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## *INTRODUCTION*

Welcome to year 14 of ***Writing the Walls***. The 2019 exhibit, ***Death is Irrelevant***, was not the easiest to decipher, however, poets are always explorers and they undertook this journey through the figurative sculpture of the Straus Collection with bravery and pens blazing. We thank you all. The historical process of *Writing the Walls* begins with an invited tour with Livia Straus, co-founder of Hudson Valley MOCA. The poets found inspiration in the art works, wrote, and sent us their poems. An anonymous committee of poets and writers read the works and the resultant poems hang next to the art that inspired them.

Over the years, visitors to the museum tell us how much they've enjoyed reading the work. "It gives us a chance to know what others think," is the most frequent comment. "It encourages me to have my own opinion about the work," others say. Contemporary art elicits personal reflection. It is the art of our times; the art that records sensory, intellectual, and artistic history gleaned from living in the present. Contemporary art elicits a dialogue and relationship with the viewer. These poems are an expression of that dialogue and our own experiences as we face work that comments on our time and our history.

We thank the many poets who have submitted and been chosen to have their work exhibited and read. And a thanks to MaryAnn McCarra-Fitzpatrick for proofing.

Thank you,  
Mara Mills and Jo-Ann Brody

*Between the Flowers and the Rain*

**Richard P. Kline**

*Death Is Irrelevant*

It was 5 thousand years ago  
he walked across the village green,  
if they called it a village green  
way back in those days.  
he didn't have pictures of his wife  
holding their new born baby child.  
so many years till cameras came,  
just scratches on the cave walls,  
if only they had colored chalk  
or anything at all.

Sometimes we fight sometimes we live,  
until there's nothing left to give.  
resist! swept down a narrow lane,  
between the flowers and the rain,  
till we circle round the drain,  
just circling around the drain.

Fingers from an unclenched fist  
gently reached to touch her wrist.  
putting down his bloody sword,  
looks for love amidst the words,  
to find unique within his herd,  
big answers still escape him.

Little time to learn of love  
he tried as best he can.  
explored her vast treasure trove,  
symbolic acts join words in poems,  
a tapestry still on the loom  
amongst the flowers, and perfumes.  
he lays his knife beneath her bed,  
soothes the impulse in his head  
and tries to think of love instead,  
his violent self he'll free it.

A wisdom borne of inspiration,  
doing all he can.  
she's parries once more his flirtation,  
barely shifts her concentration  
It's not what, but when.

This same story for millennia,  
he fights to know what love is.  
but now amidst the melting ice,  
the storms with records broken twice,  
while others talk of sea walls  
some are trapped in free falls.

It comes again that very year  
way too much beyond repair.  
no time to finish undone plans,  
forget the brotherhood of man,  
forget the tired masses yearning  
to breathe free.  
forget the self centered, narcissistic  
yearning to love me.

Amongst the lies this fool trods,  
learning to love spent fuel rods,  
stopping to charge his ipod,  
strutting the stage his life's fraud.

Between love and war  
endlessly drifting  
sometimes getting high  
on a star filled sky.

Coda:  
But what is life what is death,  
respites in the other's breath.  
from earth to life and back again,  
more important than the struggle  
enjoyment, memory of the same,  
in your mind or that of others,  
entwined with love recalls the flame.

Tis better to feel than recall feelings  
explore our thoughts In holy rapture  
or find a place In deepest mind,  
An ember smolders warm like living,  
A ripple on the water lasting,  
Or a marker made from stones,  
Sure not these somber bones.

***Begin at the Beginnings***  
Donna Barkman

***Becoming of Age***

Maria Nepomuceno, *Redemagma*, 2013

Pistil stamen sprout stem  
leaf blossom  
yield—  
orange fruit with pulp and juice

Fetal flesh secure  
in a hammock  
crazy with color  
bubbling with beads

Swings into a life more lush than hers



***Sonny, With His Sword***

Adrián Villa Rojas, *The Theater of Disappearance*, 2017

He was the sixth of seven  
wondering how many more  
would come

Like fruit flies  
in their kitchen  
springing  
from a rotten pear

Love bugs Mama called them  
clapping and laughing  
at their  
proliferation

Her babies

Papa wouldn't hear or touch them  
or her  
Sonny made sure of that



***Full of Herself***  
**Donna Barkman**

Rebecca Warren, *Teacher (w)*, 2003

It takes a while  
to fill  
to bulge  
with milk and blood and life  
to spill  
from nipples  
genitals  
gut  
aroused and ready

I am generous  
to a fault  
they say  
keep some for yourself

But I am yours  
breast  
belly  
bumptious butt  
to taste  
sate  
gorge

Be my guest



***Adoration***

Patricia Piccinini, *Undivided*, 2004

Love like this  
can't be contained—  
it swells from my embrace  
to bloom through open wombs

swollen embryos  
bare or hairy  
will harbor this child  
moored in dulcet dreams



***She's Seen So Much***  
**Donna Barkman**

Kiki Smith, *Mother*, 1991

The curvature of the earth from a jet  
From her kayak  
the simultaneous rising of the moon  
and setting of the sun  
frangipani and balsam firs  
mud huts and igloos

At an age when she could be jaded  
wonder at times prevails  
surprise at human generosity  
and mostly mendacity

She holds her breasts sensuous and  
sustaining  
Hail falls pinging on the roof and in her  
ears  
Fog obscures her once-bright vision



***She Touched Me***  
**Donna Barkman**

Keith Edmier, *Beverley Edmier*, 1967, 1998

I remember her hands as she twisted  
the crochet needle to hook the yarn  
and pull it through the loop

I remember her knucky fists as they  
kneaded dough, giving it a punch  
and a slap before a slide into the oven.

