

AWAKENED VOICES | ISSUE 13 | FALL 2021

THE BODY SPEAKS



COVER ART BY

Y. HOPE OSBORN | KALEIDOSCOPE 17 | DIGITAL ART

AWAKENED VOICES

LITERARY MAGAZINE

see. hear. heal.



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INTRODUCTION

AN EDITORIAL NOTE

We know our bodies hold stories. We know our bodies convey what they need. But how do we listen to what our bodies are saying?

Science tells us that the body stores trauma, physically changing us. (Bessel van der Kolk's *The Body Keeps The Score* comes to mind.) When we sent out the call to hear what surviving sexual violence looks like in the body, we received an overwhelming number of submissions that eschew the need to ask whether there is proof of trauma in the body. Instead, we found survivors already innately understand that the body stores trauma. This issue became about asking *then what?* Once we start listening to our bodies, what comes through?

In *Awakened Voices: The Body Speaks*, writers and artists have taken up the task of listening and putting words to the body's stories. In their prose, poems, and artwork, the body shows us how it heals, how it protects itself, and how it reconnects with the world.

We are honored to hold these stories and to share them with you—your minds, bodies, and hearts.

SPECIAL THANKS TO:

Our entire Literary Review Team, our Founder Jean Cozier, Laura Kinter, Ryan Volpe, Elle Thompson, Jackie Valdez, Megan Otto, Awakenings' Board of Directors

All of our writers and artists

CONTENT WARNING

The following issue contains material including one or more of the following: nudity, sex, rape, incest, sexual assault, abuse, child abuse, medical trauma, racism, colonialism, gender-based violence.

The intention behind this content warning is to prepare a reader so they can choose to bravely engage with potentially activating material, even if this doesn't always feel comfortable. May it also serve as a reminder that a reader can pause and take a break from reading. The stories will be here, ready when the reader returns.

Untitled

Despy Boutris

Collage

8.5x11in



Despy Boutris' work has been published or is forthcoming in *Copper Nickel*, *Ploughshares*, *Crazyhorse*, *AGNI*, *American Poetry Review*, *The Gettysburg Review*, and elsewhere. Currently, she lives in California and serves as Editor-in-Chief of *The West Review*.

Butterfly

For Laura

Emily Boshkoff

When I think about him, my mind leaves my body
without warning, hangs an “out to lunch” sign
with no estimated return time.

I don’t know where it goes, maybe to a place
with all of the other minds cleaved from their bodies
when being attached was too much to bear.
Maybe those minds also couldn’t stand the memory
of blood leaking out of them and staining the sheets,
the smell of whiskey, or the merciless *weight*
of another body on top of them, pinning them to the earth.

I like to imagine that my mind is with all those others, in a bunch
of colorful, helium balloons with strings gently intertwined,
bumping softly against one another, friendly nudges. Mine
would be an emerald green or purple, or perhaps—

—My therapist shimmers into view, dreamlike, ethereal.
She is a mirage in gauzy white, arms crossed over her heart with hands
on opposite shoulders. Her voice is a faint, distant echo, but her fingers
tap her shoulders rhythmically like the flutters of tiny wings.
I realize with surprise that I am doing the same, imitating her.
I hear her now, filling the space as if pouring her voice
into a glass bowl. It sounds the way honey tastes, sweet and slow, rich
and soothing, with a hint of southern drawl—

“Come back, butterfly,”

And I do.

Emily is a child psychologist by trade and poet by hobby who lives in Charlottesville, Virginia. Her work has been featured in *Please See Me*, *3Elements Review*, and *Hippocampus Magazine*, among others. When not writing or providing therapy, Emily loves living and adventuring with her wife and newly-adopted son in their forest refuge just outside of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

Finding Strength in My Own Song *(Excerpt)**Emilee R.*

Cicadas have a certain monotony to their song. The song can mesmerize its listener into a trance. It's the cicada that can still sing me to sleep on those late summer nights in Iowa. Belting out those sultry summer torch songs that seduce and beckon in the cooler autumn breeze. When my kids were younger, I would sometimes rush to get them to bed in time to sit outside with my husband at dusk to hear the small melodic overlap of the cicadas and katydids harmonizing until the cicadas put themselves away for the night. Their sound still filters through my screen door, along with the laughter of my four children, as I chop vegetables for a late dinner. Their song mixes with a Patty Griffin ballad, "Oh Heavenly Day", carrying me back to a time when I would play barefoot in my own childhood yard, catching lightening bugs, my pale skin in a burn-peel-burn cycle, strawberry blond hair aglow under the beam of the moon, only to fall asleep later to the sounds of the cicadas and katydids.

My anxiety increased as the pregnancy went along. I started having nightmares more often, and I felt out of control over my body: it was getting bigger, and I didn't know what labor would be like. I felt like I was driving down a hill,

losing my brakes and careening fast towards a ledge where I would fall off into the abyss. More than anything, I felt like I couldn't be honest with my husband Cory, and my feelings because I didn't want him to think I didn't want her. Yes, we found out it was a girl. We would name her Eden Grace. It scared me to have a girl, because in my head that meant she would be a victim and I wouldn't be able to protect her, that she would get hurt like I had, and these thoughts were paralyzing. I believed I was weak, and I didn't want her to be like me.

