2024 | DESIGN AND DEVOTION

# THE VASSAR REVIEW

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2024 • Issue 9 • *Design and Devotion*





Printed in the United States of America
First Printing, 2024
ISBN 979-8-218-39644-2

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*Vassar Review* is a literary arts journal published annually in the spring at Vassar College.

*Vassar Review* is a not-for-profit enterprise.

## About

The *Vassar Review* is an international, multidisciplinary literary arts journal that fosters working relationships between faculty, students, and artists in order to engage its annual theme with care and reflective insight. The journal is a revival of the former literary arts magazine published by the faculty and students of Vassar College. VR entered the literary scene in 1927 shaped by a small circle of students, including Elizabeth Bishop and Muriel Rukeyser. Today, the journal is international in scope and multidisciplinary in nature, across both a print and digital interface. Each academic year culminates with a printed publication and a digital supplement.

## Mission

The *Vassar Review* aims to reconsider the traditions that have defined many publications and structures, those that are not open to all, open to interpretation, or open to change, and unfold them into a collaborative journal that believes the artist's voice and methods of expression are essential to our daily lives. Artistically & intimately, we aim to cultivate an international community that holds at its core purposeful expression, visions of things to come, and a revision of what has already been experienced.

## Submissions

Submissions are accepted each fall. Simultaneous submissions are accepted. We consider all artistic and literary forms, including painting, photography, poetry, fiction, nonfiction, scripts, and screenplays, but also forms that often prove difficult to present, such as new media art, spoken-word poetry and performances, hypertext fiction, and others. Please visit vassar-review.vassarspaces.net for full submission guidelines.

## Acknowledgments

We extend our warmest thanks to our contributors and to the following individuals and bodies for their support and advice in shaping this issue: Tobias Armborst, Elizabeth Bradley, Francine Brown, Lisa Collins, Angela DiPaolo, Sophia Harvey, Molly McGlennen, Tracy O'Neill, Amanda Potter, Erica Stein, and Tracey Sciortino;
The Vassar College American Studies Program, Vassar College Archives, Vassar Art Department, Vassar College Archives & Special Collections, Vassar English Department, Vassar College Film, the Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center, Vassar Media Studies Program, and the Office of the President.

# DESIGN *and* DEVOTION

*2024*

# TABLE OF CONTENTS



*"I have never distinguished readily between thinking and dreaming. I know my life would be much different if I could ever say, This I have learned from my senses, while that I have merely imagined."*

— Marilynne Robinson, *Housekeeping*

*"In many cases structures have the ability to move us and attract us because they are mysteriously expressive. Our excitement is primarily due to the fact that we perceive these structures not only with our eyes but with our spirit, and they display a more exact adaptation to the laws that control matter in equilibrium."*

— Eladio Dieste, "Architecture and Construction"

Dear Reader,

As we conceived the ninth edition of the *Vassar Review*, we were preoccupied by a search for order(s). Increasingly, to recover this order, we defer to the apparent objectivity of data and the 'truth' it reveals by pattern, trend, and program. At the same time, faith and devotion offer means of approaching the world that account for intangibles that evade quantification. We were left wondering: Which forms structure our actions and interactions? How do we assign value in the world? In what practices does this value find expression?

Design and devotion are, at once, prescribed and self-produced. We use each to react to the incoherence of our circumstances, but both can delude and constrict us. The following works grapple with the way we implement these knowledge systems, negotiate their contradictions, and receive them in everyday contexts. Since we began this issue, we have observed an unfathomable scale of violence in Gaza as well as ongoing global crises—the grief, brutality, and alienation of these circumstances stifle attempts to impose meaning. This frustration with the limits of both design and devotion reverberates through the work of our contributors. They challenge us to question the sources of our faith. They demand we examine the shape of our hours.

However, in exploring these limitations, the works here also map the places we find value in our lives. They deal with the relationships, rituals, and routines that continuously bind us to the world. Not only do they address man-made designs, but harken to organically occurring forms.

As you read, we hope you experience the pleasure of quiet attention and allow the gravity of these works to illuminate the mysteries of your everyday.


We would like to thank our staff, contributors, advisory board, and especially our readers for their continued support of the journal.


