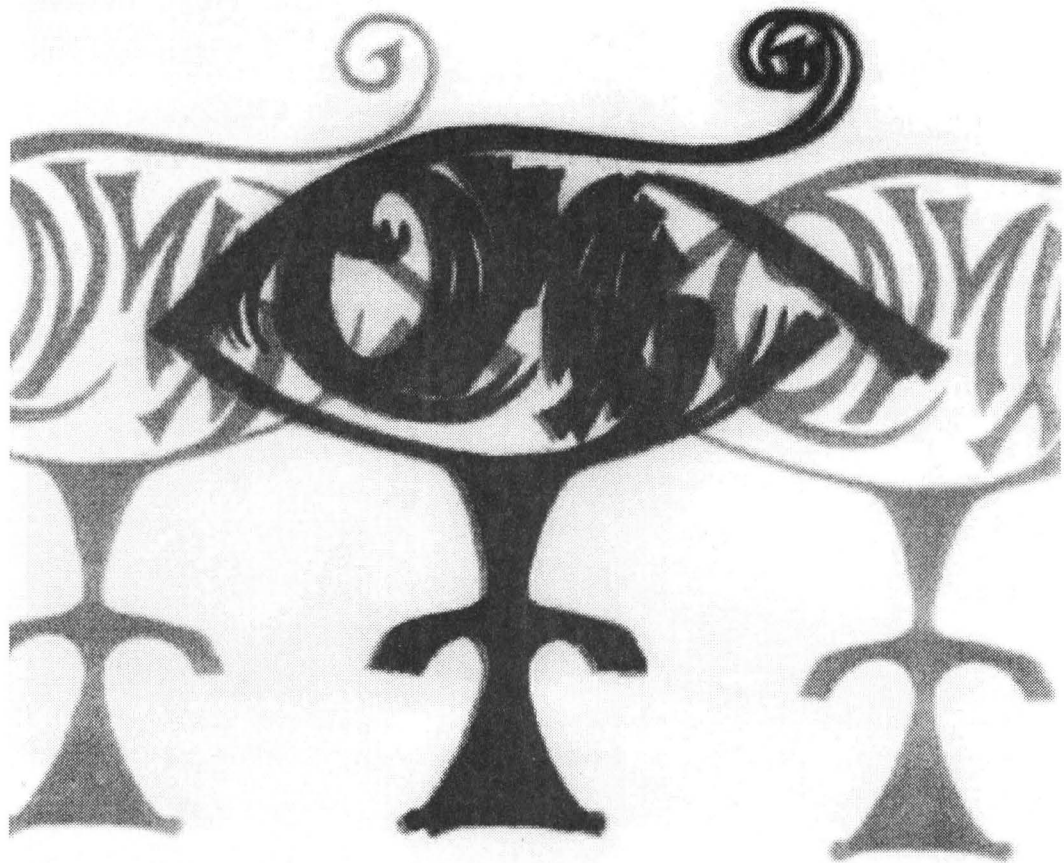


Onyx  
Fall 1998

Black Magazine of Visual & Literary Arts



## Editor's Note

As art reflects life, so does Onyx mirror the widespread creativity of the black community at Tufts. Each issue seeks to expand upon the last—taking our quest a little further. In this issue, we explored the ideas of acceptance, tolerance, and experience.

Although all of the work accepted into the magazine was exceptional, the literary editors' award this term goes to Chinedu Mbadiwe for her piece entitled *Why Have You Forsaken Me?*, which is featured in the center of the magazine. We feel that this piece is exemplary in its examination of the black female psyche.

This term, we examined the all-encompassing nature of the community by focusing on our logo. The logo juxtaposes various icons derived from ancient Egyptian script and West African folklore. The main focus of the logo is the eye—the window to the soul. The word "Onyx," inscribed within the iris, calls to mind the enduring strength of the precious black stone, as is continuously demonstrated by the black community.

Race is too often a divisive issue on this campus, and Onyx will continue to be a creative outlet for the black community. As always we welcome and encourage submissions from the entire Tufts community.

We would like to thank the African American Center, the Pan African Alliance, Ikezi Kamanu, Alex Blum, and everyone who continues to support this magazine and what we stand for. A special thanks goes to Michael Fraser for going above and beyond the call of duty when helping to put the magazine together. . . you are a really, really wonderful person!

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# Onyx

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## WATCHING (HABIT)

I try to watch myself  
In broken pieces of mirrors  
In the cracks of pavement  
My shadow is getting shorter every day  
I lost my virginity and went straight down  
I have no beliefs  
No ideas  
No form, shape or theory  
Just chaos  
I try to watch myself  
I try to understand the pluck of pain  
When my fingers touch my pen  
The paper is so white at times  
It blinds  
And as a reaction, I close the book  
Not trying to turn over a new leaf  
I remain on the same page for days  
Weeks, sometimes months  
Never wondering what is happening  
I have come to the realization that it  
Happens  
When it does

