

UPLI BANA LITERARY & ARTS





URIA BANA LITERARY & ARTS

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Editors' Note

Through a long period of isolation due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the *Urbana Literary & Arts* magazine volume XV staff bonded online. With new additions to our family, we began to explore what this volume meant for each of us. After starting our college experience in the middle of a pandemic and navigating the post-COVID world, we had changed. The pandemic marked a before and after, just as starting our higher education path represented a window into a new world. With new phases in mind, we began to wonder what this volume would accomplish. In Latin American culture, turning 15 years old represents a step into adulthood. This tradition is one of the most significant rites of passage for many Latinx teenagers. For girls, it could mean a quinceañera fiesta and for boys a special trip with their dads. To honor our coming out and to celebrate our quinceañera edition, *Urbana Literary & Arts* magazine volume XV is dedicated to exploring rites of passage.

We do not all share one universal experience, and it is our different upbringings that make us who we are today and continue to shape who we will be tomorrow. For some people, it is nurturing a passion, landing a first job, exploring sexuality, dreading the first day of school, or acknowledging those issues that affect humanity and mark a new shift in our perspectives. It is easy to get lost in the flow of life and not realize how far we have come and what has been the impetus for our actions.

Throughout this volume, we invite you, the reader, to explore your own rites of passage and discover yourself within these pages. Although we recognize that as individuals, we are all unique, we still have the ability to empathize and connect with others' experiences and share our own with the world. We embrace and reject traditions.

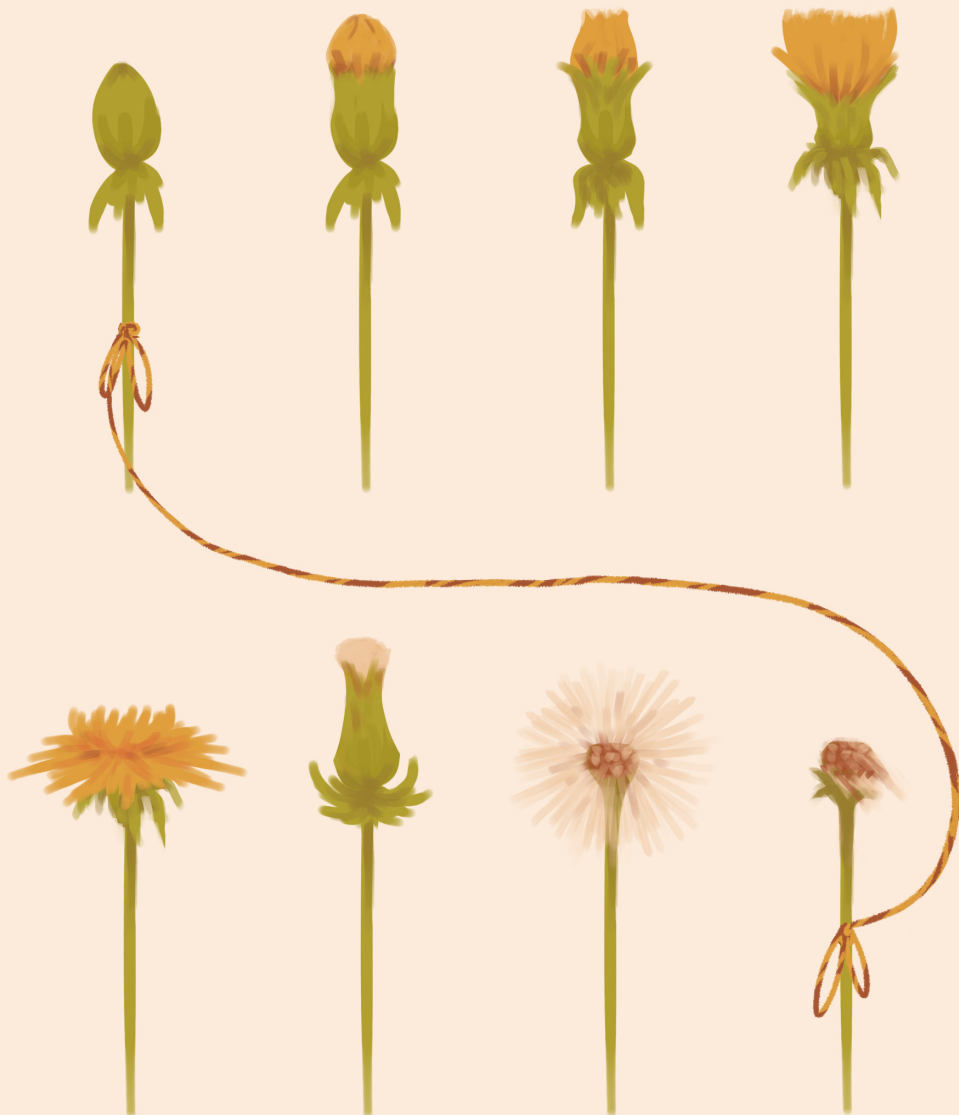
Like Gloria Anzaldúa, we feel "every increment of consciousness, every step forward is, a travesía, a crossing" and we are "again an alien in new territory. And again, and again." Rites of passage are part of the universal human experience. From childhood to adulthood. From love to heartbreak. We all have a before and after, milestones and breakthroughs.

What are yours?

Love,



Stefani Davila and Xiu Hau
Co-Editors-in-Chief
Urbana Volume 15



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By Stefani Davila

¿Seré ...?

Poetry

By Diego Faría

¿Seré Diego?
¿Seré Alejandro?
¿Seré Faría?
¿O seré Fuentes?

¿Seré mi primer nombre?
¿Seré mi último apellido?
¿Seré mi primer aliento
o mi último latido?

¿Seré?

¿Seré mi bisabuelo Domingo?
¿Seré mi abuelo Ebarido?
¿Seré mi bisabuela Torobia
o más como abuela Porfidia?

¿Seré el sufijo que lleve?
¿Seré el nombre que porte?
¿Seré el orgullo de mi padre
o la viva imagen de mi madre?

¿Creeceré rodeado por mi imaginación
o la de quienes nacieron antes que yo?
¿Viviré acaso la vida de mis sueños
o son mis sueños solamente arquetipos,
diseños creados por hombres ya fallecidos?

¿Será?

¿Será mi hijo el apellido
que mi familia lleve
o será mi hija el apellido
que mi esposa le preste?

¿Será por lo que lucho algo valiente,
para nosotros algo ferviente
o para ellos una lucha del pasado,
algo que ha probado ser infértil y ajado?

¿Será mi sueño para otros inspiración
una fuente de luz y determinación
o para mis hijos un sueño triste
concebido por un viejo que ya no existe?

¿Será mi muerte en realidad notable
o para las plantas un fertilizante más
desechado por los de arriba?

¿Y si fue?

¿Fue mi abuelo todo lo que había logrado
o fue solamente aquello que he recordado?
¿Fue mi abuela toda su ferocidad juvenil
o fue ella aquella bondad senil?

¿Fue Domingo un hombre de provecho
o fueron cuentos de un lunes exagerado?

¿Fue mi apellido traído por el Atlántico
o fueron todos cuentos hechos cánticos?

¿Y si es?

¿Es mi padre lo que siempre quiso
o es él todo desde mi natalicio?

¿Es mi madre lo que ella sola consiguió
o es ella todo desde que me concibió?

Una nueva aventura
Photography
By Stefani Davila



¿Es mi pequeño hermano
la semilla del futuro?
¿Es mi medio hermano
la esperanza del presente?
¿Son mis grandes hermanos
los guías del pasado?
¿Serán todos ellos pasado, futuro, presente?

¿Y si será?

¿Será mi vieja presencia una dependencia
para toda mi descendencia
o seré el espectador de su independencia
antes de que termine mi existencia?

¿Será mi árbol genealógico
lógico en su crecer
o se perderá por sus genes
hasta que termine por enloquecer?

¿Seré todo lo que soñé
o la vida ilustrará lo que debo ser?

Quizás mientras más este anciano lo piense,
más rápidamente este joven envejece.

Quizás

Quizás está cuestión
nunca tuvo, tiene o tendrá solución.

Cosmos Transcending
Photography
By Nicole Viloria

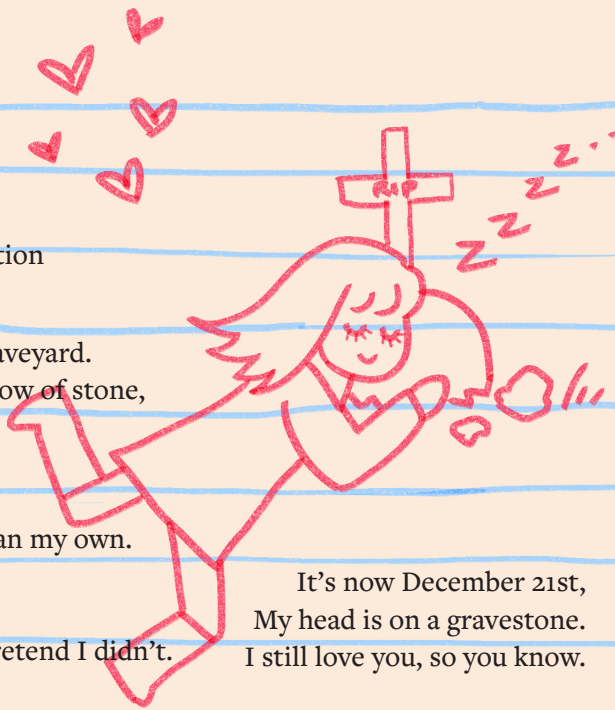
Love Grave

Poetry
By Heather Juarez

Trigger Warning: Suicidal Ideation

It's during cold winter nights
That I like to come visit the graveyard.
Nothing feels better than a pillow of stone,
Under my head,
Hair sprawled.
This bed is made up of
Dirt that holds more bodies than my own.
I've never felt more alive.

