

# COUNTERFLOW

SPRING 2022



BEGINNINGS



# COUNTERFLOW

## ISSUE 1: BEGINNINGS

PUBLISHED BY WORDSTORM SOCIETY OF THE ARTS



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ISSN 2816-5276

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#### On the Front Cover

Aviva Stein-Wotten, Underdog, Photograph (2021)  
and Dreamscape, Photograph (2021).

#### On the Back Cover

Aviva Stein-Wotten, Protest, Photograph (2021)  
and Dreamscape, Photograph (2021).



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# Introduction

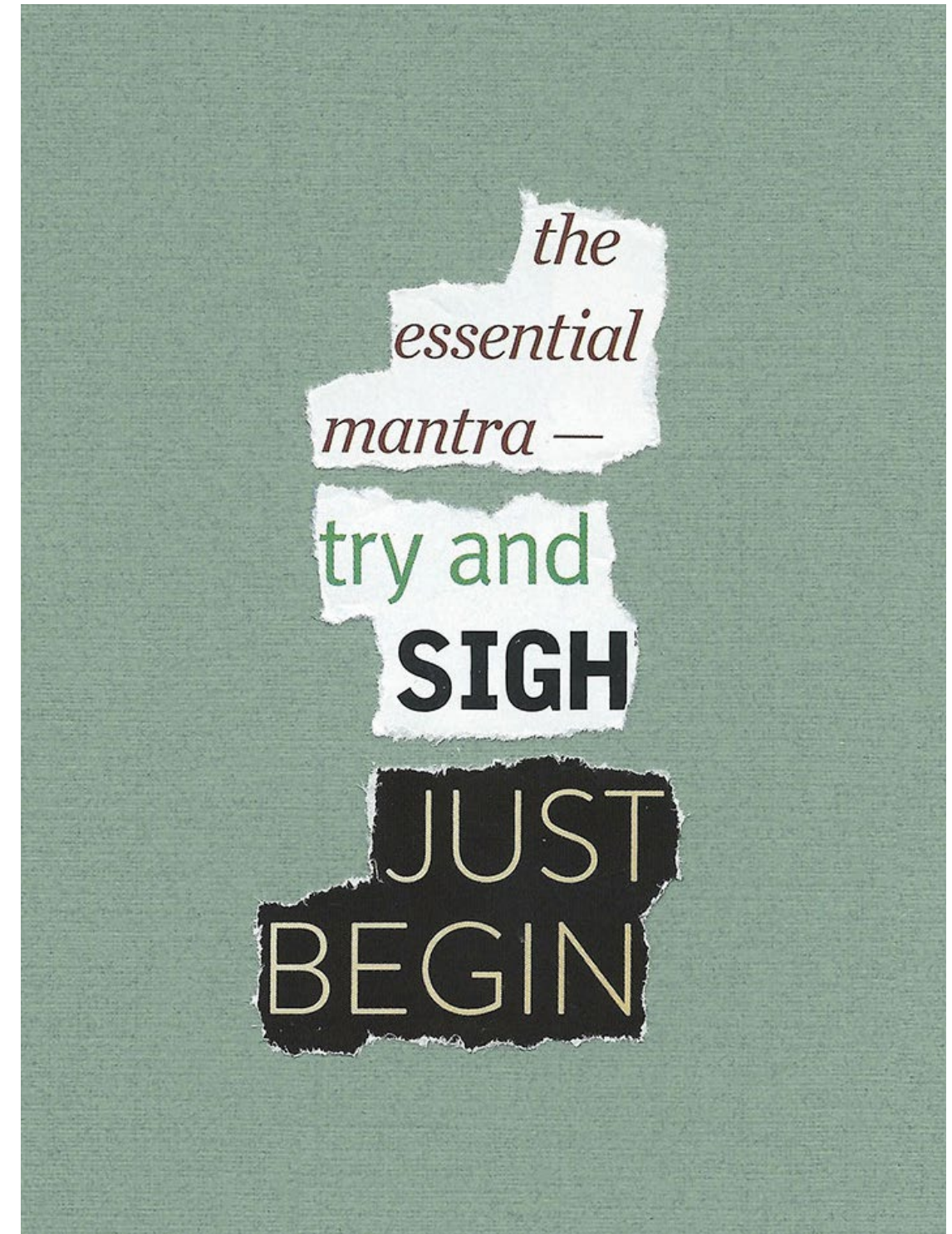
Motion. Even in what appears to be stillness, there is a balance of energies entangled in imperceptible movement. From the flow of electrons in atoms, the dance of mitochondria in cells, to the twitch of a bee's antennae inside a crocus blossom, motion surrounds us. Movement often marks a beginning.

We think you'll find that this inaugural issue of *Counterflow* speaks to the many ways in which words can create a sense of that ever-present movement spreading into experience, emotion, and thought. Whether through stories that evoke nostalgia, hope, and sometimes, regret, or poems that offer glimpses into everyday life as well as the darker cervices the mind is wont to flirt with, this issue of *Counterflow* begins with words that cancel inertia and swirl into a language of what-could-be.

*Counterflow* was conceived by Wordstorm Society of the Arts as an annual publication to highlight the energies of poets, writers, and visual artists who spin their vocabularies on Vancouver Island and around the Salish Sea Basin. These communities of creatives are boiling over with innovative dynamism and are not simply the rural or semi-rural retreats for the more urbane as often thought. We think you will agree!

We want to thank **Susan Alexander**, our guest editor and adjudicator, for her selection of both the poetry and fiction contributions published in this issue. And, of course, we are grateful to all our contributors for sharing the waves and currents of their unique perceptions.

Carla and Amber  
Counterflow Editorial Team



**J.I. Kleinberg, *the essential mantra*, visual poem.**

**BARRY HUNT**

*The Tango of Beginning*

Let us begin  
as if  
for the first time,  
eye to eye,  
estilo milonguero,  
as we stride  
across the floor  
and with a flourish  
stride once more.

Let us begin  
as if  
there is always a beginning,  
heart to heart,  
estilo milonguero,  
even though  
it has always been  
the figure *la ocho*  
we leave in the dirt floor  
of the tango bar.

**“ LET US BEGIN AS IF  
THERE IS ALWAYS  
A BEGINNING ... ”**

## PAMELA MEDLAND

### *Frankie Bell, Mosquito Creek and the Atmospheric River*

I've missed but never forgotten the rain,  
all those years on the dry prairie  
where lightning smashed out of the foothills,  
rolled east smelling of dust.

In the rain, the air thins between the living and the dead.

I follow pied leaves down a narrowing berm  
bordering the wet spine of Mosquito Creek.  
Find myself slick to the thighs in mud and  
cedar slough, purblind on the ravine's dark trails.

Once, as a child, I scratched a cave in the clay of a channel wall,  
hid trembling from backhand and slur.

