end,
I hope it is their faces
I see.



THREE DEATHS

16.

NATHAN VASQUEZ

El Paso, Texas

It started with a psychedelic trip. I saw myself lying in fetal position under a blanket. I couldn't help but joke about uncovering my lifeless body, my consciousness detached from my physicality how I had read in so many spiritual teachings.

Was this it? Was it that easy to slip out? I had done it many times through my lucid dreaming experiences, being aware and out of body was nothing foreign to me. But this time was different. I hesitated a moment, my skin raised as I pulled the blanket up revealing just a silhouette of my imagination.

A few days later I found myself being taken into emergency surgery. An abscess formed under my chin and the infection spread to my neck. I spent the next ten days in the hospital. I had a five inch incision on the left side right by my ear. A tube came out of my neck and another out of my jaw. My tongue swelled, I could barely open my mouth. I could not drink any liquids. I'll never forget that pain, like swallowing glass shards and chasing with whiskey.

Months later I was now fully recovered. Then time stopped again.

My father contracted COVID-19. The last day I saw him I walked into his room. I wanted to hold him and rub his back and his feet like I always had. He had diabetes. The nerves in his legs were damaged. He took painkillers upon awakening and maybe twenty a day just to function, working until he no longer could.

Hi papa.

He coughed and stared off into the ceilings texture.

Hi mijo. Cough, cough.

Sit up papa so I can rub your back.

I sat behind him and worked on his points.

He relaxed for a just a bit, then again. Cough. Cough.

We talked but he would daze off mid-thought.



I should have fell asleep hugging him like when I was a small boy. I should have stayed the night. I kissed his head, the scent of his scalp reminded me of my childhood.

A few weeks later I got the call late in the evening. My mom rang. Mijo, your dad's heart just stopped and they've been working on him for ten minutes. They broke his ribs during cpr. I grew sick and threw up. It was his time.

I watched him pass through a screen.
I couldn't hold his hand.
All I could do was watch.

A few months later, the love of my life and I lost our first baby girl.

I held her once.
I saw her once.
I felt her once.
Once will never be enough.

Three deaths, three moments in time, three lives.

I had no more words.
Less and less words.
My search for peace has ceased.

I spent years trying to find myself.
Only after my experiences did I realize I am always recreating myself.
Death was never an end, but the beginning of eternal life.





DESCARADA #15

MONICA MARTINEZ

Cd. Juárez, Mexico





MELANCHOLIA

19.

LEE M.S.
El Paso, Texas

I haven't had the time to reflect
on your life and the possibility
of your death,
and the aftermath of it all
were you to go.

It hits me at times,
but not as it used to,
in the middle of the night
as I dream scenarios where you are not
anymore.

And it burns me,
the way salt burns against skin,
suffocates me
the way the weight on my back
and the knot inside my lungs
tighten the noose.

I must remain
strong,
but I falter in the uncertainty
and dissociate into voices
whispering different futures,
fragmented realities
yet to find the real path.

I hear your voice
from time to time,
whispering that I must remain
sane, for the sake of it all.





A LAVAR LOS TRASTES

20.

ALMENDRA OCHOA

Cd. Juárez, Mexico

¿Existe un orden correcto para lavar los platos? Cada persona tiene su paso a paso, sus pequeñas manías, rituales de lo cotidiano.

Yo acomodo los platos sucios dentro de la tina izquierda del sink. Quito los residuos, pongo platos y cubiertos en el fondo; vasos, tazas y copas a un lado. Pongo jabón en un recipiente, abro el grifo y mezclo con la mano.

Pienso en I., en la pequeña cocina sin ventanas, el armario de metal como alacena, la vieja estufa, el lugar de la mujer en casa. Su vida consumida entre cigarrillos, cuatro paredes, platos sucios, todos los quehaceres, cenizas sobre la tarja.

Comienzo por lavar las copas, las tazas y los vasos. Enjabono cuidadosamente y luego enjuago. La casa en la que hoy vivo se construyó hace tanto. Me pregunto cuántas mujeres han estado aquí, como yo, con las manos mojadas, la vista en los árboles y dentro del pecho anhelo de vuelo como pájaro.

V. remodeló su cocina tres o cuatro veces en los últimos 15 años. Las modas cambian, lo nuevo pierde su brillo, los objetos se desgastan. Sin embargo, V. nunca guisa, tampoco limpia, no estudia, no trabaja, mucho menos sale sin compañía. No hay platos sucios, no hay vida en su casa de muñecas tristes.

Uno a uno voy frotando cada plato. Minúsculas burbujas tornasol resbalan por mis manos. Primero platos llanos, después tazones, bandejas, plásticos. Sigo con los cubiertos, invariablemente un orden: cucharas, cuchillos, tenedores. Enjuago cada pieza, escurro y acomodo. Al final, sigo el mismo proceso con ollas y sartenes.

Frente a la ventana, los árboles señalan el pasar de un tiempo desdibujado del registro en estos últimos meses. Confinamiento voluntario. Para muchas mujeres, desde hace tanto, otra pandemia de aislamiento forzado.





LA CRUDA PROPAGANDA

21.

ABRAHAM COVARRUBIAS

El Paso, Texas

Este año pasado ha sido todo un sube y baja.

Apenas había decidido convertirme en la persona que quería, en florecer y expresarme sin tapujos para crear el imperio que buscaba.

Eso fue hasta que la nación de la propaganda nos puso en un hechizo.
Un hechizo en el cual todos nos escondíamos el uno del otro.

Donde el vernos, se volvió extraño.
Donde el abrazarnos, se volvió un lujo.

Lo vi desarrollarse desde el principio como el virus mental que era, vi cómo se propagaba y tomaba el control de las acciones de aquellos que tanto amo y respeto.

Veía cómo grandes personas, decaían en la desesperación de tratar de protegerse de algo que no se puede ver.

Pero la propaganda no nos debi detener.

La probabilidad de morir, está presente a diario.

De mil y un maneras podemos morir todos los días, algunos ejemplos son, atropellados, masacrados, ahogados, en un accidente de tráfico, etc

Son muchas las formas en las que nuestra vida puede acabar, y estas maneras siempre están presentes, queramos o no.

