Essence literary and fine arts magazine is a collaborative effort of Kutztown University students who share and express personal feelings, philosophies, and views through the artistic mediums of photography, illustration, life drawing, poetry, and short stories.

ESSENCE

The works contained within are considered by the Essence staff members, some fine examples of creative art and literary expression. The Essence staff expresses appreciation to all its contributors and readers for sharing in this creative student publication.
ESSENCE
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Sunfishes

The reddened face of a small girl peers over the rim of a white bucket the frantic circling of her small fish caught only this morning

The girl strains under the weight of the bucket as she drags it home

The fish, snatched from its weedy blue-green world prays to the fish-gods for salvation

The girl, in her pajamas, comes out into the setting sun the sandy yard is warm beneath her feet she cannot understand why the fish, struggling to make the last feeble rounds of its new home does not love her.

—Jennifer Hoffman
like children we saw in films
about air raid drills,
we ran inside
away from summer shadows
of tall oaks and hickory trees,
fearing the poison spray
and the falling dead caterpillars
that squished bright green
on the pavement.

raucous on the Chevelle’s vinyl seat.
we would tire quickly
in the stale heat of the gas line
and fix our gazes on mother’s frown
in the rearview mirror.

soon to be seven,
I began to understand life’s process
in the killing of gypsy moths,
the brother growing in mother’s stomach,
and the death of aunt polly.
all wrinkled and white.

I could not understand why
it upset people
that a movie star was going to be
the president.
I thought that was everyone’s
dream.

—Isabell Fellenbaum
RESTORATION

The winter that they began
the restoration
of the Sistine Chapel,
I was in my father's study
watching him paint
with pointed brushes
made from the hair
of an animal
I'd never heard of before
brushes made in Germany,
bowls of murky gray water,
colored tubes of paint,
and the chemical smell
of paper sizing
with an undertone
of coffee
filled those cramped quarters
where he worked
standing up
his head and shoulders
bent over his desk,
while Michelangelo strained his
neck
in the opposite direction
all those centuries ago,
careful not to let
the paint drip, making
his eyes water
his mouth curl.

Scientists,
cleaning his work,
are tracing every brush stroke,
while the art historians
are at odds with each other,
and my father begins
with a plain, white
sheet of paper,
clean brushes,
and water
as clear as window glass,
his face, eyes concentrating
in a preoccupation
I take for granted
as the scientists are forming
theories,
and seeing Michelangelo
for the first time,
all of his darks and lights.
"So near," they say,
"that it's like watching him
work."

I think I saw him once, too....

It was quiet
in the Sistine Chapel,
and the air
was masked with pigment smells,
his forehead, furled,
his eyes, squinting,
he worked until dark,
and always cleaned his brushes
at the end of every day.
So, now the historians
are examining his works
again to see
how the painting beneath the
dirt
actually looked.
And at the end of the day,
when the garlic smells from the
kitchen
battle every other scent,
my father takes a wooden chair,
and lifts me on to it,
so I can see
the work he has done
during the day,
all of his oranges and blues,
and as the historians
and scientists in the Vatican
hurry home to kiss their spouses,
the wrinkle in my father's brow
slowly subsides,
putting aside his brush,
he laughs softly,
and becomes mine again.
listening to a woman
play flute in grand central station
and hands throwing change
and the beeping of atm machines
and the soft clap of leather shoes
and the loudspeaker
saying last call for wherever
and mouths eating sandwiches
and heads having a million thoughts
as they get on a train with
a million places to go

the flute hangs there
like a sculpture
rising to the ceiling
to the yellow ceiling
with windows and arches receiving it

the train is coming soon
and we'll have to leave
but right now all I want to do
eat my pastry and drink coffee
sitting on the cold stones watching this flute woman
with someone I care about more
than I thought

Mark DeNardo

Teacher
Shen Hartzell
Comfort

Every curve of her hands,
the faint smell some practical lotion,
the exact warmth and softness
as they touch my face and hand,
rest comfortably on my back.
The oval nails and oven-burned wrist,
a broken glass scar.
the garnet ring we gave her.
the first Christmas he was gone.
an aquamarine that used to
press against my hand
when Nana held it.
Imprinted years,
twirling lines of memories
marrying each flower,
curled toward her hand
like heads bent whispering.

