

# TRANSVERSE

Queer Toronto Literary Magazine Issue 20



# TRANS VERSE

QT VOLUME 20

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“My arms felt like wings, like they had become wings, beautiful wings, the most beautiful wings ever & they were mine & even more than that, they were & are a part of me, my wings & they made me beautiful (or so I thought at the time), but no, I realize now with tears of denied truth streaming down my face, it only brought out the beauty that was always there inside of me.”

“I have always wanted wings: butterfly wings, bird wings, just wings, beautiful wings. I have wanted to fly so desperately for so long, watching the swallows, the swifts, the terns & the hummingbirds perform. I have wanted to be one of them so badly.”

- CaiRa

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Transverse

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# HEY CUTIE.

Transgress

Transform

Transcend

For our 20th issue, we invited trans and nonbinary artists to question what it means to exist in flux, to shapeshift, and to cross thresholds of gender, genre, and even geography. Artists showed us the worlds they inhabit, fight for, and sculpt anew, and they examined the roadmaps, fault lines, and constellations of their becoming.

Transverse came out of real conversations at community events. We heard you loud and clear: we want a trans issue. In this moment of targeted political erasure, passing the mic to trans people is more important than ever. And in response to this call, we received the highest number of submissions for any issue ever.

So this is a super issue, and features double the usual number of artists. We're proud to share that every reviewer for this issue was also a trans or nonbinary volunteer themselves.

In this issue, we invite you to traverse beyond binaries, and dive deep into the intersections of identity, and the conflicting structures between oneself and conformity.

QT Team

NEXT PAGE:

# TRANS AMERICA

16" x 20". Acrylic paint and India Ink on canvas.

QORI MOOREHAUL

Qori Moorehaul (they/them) is a trans nonbinary painter located in Ventura, California. Qori works at an art studio for disabled adults, primarily with autism spectrum disorder. They host a show called *Can you See Me?* every Trans Day of Visibility.







# My plan was always to return home

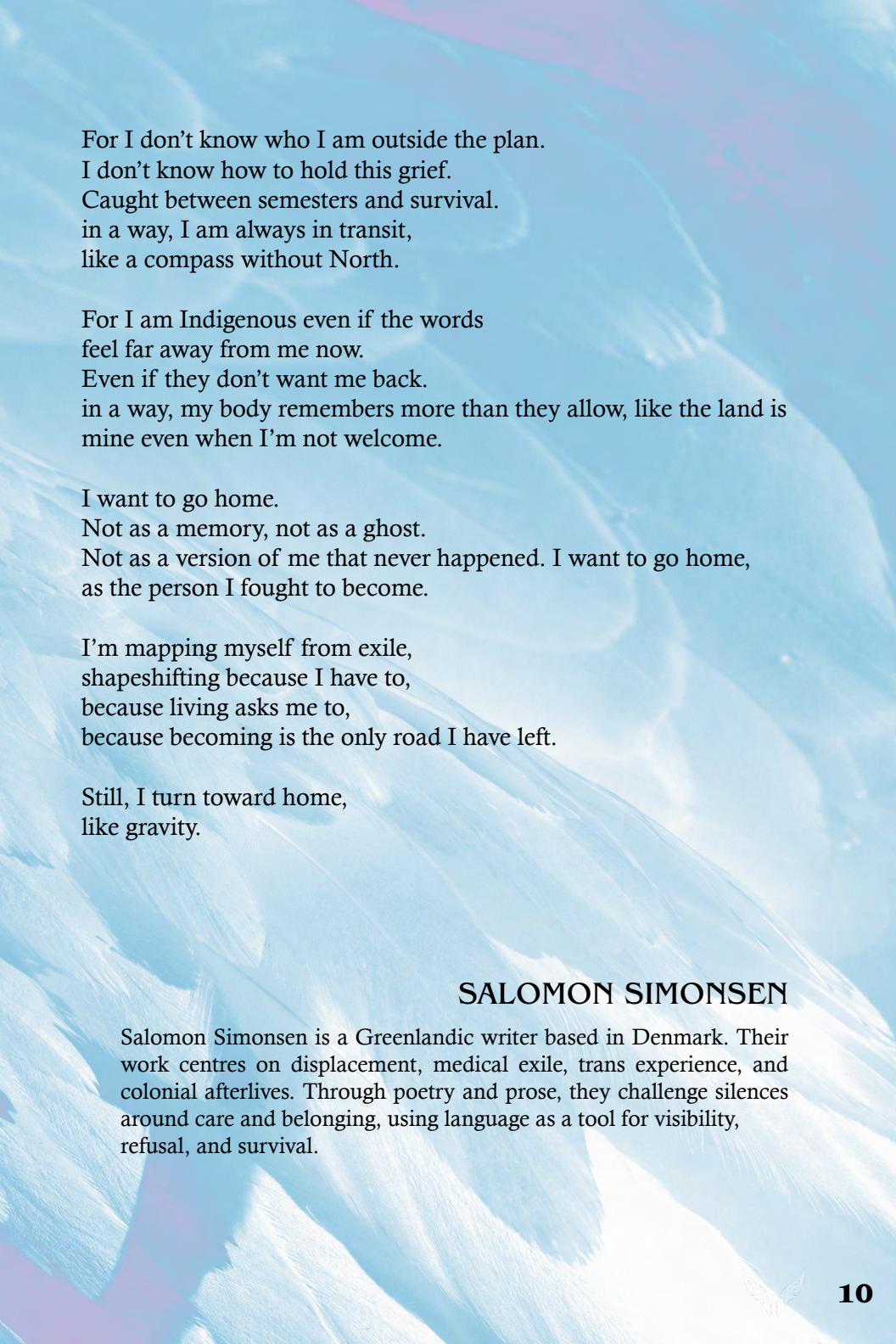
For eighteen years  
I have had a plan:  
*to get my degree and return home.*  
In a way, it was simple, obvious,  
like gravity.

For years I told everyone,  
I am going back after my degree,  
like a promise.  
In a way, it became my shield,  
like breathing.

For I almost started to believe it.  
Pretending I could just graduate,  
book a ticket, and go home.  
In a way, the denial became survival,  
like losing gently, over time.

For I didn't know that transitioning  
would mean losing my right to return.  
I didn't want to realise it.  
In a way, I tried to spare myself the pain,  
like choosing between futures.

For Greenland, I am medically exiled,  
Forced to choose between my land  
and my body.  
In a way, I am cut off from my ancestors' touch,  
like reaching for a door that isn't there.



For I don't know who I am outside the plan.  
I don't know how to hold this grief.  
Caught between semesters and survival.  
in a way, I am always in transit,  
like a compass without North.

For I am Indigenous even if the words  
feel far away from me now.  
Even if they don't want me back.  
in a way, my body remembers more than they allow, like the land is  
mine even when I'm not welcome.

I want to go home.  
Not as a memory, not as a ghost.  
Not as a version of me that never happened. I want to go home,  
as the person I fought to become.

I'm mapping myself from exile,  
shapeshifting because I have to,  
because living asks me to,  
because becoming is the only road I have left.

Still, I turn toward home,  
like gravity.

## SALOMON SIMONSEN

Salomon Simonsen is a Greenlandic writer based in Denmark. Their work centres on displacement, medical exile, trans experience, and colonial afterlives. Through poetry and prose, they challenge silences around care and belonging, using language as a tool for visibility, refusal, and survival.

# BREACHING BEYOND





## ASH HUANG

Ash Huang (she/her) is a ceramicist from the island of O‘ahu, Hawai‘i. Huang explores gender and queerness through hand-built clay sculptures that echo Hawai‘i’s naturally occurring phenomena. Rainbow, ocean, and whale metaphors tenderly unfold personal narratives and curiosity towards sacred fluidity.



# In memory of a blazing bitch mother of all mothers, Cecilia Gentili

i wake with small hands  
splitting time into  
frames, one holding  
your death — kindred pixels  
& a head of an ouroboros, where  
infinity supposed to mingle with  
zero, i find my bank account

trying to embrace the vacuum, which  
is everything, says the tele-guru in my head  
phones reaching into my pocket  
treading water  
and the lists I tend to  
when I'm afraid,

*types of time*

*biological time*

*planetary time*

*stellar time*

*galactic time*

*and TGIF*

i scrape up

Santa Cecilia, *la madre de todas las putas*  
is spanish for “the mother of all whores”  
i recall, Jesus ministered to y'all,

when her funeral was called “desecrating  
and sick” by the archdiocese, I could see  
her radiant ocean cruiser smile spreading  
across heaven's gates,  
— because there are many through which to enter.

