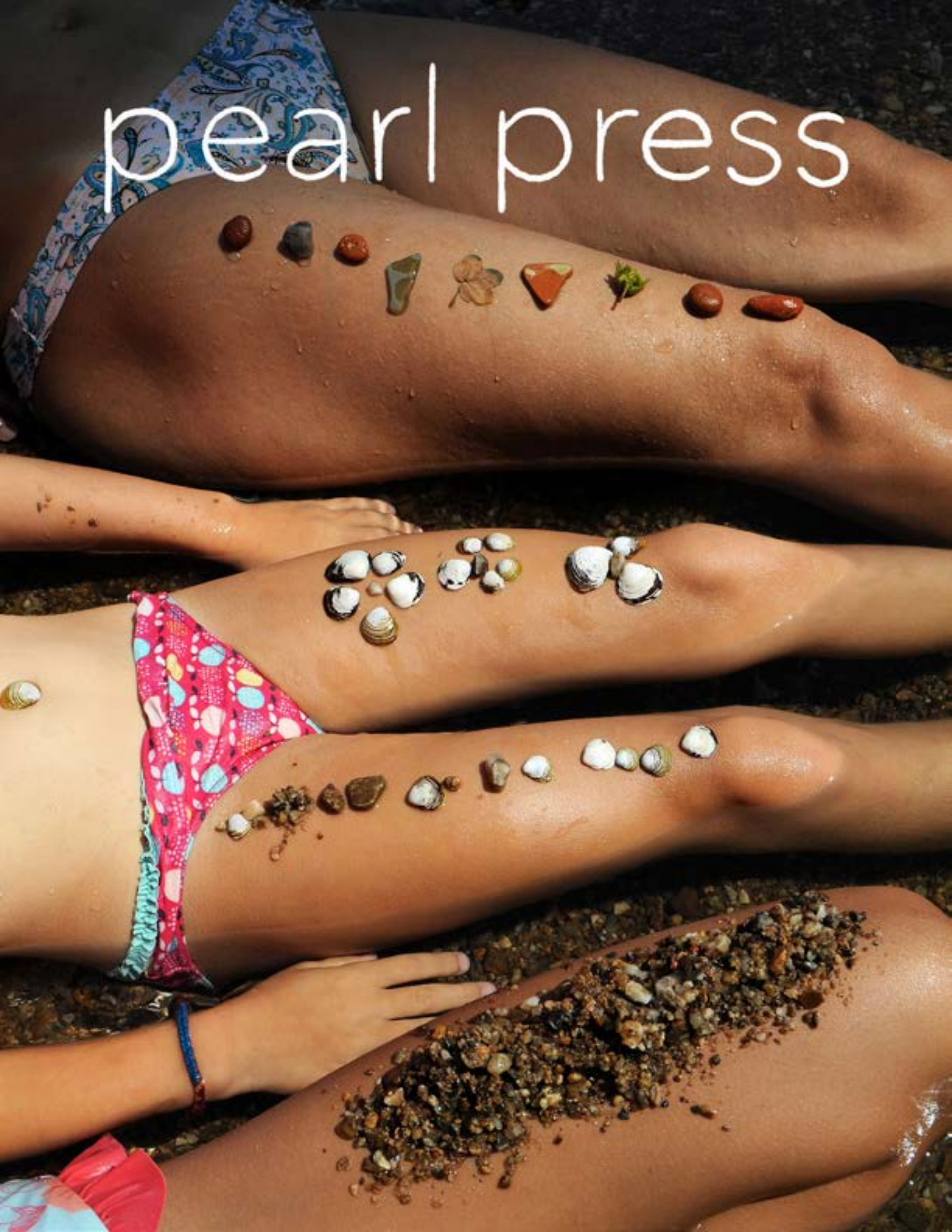


pearl press



ISSUE NO. 12: PAUSE

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This issue of Pearl Press features work from:

Catherine LeComte

Donna Hopkins

Fabien Muscio

Natalia Jaeger

Brian Van Lau

Morganne Boulden

Yukai Chen

Yana Nosenko

Sandie Friedman

Jumana Mograbi

Jai Toor

Jack Trego

Martina Tuaty

Erica Goodwin

Cover image: Fabien Muscio

Curated by: Delilah Twersky



Before You Return: Catherine LeComte



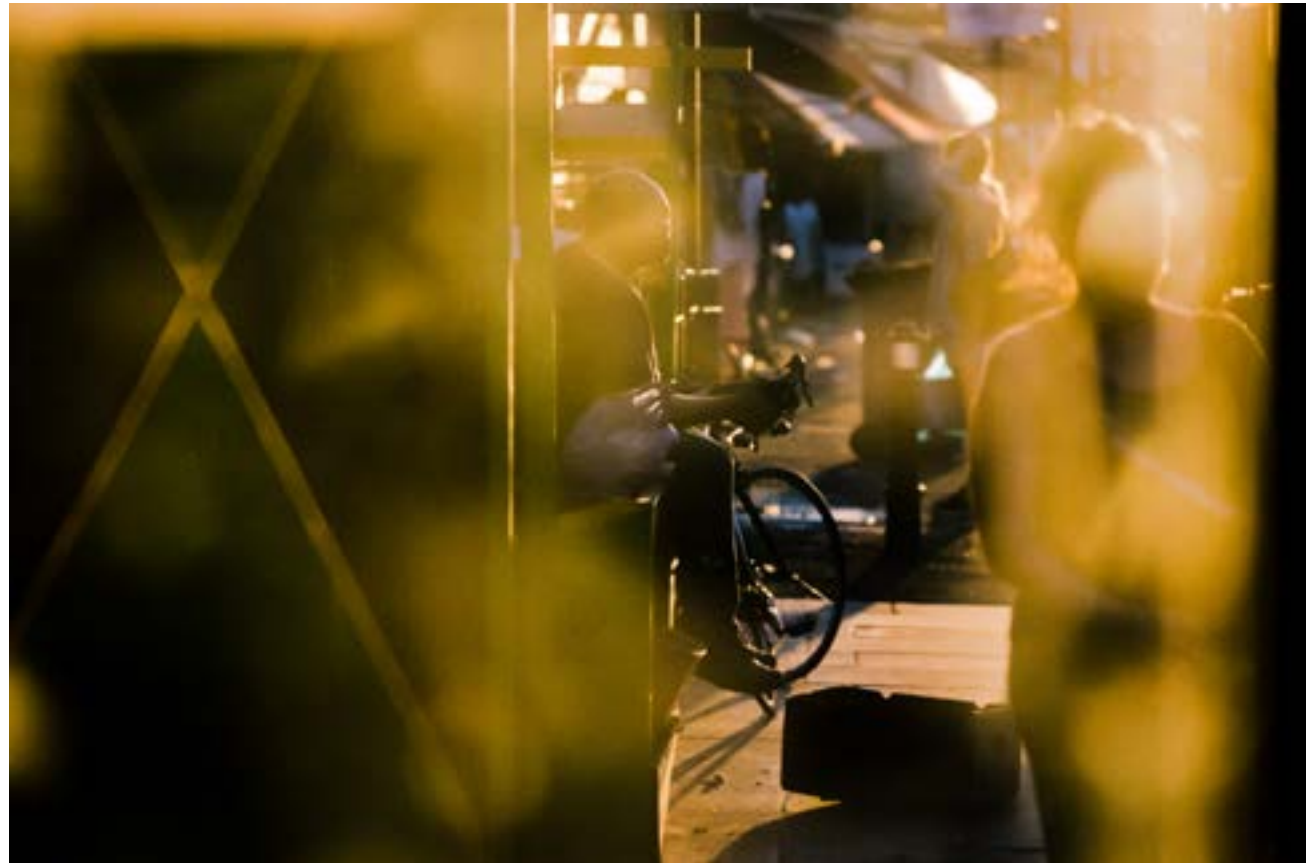
Towels Hung to Dry: Donna Hopkins



Another Summer: Fabien Muscio



Another Summer: Fabien Muscio



Untitled: Natalia Jaeger



Untitled: Natalia Jaeger



Before You Return: Catherine LeComte



WE SHARED THE SAME COLOR THAT EVENING

I've clung to a certain idealist outlook on my life for a while. As I've gotten older, the veneer of my family's past began to crumble, revealing the fragility of it all. It's as though my ideas of childhood – how everyone seemed to be, how everything was supposed to work – were built upon ideas set for me, from the security of our home to the longevity of our relationships. In the time since my teenage years these fragmentations have become more apparent, and crystalized in the complacency of our attitudes towards it.

