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Susanna Lang  
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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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## contents

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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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**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](http://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

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.

## Bibliophile

Allison Burris

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.

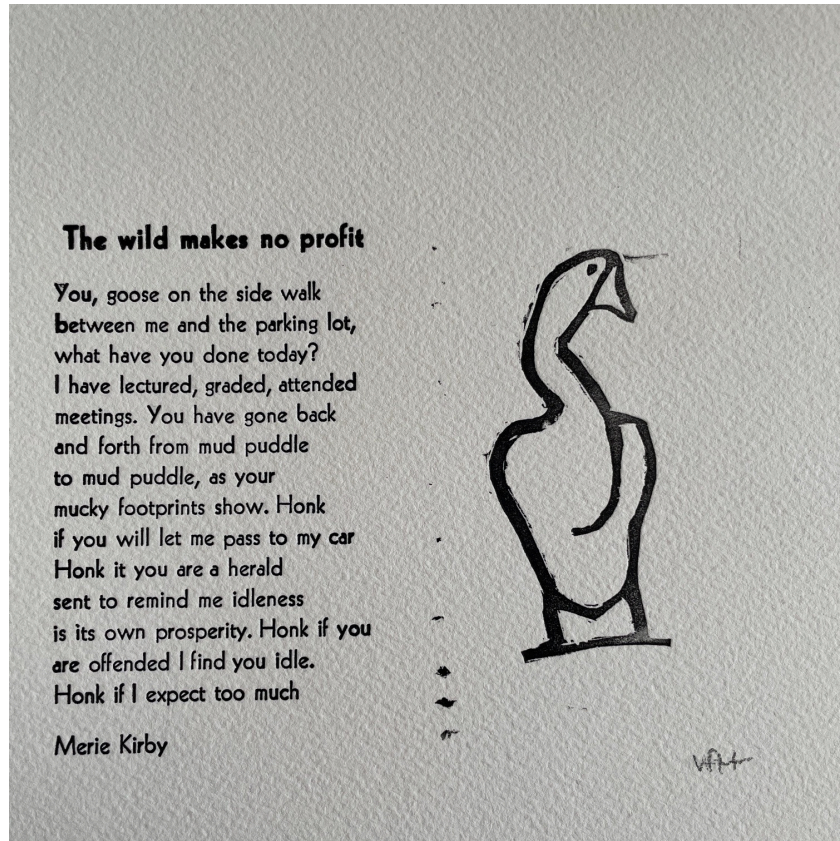
## Blackberry Days

“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



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.

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.

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.