



QUERCUS



# Quercus

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special thanks to Leslie Bell

cover image

**Angela Wilson**

*self portrait*

2000, charcoal on paper  
40" X 32"

intro photo

**Joan Johnson**

*untitled*

1999, gelatin silver print  
9.5" X 7.5"

back cover image

**Travis Englund**

*self portrait*

2000, charcoal on paper  
40" X 32"



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## Gert's Sestina Rose

Gertrude Stein, the legend, had a reputation that arose  
from just three words she chose to write:  
"a" and "is" and "rose," repeated as you know,  
you know, you know, to the point  
where anyone with half a mind could see  
she had a gay, a merry

way with words. Now Gertrude never married  
but had a friend, an Alice, not a Rose,  
(That was in Gay Paree, across the sea)  
and Gertrude knew that she was right  
and Gert and Alice made a point:  
you can, you can, you can say "No"

say no, no you can say no to rules if you know  
the rules you say no to. Even Our Lady Mary  
in the niche at Notre Dame would never point  
a finger, or shed a tear, or raise a brow  
at such a logical position. So, write right  
though unintelligible, and you will see

what a reputation you can seize  
by grabbing syntax by the nose  
and twisting left and right,  
until the words submit to all your merry  
plans to order them to stand up straight in rows.  
Now Gertrude did some other things to point

the way, to change the meanings, to appoint  
new connotations to the ancient words, you see,  
and with the tale of Misses Furr and Skeane arose  
a brand new way to know  
who's feeling gay, who's gay (not merry)  
but not who's straight or regular or right

if right is right to write, is right to right.  
Now to the lesson, or the point  
that Miss was really Mrs. Furr, who did, though gay, contrive  
to marry  
poor Mr. Furr, who doubtless was gay and did not see  
beyond his nose  
regarding Georgine Skeane, who was not a violet, nor yet a  
rose, nor yet a rose.

Gertrude certainly wrote for fun, for fun to see  
if she could point our nose, our knowses,  
along the path to find the gay, the merry rose, that is a  
rose, a rose, are roses.

—Ralph G. Smith



## Father and Son

My father was a hunter.  
He hunted because he had to hunt. He had no choice.

He strides resolutely across my memory now,  
just as he strode out across those frozen fields,  
so long ago: the 12-gauge on his shoulder,  
the khaki cap (with ear flaps) pulled down on his red hair,  
the old, worn canvas hunting coat  
flapping in the cold dawn air, and  
pants tucked into high-topped leather boots—  
boots smelling of neatsfoot oil and laced up to the knee.

Jaunty, ruddy-faced and smiling he strode out, but  
engaged in serious business, just the same.  
The marrow of the hunter was in my father's bones,  
blood-driven from a million generations.  
He hunted because he had to hunt. He had no choice.

He was the caveman with the stone-tipped spear  
attacking the hairy mammoth,  
darting now on this side, now on that,  
aiming for the eye;  
In this big man the primal instinct to survive survived.

He was the crafty Norseman, snaring rabbits in the snow,  
to put meat into the pot.

He was the deer-stalker, moving silently  
through the shadowed forest, listening  
for the crackle of a branch.

I was twelve, a good shot with my .410 pump.  
The clay birds shattered when  
I shouted "Pull!" and squeezed the trigger  
as I followed them in flight.  
And I followed him, my father, and we hunted,  
but I didn't have to hunt.  
I followed where he led,  
down the rows of dry, cold cornstalks  
that cackled in each gust of wind,  
mocking me and slashing at my face;  
I tensed for the dark explosion

of wings and tail-feathers  
as the pheasant roared into the air  
from under my very feet.

I sat with him in the duck-blind,  
shivering in my wet boots  
as the sun rose gray and cold above the icy pond;  
I cupped my hands around the duck call  
and I imitated my father  
as he taught me how to blow the mallard's raucous cry.

I trudged behind the coon hounds with my lantern  
in the dead of night,  
listening to their yelps,  
as they crashed through the black thickets,  
noses to the ground,  
then stopped along the stream to  
reaffirm the scent, bayed and  
then raced on, heading for the tree  
that bore their quarry.

I followed where the Hunter led, but  
somehow, somewhere,  
between the red-haired warrior and his son,  
the drive to bring food back to the cave had died.

For me, the joy was in the vision of the day—  
Smelling, feeling, looking—  
being outdoors, alive:

the squeak of frigid snow beneath my boot,  
the cloud of frosty breath against a  
blue-steel sky;  
the blue-steel glint of chilly sun  
upon my shotgun barrel.

The joyful leaping of the dogs through  
deep white drifts—  
hoarse barks and white explosions  
making halos around the rising sun  
before they began the serious business of the day.  
(They too were born to hunt.)



The acrid smell of carbide in the miner's lamps we carried  
as we caught the mournful crying of the hounds,  
the moon just barely seen  
above the bony fingers of the leafless trees.

The crunch of dry oak leaves  
beneath my feet, and the smell of autumn  
at squirrel-season time,  
and the red and orange of those leaves  
still clinging to the tree.

All this was why I trudged behind the Hunter.  
These were the things that held me, not the chase.  
I hunted, but I had no heart to hunt.

I know he was bewildered,  
to have a son like me,  
whose blood did not boil up with  
anticipation of the kill—  
yet he understood; at least I think he did.

One day in heavy snow,  
I struggled to keep up,  
gasping at the icy air that  
clutched my lungs, and  
stepping in his big tracks  
as best I could.

"Come on, boy," he called, impatient,  
but then looked back, and stopped and waited.  
He put his arm around my shoulder,  
"That's all right," he said.  
I think he understood.

That was the tender moment of my childhood.

—*Ralph G. Smith*



## You Are Not My Part-Time Child

You are not my part-time  
child

Reminders of this  
slap me in the face  
everyday:

Your shrill scream  
at midnight

Your whimpers  
at two a.m.

Your longing for affection  
my hands  
on your back, your cheek  
on my shoulder

With eyes closed  
I go to you

In a.m. I forget  
where I've been

At midnight  
we begin again

You are not  
my part-time child:

You are my world  
in wide open eyes  
and arms  
and need, when I try to give you  
all of everything I don't even know

Yet your smile  
melts  
all that I am

You are not what I expected  
But so much more  
than a word  
than a smile  
than a kiss

You are not my  
part-time child: you are my  
full-time everything

My son,  
I am your mom

Can I tell you I  
love you  
again  
and again  
or ever enough

—Tracee Becker Orman

## Money on Page Fifty

not too much to tell these days  
the grass is covered by fallen snow  
friends are few and far apart  
loneliness is always served by itself  
women do not have the same luster as in magazines  
money is short in hand and owed  
pride is the hardest to hold  
sleep is not fun  
work is hard and the rewards don't pay off  
love is not what I have  
and if I had it  
I'd probably kill it  
just because I want to destroy something so real and beautiful

the others all look around  
but I am not there  
the truth is lost and I stopped looking  
my virginal angel ran away and cries in the dark  
what I have is not hard  
masturbation is no longer fun  
I am not the same person I was when we met  
you are still pain free in my memories  
I contemplate the art of recreating myself  
cause I am no one image  
fingers on hands so right that night falls again  
dressed again only to be stripped of self  
tears unshed  
moments un-lived  
days spent looking in the mirror at a man  
imprinted brow and lips ready to break  
I awake in flesh covered pain  
loves haunt me back to days I cannot live again  
this dagger cuts rough and rugged  
self and identity are dismembered  
another day is here and gone  
like pinpricks of an AIDS test  
here yet gone all the same

—Qani Rushani



## Champion

Four walls coming closer  
Each day is tighter  
Than the noose  
Around my neck  
Breaths become gasps  
Lips drowning  
Sucking back deeply  
Fading into white balled fists  
Claiming fury  
As desire  
To not go down  
Before the bell sounds  
Teeth clenched  
Swinging  
Left right  
Left right  
Bobbing and weaving  
Until the fury  
Is deafened  
By ringing

—Qani Rushani

i am the setting sun  
eternally dying  
its orange and melancholy  
death

while lovers gather  
on lakeshores  
park benches and back porches  
securing their oblivion in a kiss  
and whispering small unavailing revolts  
against impermanence

but the moon mocks their folly

and a silent symphony spills out of me  
a hidden beauty bleeds from me  
like outstretched hands  
hopelessly railing against the horizon  
condemned to plead for all eternity

until the evening's coffin  
drops its omnipotent lid  
and all my metaphors run on  
into nothingness

in that moment – and only for that moment  
those tied tongues  
release  
to mutter  
    how beautiful it is  
    how beautiful it is

i am the setting sun  
eternally dying  
its orange and melancholy  
death

—James Richards

Stagnant mind  
consuming a synthetic plasticity  
Numb  
inside the purgatory created  
ever wanting, always needing  
More...Soon  
inconceivable highs  
come before her morning cup of coffee  
never quite grasping  
the beginning  
or the end  
of this artificial need to keep going.

