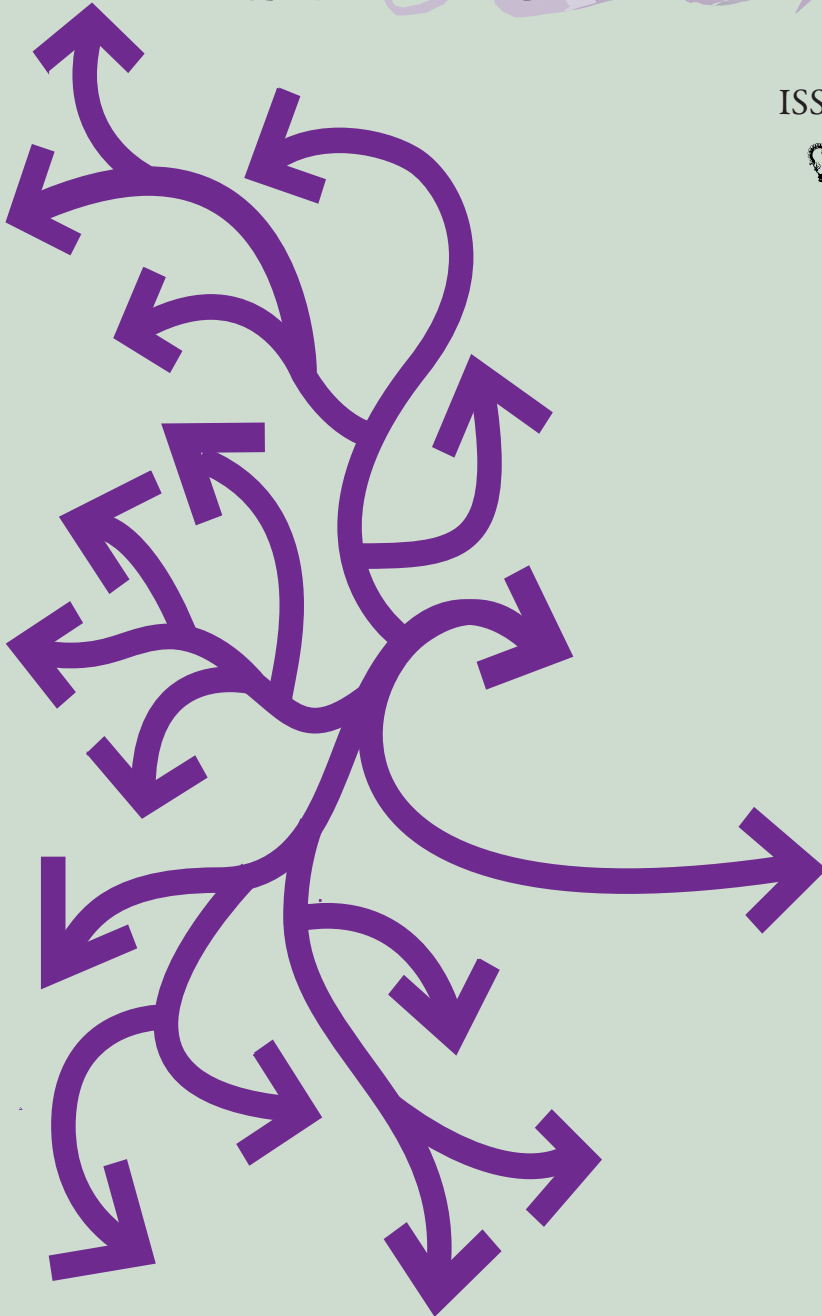


# HER ROYAL MAJESTY

ISSUE NUMBER 6



FALL 2009



# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

I consider the fall to be more of a personal New Year than the turnover that occurs on the first of January. When the last number of the year flaps over, as impersonal as the numbers on those old-fashioned alarm clocks, slapping the one preceding it, nothing changes except for that number. The fall has a physical correlation with change with its crispness, its precision: in September, something is different and you can feel it. The summer's harvest has been gathered and the new season is setting in, and while most people aren't directly connected to this rhythm anymore, the feeling of a new start lingers. Part of this feeling of freshness comes from the new agenda books – blank canvases full of potential—which students are given every year. (Though this is the first year that I have not been part of the momentum of the back-to-school migration, that doesn't mean that I didn't buy new notebooks and HB pencils). In January, the New Year is more like a hope for change, or a promise of it: it is not conditional, but it is subjunctive.

The subjunctive mood is used to express suggestions, wishes, hypotheses, and doubts. It describes a future that may not happen, that does not travel the rut of inevitability. To talk about the future is to consider the past and our relation to it; the past both feeds and devours the present and future. This issue of *Her Royal Majesty* focuses on this interrelationship.

Many people use genealogy to comprehend the way that their history affects their present life. Family trees illustrate entire root systems and show the ways in which people grow into and around one another, branching off independently, yet supported by the trunk of the past. The fascination, often obsessive, with family history is explored in Heirs of the Living Body, a chapter in Alice Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women*. In this chapter, Del Jordan's uncle has died, leaving the typewritten history and detailed family tree that he was working on (both of which focus on what the men in the family have done) as evidence of "a solid, intricate structures of lives supporting us from the past" (52). Del challenges his patriarchal representation by drawing attention to the lacunae within the documents: approaching history from a different angle, Del is able to tell the stories of the lives of girls and women in her family. As Coral Ann Howells writes in her book *Alice Munro*, "Every one of these women's lives is different from the others, so that the living body of family history begins to look less like a solid structure and more like a mosaic of secret worlds coexisting under the surface of ordinariness" (39).

copy editors:	CYNTHIA SPRING, JAMES GREGOR
layout:	CLAIRE KELLEY
website:	SIMON BLOOM, DAVID LYE

Much of the work in this issue deals with the "living body" and "mosaic" of the past, and the way that it exists in both the present and the future. Even the recipe was developed with a consideration of how to bring the past into the present, of how one's relationship to the past and family history can evolve.

It would be nice if, rather than relying on the family tree that focuses solely on the past as concrete and unchanging, we each had our own personal tree—an intricate diagram illustrating how each life is a culmination of its events as well as a spontaneous and unpredictable growth. The seeds we plant ourselves grow and blossom according to the ways in which we tend to them, as well as being affected by their circumstances. The plants that grow are at once structured and impressionable; they are, at every moment, full of everything we were and are and hope to be.

