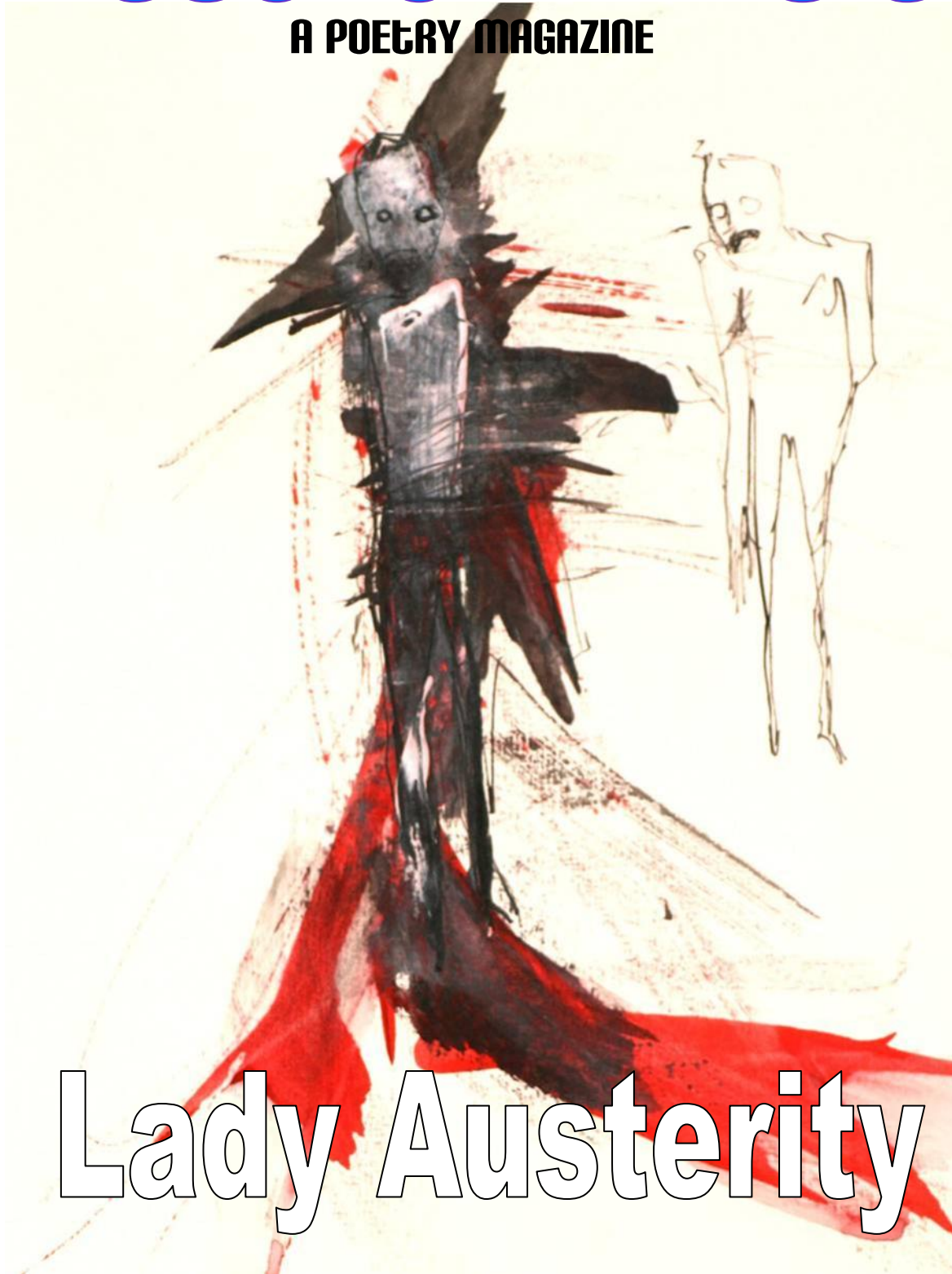


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MASTODON DENTIST

A POETRY MAGAZINE



Lady Austerity

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Mastodon Dentist Issue 26: “Lady Austerity”

With artwork by Ivan de Monbrison

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Editor's note:

It's no wonder that the Judeo-Christian religion is a story that begins with a remarkable woman—the mother of us all. OK, she gets kind of a bad rap but she can take it. In this issue we have a lot of poems that are praiseworthy of the female form, physical and otherwise.