—Erin Murphy
Enigmatic Arrival

Across the boundless places
Apparent to the masses
One ship hurries forward
With three souls ever kept

The blue tribes rushes to the scene
Seeing just enigma
But one whose years in shadow lie
Emerges with his mate

So disoriented and confused
The couple lives again
His brother is the last one out
He gets jammed inside the door

“I am the king,” the first one cries
“My wife, the sovereign of the state!”
“Please help us to stand up,” he begged
“Your air is weighty to my brain”

His words go unheeded as they stare
For one wears just a flimsy shift
Her garments stream in torn up tatters
She shivers in the nip cold winds

The large one offers up his cloak
Its mass consumes the lady
Her white skin concealed beneath the shroud
She kisses her brother-in-law with cold pale lips

The first one staggers and with a cry
He plummets to the floor
The other two while strong at first
Soon can stand no more

The first emerger stares real hard before he passes out
At the horde of green-faced strangers rushing at him
And the enormous crowd of gawking onlookers
Wondering what they’ll do to his and him

-Christopher Schmehl

The Struggle
Lisa Colon
swollen hands

called black

thick as the August noon

rough on my skin

as you smudged away

the salt of my eyes

and told me

in your blue shirt

we'd get another bike

tomorrow

Blue Shirt

— Elizabeth Feller-blum
All the talk that blares like it was out of
a blown speaker
about heading west seems like it is enjoyed more on the tongue
then wearing or tearing on your knees or bones
but focus on the headline and forget the content
gather sticks and stones
and paper and print expectations and go

Stories and tales remind me of when I was 12
My friends pathbillyandy
inflated our tires
and went four miles
to a convenience store
that sold 10¢ popcorn
candy cigarettes
and Near Beer to twelve year olds
we paid the six bucks for the six pack
and fled to the trolley tracks
with thumb tack conversations
medicine faces
but pat swore he loved the taste
we bragged our field reports to the faces
of the anxious eleven year olds on our block

but it's not always that way

I turned nineteen and turned the trick
and expectations were answered
faint, seasick on land
some things are better in pictures and some aren't
the west was my Kodak and I came out of the darkroom
bleary eyed and bland
cursing familiar land
clicking my heels and repeating phrases
in dirt red feet with eyes like mazes
and then, noticing the pattern
shut up.

Conversation Piece

- Ryan Farrell
Time

Seven decades—more or less of space allotted
a vertical time-line
of various events
The mercury has been
rising steadily
ever since I can remember
Just a few years ago
it suddenly picked up the pace
and now
it is almost halfway through.

What have I done?
Is anything in anyone's life
so monumental
before the face of the universe
(sir, I exist!)
to deserve a tiny notch
and a label:
1066-Battle of Hastings
My time line is blank.
The mercury rises.

Leah McCelan
my grandmother smuggled his pus-dried gowns
and hung them out to dry
because she had done so for 53 years.

my grandfather caressed with shrunken hospital hands
into the mystical sailing knots
he invented on his days off,
and slung over the shower rod.
and managed to balance his 80 year old frame on the steel walker,
and hang himself,
his starving legs backpedaling into the medical darkness,
his eyes bulged until nurse Sara cut him down
on one of her rounds.

washline, washline, washline, it's all washline
a million miles wound around the earth
like a universal yarn ball.

washline in San Pedro, washline in Las Cruces
washline in Kevlar;
Juneau,
Kachina Point,
Lightning Flats,
Fleetwood,
Toonopah, Yucatan, Manila, Maracanda, and Marburg.

forever dangling
in front of the television sofa.
A new washline, where my mother
now hangs out the laundry,
my grandmother's clothespins smooth in her mouth.

Jeff Fennel
my grandmother would hang out the laundry.

the worn wooden clothespins smooth in her mouth
as I stood on a step stool
and held one end to the washline
pestering her to teach me how to crochet
in the broken darkness of morning.

Washline. my grandfather would endlessly mend
in his workshop basement,
tinkering with new ways to seal the frayed rope
to save the nickel a foot expense.

Washline. rehung, I crouched under
in olive green camos
aiming with pellet gun for the crows eyes
perched in the circular garden of corn
attempting to earn my childhood keep.

Washline. that bore the weight of all the work worn overalls
of rusty August mud.

Washline. that bore the weight of the blood pus bed sheets
from grandfather's hip replacement of 72.

Washline. that bore the weight of a daughter's violet sun dresses.