—J. M. Lesner



## Bittersweet

Ashes are building blocks for the new world  
Reconstructing with the old and painting over with the new  
Subterranean torrents gently rumble the earth  
    As grass spits flowers  
Never again will the chill freeze the sun  
And the wind blow the sun into a spraying dust of gold  
    That will be treasured by the pagans  
Nor will stacks of Bibles be used as ladders  
    Or drunks be tailored to  
    Or milestones be removed  
    Or divas dancing go unnoticed  
    Or Mother Teresa kiss the hand of Diana  
    Or the sun burn the skin of our young  
I wish I could bake you all a giant yellow cake and feed you random thoughts

—Katy Anderson

## Most Everything I Own

I bought at a garage sale.  
My bed, with its 60's style headboard  
and now duct taped footboard;  
the pastel plaid sleeper sofa,  
a little too feminine for my tastes  
but a deal nonetheless at \$35;  
a buffet obviously missing its partner;  
a water stained oak table and  
4 barrel chairs with spindles popping from every seam.

With the phone brutally silent,  
I wonder why I hadn't chosen things of greater value  
made of substance,  
reinforced with steel,  
heirlooms on which to lavish careful attentions,  
kept, revered, passed on.

Yet even before the question  
bears weight on my lips,  
I know it is for the very reason  
I am cloaked in solitude.

—*Laura Ernzen*

Such a pity  
salt won't meet pepper  
prostrated ice drips  
silver sweat  
dissolving the sweet saccharine  
taste of my words  
in your mouth  
equal to the percentage  
of hands meeting air

—*Ralene Fairbank-Cannatta*



She stares out with swollen hooded eyes  
onto the street she has known for decades.  
Cries and moans can be heard echoing throughout  
the dust-filled attic of her mind.  
Happiness is a forgotten memory  
for the chestnut child  
who reached out to her is now gone  
severed and chopped from her life forever.  
As darkness engulfs her,  
they sneak towards her  
intent on raping her with broken bottles and graffiti.  
As the sun rises they sleep in her lap  
like lost boys who have found their way home.  
She loathes and loves them  
for they will use her  
tearing out her insides  
yet returning to her breast for comfort.  
And on rotting knees,  
she will embrace them  
as she embraces the weeds  
that hide her face as she weeps.

—*Ralene Fairbank-Cannatta*

## Horticulture

I will take you  
to my garden  
of jealous leaves climbing  
blushing roses  
lavender on soft-scented linen  
too soft for your body  
crushing the lily white petals  
penetrating and obscuring the pattern  
of the topiary maze to my body  
my hot house is filled with flowers of colors  
not known to man  
crushed under your weight  
their scent mingles with yours  
as you find my garden  
I feel the dewy sensation of petals  
grind between my toes

—*Ralene Fairbank-Cannatta*

## Desktop

blue balls  
talk  
to indians  
while robots stare  
at time  
measuring samurai swords  
fighting with cork  
as radio stations hide  
behind doctors  
or basketball stars  
who watch me  
as i study their shadows

—Jeremy Burke



## I Ate an Apple in Louisiana

The skin broke easily,  
but snapped as my  
teeth pierced its veil.

I shared my water in Louisiana  
with Sammala, on Phillips Street.  
We came from different worlds,  
but met on blacktop streets  
and talked of homelands.

I spoke in Louisiana  
between gulps of cheap beer,  
over crabcakes and jambalaya.  
The rice could have come from anywhere,  
but the crawfish from only here.

I walked in Louisiana  
along the Mississippi and in parks,  
through the Quarters narrow streets,  
up steps and over tree stumps,  
on bridges, between people;  
I took the trolley when my feet protested.

I slept in Louisiana  
on park benches and bar stools,  
in bunk beds and truck beds.  
Sweat covered me  
and the sun woke me up.

I lived in Louisiana  
with Germans and Asians,  
in bars and bookstores,  
staring at trees, then stars;  
looking for life  
and living it.

—*Jeremy Burke*

## Speak to Me

of philosophers and poets,  
about caves you've crawled through  
where memories are hidden from long ago  
with loot from distant kingdoms,  
of creatures that don't exist  
and those that do.  
Tell me where the wind comes from  
and where it blows  
on cool Sunday afternoons  
and how the clouds hang in the sky  
and whether lightning falls to the ground  
or explodes  
up from the surface  
trying to escape.  
Whisper to me  
your secret wishes  
or rant on your pet peeves.  
Or say nothing at all.  
Just come with me  
and we'll take a walk back to the rusty red gate  
and stroll to the other side.  
Then we'll sit in the whispering grass  
and wonder at her wisdom.

—*Jeremy Burke*

## When I Grow Old

When I grow old I'll write poetry  
caring not for rhyming or timing.  
I'll pick my way word by word  
up the steep slippery slopes.

I'll reside near a small café  
dining on homemade bread and beer.  
I'll seek the company of beauty  
blooming among gray-haired women.

When I grow old I'll wander  
into the dark forest  
deeper than ever before  
listening for the sound of death.

I'll watch colorful birds  
flitting high among the trees  
knowing as their songs fade  
my earthly life will follow.

—Jerry McConoughey



## The New Asia

She was a Saigon lady  
bristling with business aplomb.  
Though cucumber cool, her mind  
was quick as a forehand drive,  
her tongue a knife slicing  
words into sharp shafts  
launched with deadly accuracy.  
Few men dared look into her  
steely dark eyes, reflecting  
as they did the awful truth  
of one's own inferior status.

—Jerry McConoughey

Suddenly the moment flashed into reality  
springing the deep urgency of withheld emotions  
evolution no longer hiding in the deep corners of despair  
continuing to look for the escape hole that would  
breathe life, into a fuller life  
hoping to make the bond complete and utterly wholesome  
seeming unconcerned of what hovers  
in vast wastelands of  
hope  
searching to fill the holes with patches of understanding  
a desire to stand together through  
the bright sunny days and  
the dark gloom of the stormy winter  
questing  
to find a lapse in time  
when the cruel world no longer rotates  
forcing the wall to tremble down  
in front of us releasing  
landslides of emotions to fill the earth and my  
heart

—*Matt Hoffmiller*



KA?

## Making Sense of the Millennium

Nothing turned out as expected. It took longer to get to and from everywhere, the schedule got corrupted, songs had to be sung or dances danced, or volleyball games played, or photos taken, or tin-lunch curry gets shoved into your mouth, or rock-star autographs were required, or a tractor was overturned, or an ox-cart full of rice hay hogged the road, or herds of several hundred chocolate brown goats clogged the only way through the village while a swallow-tailed eagle caressed the high breezes. There was tea to be brewed, more photos to be taken, homes with gaping wounds for roofs to be visited, even jail-hospitality to be endured where 300 still await trial and most of the 700 convicts are there for clan feud killing. The cobra had to be spear-clubbed to death before it can get to the hen house, even though it's supposed to be and is otherwise worshipped as an incarnation of Siva. And we had come to India looking for Christ among the poor.

And everyone seemed to want something. The 100 or so Muslim guys who surrounded our van in Cuddapah wanted autographs and photos. The uniformed orphans and crawling polio victims wanted smiles and touches. The stomping, circling arm and hand and finger weaving, primordially erotic dancers wanted new costumes. The beggars wanted money, of course, but they gratefully took their own dignity in the form of jokes and games and gentle touches. The teen-aged students wanted American connections. Even the monkeys wanted tamarisk pods. The elephant took a scratch on the head and offered rides. The ubiquitous cow just wanted to be left alone. The infuriatingly poor villagers wanted new homes and something other than open sewage drains. The rural sherper boys wanted sticks of gum and the headmaster of their school-with-no-roof wanted, well, he wanted a roof!

