

# FOCUS

the literary magazine

of

Spelman College

2000

**FOCUS STAFF**

**Editor-in-Chief**

**Jamila Zahra Wade**

**Art Editors**

**Joslyn Chandler**

**Ja'nell Nequeva**

**Spring 2000 Editorial Board**

**Arcynta Ali**

**Joslyn Chandler**

**Iyabo Kwayana**

**Ja'nell Nequeva**

**Wambui Ngugi**

**Sherron Thomas**

**Penny Wrenn**

**Fall 1999 Editorial Board**

**Marsha Ablill**

**Ruha Benjamin**

**Jadawnya C. Butler**

**Joslyn Chandler**

**LaShonda Everett**

**Crystal Flowers**

**Katrice Grayson**

**Iyabo Kwayana**

**Wambui Ngugi**

**Mia Radford**

**Qimmah Saafir**

**Sherron Thomas**

**Najeema Washington**

**Penny Wrenn**

**Sponsors**

**Opal J. Moore**

**Anne B. Warner**

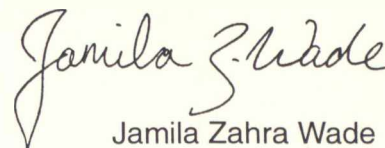
## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Editorial Board would like to thank:  
Teras A. Smith<sup>2</sup> and Daniele Bascelli of the Spelman College Writing Center Lab,  
Bill Barney and the staff of Automated Print,  
the Spelman College English Department and English Club,  
Professor Warner, Professor Moore, and  
the Sisters and Brothers who contributed  
their creative words and visions to this issue.

## EDITOR'S NOTE

Although this time feels new, uncharted,  
we have been here before.  
Our fingers and eyes have journeyed across these pages,  
our minds have taken in the fear, the confusion, and the pride in these words.  
We have been here before.

We are not the first to rejoice, to fight back, or to burn pages with the heavy strikes of pens.  
Nor are we the last.  
We are not the first to breathe images, to capture spirits, or to exhale fears.  
And, we will never be the last.  
Thus, in the traditions that we are destined to continue, as well as create,  
FOCUS 2000 is dedicated  
to our ancestors,  
to our Sisters who gave birth to FOCUS in the 1960's,  
and to all of the poets, thinkers, artists, storytellers, and photographers  
who will journey behind us.



Jamila Zahra Wade  
Editor-in-Chief  
FOCUS 2000

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

N'kenge Ayo Carter	Ode to My mama, writing, and sanity	7
Napoleon D. Wells	Koko (In a Woman)	8
Earl "We One" Strozier	The Balance Remains	9
Taneyia Gethers	Untitled	12
William Corey Mccaskill	Sincerity for my X	13
Ayana Free	d'antan	14
Sojourner Ruth Marable	Oneside	17
Jamila Zahra Wade	haiku: prison voices	17
Miranda Baugh	Untitled	18
Benyka L. Mitchell	Petals	19
Nicole Eugene	Time Hasten to Me	20
Jamal L. Burt	Manifesto	21
Penny Wrenn	Untitled	22
Blair Hayes	From Shadows to Sunlight	24
N'kenge Ayo Carter	Midnight	26
Maurice Cherry, II	The Callow Heart	27
Nannie Reed	Untitled	28
Kali Polk-Matthews	Sweetie-pie	29
Tasha Keeble	1920	31
Benyvette Robinson Ashburn	That First Moment	32
Nannie Reed	Memories of Smoke	34
Ayana Free	spiritual seduction	35
Penny Wrenn	Untitled	37
Kali Polk-Matthews	Celtic Nar or My High School Days (and Nights)	38
Jamila Zahra Wade	Listen Brother!	40
Latoya Henry	Alone	42
Gina Loring	These Foolish Things	44
Tasha Keeble	He said; She says	46
N'kenge Ayo Carter	Cleage, Sheftall, and Steinem inspired	47

Niccolo Illuminado	Inamorata	48
Kali Polk-Matthews	Tone Deaf	49
Maurice Cherry, II	Untitled	50
Andrea "Andei" N. Williams	Reincarnation	52
Earl "We One" Strozier	For Iya . . .	54
Qelsi Qualls	She	57
Ayana Free	The Man With a Face Like a Mask	58
Roni Flowers	you are forgiven	61
Christian Williams	The Rain Came	64
Taneyia Gethers	Untitled	67
Penny Wrenn	Untitled	68
Miranda Baugh	Hiding Out from Love	69
Qelsi Qualls	Can I?	71
Benyka L. Mitchell	Hidden Talent	73

#### COVER DESIGN

Ragenia Waddada

#### PHOTOGRAPHY

Camille Brown featured on 11 & 23

Joslyn Chandler featured on 16, 30, 56 & 63

Ja'nell Nequeva featured on 33, 43, 51, 60 & 66

Joni Alexis Poitier featured on 6, 53 & 72



photo by Joni Alexis Poitier

Ode to My mama, writing, and sanity  
N'kenge Ayo Carter

write because soul tells me to  
cause spirit speaks and I listen.  
words leap from my heart  
to pages  
to images and treasures stored.

write because it is a gift of sanity from the most high.

is the means through which I remember  
the magic of my existence.  
the reason my knowing my being,  
write therefore I am and will be.

my mama died the day before my 15th birthday.  
I am 19 now.  
on the table lying next to her limp body  
I hid an outline "things I wanna tell Ayo before I go."

that tear stained piece of paper  
written in pencil that fades  
old things I would never hear uttered from her lips . . .  
    . . . got my first abortion at 13  
    was molested since 7  
    . . . still love your father  
    have always loved you  
    . . . knew your name since our beginning

write in tribute to her, to us, to loving . . .  
that I write to breathe, to see, to survive.

don't know if I been here before  
or if I'll ever come here again  
but if I have and if I will, then this is what I'll do.  
because there ain't no escaping this fate, so . . .  
instead of running from it, I am full speed ahead  
with the wind as part of I  
surfing the waves of destiny's imperfection



like a goddess of the seas - Yemanja knows my name -  
reclaiming what has been stolen by time  
doing divinations with cowrie shells  
pencil and pen  
this is my essence  
recreated  
again and again and again.

Koko (In a Woman)  
Napoleon D. Wells

She has these hips  
these lips

A little too soft  
to the touch

She has the perfect curve  
of the breast and thighs  
these smiling eyes

I could picture what our  
kids will look like all day

and night

An instep that seduces a shoe  
Ebony skin . . . a rich dark hue

a creamy feeling  
much like koko  
in a woman

The Balance Remains  
Earl "We One" Strozier

The drum is Still.  
At rest, leaving  
The Sun to shine  
On trees standing,  
Growing branches  
Reaching strongly  
Into the stillness  
Of the wind.  
Wishing to touch  
Light's vibration.  
And When troubled  
Times combine;  
Traveling in the  
Company of Hate  
And Insanity.  
Stand squarely  
Meditating on the  
Understanding of  
Your divinity  
Deeply Rooted in the  
Conviction of Patience  
Just observing the  
Lessons.  
I stand balanced  
Centered in Bliss  
As Calmness washes  
Over me. I Am a  
Tree yielding to Peace  
Dancing with the Moon  
Consumed as Love  
Rages Passionately.  
I with balanced mind,  
Living,  
Breathing on spirits,  
Standing against  
Confusion.

As Wind Dances  
to Air rhythms.  
Bending trees under  
Mother water's influence.  
Leaves freely embrace rain.  
Swaying, Standing, yet  
Yielding.  
Nature's beautiful  
Non Dual contradiction.  
The flame of Being  
breathes in the Heart.  
A water drum  
Expanding.  
Contractions of the  
Lung drum gives  
Birth to a Sun; known  
As Self. That yields  
Like sand to an Ocean's  
Constant tide, guiding the  
Currents of your life.  
Each beat reaching to  
The Sun.

The Balance Remains;  
Yielding yet Standing.

