

2019

SHANKPAINTER
59

OFF SEASON

FINE ARTS WORK CENTER IN PROVINCETOWN

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OFF SEASON
SPRING 2019

FINE ARTS WORK CENTER IN PROVINCETOWN
24 Pearl Street Provincetown, MA 02657 508.487.9960 **FAWC.ORG**

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CONTRIBUTORS

Neil Thompson still owes **PRAVEEN KRISHNA** twenty dollars.

GABE KRUIS aka Gabriel Kludge hails from Michigan City, Indiana, where you can find him most days in the local Townville Mall roasting and salting his own artisanal nuts at “Kludge’s Cashew Kiosk.” He is the author of the outsider comix series “Mr. Alarm vs Dr. Awkward” and the recipient of numerous awards, including “Top Nut Huts of 2002, Greater Gary-Michigan City Exurban Area.” He holds a BS in Cryptooology with an emphasis in Reptilian Ovoviviparity from the Missouri branch of Kansas City Community College University and a Masters of Divinity from Yale.

KANNAN R. MAHADEVAN is 33 years old. He divides his time between the kitchen and the shower.

SARA MARTIN is best known for her fearless participation in the Dimetapp Tea Party in her parent’s bathroom circa 1993. She is probably going to be an internationally lauded entrepreneur for her fashion line, *Hyper Thyroid*, her end-of-life care-taking service: *The Harrie Pawter Hospice* and her dating application, *Looks & Books*, which combines her love of severely judging others’ taste in books with Face timing silently with strangers.

PHILIP MATTHEWS is a poet known to lie down by a dead gull. He tries to position his body in communion with what he finds on long beach walks. The last time he looked, he found that what had felt like walking a straight line was actually tracing the flowing memory of high tide.

LAURA NEAL: poet, South Carolina, quiet not shy, black and proud, always smiles, Maryland MFA, reads every day.

J. STILLWELL POWERS has figured out how to convince people he is a writer. He is at work on his unibrow.

Second-year fiction fellow **CECILY SCUTT** spent her winter brooding on the “discomfiting trochaics” of the word *Frodo*. Regrettably, her subsequent verse, made ‘to trouble the unhappy world,’ eschews the Quenya and “is but rendered in the Common Tongue.”

AUSTIN SEGREST lives in Six Fish Down. It’s likely going to take a coordinated offensive to remove him.

SOPHIA STARMACK was ultimately a little too wild for the convent, but is making up for it as resident mystic of P’town.

JOSHUA WEINER is the chair of the writing committee and the author of four books of poems, and other mistakes.

I’m sorry, but **J. PRESTON WITT** is closed for the season. He will reopen for business this summer. Have a great day.

AUSTIN SEGREST OFF-SEASON

Hightide rocks the toilet water.
The wiring's jitterbugged.
The current fails the whales.
Something's come loose
in the labyrinth. Loggerheads
climb out stoned by the cold,
dodder off in dunegrass, dead reckoning
dead wrong. The season is off.
Every day goes down
as a lost time accident.
Far to the west
the Atlantic's windshield is fogging up,
the coarse winter marsh matted, post-coital.
The wind saws like Vivaldi.
Off Race Point, the gannet's curtains
of rain have parted, pastel applicators,
one after another, coughed up by the storm.
Haywire moon, the moonsnail's compass
is cracked. Foxes,
sadistic in black leggings.
The tide chases its tail.

LAURA NEAL OFF-SEASON CONVERSATIONS

Anyone want to go to karaoke tonight?
4:30 in the afternoon
but dark as half past midnight.
We found a beached seal—it waved at us.
Naturally, we waved back.
It had red eyes, but a face you could trust.
Words on repeat: Low tide, breakwater, clamming, dunes.
12:00 the foghorn, the Squealing Pig, the Stop & Shop
a mass broadcast: come eat meat and worship Lydia's moons.

Everything is in coves or closed on Commercial
just you and the tight street
your vagrant shadow an invading traversal.
Stipends are in! Do you know who's coming to read?
Baudelaire, Dickinson, Whitman, Freud
slipped through a void, (fine arts work indeed).
Austin taught me the distinction of razor clams and moon snails.
Sara discovered a gynandromorph cardinal.
Philip would make the best soup from their heads and tails.

