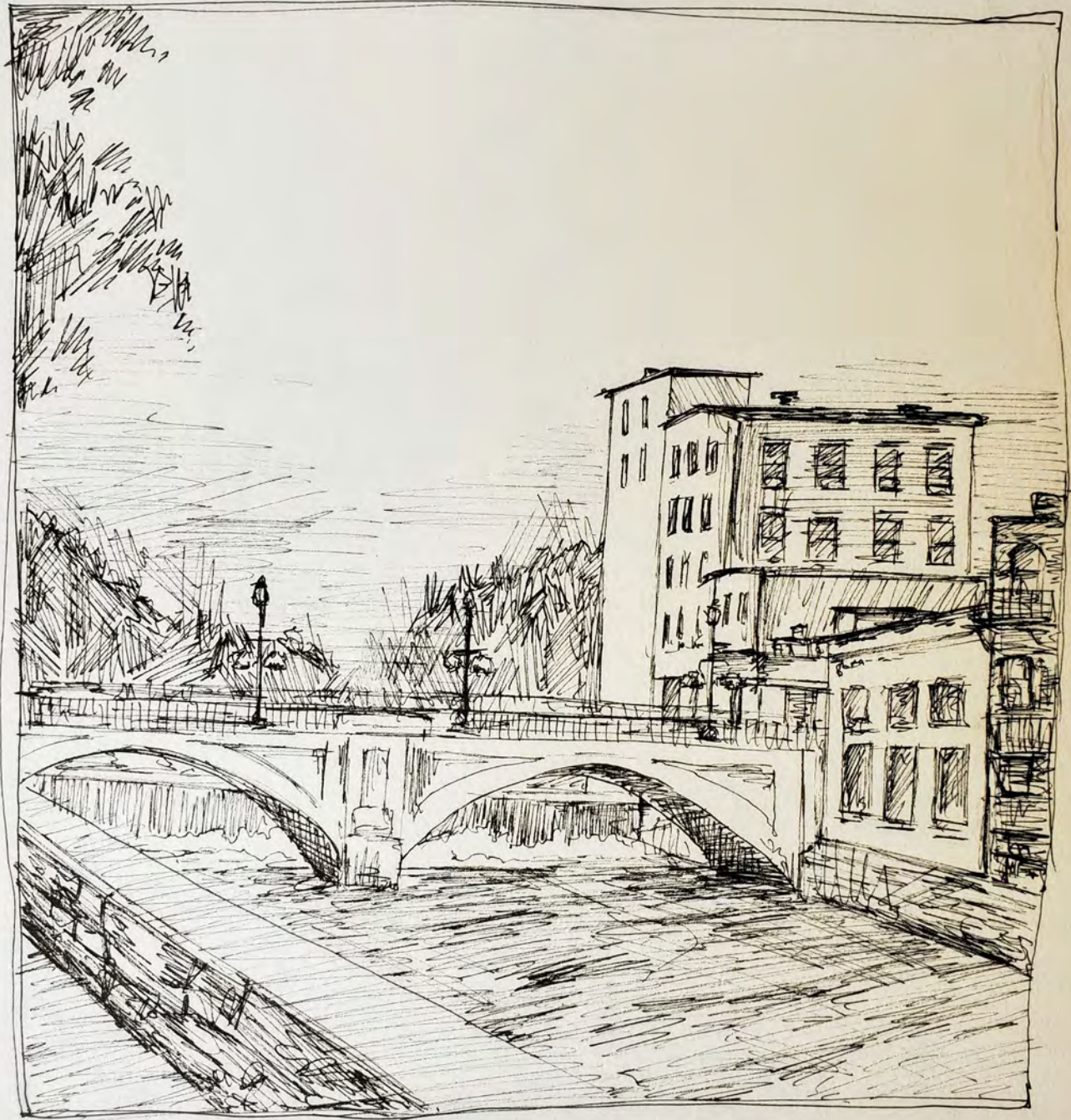


quiet town



The idea for this book began in Greg Hewett's poetry workshop in the spring of 2020. This collection of student works was compiled and edited by Avery Davis ('20). This chapbook was produced as part of an Academic Civic Engagement project supported by Carleton College's Center for Community and Civic Engagement, and we thank Emily Oliver for her contribution. Cover designs were made by Avery Davis ('20).

