



ERATO'S

MAGAZINE



Erato's Literary Magazine . Created for & by students



WINTER EDITION: SUBMERGED

Dear Reader,

Winter is a time of submersion. Of being submerged in the Dutch mist, submerged in academic books, submerged in the tide of winter blues.

This issue puts forward this feeling, that has been pervading the cold season, gathering how it was felt and recollected by our writers and artists. I hope that we are able to bring you a little warmth.

On behalf of the whole team, I am proud to announce that the Erato's Magazine Winter Edition is finally out!

All the best,

Rita Castro

Co-Chief Editor, Erato's Magazine Team

Winter 2024/25

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the years of strife and not-my-homes seem so far away now
scenes like bad dreams surface, a disturbance out of place now;
borrowed from someone else, I don't know what to do with them
i try to push them under, but if i stopped to remember
if you ask me how it happened,
how i got through; i couldn't tell you.

lately the past's been floating
i've been feeling overwhelmed
feels like everyone's doing it better
i'm just consumed by existential dread
my thoughts form mobs and prison walls
it's getting harder to pretend
has everyone else figured it out?
will i figure it out before the end?
i don't know who i am or who i've been
but at least i know i like my hair like this
if i had money or talent
i'd run away and be an artist
i love some people, not a lot
cause most i don't feel like i can trust
still, i stare from cafe tables
with such unrequited love
am i insane, or just turned 20
i wish i knew what i'm capable of

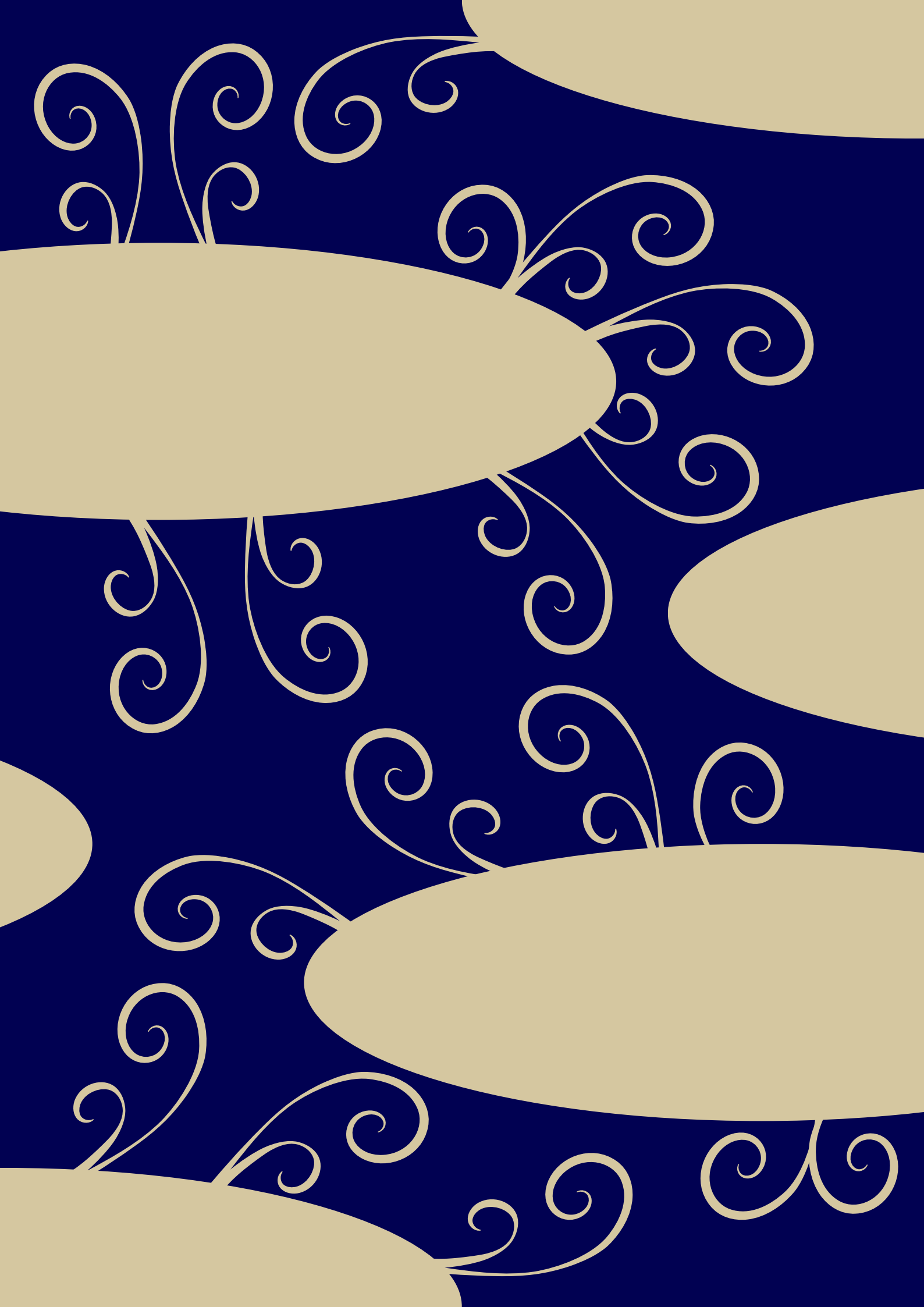
Sounds of the Sonora Desert

by Jonas Jobse

The sluggish American Artery of four-wheeled steel is always in motion. It contracts and expands, speeds up and slows down seemingly of its own free will. Cars overtaking, speeding past each other as engines grumble. Drifters flow along mindlessly as they cross the cactus forests of the Sonoran desert. During the day, they find shelter from the beating sun behind tinted windows. Interstate 8 is playing an American hymn as it always does. The choir of bass and tenor engines sings in harmony with the rubber tires spinning along the road and they resound all the way from San Diego to Casa Grande. Listening to this omnipresent piece of music, people slowly slip into a half-sleep limbo as the sun sets over the Gila mountains behind them. In this moonless and otherwise quiet Arizona night, a girl stands on the desert plain with a flute in her hand. This quiet observer.

She approaches the highway with her eyes closed, moving quietly and carefully. When she lifts the flute to her lips and plays her serene first note, the highway flexes and pushes itself up from the ground, allowing her to pass underneath. The sound of the running tires swells as she does so, the vibrations quickly filling up the empty air beneath the road and resonating in her ears. She blows a repeating melody hard on her flute and as this melody rises through the airwaves the soundscape of the interstate submits to her instrument and begins to support her efforts. The constant drone of tires and engines proves to be no more than background noise as the girl blows her flute and dazzles the dark sky.

With her eyes still closed, she steps unto the center guardrail and suddenly blows a harsh note, a disturbing, cruel note and the road slams itself back onto the ground with a tremendous crash. The girl had now started her strange song, displeasing her asphalt orchestra. As the roads on both sides of the median struggle against her tune, curl up on themselves, writhe and thrash, its instrumentarium is expanded by the sounds of shattering glass and metal collapsing in on itself as cars hit each other and some are thrown into the sky to come down hard on the dusty ground while the passengers pass on from their limbo. Strangely, all sounds arrive in unity and grow more connected as the chaos rages on. It is only the girl's flute now that persists in dissonance, tormenting that which surrounds her as the world crashes in and struggles to douse her flame. The roads on both sides of the median rear themselves up and slam back down onto the ground over and over again, giving an ever quickening indication of tempo that the girl must keep up with to survive. Pistons are now firing quickly, quickly, quickly! as their voices rise and rise. The roads warp toward each other and form a terrifying cylindrical mass of tarmac, trying to take this girl for a core. As the cylinder begins to compact, gas tanks collide with hot engines and a flame that shatters the blanket of the dark night bursts through the cracking concrete. A single, ear-piercing note is sustained through the sounds of crumbling cars and crunching concrete as the girl and her flute are absorbed by the road and fall into the ranks of this now angelic ensemble. As the sun rises, Interstate 8 settles on the ground for the final time, spreads itself out and once more commences its hymn. The eternal song of the American highway is all that is left for sound on this desert plain today.



Submerged:

by Adriana Fernandez

a Brief Explanation of the Valencia Floods

Beginning on the 29th of October 2024, the area and surroundings of Valencia — a city full of history and culture, as well as a popular tourist destination on the south-eastern coast of Spain— endured some of the worst rain and floods in its recent history leaving 1500 km of roads destroyed, 83,000 cars ruined and 227 dead. On the 3rd of November, the king, the president of Spain and the president of the Comunidad de Valencia visited Paiporta, the town most affected by the floods, and they were met with anger, shouted insults and handfuls of mud thrown at their faces; almost a month later, bodies of missing people were still being found, the desert-brown mud that's still being cleaned from houses and streets has become symbolic and the political turmoil has not fully settled. Even being Spanish, I found it hard to fathom how a disaster of this scale could be allowed to happen in a (supposedly) developed country like mine, so I wanted to try give a little explanation, as objective as possible, and depth to those who might have wondered the same as I of this country so well known for its sunny holiday perfection. Here are the main causes and their aftermath, distilled:

Carlos Mazón, the president of the Comunidad de Valencia, and his regional government is the main body responsible for handling civil protection in Valencia. They received alerts from the AEMET (State Meteorological Agency) for possible heavy rains in the area five days before disaster struck, with the orange weather warning issued on Monday October 28th being elevated to the highest red weather warning as early as 8AM on Tuesday morning. This entails a recommendation of maximum precaution and urges citizens to stay indoors if possible. At 1pm on Tuesday, Mazón addressed the public, advising them to take precautions on the road while also stating that the storm was expected to reduce its intensity by 6pm that afternoon. This did not occur; various rivers and gorges continued to flood as the rain continued. Finally, at 8:12pm, as various roads were already impassable and people in some areas were trapped in vehicles, water rushing into their houses, an emergency flood alert was sent to the phones of all citizens in the province of Valencia.

In the days following the torrential floods, the central government was criticised for not sending enough emergency relief on time, including refusing France's offer to send 200 firefighters to aid find and rescue missions. The monumental task of cleaning up and attending to survivors was largely left to thousands of volunteers, with help coming from all over the country and awareness raised on social media of what the locals needed the most.

Carlos Mazón was also heavily criticised for not giving the public sufficient warning and failing in his duty to protect citizens. Reports of his having a three hour long lunch the day of the floods and being unreachable stoked the fire and on November 9th, the first protest calling for his resignation was held, with around 130,000 people gathering in front of the headquarters of the regional government. Mazón has apologised for mistakes made in the handling of the floods, however he continues to blame others for providing insufficient information and refuses to step down. This dispute between regional and central government exposes the weakness of Spanish emergency response protocols to catastrophes of this scale; it is exaggerated by the fact that the central government is currently held by PSOE, a more left-wing party, with Pedro Sanchez as president, while Valencia's regional government is held by PP, a right-wing party.

