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Essence Fine Art & Literary Magazine is a collaborative effort of Kutztown University students who express themselves through various artistic mediums. These pieces are a compilation of the best student work created at Kutztown University. The magazine is curated, edited, and designed by students committed to the goal of producing a beautiful showcase for their work. The Essence staff expresses its appreciation to all its contributors and readers for sharing in this publication.

This issue is dedicated to the past issues of Essence Fine Arts and Literary Magazine from 1960 to 1970. This year we blend the old with the new to bring Essence back to its roots, with inspiration from the cut paper art of Henri Matisse.
DEVON STACKONIS

VIEWS FROM HOPE

OIL ON CANVAS. 18" X 18"

ESSENCE 2018
SLIPPING

BREEANNA YOSMANOVICH

The Night wasn’t particularly cold, but it certainly wasn’t warm either,
And there didn’t seem to be anything good about that.
Because there was nothing worse than being cold,
And as I stood there in the soggy chilled air, cool water on the
pavement seeping through the fiber of my mismatched socks, I knew
I was dead inside,
And it was only a matter of time
Before the death started seeping through the cracks in my smiles
And the splitting seams of the scars on my soul
From fights and frights and flights galore
And tales of dreams and desires I would never tell a room of peers or
parents or perfect strangers.
I’ve got miles on my mind.
I hide from smiles behind smiles
When I’m dying,
Asphyxiation.
I’m dancing around in someone else’s idea of a person.
Sophistication.
Holding onto something I can never have and never really wanted.
Affixation.
I’m cracked.
Some call them smiles,
But I’m slipping,
Gone for miles.

KEELEY GOLDEN THE FUTURE STEEL 4’4’’ X 2’ X 4’8’’

ESSENCE 2018
6:24 AM

ADRIANA SOMMA

Sleepy stumbles down steep steps, in our oversized sweaters blankets wrapped around us, we pile into your car. With the music low and smoke swimming in the sweet morning light, we drive.

Winding country lanes lead us to the best break in the scenery. We park in the heart of the mountain, where her skin cracks and she lets us see her raw beauty; a field new with blossoms, a clear view of the horizon. The fresh sun thaws her rocky shoulders and our shaking hands. Clambering onto the car, our blankets melt together to tent us from the still settling dew. I can’t tell the difference between the lingering smoke, rushing from the sunroof we climbed through, and our breath.
A particular intimacy relies on his bare feet, lazy in the coarse grass and the trust that their livestock will not run away.

Intimacy lies in the woman, curled into herself as if the man guards her from something greater, and in their sickles laying side by side, like two halves of a heart split apart.

On warmer days, the woman would hold his head in her lap, remove his hat, thread her fingers through his knotted, sweating head and sing sweet, Spanish songs until he drifted. But today, in the hardworking shade, she sleeps too.

She is folded up like clean dish towels, he is spread out like the cloudless sky.

Today, he can feel the pressure of her arm resting against his armpit and her knee barely grazing his shin. Tucked away in his dreams, he can see her floating above him.

Skirt untucked and flowing in the flushed breeze like many birds flapping their wings and she reaches for his hat, tossing it aside, gently twists his sun-bleached hair and softly sings: Duerme, querida. Sueña de mi.

Despierta y me conocerás.

He slowly wakes, turns his head with a solid, sleepy effort. With the steady sun behind her, he sees she is not asleep at all, her dark eyes focusing on a piece of scorched grass she works into a knot with her long, slender fingers (he can feel the ghost of them there, in his hair) and from under the brim of his hat, he watches her thin, pink lips as they murmur: Duerme, querida. Sueña de mi...
OUR LOVE ANGERS GOD