Trying to watch myself  
I look in books that do not  
Spell my name  
Soul searching in Dickens  
I have expectations  
Great ones  
But they seem to be unfulfilled  
Like a large glass of knowledge  
Upset at my temper  
I cool my head in an icebox  
If only I could release  
A portion of what is mine  
Owned, and let it be a part of nothing, Contradiction  
Trying to watch myself  
I watch what is chewed  
And see most of it spitted out  
In one way or another  
I pay too much for  
Acids that eat up my insides and  
Add onto my outside

And those that give me pain in my chest  
Oh You  
If you are alive hear me  
I fear myself  
Wish to be myself  
And see no way out  
I try to watch myself  
For I  
Don't want to disappear  
I feel that I can take control  
Whenever I want to  
I just need an incentive  
And right now, watching,  
Is the only one I have  
I feel nothing on the outside and  
Everything on the inside  
I am afraid to release everything  
For it may hurt  
Watching is such a hard habit  
To break

--Eris Johnson-Smith





Ayanna McLean

*Photo*

## GRANDMA SPOKE TO ME OF BEAUTY

Some people we remember,  
Some things we forget.  
Meeting You is something which I know  
that I'll never regret.

Once Grandma, this Wise Ole Lady,  
Told me the most wonderful story  
Of a woman whose name was Beauty.

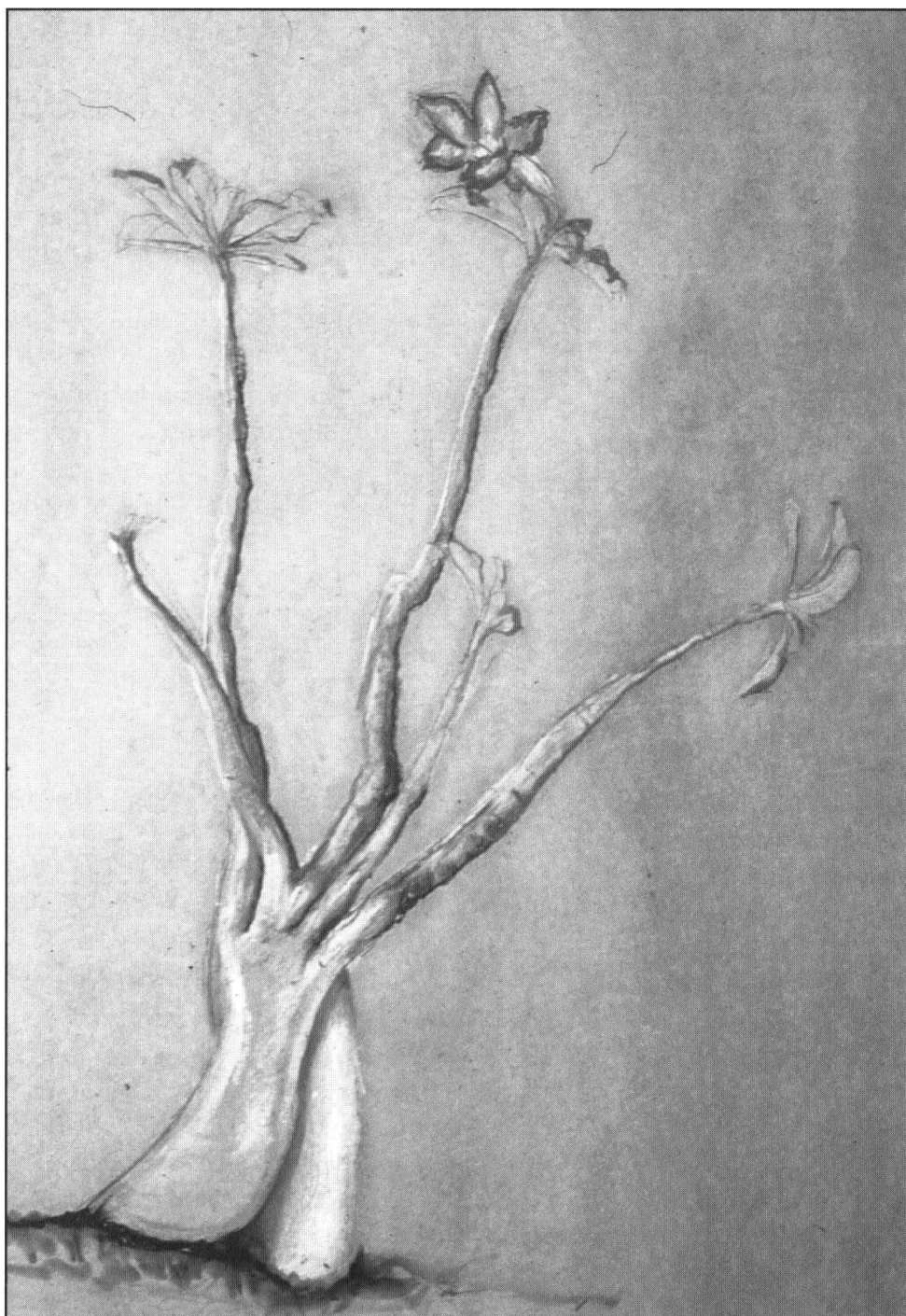
She spoke of a woman whose smile brought  
peace to a man's heart.  
She told me of a woman whose eyes  
would make you surrender your all and worship Her.  
Grandma mentioned a woman whose hair  
became one with the wind  
when She walked in a gentle breeze.  
Grandma said one look at this woman  
and you would volunteer your place in heaven for Her.  
Grandma also said that the woman did not  
know the extent of Her beauty.  
According to Grandma,  
"Beauty had a warm heart,  
a splendid smile  
and a blissful touch.  
Beauty could make an Englishman speak Dutch!"