El que le teme a la muerte, no ha decidido vivir por algo.

Fue lo que me dije, y fue la forma en la que combatí esta plaga que nos tomaba de sorpresa.

No dejemos que esto nos detenga en la ejecución de nuestros sueños.





22.

Esto era solo una valla más que saltar, un obstáculo que se presentó, pero que no tenemos miedo a abatir.

No dejes que otros controlen tus miedos. El que controla tus miedos, controla tu vida.

Y si no eres tú el que decide qué información dejas entrar a tu vida, y cómo tomarla, es hora que empieces a filtrar la información que recibes, es hora de pensar dos veces antes de sucumbir al pánico.

Si estás leyendo esto,

No temas más.

Enfréntate contra tus miedos.

Verás cómo el universo se pone a tu favor.





EVIL'S ROOT

23.

CAROLYN RHEA DRAPES

El Paso, Texas

Evil's root awoke me today and convinced me that it was Saturday.

It was not.

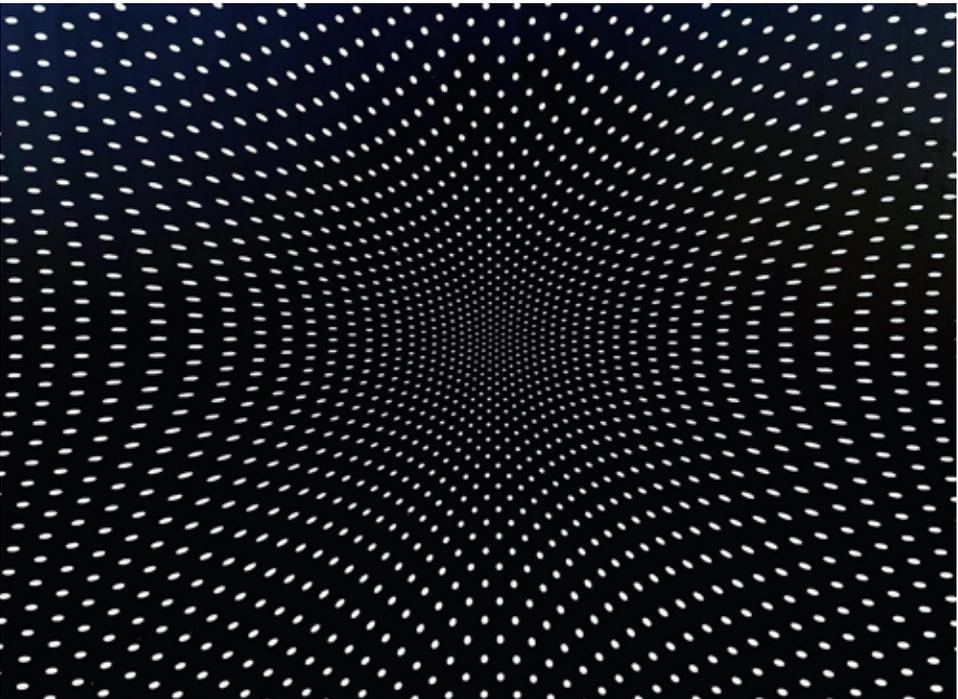
This confounding continuum began when I thought Thursday was Friday. Before that I cannot recall. But it was a deathlike sleep from which I awoke, and next wondered where went the old man. I virtually tracked him down, but did not check journal nor site online to see when I lived today. All dates remain abstractions, just like evil's root.

This concept (coinage and bills) begets all evil. And traced to us wearing literal public masks and decamping to our houses. Screening if we have work, hiking otherwise, sleeping when neither works. No depositing to bank accounts, just overdraft fees, with loans elbowing their ways by means that add to balances that make more imaginary numbers and concrete fees.

Elsewhere, lions lie upon asphalt lanes while coyotes saunter down deserted fora. And I am going broke one suet block, one bag of seed and fruit at a time — fueling white-winged doves, purple finches, and red punk-head ladder-backs. I set food for them outside my bunker. In turn, they chase each other all day, begetting more winged creatures while the two-legged ones about us cannot breathe let alone fly.

I scrawl on window panes: Help, send seed. Need fruit. It's Saturday and I must not leave. Evil's root holds me captive.





BW OP 1

LAURA TURRON

El Paso, Texas





CONFINEMENT

25.

DALIA HAJIR

El Paso, Texas

Growing within these walls
A nest of bacteria feeds;
It finds my thoughts and seeks
To swell them like giant balls.
They roll, roll, make themselves bigger:
Like fat piles of snow,
Until they finally explode.
Over these months I have drunken,
Filled with too much of me.
There's no other world but me,
And that's the reality.
While others do have the need
To let out their inner screams;
Mine are dull and unbidden,
So I'll keep them just for me.
In a world choked with fires,
I have come to learn,
The flame of a little lighter
Will nearly go unseen.
And I can't help but dread,
At the thread of uncertainty,
Which comes undone, stitches ripping,
And there, in a hole, I see...
How will I swim that torrent,
The waves of this enormous ocean,
If a glass of water is enough
To find myself drowning?
The waves are flat, though,
And for now, I just float,
As there's nothing more to do:
To have my back to the water,
Close my eyes shut,
Slowly drift away...
And wait.





VANISHING AVIANS 10

SUZI DAVIDOFF
El Paso, Texas





A REDHEADED PIGEON FLEW INTO MY HOME

27.

DONNA SNYDER

El Paso, Texas

I held a dying pigeon in my hand and cried,
singing to it as it ceased to flail, its tiny guts
dangling loose and gory, but I couldn't save it.
A few days later another flew into my house!
It passed through all the rooms, as if seeking,
maybe hoping to find the one I took inside to die,
both of them red headed, uncommon hereabouts.

I followed it as it flew from room to room.
It hid behind doors, beneath the desk, inside
a broken stove pipe below the metal shelves.
Flapping up about my head, it scared us both.
I mindlessly sang to it, who knows what words,
finally trapped it between wardrobe and bed,
held it quiet in my hands, sang broken prayers.