MARVIN DEVOSE

But with you, the way you wail, the way you writhe a Salem's waltz
on your mother's couch and in projector rooms of college campuses,
I can hear your heart pulling from your breasts when you breathe
hot into my ears, eyes closed to feel my spirit blend with yours.
You wail those three dangerous words with your sweat on my chin,
my eyes lost in raw and charcoal-colored thighs,
the salt-rose wet, the sweet maple, ginger root, honeysuckle,
the pleasant dull lulling the winced hums of pat and quaff;
calabash and oil palm, the lugged skin-flap soured by moist
but syrup to the tongue;
strawberry seeds on my sweetheart's other lip,
a couplet of light kisses, a gesture of Come Here's in the clenched-warmth,
the notion of abundance appraised to holy animation,
the song of her rising and meeting God.
There is power in this.
Not because of my own pleasure, but she looks to be ablaze
in the Holy Ghost and Fire and says
I Love You in every language of the speaking tongues.
Castrate me clean and drown me in this moment if her holy screams
are wrong.
There is no sin in this.
FROM A DREAM
Ella Luzzi

I try to fill the blank spaces
in my head with you.

But you took more
than I had to offer.

You left me
feeling as hollow
as a pin-pricked egg.

Christ,
I never had a chance,
did I?
HEAT

ELLA LUZZI

I am a candle born without a wick.
You’ve always been a box full of matchsticks.
Your heat melts me to my core,
But you burn out as fast as you came,
And I’m now only useless wax drippings.
It wasn’t healthy. It wasn’t healthy the way Eagan and Finn were when they were together. Eagan was striking and cunning, ever willing to fight with a sharp smile on his face. Finn was willowy, but wouldn’t back down from a fight, coming back like a roach. The men were simultaneously a perfect match and extremely toxic for each other.

Kisses would go from docile to volatile. Lips would be red and busted. Tasting copper against Eagan’s tongue, he would lick the blood away from Finn’s lower lip.

They’d go from playful one moment then aggressive the next, turning into a full-on fistfight. Afterwards, they shared kisses upon one another’s bruises and abrasions.

Their romantic moments often started slow and gentle until ended with red scratches, more bruising, and teeth marks everywhere, all before they wound down to sleep warmly against one another like a pair of dosing cats.

Nothing ever stayed sweet with Eagan, but nothing ever stayed sour with Finn.

There were times they considered walking their separate ways. It might have been easy to just walk away and have each other’s faces blur into the crowd like they never met. It might have been easy to break the spears that the winged Eros so sadistically shot into their backs the first time they had touched. It might have been so easy to not return home.

If only it was that easy.

The intimacy was a thread strung between their chests, bringing them back together, and although thin, it struggled to fray, let alone break.

Sometimes they tried breaking it. Things would go too far, and they’d leave.

Finn would take a walk, watching the buses pass while music filled his ears and soul. He’d only end up back at their front door, threading his fingers through the Eagan’s hair.

They were in their own “Theater of the Absurd” story that fate had made them act out every day. They knew it wasn’t healthy, the constant cycle of wondering what their purpose was, why they were meant to be together, why they aren’t allowed to wonder off-stage and out the exit.

Yet, every time they thought it would die out in cinders, they would touch, and from the ashes, it would rise all over again.

“I’m sorry,” Finn would say. “I’m sorry,” Eagan would say.
The same toxic apology, recycled.
ON MY MENTAL HEALTH

ELLA LUZZI

I try to write a poem about my mental health.
I want the words to fall from my mouth
Like sticky sweet syrup.
I want to baptize my head
In a river of metaphors and similes.
I want a beautiful, tragic epic
That sheds tears and touches hearts.
But how can I do that when
My fingers are too numb to write them?
When my head is too foggy
To finish a sentence?
When my tongue is heavy like lead
And my jaw aches from the clench?
Besides,
My schedule is too booked up
With staring at my wall for hours
To make any time to write.
My mental health is not a beautiful girl
Crying through her perfect makeup.
My mental health is an angry-red face,
Swollen from crying,
And worrying so much about people noticing
That you miss your classes.
Sure, I eat and sleep and talk,
But the smile on my face
Is as counterfeit as a three dollar bill.