As I listened to Grandma speak of Beauty.  
I used to sit there and think,  
"Who and where could She be?  
And if I asked Her, would She ever kiss or love me?"

My Question remained unanswered until...  
I first saw Thee.

--Alwin Jones





Danny Klainbaum

*Drawing*



## OH, BROTHER

Oh brother, my brother  
Why are your pants so low  
Peepin' all the girls—HELLO  
Tryin' to get the digits—I KNOW  
Do you gotta woman?—HELL NO  
Thinking we don't know . . .

What the dilly yo  
When you see us walk by  
Saying "Oh, you can't say hi?"  
Well brother, my brother

It ain't like that at all  
When we give you our number you don't call  
Sayin' "Naw girl, I was playing ball!"  
Thinking you can dunk when you're five feet tall  
"Psst, psst" when we pass in the mall  
Is that how to get a woman's attention while chillin' on the wall?

Well brother, my brother  
Next time you see us walk by  
No more "pssts" or kisses—just hi  
Because brother, my brother  
You are fine as all hell  
And you know you can ring my bell  
But you gotta treat me well  
No more image to sell  
So brother. . .

--Larissa Johnson

## BRAINSTORMING

I didn't know that you could dance—  
A revelation!  
You interrupted me.  
I could not finish my writing.  
Also, the sun was very hot,  
The breeze, cool blue and green.  
And my long skirt  
Green yellow and red;  
That first I used to seduce him  
And then to remind him.  
My brown feet are hot, my brown sandals  
Offer them up to the light  
With reverence  
And yet sadness, for  
Shoe and foot shall soon blend  
And such decoration will be meaningless.

--Kafui Bediako



## CONCHSHELL

I was born  
on the third of July.  
Distant kin thought I came a day  
too early.  
—My mother's shoulders knew the truth.

—My mother, knees apart, back arched—breathe  
Alone, hiding from straps of coarse leather and  
rings of thick rope,  
Whispering to me, "Your time is here."

—My mother, hands on thighs, squatting—push  
Alone, spitting the syrup of sugarcane on  
The Great House steps, telling  
the master that I was not his child  
but hers!

—My mother opened to let me through  
Her hands gripping sticks of fire—  
setting huts and plantations ablaze.  
She began to birth me.

Contractions close, conchshell blow!  
On the third of July I was born,  
All bloody, tired  
Screeching from centuries of being  
forced back in, overdue.

And not a day too early.

--Tiphonie Yanique Galiber Gundel

(For the US (Dutch) Virgin Islands on the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our emancipation from slavery, July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1848.)

## COUP DE GRACE

Death, so much an escape more than anything else  
From things I need not tell you about  
For you are well acquainted with them  
And if you are not this poem is not for you  
And you must stop reading here

But those of you that continue on my suicidal descent into the wishes we make in our  
darkest hour  
When our presence would wither flowers  
And we entrap ourselves in a tower of despair  
When our cares overwhelm us and our dreams seem so far away  
Though we have tried Oh so much to make them real

Yes it is here we wish death to come and swoop us up in the all consuming embrace of  
eternal sleep  
'Tis here we sleep and sleepless sleep . . . waking in contempt of the breath that swells our  
lungs  
And when not having death answer our call . . . much like other deities  
We rage in the absence of recognition  
"Take me away you Fuck that has stolen my 'ME.' Take me away!"  
Coup de grace Coup de grace Coup de grace Coup de grace  
For you have already defeated me.

--Michael Fraser





Ikezi Kamanu

*Soon*



Shani Sandy

*Drawing*



## SOUL PARADE

Children cry the lost dreams of forgotten  
parents, out on  
street corners, dim lights capture silhouettes  
of those seeking fame.

Misfortune guides their weary eyes,  
political assassins they are,  
not knowing their growing seeds  
of disaster planted by their  
great—

grandfather's master.

Why? Young babes native to  
gold mines and grasslands,  
you sit—don't stand—  
always looking  
out—

Never within that prism of  
eloquent being.

What are you seeing, when  
your lids set on melancholy  
skies? Stars way up  
in heaven are dropped  
into the palms of your  
lazy hands. The plan's  
in effect to drive away  
your strive, your stride  
got them watching you, jocking  
you—if you  
will,

bear with me, shed a  
tear with me, please just  
hear with me. When you place your  
ears to the ground,  
can you catch the sound of  
Hannibal's feet thumping  
against cracked

concrete?

Is all you know, the flow  
of urban poets reciting,  
dictating—sometimes elevating your conscience

to a plane of greater thought?

Our mothers raped

of divinity.

Our fathers stripped

of identity.