I loved you so much I had to pretend I didn't.
You left me so often,
I had to ask you to stay gone.
So we never visited a graveyard together
Because the last time I saw you,
We barely spoke.



It's now December 21st,
My head is on a gravestone.
I still love you, so you know.

I'm lying on this dirt,
Hoping underneath me
Is the coffin with our names.
Our story etched onto the wood.

Happy Yule,
New Year's approaching,
And I still don't know what to do.
So as my New Year's resolution,
I'll love you just as much.
I'll love you so much,
Just until I don't.

I'm lying on this dirt,
My head on this tombstone,
Hair sprawled,
Hoping underneath me
Is the coffin with our names.
Our story etched onto the wood.



Art in Adornments

Poetry
By Giuliana Mesa

I'm beginning to think of my scars
As stars that landed on my body
When my sky fell apart.

I'm beginning to think of myself as a galaxy,
Just in case the weight of life
Tricks me into feeling minuscule.

I'm beginning to not be drawn to the flame,
Just in case the need for warmth
Outgrows my fear of pain.

I'm learning to build sandcastles,
Just in case I forget the value of stability
And decide to use quicksand as a foundation.

I'm learning how to call myself home,
Just in case you decide to remind me
That to you, I'm just a one-night stop.

I'm learning there's art in everything,
All of my existential misery,
Burn marks,
Wobbly steps,
And mistakes in the shape of people.



Diary Page
Digital Illustration
By Camila Ramirez

The Ghost of My Memory

Poetry
By Stefani Davila

This feeling is like our old love sign
Maybe our sins might still be hopeful light
But in the solitude of the night
I ask myself, will you ever be mine
Maybe, just for tonight, our bodies can align
And tomorrow, our destiny can be bright
But we have to stop this life fight
And let ourselves again shine

This is not meant to be; get out and hide
No more lies and finally be apart
There is no need to have pride
The end of a unique beginning departs
The ghost of my memory will be your guide,
But for now, take care of your heart.

To Be Ripped Apart
Digital Illustration
By Camila Ramirez

Ripped White T-Shirt

Poetry
By Heather Juarez

Trigger Warning: Sexual Assault

Your thin white t-shirt was ripped.
Spit and tears fell from your face
like blood.

In that very moment,
watching you crouch and quiver,
I was no longer a child.

I wanted to hold you,
nurture you,
but I didn't know how.

You tumbled,
into adulthood,
tripped and veiled in-between times.

I remember you wept,
struggling to comprehend.
I remember hiding,
and being asked why,

As if fear wasn't expected.
As if it was such a childish thing to do.

But after that moment,
I was no longer a child,
and neither were you.
There was no going back.
You didn't know,
and I never told you.

Our bond was forever changed,
and there wasn't anything either of us could do.



Life
Photography
By Stefani Davila

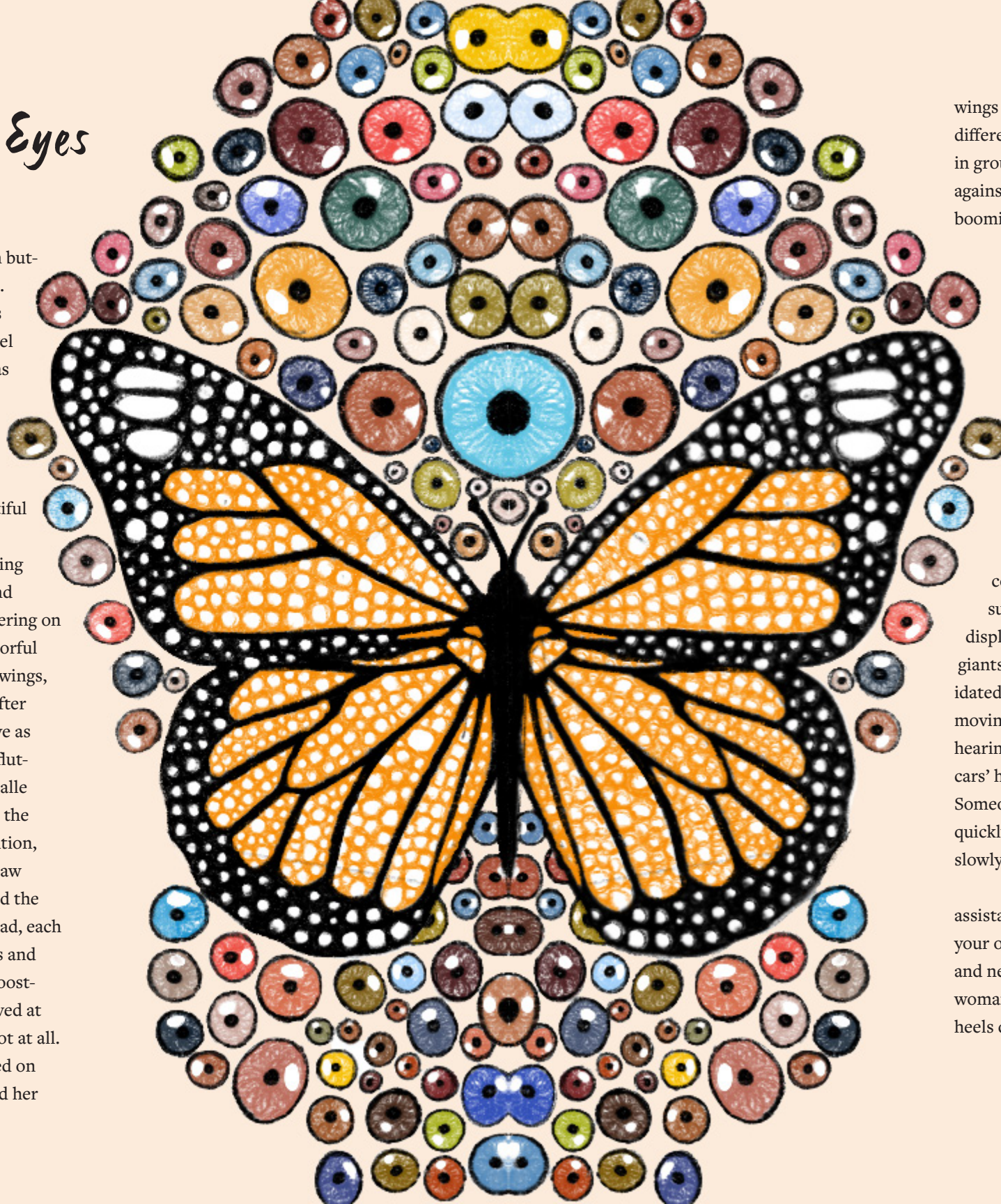
Through Her Eyes

Fiction

By Cristina Garcia

Much like birds, monarch butterflies make a two-way migration. Monarchs use environmental cues that help them know when to travel south for the winter, some flying as far as 3,000 miles. Similar to the monarch butterfly, our time to migrate will come, and as it looms closer, I wonder about this creature's perception of our beautiful city.

In the streets of the buzzing sector of Calle Ocho, an orange and black striped butterfly rested shivering on the beak of what seems to be a colorful oversized rooster. She spread her wings, basking in the midmorning sun. After several minutes, she began to move as she prepared to fly. The butterfly fluttered and flew higher and above Calle Ocho traffic. Its antennae grasped the familiar smell of flowers, car pollution, Cuban coladas, and tobacco. She saw the small yet colorful buildings and the decor of the stores on the main road, each uniquely promoting their business and another multicolored, fiberglass rooster. Cars of all sizes and colors moved at different speeds and sometimes not at all. The monarch descended and rested on a park's metallic sign. She fluttered her



wings and observed humans wearing different patterns and pigments sitting in groups of fours and heard tile clash against each other with the occasional booming of table slams.

“¡Coño se cerró el juego!”

“Let’s try again para ver si cambia la cosa,” said the man in the white guayabera.

The monarch continued her flight; she then gracefully rested on a yellow and red sign to find relief from the city’s scorching heat and humidity.

Looking up, she inspected the buildings around her, amazed at their size. She took note of the contrasting heights and how the sunlight reflected on the structures displaying several hues. These striking giants seem important. She felt intimidated by the towers and the myriad of moving cars. The butterfly’s sensitive hearing picked up the human chattering, cars’ honking, and cell phones’ ringing. Someone wore dull clothes and moved quickly while more colorful ones moved slowly, admiring the view.