I listened to those cicadas as an anchor, reminding me that I was still alive. They were only around for a couple of short months in the late summer, but I am sure their cadence was in my ears year-round, willing my body to get up and face another day. That keep-taking-one-more-step-after-another stubborn hope that it has taken me years to understand is one I would hold on to as tightly as I would hold on to Eden's little hand when we crossed the street to go to the library. The corn might have risen like prison bars, holding me captive in a hell I couldn't escape, but the cicadas were a constant I came to rely on, their night-time lullaby sometimes the

only sense of comfort slowly getting replaced knowing the steady breaths of my sleeping child in the next room. Hope happens when a heart that is broken heals enough to see that the damage done might now serve a greater purpose moving forward. Hope was all I had. Hope helped me see that I was more than my past taught me I was.

In college, I worked two part-time jobs and went to school full time. By then they had schooled me in the finer things of life, such as how best to sweep things under the rug and still make everything look good. How to keep smiling when I would like to scream, all without breaking my back teeth. And while I had vivid memories of some things, I had gaping holes in my memory. They say ignorance is bliss, so I went through college as if the way things looked was my reality. I bought my own guitar, wrote my own songs and played at coffee shops and open mics. I recorded a CD at a local recording studio that was all about finding my voice. I was majoring in social work, not to follow in my father's footsteps, but because I thought that was the best way I could help a hurting world.

Being out from under what was happening with my father, I saw that he used my love for him, counting on my silence, adding people to the equation only to complicate and collude the already murky waters of our relationship. This wisdom did not come all at once. It was more of a choked faucet being turned on for the first time, and where my mom would turn to alcohol, I turned to self-starvation as my poison of choice. This was not the first time I had used this as a form of coping.

After my parents' divorce when I was 11 years old, I went to live with my father. I stopped eating then as well. I just wanted to disappear. My father, being very concerned about my well-being, got me set up with one of his colleagues for therapy and came in five minutes before the session was done to make sure everything was going okay.

It was in college that I sought therapy for myself, to talk about all the self-awareness that was happening in my head and all the subtle ways I found my parents had backed me into a corner. Therapy became an archaeological dig, uncovering artifacts within memories. I would

learn things I didn't always understand about myself and what had happened. I didn't always like what I found.

Christmas time is here. Happiness and cheer ...
But a 5-cent psychiatry appointment with Dr. Lucy couldn't diagnose this problem away. I loved that show on the T.V. playing just rooms away, but getting farther and farther from my reach. I just wanted to see that little lonely tree bent over under the weight of all it had to bear in that one red ornament. Instead, I was kneeling, looking up as if in prayer or praise to a savior, although he was anything but. So, I clenched my fists, gathered my pleas, fought my tears and swallowed them. I swallowed them because it was easier, because there was no other way. Because I was required to... swallow. Because swallowing the pleas and the tears made all the other things go down easier. Was I seven? Was I nine? I can't remember anymore, and my sense is that little girl in my memory was far removed from all time and age.

The radio was playing non-stop music. I could hear it in the other room. Reminders about Santa and Baby Jesus. I knew neither Santa nor God

would find me that night or want someone like me. "O, Holy Night" played as "the savior" and his friend both put me to bed. There was no bright star or glorious light as I laid there. It was a holy darkness, cold and empty, and I carried that heavy, disfiguring load bearing its weight all by myself. All I could think was

Merry Christmas to all and to all a good night.

Nobody is held accountable when it comes to soul murder; the deep bruises that hurt my breath away but aren't visible. I was torn; torn between showing loudly the evidence of my hurt and hiding away in quiet surrender to the man who gave me life. I was convinced if I was still enough, I would feel as unreal as what was happening. I was bone tired, my hands reaching like gulps of air and coming up empty.

I felt like I was taking up too much space, and that I didn't feel worthy of the air that I used, so I tried not to breathe at all. I learned to be quiet through the years; as the pillow absorbed my tears and screams until it all just stopped hurting.

I hear the powerful song of the cicadas as I write words to poems and stories of my making,

so distant from days of rushed scribbles on paper with pen and hiding them from searching eyes. I still hear them as I am in the kitchen; the kids running wild and free outside, jumping on the trampoline and chasing kick balls around the yard with the dogs. So much of life had been about keeping secrets and being quiet, but growing up, not everything was bad, and holding both the love and trauma was almost more difficult than the trauma itself. It would be like taking a pair of scissors to all the self-sewn sutures, the wounds splitting wide open.

Like the cicadas, I am breaking free from the confines of my shell, shedding the skin of my past and continuing to find my voice. It's not so much of a renewal like a caterpillar turning into a butterfly but the cicada's strength and beauty is already there inside them and they reemerge as a better version of themselves through self-examination and deep reflection. Perhaps that beauty and strength was already in me too, and Eden got some of that from me. Maybe being a mom only sharpened the resilient survivor I didn't know was in me, and I passed on that strength to all four of my children.

My husband and I (**Emilee R.**) have 4 beautiful children, ages ranging from 7 to 13. I currently stay at home while I work on getting my MFA in Creative Writing from Lindenwood University. I love to sit outside in nature with my coffee and listen to music to get my inspiration.

Burnt Skin I

Miguel Barros

Oil on emergency blankets

12x15in



Burnt Skin II

Miguel Barros

Oil on emergency blankets

12x15in



Burnt Skin III

Miguel Barros

Oil on emergency blankets

12x15in



The suffering that life can cause in certain moments to so many people is something hard to express, or to talk about it.