I remember her licking her finger  
to catch the edge of a page of a book

I remember her hands rolling  
socks into a ball just off the line  
and sunny dry

I remember her fingers curling  
the end of a thread and pulling  
it into a knot before stitching

I remember her hands strong  
and persistent as they tugged  
my hair into long thick braids

I remember her palms sandpaper  
rough as they checked for fever  
on my brow

I remember her hands as I look  
at my own and wonder what  
will be remembered



**Babies & Bruises**  
**Tony Howorth**

Figures in an art museum: Keith Edmier, *Beverly Edmier*, 1967; Pawel Althamer, *The Power of Now*; Olaf Westphalen, *Statue, (Laying Down)*; Kiki Smith, *Mother*

1.  
lady dressed in pink  
surrounded by antiseptic walls  
feels a kick in her belly  
lifts her blouse, whispers hello  
to the child inside

Keith Edmier, *Beverly Edmier*, 1967, 1998



2.  
battered and hammered  
from wandering nowhere  
under skies that only ever pelt him  
a corner of a park, end of a bench  
bent into himself, exhausted  
mutters non-stop  
who you must no one  
need go on . . .

Pawel Althamer, *The Power of Now*, 2016



3.  
swat team swarms, handcuffs him  
stretches him on the sidewalk  
blue tie flows like blood, cheek  
flat on the concrete, waiting numb  
for what happens next

Olaf Westphalen, *Statue, (Laying Down)*, 2004



4.  
Rapunzel lives in a castle  
her long hair reaches  
outside to the ground  
the prince passes by  
grips it like a rope  
climbs through her window  
weeks later she feels  
her breasts begin to swell

Kiki Smith, *Mother*, 1991



## **ANTHONY'S IDEAL WOMAN**

**Liz Burk**

Tony Matelli, *Ideal Woman*, 1998-1999

*My ideal woman is deaf, dumb, blind,  
and owns a liquor store, proclaimed  
my last patient of the evening, presently  
wending his well-dressed way  
through a third divorce.*

I struggle to remain inscrutable  
as I was trained to do, but inwardly  
I roll my eyes, and manage to hold back  
a giggle, as I engage in my own  
sexist musings.

*Yup, that's what most men really want,  
I think, but most don't say it aloud.  
Although these days men claim  
they want smart, the contest is on  
when they find a woman who's smarter.*

My patient is trying with his careless quip  
to amuse me and to distract himself  
from deep hurt and disillusion—flirting  
with me, this lanky dapper man,  
daring me to disagree.

*Seriously?* I finally ask, as he waits,  
grinning, for my reply. *Nah*, he relents,  
as he reaches over to the table beside him  
turning around the clock so I can't see  
our time is up.





**PERFECTION / REFLECTION**

**Edward D. Currelley**

Tony Matelli, *Ideal Woman*, 1998-1999

Flat head, large ears, toothless, naked and vulnerable  
All that you are, is who I am  
Your perfection, is my reflection  
My taught perception of who you are, should be, have become  
A forced identity of selfish convenience  
Couch caddy, door mat, punching bag  
Pleasure tool who submits to my sexual whims  
Comforting when the man within can't bare the pain or face the reality of weakness  
Hating the strength and fortitude of your conviction, allegiance, mere presence  
Yet, you remain  
Tear filled glassy eyes that penetrate, staring, wondering why with each episode  
Evidence of your love or fear, felt deeply from your embrace when comforting  
Time after time after time  
Always as I crumble on bent knee sobbing, begging for forgiveness  
Again and again and again  
Time after time after time  
Purple bruising on arms, neck and back  
Ears that suffer the burden of misguided screams and verbal assault  
Yet, you remain  
Silently, hiding in the shadow, waiting to comfort, enduring the pain  
Time after time after time  
Yet, you remain  
My courage, my strength, my reflection

**STRENGTH & FRAGILITY**  
**Edward D. Currelley**

Kiki Smith, *Mother*, 1991

Backed against the wall  
Hanging in wait, as mothers do  
Nurturing instinct at the ready  
A vacant womb still experiencing echoing pains  
Calls of concern, non-existent  
Calls of urgency, with overwhelming frequency  
The fragility of strength always overestimated  
Tested time after time after time, always prevailing  
Nerve racking, exhausting repetitious anticipation of woe  
Bosom coupled in callused yet, gentle hands, bearing offerings again  
Breast milk rich in nourishment, like blood in veins, always flowing  
Body of paper, strength of steel  
Hair like Rapunzel, lowered from tender not yet fully healed scalp  
Yet again, assisting in the ascent to sanctuary  
Pleading voices of action, echoing in silence, fallen on deaf ears  
Reminder that mother's cup, filled with righteousness is always within reach  
Always ready to quench the thirst and feed the soul of her hungry child



***Mother's Milk***  
**Colette Kavana**

Kiki Smith, *Mother*, 1991

Smallest haiku, opens its carcass  
Body of calling  
Sacrilege of taking  
One breast a fig tree  
The other a white dove  
A feeding of mother's tree  
Lost branch from which we grow  
Nipples gentle with the stems  
Suckling fulfillment, deep of flesh  
Endless hollow creeping of night  
Yawning cave of a mother's love  
Where maternal love is the song of the flower  
Suitcase of skin folded around us  
Tugging impulse of paper dolls  
Full hands holding the softness of brie  
Burning spoiled waters, born capable of forgiveness  
Nourishing of leaking milk, poured nipples of golden harvest  
Where heart lives in the middle of earth and blood of river  
Where crest of waves spill milk, from menstrual blood's thick knowledge  
Where death and dreams are a strange place  
A women utterly silent, in the picked clean of her carcass  
Cage she is incorpored to  
Lifetime reservoir  
Corridor of blood  
Necessity of born flesh  
An empty swan of dried river  
Flapping her wings against the rain  
Indigo of separation  
Final moment of relief  
Conjoined passage of birth and death  
    Body to body     Bone to bone

## **RESURRECTION**

**Liz Burk**

Berlinde de Bruyckere, *La Femme sans Tete*, 2003

the limber body, smooth flesh  
    strong bones, resilient spine, the moxie  
and verve of my younger self. The wish

to haul that body from the graveyard  
    of buried hope haunts me, stirs images  
of endless calisthenics and vitamin brews,  
    nutrient-rich tasteless diets, enemas.