Appreciatively,

Colin and Bryn
Editors-in-Chief

# FACING DEATH

*Robert McMichael*

Like a lot of ranch kids, I grew up shooting things. Varmints. Little birds. My grandpa gave me my first gun, a Daisy pellet rifle, and I got pretty good at killing. Then one day I shot my mom's cat, a feral tortoise-shell who'd adopted her. It was an accident; I'd thought it was a packrat. For some reason my mom had named that cat "Punch." I felt terrible, and my mom didn't try to stop me feeling that way.

The aftermath of Punch quieted my killing around the ranch for a while. Maybe that incident helped me grow up, I don't know. But it just didn't feel necessary to shoot magpies or squirrels anymore. Instead, my interest in hunting for food gathered strength. So the next fall, when I turned ten years old, I was finally eligible to take my hunter's safety class down at the Grange Hall. The instructor, the head of the local Fish and Game office, was a fat, kind of smelly old guy with bushy gray eyebrows and stained yellow teeth named Mr. Henshaw, who ran cows on an allotment in the National Forest next to one of the areas we leased. He was a good teacher in the sense that he told lots of hard-to-believe stories about hunting accidents, like the father who—stuck with his two-year-old daughter on opening day of deer season because his wife worked the graveyard shift at the hospital—brought her along in the pickup with him as he road-hunted for a buck. Spotting horns up the slope from the road, he stopped, rolled down the passenger window, put the crosshairs on the buck, and just as he was about to squeeze the trigger his little girl, who'd been asleep, leaned forward in front of the barrel and got shot in the head. I didn't believe this could be true, or didn't want to believe it, so when we returned home from that class I got out my dad's rifle, sat in the driver's seat of our pickup and tried to reenact the scene. Sure enough, even though I was only a kid, the barrel of the rifle extended almost to the passenger window, which would have left no room for the little girl to lean in front of it. I wanted to tell Mr. Henshaw that his story was bogus, but thought better of it.

After I passed the hunter's safety test, my dad took me on my first rifle hunt, and we left before light on opening day of deer season. We'd sighted-in his .30-06 the previous day across the creek, where the ridge comes down to a flat spot. We marked off targets at 100 and 200 yards, and got the scope dialed in at 200, which meant I had to figure out where to put the crosshairs on the 100-yard target. I guessed about two inches low, and my first shot hit the bull's eye. I was ready. My shoulder hurt a little because of the kick from my dad's rifle, and he said that if I got a deer this year, and wanted to go again the following season, he'd round up another gun so I could have my own rifle. I couldn't understand how my dad could think I wouldn't want to hunt again next year, but I just went along with him on this.

We parked the pickup in a wide spot on the dirt road near the creek we planned to hunt, got our gear together, then stepped into the cold dark. A slight breeze added measurable discomfort to my anticipation. We'd scouted this area a few times in the past couple of weeks, and had only a short hike to where we'd hang out until light. Stars and a half moon made the creek's watery folds jump and dart like ghosts. Following my dad along a game trail, I matched the rhythm of his steps and tried to walk so quietly that he might think I'd disappeared into the forest. He stopped suddenly and I bumped into him as he slowly turned his face to me and held his finger to his lips. We listened. Hollow pounding of hooves percussed the ground above us and faded. We resumed walking, each of us trying for silence. I wondered about the deer we hoped to find and whether they sensed our presence somehow. I knew their sense of smell far exceeded ours, and that— even in still mornings like this one—they could probably smell something wrong.

After a short rise, we reached a spot with a view, and my dad stopped. He motioned me to sit next to him. Below us a small meadow with a game trail just inside the treeline waited for the layer of light. It seemed to get colder. Like an actor sneaking a peek at the audience through the stage curtain, a small three-point buck emerged from the trees. I did what my dad did: stayed frozen. The deer hadn't spotted us, and I knew he was upwind. My dad waited several minutes until the buck appeared more comfortable, grazing more steadily with each lowering of his head to the cured grass. Very slowly my dad raised his rifle, ready to freeze his motion if the deer looked up. It did. My dad froze. Back to feeding. Continued slow motion getting the gun up. No interruption. Resting his left elbow on his thigh, my dad put the spot just behind the feeding buck's elbow in the crosshairs, inhaled softly, and at the transition from inhale to exhale gently contracted his right index finger. The buck fell sideways and then I heard what sounded like the thwack of a broomstick on a blanket hanging to dry, the echo of the bullet's impact on the side of the deer. My dad lowered his gun. The deer didn't move. Sunlight slowly unveiled detail below. I looked at my dad, wondering what was next. He didn't look at me. I wanted him to. But I just waited. Finally, several minutes later, he said, "Let's see if he's really dead."