Today flash floods churn the forest floor.  
I search for but can't find that lost cave mouth  
hidden in the underbrush. Deaf with the roar  
of earthly and atmospheric rivers,

I backtrack, call for the ones I've lost, but their voices fade—  
have their spirits taken shelter in the storm?

---

Frankie Bell's cheeks are rose peach,  
she smells of new infant and old milk.  
Bundled in a green Baby Yoda sleeper,  
my new niece looks like a forest sprite, a changeling  
wise beyond her years.

Travelling snug in her parent's SUV  
with its five-speed wiper blades  
and heated seats, Frankie Bell  
sleeps through the cloudburst,  
travels peacefully over the gash  
transecting forest and slope.

I hope one day she will discover this path,  
enter the woods as Mosquito Creek rises,  
rages white   drowns salal and fern.

My gift to her is a cave clawed from clay,  
dank in a firestorm,  
dry when the sky breaks open and the mountain  
slides to the sea.

## KAIDEN COUGHLAN

### *consequence*

my biggest regret by far  
is seeing you,  
asleep on my bed,  
and assuming it would be this way forever.



## CORNELIA HOOGLAND

### *The Understory Distorting The Syntax*

In a fiction class at the University of Calgary, my professor encouraged me to write about my parents' immigration to Canada. How could she tell? "I'm born here," I said, tugging my sleeves over my hands.

She made immigration sound — valuable. "The past is understory." *Understory* excited her. She explained it as leaf-matter decomposing beneath the forest canopy, "A new language, a new land. The cold. How did they manage? It's rich material. You can work with it."

It was autumn, poplars clapping their hard yellow hands to the sky. In Fish Creek Park the children tossed up armfuls of leaves for the fun of gold raining over their bare heads. Seeing their pleasure made me realize the difficulty of moving to Calgary was not theirs; it was mine. Maybe all moves, whether from country to country, or, like mine, to a neighbouring province, were difficult. Calgary was a flat prairie town under a wide, indigo-blue sky. Did the city's great expanse expose desires I hadn't felt before? I longed for the broody Douglas-firs, the framing ridge of the coastal mountains I thought had invented me. I didn't understand then, how my mother had shaped me; how her voice shaped me still. I'd never really left home.

I told my professor that ethnicity — immigration — seemed the least of it.

She smiled at me patiently, said. "I'm hearing something else in your writing. An earlier tongue beneath the English sentences. A resistance, an expectation averted."

When she bought a new Macintosh computer, she gave me her electric Remington typewriter, designed to be portable. I adored releasing the roller pressure, whipping out the sheet of paper, starting *anew*. The typewriter's correction feature — a ribbon of white-out — was everything I wanted or thought I did. With a simple tap of the white-out key, the ribbon lifted and a letter, an entire word — disappeared! If only I could white-out my past.

I worked at night with everybody else asleep. The fluorescents cast a cold light over the kitchen table piled with books and notes. I stared at my hands poised above the keyboard, watched them type black letters on the white page. Under my fingers, each key with its character. Did I romanticize the west coast because I couldn't do the harder work of locating where my mother's voice ended and mine began? Separation is painful. Outside my mother's patrol, who was I? I wanted to know.

I listened. I wanted to hear it, too, that earlier language — faint, the understory, slightly distorting the syntax.



**Aviva Stein-Wotten, *peace*, photograph (2021).**

**“ BUY LOCAL.  
LOOK AT THE ADDRESS ON THE LABEL:  
THE CLOSER, THE LESS AIR AND WATER YOU STEAL.  
ALSO, NEVER SHOP WHEN YOU’RE HUNGRY.”**

**C.W. BUCKLEY**  
*Safe Way*  
*A haibun*

Somewhere between the dispenser and the sanitized handbaskets, I lose the list I memorized. Searching reveals only questions, at once both existential and pragmatic: Why am I here? What have I come for? What do I want when I leave? From this cloud of unknowing comes only the Sesame Street mantra: “A loaf of bread. A container of milk. A stick of butter.”

Contemporary foraging means comparing unit cost, not sticker price. I show my son the difference: 18 cents per ounce beats 23, even if you get “more” of the latter. Buy local. Look at the address on the label: the closer, the less air and water you steal. Also, never shop when you’re hungry.

Leaving the store, I turn an immediate left. No need to ford parking lot to sidewalk. There’s a safer way to walk: a hidden neighborhood behind the bank, peeling postwar bungalows all in pastel set back from the street. The first is shingled, a misplaced chalet, mountain bike atop the stairs a sign of youth and life. Then, past the dumpsters, an explosion of colors: sky blue, pale lavender, ice cream pink, chiffon yellow.

Each obvious unit wears its age, its white privacy fence affording what shelter it can to occupants behind screen doors from a parking strip too full of cars. I hope they are working. I hope they are well. I hope, here, someone knows home, despite the landlord’s apology in beach colors.

“OK,” the boy proclaims. “This is the greatest place to live. I’m just saying.”

Russet, ochre, grey  
Autumn rainbows in earth tones  
Just one acorn more



## C.W. BUCKLEY

### *Blood Rite*

When I first put on an animal's skin  
Bloody and scraped near the fire  
It wasn't for warmth  
But to hide in the beast

Even unto this day  
My glorified face is born to heaven  
Wearing the head of a dog  
Haloed in gold and baying psalms

Good thing too, because now  
There's something wrong with the birds  
Ever since July when those crows  
Strafed the red, white, and blue car lot

I walked right by one later, staring blankly at a brick wall  
And I hear owls are crashing into cars around Sequim  
    Northern Pygmy  
    Barred  
    Barn  
    Great Horned, I don't know  
The point is a hummingbird trapped itself  
Under the monorail station glass seeking sky  
And as far as I know, it's still there

Maybe it's my new head  
(It needs grooming, but whatever)

One thing's for sure, if pigeons were cardinals  
Cities would bleed upward  
Sprinkling the horns of the consecrated sky  
One vast, collective martyrdom on the wing

Even then, would you look up?

## PRISCILLA DUNNING

### *Tiny Love Stories*

No one told me how grief would function  
when my mother passed away quietly  
through some unknown door  
while tea was steeping in the kitchen.  
How quickly its heaviness  
would cause light to fade from the day  
and make creaks in the floor  
seem like notes in a piercing song as I stepped  
through the doorway of her room,  
willing her breath to begin again.

In that moment,  
before tears could begin their work  
and before my heart could ache,  
I remembered things she had done for me—  
a lifetime of lifting and bending  
and guiding my way,  
and all my muscles remembered  
what they had done for her—  
lifting and bending and soothing her pain.  
They hurt now, those muscles,  
with the weight of reminder,  
longing to continue the habit of care.  
My skin still tingles from her light touch,  
replacing words she was unable to speak—  
the gift of her face cream softening mine.

In that brief moment, in that doorway,  
my whole body recognized  
another side of grief,  
that at the end of life's give and take,  
in the mystery of a single intense moment,  
my heart would break  
into a thousand tiny love stories.