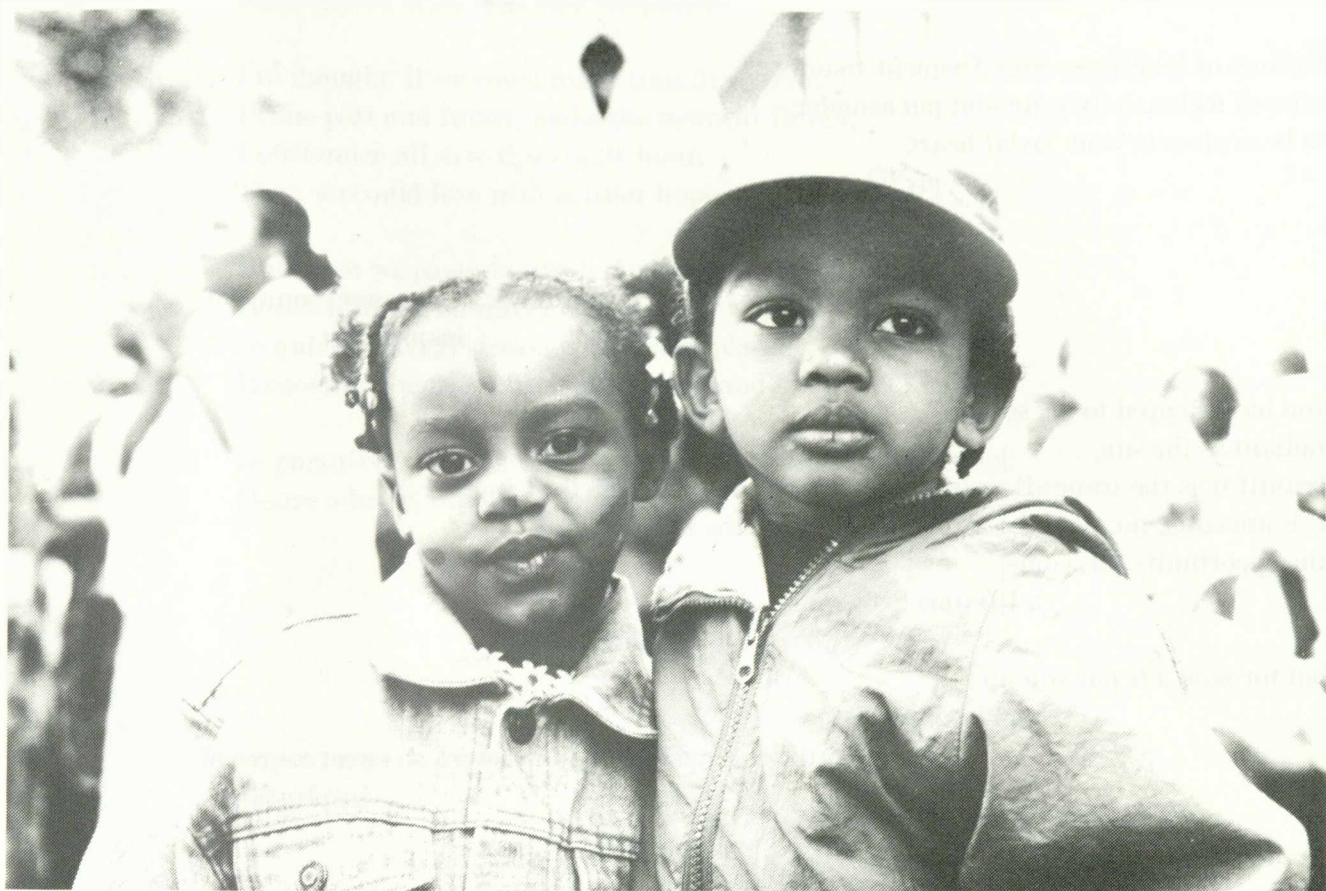


photo by Camille Brown photo by Ja'neil Nequeva

Untitled  
Taneya Gethers

inhaling your warmth,  
breathing your spirit,  
rendering your touch  
-my sweet source of inspiration.

feelings of loneliness were frequent visitors;  
cries of melancholy your soul put asunder.  
to be so close to your jovial heart:

my honey,  
my love,  
my joy

... and YES ... my sweet source of  
inspiration.

you have stepped to my scene  
radiant as the sun,  
beautiful as the tranquil waters and fruitful earth that birthed you.  
it is amazing, no, nearly a miracle that our paths have crossed.  
the opportunity has come,

a lifetime too wrong,  
two seconds too late

but for now, I'll put you up  
and keep you safe  
until it's time to reveal my sweet, so sweet source of  
inspiration.

Sincerity for my X  
William Corey Mccaskill

Last night, today, tonight I've thought of you,  
Your fear of trusting me, your fear of pain,  
My own reluctance to be serious again,  
And why we often flee what we pursue.

I've thought: if we could make time disappear,  
Prune past and future, make the moment flower,  
Lobotomize all save this single hour,  
Then we could love with neither hope nor fear.

But when we pause to watch ourselves grow,  
Beneath we see eternity and space,  
So quick a carnal stream is time and place,  
Removing attention, from all we love and know.

In pursuit of your affection, I could never anticipate the end:  
Desire a lover, yet lose a friend.

dans mes rêves d'antan  
les arcs-en-ciel faisaient l'amour  
en les coins de ton sourire

quand je vis le jardin en fleurs  
sur le fenêtre ouvert dans ma salle de classe  
je réfléchis à toi

il y a des siècles que je t'ai vu  
et maintenant mes mémoires sont seulement des fantasmes  
d'un coeur créatif

je luttais vainement de te maintenir en vie  
dans les phrases poétiques  
je sais que je suis fleur bleue  
et mes sentiments sont banals par définition  
mais je ne peux pas t'oublier  
ou bien le fait que

dans mes rêves d'antan  
les arcs-en-ciel faisaient l'amour  
en les coins de ton sourire

yesteryear  
Ayana Free

in my dreams of yesteryear  
rainbows made love  
in the corners of your smile

when i see the garden full of flowers  
through the open window of my classroom  
i think of you

it has been centuries since i have seen you  
and now my memories are only the fantasies  
of an imaginative heart

i struggle vainly to keep you alive  
in poetic phrases  
i know that i am a silly romantic  
and my sentiments are banal by definition  
but i can't forget you  
or the fact that

in my dreams of yesteryear  
rainbows made love  
in the corners of your smile



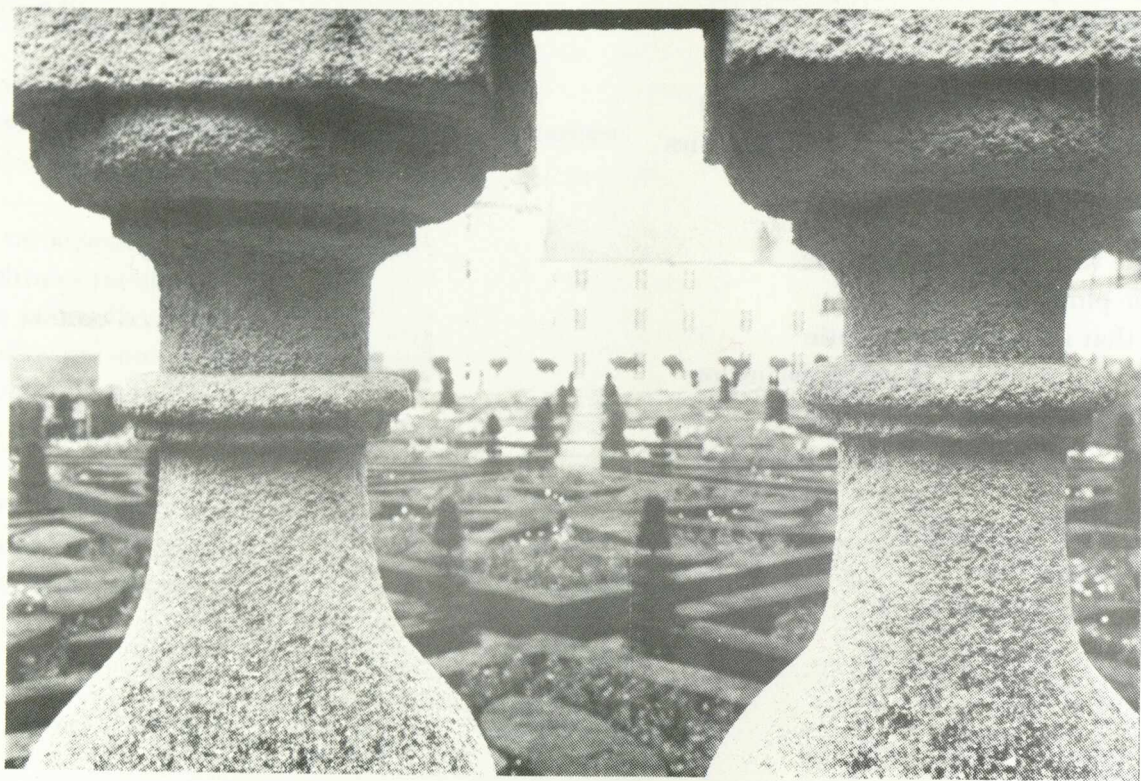


photo by Joslyn Chandler

I sit by my lonesome in the mist of the morning  
As a girl walks by kicking a stone  
Hitting my narrow Negro toes  
And landing on my side of the street  
I retrieve the stone and toss it  
Ending up in the middle of the road  
Wondering who is going to cross the boundary  
Only realizing we would meet in the center

haiku: prison voices  
Jamila Zahra Wade

spitting rhymes through bars,  
living hard, freedom's far, words  
liberate soul's state.

