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Leo Johnson
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Tova Kranz
Susanna Lang
Kindra McDonald
Erin Murphy
Kenneth Pobo
T. R. Poulson
Elizabeth Shack
Michelle Bovée Stange
Mary Ellen Talley
Susan Vinson
Kelly Watt
Ariana Yeatts-Lonske
Jenna Ziegler



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submission guidelines

Welcome to Painted Pebble's community. PPLM is a quarterly, no fee/no payment publication which celebrates short form writing, no matter what the genre. Our issues are released online and in PDF in the first month of each quarter, in a format which can be printed out and easily distributed in communities, anywhere someone might enjoy a little lit.

While we have calls under each genre, we don't feel genre's divisions are useful for our readers and submitters. We enjoy short-form works in all its iterations, all submissions go into the same pool of work being considered. We welcome work from anyone ages 18 and up worldwide. Submissions must be your own work, and created in English. We accept work that has been translated into English, with original text and complete, accurate attributions. Please make sure you have the full permissions of the original author. For full guidelines, and to submit, please visit <https://paintedpebblelit.com/submissions-page/>

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about us

Painted Pebble Lit Mag is a journal founded with the aim of publishing quality short form writing. Like “little” pockets of kindness which exist solely to help one another, we think small works can have a big impact. Our mission is to celebrate our wonderfully diverse world of writers and readers by reaching them wherever they are.

Each issue is published both online and as a PDF, each available for free. We hope readers like you will help bring our lit mag to any place someone might enjoy finding a bite sized read.

Share it with friends! Keep a copy for yourself! Pass it into the hands of a kindred spirit who might like it! Please visit our website if you'd like to download the free pdf to this issue to keep, print, or share.



Made to Share

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Ariana Yeatts-Lonske is a disabled poet and mediator. Her writing has won an Academy of American Poets prize. Ariana moderates a support group for MCAS patients; she is interested in art as survival, survival as an art. She lives in St. Louis with her partner Matthew and their cat Dandelion.

Jenna Ziegler is a poet with chronic illness who writes about grief, hope, and nostalgia, the solace of nature, and what it means to be human. Her work appears in *Seaside Gothic*, *The Walnut Branch*, *Macrame Literary Journal* and elsewhere. You can connect with Jenna on Instagram (@jtzieglerauthor) or at jtzieglerauthor.com.

contents

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Susanna Lang's chapbook, *Like This*, was released in 2023 (Unsolicited Books), along with her translation of poems by Souad Labbize, *My Soul Has No Corners* (Diálogos Books). Her fourth full-length collection is forthcoming from Cornerstone Press.

Kindra McDonald is the author of the collections *Teaching a Wild Thing*, *Fossils* and *In the Meat Years*. She received her MFA from Queens University of Charlotte and is a poet artist working and teaching in mixed-media and found poetry. You can find her in the woods or at www.kindramcdonald.com

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Elizabeth Shack lives in central Illinois with her spouse, cat, and an expanding collection of art supplies and gardening tools. Her poetry and fiction have appeared in *Contemporary Haibun Online*, *Writers Resist*, *Daily Science Fiction*, *DailyHaiga*, *The MacGuffin*, and other venues.

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Space Coast

Florida, I love you, but I couldn't stay.
Long grasses grow in deep water, but
the more acres you clear, the less
there is to burn. The spaceship Discovery
launched on its second Return to Flight
mission on my 12th birthday. I watched
from my stoop and wished I could go
with it. Ever since, then I'm always looking
East. Florida, the heat never bothered me;
I just wish the breeze reached Orlando

more. When the sunlight lays heavy on my
hair, I feel like I am back, but the air is too thin,
and where do I go when I'm only now missing
the grapefruit tree outside my window?
I don't need thunderstorms or the local
paper wrapped in sweating plastic, just
the muggy hand of Saint Francis holding
mine—a platonically lovegrip we both need to
feel like the crazy Florida birds are real.
This isn't longing, just the ache of knowing
that the places that you know best are places
you barely know at all.

contributors

Allison Burris lives in Oakland, CA, where you can find her reading and searching for whimsy. She has a Master's in Library Science and her work appears in various journals like Passionfruit Review, Hoxie Gorge Review, Heartlines Spec, and Metaphrastics. Connect with her: <https://linktr.ee/allisonburris>

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Angela Dribben is an astrophysicist and writer living in the Appalachian region of Virginia. She recently co-founded Great_Goodness—a YouTube show highlighting the good creatives and healers give to the world. Her writing can be found at *Orion*, *Westchester Review*, and others. Find Angela at www.twodogtarot.com and @Great_Goodness on YouTube.