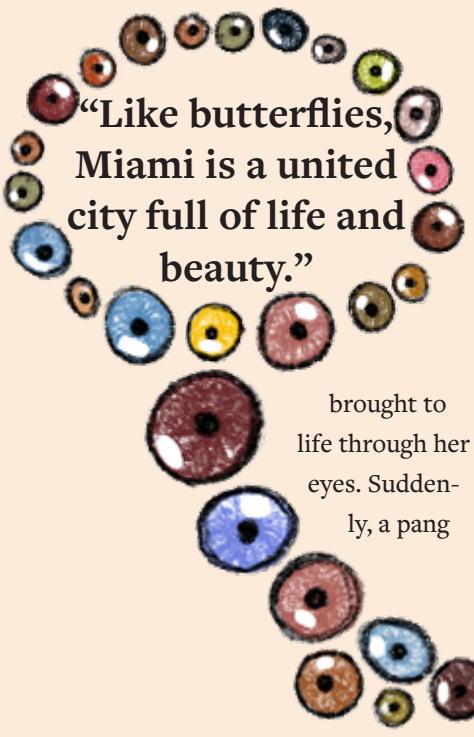
“Hi, it is Mr. Ramos’s personal assistant calling; I need to reschedule your one o’clock. He had an emergency and needed to leave the office,” said a woman dressed in a dark blue suit as her heels quickly clicked.

Butterfly
Digital Illustration
By Maria Alejandra Albarracin

“Oh my God, look at how busy the streets are today. I think we should walk to the restaurant instead of getting an uber. Traffic here sucks,” said a man as the woman in the blue suit rushed by.

The monarch continued her flight, stopping ever so often to rest and gaze at the buzzing city. She kept going until the structures disappeared and all she could see was a blue horizon. It was nothing she had ever seen before. The blue expanse was captivating ... breathtaking.

It was now late afternoon, and the sun was setting. The sky flooded with soft clouds, blue tones, and a light orange glow. She now rested under a street lamp with her wings shut tightly; at first glance, it would be hard to spot her as she slept after a long flight. The beauty overwhelmed her that day. She saw lifeforms



**“Like butterflies,
Miami is a united
city full of life and
beauty.”**

brought to life through her eyes. Suddenly, a pang

of vibrations awoke her. She detached herself from the lamppost and flew away. She flew through the city and came upon a bridge filled with colorful cars frozen in place. She wondered at this peculiar sight. Over a sea of gleaming red lights, the butterfly fluttered in between the rows of the vibrant tail lights. The smell of salt intoxicated her.

As she followed the rows of cars, she noticed the change of scenery in this area. The structures were not as tall in this location, and their colors grew bolder.

“Miami is so beautiful, but even after the sun sets, it never sleeps. If anything, the restaurants and bars are becoming more packed.”

“Well yeah, only in the 305 will you have work in the morning and parties at night. Let’s go to that place they just opened on Collins Avenue! I hear it has amazing food and good music.”

“Dale, nos fuimos,” said a young woman as she danced away with her companion.

She heard the sounds of cars rushing and honking, of laughter and chatter, the music of all styles blasting from all directions. The clatter of silverware and glass, but most importantly, the faint sound of the roaring ocean.

Butterflies can see the world differently from humans; however, that does not mean they cannot feel Miami’s vibrant energy. Like butterflies, Miami is a united

city full of life and beauty. Butterflies are simple creatures often depicted as fragile and graceful, but they are one of the strongest life forms on Earth. No matter where they go, they will always carry the energy of their hometown as we will when our time comes.



Born Again
Acrylic
By Kamila Izquierdo

Curious Circle
Digital Illustration
By Camila Ramirez



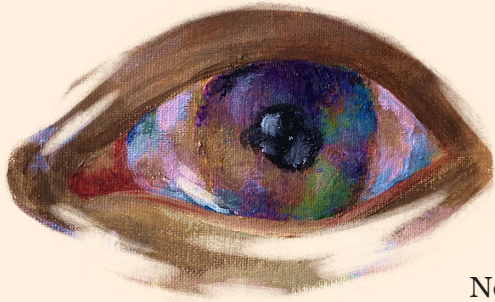
Don't Look Up
Photography
By Stefani Davila

This Is the World We Live In

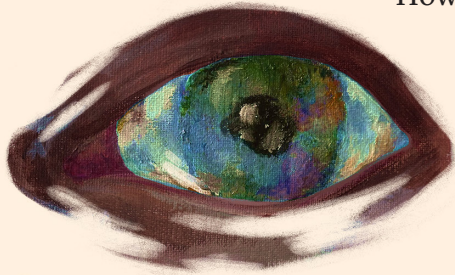
Poetry
By Karen Pasos

Trigger Warning: Sexual harrasment, Misogyny

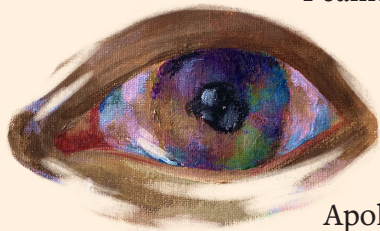
I could never forget the day my mother told me
I could change the world
Followed by the sound of my father's laughter
As if she had just told a funny joke
I ignored the feeling in my stomach
Of a thousand untangling ropes
This is the world we live in



I could never forget the first time
I noticed men liked to watch me
No matter the attire, location, or time
I am their personal art exhibition
Art does not talk
How rude of me for feeling uncomfortable
This is the world we live in



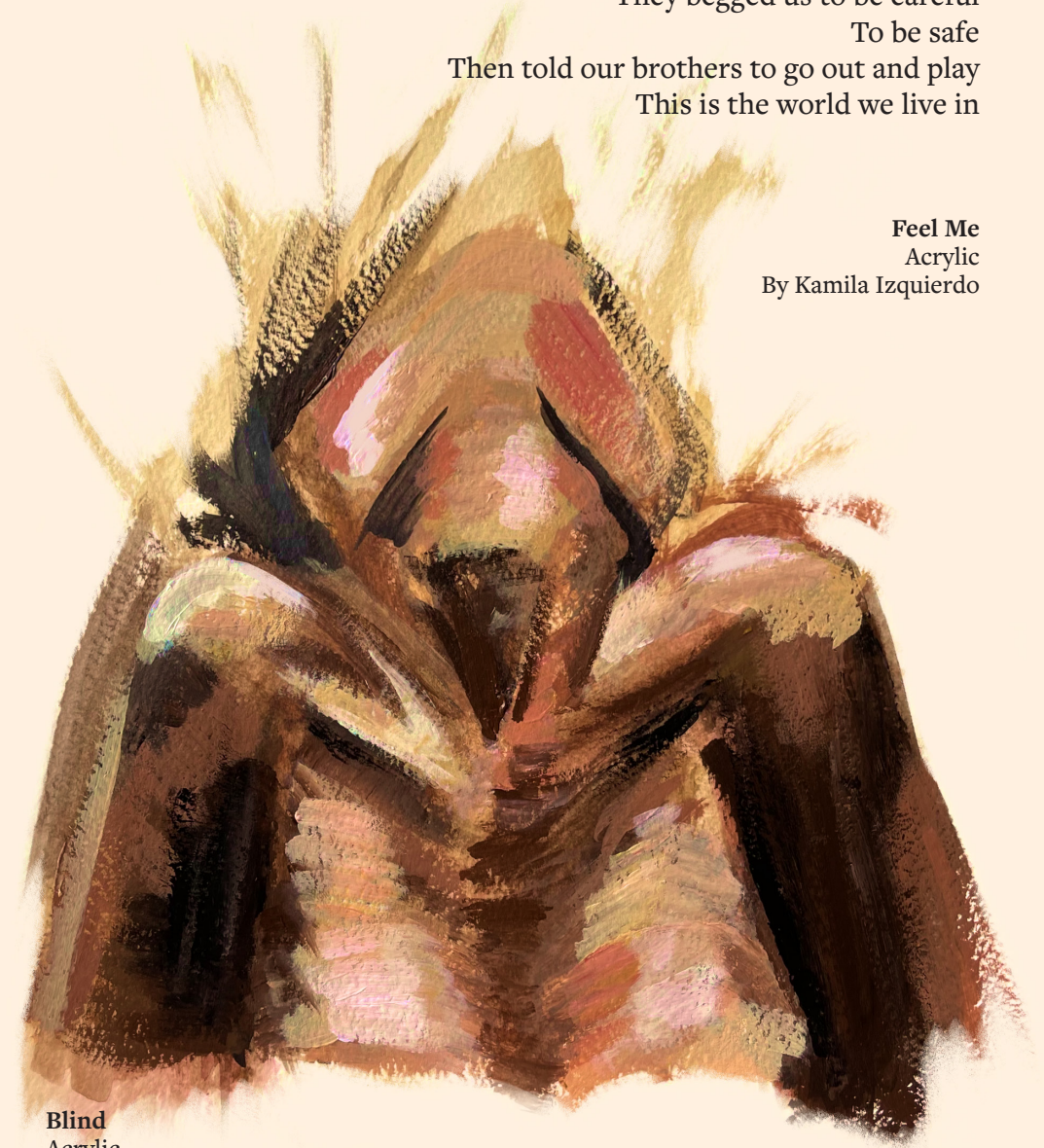
I could never forget the day
I was told I was too ambitious
Dreams are for the weak
And women are the weakest link
How dare I think I could be more
This is the world we live in



I came into this world with a target on my back
And everyday there is a bullseye
How can I believe in myself
When the world does not want me to
I am picked apart
And told I am less because of my gender
Apologizing to men for stepping on their toes
This is the world we live in

We are the daughters
Of men who warned us about the news
And the missing girls on the milk carton
And the sharp edge of the world
They begged us to be careful
To be safe
Then told our brothers to go out and play
This is the world we live in

Feel Me
Acrylic
By Kamila Izquierdo



Blind
Acrylic
By Kamila Izquierdo

One Man's Trash Is Another Man's Treasure

Poetry
By Christopher Perez

One man's trash is another man's treasure.
Some unwanted item in your possession.
I will take it, and it is my pleasure.