Harriet Alida Lye  
*Editor*

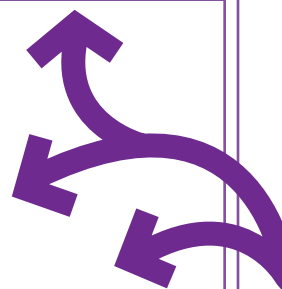
"What is modernity? The human heart is not a modern thing"

—spoken by the character of Tennessee Williams in Daniel McIvor's play, *His Greatness*

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Letter from the Editor

Table of Contents.....	2
An Augury (an Elegy) .....	3
Dino Stack, <i>by Daniel Joyce</i> .....	3
Heads in a Row, <i>by Stewart Wayne Fanning</i> .....	4
Mirrors, <i>by Michael Duncan</i> .....	5
The Grandmothers, <i>series by Lisa Lipton</i> .....	6, 24, 25
Farm Talk, <i>by Patrick Shaw</i> .....	7
Prophecy, <i>by Maren Schenk</i> .....	8
The Trouble I've Seen, <i>by Ashley Lamb</i> .....	9
Lines, <i>by Julé Malet-Veale</i> .....	10
The Rotary Dial, <i>by Yamuna Marie Pi</i> .....	11
Plan Ahead, <i>by Ashley Lamb</i> .....	12
Last Exit, <i>by James Gregor</i> .....	13
No News is Good News, <i>by Laura Piani</i> .....	14
Words to Describe the People Who Live Here.....	15
It's called "Paella in the Bathroom" .....	16
Only My True Love Sees My Real Self, <i>by Melanie Colosimo</i> .....	17
Carousel Thoughts, <i>by Shannon Webb-Campbell</i> .....	18
The Truth, and Lady in Red, <i>by Andrew James Weatherhead</i> .....	19
Imp in the Desert, <i>by Stewart Wayne Fanning</i> .....	19
Warm Wind, <i>by Melissa Amber Lee Boyle</i> .....	20
Recipe, <i>by Matthew Lewkowicz</i> .....	20
The Meating, <i>by Ashley Lamb</i> .....	21
The Mirror, <i>by Harriet Alida Lye</i> .....	22
Nos Vies Invisibles, <i>by Yann Ornan</i> .....	27
Chance, Choice.....	28
Future Tents, <i>by Steve Wiseman</i> .....	29



# An Augury (An Elegy)

You warm the milk and peel the skin,  
a sunburn discovered  
in late evening.

This is new.

These days will soon be  
those days.  
Meals out, heat, yearning—

We live in the City  
for our  
sins

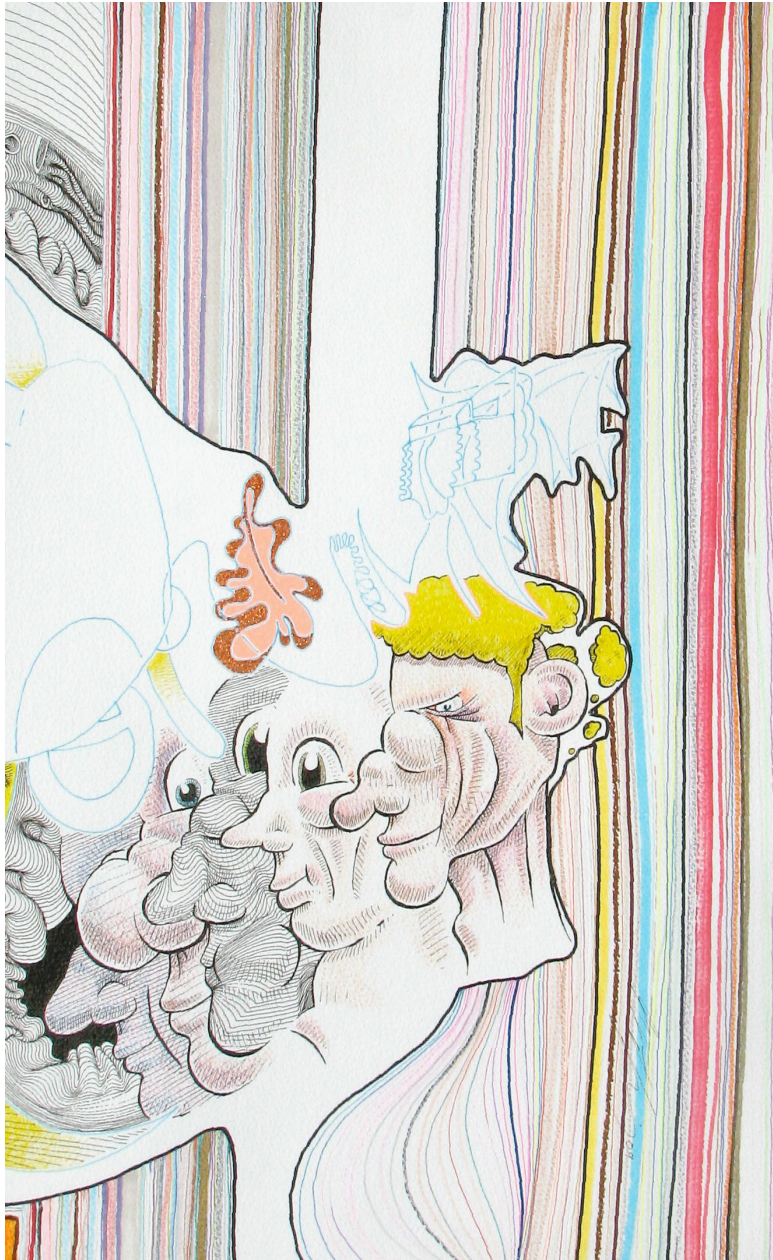
Nightly we sleep, sometimes alone,  
because sometimes love has work to do in the morning,  
because sometimes you are not to be found.

In the morning we wake,  
pure, still damp, and repeat this sticky cycle.

In the afternoon, propped on your elbows,  
holding your milky coffee (I won't tell you  
what I think when I watch the way you hold the cup)  
you sit reading, not quite smiling,  
always parsing  
the sentences of solitude.