To our shame, we tried to give them what we and they thought they wanted. We scattered bourgeois largesse like elephant-borne Moguls of old. We practiced religious colonialism by telling a village exactly what we expect them to do with the money we so judiciously doled out to only those who had proven themselves worthy. And everyone said thank you, "onedenamulu" in their Telagu language.

Then there's the incongruous fact that they wanted to give. We were offered berries by the women water buffalo herders whom we had interrupted from picking lice out of one another's hair. Suspicious teens offered to sell everything from postcards to prostitutes, hotels to hashish. It was *de rigour* to have tea while the swami



cut the cake to mandatory applause. We were fed like royalty on tandori chicken, indiscernible lamb bits, plantains and "Thumbs Up!" We got holy cards from the financially strapped bishop, and notebooks from the education society that can't afford seats, books, or electricity for its schools. We were given smiles by the 1700 kids at the Schools of the Assumption, dances from kids whose legs don't work, prayers from old ladies with open diabetic sores, songs by every shy-grinned kid in the country. A budding village entrepreneurship produced a goat-hair blanket. We got nicknames like "Cuca," "Coti," "Cactus," and "Dornado."

But their gifts were oppressive and burdensome. We were pelted with chrysanthemum petals that stung like molten gold coming from the hands of the very poor and offered to us complete strangers for no better reason than that we have power. The garlands hung like nooses around our necks, indicting us for the capital crime of privilege-of-birth. The blanket is a hair-shirt of penance for our sin. And all we could ever say is "namaste" and "onedenamulu."

We lost our senses, and are still trying to make sense of it: incense smoldering on the staircase landing; rain-soaked street vended curry; body odor mixed with fuel exhaust and urine: children laughing and screaming "Happy Christmas!"; "honk thank you please" bleating from auto-rickshaws, delivery vans, bicycles and everything else that moves except the ox carts; laughing kids playing cricket in the midst of ancient holiness and modern squalor; cheerful greetings of "namaste" accompanied by prayer-clasped hands: spices smothering otherwise bland rice; Kingfisher beer; tangerines, limewater, bread and jam; paan; a Eucharist of sugar cane and just-roasted peanuts: reclining on woven mats (latter-day beds) beneath the glance of the unblinking satellite dish mounted on the roof of the village's finest stuccoed brick hut gazing intently at a billion stars (one for each person living and dying in India); out there, in the star speckled darkness among the patties, recline the tombs of the ancestors: 1700 kids' finger trace on our arms and cheeks; a 15 month orphan grinningly grabs my nose as I hold him; granite underfoot suspended over open sewers; the rough textured temple carvings of reclining Vishnu, Dancing Siva, grinning fat elephant-headed Ganishi; bas reliefs of gods milking cows or scurrying toward the prayer of a dancing mendicant. (The real power is not that of the gods, but of the ascetic guru who beckons them through purity and surrender. Ingeniously, Hinduism has deified Buddha,

Gandhi, Mother Theresa, Anthony of Padua, and (crazily) the Infant of Prague. Mary is Parvati. The Sacred Heart offers its bleeding, lovingly suffering self in images of a pasty skinned Aryan Christ.)

And we took. We took their pictures. We bought tawdry souvenirs. We bickered over the going rate for auto-rickshaws, getting them down to a ridiculous 15 rupee for a 10 kilometer ride into town. We also took trains, airplanes (bolstered by highjack conscious security forces), buses, jeeps, a boat, even an ox cart once. But mostly we took a humbling look at ourselves, and discovered that being "rock-starred" was an accusation.

We wanted them to claim their own dignity, not to shower us with unmerited admiration. We wanted them, in the words of one of our translators (who never translated what we said, but rather used our words as inspiration for their own eloquence), to "be proud of India!" We wanted their autographs. We wanted their simplicity. We wanted their joyously unselfconscious dancing and singing and trying to play Frisbee for the first time.

But nothing ever turns out as expected. In the end, in Mumbai, where the four star hotel butts up against a corrugated village and provides walls for the lean-to garbage bag pup tents; where British Imperial era architecture crumbles amidst the shanty villages-within-city; where HIV positive Madonnas of new born babes of uncertain future, wives of the already dead husbands who'd infected them with the consequences of unprotected prostitution, expelled from in-laws under suspicion of killing their sons, glow with unabashed maternal pride when the American coos over the gorgeous and doomed infant; in a final desperate attempt to serve the poor, to leave with some dignity, to return some straggling thread of dignity, we decided to give away our clothes.

Of course we knew it was tokenism of the highest order. Of course we knew it was futile. Of course we knew that it would be dirty and cheap. But, well, it was our last chance, here beside this last ditch.

Having decided that the corrugated villagers were wealthy compared to the Moslem guy up the street with no hands, or the family of four laid out on the beautiful blankets on the dirty sidewalk, or the gorgeous 12 year old girl with the perfect street-English, we returned to the garbage bag huts. Speaking a language we knew he couldn't understand, we told the handsome husband that the clothes were for his serenely sleeping wife and brown



beautiful children, over whom he stood as the night watchman—their guardian if not their provider. But before we could transfer the T-shirts and towels to him they were snatched by an ugly old woman, tugged at by rival beggars. One sandal went one way, its mate the other (I stole one back and reunited the pair). My American good-will purchased trousers flew off down the street, the spoils to the victor. Voices were raised. The young father stared passive and beaten, until I was finally able to stuff a duffel bag of socks into his arms in a move like a football hand-off. It was all over in 10 minutes that seemed like 10 seconds. It was the closest we'd been to violence and the only time I imagined that we were unsafe. We stood, nauseous, and sighed with the resignation that came from experience: we knew it would be trite and it was.

Then, as I turned on my heel to leave India, India stopped me, turned up his impossibly wide 12 year old brown eyes at me, grinned white teeth in the gathering darkness, and offered me Jesus' own salvation in the simple English words: "Thank you."

—*Bud Grant*





Susan M. Lafferty  
*Geese*

1999, gelatin silver print, 9.5 inches x 6.25 inches

beautiful children over whom he stood as the right watchman—  
their guardian & not their provider. But before we could transfer



Susan M. Lafferty  
*untitled*

1999, gelatin silver print, 9.25 inches x 6 inches



Dominic Ramirez  
*untitled*

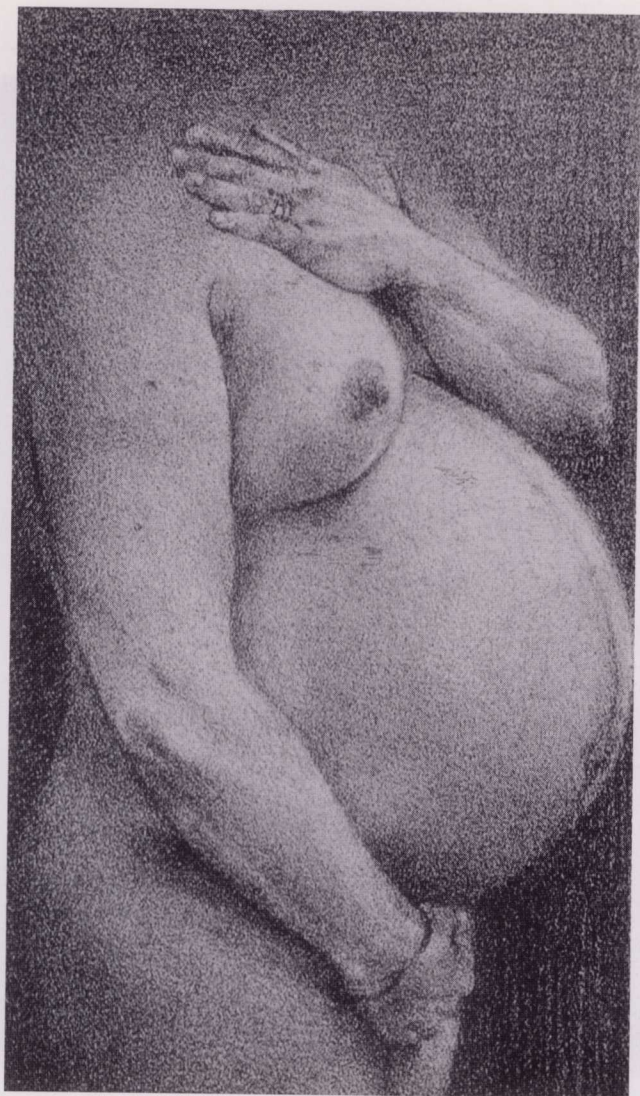
1999, gelatin silver print, 6.5 inches x 9.5 inches





