

CREATE | ENCOUNTER



AUGUST 2020

**4TH ANNUAL CREATIVE ISSUE
OF LIFE MATTERS JOURNAL**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

VISUAL (2D)

- 12 1st Place: *Mother of Gynecology* by Lauren Handy
4 2nd Place: *Protoevangelia* by Alexandra Kilgore
Honorable Mentions:
3 *Make Babies Not War* by Laura Hill
5 *No Pity* by Aimee Murphy

VISUAL (3D)

- 14 1st Place: *Little Red Heart* by Hannah Slatsky
18 2nd Place: *Aftermath* by Haley Spencer

POETRY

- 2 1st Place: *Robin Redbreast* by Danny Collins
15 2nd Place: *Santiago de Compostela* by Grant Hartley
Honorable Mentions:
19 *three lessons from the portuguese man-of-war* by Grant Hartley
20 *Failing to See* by Acyutananda

PROSE

- 6 1st Place: *Swans* by Grace Malinee
16 2nd Place: *Here's the Thing* by Margaret Ao
Honorable Mention:
21 *Juliana's Call* by Sophie Trist

LETTER FROM THE COORDINATOR

Dear Reader,

Every year, I am taken aback by the compelling and beautiful creations submitted to this contest. This year is no different in that regard — though it has been tremendously different in many other ways. 2020 has been challenging to say the least. I don't know what the future holds, but I know that truth, beauty, and goodness still exist in the midst of challenging times, and that is worth celebrating.

I'm grateful to be in the position to celebrate and share with you the works of this year's winning artists. Their pieces, though varied in medium and topic, all

highlight the importance of cherishing human dignity in every circumstance. I hope that you will appreciate them as much as I do.

Yours for peace and every human life,



Maria Oswalt

Create | Encounter Coordinator
Director of Creative Projects,
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CREATE | ENCOUNTER

is a special edition of
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CREATE-ENCOUNTER**

This journal is dedicated to the aborted, the bombed, the executed, the euthanized, the abused, the raped, and all other victims of violence, whether that violence is legal or illegal.

We have been told by our society and our culture wars that those of us who oppose these acts of violence must be divided. We have been told to take a lukewarm, halfway attitude toward the victims of violence. We have been told to embrace some with love while endorsing the killing of others.

We reject that conventional attitude, whether it's called Left or Right, and instead embrace a consistent ethic of life toward all victims of violence.

DISCLAIMER

The views presented in this journal do not necessarily represent the views of all members, contributors, or donors. We exist to present a forum for discussion within the Consistent Life Ethic, to promote discourse and present an opportunity for peer-review and dialogue.

Robin Redbreast

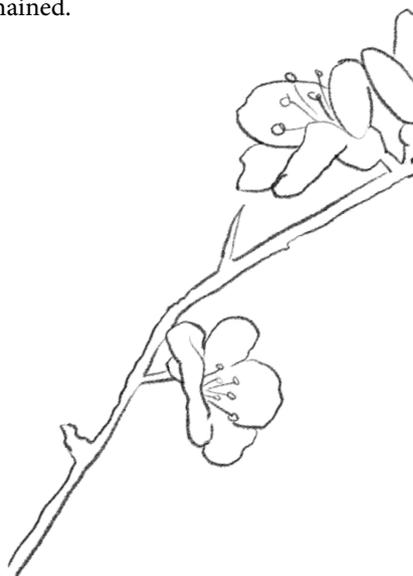
by Daniel Collins

1st Place, Poetry

Daughter of Spring and life-bright gaiety,
Unwearied psalmist of the temple green,
Who fashions for thy tree-born deity
Sweet hymns to speed upon the wind unseen,
The blood that stains thy breast is fair and clean,
A mark of life too rich to be contained,
But ever flowing from thy home between
The Earth and Sky, in a singing unrestrained
By any of those weighty woes that leave my music chained.

Daughter of Winter, of black nights, and the cold,
The howling wind descends with hungry snows
To smite thy young and waste away the old,
And thou art left alone to bear these blows.
What song of Spring can rival the cruel prose,
The cold reason, that frozen nights propound?
“Death comes with dark, as every mortal knows,
No life-bright hymn will leave the cold uncrowned,
And better far to dash thine eggs upon the ground.”

Daughter of day, and of the darkness too,
Hearken not to Winter’s whispered doom,
The death it augers never shall be true.
It drives thee all alone to meet thy tomb,
But bound by love, we’ll face this mortal gloom
Together. I’ll scatter seed the Winter long,
And thou shalt be my guest, until the bloom
Of Spring-Sun finds us ready, gay, and strong
Enough to fill this wood with blessing by our song.

