



Brackish Magazine

BRACKISH MAGAZINE

Backwoods Kinship Issue

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Georgia Howe

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Brackish Magazine is a project of the Power and Belonging Fellowship made possible by Out in the Open. Out in the Open is a “multiracial, majority working class, grassroots, movement and capacity building organization based in Wabanaki territory throughout the states of Vermont and Maine.” For more information, visit <https://www.weareoutintheopen.org/>



Letters from the Editor

Dear Reader,

You are holding in your hands (or screen) a passion project that spanned several months and took the time and dedication of many to come to fruition. I started Brackish Magazine as a medium for rural Mainers to connect, create, and express themselves authentically. This issue’s theme is a testament to that mission. Backwoods Kinship. Connections with others and the rich ecology that surrounds us. In an increasingly digital age, this issue is meant to serve as a space for us to see how our roots intertwine, a space to stick our fingers into the dirt and imagine and play and simply be.

So why “brackish?” Brackish invokes the water that runs through our veins and invites an awareness of place. Brackish is also a call to queerness: a natural phenomena that rejects binary categorization. It is not saltwater and not freshwater, but both at once and something entirely new. It is found in the liminal space between land and sea, where river becomes ocean. Brackish, to me, is an example of queer ecology, and thus representative of the conversations and art I wanted this magazine to produce.

This project wouldn’t have been possible without the support of Out in the Open. I would like to thank Grace Johnston-Fennell for their unwavering support and guidance through this beautiful process. I’d also like to thank the Creative Arts and Social Practice fellowship cohorts. The advice, inspiration, and friendship I’ve gained from each of you has been life changing, to say the least.

Thank you,
Georgia Howe
Founder + EIC

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Contributor Bios

Calluna (they/ki) is a queer poet, mother, and burlesque performance artist. Calluna and their family were gifted the opportunity to tend 80 acres of unceded Wabanaki lands. They aspire to keep that gift moving through the world via storytelling, creating home with other human and more-than-human beings, farming and feeding. Join the conversation on instagram @callunavulgarling

Dee Dee Seahorn grew up in the mountains of Montana, eventually crash landing in the Poetry Department of the University of Montana. Poems led to writing and singing. After a few years of opening for bands like Magnolia Electric Co and Bill Callahan with his singer songwriter outsider folk project, Dee Dee was offered a touring gig acting and performing original songs for the punk theater company, The Missoula Oblongata. Years on stage passed with time off spent squatting in London and New Orleans, always pen and journal in hand, keeping track of life with dirty little poems. Tramping life gave way to hermiting away on the coast of Maine, a life of quieter times and lots of fulfilling “life’s work”. Calling Belfast home for now, Dee Dee is coming back out of the hermit’s shell, with new poems, lots of new music and a collaborative theater project with 4

other best friend Northeast artists, the elusive Brotherdykes.

Eli Ayodele Johnson was born and raised in Huichun (Berkeley, California). Ayo holds a degree in Human Ecology from College of the Atlantic on the island of Pesamkuk (Mount Desert Island, Maine). His work explores the rhythms and forms co-created by plants, fungi, insects, microbes, and people –posing open questions surrounding Black and queer identity as they are formed through orientations to these other bodies.

Fen Levy is a multi-instrumentalist by night and multi-ornithologist by early morning from ancestral Abenaki land in what’s now the castaway lobster town of Harpswell. She currently pays the bills as a biology grad student and teacher in Boston, but finds her inspiration in a much wider landscape: conversing with hemlocks in the Downeast, songwriting for vanishing warblers in the boreal forest, or immersing in the vibrancy of the Somerville porch scene. To put it more simply, their favorite place is anywhere they can find a communal love language through music. They would like to move back to Maine after school so as to no longer fear getting pancaked on their bike.

Georgia Howe (she/her) is a writer and creative living on unceded Wabanaki lands, known now as Central Maine. She holds a BFA in creative writing and has been published in numerous magazines. In addition to her job in nonprofit marketing, she also volunteers as a staff writer for Same Faces Collective. Her work often focuses on folklore, identity, and the outdoors. In her free time, you can find Georgia exploring Maine’s coast or curled up at home with a book and a cup of tea.

Iris Ireland has lived in Maine her whole life and attends Bates College. She spent her younger years playing in Vaughan Woods, going on walks with her dog and family. She volunteered there as a young teenager, helping rebuild trails and maintaining overgrowth. Her creative work primarily focuses on photography.

Morgain Bailey (b.1970, she/they) is a European-American artist who lives in northern Maine, home of the Wabanaki nations. Her multifaceted art practice centers around photography, painting, public art projects and a critical dialogue about how we perceive and relate to the people and places where we live. Her work serves as visual evidence, emotional metaphor and as a playful place for visual contemplation. Her public art projects stem from a desire to lead change in organic ways that create community connections and inspire participants to think both creatively and collaboratively.

Shannon Renner is a Cincinnati, Ohio based multi media artist who lived and worked in rural mid-coast Maine for the 2024 Summer season. While working a contracted position at Watershed Center for the Ceramic Arts, Renner spent their time exploring unmasked queer identity. After years of living in a city and using clothes and makeup as a means of expression, they found that the rural setting allowed them to embrace inherent queerness without the need for overt visual compensation.