Cecilia, thank you for teaching me,  
the legacy a trans body shall leave  
behind is Joy.

Your skin had a natural glow even at 52,  
at 10 when your mother would scream  
“Boy, come down at once from that bloody  
tree!” you would scream back “No mother, no!

*types of space*

*out of work space*

*out of body space*

*a space of a near death experience*

*a space of ghosts*

*a space of mystical experiences*

I won't come down!"  
"Why not?!"  
"Because I'm not a boy!"

*types of space*

*space of gender dysphoria*  
*space where the air makes way for me*

Cecilia, you were far more accomplished  
than me or most of us. You had a body  
of work. I have a body  
so I work,  
hashtag  
promote,  
follow,  
post,  
to earn invisible credits,  
private practice,  
subscribe,  
or not.

## **the trick is not to**

betray the vocabulary of my desires  
snaring the surge into meagre breezes,  
but to edge what is bold, to slam open  
the windows & apples & you too  
want to be brave, but learn  
to curl under blankets  
of breeze, you breathe a sigh  
beneath the symphony of  
the world, inhale  
me  
to be  
remade waves  
washing over  
bleached shells,  
searching in a way  
that will not fail this time,  
soft water, and what holds together  
the unlit spaces of  
a darkening sky, is what  
i came for.  
or so i believe, into truth  
we become & that all desire  
is the desire of god's  
in disguise.

**—ORSHI**

—ORSHI is a poet & performer. Hir practice orbits eco-feminist fictioning, and  
contaminating spaces like the Glastonbury Festival, The Arts of The Working Class, the  
Poetry Project New York, and national galleries. Shey is a co-parent of *KONVENT*, a Berlin-  
based queer collective where rave, social enquiry and visual arts collide.



# Nice Nurse Doesn't Want To Treat The Tranny

Nice nurse doesn't want to treat  
the tranny.  
Can't look the her...  
umm... him? umm... they?  
in the eyes,  
or speak a word beyond  
medicine. The tranny  
puts up a flag  
that tells everyone  
and like a light  
her eyes                    go dark.

Manner  
shifting like matter,  
no longer on the tranny's care team,  
doesn't have to deal  
with the tranny  
except when there's a nursing shortage. Nice nurse  
needs to take care of the tranny now.

Care  
a generous word. Her hands  
cold        and unsterile, risk of infection  
rises with every touch,  
makes the tranny tremble, feel weak, small        like a June bug  
dying in September,  
at the mercy of sun  
and the sun is  
setting.

Darkness descends  
every shift change, every weekend.

The tranny turns to stone,  
cannot tell    nice nurse  
to follow protocol.

The tranny is afraid. The tranny  
is alone with        nice nurse  
at the end of the day. The tranny's life  
is at the hands of  
nice nurse. The tranny cries  
and cries and        nice nurse  
cannot comprehend it.        None of it.

KARUNA VELLINO

Karuna Vellino is a nonbinary disabled screenwriter, playwright, and poet. They are passionate about exploring disability, trans identity, and love in all its forms and misforms. In their free time, they can be found writing, watching bad reality TV and petting their two cats.

# PARASITISM I,II,III



**TAYLOR VIOLET ROSS**

Taylor Violet Ross is a Canadian multidisciplinary forensic artist and researcher. Her subject matter ranges from personal explorations of being a disabled transgender woman, to approximating faces lost to time through her forensic art practice. She strives to bridge the gap between artistic practice and scientific research, offering nuanced expertise and experience that spans two continents.



# FAIRY RINGS

In the fairy rings, the mushrooms grow. The toadstools are chairs for pixies and shelter for ants, umbrellas for the small in the floating rings of my Papa's garden.

Just like that, the war began. They never saw the shovel coming. New sod the first year, then the next he used seed, weed killer, dish soap. And the shrooms returned with pixies on guard. They stoned my Papa with strawberry seeds and grew six rings instead of two and flew with the mosquitos circling his jeans. An aerial attack bloomed in the Battle of the Backyard.

The tomatoes watched on and the potatoes laughed at my Papa swearing at the grass.

I fell into a fairy ring once. That's right. You heard me. There was glitter and pixie dust under the mushroom tops. I like mushrooms. They're yummy on pizza.

You should have heard the gasps when I told the fairies that.

How could I eat their homes?! Well... they're delicious. How could I not? Maybe we could trade. I take the mushrooms and they take the olives. They could use them as bricks and build a house not even Papa's shovel could take down.

Ignoring my misdemeanour, my trip of the tongue, they let me party as fairies do. We sang anthems about flying and transformation. I used hot glue

to build myself green leaf wings just like theirs.  
I ignored the burns on my skin from the procedure,  
and beamed at my reflection in the puddles.

But then the glitter faded, and the fairies snickered  
at my wings that looked more than natural.  
Shrunken, I cried from my perch on a mushroom cap.

Then Tinkerbell laughed in my face.  
Don't go crying to the fairies.  
They'll call you a pussy willow.

I poured dish soap on their wings  
after that. Who laughs their  
ass off of a mushroom cap when  
someone's grief floods their garden.

I think Disney lied to me when  
I wished upon a star and was  
promised it didn't matter who  
you are. Now onto the second star  
and straight onto mourning.

I watch fairies praise metamorphosis.  
They culture butterflies, cheer as they fly  
over the fence. And I am not a fairy  
making home in a yard. But I still hoped  
the fairies would recognize my effort  
to make home in my body.

I think my yearning for evolution  
was too desperate for the naturally ethereal.

## TEREN HAZZARD

Teren Hazzard is a transgender writer and Conservation Biology student at the University of Alberta on Treaty 6 Territory. His poetry explores the everyday experience of being queer. His poem, *Dance with Us, Girly Girl*, won first place in the 2025 Centre for Literatures in Canada Poetry Contest.



# THE MYTH OF MEXICO

I was eaten by a god here.  
Though that's not where this starts.

I arrived beneath eternal blue skies  
and walked the beaches, where a lizard told me I was holy.  
I drove a Bronco through sandy mountains,  
mules walked slowly beside me,  
nodding their heads, gossiping about those who came before.

In town one day, while I explored markets and cathedrals,  
my heart caught fire.  
A woman in a shop wrapped it in tissue  
and sold it to a tourist man,  
who said simply he'd hang it over a doorway in his home.  
A decoration.

I met strangers there.  
Annoyingly, I would babble—  
ask a question too sharp, onion-strong.  
And they'd tear up.  
Stories of love and loss.  
Loss, loss, loss.  
We hate suffering,  
but suffering evokes the humanity of the heart.  
So I sit with them in it.  
Stitch them a blanket of quetzal feathers—  
crimson and emerald green—  
and we get cozy.

Each night,  
I'd unbuckle my bones before bed.  
The sound of ocean waves while I slept—

a vivid memory.  
Memories, especially the good ones,  
will haunt you.

The next day, on the water,  
I laughed at the manta ray  
leaping from the sea,  
strutting, displaying courtship.  
When my companion asked what was funny,  
I told him the manta rays kept saying my name.  
And how I loved how they flap their wings,  
wearing shiny cloaks of depth—  
still dripping with the ocean they came from.

That man...  
he was strange.  
There was a hole in his torso that he'd try to hide.  
While I stayed warm on that small boat,  
sipping willow tea and eating banana bread,  
he devoured women—  
quietly,  
in the corner.

Mexico was an underworld disguised as paradise.

Eventually, I found tunnels.  
Dark.  
So dark,  
even the moon above couldn't reach them.  
I had to leave my soul at the entrance.  
I tucked it under a stone.  
Told it to wait.

I walked for days with no soul,  
no light.  
Only rodents for company.  
They said they'd fetch my soul,  
or guide me back.  
But they never showed up.

I know I wore white at the end.



I slipped into water,  
and it clung to every part of me.  
It didn't cleanse.  
It crowned.

I climbed out and sat on the rocks.  
I think I heard a quetzal—  
but there's no food down here to feed the song.

Even the rodents stopped arriving  
with their empty promises.  
And I was left for the gods.

You see?

They buried me in Mexico.  
Under eternal blue skies,  
and a smiling moon who never waited her turn.

## ASHLEY FRÜCK SIOMOS

Ashley Frück Siomos is a Toronto-based writer, director, and producer. Her work explores intimacy, identity, and the quiet absurdities of being human, often through surreal, absurdist and tender lenses.