From outside I could hear metal on metal,
perhaps a neighbor building fortifications,
rebar and tin to discourage riff raff, maybe,
or someone trying to make an air cooler
cool air. Words tumbled through synapses,
clutched my throat and choked me before I
could articulate a message of cheer and hope.

Dozens of pigeons often line the rotting eaves.
They watch for me, hoping that I will fling
some seed, singing to them the only song
I still recall, or merely a mindless murmur—
pretty birds, pretty birds, pretty, pretty birds.
The world, so weary of my sorrow and grief,
plainly yearns for my silence if not my solace.

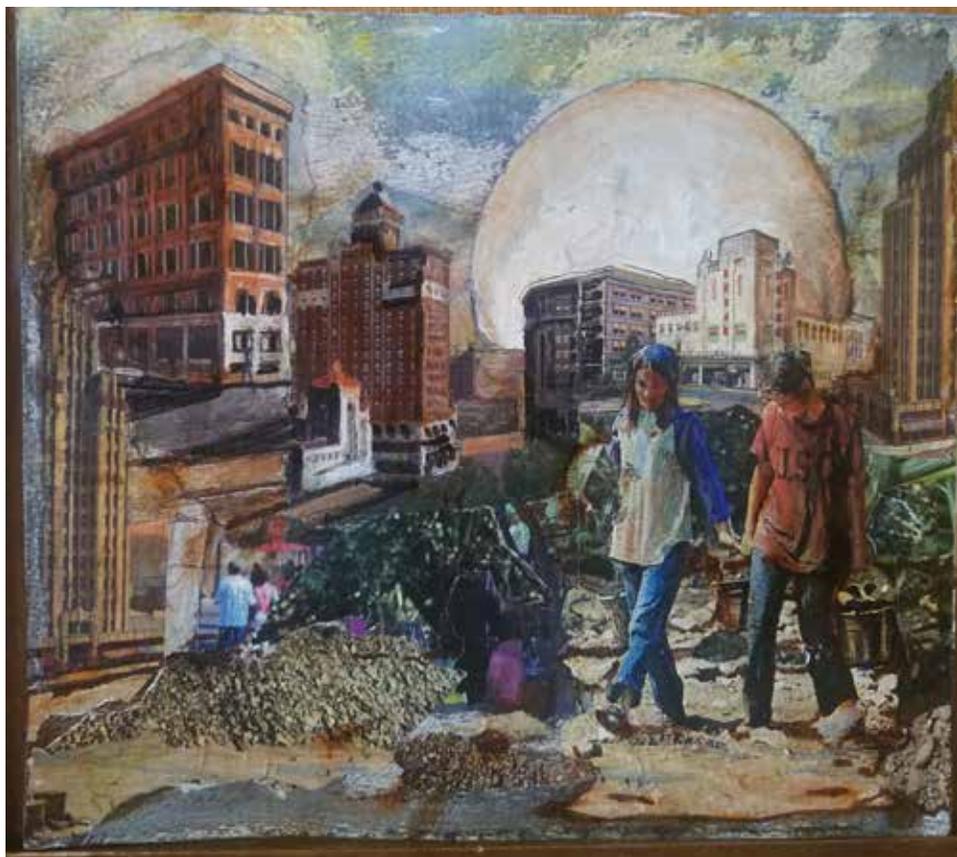




This bird sat nested in my hands, quiet, resting,
wary but peaceful as I walked through the house.
Released through my front door to many wings,
its waiting companions, white with silver bars,
gray and black mottled ones with iridescent necks.
They flew down to my feet and back up again,
a welcoming cloud of feathers and wings aflutter,

and a red headed old woman held a memory of hope—
still, waiting—warm within her veiny spotted hands.





EL PASO, EL CHUCO

EDWARD LOWRANCE

El Paso, Texas





A PANDEMIC LOVE STORY

30.

DANIEL CHACÓN

El Paso, Texas

El Paso Avenue was lined with discount stores, and it used to be the busiest street in the city. The border crossing from Juárez fed right into it, so there was a lot of foot traffic, people coming into the city to shop and work.

But now, of course, everything's closed, and there's nobody but me.

I guard the building of some rich asshole. I know it's risky, but it's good money, deposited directly into my account every day I work. I get enough e-money to use all the apps that make life enjoyable-ish.

One day, about 3 PM, it was hot, and a windstorm came through. Dust filled the air, and you could barely see the Plaza Hotel at the end of the street, like a god overlooking the destruction.

Then the wind died, and two empty chip bags in the air swirled around each until they landed on the street.

That was when I saw Olga Ortiz.

She was hauling a plastic garbage bag over her shoulder, wearing a black, long sleeve shirt, heavy as a jacket, but she wasn't sweating at all. She had her hair tied back.

When we were in high school, she took a lot of pride in her hair. We dated twice our senior year, but after the second date, something happened at home, and she missed months of school. By the time she came back, she acted like a stranger.

I tried to talk to her once, following her out at the school to the front, but there was a car waiting for her, a brown station wagon with wood panels, and she got in and they drove off.

After high school we lost contact, but every year or so we might see each other around town. El Paso in those days was little, so you could go places and see





someone you knew, especially if you'd been living there all your life. I'd see her at a mall, a music festival, and one time I saw her at the movies. I was there with my wife before she died. Before everybody died, really. She was in line at the concession stand. We were in our 30s. And she looked at me, and we nodded our heads at each other with a smile.

But there she was now, walking down the street.

Obviously, when you're in a city as empty as this, you're going to notice any sign of a person, and she noticed me standing up, as I do most of the day.

Sitting down for eight hours is like smoking two packs of cigarettes a day.

She stopped when she got directly across the street from me.

Sam?

Hey, Olga!

I'd give you a hug, she said, but, you know. She stayed on her side of the avenue.

But it's nice to see you! I said.

Are you alone? She asked.

I'm the only one that works this street. Some rich asshole owns this building.

She looked up at the building, an art-deco design that had been painted like the face of a clown.

I mean are you alone alone?

Oh, yeah. You? I asked.