At the same time we face severe, even heavy times. But the arts will survive, God willing. If not your spirit I think your intellect will be greatly piqued by the phenomenal work contained in this issue. But don't let me assuage you—you, dear reader, be our judge. As always, enjoy. Much love and respect.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Gordon Purkis".

Gordon Purkis
Editor

KJ HANNAH GREENBERG

Metamorphoses Enough for All Her Gatekeepers: Moving from Gifted Child to Muted Woman

Adolescence marked elements ordinarily notched for beauty.
While elders measured distances between growth lamps and tomato seedlings,
Her huffs and puffs of such “higher intelligence” seemed sufficient proviso.
Charm or wealth habitually surpassed dollops of “common” talent, yet
That rare, succulent manner of unpaid entry, which scrunched her feminine glabella,
Made short work of deracinated ideas, also punched dogma in the nose,
While impressing lots of dolts. She got elected. Shortly thereafter, regular social
Therapy, acutely anodyne in nature, relived her of her difference.



SAMANTHA HENRICKSON

The hole

They knew at once when they saw
The look in my eyes
It was time for the hole
And I knew they would try to take
You away
What I saw was what I've seen
A dog with no pain
And myself but without
All the bruises that had led my
Skin astray
I said they will not take another feeling
I've hidden from the hole
Look in my eyes; the hole is not where they lay
My eyes look at them
Not the dog or me
Or the hole that took them
I only look where my happiness can stay



JAMES B. NICOLA



If Mother Nature were a bachelor

If Mother Nature were a bachelor (whose language were the universal) and were smitten by the soul of a maid—or a man (and either, I would understand)—he couldn't do much better than this rose garden of fourteen lines of bushes, each appealing to the heart and mind through nose and eye (as silence gives the stir to speech), where dirt's distilled to beauty through the unseen process. Ambling up and down, I cannot help but rub a petal here and there and think it feels like rain caressed by sun and wonder on what nature makes the man who has to plant a plot like this, somewhere.

JAMES CIHLAR

Laura's Models and Time's Quick Exit

I.

In the theater
Barbara Streisand's disco voice
careened around several half notes
before rhythmically pounding the chorus.

As Laura, a fleshy, mature Faye Dunaway
in slit skirts, slouch hats, and shawls layered
over coats ran down New York Streets alone.
She saw through the eyes of a killer
before the murder happened.

When the Michael Zager Band
began caterwauling,
Laura told the blue-eyed male model
to recline on the edge of the pool as if dead.
He never looked so good.

Not ready to absorb sex
I had no choice but to sit still
and hope no one noticed me.
Adult challenges lay ahead,
the change in direction
the color wheel took
after my parents
put me to bed at night.
A story doesn't need words
for everyone to know it.

Laura's models understood the pleasure
of giving each other topless backrubs,
delicately snorting a line on the job.
Sophistication pulls us into sex,
not the raw drop and roll,
the sticky bang bang
of our cells talking to each other.

II.

This day has taken many years
to shed the morning,
yet I need more time.
When the parking lot
hit my friend's forehead,
she lost six months.
There is enough
electricity in the brain to burn
a forty-watt light bulb.
Medical science should try
bringing up the energy,
not taking it down.

Sometimes the physical world
is against us. I hope I kept the body safe.
Coming off the exit ramp mid-fight,
my husband screamed to get my attention
before I merged into a speeding car.
I accompanied my cat
to the vet's operating room
while she drew urine from his side
with a hollow needle.

A friend is covering his body
with writing. He has had two surgeries
on his brain. I began remembering
the day after I was born. When I replace a cut
with words, it doesn't hurt. Enforced
retirement, I call it, mandatory nostalgia.
When no bare skin is left, we die.