Somehow, like a tree burnt by the wildfire, the miracle happens in the regeneration of life in Nature. We can see those effects in the skin of the trees burnt, and through the deep wounds and scars it is possible to start new beginnings... and Hope is born again!

The skin on the body of a victim of violence talks through its surface, and it is the face of deeper pain, suffering, and trauma. The signals are all there in the different layers of the fragile skin, that wonderful thing that covers us and protects all the inner of our bodies and deep soul, like a silk cover that shields us from the storms of sand in a desert, or sunburns...

These three paintings are a metaphor of visible effects of suffering, pain, and trauma of the soul and the body from the horror of all kinds of violence of the victims.

I've tried to represent this psychosomatic effect caused by the suffering. It is as if in each layer or level of the skin, there's a bitter and lonely pain that burns deep not only in the body, but deeper in soul, mind, and heart!

In these three paintings, I've worked on a surface of the "emergency blankets" used in accidents or disaster situations. Then, I've painted it all in an abstract expression with oil painted technique. After that, I've literally burnt everything with a torch of fire. Finally, I've fixed the paintings layer by layer on themselves, creating this raw artistic expression.

Miguel Barros was born in Lisbon, 1962, he's a citizen of Canada, Portugal, and Angola. In 2014, he moved from Africa to Canada. His art's between harmony & conflict. His work is his soul handwriting a letter in a message of emotions that materialize into colours and shapeless forms!

Lost Words Haibun: The Telling of My Body

Kate Falvey

The final lines were defiant and desperately triumphant, a plea for vindication, resolution, self-regard. My young body's supposed imperfections splayed into pages of anguished, stretched-to-the-limit metaphors, brave and semi-maniac multitudes of cock-eyed stanzas, an attempt at declaration, self-acceptance, unmolested pride. To older eyes, the poem was a transparent primal cry of outraged selfhood and gargantuan gaping need, tortured with fervid distortions about repulsive, reprehensible make-believe flaws, written after some befuddled early boyfriend walked shiftlessly away.

The last time I saw these pages, I was in early middle age. There were some intricate, clever, images and a promising, startling candor knifing through vivacious wordplay. Seeing the purple ink on a basement-musty yellow legal pad, I was pleased with my young self's experimental brashness.

I have never written directly about being doubly torn when I was an unworldly girl of fourteen attempting to be bold and worldly. This early poem came closest to revealing my wrecked belief in my own desirability and worthiness.

And this poem was lost in a brutalizing flood in which crate-loads of handwritten juvenilia were reduced to mash and wistful smears of memory. I rescued what I could.

All that remains from *The Telling of My Body* are the final lines, which referred to my apparently short, ungainly legs: *They are hard in the darkness. They push aside air. They make a vital outline. Better than best.*

I am uncomfortable with revelation even now. Flat-out telling doesn't seem to me like my poetic voice or body. I hardly know how to write without allusiveness and dreamy obfuscation, words as saving camouflage, sputtering, sashaying, storying over suppurating life-time wounds.

I was fearless once, having a child in my forties on my own, my body re-claimed through a perfect pregnancy, my body re-told through the thrilling strength of this young woman, my late-life, wondrous daughter.

I rescued what I could.

So, I'm trying to tell now, my daughter, what you
already know: that your mother makes a vital
outline and has always filled the air with song and
outcry, sweet enchantments, brave, headlong
attempts, which will, when all is written, lead me
to conclude that my life has been, with you,
better than best.

Audacious daughter,
mothering you has brought my
body back to me.

Kate Falvey's work has been fairly widely published in
an eclectic array of journals and anthologies; in a full-
length collection, *The Language of Little Girls* (David
Robert Books); and in two chapbooks, *What the Sea
Washes Up* (Dancing Girl Press) and *Morning
Constitutional in Sunhat and Bolero* (Green Fuse Poetic
Arts). She co-founded and edited the *2 Bridges Review*,
published through City Tech (City University of New
York) where she teaches, and is an associate editor for
the *Bellevue Literary Review*.

The rope and the hole

Caitlin Coey

is Evan Rachel Wood and all the others saying the names
of those who hurt them and exactly what they did.

And it's that it happened.

It's listening

And

it's

listening...

some

interviewer asking FKA Twigs why she didn't leave.

Asking what were you wearing?

Why didn't you say anything?

What did you do?

Asking how come you're so afraid?

Asking why are you doing that

with your voice?

The doctor takes one look at my long legs when I use the word "run" and says,
it happens in hyperathletic perfectionistic females...

He doesn't hear the rest of the sentence "running for the bus." He
doesn't understand I've spent the last year on the couch.

They stick a camera down my throat. One doctor, two interns, their faces so close to mine. *Do I
want to look at the screen?* The inside of my throat looks like a punctured jellyfish.

I am counting my breaths. No thank you.

Later a different doctor, a non-male doctor

tells me I have a deviated septum, that's why it hurt so much, although of course it does. It's a camera in your throat.

I run up and down the stairs of the hospital,
stop when it feels like a hand is clenching my throat.

The camera again. This time, only one doctor. She
is so sorry for how much it hurts. I count my breaths.

Again the screen. This time I look, and I see it.

The vocal cords close when they are supposed to open.

Open when they are supposed to close.

It's called paradoxical vocal fold motion. They say it can happen in survivors of abuse.