Untitled  
Miranda Baugh

Satan is smiling at me in Hell  
How did I get here?  
You don't remember, do you?  
Smirk You remember the playground

Oh shit        The little blond boy on the swings  
But I was so little - well, old enough to know better  
                 but little enough to care  
I was bigger than him, though, and he wanted to race me  
Winner gets any one thing of the loser's - his terms  
but he had a bright red stopwatch  
                 with big black buttons that I wanted  
I would win and take it  
We say        Swear to God, hope to die  
                 go straight to Hell if I lie  
because he says we have to swear it

We take our marks on the painted soccer line  
I yell GO        and I start pumping  
I'm fast, like my dog running down the street away  
from my momma and his bath  
I see the goal and I kick harder        I know I'm in front  
I reach out to smack the metal pole  
CLANG  
But it isn't my smack Mine came a half step later  
Shit  
I lean on my knees, panting and his queer little voice says - I won  
So what do you want? all resentful  
I get You he nods  
I look up square in his eyes That's stupid What do you want?  
I get You - forever . . . You swore  
I go cold        as if he means the me inside me  
Well, nobody can have that but me, so I get my lunch and drop it near him  
I even leave the pudding cup

He just smiles at my back as I walk off  
and push down the vomit taste tickling my throat

I ended up in Hell

That little shit

### Petals

Benyka L. Mitchell

He loves me  
He loves me not  
Got me picking  
flowers  
And singing hours  
On end  
In love I'm falling  
Like these petals  
I'm dropping

Never stopping  
For one second  
To check my heart  
With its pulsation  
And my  
imagination  
Got me drifting  
Like I've been  
sipping

His potion  
In slow motion  
We floatin'  
Like liquid metal  
And these petals  
Steadily dropping  
Never stopping  
To make one  
decision

And he got me  
wishin'  
On a flower.  
He loves me  
He loves me not  
He loves me . . .

Time Hasten to Me  
Nicole Eugene

From horizon to horizon ephemeral sun passes too quickly.  
For with the advent of day comes old obligations, and new destinations.  
Yet between each upright stroke,  
Illucid time flies from my sight,  
Leaving thine eyes fixed upon a day minus 2 dozen hours.

Must your spherical voyage  
Seek to trade my only future  
For an unmalleable past  
Wrapped in an opaque present.

Take it back!  
If I gave you four seasons of my life  
Then could that brilliant day-star  
Retrace its steps across the sky,  
Until it meets east's dawn.

Be still ticking hand!  
Postpone your rounds,  
Or pattern your turning  
To the palpitations of this worn heart

Minutes I beg you to solidify your state.  
To slip through fingers no more.  
Yield only to my will, and bend only to my hand.

Or perchance would my young be valued  
So that I might bribe ancient shadow clock to reverse his sullen shadow  
Or emerge it in the sun's rays;  
Erasing time's line.

Manifesto  
Jamal L. Burt

Blocks are tumbled when my pen breaks the silence  
and the pressure of spirit blows through.  
Suddenly words formulate in the midst  
And my freedom of mind rings true.

A true word artist  
with paintbrush and letters to paint minds  
with thoughts and colors and emotions.

Mental photo phonics  
through the use of sonics.  
The portrait of an oration.

Different from these other guys  
only using poems to hypnotize  
some girl to impress.

With that, I'm not stressed  
This is how I give my soul to eternity  
So when I die, my thoughts are still here  
for the whole world to see.

To leave a true piece of my mind for my people  
So we soar to new heights and advance to no equal.  
Sharing our spirits through clear word expression  
and feeding the fire, everyday a new lesson.

Modern day griots are speaking with saints.  
No use to be timid, no room for the faint.  
All true lyricists please rise to the time.

Whether you flow it free verse  
or kick it in rhyme.

Stay true to your art and give us something we can feel  
and in time our essence may be something more real

Untitled  
Penny Wrenn

maybe women do like  
doing it alone  
the house  
the kids  
the love  
maybe there is  
no we  
no matter what happens

what happened  
to doing it together



photo by Camille Brown



From Shadows to Sunlight  
Blair Hayes

Isn't it funny  
How when laying down  
Everything can be quiet  
Ain't even no sounds.  
But with the light  
Of a brand new day,  
After last night  
has been washed away,  
Two people,  
once lovers,  
Have thrown off their covers  
And now are staring,  
At strangers,  
With questions for days.  
No longer are they beaming  
Because now they all confused.  
Mind pregnant with questions  
Conceived in the night  
What was hidden in moonlight  
Is now easy to see.  
Although, sunlight casts shadows  
It reveals so much more.  
I'm talking from experience  
Because I've seen it all before.

It's a tale of the ages,  
Been going on for years,  
Events in the night  
Giving way to insecurities  
And fears.

Its all part of the cycle  
And the rules for the game  
State somebody's gonna  
Be the winner,  
And the other gotta stake their claim.  
You better go down swingin'  
Cause the bell can't save  
you now.

So you better catch your breath,  
For that final stretch,  
Or you'll end up a victim,  
Just another casualty  
In the war game  
of love.

Midnight  
N'kenge Ayo Carter

In the late afternoon  
of a dusty Urban Ghetto  
When the sun glows  
Like Fire in the sky  
You make snow angels in polluted earth

You've walked on this plane  
not much longer than four years  
yet your soul knows 20 years worth of pain  
We don't have a clue as to what those  
big brown eyes of yours take in

Cursing like an old man -  
mingling like melodies in the same breath  
your Ignorance is your innocence

As my mind rolled through your hood  
I caught a glimpse of your tears mixing with  
the blue of Popsicle stained lips  
As droplets fell to the earth  
Cause once more your daddy  
Didn't come  
through

In my soul's solitude I cry for you my  
beautiful one.

I wonder what you're  
thinking when you look in the mirror. I wonder what you see.  
I wonder if you know why your momma named you midnight.

Midnight reconciles day and night  
In likeness you juxtapose her pleasure  
And pain as the origin of both

One day you'll understand that  
the vicious cycle of poverty  
inhibits your development  
you'll find your own light  
and grow from within

### Midnight

The Callow Heart  
Maurice Cherry, II

Inside of anyone you see  
There is a heart of candle wax  
And a slender string  
that is lighted  
by trivial fires  
of orange . . .  
So that when  
a heartbreaking incident  
Occurs  
the wick burns crimson  
and after a time  
your heart  
Callow and soft  
is melted hard  
and nothing, now  
will light it  
Because is is wiser  
than it once was  
when faint orange glows  
set it afire.

Untitled  
Nannie Reed

in the hot Georgia sun all that could be seen were swift moving fans beating humid air,  
sounding like rumbles of thunder

and i looked all around at the faces of young, black women from every end of the world  
united here in sisterhood,

pooling resources and minds, combining selves for the betterment of all,

and though the sweat rushed down from heads to necks like great avalanches of water,

no one complained, only smiled and endured for our selves, for our people, for our nation,  
for our struggle

Sweetie-pie  
Kali Polk-Mathews

Your misleading objective was cellophane clear  
As transparent as the ice on your shoulder  
My clairvoyance allowed me to see  
that your chauvinism desired to  
eat me devour me consume me  
digest me and spit me out  
so that I didn't resemble  
in any way  
my original anatomical pattern  
From the beginnings of my existence  
your gluttonous motive  
has been to make me edible  
you worked hard to make me edible  
Fantasized about human pupae  
metamorphizing from estrogen to sucrose  
I was edible to you  
women were always edible to you  
women are always edible  
your sugar-candy-sweetie-  
caramel-chocolate-pumpkin-  
pudding-pie-honey-bunch  
I work to be inedible to you  
Arsenic to curdle and corrode your taste buds  
every moment that you  
and your corpulent and selfish ego  
want to degrade my vitality to something  
that dissolves in your mouth