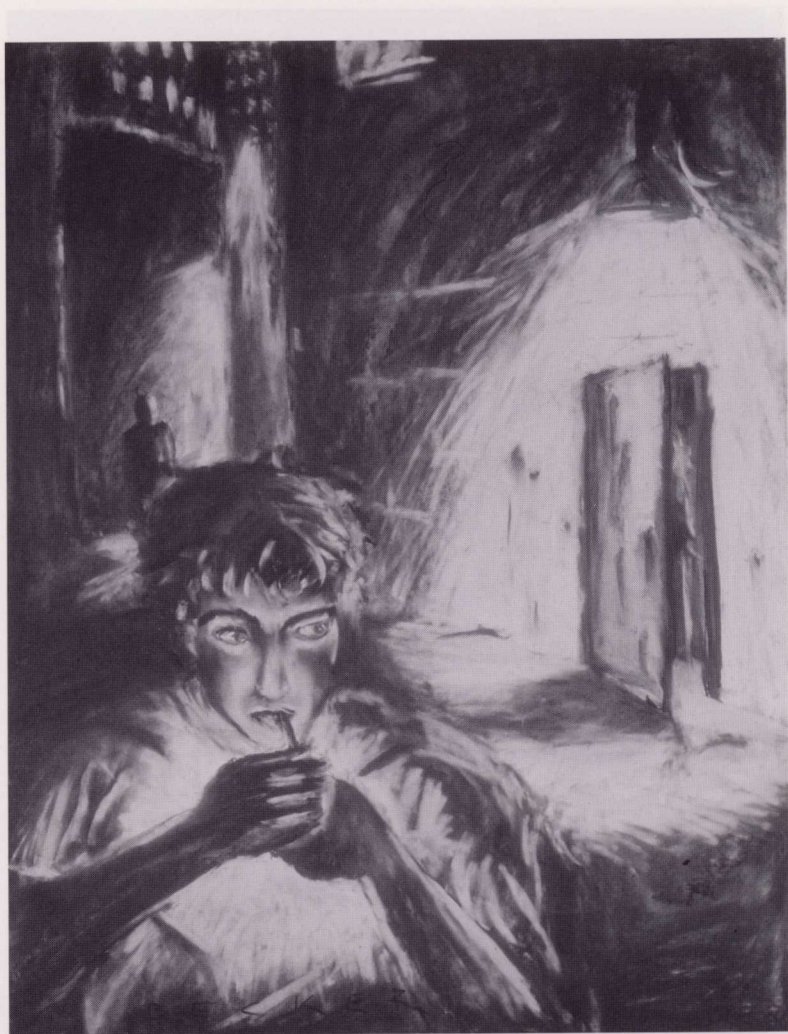
Sonya Green  
*The Kiss*

1999, gelatin silver print, 5 inches x 7 inches



Suzanne Chouteau  
*Chiaroscuro, Egg*

1999, lithograph, 5.5 inches x 3 inches

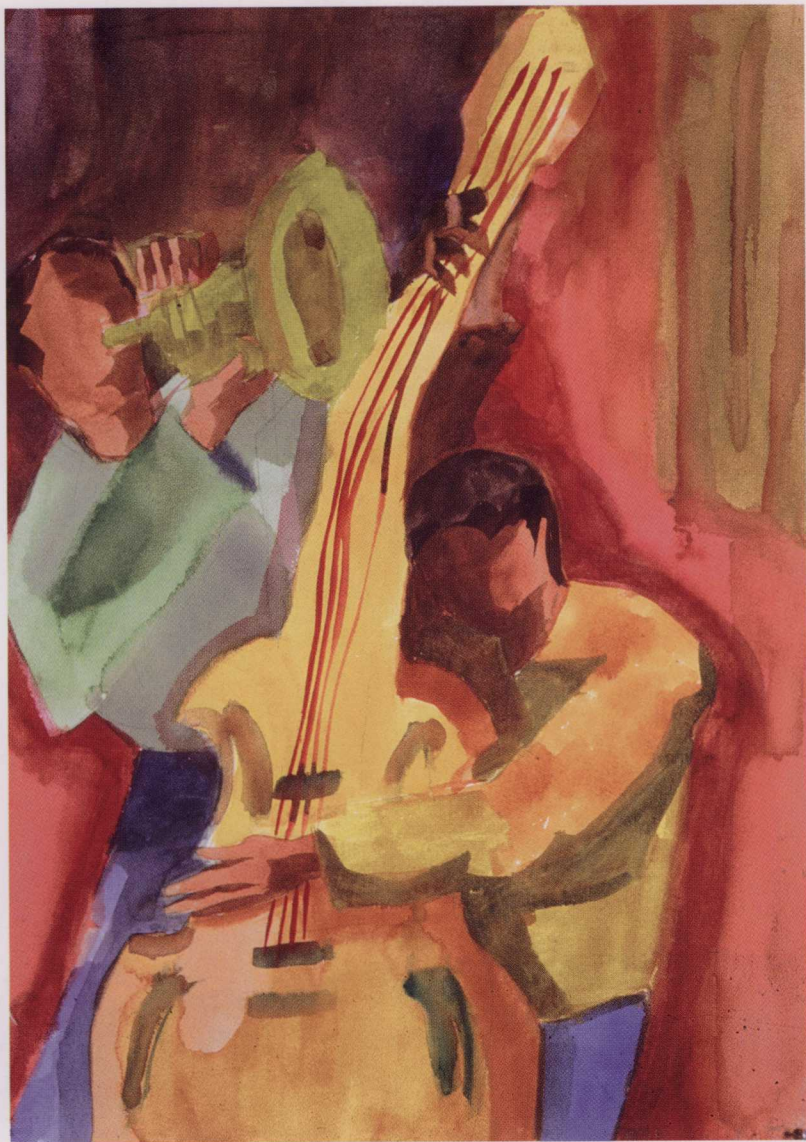


Nathan Becker

*untitled*

2000, charcoal, 32 inches x 40 inches





Nathan Becker  
*Blowing Sessions*

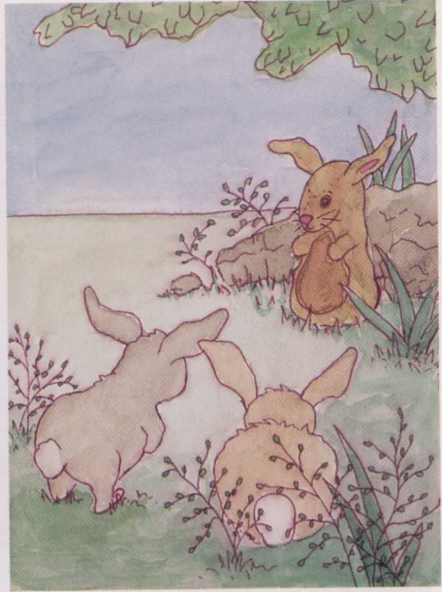
1999, watercolor, 22 inches x 30 inches



Gina Radochonski  
*Deceit*

1999, oil on canvas, 32 inches x 40 inches

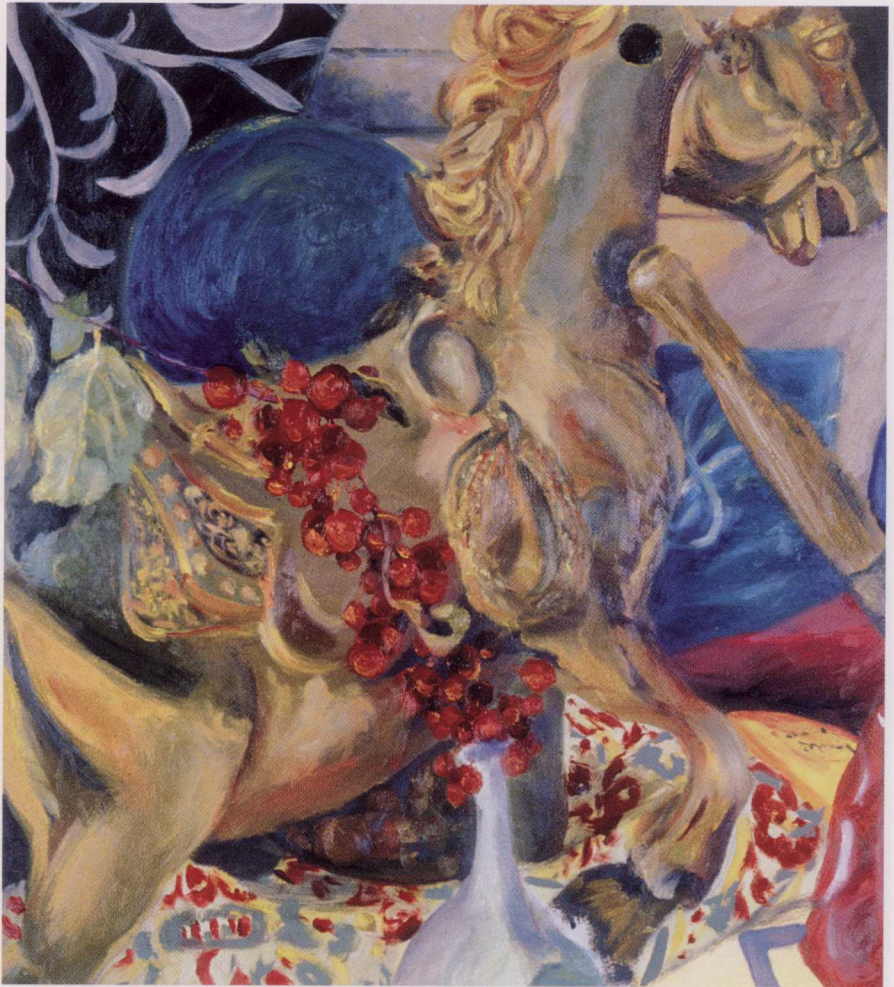




Susan M. Lafferty  
*Illustrations from the Velveteen Rabbit*

1999, water color and ink, 4 panels





Emily Majeski  
*untitled*

1999, oil on paper, 8.25 inches x 9.125 inches



Karin Kuzniar  
*Bodice*

1999, oil on canvas, 21.5 inches x 17.5 inches



Koleksi  
Ben Phalatin Gij

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# The Cat

## I

The Cat was lying dead on its back, with feet sticking straight up into the air. Its orange mottled fur glistened in the sun. Its calico coat was still fresh. I was seeing new death.

The cat had apparently fallen from the tree, and had died from the fall; the stiff rigidity that it displayed was from the suddenness of death; it had not even rolled over.

I felt sad; the cat had died unnecessarily; it had offered warmth and mirth in an indifferent world, and it used to eat mice; it always ran from my porch in the morning when I left my apartment for work; I knew I would miss its scurrying ways.

I thought that the loving owners of the cat would notice its absence, search it out, and give it the proper burial of a pet.

## II

The cat began to display the characteristic signs of decomposition. Gnats and flies sought out its once warm body for food and nesting. Birds picked at its eyes. The once straight legs began to sag sideways from the gray, dreary rain that poured over it.

All living things die and decay. The cat illustrated the fate of every living thing, perishing in the grass, returning to the earth, humbled.

Although the cat's death must have been momentary, the wake seemed gray, bland, dispirited, and patient like the waves behind a slow moving ship, displacing the otherwise calm, patterned waters.

I wondered if the cat had died a different way. Why had its legs stayed straight up as if it had died in shock? Had a demonic youth killed it by swinging it around by its tail, similar to stories I had heard as a youth? Had someone shot the cat or poisoned it? Had it eaten a mouse that had been poisoned? I hurriedly thought that a concerned neighbor, the good civic type, would surely see the cat and send for the proper authorities to dispose of it.

## III

The cat's decomposition now produced a new sense, a putrid, sickly sweet stench that wafted through the neighborhood, coming and going in waves, not at all constant but distinct and powerful. It was impossible to ignore.

Things that linger and smell disturb people. Disgust replaces concern for objects that annoy the senses, especially the sense of smell. Death's wake is gray, the gray slime that coats the grass

underneath a decomposing organic body interacting with living grass, insects and microbes. Death and life are intertwined. Death's wake is synthesis.

Somehow the cat belonged where it lay, reminding the joggers on the street, the cutters-through-the-yard, the casual dog-walkers, the hurried workers that they should not presume pleasant, sunny days, clear paths, and fresh air.

I wondered if I would have to be the dutiful citizen.

#### IV

Closer inspection of the cat revealed a mouth that had receded, revealing sharp teeth and an ironic, macabre smile. Bees and hornets had joined the flies and gnats for nesting rights. They busily and dutifully flew in and out of its mouth, completely unaware that this was, or used to be, a cat.