And now you wear your  
badge

of

honor

on your hip. Get a grip  
on the handle of lifetimes, not nines.

Young soldiers, I wonder,

where are you

marching

to?

— Cory Person

## MY NEW YORK

If I were to tell you that I'm from New York City and you visited there once from a country area, maybe you would tell me that I'm lucky. You would tell me of the postcard New York City and its beauty. You would describe a heaven in which there was everything that one could desire from the worldly world.

New York to you would mean the street vendors from Pakistan or Mexico selling cheap hot dogs with soda in Central Park. New York City would be the Asian artists competing fiercely on the corner of W 42nd and Broadway to draw a realistic portrait of you (and maybe a friend or loved one). Maybe you would quickly recall MTV headquarters sitting directly opposite those artists with The All-Star Cafe to the right of them. On the left of MTV you might remember the theater where you watched the play *Chicago* and maybe even *Cats*. And maybe you would not forget to mention the huge television screen in the middle of Broadway.

You would remember the people all rushing faster than your mom trying to prevent the Sunday Special, roasted chicken, corn, and baked potatoes— from burning. Yes, you might recall the men in dark suits fast-walking through the elegant giants called the Twin Towers. You would remember the blood-red antenna on the Empire State Building you saw one night from your room in the Plaza or the Trump Towers on the outskirts of Central Park.

I would agree, but also proceed to tell you of the New York that I know and that many are not familiar with.

Where I live, there are no colorful Twin Towers or a marvelous Empire State Building. My Twin Towers and Empire State buildings are not made out of expensive green marble or blue glass fit for kings.

My castles are made out of dingy brown bricks and gray cement instead of colorful glass and marble-covered walls. My towers do not watch over my city with pride and confidence, as do the Twin Towers. My towers, the housing projects, hover over my Brooklyn with the confidence of a dog just beaten mercilessly by a band of immature teenagers.

My towers stand with less pride than that of a depressed slave woman who had just been raped by her master.

And whenever I rush in Brooklyn, it is not solely because I am late for work, but it is also because I do not want to see my twin towers.

This is my New York — "brown" bricks and "gray" cement as opposed to green marble and purple translucent glass.

--Alwin Jones





Allison Chapman

*Photo*



## HER ADAM

I sleep with an old, white shirt of his  
that still smells of tequila and sex—  
Remembering the way his eyes  
sought me through a web of darkness—tangled  
with the moonlight that swallowed my bed.

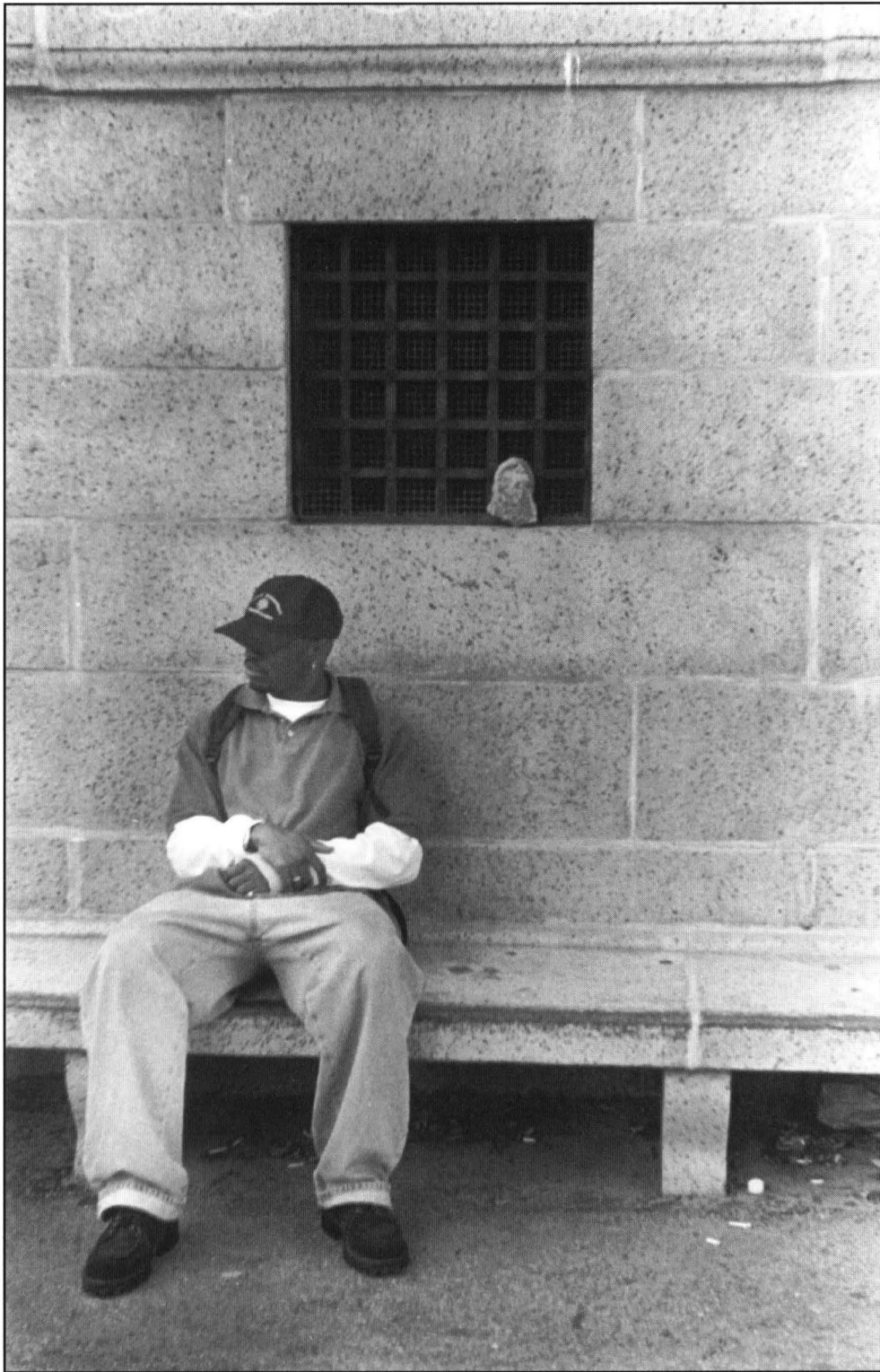
I wanted him to break me—tame me  
but, he only wanted to make love  
and bathe me in his salty sweetness  
instead. Night into morning we fused,  
Tasting the fear on each other's lips—  
denying the inevitable.

