

pearl press



ISSUE NO. 13: GRAYSCALE

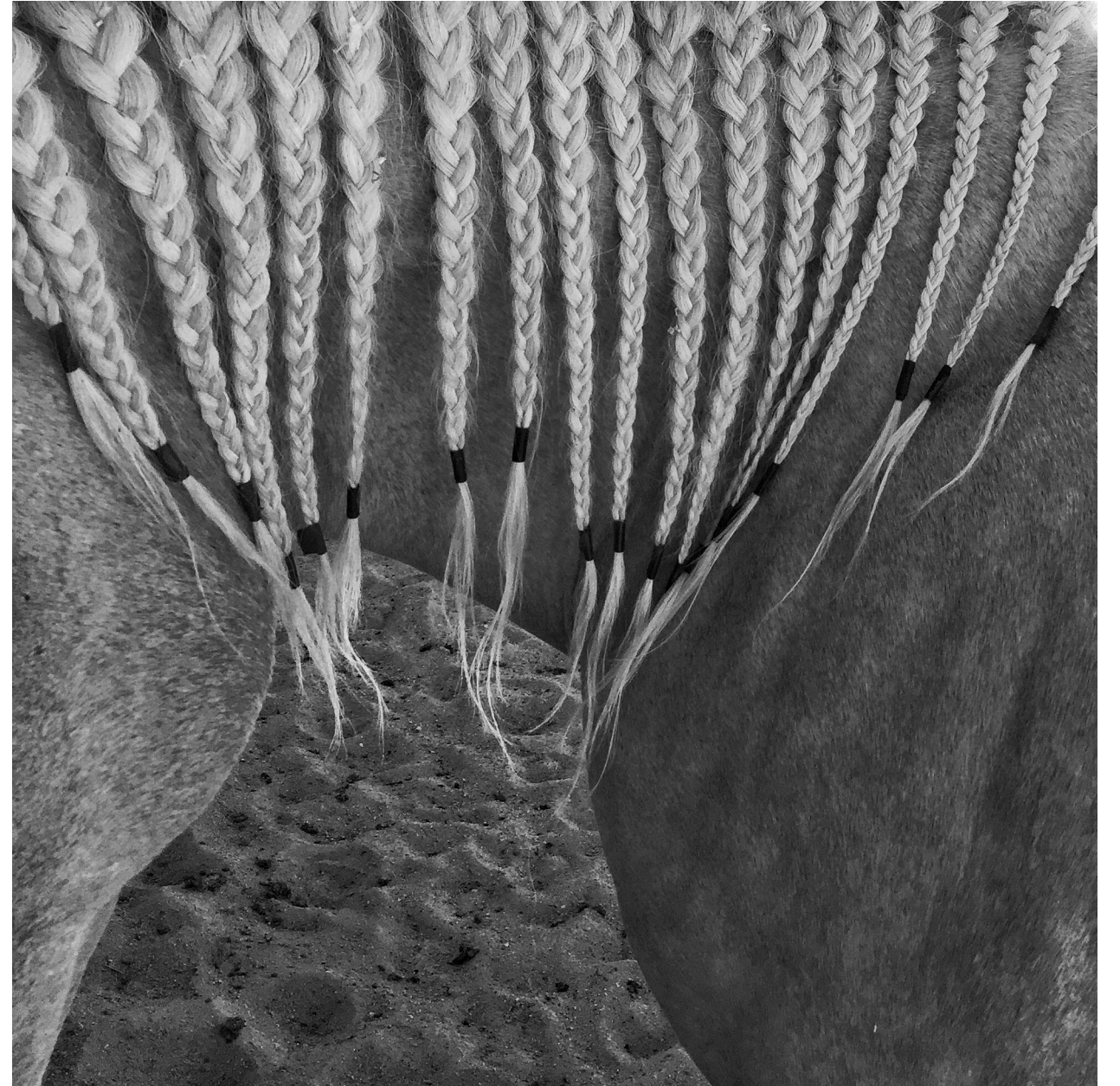
October 2022

This issue of Pearl Press features work from:

Molly Peters
Javier Piñero
Frida Braide
Ryan Helfant
Jen Prouty
Melanie Schoeniger
Elsa Valmidiano
M. Apparition
Arfil Pajarillaga
Maalik Rahim
Michelle Ann
Marié Nobematsu-Le Gassic
Morgan Hoffman
Donna Hopkins
Stephen Mead

Cover image: Melanie Schoeniger

Curated by: Delilah Twersky



From the book, Rancho: Molly Peters



Survived by Few: Javier Piñero



The first tulips I ever bought: Frida Braide



Untitled: Ryan Helfant



Untitled: Ryan Helfant



Summer: Jen Prouty



For You My Love: Javier Piñero



For You My Love: Javier Piñero



Layers of Perception: Melanie Schoeniger



A Peony Story: Melanie Schoeniger



Untitled #2: Frida Braide



Survived by Few: Javier Piñero



Survived by Few: Javier Piñero

ANSISIT

TW: topics of rape, abortion, and miscarriage.