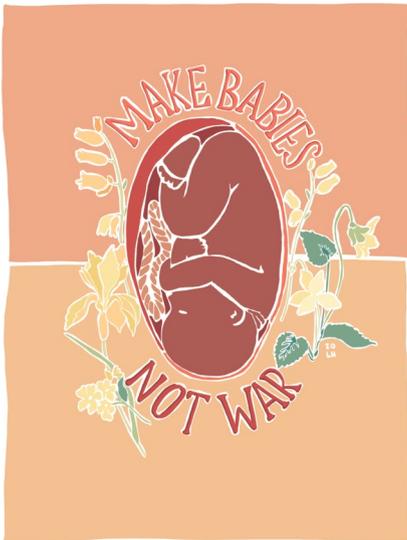
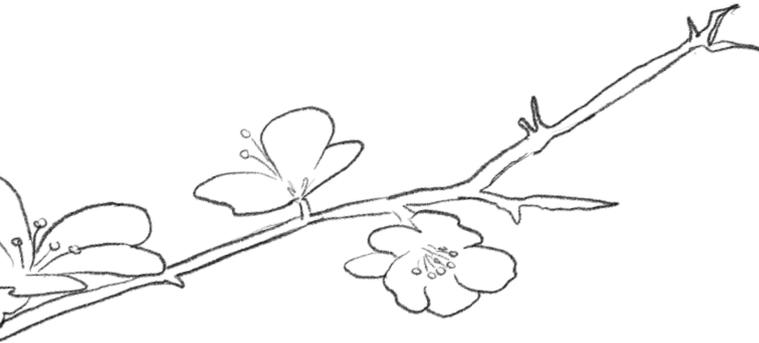


Artist Statement

Robin Redbreast

This pastiche of 19th Century Romantic odes places solidarity at the heart of the pro-life movement. The original and spiritual joy of life in the first stanza, and the material struggle and the harshness of death in the second are plain facts we cannot escape. The final stanza contends that purpose

of the pro-life movement is not to irradicate all death, but to ensure the dignity of life is enshrined. And that we accomplish through solidarity. It is through the material aid of “scattering seed” that we allow room for the spiritual song of peace and dignity.



Make Babies, Not War

by Laura Hill

Honorable Mention, Visual (2D)

Artist Statement

Make Babies, Not War

As a black woman, mother, and veteran I am deeply impacted by war and abortion. While in service I witnessed the utter disregard for human life, especially for those who are poor or “un-American”. This piece speaks for all types of war on humans, but more specifically for those who are regarded as “different” and have been held back by society and privilege. Let the babies be born and given equal opportunity, no matter their race, religion, or background.



Protoevangelia

by Alexandra Kilgore
2nd Place, Visual (2D)

Artist Statement

Protoevangelia

This is a mixed-media collage made from magazine clippings, print outs, and marker titled “Protevangelia,” which I carried as a sign at the 2020 March for Life. I created the work while volunteering at a pro-life overnight for high school students hosted on my college campus, and as I tore scraps out of magazines into the wee hours of the morning, many curious teenage girls wandered over to ask what I was doing, which facilitated so many beautiful discussions about the sanctity of life, art as political protest, and the meaning of authentic feminism. Genesis 3:15 is often referred to as the “protoevangelium”, the first mention of the message of salvation in the Bible: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and

between your offspring and hers; They will strike at your head, while you strike at their heel.” The prophecy of the woman mentioned is plainly fulfilled in Mary, the Mother of God, whose intercession is still striking at the head of sins that affront the dignity of the human person: abortion, capital punishment, euthanasia, racism, sexism, ableism, hate, discrimination, and all forms of violence. I chose to depict Our Lady as she appeared to St. Juan Diego not only due to my deep personal devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe but also because in this apparition Mary presented herself to an Indigenous man as a mixed-race woman clearly pregnant with the Christ child.

No Pity

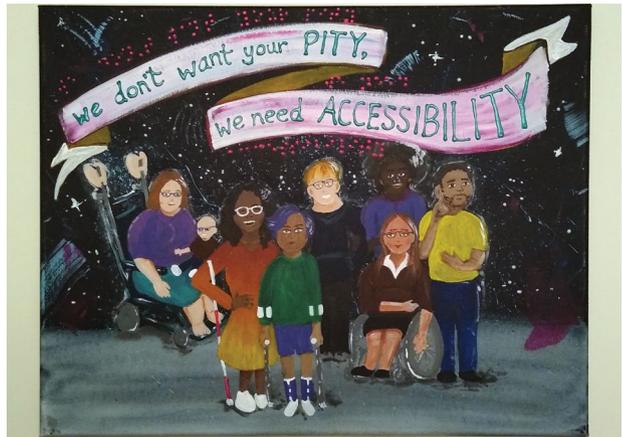
by Aimee Murphy
*Honorable Mention,
Visual (2D)*

Artist Statement

No Pity

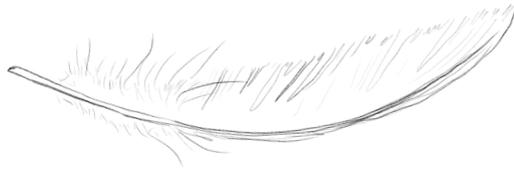
This acrylic painting on canvas is one of the fruits of my own journey to uprooting ableism in my own life. As I have slowly and painfully come to terms with my own newly diagnosed disability, I have found a beautiful community of outspoken and brilliant activists for universal disability inclusion. The diversity of those pictured includes people from many racial backgrounds, and

includes a depiction of many conditions represented within the disability community. I wanted to convey an idea I have come upon time and time again in finding my place in the movement for rights for all people with disabilities: pity serves no one, but creating accessible space brings limitless opportunities.