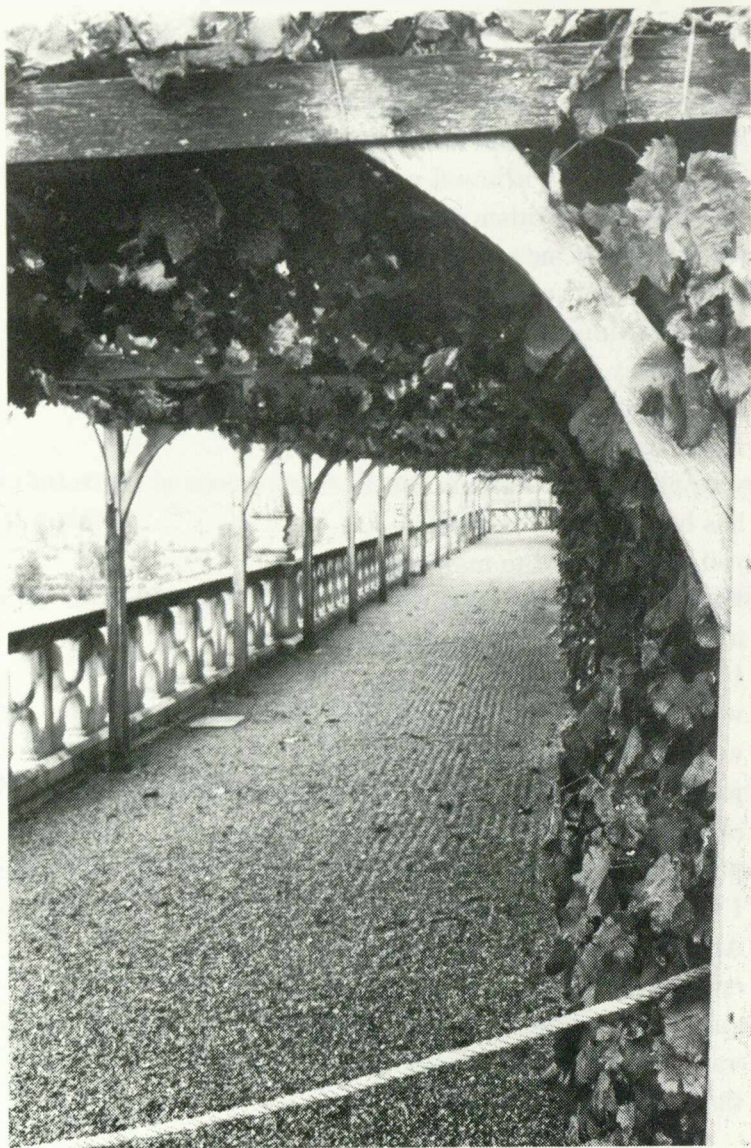


photo by Joslyn Chandler

1920  
Tasha Keeble

I am the granddaughter to  
Bobo Sweetwine.

One ear hitched to the running ground  
He left for Mendocino.

Mexican now.  
Choctaw lie:  
Hating "niggers,"  
and their calloused elbows.

He'll pick sallow grapes  
dry.  
And in the coming rush of  
winter,  
will leave a trail of  
vermilion -  
For his blackening Arkansas babies.



That First Moment  
Benyvette Robinson-Ashburn

Brown on Brown  
Dark circles pressed against Strong  
Brown Back  
Thin cotton draped between  
Wet surface rubbing on thin bone  
Intertwined hair, dark and coarse, wet and hungry,  
Prints of Pink Tips  
Cover the surface of the muscle:  
Round, Soft, Firm, Strong  
My face and brain rush with blood  
While your hands pull my curls  
Our blood boils to 1000 degrees,  
Our skin sheds several tears of pleasure  
Sucking of Brown muscle  
Tasting of soft lips  
Round and round the tip neatly trimmed,  
Round and round my tip neatly trimmed  
Wipe the honey  
from your lips  
Lick the honey  
From mine  
Our intensity and passion now cover us,  
The thickness creates a fog,  
I cannot see, only feel  
You see me as my eyes are tightly shut  
The passion burns my pupils,  
I enjoy the pain  
You look at me when I suddenly hold my breath . . . .  
Unhhh . . . . (the countdown begins) . . . . .  
A virgin to pleasure  
Now being compromised . . . .  
Unhhh . . . . (ten more seconds) . . . . .  
I shed one tear...  
I scream one shriek . . . .  
I call one name . . . .  
I clench one muscle . . . . .



photo by Ja'nell Nequeva

## MEMORIES OF SMOKE

Nannie Reed

My mother was a beautiful woman. I remember how she would sit in the most elegant of fashions. Her long, slender, walnut-colored legs would be perfectly crossed. The top leg would swing in a rhythm that was hypnotizing. I especially loved when she wore her polka-dotted dress. It was her favorite and mine too. That dress fit her every curve. She was created to wear it. Because of its low-cut neckline, her breasts were partly exposed when she leaned at the right angle. They were truly one of the most captivating parts of her person, next to her priceless face. When she inhaled and exhaled, the freckles on them seemed to be dancing, celebrating their coveted position. And her smoking was a glorious sight to behold. Her long, narrow fingers would caress the sticks. Her hands made love to them. The gray mist would hover above her dark crown, not wanting to leave her. This smoke was the symbol of her love; It was the fruit of her love-making. She had given birth to it. With each puff, her eyelids lowered in ecstasy. I watched her time and again give birth with pleasure. And I loved her. She was a Goddess, beautiful and perfect. When she stood up to walk away from her den of pleasure, her children stayed behind filling the room, filling me. So, I was quite surprised when they said that she was dying. I did not understand how her lover could kill her. She had allowed his seed to fill her, and then she had given birth to it. These once great lovers were now mortal enemies. When they covered her face and breast, that had become dark and ugly with wet dirt, the remnants of all her many children still lingered around her, but this time she could not walk away.

spiritual seduction

Ayana Free

it's your divinity  
that sounds so foolish  
like an excuse  
but  
the truth never did  
pretend to be convincing

it's your divinity  
that draws me  
mothlike  
to the flame  
of your subtle passions  
i apologize  
in advance for  
trite metaphors,  
but i don't know  
how else to describe  
your silent seduction  
the twinkle  
in your left eye  
the dimples  
posted like a mantle  
over the fireplace  
of your mouth

i finally understand  
why Senghor once described  
a black woman's mouth as a  
"mouth that moves my mouth to poetry"  
the birthmark on your lower lip  
sits like a lily pad  
calling my toad lips  
to moist comfort

it's so easy to romanticize you  
effortless really

do you blame me  
for not resisting?  
i won't let my guilt  
take over

it's your divinity  
that offers up  
morsels of your spirit  
as a succulent delicacy  
for my selfish consumption

Untitled  
Penny Wrenn

If I were morning for your man  
I would cuss him out myself  
Damn you for the nights I slept with her

I stayed up with the moon and you  
talkin' bout him  
Cause what he did to you . . . Damn him for what he did  
Damn him for puffy eyes the next morning  
Swollen and still full of a man's indecision  
Your tears aren't holy water  
Damn you for this sacrilegious mess

I dumped the buckets of sin  
In the sink  
Like rain  
In the sewage  
What you think is clean,  
I say it really never is  
Or at least it never is for long

If I were on top of the sun  
Blinded by good-will  
I would cuss him out myself  
But I am on top of the sun  
Blinded by good-will  
And I am cleaning up the mess  
In the night/darkness/clouds

## Celtic Nar or My High School Days (and Nights)

Kali Polk-Matthews

There was a brilliant, full moon rising over San Francisco. It was midnight and I was tripping on acid. I was sitting uncomfortably on a large boulder at the top of Randall Point, a well-known look-out point in the City. It was a warm, soothing, summer night, and I forgot for a moment about my friends because of the exhibition that was taking place in front of me. Every full moon, a group of Colombians gathered at Randall to play their drums, dance and freestyle verses. Fortunately, I had forgotten about that fact on this night and was consequently surprised to find out that my friends and I would have this vibrant group of people as our entertainment. So much was happening at once; at least that's what I thought because of my drug-induced sensitivity to the surroundings. People were enticing soulful sounds from the curves of the congas, clapping, snapping, whistling, and reciting sexy Spanish verses over the rhythm; the city lights were dancing. I suddenly realized that my friend Cassie was sitting to my immediate right only because she picked up a cow bell and was performing a sassy solo. Then I thought about why we were all here, and became consumed in a lazy daydream about Tracy. I had purchased the hits from a girl named Tracy earlier that day.

It was an extraordinary day in San Francisco, sunny with a slight breeze. I am convinced that sunny days in the City are more beautiful than they are anywhere else because they are such a treat, and all the City people recognize that, and take full advantage of them. I was wearing a navy blue crocheted skirt that fit low around my waist (that Tracy would later say she thought was cute) and a black tank top that came up to my first floating rib. My outfit helped to ease the irritation from the tattoo that I got the day before. It was the second part of the tattoo that I got two years earlier, and I adored it. My body art cost about six hundred dollars total and landed me a combined five hours on the slab. I didn't pay for all of it though. My best friend, Chuck, funded the second half of my tattoo as a present for my seventeenth birthday (even though my birthday was in August and it was September). Chuck was currently inside Erno's tattoo parlor waiting to pay for the tattoo of my other friend, Alex, who was getting tattered at the same time I was outside on a cigarette break. That day, September the seventh, was Alex's birthday. He turned eighteen, and spent a good part of the day meditating on the Selective Service papers that he would receive in the mail; the thought of being drafted made him anxious. He said he'd rather deal with the repercussions of not filling out the papers than the repercussions of being drafted should a war occur.