An item whose worth you cannot measure.
Something you will relinquish without question.
One man's trash is another man's treasure.

An old necklace that brings only displeasure.
Something you dispose of at your discretion.
I will take it, and it is my pleasure.

A pocket watch crushed under firm pressure.
I will take this item, with your permission.
One man's trash is another man's treasure.

A set of old clothes replaced by something fresher.
An object that leaves a negative impression.
I will take it, and it is my pleasure.

These are items I collected at my leisure.
And if I could teach you a lesson,
One man's trash is another man's treasure
I will take it, it will be my pleasure.

Death
Photography
By Stefani Davila

On This Cold and Dreary Day

Poetry
By Christopher Perez

Here I stand, on this cold and dreary day.
Alone and empty, on this broken bench.
The morning air blows a disgusting stench.
A broken and tarnished city on display.
A barren landscape, spoiled by grand decay.
This misery that I wish I could quench.
A dreariness that I cannot unclench.
An endless torment, much to my dismay.
Yet here I am, near this vibrant rose.
Enthralled by the brilliance she imposes.
Gleefully, I gaze at her red beauty,
And the cruel destruction she opposes.
A glow of hope finally approaches.



An Astronomical Encounter

Fiction

By Nicole Vilorio

Meeting her was an act of serendipity. She was drunk, probably in another reality, all thanks to the influence of alcohol. However, that laugh. *Her* laugh was enough to put me in a state of euphoria. I still don't know how I talked to her at that party. She felt intangible.

"That Danny is bonkers, man. I would never get near his girl." I heard a guy telling a friend; just typical college guys at a typical college party that is supposed to transcend your college experience to the next level. What level is that? I can only justify my mind wandering to this whole idealistic concept because of Becca. My roommate is not the most subjective source for getting information. All Becca says is full of buffoonery, if you ask me. In the process of following Julia Roberts' trajectory in *Eat Pray Love*, she had to choose Israel. Bali was too expensive, blah, blah, blah. So, it is always "your neshama must be in alignment this, or it must be that ... blah, blah, blah." Still, she has helped me since those letters arrived. Those freaking letters from my family's church. I just remember reading how most of them ended, "Wholeheartedly, those who love you." Yikes! I bet the word acceptance is not there. My mom has been going all crazy with those stories about me not having had a boyfriend at my age.

"You are 19, Hope. I read that they fustigate girls in Japan when they have been single for too long. Her eggs, Hope! Your eggs; they won't be functioning forever! It's something about the ectoplasmic, something in your vagina, and, and ..." my mom said.

"Mom, seriously? Ectoplasmic? What are you even talking about? If it weren't so ridiculous, I would say that you are hilarious."

"There was also something else in the article, Hope." I knew it was coming.

"Oh, yeah?" I said, already spacing out and putting my headphones on, ready to hear some Nirvana.

"Are you a lesbian?"
"It's almost nightfall, Mom. Go with Dad to see some stars. They are supposed to be out of this world, astronomical, if you will."

"I called the church, you know?"
"Bye, Mom."

And so there I was. At a random college party, flabbergasted. This party is just like a Leviathan; such a big house, so many people, so much alcohol. However, I only have eyes for her. I stood there, perplexed, my mind filled with so many questions. I learned this word, about people with a beautiful mind, "eunoia." Was her mind like that? I remembered

what those dudes said, but I didn't care. A sense of irreverence took over me. I chose to be resilient; it didn't matter if I got nothing out of it. I was determined to know her name.

"Hi, are you okay?" I heard myself say, while my soul or, I guess my "neshama," left my body.

"Ha, ha! You are so small. Hi, hello! Who are you?" She needed help.

"Hey, Alana!" I heard a guy scream from afar. I knew her name.



Remarkable Evening
Digital Illustration
By Andres Dominguez Solano
and Camila Ramirez

Dear Blue and Yellow

Poetry

By Nicole Vioria

Dear тiтka, what will you give me this year?
Each birthday, I need to lie to you
An odd purse, a weird skirt, but never an item I think I deserve
Mark, my love, what will you give me this year?
Love letters, polaroids, dolls?
Honestly, dear, I always try for my smile to be sincere
but I never thought this day would come
when all I want is to hold that doll,
to wear that purse,
to keep you close,
and for all this mayhem to be false.
Ukraine, my love, now I need to speak Dutch
since I do not know when there will be no dust,
when this war will be won or lost.
Here, between red, white and blue
the least I can think about is blue
since without yellow,
it's just not you.
Dear тiтka, dear Mark, thank you for giving me the sky
because in my skirts and polaroids,
I see you, Ukraine.

*Note from the author: This poem was inspired
by the story of a friend who left Ukraine days
after the war started.*

Little Flag
Digital Illustration
By Camila Ramirez

My Hand
Color Pencil
By Kamila Izquierdo



Te recuerdo
Photography
By Stefani Davila



Paz
Photography
By Stefani Davila

Innocence in Disguise
Photography
By Nicole Vilorio



The Progression of Darkness

Poetry

By Cristina Garcia

Trigger Warning: Suicidal Ideation

Once again, night has fallen upon me.
I beg the moon to light my way and
the stars to lead me home.

However, I only crave for someone to
turn a light on and guide me home.
I walk a lonely road with holes and
turns I have painfully come to know,
but somehow, forward I go.

I lift my eyes to the infinite darkness
and once again wonder, will I ever
break free from this labyrinth of pain
and suffering?

Or will my salvation be eternal hell?
The bells of doom are ringing, and I
hear them calling for me.
And once again, I wonder; Am I strong
enough to turn away the sirens of
death? Or will I become one with the
choir?

The night has reached its peak. My
mind has rendered me weak, and I
feel myself disintegrating.
Gods of this world and the next, pro-
tectors of the universe, sympathizers
of the living, and companions of mine;
can you not hear my cries? Can you
not feel my pain and sadness? Can you
not see me crumbling?

The darkness consumes me, and I am
reaching points of no return. I am on
my knees, and I need to scream.
Somebody, I beg of you, spare me of
this misery, for I am holding on to
heaven, but I am hanging by a thread.
Free me from this sadness and save
my heart before it makes me disinte-
grate into the great unknown.

Beloved Knights of Mine

Poetry

By Cristina Garcia

My beloved knights, it is the bitter end.
Despite all your illusions and hearts of
gold on your sleeves, surrender.
The apple of our eyes, our universe, and
our reason for being has vanished.

My knights of dedication and uncon-
ditional love, I have lost and I am now
frail.
Hear me, heart and soul of mine, I beg
you to be still, and I will find a new
world.

But now, knights of mine, I ask that you
let go of your swords.

For the arms that once defended us in
the name of honesty and innocence are
now dull.

And now, knights of mine, I implore
you to remove your armor and dis-
pose of it.
For the armor that once protected us
in the name of affection and sincerity
is now rust.

Knights of mine, it is the bitter end,
so I release you of your duties, and I
wish to see you another time.

I beg you, heart and soul of mine,
retreat to your old ways and thrive in
silence and loneliness.

My beloved knights, it is the bitter
end, and I must now venture on my
own, hoping for the best and expect-
ing the worst, for everything I loved
became everything I lost.

Progression of Light
Photography
By Stefani Davila

Orden en el desorden

Poetry

By Cristina Garcia

Sucede que me siento atrapad@ en el tiempo de ayer
pero a la vez en el que no sucederá.
Sucede que mis sentimientos son complejos
pero a la vez fáciles de entender.
Sucede que me cansé de este círculo vicioso que es la vida
pero a la vez no la cambiaría.

Es como que nada tuviera sentido
pero todo tiene su propósito.
Es como que la verdad no existe
pero todo es posible.
Es como que no resisto estar en el presente
pero heme aquí.

Sucede que es como que un@ nunca sabe lo que necesita o quiere
pero a la vez el alma y el corazón lo sienten.
Sucede que eso como que la vida es compleja y dolorosa
pero a la vez es simple y bellísima.
Sucede que es como que el mundo estuviera en tu contra
incluyéndote a ti mism@
pero a la vez no estás sol@
y alguien te quiere aunque seas tu mism@.