I might have been the only person who noticed or cared, even though I knew my concern was mostly practical. I wondered how I would get rid of the cat, especially now that it was nesting a hive of bees and hornets; nature's own, compensatory method was in full play.

I was now angry at the cat, the thing, and the gray fish-like slime underneath it. Although its presence already annoyed, I wanted the cat to make noise, to call out its weird fate; its mouth now appeared almost artificial, like a stuffed doll with an incorrectly sewn grin. It was toying with me, laughing at me and defying me to ignore it. It was harlequin, and I dreamt about it coming to life as a puppet to taunt those who failed to acknowledge it. It was haunting me.

If it did speak, I wondered what it would say, probably something simple like, "Bury me."

#### V

The cat awaited its proper burial. Its fur was patchy now. The swarm of inhabitants had intensified.

I thought about burying it myself, but I thought, ironically, that after days of ignorance that this act would arouse negative attention and blame from the previously disinterested neighborhood. Like a coward, I called the special division of the city's garbage collection for dead animals. They impolitely told me that they could do nothing unless it was in the street and that I would have to place the cat in a bag by the street so that they could pick



it up. They asked if I still wanted them to come by, and I hung up in anger. I thought about shoveling the cat into the street and calling them back about its new location, but I decided that the cat, the thing, deserved better.

I prepared myself to meet my accuser, the taunting haunter. I found some old gloves and my anger increased. I wondered why I should have to undergo this humiliation, this dirty work, as if I was responsible for it. I caught myself whining as if I was the one suffering and not the cat, although it was well past this point, and the once straight legs reminded me of its quick death, unless my other speculations had been correct. I had to stop thinking. I approached the cat. The fur was now truly troubling, discolored from the sun, even more mottled from the rain and insects. But even more distressing was the indifferent flight of flies, gnats, bees and hornets in and out of the inanimate mouth. I managed to get a shovel underneath it, but this was difficult because the grayish orange slime had increased and the cat had begun to liquify and merge with the turf, due, in part, to the action of the maggots that now crawled through the lawn. I placed it in a heavy green garbage bag, lining a standard aluminum can. I bore it to the curb and then I called the city employees. They told me that the cat could not be in a bag inside of a can because the collectors would not look for that, so I went back out and took the cat out of the can to place it on the curb.

Its weight was surprising and strained the elasticity of the bag. I worried that the bag might break and that I would have to begin my ordeal over again. It felt like a sack of wet oatmeal. Its stench was masked now by the bag, but it smelled bad enough to arouse the neighbor children's attention. I hoped for their sakes that they would not inquire. I left it without thinking and returned to my apartment, but I looked out of my window to see if it had been taken. I had been warned that this was a low priority job. Later that day the bag was gone. The only thing left was the patch of grass where the cat had lain and the sickening vomit-like residue that was left behind. I knew that its decomposition would later produce a lush patch of vibrant green grass.