I sat outside on a shaded stoop, smoking my cigarette slowly. I watched people walk by, observed the groups talking at the café across the street, and enjoyed every single carcinogenic molecule that entered my lungs, being thankful to be alive on this beautiful day. As I scanned the sidewalk, I noticed a street kid at the corner who was walking down the block in my direction. She was white, and looked about nineteen years of age. Her

hair, which had seen neither shampoo nor conditioner for six months had formed into haphazard dreads that she tied back with a rubber band. Her short and skinny frame was draped with filthy, oversized clothes - overalls and a jacket. She was wearing too-big-for-her-small-feet shoes that caused her to shuffle awkwardly like a toddler. I watched her walk towards me and wondered, casually, whether she would walk by me or ask for a cigarette; she asked for a smoke. She thanked me for the cigarette, said her name was Tracy, and told me that I was exceptionally beautiful. I was surprised by her comment, but thanked her in return, and introduced myself while I lit her cigarette with matches, having forgotten my lighter in the parlor. We started to talk.

Our conversation was calm and came easily. While we talked, I watched her lips move. They were small, thin, and chapped. Thin lines of dried blood had formed in the creases of her lips, and it looked like it must hurt for her to smile. Our talk was pleasant. Most teenagers in San Francisco are closely connected with all of the street kids. We spend time with them, know their names, know where we're most likely to find them, buy some of our drugs from them, push drugs with them, and get into trouble with the law with them. I had never met Tracy before, but knew some of her friends that traipsed around Haight-Ashbury, which had become a mecca for run-aways, ravers and smalltime high school hustlers like myself.

Twenty minutes into the conversation, she asked me if I wanted some acid. She said it was called Celtic Nar and that it was some of the best on the street right now. We agreed to make the exchange in a market, and got up to walk casually down the street to a grimy corner store. The homeless and helpless alike were lined up with liquor and cartons of cigarettes, waiting for their bottles to be brown-bragged so that they could sip off of them on the street corner. Tracy grabbed a Milky Way and stood in line. She asked if I would buy it for her, and I said that I would. The line moved forward. I gave her my pack of Marlboro Reds, which I often refer to as "my cowboy killers," and she slipped the hits inside. I placed twenty dollars plus sixty cents for the candy bar into her grimy hand. I was excited about my purchase and couldn't wait to tell my friends. We walked back to Erno, slowly. The radiance of the day transformed the sidewalk into a river, and I drifted down it lackadaisically. I wondered what the masses that floated by on currents beside me were thinking. What would they be doing that night? I knew what I would be doing. From going to grab some food after Alex was done, to going back to my place to watch some television, to talking about the significance of being an adolescent and an adult at the same time, to wondering about how important school really was anyway, to tentatively placing the acid tab on my tongue, to here.

I was released from my daydream. Cassie, playing the cow bell, became a reality to me again. Emma was standing silhouetted against the overstimulating city lights, singing and laughing alternately. Chuck was leaning his soft, round head on my shoulder, having a side conversation with Alex, whom I don't think was listening because he was tripping pretty hard.



I could see all of San Francisco and the Bay Area. I could see my house, the archaic church next to my house, and the new, gleaming Safeway down the street from my house. The cars looked like blood vessels rushing through the veins of the city, and I thought about how beautiful it was that the city was alive. It had been an extraordinary day in San Francisco, sunny with a breeze. I realized that this was one of those days that I would think about often after it had passed. This day embodied my experience of being a teenager in the City. I knew I would regret it if I didn't squeeze every ounce of experiential juice that I could from the moment, so I got up. I moved through the darkness towards Renaldo, who was diffusing rhythmically in and out of the night molecules, and started to Salsa.

**Listen Brother!**  
**Jamila Zahra Wade**

what is it that you  
hear?

**LISTEN**  
**LISTEN**

**Brother!**  
what is it that you  
hear?

or is it the fear  
of distant chickens clucking?  
of distant sisters clucking?  
of distant black women loving  
someone else?

**ARE YOU LISTENING**

**Brother?**

you claim not  
to understand  
mic in hand  
on whose platform do you stand?

**ARE YOU LISTENING**

Brother?

do you hear US?  
refusing to be your hoes?  
screaming our every day NO's?  
sacrificing the health of our souls  
for you,  
Brother?

**ARE YOU LISTENING?**

or are you dumbfounded by the beat?  
addicted to the white man's sweet?  
caught by the madness of the street?

are you even aware,  
Brother?

**LISTEN!**

are you even aware

that I have a voice  
i am silent

that I have a voice  
i am silent

**THAT I HAVE A VOICE**  
i am silent

**THAT I HAVE A VOICE**  
yet, i am still, somehow silent . . .

Brother,  
are you listening?

ALONE  
Latoya Henry

Whispers in the dark  
But there's no one there.  
The wind blows and  
The trees whistle softly outside my window.  
The birds chirp and  
The sun shines  
As bright as God himself.  
I sit there alone  
In the dark  
Wishing I were not  
With thoughts,  
Memories, and  
Fantasies of being with you.  
The air around me entangles my body in your arms.  
Each ribbon of wind that blows feels like your caress  
My heart floats with the memory of your love.  
And then I open my eyes  
Only to realize  
That  
I am alone.



photo by Ja'nell Nequeva

These Foolish Things  
Gina Loring

Parted like lips to speak we have become  
all knowing and enticing  
trying hard not to slip behind  
or thoroughly unwind  
the story before its time.  
Once again it's on -  
and I'm up to bat.  
My knees shake as I look straight ahead  
breathing like a child new to it all  
and you -  
having become merely a memory,  
sit cuddled in the farrest corner of my mind with all the rest.  
The clouds outside tell my story if you listen -  
hear the stars cookin in brother moon's kitchen  
If you try you can see  
the shiny lights of man, rough against the slippery essence of natural life  
Something we choose to ignore

As if it's a chore

to use our minds  
Fall into the gap  
of knowledge  
name our blessings like a shopping list  
humming quietly words of the past play tag and thud from side  
to side  
inside

but I allow a smile as if not to seem disturbed or aware  
reality almost my joke but not quite  
right  
view this sight

for yourself  
peer into my window  
sneak through the crack,  
huddle beneath the sound of laughter and  
be.  
Ironing the kinks out of this here situation like an expert  
So much to say

So much to do  
And it feels so damn strange  
    got to rearrange  
And rewrite this novel so the heroine wins once and for all  
I could stand tall and  
Peer over the river and through the woods  
To meet my destiny  
Get on the right path  
cause this one's feeling old and used  
Bruised and abused  
Left outside for too long and tattered from the wind  
Sell me a message  
give me a hug  
touching the inside of my being with warm feathers of strength  
to nudge along this otherwise tedious process  
    unless  
Living and dying in LA is not exactly what I had in mind  
but kind and useless words fill up all that empty space  
Trace  
The path you take to where you want to be  
and love every moment for all we know  
we may never meet again and this may only be a dream.  
Snuggle up inside yourself, trying to mold your insides into a shape of comfort  
and sew back up this here broken heart  
torn and sighing  
But it's not too late  
The light right here is more powerful than any electric socket  
to me  
Bring it on.  
I'm allowing you to be there and me to be here  
Our connection's gone but I'm keeping on  
And losing sight of nothing ahead.  
Being strong is no question  
Sleeping is not an option  
Although dreams quick come and fly me away on melodic wings  
These foolish things  
Remind me of you.

He said; She says.  
Tasha Keeble

He said:

Your heart is like papier-mâché  
molded onto a lighted bulb  
which after too many days of Sun  
is no longer fit to give as gift or Light.

She says:

I remember that I puffed temperately at  
that Light just beneath your skin.  
It glowed brown like the chapparal at  
Santa Cruz where plum-apples fall,  
to sleep hard on the  
shadowing weeds.  
Plum-apples sated by weeds.

Now your skin falls from the bone  
like stew meat.  
And I find no cause  
to puff at all.  
No Light beneath your skin.