Victoria Facchin-Herman is the Assistant Professor of Graphic Design for the University of North Dakota Art & Design department. She is a Brazilian graphic designer and educator whose work spans academic research and creative practice. Her focal areas are visual literacy, graphic design education, and typography. In her creative practice, she uses a mix of cyanotype, found objects, painting, crochet, and letterpress printing to explore themes related to time, personhood, and politics.

Paul Hostovsky's poems and essays appear widely online and in print. He has won a Pushcart Prize, two Best of the Net Awards, the FutureCycle Poetry Book Prize, the Muriel Craft Bailey Award from the Comstock Review, and has been featured on *Poetry Daily*, *Verses Daily*, and *The Writer's Almanac*. He makes his living in Boston as a sign language interpreter and braille instructor. Website: paulhostovsky.com

Leo Johnson is a writer originally from a small town in Alabama, but now living in a big city in California. He enjoys gardening, reading, and cooking. He doesn't enjoy how often he has to repeat himself because of his accent.

Sarah CR Clark

120 +1 species of Sepiida

When the end comes
you can have my standard-issue space suit

I would rather refashion my skin
into a cuttlefish here at home

adapting at the speed of thought
NOW red with bumps to blend into coral

NOW pulse black and white to hypnotize
I will glide through the turquoise sea

not the ruddy dust of Mars
in a clinically sterile rover

NOW toasted white rough like sand
to soar within this inner space

plucking fresh crab with my tentacles
inking with the sheer joy of being earthbound

Kenneth Pobo

These Days My Body

I want to fly, take my place
among clouds. It's hard
to soar when wounds
keep me on the ground.
Still, violets

cover the ground,
blue ones, white ones.
A box turtle makes her way
slowly across our garden bed
with multi-colored cosmos
and a snow-on-a-stem dahlia.

Ground has often been kind
to my body. When I get tired,
ground says, "Go ahead.
Lay on me." Why resist?

I see planes in the sky,
feel a touch of jealousy,
which fades. I soar
among petals.

T. R. Poulson

Windsurfing Freestyle at Sherman Island

The way the wind takes the ebb like a lover
to build ramps for jumping on starboard tack,
where I can't stop tumbling hard, cold. The others
fly, spin, plane away. I try until I make
an upwind three-sixty. Here, in the water
no other world exists. No mortgage circling
fast before a crash. It doesn't matter
if the man I love loves me—purple ink
on notes and texts blown off. After the wind,
I peel away my wetsuit, bare thighs new
with bruise and fall. I falter flirting. Send
him a smile among the chatter (clew-
first grubbies, shove-its, forward loops). I feel
him toss me like those ramps. So raw. So pale.

Erin Murphy

Between Symptom and Diagnosis

Landscape of chronic
fog and mist,
ellipses linking what was
and what is.
Miners straining to hear
a rescue team,
tan line from a wedding ring.
A baton mid-
toss, an arrhythmic
dance, a song bleeding
from a prison cell.
How when you try
not to think of something,
you think of nothing
else. An unplanned
nap. The lavender hour
when you can't tell bird
from bat. A lake on
an acutely blue afternoon
when sky becomes water
and water becomes air.
The distance between
belief and belief,
prayer and prayer.

Michelle Bovée Stange

Exercises for living

- i.
Look at the moon
Fold the distance between you like a fan
Hold her gently and give her to someone you love
Remember the feeling of her craters
- ii.
Breathe in the shape of a circle
Smooth it into a stone
Skip it over the water and watch it sink
Inhale
- iii.
Fold your heart into a paper airplane
Throw it from the roof of the tallest skyscraper you can find
Live in the apartment building where it lands
Fall in love

Paul Hostovsky

Tiny House

It feels so good
to throw stuff out,
toss what's unneeded,
which is just about
everything, as it turns out,
declutter the rooms,
consolidate the stanzas
into one tiny poem
all about spaciousness.

Kindra McDonald

Mission

I dream this month of Artemis
of hunting and the wild animals
that leave their trails across the grass
at night. Some mornings, my pillow is damp
from tears or paw prints. I imagine soon
a rocket bearing the goddess' name will circle
the moon searching for Orion in its orbit, searching
for a way to Mars, as we flood and burn and fight,
we look to the stars
we will always hunt.