Check out Louise in her new Molly Ringwald sweater.
REMEMBER: Leave your pipes on a slow trickle
this Cape weather is shifty as a falling feather.

Do you know where you're going after this?
Home. Residency. JobCorps. No.
Living with artists and scribes I'm convinced—

this is an endless, blissful, abyss!

*P.S. & B.T.W
I'm sorry I failed to offer you a bandage
my hand instincts to the dead and broken
and I don't mean the seashells by the seashore
I've been made with red clay in my veins
swing straight the sharp axe, but these pines too thin
so I rake pages with an ink pen, saw off a dead rat's tail.

SARA MARTIN TO SPRING FROM THE SOIL OF WHICH YOU ARE A STRANGER

Sometimes, when I walk the dog, people mistake her aloofness for being well trained. The ones who brace themselves at first walk away impressed and glad.

Briefly, I bask in the fiction that they think I am a great dog trainer.
And for a moment, I am.

At least someone is doing some good work around here, I think, and it was so very much work!

I inhabit the perception I have, of a stranger, with an entire life that has nothing to do with me, possibly experiencing a minor misconception of my relationship to a dog. After we have passed each other on the street, one time.

There should be a word for when an escape from yourself finds *you* for a change.

It isn't something you hide in your desk. That you take teeny tiny bites of.
Until your forehead builds a porch.
Like the narwhale's tusk. How it grows straight out of its upper lip.

Instead, the escape moves through you and then, right on.
Into someone else who needs escaping.

*

Robbie came to my office for the first time the other day, said Jessie, pouring coffee, and it made me realize he would have had no idea if I didn't actually work there, until that day.

I could have been doing anything, every day, for years and he never, ever would have known, she wrapped both hands around her mug and the gesture looked comforting so I imitated it and wrapped both hands around my mug too.

*It made me keep thinking to myself – see, Robbie, see? I do have a job! I do!
Though he insists he never doubted that I did, she said, so why was it so satisfying to prove?*

*

You and your daughter are adorable together, the cashier at Whole Foods tells me while my babysitting charge, Raleigh, and I cheers pieces of vegetable sushi.

Thanks, I say, and smile, when her mouth is full so she can't say, you're not my mom!

Of course I'm not – I know that! The extent of the of-course-ness of it.

With the choices I've made? The audacity to think that if I had a five year old child, we'd be dropping three hundred dollars at Whole Foods in the middle of the day in between a trip to the insectarium and her weekly chiropractor appointment.

Don't let her straighten those curls, the cashier says, girls always want the hair they don't have.

SOPHIA STARMACK WINTER SUMAC

Roots of red osier gone under the water, December and no snow come.
How things grow in the marsh: from rot and rain blooms mesh of moss,
red hair of the sumac stand I can see but haven't yet tried to reach,
that harvest of weed, wind, trunk, branch, pitch pine
and marsh mud, more root rot and sand than soil.

How things grow in the marsh: sunk sky and collecting pool.
Somewhere supposedly you and you and you are feeding the stars,
how the fortune teller said through your mouth, *Tea,*
she wants you to drink more tea and buy a little teapot at a thrift store
and when you drink from it, you'll remember. Your forever voice also said,

I was born with a brain that could not survive. I can see that now.
Nerve branch of birch tree swaying electrical time, dendritic staccato
passing impulse from water to sky. Is it a great eye opening, bronzing
the house up there on the small hill, two gables blank like an unblinking smile?
Perhaps the great sky sleeper has opened the hole in his head to watch it again.

Dendrite time pulsing bits of color back into the marsh: just now I looked up
and green, rust, wheatbeige stitched in where a quarter hour before all was gray.
In the winter here on Cape Cod, sun and its day coat come on slow.
I wake slowly too, pushing myself up from the cellular swamp.
Looking out into the marsh is like that: each small movement keeping its own.