Quiet Town addresses themes surrounding the COVID-19 virus and pandemic through a collection of Carleton College student poetry and artwork. 100% of the profits from this book will be donated to the Northfield Community Action Center's front line coronavirus relief work. This project demonstrates the importance of connection and community while coping with times of crisis and finding relief through openly shared experience through art and poetry.

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Little Brown Bag

It has been approximately 432 hours and 34 seconds since I entered isolation.

After a violating first hour where I was completely scrubbed of my dignity,

I have been banished to the closet to think about my lifestyle.

I'm not proud to admit that the first 100 hours or so I pouted and lashed out at those around me, but now I've been forced to come to terms with my new reality.

I started doing yoga to really loosen up my straps and release tension I'd been holding in my handles

I've been talking to the nearby hangers, a safe 6ft apart, and learned about their daily lifting routines

I also started hiding my money in spare pockets so I'm not tempted to spend.

I'll admit, I miss the lunch dates with my friends and the wandering around in malls but it's for the best.

For all those other bags who aren't made of strong leather and who can't isolate in a closet

I'll patiently wait here for 432,000 more hours and 34 more seconds until it's safe for everyone.

by Nia Harris

The daily routine; or, the slow and inevitable descent into madness

my brother sits on the couch watching a video on his phone
his face turned sallow and ghostly by its faint, bluish glow

i sit in front of a window
in the webcam my face looks pale—i haven't been outside since
monday the air in this house has gone stale

and my brother is still on the couch—he hasn't moved for an hour now
from the video on his phone which he can't seem to live without

when i move i do it strangely
i drift down the stairs like a ghost
i make my third cup of coffee (my hands shake as i hold the mug)

and my brother is still on the couch watching his stupid fucking video
hypnotized by some talking face he doesn't even know

at midnight i dance in my room, consumed by a frenzy
i've been shutting away for weeks now
my own private bacchanal

my brother sits on the couch watching a video on his phone
his face turned sallow and ghostly by its faint, bluish glow