## LEAH MURRAY

### *The Abandoned Land Book of Verse*

Autumn blades of grass  
lean pale on poison ivy:  
leafy metamorphs.

Crunches, bitter snow  
'neath big coyote paws, bird-  
free and winter chilled.

Wet winds, muddy earth  
spring melts to pale new growth,  
garter snakes between.

Noisy youthful birds  
fledging on the winds of change --  
summer flees, too short.

Unwary hiker  
stumbles on warm grassed-over  
bones of dead buildings.

Half hid foundations  
broken stone, concrete, worn steel  
tilt jagged – bomb bones.

Twisted girders lie  
athwart bent trusses; sumac  
bodyguards around.

Stone blocks and pavers  
heave slantwise through the grey ground  
snap at careless feet.

Rain damp nuts and bolts  
hold moss tight to broken cubes,  
oxidating frames.

One century past  
(short quintant), this town  
coloured night with light.



**Aviva Stein-Wotten, *dirty*, photograph (2021).**



## MICHAEL PENNY

### *A New Arrival in Heaven*

To my surprise I was wrong.  
I landed above clouds  
in a sunny place.  
I am comfortable, if perplexed.

The rain has made the path into a creek. I walk with my head down, as I do not want to trip over the roots and rocks that bump the path.

Soft feathers grow from my spine  
and my gown shimmers  
over the shoulders and hips  
I did not expect to keep.

The occasional rock clatters under my foot, but I keep my balance. The path climbs steadily. I pause often to catch my breath. My heart thumps against the bones that frame my chest.

In heaven, my bones rejuvenate  
and I wish I had a mirror  
to check it all out, but then  
vanity seems misplaced.

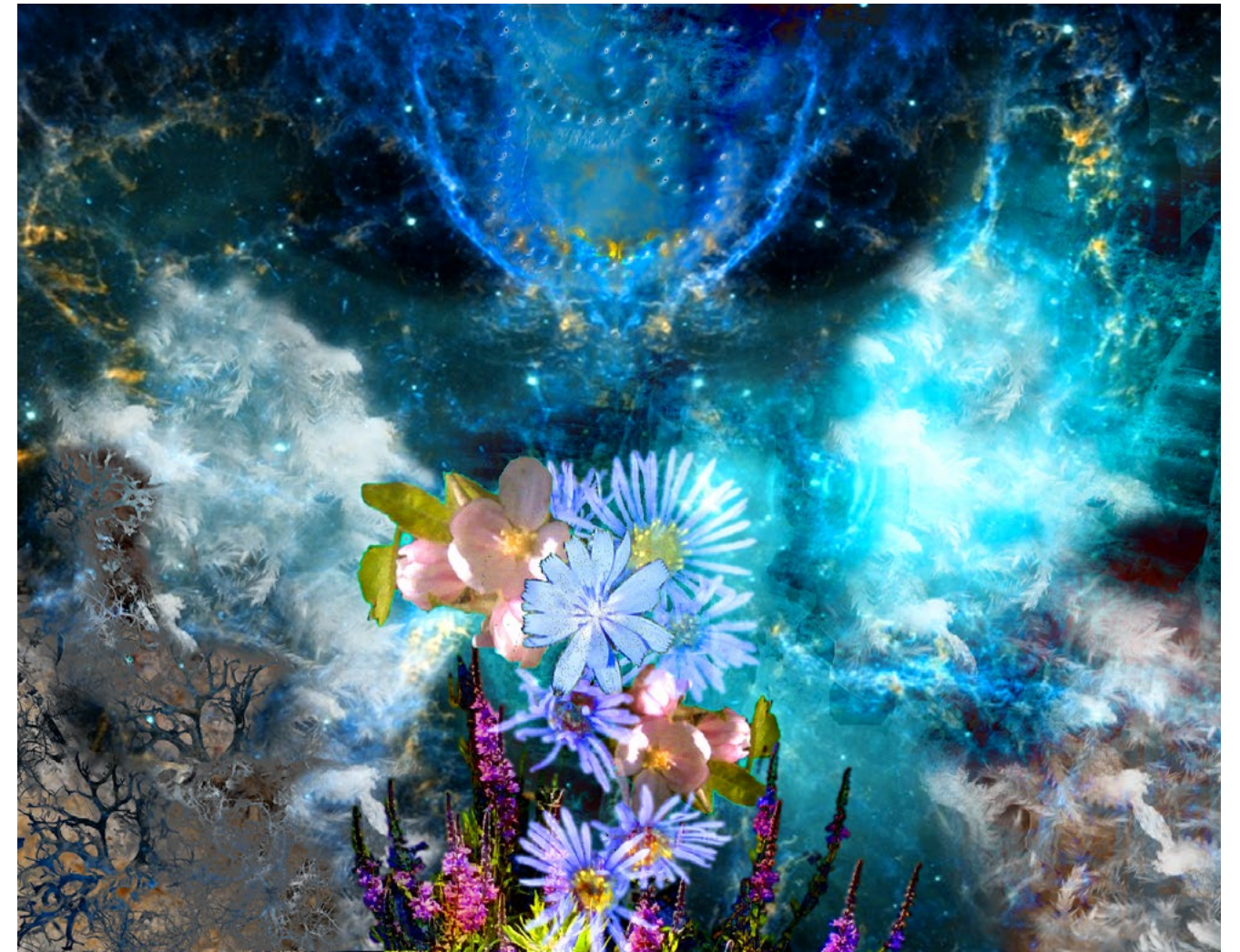
Walking helps me forget what I did. It's not that I feel guilty; yes, I do, but what can I do about it? Someone's life is ruined. I vacillate between wanting to apologize and wanting to explain myself.

I sip the sweet ambrosia  
and chat with renewed friends  
as almost everyone's here.  
And I talk to them all,

What I really want is a place and a time where I could change the past, but I am confronted by the unchangeable fact that the past is unchangeable.

but no-one can tell me  
how we made it here.  
A practical joke? A soul?  
I didn't expect to have one.

The walking helps. Perhaps the effort makes my body produce the chemicals that will allow me to forget or make the memory less painful. As if my pain mattered. I reach the cliff at the top of my climb. My chance to fly.



**Leah Murray, *Life Forms*, digital photomontage (2021).**

## MICHAEL PENNY

### *Installing a New Dishwasher*

I shouldn't need one  
as I have hands and sink  
and the green liqueur of scrub,

but the house insisted  
and it's bad to leave  
emptied plates for next morning.

I rationalize:  
it does a better job than me  
using water so hot it's sterile.

In the days before this appliance  
my mother ended dinner parties at the sink  
with the other wives, gossip and drying.

Such gatherings gone, but now  
we'd never insult by such separation,  
cigarettes and salaciousness,

before joining for insomnia coffee  
and what did you talk about?  
Everything, but it changed nothing.