Two years.





She put down her bag, rested her shoulders.
You're looking pretty strong, I said.

Got to be, she said.

You live around here?

Other side of the mountain. Just looking for things.

That's brave, I said.

So is watching a building. What's inside of it that they need human security?

I shrugged my shoulders. I was about to have lunch, I said. Want to join me?

Ok, she said, staying on her side of the street. She sat against the wall and pulled out a sandwich and a little baggie with cheese puffs or baby carrots.

Wish I could offer you one, she said, holding up the bag.

I wish I could share my hummus.

We laughed.

After as much as an hour, which is a long time to be in one place in the desert heat, even if you are in the shade, she stood up, said she had to move on. Dogs start coming out when it gets dark, she says.

She started lifting her sack, but she put it back on the sidewalk, like she had forgotten something. She reached for her hair and undid the scrunchie.

She let it loose, swayed it around with some shakes of her head, as if giving it air. Then she bunched it all together and tied it back again.

It was as beautiful.





Hey, I just thought of something, I said. I mean, I don't know if you're ever going to be by here again, but I'm here all the time. I mean, it's not impossible that we might see each other again. Maybe we could consider today our third date.

Our third what?

Don't you remember? We dated twice in high school, and probably there would've been a third time, but something happened in your family.

Dang, I'm really sorry, Sam, I don't remember that. I remember you were always a nice guy. It's good seeing you again.

She picked up her bag and started walking. I watched her until she was a tiny thing and then, poof! she was gone.





ETERNAL SUNSETS

FEDERICO VILLALBA

El Paso, Texas



JULIA QUINTANAR

El Paso, Texas

The year was 2020 and the silent thousands were crossing over the bridge. Juan and his friend Ricardo were getting pushed back. “Looks like we might not get home on time,” Juan lamented. “We need to find out what happened.” Juan stopped an older woman wearing a mask. She was going in the opposite direction. He spoke in English, then in Spanish, hoping she would understand. She cleared her throat and answered in English with short breaths.

“Covid...19...”

“Coke 19?” Ricardo asked, thinking it was a soft drink. She shook her head and removed her mask.

“COVID-19...IT’S A... VIRUS... sick from... my grandchildren...very lonely...the hospital...No one...visited...Not even...at death...” She disappeared into the irresistible current of people before she finished.

“Probably no one liked her,” Ricardo whispered into Juan’s ear.

“I don’t think so; she had gentle abuelita eyes. Only kind grandmas have them,” Juan remarked.

“Where are the people? It’s so... dead.” Ricardo stood astonished on the other side. Instead of seeing a boisterous festival, the city was a mute ghost town. There was no one celebrating Day of the Dead. In fact, people were scurrying to avoid each other.

“THAT was them,” Juan teased, tilting his head toward the throng they had escaped. Ricardo squinted his eyes, looking back at the multitude. Something was very wrong this year.

“Did you notice that there were a lot of black and brown people on the bridge leaving?” remarked Ricardo. He saw conspiracies everywhere.

“No,” Juan lied. He was not in a mood for a political debate. All he



wanted was to hear his family's laughter at the annual gathering. They welcomed everyone. There was so much joy, it was heavenly.

The two friends reminisced until Ricardo reached his destination. Juan eagerly headed home. His smile flattened. The house was as dark as Ricardo's. Was he not remembered?

Entering the living room was like being born. It was alive with vibrant colors, savory aromas, and inviting warmth. Multicolored papel picado hung like festive laundry from the ceiling. Golden candlelight lit the room as soft mariachi music played. All around the room were family pictures looking back at him. Best of all, he inhaled the delicious smell of Irma's cooking.

On the altar, his plate was steaming hot with mole, charro beans, and red rice. The cream in his coffee was swirling like a mini tornado next to his photograph. A bowl of spicy dried grasshoppers sat on top of his favorite books, awaiting him.

Everything triggered a flashback. His favorite memory involved the spicy dried grasshopper. It made him laugh. He tricked his little granddaughter into eating some of them. Both giggled at the bug-laden surprise. Mona became an adventurous cannibal of insects, much to her mother's bewilderment. It warmed his old bones just looking around. He had lived such a great life. So where was his family?

After checking her hair and makeup, Irma, his wife, sat alone near the laptop. Juan looked over her shoulder. His smile bloomed. There was his entire family visiting virtually. They had not forgotten. At peace, he sat down in the other chair next to her. He had made it home on time.





MESSAGE SENT, 1:31 AM 7/8/2020
MESSAGE SEEN, 1:32 AM 7/8/2020

37.

KIT WREN
El Paso, Texas

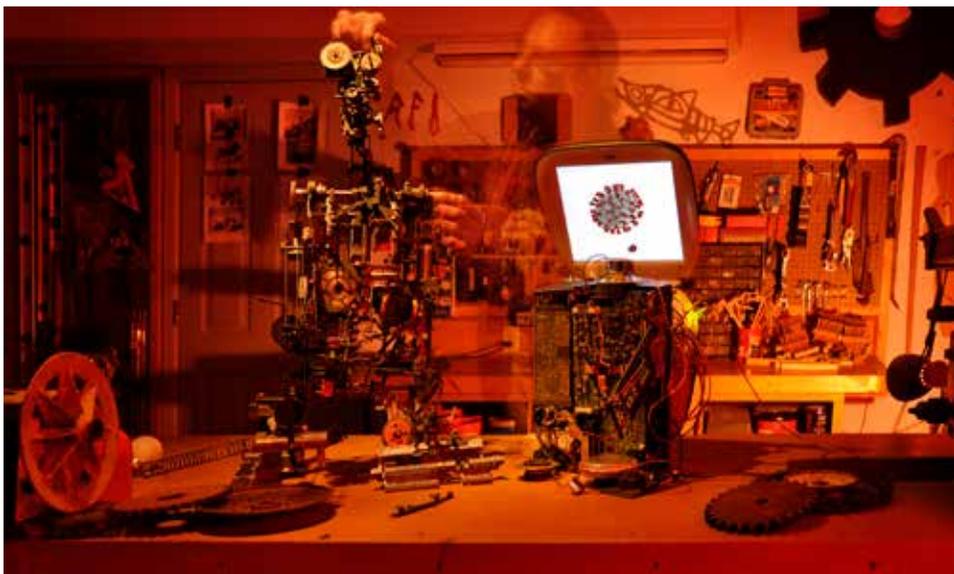
A sudden dark thought propels me to send a message to a friend, saying, “I just want to make sure nobody spirited you off the streets of Portland into an unmarked van.” When she replies, quickly, I am able to pretend it is a dark joke, and not a mental image that I have had and can’t shake even as we continue to talk. She also kids on the square. She says she is too asthmatic to risk exposure to tear gas, no matter how close to her heart or her doorstep the conflict reaches.

