

Art Tales

A Unique Contest
for Creative Writers

2014 Contest Winners



Katherine Chang Liu



Catherine Jessie Botke



Alberta Fins



Debra McKillop



Elisse Pogofsky Harris



Jane McKinney

CITY OF
VENTURA
PARKS, RECREATION &
COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS
www.cityofventura.net

Sixth Annual

Art Tales

A Unique Contest for
Creative Writers

The City of Ventura is pleased to sponsor, in partnership with E.P. Foster Library, a creative contest for local writers. The competition invites writers to submit an original short story or poem that was inspired by one of the Municipal Art Collection works of art currently on exhibit on the second floor of the E.P. Foster Library in downtown Ventura.

In an effort to make the City's art collection more accessible to the community, the City of Ventura joined with E.P. Foster Library to provide an exhibit space for a limited number of works, which are rotated annually. Each piece in this year's assortment of artwork challenges the viewer to puzzle over the work's meaning and provides an excellent opportunity for students and adults alike to exhibit their written skills while learning about viewing works of art. This contest is a call for imaginative and inventive people to examine a work of art and then write a short story or poem reflecting their unique interpretation.

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Alberta Fins

Grief

by Sihyun Na

My head exists
within a black storm.
Thunder wakes me.
Standing in oblivion,
my plans
are forgotten.
Everything
has clouded over.
Her face
draws itself
repeatedly
across the universe.

While I envision
hearing her laugh,
watching her talk,
feeling her hair,
the clock hurries forward.
Engulfed in nothingness,
I wish that
my tears would
gather,
form a bridge
for her to
walk back
to the world
I am living in.

Second Place: Youth Poetry

Moonlit Legend

by Nadia Connelly

The darkness of the night spilled over,
yet all was still.

The wolf stood and waited.
All animals of the forest stood and waited beside the wolf.

The wind whispered of the past.
The trees murmured their reply. All animals stood still.

Magic swirled, animals came, all waited.

Moonlight danced, and it happened.
A cape of moonlight and sun drifted down,
down
to
earth.

Silver deer galloped, white doves cooed.
It was the birthday of the world,
and all had come to see.

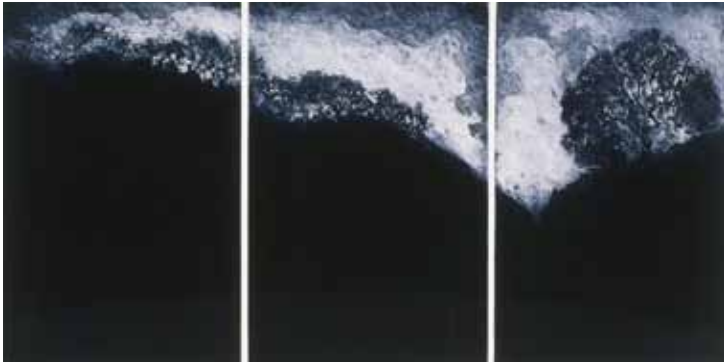
The sun began to rise.
The silver deer were gone. The majestic wolf too.

The wind and the trees nodded to the sun.

It was the birthday of the world.



Elisse Pogofsky Harris



Catherine Jessie Botke

A Shadow

by Anna Nelles

I sat in my bunk
in my RV
watching the waves
flowing so free—
a passer-by from Ireland
enjoying a California beach
drifting towards sleep.
But then a shadow
blocked my view.
I managed a photo
but then it flew
the mysterious shadow did.
Quiet as night itself
the thing blocked my view.
I woke the next morning
with my picture cut in three.
An escaped dog?
A beachcomber in the night?
Or worst of all
a sneaky thief?
What was the shadow that blocked my view?
The picture was the only clue.
Honestly
I never even knew.

Inspired by: Midnight Storm, 1997, aquatint, Catherine Jessie Botke



A Break in the Hedge

by Chloe Vaughan

The sun comes down after rising so high,
dusk slowly blotching out the bright blue sky.
I race towards freedom waiting on the other side,
reaching towards eternity, my heart filled with pride.

But darkness shields the glowing light,
Sad, lonely, desperate, I battle the night.

I collapse, I fall
I expire from the fight.



Elisse Pogofsky Harris

A Present

by Hana Vrablok

The gleaming coat of a wolf was engulfed in the dark air. The moon cut through the sky like a knife, and everything below it was washed in a pale, white glow. A breeze whispered through the black branches of the trees. And the wolf lay there expectantly, its dark eyes open, as if it was waiting for something. It seemed as though the whole world was waiting too, for the wind stopped blowing and the air became stiff. You could hear nothing except silence and you could see nothing except the darkness of the sky under the radiance of the white moon. And then there it came, a great present wrapped in the colors of the shaded sky, floating down to the ground and dithering in the contrast of colors. The gift landed on the ground, and the wolf, though interested, didn't stir. Everything was silent and still for a while again, but then the box shivered. It quaked and quivered until the cardboard burst open and colors danced out and into the world. Rich shades of reds and pinks blossomed onto every pale flower, and the soothing tone of mint green seeped into the grass. Baby blue painted itself across the sky, as oranges and violets settled into the lifeless corners of the world. The yellow sun finally came out, along with the flamboyant animals, celebrating the gift of color to the once dull and silent world.

Inspired by: Birthday of the World, 1991, oil on paper, Elisse Pogofsky Harris



Jane McKinney

The Picture

by Abigail Carroll

As I looked at the strange picture on the wall I thought to myself, “Who painted this picture and why is it in my room?”

Suddenly, I was transported into the picture. I was surrounded by blocky, grassy-looking things. I touched the ground and it crumbled in my hand. It felt like pastels or oil paint. I could see a maze in front of me. Shivering, and making a “br-r-r” sound, the maze became a pathway. I followed it.

As I walked on, I put a smile on my face because I knew it could come in handy, since I might never find my way out! I glared ahead of me and saw my own room and realized that I had entered a portal. There was my real room, in front of my eyes, and to make it even weirder, I was in it!

I stepped out of the painting. My mom came upstairs and into my room. “Mom, what is this picture?” I said very quickly.