So much time spent counting our breaths,
making our faces blank, humming,

I am out here studying stones trying to learn to be less alive, using all of my skill to keep very
Still, still
even on the inside.

You learn not to speak to stay alive, eventually, the body does it for you.

I have a picture of myself

At four, covered in Band-aids. A panacea against the chicken pox.
I did it myself on the bathroom floor, the first time I remember knowing that I could make
myself
Feel better. In the picture one shoulder higher than the other, holding my opposite wrist. Leaning
onto the same leg, head slightly to one side.

I don't have the Ma Bell phone company T-shirt anymore, or the
side ponytail, the Bandaid on the left side of my mouth, replaced by a scar, but otherwise,
that's how I'm standing when the PT says my pelvis is crooked,
my shoulder muscles are weak.

"I am out here studying stones trying to learn to be less alive, using all of my skill to keep very, Still, still even on the inside" *Studying Stones* by Ani Difranco.

Caitlin Coey is a queer poet and playwright. Her writing focuses on gender-based violence, mental health, queer love, and the importance of friendship. She has an MFA in Creative Writing from Antioch University Los Angeles. Her poetry has appeared in *Shambles* and *The Roadrunner Review*. Follow Caitlin's work on Instagram at @coeywrites and her website caitlincoeypoet.net.

What We Carry

Marianne Peel

I. My former student Clara –
star of brilliance studying at Oxford –
clutches a chunk of concrete
from a construction site
in her hand, as she walks home today.

A windowless van
loaded with men
drives away,
laughing at her in the wake
of their exhaust.

Within five minutes
a man who claims *I've seen you*
around lately, follows her, trails her,
until another woman joins her side,
walks with her.

II. Forty-five years ago,
waitressing, the manager at Denny's
gut-punched me, knocked me onto the floor.
Because I had refused to park in the back lot
when I worked the graveyard shift.

Told me he was teaching me a lesson:
training me to prepare
for coffee counter 2am drunks
who would attack me in the unlit back lot,
shrouded by the cover of woods.

Forty years ago
a professor – reviewer of opera
and all things artful – implored me to
wear my hair in pigtails. To fulfill his fantasy
of having an incestuous affair with his daughter.

Another professor admonished me for wearing
overalls over my blue flannel shirt. Declared
I had *no right to hide my curves from*
the male gaze. Told me I had no business
burying my femininity beneath sack denim.

Twenty years ago
on a bridge at night, a man on a bike
rode figure 8's around me. Humming.
And then whistling. Each rotation
moving closer and closer. Tires whirring.

I clutched my sharpest key
between thumb and forefinger.
Rehearsed how I would use this weapon
to penetrate the tender spot
between his eyes.

I planned his destruction over and over,
as each figure 8 encroached further into my sphere.
I would not hesitate to gouge out his eyes. This fight
response embedded in my DNA. I have prepared
for this battle my whole life. I would not hesitate
to gouge out his eyes. And I would feel no remorse.

III. This morning my new doctor in Chicago
stares at my torso. Asks how tall I am.
We are the same height. Tells me
his weight. Frowns at my torso. Tells me
his weight again. Boasting that he eats
no pizza or pasta.

Checking for psoriasis, he tells me *now I am*
going to get a little personal. Reaches behind my back.
Pulls the elastic of my underwear away from my skin.
Searches for psoriasis. Grabs the bloodwork sheets
out of my hands. Instructs me to pull up a chair next to him.
At his desk. To go over results.

I scrounge through a script in my head. Negotiate
with myself. I am afraid
if I don't cooperate, he will dismiss me as a patient.
I waited four months for this appointment. A specialist:
he is in desperate demand and knows it. I can barely
walk, joints inflamed. I cannot wait
another four months for meds.

I want him to stay on his side
of the exam room. To talk to me
from behind his mask. Want to discuss
a treatment plan without his trousers
breathing too close to my knees.

And in the meantime, I choke on my own
unspoken words. Gag on the muffling
of rage firing at the back of my throat.
Feel the adrenaline
in my shaking hands
hours
years
decades
after I am violated.

Every woman knows
this story. We all clutch
chunks of concrete.

A middle/high school English teacher for 32 years, **Marianne** now nurtures her own creativity. She spent three summers teaching in China and received Fulbright Awards to Nepal and Turkey. Marianne participated in Marge Piercy's Juried Poetry Workshop (2016). Marianne's debut book "No Distance Between Us" was published by Shadelandhouse Modern Press in Fall of 2021.

Life Jackets

Madeline Lebovic

Ink on paper

5x7in



The life jacket is yellow.

Or orange.

In retrospect, the color doesn't matter as much as the malice with which it attacks my body. The straps tighten around my neck as ice water courses violently through my veins, sending all systems into shock.

"Breathe!" urges a distant voice.

Whatever consciousness remains tries her best to comply, but inhales desperation instead of air and decides that the body is no longer inhabitable. She and I float for a while. There is a pleasant sort of apathy in this in-between. When nothing is engaged, nothing matters, and for the moment that feels comfortable. I look at her body. She is 7, and 15, and 19, and 25.

When are we? her eyes ask, and a warm splash of tears — ours, I suppose— brings me back to the pier.

"Miss, you need to put on a life jacket in order to see the waterfall," the boat attendant says, looking baffled.