He was.

The next year my dad got me my own rifle, an older Winchester .270 that another rancher traded him for a couple of rusty old cattle bunks. It shot straight, and I used some of my work money to buy a couple boxes of Federal 130-grain cartridges. School had started, and I fought against the impulse to ignore it, but usually lost to a haze of dreams of big death and freezer meat. I wanted to try hunting deer by myself, but the deal was that I had to keep a B average if that was to happen. I learned how to manage mediocre. And on opening day, my dad let me go. I wasn't really ready, but I was thrilled. And I went.

October, despite its gathering greediness with daylight, always feels satisfying in a way other months don't. Some of it has to do with hunting, but most of it is just how things look. They change, and the light changes on them, making old things look new but in a familiar, kind of sad but pretty way.

But it's not that that makes this sad. That's the good part. I guess I'm the kind of person who doesn't mind knowing about sadness, or at least isn't afraid of it. What's sad is more about what happened, and it wasn't even sad, really, when it happened, which makes me think that sadness isn't something immediate to an event but instead takes some time to sink in.

With my pack and rifle I headed toward the river, first across a plowed field soon to become winter wheat, then through a thick stand of cottonwoods growing in dark loamy soil, smelling not too unlike maple syrup, and finally into a wall of willows. When I could see patches of water through the willow leaves and branches I slowed down and paused for a long time between steps to listen for something other than the usual water sounds, something out of place. But I didn't hear anything strange. I looked on the ground for small, fresh triangular deer prints that might help my hopes get up. But I didn't see any. Then I remembered to check the wind. But there wasn't any breeze.

I moved out along the bank deliberately in the moist soil for a few minutes before spotting fresh prints. They could be hours old or minutes. I went slowly still, scanning the scenery with as much care as I could muster. Beyond a stand of willows on the opposite bank, a fawn's face watched me. I crouched in slow motion, hoping to escape serious notice, and then, just beyond the fawn, I saw the small forked antlers I'd been hoping for. Three deer in all, one a legal buck, moved leisurely through the willows, a young family grazing an early dinner together.

I'd have a shot at the buck in a few seconds once it cleared the stand of brush. I waited with the scope to my eye, and the young buck crossed perfectly broadside and stopped. I centered the crosshairs on his vitals and squeezed the trigger. He reared and I saw a plume of bright pink as he and the other two deer crashed into the woods. The pink told me it was a lung shot, which pleased me because it's less painful than a heart shot, or at least that's what a biologist friend of my dad's told me once, as if there really were a way to know.

Sitting there waiting for things to calm down, I felt he'd die quickly and not too far from where I hit him. My adrenaline slowed, and I replayed the shot and response: boom, hoofbeats pounding in the woods like a Doppler Effect, crescendoing and then fading away. Was that the buck? The others? All of them? Stillness. A breeze stuttered the yellowing cottonwood leaves. The sun closed in on the ridge that would put it to bed in a few minutes. The promise of dusk and what lay ahead made me a little sad, so I thought about the meat I'd get from him.

It was time to start looking. Frothy pink blood stained the sand where I had hit him and pointed into the woods. After a dozen yards the blood's hue changed from pink to crimson, and the drops got smaller and sparser. I kept looking ahead, hoping, expecting to see him on the ground, expired. I glanced to my right and saw the doe and her small yearling thirty yards away, standing still, watching me. I crouched and put the binoculars on them. A wide ribbon of pink froth stained the left side of the doe's face and neck. She wasn't injured, but marked by the buck's blood and lung tissue.