The machine now takes over  
and we've decided to install it  
ourselves, eschewing expertise

as we expense our wrenches  
and scrape our clumsy knuckles  
until an unexpected Arethusa

wets the floor.  
Towels, reconsideration,  
then it's done and truly begun.

## BRIAN DAY

### *Caesura of Listening*

We return to this particular clearing in history,  
the caesura of listening where we began—

this silver field of silence where the coming  
might be heard. We listen to the clarion

stillness at the centre of our flesh. We would,  
for all the world, continue, follow a bright path

leading green through the trees, trace  
the inscriptions we find written on the cosmos—

that something of promise might sit adjacent  
to every previewed scene of extinction.

Always this thirsting world wants for its singing  
all that envelops us, and also, inexplicably,

us. We listen as if listening were our purest name,  
as if this were the reason we are here;

listen for susurrations that stir beneath  
our hearing; for the moment when from blank

interregnum lifts lilt and sonority of song.  
We listen for a further epic, scripture,

a further phase of Vishnu's dreams,  
for the breath of the beloved as it moves on our face.

We listen for ancient ways that might coax us  
toward the tableaux of a faceable future;

we listen for the florilegium of stories  
by which we might yet find our way;

for the scenes, the lines, the verbal stirrings  
that would pierce our novice hearts with light.



## PATRICIA STRIAR ROHNER

### *Anticipation*

I was a thirteen year old girl in seventh grade and the school was having a dance. I didn't know if anyone would invite me. Images and sounds of music, colored streamers, a party dress, and a boy spun in my head. Signs blazed, "Seventh Grade Dance, January 30, 7 p.m. in school gym." The letters were in bright red and notices hung in the hallways of the junior high school.

I wondered what was going to happen. Maybe no boy would want to take me, wouldn't find me attractive enough, or or had other plans. It was a big deal to me that some fellow would ask me so I wouldn't feel like an 'undesirable'. My mother stressed attractiveness. Every Sunday she read me every marriage and engagement announcement from the newspaper that spelled out who those people were, where they had gone to school, and where they lived. Being invited to a school dance seemed like an auspicious beginning. Maybe I wasn't pretty enough, my personality less than fascinating, my shape a bit pudgy, my height too short. I didn't know what would happen, but I was sure that the popular girls like Laura Epstein with her red hair and straight A's would get invited. I hated to be one of the less appealing. I asked around and heard the buzz. My neighbor, Elsa Herman, was not sure she'd be invited.

"What do you think about the school dance?" I said to Elsa as we walked to school the next day. Elsa was three months older and my best friend. The way to school was downhill and through the park. It was a ten minute walk from my house.

"I don't know. I've never been to a dance in my life," Elsa said. At thirteen, there had not been many years to both of our lives, I thought.

"Me neither." I answered. The days went by and nothing happened.

In science class towards the end of the week I listened to the gossip. A kid reported that he had heard Steven Steiner was going to call me up and ask me to the dance. I got excited and tried not to look at Steven Steiner, who was also in my science class. He was an okay looking boy, but not someone who set my heart ablaze. As I tried to concentrate, I stared at the periodic table hanging over the blackboard while the science teacher talked. My two friends, Robin Blum and Lynn Paster, asked me about the rumor after class.

"Are you excited?" Robin asked. She was a petite girl with bangs.

"Yeah, I guess so."

"Do you like him?" Lynn inquired. She had red hair and was tall.

"He's okay."

When school let out, I didn't look for Elsa and I walked straight home. No one was home so I didn't have to discuss this topic with anyone. I went to the alcove where the telephone was kept, sat down on the stool and waited. I couldn't concentrate on my social studies project about the Pygmies in Africa.

Without an appetite, I didn't feel like a snack. Plonking myself on the stool, I stared at the telephone. There was no point in trying to keep busy, I was too excited. I didn't have any idea how long it would take until Steven Steiner might call me. The dance was in a few days. I licked my lips in anticipation. After a quarter of an hour, the phone rang. I did not wait until the telephone completed its full ring, but grabbed the receiver, and placed it on my ear in the middle of the ring and said, "Hello."

There was a brief silence before a word was spoken and then a voice on the other end said, "Not too anxious, are you?"

My face turned pink with embarrassment and I knew that I was now the most uncool girl in the seventh grade. I had no dating smarts. Unable to respond, I didn't utter a word and just waited.

"This is Steven. Do you want to go to the school dance?"

"Yes."

"I'll pick you up at 7 p.m. Okay?"

"Fine."

End of conversation. I knew that I would never forget my humiliation. I also knew that I had a long way to go.

## LAURA KELSEY

### *pass the pomegranates*

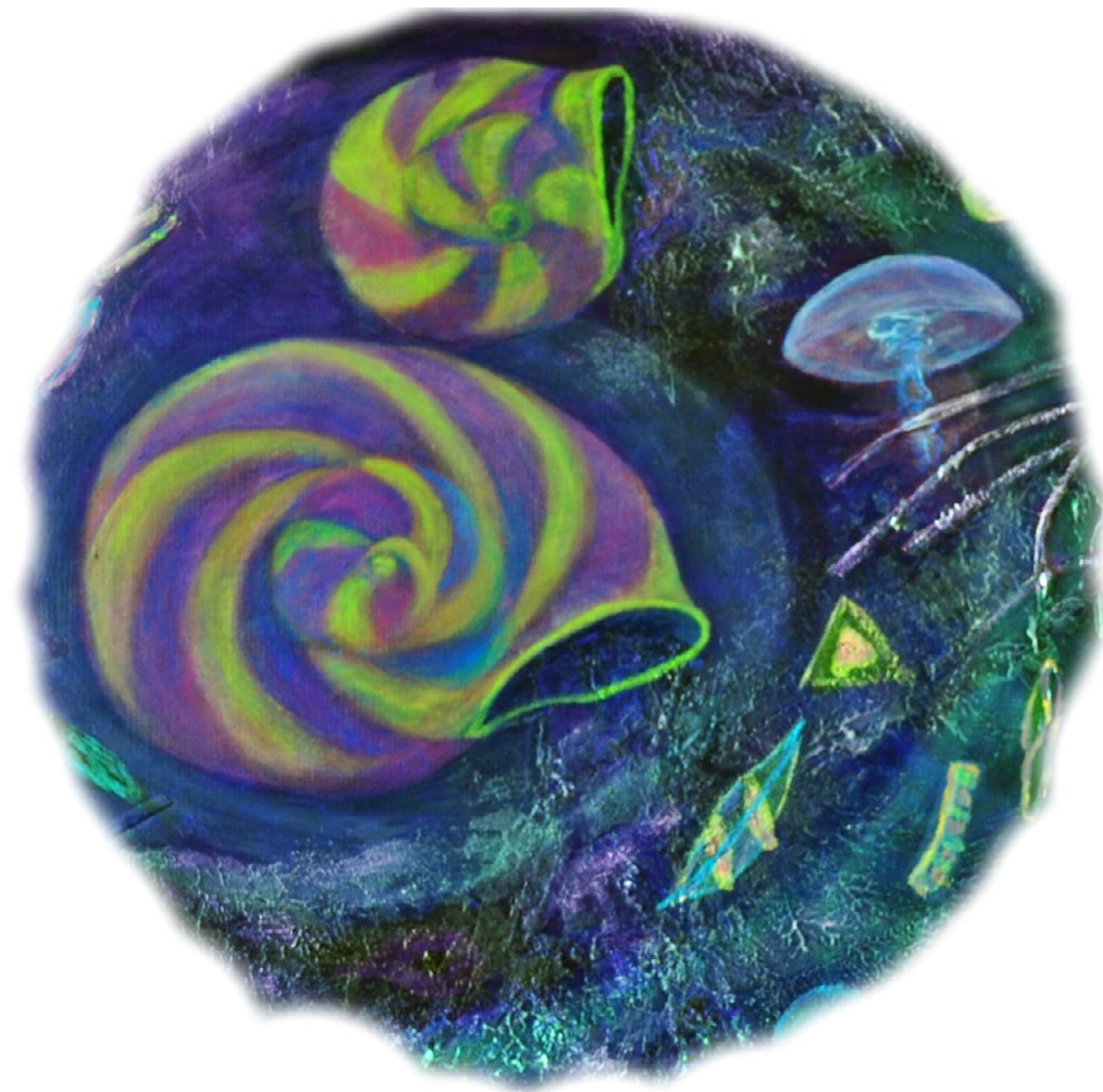
pomegranate. it was pomegranate, the juice on her face  
after she made the salad with the dandelion leaves,  
the green apples and the pomegranates.  
I brought over the dressing, made it myself: balsamic.