If I were not in such a state of distress, I might return the look with a nod of understanding. Perhaps I could explain that PTSD from sexual trauma is an unpredictable alarm system that runs drills on a schedule that even I don't quite understand. I would be open; I would try to claim my story from a point of power rather than shame. But the body remembers more than I, and speaks from years of harbored fear even if the brain doesn't want to.

"I. Can. Do. It. Myself." I grab the life jacket from the man's hands and collapse into quiet sobs. I mourn the girl whose body I saw and release the weight of her past in tears.

Madeleine is a writer and artist whose creative work explores innocence, trauma, and time. She holds a BA in International Relations from Tufts University and is currently fulfilling a Fulbright grant in Germany. Originally from the Chicago area, her perfect city day includes family, friends, and rollerblading the Lakefront Trail.

Embracing the Erotic After Sexual Trauma

Dana Sayre

I have a growing realization of this thing that I have to deal with at some point. It's something I've been putting off dealing with for a long time. But you can't contain trauma, no matter how hard you try; it seeps through the cracks of any container you try to put it in. The spillover will infect every aspect of your life until you confront it.

But everything also has to be worked through in its own time. You can't rush the healing process. We understand this when it comes to physical injury. I broke my right ankle in high school, and I've had major sprains of it several times before and since. That ankle will always be weaker than my left one, and the muscles will sprain more easily than if they had never been injured. The same is true for emotional wounds – if they reoccur, each injury makes the next that much more statistically likely. It's also true that if I injure that ankle again, I will need to give it time to heal and not try to rush back into normal activity. In the same way, emotional trauma needs time and space before it can be dealt with. You don't do physical therapy until the cast comes off.

Something my therapist said at my last session keeps playing in the back of my mind. "If 2% of

you believes something, then you believe it." And all I can think is, well, then I'm fucked. 2% of me believes a lot of fucked-up shit about me that the other 98% knows isn't true. I know it takes time to pull the hooks out. Maybe at first, 25% of you believes something. Then, 10%. In comparison, 2% isn't much. But you have to keep working, because that 2% is still strong enough to keep drawing you back into negative patterns.

When I was 11 years old, girls in my grade started getting crushes on boys and I didn't understand why, and it made me an outsider. When I was 12 years old, my mother told me I was too fat for anyone to ever love me. When I was in high school, I was constantly bullied for never dating anyone, so I made up crushes so my classmates would leave me alone. Then, a bunch of boys in school thought it would be funny to write a letter describing in detail sexual acts they said I wanted to perform with a teacher. It wasn't true, but I was afraid saying anything about it or advocating for disciplinary action would only make the bullying worse. When I was 18 years old, I was emotionally and sexually abused in my first romantic relationship. Any repeated injury makes the next statistically more likely.

I had worked through, or thought I worked

through, a lot of my sexual trauma in my most recent romantic relationship. We were engaging in a D/s dynamic, which included consensual rape play. I thought that was helping me process my past history of assault, but I think I was actually just reenacting it because I have no idea how to engage sexually in a different way. My body freezes up, and I can get overwhelmed by sensation, even when I am enjoying it. Choosing to be out of control feels safer in some ways because I know that is how I will feel regardless.

I am still so uncomfortable being in sex-positive - or even sensual - spaces that I feel cut off from a lot of communities I used to engage in. The breakup retraumatized me in a lot of ways, and the more time that passes, the clearer it becomes to me that this isn't something I'm going to be able to work through on my own. I feel fortunate that I have two loving and supportive partners with whom I can have deep emotional intimacy, and who are accepting and affirming of wherever I am in this process and wherever I end up. Who are not pressuring me to engage in sexual activities, and who have reassured me they value our relationship even if we never have sex. The fact that I have access to love in a non-sexual context is important and affirming in its own way.

Because for a long time I felt like sex was a price I had to pay to receive love.

I attended a conference where one of the keynotes centered around Audre Lorde's conception of the erotic. Lorde says, "The erotic is a measure between the beginnings of our sense of self and the chaos of our strongest feelings. It is an internal sense of satisfaction to which, once we have experienced it, we know we can aspire. For having experienced the fullness of this depth of feeling and recognizing its power, in honor and self-respect we can require no less of ourselves." The erotic, then, is where sensation meets our deepest feelings, and it can be applied to anything which gives us a deep sense of joy and satisfaction, not just sexual things.

I have come to realize that because of my past sexual trauma, the rejection of the revelation of my erotic self to another (as marked by the termination of a relationship) has the potential to cause re-traumatization. But in the same way that depression numbs all feelings, not just negative ones, any attempt to shut down or compartmentalize the sexual component of my connection to my own sense of erotic power cuts off all access to that eroticism in my life,

including other forms of sensation-based joy. It hampers my ability to truly be in my body and to feel my deepest feelings. And I'm not okay with that.

I believe that I was grey-asexual and then I was sexually abused, in the same way that I was kinky and then I was abused. I don't think either aspect of my sexuality was caused by said abuse, but both (and my lack of knowledge that asexuality was a viable option) combined with growing up in a shame-based Christian culture made me vulnerable to sexual coercion. I don't know whether working through my trauma will change how I engage with any of my partners, whether now or in the future. But I want to be able to feel open to engaging with my erotic power, whether or not it's in a sexual context. I don't want to feel that there are spaces which are not open or welcoming to me, or places that I cannot go to or people who I cannot engage. I don't want to feel uncomfortable even thinking about being in a place where others are engaging in a sensual or sex-positive way.