After a while, they meandered away. The blood trail was labyrinthine, folding back on itself, over deadfall, disappearing, cultivating worry. He couldn't have gone far. Why couldn't I find him? A few minutes later, to my left, I saw the doe and yearling watching me again, the frothy pink stain on the doe's face nearly fluorescent. They'd been circling me. Five minutes later, deeper into the woods, they turned up once more, the yearling flanked slightly behind its mother. I kept thinking the doe wanted my attention, but after trying and failing to read her eyes I tried ignoring her.

Pressing on, I found him on his right side at the opening of a small meadow, his dun flanks barely distinguishable from the dried grasses, his left eye vacantly reflecting the darkening cloudless sky, his soul dispatched. I apologized, as much to the doe and yearling as to the buck, and petted him, his young fur surprising me by its softness. He was still warm, which also surprised me. I got my knife. The sun had dropped below the ridge and I could feel everything cooling. Fifty yards away, my peripheral vision caught movement. The doe and yearling had circled back into the meadow and watched. I gazed at them, sighed, and tried to remember what to do first with my knife. After a minute or two, I looked up and saw them walking slowly back toward the river, the fawn's little hooves hastening to keep up with its mother.

What had I done? I hadn't anticipated this. I'd watched my dad field dress the deer last year, but I hadn't made notes. I'd brought a knife, but didn't know how to start. All I remembered was how shiny and wet everything was inside the deer after my dad made the first big cut, and how the peculiar smell intensified with his knife's deft cutting of the skin and muscle. A pang of shame overcame me for not knowing, for not being prepared to do this all on my own, to treat the buck with the respect he deserved. I was about a mile-and-a-half from the house, so I decided the best thing for me to do was to hoof it back home and ask my dad to come help. We could come back with the 4-wheeler and have it dressed and hanging at home within an hour.

A couple hundred yards from the house, I saw weird pulsing blue and red lights strobing the dusk enveloping the house, spraying the half dead maple leaves with a dance of purple. When I got there, an ambulance and the sheriff's car with their doors open. Strange silence. Then starlings in the nearly naked maple. As I came to the front door a gurney met me, my dad on it. Blood soaked through his denim shirt above his navel. His eyes were closed and his nose and mouth covered by an oxygen mask. Sobbing. My little brother Barnard at the kitchen table, head in hands. Mom on the sofa in the living room, staring at the floor while the sheriff talked to her. I couldn't make it out. "Mom!" Either she didn't hear me or she couldn't look. On the coffee table, a revolver.

The rest is murky. I can't remember how I ended up at the hospital, or back at the deer with our Cree ranch hand, Jim, the next morning. Crows and magpies had started on its eyes, but Jim got it gutted and skinned and just carried the whole thing on his shoulder a few hundred yards back to his 4-wheeler. Following him from behind, it looked like he was carrying a wounded soldier from the front lines. In my peripheral vision, the doe and fawn watched. She'd have to wait for rain to remove the still-pink stain.

Two days later, my dad died in the hospital. Three days later my eight-year-old brother hanged himself, overcome with guilt for (he thought) causing all this by telling my dad he'd seen my mom with Jim. Two weeks after that, my mom died in county jail. They said it was an aneurysm, but I think it was a broken heart. Jim became my guardian. It took him more than a year to tell me he and my mom had been lovers and that my dad had regularly beat my mom.

"That's a face," Jim said.

He saw me bending down to pick up the antler. It was another world. Hard and smooth. Of course I'd seen them before, held them, ignored them. I saw this one differently. It had been dropped this year, sometime in January, when the snow was deciding if it would stay awhile longer. A brown. Big. Five points. Mule deer, a bigger version of the one I had shot the night my mom shot my dad two years earlier. Its furrows were filled with what looked like pine tar on a baseball bat. A combination of pitch from immature firs, pines, aspens, and dirt. Other antlers, maybe in battle. Its shelter had been the intersection of lichen-clad basalt and iron-rich, reddish dirt tufted with bunchgrass and buckwheat. It'd been in the shade, but had suffered enough straight sun starting the bleaching that would, over time and under rodents' teeth, reduce it to more earth. Mere earth.

I fondled the pedicle and its porous bulb, noticing its slight angle as I rotated it, wondering if I should keep it. What would I do with it? I liked how the furrows felt as I ran my fingers over them and thought about what Jim said. Face. I stuffed it in my bird pouch, but the points stuck out on one side; my right elbow touched them with every step. I liked the contact. Jim had sat down on a stone shelf near the edge of the rimrock and was looking over it. I wasn't sure where Fergus was; maybe Jim was watching him hunt below.