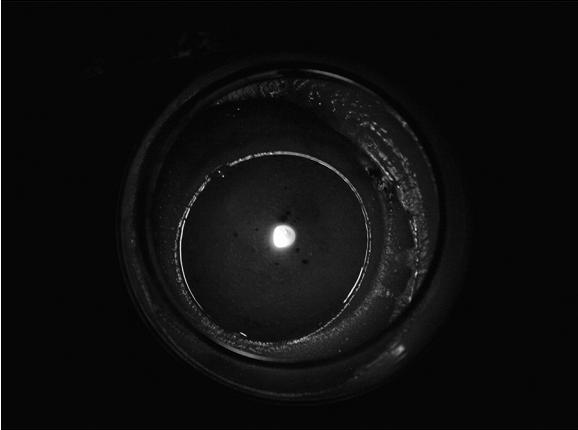
Its own pulse dizzying and incomprehensible when viewed as a sprawled out quilt
but unmistakable: every branch and blade spiraling in the wind, wind off the
ocean
eddies back here in the marsh, wind that shimmers and ripples the trees.
No storm today, just quiet presence, night's stillness blowing on
as the big house's two gables and two porches rise in the filtered sun,
that sumac out there, that sorrow unreachable by boot or blade but flaring up
unbidden.

**J. STILLWELL POWERS
RITUAL**

Childhood, statues wept oil. Paintings opened doorways to the divine. Saints bent laws of nature, healed affliction, grappled demons, took arrows and stones and fire with grace. Bread and wine were flesh and blood. What is left when God disappears? I've become a man who cannot will himself toward belief, though vestiges of childhood remain, like fractured bone healed thicker. A fondness for ritual, a tolerance for slow unfolding, a knowing there are things I cannot know. It's been an off season, but I bring myself to the altar daily. Sometimes, there are little miracles. Some days, I find a sliver of light in the space where God used to be.



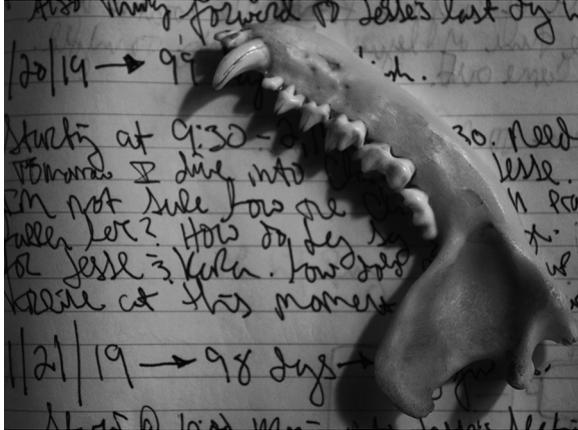
1.



2.



3.



4.



5.



6.



7.

- 1. "Altar"
- 2. "Votive"
- 3. "Unfolding"
- 4. "Relic"
- 5. "Contemplation"
- 6. "Communion"
- 7. "Epiphany"

J. PRESTON WITT

GREAT DEALS ON REAL GOLD ITEMS

“A friend of a friend of a friend was gardening one day and found a golden wedding band in the dirt—that sounds like the start of a story, doesn’t it? but I’m afraid it isn’t—the ring didn’t turn her invisible or evil, and Sir Ian McKellen didn’t arrive at her doorstep, wind blowing through his great white beard—what happened was she went for coffee with acquaintances and for a time was someone who’d found something—I dated a marine biologist who discovered a diamond in a shark’s belly, people told her and ‘My uncle found 10,000 dollars inside an afghan at a garage sale and didn’t keep it,’ and every time the woman would think, So what? what does that have to do with me and my ring?—at night, while her husband snored and the panic crept up the back of her thighs, she held the ring tightly, feeling the past lives of each golden atom and coming to know how everything that had been before was still here—she saw in her mind a hall of angel-monks tasked with keeping the complete history of everything, a great system that ensured a ring in the dirt was not truly lost—for a time, this consoled her—but one day, she noticed that the golden band was so similar, had become so similar, perhaps, in fit and weight to the one she wore for her husband, that in the taking on and off of things she could no longer tell them apart—the fear returned, worse than before, because she saw the possibility that everything was indeed known, just as she believed, but that, so what? what did it matter? who cared which was which? truth was neither created nor destroyed, just matter, and to matter matter must gain momentum must act must matter must matter must matter must matter...The ring brought her no impetus then, no divine motion—you should know that she did not bury them, her wedding bands were not buried with her, but ended up here in this very shop, which is not a conclusion, I’ll admit, or a coincidence, but the point is that these rings have unique pasts, special histories, and would you care to try one on?”