October 23, 1997

Dear Elsa,

“Ansisit are unseen mystical little people who usually live in the baliti and bangar trees, and in Labnig, you can hear them laughing as you pass by. When you don’t acknowledge them as you pass a baliti or bangar tree, you are disrespecting them, and they can curse you,” your father, my almost-Lolo, told you.

People throughout the Ilocos claim to have seen us. People say we are trolls. Fairies. People say we are hideous. Cunning. Mischievous. Enchanting. People say we bring down curses. These are just simplified prescriptions, descriptions. Being unseen is the point.

The result of our coming and going can feel tragic. We can constantly make you wonder why. A reason would be trite.

I would call you “Mother” but you’re not my mother. I am not what you want but I’m here. We’ve talked during the long drives between San Diego and LA, and I’ve sat with you during your Literature classes where I listened in on your professor’s lecture on Charles Dickens’ *Hard Times* (what a fitting title by the way specifically for the times) but it’s time for me to take leave. This is the first time you will take hold of your life in a quiet but magnanimous way, and the only ones who will truly appreciate your decision are you and me.

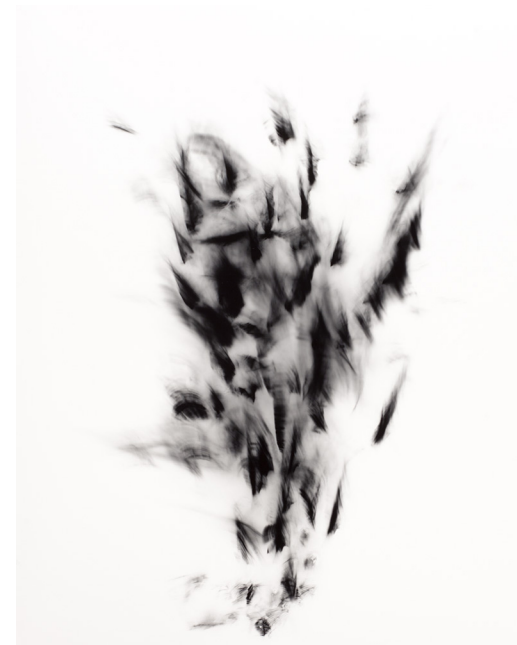
You know if you had me right now at the age of twenty, you will be pressured to marry the person who raped you, just to save your family’s face, as they will tell you it’s the right thing to do when you know it’s not, when you yourself have yet to grapple with understanding that an intimate partner can rape you. You know marrying him and having me will seal our fate to him for the rest of our lives. I may be genetically half of him, but he is not me and I am not him. I am yours, and you ending me will be the best thing for the both of us, and will be the best thing for your life to come, and what a rich life that will be, even though you will not think so, but it will be, and not in the materialistic sense.

You will exercise power for the first time in your life when you will force me out. Please don’t take it as karma when nineteen years later, I will leave you. I will need to leave you even though you will want me to stay.

You will eventually fall into a long entrancing sleep, when that matrix of a reality you call “your life” will be doing nothing but stamping out your light, keeping you asleep in a society that will make you believe “this is what you’re supposed to be doing.”

I am speaking in riddles, but for now, this will be the first time you will defy everything expected of you, and it will be lonely as all of the greatest things usually are.

Love,
O



Flight F16-3, F16-19, F16-8, F16-7 (Left to Right): M. Apparition

September 2, 2016

Dear Elsa,

I'm here again. And I am leaving you. You've been tirelessly trying to have me exist while you can't see a way out of your career that demands everything of you, where you give so little to yourself. How could there be anything left to give to me—to grow and thrive?

You don't have time to think about where your life is going, except it's just going. You have been sleeping for nearly twenty years until sleepwalking becomes indistinguishable to doing the motions, day in and day out.

You get up. You make the bed. You brush your teeth. You shower. You get dressed. You commute for an hour that involves taking public transportation where you stare out a window, watching the San Francisco Bay whizz by as you cross the Bay Bridge, and walk over a mile among skyscrapers. You put off bathroom breaks. You put off meal breaks. You finish your assignments without pause. And then to decompress after meeting tight deadlines and your ability to juggle multiple tasks at once, you numbly scroll through social media to pass the time. Before you know it, it's time to go home. Sometimes it is 5:30 PM. Other times it is midnight. You commute for an hour that involves taking public transportation where you stare out a window, watching the San Francisco Bay whizz by as you cross the Bay Bridge, and walk over a mile among skyscrapers. And if it's midnight, the company pays for you to take a twenty-minute Uber ride home when they don't know how sketchy some drivers have been for you. You undress and change into sweats. You have dinner with your husband if you're home in time. You watch TV. You brush your teeth. You might write late into the night. You go to bed.