Face. The doe's face spattered with the buck's lungblood hovered in my head. Does don't get these horns, but she got more than she bargained for that day. Her excess calcium went into her spawn, his into his antlers. I wondered if she'd looked at his face after I shot him. What did she see? What did she feel? What must her baby have been thinking while she towed him through the forest circling me as I looked for its dying father? I didn't want to think about what the buck felt. What I'd caused. I couldn't even imagine, really, or maybe I could but I just didn't want to. Especially now. But I did wonder if he saw her face after I shot him, if he saw himself on her, part of himself that was now gone, could not be put back, made right.

But the antlers must be faces, too, because -- of all the people I've known who are liars, which includes almost everyone — Jim stands out as the one person who was incapable of telling a lie. He never said enough about *important* things, so why would he waste a word on something that wasn't true? I like thinking of faces, some of them. I like thinking the antlers I've seen and have yet to see might be faces I knew once and liked. Maybe Barnard's is one of them.

Barnard's face comes to me a lot, still. Back then it was more regular and more frequent. It would come on TV. If it came on a particular show it would always be on the same character's face, but it never made sense why, and sometimes it didn't show up at all, which vaguely disappointed me. It might have been me, my fault. Sometimes it was on a person when I didn't want to listen to them. When I'd look back, Barnard would be staring back at me, blank, almost like he knew he wasn't really there. Later, it was more angular, irregular.

One night in my apartment, I realized I hadn't looked in the mirror for a long time. I'd avoided it because I was afraid his face might show up; I'd hoped I might be able to control where his face would appear. But that night, I stood there, tempting myself to look at the mirror, trying to make my grief and the guilt of our exposed family fuck-up meet. I raised my eyes from the sink slowly up to the bottom of the mirror. I looked at my white t-shirt, past the ribbed collar to the chin, lower lip, teeth, upper lip, Cupid's Bow, philtrum... When I got to the nostrils I recognized myself. But with recognition came understanding, like a shadow clouding the sun: I wanted it to be Barnard there.

The day Jim told me that antlers were faces we'd hunted for partridges in different draws and then would meet back up. I always knew where he was but couldn't see him; I'd hear a shot once in a while and I assumed he heard some of mine. Conversation.

When we met up again, Jim said, "There's a word for the sound these birds make when they bust." That was it. I should have asked him what it was. But I did ask him how he learned to hunt, and how all his birds seemed to be dead when Fergus retrieved them, unlike mine, which

I often had to kill. As usual, he didn't answer. Then, as we continued along a ridge a while later, he started talking. "I remember checking traps with my grandma up in the bush. Lots of times there would be a grouse or ptarmigan caught by the leg, and my job was to take its life. At first I didn't know how, but she showed me. She'd grip the bird with one hand over the back, and the other hand she'd put over its eyes. She'd talk to it softly, almost a whisper. I could tell she was waiting for the bird to calm down. Then she'd slowly hold it tighter, almost like she was the bird and was taking her own life away. I could tell she'd got the bird to agree to give up by what she said. But I also watched her listen to the bird. She'd pause between the things she said. And she'd repeat what she heard from the bird. I could catch little bits. 'Eat me well...' 'Remember where I was...' 'I'll be here again.' I haven't thought about it for a long time."

"Did you believe she talked with the birds?"

"Yes. I did, too. I watched her, watched what she did. Otherwise I couldn't have killed them. I needed their permission. Like I said, I haven't thought about this for a long time. I think that's why I didn't hunt for a long time. Because I forgot. Doing this is bringing some of it back."

"Can you teach me to talk to them?"

"I don't know. As I remember, my grandma didn't really teach me. I just watched her, and then did it."

"I want to learn. I hate killing these birds when Fergus brings them back alive. They claw and scrape and struggle. They're doing everything they can to stay alive, and I'm taking their life away, but I don't know what to say to them. Teach me, *please*."

"I think if you want to learn, you can. Just listen. Next time."