Swans

by Grace Malinee
1st Place, Prose



What if my baby is born dead? Arianna Pena didn't know why the thought occurred to her as Scott sped down the nocturnal Ohio streets, but there it was, creeping into her mind and taking root there.

She had woken not an hour ago with a pain in her back and a pressure inside her, a building pressure. Was this labor? She didn't know. She hadn't done that before.

Though she was only 34 weeks, she had woken Scott anyway.

Despite every ultrasound that had come back normal, despite every test that assured her that her baby was fine, Arianna still lived in fear of her child dying and God laughing at her misfortune.

She was waiting for a tragedy.

She didn't deserve this baby. She didn't. Not after last time.

The pain came again and she reached across the car and grabbed Scott's arm, tears making the streetlamps blurry streaks as he began to speed faster.

The hospital received her quickly and though every nurse she encountered told her to 'relax and smile', Arianna felt like she was a domino poised, ready to be tipped.

After a nervous two hours, a verdict was reached.

Braxton-Hicks contractions mixed with indigestion.

Standard for the third trimester. Nothing to worry about.

When Scott helped her back into the car and she fastened the seat belt around her belly that still housed a healthy and growing baby, she couldn't help but feel like she'd dodged a bullet.

"Lookin' tired there, Ms. Pena." Rashida said, stopping by her cubicle around noon the next day.

Arianna *was* tired. She had insisted on going to work despite a meager five hours of sleep. She rolled her desk chair back and smiled, but said nothing. She took two fingers and massaged the place below her sternum.

"Mmmmm, well, you been sleeping alright at night, hon?" Rashida asked, head tilted, hands on hips.

"Not really," Arianna said. "False labor's a bitch."

Rashida laughed, loud and hard, throwing her head back in amusement. "Got that right."

She paused, glanced over her shoulder. "Have you looked out at the lake today? The swans are nesting."

The east wall of the office, composed entirely of windows, looked onto a sizable lake with a walking path circling round. From their position on the first floor, the water was a mere meter from their windows. But as they wandered to the window, in the slim margin of grass between the lake and the window, Arianna could see a swan sitting on what looked like a carefully woven nest of grass, straw, and other bits of nature. Rashida pulled out her phone to snap a picture.

"Looks like there are at least three nests this year," she said, craning her neck to look.

"Are there normally this many?" Arianna asked. She watched as a swan preened her feathers, beak hidden beneath lifted wing. "How long does it take for baby swans to hatch?"

Rashida tilted her head. "You know, I'm not sure. A few weeks, probably."

"Hopefully I'll still be here when

they do,” Arianna said. “I would hate to miss seeing the babies while I’m on maternity leave. You’ll have to send me pictures—”

Rashida’s face fell. “Yeah, it would be nice if we got to see the chicks, but they take the eggs away before they ever hatch.”

Arianna turned to look at her. “What do you mean?”

“The groundskeepers, they don’t let the swans hatch,” Rashida repeated. “They take away the eggs away soon after they’re laid.”

“Why?”

“The swan population would get out of control if they didn’t. They have to. It’s for the best in the long run.”

Arianna turned back to the mother swan, sitting on a nest, readying herself to lay eggs she didn’t know would never hatch. Her insides felt cold.

“It really is sad, though,” Rashida said. “To watch the mother and father in the days after the eggs are taken. They just kind of wander around, honking, confused and unsure about where their eggs went. It really is pretty sad.”

Arianna watched as the mother swan adjusted herself, fluffing her feathers and then settling down again. It seemed cruel, she thought, to let them hope about all of their babies, only to have them taken away. She stayed at the window, watching, long after everyone else had gone back to work.

—

Scott came home about a half an hour after her. She was already at the stove, cooking dinner and thinking about the swans again when Scott hugged her from behind.

“Hello,” he purred into her ear.

“Hi,” she said, leaning into him.

“I like your shirt,” he said. He ran his fingers down her sides. “So soft,” he muttered, grabbing fistfuls of fabric.

“Thanks,” she said. “You can borrow it sometime.”

Scott laughed into her neck. Kissed her.

She’d started stealing his flannels from their closet when she’d reached six months, at first she’d tried to be sneaky, but now she took them whenever she pleased. Thankfully, he didn’t seem to mind.

“How was work?” she asked, setting the kitchen timer. They were having pasta. The usual. Three years out of college and she still didn’t know how to cook. She’d better start learning.

“Oh, it was good,” Scott reached his arms further around her, slid them down around her waist, kissed her neck. He spun her around and she giggled in surprise. He cupped her face with one hand, put the other hand on her belly, kissed her again.

Arianna melted into him, her head on his shoulder.

After a while, Scott let her go and he settled down at the kitchen table with a beer while she worked on the meat sauce. They talked about everything and nothing.

It always felt so right when he came home, little moments like these.

She was so glad he was here, so glad he had stayed.

—

Once upon a time, she was naive enough to think that she was enough to make any man stay. But Liam had proved her wrong.