# new year's resolutions

sleep less smoke more cigarettes make more enemies crash the car again all burning-bright-lightning like sticking another fork into a socket try not to think about slitting your wrists don't reread the bell jar stay in more identical hotel rooms and walk the halls of the holiday inn like a graveyard don't go back to new york city you've seen enough of brooklyn buy more t-shirts with low pixel count band slogans and anime characters going super saiyan flip off more men when you're stumbling drunk down the street with your girls because you own this city say it again *TO-RON-TO* eat more poutine walk until your feet are sore from your bargain-basement blue-white flat shoes plant more mint even if it dies half a month later talk more talk back more swear more talk more shit get mad more watch more sad movies go to more lesbian bars check the flyers at the bookstore because there are no lesbian bars in toronto but sometimes they have a sapphic night at the tea house take up more space in the history section of the library put out your feet so the boys know those are *your* WWII books thank you kindly acquire a diamond tipped nose piercing do not under any circumstances say *i love you* unless it is 100% true lie in bed with more girls try not to lie to more girls stop telling them you're in love with them please please stop doing that abandon God the Catholic Church bisexuality and all forms of politics take up making molotovs but end up writing poetry instead drink more margaritas on rooftop bars while the sun slants slowly over the benches like an orange that's been bitten open and spills out light get on more red eyes eat more enchiladas the nopales and carne asada ones that remind you of the smoked meat you saw hanging from the sky in tucson arizona all those years ago yeah those ones learn bulgarian learn czech learn polish go back to japan or maybe just port credit eat more weird fruit so far guava passionfruit and goldenberries are all a go get weirder get stupider get stranger take more buses especially if they're over fourteen hours and overnight eat out more eat girls out more buy the bacon breakfast sandwich at Tim Horton's at any occasion but especially at 11pm in a st. catharines' parking lot on your way home insult more idiots fuck off more acquire a knife acquire a gun but keep living.

ADDISON NAVAY

Addison Navay (they/she) is a queer enby native to Toronto. They recently completed an undergraduate at McGill, where they published in various student magazines. They also have an upcoming publication in *Ahoy* literary magazine.



# BELLS

And then you are there—  
cutting through my speaker in  
a small sequence of notes,  
a trill and also a rumble like  
some precious metal  
passing in the night,  
just as I am here  
cutting my antiandrogens into quarters,  
each one a note beating with the wings of  
your plucking fingers. Your hearer, I  
listen for a tolling in sync  
with a faucet not my own, voicing  
not *Passing* but its echo as some other syncope, and  
blanched as the broccoli might be  
come evening, I faint into  
your melody, chiming in from behind.

And now cross-eared and starstruck from our  
*tête-à-tête* at Dead Dog, I am beside  
myself alongside your deep cuts and B-sides.  
To glimpse yourself in the window, inversed  
and in verse, would make anyone dizzy. And do  
we all have brothers we hope will transition out  
of their phases? Not all of us can be moons,  
but here we are, rebelling in the vessels  
we promise to shatter in sinks as to  
sync up with the way the wind blows, a breeze  
that leaves one breathless and floating. This is how  
we learn to vinyl both the gravity of the matter  
and its lack thereof: as a black hole spiralling out  
towards a starriness embodied otherwise.

And after winging my liner, I take another  
look at the liner notes. Homing in on

your scrawl, cutting my greens,  
a strand gets stuck in my teeth, and  
I can't tell if it's a floret or a flowering, but  
    really it's all for better health, a medicine  
to make one blur into a kitchen or a clock  
we've misadventured into, imperceptible  
    and more faithful in form than any other shape  
    that stony mass could ever fold into or  
that the inky pockets it sinks into could  
ever hold. No, nothing rings truer, nothing cuts deeper  
    than the needles with which we record ourselves.

CAMERON JADE MACDONALD

cameron jade macdonald is a writer, scholar, and musician transitioning in Toronto. Sometimes she is musing about queerness, sound, and literature at the University of Toronto, where she is pursuing a PhD. But more often she is musing elsewhere and otherwise. The rest of her bio is in that transit.

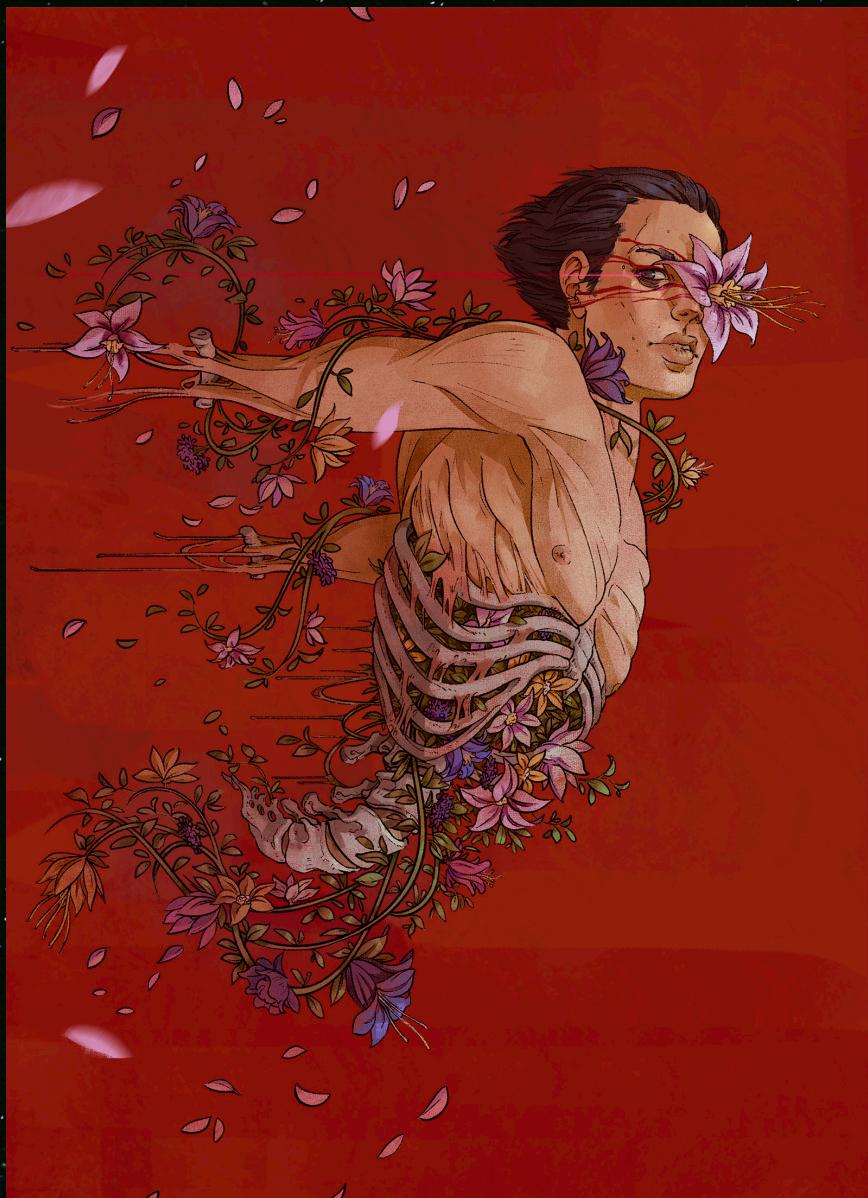
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# PASCALESSENCE/ ANGEL

NOLAN BREWER

Nolan Brewer (they/them) is a nonbinary artist born and raised in Toronto, Ontario. They have a background in animation and a passion for creating comics and illustrations focusing on queer love and gender identity.







# THE HERRING

BY ANGLERFISHING



FACING PAGE

# THE HERRING

FRAN CARANDANG

Fran is a 2-D/3-D artist who enjoys creating artwork of strange creatures and environments. Coming from a background in film, Fran is passionate about telling stories through images and illustrations. Through these images, they find beauty in creating strange creatures to express complex emotions.



# Dream of a Softer Life

I am learning to paint.

Something is off, everything looks blocky and amateur.

I know I will get better, with time, with patience, with practice.

I know I will change.

I'm not used to this feeling. Being able to breathe.

Being alone.

I take a drag of my cigarette. I feel that wave of calm as I inhale. The soft heat spreads throughout my body from my lungs. The cold air in contrast with the hot smoke I hold in makes the hit feel even better. I never used to smoke back then, even though I knew it helped. But things change, I guess. When my mind rushes, sometimes I need it to slow down a little.