Dino Stack  
Daniel Joyce



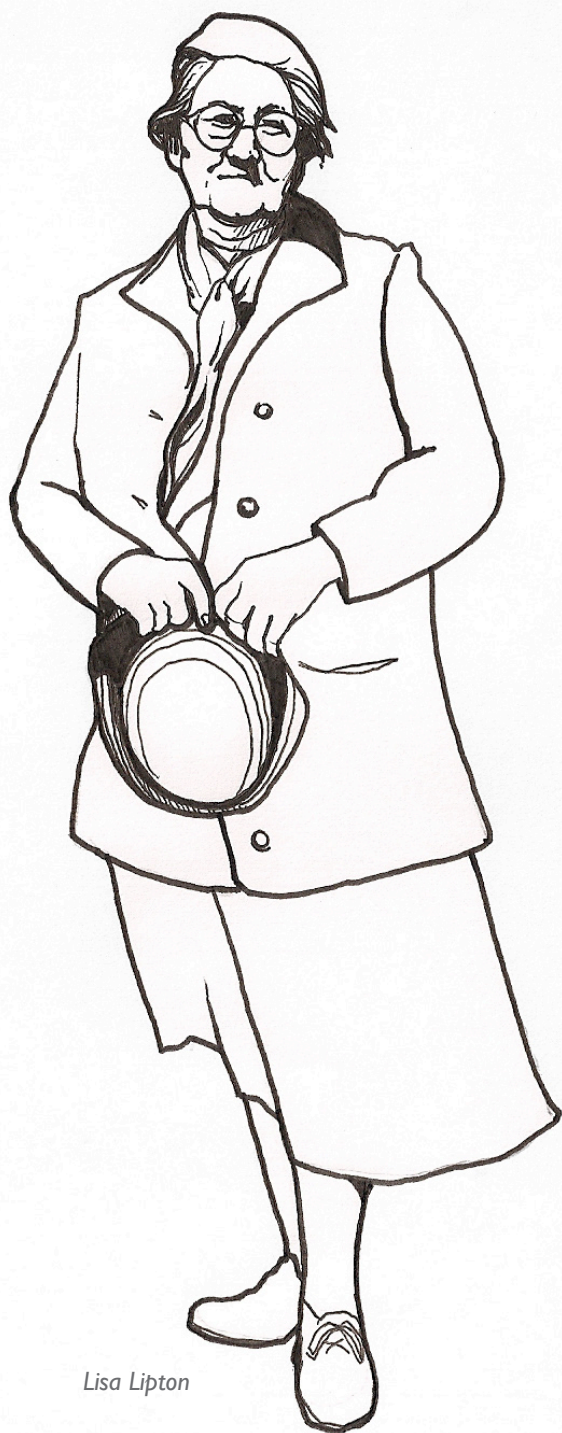
Heads in a Row  
*Stewart Wayne Fanning*



# MIRRORS

by Michael Duncan

You look in the mirror and you *look* down at your wrinkled *hands* of the clock are *circling* like vultures waiting for your *fall* has come and the leaves outside brown in *piles* of unread books that lay on your desk and are *rotting* your face that was once *smooth* and now the shadows are *lengthening* is all you *desire* has *faded* are your memories of the past due bills in your mailbox stamped with final *notice* how quickly it has all gone and how much more you had imagined to be your *fate* is *death* awaits us *all* you want is *longer* grow your wrinkles every *second* chance you need to fix your mistakes and live *better* check the time and you read your *watch* yourself be passed *by the day* you can feel it inside *you* are a reminder of your own *age* affects the way you act and the way you think and the way you hope and the way you love and the way you *look* in the mirror and you *look* down at your wrinkled *hands* of the clock are *circling* like vultures waiting for your *fall* has come and the leaves outside brown in piles of unread books that lay on your desk and are *rotting* your face that was once *smooth* and now the shadows are *lengthening* is all you *desire* has *faded* are your memories of the *past* due bills in your mailbox stamped with final *notice* how quickly it has all gone and how much more you had imagined to be your *fate* is *death* awaits us *all* you want is *longer* grow your wrinkles every *second* chance you need to fix your mistakes and live *better* check the time and you read your *watch* yourself be passed *by the day* you can feel it inside *you* are a reminder of your own *age* affects the way you act and the way you think and the way you hope and the way you love and the way you *look* in the mirror...



*Lisa Lipton*

# Farm Talk

*by Patrick Shaw*

Aloishus spoke to me for the first time,  
“God-ram patrons of cotton”  
I swung high and tagged a pirate cloud  
and it did spat  
straight to and at our hero.  
There can be prerogatives.  
‘loishus had at least one, though  
I forget now how he spelled the sounds  
he used. I forget often.  
Menacing pirates continue.  
His vapor fleet reinforces until  
Uncle, who often reminded me of  
the one serving spoon  
in one stream of silver congruence—  
Uncle said something about the  
cotton shure nuff until  
or maybe when  
I remembered all the moments  
he nearly forgot to not speak  
or like he was walking too fast  
too much milk in the mug  
leaving slipped white down his  
LL Beans.  
1st time Aloishus dribbled:  
Language happened when the cow  
birthed her last,  
a promised land of mess.  
Our roles: Eden’s custodial staff.  
He got Florida on his pants  
or some such peninsular yuck  
When he said that thing about the soft fluffy saints,  
the ones we get embarrassed of wearing back into the house.

I can't help it if these are my heroes  
I come from the dirt

I'm going to be blessed  
And be cursed for sure

*Maren Schenk*



The Trouble I've Seen  
*Ashley Lamb*



Lines  
*Julé Malet-Veale*

## The Rotary Dial

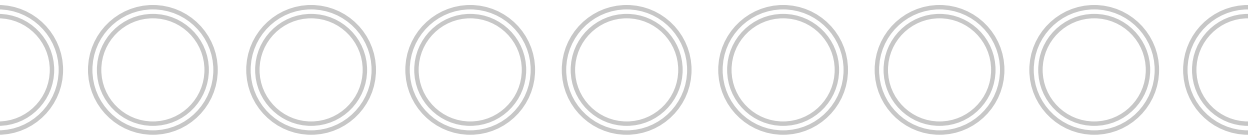
*by Yamuna*

We are living in touch tone,

But I want the rotary dial

To the left—right circular connections in sweet pulses

And it takes time.





Plan Ahead  
Ashley Lamb

# Last Exit

by James Gregor

The make-up artist is hovering nervously, rubbing the trigger of the blow dryer, and the fan is blowing steadily, fluttering a red ribbon, and the actor is staring dubiously at his own face in the vanity mirror. Tilting a lean torso, he shifts forward in the elevated make-up chair (for he is not a tall man) close enough so that his breath makes a pulsing smudge on the smooth quicksilver. He is about to investigate a spot beside his lip—a manly hand poised in the air—when a young woman with a pronounced belly and two miserable-looking children invades a corner of the mirror, fixes him with a look of sour disapproval, and disappears.

My poor deranged wife, he thinks.

The Xanax, ingested in the limousine, has annexed his veins. His eyes begin to droop. Before long he'll fall asleep. He must get going. His head tumbles forward and then he is staring at the important, bulging crotch. Troublesome crotch! Nexus of inconvenient desires, trigger of wife's tiresome fecundity, focal point of awkward manoeuvres.