Jim headed over the ridge away from me again, and soon I heard a shot. Fergus stayed with me. When we got close to the bottom of the day's last draw where it widens alluvially toward the river, Fergus pointed, locked on a dime, facing the sun, neck supinated, eyes looking into tufts of bunchgrass punctuating basalt scatter. I gingerly descended toward him, watching for rocks and crispy balsamroot that might make the noise to bust the covey. I tried sidehilling to Fergus's left so I wouldn't be looking into the sun when I shot. I took a step, then stopped, putting the weight on my front leg, gun in the ready position. Then another step. One at a time. Another. Wait. Another. Fergus stayed a statue except for his lower jaw, oscillating with breath, gathering scent. Another step in front of him. Just then the birds busted, making that sound of shock and hope and will, fleeing away, ascending gradually towards the light, a covey of maybe a dozen birds, tightly patterned, like a unit, escaping. As I mounted the shotgun I picked one bird to focus on, which happened to be smack dab in the center of the covey. When I got the rib markers lined up on the bird's head I triggered the shot.

What happened next surprised me. Shots like these are probably the hardest. Fast flying partridges fly only as a last resort; they prefer to flee on the ground. So when they do fly, they make you pay. It's as if each one has a specific role, and each role fits subtly into the vengeful intricacy of their defensive strategy, which—you must believe—they had to have discussed carefully in the way only birds can. The only thing predictable about it is its unpredictability. More than a way simply of consoling yourself you repeatedly refer to them to anyone who'll listen as "geniuses." These birds. As Hamlet says, "There's the respect that makes calamity of so long life." When I triggered the shot I expected them to escape *en masse*, as had happened many times that day, and most other days I'd hunted. Three of ten was a good outing, and rare; one or two of ten was more common. Even though I was able to do what I'd repeatedly restated to myself as I edged toward the pointing Fergus — mount the gun properly; feel your anchors: earlobe, cheek, clavicle; slow is smooth, and smooth is fast; mind the wind; pick out a dime-sized spot centered on the beak; keep the barrel moving with the bird even after the shot — I expected to miss, and miss cleanly. Instead, a millisecond after triggering the shot, the bird I'd focused on instantly ceased its rapid wingbeats and began, in slow motion, spiraling counterclockwise, gradually descending in the same direction as the rest of its coveymates. Fixation on a thing sometimes changes time. Hitters talk about this, about seeing the rotation of the ball when it leaves the pitcher's hand and then plotting the parabolic trajectory of the pill to coincide with the meat of the barrel and sending it thusly over the leftfield wall. This bird's spiral was radical in that it was dramatically counterposed to the wingbeats of the undead birds surrounding it. In that through an accident of physics and scatteration and aerodynamics only one wing caught enough air to cause the bird to spiral. In that, through a non-illusory optical *fact* each feather that was raised above the other feathers and thus out of order, which is to be expected among the dead, was backlit by the sun toward which it sailed and made to glow in radical, kaleidoscopic fashion. The whole of which made the sight so beautiful and spectacular and very, very slow. It was a *calling*. And in all of this I recognized *myself* purely. Mom, Dad, Barnard—even Fergus and Jim—they weren't recognizable, weren't there.

Fergus carried the bird back to me without my saying anything, which might have confused him: usually I praised him profusely. But I was stunned, and stood there regarding the lifeless bird in my hand, imagining what had happened to it in the time leading up to the shot. Prey. Predator. Intermediary. Coincidence. Remorse. "I will eat you well," I told it. "Thanks for your life." I put it in my bag with the antler. Afterward, I didn't mention it to Jim, aside from telling him that Fergus had retrieved a chukar I'd shot and that it was dead when he brought it to my hand.

The face in the mirror that was mine, and then wasn't, and wasn't—as I'd expected—Barnard's, was Jim's.

## MARTIN KEAVENEY

Martin Keaveney has written five books of fiction, all published by boutique publisher Penniless Press. His short fiction, flash pieces and poems have been published in many different literary magazines. His play, *Coathanger*, was staged in NUIG in 2015 and later performed at the Scripts Ireland playwriting festival where it was selected from a national competition. His screenwriting has been produced and broadcast on national television and his films exhibited throughout the world. His academic qualifications include a PhD in Irish Literature, Narratology and Creative Writing. He is a contributor to global discussions on the narratology of Irish literature and his research has been published in several leading journals. He operates MKCW, a provider of creative writing and literature courses working with hundreds of students annually from all over the world.