And after he left, I made wishes  
that I might possess him completely—  
Taking in more and more of him  
every single time my eyelids kissed.

His shirt is almost empty now, as  
I have drained it of his musky scent,  
I am tired—faded from lending  
warmth, that he can only feel again,  
When twelve planets are in alignment,  
When crows sing—wistful, in crimson noise,  
When Eve is forgiven for her weakness—  
At ease with the crepe-paper colors  
That only remind her of Adam.

--Natasha Marin





Michelle Lea Ramirez

*Photo*

# Literary Editors' Award

## WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?

I brought you cool water in the Sahara  
When you completed the pyramids  
I kept you warm in Rome  
When you rode your elephants through the Swiss Alps  
I was your inspiration  
When you wrote the UNIA  
I presented you your Koran  
When you stood before the Nation of Islam  
We have ventured out into the world  
Side by side

In my womb, I bore your child  
In my hands, I held your tears  
On my back, I carried your burdens  
Between my thighs, I held your love  
In my eyes, I saw your struggles  
In my heart, I felt your pain  
In my mind, I remembered your legacy

You promised to stand by me  
'Till death did us part  
I was your hope,  
Your pride,  
Your world,  
Your WOMAN!  
But now you claim others

Can she groove like me?  
Can she get down like me?  
Are her lips as full as mine  
That you can taste the sweetness of her nectar?  
Are her hips as wide as mine  
That she can bear the seed in which you will plant?  
Are her breasts as succulent as mine  
that they can contain the one thing to quench your thirst?  
Is her love as deep as mine  
That she can show you affection all night long?

*She used to claim  
you raped her in the night  
Now she claims  
your love is outta sight*

*Have you forgotten?  
Have you forgotten who brought you into this world?  
Have you forgotten who sang you lullabies?  
Have you forgotten who fought the battles with nothing in their hands?  
Have you forgotten where you've come from?  
Have you?*

*Your touch was soft and passionate  
Now it's hard and forceful  
You used to honor and obey  
Now you deceive and play  
You used to fight for me  
Now you've disowned me*

*I  
am your Black Queen  
Respect me  
Soothe me  
Love me  
Claim me  
It's only a matter of time  
Before you lose me*

*--Chinedu Mbadinwe*





Dan Fromm

*Photo*



## SHADOWS

Darkness surrounds  
Fear and Doubt around me growls  
I smell the stench  
Of Failure near  
At my soul it hungrily stares  
Wanting at my will to tear

Broad sword in hand  
I must resist  
I clench the hilt within my fist  
And Toward the advancing shadows I twist  
Ready to grant Satan's demons death wish

Instinct guides the blade  
Parry, thrust, duck the blow  
Bending low  
Upper cut to the sternum's base  
Fear gashes his teeth at my wrath's bitter taste

Roundhouse,  
Then in a second cleave  
the demon with righteous grace  
Doubt increases the battle pace  
And with vengeance at me race

He draws his sword  
My hand goes weak as I block the blow  
I see an opening but hesitate  
Am I fast enough? Shit too Late  
His blow I receive, shoulder cleaved

Failure laughs and thinks he has won  
But I trust my weapon  
I'll kill this bitch's son  
Mercilessly my blade flies  
He soon sinks into the shadows and dies

Failure surprised  
And seem to shrink in size  
I no longer hear Doubt's lies  
And with hope renewed  
I heal my wound

I lift the broad sword in hands  
At this Failure stands  
As thunder our blades clash  
Under the strain my teeth gash  
Parry, slice, duck, thrust, tactical retreat  
Escape defeat. . .  
Leap!!  
At his legs sweep  
He jumps, grunts, and the test of endurance flunks  
On his hilt weary fingers lose their grip  
and aided by sweat the blade slips  
A plea of mercy from his lips  
As the wine of victory I sip  
His head rolls to the floor  
These demons are no more!!  
The shadows clear. . .