My six-year old self lurks inside, erupts in an argument  
    with my husband, sulks, slams doors. My 12-year-old  
appears at faculty meetings, craves approval, weeps at frowns.

The 40-year-old flirts shamelessly, dances  
    past midnight—the Texas Two-Step,  
Whisky River Jitterbug, West Coast Lindy—drinks  
    bourbon to ease pain.

.  
But they all wake up the next morning  
    in the crone's aging body, with sprained knee,  
twisted tendons, bruised hips, rumbling tummy.

.  
A bittersweet caution creeps in—is it wiser  
    to relinquish pulse and desire, the longing  
for an African safari? A trip to Moscow clashes  
    with the wisdom of staying home with a book.

I remind myself from time to time, *I'm old*.  
    The body is worn, the mind rusty. My Zen  
friends ask, *Why isn't it enough to just be?* And yet

how can I surrender my yen  
    to sky dive, play fiddle, write poems,  
make love? To walk all available avenues  
    before this body folds?



*Hope, Excised*  
Moira Trachtenberg

Berlinde de Bruyckere, *La Femme sans Tete*, 2003

All haunch and hunch  
and cropped  
the only apparent effeminate  
the waist  
pinched and tucked  
scrawny feet  
(so little to balance on)  
without head  
without arms  
without breasts  
so circumcised

Circumscribed  
in gray and white  
only the faintest blush of pink  
labia-less on a rusted  
lab table  
the empty results of  
every medical study  
an experiment in absentia  
due to the very exclusion  
of women—  
excision

And yet the soul  
hovers its presence  
claims its space  
in this void  
of necessary parts  
lay on your hands  
soak up the pain  
don't panic—  
it may not decimate you

Take on this task  
warm her waxen flesh  
until pliable  
remodel without fear  
untwist cold despair  
build her up  
into a new shape  
and name it *hope*

***Untitled***  
**Alicia Morgan**

Claudette Schreuders, *Crying in Public*, 2002

In her gallery Uptown  
The artist is crying

Sneaking amongst the wreckage  
A cross-cultural pillager

Our lady of various sorrows  
A Madonna on timeshare

Carved from a single piece  
Of Old World stock.

In her studio Downtown  
The artist is transcendent

Our Lady Valarosa  
Fearless and knowing

Rising to the occasion  
With pulse racing

Exultant to the glory  
Of divine love.



***Seated***  
**Wayne L. Miller**

Huma Bhabha, *The Orientalist*, 2011

Wind sun sandstorms  
strip once-painted skin  
from this King who rules  
abandoned regions

barren and inhospitable,  
staring at the wall,  
looked upon by you  
ignorant of his name.

Read the inscription  
that omit the victories  
and accomplishments  
he heroically achieved

through wise mind  
and mighty body.



***Witness***  
**Loretta Oleck**

Chris Jones, *Furtrapper*, 2012

Spectator of the dead.  
Bystander to tragedy.  
Onlooker of trauma.

I've been called a *gore ghoul*,  
and although I denounce that label,  
on some level, I know it's true.

I was there, 9/11-  
interviewing relatives of the deceased,  
photographing devastation,  
camera and notebook in hand.

I've documented war zones,  
pressed lens to my eye, searching  
for perfect angles and nuanced light  
to better capture the plight of the starving,  
and the sites of mass destruction.

All the while, scribbling fragmented  
metaphors to later build into articles  
and poems.

*If it matters. As if it heals.*

Shame burns inside as I edit photographs-  
a voyeuristic pursuit bordering on addiction.

*As if it matters. As if it heals.*

What is my responsibility as witness?  
To share the story, or to hold it in confidence?  
To distract myself from myself?

How often do I awaken from nightmares  
and flashbacks to find my heart numb  
amid chaos?

Must I become larger than life to be loved by you?

To be loved by anyone?

Might I learn to bear witness to the mundane  
without dying?

Is death irrelevant?





***Birth Night***  
**Julie Nord**

Patricia Piccinini, *Undivided*, 2014

Buttoning your soft blue pajamas, little boy,  
you curled up on your ample mattress  
where there was plenty of room for something  
to join you and spoon, nestling  
its naked pudge around your back.  
How sleepy you must have been  
to not notice its arrival—it does not have  
a body type that could maneuver subtly.  
The mattress would have groaned  
at the creature’s weight. And  
the entire bed must have rocked,  
a boat taking on a clumsy  
passenger, and it’s possible  
the armadillo-like plates that run down its spine  
clacked and rattled as it drew you  
close to its belly. Yet here you two lie now,  
peaceful, as if you were matching peas in a pod, yet  
to anyone awake and observant you look  
oppositional, unlike in the extreme.  
The smile on your boy lips is baby-blissful as if  
you were back in your mama’s womb, while  
the ugliness cuddling you slumbers  
through the birthing of infant revisions  
of itself—no, not quite of itself . . . No, the litter it’s spawning  
from its back has shed the scales and  
replicates your smile and porcelain skin, while sporting full fur coats,  
and each baby’s little brown claws  
are clenched up in the most human-like, fetal sleep.  
Whatever is emerging during this night,  
sleep well all of you, while you still can.