Resulta que lo que sucede es que un@ no es capaz de entender
que las pesadillas pueden ser un mundo de maravillas si solo un@
se dejara llevar por la vida misma.

Harvest Confusion
Digital Illustration
By Camila Ramirez



¿Te gusta el café?

Poetry

By Giuliana Mesa

Desde que soy muy pequeña tomé café,
Nunca me he preguntado el porqué,
Siento que se ha vuelto parte de mí,
El endulzar todo lo que amargo es
Y pasar noches sin dormir.

El café no me gusta de la misma forma como me
gustaría conocerte,
Mi cabeza no pide sus desvelos de la misma forma
que pide llamarte
Y su calor ha sido reemplazado por mis ansias de
tomarte de la mano.

Desde que te encontré,
Ya no me gusta tanto el café,
Prefiero dormir ocho horas
A estar despierta a deshora.
Lo amargo ya no me sabe dulce
Y lo triste ya no se ve tan feliz.
Lo malo no viene de la mano con lo bueno
Y el café no me gusta tanto como quererte.

Me gusta el té,
Desde el día que no dejé de pensarte
Y solo tenía ganas de verte.
Desde el día que me dijiste te quiero
lo amargo supo a dulce.
Me gusta el té
Y me gustas tu.





Iworo Lade Olokun

Non-Fiction

By Kamila Izquierdo

I cried endlessly for the sacrifice, and while no one there understood my pain, remorse consumed me. It seems like it happened ten years ago, but the person I was in 2019 is far from the one I am now. It was a hot summer afternoon in Havana, Cuba. Crying on the front porch, I waited for the ritual to be done.

I went back to Cuba for the first time in ten years. After being gone for so long, I was excited to be coming back to my culture, which is imbued with religion. In Cuba, we are very spiritual. Many Cubans place their faith in the Afro-Cuban religion, mostly known as Santería. This religion does not have a church or a Bible; it has dances and rituals. Santería is a lively religion that deals with the spiritual world in an untamed way by connecting with Orishas or minor gods. Seven-teen-year-old me was eager to experience the music, dances, food ... and all that involved Santería.

The night before I was told that I needed to receive Orisha Olokun for my health, I wore a blue tank top and a beautiful handmade yellow long skirt that had sewn red and green details everywhere, making it a masterpiece. On my head, I had a white scarf covering the residues of coconut and the white circle that had

been drawn on my hair with chalk. Enthusiastically, I waited for my Orisha until I found out that a duck was being prepared for the offering. Although I knew that Santería requires animal sacrifices as offerings to the gods, because I had never been around for one, I failed to face reality. That afternoon, however, the truth broke me, and I experienced immense grief.

As I waited outside, I heard Santería prayers, singing, and the duck's spontaneous quacks here and there reminding me of his innocence. After almost one hour, one of the women called me inside. Because I had not yet joined the religion, I was not allowed to see the ceremony, but I had to be present for the final part. When I entered the room, three women wearing skirts like mine made me face the wall. Once there, the ritual resumed. The drummers started once again, and the duck was brought to the middle of the room.

"Sawade Lade Olokun, Sawade Lade Olokun," the women sang.

How can they be okay with this killing and call it religion? I asked myself. As the duck cried for his life, I cried for him. My sobs built up as his despair for freedom increased. His fight and my sor-



Santera
Color Pencil
By Kamila Izquierdo

row became one.

“Iworo Lade Olokun,” the singing continued.

This is not how it is supposed to be. This won't happen again. Not under my watch, I thought. Another life won't be taken at the cost of my religion, I promised myself and the energy floating in the room.

God, please just make it all stop.



Sacrifice
Digital Illustration
By Camila Ramirez

Forgive my ignorance, and let him live, I prayed. It felt as if the duck's spirit was connecting with my body and provoking that anguish in me.

“Sawade Lade Olukun, Sawade Lade Olokun,” all the voices in the room sang in unison.

I remember the intense sound of the sung prayers, the bells, the drums, the duck, and my crying combining into one heavy scream of agony.

Gasping for air, reality hit my feet. I looked down, and they were covered with the duck's blood. The sadness that I felt that afternoon at first went silent as I reflected on what happened, and then built up into a cry of anger, confusion, and sorrow, but most of all, rejection of the person that I was in that room. After the ceremony, we took the offering to the sea, Olokun's kingdom, and let it submerge into its depth.

During that whole afternoon, I questioned the meaning of following a religion. I always believed in the spiritual world and considered myself linked to it. However, I never felt connected with a church or the Bible. I always gravitated

to rituals that involve nature, such as Santeria since it includes plants, water, and rocks. With the duck's last breath, I had an epiphany. I did not see God or an angel. I just had this mighty confidence within myself, telling me that God just wanted my faith. God did not want any animal offerings, gigantic buildings, or forced prayers. God just wanted me to never lose my faith and love for life.

I never felt so sure of something in my life.

That afternoon marked me forever. My faith shifted. I no longer believed in a religion, because although all religions are different, they all worship the idea of an almighty God or gods and forget about God itself.

I am still figuring out if

I will gravitate towards a specific creed, but if I do not, I still have faith and see God everywhere. I see it in all the plants around my house. I see it in the sky at every sunset. I see it in my mom's eyes and my dad's hands. I see it in the love that I feel for them. I see it every time that I let my heart write. I see God in the crystal clear seawater. And I see it in the breath of every living being.

**“the duck's
spirit was
connecting
with my
body”**

Dimly Lit Route

Poetry

By Carlos Torres

On that stroll down the dimly lit route,
Encountered a thought that I kept close to mind.
As the light vanished, my soul became mute.

Past mistakes sprouting and bearing fruit,
Fogging all sight and turning me blind.
On that stroll down the dimly lit route.

It became rather difficult to dispute
The feeling kept inside trapped and confined.
As the light vanished, my soul became mute.

Listening to them snickering: "what a brute,"
That one voice urging me to stay kind.
On that stroll down the dimly lit route.

Playing a distasteful melody on their flute.
It was time to let go and bind.
As the light vanished, my soul became mute.

Old friend, I am here to salute,
And deceive the fates that were aligned.
On that stroll down the dimly lit route.
As the light vanished, my soul became mute.

Another Day
Acrylic and Pen
By Camila Ramirez





I Still Have Your Letter

Poetry
By Kamila Izquierdo

I still have your letter,
and the little blue card
with the rose that you drew.
although I never opened them,
I still conserve the memory of you.

I saw you every morning on my way to school.
For months, I grew to know you,
your pace, your air, your blue.
The stranger that I knew.
Not so much a stranger, for we crossed paths every day.
Not so much a stranger, for we shared the same way.

I still remember when we met
not for the first time.
I still have your voice, your love,
your letter.
I never opened it.
I never lost it — no, I never could.