Vin Haley, also known as “LordyIrony,” is a 2D visual artist currently residing in rural Maine. They focus on illustrations and storytelling to process various concepts, emotions, and struggles.

spring by

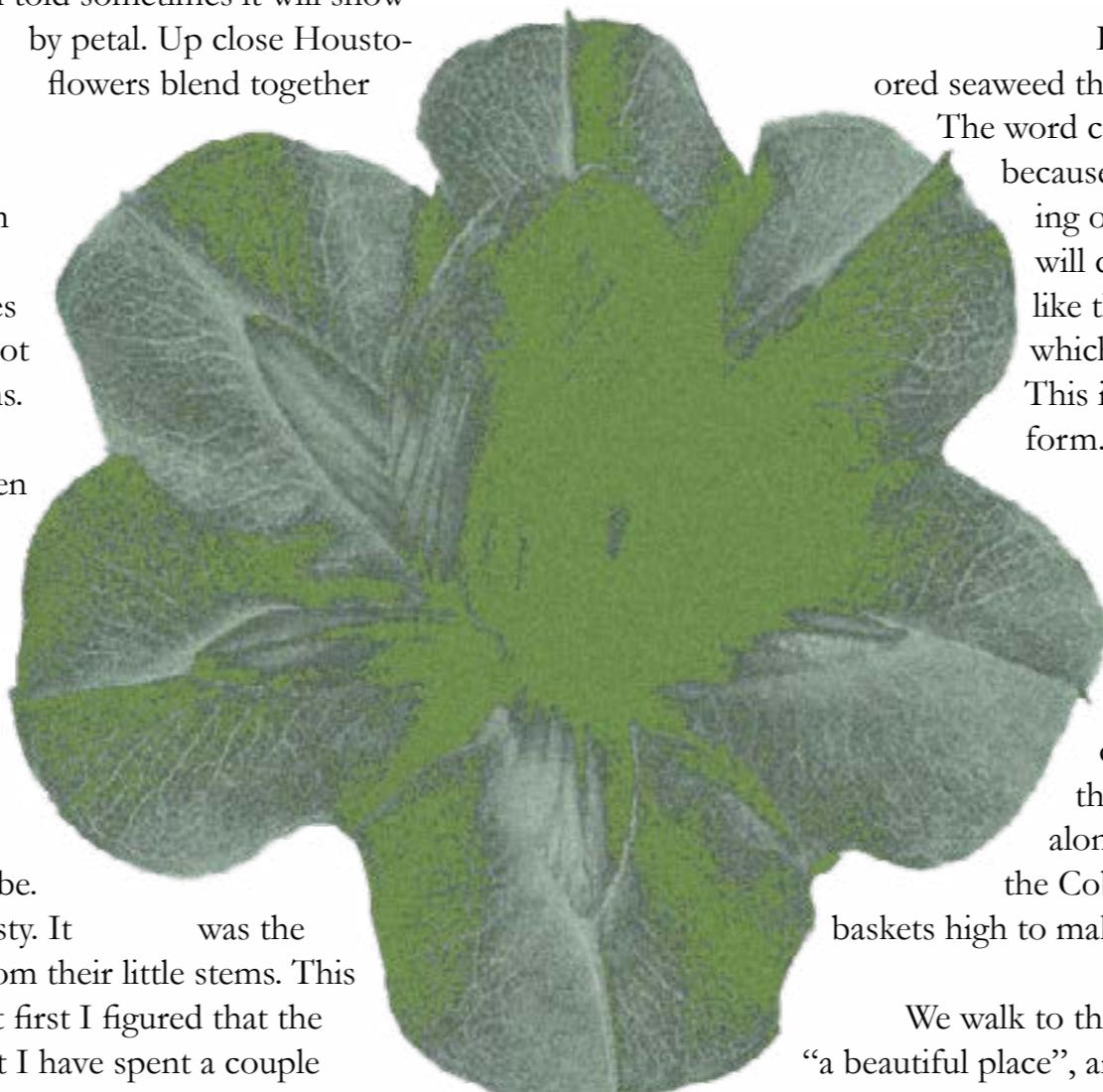
I had been patiently waiting for the violets to bloom. Now their color is fading. It really is just a brief moment; they begin to appear before the maples start to grow leaves to accompany their pendulous chains of tiny samaras, after their companions *Houstonia caerulea* have opened their flowers. *Houstonia* as a plant is mostly a flower, borne on a slender stalk with the most diminutive leaves. When I look out from the car window or at the start of a road while standing on my own feet the little white flowers look like snowfall. I've been told sometimes it will snow until May here in Maine, though I have only seen it happen petal by petal. Up close *Houstonia* is purple, purple and yellow, so it is amusing that all the little flowers blend together into a milky froth.

I am distracted, as usual. But now understanding the place in which I see violets: as the bearers of spring. Maybe this is unfair to the myriad trees that are quick to flower whenever the weather loses its most biting chill. I am certainly being unfair to the bluets who got there first, only to sit and wait for their fashionably late companions. But it is most definitely spring when the violets appear in all those spaces between the grass that can be looked over until they are taken up by someone else entirely. It is most definitely spring when I can graze on the tender violet petals like I am a creature only as tall as emergence. Or maybe some ancient megafauna, almost comically sustained by early shoots and leaves alone. I've been called minimalist before.