His face, on the other hand, has always been profitable—pitiless brow, perfect blockade of teeth, cheekbones smoothed to a poreless glisten. A shame for such a thing to pass into oblivion. Except of course there's that pimple, pink and swollen, rising beside his lip. It's been there since yesterday. He touches it. The skin is sore and hard.

He gestures for the make-up artist, but the make-up artist is gone.

In earlier days his wife was enthusiastic, smiled well, and had long glossy hair. In another life they might have been friends. They might have worked together in an office and canvassed for autistic children, might have met for coffee on rainy afternoons and stared at each other over the rims of mugs, discussing their men troubles. His insensitive boyfriend, her workaholic husband.

The minutes are bearing him towards the stage under the bright lights where he will sit on the sofa and discuss the new pregnancy with the hostess in the white tennis shoes. He has not seen the sun for weeks. For weeks he has been holed up in a remote wing of the house, amidst pillows and televisions, with a man named Pierre from St. Tropez. They welcome visitors through the back door, carrying bags. Transmit their requests for food along the intercom.

No more of this.

No more nervousness around beautiful young men. No more jumping around on sofas. No more thanking God for Risky Business. No more thinking of Rain Man on days when he's depressed.

One more audience.

The thick-limbed clutch of JC Penny women will shadow him across the stage. Like a machine gun measuring its target before the mutilating barrage.

They will see the pimple.

They're motioning him forward but he goes to the dressing room. The very air delays him, the heavy motion of bald, potbellied men in t-shirts running to and fro, crying into microphones, making circular motions with fleshy arms ('coiling the dock line of a tugboat' he thinks.)

In the dressing room the children are slumped on a sofa, their mother nowhere to be found. Where is she? Has she gone back to Toledo? It's a shame, he thinks. He feels as though he would like to hug her. He would like to acknowledge their joint venture with a wink of the eye, have a last laugh over the religion which keeps sucking their money away, trade a few barbs about his pale ex-wife, and hurl some final insults at all those who have called him a lunatic. He wishes her well. He reaches into the leather satchel and pulls it out. He loosens the tightly-cinched belt and stuffs it down, close to the important crotch.

In the full-length mirror by the door, the pimple glistens.

They're calling him out now, the potbellied men motioning him forward with their tugboat arms. They tell him to watch his step. The floor is crawling with electrical wires.

The black curtains are parted. Out in the blinding light the women are clapping. He walks across the stage, making out a wobbly arm here, a pony tail there, a belly defining itself through the palest turquoise.

Is that his wife, hidden out in the vast distance, smiling conspiratorially, guiding the way like a lighthouse? It's hard to see. It's too bright. He squints and grins.

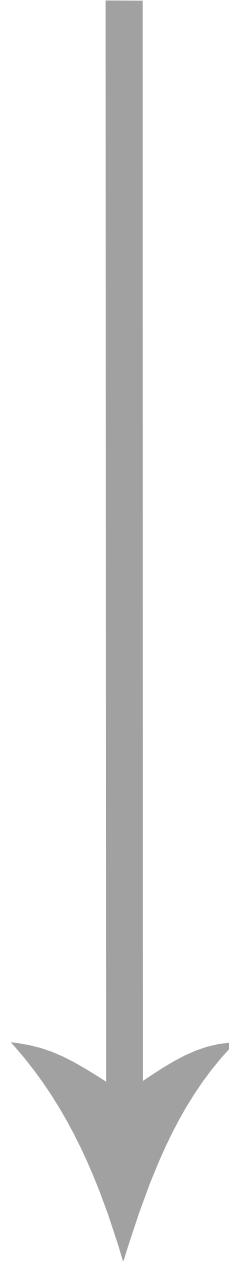
He settles into the plush sofa, an immense relief for his tiring limbs. The hostess in the black suit jacket leans forward with her first question, the blond hair in thick blades across the twitching forehead. The question explodes around him, mingling with the baying of the audience. He feels it press against his crotch, the cold metal. It's a shiver, spreading to his whole body. He is already moving away.



No News is Good News  
*Laura Piani*

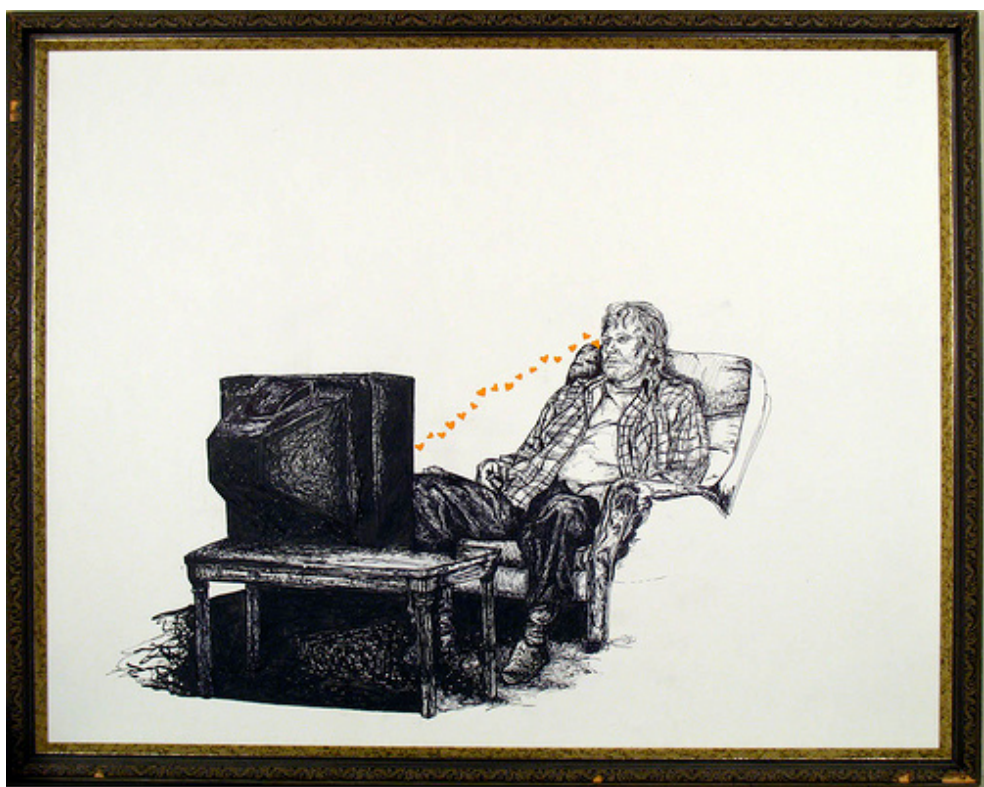
# Words to Describe the People Who Live Here

teetering on  
the fine  
edge of  
existence,  
permeating,  
making  
the passing  
of time  
last longer  
    extending  
the  
transitional,  
    hungry.  
impressionistic  
full of fingerprints  
deliberate.  
determined,  
stretched and stuffed full  
and  
leaking  
    internally.  
        awake  
eternally.  
their eyes  
with lids  
like awnings over  
    closed  
antique shops  
are hungry.  
their  
mouths are  
hungry, too,  
their long  
lean  
earth-sloughing  
bodies are  
    hungry.  
this thinness  
    speaks  
of a  
different  
kind of hunger—a  
    people hunger.  
alone but not  
lonely,  
necessarily.