It was six months until graduation when the pregnancy test had come back positive.

Arianna had found out in the bathroom of her own apartment. Alone.

She was terrified of course, scared shitless. But Liam wasn’t like the others. He *cared*.

They were moving in together, as soon as they graduated anyway. They’d move to Chicago.

They’d both get jobs. Get engaged. Get married.

They'd discussed it all before.

But *hell*, a baby?

She'd almost gotten used to the fact by the time she told Liam. She'd almost begun to plan.

She'd made sure to wear her best dress that night, to do her hair really nice. She'd taken the pregnancy test with her in her purse. She tried to think of the best way to tell him. Something that perhaps wouldn't be quite so jarring. She had been nervous as hell.

But you don't need to be, she'd told herself. They could handle this. Together.

He'd taken her out to their favorite Mexican restaurant. She'd made an excuse about not drinking her usual margarita, though she could have used some alcohol to calm the nerves.

They'd talked, laughed, held hands across the table. Arianna barely thought about the pregnancy test in her purse after a while. Until they'd gotten to the parking-lot and she had thrown up against the car door.

Liam had rummaged through her purse to grab her some tissues — and that's when he'd found it.

She could still recall the feeling of crouching there helplessly, still doubled over, the taste of bile burning her throat, tears already gathering in her eyes. She watched as Liam's face had drained of color except for two splotches of red, one on each cheek, his shaking hands clutching that stupid plastic stick.

He hadn't said a thing. He hadn't even opened the door for her. He'd simply dropped the test on the ground, got in the car, and started the ignition. Arianna meekly pulled herself in after him.

It was a long time before he spoke. He sat there behind the wheel, his jaw clenching and unclenching.

He lit a cigarette. Arianna cupped a hand over her nose. She normally hated it when he smoked, but now, with

her sense of smell so sensitive it was positively intolerable.

She didn't dare protest.

"Please tell me I'm wrong," Liam said after what felt like years. "Please tell me you....please don't tell me you're...."

Arianna stayed silent. She blinked back tears.

"How long have you known?" he asked after a while longer.

"Four days," she whispered.

Liam asked the next question like he was afraid to know the answer. "How far along are you?"

"I'm not sure exactly," Arianna said. "Maybe six weeks?"

"Six weeks?" Liam asked. "Like over a whole month?"

It felt like an accusation. A couple of tears slipped down Arianna's cheeks. This was not at all like she'd wanted this to go.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I thought that my period was just late and —"

Liam muttered something that sounded like 'bullshit'.

"You told me you were still on the pill," he said. His knuckles tightened on the wheel.

"I was!"

"A great fucking lot that did for us."

Arianna sank further into her seat. She wrapped her arms around her stomach. The tears were coming faster now. Black rivers of mascara snaked down her cheeks. She sniffed audibly.

Liam turned to look at her. His eyes softened. "Babe. Babe. Don't cry, okay? Shit. Just — just don't cry. We can get this fixed. It's okay, babe. I'm here for you."

And he'd reached across the car and took her hand. Arianna allowed herself a flicker of a smile.

She hadn't known then that he was lying.

—

Arianna watched the swans for a long time the next day. She kept finding excuses to go to the window and watch them

preen themselves or drift lazily in the water, or sit on their nests.

She wondered if somehow, they knew. She wondered if the knowledge made them cherish the days they had now, or if secretly they were dreading what was to come. By watching their behavior, she couldn't be sure.

She shook her head. *They're just swans*, she reminded herself. *They don't have feelings.*

It took a lot of her willpower to step away from the window and go back to work.

—

She had expected to feel relieved afterwards. To move on like nothing had ever happened.

That's what she had hoped, despite the dread that had been building, building during the days leading up. Dread that made it hard to sleep. Dread so heavy it had made her shoulders ache. She'd thought that if she just went like Liam had told her to, he would stop avoiding her and yelling and throwing things and they would stop fighting all the time.

So she had gone. She had gone to that clinic and laid on that table and spread her legs when they had told her to. And she had let them reach inside of her and steal something irreplaceable.

That night, she sat on the bathroom floor in her apartment, the shower water running to block out the sound of her sobbing, with an aching emptiness inside, a chasm so wide and deep it might swallow all of her.

That night, she sat on the bathroom floor in her apartment... with an aching emptiness inside, a chasm so wide and deep it might swallow all of her.

Some fucking fix.

It was not quite a month afterwards that Liam had left her.

There were many reasons. But Arianna told herself that all of them were her fault. He hadn't understood why she was scared to leave her apartment sometimes. He hadn't understood why she wanted to sleep with the lights on. He had told her that 'it was all behind them'. If only that were true.

After he left, she'd let her roommate think that all of her crying was because she was torn up about the breakup. She'd let her mom think that too. She'd let her professors and her advisors think that her sudden plummeting grades were due to severe senioritis and graduation-blues.

She'd let people think whatever they wanted, really. Anything was better than the truth.

She didn't know if there was an acceptable mourning period. A mourning period following the loss of something you'd been told you should be glad to be rid of. Something you weren't supposed to miss. But if there was one, Arianna had far surpassed it. It had taken years.