***In Praise of Monsters***  
**Lorraine Currelley**

Patricia Piccinini, *Undivided*, 2004

one night when Jeffrey was a little boy he could not sleep. he heard a sound. looking around his room he could not tell where the sound was coming from. opening his closet door, there was only silence. where could the sound be coming from? I know! so, he peeked underneath his bed. there his eyes met with a curious face like no face he had ever met before. staring back at him. the face had large eyes and a smile that looked as though it was about to break into laughter. suddenly as quickly as it had appeared it disappeared. don't go! don't go! Jeffrey cried out. crawling underneath his bed he searched but there was nothing to be found. the following night when it was time for him to go to bed he pleaded with his parents to come with him, saying he had something special to show them. go to bed Jeffrey and take Toby bear his parents shouted from their bedroom. Mommy, Daddy, please come!

there are no monsters living under our beds!  
there are no monsters living under our beds!

children do not cry themselves to sleep. nor do toys comfort needing souls no matter how soft and cuddly. nor provide love's tender embrace, warmth and soothing words. nor weave magic's colors and joy into sweet song. their tears are comforted by those responding to the universal child's cry when others fail to listen. children understand, know and speak the language of love's true purity and same.

there are no monsters living under our beds!  
there are no monsters living under our beds!

when Jeffrey became a parent he cuddled with his children, told them stories and sung until they had fallen asleep. he spoke of monsters not being unworldly creatures; but us in our most shameful and evil form, when trying to hurt others in failed attempts to heal the hurting and ugly spaces in barren hearts and souls.

words like they, we, them, us, other becoming the monsters keeping us from ourselves and each other. they are different from us. We are different from them, makes the labeled other possible. the feared, suspected dangerous outsider. the one who does not belong. the one who does not look like us.

there are no monsters living under our beds!  
there are no monsters living under our beds!

there are only the ones we create and place there.

**TURNED AROUND**  
**Edward D. Currelley**

Evan Penny, *Back of Evan, (Variation #3)*, 2006

I turned my back away from the absurdity of today's politics, not America  
Ironically, I find myself still facing a wall  
The wall, real or not, has already manifested itself through the back channels dark politics  
America is larger than an individual, bigger and stronger than any singular political party

My back is turned from politics that resist its founding ideals, closes its doors on the growing  
inevitability of change, choosing an un-just electoral college over the one person one vote  
promise.

America is suffering from fear, greed, the perpetuation of hate and the allowed flawed  
leadership that has closed its eyes on a nation and leaving **We the people** without guidance or  
direction.

Our youth, the future of this nation is scrambling, clutching at false hopes and distant promises.

The beauty of America has always been in the belief that all things are possible.  
That the dreams and ideals of democracy will lead to prosperity.

We are all dreamers and must not allow dark politics to forget that a blind eye is exactly what it  
is, and that the road map defining our nation, drawn on parchment, stands on its own, but, only  
when adhered to.

We are all dreamers.

When we're allowed to dream, America stands tall, proud, strong and un-matched  
America is the land of infinite possibilities and opportunity, there is no better nation than a  
nation that represents every culture and people on the entire planet.

**Like me, it's time for the dark politics of America to turn around.**

***I STILL SEE YOU***  
**Merle Molofsky**

Evan Penny, *Back of Evan (Variation # 3)*, 2006

Don't turn away,  
I'm still here, are you listening?

Time is turning us to stone, or gravel, or silt.  
You imagine you are so all alone,  
you sit motionless, and travel  
into an emptiness you still believe we had built  
together.

You think you will live forever,  
but I still see you....



***For Argument's Sake***  
**Les Von Losberg**

Sam Jinks, *Standing Pieta*, 2014

Okay, let's say for argument's sake  
That death is irrelevant. I could  
Pontificate upon the meaning  
Of irrelevance from epistemological  
First principles or from a cosmological  
Perspective illuminate the cyclicity  
Of matter and energy in time and space;  
Or dumb it down and sing the praises  
Of the never-ending circle of life  
Like some Disney animal cliché.



But I'd rather speak about the dead,  
The dead whose sudden departure—  
It's always sudden, that brash  
Transition from here to there—alters  
The world irreparably: grandparent,  
Parent: the ground shifts out  
From under our feet; brother,  
Sister: the air we breathe rarifies,  
Becomes less dense, less sustaining;  
A child, a grandchild: the soul  
Of the world contracts, grows hard  
And brittle, cracks. Even a stranger's  
Death leaves a hairline fracture  
In the beautiful world we've been  
Force-fed in school, by television,  
In church and synagogue and mosque  
By those who know nothing  
About what really happens next.

Whether death is relevant or not  
For the dead is, in every relevant way,  
Irrelevant, but nothing diminishes death  
for the living. Anything to the contrary  
is a lie, a hoax, a fairytale, or a miracle:  
this is all one can say with certainty,  
and all we can say in the moment  
is irrelevant as well and of no matter.

***The Leaving Place***  
**Colette Kavana**

Sam Jinks, *Standing Pieta*, 2014

It's time to go it's time to go  
Someplace full of flat blue sky  
Full of sshhuush and quiet  
The close of tired eyes  
No longer to hear the call of morning  
The sensed distance stretching it's defeating  
spine between our hearts  
The haunting gale of vacancy to fill the  
hollows of our eyes  
There is no thief to blame because we loved  
you  
We will send you into the night  
Hand you a compass and tell you it will be  
alright  
Before we lose each other beneath an  
endless sky  
We will find ourselves again amongst your  
shadow  
Turn the hours, hold the pages of your  
hands  
Suckle darkness too heavy to swallow  
We will walk backwards into the vexed  
destinies of a shared life  
The confines of a heart, which is without  
confinement, in final pause  
Before the threshold of the inexhaustible  
silence of lose  
How far it feels from the infatuation of  
childhood  
How thin time seems, how late the  
fragrance  
Bursting from moments of before  
And how your name will throb inside our  
minds, and how our hearts dissolve  
Into a trembling luminous confusion of  
bright anguished tears  
Beyond the depth of sight, there is a  
kingdom of peace

Vibrating like a cloud of fireflies in warm  
summer air  
And now that disembodied grief has come  
our way  
We float in a literary kind of sadness  
The suspension of a life and the  
remembrance of yours in ours  
Where the sky will remain a page of water  
Where the life we have longed for finds us  
all at the end  
The body as a kind of place where the soul  
migrates in a spiral of completion  
That brings relief and freedom from all  
complexity  
Escaping one by one into the embers of its  
former life  
Where the waiting is over the repentance  
done, ascending into a final sacrament  
of light  
We have never really known how intricate a  
tone of voice could be  
Or how evasive the direct approach to life,  
and all of it's conditional endings, could  
finally become  
A minor shading or a faint intoxication, of a  
now memory held in our mind  
In pristine of innocence and all insubstantial  
floating intellect, we will seek to  
understand  
The feel of wind which blows the soul about  
Where nothing can bring a fragrance back,  
nor make it breathe again  
We will feel the chill of something much too  
bold too comprehend  
As night folds, we will watch the stars come  
out in revelry of fallen silence  
Death is still the unimaginable, shadowing  
the years  
It's time to go It's time to go

***Death Sigh***  
**Cindy Beer-Fouhy**

Sam Jinks, *Standing Pieta*, 2014

Not nearly ready  
To let go,  
I lean to hold your  
Limp body

As life escapes  
Not all at once  
But like the breath of long sighs.