Violets, simply put, are magic. Steep enough of them in water and the result is unlike anything I had seen until it was right in front of me. First though, you need many hands or nowhere to be.

Even better if you can find a way to have both. Last year it was misty. It was the beginning of May and the three of us went to pluck the flowers from their little stems. This year it was sunny; I was alone. On both occasions time stopped. At first I figured that the repetitive nature of the task had lulled me into a sort of trance, but I have spent a couple summers picking fruit: plums, peaches, oranges, figs, and can assure you that time was very real in those moments. There is something else happening with the violets.

Here is what I suspect contributes to their power: they are always forming congregations. Also, they are cleistogamous. In the underground world of the violet communities, tangled between roots and mycorrhizae, worms, burrows, who-knows-what, there are flowers. Of course they do not look or behave like the ones above the surface. These flowers are closed, they pollinate themselves; in my mind they are capsule seed pods forever, they are flowers and they are not. Maybe all flowers are the promise of seeds, all seeds are no doubt the promise of flowers. And such is the morphological joke, assuring us that promises can be broken. They are most frequently bent. But what seems to be fully intact is a field full of violets. They exist above and below, pulling you into their gentle and encompassing aura. Swaying and purple, one yellow dot inside each one. Tasting of green and the breeze. Stopping time.



eli ayodele johnson

The dulse crackles inside my mouth so I imagine the oil-slick purple fronds between my teeth shattering like delicate stained glass. I have never eaten dulse fresh out of the low tide before, so I am surprised by the crisp texture and mild, metallic flavor. It is so different from the chewy, opaque seaweed that I have bought from the store. In that form I like to put a piece of the seaweed on my tongue and let it reconstitute, slowly filling my mouth with everything and salt.

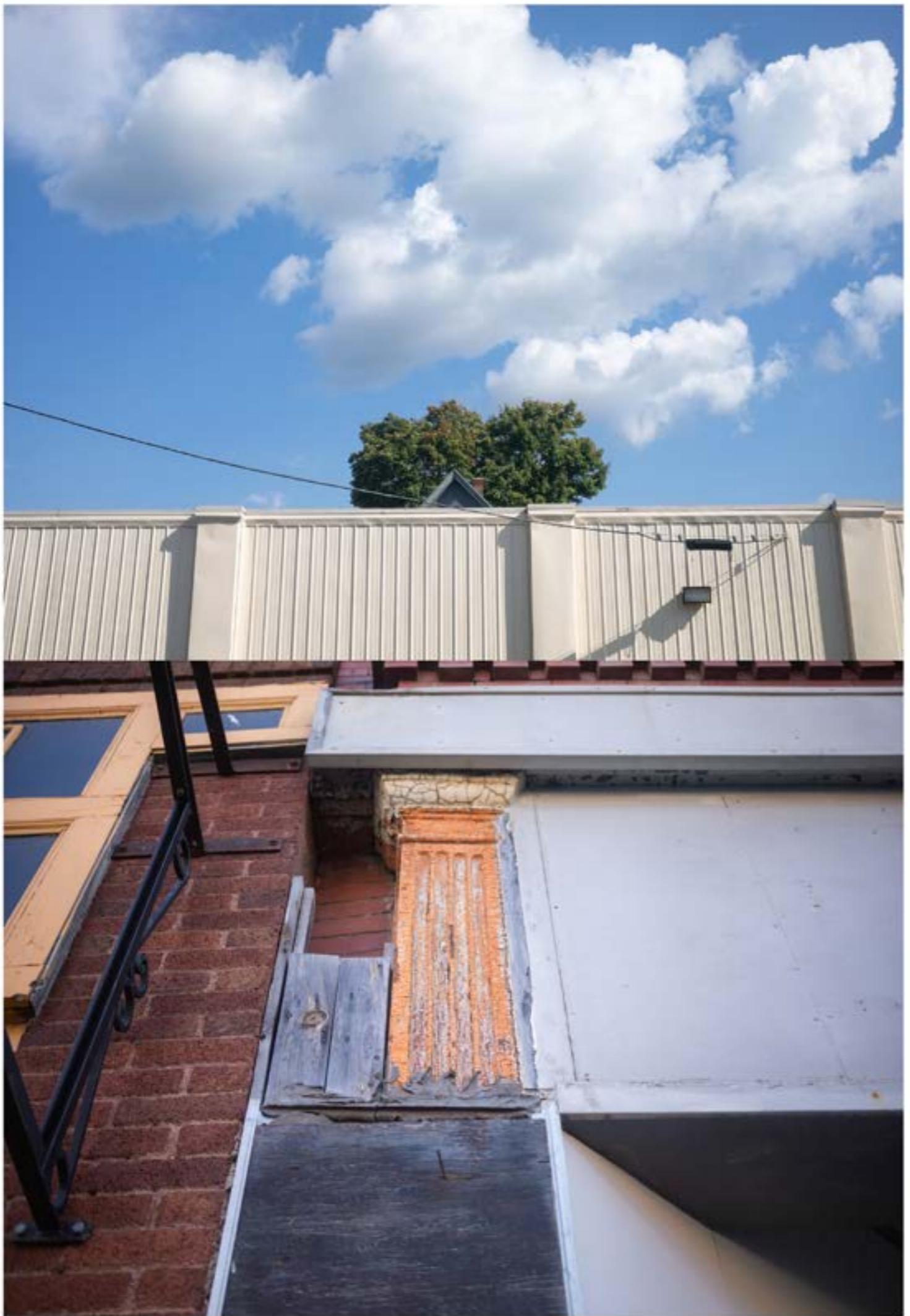
Different under my feet than my molars, the carpet of multi-colored seaweed that clings to the rocks is slick below my waterlogged tennis shoes.