Unlike so many others, sleepwalking is not meant for you.

You wake from time to time, where you binge on weeks-long travel to scale cliffs, swim with tropical fish, dive off rocks, hike in the snow, kayak with seals, bike in the rain, meditate in monasteries, talk with dear friends until dawn, write poems, march in protests, and spend passionate days and nights with your husband, only to ultimately return to your life of sleepwalking. Your life has become rich with intensity but also inescapably empty where you want to permanently wake from your long slumber but don't know how.

When you're pregnant with me, your life is simply a means to an end—to make sure I exist and get born—when there is something far greater you need to achieve, and isn't measured by what society would have you believe: a job, a spouse, a house with a two-car garage, a 401K, and a baby.

You write poems and sentences and paragraphs here and there, and you tuck them away for a future opus, but the opus doesn't come to fruition as you worry about who will do your day job if you were to leave, when the day job will always find someone to replace you.

You are a storyteller but you unfalteringly obey life's demands, leaving little room to be a storyteller. You instead devote your life to a job that will provide income to comfortably provide for my existence, even though your job will stamp out your light. I can't have your light stamped out just so I can exist. I know how much you'll give so I can live. You will give without boundaries. Because of that, I must leave you.

I'll call for the Manananggal to take me away, and She'll come. Don't ever think I work alone. The Manananggal hangs out in the baliti tree with me, after all. I'll hear the flapping of Her bat wings from Her dislodged torso, and She will slither Her long thin proboscis tongue into you and snatch me up while you sleep. The man who would've been my Lolo told you, "Ansisit are unseen mystical little people who usually live in the baliti and bangar trees, and in Labnig, you can hear them laughing as you pass by." Just because you are far from the Home of your ancestors and cut off from your ancestral tongue doesn't mean we didn't follow you to this new land you now call home and reach out to you and speak to you and inhabit you. You have never seen me, but just because I am unseen doesn't mean I'm not here.

You wish things were different and are trying to make it so. You have gifts you're still figuring out how to use. The difference is you will finally have time to figure it out.

After I leave, you will slowly begin to wake from your twenty-year sleep. You will exercise power again, and this time you will come to the realization that you never have to stay anywhere you don't want. You know you can leave. And you do. You will be okay even though society tells you not planning for your future is a bad thing, when reality has shown you too much planning combined with a lack of awareness for no guarantees can make you fall into a long entrancing sleep. The future never really turns out as you want no matter how much you try to control it.

I can't tell you if I will visit again and leave or stay next time. You hate hearing that—the not knowing.

I can tell you my presence and absence will always drive you to see what you need to see when you can't see it for yourself. Trust that. Know that.

Apoc nga babai. Balasang.
Nanang.

Love,
O

Elsa Valmidiano



Untitled: Arfil Pajarillaga



Untitled: Maalik Rahim



Untitled: Maalik Rahim



From the book, Rancho: Molly Peters



Gare du Nord: Michelle Ann



Untitled (2019-ongoing): Marié Nobematsu-Le Gassic



For You My Love: Javier Piñero



Detroit: Jen Prouty

WHEN WE FIGHT

It is not just ours
but our parents
our ancestors.

It is for liberation.

To be heard,
we play out these roles
assigned
inherited
at odds.

When we enter these thin spaces
where time and space bleed
we reenact death
trauma
suffering.

We are mouthpieces
bystanders
lightning rods, nonetheless.

If we could find an anchor
we might center
entire civilizations.

Morgan Hoffman



Behind the Wheel: Donna Hopkins



Window to the Desert. Near Winslow, AZ: Molly Peters



Self-Portrait, a moment: Michelle Ann

GREY ROOMS

But of such light.
Opal, this hue, & wan & vast-----
Snow swirls, sun motes, silver
feathers all..
All gathers true & whole as the globe
for our wallflower hands
reflecting amethyst...

Love, pride is not a feeling
so much as a stance of feelings compiled.
Spread them out as rays & what we'd have
is a fan dance. Spread them out as covers
and robes would not be needed.

No. Each of these colors we'd be
& the lightest pearl, the clearest shade
of certainty

alone but afloat now
as nocturnal pigeons

while I watch you go

Stephen Mead



HOT: Donna Hopkins



Layers of Perception: Melanie Schoeniger



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Thank you for reading.
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www.pearl-press.com

Delilah Twersky
Pearl Press
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