My anxiety and depression
Were once in a war with no end in sight.
It seemed the body count would be one
When the last shot fired.
But a doctor was my messiah
And threw a white flag the size of a pill down
my throat
And the chemicals started to draw a treaty.
I no longer wake up because I have to;
I get up because I want to and can.
I live.
I am victorious.

FRANCESCO TORNABENE  THE CRITIC  SCREEN PRINT, 7"X7"
ODE TO MARS DEN HARTLEY
AMANDA POOLE

Has there ever been a man of more woe
And misfortune, than a painter like he?
Very few times did he manage a break
Tis the life of the poor Marsden Hartley.

Neither luck nor love was his strongest suit,
Not once could any of them seem to stay.
When he allowed himself to love some man,
Like an angel's kiss, death whisked them away.

He memorialized them in paintings,
Along with places he had traveled by.
Cake on, scrape off, build and recede the paint,
Build up shapes, mountains, oceans, and sky.

He was acquainted with many people,
Like Ryder, Marc, Kandinsky, included.
Yet never reached their success. He was a
Meager art teacher when his life concluded.

Tis pity he never knew fame in life.
But through painting he was given some peace.
While alive, little money to his name,
Never once did poor Hartley want to cease.

I offer my dearest condolences
For imagine, what would the art world be
If there never was such work or sorrow,
Such as that of the great Marsden Hartley?
GREENWICH

ADRIANA SOMMA

My bedroom still smells of the wildflowers plucked from the sturdy soil of rural New York. Even as they decay in their vase, their aroma takes me back to that hillside.

Your soul dipped and rose between the peaks.
You painted the sky.

Still, like this rotting bouquet, you are here.

You fill my lungs with your perfume. You rush through my skin and bones. You are every freckle on my flesh and every breath that swells inside my chest and every beat that pumps the blood through my body.

( Maybe for the very first time ) I find comfort in the truth that I can never forget you.
CONTROLLESS
MALEK C. DERHAMMER

turn it off, she says.

(turn it off?)
as if my mind were a
pull-string light
that clicks once for
emotional shutdown,
clicks again
for emotional overload.
on or off, the bulb flickers
in darkness. there is no chain,
no switch, nothing to
stop the thoughts that move through me at lightspeed.
I am sparking, crackling,
contact wires on fire,
glass skin charring.
my head is a burnt-out bulb
and there is no replacement
for that kind of self-insult.

but then she grabs my hand.
look at me.
I need you out here, too.
not just in there.
she gently pokes the center
of my forehead and smiles.

just turn it off
and breathe
for me.
WHAT FOLLOWS YOU TO THE GRAVE

MALEK C. DERHAMMER

I sit up in a sweat and dig for a cigarette to put between my teeth. I raise my bedroom window and lean out, striking a match and tossing it aside. I look down at the sidewalks below, watching shadows sway when blurs of orange pass on the street. I trace their strides in the early morning emptiness. As inner-city smog nears, the cigarette is thrown out the window. It dwindles down, landing on the sill below. I cough and slam the window frame down. I lift my sheets up and tie them into a sack. It clanks with empty bottles. I throw it into the corner of my room and something shatters. As I lean back and hit the plain mattress, my body falls through it like a ghost between walls. I grasp at my bedpost, but my hands phase through it. I descend beneath the floorboards, untangling through the wiring and webbing until I hit the 3rd-floor ceiling. I find myself in the apartment below in near darkness. A weight grounds me to the floor, and I gather my footing. I walk towards the glimpse of light in the window and open the curtains. A white-blue light peaks past, traveling its hand onto the pale palette of a woman’s skin. She lies on a bed in the corner, faintly clothed with her hair draping over her face. I brush the dying embers off the sill and quietly make my way to the door until I see a shimmer across the room. On the dresser next to her, something refracts in iridescence. It pulls me in.

I step cautiously near and kneel beside her bed. I pick up the necklace, silver sterling with a North Star pendant, like the one I had given a girl when I was younger. I turn back towards the woman and gently lift my fingers through her ashen hair. I see her face, one that I only recognize by the form of the lips. I stand up, and the necklace slips from my hand. It splits and shatters. I shake my head and run out the door.