Angela Dribben

Spotted Touch-Me-Not

Each flower hangs
as an opulent orange mouth
tangerine tongue lip-draped
red spots ride the lick
As husks mature
the lightest touch expels their seeds
Dehiscence—the splitting or bursting open of a bur or
wound
Sometimes the lightest touch is love
Sometimes our armor must split open

Erin Murphy

Rhododendron

I want a rhododendron,
its waxy evergreen leaves,

its bursts of purple
in early spring. No

I want to be a rhododendron,
sprawling yet hardy,

a woman who sits
on the bed's edge and leans

into your story while
massaging lotion

into her tapered arms and legs.
Or maybe I want the word

rhododendron, how it travels rhythmically
along the roof of the mouth,

the way a driver taps
the rim of an open window

to the beat of a song
on the radio. But not

just any song—
a deep cut. A song

she forgot she
knew. Forgot she loved.

Erin Murphy

Goodnight Mood

The night has monsters under
the monsters, cobwebs

of clotted logic, jostled
thoughts, jostled gods.

In this rough translation of day,
the darkest sparks come

from shadows in your throat.
No matter what the poets say:

the glass of milk is dim and resin-thick.
The shiver of history shrinks

to the button on the blue black
wool coat you wore in eighth grade,

to the bus token that took you—fugitive
from school—downtown,

scaffold of smoke against a bruised sky.
Blue black or black blue? Blue

blue. Oh, patches of anger,
chiseled misery. See the stars burn

out or drown. You are an old
question. You have been counted

by sheep. It is time
to rock the song to sleep.

Kelly Watt

Grandmother

She lies in bed, sick with night sweats and shivers,
aching joints. Strange premonition of something not
right. Incessant rain in the crops have withered and died.
The fire crackles like a living thing, rearranging itself.
Grandmother tiptoes across the wooden floor on cold
bare feet to coax the fire. Returns to the warmth of her
rank bed. Juice of black beetroot and honey will clear the
head. The clock ticks. Her only friends—ghosts from the
past—trip soundlessly in and out her door, conversing in
breathy voices only she can hear. This matter of their
untimely fate. Woven rug, soot-stained hearth, rocking
chair in the afternoons on better days. One small lamp to
read by. *The Book of Hours*. Marked passages,
underlined with tears. Poems for warding off impending
grief. The girl child who died too young, only ten. What
God would allow such a thing? The sketch of her on the
mantel still. A twist of ringlet. The smile for days. When
we lose a child, the next is more precious, like Little Red.
Grandmother counts the days until the girl visits—smoke
and ash, old cheese, dried bread. Meanwhile, the cow
collapses, a sheep dies. Their rigid limbs curse the sky.
The cat absconds, and the rats play havoc in the kitchen
at night. Horse flesh for stew, rumours of cannibalism

Allison Burris

Bibliophile

I could have fallen in love with books for the sound alone,
the crackle of a spine, the whisper of my thumb along the edge,
volumes could be written about the turning of a single page,
or that thrum, flapping paper wobbles when you shake
the binding. The flicker of flipping through pages, never
quite like a bird's wing. Then consider the smell: musty ink
spice. There's the heft. It would be enough to have pages
thick as cream, empty choirs to fill with humming hands.
It would be enough if they kept their stacking property,
and it was only as blocks that you could build worlds.

Ariana Yeatts-Lonske

Evening at the World Bird Sanctuary

The room is an egg.
We are inside the egg, and the barred owl
can hear our heartbeats.

The barred owl can hear the whisper
of mice feet under snow.

The barred owl is here
because the first face he saw
was beakless.

Irreversible illegal imprint—

He wants to mate with all of you, his trainer says.
He spends his days shrieking and searching
for a nest.

We laugh, but I feel myself become
the shreds of small mammal
in his talons.

The sunlight
through streaked feathers.

The tree
he wishes
had a hollow.

The wild
calling back in the night.

The egg, the egg, the egg.

too. The world's gone mad. They say the wolf is out and
about.

She doesn't recognize her face anymore in the cracked
glass. Long hair now alabaster. She braids and coils it
into her cap.

And waits.