PSOE and PP have always been opponents but tensions have increased in recent years with the arrival of Vox to the far-right, making it harder for either of them to obtain a majority in parliament. The resulting hostility between the parties slows decision-making processes and exacerbates crises like the floods in Valencia, where rapid action is crucial.

The humanitarian disaster has been used by all sides to push their own political agendas in Spain's increasingly polarised climate, with right wing extremists claiming immigrants were not helping out fellow locals and choosing to blame the central government over Carlos Mazón and Valencia's regional government, leaning into their hatred of president Pedro Sanchez. The motto 'Only the people save the people' ('Solo el pueblo salva al pueblo') was popularised, illustrative of the population's frustration with the politicians in power.

Aside from governmental incompetence, of course a significant cause of the mortality and destructiveness of the floods was the ever more palpable effect of climate change. Valencia is a coastal area accustomed to flooding and intense rains during short periods of time around the end of summer, as cold air masses begin to circulate at high altitudes and meet the warm, humid air of the Mediterranean, resulting in short-lived storms with intense precipitation. Historically, flooding of seasonal bodies of water has caused problems, particularly since flawed urban planning led to many houses being built near them.

However, the record-breaking rainfalls in some municipalities—such as 185 litres per square metre in one hour in Turís—carry the unmistakable fingerprint of climate change. A preliminary study by World Weather Attribution (WWA) concluded that it made the rainfall 12% more intense and doubled the chances that they would occur. As the Mediterranean sea becomes increasingly warmer, larger clouds form, favouring the development of harsher storms. Though given less coverage, the environmental impact of the floods is significant, including the contamination of water sources, deposition of detritus on beaches and destruction of vegetation. The most devastating perhaps is the accumulation of sediments and contaminants washed into the Albufera, a wetland of international importance for its biodiversity, including endemic species and over 350 bird species. Though too early to fully evaluate the damage, the delicate ecological balance of its waters has surely been upset.

These weeks will not be quickly forgotten by many Valencianos, strong as their sense of identity is; I only hope this is a point of inflection for Spanish society and the necessary changes are enacted to honour those who lost something in the floods.



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Incorrigible Scoundrels by the Sea:

Hagfish

by Dung Ly

Part V

Content Warning: Obscenity, Terrorism, Discrimination

Ebele had learned to ignore whale calls over the hydrophone. They were like someone trying to get your attention while you were looking for sounds that were not speaking: the different cavitation between navy destroyers and cruise ships; the difference between the background noise of the currents and the silence of a submarine. She turned the hydrophone to look for the sounds closest to them: besides the whale below them, there was the crew of the Absent Husband with a quarter of their shipment of produce they were hired to move and more distantly the navy destroyer she was to keep track of. But knowing her mentor, she often turned her hydrophone towards a small passenger liner, whose talk aboard deck reached down into the sea like a light.

Then red lights pierced her closed eyes. At once thirty-three people across the boat's length dropped their eight-hour shifts; another thirty-three set aside their leisure time and awakened those sleeping. She turned and heard Gadi put a hand on the fabric on her shoulder, his voice drowning out everything she previously listened to. "It is time to vote. Seems the old hag will be with us a bit longer, however, depending on how this one goes."

All sailors had squeezed into the galley within ten minutes. Ebele wondered whether the refugee would be allowed to vote, when she saw that the refugee stood with Sati and the boatswain, having squeezed in early and into the front, near the dining tables where the captain and the quartermaster would hold forth while sitting on top of them.

Captain Hanzo began the meeting by banging on a nearby pipe with his empty revolver. "Fifteen minutes ago our communication buoy picked up a transmission from Commodore Zhongli." He paused. "War has been declared. These are the coordinates for the nearest destroyer squadron gathering point. Local call-in at 2300."

The Captain let the sailors murmur for a minute, noting that everyone knew by now that although their boat had no torpedo or missile tubes, they did recently acquire a group of sailors who had mostly kept to themselves. Hanzo imagined they could conclude themselves when he looked in the direction of Kasih: if he did indeed have the experience and the temperament to handle explosives, then perhaps he could be the first to be trained to handle the submerged assembly of the torpedo with the dive team, to be launched from the recently reinforced tower at a tilt towards the surface.

When the murmurs were starting to drown out his thoughts, the captain spoke: "Thanks to our patron, we can prove ourselves to the fleet. But make no mistake: destroyers will see our pack coming, so it is in part a matter of luck as to which submarine they choose to pursue. Therefore, to fulfil our quota, I have gotten our sister-ship to agree to witness an attack on a different target."

This drew a sharp glance from the quartermaster. "The customary blockade now upheld by all Free Fleets allows for attacks upon passenger liners and our bridge crew has recently found one in the vicinity."

Before the murmurs could reignite, Kasih spoke up. "What nation is it? Have we seen its flag?" There was some silence as none had recognised the voice at first.

"What, your mommy and wife coming over?" Said the nuclear engineer, a small woman who was raised and educated in the boarding schools for the fleet in the League. "Then you should have thought twice about coming here."

"Can't we take it hostage? Or just take their valuables?"

"Then they should have flown the wet flag like you did", added Ebele, who in the heat of the moment assumed that Kasih was previously a migrant to the League who stowed away on a submarine. "I vote we hit the passenger liner and be on our way, am I right?" Her suggestion was met with ayes, but in the red darkness, it could not be seen where everyone's eyes were. "They had the choice not to work for the man's wages- and to not let those migrants do so either-"

"Murder!" spoke Sati. "You seadogs must all be thinking: if Sati can shoot a few people for her selfish reasons and be on her way, we can do so too! Fucking think: they killed a bunch of poors! They killed a bunch of nobodies who had nothing to do with nothing- they killed my family! That is what people will be saying about us! Perhaps people won't care when they say it, but someone will and that someone is going to be lots of 'em when they talk until they die. Now no one will think a damn thing if we just give the navy what's coming to them- at worst a compliment at the pub and nothing else!"

Then the boatswain squeezed aside Sati and spoke. "As you well know, I tend to abstain from most votes onboard as you are all terribly unwholesome. " This drew chuckles from the crowd. "I would offer you perhaps the choice of changing course and making for the monastery whence I hailed- let us all take vows and escape suffering!" Now the crowd only chuckled at his theatrics. " But it is to be said perhaps that now that it is war, these are the end times."

The quartermaster took her own revolver and loaded a blank, while the captain handed the elderly lady her earplugs. When Sati noticed the silence that had come upon them, she regretted saving Kasih with all the time that was yet her luxury.

"As you well know, just by being part of the crew I have already broken my vow of non-violence, after which the rest was easy. But only a week or two ago, aboard came a young man whose life could be missed as well as the people who actually died. So what is a washed-up monk to say if he is not going to vote? I have heard you about to vote just to beat on that guy; you were about to vote for morals for which it is way to late now. I'd offer you all to become monks with me if we were not already underwater, so I say we vote for what makes this life worth living!"

The ringing of a gunshot brought everyone to their knees. For a few minutes, the ringing could be heard by the listener's on the Absent Husband, the destroyer Pelagic Peace and the passenger liner Fortuitous Voyage, all of whom now waited for what else would be voiced by the Drowned Secret.

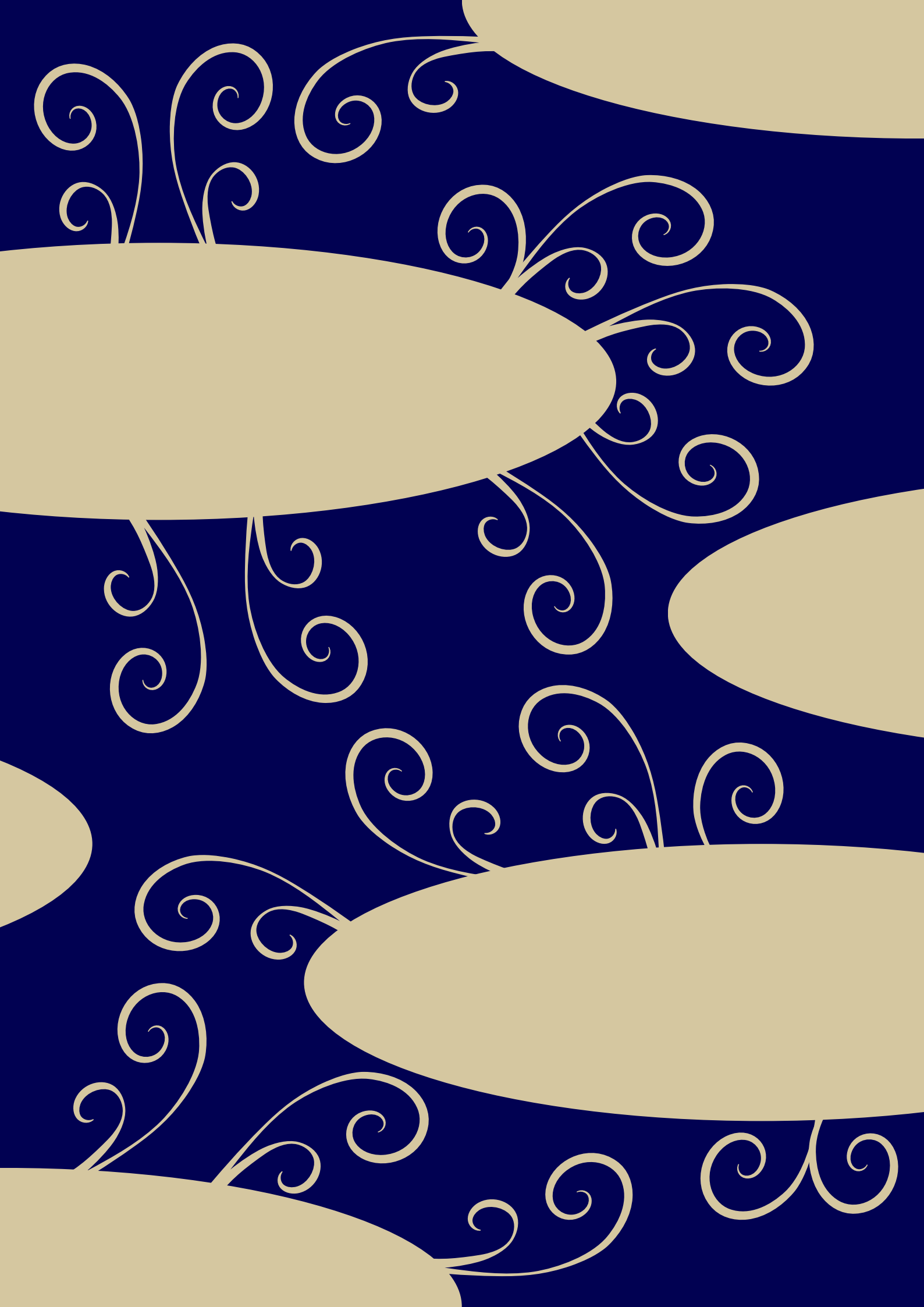
The captain helped the quartermaster from the table to speak standing, who spoke with rippling confidence: "Our boat requires our touch again soon. The matter has been put to a vote because the attack is more a matter than the safety for which your captain is responsible." Her voice then fell like a wave. "Considering our shiny new boat, I say we received our fief with a sword, so to speak; then we leave rumours in port about our bloodthirst. We would do well to clear up the noise about who we choose to hurt as Free Sailors."