When I wake,
I think of how
It must have felt
for her back then,
to be haunted by
someone you
loved.
strangers came from the mountain to see holy men
through a summer the color of marigolds
from uglied urban bungalows or suburban sprawls
from the rough home or the easy places
from a storm or a river.
    a parade of sunlight in the distant tree lines
    and the wind shared a walk of no purpose,
    honey-thick and restlessly chiming like fire bells.
the strangers passed a dead poet
scribbling on a drop leaf table covered in doby cloth,
joy breaking over their faces
with tighter jaws grinning,
    they've come to see her
now all she does is sex and cry.

there was once an excited valley here
exploding with beds of exotic blooms,
long-necked trees writing on the sky,
always ever-blue, always ridden by wind-charged birds
an open house for local wildlife,
and a sun-filled stream ever-bending
and its clear abundance singing.

I saw the girl's soul as a ghost in the body of flowers,
faceless and inharmonic,
like something almost being said
    she turned and escaped with the strangers
to try them all herself.
I wanted to speak god's name,
but would she answer back?

I just wanted to say,
    "I love you, you're wanted,
    there's no reason to die this way."
She walked with no purpose, like the wind.
The clouds were getting mighty low.
The orange evening drooped over the once
snow-clothed mountain peaks.
    Lord, help the strangers of the night
don't take her to that place.
God, help Coffee, and be still
my beating heart,
for her nights like these will only last a season,
    and she'll return,
    my lake's gaze showing my peace,
    my poetry, like boomerang,
    the thing that came back to me.

I took a beeline back to a barren glade
to wallow in this saddened, storm-worn
mid-summer evening, the whole hideous
wetness of the rain-scented shrubbery
riding the stirs of the wind and
carrying a cold draft into my inner room.
There's a red rose there in the blackened grass
like the wrist's trickle against the ride of a blade,
the journey of blood to the smoke-stained fingers,
wetting the earth and giving God his sorrow back.
    This red rose alone,
I take it and hold it and like it,
my last pretense of hope.
SUMMER LIKE I LOVE YOU
MARVIN DEVOSE

Speak to me again in Neruda,
where a butterfly lands on the petals of your lips.
From spring or the plum-flushed creepers,
to that summer day, deep terracotta kisses
tapping the whiffs of shea butter in the rose,
the lavender, the smoke of sunlight in the summerhouse.
These moments are full of secrets and song,
the wind leaving a young girl
into the dead sound of a poet.
The amalgamation of solid spirits
and the soul takes off its clothes,
like the naked shivering of the wind,
like this is foreign to you,
like sweat and smiles,
like I love you.

Something so small
—a moment out to a thousand—
to let me dress your perfect bareness in bluebells,
and honeysuckle, and sweet-smelling verbs,
to lay your body on a bed of wisteria blooms
to see what the Lord has made with the bearings
of the First Garden.
Thank you.
And thank you to the dance of eyes a teenager had

and went on down the university rotunda
without a word,
and thank you to the evening empty of people,
and thank you to the skirt worn
and to the room in green-eyed solitude,
and to the train too late,
and to you, for saying Yes,
like you shared this dark room’s thrill,
like that delicious moan tossed on your screams,
like I could lose everything for this,
like you were worth losing everything for,
like I love you.

Gone.
She is another’s. She is another’s.
Her memory is made of shadows from
the half-moon’s beam,
the gap-toothed grin like my mother’s,
hers silly dance at random, a still river,
the seventeen cherry blossoms inviting me to
peaches
(the ones from our late lunch on the perennial-fed mezzanine last June),
a metaphor for joy, newly discovered colors,
the light of the First Day
—and there was light, and she was good.
Gone. But always is a place,
a place we promised when she once shared

the smile of the water polished by the moon,
as cool as the moon,
and where her hair always seemed to carry
a small flower like a noondream,
like a ring,
like I love you.