we laughed when she said she hated when restaurants only have the vinegar  
and the balsamic and you're supposed to drizzle-mix it yourself. I totally agreed.  
when she laughed her face looked rounder, her eyes disappeared  
and I focused on the spots of juice on her skin that looked like big, red pores.

I opened my mouth to say something witty but I totally forgot  
how to speak when she touched my arm as she laughed again. in the silence  
that followed she let the dressing I so carefully mixed drip from its bottle  
and we watched it splash upon the dandelions like the wine into her glass.

I thought about kissing her, how we'd be more than friends.  
I'd whistle at work, text her something witty at lunch  
and invite her over for more salad: "i o u salad."  
and she'd type back, "sounds good. tonite ok?" and that would be it.

But I didn't kiss her then, and I didn't kiss her later,  
my truck especially cold as I watched her  
close the door through its icy windshield. I squealed out  
of her driveway, back tires slipping and making an S in the snow.



Carla Stein, *The Beginning* (detail), mixed media (2021).



## JOHN BEATON

### *Older Brother*

Snow canopies the bracken on the hill.  
We break its crust and, snapping the stems, make tracks  
that cross the step-stoned stream from our ivied house.  
We crest. Our snowy world extends—the river,  
a brown and yellow eel, slithers in its groove;  
land and sky share grey with one another,  
and hills are pillows where the forests sleep.  
We've come to Ardochy. Here two old brothers  
farmed this heath in lifelong isolation—  
even in the snow the house is wild;  
white blackberry briars arc over the garden  
where collies romped, euphoric among roses.

Two stags break clear and separate and bound  
through banks of withered ferns up to the skyline.  
Now here, on the snowy palm of the valley's hand,  
a life-line marked in bracken from our home forks  
and disappears. I am the older brother,  
who breaks the trail. I'll take tomorrow's train  
and slide out of the station like the river.  
And when I walk through slush from the concrete platform  
to steeped halls across the cold quadrangle,  
I'll hear the ice still sliding from this bracken  
and wish the crust unbroken once again.

## JOHN BEATON

### *The Sunlight Zone*

*(No light penetrates down to the approximately  
6,000 meter depth of the ocean's abyssal zone.)*

The wind's long blades doze set waves up the beach  
to crumbling berms of surf. Inside our room,  
where you are sleeping by my side, I reach  
and touch your hair,  
caress your ear,  
and hear the lulling roar  
as swells from thousand-mile fetches boom  
across the continental shelf and snore  
and snore to shore.

And as these combers bowl around a reef  
you waken, roll around, and hold me close,  
murmur my name and wash me with belief  
that, though we'll vanish  
inside the shush  
of wave-crests when they crash,  
we'll master how to mount them while they toss  
their heads and manes, stand on their shoulders, ride,  
and leap the tide,

that breakers will not break our hearts. Your eyes  
have never peered into the abyssal sea.  
I sink. You surf, lifting on rollers, rise,  
and, when they barrel  
and pipe, I marvel  
at how you carve and curl  
off the fall-line, down the face of free  
joie de vivre. You smile. I touch your dimple.  
It seems so simple.

## W. B. PETRICKO

### *The Promise*

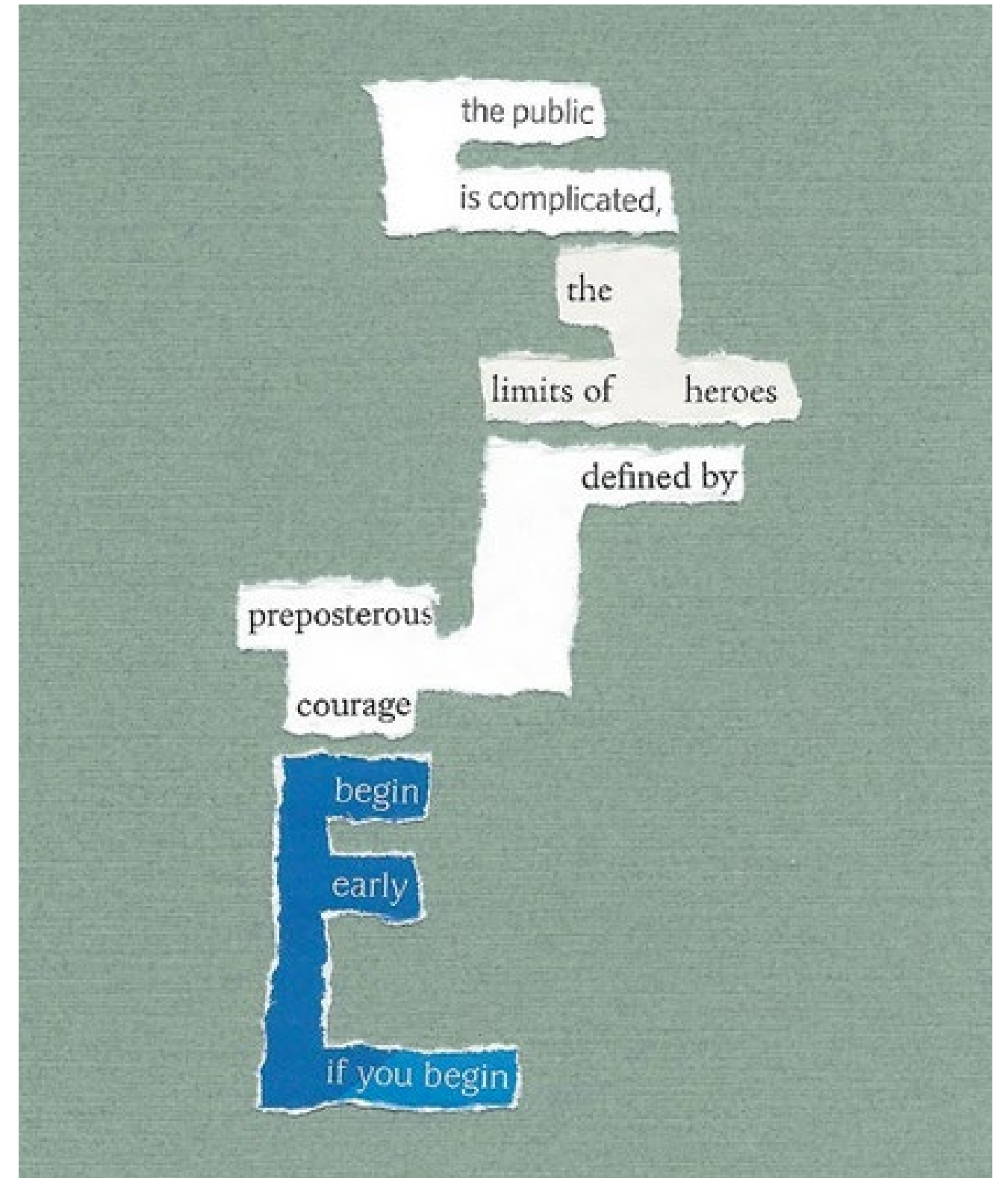
Maybe it's because  
He's old now  
and fragile  
and has learned  
    too late  
That fragile  
has always meant