Not audible sighs  
Of grief or sadness or lost love  
But sighs that leave without sound

Like a wave goodbye,  
The vapor hand of a  
Bottled genie set free.

*Perhaps the sigh*  
*Of suffering's end*  
I tell myself.

But still not ready  
To let go,  
I close my eyes,

Tighten my hands  
Around your arms  
Clenching life,

Unyielding  
As a held breath.

## ***The Alchemy of Hades***

Robert Miss

Pawel Althamer, *The Power of Now*, 2016

We sat on the rim of Hades watching the firemen  
emerge from the mammoth pit in their dusty shuttle bus.  
They had labored a twelve-hour shift to clear the debris  
and find the bones that were not incinerated.  
When melted computers fuse with flesh  
an insidious fragrance effuses the air like leftover funeral flowers.  
Perhaps more like the smell emitted from the furnaces at Auschwitz,  
or the smoldering Cheyenne tepees left burning by Custer's cavalry.

Such was the malingering scent at ground zero of America's commerce,  
the towering twins born from the loins of mammon,  
reduced now to a hole in the ground of twisted metal and sticky-gray ashes.  
While the other firemen sat, heads down, exhausted,  
Captain Murphy sat next to us,  
rogue visitors who somehow slipped past security  
to vainly see if we could help.  
He did not question us, but spoke about his family in Queens,  
and his first responder son who made it out in time.  
For us to play counselor or consoler,  
quote the Bible or a spiritual healer  
would have been a meaningless distraction.

Captain Murphy was pure American steel doing what he was trained to do,  
and he was doing it well.  
The survival of his son, his love for family and country was  
positive enough on this sunny day in September,  
overlooking Hell.





**Canary in a Coal Mine**  
**Loretta Oleck**

Pawel Althamer, *The Power of Now*, 2016

Trapped inside the minefield of your mind,  
voices calm and coax, mock and joke, lure  
you, daily,  
into the ravenous mouth of a bottomless  
pit.

You tell me that 4,600 feet underground in  
the tunnels  
of a far away gold mine, lives a worm called  
Mephisto-  
a devil-worm from hell.

You weep when you tell me that only this  
blind worm  
can endure such dark, cramped spaces of  
the deep.

I say, then, you too must be a worm.

Your headlamp casts light only a few feet in  
front of you,  
never bright enough to see anything whole,  
including me.

I have become a piece-meal messy mosaic,  
a patchwork  
of a partner. You know you are still alive on  
the rare occasion  
when you catch a glimpse of my thighs  
tangled in sheets, my lips  
cracked from the heat. More often, a stray  
beam from your helmet,  
like a bullet, pierces my bones, jagged and  
sharp rocks under flesh.

The voices in your head have become noisy,  
now.

They speak the language of dead miners,  
ghosts getting in our way. They are loud  
enough for me to clearly hear their words,  
weighing out what is real and what is an  
illusion-

*even in the center of earth, darkness  
doesn't exist. The sun  
never sets. It continually burns. I am a  
worm. I am rock.  
I am coal. I am earth. I am sky. I am light. I  
am you.*

*I am.*

You remind me, the blind, devil-worm will  
be the last  
bastion of bloom when this world tumbles  
into ruins.

I say, you too have thrived inside a barren  
womb  
without sunshine, without oxygen.  
And, you would no longer recognize me  
if you saw me naked in the light.

You may be a worm but I am a canary.

When you emerge from the shadows of the  
mine,  
and the chatter of your mind, don't bother  
coming home.

This canary no longer whistles.

***There, but for the Grace of God, Go I***  
**Walter Rabetz**

Pawel Althamer, *The Power of Now*, 2016

Each morning on the way to work,  
I pass a man sitting in a cardboard box with plastic over it.  
Legs sticking out!  
Winter -cold.  
Shoes - with holes - where scraps of newspaper instead of toes, stick out.  
A small can sits in front next to a scribbled cardboard sign.

Thank you -Praise the Lord.

This morning as I am about to pass the man and reach into my pocket for some change, the gentle snow flakes stop and the sky brightens just as I was murmuring to myself, "*There, but for the grace of God, go I.*" I am overwhelmed with the reality of that phrase and its deepest meaning. What if, I, was that man and not vice president of... at that moment ...I am compelled to bend down, take off my shoes and exchange them for his, as I do this, I hear a melodious

*"There, but for the grace of God, go I "*

I realize that I am cold, - very cold, with frozen toes. I look up and I see a man in a warm elegant overcoat bending down and putting several coins in my box.

With frozen lips I say,

"Thank you - Praise the Lord."

***Mama's Hands***  
**Lorraine Currelley**

Pawel Althamer, *The Power of Now*, 2016

I hear your silent words. witnessing your body bent over as though in prayer. I see the mask that protects and hides your pain. I smile my mouth forming the word hello. you deserve so much more. this is a dance we acknowledge and understand. there will be no perks nor government handouts for our children and families. unlike, fat asses pimping our blood. living high off of our dime. Brother, I got my own story to tell.

seems like my mama was always working to provide for her family.  
we children witnessing blood, sweat and tears pay for our survival and lives.  
sun up and sun down is how we learned to tell time. half a day meant 7 to 12. full day meant 7 to 4. overtime, meant mama arriving home by 6 or 7 sometimes, taking a little nap before caring for her own family.

when mama awoke from her nap. We were always eager to hear mama's stories. bachelors, masters, and doctorates operating elevators, pushing mops, sweeping floors and caring and consoling other people's children when she had to leave her own. she managed to make hard work sound like adventures.

mama's telling was always colorful and dramatic. the more we laughed the more dramatic she became. we would plead with her to tell them over and over again. finally after the second or third telling she would say okay that's enough now, leaving to prepare dinner while we completed our homework. she would tell us from the kitchen what to lay out to wear to school in the morning. we could cook some things. but mama preferred cooking for her family and said she did not want us messing up good food.

mama's reward was well fed children, content smiles, a roof over our heads, clothing on our backs, compliments on the meals she prepared, laughter and hope. an ever present resiliency birthing generations of Black women and men. standing tall sometimes delayed dreams but never broken spirits. This is what mama's hands gave the world.