But in order to work through this, I know that I will have to confront the parts of my abuser which I have internalized. That 2% of me which still has quite a lot of psychic power. I've tried so

hard to annihilate any trace of that time in my life, up to the point of attempting suicide at the age of 20. But you can't compartmentalize trauma; it will seep through the cracks of any container you attempt to put it in. And I'm just so tired of carrying this trauma around. This fear of abandonment, these feelings of inadequacy, this anxious attachment and insecurity about those I love. I'm tired of even 2% of me thinking that I'm unlovable or undesirable.

So I am starting small, by exploring my relationship to myself, and finding safe ways to engage with eroticism, whether it is wearing fabric that feels good on my skin, dancing to a song I love, or really enjoying the tastes, textures, and smells of a favorite meal. I'm learning to listen to my body when it tells me it likes something and trying to move closer to things which give me a full-body feeling of joy. I am learning to show love and care to myself, when I'm alone, and how to soothe myself when I'm upset or experiencing a trauma trigger. I wrap myself in a fleece blanket, or cuddle with my cat, and learn what kinds of sensations my body can tolerate. I am okay if I never engage in partnered sex again. But I'm leaving the door open and adopting a "never say never" attitude. I know it

will take time, but I am trying to enjoy the journey of building a relationship with this body, and seeing where it takes us.

Dana Sayre is a white, queer, fat, trans non-binary, disabled, and neurodivergent writer, performance artist/activist, and drama therapist. They live in Austin, TX with their cat Angel, helping create social support spaces for other disabled queers. Dana's writing has been published in local news and literary/lifestyle websites, zines, academic journals, and on their personal blog.

Kaleidoscope 17

Y. Hope Osborn

Digital photograph abstraction print

16x16in



The *Kaleidoscope Captures* series, of which “Kaleidoscope 17” is one, is a fond reminder of my lifelong fascination with kaleidoscopes. Now, I am blessed to play with the full spectrum of color, so I grasp, mix, and twist it to sate my hunger for rich variety and the freedom of abstracts.

I am free to move and imagine in a way I couldn’t have in a traumatic childhood. I didn’t know how to play then, so I learn to play now, creating endless possibilities, rivaling the most valuable kaleidoscopes.

Y. Hope Osborn is a degreed, freelance writer and emerging artist who photographs monochromes, colors abstracts, writes about mushrooms, and shares personal traumas. Her works are published, exhibited, and awarded, but being a great author and artist is expressing reality and imagination that captivates, inspires, or informs while enriching lives.

After Being Abused

Laurie Kuntz

I heard the sirens in the distance coming closer,
somehow I knew who they were keening for.

Before the call, the knock on the door, the wail
closing in, I captured the bird song, the color of
the sky, the buzz of midday flies, the neighbor's
cat scratching on the screen door, the air rife
with motion.

My bruised body lit before me, and somehow I
knew nothing would ever feel the same.

Laurie Kuntz is an award-winning poet and film producer. Her new full-length poetry collection, *The Moon Over My Mother's House*, is available from Finishing Line Press. Recently retired, she lives in an endless summer state of mind. Visit her at: <https://lauriekuntz.myportfolio.com/home-1>

FOR MY MOTHER'S POSTCARD COLLECTION

Troi Speaks

I am a thing with feathers full of butterflies with no intention to repent.

I am not a safe enough shelter for anyone to stay in for too long. My body is not an irregular shaped residence for anyone to pay a mortgage on- I am not a soft-edged coffin, or a pentagon, or a box and yet here I stand, still building walls, and windows, and doors. I am more like a museum with a glass roof.

Among many of my exhibits is one called, "The Closet." Wherein there is a makeshift screen door made of patch together panties. Lace, silk, cotton. Clean, dirty, old, and period stained. In every color but white, that could only be opened from the inside but it is torn down the middle from top to bottom. The split, leaving tattered edges frayed and bristled, looks like an open cut on someone's chapped bottom lip or like a hairy vagina. And behind the backward broken door, is a retro minimalistic redwood & leather chair, with an open switchblade on the seat. A vintage suitcase.

A dangling lightbulb, flickering.
A small nightstand on which rests an empty bottle of gin and a double shot glass full of burnt roaches. When the light strobes bright enough it reveals how small the space inside really is, the

rooms' glossy crimson floor and how all the walls are actually mirrors covered in smudges. Some from lipstick, most from fingers. But the light never lasts long enough to reflect anyone's face. Few people have stepped through the screen-most just stare.

In every showroom, there is a mailbox of some kind. In one there is a shredder. It sits on a mound of sharp shattered things in an Exhibit titled "Tender headed" and in the description plaque on the left-hand side of the entryway you are instructed to remove all footwear before entering

at your own risk.

At the foot of the shredder is a suicide note addressed to no one in particular, poking out of the gravel as if nearly forgotten. There is a trail of dried blood betwixt the doorway and the shredder that leaves the shards behind and leads to a garden where it fades into soft moss. The letter drop there, in the grass, resembles a well with a pulley operated bucket to send and receive writings in. Recently I've been spending more time on this installation room. Planting seeds, watering plants, soaking my feet, lowering words with wires into the black of the

well and waiting for the echo of a rattling pail.

Sometimes it sounds like wind chimes.

Sometimes it sounds like thunder clapping
right above me.