by Sophia Heidebrecht



by Sophie Rogers

Fishing poem

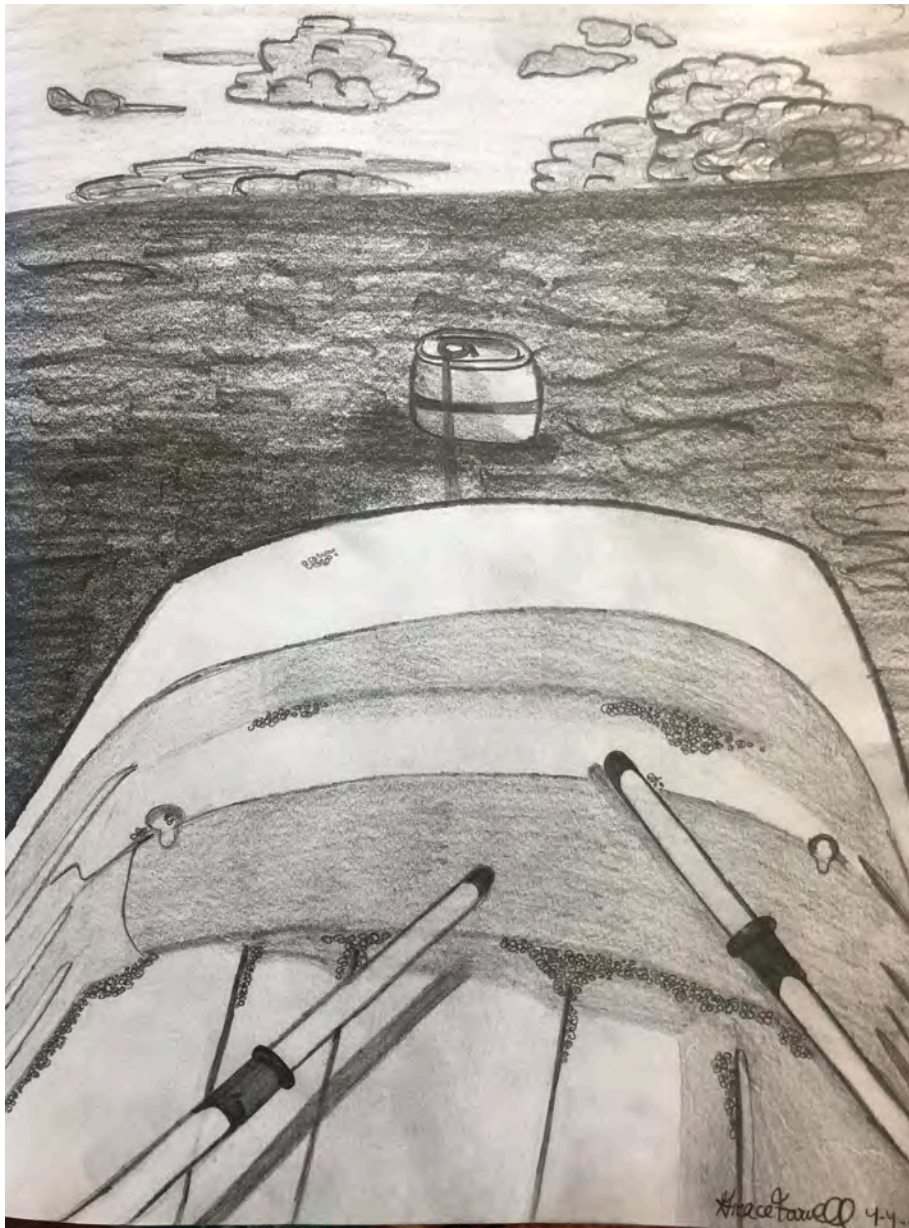
There is more time to fish now,
I go down to the river with my father—
we stand in the water and swing our lines in clumsy, wide, whizzing loops—

Feathered flies splash,
too heavily, scattering ripples—
rolling over the silty churning of our feet; the mirror clouds and undulates—

The reel clicks, rattles,
I feel the branch that I have caught—
I have lost sight of my reflection, there are other things where it should be—

I see the line, taut, then tangled,
I see the rod, my father, bent—
for a second, a shadow of a fish, but I have pulled too hard and the line has
broken.