It was just when she met Scott that she had begun to hope again.

It was only when he slept with his arms around her that she stopped waking up with wet marks on her pillow in the morning.

And she had not told Scott what had happened. It was still too raw. Three years. A drop in a bucket, really. Three years of avoiding playgrounds and the baby-section at Wal-Mart and making excuses to avoid going to friends' baby showers. Three years.

She felt damaged somehow. She wondered if Scott could see it when he looked at her. A private wound fed by her own self-hatred. A mess of scar tissue in her womb that reached all the way up to her heart.

—

Spring began to bleed into summer and seemingly all at once, three weeks passed. Three more weeks of waiting.

And in those three weeks, the swans began to lay their eggs. They now sat on their temporary nests, incubating eggs that would never hatch.

Three weeks of sleepless nights. Three weeks of coworkers fussing over her. Three weeks that contained a baby shower and too many Thank-You cards to write. Three weeks of feeling like imminent danger was still approaching.

—

After dinner one night, Scott announced that he was going to go watch the hockey play-offs at Trevor's apartment, a few miles away. "If that's alright?" he asked.

Arianna tried not to show her discomfort when he suggested it. But lately, the more time she spent alone, the more vulnerable she felt.

"Yeah, go ahead," she said, purposefully not meeting his eyes. "I'm going to go to bed soon anyway."

"You sure?" Scott asked. And she forced herself to nod.

She went to bed early, climbing in and laying on her side and trying to imagine shapes on the walls in the darkness. Eventually, she drifted off.

It was ten-thirty when she woke. The *feeling* was coming again. Deep within her.

It's just a practice contraction, she told herself. It's not the real thing. Nothing to worry about.

The other side of the bed was still empty. She looked at her phone on the bedside table, thought about calling Scott, and decided against it.

She stood up, instead, and began pacing.

The doctor had told her that a change in position would help with the contractions. She paced at the foot of the bed,

ran her fingers across her belly, and took deep breaths.

The tightness came again and Arianna stopped, gripping the bedpost and allowing herself to cuss a little. After a few moments, the pressure released.

She climbed back into bed and laid on her side. The baby seemed to settle down too.

A minute passed. Maybe two.

The room felt too small. Too hot.

The apartment seemed to groan. Any minute and the walls would close in. Any minute and they'd crush her.

Arianna sat up. She was sweating.

She didn't have a destination in mind, but she drove. She drove with the windows rolled down as the contractions eased and trickled to a stop. She wasn't really surprised when she ended up at the lake.

A couple of swans were drifting on the water. A couple were scattered in the grass.

Arianna parked in her usual spot for work, then approached them. She had memorized where each of the nests were. She approached the one that was closest to her window on the first floor.

She wondered if there was anything she could do. Any ways she could stop their nests from being raided. Maybe she could talk to the groundskeepers or—

The landscape looked different in the dark. She searched wildly but could not see much more than a few feet in front of her.

That bush. Maybe it was by that bush. She moved closer to the building and—

A crunch beneath her foot. She stepped on a pile of sticks. Swan feathers littered the ground around her feet.

This. This was the nest. It was empty.

No. Surely not. Surely they hadn't taken the eggs. Already? Now?

She checked the two other nests, her heart-rate spiking, her hands beginning to shake.

The other two. They were empty. Nothing but swan feathers, broken twigs and the promise of what might have been. A possibility stolen.
All for the best.

—
When she got home, Scott was pacing the living room.

“Ari!” he cried when she came through the door. “Where were you? I called you like three times!”

Arianna walked to him, pressed herself against him, and cried into his shoulder.

“They’re gone,” she told him. “They’re all gone.”

Scott’s rigid body softened into her. He cupped her face with his hand. “Babe, what are gone? What are you talking about? Are you alright?”

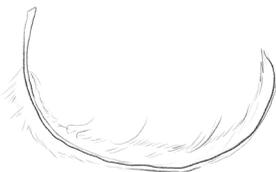
“It’s just...” She took a shuddering breath, hiccupped into Scott’s shirt. “No one asked the swans if they wanted to keep their eggs. No one asked.”

Scott opened his mouth, as if to ask another question, closed it again.

He led her to their bedroom. “Get some sleep. It’s late,” he said. “We’ll talk about it in the morning. I’m just glad you’re alright.”

Arianna nodded and settled down. They would talk about this in the morning. And maybe Arianna would tell him everything. Maybe she would finally have the words.

Scott lay behind her then, massaging the small of her back. She fell asleep after a long while, once the tears had stopped. She fell asleep holding her belly and looking at the two slender swan feathers resting on the bedside table.



Nothing but swan feathers, broken twigs and the promise of what might have been.



Artist Statement

Swans

Not only do we live in a culture where abortion is permissible, but we live in a culture where it is dressed up in gaudy euphemisms and draped in false reverence. This violence is sold to women as liberation, as necessary, as vital, and good. The effects of these lies lead many post-abortive women stranded and confused in a culture that tells them that they should be thankful for the violence done unto them and their children. I wanted to write a story in which a brave woman begins to lift the veil and see abortion for what it truly is. I wanted to delve into the psychology of a woman whose intuition has long told her the truth, and she has now come to the *metaoia* moment that allows her to dismantle the lies and see her trauma as real and valid, and that her loss is worthy of being mourned — and healed.