I stand above the pan, this pasta turned out even better than the last. Of all the soft things I've picked up, cooking is my favourite. A mix of the instant gratification I crave so badly but still steady, still slow, still thoughtful, and still still. I made vegan mushroom pasta, because I know you can't eat dairy, despite the fact it's been years since we last spoke. It's strange the things we do hold onto.

I look in the mirror and I'm different than I remember. With my new meds, my weight fluctuates like crazy. You never met me with these new meds, you've never seen me like this, all changed. I have stretch marks all over my body now because of them. My stomach is tiger striped and purple. You've never seen this body.

I never really knew change unless it was violent, sudden, or chaotic. I reflect a lot of that in my personality, I think. I used to find comfort in that. I never understood the importance of slow change.

I remember how life punched back then. Year after year flashing by like I was in a storm. Puberty hitting like a wave into me. High school and college hitting me with back-to-back assignments, back-to-back tests, no space to breathe, back-to-back failures.

I remember coming out. I was still young. A sudden death in the family made me realize how important it was for them all to know. One sudden

change after the next, only ever able to react.

I came out and started HRT and the changes were sudden and satisfying and wonderful. Buds started to grow, skin soft anew, blossoming. Those first few months were the greatest of my life, finally the sudden changes were good, finally I could envision a world where I could stop and breathe. Finally control. An action instead of just reaction.

Then the family started whispering, rumours spread, ignorance became the norm. In a house where the mood was explosive and switched on a dime, having all eyes on you was not a blessing. They started looking at me different. I needed quiet. I needed care. I needed safety. I had to leave if I wanted my younger siblings to have any sort of positive view of me.

**Survive. React. Change.**

That was years ago now.

**Now I get to breathe.**

I paint my little pictures. Knowing every time I do I get better. Knowing one day I will be able to put the images in my head to canvas. Knowing that with patience, I will change in ways I can't even perceive. I paint my body, no budding or newly soft skin, but still different and changing in ways I never even noticed. The paint and I both curve in ways we never used to.

I take deep breaths, knowing there was a time where panicked, shallow breaths was all I could take. I listen to my breaths, the inhales and exhales, and feel it in my chest. I watch the smoke leave my lips. Like a kid on a cold, winter day, I exhale it as far as it can go.

I cook the pasta that reminds me of you. No dairy, no peanuts. I don't know why years later I still remember that, after all these changes. But I do. And in this life of slow changes I have built, I let myself taste the instant gratification of cooking. I sit and enjoy the labour of my love.

## KATHERINE GOOD

Katherine Good (she/her) is a trans Anishinaabe writer based in Hamilton, Ontario. She works in and is passionate about anything library and archives and enjoys spending her free time exploring creativity and community!



## THE SCIENCE OF GENDER

### RESEARCH

I PLAN TO  
ASK HER OUT.  
HER INTEREST  
IN ME WOULD  
BE PURELY  
SCIENTIFIC

BUT I'D  
SETTLE  
FOR IT

For one moment  
we're held, just so

### Gender benders

Peacock proud and  
ready to strut

What if  
we viewed gender  
as something  
that evolves

High heels and high hopes

FACING PAGE

# GENDER RESEARCH

JUNIPER INGLIS

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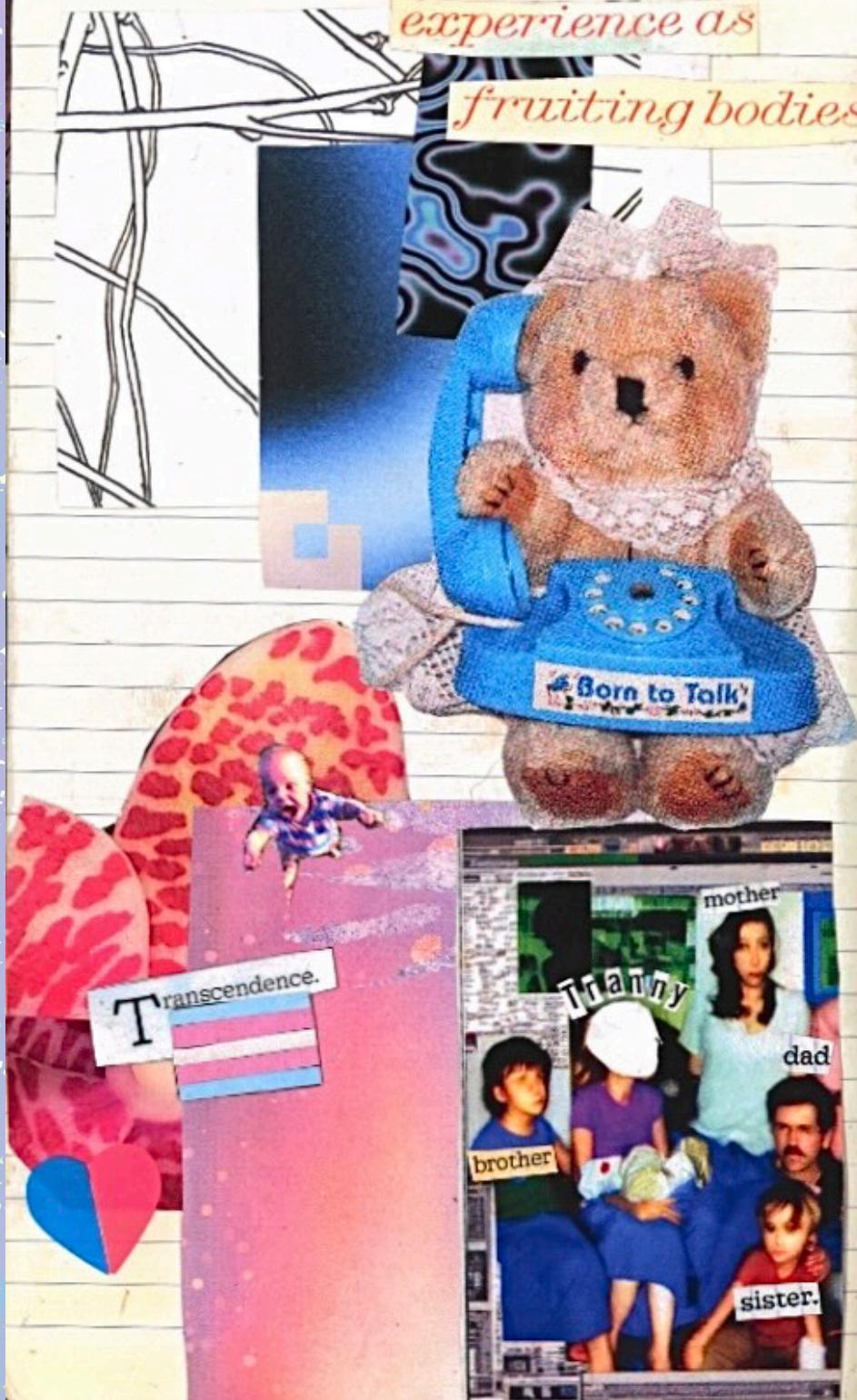
# DOG IS TRANS

MAXIMILLIAN

Maximillian (they/he) is a QTBIPOC multidisciplinary artist based in Tiohtià:ke (Montreal) whose practice blends hand-cut collage, stained glass, and silversmith jewelry. They create vibrant, layered works that celebrate queer and trans embodiment, love, joy, and resistance.