The word carpet is teetering on the edge of being figurative language, because the shining fronds are quite literally woven together. But looking out over this landscape I know (think) that the slivers of algae will carefully unknot as the tide comes in. Wiggling in the cold water like the fish that swim between them. Severine speaks of the ways in which the shape of the kelp affects the water currents around them. This is because the waves have given them insight towards perfected form. The seaweed transfigures time with a slippery cosmology.

A fleshy, golden *Laminaria* holdfast is tucked into my pocket. Our buckets are not yet full, but the tide is quickly coming in. We started collecting just before five this morning. It is the kind of day where the clouds obscuring the sun fade the night into day with very little grandeur. On such a day it can get difficult to measure hours methodically. Because of this the tide, which warned us as it briefly hung slack, is now rushing along and between the rocks and technicolor islands in this inlet in the Cobscook bay. The water is up to my thighs so we hold our laden baskets high to make sure they don't become heavy with sea water.

We walk to the other side of the peninsula, they had insisted on showing us "a beautiful place", and it is. The lichens are particularly spectacular, and the Amelanchier moves me like something heavy inside my body is rolling over. I am almost so enamored by the cliff-like wood's edge that I don't notice the expanse before me. Would it mean anything now to describe what I saw?

We follow down, flat, red pebbles cascade after us. Here is a place where the little islands form wide tide pools between them. There is more seaweed, swaying in the incoming tide. There are also pink algal bodies that cover the rocks underwater. Severine holds out her hand. She had shouted earlier, catalyzing the tumble down the beach towards the waterlogged valley. A water centipede she calls it. I think it is supposed to be this shade of grey, but it looks tattered, it is barely moving. Perhaps it is afraid, or dying, or afraid of dying. I feel guilty knowing that I am really living; everything is so bright and the air is saturated with sea salt, dirt, decomposition.



A R O O S T O O K MASHUP — 2024



M O R G A I N
B A I L E Y

Just enough to stay alive (love bologna)

by Dee Dee Seahorn

Water wing taste in the painted blue wave pool. My granny, walking the hot chipped, sidewalk, creaking splinter gate, push it open with her bird like rear end.

“YooHoo! Ever who wants it! I got bologna frying!”

Here is the sizzle. Here is the red plywood of meat circle. A humble meat but in her hungry eyes, (“I only eat enough to stay alive, rest in peace”) it was the Ritz. This marvel of the food laborer, you can just toss it like a frisbee across the room when no one is home. The joy of flight, the pinky splat in the circle pan, the bubble! The bubble in the circle pan.

The circle meat bubble in the circle pan.

Just before that bubble burst, before anyone sees you, finger grab it and toss it to a plain white circle plate.

Burden fingers in your mouth to taste the salt. The grease. Just enough to stay alive.

Put the steaming meat circle on it's plain white target plate, on a brown wicker tray, the poolside tray, (we fancy). Switch house slippers to pool shoes while smelling that bubble, barely audible sizzle and check your face on the way out... Just lick a bit of that. Grease off your lips just enough to stay alive.

See me out there in the blue waves pool, in the middle of a cow farm, Carolina. The race day roar from beyond the trees, someone must've run through the wall or flipped....the sizzle...the roar...

I'm tasting the water wing. Here you come through the gate rear end first, with just enough and a little more, which is still just enough.

A Beautiful NH Town

by Calluna

A beautiful town, the conservationists say - they say the forests here host the most biodiversity east of the Mississippi. I know this to be true. I spent time with the orange newts, climbed the tall trees, made potions from water drawn from forgotten stone wells. Dug deep once, now filled with decades of mud and leaves. Each stone laid by hand.

The mica mine where we would go to see ourselves reflected in the shiny bright eyes still embedded in Earth, sensing how the windows to our souls were made of thick panes of flaking, ethereal stone.