Cleage, Sheftall, and Steinem inspired  
N'kenge Ayo Carter

Dey be light brown to blue black  
with the oceanic moans  
of verbal manifestos

Odes to the Black Nubian Princess  
and her impoverished counter  
the quintessential Ghetto Bitch

The pimps, playas, and hustlers  
of bold imaginations and  
transformative dreams

Ours is an oppressed art of Genocidal Lullabies

So is there redemption in rap  
can she still serenade my soul  
with a love song of resistance?



Inamorata  
Niccolo Illuminado

What is love  
But a desire?

The one woman  
Whose image  
Shines in your heart  
Burning intensely  
Like the corona  
Of a star of fire

The memory of moments past  
But by reminiscing  
The experience forever  
Lasts

The pleasure  
Its sweetness  
To be forever cherished

A consuming need  
An enveloping emotion  
An elusive enigma

Cannot be touched  
But can be felt  
Not readily seen  
Yet easily perceived  
Not explained  
Yet I understand  
Poised to strike  
Wherever I stand

Incandescent passions  
Illuminating the darkest  
Of nights

My Inamorata  
Immortal love  
As emotion is forever  
Through distant  
Thoughts  
Eternally together

Tone Deaf  
Kali Polk-Matthews

I struggled to put words to/  
in a definitive manner/  
the ephemeral and unidentifiable source  
of the disconnectedness  
    discontent,  
    apathy,  
    and unproductiveness in my life/  
and for a moment/  
I believed I had a medical condition/  
like my mother/  
whose stomach muscles/  
were ruined by a Cesarean section/  
that stopped me from singing/

Untitled  
Maurice Cherry, II

When I walked away, she didn't believe the pain of that instant of the love calling back the past, traveling of freedom it was lost.

It cost her the freedom to love this open valley of decision as the grace crept slowly to cut off the emotion and walk away.

But time kept on steppin' lively as if she never existed, see, that's what really hurt her, not the letting go. But after all that time of meaning nothing, when it was truth staring her in the face, that same emotion of void right there in the mirror; she felt the pain and rearranged her thoughts.

I meant everything as I faded in the water she drowned in.

I mean, I was deep, but the street hop wanted to call near her name her smell of flowery aura of orgasmic electricity.

I didn't want to forget that, that was peace and love too.

I felt her orgasms so far away, that's what attracted me to touch her soft bosom, hold lavish and dear sips of wine (or was it water? it had to be water).

I called her the blossom queen; she was that cool, rich, dark dream that you always have the impression of but never remember . . . that love, that relaxation of a long sleep in the summertime of dawn, that the breezes blew by just to thank you for waking up.

I didn't want to forget that, but that's what I told her: **FORGET YOU!!!**

My anger steamed at the mirror I stared at . . . and that was the last time.

That was the last thing I gave her . . . I should have given her love, peace, or maybe even happiness, but my frustration just wanted out of my wounded world called a mind.

Now I am the one who is forgotten.



photo by Ja'nell Nequeva

Reincarnation  
Andrea "Andei" N. Williams

I keep running into my father.  
Long gone ghost  
still in the voice of my baby's daddy.  
Slap my face,  
slop his things into a suitcase and go.  
Trying to find anybody but my daddy.  
Almost had it this time.  
Seven months of man so sweet,  
near complete  
'til womanizing  
daddy wakes again in new boyfriend.  
I'm the magnet my mother was —  
draw low down niggas  
when I most try to forget.  
Take your rattling bones ass and go.  
Sucked up one life,  
Momma's too,  
oughta be enough for you.  
Drag me to the grave  
as I run away  
to your arms again.

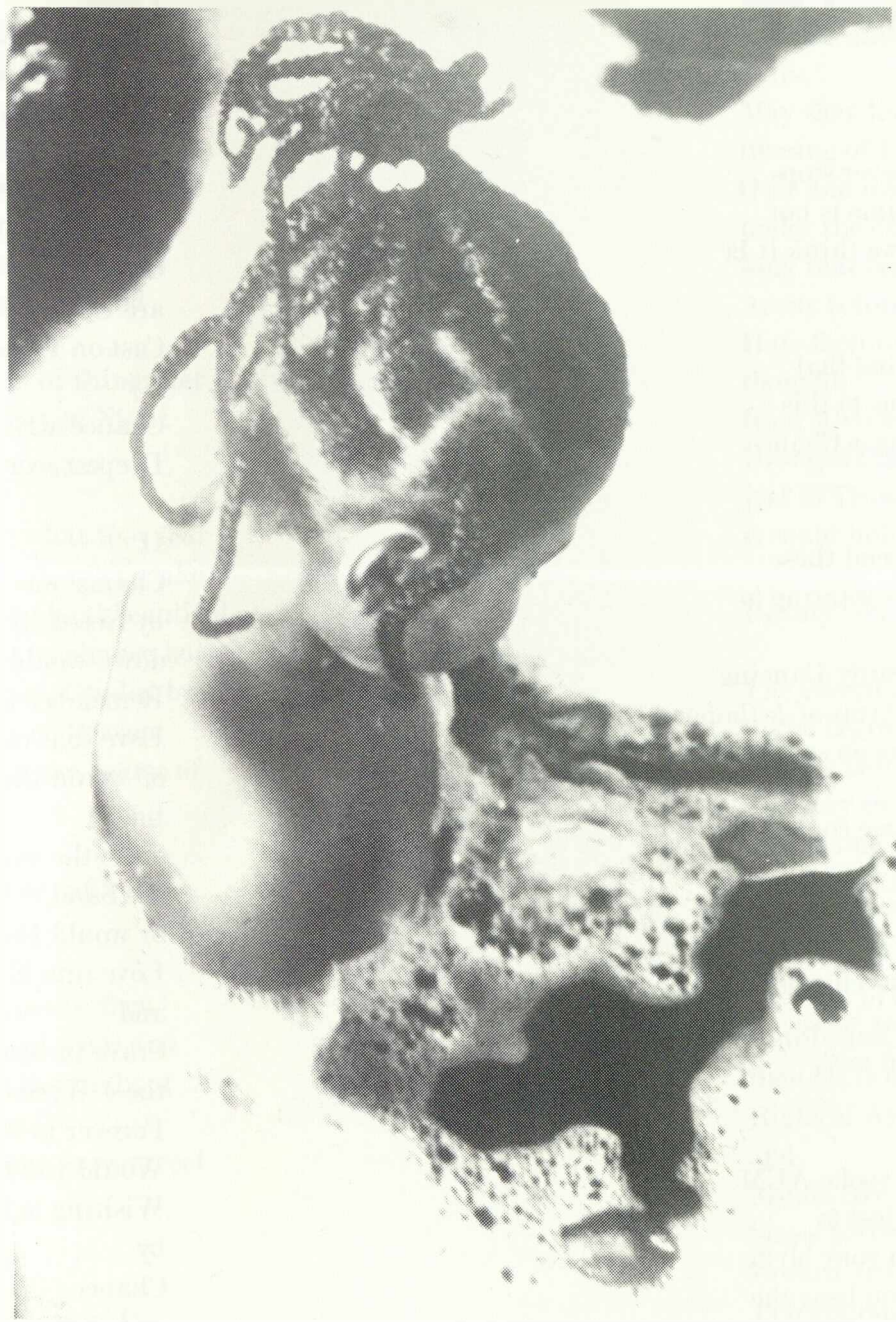


photo by Joni Alexis Poitier

For Iya . . .  
Earl "We One" Strozier

If  
Love never stops  
Then time is not  
What we think it Is

If  
The thing that  
Binds us to this  
Moment is Chance

Then  
Let's spend these  
Seconds wanting to  
know  
The Beauty Dancing  
in the Arms of A flame  
Floating on soft Wind  
and  
If a flame could know  
Rain  
and speak it's name.

Could we change;  
The ways we see  
You and me?

If  
Chance spoke AUM  
To you just to  
Awaken your birth  
Could you hear the  
Soul scream calling  
To Peace  
Knowing at this  
Moment, you are  
Beauty  
dancing in The arms of

Flame.  
Gracefully keeping  
Pace with the wind,  
Tasting each second,  
looking into the eyes of  
Chance, Dark  
reflections of Night  
Only to find that you  
are Boundless Art  
Cast on Urban canvas.  
By  
Chance a Heart's  
Deepest secret . . .

If  
Chance was Wrought  
by Necessity to write It  
down would they  
Remember that it was  
Love that made us Stars,  
or would the Ocean's  
tide  
erase the words from  
the Sand,  
or would Beauty speak  
Love into Existence  
and  
Crave its sound onto  
the 4 Winds  
Forever to be Carried.  
Would you listen  
Wishing to be touched  
by  
Chance.