CECILY SCUTT

THE FELLOWSHIP IX – BREE

For the fellows & former fellows, and JRR Tolkien

this party is too small
the walls sweat butter
& out the window
mushrooms lean sallow
& beyond that in the weathered wastes
lone horsemen crawl like lost ants

but we are singing
poetry and trading
recipes and fellowship
- the halves and the wholes -
our saucers & the milk jug
printed with a jaunty cow
and someone plays a violin

and I would prance upon this tabletop, I would,
pin to my pocket
this legacy, this birth day gift,
that it won’t finger numb
across the lobes
that I shan’t slip
and disappear
mid verse

I was here under the table the whole time
I’ll say
to the tangled chair legs
and the spoons

SARA MARTIN STILL LIFE

The Martins are going to Peru! My mother exclaimed on her end of the phone and I didn't respond right away.

I was walking on the treadmill, choking back tears while watching a program about a French Bulldog using a rear wheelchair after bone cancer.

This just isn't a good time for me to go to Peru, I said importantly, imagining that I had a briefcase and used hand sanitizer.

Are you crying? she asked.

No, I said, *I'm exercising.*

Which always makes me cry. Especially if *Shark Tank* is on.

Well, you should be crying! she said, *if this trip doesn't go well, your father thinks he'd like to be married to someone else.*

Seems like his mind is already made up then, I almost said, watching the French Bulldog's owners circle his capable front half and rub his sweet face.

My eyes filled again.

I changed the channel. Oh, great. *Sex and The City*.
The only thing that ruined me more than handicapped pets
or budding entrepreneurs on screen:

Fictional Female Friendships.

*

Maybe ultimatums run in our family.

I made one in high school, when Adam Sussman and I were touching each other in an empty movie theater during a showing of *Mystic River*, and I said, *you have fifteen minutes to impress me or we're never doing this again.*

I think I got that stupid line from *Hot Shots Part Deux* starring Charlie Sheen.

I didn't call Adam back after that.

So, he circulated a topless picture of me drinking tequila on the beach with a girl named Diana who was 15 but looked 25 and could only be dead or a spy by now.

*

A man stood on the treadmill next to me with his feet on either side of the belt. He turned the speed up to 9 mph but didn't get on. The belt just sped beneath him. Like he was contemplating jumping out of a bus.

*

Adam still reaches out to me every now and then.
Usually in the form of a picture of himself wearing a cowboy hat
or a GIF of Spongebob Square Pants.

The last message he sent me said, *I read some of your brother's new book. I thought it sucked ass.*

Adam had a really, really mean dad.

*

I just don't understand, I said, *how a trip to Machu Picchu with your adult children and your unhappy husband is going to repair a marriage that don't seem all that broke.*

What did you say?

I just mean, I said, *if he has gotten the idea of a new partner into his mind, when nothing in particular has happened, a song and dance in South America is not the answer.*

Don't. Seem. Broke? She said, slowly, back to me the way she had said, *Green. Day? Or Limp. Biz. Kit?* when I had asked for their CDs as a teen.

Don't seem broke, Mom! I said, *you know what I mean.*

The man next to me was leaning over his handrail watching my treadmill TV, which was now playing *Harry Potter and The Sorcerer's Stone*. The belt was still speeding beneath him like lava.

Might I remind you, she said, *that you have a Burberry coat? People get confused when you talk like that. It's why you make the wrong people too comfortable. Like waiters. Or Peter!*

Peter Abrahams was her friend Francine's husband, who was very *fun* but never employed and was always emailing me sketches of a house he was designing that looked like a beehive and trying to meet up for ping pong.

He is friends with drug addicts, my mother said, *I don't know where he finds all of them! In Princeton, New Jersey!*

I'd like to know how to not find a drug addict in Princeton, New Jersey.
I'd like to trade *speaking* drug addict for a second language I can put on my resume, please.

People say you're fluent in something
if you speak it in your dreams.

*

Your father and I did cocaine one time, my mother went on, *and I so was worried about doing it that I don't think I did it right. I didn't feel anything.*

Well, if you want to do it again, I thought, I can introduce you to Kyle Sjoström or Always-His-Birthday-Eric or Leo Ratale or Avery Fox or Julie Anna Murphy or Kendall McCue or Petri or Chess Andy or-

I motioned for the man to switch treadmills with me because his TV was stuck on Fox News and I felt confident I could continue emoting, even to that.
The endorphins were really flowin'!