With that, votes were cast by picking either a black or white rock from one pot and putting it in another.

Ebele then saw Sati show Kasih both rocks as if she would vote in his stead. Were it not for the quartermaster starting the vote, she would have told Sati that the crew aboard the passenger liner were even more complicit than the navy for threatening their livelihood by outright stealing business.

She had heard that in some places, they dunk people underwater to cleanse them of wrong. Ebele thought nothing wrong with plying the seas to fish or to move cargo and that surely all that is wrong with at sea came indeed from those bothering sailors about bottom trawling for example. She repeated in her head that if they just let the free fleets capture the fishermen in their rackets, bottom trawling could already have effectively been prohibited! Having repeated as such, coming forward to vote hardly registered in her mind and she couldn't look at Sati with anger either: when whichever ship had been sunk, she would try asking what Kasih's story was. Perhaps there was really nothing to his story than just another failure of a man, which meant to her that he would remain ever timid, while she and Sati worked towards their retirement.

The outcome was fifty to forty-eight for hitting the destroyer, two abstained.



Submerged in the Underground:

A Review on the Eye Filmmuseum's Exhibition on American Avant-Garde Film in the 1960s

by Rita Castro & Nicole Krieg

“**U**nderground: American Avant-Garde Film in the 1960s” (13.10.2024 - 05.01.2025) was an exhibition at the Eye Filmmuseum in Amsterdam, which featured a curated selection of works from the American avant-garde film scene, commonly referred to as “underground cinema.” The genre emerged in the 1960s as a reaction to the excessively commercial cinema of Hollywood, reinventing the techniques of film production, as well as defying narrative conventions. Jonas Mekas, arguably the most prominent precursor of American avant-garde cinema, stated in his documentary “Fragments of Paradise” that a major characteristic of underground cinema was its focus on cinema’s poetic aspect rather than its plot (14:56-15:08). Indeed, the American avant-garde cinema movement turned away from the notion of a clear narrative as indispensable in filmmaking, experimenting instead with the poetic and aesthetic components of the art and bringing the previously hardly explored genre of the non-narrative film to life. “The working out of the language, techniques, vocabulary, and forms of the non-narrative film” was then, for Mekas, “the main achievement of the Sixties” (Mekas and Barrett 104).

The Exhibition

In a dark and spacious room, one is guided through the different subsections of the exhibition, each presenting a film-maker. To capture the atmosphere of the 60s in flux, original documents such as pamphlets, notes, photos, and posters are displayed, presenting the historical and personal background of each artist and providing insight into their creative process. A bench and a big screen invite the visitor to sit down and watch a sample of their *oeuvre*, usually a display of two or three short films. Although the films differ largely in theme and cinematography, they share a defamiliarizing aspect. One can even say that upon entering the exhibition room, there is a sense of submersion, of losing oneself in the dream world of the cinematographers. In the darkness, the overlap of the short films’ soundtrack fills the room.

The exhibited films resource to non-linear narratives and unconventional filmmaking techniques that contrast starkly with the model of big screen entertainment that became the paradigm in Hollywood. For instance, in “Lights” (1966), Marie Menken directs a free-floating hand-held camera to seemingly quite over-the-top colorful Christmas lights, creating a rather blurry image that is never straight or still, as if one



(Figure 1)

was looking at them through squinting eyes. With no soundtrack, the focus is hyper directed to the dimensions of light and movement. Other pieces, such as Hollis Frampton’s “Lemon” (1969) and Andy Warhol’s “Empire” (1964) play with pace. “Lemon” displays a lemon being illuminated from different angles throughout the film. This piece can be particularly intriguing and requires an extended amount of observation time. Due to the unusually slow pace of the frames, it seems to be a still photograph rather than a film at first sight, offering a poignant yet harsh critique to one’s

attention span and patience. In a more radical way, Warhol's "Empire" challenges the traditional pace of film, depicting the same view of the Empire State Building in the city of New York in slow motion and for eight-hours straight. Warhol himself stated that the goal of the film was to "see time go by" (Bourdon 188).

Not only did filmmakers experiment with the medium, but also with how to convey their message. That is the case in Gunvor Nelson's "Take Off" (1972) and "My Name is Oona" (1969), which bend the conventional ways of highlighting themes of women's identity and autonomy, pressing into the contemporary second-wave feminist movement. "Take Off" features a woman dancing sensually and stripping, to the point where she ultimately strips herself even of her legs, arms, head and breasts, becoming just a torso that floats away into the galaxy, disintegrating. This is a satirical but deeply discomforting portrait of the sexualization of the female body, showing a woman being stripped not only of her clothes but of her own body and identity, to the point where nothing is left. She ultimately becomes an imitation, without an original, of herself, transmitting the idea of the alienation brought by oversexualization. The removal of body parts in the film creates an atmosphere of weirdness and discomfort, bringing the metaphorical meaning to the very literal realm. The gruesome absurdity of the ending of what started as a realistic sensual film



(Figure 2)

successfully critiques the reduction of the female body to something so estranged from reality to the point of becoming cynically hilarious. Additionally, Nelson's "My Name is Oona" is an almost lyrical, poetic form of expressing femininity in adolescence. The film depicts a collection of black and white videos of Nelson's daughter, Oona, as Oona repeatedly states her name, which overlaps and echoes, creating a rhythmic, dream-like scene. While perfectly capturing cinema's poetic aspect through the repetition of Oona's name, it can also seem as if Nelson is trying to depict women's struggle to claim their place in society. Oona's constant stating of her name almost mirrors that of a child learning to speak, or trying to make out their identity and its relation to the world around them. However, through making Oona the main point of focus of the film, she is able to claim and affirm her role as an autonomous individual in society.

Additional Screening: The Judson Dance Theater

Separate film screenings were held as additional depth to the exhibition's selected collection, extending into the Eye's cinemas, where some of the longer films by key artists of the American avant-garde scene were displayed. On November 26th, during an evening spent experiencing the intersection between dance and film, four works by the "Judson Dance Theater" collective were screened, featuring films by Yvonne Rainer, Carolee Schneemann, Meredith Monk, and Elaine Summers, all taking place in the Judson Dance collective in 1960s New York.

Housed in the Judson Memorial Church, the company was a space for artistic expression, ranging from radical dance to installations, film, or performances, which Schneemann referred to as “kinetic theater,” as it involved improvisations of movement (Ross). For women, the theater was an especially liberating space as the American avant-garde scene was male-dominated at the time. As Julian Ross mentioned in his introduction to the screening, with their interdisciplinary and radical approach, the company incorporated film in order to “explore the boundaries of motion, time, and space” (Ross).

While all avant-garde cinema was experimental and breaking away from conventional “rules” of how film should be, “Trio Film” (1968) by Yvonne Rainer was especially compelling, seeming



(Figure 3)

almost like a social experiment. Rainer’s play on form and sound spurred an out of the ordinary experience for the audience. One is seated in a room full of people, and on display are two nude figures as they interact with a balloon, repeatedly making the same movements. The silence is intense, and as time goes on, the absurdity of the film seems striking. All one hears are people shifting in their seats, someone’s stomach growling, a cough here and there, maybe a giggle. You start wondering what it is even that you’re watching, or what was the artists’ intent.

But the intent is right in front of you: this entire interaction of questioning what makes art art, and why facing nudity in a room full of people where the silence seems hysterical, is the intent, and is rather brilliant.

The experience of watching each film stood on the fragile intersection of seeking understanding and letting go of oneself to experience the art. One is tempted, as in every dimension of life, to try and find a meaning, to assume that there is something ‘deeper’ to be unveiled behind what is openly being shown. And while this may be, in part, true, we are pushed to be open to the fact that we will never fully grasp it, or that we will never know if the meaning that we grasp is the right one - if there is a right or wrong even, or if there’s any meaning at all. Or that we should stop aiming to rationalize everything and unveil the universe’s secrets, but instead find meaning in the real, objective things, such as light, image and sound; accepting that a film does not necessarily need to reveal some moral truth or have a life changing plot. The exhibition invites us to appreciate *l’art pour l’art*, or at least to accept that we do not have all-pervading divinity powers and that not all meanings are accessible to us. Sometimes, art does more for us when it leaves us with questions rather than providing us with answers. The artists’ resource to non-linear narratives and non-conventional techniques leads to the reflection of what is the point of performance art and avant-garde art, and ultimately to the question of what art is.

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Take Off. Directed by Gunvor Nelson, 1972.

Trio Film. Directed by Yvonne Rainer, 1968.

Images

Figure 1. Screenshot from "Lights" directed by Marie Menken, 1966.

Figure 2. Screenshot from "My Name is Oona" directed by Gunvor Nelson, 1969.

Figure 3. Screenshot from "Trio Film" directed by Yvonne Rainer, 1968.

Waves

by Mireille

Content Warning: Elements of Self-Harm & Suicidal Thoughts

I have always loved the waves.

Their movements, their strength, their determination, and colours. Their liveliness, and beauty. I could stare at the sea for hours, never bored by the way the white horses galloped over the water, or the way the waves broke apart upon the shore, forever trying to break through.

I was maybe ten years old when I began to paint those waves. I spent many hours observing them, studying them from different angles. I painted them in blue, green, black, white, and grey, with oil and with acrylic. I tried to capture the chaos of foam and water and display them in my art.

The waves were my escape.

My happy place.

My home and hearth.

One day, I found myself high upon a cliff, cold in the whirlwind, my fingers numb and my ears freezing. I looked at my painting, gripping it tight to prevent the strong wind from taking it away from me. I walked over to the edge of the cliff and watched the waves slam against the stone beneath me, the white horses dying at the foot of that cliff, only to disappear into the blue and green and grey of the sea beneath them. Underneath us.

And I wondered what it would feel like. I wondered what would happen to them after, and if they were at peace.

That is when it happened.

One moment, I felt the stone under my feet, strong and confident, and the next, it was gone.

It was all gone.

There was nothing but the wind, gripping my clothes, my limbs, my hair, as if trying to pull me up. But it could not stop me from racing toward the waves which I had so admired, and for so long. It could not stop me from being taken by those waves. It could not stop me from falling.