Handle with care

And even more so

This pink-laced May morning  
These moist blue-faced memories  
Welling up  
from an age-kept forest floor

How she adored forget-me-nots.



J.I. Kleinberg, *the public*, visual poem.



## ROB LEWIS

### *At the Western Edge*

Point Lobos, California Coast  
May, 2017

Light fountains up  
off the half-shell horizon  
whether you are ready  
for it or not.

The flood waves  
flow past you  
and have all time in them  
magnifying the leaves  
unveiling the buried phrases  
alive inside matter.

With your pen  
or daydream  
you circle the feeling  
and hope to enter it  
and be fed.

What is the success  
enacted by failure,  
the language learned  
in the losing of sound?

The cliff fails before the sea

and in the washed-out hollows cormorants nest,  
and inside their eggs something listens  
to the sound of water slapping basalt wings  
leaving and returning again.

## ROB LEWIS

### *Getting Ready*

There's a faint shift out there.  
A certain leaf has turned over somewhere  
I'm pretty sure.  
Many sand grains have tumbled  
Undoubtedly.  
The coyote sniffing a north wind Is  
now sniffing one from the South. In  
the darkness between houses Trees are  
branching.



Margaret Lonsdale, *Magnolia*, photograph (2021).

# BILL ENGLESON

## *Stroke*

I have heard of old men  
shovelling snow,  
the swing of their aging arms,  
the bend of their back,  
the heft of the wet stuff,  
the dig after dig,  
the weight,  
the wet stream across their brow,  
the pain across the chest,  
the matting of their hirsute bristles,  
the ache of the temple,  
the dying stroke  
of the shovel,  
the snow cleared,  
the way back,  
lost.



**Amber Morrison Fox, 2 broken arms, photograph (2019).**

## BILL ENGLESON

### *Generational Angst*

The backlash began innocuously enough. One commentator expressed concern for the young who had lost their means of employment.

*“When it comes to the economy on our island, I think the voices of those under forty should be worth the voices of two between 40 and 65 and three over 65.”*

It was a startling remark. Suddenly, the divide we all knew instinctively was there struck in vengeful real time. We instantly become three separate groups with three separate standings. I immediately regretted belonging to the withering, doddering *sixty-five-and-longer-in-the-tooth-then-anyone-has-a-right-to-be-demographic*.

The under forties were demanding dominance, marshalling their forces, even amongst the addled over forties who had been lulled into short-lived collaboration by casual friendships and familial links. One quisling asked: *“So should those to whom this has very little impact have just as much say as those who stand to lose everything?”*

He might as well have asked whether life expectancy determined who should be fed in a food shortage. As one who embraces the intake of food with much relish, I was mortified.

Life without food spelled death.

The message was crystal clear. There was no longer any old age security. Elders were a weight, an aging tumor on the future of the human race.

I retreated into my emotional bunker. We were expected to isolate anyway but the awareness that we were redundant by half or by a third depending on which demographic we were being measured by was shattering.

Old thoughts started to emerge. Not because I'm old, but because I'd had them decades ago. They were young thoughts then. George McGovern summarized those best when he said, *“I'm fed up to the ears with old men dreaming up wars for young men to die in.”*

As the pandemic war spread, and as the younger set felt unnecessarily imprisoned by a plague that was primarily attacking the elderly, a part of me could appreciate that they might be 'fed up to the ears' with the old smacking them down.

Then came The Vaccine. The speed of its discovery and implementation was miraculous. The world was saved. The opportunity was there to save us all, the well-placed as well as the wretched, including the ill-advised individuals amongst us. Though not legion, those people were lounging about awaiting the perfection of their precious anti-injection predilections.

The old, the young, the in-between could return to their customary concerns: the cost of everything, the do-I-have-a-will dilemma, coupled with that imponderable query, is there free-will? Other delightful conundrums could again reappear: Should I wear a tin-foil hat? How can I save the environment and not be too inconvenienced? AND, for the seriously rural and befuddled, what is the acceptable size of a decent turnip? We could finally return to the generally accepted rate, the joy and grief of normal births and expected deaths, all of our shared 'mutual woes and mutual burdens', back to our respective vaunted, almost forgotten NORMAL.



## JOY SHELDON

### *Holdup!*

The doors of the bank burst open with a metallic clang. A couple of doped-up teenagers, black hoodies pulled low, rushed in. The barrels of their AK-47's gleamed in the afternoon light. I could smell their stress sweat from where I stood in the line-up. A lady near the end of the line started to scream and Punk #1 shouted: "Do that again and yer dead, Lady!" She shut up.

Hophead #1: "O.K., all you motherfuckers! Put your hands in the air where I can see them. Drop to your knees!"

The tallest (and mouthiest) who had just spoken, pointed his weapon at me. "That includes you, Granny! Yeh, I wanna see 'em." When I was slow to comply, he marched over and stuck the gun in my face. "Move, now, ya ol' bitch."