“It’s called A Break in the Hedge,” she replied, “it is by Jane McKinney.” She seemed very happy as she looked at it.

I returned to the painting many times. Once, I met a girl and we went walking down by a stream. The girl told me that she had left her castle because she wasn’t able to live her own way when she lived in it. Lots of people lived there.

I never wanted to leave the picture but I had no choice. A week after the painting first appeared in my room it was removed from my house. No one was allowed to go in that house anymore. We found another home in an odd place. When I went down into the basement, I found the picture and hopped into it. For many days I found hope from the picture, and I still do. If I lose hope, I enter the painting and I always find it again.



Katherine Chang Liu

Field Notes #24

by Bailey Welch

When I look into this painting I see a nice pier. I see a couple of boats that are docked there. I also feel wet and cold but I sort of have a warm feeling. I smell the ocean with its amazing waves crashing against the rocks all lined up against the edge of the long and graceful beach. I hear the waves and the boats talking to each other. They seem happy to have each other, but I can tell they are scared also. I think they might be scared of the darkness there or the cold dark clouds that sleep endlessly there or they might be scared of the sun never appearing in the sky again, always having to live in the dark. I bet they wonder all the time now of where the sun might have gone and when the sun might come back. Then when the sun does come out they probably wonder where the darkness has gone or if it is hiding behind the sun. They probably feel happier when the sun comes out because the clouds awake and want to play and jump around with the boats and the waves. But when you look at the dock you can still feel the darkness there, that you can't see with your eyes. It makes me feel cold when I look there. I feel lonely even though I am not. I know that the sun is there looking over the clouds and the clouds are there playing with the boats and the waves. I also know that they are talking to each other. That is what I see, hear, and feel in the picture Field Notes.

Inspired by: Field Notes #24, 2001, monotype, Katherine Chang Liu



Debra McKillop

The Canned Shaped Diamond

by Niklas Shore

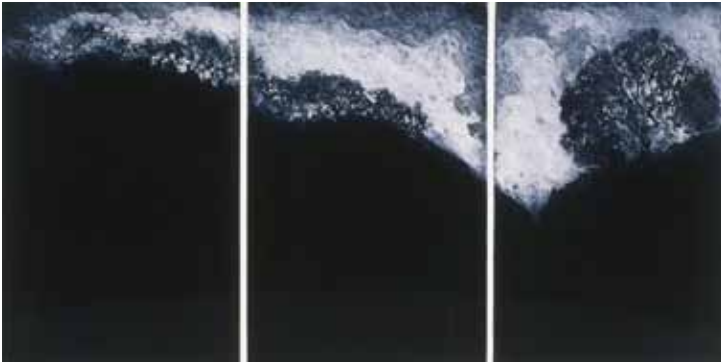
One day there was a boy named Ben. Ben was at a book store and a book caught his eye. The book was named The Canned Shaped Diamond. Ben always wanted to be rich, so this was his chance. Ben bought the book and looked for information. Ben found out that there were rumors about it being in a cave called Cross Cave in Florida.

A few years later Ben had enough money to fly from California to Florida. Ben was now 16 and was allowed to fly alone. Ben flew down and found Cross Cave. Then he remembered that he forgot a shovel, so Ben looked around and found a 13 inch long and 2 inch wide stick.

The next day Ben started digging. After a week, all he found was a geode rock worth only 2 dollars. Ben kept on searching and after a month he found a small diamond about 2 inches big. This was worth about 5,000 dollars.

After a year, Ben had 7 small diamonds, but that wasn't enough. Ben wanted to find "The Can Shaped Diamond" and strike it rich. Five years, 2 months and 16 days later Ben found the 10 inch Can Shaped Diamond worth 50,000 dollars. Ben used the 1 small diamond to buy a plane ticket back home. Of course, Ben still had 6 other diamonds and used one of them to buy a safe.

The next year word had gotten out that 21 year old Ben in Ventura, California at 672 Elm Street had found the Can Shaped Diamond. Ben came home on March 22, 2001 at 2:14 to find somebody had stolen the Can Shaped Diamond. It's still a mystery to this day who has it. That is the only picture of the stick and the diamond left. Hopefully the police can track down the man and the Can Shaped Diamond to give it back to Ben.



Catherine Jessie Botke

Storm of Thought

by Cianna Calia

The only nightmares I have to fear
Are waking hours, so dull and drear.
By day my life is run by the clock,
So much work to do, tick-tock, tick-tock.
As the hours pass, tick-tock, it seems
I've no time for thinking, nor for dreams.
My bills to pay and my home to keep,
But everything changes when I sleep.
Everything changes when I sleep.

When I lie down in my bed at night,
There's no more work and there's no more light.
Then from the hours without number
Of horrid, thoughtless, wakeful slumber
That midnight storm of thought awakes me
And my imagination takes me
Around the world or across the sea,
To the lands of shadowed reverie.

Now from the light I am free at last
And the daily drudgery has passed.
I see lightning flash, hear thunder roll
Across my mind and within my soul.
But in this dream I have naught to fear;
I know that nothing can harm me here.
I close my eyes and open my mind,
Within the darkness a world I find.

And though I know it cannot be real,
More real sensations I ne'er did feel.
I swim through the air, fly through the sea
For adventure lies ahead of me.
I'm lost in light, but in dark I'm found
And the possibilities abound.
My fate to seek and my soul to take
To Heaven and back before I wake.

When I awake, my mind falls asleep,
My work to do and my home to keep.
I know that my life seems sad; indeed
To whim and to wish I take no heed.
But still for nothing would I e'er trade
That midnight storm, O that grand parade
Of my thoughts and dreams and fantasy
That wakes me from all my misery.

When at last I close my eyes again,
I'll not ask where and I'll not ask when,
I'll not ask why and I'll not ask how,
I'll leave my worries behind for now.
Of Providence I shall ne'er beg more
Than a dream each night, of this I'm sure.
My fate to seek, in darkness to find
A world of wonders within my mind.
World of wonders within my mind.