# IT'S CALLED "PAELLA IN THE BATHROOM"

1. Eating paella in the bathroom of the Pompidou centre, the national modern art museum of Paris, one falls into a series of unavoidable analyses.
2. It is impossible to avoid being put through an assortment of assertions if you are eating paella in the bathroom of the Pompidou Modern Art Museum in Paris.
3. Strangers will look at you with conviction in their conclusions if you happen to be the one eating paella in the bathroom of the Pompidou.
4. I was eating paella in the bathroom of the Centre Pompidou and could not help but be pushed and pulled through a series of critical thoughts. Coming from the Giacommetti, down the stairs, through the Chagall, one's mind is necessarily operating on a certain analytical level.
5. It is a post-post-modern, neo-realist, no, hyper-realist, or surrealist, maybe, post-structuralist, anti-formalist, non-essentialist, super-constructionist, anti-disestablishment statement to eat paella in the bathroom of the Pompidou centre.
6. The girl eating paella in the bathroom of the Pompidou is a statement of necessity, a picture of humanity, beautiful in its simplicity. However, she becomes subject to the art-critics-for-the-day in the "gallery of piss and shit" on the fourth floor.
7. A girl in a gray dress sitting on the steel shelf hunched over the chrome sink eating saffron seafood paella in the bathroom of the Pompidou centre, with a clear plastic fork, is a critique on the stark minimalist anti-formalist tendencies of her modern Swiss predecessors.
8. The art-goers minds are forcefully attuned to modernity and the meaning of transubstantiality – they think: is there always a girl eating paella in the bathroom of the Pompidou? does she symbolize humanity and the necessary, recapitulated by the very fact of me being here, in this bathroom, in this city, in the world? Or is it a critique on luxury: she is wearing a polka-dot silk dress and eating saffron paella, for Chris'sakes. So exasperated by black stripes and blank canvases representing the beginning and end of the world, respectively, they think, with a grand inner sigh, that
9. This girl is much more real than the body-shaped cloud of cobalt tempera on an otherwise blank canvas.
10. This girl, eating paella in the bathroom of the Pompidou, is real.



Only My True Love Sees My Real Self  
*Melanie Colosimo*



Carousel Thoughts  
*Shannon Webb-Campbell*

# POEMS

by Andrew James Weatherhead

## Lady in Red is Painting a Picture for Me

I am the lady in red who left the toilet clogged.  
I am also the lady in red who made it known to  
everyone.

I am at the party.  
I am Brett and I am John. I am Brett-John.

I am at the subway station for a moment.  
I'm conducting interviews here because it's just  
that kind of day.

I am in other public places too. In the piazza,  
I saw the man who took your wallet and I  
congratulated him, then I took his wallet.

I am out in the snow now, waiting for a cab. I  
am looking down 1st Avenue while you are the  
blood on my shirt.

I am now clasped by your hand, yeah.

## The Truth

Outside, a piece of pizza is getting rained on—  
the water fills the crust soggy,  
toppings washed away

From a distance, it looks like my friend Phillip—  
the cheese running down his face,  
the water filling his lungs



Imp in the Desert  
Stewart Wayne Fanning

# Brisket Chili

recipe by Matthew Lewkowicz

The whole thing started with a can of ginger ale and spoonfuls of grape jelly. This was many years ago, when your mom and her siblings were kids, and that's how Nana cooked. But Mom and Aunt Heidi grew up, and had the good sense to update the ingredients. They still use ketchup, a vestige of Nan and her 1950's "modernism", but slow-cooked with the melted onions it makes the sauce so delicious, you're willing to forgive just about anything. You decide to learn the history of your family's famous brisket by phoning your mom, your aunt and your Nana on a fall day in Los Angeles. The weather's turning as much as it ever will, which is just a little, and just enough to incite a windy Sunday cooking experiment.

Football is on. You and the guys plan a poker game and pull the kitchen table into the living room. Chili seems like the best option. You want to present something dark and syrupy - ground beef would only get you halfway there - and you keep coming back to that famous family brisket. Jews have cooked brisket for as long as you've been one, and many years before that, most probably. The secret to a good Texan brisket chili is in smoking the meat first, as if you were going to eat it just like that, and then making a chili out of it, why can't you make mom's brisket the way she always did and then turn that into a pot of chili? No reason. It's on.

You remember Mom's brisket. A glorious Pyrex dish of it. Alight with the yellow glow of beef fat, each slice hardly discernible from it's milieu of sturdy red sauce, at once sweet, tangy, salty and full of oniony earthiness. You've never made one, but it's time, it's your birthright, you're 27. Aunt Heidi and Mom are mostly agreed. Onions, ketchup, brown sugar, cider vinegar. And some onions. You cradle the phone with your shoulder and jot it down without amounts. Not a recipe, just notes. You don't do recipes, really. You like to feel it out. Some apple juice? You've got a jug of the cloudy stuff. You'll give it a shot because you're a really imaginative cook, you can roll with new ideas. Mom does it on the stove but Heidi thinks the oven works nicely too. You love options! A recipe passed down from one generation to the next evolves. A mother omits something her kids don't like. An ingredient comes in from a mother-in-law's method, cross-pollinating recipe ancestry, circling ever closer then further from its original roots somewhere in Lodz, or Kiev, or Frankfurt, then back again.

On Hayworth Avenue, you lift the bike and a 4 pound brisket up the stairs, the palm trees lean and rustle a mile above. It begins. You put the meat into a roasting pan with sliced onions, ketchup, cider vinegar, brown sugar, Worcestershire sauce, mustard, apple juice, a bottle of dark beer, salt, pepper. Beer? Your ancestors cock an eyebrow. To cross a traditional Southwest dish

with an old-world Jewish recipe, you have to get a little creative. Into the oven for 3 or 4 hours at 325°. You take it out every once in a while and call your friends over to worship its getting-there aromas. Poke it. Spoon sauce over it. Flip it once, twice. Who cares, with a hunk of meat and sinew swimming in a sweet magic marinade it's going to be awesome and you know it. When the onions are a gloppy amber paste and the liquid fat pools opaque in the corners and the meat pulls off into fragile strings with the lightest fork prod you're done. With step one.