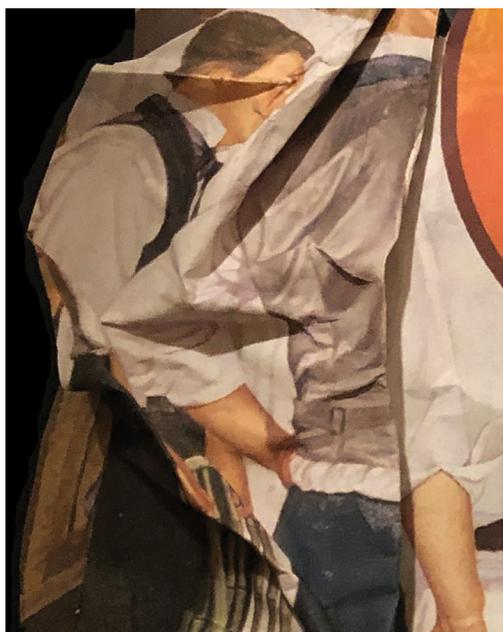
Editor’s note: this an abridged version of “Swans.” The longer, 6000-word version of this piece is published online at rehumanizeintl.org/create-encounter.



Mother of Gynecology

by Lauren Handy

1st Place, Visual (2D)



Artist Statement

Mother of Gynecology

I deconstructed the infamous *The Father of Gynecology*, a painting created by Robert Thom about J. Marion Sims. Sims was a 19th-century gynecologist who performed experimental surgeries on enslaved black women without using anesthesia. While he conducted the surgeries on many women, history only remembers three: Anarcha, Lucy and Betsey. In the painting Betsey is being evaluated by Sims with a cold/calculated gaze. He viewed her as property in the painting's depiction and in real life. But she is more than property or a blip in history. Betsey is the Mother of Gynecology. I printed out the original painting and crumpled back the darkness to reveal the one who sacrificed, labored and suffered for this medical advancement. Betsy gazes back with a contemplative defiance and the halo around her harkens back to the land she was taken from. This is about challenging white supremacy, reclaiming history and confronting medical injustices within BIPOC communities.

Little Red Heart

by Hannah Slatsky
1st Place, Visual (3D)



Artist Statement

Little Red Heart

I use mainly ink and watercolor in my artwork, but also found objects and fabric. I create characters to tell stories that cause people to ask themselves psychological questions. The questions the art asks are about the world around them, themselves, and where the source of beauty is from. This piece came about while leading a Theology of the Body bible study last semester. *Little Red Heart* can address different issues

based on the person viewing the piece. The topics that strongly inspired me were abortion and the Incarnation. The lamb representing both Jesus as the Lamb of God and as children in the womb. While it is not obvious at first glance, the deep undertones can be seen upon further investigation of the piece, causing the viewer to explore the topic for themselves.

Santiago de Compostela

by Grant Hartley
2nd Place, Poetry

AMERICAN IS 79TH FATALITY
IN SPAIN CAR CRASH

...

*The doors busted out like teeth
from their frames
from the houses
of the barrio uphill,
sliding down the dirt to be
offered up as gurneys
for the dead, the dying,
fragmented, our lives
for your lives, to carry them—*

...

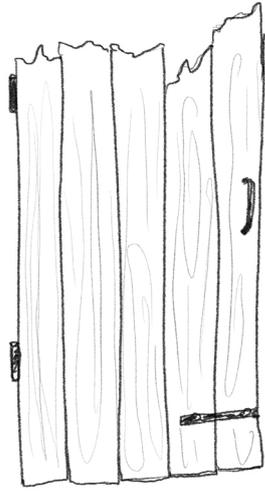
Myrta,
Robert introduced himself to us at
the coffee stand near the beach in Rincon,
called himself a “man of faith”. Of course
he meant God, but he meant you, too—

he still wears you like fragrance, describes
the crash like he is having a vision:
how you were rested on a long piece
of the wreckage, a makeshift stretcher,
how you were the very last to pass,
in the hospital four days later,

and then he spoke it, *seventy-nine*,
the number of your death, his lips
formed around the syllables as if burned,
purified by a flaming piece of coal.

...

*Fragmented, our lives
for your lives, to carry them—*



Artist Statement

Santiago de Compostela

On the 24th of July, 2013, a high-speed train crashed a few miles outside of Santiago de Compostela, Spain. Seventy-nine people died, including Myrta, LaSalle Fariza, the wife of a man I met when I was visiting Puerto Rico, Robert. Over an afternoon coffee, Robert shared with me how the residents of the nearby barrio, in a demonstration of human solidarity and compassion, broke off their front doors and slid them downhill, so they could be used to carry the victims away from the wreckage. This poem represents an expression of thankfulness to Myrta, as well as a reflection on what binds all human beings together in the midst of tragedy.