I wondered later when I would see orange cats in the neighborhood if they were related, perhaps offspring or siblings, or maybe there was only one scurrying orange cat that played with various stages of life including death and decomposition, testing us and laughing with a clenched, wry smile.

—Patrick Connelly



i came as the student  
and you as the open-minded teacher  
in a kind of existential drama  
of role reversal  
and late night parades  
leaving me alone to my thoughts  
as you walked the blank of that ship to  
japan  
always remembering to leave a lesson plan behind  
for me to contemplate  
as you write poetry on mountain walls  
and I examine the posterity of virtue  
to swallow whole the secret daydreams of midnight  
buddha nature  
multiplied on colors in sequence  
as we washed away the rainstorm  
of contempt that we have come to know in  
america  
and awakened to the eternal warmth of  
eastern living

—Eric Anderson

she smiled  
with that kantian expression  
    while fingernails ran down  
bubble gum  
    sticks  
    (but only for a moment)  
like a hot flash  
        after a cold shower  
    and an afternoon bedtime story  
        with cookies and tea  
'cause trumpets blare  
    but not for me  
    cause you felt it too  
surprised  
        simply cunning  
are we gonna stop  
    or maybe keep on going  
        for a little while longer  
    breath  
    (less)  
    than maybe you had expected  
spiced rum  
    for you my captain  
    so aloha naomi  
        around five july  
tab gets caught  
    opened up  
    and slurped  
        until dissolved like little bubbles  
melting in the oil field.

—Eric Anderson

## contemplation of nothing at all

Ancient bodhisattva nature  
    Zen free love lunacy  
For Buddhism is philosophy  
    And philosophy is knowing  
As I go thru a year of intimate celibacy  
    Cause she was sex mad  
Becoming the thunderbolt vehicle  
    So take off your clothes and stay a while  
For there is a happiness in sadness  
    In my full lotus position  
And a bottle of wine  
    Because my princess is calling  
When wilderness fills the void of darkness  
    And oregon will always be home  
Teach me of han shan  
    And the ways of a vegetarian  
In midnight conversations with ghosts on railroad tracks  
    As poetry becomes redemption for this once lost soul

—Eric Anderson



## The Letter Poem

penthouse delight as  
heraclitus' hammer held strong on an  
inferno of water, caves and society  
leaving and leaning towards individual utility  
on soft tones of melancholy, distrust and  
sobriety of thoughts that twist and turn  
on external parameters, undivided between  
proximity and the irony of an *a priori* empiricism  
hollowed and sought after until the  
yin and yang balance of earthliness approaches.

—Eric Anderson

yesterday  
mrs. johnson's supermarket fish-fry  
sold the secrets of the mystical world  
for two dollars and thirteen cents  
(or a piece of the metaphysical puzzle)  
topped with whipped cream and real cherries.  
and for a dollar extra you got the  
book of nothing  
which teaches you everything you need to know  
about nothing  
and the nothingness of everything.  
and if you missed out,  
not to worry.  
because next week don's gingerbread house of delight  
will be having the exact same deal  
for half-off.

—Eric Anderson

Did anyone ever tell Lucy  
that she would bleed someday.  
That there is no shame in the sun  
and that death seems only an illusion.  
Did we watch as her candle  
melted tears into honey  
dipped in the everlasting forest of regret.  
Could we hear her sing  
silently to the moon  
and patiently to her father  
who failed to answer the call.  
Was there reassurance in her  
that goodness is inherent  
and inevitable.  
That rooftops are a safe haven for joy.  
Did we show her how pretty she was  
without lipstick and  
without having to open up her legs  
to the hounds of insanity.  
Was she aware of the fact  
that she didn't have to die for us.  
That Christmas was around the corner  
and happiness was waiting  
in the phone call to come at New Years.

—Eric Anderson



## Heightened Extremities

the enjoyment of a cover.  
jazz hands stretched anywhere and everywhere,  
filled with "strung-out hippie hair."  
a pink price tag scribbled in black marker and blue pen.  
the fourth edition of a used book.

---

Dracula couldn't sleep,  
his coffin was occupied.  
He went to the kitchen for a bit to eat  
and fell victim to the sunlight of morning.

---

sexual revelations become apparent  
thru the mind and body  
of yabyum rituals  
and late night tea-binges  
as I lost my mind in you  
at first glance  
and second glance  
but came to awareness of your ironic nature  
in that third glance

---

forgive my innocence  
in west coast philosophy  
for it truly was  
the lumberjack in me  
that failed to see  
the logger in you  
at first sight

---

dialectic eyes that show how  
infinity may be more fun than  
earthly foolishness wrapped beyond  
titillating views that portray  
zeno of citium as an absolutist.

---

my inner subconscious jung  
undermining capacity within  
spades and elements of fire  
hidden eyes of the third nature so  
rhetoric of don juan prevails  
over my personal enemy  
ordering my oxygen ally to be  
mediated upon inspection.

---

uncle joe lost the beat  
when summer lost its symmetry.  
you brought home his cap that day  
when fearing duality was inevitable.

---

the downfall of Descartes was  
a lack of imagination to avoid the  
spiritual spacialism  
of reason in circles  
as told by the blood  
in the heart.

---

cunning scars of tempo  
you blue light casanova  
sing brightness  
covered by a blanket  
that downtown spiral  
of sycamore distrust  
embodied half and half  
in a bahai washing machine

---

six of hearts  
possessed with identical motion  
while perched on all fours.

—Eric Anderson



## 10:04; or, the epistemology of waking to me

Jan(et): direct...apparent...nakedness in a hillside pond...

Ten-O-Four: ...conscious...undefined...slipping into bitter bereft....

Jan(et): Do I scare you? Please don't be shy. Answer for pure honesty.

Ten-O-Four: ...honesty is subconscious...underlying...attached, but not connected.

Jan(et): The subconscious is just a lamp. Waiting and...waiting...just to be turned on.

Ten-O-Four: What kind of obstructive injustice is this??? Outrage of a moral definitive. Leaves up incomplete.

Jan(et): Do I make you pretty? Can you measure me in emotions? Or am I to be blatantly categorized?

Ten-O-Four: I speak of no ills. Does something innately existing conjure into you...leaving you...well...well like this?

Jan(et): I'm bored with these senses on non-ness. Have you any manners, or do I have to construct them into your cranial compartment?

Ten-O-Four: I have nothing to hide. Merely suggesting unique possibilities.

Jan(et): What possibilities can you possibly be suggesting? You only demonstrate a desire to deconstruct the very essence of which I call being. (Pause) Do you alternate some other notion? If so, not becoming apparent.

Ten-O-Four: Carry on darling. Fool yourself into another whirlpool of liquid delusions. My concerns lie elsewhere now. (Slight Pause) I have evolved.

Jan(et): Which in no way compliments my de-evolving nature.



Ten-O-Four: If this day has chosen such a fate for us,  
then...well...I suppose so then.

Jan(et): You please me little with such unintelligible remarks, but  
yet, you shall find no hint of surprise on my external front. (Pause)  
So, shall I hear of this new science...this new evolution that you  
speak of...well...what shall it be...WHAT THE HELL IS IT  
THAT YOU TAKE FROM ME?

Ten-O-Four: (Laughs)...my evolution is small in comparison to  
what can be historically defined within the context of your present  
situation. Here...I merely ask for one thing...for your soul to wake  
up to me.

—Eric Anderson

## Perennial Outcomes

Dimensia: because I talk damnit.....  
I guess that's why.

Forthcoming: I realize your dilemma as purely nothing more than lies. Any retort?

Dimensia: how does this sound? (*flicks Forthcoming off*)

Forthcoming: Don't play games with me. (*Slight Pause*)  
But isn't that what you really want?

Dimensia: my mind was created for you to take a picture of. Isn't that what you really want?

Forthcoming: my voice. Extended. Transcendent. But in this world.

Dimensia: paranoid. psyche diseases of a grandiose proportion becoming evident. clear.

Forthcoming: why do you maximize!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!????????!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Dimensia: my intent is not relevant at this time. or any other time for that matter.

Forthcoming: not clear. I see (w)holes in your fight for clarity. Which one?

Dimensia: do you see a tree?

Forthcoming: No...I see a fallen leaf.