by Finn Tierney

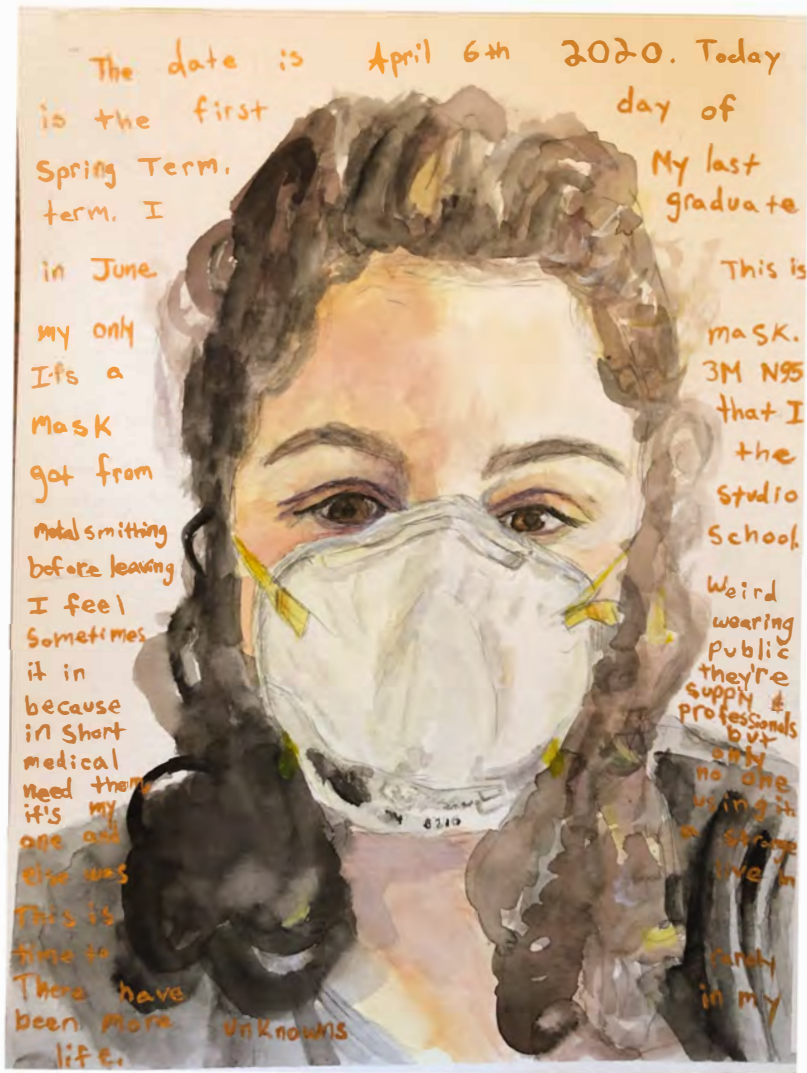


by Grace Farwell

Passing By

When the tiny shoots of lime green innocence start to once again decorate the wizened oak. When the fluffy white clouds of nature spun silk start to fall from the cottonwood outside. When the sun starts to warm up the sidewalk to a balmy burn-your-feet degrees. When everything points to the normal passage of time from winter into spring into summer, but instead of the piercing laughs of the neighbor children playing in the red treehouse in the backyard, you're met with silence. The silence of sprinklers shooting out in their rhythmic psst, psst, psst, psssssssst with no one to run through them. The silence of noon without a single dog on the block barking his hellos. The silence of the crickets you've never heard at this time of day before. The silence of the neighbor mowing her lawn continuously, with no pauses every five minutes to say hello to someone passing by. The overwhelming silence of the wrong noises. Time is passing, but we're not passing with it.

by Marcella Lees



by Molly Sandweiss

What Shadows We Are

Last night the wind was listening
and taking notes, scrawling in the trees
as I sang and spoke spells
out into the mesquite air.
But tonight the wind has died.

The light has left the eyes
of the overgrown houses.
All is still but the coyotes
swimming in the mottled shadows.
Down the hill, someone is howling.

by Sid Hirshberg

Coronavirus

Seep,
Seep and fester,
Let us break down your walls
And tear you apart.
Bit by bit, you start
To leave one another
And support systems crumble.

Elongate the war,
Distances stretch on as we deplete
Stores of essentials and
Cells become empty shells of
What they once were before.

It's a full on battle now, with
Coughs dominating conversations
Casually climbing farther away from
Social collaborations because you're scared.
Scared of your best friend,
Scared of the ones who led you
And told you to kill
To whom you obeyed
As long as it was truly their will to act.

And we leave once we can no longer breathe,
The damage has been done,
Irreversible inside and out because
The distances we tried to create
Cannot close anymore.

And it continues, seeping in as droplets fall
The tears make no difference to the coughs
Because it is all seen as a hazard.
You are the hazard.
You are the danger.
You aren't wanted.

And when there is no room for you, the infectee,
You continue to pillage because
What else can you do?
It wasn't your fault that it came to this,
Or maybe it is.

The outside world is against you,
The system itself is fighting you too,
Because you are a defect that came from the outside.
You were outside.
The screams of horror and the signs of fear
Are too much to bear when sheer patience
Is no longer enough.