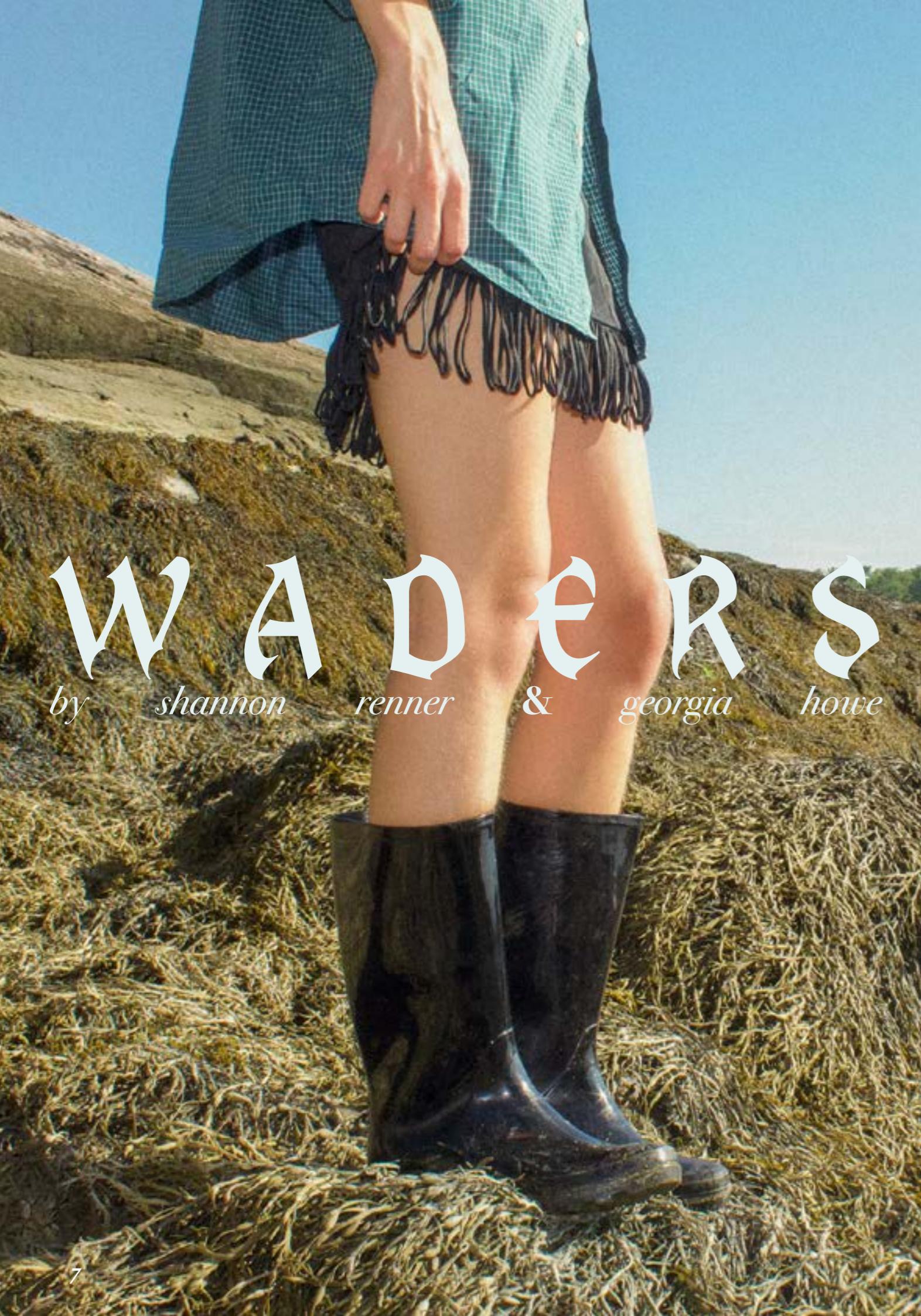
Hidden Lake, Edgerly Falls, Bow Lake, The Ledges, Blue Job and Parker Mountain. These are breathtaking places. You think the kids in this town would have more than enough to keep their hands dirty and minds clean. Yet sixth grade girls give their high school boyfriends their virginity between gymnastics and horseback riding in exchange for undefeatable status. And maybe a longing to know love.

The first time I smoked pot my younger brother rolled me a spliff from weed he bought from his friends two grades older than me. Once, black out drunk, fifteen, my friend groped me until I snored and later they told me I single handedly pushed my ride's car out of the snowbank. Small town, varsity volleyball strength. After my friend fucked my two best friends he tried for me. I laughed in his face. We played Mario Kart instead.

A beautiful lake town, where Officer Randy was a royal dick, ending the futures of every young male hellion, and the only reason he didn't ruin mine when he caught me going 80 on back roads was because I would spit in his weekly steak and cheese.

He liked watching me make it too much to trade his leering gaze for never being sure about his cheesy meat again.

We camped under the stars and ate mushrooms before school. Our cheap beater cars pirouetted in elegant donuts on the frozen lake. Some of us found our way. Some of us died or died inside watching each other die from speeding or overdoses. We all still carry the specter of Live Free, or Die.



W A D e R S

by shannon renner & georgia howe









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WHEN A MEAT HEN IS READY FOR SLAUGHTER

by Calluna

They can barely walk
Much less fly. But watch them try
Their wings remember their foremothers
F 1 i g h t
They are Bred for consumption. This is something we share.
There is more
Stocky legs, powerful, but never strong enough
To carry all that weight
Our inheritance.

We are built like the
Women in my family.
All thighs and breasts provide
Bred to good meal.

Fat and fleshy, we grow up too fast
For or biology evolution
To keep pace.

Yet, our too big hearts
Will never let go
Of our love of lying in the grass
In the sun,
Of digging in the earth,
Of crowing and eating.
Of fucking.
Of c l u c k i n g .

beyond the * yard

by Fen Levy

There is a path beyond the yard out in the woods,
Out in the woods of liquid thrushes' reverie.
Every stump and stick and stony wall long past
Passed unseen by older eyes and older feet.

The ridge surmounts a hulking granite beast
Bestilled behind the slinking slab of ice.
I startled shouts of deer up from the brush,
Brushed off the crust from winter webs of mice.