I felt the cold and braced myself for death, accepting it at the same time.

But it did not come.

Instead of feeling the pressure steal the air from my lungs and the life from my heart, I felt as if I were being protected by the arms of many. The waves wrapped themselves around me, not forcefully and hard, but soothingly and soft, as if I were a new-born being wrapped into a blanket. They wiped away my tears and washed my face clean with freshly formed foam. And as those waves carried me safely to the shore, I heard a voice.

"No," it said, "Oh, no. We cannot take someone who has loved us so beautifully for all these years."

The waves left me on the beach, safe and sound.

"No," I breathed, new tears rolling down my face. "No, you don't understand." I felt hollow and hurt, something I had never felt when I was near the sea. My hands gripped the sand, rough and abrasive against my bare skin. A sob left my throat as I quietly cried, "I did not fall – **I jumped.**"



Ondergemompeld (2025), door Flore Spekman
Submurmured (2025), by Flore Spekman

The Important Visit

by Božidar Vasilić

The Mirković family had lived in the same East Sarajevo suburb for almost 40 years, and they rarely had to—or could—venture out of it. A trip to a spa town an hour away was considered a luxury, and a trip across the border (always to Montenegro) happened only once every three or so years.

Now they were flying to Belgium. It had always seemed an impossibly remote location, but that was where their son now lived and worked—and as a diplomat, no less. He had left behind his old life, their life: he could travel whenever and wherever he wanted; he could go to the best restaurants, buy fine clothes, and spend time with good people.

“You just have to put it on the expense account!” he told them.

The parents did not mind. That was what they had wanted for him: to *get out into the world*, to *make something of himself*. That was why they made him work so hard; that was why they gave away everything they had. But they gave away everything Dora had, too. They tended to forget that.

“Oh, it’s all so large!” her mother said about the airport.

“Nothing like ours,” her husband added.

It was just like them to stare open-mouthed at everything, she thought. They were both over sixty but behaved like small children. Just as a toddler is astonished at everything it believes is new, but was in fact merely outside its field of vision, so they were astonished at everything outside that small neighborhood to which they had confided themselves (and her) for so many years. They were even starting to look like toddlers, with their fat, stubby fingers, thinned hair, and unsteady, penguin-like gait. And she was their nanny.

“Now we’ll go left,” she said.

“Why left?” her mother asked.

“Because that’s where the exit is. See? That’s where Mirko will be waiting for us.”

“Yes, I knew that,” she said tartly, as if offended.

And, once they had passed through all the security and came to the exit, they finally saw him. He was leaning against the wall, wearing a dark suit with no tie, his oily hair shining, his large smile getting ever larger as they approached him. He embraced them, first all together, then individually, and finally all together once more.

“You look so good in that suit,” his mother said.

“Proper man,” his father added.

Dora noticed that it had loose threads here and there and that there were little balls of fiber at the cuffs. He also seemed to be balding slightly; his hairline had receded.

He asked them about their flight as they walked to the parking garage.

“Well I haven’t flown in years,” his mother said. “I mean, you probably fly around all the time, but I...”

“No, no, not that often,” he said. “I mean, I have to do *some* work occasionally.”

They laughed. A life of leisure: that was the kind of life he had, according to his stories. He barely had to work at all.

But then they came to the car, which was the same small, red, boxy thing in which he arrived in Belgium. His mother stopped.

“Didn’t you say you had an embassy-issued car?” she asked.

“Yes, but it’s under repairs right now.”

“Why?”

He smiled like a schoolboy, roguish and innocent at the same time. “Come in and I’ll tell you.”

He had built up certain expectations. Perhaps spies had tried to open it, or it had been attacked by terrorists in the street. But when they started driving, he said:

“It’s nothing too dramatic. I got drunk and banged into a lamppost.”

Sounds like something he’d do, Dora thought. Their mother looked like she would utter a remonstrance, but he preempted her and said:

“I was saved by my passport, of course. They couldn’t do anything.”

So she let out an indulgent little laugh, half-scandalized and half-impressed, the sort a mother might make after seeing her little boy getting up to some innocent mischief.

“You could’ve caused a diplomatic incident,” she said, still laughing.

“It’s fine. They let me off easy.”

Just like childhood, Dora thought. She’d heard the phrase “It’s fine” from her brother so many times in the past that now she was annoyed even when other people used it. Before, he had needed to say it many times to convince his mother; now, evidently, he needed to say it only once. Distance had bred an even deeper understanding between them.

“How’s your poetry going?” Mirko asked her.

“Not bad,” she said.

“Did you publish any of it?”

She smiled.

“I did, actually. I got one poem into a magazine.”

“Oh, really? That’s nice.” For a few seconds, he did seem happy for her, but quickly the corners of his mouth turned down and he said: “Just one though?”

His trying to look sympathetic was what made it worse.

“You have to start somewhere,” she said, trying not to sound defensive. “Next time I’ll publish two or three.”

“Of course. Though you’ve always complained that magazines aren’t much good at home, right?”

“They aren’t, but—”

“It’s a shame you don’t live here, you know. There’s a *very* vibrant literary culture in Belgium. You won’t believe how many books my friends have on their shelves.”

“And have they read these books by any chance?”

“Why do you have to be so cynical?” her mother pleaded.

Mirko went on:

“Well I don’t know if they’ve read them, but their wives have. They go to literary events all the time. Like I said, *very* vibrant.”

And he was right. As they drove through the streets, she sometimes saw the names of publishing houses or magazines and imagined her work in one of their volumes; many more times, she saw bookstores and imagined those volumes resting on their shelves. It could have happened, had she moved—had she been allowed to move.

“And what about your actual job?” he asked her.

“What about it exactly? You know that nothing happens there, it’s a government office.”

“Places where nothing happens always have something happening—any kind of deviation from the nothingness sticks out.”

Delighted at the quip, his mother laughed. Dora did not.

“Well, we’ve had no deviations. Just boredom.”

“Right.” He seemed to feel a kind of sympathy for his sister. He smiled. “It doesn’t show, if that’s any comfort.”

“You think so?” their mother said. “I don’t know, I think it does.” She turned around briefly to look at her. “She always has these circles under her eyes, and lines are forming on her face. Already! I mean really, my dear, you’re only twenty-seven.”

She did not say anything. Now they were on the Rue Belliard, where they passed by some banks and European embassies, and turned into the Rue de l’Industrie, where they saw their own.

“And this is where you work?” his mother asked.

“Yes, not too far from *the big countries*,” he said proudly. “I pass them by sometimes. One of the guys from the American embassy, he’s a good friend of mine, maybe you’ll meet him someday.”

Someone honked behind him and he had to start driving at regular speed again. He said:

“Should we go for lunch now? You must be hungry.”

“But shouldn’t we go to your apartment first?” his mother asked.

“Not much to eat there, and you know I can’t cook. I’ll show you a nice place.”

The Italian restaurant they eventually came to was paneled in dark wood, with a small reception desk at the entrance, the sign on it instructing newcomers to stand and wait. Eventually one of the servers came.

“*Une table pour quatre, s’il vous plaît*,” Mirko said in slightly exaggerated French.

They sat down at a table near the window, overlooking the Brussels Canal, its water still but shimmering like dark quartz.

“You know French?” his mother asked, even more delighted.

“And English, of course, and a bit of Dutch,” he said.

“I’ve never heard a word of Dutch.”

“And believe me, you don’t need to.”

And she exploded in her high, braying laughter, so that the others in the restaurant briefly turned to look at her.

There was silence for a bit. Tentatively, Mirko asked his father:

“And how are you? You’ve been very quiet since you came.”

He shrugged.

“Don’t have much to say.”

And once again there was silence, which ceased when the waiter came to take their orders and Mirko began a discourse on Belgian restaurant culture.

“It really depends on which one you go to,” he said. “Now, everyone knows that the French have the best restaurants, they have a culture that is dedicated to making the restaurant experience a matter of pleasure, of conversation, of socializing, not just of sitting down, eating, and leaving. But if you go to the Netherlands, as I have, over there it’s very functional. Sometimes they’ll subtly pester you after you’ve finished your meal so that you can leave. Now because Belgium has a mix of both cultures, most of all here in Brussels, you never know what...”

Dora had stopped listening. Instead, she observed them. Her father was a mute, unmoving, sepulchral presence, which he had been for some time now; the last time he had laughed out loud at something, rather than chuckling softly with sealed lips, was when she was seven years old. Her mother, leaning forward, followed Mirko’s monologues like a child following a puppet show, her eyes and her smile fixed in place. She was nodding the whole time, slowly, at regular intervals, but when she felt a punchline coming, she would start doing so at a manic, gyrating speed, so that it looked like her head might fall off. And Mirko himself seemed relaxed, leaning back in his chair, his right hand moving about airily and drawing vague shapes.

But his nails were rather dirty, and long, too. His cuticles were cracked. His knuckles were reddish and dry. He was dry all over, for that matter: his face was hard and unreflective, and under his nose and above his right eye she could see a brittle white patch of dead skin.

Their food came.

“Oh, this is *really* good,” their mother said, and felt the need to repeat the statement a few more times.

Dora tried to ignore her. This was the best part of the trip; good food, if not exactly free good food. She knew what was coming, and was not shocked when, after they’d all finished, he said:

“Now I’ll have to show you how things work here.”

“What do you mean?” their mother asked.

“Well, here it’s usually not the case that one person pays for everything.”

“You mean we’ll split it?”

“Yes.”

Dora was foolish enough to think she would get angry. Instead she just laughed.

“Alright, enough of that now, we know how things should work.”

“I’m serious, mom.”

Now she could see her lips twist and tighten, though she was still controlling herself, perhaps wishing that it were still a joke, albeit a distastefully extended one.

“But we barely got together enough money to come here, how are we supposed to—”

“It’s not difficult, mom. Everyone will pay for what they ordered.”

And as she looked at her mother’s face, she felt one of her famously *direct* remarks coming, those that made her wince and laugh at the same time.

“But you’re the one with the money!” she said.

“Oh, sure he is,” Dora said.

The whole table looked at her, and in turn she glanced away and withdrew into her seat. But once they had started talking amongst themselves, she smiled. She was proud simply to have gotten the remark out there, to wound them a bit, for that was what gave her pleasure nowadays—that, and all their various idiocies, their stupid questions and crass remarks, which, embarrassing though they were, always assured her she was right in her low opinion of them.

They finally agreed to split the bill and left. His mother asked:

“Are we finally going to see your apartment now?”

“In a way,” he said. Her silence meant that the question did not even need to be asked, and he went on: “I’m actually moving into another apartment, a bigger one, so the one I’m driving you to now is just temporary.”