Beauty Encapsulation
Photography
By Nicole Viloría

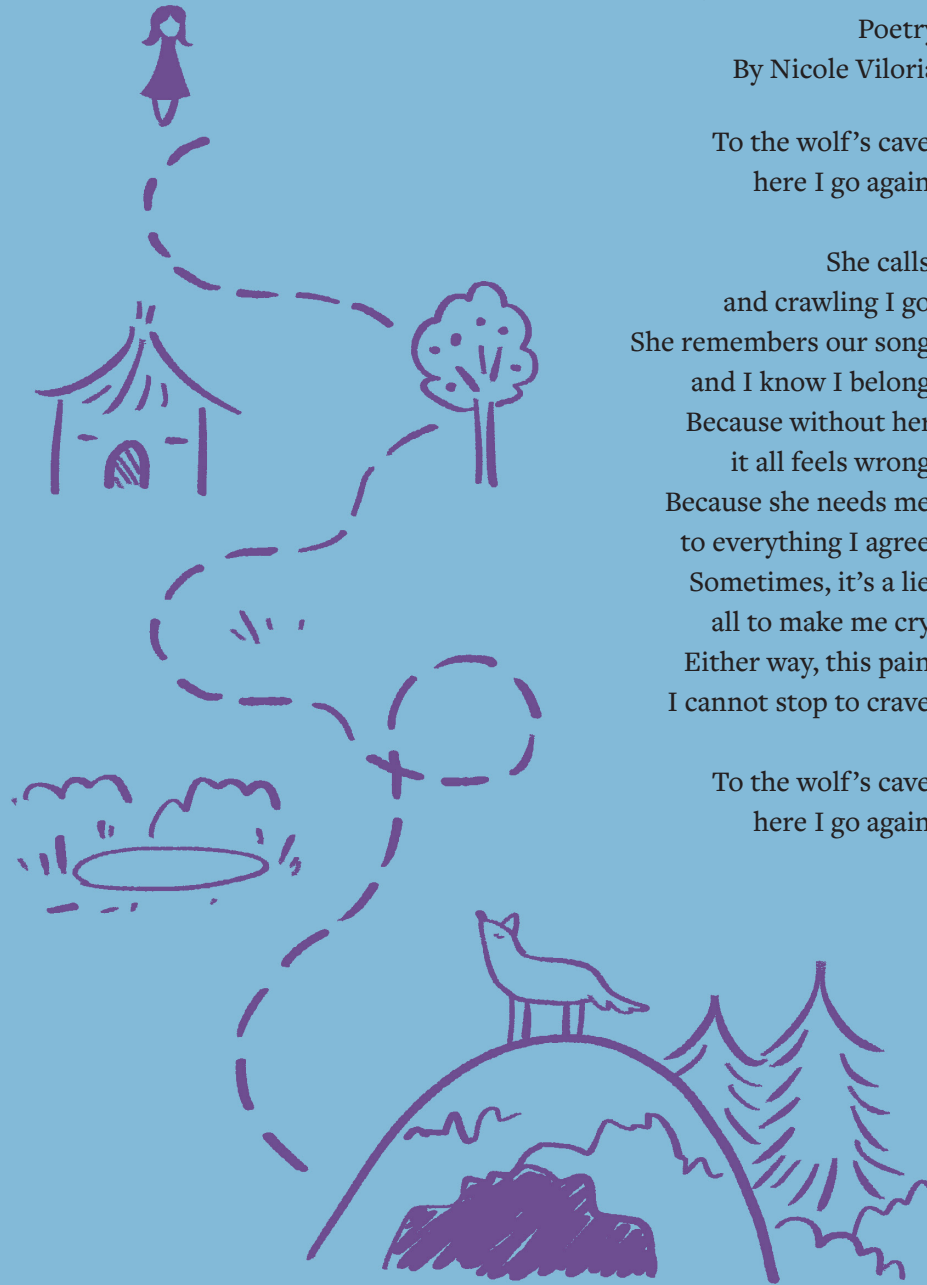
The Wolf's Cave

Poetry
By Nicole Viloría

To the wolf's cave,
here I go again.

She calls,
and crawling I go.
She remembers our song,
and I know I belong.
Because without her,
it all feels wrong.
Because she needs me,
to everything I agree.
Sometimes, it's a lie,
all to make me cry.
Either way, this pain,
I cannot stop to crave.

To the wolf's cave,
here I go again.



Onwards
Digital Illustration
By Camila Ramirez

Sin ti

Poetry
By Liliانا Medina

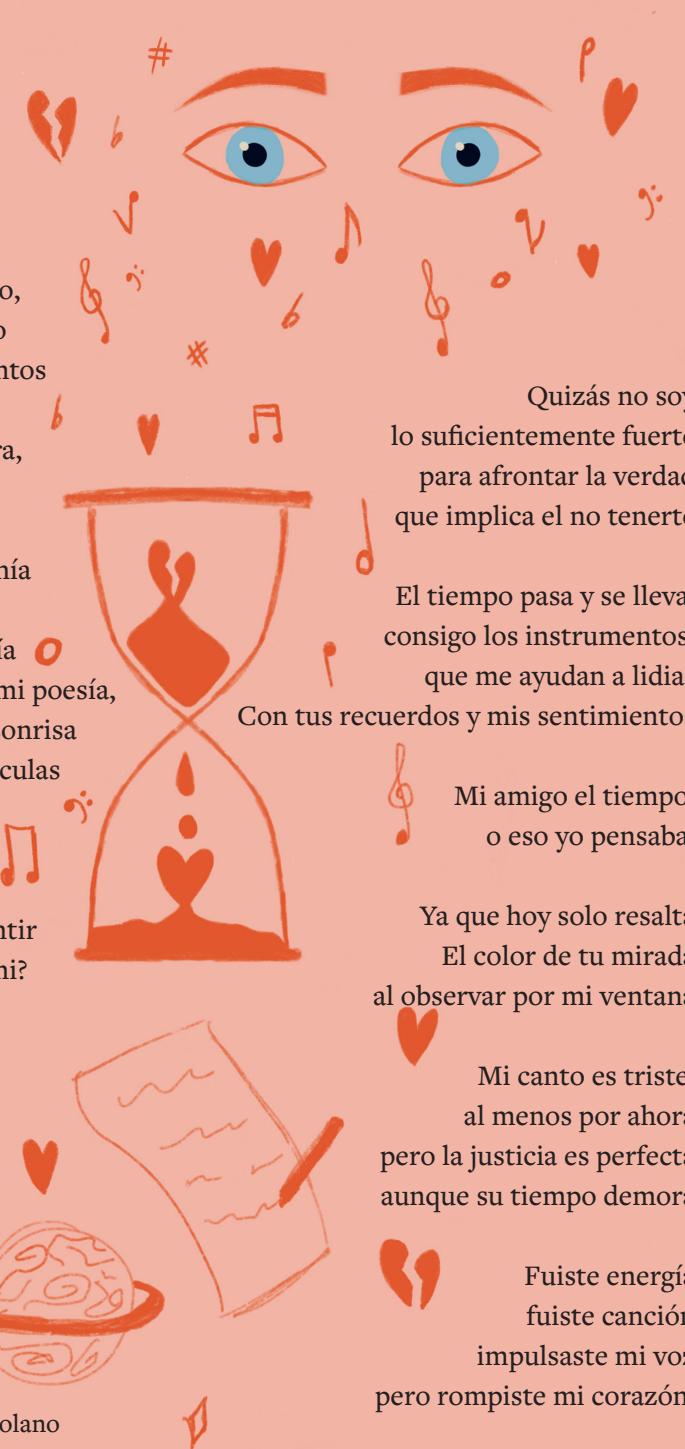
Parte soy,
aunque no física
de tu universo paralelo,
pero deseo con anhelo
vivir en tus pensamientos

Seré firme a mi palabra,
eivaré mi energía
y ganaré esta batalla
con mi alma en sintonía

Quiero escalar cada día
a la mejor versión de mi poesía,
donde mi canto y mi sonrisa
protagonizan mis películas

Sola estoy,
pues sola nací.
¿Entonces por qué sentir
este vacío dentro de mi?

Obsession & Healing
Digital Illustration
By Andres Dominguez Solano



Quizás no soy
lo suficientemente fuerte
para afrontar la verdad
que implica el no tenerte

El tiempo pasa y se lleva,
consigo los instrumentos,
que me ayudan a lidiar
Con tus recuerdos y mis sentimientos

Mi amigo el tiempo,
o eso yo pensaba;

Ya que hoy solo resalta
El color de tu mirada
al observar por mi ventana

Mi canto es triste,
al menos por ahora
pero la justicia es perfecta
aunque su tiempo demora

Fuiste energía
fuiste canción
impulsaste mi voz
pero rompiste mi corazón.

A Heavenly Ruse

Poetry

By Carlos Torres

A heavenly ruse
Fills the heart with doubtful grief
All belief shattered

A New Lease On Life

Temperatures ever changing,
Bringing to light buried threats,
Lying dormant within frozen grounds.

Forthcoming doom,
Diseases encountered long ago,
Awaiting a new lease on life.

The Raging Ocean

The raging ocean
Devours all wandering souls
Revenge for our faults

Nowhere
Digital Illustration
By Camila Ramirez



Descent

Fiction

By Richard Talavera



10 p.m.

Santiago didn't know he was about to walk through the shadows. It came natural to him as if it were engraved in his brain. He did exactly every step of the dance, thinking that Madame Alberta had lied to him. What could he expect from somebody who made a living out of scaring people?

It was one of those early winter nights where the wind blew through the trees and transported the chilly feeling of being watched. Every branch his foot stepped on carried the echo of being hunted. Maybe one of his classmates from the institute had followed him to continue the ongoing joke that his life had become.

He heard his name in the wind, "Santi," like everyone he loved called him. Like giving him a warm embrace, welcoming him further into the night. He got chills with every word he made out from the wind. But, this didn't stop him. Tonight he was sure of what he was doing.

He slid his foot to the right, following the dance pattern that the witch gave him. When he was about to spin, he did it too fast and knocked his head out with a tree branch, losing consciousness as his eyes closed.

6 p.m.

Santiago knew that it was a bad idea as soon as he walked into the festival. He wasn't expected tonight at all, and he felt it from the look on his classmates' faces. His heart always broke a little when his childhood friends didn't like him anymore. At least he had friends at some point.

He went straight to the back where he was supposed to meet with Amanda. He looked around the meeting spot begging to find someone as confused as he was. His palms were sweaty. The excitement had already beaten his social anxiety, and he felt lucky. Amanda would understand because she had accepted him like that. It was then a matter of translating those feelings from the screen into real life.

They had decided that day, with the whole town at the festival, was the perfect night to blend into the crowd and fill the awkward silence with activities. They talked about meeting each other for months since they connected online but never had the courage to do it.

He sat and waited, feeling watched, but he thought it was just his classmates trying to humiliate him more. "Tonight, everything will be different," he

thought. A spirit behind him laughed and moved away towards the woods.

Shortly after 10 p.m.

He was unconscious, but he was very much present in his vivid dream. Thoughts of the years after his father's trial flashed through his head. He felt restricted and couldn't scream to make the nightmare go away.