Right now I am in my garden hesitant to
lower a postcard addressed to my mom who is
visiting her parents in Guam. It reads, "Hafe Dae
and Happy New Year, I hope all is well. I have
been struggling to find a way to tell you that I am
bisexual and I'm sorry I came out on stage before
telling you first. I hope you're having a good time.
I hope when you pray for me, you don't ask God
to forgive me for what she made. I'm still the
same girl, just more open like you've always
wanted, and I need to know you will still accept
me. I need to hear that you are still proud."

My palms are sweaty. I'm hoping for wind
chimes but I am still holding on to the rope too
tight - What if she refused to add this card to her
collection? Still, I have to let go - I want to let go
but I keep asking myself if the greenery I've
nursed these past 23 years is worth losing to a
storm I know I can avoid.

Troi Speaks (she/they) is an emerging multimedia artist originally from Van Nuys, California, who is currently focusing on abstract painting and poetry. She bases her work around the wonderful/colorful complexity of how vast and arbitrary language, or the lack thereof, can be. Pointing out that at the center of creativity is the need for a necessary emotional conduit to express our reflections and perceptions of the world around us. Existing is an art and a paintbrush is just as much a pen as a pen is a microphone- a tool used to amplify one's voice. Living by this idea as a core value, she uses her voice to encourage mental health awareness, environmental justice, etc, and to share her experience as a queer black woman/gender-neutral person to invoke inclusivity and representation. Right now she is in the process of honing her skills and expanding her comfort zones but ultimately, she intends to turn her artistry into a career that puts emphasis on self-care and nature through educationally therapeutic studio workshops in various mediums. She hopes to create a space for people to feel safe transmuting emotions such as anger, grief, or joy, into tangible art and in doing so learn how to allow themselves to feel/heal in a healthy way.

Commodities: Entertain Me

Jennifer Weigel

Collage and glitter watercolor on watercolor paper
6x4in



Commodities: Blow Job

Jennifer Weigel

Collage and glitter watercolor on watercolor paper
6x4in



Commodities: Heels Up

Jennifer Weigel

Collage and glitter watercolor on watercolor paper
6x4in



These pieces were created during my divorce in response to something my ex said to me asserting that he still held ownership of my body until the legal discourse was finalized over 6 months out. I am very sensitive to these sorts of issues due to childhood sexual trauma and harassment and called him out on it, saying I'd be damned if he claimed ownership over my body if he wanted nothing to do with my mind and spirit. He withdrew his comments later, recognizing he had only said them out of a desire for control, but they inspired this series of collages using advertising and bridal cutouts.

Jennifer Weigel is a multi-disciplinary mixed media conceptual artist. Weigel utilizes a wide range of media to convey her ideas, including assemblage, drawing, fibers, installation, jewelry, painting, performance, photography, video and writing. Much of her work touches on themes of beauty, identity (especially gender identity), memory & forgetting, and institutional critique. Weigel's art has been exhibited nationally in all 50 states and has won numerous awards.

Let Them Not Be Your Ten!

Ada Cheng

It took me ten years.

In February 2020, I was invited by a faculty member from the Global Asian Studies Program at UIC to do presentations for his Asian American courses. The presentation was entitled “Sexual Assault on College Campus and Asian American Experiences.”

This presentation was different for me for one major reason. It was the first time that I had presented for college classes with predominantly Asian American students. Staring at faces similar to mine hit me viscerally.

I started my talk with the following major topics:

- The American colonization in Asia, their military/political interventions in the Asian region, and the United States’ racist and imperialist legacies in Asia;
- The constructed images of Asian women as docile, submissive, exotic, sensual, and sexually willing and the sexual fetishization of Asian/Asian American women;
- The historical symbolic/cultural emasculation and de-sexualization of Asian/Asian American men;
- The necessity to center race in sexual assault discourse.

Why are race or racialized images central to our understanding of sexual assault? If you are perceived to be submissive, docile, sensual, exotic, and fetishized, is it possible that your rejections, even if they are firm, can be disregarded over and over? Is it possible that, if you are perceived to be sexually willing and available, your rejections, even if they are clear and persistent, can be fantasized in a twisted way to mean affirmations?

Immediately after the class, a student approached me and said, “Thank you for your presentation. I really appreciate the way you approached this topic. You made this material relevant to me and my experiences.” I knew what she meant. She didn’t mean that my presentation was relevant to her as a woman. She meant it was relevant to her as an Asian woman in this country.

Her remark shook me to my core, not only in terms of how I should do gender-based violence training in the future, but also how I had to re-examine my own sexual assault. I had to ask myself: Why did I tell the story the way I did? Why did I leave out certain details? And most importantly, why was my identity as an Asian woman never given a proper place in my own

public account of the story?

My sexual assault took place in 2010. He was a colleague of mine in the department at a well-known university in Chicago. He was a friend, a progressive faculty member, and a comrade: one who would march with women and speak up for us.

Yet he sexually assaulted me despite my repeated rejections. I couldn't even name it as rape until another close colleague of mine named it for me. I could not reconcile his good man image in public with the violence he committed in private.

I have told this story in public a few times since 2016. I left out something important.

I decided not to discuss race in the story to mitigate the stereotyping that might ensue. My colleague is an immigrant man of color, a member of a marginalized community. I left out that detail because of the larger political climate of our time.