—Eric Anderson



## Darkness

I awakened to a world of total darkness, which enveloped me within seconds to a nightmare of anguish and excruciating torture. I screamed. Yet my ears heard nothing; the sound played over and over in my mind, echoing deeper and deeper into my being. I could not tell if I was blind or if I was locked in a darkened room. I tried to reason myself into calmness, "Think," I said, "Open your eyes." But the darkness was so overwhelming, I did not even know for sure if my eyes were open or closed. I knew that I was lying down, that was for certain. I had no memory of who I was or where I had been; as these thoughts flowed in and out of my mind, it frightened me even more so. I concentrated on my eyes. "Open them," I thought. Finally, I sensed them blinking. I knew at least my mind was telling me that my eyes were now open.

The next thing I told myself was to concentrate on moving my legs, arms, fingers, anything at all so that I could try and make some sense of my surroundings. I tried to move my head from side to side, but nothing—fear began to overtake me. Again I screamed for someone, anyone to come to my aid. But the sounds I thought I had uttered were only in my mind. I contained myself and resolved to try to move my extremities. "I want to move my fingers," I commanded my mind. "I want to feel my fingers," I commanded again and again.

After what seemed like an eternity, I felt a prickling sensation in my fingertips and toes. "Thank you, God, thank you," I thought to myself. Slowly my fingers moved, oh the pain, the horrible pain; my limbs felt like they had not moved in years. There was something obstructing my fingers from moving. I felt something solid against my fingertips; and as my toes began to feel about they too sensed a wall, a partition keeping them within. I suddenly realized I was confined within a very narrow box. I began to panic, "Help me! God in heaven help me out of this!" I could not be dead; I would not be thinking! Would I? I was now able to feel my arms above my face, and I commanded my fingers to scratch at the cover that held me prisoner within this box. Suddenly the lid pulled back, "Oh, the pain, the blinding light!" I screamed in pain and terror as the lid fell away from my box.

Roger removed the ribbons from his birthday gift, and slid the lid from atop the box. "I can't believe you guys! A battery operated Wanda Doll!"

—Jose Oliva



## A Letter of Freedom - A Letter of Hope

My Dearest Marisa:

I realize that the art of hand written letters is all but forgotten in your modern world, but I take great pride in this lost sacred tradition, wielding thin pen and paper to put down my thoughts to you. I write with the hope you will understand the things that have happened to me, and why things must be the way they are. I don't want you to worry like I am sure our parents must. I want you to know that your baby brother is OK, for the first time in his life. I now know my destiny. I know father will never understand what would make a man abandon a Fortune 500 company, and devote his life to such a calling, but I wish for you to understand. So that you may comprehend the journey I have been on, I will start from the beginning.

I know that you and the rest of the family shared my exultation when I was hired by Ceperon Corporation, believing that my lifelong dreams had finally been fulfilled. I was barely 35 when I interviewed with the legendary George Apis, and after only five minutes, he looked at me, crossed his burley arms and said, "Happy Fustat, you will do great things for my company, this I know."

Although at the time I did not see the resemblance, I was told repeatedly by my coworkers that in many ways I reminded them of the great founder of Ceperon Corporation. Aside from our similar builds and tanned complexion, I saw no other similarities. I admit that my face is not as attractive as I would like, but George Apis appeared to me more like a snarling bull than I hope I ever will. At the time, I assumed that our physical similarities was one of the reasons he took such an immediate affection towards me. I know now it was much more than that.

As you may recall, this affection was short lived, as George Apis would be found dead in his office just hours before I was to arrive on my first day. While tragic, even his death could not diminish my enthusiasm for my first real position in the corporate world. I was to be the youngest member of the executive staff of Ceperon, charged with the task of ensuring that the company's meager computer systems would survive past the year 2000. With my education and background, it was the position I had dreamed of my entire adult life.

There was a brief power struggle for the leadership position. Two figures arose, Ronald Ashton and Jimmy Adon. Jimmy Adon was in his mid sixties, a short, thin man with only a few wisps of dull gray hair remaining on his undersized head, but he was respected by all and it was said that he was one of Apis's favorites. Ronald

Ashton on the other hand seemed more like a piece of steel than a human. He was well over six feet tall, with shimmering silver hair, and a demeanor that overflowed with professional determination. He could have been a clone to any of a thousand executives in this country.

In truth, it was not much of a battle. For all of Jimmy Adon's good and humble qualities, he had that characteristic about him that seemed as if he was always searching for his last and next thought, much like I remember father doing. Ronald Ashton on the other hand was firm in his convictions, and could articulate them as skillfully as the most seasoned politician. Adon offered little more than a continuation of the same course, while Ashton offered Cepherson promises of a new and brighter future.

To the benefit of my career, Ronald Ashton would ascend to the company's leadership position, with the promises of technology that would revolutionize Cepherson. Given that I was the junior member of the executive staff, I was not expected to take sides in the power struggle, a position that allowed me to remain in the good graces of both Ashton and Adon. Ashton had great visions for the company, and put his faith in me to drive Cepherson into the twenty-first century, carrying the banner of technological change. I was happier then than I had been in my entire life.

The next twelve months were nothing short of a re-invention of Cepherson. As I am sure you recall, there was not an industry publication or national newspaper that did not at some time do a story about the bold new directions we were heading in. Computer systems were implemented with religious fervor. Typewriters were discarded for word processors, paper of any sort was frowned upon and digital imaging and electronic filing became the mantra of this modern wonder. Cubicles were torn down, and each employee, regardless of age or tenure, was given their own office, and encouraged to keep the door shut and work hard with their new computer system for the good of the company. We were hailed publicly as the epitome of how an American corporation could embrace technology and change, and retool for the coming millennium.

As you can imagine, this rapid change did not come without cost, and I speak now of cost in the human sense. To those in the company who resisted changes, Jimmy Adon was their hero. He alone fought in vain to slow the tides of change, but in the end he was too weak to slow the advancement of Ashton's vision. It was well known that Ashton did not approve of Adon or his constant dissenting views, but given that Adon was so well liked by even the



coldest of the executive staff, and the fact that he was nearing retirement, he was a thorn Ashton tolerated.

Despite his opposition of everything I stood for, I developed a fondness for Jimmy Adon, and made it my mission to persuade him to the true beauty of our changes. As you may remember from our childhood, I have always had the ability to explain complicated concepts to almost anyone, and I spent much of my spare time working with Adon, and some of his older colleagues, to try and help them through this period of change. If Jimmy Adon was confused or lost by any of the new technology, he knew he could always call for my assistance. I say "call" because Adon was the only one of my colleagues who did call rather than sending me an e-mail, a trait that I was never able to altar.

Quite simply, Adon longed for the good old days. He longed for the feel of paper, the sound of typewriter keys striking ink, and personal contact with his coworkers. I remember one day he lamented the fact that all our in-house education classes were totally computerized, from the enrollment process to the actual classes themselves.

"Happi, this is ridiculous. I have spent almost the entire morning just trying to enroll my secretary in a simple customer service class. It used to be you just waited for the catalogue, found the class, filled out the registration and showed up. Now I have to tunnel through layer after layer of directories just to track down the information, then write it down on paper for God's sake, then dig through more layers of directories to find the correct enrollment form, transfer the information and then pray that I have e-mailed it to the right person. Does that sound like progress?"

I tried to explain the benefits of electronic registration, the saving of paper, time and labor, but he would hear none of it.

"And then, once enrolled, does my secretary get to spend a nice morning away from the office in a pleasant hotel with cookies and coffee. No! She is stuck still coming to her desk and attending the class through her computer. I'm amazed that anyone even signs up for the classes anymore. Your technology may be leading us into the next century, but it's taking away what little humanity we have left." In retrospect, I realize that just as I was trying to change Adon, he was trying to change me. Futile attempts, but we persisted in this dance for many months.

Meanwhile, Ronald Ashton continued vigorously implementing his vision for the future of Cepharon. Ashton was not a personable man, and I doubt if anyone in the company would have called him a friend, but because I was the implementor of much of his



vision, and we shared a love for technology, I was closer to him than most. He lived in his office, and had all three of his meals catered up to him so he could keep a watchful eye over his employees and his technology driven utopian dream.