ALAN CATLIN

Our Lady of Too Many Madonnas

The profile she sees in condensation on a window is not the miracle she feels destined for, not quite the second sight nurtured by all those pious women of her life, those mothers and aunts, sisters of the altar and the cross, always one step away from the stations of the Lord who is everywhere and in all things, even in light bulbs suddenly bright then completely dark, in all those cloaked images seen in half-light mornings after electric dreams of a bleeding Jesus and a crown of thorns embossed on every wall, shimmering in every doorway, vivid as those stigmata scars on her pale, scarred palms, anemic arms, undeveloped breasts, all part of her regimen, mastering the art of fainting on command as if overcome by the enormity of being, all of it written down on personal diary pages, as baby steps toward heaven, preludes to mornings seeing spirits coalescing in cups of tea, the face of the blessed mother in patterns of rust left behind by leaking faucets, on porcelain sinks and tubs, visions revealed in the folds of habits draped over a high backed chair, on the afterglow once a light had been extinguished, on the ceiling or behind her eyes, deeply impressed within.



Crossing a Bright Room:

A Short Collection by Valentina Cano

Mastodon Dentist Special Feature



VALENTINA CANO

Others

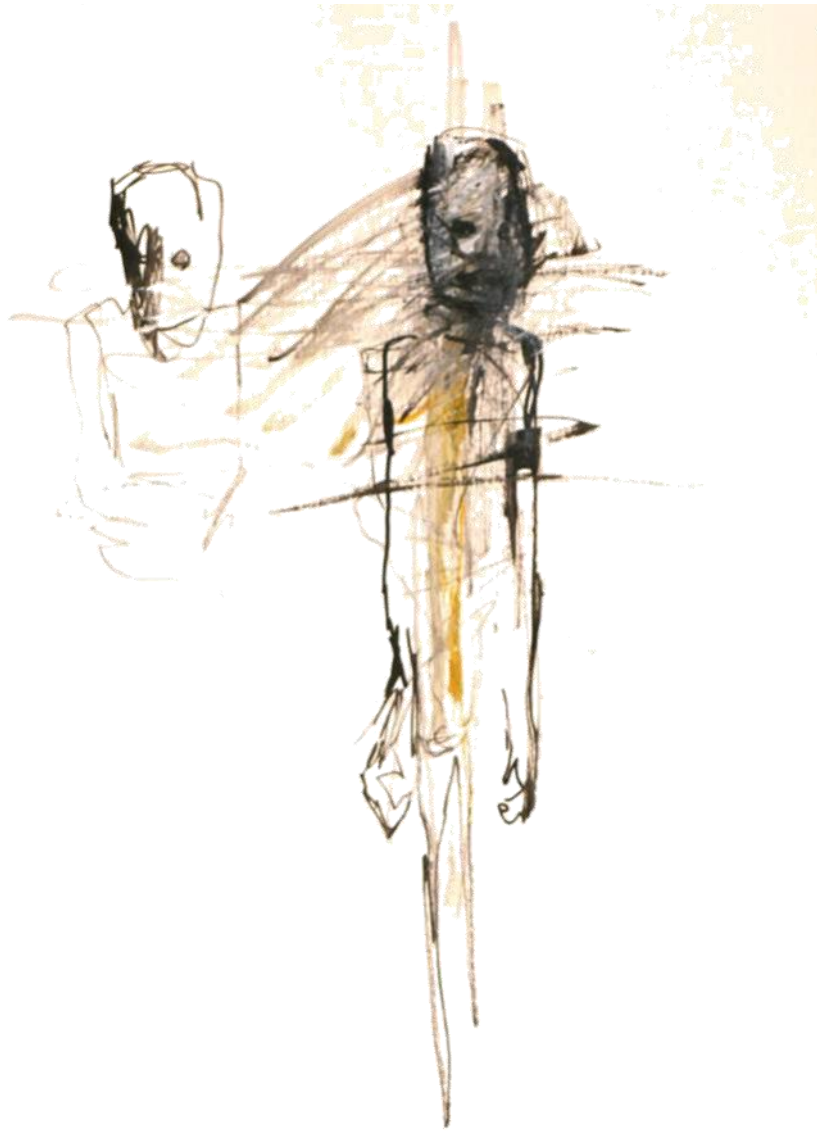
Others course through
like multicolored fish
mad out of crystals.
See-through and cold
they pass by,
a whipping of a tail,
a slice of a fin
in everlasting loops.
Nothing I say stops
their carousel of pain,
nowhere I go can erase them,
topple them over,
smash them into scale-sized pieces.
Ones I can't feel.
No, I am lost in these moments,
wincing at the cold glass trinkets
wading through my veins.