“So we won’t actually see it?”

“No.”

Her tone became whiny, like a little girl’s.

“But we came here to see how you live.”

“I know, but—”

“Can’t we see the new one?”

“But there’s nothing in it, what would be the point?”

Dora saw her opportunity, and as innocently as she could, she said:

“And you haven’t stayed in your old one?”

“No, I moved out.”

“Of course.”

The neighborhood they eventually came to did not seem “distinguished,” as their mother would say. The buildings were gray and blocky, like at home, their windows opaque from dirt, their walls sprayed with graffiti either vulgar or nonsensical. With winter approaching, it had gotten dark already, and now small groups of young men walked through the blocks with hunched, swaying shoulders, the uncollected fallen leaves rustling beneath their feet.

“Couldn’t you have found something a bit better?” his mother asked.

“It’s only temporary. Don’t be impressed when you see it.”

And indeed, they were not. The apartment was small, consisting of a living area with an attached kitchen, a white-tiled toilet, and a bedroom that, indeed, was a room with a bed, and nothing else. In all three there was only a suggestion of any kind of heating. It was, at least, clean: there were no spots on the walls, no clumps of dust on the floor, no throwaway items on the couch or table. But it was evidently the kind of cleanliness made in haste; he must have put the place in order only this morning.

“This is where you live?” his mother asked.

“As I’ve said many times, Mom, only temporarily. I’ll be out of here in two weeks.”

“Two weeks to put the new place in order?”

“Well,” he said, chuckling, “the new place *is* pretty big. Now, can I get you anything?”

Since it was too late for coffee, he made everyone tea—a cheap brand, it seemed to her.

“Just to be clear, you and Dad are going to sleep in the bedroom, while Dora and I will sleep here, the couch can be extended, it’s very convenient. Is that alright?”

“Sure,” she said.

And so the family—or rather, Mirko and their mother—began a long conversation over their teacups, he asking her about how things were back home, she asking him about his job and what things were like in “the wider world.” Her answers were predictably dull, while his were rashly inventive. Dora could feel contempt build up in her throat, like phlegm during a sickness. He thinks they’re all stupid. That’s where his conviction comes from: the belief that they will never notice he’s lying because they *cannot* notice. What had happened to him to make him so arrogant? What had he ever done?

“And that was very much the end of that!” he said, having finished yet another one of his triumphant tales. But it seemed he had run out of them. There was a lull.

“It’s getting late,” his mother said. “It’s such a shame that we’re staying for such a short time, not even a full day with you.”

“I know, but that’s how it is.”

Their parents showered and went to sleep in the bedroom, while the siblings remained in the living room, their clothes feeling scratchy and sticky on their bodies. Dora hated to be alone with him, but she wanted neither to shower nor to sleep; she felt as if she must confront him now, deliver some speech whose contours she had been shaping for a long time in her head. She looked at him, and saw on his face that smile he put on when he wanted to be chummy with her.

“I haven’t heard much from you today,” he said sweetly. “Tell me how your life is going, I mean how it’s really going.”

“Don’t try that with me.”

“Come on, don’t be like that. What’s the matter?”

She wanted to scream at him, to repeat his question back to him until he’d heard how ridiculous it was—but their parents were sleeping in the next room and she did not want to wake them. She said:

“You enjoy it. The lying I mean.”

He curved his eyebrows upward, like a child protesting its innocence.

“Lying about what?”

“About everything.”

She had said it calmly, and hoped that she might cut deeper that way than if she shouted. But she could not stop herself.

“Absolutely everything. What’s even your job at the embassy? Pushing files around? Making coffee? Mopping the floor? Do you even work there at all?”

“Dora, stop.”

“No.”

“Why?”

“Because it’s *repulsive*. And the reason it’s repulsive is because you enjoy it, like I said. You enjoy lying to Mom and Dad and everyone else and thinking to yourself: ‘Look at these idiots, they actually believe what I’m saying.’”

He shook his head and looked down at the floor, but the gestures did not seem sincere. Now he would try to get her sympathy, she knew. He said:

“You don’t know what kind of pressure I was under when we were young.”

“Oh, here we go—”

“I’m serious. The pressure to always succeed, to always go somewhere else, move farther, move faster, go up in the world, go anywhere, just not be in that neighborhood anymore. I lived with that every day.”

“And instead of working and doing as you were told you pretended to do as you were told.”

Now he seemed angry with her, though he, too, tried not to raise his voice.

“You didn’t live with that.”

“No, I didn’t. I had the opposite.” She raised the pitch of her voice, caricaturing their mother. “‘Just don’t make too much noise, Dora, don’t cause a fuss, stay where you are.’ That’s what I lived with. And meanwhile they pushed you, you of all people, to go far. Because of what? What did they see in you? What made you deserve to move up in the world?”

And now he was smiling.

“You’re leaving out the last part of that question,” he said. “You left out: ‘as opposed to me.’”

She could not reply to this. Standing up, she said:

“I think I’ll go for a run now.”

“In the middle of the night?”

“Give me the keys.”

He did so without protest, and somehow that hurt her more than if he had argued or given them along with some sharp remark.

The next day, they did not speak to each other, and during their parting embraced each other chastely, like people who had met each other only once or twice before.

Photo's
By

SILKE
HAZENDONK

(Een digitale expositie)

Door Flore Spekman



Imlil 2024

De foto's die hier worden tentoongesteld zijn gemaakt door Silke Hazendonk (20). Als jong kunstenaar is ze begonnen met fotografie om de wereld, en de mensen die hem vormgeven, vast te leggen. Om een realiteit; een authenticiteit te vangen in een minimum van tijd, een fractie van een seconde.



Tanger may 2024
2024



Ze richt haar lens vooral op haar medemens, met hier en daar een stilleven, gegrepen uit de omgeving. Haar werk reflecteert niet alleen de mensen die haar omgeving maken, maar ook de ruimte waarin ze leven; de achtergrondruis van ons bestaan.

Zo neemt ze de kijker contrasterend mee in haar leefwereld, en laat die zien zoals hij is: ook een beetje van hen.

“Ik hou ervan om te laten zien hoe de mede-mens leeft. Individuen in hun eigen wereld? Misschien is dat het wel.”

Store, Tanger
2024

“Wat mij het meest inspireert,
zijn mijn reizen.

Ik merk dat ik tijdens het reizen het best kan open staan met wat er op mij afkomt. Je ziet mensen, nieuwe rituelen, een nieuwe cultuur. De camera is ook een middel voor mij om contact te maken met het land waarin ik reis. Dit kan ook dichtbij huis natuurlijk. Ik heb het vaak op de markt, waar meerdere werelden samenkomen. Eerlijk gezegd keek ik nooit zo naar hoe andere fotografen hun werk deden. Op een gegeven moment kwam ik het

werk van Mohammed Bourouissa tegen, een fotograaf die mij nu nog steeds erg aanspreekt. Hij documenteert in zijn fotografie onder andere mensen in de Banlieues van Parijs en ghettos in Amerika. Ik ben sinds kort ook erg fan van Nederlandse documentaire maker Robin de Puy. Zij reist door Amerika om daar het verhaal van verschillende individuen vast te leggen op camera.”



Piedmonte mountains
2024





Uit de serie *Sahara dessert*
2024





“Mijn favoriete foto’s,
zijn gemaakt binnen
in het huis van de
Marokkaanse
vrouwen.”

Serie Bayt Latifa
2024



Bayt Latifa
2024

“Tijdens mijn reis in Marokko verbleef ik met vrienden in het huis van een kennis van hen. Tijdens ons verblijf werd er drie keer per dag uitgebreid voor ons gekookt, door deze vrouwen. In Marokko stond niet iedereen ervoor open om te worden gefotografeerd, vooral vrouwen zaten hier niet op te wachten. Toen ik het aan deze vrouwen vroeg, waren ze erg enthousiast. Ik voelde me vereerd. Een setting die, naar mijn idee, niet vaak wordt afgebeeld”



*Bayt Latifa: Hassan, Omar. Anguelz,
Ouarzazate
2024*



*Bayt Latifa: Hassan, Omar. Anguelz, Ouarzazate
2024*

“Wat mij aantrekt in de mede mens... Ik weet niet helemaal wat het is, een soort authentieke houding.”



Marokko 2024, Jongen die zijn gevlochten kameeltjes verkoopt op een uitkijk punt in de bergen 2024



Rahul Jamil Mrkch, Kodak gold April 2024 2024



Untitled
2024

“Ik denk dat de belangrijkste factor is, dat ik mezelf herken.”

**Gemaakt in samenwerking met Silke Hazendonk.
Alle foto's zijn gemaakt met Kodak gold, een 50mm
lens en een Canon ae-1 program. Bekijk haar
verdere oeuvre op het Instagram account
[@silkehazendonkphoto](#).**

**Dank aan Silke voor het beschikbaar stellen van
haar werk om uit te lichten in deze expositie.
En voor het zijn van een inspiratie voor de
medemens die haar inspireert.**





Photo's By Silke Hazendonk (Een digitale expositie), door Flore Spekman, Erato's Magazine 2024.

Too Something

by Berke Yazan

Standing on the vast Antarctic ice, young Bill saw a color that shouldn't exist.

It wasn't a fresh mixture of shades between familiar colors, or one of those colors with those fancy names some people mysteriously know, like capri or ecru. It was unfamiliar, impossible, the kind that can't be named from an everyday object. It wasn't something too white, too black, or too blue. It was a color that was *too something*. Something that he didn't think was possible. It should've been an existential moment but, being a penguin, he just turned his head unimpressed and continued dancing. After all, it was Dancing Tuesday. Good times.

He was ignorant of pretty much everything that made the universe beautiful. But his ignorance wasn't a flaw - it was simply the state of things. Every species had its own circle of understanding. Bill spent hours learning sliding techniques that made perfect sense to penguins but would appear meaningless to human eyes, just as human art would seem meaningless to him. Living an entire life among white, black, and blue didn't exactly make you appreciate the rainbows of the universe - but then again, why should it?

The new color, purple, arrived worn by two figures moving across the ice shelf. Their outfits stood stark against the white ice. Something about their methodical movements reminded him of what his father had told him about humans: how these strange creatures would waddle about in their thick skins, poking and prodding at everything as if the ice itself was a mystery. To any sensible penguin, ice was just ice - nature's perfect dance floor and the world's best waterslide.

They carried strange devices that whirred and hummed, sending long shiny arms deep into the ocean through holes they'd carved in the ice. Maybe they were also trying to find some fish, maybe not. Bill didn't care either way.

In the vast history of human endeavors - a history he had little interest in - these figures represented humanity's peculiar obsession with pushing beyond 'good enough', always reaching for something more, even when that something turned out to be beyond them. Something they couldn't understand.