Here's the Thing

by Margaret Ao

2nd Place, Prose

Here's the thing: I know that if I spoke about my sadness—the numbness—the days when despair reached so deep that the seabed seemed a finger brush away, when it seemed as though a stifling silence made everything in my life still, there would be people who'd support me. Who would tell me to live. Who would say, "Every life is worth living, no matter the circumstances. Don't let other people's opinions define you."

And this would make me happy. Truly, it would. For those are words that I believe in, and they would be said with such conviction, such confidence, that I'd know the people who said them believed in them too. And perhaps that's why it hurts so much that I know that many of the people who would tell me to live, whether they knew me or not, are the same ones that'd say that others should die. It sounds weird, because from a logical standpoint those two beliefs contradict each other, but the older I grow the more I realize just how many people live in contradictions—to the extent that the history of injustice can really just be summed up by sets of people saying, "You deserve rights" to one group of people and "but not you" to another. And sometimes I think about that, the ways we divide ourselves and hurt our own kind—hurt people with faces like ours, so alike in pain and relief and joy that they could be us, in another life. But we turn our backs on them for so and so reason, each one more meaningless than the last. We

forget the mistakes our ancestors have made, and make them again, and *pay* for them again.

When I was younger I tried not to dwell on those things, out of fear that the despair would overwhelm me: reach deep into my chest, flood my lungs, drag me down into the depths of the sea. I flinched away from words like *pro-life*, despite knowing that that was what I was, technically, because I thought facing the horrifying reality of abortion would be too much, and surely there was nothing I could do anyways. I didn't say anything when a classmate mocked people who disagreed with embryonic stem cell research by claiming that "it wasn't a baby yet." I said I didn't know enough to take a stance on issues I had stances on, all in an effort to remain liked. But that was a mistake. It didn't stop the horror. It didn't stop the death, or the yelling, or the words coming out of peoples' mouths that advocated for violence. Shadows still lurked inside my head, crowds of citizens still clamoured for war, people still called for blood to pay for crimes—and soon enough the words became a downpour, then a flood, with tides that came in and crashed against every wall in my brain. The sound made the words echo over and over again like a video on loop, until they were one voice only.

The most shocking thing about this was not that it was one voice, but that I knew it so well. I'd heard it, and felt it—the hatred lingering in the air, a palpable itch against my skin—and wept because of it, because in my greatest times of sorrow, one of the things that would hurt me the most is the idea that my worth could be taken away. That I could only ever be loved if I met certain conditions: how I looked, what I

did, if I were good enough. And I hated it, this feeling that I was worth only what I could do for someone else. And sometimes I felt like shouting: *Isn't it enough that I'm here and alive? Isn't that enough? Haven't I done enough for you to love me? Lull me to sleep, please. Be a bit kinder.*

And sometimes I felt like shouting: Isn't it enough that I'm here and alive? Isn't that enough?

And other times I wanted to shake the voice and say: *What would it take for you to quiet? What would it take for you to pack your things and go?!*

And other times still, when I calmed a little, I would ask myself: *what would it take for me to stand in front of the mirror and say "I want my life" in a way that I could make myself believe it?* And another question, that I still sometimes ask myself: How can I genuinely believe that I have any kind of inner worth unless I believe that everyone does, and believe that without advocating for the lives of everyone else? And I don't think I can. Humans have always tried to connect with each other—it's science that we long for companionship. After all, they say what gets to people lost in the wild most isn't the hunger or the thirst or the danger, but the loneliness. And there's something poetic in that, I think, that if humans don't have love we go mad. And maybe that's what's wrong with us, if there's so much hate in the world. Maybe that's all hate is—being driven mad by a lack of love. Because what is causing each other so much pain if not some special kind of insanity?

Just look: *Every life is worth living, no matter the circumstances. Don't let other people's opinions define you.* Have you ever thought of a concept so beautiful? Can you imagine the pain of being the exception to those words? I think of my fear in the darkest days that I would be the exception to love and so I make none: the moment I say but is another day the voice speaks on.

And here's the thing: I know we have a long way to go. We are a culture of *buts* and *maybes* and *excepts*. We act as though the value of lives can be measured out on weighing scales and compared and traded when they can't—because there's nothing as valuable as human life. But for the world to see that, then the voice of violence must be replaced by another, so that one day the sounds in our world can change from shouts of hate to exclamations of love.

Artist Statement

Here's the Thing

The majority of my friends and family are pro-choice. While a few know that I'm pro life, most of them do not. Navigating this emotionally has always been rather complicated for me, because while I believe that they are all good people, I also believe that they (as well as the majority of society) are inconsistent with the way they approach human rights, supporting some nonviolent causes but opposing others. I wrote this piece partly as a way to express my complicated emotions on the issue, but also to show that although we like to draw lines — pick and choose which humans actually matter — that it is impossible to stand for one of us unless we stand for all of us.



Aftermath

by Haley Spencer
2nd Place, Visual (3D)

Artist Statement

Aftermath

This piece was originally created as a way to process the grief and sorrow of my dear friend after her abortion. The sculpture presents the mother's body as an anonymous (and colorless) empty vessel, as women's bodies are often discussed. The wound left behind is deep and unable to heal; part of her is forever missing. It became a symbolic piece for me, after my own traumatic birth experience, representing the wounds of motherhood for those who encounter a lack of compassion in our current maternal and perinatal healthcare system as they birth life, or loss.