VALENTINA CANO

Going Up

Edges of colors close in on her,
a tangle of tails,
bright, manic greens
that seem to fold her in
like egg whites,
keeping her stiff,
swallowing her whole.
The colors move in lines like scarves,
one giving way to the other,
until her eyes can
no longer tell them apart.
Reds become whites,
blood seeping out,
drying out to a husk.
Grays become oranges
as her days swim in flames.
No sense in her little
fluorescent snow-globe.
The colors swirl in
a chant of images
as her eyes twist off
like dried-up corks.



VALENTINA CANO



Plaintive Attacks

Instead of looking at her
as if she'd thrown her hair
into the fire,
ask yourself why
she's dangling from
a chandelier of words.
See if you understand
the lines of gunpowder
she's been snorting.
The burn in her throat
lifting off with wings of sulfur.
You see nothing.
You care nothing for
her crackling eyes
that plead for a lie dry as cotton.
She's just a doorway to you,
something to step through,
to bow out from.
Air in a vague shape
with bones of wood to hold it up.
Wake up.
She's holding the scissors,
running, crab-like
towards you.

VALENTINA CANO

Disharmony

You cannot do this,
this fight of ice and stone
that you've settled on.
You plan to cover everything
with rehearsed, tangled words
spreading crystallized vines.
With a push of air,
a trumpet of thoughts
screams in the quiet room.
The picture frames shake,
the captured faces growing
crooked with fright.
The floor rumbles
with a train of anger
which you've managed to commandeer.
Put down the cold blades of sound.
Close your lips,
like two calm hands in silent prayer.



VALENTINA CANO

Crossing a Bright Room

She walks with feet of coral,
all air holes and sea water,
two floating organisms
that travel across the room
without her consent.
Her smile trembles,
a clothes-line tugged,
as she nears the group
who closes itself off.
A lock clicking shut.
Her steps never falter,
her hands limp at her side,
but her dress sways,
revealing skin flushed and dry.
The fabric is a ripple of seaweed
that refuses to be tamed.

VELENTINA CANO

A Kind of Forgiveness

I ground the anger into a powder
that fits in a thimbleful.
It rested on the porcelain,
dubious, squirming with energy.
I forced it to hold itself
like water, always at the moment of spilling.
It held for a day,
maybe two,
as I gathered loose socks,
as I carved out meal after meal
from our kitchen table.
Without warning,
one tired grain gave up the fight
and fell to a cascading death.
Its fall rung in me,
an echo in reverse,
that forced my head open
in an aluminum can's scream.

VALENTINA CANO

Inhospitable Terrain

I am not involved in
your map of plans.
I refuse to have my name
stitched in the roads,
crosses marking spots
I don't want to travel.
Your landscape is not warm enough.
It teems with ice sculptures
and overturned buckets of water.
The trees are born of glass seeds
that just stretch, molten, into shape.
Your words, your looks,
have painted that place
a lick of frost at a time.
I cannot march down
your road
or through your peaking valleys.
I will not drink from
your crackling shores.



ALICE PETTWAY

Unshrouded

Mozambique 2011


The light slinks across the man's limbs,
twisted and cracked on the road,
on its way to night's horizon.
It is kinder than we are
and stops to cup his cheek,
a dull glow in the dusk
as our tires crunch by
close enough to splash shadow
over the body: the shroud
we are not decent enough
to cover him with ourselves.
The other passengers tell me
they are afraid to stop.
To stop is to confess,
and the air is darkening
between the palm fronds.
When the family comes for the body
they will want two: extra weight
to lighten their burden.
And so, we drive
into the shadows swiftly,
avoiding the rear window
long after the last light
has been laid to rest.