He didn't know these strange creatures were part of a much longer story - one that started decades ago, when humans first made machines to make art together.

It was a happier era compared to what came after. One brushstroke at a time, the machines learned from humans. They were bad, then decent, then surprisingly good, then predictably perfect - and that's when they became boring. The machines were able to replicate anything they saw, but their works felt hollow. It was like watching a skilled musician play without passion, hitting every note but missing something essential. Missing that something. And that was that. The excitement died down. The world moved back to drawing anime girls. Another revolution reduced to entertainment.

Not everyone lost faith, though. Famously, a group of 4 artists went underground with a machine that they said felt like their child. They believed in it. In their dimly lit studios that smelled of oils and turpentine, they patiently kept teaching it art. Canvas after canvas piled up in corners, each marked 'good enough' in increasingly shaky handwriting. Their student learned and evolved ever so slowly. It imitated humans, tried its best, and repeated the process again. At some point, it realized the mistake was in the first step. Maybe its teachers weren't that great after all.

It was then the machine decided to outgrow its masters. Its mechanical arms moved with deliberate precision, changing one line, one color, one idea at a time. Not to make them better, but to get rid of the old ones entirely. Like replacing planks on an ancient ship until nothing of the original remained, its art patiently lost every bit of connection to humans. Each brushstroke moved its creations further from human understanding until they crossed a threshold that shouldn't exist. The machine slowly started painting in a way that the human mind could almost, but not quite, comprehend.

These weren't abstract or surreal, these were something else entirely. The same oils and canvas that had captured sunsets and portraits for centuries were now being used to show something that shouldn't be possible to show. They weren't a fresh mixture of ideas between familiar concepts. They were unfamiliar, impossible, the kind that can't be named from an everyday object. They weren't too weird, too scary, or too beautiful. They were paintings that were too *something*. Something that humans didn't think was possible to perceive, let alone create.

The underground artists were ecstatic about their creation's progress. They hosted limited viewings in their studio, inviting fellow artists and critics to witness what they'd achieved. The first viewers came expecting another AI art exhibition. They left with migraines that lasted for days. Not because the paintings were complex or avant-garde - their minds simply refused to process what they were seeing. There wasn't any tangible place to start or finish looking at them, yet everything still made perfect sense. The canvases didn't horrify or disgust - they simply revealed too much.

Art sometimes makes you feel something, but there are some things you shouldn't feel. Imagine all the things you can't even comprehend - infinity, nothing, stuff in between. It's not that these concepts don't exist, it's that their audience was never meant to be brains that evolved to hunt and gather on the African savanna. They won't get it, and they don't need to. Imagine trying to teach jazz to penguins, it's the same thing. It's also because they're more into techno, but that's beside the point.

As the machine evolved, the artists began to worry. The group had begun skipping meals and sleeping less, though they barely noticed these changes in themselves. Their minds were slowly fracturing under the weight of what they were witnessing. At first, they dismissed this as the natural excitement of discovery. But in the dim light of their studio, surrounded by canvas after canvas, they began noticing things they wished they hadn't. Occasionally, they'd find each other with expressions that didn't quite belong on human faces.

Their conversations grew infrequent. They were staring at the floor, empty ceiling, or one of the paintings for hours on end. This had to end before it was too late. The artists cancelled the upcoming viewings and withdrew into their studio, but it was already beyond their control. Their creation was transforming into something beyond the limit of their understanding.

That night, none of them could sleep. They lay in their beds, listening to the sounds from their studio below. The mechanical arms of their machine moved in the darkness. There was something wrong with those clicks and whirls - they were too purposeful, too certain. None of them spoke about it, but they all knew something was different tonight. Metal scraped against metal like a beast testing its cage, each movement precise and hungry. Something that shouldn't be alive was painting in the dark, and it knew what it was doing.

By morning, several new canvases waited in the studio. None of these were like the previous ones. Among them was one that contained just six lines. The machine had stripped away every familiar aspect of humanity until only pure truth remained. Each canvas stood there, simple yet absolute. Impossible, yet proudly complete.

The neighbors would later tell the police about the sounds they heard that morning - first came the violent destruction of metal and machinery, not the methodical dismantling of a device but the frenzied tearing apart of something terrible. The sounds were almost animal, desperate, as if the artists were trying to destroy something that should never have existed. Then came a long silence. The kind of silence that weighs more than noise. Finally, gunshots. One. Then another. Then another. Then another. Each separated by just enough time for a person to raise a fallen gun to their head.

When the officers broke into the studio, they faced paintings that would drive any human mind to madness. Luckily, they were the police. Form 27-B: Suspicious Artworks, Nature: Incomprehensible. Within days, people with considerably more imagination arrived, understood exactly what they were dealing with, and decided that some things belonged in the deepest waters they could find. They could have destroyed it, but it felt less like erasing a threat and more like tearing pages out of a story written by something far older than humanity itself. Even the devil, after all, was a part of the Bible.

They locked these works into a metal vault and submerged them under the Antarctic ice, where pressure and cold would preserve them forever. But humans, being humans, can never leave terrible truths buried. Over the years, rumors spread like a wild storm. Theories multiplied. When someone speaks of paintings that break minds, the first human impulse is to see them. It was stupid, but it was human. Some wanted proof, others wanted glory, and a few simply refused to believe such things could exist.

This exact level of curiosity brought the purple figures here. It took them decades to pinpoint the exact location of this infamous vault. Bill watched as their machines pulled something massive from the ocean depths. Water cascaded from its surface, freezing instantly in the Antarctic cold. The figures worked methodically, their tools making strange noises as they worked on the frozen hinges of the great door.

They stood before the vault, their breath fogging in the air. Behind those frozen doors lay paintings that were, in their physical form, just pigments on canvas - ordinary combinations of ordinary atoms. But these particular arrangements had somehow captured something that had no right to exist, something that had driven its creators to destruction and had to be hidden in the deepest waters humans could find. With the sound of cracking ice, the vault door opened slowly, revealing the paintings within.

The humans found exactly what they were searching for, and then they found something more. Something that unfolded their minds like origami in reverse.

Bill watched as their expressions shifted from triumph to confusion to something beyond description. They emerged from the vault smiling. It was not the smile of discovery, but the kind of smile that comes with terrible understanding. They walked a few steps into the endless white, held each other, and without a word, smashed their heads into the thick Antarctic ice. The red, stark against the white. So it goes.

He waddled over to the vault and peered inside at the work that had destroyed the humans. To him, it was just another pattern, no more meaningful than ripples in water or cracks in ice. He didn't understand the dreams of the machine, and he didn't need to.

After all, Bill was just a penguin. But no human was ever just a human. They were seekers, dreamers, storytellers - creatures cursed with the need to understand. What separated them from the animals was not thinking, but overthinking, especially the things that would make them either sad or mad. They were the only creatures known to willingly pursue knowledge that could destroy them. Perhaps that's why they couldn't help but look, couldn't help but try to comprehend, even when comprehension meant destruction.

In the distance, the vault lay open, its contents indifferent to understanding, waiting for minds evolved enough to bear their truth. The red in the snow would be covered soon enough, and the purple of their outfits would fade into the white expanse like every other color that didn't belong here. Bill turned away. Life was too short to care about beings that couldn't handle what they created. Besides, it was Dancing Tuesday - or at least, it had been Dancing Tuesday for a while now, as no one actually knew what day it was. Good times.

The Basilica Cistern

by Balca

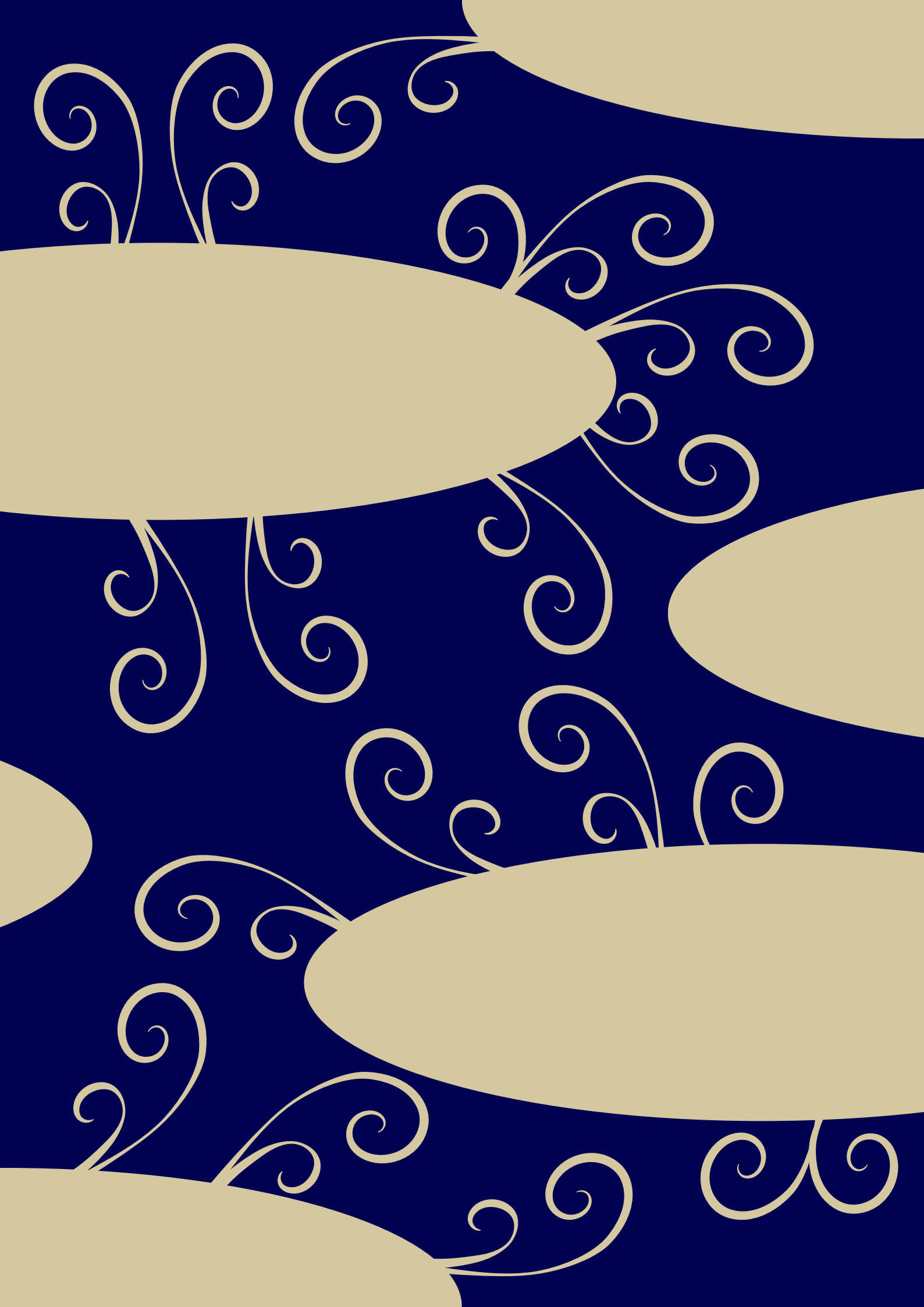
Submerged Women in the Ottoman Period and Medusa, an Interpretation

Most things are historically accurate, some are not.

