Paper Mill Press
A Journal of Creative Arts

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Light-paper Cave Detail

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Issue I.iii
Megan Keough

What Once Was
Bernard Wills

Houston 4. A.M. Montrose

You would be surprised at what goes on.
Some of the locals here are bats, fireflies, mostly out at night.
I know. I don’t sleep so well.
Sometimes I’m up at 3 or 4 A.M.
while a whole layer of life is being lived outside.
The police know this.
The chopper still circles my building on the hour
its searchlight sweeping a geometric arc
across the darkness of my sparsely furnished floor.
Damned if I know why. It’s pretty harmless here.
There’s me, the Mexican, the terminal gay guy
and crazy Basil who invented, so he says, the crunchy granola bar
then had his patent stolen. I know. What villainy.
The others here seem jobless and alone,
no kids, no hassles, acres of unstructured time.
A sad lot to be sure: poor, foreign, distracted in their wits.
Most of them are white haired, fading,
their foreheads wrinkled deep beyond the need for making trouble.
No sir, hardly a rowdy bone in this decrepit bunch
though the HPD feels it should keep tabs regardless…

So, what’s up tonight on Montrose street?
One of my neighbors is up and about,
puttering in the courtyard.
I can hear his echoed footsteps shuffling.
Suddenly he stops, a thought has crossed his mind.
He’s not sleeping…why not get some housework done?
Well…that seems sensible enough.
He pounds vigorously on my neighbor’s door.
A miserable voice with its high distinctive whine answers
“whaaaaaat?” Yikes, the poor guy
saw no harm in knocking, even at 4 A.M!
He’s blown back by such crabbed hostility.
Sheepishly, his voice quivering he asks
“Do you have a vacuum cleaner?”

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A shrieked “noooooo” pierces the dank, humid air. It echoes but the silence slips back in, just a light breeze whispering in the banana trees. Really… some people…the guy just wanted a tidy floor. He mutters sorry, sadly, then beats a glum retreat beneath the all-seeing eye of the HPD police chopper.
Bernard Wills

Eel Poem

At that time I would haunt the harbor, breathing
the smell that it had of salt flake and sharp tar
and once, with that brown-glass water clearing,
I could see to the bottom, an undulating bar
of sand that the slow sculpins, odd flounder patrolled
and so it was that I could see the eel whip round to bite
some seconds after the hook and line unrolled.
I felt the jolt…I heaved the squirming shape into the light.

Ghastly, the silent victim writhed upon the dock
wriggling beneath the stacked up lobster traps.
I yanked it by the tail. I smashed its head to a rock,
five hefty clouts to kill the thing, five solid cracks
that splattered the stone with blood… the shock
of what had passed impressed sensation’s sheeted wax.
Bernard Wills

Eels

Back then you could fill your bucket full of eels and I did so, with my dad and many laughing cousins: the whole damn clan was there with rods and reels at ready to slaughter those fuckers by the dozens and that’s what we did- till night fell- half past ten- though even then our innocent frenzy soldiered on raising a ruckus for every slick beast taken and dumped into the buckets. Our killing done,

we tumbled into the trucks to head for home. I think we threw some eels to Annie’s cats. Others we froze. Yet others we skinned and fried. But that was the last big run of eels. We tried for years after: nothing. Those snot green rats had bugged who knows where through wave and foam.
Bernard Wills

Tahir

“Fuck man, dis is bullsht man, bullsht!”

There goes Tahir again, madly whipping the dishwasher with a towel…

no-one takes much notice.

You see Tahir was dinged on the head in a Turkish jail, or so we suppose, and is subject to these sudden rages -

they flare up, flare out. Now to be fair there definitely is a bullshit aspect to the way things go around here,

like how our hard work gets undone, the dishes soiled and muddied once again in ghastly nightmares of recurrence that even Nietzsche might have shuddered at:

but a working man must quench his sense of the absurd

and that’s the skill Tahir has lost to the blunt end of a billy-club.

Yet Sisyphus kept at his stone so back to work he goes

and anyway the Chefs have tricks to discipline Tahir, to haul him back in line,

to keep the wheels of being grinding,
turning those satanic mills…

Let him peel a box of garlic…see how he likes that…
pungent past the threshold of his pain!
Or set him to de-veining shrimp!

But here Tahir gets back his own-
he only pretends to do it
and now the clientele
are eating shrimp shit at 30 bucks a plate.