ALICE PETTWAY

Convert

Mozambique 2011



Walk to Israel, God said,
and you, like a child, walked
until sunstroke and malaria
made you lie down in the waves
of the Indian Ocean, and God said,
Walk to Israel, and you stood again
and strode until the sand sang
against the soles of your feet
and your clothes were the flags
of lost nations torn and helpless
against the incoming typhoon.
And God said, *Walk to Israel*,
and like a crab, you crawled
across the dunes searching
for any hole to shield you,
a hand to cup itself over you,
and God said, *Walk to Israel*.
And like a beached fish, you flopped
there until the witchdoctor
found you and said,
Beseech your ancestors,
and you poured corn beer
against the roots of the cajueira
and the strength of your grandmothers
filled you and the witchdoctor said
Beseech your ancestors,
and you tore bread on the dirt
and danced with knees high,
feet arched against the hard ground,
and the witchdoctor said
Beseech your ancestors,
and you, like a child,
thought briefly of rebelling,
but your tongue had no words
and your feet had no steps
of their own and so
you drifted to Israel
whispering
to your fathers.

MICHAEL ESTABROOK

Gray suede pump

Fortunately, she's next to me now in this pew
during this lengthy mass and baptism,
and I'm distracted as hell, and enamored too,
by her simple gray suede pump on the one end
and on the other end the taut sweet hem
of her simple woolen gray dress,
and in between a smooth,
white, flawlessly perfect calf.



JASON HUTTO

from All Praise Be To Allah

Each sun-kissed daffodil bounces back and forth in the refreshing spring breeze. Every flower an individual, but at the same time keeping the melodic ebb and flow of the others. Depending how you look, what you want your vision to be, you see one or you see all. You see just a bunch of flowers, or just the one. I tend to look at the one.



CONTRIBUTOR BIOS

Valentina Cano is a student of classical singing who spends whatever free time either writing or reading. Her works have appeared in *Exercise Bowler*, *Blinking Cursor*, *Theory Train*, *Magnolia's Press*, *Cartier Street Press*, *Berg Gasse 19*, *Precious Metals* and will appear in the upcoming editions *A Handful of Dust*, *The Scarlet Sound*, *The Adroit Journal*, *Perceptions Literary Magazine*, *Welcome to Whichever*, *The Corner Club Press*, *Death Rattle*, *Danse Macabre*, *Subliminal Interiors*, *Generations Literary Journal*, *Super Poetry Highway*, *Stream Press*, *Stone Telling* and *Perhaps I'm Wrong About the World*. You can find her here: <http://coldbloodedlives.blogspot.com>

Alan Catlin has published numerous chapbooks and full-length books of prose and poetry. His next full-length book, incorporating four related chapbooks, is "Alien Nation" from March Street Press due out shortly.

James Cihlar is the author of the poetry book *Undoing* (Little Pear Press, 2008) and chapbook *Metaphysical Bailout* (Pudding House Press, 2010), and he has placed his writing with *American Poetry Review*, *The Awl*, *Cold Mountain Review*, *Court Green*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Mary*, *Rhino*, *Painted Bride Quarterly*, *Emprise Review*, *Verse Daily*, *Washington Square Review*, and *Forklift, Ohio*. His work appears in the anthologies *American Tensions: Literature of Identity and the Search for Social Justice* (New Village, 2011), *Collective Brightness: LGBTIQ Writers on Faith, Religion, and Spirituality* (Sibling Rivalry, 2011), and *Divining Divas* (Lethe, 2012). His reviews appear in the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, *Western American Literature*, *Coldfront*, and *Gently Read Literature*. He is the Book Reviews Editor for *American Poetry Journal* and the Fiction/Nonfiction Editor for Etruscan Press. The recipient of a Minnesota State Arts Board Fellowship for Poetry and a Glenna Luschei Award from *Prairie Schooner*, Cihlar is a Lecturer at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis and a Visiting Professor at Macalester College in St. Paul.

Michael Estabrook is a baby boomer who began getting his poetry published in the late 1980s. Over the years he has published 15 poetry chapbooks, his most recent entitled "When the Muse Speaks." Other interests include art, music, theatre, opera, and his wife who just happens to be the most beautiful woman he has ever known.