Washline. that bore the weight of a lifetime of rain,
ultra-violet rays.

snow that clung an inch high
only to be brushed off by my grandmother
as she shoveled through to the cement patio.
the plastic washbasket trailing behind.

Washline. that bore the weight of the liquid diarrhea pajamas
from the colectomy in the Fall of 83.

Washline. that hung behind the Gerbers on Becker street.
Mr Gerber would make his son Joe hold
for his daily beating with an oak switch.

Washline. in back of the Willets
where I watched their daughter Gina
gently drape her black nylons
and imagine how she would ease them
up and over the knee
in the throbbing discovery of teenage right.

Washline. my grandmother smuggled in her purse up the psychiatric
past the orderly guards;
down the stagnant air hallways.
and into his bathroom
so she could sink wash his pus dried gowns
and hang them out to dry
because she had done so for 53 years.

Washline. my grandfather caressed with shrunken hospital hands
into the mystical sailing knots
he invented on his days off,
and slung over the shower rod.
and managed to balance his 80 year old frame on the steel walker.
and hang himself.
his starving legs backpedalling into the medical darkness
his eyes bulged until nurse Sara cut him down
on one of her rounds.

Washline. washline, washline, it's all washline
In the backyard garden, a simple thing,
The damp, torn leaves of fall
barely stirring
over pointed bulb sprouts,
Long covered.

Frail,
Disbelieving,
She knelt,
Brushed aside the debris,
Sank her tired fingers
into the black soil, searching
For a bottle top—yes, that’s one—
hard and round, a cork,
A boy—a baby boy
and the next.
It was cough syrup,
a daughter—
Dresher
she was Dresher now—in Hamburg,
and there were more,

More bottles,
all filled,
And more tears falling,
thanking the dark earth
and the secrets it kept,
hidden and waiting.
For her to come home
And pull them into
newer sunlight.

During World War II, a German nurse, playing on the Nazi’s fear of a typhus epidemic, made routine trips into the ghettos under the pretence of removing those dying or dead of the disease. In an ambulance, she smuggled out hundreds of Jewish children and made new identities for them with families all over Europe. She kept the names of the children, parents and sheltering families written down in bottles buried in her garden. Although she was eventually captured and imprisoned, she returned to her home after the War and reunited as many families as possible.
They sit imprisoned in their metallic chairs
like children in shopping carts
on the weekly trip to the market,
wedged between the plaid green recliners,
drowning out Phil Donahue with wheezes and snores
Their rooms contain photos of loves
in case the memory fails,
and the pungent air smells of lysol and urine.
They wait to be fed,
They wait to be bathed,
they wait to be tucked in,
and they wait to be awakened.
The emphyzemic veterans cigarettes have turned into daily back beatings
and expulsions of mucus and spittle,
and the war stories have all worn thin,
and Mary Margaret can no longer bake
her blue ribbon cherry cobbler.
Thursday afternoons are reserved for dancing with walkers
to Duke Ellington but carefully
because the arms and legs bruise like ripe bananas.
And Friday nights they play bingo for toothbrushes and combs,
though for some Saturdays are big business
when visitors pencil in their parents from noon til three
and bring last week's paper
and push grandpa around in his shopping cart
while grandkids display their crayola Picassos.
But for those who are left unvisited in deep, cushioned indentations
Saturdays are for sleep.

-Jeff Femer
Philadelphia, Late Fall, 1994

I have seen the streets where you walked,
Catholic school jumper,
Cracking your gum,
Talking like South Philadelphia,
Like the whining whisper of the El,
Shooting overhead,
An artery of light in the urban body,
And then we were turning under the tracks
Away from your father's garage, full of tools and animal heads,
Past pawn shops and liquor stores,
And in traffic,
A black man on a black bike,
Looking through dark glasses,
And I met his eyes,
While you sat and thought,
of cousins and sisters and aunts,
Who drew your world around you,
With love and tradition,
You said, "We would climb that fence and get drunk in that park."
And I thought did I ever, did I ever?