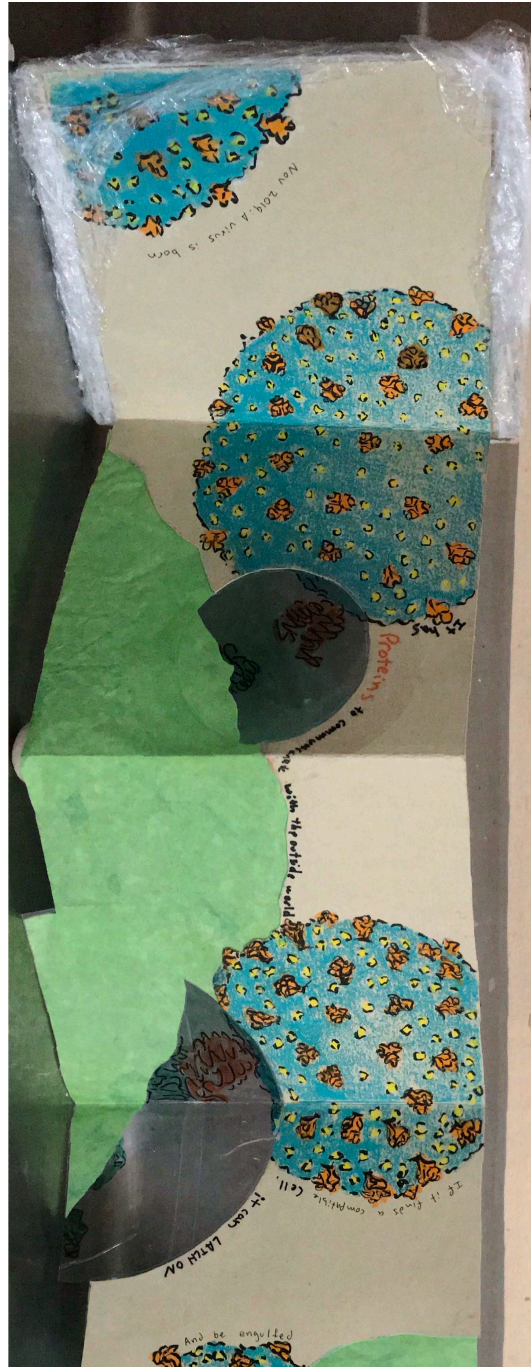
We need to regroup,
And think it through.
But are we alive, or dead?
How can we defeat or be defeated in our
Zombie-like state, or would it be
Cruel fate that makes us continue moving,
Continue producing,
Because we lack thought?

Take away the walls we have,
Break away formed groups
But they find ways to stall,
And the process hurts us as we now deplete.

We, who did the depleting will leave
Because you distanced yourselves in the fights,
Sent fewer warriors to storm the plight,
Because you heeded the calls of the leaders
Who were once confused,
Killing off those who were innocent,
Those who were not infected.
But once the confusion wore off
And the stunt failed to take hold,
The stalling started falling away.

We can no longer stay.
And finally, you can say that
Beyond the sheer gleam in your eyes,
Your body has defeated us: COVID-19.

by JoJo Z.



by Irene Stoutland

Quarantine Headlines

City parks close, picnickers move
to graveyards

Kids hunt for Easter eggs
six feet apart, in medical masks

Amid shelter-in-place boredom,
tic-tac-toe against cats becomes competitive sport

NYC: Man rents dog to stir-crazy neighbors dying
for more walks

Hong Kong: Armed robbers steal 600
toilet paper rolls

Desperate eBay customer pays £2,500
for chicken McNuggets

COVID-19 silver lining –
pollution is plummeting

Zoom profits soar
past projections

Graveyard visitor
numbers reach new high

by Charlotte Zinda

Watering the Slippers

A ninety six year old diabetic
hears sirens
as he waters the empty flower pots
on the balcony of his apartment.