In this moment, I am briefly thankful for social media, for taking all the panic out of all my panicked missives, turning my frightened whelps into nervous chuckles. We laugh at death, to make him feel bad about himself, we want to demotivate him, make him move with a slower, more predictable gait. If we keep it up, we will make him resent his job and half-ass it. We will keep doing that, even after it has been proven not to work. Even after the tests come back, and the low grade fevers get closer and closer to my hermetic circle.

Perhaps death has never actually been able to distinguish between mockery and encouragement, and reads all our words in the same flat tone. Perhaps I should not let my heart whisper furtive squirts of succor, but let it blast in steroid-aided pumps an arrhythmia loud enough to set off car alarms, to give all the people fighting urgent fights one secure moment, to disorganize the destroyers and acolytes of death for just long enough.

I am not that powerful. I fear I am not equal to this moment. But I know the people who are. I trust them with my affirming light. They live in the mountains. They hang hammocks with each end on a saguaro. They walk all day in forests without getting lost. They know that I know them. They know that I need them. They, too, fight the silence, and aim their heartbeats carefully.





MAKING FRIENDS IN A PANDEMIC

BRACK MORROW

El Paso, Texas





LATE FOR A ZOOM MEETING

39.

MÓNICA E. GÓMEZ

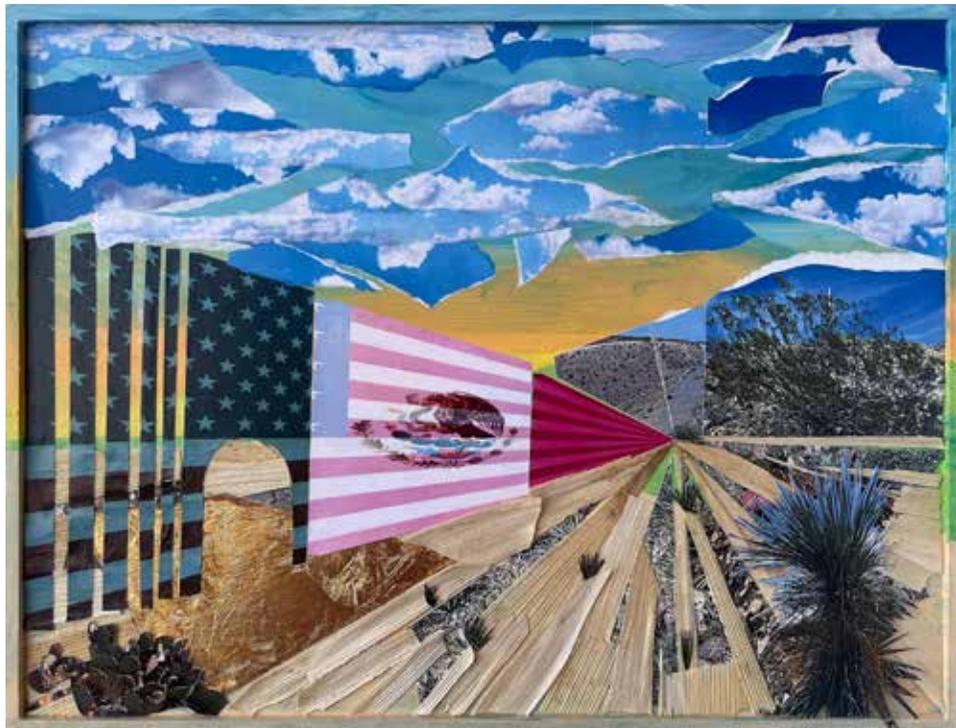
El Paso, Texas

sorry I was late
not as in a late model car
deceased or pregnant

just late, as in Zooming
nowhere fast, entering
the wrong link and credentials
running down unfamiliar
cyber-hallways, peering through
windowed doors at
empty screens

until I found the key
right where I left it
on the floor of my brain
hay, que pendeja





A BIG BEAUTIFUL WALL

MATTHEW VILLAREAL

El Paso, Texas





FEARLESS CONVICTION

41.

NANCY LORENZA GREEN

El Paso, Texas

Fear has transformed
into conviction

New generations of warriors
fearlessly rise to hunt injustice

The tyranny of violence cannot
stop this global tsunami of resistance

As walls of white supremacy crumble into
dust, the Earth uplifts the human spirit

Divine justice touches every heart
to heal the wounds of hatred





DON'T

42.

DENISE SAENZ

El Paso, Texas

Don't tell us to get over atrocities that seem like history to you.

Our wounds are still open, we still bleed.

Don't tell us to make peace with the war you brought upon us,
when you won't even take responsibility for the millions of lives lost.

You say that was centuries ago, yet genocide still happens across the world.

When segregation is not yet eradicated.

While our grandmothers can still remember being spit on for being in a white
establishment.

While sundown towns still exist.

While you still reap the benefits of your pale complexion,
we are shot for fitting the description.

Don't tell us to get over what happened so long ago,
when my parents were taught assimilation in school,
now they ban our history from the text books

Don't tell us to stop dividing the world in black in white
when we clearly are all different shades of brown.

Don't tell us to get over it.

When brown people are dying all across the world because white countries are
priority for the vaccine.

When we are supporting a genocide through our tax dollars because this is a
white Christian nation who wants nothing more than the rapture to begin.





Zion exists in your heart.