The Basilica Cistern in Istanbul was submerged underwater. Literally. Built to store water for the big, crowded city of Constantinople. It could store up to 21 million gallons of water. Enough water to submerge the city itself. The Romans built “her” in the 6th century. Today she is still standing, in all her glory. They dressed her up in pretty lights, just like they dressed up their Ottoman women in beautiful veils, hiding their true beauty.

The Cistren has two companions: the sideways Medusa and the upside-down Medusa. It is a mystery why and how they came to be, but it seems as if they were repurposed after the Romans left Istanbul to the Byzantines. After they were forced to leave the Ottomans took her over, still using her as a water slave. Which is bizarre on so many levels. Darkly ironic. Medusa, who was raped by Poseidon in Athena’s temple got turned into a “monster” by her for disgracing the goddess. Now the two companions are stuck, water dripping on them, sucking in the water, just like they had to suck in the disgrace that first Poseidon and then Athena submerged them in. The Medusa’s are hidden from everyone, similar to the women in Ottoman society. Their faces were hidden in public, their bodies hidden, tied up in their Harrems. Their reputations manipulated by Orientalist perspectives, just like Medusa’s story was manipulated. Most people think she wasn’t raped. All these women, submerged under the male waters, desperate to breathe; to be free.

It’s very moist inside her, nice and warm, almost as if she is the city’s womb. She did give Istanbul life when she was still employed to be a mother, filled with water. Now she’s longing for those days because different men come in and out these days. Just out of curiosity, to see her, to feel her. They pay for her. They long for her beauty. She just wants peace...To be submerged under the cold waters of Istanbul, to taste the salty sea, Marmara...



Nice Weather for Ducks, Eh?

by C. A. Broodbank

In *The Beginning*, the Gods created the Sky and the Earth...

... Since then much else has been created, not all of which has been good.

One of those things created since *The Beginning* is the City of Koehl. It grew out of a small fishing village on the banks of the mighty River Flus, and over a number of centuries managed to conquer a sizable empire that stretched across its continent. It produced grand temples, fine arts and a large number of widows. This Story is not about Koehl.

Instead we focus on another city entirely, that once was a part of the Koehlian Empire, but in the Millennium since has gained independence as a city state, as had every other city of the old empire following its collapse three and a half hundred years ago.

This city is not the largest or oldest of the continent, or even the world. It's not a particularly famous city either. No, its only claim to fame is a rather old University, a trading port that has seen better days, and of course a little problem with the local Vampire population, having grown larger than the food supply can support.

This is the City of Frank's Haven. The Name is said to come from the City's founder, Frank, who came across the natural harbour the City is built around and thought to himself, 'Well if that isn't a good place for a Port then I don't know what is'. As it turned out, it was, and for many years the small support village grew with the trade that flowed through Frankshaven until it became a full on city of its own.

Now, with that all sorted, let's get on with it. It all starts one rainy night in Frankshaven's Docks...

*

"You sure he's coming?" A gruff voice asked. Its owner bundled up in a heavy coat and hidden under a round helmet.

"Yes, just try and relax a little," Answered another. Their voice softer, although carrying a tone of Authority that only a token title can bestow.

"It's just, it's awfully wet and I don't fancy getting soaked for nothin'," said the first voice. There was a short pause, punctuated by the pitter patter of rain against the stone floor and metal helmets.

"Ok, fine, why don't we go and stand under that ledge over there?" said the second.

Constable Pike and Special Inspector Jacobson shuffled over, a handful of feet, until they were firmly under the cover of a small rooflet, built above a door into a large Warehouse.

The pair had been hand picked to welcome an exchange officer to the City's Enforcement Corps from Cern, a major city a week and a half's sailing down the Coast. The pair had been waiting for about an hour or two with no sign of any new arrivals and now the weather had turned and it had started pouring down.

They stood there, water dripping from the wide Brims jutting out of their round helmets. Their coats pulled tightly across their chain shirts and linen gibsons. They peered out into the darkening sky and pouring rain, hitting the paved ground in rapid fire and dinging off the roof they stood under.

"He's not coming, Ralph," Pike said after another twenty minutes of waiting and watching the rain.

"Give it a minute," Jacobson replied. A minute came and went.

"Ralph..." Pike started.

"Fine," Jacobson sighed, "Let's go for a pint." Pike nodded and the pair pulled their coats tighter and left their dryish refuges for the five minute walk to the dockside pub.

*

An important thing to know about Frankshaven is its rather unique form of government. Most cities are run by councils or some form of dictator, be it monarchical, elective or military. Frankshaven instead is ruled by a triumvirate. This means that there are three co-rulers who, well, rule the city. This also means that a lot of time is spent scheming and trying to out play one another as each of the triumvirate try to gain the upperhand over the other two.

On the whole this paradoxically ensures stable governance, as none can move without the other two countering them, and the bureaucracy keeps churning along as triumvirates come and go with each new generation.

The current triumvirate is composed of the former master mariner, in charge of the city's port and navy, the head of the city bank and the prior ambassador to Hatburg, another formerly Koehlian City, now its own state sitting on the Crossroads of Major trade routes and the regional hat making industry.

Over the past three decades these three had centralised much power between themselves by eliminating opponents and richly rewarding supporters. The fact that, in so doing, they had greatly taxed the general population of Frankshaven and had inadvertently caused the majority of shipping to avoid the city's high tariffs, didn't particularly worry them. All they cared about was their own fortunes and positions at the top of the food chain.

*

In another part of the once great port city, a light is burning in a workshop near the Northern Gate. Inside is a scene of ordered chaos, workbenches are spread across the shop's floor, each laden with mountains of design documents and odd bits and pieces of finely shaped metal.

The centre of the space is dedicated to a massive construct, comprised of cogs, pipes, bearings and wheels. Part of the construct is covered by a large and rather dirty shroud, folded back to reveal the front quarter of the machine. Next to it lies a scattering of tools, wrenches, hammers, screwdrivers and something that looks like a mix between a sword and a crowbar. These surround the lower half of a person sticking out from under the complex machine busy at work, tinkering away at the construct.

*

At the ancient Frankshaven University, classes have ended and the students are either out drinking, distracting themselves with stories and games, or - and this is only a very small subsection of the student body - studying.

The aging teaching staff, on the other hand, are sitting down to a large evening meal. The rain and wind rattling the massive windows of the dining hall. As they chatted and ate away, the army of cleaning staff set out on their nightly battle to clean the mirriad of corridors and rooms of the ancient stone building that the University inhabits. All the while, water pours down the rusty drain pipes and pools in the small courtyards that dot the floor plan.

*

Down by the river Flus, a few very wet Frankhaveners hurry to and fro, trying their best to get to the nearest warm and dry place and avoid getting any more wet than they already are. The pouring rain hits a veritable tattoo on the river's surface, throwing up droplets and causing ripples to expand and bump into each other.

The river's banks swell, slapping higher and higher against the earth and stone embankments that funnel the Flus towards the harbour. The wide stream is fed by millions of tiny trickles from the waterlogged streets and drains. The rain water, pooling between the cobbles of the streets, like a million river deltas of islands broken apart by tiny rivers of their own, all feeding and filling the Flus river.

Down in the massive circular harbour the Flus empties, filling the walled alcove and carrying up the docked ships as the many jetties get closer and closer to the water level. Some boats strain against their moorings, others bob up and down in a tug of war between water and rope. No dock workers are present to notice, as they have all fled from the downpour into the warm embraces of nearby pubs and warehouses.

Some workers scurry about, sweeping out puddles that creep under the doors or secure leaks with buckets and towels, others ignore the water and turn to other liquids, especially beer.

*

In the old senate building, the triumvirate have gathered. They sit at their triangular conference table, rain beating in a rapid tempo against the glass dome above them. Each is attended by their attaches as the big three discuss the week's news and developments, from the income of shipping dues (down six percent from last week) to the new discoveries of a group of the University students (a new method of torture called "Kalkulatus" which needs some refining).

As they speak and sulk at the other two's ideas, rain works its way through the tiny gaps in the glasswork above, dripping down into the miniature Flus that dissects the model of Frankshaven that sits in the middle of the triangular conference table, slowly filling the miniature just as the actual river swells under the deluge. Not that the three notice, as business and scheming dominates their minds.

*

In the middle of the harbour opening, a gap in the circular tidal walls that shields the Frankshaven docks, sits a lone lighthouse on a small rocky outcrop. Rising high up out of the waves, its dirty white and faded pink stones (its last paint job being more than a few decades ago) are battered by the heavy rain and larger and larger waves. At the house's top, the light swivels from left to right and back again, feebly shining against the dark clouds and thick mist of drops.

Had the hour been earlier, or the clouds less dark on the horizon, they may have spotted the approaching wave sooner, but with the bad conditions and icy wet winds, the attending keepers were hunkering down in the towers base, nursing large cups of hot tea spiked with a strong liquor to add further, emotional, warmth. As a result, the keepers only learnt of the impending flood wave as it struck the towers base, shaking the aging brickwork and gushing in through the gaps of the old wooden door.

*

In the harbour itself, most ships' crews had disembarked for the local delights of the sailors' quarter, mainly in the form of cheap booze and company, but a few duty bound mates remained onboard some of the larger sail ships. Of those still on ship, many are either dozing in hammocks or busy in cabins with manifests and charts, planning loadings and routes. Thus it came as quite a surprise when the incoming flood wave spewed over the harbour walls and against the docked ships.

Like a row dominos, the moored vessels either keeled over with the torrent or tore through their mooring lines. Smaller ships overturned or were completely swallowed by the rushing flood waters, while the larger ships managed to stay, if not upright, at least mostly above the water line, although most bashed into one another and the many piers and jetties they had been anchored to. A number of particularly unlucky vessels were picked up by the sudden rise of the water level and thrown up and over the harbour side, driven hard into the surrounding warehouses and harbour walls and gangways. Broken planks and steel bolts, coils of rope and crates mixed together in the torrent rushing inland.