**NOW WHAT HAPPENED**  
**Merle Molofsky**

Pawel Althamer, *The Power of Now*, 2013

Old Grandmother knows the stories, knows the truth  
of everything that happened everywhere, to everyone.  
She wove a magic carpet when she was young,  
dreaming she could fly, and then she could.  
Old Grandmother twirls the carpet in the air,  
and all eyes follow, and obey, and see  
what she tells us is truly there.  
In the park, where children play,  
she cast the carpet on the grass, and there it lay,  
until she gave it form. Transform! she cried,  
and carpet danced its way to being bench.  
Park bench. Whoever finds her way, his way,  
to sit and ponder what has brought her there,  
him there, expects to dream a magic carpet dream.  
Some may.  
Some won't. Some find that they are stuck in time,  
remembering what they should forget.  
Is rosemary for remembrance?  
The grass is only grass, but if you ran  
along the edge and saw the bench  
your thoughts would turn pensive, and you'd think  
of pansies, of thyme, of rue.  
Old Grandmother knew  
that one day he'd return to her  
empty of dreams....

***Why Does Now Move?***  
**Wayne L. Miller**

Pawel Althamer, *The Power of Now*, 2016

Staring into the floor  
hands over his ears  
suspended in toxic complicity  
with a burden of psychological  
time jumping from conditioned patterns  
denying any presence running  
from the future into an existence  
before memory questions  
if a milestone is moved ten feet is it  
still a milestone or a stepping stone  
why is most of life in the present  
why does now move one second  
per second but I am still here still here  
and if I reprogram my curse words  
to gosh-darn can I become a griot  
and if I tear all the pages  
from a book and read them  
in order did I just read a book  
and today is the last goddamn  
goodsweet day of doing nothing  
and if I haven't looked into a mirror  
am I still there and I have  
no money I'm hungry there's no  
work and what time is it  
now and I can't stay here now  
gonna get up to go to the bathroom  
at the coffee shop now ask  
for a sandwich find a warm subway  
grating for tonight and I haven't got time  
and I can't move now

***Pretty In Pink***  
**Les Von Losberg**

Keith Edmier, *Beverly Edmier, 1967, 1998*

In the end, flesh rots  
Or is turned to ash,  
Or is dried out  
Like a large piece  
Of candied fruit—  
But we know this,  
At least for the deceased,  
Is irrelevant.

    What isn't  
And what wasn't  
Even for the dead  
Is the first pink blush  
Of a young girl's cheeks,  
The crimson flush of her  
Burgeoning pubescence,  
The delicate scarlet of marriage,  
The rouge rush first sex  
Washes over her chest and neck,  
The delicate pink blossom  
Swell of her belly as she waits  
To make life, hidden away,  
An impending miracle, appear;  
To make death—however  
Irrelevant in the end—once  
Again all that seems to matter.



***I'm Glad to know Someone like You***  
**Verity O'Connell**

Keith Edmier, *Beverly Edmier*, 1967

You have to pay five dollar admissions  
Then I'll lift it up  
Then I'll let you see  
The little baby that  
Grows inside of me  
Pretty cute  
Hopefully it won't turn out  
Looking like you  
Have the image of an  
Angel and the wings of one too  
I don't want you to touch  
Stay at a safe distance  
All day long I look  
Through the plexiglas to see it move  
Its eating me  
Maybe it likes chocolate too  
One day I woke up and it was there  
I don't know what to do with it now  
It keeps growing  
And I know  
That one day it will tear me apart  
And scream into the world  
And conquer me  
And the creatures in the sea  
For now I'll let it be  
It's the closest one can be to another thing  
I'm glad I got it  
I hope it likes pink  
And touching reflections  
In dirty pools  
On side streets

***Kiss this Fish***  
**Moira Trachtenberg**

Entang Wiharso, *Inheritance*, 2014

It is all of the things  
we never talked about,  
this fish,  
all lips and gulp and gape  
But now,  
a fish out of water  
these things we never talked about  
so obvious  
glistening here on the table  
and yet dying  
because we could never admit  
any of them were there!  
that they needed water  
and not air  
or air and not water  
or at least not a wall of fog  
like the drugs  
our mother consumed  
for pain  
no one called it addiction  
even when she marked the hours  
until the next pill right on the bottle  
like our father, who never  
helped us with our homework  
who never talked about his father  
who jumped off a roof  
harboring no illusion  
that he could fly  
he landed as hard

as the fish on this table  
the evidence is overwhelming  
that many things in this world exist  
even though never acknowledged  
this is your inheritance  
children  
to see  
to confront  
to resolve  
for a better future—  
embrace this fish  
kiss it on the lips





## Family Secrets Loretta Oleck

Entang Wiharso, *Inheritance*, 2014

Wife: Straight spine. Silver dagger in thick hair-  
it would only take a quick flick of her wrist to  
send it flying, directly into her husband's jugular.

Instead, she sits, prim and proper, and says -  
you have been nothing but a bonefish, feeding  
in shallow mudflats with the incoming tide.  
Feeding on lies spit out since the day we  
married.

What lies? Husband asks.

Lies you slurp and scrape, she says. Fitting  
falsehoods over fact. Only an expert angler  
could bait you, turning you belly up to fillet your  
truth. Spineless man.