--Michael Fraser

## WITHOUT YOU

*Gradually,*

*I become an old, gray sweatshirt  
and unshaven legs.*

*Morning hardly notices me anymore  
While she sweeps the sky silver . . .*

*I stand in the corner—  
Trying not to get in her way.*

*I have been surprising myself with stillness—  
Taking comfort in the little things:*

*Cucumber slices lightly salted.*

*Flannel pajamas still warm from the dryer.*

*It's not much but,*

*It's all I can do to keep from feeling  
limp.*

*I watch the curtains and take deep breaths  
As they gently heave in and out.*

*The air is thick.*

*It reminds me of your voice—  
Warm and damp.*

*When my eyes are thirsty for sleep.*

*I conjure up distractions—*

*casually dipping into the quietness inside me,  
while chipping off the thin, metallic  
continents that have formed on my fingernails  
In your absence.*

*--Natasha Marin*





Kafui Bediako

*Florence*

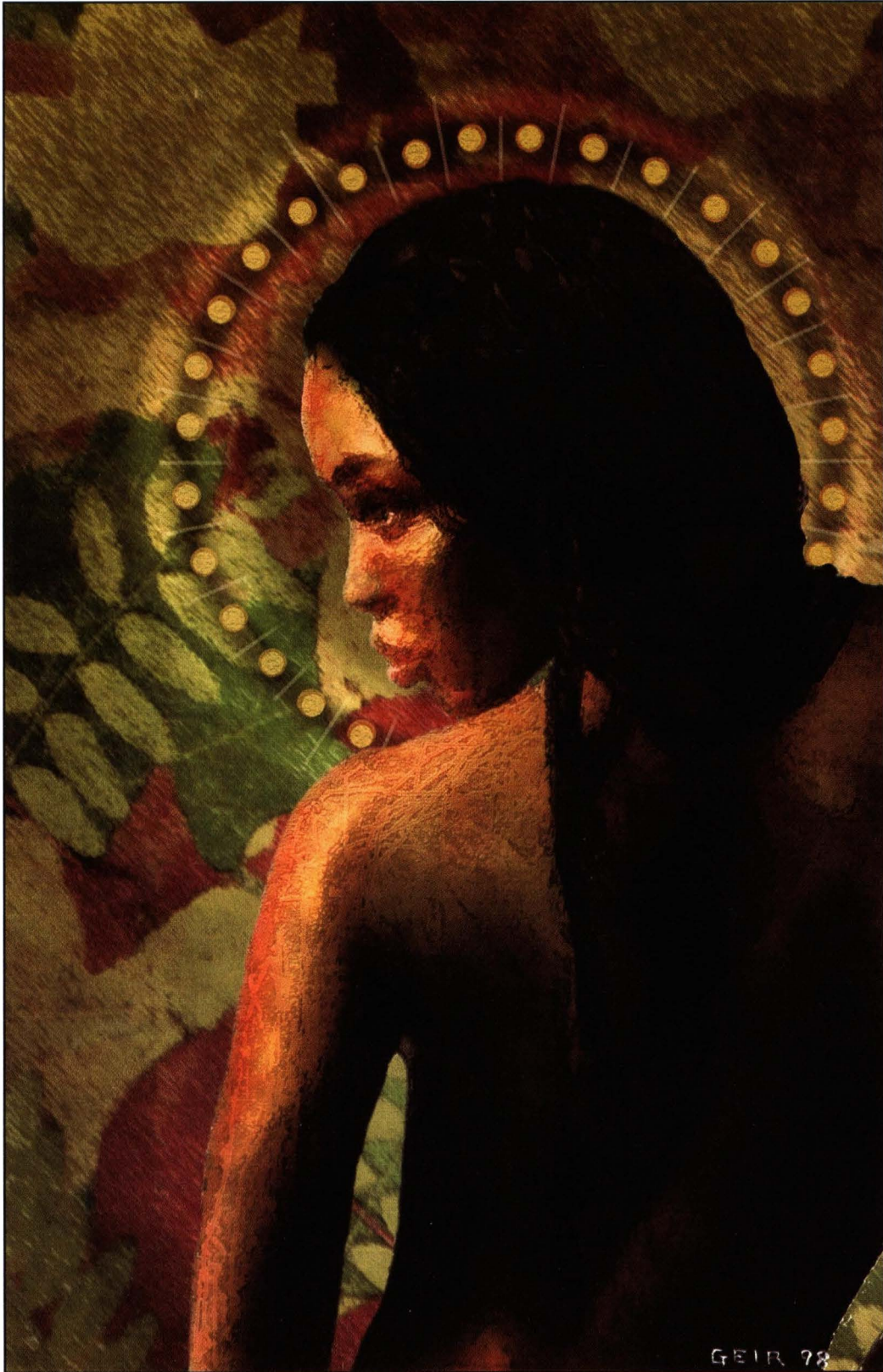


## EDIBLE

If it were just you and me  
I know it would be so good,  
because I sit alone  
and all I can think of is you.  
Thinking so hard  
that I swear I can smell you  
as I feel myself melting  
so quickly,  
wishing that it would be your soft hands  
there to catch me,  
pull me up.  
I thought I felt your touch,  
but I see that I am lying in a puddle on the floor  
coalescing at your feet.  
Did I slip through your fingers?  
Were you distracted?  
Or did the juggling act finally fall apart?  
Did you forget to watch out for me?  
I'm here.  
Do you see me?  
I'm screaming.  
Can't you hear me?  
I only wanted you to know  
that it's you I crave.  
What I wouldn't do to be yours  
to taste,  
perfectly edible.