There is no holy land left on this planet.

The ground has been desecrated by the bodies of brown children buried under
neath residential schools.

Kill the Indian, save the man.

Don't tell us to get over it.

When they are actively giving us hysterectomies so no one will know of our
rape in immigration camps.

Don't fucking tell us to get over it!

When you wear our culture as costumes.

Name your sports teams after our people.

Paint your face black, brown, yellow and red.

Cry wolf when try and take the culture you appropriate back.

Call us terrorists when we defend our land from your occupation.

Comparing the n word to Karen and Kyle.

Gentrify our communities so you can be more comfortable,
while our poor have to find another place out on the street.

Don't tell us to get over it,
when it just never seems to end.





JOVEN-BARRETAL

ADRIAN AGUIRRE

El Paso, Texas





THERAPIST ONCE ASKED ME

45.

J.R. ESTRADA

El Paso, Texas

“What do you want?”

I’d like to do what I want
and be paid for it.

I’d like to lay down
what weighs heavy on me.

I’d like to buy my mother
and every other mother
that has wept for a child
that wasn’t her own
a big house
with room for their heart.

I’d like for days to be longer
nights to happen once a year
for a week where we can hash
everything out
until the sun comes up
so one ever holds on
to poison that might
take them from me
before their time.

Time.

I’d like dominion over time
to meditate on blissful childhood
make it





Pause.

Take back moments
I never cherished
and hold them tight
and squeeze them into a
bottle I'll carry around my neck.

I'd like to go back in time
tell a kid laying
face up on the concrete,

*"It's a thin fucking line
between patience
and time wasted
and you're gonna have to walk it
for the rest of your life."*





PANDEMIC PARTNERS

47.

MARK PUMPHREY

El Paso, Texas

I am grateful for having a pandemic partner who has blessed my life with moments of happiness in a time of great suffering for everyone and tragedy in many families and many homes.

My husband suggested that we skip the Christmas tree this year—it is so much trouble to buy it, get it balanced, trim it with too many ornaments. “This is going to be your Christmas tree this year,” he said, holding up a two-foot artificial table-top Christmas tree.

In past years, I fought to keep the Christmas tree tradition alive—no artificial trees for me. Easy for me to say since he is the one who buys it, decorates it, and undecorates it every year, neatly storing the ornaments in boxes and taking the tree to the landfill. His job at the golf resort in North Carolina, where he worked for over twenty-five years as a gardening magician, included the task of decorating all the buildings at the resort for every holiday during the year. So that has been my excuse—he is so much better at it than me. The truth is that my extreme performance anxiety kicks in every year when the thought of decorating the house and tree comes around.

This year was different. As a recently converted Zen Buddhist, my new approach to life is to accept the “isness” of my present experience, and that includes shaking it up when it comes to upholding traditions and habits that I do just because that is the way I have always done things.

Buddha-like, I embraced the little tree and accepted my present reality, basking in a double victory over my monkey mind and my lower consciousness.

A few days later, after the little tree was fully decorated, which took two minutes, I awoke one morning to hear my husband talking to a friend on the phone. “I could tell he really wanted one,” I heard him say.

Retirement allows me to stay up until godawful hours of the night and then sleep in the next morning.





Once I finally roused myself from bed, I walked past the living room on the way to the kitchen and coffee, only to take a step back and with a start spy a seven-foot Christmas tree, fully decorated and standing majestically in the usual designated corner.

I smiled and commented to my husband, who was absorbed in his computer at the dining room table. He looked up long enough to say, “I knew you wanted one.”

He was right. I did. Not very Buddha-like, empty of desire. But then, gratitude is big in Zen Buddhism and what I lack at this point on the Buddhist path toward emptying my heart of all desire I surely gained in this moment in gratitude. Gratitude for the uncannily perceptive and weirdly wonderful combination of French romantic abandon and rigid German organization that is my beloved husband.



CAROLYNNE AYOUB

El Paso, Texas

Becky grimaced as she put just one more meal in the oven, set the table one more time, for yet another communal dinner with her daughter. Candice, whose nose stayed glued to her I-phone for the ninth month in a row, didn't seem to enjoy the delicious meal her mom had just made. *Eating together with Candice was even worse than eating by myself*, Becky thought and then she corrected herself out loud, "Be nice, Mother."

Becky felt lucky her daughter made the daily effort to join her at the kitchen table. It has taken a lot to train Candice to stop grazing from the refrigerator so that they could eat together.

"Please," Becky pleaded with her daughter, "could you try, Honey? I just want to eat a meal with you, talk to you."

Candice's cool hazel eyes glided over her mother's lonely face. She felt sorry for her but decided it better to maintain a safe distance. Candice was angry because she knew that Mom was the reason Dad had left.

She had overheard Dad telling her mother at the front door, "Rebecca, I'm so damn tired of you." His words sounded like he wanted to spit them out of his life. "You are the most bitter woman I have ever known." Becky cried after him but didn't even try to stop him because she knew that he never really cared about anyone except himself, but Candice didn't see it that way. It meant that she just had Mom and was now stuck with her in a stale apartment.

Now the two avoided eye contact while they eat, and instead stared at the row of family photographs on different walls. The table was covered with the bright flowery vinyl cloth that Candice had bought her parents when she was nine. Everything seemed the same, but everything was different.

"Honey, let's sit together and look at some of your TikToks. Teach me," she asked, stretching out her hands toward her daughter. She looked at her daughter's still expression. Not a touch of interest in those grey-green eyes. Becky remembered how when Candice was little—her eyes would widen and then crinkle when the two of them had silly tickling fights and then they raced to the moon and back. Candice's eyes were vivid.

Candice turned her face and looked down at the phone in her hand. She had been listening to her mother without letting her know. There were a lot of notifications from her friends and this little mother-daughter talk was becoming a bother. Candice's mind drifted: *When would it be time to get to her*



messages? Mom was still talking about connection and how the two of them needed to be there for each other. *Why was she being so clingy?* Candice thought crossly.

Her mother barely knew how to text much less understand that Candice had many friends on Facebook, TikTok, video play who were also sheltering in their spaces and they needed her too.