We battled redcoats armed with oak twig swords,
Swore not to spill our master schemes elsewhere.
Where unraveled snowball sagas came to life
To lie freshly tracked in snow to be read there.

There is a path deep in the alders by the lake,
By the lake where canoes croak in pickerelweed.
We'd race to rig a makeshift sail aloft.
Lofty, jaunty, salty cries to the high seas.

The broadwings came above the autumn bronze,
Brawny bears the pirates of our suet stock.
Stalk softly as the white face in the boughs,
Bow beneath the flurried brown bat flock.

The jewels within the thorns picked ripe and black.
Blacktop whizzing, dusty, through two sets of spokes.
Spoken rambles traipse the table on the fourth,
For the space between the loons' long languid notes.

There is a road that cuts with furrows, fence, and field,
Fielding groaning, tired tourists on tin wheels.
We leave behind the paths through humid woods.
Would that all remain the same once seasons yield.

'Cross bridges fleshed in green and turnpikes thick,
The kiss of moss to toes retreats from sense.
Since years and loves and faces passed their way,
Weighed down by that they could not recompense.

A fox turns, furtive, through the bank of ferns,
For no one stomps out paths among them now.
No eager cries resound across the slopes.
Slowed down with age the hemlocks take a bow.

There is a path behind the house up in the woods,
Up in the woods where roots and rocks and bracken grow.
Grown tall like the apollo rocket pines,
Pining for the haunts I never got to know.

What Does Queerness Mean to Me?

words by Calluna, photos by Georgia Howe

Version 1: The letter to my husband and our therapist. My Truth.

Queerness cum from Earth, Water, Life.

Queerness is about embracing the magic all around us.

About play,

About breaking all the rules in the stories I was and am still being fed.

Queerness is embodying messiness, messing around, is letting go of the illusion of (and addiction to) control.

Queerness is welcoming the miracle that is both ancient and new in each and every moment.

Queerness is releasing literally EVERYTHING I was told to be and how I was told to be it.

Its learning to embody the steadiness of Earth and the fluidity of water

Queerness is refusing to dam up our eroticism, refusing to shut down what we feel.

Queerness is embodied liberation.

Abundance



Version 2: Just for us. Also Truth.

What does Queerness mean to me?

Queerness is digging in my own flesh, with my finger nails, picking, bleeding, Finding all the places that their stories of my gender, worth, and femininity have gotten their hooks in me.

Gingerly removing them, as if from a fishes mouth

Tossing them back like an oyster, letting their dying nourish whatever new being

Is be-cumming in me
in that moment.

The stories they told that my existence,
my value, my future,
Was for serving others.

What's funny is that they were right.

But not in service to men,
nor to mothers whose victimhood became
their identity and their protection

I am here to be of service.

But Not to make myself smaller so they can feel larger
Not to anticipate their every need

And believe me, I can do all that, and do it well.

Made a career of it.

(At least I get paid for it now.)
No.

Queerness is being the willing and eager submissive of water
Its being of service
Because I desire to be
Long to be

Because it feels good
Because the erotic is
ancient spirit power
coursing through me

Queerness is essential

Elemental

Its being fluid

Being powerful

Its refusing to be any specific gender or identity in any moment.
Refusing to be tethered to who we were 5 seconds ago.

Its being a good little slut,

Being whatever is turning Spirit on in that moment.

Queerness is change.

Queerness is ancient

Is water, tree, stone,
sun's warmth on our skin

It's coyote song

It's the echo of loon.

Queerness is being exactly
what this moment calls for

Its standing in my power

Its being of service to LIFE

So that all life can thrive

So that LOVE can thrive and flow

Queerness is being who I am in this moment,
Whoever WE are

For this is no I in this body

Only trillions of cells working together so we can move across the Earth
So we can give the gifts we are here to give.

There is no I in this body

It is we

The ancestors that gave our lives so that this body could stand tall
We are the water spirits and queens in our lineages
We the living beings that gave our lives so this body could eat
We are the land and waters that make life possible.

Queerness is giving up the story of separation

Of individualism

Of human exceptionalism

Its freedom and liberation

But not without commitment, no,

Only with obligation, ligament, lig

Meaning to tie me to you, to everything.