Inspired by: Midnight Storm, 1997, aquatint, Catherine Jessie Botke

Wings

by Dahyun Na

Standing at the edge of the ocean,
dim horizon stretches beyond.

Eerie, undisturbed tranquility
with rhythmic murmurs of waves—
silence before storm.

Flutter of wings fills sky,
as if chasing after light
at the end of a tunnel.

Vision eclipsed,
warmth taken away.

Waves rise
to chip away at large boulders.

Wind grows
from whispers to a wail.

Thin line of tension fills the air,
fragile and in peril of losing light.
An eternity passes.

Where the last bird flew
the moon now stands.

Nothing traps the light.
Faint silver glow reaches
ocean and whatever lies under.



Debra McKillop

Inspired by: Migration #8, mixed media on paper, Debra McKillop



Alberta Fins

Tie: Third Place: High School Poetry

Who are you?

by Sarah Yenney

Who are you?

I am the star that illuminates the screen in your living room wall,

I am the face you watch from your couch,

Sometimes sad,

Or utterly upset,

Or absolutely angry,

Or a reckless wreck,

But other times I'm harmoniously happy,

Or completely content,

Or extremely exhilarated,

Or loving life,

There's nothing more than a mask on my face,

Though you cheer on my triumph and follow me on the race,

But when the lights flash on,

And I leave my costume behind,

I am ordinary, yet one of a kind,

Yet, you continue to linger with me wherever I go,

You attempt to evaluate whatever I do,

You ask why I say "No! No! No!"

Now I am simply your drawing scribbled on the page that lies open on your shelf,

I am the false forgeries in a libertine's list,

Trapped and tangled in the terrible text,

Can you hear me crying for help?

If only you could see me not on the page,

And not how I act when I'm on stage,

If only you knew what goes on in my head,

Maybe you would spare me what you have said,

If only you understood that you don't understand,

Maybe you wouldn't sift through my secrets like sand.

continued —

Please stop and look at my hand,
What you see is the work I've done on my rough skin,
But can you see the places that I have been?
What you see is my age on the wrinkles on my palm,
But can you see all I have learned?
Can you hear my song?
What you see is a bad habit on my fingernails gnawed raw,
But can you see what I saw?

The sights that made me so nervous and gave me a phobia,
The sunrise that woke me up today,
The past that seems to always stay present,
The mistakes that I resent,
The ideas that knock on my front door,
The purpose that I live my life for,
My first word,
The summer haze in my family's backyard that I explored,
My history,
My home,
My family,
My friends,
My teachers,
People who shaped who I've become,
Good times and bad times.

What you read is only a show though you don't know,
What you hear is unclear,
I am the star that illuminates the screen on your living room wall,
I am the face you watch from your couch,
I am simply your drawing scribbled on the page that lies open on your shelf,
I am the false forgeries in a libertine's list,
I am your whispers where rumors brew,
Remember this,
If I meet you I might ask,
Who are you?



Debra McKillop

The Eye of the Storm

by Olivia Loorz

The stinging salt water
pounds against the wooden hull
with each rapid heartbeat
of the dizzy sailors

Onward the bow
bends into the waves
surging, still searching
for relief

The luffing sails shout
"stop"
"turn around"
"The wind is not coming one way"

The captain
buried in his own
drunken calm

A sailor
pleads with a gesture
sees
in the captain's eye
his goal

The bright, beautiful eye of the storm
the eye of
light
and peace
and calm

The sailors see this goal too
as they urge the ship
to turn around
to real safety

The captain
holds out his hand
"real safety"
he scoffs
"will come"

Behind his eyes
he dreams
of the light
the calm
of the eye of the storm

As a looming god
of a wave
comes to pound on the hull
himself

The sail
gives
the keel
turns
belly up
like fish
overfed

And the captain
in his drunken calm
smiles
as he reaches
the light
the calm
of the storm's eye

Three Years

by Erin Stoodley



Jane McKinney

"Two years," I say.

We stand at the edge of the back porch, looking over our grandfather's field. In daylight, it's a map of disjointed paths and hedges. Every evening, Grandpa would weave rusted shears in and around, separating the sloping golden masses. And now, as the subdued mauve of dusk passes, the field becomes an abyss. Since my last visit, the hedges have outstretched their limbs. Their roots curl deeper into the December frost, and their crowns reach higher than the apricot trees.

"Three years," Avery replies in a soft voice. "This January." She tucks the metal shears beneath her arm.

We step from under the veranda and into the gentle rain. I stop, but Avery continues through the mud. As she slishes farther into the field, her body converges with the darkness. The moon reflects off her coat, shifting with the movements of her arms. Avery's wrists glide the shears as she breaks the winding spurs.

"Do you need help?" I call through the sudden thrash of downpour.

She snaps a branch. Crrrrrk. "I'm fine." Crr. Crrrr. Crrrrrk.

"I'm sorry I didn't get out here sooner," I say.

"It's fine." Crrrrrrrrrrrk. "You don't like it here. You've never liked it."

I walk past the porch and into the backyard. A cloud obstructs the moon's glow, and I strain my eyes to find Avery.

"No, I like it here, but I just ca—"

"You hate it here!" Avery shouts. "You hate it! You grew up here, but you hate Grandpa's house, the hedges! You hate how I stayed and took care of him when you—you! You left!"

Crrrk. Crrrrrrrk. Crrk. Crrrk. Crrrrrrrk.

"You left me," she breathes.

Avery drops the shears into the mud and pulls her coat tighter.

"We could do this tomorrow." I touch the hedge she had been cutting. It's uneven and tangled. My palm sears from the splintered branches.

The torrent halts. "He didn't remember me," I whisper.

Avery cries, "That was three years ago!"

"I couldn't stay!" I yell. "This was my home! I wasn't a stranger."

"You are a stranger!" Avery turns to the porch and starts drudging back.

I run to my sister. "Avery, wait!"

"He didn't remember me either." Avery pauses as she opens the screen door. "He was ill, Kitty."

I return to the field and pick up the shears. The rain lessens, and pools of mud mirror the vacant sky. I even the hedge Avery left. My arms are sore, but I begin shaping the next hedge, a wall of boughs that rises to my shoulders. The branches fall stiffly around me and into the streams of rainwater. From behind a blurred grey cloud, the moon appears, and I use its light to continue cutting.