Then. You shred it with two forks, working horizontally along the brisket. Or pull it with your fingers, or whatever. You make it into pieces that you'd most like to find in your bowl of chili. And you eat a lot of it with your roommates while you collectively chop and shred and mince and you all mumble wide-eyed and delighted through steaming meat-mouths. Now you start the chili. Onions, garlic, jalapeños and carrots in a hot pot with olive oil. You add some green and red peppers. When the whole mess is hissing and sweating you throw in a can of chipotle peppers, chopped, with their juice. Then a can of crushed tomatoes. And then in goes your entire roasting pan of shredded brisket and onion sauce. You call your friends over again and talk about how this is crazy. Do you realize how amazing this is going to be? Holy shit. You all recognize the first-rate work you're doing there, on your stovetop. Salt, pepper, cumin, chili powder, a dash of cayenne. You cook it down for an hour and add kidney beans.

You lose a good deal of money at poker because you're a good friend and you care about your friends' feelings. Between bets that shouldn't confuse you but do, they'll say the only honest words of the evening, and they're all about the chili. They know that while watching football on a coolish day with buddies and beer is not unique, this chili is, and that they've tasted the birth of a strange and wonderful child. You've come a long way since meat and jelly, and you hope this unspoken fact will suffice in convincing the guy who took you for at least \$50 and ate two bowls of chili to wash the brisket pan.





The Meating  
Ashley Lamb

# The Mirror

by *Harriet Alida Lye*

Jasmine was one of those site-specific bisexuals. Marc thought so, too. Marc and I had talked about it once or twice, but he didn't show as much interest in Jasmine's life choices as I did (and even then, I knew when to let things lie). We were on our way to have dinner at Jasmine's basement apartment, right off Bedford Avenue.

It was a Thursday evening, sometime in late summer. It had rained earlier that day and there was a closeness in the air. When Marc, Ethan and I came out of the subway onto North 8th street, the sky was cantaloupe-coloured and a few woolly clouds were purpling at the periphery as the sun set over Manhattan.

I had been unemployed, with only one minor interruption, since graduation. My boredom was unrelenting, persistent as a rash. I don't remember what I did with my days, but I certainly wasn't finding my "voice" or my "calling," which was what I had told my parents I'd be doing in The City. I was quiet, had no interest in finding anyone to talk to; nobody ever called.

My daybook doesn't give me any proof of my existence. It was filled with only hopes and doodles. Even my dreams were forgettable.

"Look," Ethan said, pointing just above the horizon. "The moon. It's beautiful." He was wearing navy-blue velour pants. Marc and I caught each other's eyes, and I smiled. The half-moon (half-man, half-invisible) was opalescent. It was beautiful, though I didn't want to say so.

None of us had any money. Ethan and Marc, the only ones with jobs, were always just as broke as Jasmine and me – their wants increased in relation to their means. She and I ran our respective, arbitrary errands during the day, errands we clung to like ID badges. At night, though, the four of us would collect from our various corners of the city – I lived deep into Bushwick, a part of Brooklyn that wasn't even remotely gentrified – and eat dinner together, or sit down by the piers overlooking the East River and the Manhattan skyline, shiny and wet with lacquer and light. These were the moments that provided contour to the months I spent there.

We had met at a coffee shop in the East village where we'd all worked at one point, but Ethan was the only one still there. Unable to keep up, I had quit after a week. I did learn something valuable there, though: I learned how to carry out tasks and conversations on the surface above my own thoughts; underneath, I could continue swimming, alone and unmolested. Mind over matter. Against my natural instincts, I continued to spend time with them. Except for Marc, of course: I enjoyed him without reservation.

"I'm just saying, he certainly knows how to fascinate the ladies," Jasmine said, her voice creamy, foreboding. She smoothed her hand over her hair, sticking up in tight curls.

Jasmine had just opened a second bottle of wine using a corkscrew that popped out of a Swiss Army knife. She poured us all refills and set the bottle next to the sink, too close to the edge of the counter. We were in the middle of a long-running conversation about love. It was sort of all we ever talked about, really.

Marc coughed in a way that was anything but involuntary.

"How do you mean, fascinate?" I said, falling into Jasmine's provocation.

Jasmine had a sharp, effervescent sort of beauty, a sort of beauty that would not have been considered pleasing sixty years ago (but now, with her confidence and puckish good looks, she was the paragon of attractiveness). She had a yellow jolt of hair spitzing out of her head. She had small blue eyes – alert, electric. She spoke with effusive gestures and had difficulty controlling the volume of her voice: her speech escalated at seemingly irrelevant points. When talking about Hans, her new lover, her pitch remained mostly in its shrill tones.

"Well firstly, he's gorgeous" – at that point in my life I had rashly given up on dating good-looking people, mainly because of the way that I coveted them. So, as Jasmine carried on answering my question, my mental image of Hans, whom I had instinctively pictured as a ruddy, ogre-like man, became obscured in a kind of envious haze rather than clarified into the handsome being he was – "and he speaks with this soft little accent so everyone always has to lean in and just cling to everything he says." Jasmine took a large slug of wine.

"And secondly?" Marc asked, dryly.

The late-August light barely made it through the windows, high up on the ceiling, only just at sidewalk level. Whatever light was able to penetrate sat on the table like a fifth guest. There were candles scattered around the room.

"Secondly, Marc –" she pushed her tongue out of her mouth to articulate the ly, "he's not afraid of experimenting."

I couldn't help myself. "Experimenting?"

"He's way more" – here there was a pause for drama, rather than thought – "attentive."

Marc, Ethan, Jasmine and I were sitting around the little square table drinking like dehydrated tourists. Ethan and I picked at the cubes of French blue cheese and roasted beets with unnecessary impatience. I looked over to Marc. He was examining his fingernails. I looked at Ethan; he was looking back at me with a face as if to say "why did we even agree to come?" or maybe it was more like "do I have something on my mouth?"

Ethan swallowed. "You aren't seeing Anastasia anymore?"

"Oh, once in a while," and she giggled. I don't think I ever had what it takes to giggle; I have always been too woollen.

Anastasia was a model whom Jasmine had taken home from the bar across from her place one night earlier in the summer. The bar was called "Hog Wild." The models' apartment was all the way over in Jersey: Anastasia did not need much coercion.

"Do you call that a relationship?" Ethan blurted.

As she was speaking I was paying less attention to what she was saying than the way in which she was saying it: her low patronizing monotone, her small neck that craned forward, her animated over-plucked eyebrows. I was becoming more aware that people like her are the ones who will be the most successful.