Putting my hands up in plain sight, I pleaded with him. "Look son, you don't have to do this. I'm sure if you put your gun down now and your friend cooperates, you can both get out of this alive."

He sneered with a sound that was more like a snarl as he shoved the barrel tip right between my eyes. I heard the loud click as he cocked the firing mechanism. In one swift movement, I grabbed the barrel and swung it around and downwards. I took out his left knee cap. He went down like a fallen oak, screaming in pain.

As I dropped to one knee, my peripheral picked up his jittery friend covering the nearest teller while trying to scope out the rest of the bank. I reversed the weapon and shot him in the right shoulder. He dropped his gun, bleeding profusely. I couldn't tell whether they had a lookout covering the front of the bank, but I ran forward, my own gun at the ready. On the way, I nodded to the teller to hit the panic button under her counter. No sign of anyone but a few startled onlookers outside.

I ran back inside, weapon lowered. Punk #1 was still on the floor, clutching his now-shattered knee. Punk #2 was lying half-on, half-off the wicket, puking his guts out. His hoodie was becoming noticeably stained with blood. I gestured to another bystander who looked like he could be a doctor.

Then I heard the sirens. I rushed for the entrance again.

Punk #1 reached out and grabbed at my pant leg. I avoided contact as he whined, "Jeez, Grandma! Where'd ya learn to handle a weapon like that?" Sassily, I responded, "Sorry, Sonny, you should have listened when I gave you your chance to surrender. You and your buddy over there are just a couple of amateurs. Let me introduce myself — I'm Special Agent Angela Stonewall, C.I.A., retired."

I hurried forward, gun lowered, to greet the cops as I muttered to myself, "Jeez, I guess I HAVEN'T lost it. Maybe I should come out of retirement and make a new beginning."

**“ LOOK SON,  
YOU DON'T HAVE TO DO THIS.  
I'M SURE IF YOU PUT YOUR GUN  
DOWN NOW AND YOUR FRIEND  
COOPERATES, YOU CAN BOTH  
GET OUT OF THIS ALIVE. ”**

# Possibilities:

## THE PHOTOGRAPHY OF AVIVA STEIN-WOTTEN

Aviva Stein-Wotten is a Canadian photographer based on Vancouver Island, B.C. Her passion is film photography and she can often be found at her studio & darkroom in downtown Nanaimo. Aviva's work has appeared in both Canadian and international publications including: Skye Magazine, JÓN Magazine, Edith Mag, and Ossma Magazine. She is also on the roster of artists at The Numa Network.

Of her process, Aviva writes: "Currently I have a fascination with the dead. More vegetable than animal. I think seeing from a different perspective, such as a time in the life of a plant that normally is regarded as ugly or "dead" when, in fact, it is not dead and is storing energy for its next chance to bloom. For me, it is important to pay attention to things at all times of their life - including human life. Putting too much emphasis on being happy all the time makes for great highs, but often, very low lows. However, in those lows, I find I see things best; notice things I wouldn't normally.

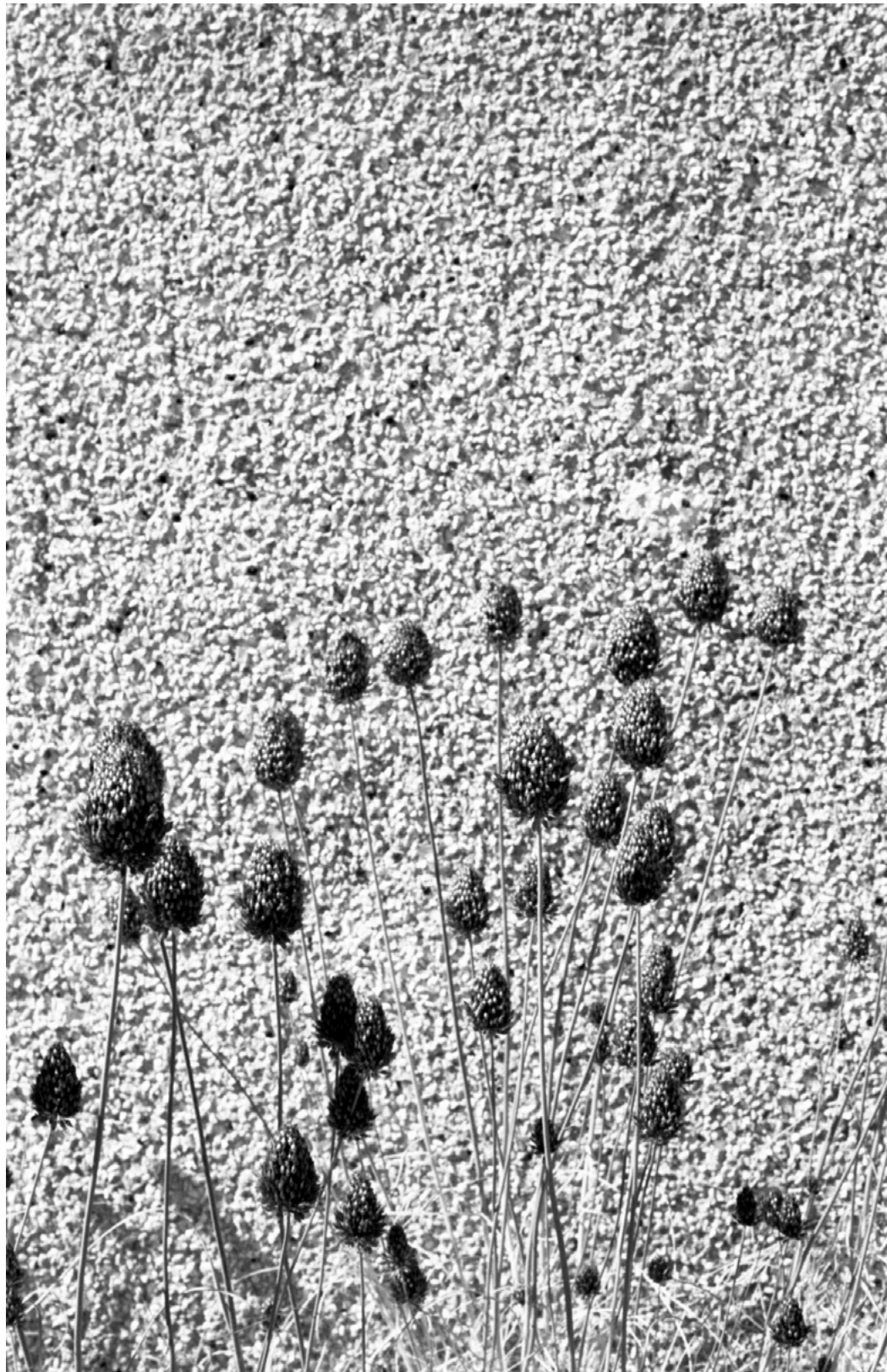
I especially love to try to see things from the perspective of what I am photographing. A flower, my dog, a person. Again, it's putting myself in a different place whether physically or emotionally that allows for a glimpse beyond the obvious. I'm learning that when inspiration strikes, it rarely strikes twice, so go with it! The same for light, it's constantly changing and is never the same from 3 o'clock one day to the same time the following day. I've discovered that there is only one chance to capture that moment. So when I see something, I best have my camera ready."