Do you think he has anyone in mind? I asked my mother, returning to the subject of her impending divorce, *do you think Dad is imagining being married to someone else in particular?*

PRAVEEN KRISHNA
SPEED CHESS AT THE GOVERNOR BRADFORD

Just one game. Eighties night is not done yet.
Before the natives descend,
And the karaoke starts,
Before the pilgrims appear,
Awaiting the total eclipse of their hearts.
A quick match, you said.
You promised that we would leave
Before the crowd starts to object
To the shrill scent of Aqua Net
In my polyester weave.
All their slapdash kinships
Adored and irate
And as American as
The resurrection of Pontius Pilate.

But with two pawns missing,
We had to steal salt shakers,
Inching the crusted vitrines,
Across the plywood acres,
Then begin the common moves: 1e4, 1e5...
We play not to conquer, just to survive.
From pawns to knaves
That was always going to be our fate.
Exiled from the summer
Excommunicated from the Cape
Sordid lives, shrunken oysters
Ramshackle and boisterous.
Our former lives, we're now just ambassadors.
This meager board, our flux capacitor.

Softly, a version that everyone else sees.
Pair of old salts, pas de deux, tête-à-tête
A sweet, doddering couple, worth these
Three broken sonnets.
Our ersatz remedy draws gasps, awe.
We find ourselves besieged by homilies.
Control the center, rock the Casbah,
Don't stop believing, other dictums of that kind.
But our strategies are coarser, unrefined,
We know the real path to success:
If you loved me more, we'd fight more.
If I loved you more, we'd fight less.
Stalemate, armistice, and cold war,
All of our gambits declined.

JOSHUA WEINER
THE SEVENTEENTH BLOW

After years of instruction,
application, effort, and further
study of the masters;
after years of slow but steady
progress in my so-called art
and modest success
that comes from isolated acts of recognition
paid me
by those who took an hour from one day;
after years of worry and wonder
at the state of cultural production
versus the individual voice,
the national resource of understanding
escaping like neon from a broken sign;
I had finally arrived at the place
where nothing is written.
Shazam! What a relief.
I watched the tide go out,
the bread rise,
and took pure pleasure
in the middle school musical adaptation
of *The Lion King*. Genius
re-scaled to chaff
I was released from
rigors of the gratuitous,
unyielding, heroically
poised in the absolute
mode of change
otherwise known as Time.
Practicalities filled my day.
I paid bills when due,
replaced the head of my Sonicare
every three months,
and signed for my neighbors'
packages when they were away.

Helping my wife in the garden,
the garden became sole location
of my process. I read books again
without envy, only awe.
And nothing I experienced
was put to any use
except to the degree that
in the moment
I could feel it and
feeling it
let the feeling drift away
like a zeppelin heading back to Europe.
I developed a habit
of adding
Fuck the Right
to the end of all my letters
in a font called 12-point Nightbloom
and I went without fear
of non-sequitur, everything
I touched seeming like a form
of Nature, as of now
the old saying
if I don't see you in the future
I'll see you in the pasture
how that equals fountains
and that eagle, for instance,
flying across the threshold span
of this open sliding door
is / in truth / far away
as a buoy unmoored from its trap
traversing the overpass
on a single stream of air
giving unending shape
at the end of my pipe
to a globe of molten glass.

for Bob Bailey

PHILIP MATTHEWS OPEN SEASON

What fur knows: opportunity, proportion, respect.
How to bleed, shed history, offer a stiff structure, clung to
even while sweeping, keeping to a few inches in front of me.
Keeping close information of value.

I listen. I witness.

I startle, rustle, I clink. Wherever I turn, actions unfurl
I am wed to.

I clang, know affection, pain I have caused,
sit with both like hurt friends. Spirit, bowing,
hand at a headache, water, familiar position.

*

Turn, ride east of Cassock.
Stand still now.

Lark, I laugh, ever wow, a most lustrous kill. I dew, mama luffa, snail, I
rev, I rev, take the far arm of mortuary, knock off an effigy I. I am the hunter.
How I've shot it, filled it.