He wasn't thinking of the morning he saw the police break into his house, his mother crying in the corner, holding both him and his brother as the officer handcuffed his father against the wall. He cried when his father received a life sentence because he couldn't believe his life unraveling in front of his eyes.

He dreamt about the day after his father was found dead in his cell. He wasn't there when they found him, but he could almost picture the guards taking his father out of the confined room, where he only spent two weeks. As expected, there was no funeral.

Going back to school, he didn't expect things to get more complicated. Nobody tried to comfort him, because they knew who he was, and he could never get away from his last name, carrying the consequences of his father's sins.

As he walked down the hallway, the first thing he noticed was the blood dripping off his locker. "Murderer" on

In the Shadows
Digital Illustration
By Camila Ramirez

thick fresh red liquid. The rest of the locker was filled with hate words.

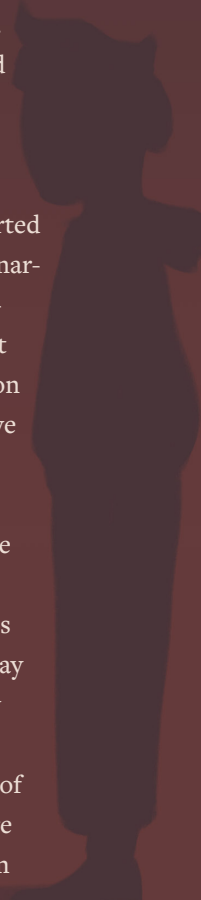
Tears ran down his cheeks as he heard a loudspeaker behind him, calling the name he hated the most in the world. "DeLaNeau, Santiago DeLaNeau, we all believe that justice should not be above anyone. As a community, we believe what your dad did to those people was inhumane." That was Lorena, her mother had the whole PTA signing a petition to kick him out of school the previous week.

His days went by like that, and once the doctors started to give him pills, he muted the outside world. As years went by, he isolated himself from society.

6:30 p.m.

The excitement diminished when his head started to put together possible scenarios. What if this was just another cruel joke? He thought about the possibility a million times, but he couldn't believe someone would fake such a beautiful personality. What if she saw him and didn't like him? He warned her that he wasn't good-looking, but it is one of those things people say all the time, even when they don't mean it.

As he was thinking of his misfortunes, on the verge of crying, he saw a shadow in



front of him. Ready to confront whatever terror he was about to experience, he wiped his tears from his eyes and looked up.

Amanda wore a green sweater, the most beautiful sweater in the world, and he had to bite himself to remember how to keep his mouth closed. She was everything he wanted in the world. A real connection. Somebody warm and loving.

“Hey, handsome,” she said, as she winked at him and smiled. That beautiful smile. He immediately changed his posture and stood up to greet her. She had such a magnificent scent; he wanted to bathe in it.

“Hey, beautiful,” he repeated the words he had said online several times.

They walked through the festival having fun and learning about each other. It was a beautiful night until he reached the stand that would change his life forever.

11 p.m.

His whole body felt sore when he woke up. He got a little high that night before arriving at the festival, but he completely sobered up by then. He looked at the spot where he fell and saw his shape on the ground. How long had it been?

He looked for his phone and noticed the burns in his arms. He had marks in the shape of claws. As he tried

Full Moon
Digital Illustration
By Camila Ramirez

to remember what the witch said, he couldn't help but panic and felt he was hallucinating. He entered a realm where he didn't belong. The spirits scent it too.

8 p.m.

“Come on in and let me read your future!” Madame Alberta greeted them as they walked inside. He thought nothing could ruin that moment, but he should have noticed the shadows inside the tent.

He didn't believe in these things; he was doing it to keep the magic of the night going. He would do anything to please her that night. As he was about to make a joke of a Madame Alberta cut-out, the room temperature dropped drastically.

“There is a dark calling to you, Santiago DeLaNeau,” she said, getting serious in a blink. “Your name has been promised to the shadows, and the shadows are trying to claim it back.” He felt like his heart skipped a beat. Then, he remembered that the whole town knew who he was, so that was just another painful reminder of the mistakes he didn't make.

The lights in the tent tilted, almost extinguished and they could barely see their faces through the shadows that moved around them. The witch let out a scream while her eyes looked dead into his eyes. Santiago panicked, noticing weird shadows outside the tent.

The witch performed a dance, one he had done as a child. It felt as if he

had learned it the day before, anticipating every move until she stopped.

“You must go back to the place of the sacrifice where the lost souls wander. Face your destiny. Follow the steps to the ritual and the path would present itself to you,” she said as she held her weight in one foot and looked at him.

He stayed frozen in the spot for what felt like hours until he realized that Amanda was outside of the tent, walking fast toward the exit.

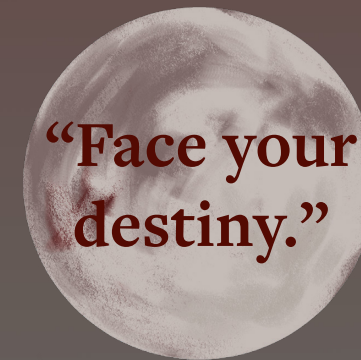
“Be careful with your words. Bargain your freedom. The border would be opened tonight for you, and the spirits don't play with wishes,” she said, grabbing him by the shoulder before he could exit the tent.

He didn't care to reply, stay or ask. His night had been ruined, and he felt like ripping apart the whole world. He got close to Amanda and tried to talk to her.

“Don't follow me anymore, don't even talk to me ever in your life. It was a mistake to think that this was a good idea, but I didn't expect your dad to be such a monster.” He just looked at her while she screamed. Tears ran down both of their cheeks even if they were both now in different courts. “Your dad is the creator of the Church of Light. Don't you think I would like to know if someone from your

family ruled the most dangerous sect in our country?”

That was the speech he got every time someone learned about his parentage. His father, leader, and founder of the Church of Light, had driven people insane with both his extreme ideas and twisted practices. When he gained enough power, he asked his followers to prove their worth by taking one innocent life weekly in a span of two years.



It all came out when one of the members decided to leave the church and talked to the authorities. His dad got captured but didn't give any of his followers' names. It ended in a massive homicide-sui-

cide in the woods where they took so many lives. It was the same night his dad was found dead in his cell.

He couldn't stop Amanda. He understood her and decided to turn his life around. He drove west, far from the main roads into the forest where his future awaited.

Midnight

Santiago felt the ground shake around him as he finished the last steps of the summoning ritual. His eyes adjusted to the darkness, and he saw the bodies around him.

His instincts shut down. He couldn't react, move, or scream. Not that it would help. He was far away from town. It wasn't until he recognized the god his dad used to worship that he remembered why he knew the dance.

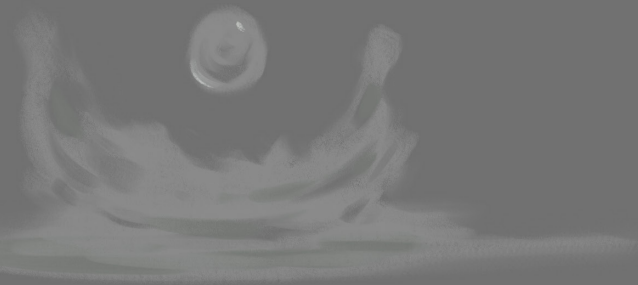
As Kalasji approached him, smiling, the vivid memory of young Santiago performing the ritual played like a movie in his mind. It was one of the few good memories he had of his dad.

Santiago looked at the creature in the eyes. He was ready to own his future again.

"What do you wish, human?" Kalasji asked.

He fell to his knees, searching for the stars that he could not find. He took a deep breath and set himself free.

Unknown Source
Digital Illustration
By Camila Ramirez



Remains
Digital Illustration
By Maurizio Casamassima





Only a Candle

Poetry

By Olivia Abreu

If I were to light only a candle for every tear I've seen you shed.
For every time you've had to dig your way out of mud
to collect what you can.
If I were to save you,
How many times every day?
How many times would I have to share
The horrible pictures of such disdain?
How many times would I have to remind them the ocean
does not belong to them?
How many times would I have to say the higher the mountain,
the deeper your grave?
Oh sweet shushing of ever-blessing rain
that you so much dread.
They seek the sunshine, the chirps, and the waves.
Have they ever seen you on their promenades?
Have they ever wondered if you too, slide away?
If I were to light a single candle, do you think you would be saved?