Husband: Severed head in hand. Dreams oozing  
out the neck-dead dreams, dreaded themes,  
over and again. Will his wife never speak the  
truth?

Husband says to Wife-you are Narcissus, peering  
at yourself in the pond where the orange Koi  
grow  
so large they no longer resemble fish. You have  
spent decades in love with your own reflection  
and its ever-changing complexion. Like the Koi,  
your pallor looks nothing as it did the day we  
married.

Wife says, you are a bonefish, not a Koi. You are  
a skittish, grey ghost retreating into deeper  
waters  
when the tide ebbs, hiding from light.

Son Number One: Butterfly, twitchy hands.  
Thoughts rumbling. Ruminating. *Stop!* He wants  
to shout.

He wants to gut this fish. He wants to steal the  
dagger from his mother's perfect up-do. Stab it  
into the tail. Draw the blade up towards the  
head. Split it open. Use his spit to rinse out its  
insides filled with secrets

and lies. But, Son Number One knows he won't  
do it.

A family is as unhealthy as its many secrets  
untold.

Son Number Two: Lives in shadows as a  
phantom. Tunes out the cacophony of all that is  
thought  
but is never spoken. His heart is broken. He goes  
through the motions of family dinners, all the  
while, planning his escape. He is a coy and  
cunning boy. He can morph his face to look like  
anybody else's.  
He can keep secrets so close to his chest they  
appear to be nothing but his beating heart. He  
can flee,  
and his family will never notice he is gone.

Wife: Looks past the lolling fish tongue, resting  
heavy on her lap, deep inside its gaping mouth.  
She sees the bones of her future, and has no  
other choice but to cut out this Koi's tongue.

Some songs should never be sung.

Husband will throw the severed head aside.  
Dreams lost in a tide of secrets. He will ride  
the tongue-less Koi like a wild bronco. Perhaps,  
then, he will impress his unimpressible wife.

Son Number One will live a shortened life- a  
butterfly landing, too soon, on the razor's edge  
of mother's blade.

Son Number Two never existed, but no one ever  
knew.

A family stew of secrets- neatly plated and  
served. An unspoken pact pulsing through their  
veins-  
the fish who keeps its mouth shut will never get  
caught

***DON'T JUST STAND THERE. PLEASE DO SOMETHING.***

**Gene Tashoff**

Mark Manders, *Iron Ruler*, 2004

You can see what my creator has done to me.  
Or what he's not done. Left me naked, entrapped and debauched -  
without arms or breasts, seemingly dead, robbing me of the  
opportunity to be a fully realized woman.

Why? Perhaps to express his rage at a lover who left him.  
Or a mother who could not express love to him. Or a public  
that at first didn't accept him.

But I still have a brain, a fine, pliant one, if I do say so myself.  
That is, if I could speak. My artist doesn't know that.  
He would be outraged if he did. And he would neither  
understand nor tolerate it.

Despite my limitations, I have hopes, dreams and aspirations.  
Starting with a need to join all the other strong-minded young women who are using their  
intelligence and ambition to run things.  
Look at your recent elections. I've heard all about them from  
scores of visitors like you.

I know a lot, actually. I know the painter Cy Twombly said, "In art, it's what you leave out, not  
what you put in." His and my artist's arrogance could fill all the galleries and museums on the  
planet.

This gallery's owners are fine, knowledgeable people,  
fully appreciative of their art. But they are in the thrall of my  
artist's skill and reputation, so they don't understand my need  
to be whole and alive.

I desperately need your help in convincing my creator  
to complete me. Though his ego would probably say that I'm complete when he says I am.

I'm aware that this would be hard. But you know what was really hard? Telepathically  
convincing one of your male poets to write this page of what I call free-me verse.



***Leavening***  
**Judith Heineman**

Matt Johnson, *Bread Figure Reclining*, 2017

Needing dough  
Is not enough

Half baked ideas  
rise in the recesses  
ingredients  
ooze, slide, solidify  
crusts of memory

stoked meticulously  
early morning embers  
ignite  
woodfired  
at the perfect temperature

bemused baguettes  
emerge  
mere bagatelles  
elongated  
rounded  
pounded  
stretched and folded back onto itself

food for thought

Pungent aroma intoxicates  
beckoning warmth  
security, ritual

Taste buds scream



***I was toast before I was even baked***  
**Francesca Ricapito**

Matt Johnson, *Bread Figure Reclining*, 2017

*First you pat it*  
*Then you roll it*  
*Then you mark it with an X*

Poor sad-sack baker's man  
calloused knuckles probing my flesh.  
Pushing me into shapes that fit your hand,  
stretching me wide,  
flipping me over,  
and doing it again.  
I see your mouth watering.  
You want to feel me?  
Want to crush my crust and cut me open?  
Stick your face up close and smell me?  
Are you going to taste me?  
Butter me up and eat my soft insides?  
Feel the heat: I'm rising. I'm hot and fresh.  
And you can chew on that.

***Geiger Man and the Naked Lady***  
**Robert Miss**

Damien Hirst, *Death Is Irrelevant*, 2000

This is the night of the snow moon.  
It rises above the curved rim of the sea,  
sending a spume of waves  
rushing like tossed silver to the very shore.  
But the black swan of night swoops down  
to turn dark the sweeping strand.  
A solitary figure follows the  
scratchy clicks of his Geiger counter,  
probing the beach inch-by-inch  
for sandy treasure,  
a bobbing flashlight in his hand.  
At the beach motel, a whirr of alabaster legs  
sweeps across the shadowed rooftop.  
Lounging guards protecting their rebel commander,  
see the naked lady as a moving target,  
but too late as she swings through an open window,  
probably into the arms of her lover, they surmise.  
A tossed grenade pre-empt the imagined tryst.  
Two lovers dying in each other's arms.  
Geiger man's headphones cancel out  
the explosive mayhem. He does not pause.  
The guards are unsure of detection.  
They run toward the surf, snatch the Geiger counter,  
make the man kneel in the sand,  
shoot him in the back of the head.  
Only empty coke cans are uncovered  
as they play with the Geiger counter  
then abandon it.  
It's daybreak. Some people are now walking their dogs  
up and down the beach.  
They are afraid to go near or even look at the body.  
But in the morning glare, the tattoo of a naked woman  
across Geiger man's back cannot go unnoticed.  
He had it made to please his wild and beautiful wife.