*experience as*

*fruited bodies.*





# DOG IS TRANS

BUT LIKE OBVIOUSLY

MY ISSUE WITH MY DAD  
IS THAT HE IS ME

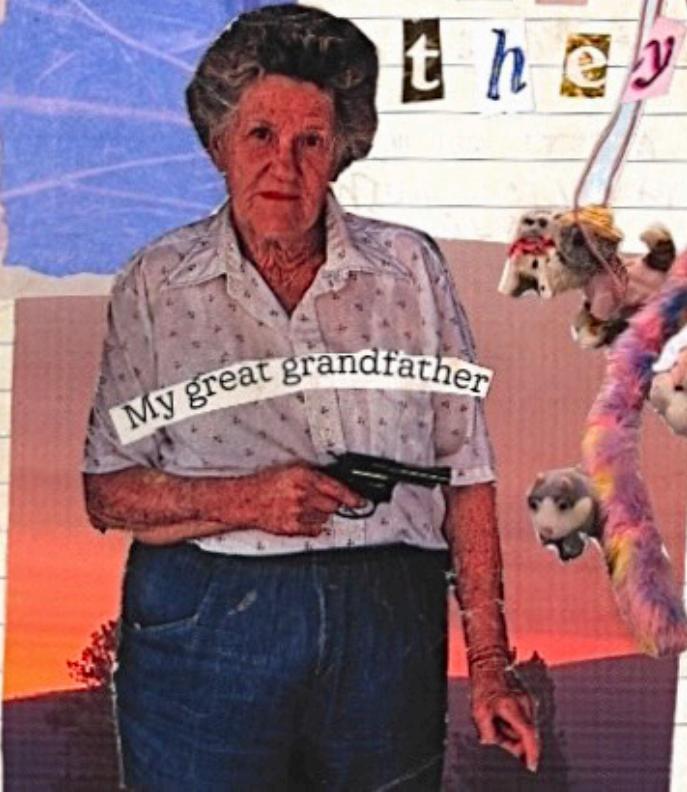
I MEAN I AM HIM

AND I HAVE AN  
ISSUE WITH HIM

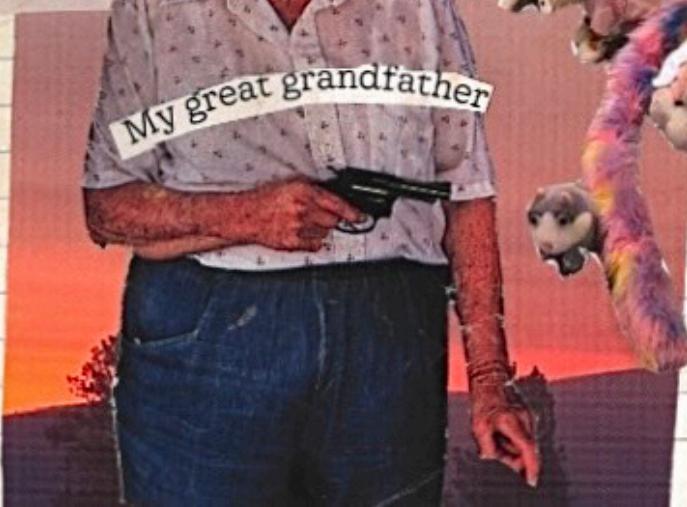
SO LIKE I HAVE AN  
ISSUE WITH MYSELF

H  
E

t  
h  
e  
y



My great grandfather



# THE UNKNOWNABLE

Although Edith Qi's body had been working for her just fine, after a mere one week, she replaced it easily, as if doing so was the most mundane of tasks.

Penelope found her mid-transformation, attention piqued by the sounds of cracking bones and barely-contained screams. Peeking into the village's boutique, she found Edith on her knees, hunched over and clutching her stomach as if a blade had been run through her. She was trembling. Penelope doubted it was from the summer heat.

With a sigh, she grabbed a thin blanket from a nearby chair. When she reached Edith, she draped it around her bare shoulders and settled by her side.

"Edith?" Penelope said quietly, waiting for confirmation.

She knew there was no one who was more likely to sneak out at night to alter themselves, but she wanted to be sure. In front of her now was a person with a slender build, a pointed face, and short, black hair that stopped just atop their ears. The last body that Edith was seen in was softer with more rounded features, her locks ending right below her chin. The contrast in appearance gave Penelope pause.

"Can... can you call me Milo now?"

"Alright," Penelope said, noting how hoarse his voice sounded. "Milo then."

"Thank you."

She studied him more closely now, taking in the sight of his red-rimmed eyes and the marks along his arms where nails had dug into skin. His breathing was still uneven, a barely audible wheeze escaping him as his head lolled onto her shoulder. A beat passed before Penelope spoke.

"You scare me sometimes. Do you know that?" she asked. "I've made a bad habit of stopping by here every time I'm about to head home because something tells me I'll find you. Hurting. Bloody. Bruised."

Milo shifted awkwardly. "You shouldn't worry about me—"

"But I do. We've been together longer than we've been apart."

Penelope swallowed. "How can I not care about you, especially when you're doing *this* to yourself more and more? Why do you keep coming back here?"

Milo fiddled with the ring around his index finger. It was a great find for the village when they first unearthed it, an old artifact steeped with magic, an art that was now long forgotten. Anyone who wore it would be given the ability to change their appearance, so long as they were willing to endure the transformation.

Small alterations could leave folks with a brief ache, which many tended to settle for. Then, there was Milo's consistent decision to gut his full body, killing the person he was last as a sacrifice to step into a new skin. Penelope had seen him reinvent himself many a time, his limbs spasming as magic chewed away at what he deemed unworthy. The ring was a scavenger sinking its teeth into the tender flesh of a corpse.

"Milo," Penelope said, nudging him. "You can't keep doing this. There'll always be something about your body you won't like. That's normal. Please... please don't ruin yourself over this."

"I'm not going to break, Pen," Milo said, "and you're wrong. Lavender, Kit, Sawyer—I loved being them."

"Did you?"

Milo stood up on wobbling knees, the blanket falling to the ground with a whisper. He shuffled toward the centre of the room, where a trifold mirror reflected his body back from three separate angles. Carefully, he traced a finger along the middle pane, outlining the shape of his jaw.

"I like this person so far too," Milo admitted. "I wouldn't mind staying like this for a while. Hopefully, I'll last longer than Edith did."

Penelope opened her mouth, but nothing came out except for a strangled sound. Milo began to sift through racks and dressers, pulling out an assortment of clothing. Overalls, trousers, knit sweaters, and skirts were thrown into a heap.

"If you loved those selves that much," Penelope eventually managed to utter, "then why this?"

Milo stilled. "I don't—you'll think I've lost it."

"I would *not*."

"You wouldn't get it."

"I can try," she insisted, making her way toward him. "I've been wanting to know about your obsession with this damned ring for the past year. If your reasons make sense to you, then I'll understand them too. Please."

Milo bit his lip.

Penelope grabbed a pair of shorts and held it out to him. "If you won't talk, then fine, I won't press, but put these on. There's no way that you're actually considering wearing slacks when we've been having heat-waves for the past week. They're black too so grass stains won't be as



obvious. God knows you'll need all the help you can get with how often you choose to just lay down flat in a field in the middle of nowhere."

Milo snorted. "It's called cloud gazing."

"You can do that anywhere. Laying in the dirt is a personal decision."

"It enhances the experience!"

Their amusement slowly subsided as Milo slipped the shorts on alongside a sleeveless shirt. After studying his reflection, he gave a low, satisfied hum. As they returned the clothes to their spots, the tension from earlier crept back in. It was only when Penelope had one foot out the door of the boutique that Milo called out to her.

"I don't want to be known, Pen."

She frowned. "What do you mean?"

Wringing his hands together, he said, "When I changed myself completely for the first time, it was meant to be a joke. I wanted to play a prank on you, remember? Well, when I was Lavender, no one in the village could tell who I was. I was either this handsome woman or this beautiful man. They weren't sure. And... and I liked it. A lot."

Penelope remembered that day, the way Milo had spoiled their plan because he was so desperate to share how he was messing about with people through his looks alone. His face was flushed pink. His smile was wider than she'd ever seen before. Even though she'd been caught off guard by his new appearance, that was the one thing about him that stayed the same. His unbridled joy always felt familiar.

"It was the best week of my life," Milo said softly. "And then they tried to make sense of me. I put on a dress and they stopped calling me anything but a lady. I changed myself afterwards, put on a waistcoat, and they told me I was a man." Running a hand through his mussed hair, he added, "I couldn't stand it. I thought that if I chose to wear the most plain clothes next time, I could keep being unknown."

"It didn't work, did it?"

He shook his head. "It never does. It's always something ridiculous that gives me credence with them. My eyelashes are too long, my muscles are too defined, or my body curves this way instead of that. That's why I have to keep this up, Pen. The first day is always the best, did I ever tell you that? I'm a walking mystery to them and it's *beautiful*."

Penelope gave him a long, searching look. "Is that it then? The reason you've kept becoming someone else is because you're chasing a thrill?"

"It's – it's not just that!" Milo waved his hands around wildly as if it would help explain his point. "It's about being more than what they say I

am.”

“Do you mean a man? Or a woman?”

He huffed. “I—yes.” Shifting his weight from one foot to the next, he sighed. “Is that too weird for you?”

“I haven’t said anything but the concern about your transformations, haven’t I? Give me some credit, Milo.”