Pushcart Prize Nominee and National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Scholar, **KJ Hannah Greenberg**, blasted onto the creative writing scene. In 2010, French Creek Press published an assortment of her essays, *Oblivious to the Obvious: Wishfully Mindful Parenting*. In December of this year, Unbound CONTENT will be offering *A Bank Robber's Bad Luck with His Ex-Girlfriend*, a full-length collection of Hannah's poetry. In early 2012, Bards and Sages Publishing will be issuing a compilation of seventy of Hannah's flash and brief fictions, *Don't Pet the Sweaty Things*.

Hannah writes *The Jerusalem Post's*, "Middle Eastern Musings" and contributes to *Natural Jewish Parenting*. She's an Associate Editor of *Bewildering Stories* and a former guest editor of *Communication Quarterly*. What's more, Hannah's sold freestanding pieces to a wide-ranging assortment of hundreds of electronic and print venues ranging from Australia's *Kindred*, *Antipodean SF*, and *Language and Culture Journal*, to the UK's *Morpheus Tales*, *The Mother Magazine*, and *Other Poetry*, to the USA's *The American Journal of Semiotics*, *Danse Macabre*, and *Vox Poetica* to Israel's *Fallopian Falafel*, *Mishpacha Magazine* and *Horizons*. Look for her work on the Internet or in a bookstore near you.

Samantha Henrickson is looking to get her foot in the door of literature.

James B. Nicola urges you to read *PLAYING THE AUDIENCE*, CHOICE award-winner and his latest poems on-line at: <http://pennreview.com/2011/07/camping-out/>; <http://ficklemuses.com/2011/04/03/daedalus/>

Alice Pettway is currently serving as a Peace Corps volunteer in rural Mozambique where she teaches English in a small community with no electricity or running water. Her poetry has appeared in various journals including *The Bitter Oleander*, *Crab Creek Review*, *The Connecticut Review*, *The Foundling Review*, *Lullwater Review*, *Keyhole*, *The Mid-America Poetry Review*, *Women's Voices for Change* and others. Her chapbook, *Barbed Wire and Bedclothes* was published by Spire Press, Inc. (New York) in summer 2009. She is a former Lily Peter fellow, Raymond L. Barnes Poetry Award winner, and two-time Pushcart Prize nominee.

Born and bred in South Carolina means **Uriah Hutto** talks a little funny and possesses great manners, as well as high-blood pressure and probably high cholesterol. After three non-platinum rap albums Uriah has turned his creative faculties towards writing. Instead of entertaining people on the stage with his actions he would rather entertain people with his feelings and emotions, that he balls up and turns into printed word. He is currently working on a compilation of works entitled "Meditations With Jason: A Collection of Ramblings". Uriah's prose style is well polished and descriptive. His approach to writing is very unique and humorous. Uriah enjoys beer, a little too much.

Artist's Statement by Ivan de Monbrison

Art is for me the only answer in our modern world to the question of death and the fragility of human nature. Through the ages human beings have used the representation of the world as a medium to conjure what they saw, powerful elements of nature that they could not explain and which would threaten them, including spirits of their ancestors, forces of nature, and death itself. I think this process is still at the core of the art medium. To represent ourselves is still a mirror to our own self, and the consciousness we have of it is reflected in the very image on the surface. In a world of technology to choose to use still a very classical medium like painting is a way to set a bridge with the past resisting the facility of technology but with the will to represent the world with a modern eye. That is why I choose to paint mostly in black and white and to represent human beings more as shadows than as fleshy bodies. They are incarnated in the canvas but not yet fully present. I hope that people who have experienced pain and loss in life as absurd and meaningless will be able to connect with these ghostly shapes as images of the sense of precarity they may feel, giving it a depth that goes far beyond the simple pleasure of the eye.

-Ivan de Monbrison 2010

Poems by:

Alan Catlin

KJ Hannah Greenberg

Valentina Cano

Samantha Henrickson

James B. Nicola

James Cihlar

Alice Pettway

Michael Estabrook

Jason Hutto

With artwork by Ivan de Monbrison



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