Debra McKillop

Crossing Casimir

by Gabrielle Genhart

My lungs ache as the smoky air embraces me, and I can feel his eyes on me. The clock reads one, but I don't know if it's morning or night. Shattered glass glitters in the moonlight, silver in its persistence. The curtains blow in the breeze that captures the drifting smoke, dancing as it suffocates me. I look down at my arms and legs, only to see they're cracking like porcelain.

I close my eyes and remember his words, the memory of a whisper brushing my mind like a feather, "We'll run forever, because we have nowhere to go."

My chest burns as if I'm breathing fire, and I open my eyes to see the world drowned by black and white. The absence and presence create outlines of gray that slowly gives way to icy blue. I look back at him, my eyes unable to see, though my heart strains to think he's there. I take a deep breath of the poisoned air, choking on it. As much as I'd like to believe, I know he won't stay. The forgotten metallic of his tongue stings me as I walk toward the frosty light, the mark of a nonexistent winter.

It shimmers, only illumination, but I reach for it anyway. I jerk back as my fingers meet resistance. Before me, three doors coalesce out of the blue that whispers to me of hypothermia, idealized beauty stolen by the kiss of an ever-persistent death. My fingers hesitantly clutch one of the intricate doorknobs, with designs of the nature it seems to have defied, but it resists me with the stiffness of a lock.

Three doors and no keys.

I gasp and my lungs fill with smoke, disease awaiting. My fingers still grasping the doorknob, a surge of energy flashes through my mind, alighting it with a vision that's not mine. I see a man with his face to the concrete, dying of deprivation, a mirror of everyone. Through him flares the lives of millions, starving, diseased, addicted, broken. He cries out, a sound that resonates through my body until it's on my own lips. I flinch away from the door and try the next. Again, it's locked, but the vision comes faster this time.

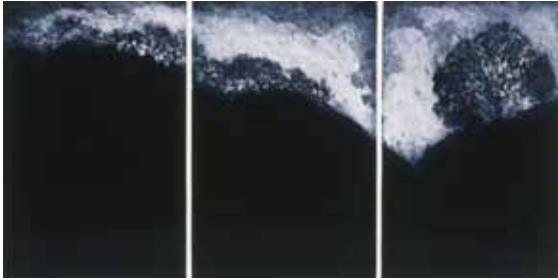
A woman lays with her back to the concrete, covered in sunlight, a mirror of everyone. Through her flares the lives of millions, smiling, laughing, dancing, imagining. She laughs along, a sound that resonates through my body until it's on my own lips.

My fingers slip off the doorknob, and I reach for the last one. The blue light blazes up around me, smothering me until my lungs stop working all together and I can see billions of stars, winking at me. I wonder if any of them will fall, streaking the sky in silent agony, as the flame that sustains me flickers away.

With stars in the sky, breathing in my eyes, I gasp for the final time.

Oh, you know I always wanted to die.

Inspired by: Migration #8, mixed media on paper, Debra McKillop



Catherine Jessie Botke

Tie: Third Place: High School Fiction

Midnight Storm

by Brodie Shore

The wind howled through the brush and into the trees, blowing the pouring rain at an inescapable angle, effectively drenching the prone bodies of the recon marines. The wind bit through their soaked digital camouflage fatigues, chilling each marine to the bone. The occasional lightning strike illuminated the area, silhouetting any operator in a bad position, adding even more danger in the landmine infested hillside.

The rain quickly smeared the carefully applied face paint, supposedly water resistant, but the angle and velocity of the showers eroded the detailed artwork. The marines silently produced their waterlogged balaclavas and tried unsuccessfully to wring out the water. They were better than nothing, and the men pulled them on over their heads, leaving only their eyes exposed to the unrelenting wind and rain. They pulled their drooping boonie hats over the balaclavas as a petty attempt to prevent rain from getting in their eyes. Their exposed eyes watered from biting wind, and the rain and lightning made night vision goggles ineffective, and made natural night vision impossible. The platoon navigated by feel, and by the flashes of illumination from the lightning.

They were crawling uphill towards a tree-topped hillside, increasing the danger of the ever present lightning strikes. Thunder echoed through the hills as the marines inched their way up the hill, slowly low crawling through the tall, wavy grass. The trees shook violently, and it sounded like the trees could uproot and fly away any second.

A dim glow was coming from the other side of the hill, rays of halogen produced light piercing through the pouring rain. The marines slowed down, if at all possible, and carefully crept closer to the top of the hill. They reached the edge of the hill ten minutes later, effectively hidden, even though the compound was miles away. Patrols in this weather and time were unlikely, but a dedicated guard force might take the time. The sniper element, draped in camouflage netting, with pieces of the local brush and leaves carefully weaved through it, known as a ghillie suit, moved into position. The tall grass on the ghillie was soaked, and drooped, making it even more cumbersome to move with the high powered rifle he used. The sniper and his spotter picked out a good spot on the hilltop, in a small ditch, blocking the bitter wind.

The sniper removed the cover off his night scope, and focused it on the floodlit compound of the military prison. His knuckles were white under the gloves, and the rain somehow got in between the glove and finger where he had cut the glove so his index finger was exposed. It was heavily guarded, and there were no shadows, every corner illuminated by the halogen lights. With the wind, combined with the distance, the rifle would be useless, but at this point, shooting wasn't their job. They were just there to watch, and they did, motionless in the never ending downpour and fierce, bitter wind of Eastern Russia.

Inspired by: Midnight Storm, 1997, aquatint, Catherine Jessie Botke

Dallas's Palace

by Monica Boedigheimer

Dallas was an invisible boy. He was invisible for his overalls, his gangly frame, his flaming hair and fiery freckles.

Maybe, one would argue, the best qualities about us can't be seen, anyways. No one saw what went on behind Dallas's eager eyes and wide grin, spread over perfectly crooked teeth.

Hidden was Dallas's palace.