Once behind a tannery in
My small town a man stopped
Me in the dark and said "Where are you going?"
And I "for a walk"
Where and I said home
But a better answer would have been nowhere, I am walking nowhere,
And on grays avenue
Where you stood, by long training
Saying the act of contrition,
While a man held a gun to your head,
And what then what if, what if he,
Had pulled the trigger would God take you prayer unfinished,
Would I years ago jerk in my sleep,
And wake lost and sad
Wondering why that I had never met you,
And I thought will some
Other man be in this car,
Next year with the sun falling away towards winter would you say,
"Josh, he never felt me, he was cold, he was cruel"
And was I oh was I?
Did I kiss away your tears in the dark,
For you or for me?
And did my books stay closed because I thought
"In the end she will not understand."
Or was I afraid you would be incandescent with love
And I,
Well I would not know,
And not knowing he afraid.
virgins

What is this virginity
upon which
so much has rested
and over which
so much has been fought
What is this thin veil
which keeps intact
a religion which has been
the author
of so much slavery
and so many wars
Who is this virgin
is she the girl who
with shield unpierced
gave blow-jobs (every so often)
to the boys on the football team
Or is she
the University Cheerleader
the everything-but virgin
the girl your mother would be pleased
to have you marry
Or is she the wide-eyed eight-year-old who
silent
satisfied the repressed distorted
grandfather
Or is she the small woman
maybe thirty roll around the waist the
black lace skirt
won't cover and cleavage
who stood on the corner of Turner and 7th
and used to be the silent eight year old?
Maybe she is the grandmother
with eight children and two ex-husbands
who never knew love
and who secretly coveted
The Joy of Sex
Or is she the woman who
ashamed afraid embarrassed
avoids the mirror when dressing and
hopes the soap from her hair
trickling down
is enough to wash the hair—down there
Who is she?
Is she anywhere, anyone I know?
Is that a statue I see in your yard?

-Leah McCullen
I don't mind riding shotgun
if they'd only let me look at the map once in a while
because it cramps your legs, your head and your style
with your eyes growing numb
from letting everyone else jerk your thumb.
With the wind whipping and the winter setting in
And everyone threatening to let the crowd come in
put you on exhibition.
And hmmm and haw and ew and oh
you into submission
because you don't want to tuck in your shirt
and you hate it that your tone is too curt
but you never let it leak and you don't let em know
cause it would ruin the act and spoil the show
It's always contrived and it's always fake
and you can never get up to 60
before the car starts to shake
Makes you think you got someone else's glasses on
cause it doesn't register the same
And you want to leave and you're gonna explode
cause you can already see 20 miles down the road
You got 4 flat tires and
2 bucks for gas
So you sit and smoke
and let the other cars pass.
Whiteriver Wanderers

We are three men searching, not for love or children, but for us.
we wear heavy boots,
carry packs, knives,
notebooks to hold the truth,
as we see it,
we look for god in the details,
we see wrongs that have no right.
and wonder, where in all of this do I fit?
do I search for warmth and comfort
in the arms of beautiful Italian women,
or look over her shoulder,
down a Tibetan pass full of prayer flags,
and think "I am somewhere, out there."
surrounded by that cold air and bare rock,
I am searching for god
in mountains and on glaciers,
in deserts where there is no man
to show me the path,
I am making my way down wild
white rivers of snow
searching for divine speed,
searching for the answers that
holy men cannot put into words.
we say
god made us, but flawed so,
we could never see him in ourselves
only in the alien world we are in
god made us and did not share the details
that would bring us into
his conversation
we say
you touch me to the quick
but in the end it is all dulled by fear of you,
and me and we, and we are wishing
hoping for each other in a world that offers me answers
and solace.
only in river foam and fine
blowing dandelion fluff

Josh Gilbert
A Stormy Night on the Delaware Coast
Mike McFarland
there's this photograph
of my father in college
where he is in a grey t-shirt
with a bit of a belly
his hair black and short (like mine)
he's not looking at the camera
he's thinking about something
maybe a physics problem or beer
it's all in his eyes
which are little pinholes of black (like mine)
and i try to understand where that man
and the man i know as my father
meet and become one person

he called me a few days ago
i was hung over
lying in bed waiting to be sick enough to get up
and he doesn't ask me how i am
or how i'm feeling
or how my life is
he asks me if i've had any medical bills
in the past year
i guess that was him saying he loved me
he wants to meet up with me
he'll ask me about school
and hows communication design
(even though i've been a writing major for
a year)
and i'll be pleasant and not smoke any cigarettes
and he'll ask me why my twin sister is so fucked up
and i'll tell him i don't know
and it's not my place to say anything
etc.

so i think about that photograph
and wonder why we can't meet somewhere
in-between there and now
i would like to