Dying Fury

Digital Illustration
By Camila Ramirez



Blossom
Photography
By Stefani Davila

URBANITES



Xiu Meiyong Hau
Co-Editor-in-Chief
*A crimson wild rose
with a special soothing charm
grown from frozen ground*

Laura Guerra-Lopez
Editor
*Moving forward to
something unbeknownst to me,
towards greater things*



Stefani Davila
Co-Editor-in-Chief
*Unique sensations
Unforgettable moments
Remarkable days*

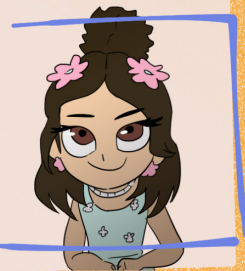


Gabriela Garcia
Media Director
*Traffic is insane
Can I just go back to bed?
It must be Monday*

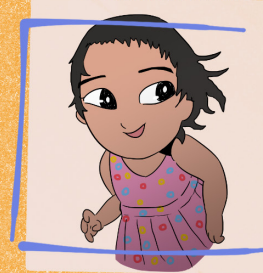


Emily Andrea Sendin
Advisor
*Supernova vibes
Unbearable bright lightness
Going out with a bang*

Ana Muñoz
Social Media Manager
*Uncertain, unknown
position in the future
tales of adventure*



Cristina Garcia
Editor
*Moonlight to Sunshine,
all is well in divine timing
as Chronus guides all*



Kamila Izquierdo
Social Media Staff /Editor
*Floating through the house,
translucent shape-shifting cloud
likes to mess around*



Nicole Vilorio
Editor
*Old books piled in front,
floor filled with magazine sheets
this feels just like home*

Maria Alejandra Albarracin
Editor / Illustrator
*Cheery summertime
A hive, powerful bee soars
while watching the fox*



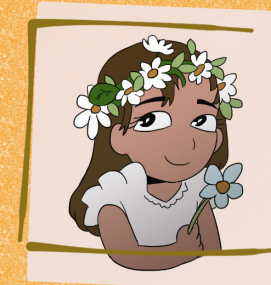
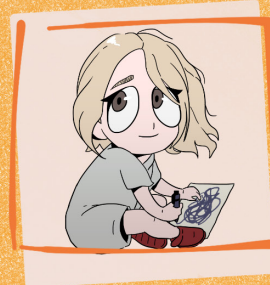


Camila Ramirez
 Design and Art Director
*I am unaware
 How to keep the wheel rolling
 As times vanishes*

Daphnie Velasquez
 Web Master
*Glorious, unknown
 the present and the future
 our hearts and minds*



Alejandra Cano
 Layout Designer
*As time ticks slowly
 I grow patient and still
 Grasping each moment*

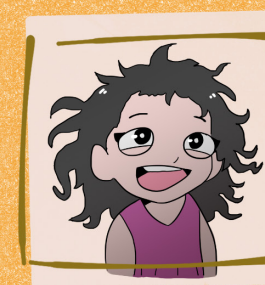


Jimena 'Fer' Romero
 Podcast Director
*Flowers blossoming
 deep in an uncertain soil
 resilience relinquishes*



Ana Camba
 Layout Designer
*The stars twinkle here
 Just enough to guide me to
 Where I will find you*

Erika Hernandez
 Podcast Staff
*As I feed my flame
 Finding simple happiness
 With grace, I emerge*



Marie Chacon
 Layout Designer
*Dispose of this love
 from your cologne to your phone,
 I have grown alone*

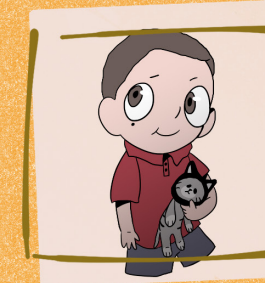


Maurizio Casamassima
 Illustrator
*I reach for my phone
 To turn the alarm clock off
 For five more minutes*



Andres Dominguez Solano
 Layout Designer
*Across the red room
 Your bright eye color catches
 All my attention*

Mario Casamassima
 Illustrator
*The biggest idea
 Is the last thing you think of
 The impossible*



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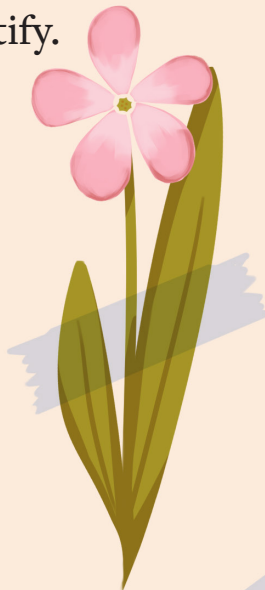
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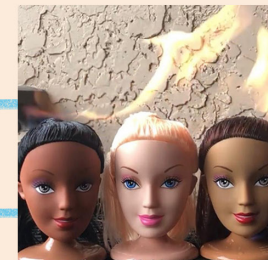
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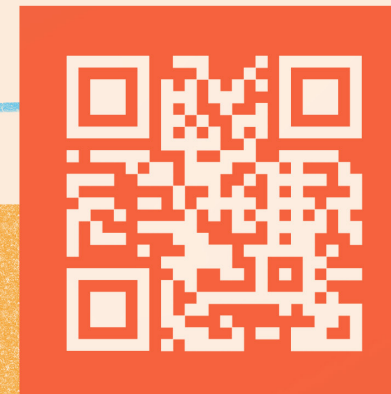
Advocacy



Media



Podcast



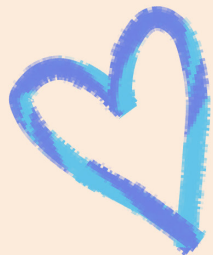
Thank You

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To our contributors, storytellers and content creators, without entrusting your work to *Urbana*, this volume would not be possible. Thank you for your vulnerability sharing your rites of passage, rituals, breakthroughs, accomplishments and disappointments.

Lastly, thank you reader. We hope your life’s milestones are reflected in the pages of our magazine and our website. As you read our quinceañera volume, allow yourself to journey back through the facets that defined your childhood, adolescence and adulthood.



Until our next life chapter,
Urbanites Team

Colophon

Urbana Literary & Arts was founded in 2007, and its purpose throughout the years has been to promote artistic and creative work within our student body of over 3,000. Since its inception, our magazine takes pride in its sole mission of serving as a medium of expression for students on print and online. *Urbana Literary & Arts* Volume 15 was published in June 2022. Two hundred copies were distributed at no cost.

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This volume was created using a desktop computer with Adobe InDesign CC 2022 software. The fonts used throughout the magazine are FreightText Pro (medium, bold and italics), Six Hands (chalk) and Minion Pro (regular).

Moreover, no contributor and/or staff member of *Urbana Literary & Arts* received any monetary reward while engaging in this extracurricular activity.

We can be reached at (305) 237-6070, urbanalitpadron@gmail.com or visit our website at urbanalit.com.



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Awards

Associated Collegiate Press

2021 Associated Collegiate Press Innovation Pacemaker Winner
2021 Associated Collegiate Press Magazine Pacemaker Finalist

Individual Awards

Multimedia Story of the Year - Blog
Ashlie Rodriguez | First Place
Social Media Promotion
Gabriela Vilas and Jeidy Gonzalez | Third Place
Broadcast News COVID-19 Coverage
Alejandra Almada and Jimena “Fer” Romero | Honorable Mention

2021 | ACP/CMA Fall National College Media Convention

ACP Best of Show
Literary Magazine | Ninth Place
Website | Seventh Place
Podcast | Fourth Place
Multimedia Story of the Year – Blog
Gabriela Garcia | First Place

2021 | CMA Audio and Film Festival

Best Audio Creative | First Place
Best Animated Film | Third Place

2021 | College Media Association

Literary Magazine Two-Year College | First Place
Best Magazine Cover | Second Place
Best Social Media Strategy | First Place
Best Social Media Presences | First Place

Columbia Scholastic Press Association

2021 CSPA | Hybrid Literary Magazine
Gold Crown

2021 CSPA | Magazine Critique

Gold Medalist
Verbal, Design and Essentials
All Columbian Honors

Gold Circle

Digital Media

Portfolio Illustration | Adriana Alonso | First Place
Essay | Ashlie Rodriguez | First Place
Non-Fiction Article | Estefano Reyes | First Place
Traditional Fiction | David Martin | First Place
Open (Free) Form Poetry | Joy Axe | First Place
First Person Experience | Ashlie Rodriguez | Third Place
Podcast | Alejandra Almada, Jimena Romero and Sebastian Parra | Third Place

Non-Fiction Column | Gabriela Garcia | First Place
Cover Design Literary Magazine | Camila Ramirez and Jorge Ramos | Certificate of Merit

National Council of Teachers of English

2021 REALM Award

Community Colleges Humanities Association

2020-2021 Magazine from Small Colleges
Southern Division | Second Place

Florida College System Publications Association

Hall of Fame | Emily Andrea Sendin

2020 - 2021 Division A
General Excellence | Third Place

Artwork Magazine

Adriana Alonso | First Place

Artwork

Adriana Alonso | Second Place

Cover

Camila Ramirez, Jorge Ramos and Wolfgang Rugeles | Second Place

Contents Page

Wolfgang Rugeles, Maria Patricia Mejicano, Jorge Ramos and Laura Santos | First Place

Staff Page

Wolfgang Rugeles, Jorge Ramos, Daniela Lopez and Camila Ramirez | Second Place

Inner Circle

Wolfgang Rugeles

Publications Students of the Month – Padrón

September 2021 | Xiu Hau
October 2021 | Camila Ramirez
November 2021 | Daphnie Velazquez
December 2021 | Alejandra Cano
February 2022 | Mario and Maurizio Casamassima
April 2022 | Gabriela Garcia

For a complete list of *Urbana's* awards please go to our website.



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