Failing to See

by Acyutananda

Honorable Mention, Poetry

Galileo's telescope
Caused him conflict with the pope,
While his science-based position
Antagonized the Inquisition.
"My friend," they said, "*We fail to see!*
Why ask for trouble? Just agree."

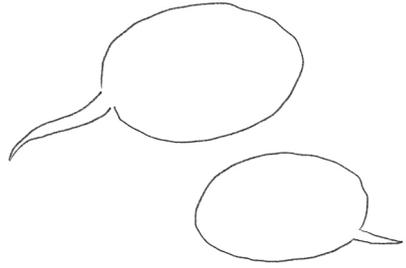
Since then we note this constant theme:
Some truths are deeper than they seem,
Yet some folks there will always be
Who view things superficially.

A single cell, you like to say,
Despite its load of DNA
Is not a glorious thing like you –
Learned in how to tie your shoe.
"A speck that I can barely see,
Lacking any advanced degree,
Is not aware. It's just a sham.
I fail to see why I should give a damn."

But whatever you may call that cell,
It knows some tricks that all your swell
Circle of friends can never do,
Such as how to be one-celled, then be two.
How to be two-celled, then be four,
And soon to pop right through the door.

If the life is ended it was starting to live,
Something is taken that you would never give.
Your future is all that matters to you,
But those victims had a future too.

Yet you clutch your pearls, you drink your tea.
You get offended. You fail to see.



Artist Statement

Failing to See

The title of the poem is "Failing To See." "I fail to see" is most commonly used sarcastically to mean "I fail to see anything because there is nothing there to see." But here I play with it. Two characters say it intending sarcasm, but they genuinely fail to see – they fail to see the reality of our solar system, or the humanity of the unborn.

Editor's note: This poem has been abbreviated due to limited printing space. The full 46-line version can be found at rehumanizeintl.org/create-encounter.

Artist Statement

Juliana's Call

This piece is about a pregnant teenager trying to escape a toxic relationship that involves sexual exploitation. It deals with the Consistent Life Ethic themes of abortion and abuse. "Juliana's Call" also touches on how we as activists can't get so caught up in our causes that we ignore the needs of our own families.

Juliana's Call

by Sophie Trist

Honorable Mention, Prose

Warning: Sexual Content

She stares at herself in the grimy mirror in the McDonald's bathroom. Dark hair dyed blond because that's how Kevin likes it. A bruise over one eye and another on her cheek, the makeup a flimsy shield. She's wearing the least sexy outfit she has: a pair of bright purple sweatpants and a baggy Tulane University t-shirt that's two sizes too big for her. Still, this insult to fashion couldn't deflect all the pitying looks from the women in the restaurant, or all the leers from the men.

Juliana looks older than seventeen, which is how she managed to pull off her fake ID and get a job in a Bourbon Street strip joint. And the guys who paid her an extra \$20 or \$50 to break the no-touching rule, even give the occasional handjob? They knew she wasn't eighteen, but they didn't give a flying shit. Neither did the strip club owner, as long as he got his cut. And in the past few days, Kevin has started to talk about how much more money they could make by doing some adult home videos. Except talk isn't really the right word, is it? No, Kevin has started insisting.

And the two lines that appeared on the pregnancy test her coworker Chandra helped her take covertly in the strip club's grimy bathroom before work last night? They're no obstacle. Juliana has passed by New Orleans's only abortion clinic dozens of times: a dark, grim-looking building, a few old people usually clutching signs or rosaries on the sidewalk just outside.

Hurry up and do this if you're going to, Juliana thinks. Her cell phone is at the bottom of Lake Ponchartrain; Kevin made her leave it behind because he said her parents could use it to track her. The lady whose phone she borrowed will come looking for her soon. Worse, Kevin will come looking for her soon.

A wave of nausea rolls through her. Morning sickness or just anxiety? Juliana thinks it's the latter. This is a stupid idea. Sure, she and Kevin have been going through a rough patch, but they'll make it through. Maybe if she works a little harder, maybe if she's a little more patient, Kevin will turn back into the guy she fell in love with back in Memphis. Would getting the abortion and doing the sex tapes really be that bad?

Juliana closes her eyes and tries to imagine what her baby (she can't seem to think of it as a fetus no matter how hard she tries) might look like. Is it even visible to the naked eye? How much value can something the size of a pea really have? But when Juliana thinks of spreading her legs for some doctor with sterile-smelling white gloves to suck her womb clean, all she feels is horror. Juliana feels as though she has been sucked into the eye of a whirling black storm; she can't imagine obliterating another human being like that. She can't hurt another person as she has been hurt, even if that person doesn't yet have a consciousness.

Even as she thinks this, Juliana is dialing a number she knows by heart. She's terribly afraid her mom won't answer. She's terribly afraid she will.

Editor's note: this prose piece has been abbreviated due to limited printing space. The rest of "Juliana's Call" is published online at rehumanizeintl.org/create-encounter.

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