Bending over is almost impossible,
as is living
in fear of dying from a doctor's visit
or walking into the grocery store.

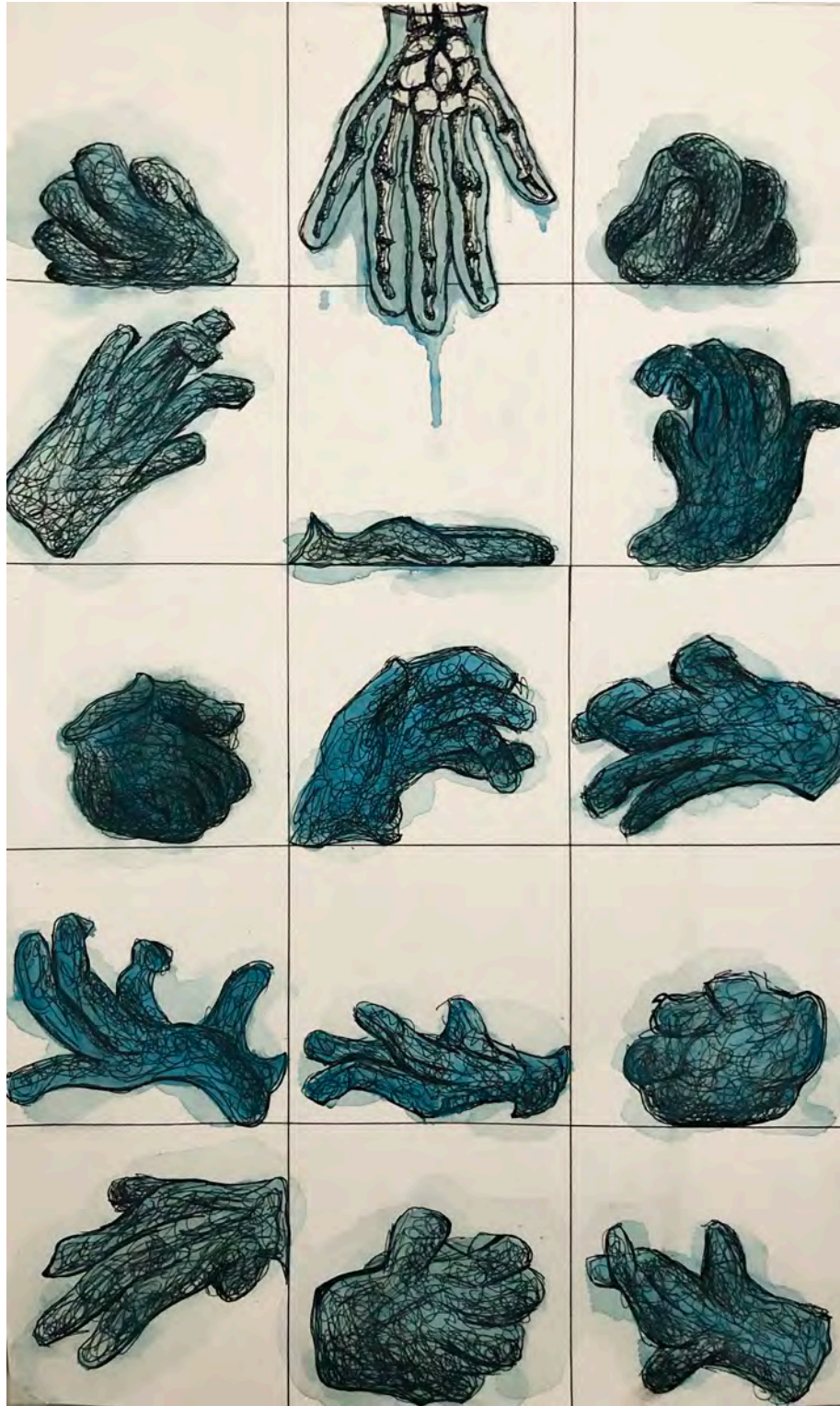
He misses soil and seeds,
the hope entailed,
but will not commit to coaxing to life
plants he may not live to see.