But today Tahir is back at the dishes,
and I’m there too,

among these lost and luckless, dispossessed
and I don’t quite get why
as all my friends have jobs in the D.N.D

and I use the word job loosely
for all they do is play Tetris
for $10.50 an hour
in a magical fairy land of money for nothing:

but anyway, as I say, here I am
because I can’t get a better job
and Tahir has turned dish-pit theologian on me:

“Hey man, what fuckeeng religion are you man?”

“Christian….” I say, sheepishly,
hoping these words
do not commit me to anything too drastic

by way of embracing the other
when the other is a nut like Tahir.

“No way man! Dats bullsheat man!
Islam is best religion man!”
Well, Tahir has something on his mind besides flogging the dishwasher so I run with it….I ask him “why”?

“Four wives man! You fuck all da time!”

Well…that is an argument at least… it displays rare candor too, some brutal honesty concerning matters of the ‘spirit’

but really, four wives? From where? And like that’s legal too! No friggin’ way. To throw back in your face your favorite word, Tahir, this is bullshit. Fuck son. Get real.

You lack impulse control. You are subject to rages.

Your head is damaged. You will only wash dishes…ever…

because…for some reason…the chefs are not particular about who does this shitty job

and so, you’ve little hope of one wife let alone four though you recite the shahada for all you’re worth though you believe it from your very core: in fact, just put a sock in it Tahir.

And while we’re at it, Mark, Herb, you stuff it too.

I’m sick of all the crap you losers talk about the shit you’ll never, ever have.
But heck. What am I raging to myself about? Not even sure I know. Hell, I’m no better.

I am, moreover, happy to admit that this is just your symbol for the grail, your myth of Eros,

the alienated form of your desire:

that happy bounty, the plenitude enjoyed by the student workers at the DND.
Steve Evans

Morning--Humber Road
Dearest Wanderlust

Dearest Wanderlust,
never put your trust in scribbles or in paper,
in shiny things which with the North do swing and follow blindly.

Not all those who wander are lost, but they ought to be.

II

But forever is a long time to be sorry with so many arms out-reaching,
gently guiding the guilty off to vacation getaways in their own cities and towns;
with the gleaming gazes of gleefully gesturing gals and gents gingerly exchanging glances over scraps of paper scrawled with lines of verse and sketches of skinny, skeletal individuals who seem so soft and yet so sturdy, and shine with passion through the blue lined paper bars of their existence.
Samantha Fitzpatrick

Artist without his bark.

He sketched to kill the days that were wasted anyway, pressed too hard on leads that weren't supposed to break, but they were liars. Every night, before he slept, he vowed tomorrow to sketch himself a personality, follow-up with limbs and soulful artist's eyes, pencil in a strand or two out of place on a skull of matted hair to pull off the not-so-put-together look, but mornings never came and the evenings were too late to do anything at all worthwhile doing. He was rooted into consequence he never recognized the cause of, busied himself with leaving until he couldn't get away.
Ashley Sutherland

Phantom Filaments

Issue I.iii
Stephan Walke

Still - Life

I found a frozen garter snake
walking west on the old rail bed
that gravel scar cutting field and forest
bordered by wild apple and hawthorn

and there the snake lay
yellow eyes of open glass
frozen blades of grass declared green
reaching through the first white of winter’s claim

and I held the snake
with sad, lonely fear
its archaic scales halted by a spell
like the still, hard river below

with head raised and mouth open
like a fossilized ghost of Pompeii
its figure lay poised, arrested
caught in the act of living
Stephan Walke

November 11th

The customer orders a coffee and asks for a loaf of day-old bread. While the barista pours, the tuneless bugle call comes over the radio, drifting through the bakery din like a dull memory—an opaque guilt. She puts the pot down and stands still for the two minutes of silence. The held breath that makes children think of all the things they shouldn’t do.

She stands watching the black liquid in the mug. Bubbles turning in a dying spiral and disappearing one by one. She avoids eye contact with the customer. It’s easier when there is always movement. People don’t notice when someone’s eyes skirt their face, rest on a mouth or a nose before fleeing to the safety of a task like pouring milk or wiping a counter. But when there is silence, without movement, the loneliness of cities finds people gazing at their shoes and into empty cups.

She likes the idea of pause. Not a smoker, she still goes on the back steps next to the dumpster for smoke breaks with the bakers. Chipping loose mortar from between the haggard bricks with her fingernails. Letting large objects go out of focus, as though her eyes were laying down to rest. Delighting in the cold halt to the movements of the day.