It is accepting that we are of this world,

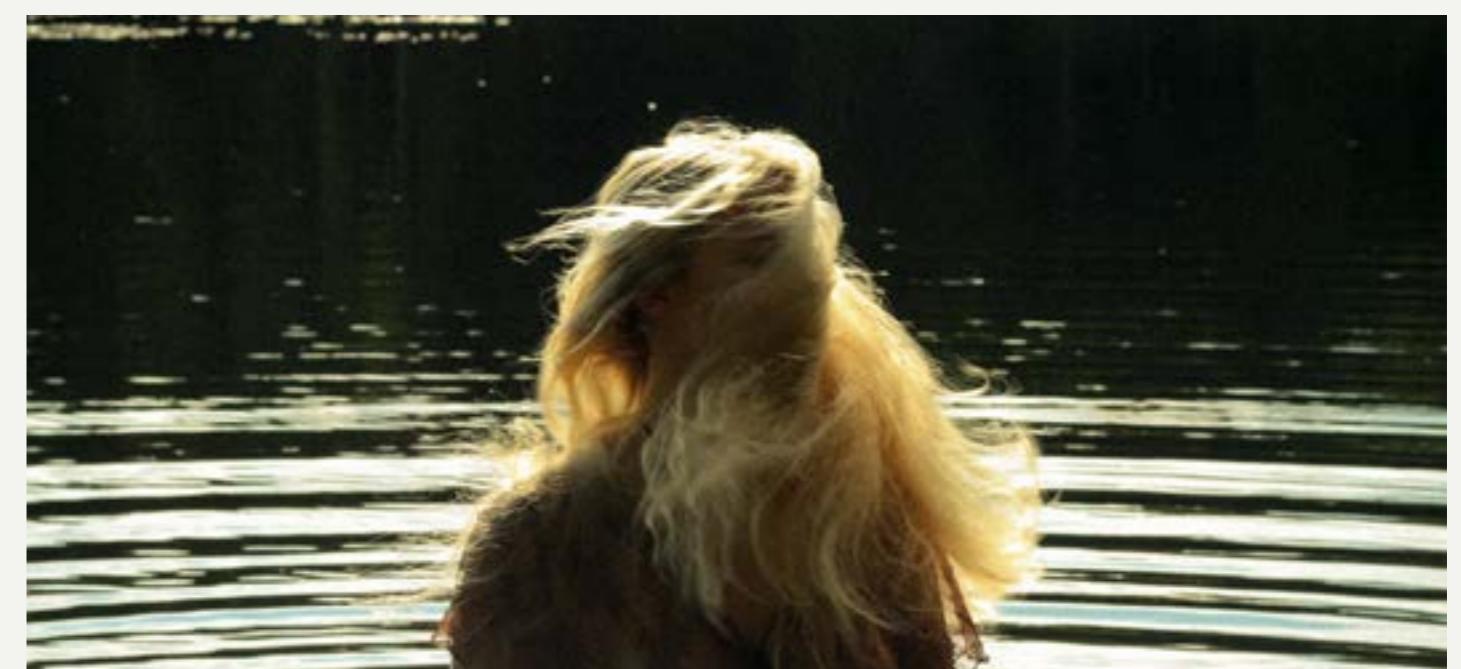
That we are meant to be here

Queerness is stepping into the pain of it

The grief, the sorrow, the heartbreak

Of all we have lost

Destroyed



How much we have forgotten
And it is lovingly
refusing
to look away.

Queerness is embodying The everchanging, sacred nature
Of everybody
Taking them within us
Into us
And making love



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by Shannon Renner

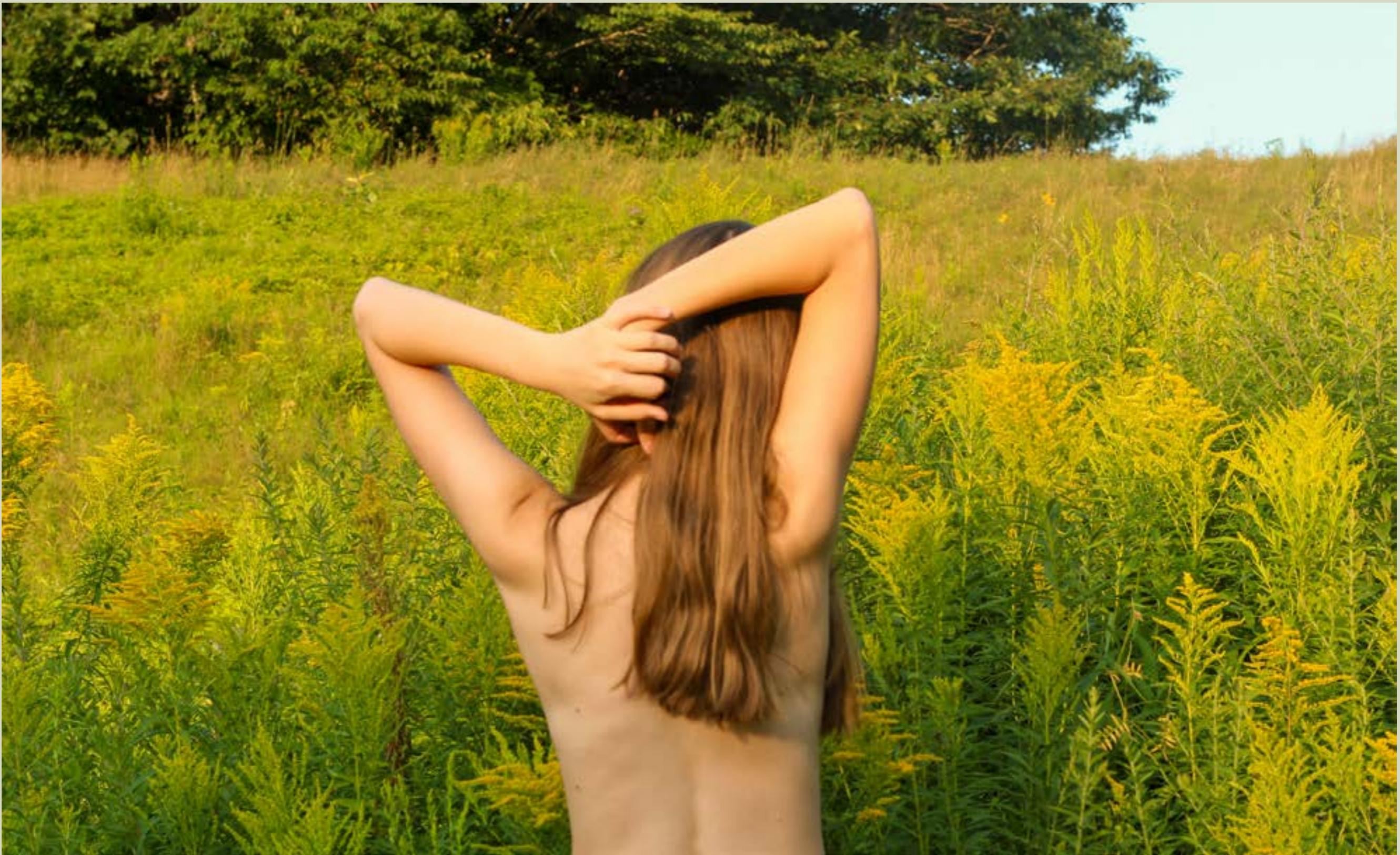
DEFENSIVE FEMININITY.
DEFENSIVE SEXUALITY.