--Swati Menta





Geir Gaseidnes

*Origin 3*

## WHEN I LOOK IN THESE WHITE MIRRORS

When I look in these mirrors  
I see my white self, burning  
    white-hot:  
Blacker than I really am  
Male in my existence

I'm wearin' this black bra cuz  
I want you to see these tits I got  
See that these legs got meat on 'em  
See these hips  
They're Wide

Extensive  
from carryin' your (browned) babies

My brown face is your bastard daughter  
Son of a thousand faceless

Silent (white)

Men.

--Lory Ivey-Alexander

## ROTONDO, FRANCESCO

His hands are thickly  
fingered animals in  
someone else's cage.  
He touches all  
the books because he knows  
them by heart.  
Italy is his puppy grown  
mangy and stubborn.  
I asked him once when he'd been  
there last; home.  
He looked up and moved away  
but said, "I remember the first time  
you wore that skirt"

--Kafui Bediako



## WAIT MEANS NEVER

Some nights I see a place where we're all the same  
Though I fear it has not been created yet  
He would surely be found there easing their pain  
As well as seeing that all of our needs were met

They offered, "Reverend, wait"  
But wait means never and never means forever  
And that is a long time

Since it was all one unpredictable game  
A chance never arose to make a sure bet  
As unjust were the laws the reasons were lame  
To the ignorant the right course had been set

They pleaded, "Doctor, wait"  
But wait means never and never means forever  
And that is a long time

Becoming restless while still remaining tame  
Always as rational as water is wet  
Keep pointing fingers but it's clear who is the bane  
Free skepticism by consulting Jet

They reasoned, "Brother, wait"  
But wait means never and never means forever  
And that is a long time

Somewhere there is a place where we all share one name  
We all get along and no one is in debt  
I've seen it in a dream and when that night came  
Peace had engulfed us and all of our needs were met

They thought, "Nigger, wait"  
But wait means never and never means forever  
And that is a long time, that's a long time—  
that's a long time . . .

--Matthew Baron

## SACRED BLUES

The melodic trance of Coltrane--  
Blue train's romantic locomotion. A conspiracy  
of notes seize silence, like a bare nipple  
covered by a flowing blouse, so to is justice created  
by luxurious freedom of ancestral horns, deep fulfillment  
sustained through arctic breaths, exhaled into golden pipes

The hypes about lips speaking into docile tubes,  
This brother, unlike others, can preach to braided naps,  
straight locks, bald heads, and curly cues. Praise methods  
of strung together intensities, key and strings persuade  
even the rash soul into uncontrolled movement--  
thoughts that furnish the mind are translated into plush  
ideas of sweet kindness and paradise.

Keep stale tongues on ice, only vocals like licorice  
can stand with these vertical tones. Document  
the moods like soft fur, encourage them like wet thighs  
interrupted by greedy consumers, needy consumers break  
this flow with snapped fingers, fake rhythm gives reason  
to end this session, prayed on by a priest of music. Chime  
the boom of the soul horn and let it shoplift your ears.

--Cory Person





Kalyn Gildehaus

*Photo*

## MAN

and you see a man  
looking down at you  
from above  
he cannot leave the  
pedestal he has placed  
himself on  
but to him  
you are below  
there is no reason  
to think you could  
walk up behind him  
and so you must yield  
and surrender your soul  
to him  
he has the name of  
an angel  
he has the eyes of  
the devil  
when he looks at you  
you know you are  
a lamb  
but not to be sacrificed  
to sacrifice yourself  
innocence and sanity  
evaporate with  
the tear  
sliding down your cheek  
as his laughter echoes  
for eternity  
so you roll over and close  
your eyes  
when they next open  
try to pretend  
you were always alone.

--Zandra Buckley

## RADIO BOOTS

Radio boots, gotta love 'em.  
Nah! Gotta leave 'em, girl!  
'Cuz you look like a China doll all dressed up  
in that shiny black,  
clothes so tight  
you can barely breathe,  
and what about  
those platform shoes you're shufflin' 'round in ...  
No one told me  
bound feet were back in style.

And now I'm late to class  
because I have to follow you  
as you tip-toe  
carefully, cautiously  
since your shoes can't even fit the steps!  
You strut and wiggle and giggle and ash  
your cigarette, not caring who's behind you—  
no, you didn't just burn me, bitch.  
Just keep walking in your radio boots, girl,  
keep playing that  
public service announcement.