She listens to the fridge kick into a hum. She hears the customer breathing, and the uncomfortable rustle of his wet jacket as he shuffles. She enjoys the vulnerability of facing the moment, with everyone else. Witness to the other worlds which people inhabit. The discomfort we share in stillness.

This is why she sometimes visits churches on her days off. She doesn’t approach their grandeur like a destination. She enters chapels and cathedrals as a deviation. As though attracted to a rare flower off the side of a forest path. She enters for the solace of a silence without context. For a couple minutes of silence.
Shaylyn King

Maison Mason Vol. 2
Basil Chiasson

Remembrance Day Ceremony

Not even the fact that is this soldier
Trumps the ends to which he’s means:
“Democracy” as well as “freedom” are the
Words upon our lips. And yes we sing because
To not would be obscene.

Not even the fact of this young Sergeant,
Finally home, with missing mate, can
Drain the colour from these flags that make
No sound.
But as they wave about the room reverberates.

Not even the fact of this vet’s tears, from
Quailing man the wound appears, escapes
The confines of a script that circumscribes:
The sound of bugle hymn, the shuffle, then
A pause all pave the way for soaring voices
That repose in no applause.

Not even the drift between the fact of soldier’s
Lesion and regret appears enough to undo
Language, flags, and debts.

Not even the fact of all this mess spread
Out before us in its real can temper voices
Telling tales of how We feel,
Of what We want and who We are, about
The past, the here and now, how it’s
A “celebration” We all gathered here.

Not even the soldier,
Not even the fact.
Ian Ryland

L’Anse aux Morts/L’Anse L’Amour
The echoes of your words drift here along the highway bleached from snow the crab-apples have turned apricot gold in the minus twenty two air the blue truck still remains embedded in December tall grasses shiver in the easy wind as eyes greet the ghosts of whimsical youth chalk blue bay stretches far magnificent corporeal vein this life force between fraying landscape beyond the kitchen window beyond the small mound of grey-green earth where the murmurings of tawny mermaids were audible to her the cold has become parasitic to you and me ashen feral dog croaks the ode of our street small square black windows bloated plastic nativities glowing embers of apathy every storm this road crumbles I hear the spittle of ice clacking like fingernails against the opalescent dark window in the residue of vulnerability we walk.
Emma Croll-Baehre

Illness

Winter has set in I hear it's breaths a coating of melting snow covers an empty jacket next to the road damp forest fabric below two small white crosses stand like totem poles in the ground where he died Happy Birthday balloons tied to their peaks dilapidated choking against the tall grey grasses consuming I hide my illness stealthily beneath my tightly packed blue-jay down feathers walking by the churning sea sloshing with ice it consumes every space in my mind infiltrating my body far below this pallid exterior stability tranquility lies to the ones who think they know secret gargoyles of rage isolation sets deep roots beneath my skin I walk until I reach the darkness past the fluorescence of a gas station clinging to the black night like a ghost a man crouches feral and anticipatory garbled words lunging at my figure illuminated beneath the esso alcove

my greyhound legs urge me to sprint back to populous thoughts ravelling forward your hardened face eyes a mixture of fragility and cigarettes I consider my options sinking into desolation spurred on red wine heightened incoherency disastrous senses mocking my secrecy defects exposed near the glowing gas pumps

silver daybreak smears the horizon magnificent gulls croak out an early adulthood circling above hideous sounds mocking my naivety disease beats the tips of my ears red it is cold this foetal November

my narrow rabbits feet are leaded with cynicism apathy
drips from my fingertips onto the crumbling concrete as I trek a world where innocence is no longer idolized back through the muddy hinterland dulling bulbs of the gas station melting into the bleak light of morning electricity rippling across the stretch of teal water succumbing to distance.
Emma Croll-Baehre

Mirror

10:34 PM at a time between Greenland and Greenwich
the fan purrs like one who’s seen it since the thirties a girl
who dresses like a celestial ringlets garnet lips
no reservations of femininity gazes into the mirror
as the omnipotent of androgyny

She wears a pinafore of candy stripes
procures a ring that glistens against her right nostril it is night a
muffled time where the animus begins to creep beneath the skin
tight muscles bear their sunburned pink against cropped hems of
sacred fabric
she thinks of freckles freckles and flaxen hair amidst a body
of prehistoric grace
what truly frightens me?