The water goes straight through the bottom,
flooding his slippers.
He knows that water will not bring him
back to life or his life back

but he will come back tomorrow anyway,
muscles aching,
it is the only exercise he can muster.
If he stays strong, next year he will garden.

Twelve stories down, seven grand-children
wave, all grown up.
he heard they were coming but through his
eyes they are flowers dancing in the wind.

by Eva Hadjiyanis



by Mattison Shreero

Wheels

In trying to crack my knuckle,
my thumb slipped, scraping the skin off my finger,
leaving me sitting here just waiting for it to bleed.

For the end of the world things still seem pretty calm
when I sit there in my pajamas failing to look for a job.
Is it because the gas bills are still coming alongside cable TV,
that we're all still out here mowing our lawns?
How thin is that line between waving to neighbors
rolling down the Sunday trash,
and beating them back up over the fence
with my mom's favorite frying pan?

When the end of the world comes it'll be slow enough,
wheels still spinning in the sand.
This guy with a flute on the train,
a modern cellist on the Titanic,
except he still asks me for change at the end.

by Owen Szafran

Apartment 414 (Blues)

My sweet little owl,
This home is soft and warm
Even as the winds howl
And cool rain turns to storm

You and me, we can stay here
As long as we need
This nest's got no harm or fear
This nest's got sticks and seed

Kind little bluebird
Please feel free to nest
Just say the word
And we'll lay down to rest

Quiet little robin
Chest flushed rosy red
Take those feathers soft as
cotton And make yourself a bed

You and me, we can stay here
As long as we need
This nest's got no harm or fear
This nest's got sticks and seed

Sweet little starling,
Up in this tree is home
Settle down next to me
And weather out this storm

Dear little sparrow
It's time to quiet down
We have nowhere to go
In this deserted town

You and me, we can stay here As
long as we need
This nest's got no harm or fear
This nest's got sticks and seed

by Avery Davis



by Dan Ashurst

TRAPPED

Tucked into the corner of my room, the back of my chair, the suffocating covers of my bed, I watch the world burn around me. I navigate the tight spaces of a virtual world and watch flames engulf reality.

Running through near-empty streets, only the clumping of my heavy, tired footfalls fill the silence where people would be, should be. My mask sits at my throat, suffocating me, hiding my smile, while people around the world really do suffocate, breath failing them.

Almost everyone I know hides in their phones, screens light up their faces, darken their hearts. Where can I escape to if not the fake virtual world? Who can I escape with if not the tiny pixelated faces of faraway friends?

Pleading with the world to stop, to think, to find kindness and love and normalcy. I long for something normal, something mine.

Powerless against the words and actions and systems that pin my individual, so many individuals in a position of fruitless struggle. When will they listen? When will it change?

Even sleep has become a dreaded escape, a place away from the material chaos of the physical world but a battle ground of subconscious fears, missing, anger, loneliness, a box.

Deep inside, I know this will pass. A time will come when I can break the walls that make me a captor in my own life. But when? When will I be free?

by Lillian Berets



by Christian Heuchert

Brief Park

I sit out here in the still and warm air
to watch through a window the dark curtains
inside our home erupt and rage, billow
and tear in the wind. It is clear out here.
It is kind. The bench which supports me was
donated by an elderly couple
with a comforting pair of common names.

by Malcolm D Mitchell

When the world stopped

I started—

crying, at first, for a whole day,
once every hour, at least, and
when I said farewell to
everything I was fond of, and
when I went to the store at
midnight to get tape because I
hadn't even started packing yet

a new show, a cartoon, since
there was nothing else to do, at
least nothing that felt possible
because I still hadn't stopped
crying, so I just watched until I
was sore from sitting and I
became one with the upholstery

reading, because when you
graduate, which I've almost done
by now, you get to rediscover
reading for pleasure, except for
me it was to escape, so I read all
of my childhood books and I
neglected to do any class reading

baking, except I had to stop
shortly after that because my
parents went off gluten, and my
brother doesn't like sweets, so I
just ate an entire cake, had it for
breakfast every day, which you'd
think is nice, but it really wasn't