If  
Memory is the pinnacle  
testament for this  
Existence

Then

Could we shape  
each image with  
vivid blues and  
different hues  
of changing light  
as Beauty recites  
hymns  
that bridge the gap  
between Fate and  
Chance;  
the kind of thing that  
binds Day to Night.

If  
We are what they fear  
us to be then let's take  
it and make it beautiful  
and not by chance but  
planning. Guided by  
Seasons of Reason  
that run the course of  
time.

Cos, Love can't stop.

If  
War must be then  
let's plant seeds and  
protect the limbs of  
infants  
that came to resurrect  
change

Let's  
Teach them of Iya  
That from which  
they came  
and to live Life  
Remembering the  
distant traces of their

Essence  
mingles amongst the  
Stars.  
May they know the  
turning of Love.  
Over and over  
under the currents of  
song that begun  
Aeons before  
Hate fashioned  
thought  
from silence and  
Brought Chaos  
just to Think  
it could hold you.

Beauty you are.

The closest connection  
to the beginning of  
Chance before  
Jealousy thought  
to re-name you;  
missing translation.

If  
There is to be  
Revolution,  
then let it be for the  
Right of Art to speak  
and  
Minds free of thought.  
Sages perceiving only  
inward visions.  
Perceptions based on  
E Mo Ti On  
and Heart Rhythm.

Cos, the beat don't  
stop. Not for Chance.





photo by Joslyn Chandler

She  
Qelsi Qualls

She likes to crush on men  
She likes to want without being wanted  
To be needy and shameful while pride seethes from her voice, eyes, stature  
and poise  
The inner most part of her bows at your feet.  
Kissing the space that it encounters  
but you would never know  
You would never know her naked  
Never know her uneventful crush qualities  
She waits you out  
eyes downcast  
In a position of complete submission  
Waiting on your every answer  
on every breath  
Until you see her  
And you do  
And then she stands  
And simply walks away  
With her desire in her suitcase.

The Man With a Face Like a Mask  
Ayana Free

when i first met you  
i was drawn  
to your blazingly bright smile  
which lately hides itself  
behind an eclipse  
of onyx clouds  
and ebony curves  
which  
when you're angry or worried  
resign themselves  
to being sullen cheeks

you tell me you love me  
almost as often  
as i find myself  
staring at the incredible contours  
in your countenance

and i admittedly disapprove  
of you growing your hair long  
because it barricades  
me from rubbing the smooth bald head  
that finds itself  
nestled under my arms  
at least  
one dawn  
of every fortnight

no one would believe  
that all six feet plus  
of you  
could shrink into  
my arms  
seeking what for you is a rarity  
comfortable sleep  
rivalled only by the baby boys  
i see in the streets of Dakar

clinging to their mother's back  
via three yards of cloth  
much in that same manner  
i find myself  
wanting to protect you  
from the heat of the midday  
which seems to be marking time  
in the furrows of your brow

and from myself  
for even though  
i candidly observe  
that moonlight shimmering  
through your window  
falls like morning dew  
on your face

and i am awestruck  
because  
at that angle  
you look exactly  
like a mahogany mask

i still have to tell you  
truthfully  
through a mix  
of teary and adoring eyes  
that  
i do not love you



photo by Ja'nell Nequeva

you are forgiven

Roni Flowers

you put the flesh on a hanger-  
along side those high heels you borrowed  
to make you look taller;  
and that lipstick Sister Facade loaned you to draw attention way from those  
soul-revealin peepers i called eyes.  
And i see you now, as you had been  
when It all began.

you traded in your drawing pens.  
you know, the ones you used to show normal folk  
how you viewed the world.  
And those paintings, so alive.  
beautiful women and nice lookin men  
with warm, shapely bodies-screamin' to any one watching, "Live."  
But you . . .  
and those eyes.  
And those hands, cramped from years of showing normal folk your view of the  
world.  
a view of over-exotic plants and women who lived in timeless rhythm.  
flowers that bloomed every time someone put their eyes on them.  
and i swear, i must have watched them bloom a million times,  
and i never grew tired of their perpetual resurrection.  
everytime felt like a first, and i love you for it.  
you show me beauty-unblemished.

you turned in your habits-  
the ones that kept you in awe of the unknown  
i suppose.  
and you let them go  
with the kind of ease you knew of as a child.  
and you were welcomed home.  
and as i sit and feel on all the signs you painted for me-  
whether on your face or on recycled canvases,  
i give thanks.  
the smile and lurking eyes that pierced my defenses,  
the quiet seeping of your soul through your pores.

no longer are we burdened by the task of figuring out whether or not  
a smile is the blanket for inner turmoil.  
or the burden of depending on inadequate limbs  
or half running cars to bring us together.  
you visit on time.  
and i call on you in my thoughts.  
you see me - inside and out.  
you know me, after 20 years of trying to figure me out.  
you help me.  
bless me with the words to express my joy, pain, and love.

Jah has replaced your drawing pens with brushes to paint my dreams with  
divination and understanding.  
Put the sky where your skin used to be.  
Jeannie, an ancestor.  
true.



photo by Joslyn Chandler



The Rain Came  
Christian Williams

She knew the rains would come, and they did come. There was not a cloud in the sky but the rain came. The sun shined with brilliant defiance as the summer rain fell from the sky. The reflective surface of the little lake warped the reality of the heavens as each raindrop sent circular ripples throughout the lake upon contact with kindred spirits. She walked the path of the pier, her feet feeling the warmth and the rigid grade of the wooden planks. Her head was lowered in a mixture of shame and sorrow, as she watched each footstep upon each plank. She carried in her hand one single blue rose, whose stem was long but its blossom was immature and unpronounced. Her head was adorned with microbraids, long black strands collected and unified upon the crown of her head. All braids were bound except two, which hung over her forehead and curved along each side of her face until their tips dangled centimeters from her cheeks. Her face had a natural beauty, one void of any unnatural enhancement. Her lips were a natural lush red tint, and her eyes were the softest of browns ever found in nature. Her nose hid none of her African-American ancestry, yet was not overly pronounced, as her nostrils flared with each breath. Her skin was a sinfully soft treasure. When God created her, he took the sunbeams trapped in a stream of flowing honey, and gave her body its golden hue. Her sundress was beautiful in its simplicity. It was two shades darker than her own glow, long and flowing revealing very little. Perhaps it is only the poet's eye who could appreciate the concept of hidden wonders, wonders in which an active imagination would only fuel one's desires.

She finally reached the edge of the pier, and stood there only a moment to contemplate what possibilities waited her beneath the water. She dropped the blue rose into the water, watching it float towards the center of the little lake. This endeavor was the easiest part of her plan, a plan that reflected her hopelessness and inadequacy. The sky cried its tears for her wayward soul, as raindrops began to tap her body with bitter embrace of sorrow. She had hoped the rain would come, because within its fall no one would notice that those drops that fell from her face were teardrops. As raindrops and teardrops intertwined on her cheeks, she placed one foot over the water's edge. She was prepared for what was about to happen, she knew that she could not swim and the moment her conviction would kick in she would be emerged in the cold embrace of eternal rest. The rain fell, making her dress cling to her skin as her foot hovered over the finality of death. She closed her eyes and shed her last earthly tear and walked off the pier.

A hand rose from beneath the water surface, taking the blue rose within its grasp. With this hand rose a man, a man of immeasurable beauty dressed in a coal black collar-less suit. Upon the lake, this man who rose

from the coldness of the placid lake began to walk upon the very water. He walked to the spot where she had fallen into the water. He looked down at her cold body, gasping for air beneath the water surface. His own reflection shadowed the woman's body. His eyes began to glow green, with a strange hue that seemed to travel with the movement of his head. With his free hand, he knelt down upon the water surface and placed his hand, open palmed, on the water. His lips parted and his words were as smooth as water flowing over pebbles in a quiet little stream. "Weeping may endureth the night, but joy comes in the morning." The water parted and her body rose to the surface as if his words turned the lake surface into glass for them both to transverse. Her clothing was a mere formality, for the lake water had pasted her light sundress to her frame, outline the curvature of her body. She coughed for a moment, his first sign of hope. Seconds later, her eyes opened and became fixed on the figure before her. He simply smiled and offered her a hand as both rose to their feet. Her mind swarmed with questions, but her lips could not speak of her bedazzlement. He took the rose within his hand and displayed it to her. She watched as he purposely pricked his index finger on one of the thorns. He took the index finger, and placed it over the blue rose. A drop of his lifeforce, his stream of existence fell upon the blue rose and it was immediately engulfed in a glowing white flame. The flame existed for only a moment, but once it faded, the flower was a crimson red fully blossomed rose. "How . . . how did you?" He simply placed his pricked finger over her lips, to silence her questions. The moment his lifeforce touched her lips, she felt this aura of inner peace and her frigid body became warm with life. He closed his eyes and bowed to her. Coal black wings sprouted from his back, and a golden halo began to shine above the crown of his head. The process was instantaneous, but still magnificent. The world's activities were frozen about them. The lake no longer rippled from raindrops, the trees no longer shook from the summer's breeze, there was no sign of movement or existence. They stood together in infinity, silent and at peace. After a moment, he opened his eyes as his massive wings began to flap. He hovered over the water and smiled. "Remember nothing of this sorrow that you burden yourself with. Remember only peace." His words were spoken in the same smooth voice as before. She gave him a nod and began to walk back to the pier. His halo began to glow in radiance, to the point that although she had her back to him, she still had to shield her eyes from its glow. Like a sunbeam over the new horizon, he flew at a remarkable speed to the heavens. The moment he was above mere human sight and she had just stepped on the pier, time restored itself and the rain came once again.