Being invisible, he had lived in it most of his life. The impenetrable stone walls were his protection, from dragons and bullies alike. If he wasn't picked for a recess baseball team, he would retreat behind closed portcullises and battle invading armies.

There was a flaw in Dallas's sanctuary. His walls were as much a haven as quarantine. He often wondered why the boys with scowling faces and beady eyes, visible boys, found friendship where he lacked it.

"Birds of a feather flock together," Dallas's mom explained.

So, Dallas decided, he would have to flock.

The next day, Dallas sat in his reading group. He was not the only invisible child there, a girl named Minnie sat across from him. Minnie suffered from an incurable case of Extremely Large Ears. Combined with her unfortunate name, she fell regular victim to cruel jokes. Often, Dallas would ignore her as he was ignored. But today, glancing between visible faces, he resolved to speak.

"Minnie and Mickey, sitting in a tree..." Dallas began chanting quietly. His group stared, awed, and burst into silent laughter.

All except Minnie. She reddened to the tips

of her offending ears, and her eyes glinted with shocked betrayal. Dallas's heart sunk at this piercing glare, but it was re-mediated by the soft chuckles still echoing among his peers.

That recess, Dallas was chosen first for the baseball team. His happiness at the end of his isolation more than countered his guilty conscience at its price. He barely remembered to swing at bat—and he missed. Twice more and he struck out. Boos rang from the bench. Dallas returned to the status: invisible.

Unnoticed, he retreated to his fortress. Today, he needed a good dragon fight. He scanned the sky—hand shading his eyes, but there was merely the intense whiteness of the sun, illuminating the grey walls of his castle in an unforgiving, unrelenting brightness. No—none were coming.

Feeling more alone than ever, Dallas went searching for a new sword. Obviously he would need one. The dragons probably knew this, and that was why they weren't coming. Dallas found one among the leaves fallen from an old oak tree, a solid weapon, only slightly crooked, and comfortable to hold, with only a few knobby bits. Definitely worthy for dragon slaying.

So Dallas returned to waiting, practicing swordplay, trying to force the beasts to show themselves—none did. His palace had crumbled. He collapsed on the grass, eyes tearing.

Suddenly, a soft voice spoke from behind him. He didn't recognize it, but knew who it was before looking.

"That is a huge dragon," Minnie remarked. When Dallas turned back around, there it was.



Debra McKillop

Shadow Play

by T. G. Lynch

In fields of gray, two shadows lay,
Till Dawn announced the coming Day,
And brought one shade to sermonize his own
philosophy:
"I fear," said he, "we must atone,
Now, before the light has grown,
The Sun demands our rev'rence to avert
catastrophe!"

"Nonsense!" cried the other shade,
"We have no cause to be afraid,
The light is neither merciful nor vengeful deity.
The sun shall merely rise and set,
And we will be its silhouette,
All without resorting to some crass absurdity."

"Blasphemy!" the first replied,
And looked about him horrified,
"The Sun shall not be pleased with your
presumptuous insolence!
"Where," asked he, "do you suppose
A disbelieving shadow goes?
Oh! What hellish fate awaits your flagrant
arrogance!"

"Albuquerque," said the other,
"Just a trip to visit Mother,
Maybe, if there's time enough, we'll have a bite
to eat.
Fairly dull, I must confess,
But 'hellish?' No. That is, unless...
One perhaps refers to that infernal desert heat?"

Stymied by such apathy
But firm in his own certainty,
The zealot soon continued with apocalyptic zeal:
"Repent!" he shrieked, "The light, it burns!
Repent before the Sun returns;
Our only hope for mercy lies in genuine appeal!"

The shade now set himself to pray,
Prostrate upon the fields of gray,
And groveled there in terror whilst the other shade
observes:
"Sir," he said, "if so inclined,
I think you may have lost your mind;
I leave you to whatever fate such foolishness
deserves."

And when the sun, indeed, did rise,
And fixed itself above the skies,
The fields of gray lay empty save one static
silhouette:
A shadow shackled by his creed,
Alone, afraid, he atrophied,
And reaped within that single day a lifetime of
regret.

The Secret

by Donna Prather

He stood in the cleft between the trees
remembering how it felt when skin brushed fur
though it had been many years before his time
when Man had come to them
his hand tucked in his pocket
a blade tucked in his hand
that spectral figure
haunting the land
wanting to be safe
spending his days
setting traps that
caught only him
his concrete homes
his iron-clad fences
his steel machines
his tin-plated guns
his golden coins
his silver words
his brassy noise
always his noise
filling the void of
those silent spaces
frightening him
their shadows
cast from
within
his fears
gaining strength
weakening him in the end
if only he had known the secret

He gazed up at the moon
watching it slide
across the sky
his muzzle raised
catching its glow
frost crackled and fell
from his whiskers
his breath rising
in the frigid air
he turned
the others
waited
his shadow
led the way
merging with theirs

Second Place: Adult Poetry



Elisse Pogofsky Harris

*Inspired by: Birthday of the World, 1991,
oil on paper, Elisse Pogofsky Harris*



Debra McKillop

Migration

by Mary Kaye Rummel

Free from the call of the sea
a Luna moth sputters
into light through an open window.
Body too heavy for wings,
she stutters against my arm,
flickering like a loose bulb
in the anemone dark. Tonight
black inverts like a mother
playing *here and gone*, drawing
a tight shirt over her child's eyes.
Tonight beneath the moth moon
we will sleep back to back.

Inspired by: Migration #8, mixed media on paper, Debra McKillop

Fencepost Song

by Joe Amaral

Storm-bristled wind
rustles
my unkempt hair

Sprays
mop-water clouds
across
ancestral skies
backlit
by a crystal ball moon

It has been foretold

Stars scatter
like pale leaves
frozen
jaggedly midair

Tossed
by a cowled child
off an autumnal pile
casting firewheels

of mystic color
that transforms
my midnight demeanor
into a ferocious howl

of restless angst

I run wild
in this dark grace



Elisse Pogofsky Harris

Inspired by: Birthday of the World, 1991, oil on paper, Elisse Pogofsky Harris

A Break in the Hedge

by Toni Guy

The hedge held a world inside; corridors carpeted with crunchy needles, walls of pointy elbow branches. The twig ceiling let through blue slices of sky. Daddy said my hedge was only waist high when he was seven. It was hard to imagine the hedge and my Daddy being small.