So I stand there, 5'8" in my  
Birkenstocks, and though you're only 5'2"  
you still tower above me ... but  
only with your radio boots on,  
always tuned in to that Fuck Me dial.

--Vivien Valenzuela





Daniel Klainbaum

*Drawing*



## LACK

Suddenly, I knew why.  
Why, all the psychobabble  
Made it clear;  
I did not want to find  
The details of that room.  
That would mean remembrance,  
A memorial,  
And with all that, the fire could not  
Possibly  
Be extinct.  
But I know it was  
Dark with light through yellow pale  
Curtains, holey things  
That still occasionally cry  
To be mended.  
The new smell had gone from the carpet and  
A new stink  
(Like the blue rug with the purple flecks from the old house)  
Had injured the pressurized air,  
Insidious soft vines scratching at bricks—  
But we hadn't noticed  
Yet

--Kafui Bediako

## HISTORY

I never want to see you again  
But I don't like you being  
Angry at me.  
You have crushed me and then  
Encouraged me  
Time and again,  
Teasing me and taunting me.  
Still, your age does not make you  
Exempt;  
You're stupid and confused, too.  
I'm not so young.  
I know you want me  
Too much for comfort.

--Kafui Bediako





Alan Duke

*Painting*

**BIRTHING #1**

looking at my hands  
in this meal  
I am remembering

feeling myself

lumping  
the food out

like an old woman  
in the south

you

living from one day  
to the next afternoon  
trying to show a man  
how to be a woman  
without a man

somehow it is hard to realize  
you raised him to be  
her man

#2

looking at your brown locks  
in this meal

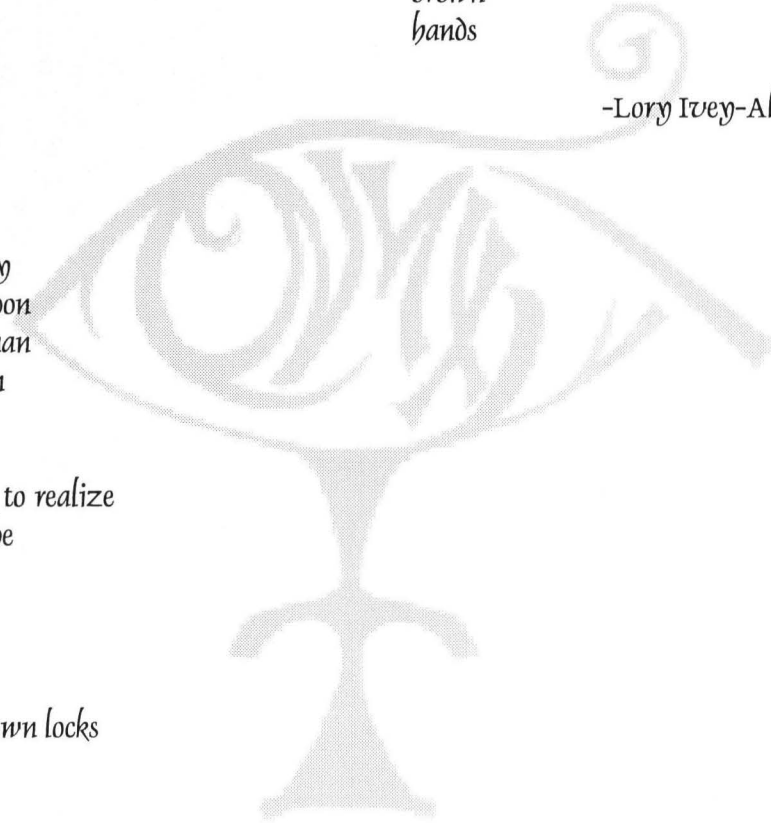
i am remembering  
when your dad left  
when we came to the mainland  
when my all changed

something makes me remember  
that you are my sun  
not my lover

something makes me remember  
that I was a woman  
once  
and nothing came between me  
and my dinner

but my own  
brown  
hands

-Lory Ivey-Alexander



## COOL GRASS

If I knew *what* to say,  
I would tell you the pale morning sunlight against your face—  
Sprinkling the trees with flecks of cool, golden paint—  
Warming the grass beneath your heavy feet.

If I knew *what* to do,  
I would order the cosmos unfold in my palm—  
Blinding me with the knowledge of *whens* and *whys*—  
Raining stars across your sleeping eyelids.

If I knew *what* to feel,  
I would touch you, piercing your mushy gray stuff  
Probing around with an isolated finger—sterilized—  
Spreading the cloves of your brain, squeezing the base of your neck.

If I knew *what* to act,  
I would be the complacency of a concubine for you—  
Opening myself to your brazen motions, allowing the pain—  
Welcoming your dominance—your mighty hand and sword.

But still,  
If I knew *what* to say,  
I would tell you love in the pale sunlight kissing your face—  
Scratching your back with the limbs of spring trees—golden—  
Burying your feet in my warmth and combing your hair—  
Cool grass.

--Natasha Marin



GEIR 98

Geir Gaseidnes

*Thoughts of Yesterday*