cities bear the children of scattered energy
feel grit inconsistency as I move my feet above the rancid
smell of sewer
a pivotal minute leaves me insecure in my ability to profit affection
I am prophet

whispering to the people how to ply men and women
playing the role of one who only wishes to bask against the lips of
any certainty
I’ve been told to set my roots deep beneath the swollen soil
carry an insight nucleus of an indigo essence
I can’t love anything that trusts me to be as tender
the anticipation in your eyes makes me despise everything that
you pretentiously mimic
I’ve yet to want you for more than pursuit
the rain pulses against the wind I hesitate to feel.
Ashley Sutherland

Magnitude of a Moment
There was a time when I would have done anything for you. I remember how, one afternoon when you were gardening, I watered a row of transplanted flowering shrubs for what seemed time out of time itself. I was bored, but you had asked me to, and I wanted to do a good job for you. That’s what mattered most to me.

You used to devour books, and maybe that is where my love of them comes from – from watching you. I remember that one day, we spent our time reading in your worn black leather chair – mine now is no compare to it. It is worn and old, but not in the same way. The holes that fleck it have been picked at over time and my chair looks spotted, diseased. But your chair somehow seemed to get more comfortable with age, like all men who age well, and women who don’t.

I don’t remember how my disenchantment with you began. I never used to listen to her when she would tell me about you from her perspective. You once went to San Francisco together, and I was told about how you argued and argued that you didn’t have enough money to buy her a beautiful glass tree, yet the hammock you bought was not an issue. That was out of my experience, though; it was before my time with you, so I made up excuses for you: maybe you were having a terrible day, maybe you were tired. It didn’t matter.

I open my eyes and look around at my apartment. Against the wall, by my bright red bicycle lies the memory of us at the park. When I was tired of riding, you took my bike from me and rode it so I could walk leisurely, but somehow, somehow, you ended up behind me on a hill. I didn’t even see you coming, but I was running by then. You still over-took me, and somehow, some way, ran right over me.

Above the bikes, where my old licence plates hang on the wall, I am reminded of our long car trips and of how I used to wear sunglasses and pretend to sleep for hours. By then, I didn’t even like the sound of your voice. From the nook in the corner springs the memory of the day you got mad at me – what for I can’t recall – but you squeezed my arms and shoved me against a wall, trapping me with the bulk of your body. Why? What for? I was scared, couldn’t even look at you. You must have thought I was ashamed.

I look behind me at a little hand-made frame on the bookcase with “You are my sunshine” stitched into it and am brought back to our old street –
a quiet little side street – and our big old house with the radio tower you built. I remember that one day you surprised me with a telescope, and that night we climbed up the tower with it and tried to distinguish one star from another from a planet. It was warm that night. My nightdress was just perfect and the breeze I found refreshing for a time...

A small Flintstones photo album lies on the top shelf too. It is covered in dust and the edges are frayed, but I know it still protects all the pictures I have from the day we went mushroom picking in the park. On the shelf above that sits my own little tree. Though not made of glass, looking at it reminds me of the one she bought in San Francisco despite your protests.

I never realized what a strong woman she was. I let my adoration and love of you cloud my mind and shield it from negative judgements of you. Even now, not enough time has passed and thoughts of you permeate my mind, though only on occasion.

I can feel my eyes becoming heavy and sore, so I look out the window, away from my tree. I try to live and let live, but sometimes, all I want is to think about you and to try to figure out why our relationship failed. I don’t like to think about how you accuse everyone except yourself, or about how condescending you can be, or about how much you love control. I know you are doing what is best for you, in the best way you know how, so I’ll continue to think about kite flying and rock collecting so that, somehow, I can forgive you.
Steve Evans

Kite Surfing--Wales
Marta Croll-Baehre

San Joaquin

I trace green graphics onto your hipbones –
in miniature circles of burnished gold
blue, blue – palms crookedly pinned onto the stiff, shanty carpet-
ing
skeleton teeth streaked with small magnets, waterless seeds

pinned on my chest like blue devil’s weeds –
not laid aside in the melting braes – you pinch
their roots with grass stained fingertips –
your nails embedded in my porous framework