I watched the bent lady pinning wet sheets on the line. It was hard to imagine Gran young, like Mummy. Mummy was in Christchurch, a plane ride away from Gran's house and from Christmas morning without us. She would wake up to empty beds. I would wake up without her.

Through the peeky holes in the hedge I could see the front porch, the clothesline, the driveway, the daily activity at Gran's. I was a tiny hedgehog tucked silently into the bush. I wasn't coming out, not even for a cup of tea with sugar.

Gran called for me. Shuffling in her velvet slippers to the front garden, she scanned the plum tree, searching for my dangling feet. Then on the porch, she'd squinted directly at my hiding spot. I swallowed my breath. Her eyes darted away.

She went back to the wet sheets. Bend, peg, clip, pull, peg, clip, bend. She turned the line like a heavy wheel. Didn't she see the rain cloud building over the mountain, darkening like a bruise? She kept pegging and spinning until the plastic tub was empty. Without raising her eyes to the sky, she went back inside.

The cicadas' creaking grew. Their call, thousands of tiny engines revving, like Mummy's car when we drove up the hill to our old house with the walnut tree. The one we had all lived in.

The first drop came after the front door slammed. The second waited until the Tui tucked its dark head between the branches, fluttering to my floor. The third and fourth drops came fast. One splashed in my palm. I lost count after 15. The tap tapping sounds overlapped. The loud emptiness of the world outside was muted. The warm air thick with sulfur, smelled of Gran's kitchen with the toasty, buckled floors. The Tui hopped to the gap and fluttered out. The rain called him.

The front door opened. Gran's shuffle was rushed. Pegs popped off two at a time as she yanked off the sheets.

I tucked my head and slipped sideways through the break in the hedge. I crossed the wet lawn and stood beside Gran. She patted my head and handed me the pegs. We finished the job quickly. She pulled, I plopped the pegs into their yellow container. The warm rain felt good soaking into my clothes. Gran picked up the full tub and headed inside.

In the sky a sliver of blue shone through. The rain lightened then stopped. I closed my eyes, the sun on my face. When I opened them, Gran was walking towards me with her tub. I smiled and handed her a peg.

Second Place: Adult Fiction

Field Notes #24

by Annabelle Warren



Katherine Chang Liu

Try and imagine the mind of a child—now, subtract the creativity, innocence, wonderment, and potential. Whatever remains is my life. I am utterly incapable of responsibility, entirely self-interested, and my existence is dependent on whoever's around to make sure I don't accidentally kill myself. I sleep a lot and I cry a lot. I am a child, without any of the childhood; this is my life on drugs. I used to look forward to growing up and living on my own; now I look back and realize that I lived my entire life in a span of 19 years—everything after that is blackness. I only have shady fragments of memory from the last 6 years of my life: the arrests, the girlfriends, the mornings I woke up in a parking garage...it's like trying to watch a fuzzy old TV. I don't even remember how I ended up in this junky apartment with masking tape over the cracks in the window and the yellow wallpaper that used to be white. I don't care to try and remember; all I can think is, How am I gonna pay for what I need to get me through the day?

I start frantically digging through the pockets of old jeans caked with mud. I check the bottoms of a pair of boots worn through the toe. The aching feeling of addiction is radiating through my arms and into my chest. I shake out an old green trench

coat that someone gave me a few years back while I was panhandling, and a folded piece of paper falls out. I jump on it, thinking it's a dollar bill—only to ashamedly feel disappointed that it is a drawing my niece had given me. She was 4 at the time, I couldn't say how old she is now. My sister stopped talking to me long ago. In fact, the last time I had seen either of them was when my niece gave me this picture. It's just a series of black dots, presumably inky fingerprints. She appears to have experimented with mediums, because pencil and crayon collide on the same page. I can see that she used her fingernails to scratch at the waxy crayon portion of the drawing, and realize with horror that it looks very similar to my fingernail marks in the yellow wallpaper. I can't remember what happened, but I can only assume that in some faded stupor I panicked and tried to escape my own room through the walls. I look at this drawing and I suddenly feel ferociously jealous. Not the kind of jealous I feel when I see someone with nice clothes and a haircut and deodorant streaks in their armpits—but a kind of jealousy for something non-physical. Something I can only reflect on, but never hope for: my youth. I wish for 4 years old, to be satisfied with a piece of paper and a crayon.

Inspired by: Field Notes #24, 2001, monotype, Katherine Chang Liu



Debra McKillop

The Last Minute Box

by Lynne Vrablik

Hitori pushed the final box into the front entranceway with the toe of her right sneaker. She labeled it "Last Minute" with her purple Sharpie. The box contained last minute grabs, like the paper towels from the kitchen, the trash can from the bathroom, the almost-forgotten bulletin board from the downstairs hall. She spotted a Kleenex box on the entranceway shelf, and tossed that into the box as well. The Last Minute Box: everything that hadn't already been loaded into the moving van or sold at the garage sale. The final moments of her life in this house.

A warm orange glow washed over the house like a shadow as the late afternoon sun moved toward twilight. Looking across the empty living room, Hitori recalled the day they first moved in as newlyweds thirty years ago, just the two of them, sitting in the middle of the vast room eating pizza out of the box.

Hitori glanced at the doorjamb to the kitchen. Most of the ink had rubbed off, but she could just make out the marks recording the girls' heights every year. She stood closer to get a better look. She could still see the marks made when first Maddie, then Olivia, surpassed her own height. When she closed her eyes, she could almost see Maddie smiling up at her with her bright, curious eyes, proudly waving her latest drawing. She could feel the warmth of Olivia's toddler embrace around her belly.

Hitori noticed the blank wall where the bulletin board had hung. Faded, but still distinct, was the sailboat Maddie had drawn on the freshly painted wall with her new violet-red crayon. There were the smudges when Charlie, as a puppy, had run through the wet garden and then all through the house. There, Olivia practiced writing her O's, and here someone, she'd forgotten who, had scotch-taped some treasure to the wall.