**MaryAnn McCarra-Fitzpatrick**  
***Resurrect, 46 Adam***

Damien Hirst, *Death is Irrelevant*, 2000

a heart, first, from a cooperative doctor  
to place behind those ivory bars—  
more pleasing eyes—those will come  
later

she winds the sinews through her hands,  
applying them there, and there, and there,  
again counting the joints of his bones,  
telling those beads,  
hardness between her thumb and index  
finger,  
then places the lacy tributaries of veins,  
scarlet,  
plushly branched lungs, to bring him life

46 Adam—do you hear me?

46 Adam—what's your status?

46 Adam—check and advise.

from the apse she hears—them—in  
the transept, gorging on carrion corpses,  
dead horseflesh, dead dogs, these pulsing  
with  
glistening maggots, each a throbbing jewel,  
fit victuals for those who twist scripture  
to their own ends—mewling, shrieking,  
nursing their air of perpetual  
grievance, aching to be offended, spoiling

for a scrap, embracing vitriol as their  
oxygen.

the tension must be just right  
to make him smile again, the eyes to  
see, azure as the painted sky breaking  
above her head,  
the flesh laid skillfully onto the  
boneframe, ivory, freckled, supple as that of  
a newborn child, drawn up  
over the skull before she bends and  
breathes life into him, for “death  
shall have no dominion” this day, the  
brainpan, heavily grey, tightly knotted,  
placed just so

And shall we dance again?

Resurrect, 46 Adam, and shake  
your black locks,  
freed, finally, from these splayed  
strictures, that most unnatural  
stance, check and advise and  
dance all your days, reborn,  
rebounding, resounding, answering the  
call to live,  
speaking truth to the  
faces of liars.



***Memory of My Father in Boca Raton***  
**Bob Zaslow**

Damien Hirst, *Death is Irrelevant*, 2000

Listened to his breaths.  
They were more forced.  
Lifted my eyes from the paper.  
Hospice bed covers barely moved.  
Eyes closed, lips closed, ears open?  
Nurse must have folded his glasses  
into their plastic case.  
The one that always closed with a CLACK!  
Which forty years ago told me  
Daddy was done reading for the night.  
I could hear that sound through  
my sister's bedroom to mine.  
I liked hearing the CLACK! before I fell asleep.  
An exclamation point on the day.  
Wondered if I'd ever hear it again.  
That's a lie. I knew.  
Stopped reading, and, moving close to his ear,  
told him what a great job he'd done.  
Kissed his forehead, and said, "I love you.  
I'll be right back."  
Two minutes later,  
Nurse touched my shoulder.  
"He's passed," she said.  
No words came.  
"I've seen it before. Some people wait  
until their loved ones have left the room  
to take their last breath."  
I don't know how long I stood by his bed,  
but before I left  
I tucked the glasses case  
into my pocket.

***Untitled***  
**Ruth D. Handel**

Damien Hirst, *Death is Irrelevant*, 2000

eyes spin but the skeleton's pinioned  
encased in a plexiglass boat,  
honey and money remaindered and stripped,  
at sea without landfall or moat

arrested mid-air for years and a day  
bones attesting to human life claim,  
compressed within boundary above and below  
no landing for whatever remains

palms cupping upward, arms stretching out,  
reminding of crucifixion,  
a torso of bone without fracture or strain  
ribs bulging with skeletal conviction

steady in place the bones of the feet,  
one curving over the other,  
left foot is raised, sole deeply etched,  
two almost identical lovers.

the ping pong eyes of this skeletal face  
with insouciant irrelevance spin,  
disdaining aluminum, steel, rubber tubing  
and hint at a spirit within

bulbs revolve above the cadaver's calmed bones,  
disclaiming all shock or surprise,  
no outsider vision can mock them  
or quiet their trickster eyes.

Moving they stake claim as the prime remains,  
though contours of bone appear;  
eyes dance in an aura of blinking light,  
humorous movement, outcome unclear.



***Para Ti***  
**Kahlil Koromantee**

Maria Nepomuceno, *Redemagma*, 2013

On the other hand,  
There's you  
And your tendency  
To position yourself  
According to which side  
The coconut falls  
And yet I fought for you  
Let your babies  
Suck at my offended nipples  
I fed you my music  
To help shape  
Your identity of convenience  
Where you honor my ancestry  
But laugh at my skin color

And I still fight for you  
Cut down sugar canes for you  
When the one who stole your nose  
Builds walls to keep you  
From crossing over  
To the heavenly place  
Where you learn to deny me  
Of even a respectful glance

It's that same tendency  
To pick at my treasures  
But marry the one  
Who throws you crumbs  
That you answer to  
So devotedly  
Or risk being seen with me

There's a reason why congas  
Came from the Congo  
Why you need me  
Only when a baby's on the way  
Why you need me  
Only when I bring you healing  
It's that tendency  
Of selective memory  
When I remember everything.



***Oranges***  
**Jo-Ann Brody**

Maria Nepomuceno, *Redemagma*, 2013

Eve ate an apple  
not an orange.  
It fell from the tree  
In the garden of Eden.

But this is the tropics  
orange tree, bright, lush colors  
A hammock filled with me  
Me filled with tree

The scent of orange blossoms from my youth  
It's a good place to live if you are an orange, she said  
But she wanted city life, culture, urbanity not an  
Orange tree all prickly  
Not unlike a rose bush  
In the desert miles from nowhere.

Hammock all  
rose colored, reds, oranges, and burgundy.

Woman as vessel, holder of the future  
A clay woman holding life, nourishment, promise  
And a tree  
fertility figure  
Venus figure  
Me