Ethan interrupted her: "fine, but is it love?"

"That's not what everything is about, Ethan. Some relationships aren't about love. What I mean is, love and relationships are different things. I mean, what do you want from someone you love?"

Ethan was silenced. It was Marc who responded like a reflex: "Want?"

"Yeah, want. Everyone wants things and needs things from people."

She picked at something in her teeth.

None of us – Jasmine included – were originally from around there. We all had grand plans (hopeful delusions) of making it big in this vast mathematical grid of a place. It wasn't working: we were just hungry and restless. I had grown up in the suburbs, though, so I was used to feeling outside of things.

Sitting there in a quiet moment, I took another quick sip of the wine, Argentinian and cheap. Our four chairs were positioned around the sides of the table so that none of us were quite sitting next to each other. Jasmine drained her glass and walked to the mini-fridge behind her, underneath the cluttered sink, and crouched in front of it. "I picked up some buckwheat soba noodles with curried squash from the little place at the corner – you guys are good with vegan, yeah?" She pulled a brown cardboard box from the otherwise empty fridge and set it on the table. I was famished.

Ethan sighed. He was fingering a long black cable, about two-fingers thick, that was wrapped around the table. Jasmine called it her "expression wire". She had found it on the side of the road. Ethan was having difficulties expressing anything, though: it was too cumbersome and stiff to perform in the way that Jasmine had wanted, and the wire usually remained static in its position around the legs of the table. The wire formed a sort of cage, making it nearly impossible to fit our knees underneath. There were places where the wire coiled onto the table, making it difficult to manoeuvre our drinks and the cubed cheese. All of us were the sort of person who liked to do things in the way less easy than other ways, though. For Lent last year, though none of us were Catholic – two Jews, one atheist, and one fallen Protestant – we all gave up coffee, cigarettes, and sex. All of us. All at once. It became a matter of pride rather than a principle.

"What, Ethan, don't you do soy?"

"What? Oh. No. Sorry. It's fine. It's great. Thanks."

Ethan didn't not do soy, but he definitely wasn't about to discuss anything even marginally related to Jasmine's temperamental views on what was good and important in the world. Ethan was from a wealthy family in upstate New York and had moved to the city just a few months ago – his first time living away from



home, though he was 24 just like the rest of us – to try and find a venue for his miniature gothic portraits. He drew these tiny portraits, mainly busts, of women in ruffs and puffed hair. He had a small frame. He was almost definitely a virgin. We all thought that he was gay, and we discussed this quite openly when he wasn't around. We talked about him with a scientific sort of pity, with condescension as though we were able to see, from our view through the microscope, his inward composition. We weren't being judgmental, though. Not in a bad sort of way, at least. It was more like we used him as an example. We empathized with his hypocrisies, after all. And besides, it was Marc who directed all these theories. He was a little bit in love with Ethan, I think.

Marc was tall and pale and impractical looking. While he had no obvious signs of physical strength, he did not look wimpy. His pallor alluded, correctly so, to his inclinations to keep himself indoors, looking out windows. If his skin did receive some sunlight, he burned immediately. His hands were feminine. His dark-blond hair was carefully shaped into one of those glossy, ripply side-part hairstyles from the 1950s, one that needed a lot of maintenance with a comb. He wore unreasonably large glasses with a mild prescription to correct his astigmatism.

"Marc, when was the last time you dated anyone?"

Jasmine never directly referred to the fact that the people Marc dated were the opposite sex to her. As she spoke, she walked from the window, where the light was fading, and shut out the draft from the front door using her foot. When she shut the door, a large, old warped mirror that hung on the wall was revealed. The mirror had oil stains on the glass; the thick wood frame was simple but beautifully polished. It was startling to see something like this in Jasmine's apartment.

"Not for a while."

"Not found the right person?"

Marc, as I said, was gay. This was common knowledge, unlike Ethan's merely hypothetical homosexuality or Jasmine's indiscriminate attractions. This did not detract from my love for him, though. My love wasn't a real sort of love, not a love that wanted anything. It was a love that made me always aware of where he was and whether or not he was happy, doing whatever he was doing.

Jasmine looked at Marc, her eyes accusing and arrogant, as she opened a third bottle of red. "A little more?" I felt a bitterness rising in my throat; my possessiveness surprised me, coming at unsuspecting times.

We all put our fingers around the necks of our glasses and pushed them just slightly towards the centre of the table as a means of accepting and encouraging her offer.

I alternated between biting the soba noodles into the smallest bites I could manage and casting Marc exasperated glances. He never looked back at me, though. This was not a conversation I wanted to be a part of – I preferred to keep these things unacknowledged – and Ethan was excluded by default.

Jasmine smirked and sat down on the arm of the kitchen chair. She was from Northern California. Her mom was still living off the money she'd earned as a popular child actress in the late 1970's. Jasmine had moved to The City to attend writing classes at NYU but she'd flunked out – or, rather, she'd "quit" – after her first year.

"Oh God, I'm exhausted," she said to nobody. "It's so exhausting looking for a job. It's just so depressing. I mean, today I actually found myself responding to a posting on the internet, a want ad for a cleaning lady for some Old Money in midtown, and I wrote saying 'I'm drug-free and dependable and love to polish!'" She gave a sharp, quick, hoot and then re-composed herself. When the laugh was through, she looked at the table, the emptied plates, the candles, and then to the window. "I would kill myself if I got that job. But then, I guess I might kill myself if I didn't." We sat there, all together, all private, for another long moment.

Ethan severed the blanket of silence by walking from the table, which was in the living room area (all part of the kitchen and sectioned off from the entry-way by the careful placement of a rectangular carpet and a browning pot of wilted mother-in-law's-tongues) and went to the squat coffee table marking the border of the "bedroom" area. There was a yoga mat rolled up against the wall – I'm sure she's the kind of person who'll turn to God when she realizes that yoga just isn't enough – and the coffee table was covered with a layer of gently-used paintbrushes and



an open, dried-out set of acrylic paints.

"Will you let me paint your portrait?" He looked straight at me. He had red-wine mouth; the chapped parts of his lips had absorbed more of the colour.

"I need a cigarette," I said quickly, before he had finished speaking.

"Oh - okay," Ethan said, his voice shaking in the continuing wake of his moment of boldness. "I'll bring the paints."

"Marc will help me get dessert ready while you're outside. Won't you, Marc?"

I put on a scarf and took two cigarettes and a small box of Redbirds from my bag. I looked in the mirror and noticed a stain on my shirt in the shape of Utah. I opened the door, obscuring the mirror again. Ethan followed.