How do you pack up an entire life? Sure, you can pack the wall hangings and paper goods, but wasn't she somehow leaving the memories behind? How do you pack the growth chart on the door jamb or the Crayola sailboat? How do you pack the O's?

Hitori picked up the Last Minute Box and carried it out to the car to join the others. She turned around and gave the house a long, last look. She hoped that the young couple moving in would at least smile at the violet-red sailboat before painting over it. She trusted that the memories they built there would be just as treasured as the ones she was leaving behind.

*Inspired by: Migration #8,
mixed media on paper, Debra McKillop*



Alberta Fins

Tie: Third Place: Adult Fiction

Venn Diagrams

by Gerald Zwiers

Her hair was blowing wildly to the left as she walked smoothly and gracefully away from the man who stood still as a marble statue. It had been an unpleasantly warm and windy day, and in that awkward unnamed gap of time when the afternoon slowly melts into twilight, he stood and watched her. She knew he watched her, but fiercely determined, she moved forward with all her might and did not turn around even once. As she walked into the dry hot direction of brightness he noticed how everything about her blended into a soft silhouette of darkness. All differences between the qualities of skin and hair, between the textures and intense colors of fabrics, as well as any detail of what was ahead, were lost, overwhelmed by the blinding light she was heading into.

Even her very movements were blurred in the brightness so that the direction of the swing of her arms or which leg was in front or behind was completely indistinguishable, and for a brief moment the man who stood still as a statue wasn't even sure if she was moving toward him or away. But it was only a brief moment of uncertainty because of course he knew she was moving away. She was getting almost imperceptibly smaller every second, and in a few brief moments her shadow form moved between the other shadow forms and she was gently swallowed by the pure light.

This day already seemed so much longer than just one single day usually did, and yet he was keenly aware that there were still many more hours left. Many more hours to spend wondering and analyzing the scattered debris left behind, the remnants of words and ideas, hopes and conversations, looks filled with tenderness or question or doubt, things said or not said, revisiting and testing the validity of an assortment of memories. Many more hours were ahead of him and he thought of the lines of the Robert Frost poem, "...The woods are lovely, dark, and deep, But I have promises to keep, And miles to go before I sleep, And miles to go before I sleep."

He closed his eyes, stretched out his arms, and took a long deep breath. Turning slowly without opening his eyes he could feel the farthest points that his outstretched hands could reach. Turning they made an almost perfect circle. This he thought, was his whole life, contained within this circle, a mixture of the person he was now and who he was destined to become, the entire range of the experiences and lessons he would one day have. And somewhere, on the other side of the bright light was her circle. For a while their two circles overlapped and there was a part in the middle that was shared. Not a complete overlap, one circle never devoured or fully enclosed the other. But for a while there had been a precious overlap. And he was tremendously grateful for it.

Inspired by all six featured works

The following six artists' work were the inspiration for this year's Art Tales. They are part of the City of Ventura's Municipal Art Collection on display at Ventura City Hall.

Catherine Jessie Botke (b. 1951)

Midnight Storm, 1997, *aquatint*.

For this innovative and eclectic artist, atmosphere is more significant than realistic detail. Although Catherine Jessie Botke belongs to a remarkable, and famous family of artists from whom to draw her inspiration, she has developed her own inimitable style and technique. (This artist is the granddaughter of Jessie Arms Botke and Cornelis Botke, and sister-in-law of Frances Botke.) "In the morning I look south to that same hill and there is usually a long horned cow or two making distinct outlines waiting for the sun to come up. I tend to texture and detail my drawings, but as I finish them in a print they always make me happier when they are stripped to a more bold and simplified illusion."

Catherine Jessie Botke is a graphic artist working in printmaking and drawing, drypoint, intaglio, mono-prints, and some watercolor and oil. She was born in Ventura County and attained a BA in printmaking from the UC Santa Barbara. She has shown her work at significant local venues such as the John Nichols Gallery, Buenaventura Art Association Gallery, Carnegie Art Museum and the Museum of Ventura County. Winning first place in the Santa Paula Art & Photography Exhibit in 2000, is among her many artistic achievements.

Alberta Fins (1931-2009)

Filtered Vision, 1999, *print on paper*.

Multi-media assemblages, prints, and acrylic painting are the materials and techniques of choice for this highly prolific and provocative artist. Alberta Fin's innovative work uses re-designated partial images and deliberate brush-strokes, to comment on the human condition. She believes that art is about being inventive, searching and daring. It should disturb, upset and also enlighten. She explains, "When I work, I think of what I feel inside, of what I have to say. These feelings start welling up, and there comes a time when it all comes out....Art is about integrity and being honest."

Alberta Fins was born in Newark, New Jersey, and after moving to Los Angeles County in 1965, she studied art at UCLA. She has lived and worked in Ventura County since 1985 and is an active member of the Los Angeles Printmaking Society and the Ojai Studio Artists. She has participated in dozens of national and international exhibitions, including the Taipei Museum in China, and received numerous awards for artistic achievement.

Katherine Chang Liu

Field Notes #24, 2001, *monotype*.

Katherine Chang Liu, who is widely regarded as one of the West Coast's leading artists, draws inspiration from both the Modernist aesthetic and ethos and her Chinese heritage. Through her use of Chinese brushstrokes, subtle collage, and realistic imagery as well as through her inherent sense of line, rhythm and composition, the artist's delicate abstractions produce rich surfaces that reveal a distinctive self-portrait. She says, "I believe that we pick up peripheral information from all our incidental exposure, and these small pieces of information, whether visual, verbal, literary, or even musical, continuously reshape our perceptual mind. My imagination, as a result, is constantly stimulated and enriched by this compounded experience."

Katherine Chang Liu, born in China and educated in Taiwan and the US, received her Master of Science degree in biochemistry from the UC Berkeley. She has held many solo, invitational exhibitions of her work in the United States, Canada, Australia, Taiwan, Hong Kong, France, and Finland and has served as an invited juror for over eighty national, regional and statewide art exhibitions and competitions. She is a former recipient of a National Endowment for the Arts grant, and has had her work featured in numerous art books and magazines.