I think God was unaware of how to make her
as she is made of everything;
the lake’s drift, the spring’s perfume coddling
the green poppies, the bedazzled track
of a yellow dwarf star,
wildfires and waterfalls,
the indigenous eminence of the First Peoples,
this dream of winter,
blue night dropped
over the once sun-cloaked mountain tops.
Nevertheless, in all this, she is another’s.
She is another’s.
Like forever isn’t real, like the butterfly’s kiss,
like the patient monochromatic night
and the teal entrance of new dawn,
like the sun is waiting for her,
an April hurried,
like summer,
like how I loved you.
EQUALITY
DE'ASIA THOMPSON

Silly you men,
You fantasize about her body,
Drool over her face,
But when it comes to the mind,
That does not exist to you.
You say that women are not strong,
Women are not wise,
Women are not courageous,
Ha! What a comic you are.
Again, you say women cannot run a business,
Women cannot lead a country,
Women cannot lift things,
But women can do all things.

Women have minds like ravens.
There are inventions that you enjoy—created by a woman.
Businesses and corporations,
Women run those too.
Women break stereotypes every day,
How can you not see the magnificence?
Women senators, women firefighters, women scientists.

You came from a woman.
A woman endured a lot of pain and still does
From the man whom she birthed.
You believe women cannot do these things,
But dare let anyone say so about your mother?

Equality.
See how much a woman can do,
And you will be surprised to see it is more than you.
HAIRCUT

THURSDAY CURRENCE

I want to cut my hair really short, so I can look just like you, Mom.
Hopefully the same haircut will give me your strength too.
I know you instilled it in me, but there are still days I feel weak.
I know you wouldn't blame me for it, instead you would hold me and tell me it will all be okay.
I could really use that right now.
I hope I still make you proud on my worst days like today.
I know my pain was yours too, so I'm hoping this mood I'm in passes.
Not so much for my sake but for yours.
You've been through enough pain, and I can't bear the thought of bringing anymore to you.
I think about you day in and day out.
I need your advice on some things I don't know the answer to.
I don't know if you would know them either, but hearing your voice would be so therapeutic right now.
I think about how our conversations would go since we haven't got the chance to speak since I've been an adult.
And you didn't get the chance to see me graduate high school.
I know if you were still here you would have loved to be there.
I know you would have helped me get ready for prom too, but since you couldn't, your sister made sure she did.
That's what sisters are for. You left me and my sisters about 5 years ago now, but I still remember that day so vividly it feels as though it happened yesterday.
If it weren't for my sisters and yours too, I'm not sure where I'd be.
They're all a part of me now.
I'm the youngest of all your kids, but the other day, my older sister told me she looks up to me.
I'm sure she could tell me a million reasons why, but I don't think she realizes I wouldn't be who I was if she wasn't who she was.
She helped me get to this point.
She practically carried me here; she still doesn't take the credit for it.
She's one of the best people I know.
She's just like you, Mom.
I want to be just like her, and I'm sure I'll get there one day.
But right now, I just want your haircut, your signature style.
I'm hoping that as all my hair falls to the ground so do all my sorrows.
CLOSE YOUR EYES TO SEE BETTER
DAVID WILSON

Like a rose that grew from the concrete, you are the 8th wonder of the world. I’ve spent many years of my life without laying eyes on you.

Where have you been? Have you been hiding this whole time? How come we’ve never rendezvoused? Has it just been bad timing this whole time?

I’ve prayed my whole life to find somebody like you. I even had an entire atlas mapped out. I looked just about everywhere, I done had every city scratched out.

So I just closed my eyes, and decided to go with blind fate. With my arms opened really wide, I started walking forward.

When I came across you I knew that I was in the presence of an angel.
EMILY SCHLOTTER

PEARL

CHARCOAL, PASTEL ON PAPER, 18" X 24"

ESSENCE 2018
What does it mean to live “Happily”?
Is it only for maids and their knights?
Or can maids with ladies, knights with lords
Partake in these fairy tale delights?

There’s no limits for love; let us share
The spoils of romance and pleasure.
For true love’s kiss is something special
That all types of lovers can treasure.