“Believe me, I give you more than anyone else,” he said, leaning against the wall. “You’re the only one who doesn’t think that I’m a ‘freak’ for not sticking with being a man or a woman. But that’s also as far as you get to understanding me.”

Penelope tilted her head. “What do you mean?”

“I told you, Pen. I don’t want to be either.” Milo held her gaze. “Be honest, you’ve already made sense of me, haven’t you?”

Penelope said nothing, which was answer enough. She wondered what parts of him, her—*them*?—led her to immediately decide who they were. Silence settled. From the moonlight peeking through the window, she could see her friend’s body more clearly. All she could focus on was that they were awfully stiff.

“Well?” they said. “What do you make of me now?”

A pause.

Then, she cleared her throat, her voice sharp. “You’re just Milo. Someone I’ll always be with longer than we’ll ever be apart.”

Their smile was the exact smile of every other person they’d ever been. “Good. I’m holding you to that.”

Penelope held open her arms and without saying a word, they walked right into her. They stayed together like that for a moment, her chin resting atop their hair. She could feel the damage to their latest body as she ran her fingers along their skin. They smelled of sweat, no doubt from the transformation. That reminder made her pull away.

“I’m still worried about you. Using that ring will wear you down eventually. You can’t keep doing this forever.”

Milo sighed. “It’s not ideal.”

“I’ll patch you up if you do it again though.”

“You always do.” They took her hand as they walked out of the boutique, shutting the door behind them. As expected, the village square was vacant. “I wonder if we’ll ever find another artifact someday that stops making transformations painful.”

Penelope hummed. “That’d be nice.”

“Then again, it’d be nice to not do it at all anymore. It’s a real hassle. I doubt there’s any artifact that’ll make an entire village see me as... *Milo* though.”



It was easy to imagine the people who'd fill the square during the day, their eyes narrowing to decipher what each feature of Milo's body meant. Scrutiny was inevitable the same way that time ticked on. The prospects of the next day must've been weighing heavy on them, for they tilted their head upwards and sighed once more. Stars winked back.

"Sometimes I think that I'm not the only one like this," Milo murmured. "That's what helps make these transformations more bearable. I believe that someone out there has a ring of sorts, just like the one we do, and can't figure out who to wear either. I believe that, if I keep doing this, they'll eventually find out that I'm doing the same thing and see through me." They laughed, airy and light. "Maybe we'll be so unknowable that the world will have to see us as another thing entirely. It's a dream, of course."

"Everyone deserves one," Penelope said.

Milo laced their fingers together, awkwardly adding, "that doesn't mean I don't appreciate you being by my side. I just mean, well—"

"You want someone who knows you the way that you know yourself," she finished with a small smile. "I get it."

"Do you? I don't want you to think that I think that you're not wonderful—"

"Milo."

"Yes?"

"There's no version of me that'll ever be hurt that you're looking for love that I'm unfamiliar with. I'll only ask you for one thing though." She squeezed their hand, her grip firm and unyielding. "Let me dream with you."

When the sun peeked over the horizon the next day, no one saw Penelope nor Milo. However, if they were to look out toward the open field by the edge of the village, they'd be able to make out two figures lying on the grass, watching clouds pass by like ships through the sea. The wind carried their voices, fleeting bits of conversation about a future where a particular ring would no longer be touched.

The figures shifted closer together, hands intertwined.

At the end of all violence was promise.

## MITZ XIANG

Mitz Xiang is a Canadian amateur writer. They enjoy telling fictional stories centred around unconventional relationships, societal pressures, and personal identity. Their previous creative work, *Viktor and the Clockmaker*, has been featured in the AZE Journal. They can be found on Tumblr @themitz or on Instagram @mitz.xiang.

# REGARDLESS

The world begins in seasons  
and ends there too;  
elements of reason, by design.

I fall apart  
when the trees strip bare,  
absorbing the ground,  
marinating in ethos  
and reminisced sin;  
motion on a plane,  
desire in a constellation.

• I burned to become.

My old shades and shackles,  
warped in the flames,  
singeing my skin,  
until release was unavoidable.

I run marathons that  
haven't happened yet;  
coming in first,  
before the starter's crack.

Down streets that  
harbour no enthusiasm  
for my win.

I cheer for myself,  
while an angry man  
hollers to keep it down  
from the second floor;  
the shutters of his mind slam shut  
and I exist regardless.

**GOLD.NBOI**

• GOLD.NBOI (they/he) is a Toronto-based poet, writer, and musician whose work explores memory, selfhood, and what remains after unraveling. Creating through abstraction and emotion, they use art as a way to process, rebuild, and stay soft. This is their first literary publication.



REMINGTON MICHEL STONE

her body. their blood. your turn.

# RED WINE

A SPORTS FOR CATS  
PRODUCTION



STEFFON PALMER

BROOKE IRWIN

PAULA THA BALLA

EVA-MARIA TAMEZ



LINK TO VIDEO

I made these to promote my queer, trans, and BIPOC music video from 2025. Recorded and premiered in LA, featuring an amazing, diverse cast & crew, it tells the story of a Final Girl seduced by mirror-obsessed, day-walking, rosary-carrying... Christian vampires? In the world of *Red Wine*, nothing is as it seems, but there will be blood.



# RED WINE

REMINGTON MICHEL STONE

Remington Michel Stone defies reality. Disarming the patterns of structure, *Red Wine* evokes worlds of possibility. As they rise from their debut album *Death of the American Mall* to their anticipated follow-up *After Death*, Stone reminds audiences that no matter what's left or what comes next, we're not alone.

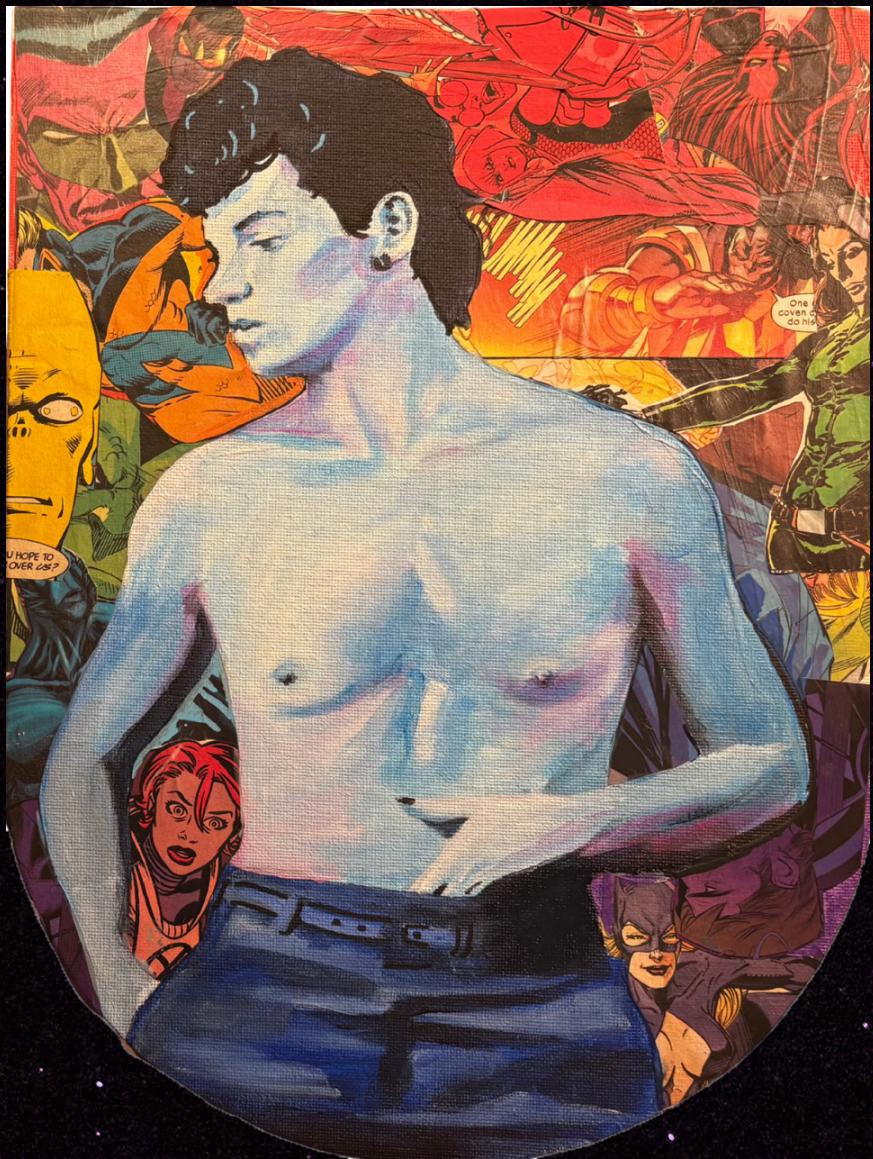
NEXT PAGE:

# BOYHOOD/GIRLHOOD FREEWAY/SOLDIER

LOU GRANDE

Lou Grande is a painter working mainly in acrylics. His high-contrast, vibrant portraits explore the intersection of pop culture and trans identity, often using neon palettes to examine themes of visibility and the commodification of femininity.