KANNAN MAHADEVAN OFF SEASON

From the first I preferred Brighton Beach to Coney Island. It was natural to compare them: they are only a boardwalk apart. At Coney the crowd was rowdy; people stood in knots, as they had on the subway down. They took pictures of themselves. At Brighton people strolled. They lived, I imagined, in those brown stone blocks built not quite parallel to the ocean. Gulags, I thought, amusingly. The gulags would get terribly hot by 5 pm, and perhaps after a cold shower and the first icy vodka of the evening the residents would come outdoors for relief, not in beach clothes, but in slacks and thin blouses; and the boardwalk would receive them like the moving walkway at the airport.

I avoided Tatiana and Volna, the beachfront restaurants with bright awnings, and not just because I had no money. To sit and eat a full meal—it would be too much, oversatiating. No, I wanted foreplay, I wanted a beer. My place was a little booth beside Volna. It had no awning, no name, no chairs; but it did have tables—short poles dug into the ground, cement circles. There were flourishes: when I asked for my Krusovice, the bartender, a burly old man or a lithe teenager in sweatpants, pointed to a refrigerator, spotted yellow and sweet-smelling inside. There glass mugs were kept to chill. I always chose the one with a Curious George-like monkey standing next to a carnival tent, then stood with my elbows on the table, hands on my cheeks, lazily listening to the Russian around me. In late September, just before I left New York, I reverently brought my friend. But it was Yom Kippur, a metal door was drawn down, hiding the liquor bottles and the taps and the counter.

Provincetown would be an extension of this day-long offseason, I thought. Before I arrived it was a stage set in my mind: the boarded-up stalls (like my Brighton booth, like Rome in August, like Noor Mohammadi, the hotel in Bombay always out of its famous buffalo thigh by the time I arrived), the deserted beach, and me, leaning into the wind in my dirty green coat. In no time I was up to my old tricks. I went to the dunes alone and congratulated myself: wouldn't that first sighting of the ocean, the promise of blue across the stunted evergreens and pale sand, wouldn't that have been sullied by a lot of exclamations? Stumbling across the jetty one day, I found the same ocean. I even found my boarded-up booth—Farland on the Beach at Herring Cove. It was government-run, and looked like it was put together out of recycled benches.

But something was wrong. I was chasing the same old thrill, with diminishing returns. Was the ocean growing more arid, day after day, or was I? And then, for the first time in my life, something new happened. A green dragon appeared outside my door. People are few in the offseason, but they are giants. Suddenly these giants, my friends, were as important to me as homemade yogurt, as a beer after a long walk, as important to me as myself.

Soon I will leave them, and go somewhere new. It doesn't seem right to cobble back together my solipsism. Change must follow change, and they have changed me, given me new shirts, a new coat to wear against any landscape.

GABE KRUIS ON INCOMPLETION

In an old notebook
I find a couplet
written in my own
hand: “the permanent
mirage of its scent, /
like a cool shadow
wavering around it.”
I’m not certain
what it refers to;
what was intended
to follow. Notes
for an imagined
garden, maybe;
a description of the
rosemary bush
outside of Mag’s
window in New
Mexico: huge, grey-
green, rough & almost
atavistic— sprays
of tiny purple flowers
angled toward the sky.
What is it about
flowers I think of
them as modern;
hard to imagine
a cretaceous nose-
gay I guess and
I’d forgotten herbs
grow so profligate,
so voraciously large
even in, or because of,
that dry heat—
But of the many such
fragments I find I’ve
written I’m satisfied
to say: This is at
least an accurate
portrait of my days.
The medium, after
all, is the message;
and even the phrase
“If the weather,” feels
not like a fragment
but a sensation
that might linger
if only for hour
but has been known,
to last a lifetime.

**THANK YOU
TO ALL
OUR CONTRIBUTORS**

2018-2019 WRITING FELLOWS



TOP **PRAVEEN KRISHNA** **PHILIP MATTHEWS** **J. PRESTON WITT**
MIDDLE **KANNAN R. MAHADEVAN** **SARA MARTIN** **J. STILLWELL POWERS**
BOTTOM **GABE KRUIS** **LAURA NEAL** **CECILY SCUTT** **AUSTIN SEGREST**

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