I was sick when you stood away – bedding fiddleheads
in Panama, ground sunk back into the black Fresco soil
where you left my body to atrophy
in Panama, que está poco a poco me mata

where your red fingers had pushed up inside my ribs –
 molested my brawny rabbit lungs – i quería morir
now they skulk with centipede tongues and sere moths
chewing through the fortress of Fresno

pray, pray – that you pierce my skeletal remnants
of insignificance entombed below the red poppy beds
that I will not have to wear away
in the blaring sun of San Joaquin Valley –

sea leaves

I see you—haggard woman, rugged sea–
eyes—your pink sorbet lips peeled Catholic
like fallow inlets that raze the bisque leaves
exposing Bengal milk tooth slouched against
my herringbone armchair, flushed jawbone squared
gently against its depressed, porous frame
ode to a bottle green heroine, harrowing
ravines trigger memories you stalk the knotted
gulfs—belicoso y ingenuo
past the brecciaed Chávez whetted sterling
fish hooks from seven years ago, rabbit
snares smearing dry hares’ blood like winterberries
dogberries up the reverent, clapboard
walls—embedded in puttied carpeting—
above caddice cements Herod’s chapel was
built here long before its boreal tenants
Marta Croll-Baehre

Cigar Box

above the flaked wallpaper—streaked strawberry
Bravais lattice tiny elephant trunk
hooks hold decade-old West African violet
striped white—purple—fuchsia marbled gumballs

moth balls lie frigid Prattling in the stern
of the upstairs guest room parched memories
sticky in small dried up cigar boxes
la douleur exquise—great Elephant tusks

from Namibia in your brown canvas
coveralls you dry up, cover up in
their chock-full asparagus gardens—
dormiveglic at the round red kitchen

tables plucking chartreuse ceramics from
the chalky, dusted windowsill—daylight
seeps in oblong shadow into the carved
skeletons of waterless bonsai leaves

withering in Onitsha’s thirsty grounds
windmills matted in the prickled gray grasses
you kneel in silence—palms bleeding into
the parched splinters of hundreds of amber

elephant tusks, curling upwards—white-knuckled
endangered—to a stiff and bloodless sky.
Steve Evans

Seefalke
Shaylyn King

Crop it Out
Danika Bath

Lights
dappled lights shine bright
at midnight on the distilled ocean waters
paper lanterns lift higher,
higher,
into the promising night of no stars
a new beginning here:
life breathed into tiny sparks
fanning into flame, like incandescent fireflies
humming in the dark, not searching for light
there is no fear of this looming knight
no weapons hidden by its armor
light is found within, beating brighter,
brighter,
like an amorphous heart
a rising life, a rising light
seeking and finding and plunging
into the beautiful unknown

Sleeplessness

It’s tiring to spend so much
time searching for sleep,
staring two am in the eye;
better to let sleep come quietly
to take you captive
quiet footsteps down the hall
a glass of water
sitting in darkness by the window
watching
tiny raindrops trickle down the glass

streetlights flicker, casting eerie
light across gasoline painted pavement
I watch the ripples of the wind on water
watch the tsunami from tires
of someone’s designated driver

a house down the street, a
single illuminated window;
It’s nice to know that
I don’t carry this sleeplessness
alone

Fire Eater

the shadow of your breath
in the cool crisp air of autumn
rises to become a cloud in
this pale sky

gray it turns and gray it is
all the whispering things unsaid
that once rose up, once scorched tongue
then were swallowed by the fire eater
I take my tea with milk

i take my tea with milk
and three sugar (sometimes more)
blossoms of cream, i
relate to this explosion of beauty
perhaps my own dreams collide
vermillion, charcoal
plumage folding and unfolding and,
with a stir,
spilling over every moment
Ian Ryland

Mr. Whiskers
Ryan Taylor

Furniture

As the days become night and dusk becomes dawn
As boys grow into men
I will become one with the furniture

Reupholster my bones and skin
Rearrange me to fit with the room that I’m in

and when I no longer match with the colors and patterns
When my worn out frame just doesn’t do it anymore

Sell my body but leave the rest
Do whatever you think best

Whatever makes you comfortable
Steve Evans

The Gravels--Port au Port
Chris Dunnett

Respond

By day, I roam the streets, the sidewalks, the alleys. I've always walked, sometimes for days, searching ‘us.’ I hear some low frequency response from the pedestrian. It's hard to get up in the morning, if only to make rent.

At night, I plant crops of antennae and search the spectrum. The poetry is precise but the math vague; its relentless, cryptographic. I'm still searching the transmissions for you, '6EQUJ5'. Please respond.
Chris Dunnet

Untitled