“Honey. Baby. Can you help me get a new look? I know you are great with cosmetics. You are a regular Mary Kay!” Becky interrupted her daughter’s silence.

“Mom, let me check a few of my notifications first,” Candice said quickly, and she scrolled through a series of greetings.

“What are you doing?” Becky seemed exasperated.

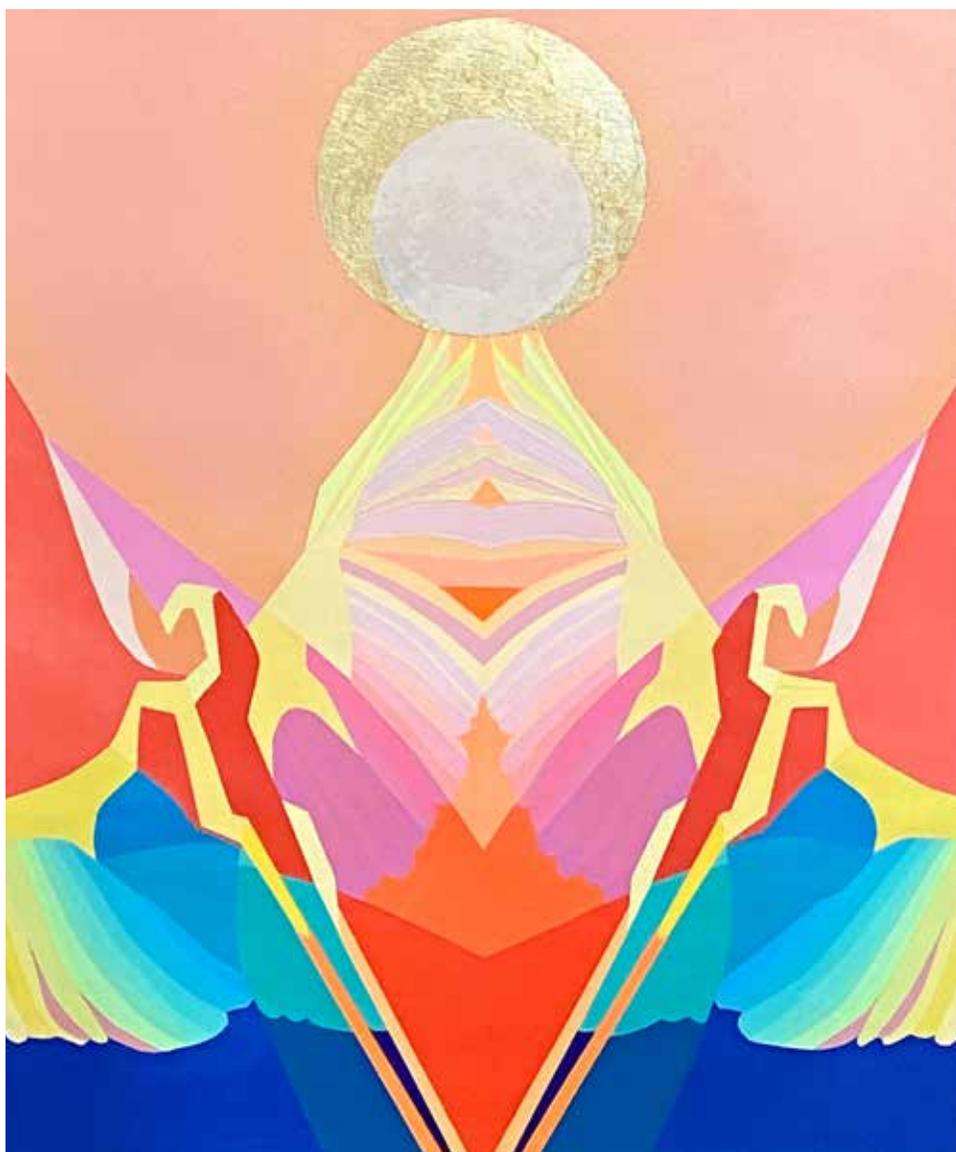
Candice made a group text to Don, Jesus, Amy and her mother watched without saying a word. Then she typed in MOM and hit send.

“Mom,” Candice looked up with a bare hint of a smile. “Go read your text. It’s a tutorial on makeup that I did. After you watch it, I’ll help.”

Becky glanced at her daughter before going off to look for her phone. Candice rolled her eyes at her mother, and ever so briefly, her grey-green eyes brightened and crinkled.

“Got it! Thanks, honey,” Becky called from her bedroom. “I’ll watch it right now.” And added softly, “I love you to the moon and back.”





MOTHER

ZOE SPILLOTIS

El Paso, Texas





ONE DAY DURING THE PANDEMIC

52.

BOBBY BYRD

El Paso, Texas

—A Poem for Earth Day, 2020

“Revolutionary consciousness is to be found among the most ruthlessly exploited classes: animals, trees, water, air, grasses.”

—Gary Snyder

One morning during the pandemic
springtime
the city silent with the fear of death
a hedgehog cactus from among its dangerous spines
gave birth to a single luscious pink and white blossom,
the size of a man’s fist,
its sexual core bright yellow and gooey—
“the promised one,”
as stated in the prophecies.
The blossom, once born in the sunshine, began to preach
the gospel of the earth,
its dance through the wide blue sky,
the sermon explaining
exactly
how and why humanity is not needed,
if it ever was, thank you,
for the earth, sun, moon and sky,
the great boundless universe,
to flourish
in the truth of love.
All day long the flower preached,
interrupted from time to time
by a pair of black-chinned hummingbirds,
seasonal migrants from south to north,
who kept coming by
greedy for communion, the body and blood,
take this and eat, take this and drink.
There was that one black bumblebee too,





squat little beast,
ravaging the delicate core of the flower's being.
The flower continued its sermonizing
unperturbed
while attending to these duties.
Neighbors and friends,
walking up and down the street,
stopped by to experience first hand
the flower's message.
What they learned, only time will tell.
We'll see, won't we?
The flower preached until sunset
and during twilight it slowly
closed those delicate petals into itself,
packed its bag and disappeared
forever. The cactus
didn't seem to mind. It had small buds
already perched among its spines,
each with its own truth to tell
—in its own time, of course,
the long hot summer, the winter to come.