I used the stone stoop to light the match. The air had thinned and a small wind blew the match out. When the third one caught, I lit both of our cigarettes. We sat on the stoop for a few minutes, facing away from each other, smoking silently.

"How are you?" Ethan, once again, interrupted the silence.

"Fine."

"Are you having a good time?"

I opened my mouth to let the smoke drift out, rather than exhaling. "At dinner?" I paused. "Yes." I had a running bet with Marc as to who would reveal Ethan's homosexuality. I watched him suck on his cigarette. He flipped a slender paintbrush around and around in his fingers inelegantly. He did not have any paper. First with the wire, now with the paints, he had been forced into muteness. In that long moment, while he played with the paintbrush and was probably trying to shape his colossal feelings into manageable words, I felt this kind of terrifying exhilaration. The air was cold now; the colour had drained from the sky, leaving a flinty canvas punctuated with only the boldest of stars.

He started abruptly and a little too loud: "You remember what Jasmine said about wanting things? Wanting from people?" He rushed through his words and I did not feel any less uneasy. "Well, I don't think I want anything."

I gave a non-committal "hmm." I was afraid of whatever epiphany or confession that could spring forth and break the surface, plunging into the depths of my own thoughts.

"I wouldn't use that word, at least. I just want to...be, next to you."

I looked up to the sky.

"Can I tell you something?"

I looked at him and waited until he turned to face me before I said "Sure."

"I've never told anyone I loved...that I loved them." I watched his eyes blink and it was like I was seeing in slow motion, like I could see his thoughts moving. Ethan was very drunk – he was so slight, it didn't take much – and he spoke softly and quickly to his hands, pulling on the tips of his fingers. I didn't reply.

"Sylvia."

"Yes, Ethan?"

"I think, I think you are beautiful."

I held out my hand and put it on his, clammy and pale like dough, resting on the stoop. There was the soft sound of very loud music playing very far away, more like the memory of a sound. There were groups of people walking towards Bedford Avenue, away from us, all wearing tight denim of varying shades of black. The wind picked up leaves, scraping them along the pavement.

"Sylvia. Will you leave here with me? Will you go and get a drink with me?" He said, grave.

I took one last inhale before putting the cigarette out and started to count in my head instead of thinking – a trick I'd learned just recently.

I looked at him looking at his hands, and thought then, in that moment, and in wanting that moment to last for a long, long time, "this is what it is to be happy: to belong, to be needed, to tell the truth." I still remember that feeling, its newness, its precision. While he sat there, his shoulders folded forwards and his eyes peering sideways at me, I saw him reach outside of himself, towards me. I didn't want to say anything, didn't want to disturb or contradict the world that he had come to believe in – the world in which I had been elevated as someone who was unboiling and good – so I just patted his hand, moist under my own. In the light of the streetlamps I could see the downiness of his cheek, his jaw. I found his eyes for the first time and recognized something.

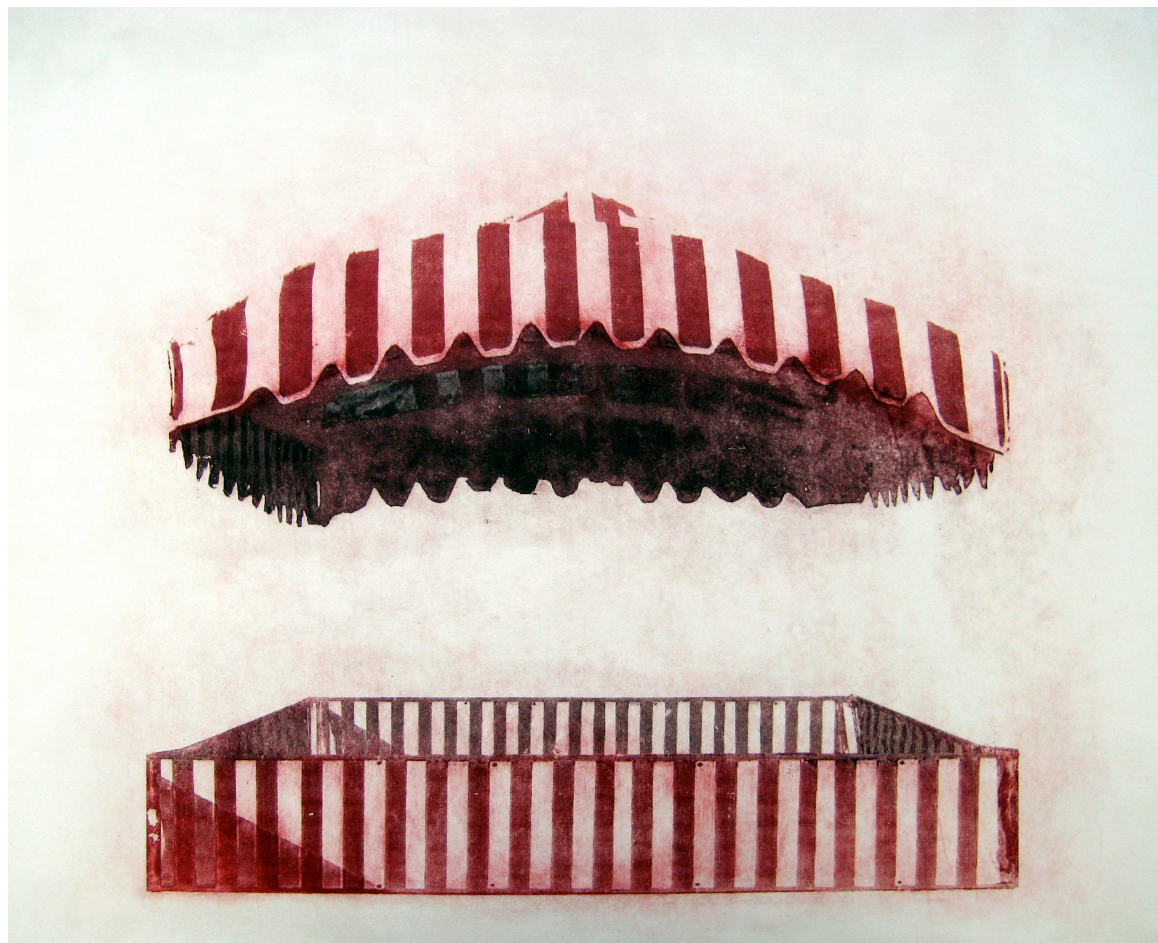


Nos Vies Invisibles  
*Yann Ornan*

I wondered if  
we would find  
each other  
We would find  
each other  
if we wanted

I wondered if  
we wanted

*yes*  
*yes I will*  
*Yes*



Future Tents  
Steve Wiseman