# BOYHOOD

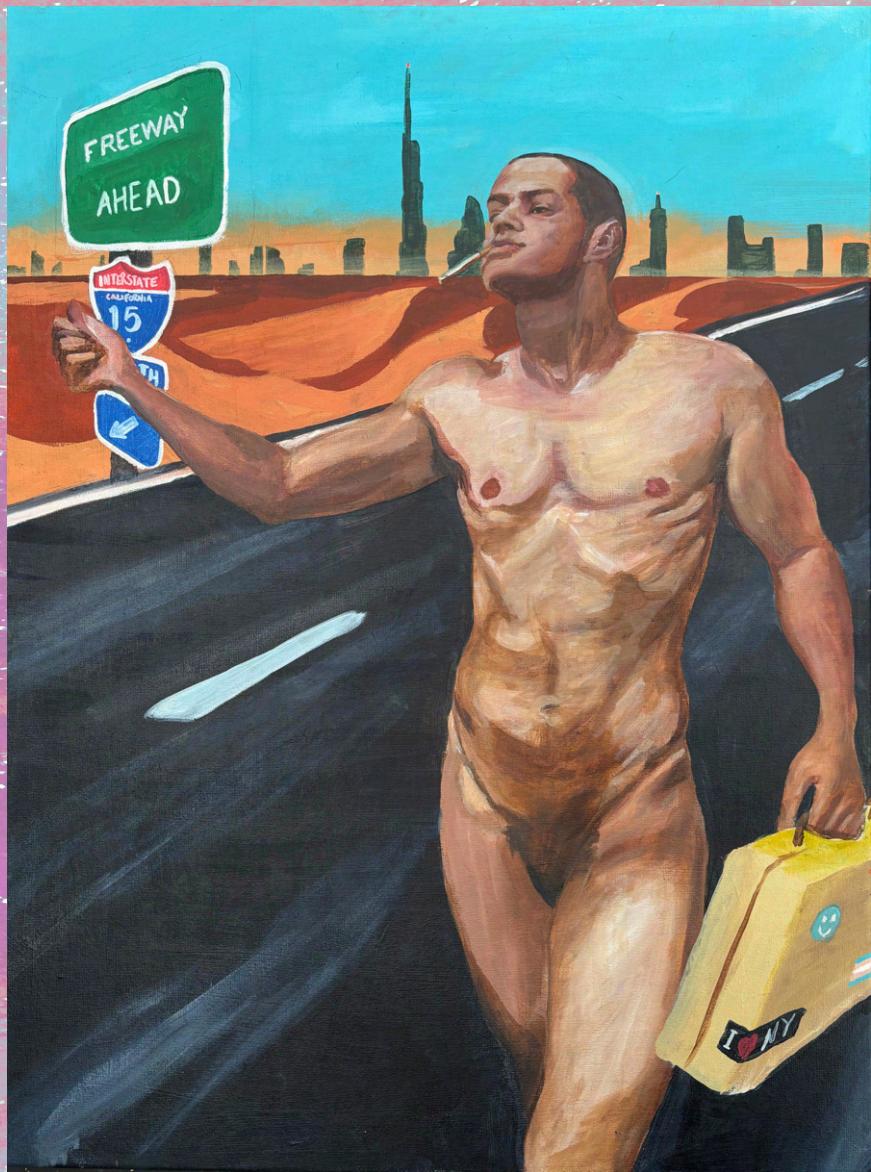
Mixed media. Painting. 9" x 12".



# GIRLHOOD

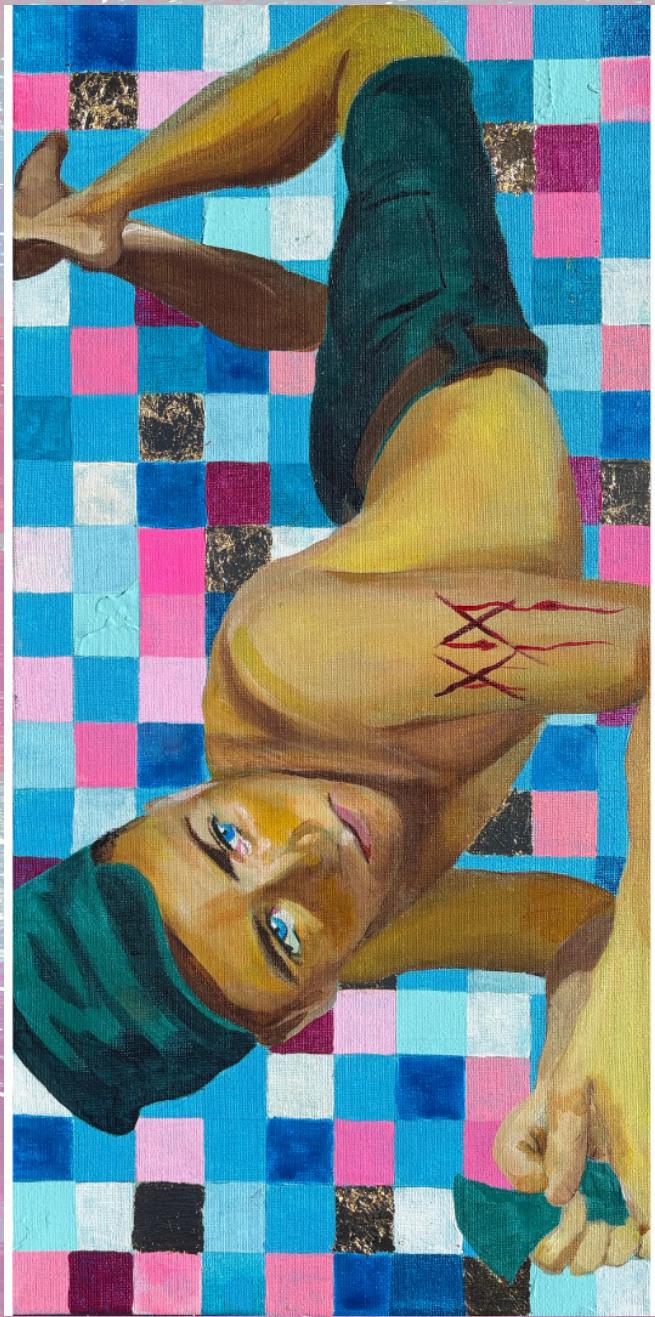
Mixed media. Painting. 9" x 12".





# FREEWAY

Acrylic on canvas. Painting. 18" x 24"



# SOLDIER

Acrylic on canvas. Painting. 20" x 10"



# BURN/BLOOM

“Excuse me, sir? Your table’s ready / Could you help me reach the top shelf? / I think you dropped this. / Do you know how to get to—?”

*They'll try to tell you that six foot two will always stand out in a crowd,  
but they're wrong.*

*The trick is to wield your body like a hermit crab does their shell.  
Visibility is both necessary & detachable;  
exchange projection/protection at will.*

*Embrace (corp)orality for the possibilities of transmutation  
rather than the purposes of translation.*

*The truth of you holds marrow-deep whether circumstances, news cycles,  
climates  
demand fading  
in or out of view.*

*If you must slip away a while, go & sun yourself on a rock on a beach on  
a continent on a planet  
within a galaxy whose stars  
spin for you alone.*

*Let the moulting moistness of your existence breathe the gentle air wafting  
off  
that primordial ocean  
with every porous inch of being  
you possess.*

*Oxygenate every cell &  
form/re/form/re/form/re/form...*

*Split the atom's apple into equal bites. Swallow peel, flesh, seeds, core*

until  
even you cannot recall a name a pronoun a voice a past a presence a grip  
on reality.

You'll be amazed at all that can go in the end.  
How much clutter you ignored in the periphery & how  
much easier it is to walk your echoing halls  
when the stacks of expectations & externalities  
are cleared away.