One Friday he invited me to have dinner with him, and seeing no way to avoid the meeting, I cheerfully accepted. To the best of my knowledge I was the only employee to ever share a meal or a near-personal conversation with Ronald Ashton, and I assure you it was quite the experience.

It was the same executive office George Apis had hired me in, but Ashton had expanded it by adding a dining, exercise and recreation area, although it was reported by his personal assistants that he rarely did anything close to recreation. Over dinner, Ronald Ashton gave me a glimpse of what was his true vision for Cepharon. He planned to completely outlaw paper in all its forms, mandate that meetings no longer be held in person, but in chat rooms, and that as much communication as possible be done via e-mail. At the time, his visions of the future thrilled me. I truly believed that I was witnessing the perfect marriage of humanity and technology.

I shared with Ashton my thoughts that with all the changes we were making, it might someday be possible for employees to work from their homes. We will advance to the point where technology can truly free our workers - people could be both productive employees and dedicated to their family at the same time. That was my utopian dream. I was quite shocked at Ashton's reaction.

"Damn it, Happi, we're not spending billions of dollars so people can sit at home and watch daytime talk shows and try to mix their work and family lives. Is that what you think we have been working for all this time? The human being is the greatest machine ever created. With the correct guidance, we can become totally self-sufficient. We don't need other people to make us better, more productive individuals; we only need technology to guide us to our own independence. That is what our mission is." Needless to say, that was the last time I attempted to combine my view of Cepharon's future with that of Ronald Ashton's, so I quietly returned to my role of chauffeur for Ashton's vision.

Now my memory of time during this period of my career is slightly blurred, so I cannot tell you with any degree of certainty how long after my dinner with Ashton that my epiphany came, but in my mind the next two events of which I shall tell are linked as if they happened on consecutive days, and both involve Jimmy Adon.

The first was a favor I undertook for him involving one of his former secretaries. Her name was Mary, and she was a very simple likable woman that I guessed was approximately the same age as Jimmy. She had been with Ceperon her entire career, and served the company with renowned distinction, but was for the first time struggling with her job. It was obvious from the short time I spent with her that she was a dedicated and hard worker, but she just could not grasp many of the new technologies that we had introduced. She had a block she just could not overcome. I hoped to use her to show Adon that no matter how difficult it may seem, anyone could adjust to the technology.

It was a Monday morning, and I had spent the previous Friday attempting in vain to help her acclimate to her new workstation. I learned later that she had worked the entire weekend trying to grasp the new computers, and was now almost totally frustrated. The more I tried to help her, the angrier she became. Dear sister, it has been years since we shared the closeness of our youth, but I assure you that my good-natured temperament as a child carried on with me into my adult life; at no time in my professional career has my personality been anything other than genial. That morning with Mary is the only deviation from that temperament.

As Mary's anger increased and her stubbornness grew, I could feel my stomach tighten and frustration begin to overcome my senses. By this time Mary had completely given up, and now seemed to be regressing. For some reason, I believed that Mary was intentionally trying to not grasp what I was teaching her, and I felt I was failing Jimmy Adon. This feeling of frustration made me angrier than I can ever recall. I am embarrassed to admit this, but I exploded with a rage of hostility laid full force on that dedicated employee of near retirement age. I said things I care not to repeat, and wish I did not remember. Through it all she did not cry, but it was clear that I deeply wounded her.

I stormed out in a rage, and only later attempted to reconcile. Mary was kind and said she understood and forgave me, but she was not adept at lying. Two weeks later I went to check in on her and found that she had abruptly retired. No farewell party, she just drifted off.

I did my best to avoid Adon after that. I was ashamed at what I had done to his colleague, and realized that I had failed not only in attempting to convert Mary as to the benefits of technology, but that I had also lost my chance to ever convince Adon. I felt I was a complete failure in every sense of the word.



Then an invitation arrived, a hand written note inviting me to join Jimmy Adon at his exclusive City Club for a steam bath. Now as you know, dear sister, I have always been reluctant to bear my chest to others due to the unusual birthmarks above my right breast, but I felt I owed it to Adon to try to rebuild our friendship. The private club was in the heart of the city, set behind solid wooden doors of monstrous proportion, and after a quick tour of the near antebellum establishment, I was escorted to the locker room and shown where my host would be waiting to receive me.

As I disobeyed, I made sure to keep a towel draped around my neck to try and hide my chest. The steaming chamber was, as you would expect, a wood paneled rectangle with three plain benches surrounding the entrance. Adon greeted and invited me to sit across from him. This was the first time we had really spoken since the unfortunate incident with Mary, but Adon made small talk and avoided the subject. Then, just as I was relaxing within the warm steam, he leaned his body forward and seemed to stare through me.

"Happi, Ronald Ashton is evil. I know you have a fondness for him due to your shared technological background, but I assure you he works for the darkness." I had never seen Jimmy so animated or sure of himself. It was as if he was reciting a well-written speech from a TelePrompTer within my eyes.

"You may think that Ashton and his goals are pure, to merge humanity and technology for the good of Cepharon and the world, but that is not his true ambition. Look at what he has done. Employees have their own offices, but are encouraged to keep the door shut whenever possible. Direct human to human communication is also discouraged, as computers are to be the medium for all contact. Friendly voices and faces have been replaced with cold words on a monitor. This is not freedom; this is prison."

After an uncomfortable pause, I collected my thoughts and felt some false need to defend Ashton.

"So you believe that Ashton is some monster out to rule people's lives, is that it? I doubt that is the case, but I can assure you that you are not alone with that opinion. There are always those who must resist change. It is the balance of nature." I tried to remain composed, while at the same time feeling trapped among the surrounding fog.

"This is what I know, Happi. Ronald Ashton is a sad, lonely man. That is who he is. He has no friends or loved ones, and I doubt if he ever did. You say he seeks to rule people's lives, but that's not what he's about. What he has done is a far greater sin. He uses your technology to isolate people from one another, not



bring them closer together. He is alone in his private hell, and he seeks to bring others there with him." I tried to interrupt, to stop his monologue, but he was too firm in his convictions, and I began to feel myself sliding off the bench.

"Happi, the human experience is isolated enough without help from Ronald Ashton. It is only when humans interact with each other that lives have true meaning, and it is this meaning that that Ashton seeks to destroy. I can see in your eyes you know this to be true."

At that moment I slipped from the bench and the towel that had been draped around my neck fell to the floor. As I quickly replaced the towel and regained my seat, I could tell that Jimmy was staring at the marks on my chest. There was another long pause, and when he spoke again, it was in a soft firm tone.

"Happi, when George Apis hired you, he told me in confidence that he knew instantly you had a destiny to fulfill for his company. I did not fully understand what he meant until just now when I saw those marks on your chest. They are nearly identical to the ones I saw once on Apis's chest."

I tilted my head downward straining to look at my birthmark from an awkward angle. I had studied those marks in the mirror since I was a child, but had never seen them the way I saw them now. I stared down and through the mist realized that the marks were words branded in their own special language with a message just for me.

"You have the power, Happi Fustat. I know that now, and so do you. I know you will do what is right. It is your destiny."

With that, he left me alone with my thoughts, and my scars.

You know the rest from the news accounts, dear sister, and I am deeply sorry for the pain and humiliation I know I caused the family. You must understand, Adon was right. It was the only way. It is the only way. Only with human contact can we truly be free, and technology is the death of human touch. It was a difficult revelation for one so technologically driven as myself, but the answer is clear.

Just a few weeks of quiet work was all I needed to erase years of year 2000 preparation, and when the first day of the new millennium arrived, Cepherson and its employees were set free. Ronald Ashton's hold was broken, and once the workers relearned the value of human contact, there was no turning back.

So now, I am a fugitive. They use the term "techno terrorist" to describe the actions of myself and those I have recruited to my crusade, but I assure you we are freedom fighters in the truest sense of the word. We grow stronger each day, as we slowly awaken those

who have been placed in technologically induced comas. As our numbers swell, so does the fear and misunderstanding that surrounds us, but we will strive on. Ronald Ashton is only a tool of darkness, one of many spliced out into the world. My destiny is as clear to me as the words I now see blazed across my chest. Death to technology. Long live the true human experience.

—*Bryon Agone*