For the daughter of the weaver and the wood carver.
Breath of fresh spring air. Red velvet cap and hood.
Grubby hands, dirty fingernails. How she loves them!
Dream of promised wine and cake. The child wears
grandmother's original face. When Little Red bends to
kiss grandmother's cheek, the faeries will sigh, the sun
will bless the stars.... But for now, grandmother listens
for footsteps. Is that a scratching at the latch? Smell of
roots and wild recklessness.

Who's there? Grandmother asks.

Susanna Lang

Prescribed Burn

A fire goes before us.
—Yves Bonnefoy

Workers in fluorescent suits, helmeted, faceless, carry
wands with fire at their tips. Flames run up the spiral
path to the summit, leaving a trail of ash.

Rivulets of smoke
twist over the dark river—
serpent mound burning

Two days later, the air is still acrid.

The grasses will grow more lush next summer. And when
I climb that path, the serpent's coils will hold residual
heat.

The epigraph is from "A Stone" (*Words in Stone*, poems
by Yves Bonnefoy, translated by Susanna Lang,
University of Massachusetts Press, 1976)

Mary Ellen Talley

Sunflowers

Dinnerplate discs
rise, bend,
and kiss driveway concrete.

I rescue a handful
while still-fresh yellow
petals spread.

Now faces bright as a birthday
emerge from a tall vase
in the room where you slept.

I discard withered faces
and dump tall stalks
in the yard waste bin,
tie the last tall blooms
to a fence post
as the seasons face change.

“We’d lug our prize back to the house, popping even more berries in our mouth while my mom and dad weren’t looking. My mom would make jams and pies with some of them, we’d eat a bunch more plain over the next couple days, and we’d freeze even more to make pies with or eat later. A fresh, wild blackberry is one of maybe my most vivid memories as a kid. One of my happiest, if we’re honest. You’ve heard how my parents were; there weren’t always good memories.

“I miss that kind of thing most, now that I’m living in the city. Just going out into the woods and coming back with something delicious and special. You felt connected to things in a way that’s hard to explain. I miss that feeling, you know?”

“Oh, really? It seems easier to just buy them, honestly.” And she walked away to the next aisle. I knew then this wouldn’t last.

Allison Burris

Egyptian Pet Cemetery

An excavation of pets preserved
in the desert. 536 cats, 32 dogs,
15 monkeys, a fox, and a falcon.
Not mummified, but precious loss
wrapped in blankets, palm leaves.
Some were toothless old seniors
wearing beaded collars, cared for
beyond the life of their teeth.
Somehow, it’s easier to imagine
the sun-warmed life of a happy
feline than the object of a scribe’s
longings through millennia of sand.
One cat was laid upon a bird’s wing,
a wish for an afterlife filled with feathers.

Aubade

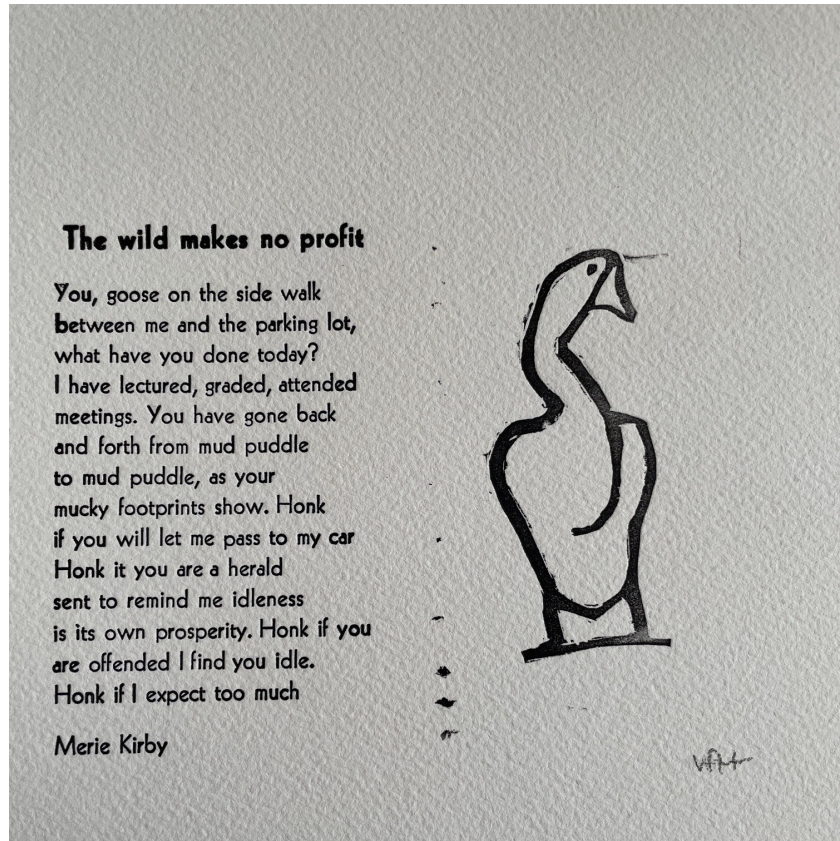
Walk up the worn stone steps
 between pecan and rebud.
 Among ferns, dance.
 Bend back, face to sky.
 Greet the new sun.
 In fog or cloudy aftermath of storm,
 on grass littered with leaves,
 give thanks for the new
 world of stone, rain,
 green
 light.