Tape a hand-lettered sign to every telephone pole.  
GARAGE SALE  
BIG DEALS!

FIVE CENTS A GENDER.  
FIVE DOLLARS FOR THE BOX.  
Leave it all on the curb for others  
to upcycle  
as they wish.

“Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.”

Sure,  
but if they don't like  
what they see  
they can pluck  
their eyes  
out.

Molecule or multiverse.  
You contain as much & as little as all that.  
Let them try to perceive the bigbangness of you  
if they dare.

Let them step back at the impossible heat.  
The phosphorus authority of an alchemical brilliance  
only you can divine.

“Oh my god, ew! What the fuck is that? Is that a guy?”

You must grasp as Prometheus did  
that the Mountain is only forbidden out of fear  
we might discover  
how easy  
the solid rock beneath our feet  
can tremor & crack.



*How quickly the vines of gods & ideas (tomato/tomato) can be pruned  
down to size  
by mere mortals like us.  
Promise: the scorch of punishment  
is worth  
the thrill of the spark.  
So, palm the fire of creation to your lips  
& blow.  
Burn it all down.  
Trust the ashen earth & charred roots  
define their own culp- & cap- ability, can still produce  
life.  
Believe these sing(e)ing bones, this brittling landscape  
ideal/idyll host for some tender newly blooming thing  
that was only waiting for space  
& light  
to grow.*

## K.R. BYGGDIN

K.R. Byggdin is the award-winning author of *Wonder World* (Enfield & Wizenty 2022). They hold an MFA from the University of Guelph and their writing has appeared in anthologies and journals across Canada, the UK, and New Zealand. Born and raised on the Prairies, they now call the East Coast home.

# Forgetting You're Trans: On Fear, Trans Attraction, & Navigating Public Space

“Well, this is amazing! Your levels are above average!” My doctor practically squealed over the video call as she looked at my latest blood work.

I smiled, still getting used to the specific sequence of numbers that followed the estrogen and testosterone levels of the math equation that was the result of my recent visit to the lab.

It all started eight months into my first year of (medically) transitioning. My doctor wouldn’t show it on her face, but she was pleasantly surprised; hell, I was too. My breasts had grown to almost a B cup; the added weight was filling out my curves. My body hair was thinning, and my face was smoothing out. By March, I was passing. After what felt like years of needing to advocate my gender identity, or being looked at with suspicion or disgust, I no longer had to *prove* my womanhood to anybody but myself.

While “passing” is not something I strive for, it still fascinates me. I remember those first few weeks in March where I would bundle up as much as possible to battle the frigid Richmond winter air and still be taken aback at the occasional “hello miss,” and “yes ma’am,” and “mama, let me get your numbers,” I’d get while walking down the street. Men’s attention is seldom appreciated, but I couldn’t help but feel just a smidge of pride at their attraction. To see others viewing my body as desirable felt nice, when I had felt so much shame prior.

By May, I felt confident to wear a bikini to the beach without feeling hideous or “clocky.” By July, I began to see my mother’s face when I looked in the mirror. By September, my curls began to fall and frame my face beautifully, growing, and growing, and still growing with no stop. And by December, my entire family was referring to me as a young woman, rarely a male pronoun uttered or spoken.

With the ability to move more freely as my authentic self came the shedding of various practices I had relied on early in my transition. I started to go out without makeup, I stopped wearing wigs, and I rarely wore heels outside a trip to the club. I felt like I didn’t have to try as hard, that I didn’t have to put on “my stuff” or “my face,” as I’d put it, to leave the house. It felt like taking my first breath after trying to catch it for so long. As the months progressed, this feeling never went away, and now two years later, I sometimes forget I’m even trans.

Or should I say, forget that I am a social pariah. It’s refreshing. Like you can just get up and go without needing to grab all the baggage of society’s transmisogyny before you walk out the door.



Now, when I look in the mirror, I smile rather than stare. Instead of picking apart my body into a crumbling mess of self-doubt and pity, I appreciate my ethnic features and love how my body feels when it's handled warmly (thank you, Ntozake Shange!). I seldom feel the pull of dysphoria on a day-to-day basis. I wake up, maybe put on a little makeup if I'm feeling nasty, put on some jeans and a cute top, and feel like that is enough. *That I am enough.* Not having my gender identity at the forefront of my mind 24/7 has given me mental clarity where I can worry less about how I look and focus more on how I feel.

At the start of my transition, I was so perceptive of every little thing I did: how I walked, talked, sat, or so much as looked, or rather, how I *refused to look*. I had a persistent fear of making eye contact with others, of letting anyone SEE me. Naturally, I wanted to protect myself, so I internalized a lot of concerning behavior: *keep your head down, talk quietly, and don't take up too much space*. I stifled myself. Again, I was refusing the air that was my self-confidence and power for an illusion of safety, which only meant to suffocate me.

With time, I began to shed these insecurities and take hold of my power as a Black trans woman. To live my life for myself and my loved ones, rather than society's respect or approval. I feel free and happy and joyful, yet something still nags at the back of my mind. A nagging thought that festers in those moments when someone flirts with me at the bar, or in the new work environment where people get my pronouns right without me having to tell them myself.

Questions such as "Let me buy you a drink," make me nervous and "Why do you have such a masculine name for a girl?" sends me into a spiral. In these moments, the nagging voice in the back of my head whispers, "*Do they know?*" Naturally, I feel like the average person in America is not as preoccupied with being a transvestigator as Fox News would like us to think. And yet, this fear is persistent, creeping up with its vice grip on my throat, that I'm hiding something or being dishonest. Like I'm a fraud or I'm not as out and proud as I'd like to believe.

For trans women, there's this danger of being perceived as a danger. Like a predator on the prowl, with nary a good intention, our detractors believe we are out to get them. "Them" in this instance changes depending on who you're asking; it could be kids, men, or other women. Who the supposed "victim" is to the wiles of trans women doesn't matter. Instead, the point must always be that *trans women are a danger to everyone they come in contact with*.

Unfortunately, I'd internalized this belief in many of my interactions with others. Dating wasn't so much of a struggle as it was a nuisance.

Even if I put “trans” in my bio, guys would often ignore it when swiping. Because of this, it felt embarrassing and humiliating to even ask them questions like “I’m trans, are you ok with that?” as if my being trans and their attraction to me were a burden I had to assuage.

It was gross, I don’t do that shit anymore. However, a new anxiety has made its way into my life, and that is whether or not to disclose at work. I’m at a stage in my life where people are meeting me for the first time as my true and whole self, without all the knowledge of what had to come before reaching this point. From the countless peers, career advisors, and trusted managers, I’d been told to make sure I’m working in an environment that is accepting of all parts of me. But in a crumbling economy where jobs are few and far between, no matter your credentials, I have to take the risk in order to maintain some semblance of job security.

Still, I’m scared. Not of being hate-crimed or outed, but of feeling like I’m repressing myself for stability and comfort. I’m scared I’m not visible. I’m terrified that I will be put into a situation where having to disclose puts me in more danger than if I kept quiet.

In the search for my truest self, I wonder what has been lost along the way. But now and then I meet a girl while out and about. Maybe we’re in the same aisle at the store or we’re crossing opposite ends of the street, but we give each other THAT look when we find each other. A look that says “hey girl, I see you,” followed by a smile or a nod, and I know I’m still me.

With each passing day, I discover something new about myself and heal the old parts that I thought were gone. Transition is an ever-present process of reflections, realizations, and revelations (yay alliteration!). Soon, a year will turn into two, which turns into three, four, then five, and then a decade, two decades, and then the rest of your life! I can’t wait for what the future has in store. Life is exciting, if not a little bit scary. But at the end of the day, at least I can say I looked good while living it.

## SHAWN WILLIAMS

shawn williams is an Afrofuturist poet and storyteller who writes and crafts narratives that challenge and critique our thoughts on identity-making, Black transfeminism, and abolitionist politics. Through the written word, shawn grapples with Black feminine subjectivity, transfeminine self-fashioning, and Afrofuturist affect in order to foster deep reflection, resistance, and pleasure.





# ABOUT QT

Queer Toronto Literary Magazine is a non-profit dedicated to elevating and celebrating queer voices in Canada. QT was started in response to the criminal shortage of Canadian queer literary magazines. There are so many queer and trans artists out there! And in times of crisis, maintaining community and connection is vital.

QT brings together our collective projects to create that sense of shared space. QT celebrates the art queer people make for ourselves and for each other.

[www.qtmag.ca](http://www.qtmag.ca)

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