IG: @avivasw.photo  
website: avivasteinwotten.com



**Aviva Stein-Wotten, *possibilities*, photograph (2021).**





Aviva Stein-Wotten, *alliums*, photograph (2021).



Aviva Stein-Wotten, *things are lookin' up*, photograph (2021).





Aviva Stein-Wotten, *beyond*, photograph (2021).



Aviva Stein-Wotten, *nude #1*, photograph (2021).

# COUNTERFLOW

## ISSUE 1: CONTRIBUTORS

**Barry Hunt** loves to dance with words, to feel the swirl of them lifting his heart. He says, “I love to dance with the natural beauty of this island, to hear the laughter and singing of the running waters, the wind in the tall cedar, hemlock and fir. If I could begin again, this is where I would begin to dance.”

**Bill Engleson** is a retired social worker, pickleball aficionado, novelist, poet, essayist, flash fictionista, a community volunteer, and lives on Denman Island. He has published one Social Work noirish novel, *Like a Child to Home*. In 2016, Silver Bow Publishing released his second book, *Confessions of an Inadvertently Gentrifying Soul*. He is currently working on a prequel to his first novel entitled, *Drawn Towards the Sun*.

**Brian Day** has published four books of poetry with Guernica Editions, including *The Daring of Paradise* and *Conjuring Jesus*. His poems have appeared in *The Malahat Review*, *Arc*, *Prairie Fire*, and other journals. He is seeking a publisher for a book-length poem that tells the story of the universe through science, history, and a range of religious stories and international folktales. He lives on Salt Spring Island.

*Dressed in Only a Cardigan*, *She Picks Up Her Tracks in the Snow*, (Baseline) and *Cosmic Bowling* (Guernica), are **Cornelia Hoogland**'s recent publications. *Trailer Park Elegy* and *Woods Wolf Girl* were finalists for Canadian national awards. Hoogland was the 2019 writer-in-residence for the Al Purdy A-Frame and the Whistler Festival. [www.corneliahoogland.com](http://www.corneliahoogland.com)

**C.W. Buckley** lives and works in Seattle with his family. Graduating from Stanford University in Human Biology, he earned an M.A. in Religion after two years as a chaplain resident. His writing explores geek culture, conscience, faith, and fatherhood. He is the author of the chapbook *BLUING*.


**J.I. Kleinberg**'s visual poems have been published in print and online journals worldwide. An artist, poet, freelance writer, and three-time Pushcart and Best of the Net nominee, she lives at the edge of the Salish Sea on the sacred and ancestral territory of the Lhaq'temish, The Lummi People, in Bellingham, Washington, USA, and on Instagram @jikleinberg.

**John Beaton** is author of “Leaving Camustianavaig” published by Word Galaxy Press. His poetry is metrical and has appeared in media as diverse as *Able Muse* and *Gray's Sporting Journal*. He wrote a monthly poetry page for several years for the magazine *Eyes on BC* and served for four years as moderator of one of the internet's most reputable poetry workshops.

**Joy Sheldon** is a published author and member of the B.C. Federation of Writers. She has now published four books at Amazon Books: ‘Whoopee, I'm A GRG (Grandparent Raising Grandchildren); *The Story of Roger Hardfoot, A Cdn Wilderness Adventure*; ‘Santa and Bumble, *The Bumbling Elf*’; and most recently, her memoir, ‘Cowichan Kid’. Joy is also a singer and drummer and her podcast can be viewed on Youtube *Electric Mermaid Live Reads*.

**Kaiden Coughlan** was born in Mill Bay and currently resides in Ladysmith. Published in a youth anthology of short stories and poems at sixteen, and published in his high school yearbook at 17. Currently in the process of editing a new manuscript for a YA thriller novel, *Last Online*. Favourite colour is yellow, favourite animals are ferrets and raccoons, currently enrolled in Vancouver Island University as an English and Creative Writing student.





**Laura Kelsey** is a former newspaper editor and now a freelance writer, photographer and performer living in Nanaimo, B.C., on the traditional territory of the Snuneymuxw First Nation. Her poems have appeared in the New Chief Tongue, the Carnegie Newsletter, Stone Pacific Zine and Sea & Cedar Magazine. She has released three self-published collections, including *12dresses* and *singing for a mate in the shadow of merlins*.

**Leah Murray**, poet, photographer, and videographer based in Surrey BC, got a moonlighting job on her local paper in her twenties, publishing images and words as a hobby. The sideline came with professional photography training, publication, developing lab and black-and-white film. She learned that wandering through wilderness was less frightening than shooting weddings. Her 30 year technology career introduced her to digital imaging and sound which today inform her poetic and visual practices.

**Margaret Lonsdale** writes essays, lyrics, poetry, and short fiction. Her work is influenced by her deep appreciation for music, a fascination with human resilience, and an awe of the natural world. She is the author of four indie titles: *The Dream Below*; *The Poem Tree*; *The Tilted Light*; and *The Warm Yuan*. Margaret resides among the cedars within the Traditional Territories of the Pauquachin and Tseycum First Nations in North Saanich, on Vancouver Island.

**Michael Penny** was born in Australia, but came to Canada as a teenager. Since then, he has published five books.

**Pamela Medland's** poetry has appeared online and in print in anthologies and literary journals such as *CV2*, *Dalhousie Review*, *Freefall Magazine*, *Grain*, *Prairie Fire*, *Room*, *The Spadina Literary Review*, and *The Prairie Journal*. A graduate of SFU and the University of Toronto, Medland currently divides her time between Calgary and Nanaimo, hereditary land of the Snuneymuxw First Nation.

**Patricia Striar Rohner** received her MFA in creative writing and has published nine short stories in literary magazines.

**Priscilla Dunning's** beginning as a writer followed her move from Detroit, Michigan to BC in 2005. She became a founding member of the writing group, *Pens Ultimate Nanaimo*, publishing four anthologies of poetry and a cookbook with the group. She has also self-published a family cookbook, a book of memoir-stories in Drabble form, and a novel entitled: *All That Is Not Said*. She lives with her husband in Nanaimo.

Through poems, essays and activism, **Rob Lewis** works to bring the power of language to the defense of the more-than-human world. As owner of *Earth Craft Painting*, he also works to revive the use of local wild clays to paint our work and living spaces. He is author of the poem/essay collection *The Silence of Vanishing Things*, and serves on the Leadership Committee for Biodiversity for a Livable Climate.

One of those Nanaimoites who frequents the forest trails, **W. B. Petricko** occasionally succumbs to the muse that pesters walking poets.