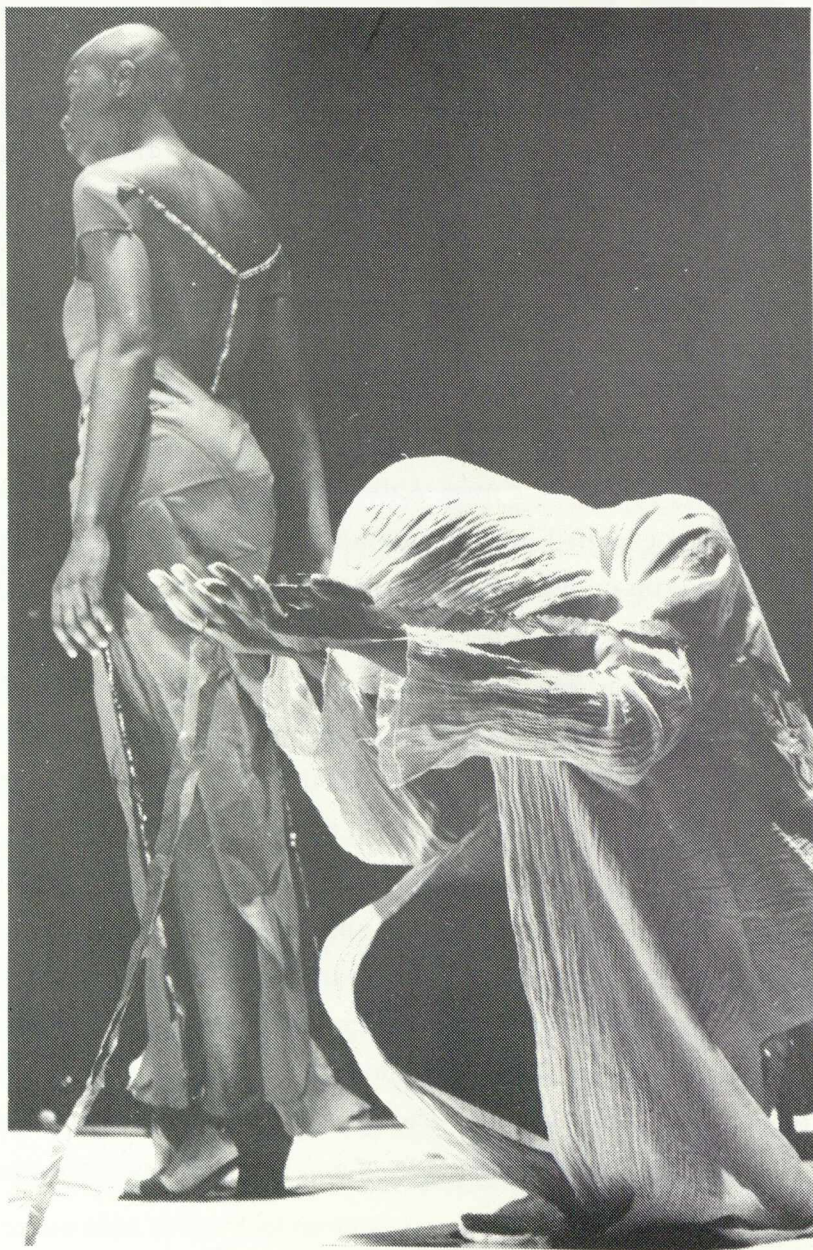


photo by Ja'nell Nequeva

Untitled  
Taneya Gethers

Blissful memories are enchanting;  
warm reminders of my love, of his warm embrace.  
Peaceful moments in time of us hugging and holding one another;  
facing the empty world as a union, as one entity . . . together.

Vivid is his smile,  
his laugh - subtle and collective.

The tip of his nose so handsome,  
so delicate,  
so charming in its own.

Tightly I grasp onto his fading existence.

Blissful memories are enchanting.

Untitled  
Penny Wrenn

You can't sit still in  
Your own house  
I feel sorry for you  
And you ignore me  
you say "nothing" to "what's wrong"  
you stomp and sigh  
you stare at yourself like a stranger  
Like you're nothing but the air around you  
Like you're see through

So you disappear in the chair  
Or you frown  
Cause you're human  
Though you'd rather not be

So you chase the universe you've never seen  
In the corners of your kitchen  
And the gum between the tiles  
In your bathroom  
There is hope for folks like you  
There is God  
Or music  
Or poetry  
There are ways to a self  
That can't be found  
In your own house

Hiding Out from Love  
Miranda Baugh

I've built myself a bomb shelter  
I buried it deep far below the brittle crust of my compliant tendencies  
The walls are constructed of the highest quality feigned indifference  
and are externally reinforced by a prudish façade  
The perimeter is guarded by an icy, unapproachable mien  
And it must remain impenetrable  
because I survived the first waves by accident  
and would not have survived any others

I keep all my precious treasures in here with me  
songs smiles memories valuable time  
mellow bubble baths flannel pajamas marshmallow furniture

And yeah I lock up every last slinky and giggle nice and tight  
Airtight so that not even a tempting little whiff of musk  
is capable of pushing its way inside  
Before my last renovation that very smell  
popped the lock and attempted to settle  
like soft dust on everything in the place  
and when I finally wrestled it out  
some of my best things had disappeared too

Victims of the latest barrage  
are audacious enough to call it BEAUTIFUL  
Like it's Jesus come to get them  
They say I'm hiding out from a damn blessing

And yeah I do admit my jar of peanut butter  
always has chocolate syrup trails in it  
after peculiarly long periods of solitude  
And I wonder why I must burn 3 sticks of gardenia incense  
each morning to replace the air  
I suck from the room into my dreams  
the night before  
And I can't seem to get the smell of mothballs  
out of the little black dress

my mother bought me some years back  
(I never wore it anyway)

But I just don't trust that unnatural glow of the infected  
I know that blind jubilation  
is merely the first symptoms of the parasite inside  
and inevitably the empty shells remaining  
will be even lonelier than me

Can I?  
Qelsi Qualls

I fight a two prong battle  
with my eyes on the prize  
The stars in the sky speak volumes  
I lift my ear to contemplation  
and the stars cloud my eyes  
When the sun appears  
What lies is a carcass of a being  
Empty and left to rot  
Self destroyed  
Self destroyed for the price of others  
Self destroyed for the price of myself  
I ask myself if I can live a lie  
with the stars in my eyes  
And can I survive when the sun rots my insides.





photo by Joni Alexis Poitier

Hidden Talent  
Benyka L. Mitchell

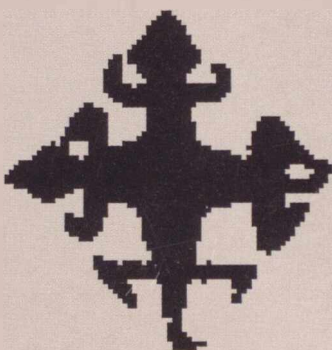
What good is a voice never spoken  
What use is a melody never sung  
What joy is a book never written  
Or a note not held for long

What point could a philosopher make  
If his thoughts are held within  
Who would be willing to follow a leader  
That hides behind other men

What beauty could a poem capture  
If the poet's thoughts are never composed  
What purpose have eyes like windows to the world  
That forever remain closed

An adventure cannot be found  
In a novel that has no words  
And an empty glass set before you  
Cannot possibly quench your thirst

No one will hear the words of a speaker  
If nothing is ever said  
Just as no one will understand the meaning  
Of this poem if it's never read.



Adinkra Symbol from Ghana

“Funtunfunafu denkyem funafu, won afuru bom nso worididi a na wo ko.”  
Need for unity, particularly where there is one destiny.