In 2015, when Donald Trump came out running for presidency, his campaign relied on demonizing immigrants, particularly immigrant men of color, constructing them as drug dealers, traffickers, criminals, and rapists. I didn't want this to become another statistic contributing to the portrayal of immigrant men of color as the

villain in our larger cultural and political landscapes.

Since I didn't name his race, I didn't explore how my own race might have played a part in my own victimization. I have been troubled by my own omission since my racial identity as an Asian woman has been central to my existence as an immigrant woman of color in this country and my experiences as an immigrant woman of color faculty in academia: in the way my colleagues have dismissed my presence, appropriated my intellectual labor, and discounted my contributions; in the way my students have disregarded my authority as a tenured faculty member; and in the way I have been told to go back to my country and consistently asked where I am from "originally", even after I became a citizen in 2015.

How could race be so salient in all my experiences as an immigrant woman of color, yet so absent at this moment of intimate violation? What other pernicious effects can this erasure of race have?

What I didn't say to students in 2020 is this: Is it possible that, because of these images, developed and constructed out of the American racist, colonial, and imperialist legacies, you will

be perceived as a complicitous collaborator in your own sexual assault, not only by others, but also by yourself? Is it possible that we also come to see ourselves as complicit in the violence against us?

I did, questioning myself in terms of the legitimacy of the rape because there was no brute force, because it was not in the dark alley, because he was no stranger but someone I trusted, because I didn't fight back and yell, because I thought I was trying to salvage a friendship, and because I stayed quiet and let it go afterwards, pretending nothing had happened.

Exactly the same way I dealt with anti-Asian racism early on in my life in this country.

On March 16 2021, a White man murdered eight people in Atlanta, among them six Asian women. In the press conference, the sheriff minimized the violence against these Asian women by labeling it as the shooter's trouble with sexual addictions.

Within one month of my arrival in this country in 1991, I learned a particular form of racial profiling, unique to me as an Asian woman, via this phrase: "I like Asian women."

This phrase has been said to me millions of times throughout decades, by men of all races,

particularly White men.

The key word here is Asian, not women. Men are looking for a particular set of titillating images and stereotypes in me. I am not important; the collective "we" that they have been fantasizing is what satisfies their sexual desire.

I am never just a woman; I have always been an Asian woman.

In an effort to protect my perpetrator, I never once asked how my identity as an Asian woman as well as the images based on the racist misogyny in his fantasies might have played a role in his repeated refusals to accept my rejections. I obscured the fact that I had consistently experienced racialized misogyny and sexism from men of color.

Even until this day, I still do not know how to address the harm done to one another within marginalized communities.

I wrote myself, the inseparable Asian woman, out of my own narratives.

When you write yourself out of your own stories, there is no story to tell about you or for you.

It took me ten years.

Let them not be your ten!

An educator-turned artist, storyteller, and creator, **Dr. Ada Cheng** has utilized storytelling to illustrate structural inequities, raise critical awareness, and build intimate communities. Committed to amplifying and uplifting marginalized voices, she has created several storytelling platforms for BIPOC and LGBTQIA communities to tell difficult and vulnerable stories. She was named 2021 Educator of the Year by the 7th Congressional District's Multi-Ethnic Task Force and the American Multi-Ethnic Coalition. She was a tenured professor in sociology at DePaul University from 2001-2016 when she resigned to pursue performance and storytelling. Since then, she has delivered numerous keynotes for academic conferences, universities, nonprofit organizations, and government agencies using storytelling and performance arts. Dr. Cheng is a speaker for Illinois Humanities Road Scholars Speakers Bureau and an adjunct faculty at Dominican University. Her interests encompass academia, storytelling/performance, and advocacy.

Broken Wings

Maithili Rajput

Sculpture

18x16x11in



Rising Phoenix

Maithili Rajput

Sculpture

32X28X28in



I've lived in three continents with discrete cultures, and I realized that no matter where a woman lives and how different her experiences are, her challenges remain the same. My art frequently features melancholic and sexually explicit subject matter, and I portray feminine perspectives on oppression, feminism, and emotions, with a strong emphasis on three-dimensional female figures.

I observed the insecure social lives of women throughout my childhood. It's never easy for women to live their life freely when they grow up. Women aim to chase their dreams but social insecurity brings frustration. A woman's journey has to pass through various phases like a struggle to strengthen her budding wings, determination to shape her life, and pursue her dream. I believe wings are the expression of freedom and resemble a distinct character of women.

My goal is to keep up my creativity, have the confidence to produce what feels true to be a woman, not necessarily attractive. I believe as an artist I have the power to create a world I dream about.

Maithili Rajput is a sculptor, painter, and mixed media artist focusing on feminine experiences and complexes through three-dimensional figures. Maithili earned her Bachelor of Fine Arts in Sculpture and Painting from Ohio Wesleyan University in 2021. She is from India, currently based in Greece working independently.

AWAKENINGS

Awakened Voices is a literary program of Awakenings, a non-profit organization dedicated to creating a physical and virtual artistic space in which to promote the healing of survivors through the arts and engage in an open dialogue that furthers awareness and understanding of sexual violence. Please consider helping us spread our message of healing by sharing and supporting Awakenings.

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Join our core squad of Awakenings' supporters and join Judith's Circle. By committing to making a monthly donation of any amount, you are directly impacting a survivor's healing process. Your contribution directly supports our artists and Awakenings' ability to provide trauma-aware, professional arts experiences like this for our survivor artists. Join the Circle at awakeningsart.org/judiths-circle.



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