Blackberry Days

“These taste better wild,” I said.
 She looked up from the phone in her hand long enough to
 see the clamshell container of blackberries I held.
 “Oh, yeah? That’s great...” she trailed off.
 I kept on.
 “Where I grew up, you could go out into the woods and
 find blackberries growing wild all over. The bushes were
 everywhere, thick and heavy with fruit. Come June or
 July, we’d all go out there dressed in long sleeves and
 long pants so the thorns wouldn’t get us and harvest as
 many as we could. It was hotter than hell under those
 long sleeves, but that was better than getting pricked a
 bunch and being itchy all day.
 “There were so many blackberries. As kids, we’d eat so
 many that we’d nearly get sick, plus fill up all the grocery
 bags and five-gallon buckets we brought. And then
 there’d still be just as many or more left on the bushes.

Merie Kirby
design by Vitoria Faccin-Herman

The wild makes no profit



The wild makes no profit

You, goose on the side walk
between me and the parking lot,
what have you done today?
I have lectured, graded, attended
meetings. You have gone back
and forth from mud puddle
to mud puddle, as your
mucky footprints show. Honk
if you will let me pass to my car
Honk if you are a herald
sent to remind me idleness
is its own prosperity. Honk if you
are offended I find you idle.
Honk if I expect too much

Merie Kirby

Susan Vinson

Morning Glory

Two clocks on the wall, dripping faucets,
alternately fill in all the empty spaces;
pulsing hands push the slivered moon
through the crisping air
while pulling purple larkspur from the powdery earth
and weaving ribbons of birdsong into the warm
scent of the sun rising through
sips of steaming coffee.
Abby Lynne laughs in Abilene
while my thoughts can't hear themselves think
until the uneven ticking synchronizes into silent rests.
Chiholloli lies tucked in your pocket.
Raindrops fill our eyes with tears.
You're a daisy
while the scarlet poppies of summer dream of
dancing dragons
with iron feathers
as we soar past, clutching blue balloons.
Gramma blows adhesive kisses
that will track your flight
with a mirrorless kaleidoscope
while lacing notes of lullabies into a crocheted hat.

Meanwhile, the snapdragons chatter
and ladybug footprints glisten like stars
as seconds gather into drying bouquets.

Paul Hostovsky

Romantic

I'm thinking of moving to Keats Street in Winthrop
because I love the idea more than the thing.
I don't love Winthrop, which is too close to the airport,
and I don't love moving, which is stressful and derailling.
I love Keats, though, and I could take the train
to work from Revere. I love the idea of writing a poem on the train
about my derailling move to Keats Street in Winthrop near Revere,
the U-Haul with its mouth open and the long metal tongue
of the ramp sticking out in the driveway, a table and chairs
on the sidewalk, boxes and boxes of books, a reading lamp,
the low-flying planes arriving and departing with a few
books spilling thunderously onto the lawn.

Jenna Ziegler

The Ant Path

We'd watch the ant path,
my brother and I,
noses to the stone.
He liked to help them,
dropping offerings along their trail—
leaves, sap, crumbs from his own lunch.
He'd pluck aphids from the rosebushes
(our mother thanked him for caring for the flowers)
and place them before the ants—
watched the feast.
My brother smiled with dimples,
proud to help the garden thrive
and ants survive—
setting gifts along their path,
altering their direction and mealtime
as ardently as the current lapping a riverstone smooth.