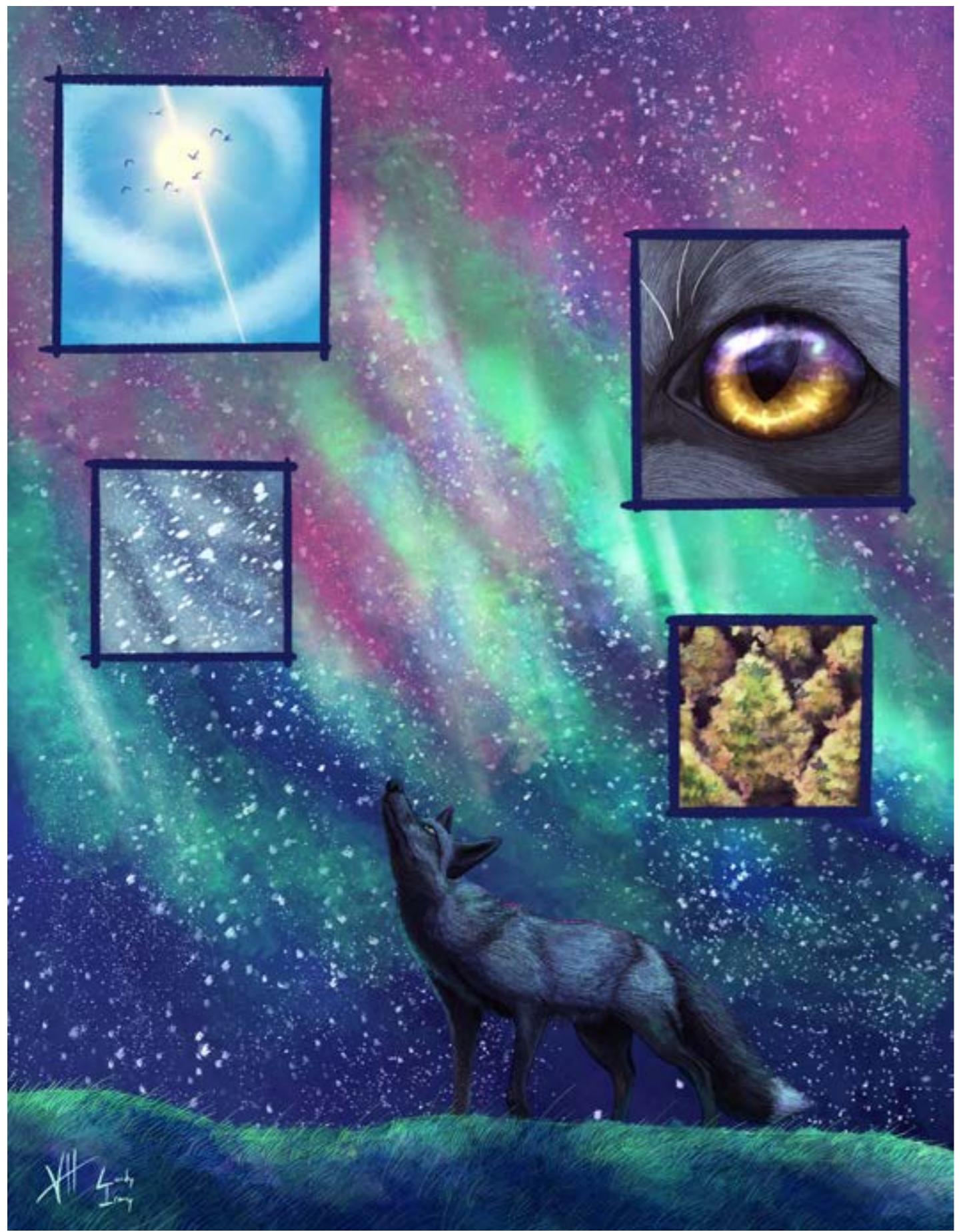


the Conch.

(September 2024)

Photo by Iris Ireland





Connection Through the Open Skies by Vin Haley