A memory forged in time,
perpetually perverted and unresolved,
the colors of the evening sun stain everything,
and the images recorded are only a fragment of the truth,
isolated and romanticized,
yet echoed and solved in another.

And this mirrors my feelings towards my family, both biological and found: the solutions for one relationship being found in another, completely alienated and disavowed from the other, a potential catharsis of some sort just out of reach. Perhaps what I fear more now is this isolation, knowing a resolve can take place, but never does.

Brian Van Lau



Before You Return: Catherine LeComte



Haircut: Morganne Boulden



The Tea Cups: Yukai Chen



I'm Glad You've Left: Yana Nosenko



The Model: Yukai Chen

ORPHAN'S HOLIDAY: THREE MICROFICTIONS

I.

After her mother's memorial service, Joanie went to Red Bank. All she wanted to do was swim laps in the hotel pool. As soon as she was checked in, she put on her suit and crossed the courtyard to the pool's edge. Her heart sank when she saw the pool was shaped like a figure eight, with curved edges. Children darted and shrieked, throwing a rainbow beach ball. In despair, she sat at the pool's edge, trying to compose her mother's overdue obituary. "A lifelong member of Congregation Beth El..." "Devoted mother and grandmother..." The formulas all sounded hollow. If only she could swim laps, the right words would come to her.

Across from Joanie, she saw a gaggle of elderly ladies in bright suits and flamboyant headgear: frilly swim caps in yellow, purple, and royal blue; a white, wide-brimmed sunhat, trimmed with a hot pink ribbon; a green toile affair; and one with a bright 70s-flavored floral design. The women sat in a row with their legs in the water, kicking gently, surveying the splashing children, chatting.

Joanie watched the ladies, smiling, and she was not even particularly surprised to see her mother approach the line, wearing her favorite bathing suit, daisies on a black background, with a yellow sarong. Two of the ladies (toile and sunhat) greeted her cheerfully and scooted apart so her mother could sit in the row. Her mother lowered herself at the pool's edge and closed her eyes blissfully as she immersed her calves in the sparkling water. Joanie had a powerful impulse to call out to her mother, but she understood instinctively that communication with the afterworld was against pool rules. When the desire to call out became too strong, she slid in with a splash and swam the length of the pool underwater, passing the ladies' manicured toes, their slowly kicking legs.

II.

Stella takes the M86 across town just as if it were a regular Thursday afternoon. She crosses Park Avenue in the hellish sunlight, feeling a mounting desperation that won't be relieved by a session with Brownstein. On a normal Thursday at 4:10 pm, she would be sitting in the burgundy armchair in his office, facing the square of dazzling sky through the window, vibrating with longing, furtively looking at him from time to time. His cloud of brown curls, his full cheeks. But she's not there because it's August: three endless weeks without therapy.

Even though she won't be going up to the office, Stella crosses Park Avenue to the building at the corner of 3rd and 86th. She has a chat with the doorman, Maurice. "A lot of people away now," she observes. Maybe Maurice will let slip something about when Brownstein left or where he was spending his vacation. But Maurice just nods and agrees that the building—the whole neighborhood—feels empty in August. When Maurice takes a call, she heads down to 83rd, eyes scanning the street, her heart on high alert in case Brownstein appears.

She sits at the lunch counter in the Lexington Candy Shop, strokes the beads of water on the outside of her glass of lemonade, and stirs the pink liquid with a straw so the ice clinks. She plucks a napkin from the holder on the counter and wipes the sweat from her face and neck. When her phone vibrates on the counter, she glances at it, but doesn't pick up. It's her sister again, texting about the stepfather's cookout that weekend. Stella turns the phone face down so she doesn't have to see her sister's name. It buzzes again, and she eyes it, takes another sip of lemonade. When it buzzes once more, she turns it over to see her sister's text: "Don't make me go alone!" and a crazy face emoji.

She knows texting Brownstein is only for emergencies, but her inexplicable anguish feels like an emergency. She types what she really wants to say: "Don't abandon me. I can't..." Can't what? She holds the phone with her thumbs poised above it: I can't, I can't, I can't.

III.