—saying “I love you” more.

by Skyelar Ginsberg

QUARANTALK

yep I'm here
sorry, I lost you
so what did you do today?
I mean, me too
wait sorry, you broke up for a second
oh, yup
where are you now? on a walk?
I figured

I wanna see that
take a weird self-timer photo

...

...

oh yeah, you do, ha, I love that
what is that shrieking?

oh okay it sounds freaking loud
no it's fine
oh man, I'm jealous, all the trees
around here are scrawny as heck
yeah, but they just grow out, not up
oh wait, my airpods are dying, let me
plug in the other ones

hey at least they're not that weird
gross kind you wear

...

can you hear me now?
oh okay, I'll just use these ones
from now on
fine
well, I pretty much just went for a run
and worked in the yard today

hello?
ah, good
no worries
truly nothing
that's how it goes
I just said that's how it goes
mmhmm
I am
actually I look like a wes anderson
character in this yellow rain jacket
and jeans tucked into rain boots
it's something
sure?
...
okay, it's sending
I'm glad
oh I'm just sitting on some swing set
at this playground I found
sorry
I did climb a pretty nice tree today

don't you have all those texas live oaks?
mmm, I see

this is why I don't associate with people
who wear airpods

we've had this discussion
...
oh wow, way better

see, I told you
ha

wait sorry, you're kind of breaking up

I went for a run and worked in the yard
yeah, that's kind of all I've been doing
shoot, lemme try turning off wifi and
just using data, see if that helps
where?

okay, I mean, that was all I had to say
about any of that anyway

...
...
nice

take one of your classic mirror selfies

...
...

you really don't but whatever
alrighty

where your dad gets drunk for work?
wow, sorry

I mean, gotta pregame mayo clinic,
am I right?

of course

buy your dad what?

he went to what?

oh, ipad

ah uh

...
...

yes? I can hear you

can you hear me? okay bye

...

yes. yes. yes. yes. yes. yes. yes yes yes yes yes yes yes yes yes yes
yes yes

I don't know what's going on

this has happened every time I've talked

to anyone this week, maybe my

service is just awful

that sounds lovely
wait what?

here, hang on, I'm back

okay, I'm going to enter my house, you
may hear weird screeching, you can keep
talking but I'll be quiet for a second

...

...

made it

god, I look like such an unsettling guy
right now, you should see me

okay

...

there

hang on, let me get to my room

I'm going up the stairs, I'm at the place
where my dad gets dressed for work

dressed for work

oh god, that's a thought

oh yes, every day he downs a glass of scotch

also, today we went to buy an ipad in byron

what about my dad?

I didn't say my dad?

yeah, so we went to byron

what?

...

hello?

hello? you're gone

...

can you hear me?

oh there you are

sorry, I lost you

no I think it's me

maybe it's both of us
what?
...
yeah?
I think so
oh yessir
having sex would be funny?
I literally heard having sex would be funny
agh
this is tragic
maybe it's time to give up
it's late anyway
I don't think you want me to tell you
we're the worst
should we sleep?
we could hang up

me too
wait, I guess I should turn data off
and wifi back on, who knows how
long this is gonna be
mmm, goodnight
'til next time

by Bryn Battani

here, let me try something
I'm putting my phone by the window
hello?
is that better?
ah, telecommunicative cans of worms
actually this whole mess is kind of lovely
what?
okay, that is definitely not what I just said
oh well
it's fine
maybe
what time is it?
oh god
even states apart
you are welcome to do so
or we could just fall asleep on the phone,
I'm kind of almost there
mmhmm

that's very true
goodnight, ms. battani