Debra McKillop (b. 1950)

Migration #8, 1996, mixed media on paper.

Much-admired for her visual reflections on the nature of time, artist Debra McKillop explains, "Time has been a recurring theme in my creative explorations, and a constant source of inspiration. I am fascinated by various ironic and often contradictory themes." To that end, she allows each theme to suggest a certain mood, palette, or medium. Then she begins to compose on paper or canvas, allowing the process of art making to follow its course.

Migration #8 is part of a series honoring an event involving huge flocks of robins that landed in her neighborhood during a storm, triggering insights on the nature of time as it relates to the natural cycles of migration. The light of this piece is reminiscent of the look of the day at the moment they "lifted off."

McKillop found her artistic footing early in the game, winning her first art contest at the age of three. Since earning a B.A. in art & photography and an M.A. in Art, McKillop has exhibited her work throughout the United States and Europe. She has been an important influence for emerging artists in her position as a popular studio and business art instructor as well as in her work as a competition juror and as a former City of Ventura, Public Art Commissioner.

Jane McKinney (b. 1943)

A Break in the Hedge, 1998, pastel on paper.

Artist Jane McKinney evokes a sense of the beauti-

ful and the sublime in her atmospheric landscapes. Using soft pastels on paper, she conjures lush landscapes inspired by morning and evening light and shadows. "These drawings are meditations for me as I do them," McKinney says, "and I hope people who see them also recognize and enjoy their dream-like quality."

McKinney received her master's degree in English from Wake Forest University in North Carolina. Upon moving to California in 1971, she studied at the Brooks Institute of Fine Art for three years. McKinney continues the arts tradition not only as an artist but also as an arts educator. She currently teaches sculpture to Ventura County School District students through the Artist-in-the-Classroom program. She has received numerous awards for her work from juried exhibitions at national museums and galleries as well as locally at the Museum of Ventura County. Her paintings can be found in private collections throughout the United States.

Elisse Pogofsky-Harris (b. 1941)

Birthday of the World, 1991, oil on paper.

The compelling paintings of Elisse Pogofsky-Harris are steeped in personal symbolism and art historical allusions, creating an ephemeral world where multi-layered dreams and reality overlap. She admires baroque painters, particularly Caravaggio, whose energetically manipulated drapery complements and emphasizes human gestures and feelings. Drapery, with an absence of the figure, becomes a dramatic icon for deeper consideration. In the artist's own words, "The alienating influence of the technological age has created in me the need to construct my own world of mystery and romance. I want these works to provide a mirror, where my stories allow viewers to reflect on their own stories."

Elisse Pogofsky-Harris was born in Chicago, Illinois and has a Bachelor of Science in Design from the University of Michigan. She has participated in solo and group exhibitions at The Carnegie Art Museum, The Frye Museum in Seattle, Washington.

Public Art Project Manager Tobie Roach

"As curator of this year's Art Tales display at the library, I say 'thank you' to the 70 writers from 9 to 89 who took up 'the dare' in this year's contest to explore the darkness, hidden emotion, creativity and interplay between the known and the unknown as illuminated by Municipal Art Collection artworks I selected towards an underlying theme, 'In Praise of Shadows.'

"Carl Jung once wrote 'in the very darkness of nature a light is hidden, a little spark without which the darkness would not be darkness.' You really made these artworks speak through your poems and short stories giving us proof that finding the 'little spark' among the shadows of these art pieces can be a vibrantly creative, poignant and, yes, even funny exercise."

About the 2014 Art Tales Contest

For the 2014 Art Tales contest "open to writers everywhere," youth, high school and adult writers submitted 70 works of short fiction and poems inspired by City of Ventura Municipal Art Collection works of art currently on loan at the library.

Contestants ranged in age from 9 to 89 with submissions from San Luis Obispo to Los Angeles, a few from the Bay area and one from the Philippines.

Three-quarters of the entries came from City of Ventura residents, over half were by adults, 20 by teenagers and the remaining youth entries were often by Ventura Unified School District students, classrooms and teachers.

The four Art Tales contest judges were Senior Librarian for E.P. Foster Library Sara Roberts, Ventura Unified School District Assistant Superintendent Kathy Asher, Public Art Commissioner Susan Cook and City of Ventura Community Partnerships Manager Denise Sindelar who said, "So many excellent entries this year made judging very hard, with five tie votes, and an honorable mention in Adult Poetry to recognize the record number of 29 mostly outstanding entries in that category."

The City of Ventura

Municipal *Art* Collection

In May of 1999, the City Council established the Municipal Art Acquisition Program to document the history of visual art in Ventura through the annual purchase of important works of art created by area artists. The collection provides increased access to art of the highest quality and of distinctive merit through its display in the public areas of City Hall and other municipal buildings. Featured artworks must be created by artists residing in Ventura County or who have made a direct contribution to the history of art in Ventura County.

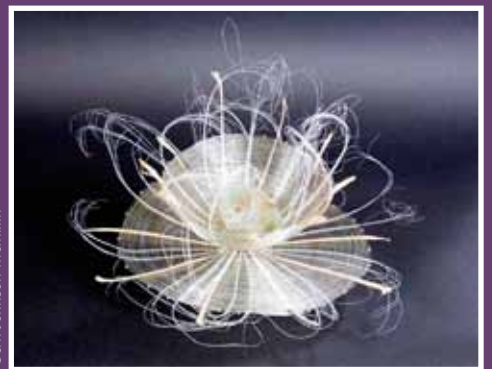
The Municipal Art Acquisition Committee, a sub-committee of the Public Art Commission, oversees the purchase of works in a variety of artistic media. The Public Art Commission plans to expand the collection in future years.

Ventura's Municipal Art Collection is exhibited in City Hall, 501 Poli Street, in the downtown Cultural District during regular business hours, closed alternate Fridays.

For more information visit www.cityofventura.net/publicart or call 805/658-4793.



Jessie Arms Botke



Geri Johnson-McMillin



Doma Granata



Robert Engel



William Hendricks

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