## Y.K. KIM

YK Kim is a writer from Pennsylvania. She is currently studying film and religion at Harvard.

## LAYLA KLINGER

Layla Klinger (b. Tel Aviv) is a Brooklyn-based multidisciplinary artist, textile educator, and hole maker. In their work, they investigate sexual desire and violence through lacemaking, light, and robotics. They recently presented a solo show at The Houston Center for Contemporary Craft, and debuted a new performance work developed during and the artist fellowship program LABA: Laboratory for Jewish Culture.

## BARBARA KRASNER

Barbara Krasner, MFA, PhD, credits her junior year abroad in West Germany as a life-changing experience. Her creative nonfiction has appeared or is forthcoming in bioStories, The Smart Set, South 85, Gravel, Collateral, and elsewhere. She lives and teaches in New Jersey.

## JAMES LIPSIUS

James Lipsius is a British American painter based in New York. His work speaks of a reverence to contemporary intimacy.

## TIMOTHY LIU

Timothy Liu's latest book of poems is *Down Low and Lowdown: Bedside Bottom-Feeder Blues*. A reader of occult esoterica, he lives in the Hudson Valley and teaches at SUNY New Paltz and Vassar College.

## SPANDITA MALIK

Spandita Malik is a New York based visual artist from India. Her work is concerned with the current global socio-political state of affairs with an emphasis on women's rights and gendered violence. Malik's work in expanded documentary and social-practice consciously emanates from the idea of decolonising the eye and aesthetic surrounding documentary photography of India.

## AMANDA MARTINEZ

Amanda Martinez (b. 1988, Greenville, SC / Miccosukee & Cherokee land) is an artist working primarily in sculpture based in Brooklyn, NY / Canarsee land. She received her BFA in 2010 from Kansas City Art Institute and is represented by Hesse Flatow, New York.

## ROBERT MCMICHAEL

Robert McMichael is a former humanities academic and high school English teacher, and was actively involved with the Boise State Writing Project. He's published essays in *American Music*, *National Geographic Traveler*, *Gray's Sporting Journal*, and *Boise Journal*. He lives in rural western Idaho.

## SHOJIRO NAKAOKA

Shojiro Nakaoka is a Tokyo based sound artist, composer, audiovisualist, who is interested in the transformation and expansion of sonic vibration in other phenomena. He creates and expands existing video-synthesis techniques using self-developed software.

## JONATHAN SÁNCHEZ NOA

Jonathan Sánchez Noa is a multidisciplinary artist born in Havana, Cuba. He creates artworks that examine how histories of colonial extractivism have impacted notions of race, identity, and climate. Jonathan earned his BFA from The Cooper Union in 2020, and attended Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in 2023. Recent exhibitions of his work include *Pathways* at Rollings Museum of Art, Orlando, FL (2024); *Once* at Cleve Carney Museum of Art, Chicago, IL (2023); *Rastros en el tiempo* at The Clemente Soto Vélez Cultural & Educational Center, New York, NY (2022); and *Kunstnernes Efterårsudstilling* at Den Frie Centre of Contemporary Art, Copenhagen, Denmark (2021).

## AELITA PARKER

Aelita Parker is a Japanese and Irish American writer based in Brooklyn. She received her MFA in fiction from Brooklyn College and her BA from the University of Pennsylvania, where she studied psychology, Japanese, and Religious Studies. Aelita is currently editing her novel, *Offering Child*: a multiperspectival narrative exploring the price of one family's devotion to a self-proclaimed Korean messiah, and the cult he helms.

## ALEXANDER PHAM

Born in Minneapolis and raised in Baltimore, Alexander Pham studied English Literature and Art History at Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, New York, where he won the Ann E. Imbrie Prize for Fiction Writing. He is currently pursuing an MFA in Fiction at Johns Hopkins University, where he also teaches creative writing and poetry.

## CÉCILE SAVELLI

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2024 • ISSUE 9 • USD $18.00
ISBN 979-8-218-39644-2
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9 798218 396442