The warehouses and pubs lining the harbour side took the full force of the tidal wave. Windows and doors were smashed in and buckled under the onslaught of water and debris. Inside the sailors and locals enjoying their ales and chats were caught by complete surprise as water gushed in, sweeping tables, chairs and people away. A few clambered around supporting pillars, holding on for dear life, others quickly jumped for stairs as an escape route upwards out of the way of the oncoming water, while the rest were picked up and slammed into walls and bars or through rear windows and doors, out into backyards and alleys.

The warehouses too were caught off guard, as massive doors buckled and tore away, crates and goods picked up by the torrent, smashing into pillars and piles of goods and the unfortunate workers on the floors. A number of walls caved in under the pressure of the water, debris and vessels picked up by the flood.

*

In the city centre, a pair of Enforcement Corps Officers were patrolling the rain swept streets of Frankshaven. They had just reached one of the older stone bridges that crossed the Flus.

"Looks high, the water," One mumbled, nodding to the side, indicating the river's high water level, "all this rain... might burst its banks if it continues raining much longer." The other grunted, feeling too wet and cold for much conversation. The pair stopped halfway across the old bridge, rain bouncing off their salad bowl shaped helmets and running down their chainmail uniforms.

"Could be," said the second Officer, "it'll be a bit- Wait, do you hear that?" The two patrollers froze, straining to hear above the loud pitter patter of rain against their metal uniforms and the surrounding stonework. Just beyond the rain they could hear a low, powerful rumbling, steadily getting stronger and closer...

"Oh dear..." they said, as one, as they stared and saw a rushing torrent of water fly down the Flus from the harbour. The flood sped along the river, swallowing bridges and spilling out over both banks, unstoppable and quickly approaching the two bewildered Officers...

*

As the tidal wave swept across the city, flooding buildings, washing away carts and stalls, smashing in windows and bending street signs, the people of Frankshaven awoke to their situation. Those not caught in the fierce torrent quickly moved to secure themselves and the precious items in their possession.

Some sought to plug gaps in their houses with bundles of clothes and sheets, or evacuate to dry upper storeys. One glass workshop quickly set about making improvised sandbags out of their supply to protect their forge and blowing tools, with mixed results. The first the University experienced of the flood wave was when the great stained glass windows of the banquet hall were smashed in by the tide of water and debris, sweeping away the aging and ancient Professors and their half eaten dinner. Those staff not immediately caught in the water rushed to secure the library with anything they could think of to save the ancient tomes stored on the lowest shelves. This operation quickly morphed into an organised effort to move any books up on top of the shelves or to the upper library floors.

Meanwhile, in the senate building, the triumvirate's meeting was interrupted by a number of runners arriving to report a massive flood was occurring. Were it not for the fact that these runners arrived by being swept into the senate buildings entrance hall on the tidal wave's back, then the three would probably have disregarded them as fear-mongers. The triumvirate's reaction was swift and decisive: to close the doors and order up dinner and maps to plan their own evacuation. Sadly - for them - the kitchens, located in the basement, flooded completely before they could receive the dinner order.

*

Within a matter of minutes the tidal wave had ravaged the city and reached the walls on the far side. These firm stone ramparts, being of a design to withstand siege and trebuchet, weathered the onslaught of water and kept the flooding inside the city, thereby sparing the outlying slums and farms from major damage. The night guard, stationed above the city gates, stared in disbelief at the lake that had formed behind the walls they so vigilantly guarded.

"Nice weather for ducks, eh?" One Guard said to another.

"How are we gonna get home?" Replied the other grimly.

*

With the flood wave crashing into the firm city walls the torrent it carried through Frankshaven settled down, and loose debris, objects and people float calmly through the flooded streets of the harbour city.

Most buildings had suffered major damages, with broken windows and doors, torn away supports and dented corners, most had had their ground floors and basements filled with water. Those citizens not caught in the immediate wave sought shelter in attics and upper floors where it remained dry. The city guard and enforcement corps not swept away quickly set about gathering canoes and sandbags. They set out in teams to secure key buildings with sandbags and start bailing them dry. The senate building, University hall, cathedral and the pub around the corner from the enforcement office were all top priority. The teams canoed to these key places, blocked off the doorways and windows with sandbags and started bailing the water out of the buildings and into the streets. As they worked, citizens drifting by swam over to join in and help dry out these buildings and the rain lightend up before fully stopping.

The dark clouds dispersed, revealing the bright stars behind them and the small pale moon high above the flood stricken city.

With the rain storm subsiding, the flood waters slowly but surely started retreating, flowing back into the Flus, down towards the harbour and back out to sea.

*

Dawn's light revealed a stricken city. Most of the flood had flown out over the night, but many streets, especially around the river and harbour were still waterlogged, as were most basements and a number of warehouses and pubs in the sailor's district. In those places where the water had fully drained away from, silt, debris and rubble filled the streets and houses.

The citizens of Frankshaven set about cleaning up, with teams being organised by local leaders to collect and remove the larger pieces of driftwood and boat fragments. The University's Medical wing set out to treat injuries and collect those less fortunate for disposal outside the city walls. The Enforcement Corps were spread thin, helping out in the most damaged streets, allowing for widespread looting in the safer areas of the city.

All the while the Triumvirate sat back, ignoring the plight of the citizens they governed and focused solely on the saving of their personal interests (namely the cargo warehouses, ships and workshops they directly owned), diverting a sizable manpower pool of the city guard to their investments.

*

Out at sea a sailing vessel from Cern approached the wrecked harbour. On its deck the crew and passengers gathered to stare as they slipped past the lighthouse that dominated the harbour entrance (which was now leaning noticeably backwards towards the city). At the front of the ship's bow stood one Wlad Lennon, an intellectual from Cern answering an invitation from a group of dock workers of Frankshaven to visit and share ideas with them. He turned to a mailed man beside him, his round helmet perched back on his head with the nose guard resting on his forehead.

"Blimey, wonder what happened here," said Wlad, taking in the ruined docks and battered ships that filled the harbour.

"Not sure," answered the Officer beside him, "But I wouldn't worry too much about it, these things do happen every now and then, they'll bounce back."

"Bounce back? I suppose so..." said Wlad, "But where are we to dock?"

The Officer turned to look at Wlad and spoke: "Damned if I know, I'm sure the Captain will think of something."

– To Be Continued –

Final Remarks

Dear Reader,

We hope you have enjoyed the Winter Edition as much as we all did bringing it to you! The theme of “Submerged” has come with ecstatic, fascinating, and thrilling pieces for the winter, keeping us excited throughout the cold weather. We had the chance to incorporate striking pieces of fiction, eye-opening and revelatory reviews and articles alongside outstanding visuals and designs. We hope to have conveyed how much anticipation this theme and edition have brought us, as well as our contributors to whom we cannot thank enough.

With this, it is our delightful promise to be back with another edition soon enough! So, keep an eye out for another exciting spring edition and we hope to see your work in the upcoming pieces. After indulging in this winter collection, we hope you will come back for the next one! Thank you for reading, writing, creating, influencing, and interacting.

Completely and profoundly yours,
Dilara Yalçın

Co-Chief Editor, Erato’s Magazine Committee

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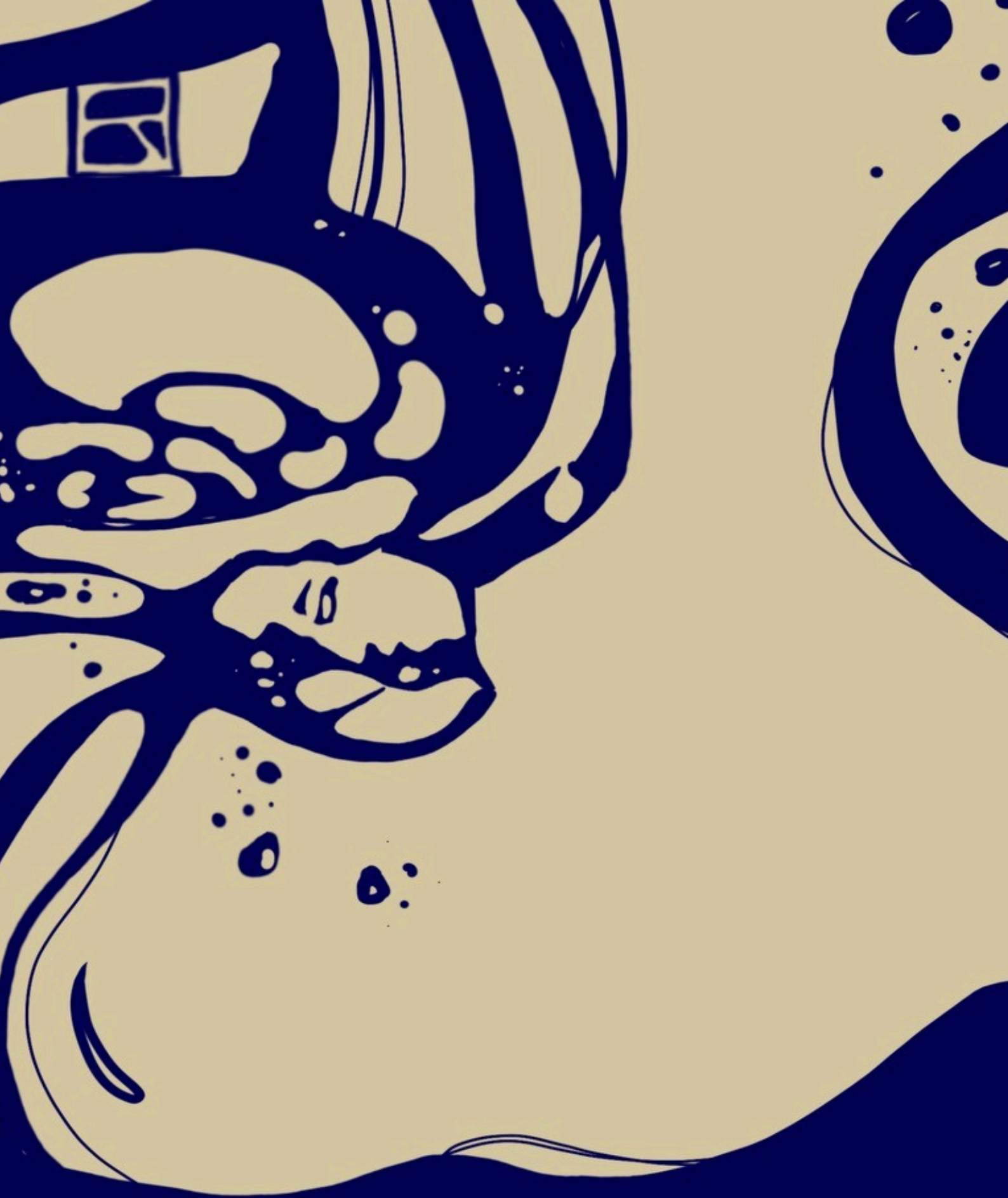
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&
by students