MONSOON

54.

MARIANNE KARPLUS

El Paso, Texas

Dark clouds shuffle across the sky,
cumulonimbus shutting out
their bright puffy predecessors,
snuffing out the fragments of blue
as they gather strength and heavy droplets
to release on the mountains below.

The raindrops fall slowly at first,
large, warm gifts of nourishment
that release the beautiful
fragrance of the creosote.
The delicate leaves of the prickly mesquite
tremble with joy after the long drought.

The drops gather together in numbers,
burst from the overwhelmed clouds,
spilling, overflowing onto the land
and mixing into streams, rivers,
absorbing dust from the surface, but
blocked from the depths by impermeable soil.

Rocks, bushes, mud are trapped in the torrent.
The thundering stream
mingles with the thunder above.
A bright flash of lightning,
piercing tendrils of electricity
connect us to the heavens for a moment.

The chaotic mudslide extracts
the feelings from my heart,
and the whole entangled mess
rips down the mountain.

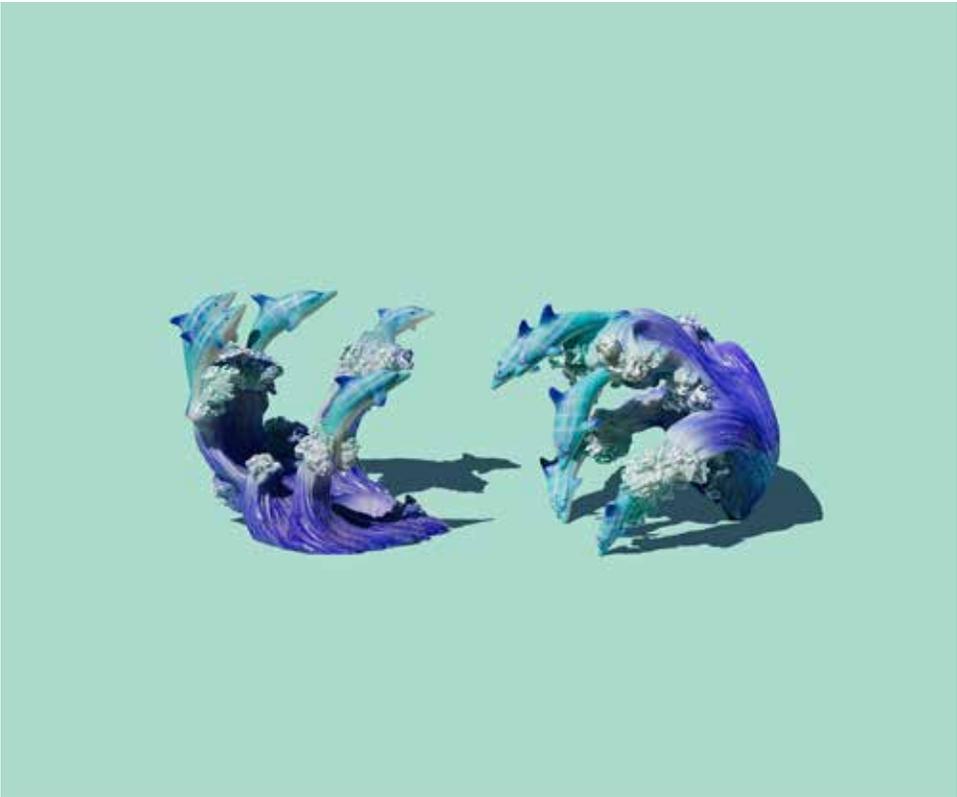




55.

Disappointment,
sadness,
fear, and
mostly
love
come to rest in the spacious arroyo.





NOSE DIVE

BREE LAMB

Las Cruces, New Mexico





¿QUE PUEDES APORTAR?

57.

SAMANTHA PICHARDO

El Paso, Texas

No se necesitan palabras agrandadas para poder mandar un mensaje.

Ni tampoco poseer muchas cosas para tener algo que ofrecer.

No se necesita abrir los ojos para poder leer, porque con el tacto el mundo podemos conocer.

Cada caricia de cuerpo, tierra, y mar nos pueden llevar hasta el infinito y más allá.

No se necesita estar despierto para poder soñar.

Ni tampoco sé necesita mucho para poder amar y perdonar.

No se necesita mucho para poder reír.

Ni tampoco mucho para poder vivir.

Se necesita mucho para poder odiar, porque es agotador y aburrido tu energía desgastar.

Se necesita mucho para poder mentir, porque poco a poco te vas destruyendo a ti.

Se necesita mucho para romper un corazón.

Porque lastimar a alguien, si no te lo han hecho, prepárate, que es una de las batallas más grandes que enfrentamos.

Se necesita mucho para compararnos con alguien más, porque todos tenemos talento y simplemente no lo vemos. Nosotros mismos impedimos nuestros sueños alcanzar.

No se necesita mucho para vivir en el momento.

Porqué el mañana se puede ir con el viento y este ser nuestro último aliento.

No se necesitan ganas para poder seguir, pero si un motivo, ¿cuál es el tuyo?

El que sea que elijas, pero me alegre que estés aquí.





EL SILENCIO

58.

GUADALUPE VALENZUELA

El Paso, Texas

Ahora que el mundo calla
el arte canta
recorre los espacios entre las calles vacías
llenando el silencio
de colores que brillan bajo el sol
cubre los edificios silentes rodeándolos en un abrazo

Mientras callamos
el espíritu del arte nos posee
vivimos a través de el y gracias a el
sus ojos nos muestras un mundo nuevo
su tacto revive nuestro cuerpo muerto
toma nuestro corazón en sus manos y lo besa
nuestra alma empequeñecida se funde en el
y vuelve a crecer
llenándolo todo
derramándose en este silencio que se alarga
en la espera que no termina
el tiempo finalmente se detiene
y vivimos
vivimos
vivimos







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