She threw a rock at a rabbit in the bushes. "I wasn't trying to hit it." She kicked sand onto the picnic blanket. She grabbed a second egg salad sandwich. She pulled the littlest one's sun hat over her eyes until she cried. She laughed and dodged when another one tried to slap her back. When I turned around, she stripped off her clothes and ran screaming into the lake. "Come on!" she yelled to the other girls, who were frozen with astonishment. "Come on!" A younger one tore off her clothes, too, ran towards the lake, and plunged in, shrieking. In twos and threes, the other girls abandoned their clothes on the banks and rushed into the water. Only the littlest one was left, standing wide-eyed in her white sundress, thumb in her mouth.

Sandie Friedman



Untitled: Jumana Mograbi



The Window: Yukai Chen



Untitled: Jai Toor



Before You Return: Catherine LeComte



Still Life with Figs: Donna Hopkins



Gray: Morganne Boulden

PEOPLE IN THE DARK

It's 5:42 again. Sunlight frames the windows, pushing against the shade begging to be let in. I refuse its entry – just a little longer, I whisper. I do not relinquish my domain to it yet.

I try my best to arrest the sharpening of the edges in the room. I wish things to be blurry a little while longer, so I gaze forward, past the blanket mounding my form, to the wall opposite. Here hangs the tapestry — the thick woven rug-like tapestry she dragged here from Ecuador, making room for it on her back. Why did she choose this? What struck her, moved her so much?

It was hung immediately, of course, covering nearly one whole side of the room. Immediately, too, it became an object of the room: for anyone here for the first time, it would seem that it had been here forever, along with all the other objects. Pieces of the eternal self materialized, pieces of the material self eternalized.

The tapestry depicts a family of 4, nearly life-sized; they're resting on a blanket in the near ground. An eggshell expanse extends from them to the top of the tapestry, the far ground, where a singular mountain stands, framed by a cloud to the right and a bird of prey to the left. The family are all looking into the distance. The scene is colored with earth tones: deep brown, rust, cream, red, and full black.

The emptiness beyond them unsettles me: how can they be so calm, so stoic in this blank place? And yet my unease passes. They are sitting, resting together, and this retains them.

How does one be with someone? I've made changes to the room, but I'm still waiting for the moment when I can find my way in the dark, or when I'm comfortable leaving a tiny mess to pick up tomorrow. I have no answer and peer at the tapestry. I doubt if it has a history. Or, if it does, I wonder if it began hundreds of years ago at the start of tapestry-weaving as an art form, or if it began when these particular threads were woven on a side street in Ecuador.

As the fan oscillates, a gentle rush of air sends a wave through it. Slight movements ripple the family on their blanket. The sun begins its march across the wall and I try to nudge it back with my eyes. Not yet, I whisper, allow me a few more moments just here. It's the darkness which I desire, that space of no or limited sight. Often I believe this is an ideal state, or a more ideal state: to be limited in some capacity seems to me the only way to know you're alive.

Squinting towards the wall again, I see the ripples have liberated the cloud and the bird of prey. The former is now lazily drifting around the ceiling and the latter is circling the air, inspecting the contents of the room. Sunlight begins to pass through the cloud, giving it substance.

I return to the tapestry. In my somnolence, I wish to be woven into its threads. I imagine they are here with me, the family, or rather I'm with them there. Perhaps there's one extra spot on their blanket, a place for me in this pre-dawn light. Perhaps to be affixed to a scene is what I desire after all.

Jack Trego



I'm Glad You've Left: Yana Nosenko



I'm Glad You've Left: Yana Nosenko



I'm Glad You've Left: Yana Nosenko



Cig Break: Jai Toor



The Apartment: Yukai Chen



Sadhu: Martina Traty



Untitled: Jumana Mograbi



Rev: Morganne Boulden



ONCE MORE LIKE THAT

Like leaving the bedroom window open all summer long. Like waking in the night to scratch the bites down our legs and forgetting by dawn. Like June. Like morning thick and slow and sweet, heat already rising from the pavement. We take our coffee cold with cream. We take our breakfast to the garden. At night, even the fireflies blink lazy in the park.

You have to believe in something, so why not believe that this will last?

Evening light frozen in amber. Moon glowing soft as an eggshell. My bike along the river, following you home.

Erica Goodwin



Another Summer: Fabien Muscio



Another Summer: Fabien Muscio

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Pearl Press
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