



*Night Sky* by Gregory Basley

# MIGRATIONS

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THE ARTISTIC AND LITERARY JOURNAL OF INTEGRITY HOUSE

VOLUME 2, FALL 2025



Integrity  
House

CREATIVE ARTS INITIATIVE



1990 - 2025

This publication is dedicated to the memory of Joshua Nolasco, a poet, novelist, and visual artist whose contributions to the Creative Arts Initiative inspired countless participants to see the beauty in their art ... and in themselves.



Integrity House's mission is to help individuals and families through an effective and measurable system of comprehensive Therapeutic Community addictions treatment, mental health treatment, and recovery support in a way that brings about positive, long-term lifestyle change.



*The activities commemorated in this publication were made possible by funding from The Healthcare Foundation of NJ.*

The Healthcare Foundation of New Jersey is an independent, endowed grant-making organization dedicated to reducing disparities in the delivery of healthcare and improving access to quality healthcare for vulnerable populations in the greater Newark, NJ area and the Jewish community of Greater MetroWest NJ.

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In its second full year of operation, Integrity House's **Creative Arts Initiative (CAI)** incorporated a variety of new visual art, performance art, creative writing, and bibliotherapy activities. The year kicked off with a series of workshops focused on contemporary artists Jean-Michel Basquiat, Keith Haring, Charles McGhee, and Bisa Butler. Participants analyzed famous works by each artist and then experimented with their techniques to create personal recovery-themed paintings. Following this, CAI participants completed several expressive art activities, most notably a two-week Neurographing workshop where they used free-form lines and watercolors to illustrate vibrant "brain maps." Other visual art activities included texture painting, multimedia textile art, pop art, and even cyanotype printing.

This year, the CAI also enlisted several published authors to deliver structured writing workshops in creative nonfiction, free verse poetry, and spoken word. In these sessions, participants read seminal works of literature in various genres and then wrote, revised, and edited their own personal essays and poems. To bridge these creative writing activities with performance art, the CAI collaborated with Newark School of the Arts on an 8-week drama workshop combining recovery-themed monologues, musical composition, and dance and other forms of interpretive movement.

Along the way, the CAI's weekly Bibliotherapy Group, or "book club," remained a vital source of introspection and inspiration for many clients. Book club participants read poems, short stories, and essays by Shakespeare, Emily Dickinson, James Baldwin, and David Foster-Wallace. They completed several longer works of fiction too. To commemorate the 100th anniversary of the publication of *The Great Gatsby*, the participants read F. Scott Fitzgerald's famous novel and drew connections between Gatsby's fatal obsession with the past and their own struggles to let go of their former selves. They even read some experimental fiction, including Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five*, a complex meditation on trauma and the structure of memory, and Mohsin Hamid's *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*, a fictional tale of comeuppance, love and aging disguised as a self-help book.

While these workshops equipped our featured artists with the skills needed to employ certain artistic and literary techniques, the true inspiration for the paintings, poems, and essays in this volume derives from the life experiences of their creators. Some works address trauma, addiction, and the uncertainty felt during the initial phases of treatment. Other works reflect the joy, gratitude, and confidence often regained in early recovery. Most importantly, though, each piece demonstrates the power of creative expression to transform heartache into hope.

Evan Weiss

Creative Arts Coordinator  
September 26, 2025



The Novels, Poems, and Stories that Inspired Us



Mohsin Hamid



Jasmine Mans



Piri Thomas

*How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*  
Mohsin Hamid

*Black Girl, Call Home*  
Jasmine Mans

*Down These Mean Streets*  
Piri Thomas

*Slaughterhouse Five*  
Kurt Vonnegut



Kurt Vonnegut



F. Scott Fitzgerald



Emma Cline

*The Great Gatsby*  
F. Scott Fitzgerald

*The Guest*  
Emma Cline

*The Money*  
Junot Diaz



Junot Diaz



David Sedaris



James Baldwin

*Leviathan*  
David Sedaris

*Sonny's Blues*  
James Baldwin

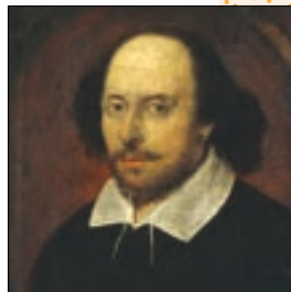
*Who Understands Me but Me*  
Jimmy Santiago Baca



Jimmy Santiago Baca



T. Kira Madden



William Shakespeare

*The Greeter*  
T. Kira Madden

*Sonnet 18 and Excerpts from Hamlet*  
William Shakespeare



poetry and prose

in 2025, Integrity's Creative Arts Initiative offered a powerful and transformative series of **creative writing workshops** led by a diverse group of published authors. These workshops focused on personal and autobiographical essays, creative nonfiction, and both written and spoken word poetry, inviting participants to explore the depth and complexity of their own lived experiences. Throughout each series, participants immersed themselves in a wide range of literary works, engaging with different voices, genres, and storytelling traditions. They were encouraged to experiment boldly with form and style, pushing beyond their comfort zones to find authentic, powerful ways to express their truths.

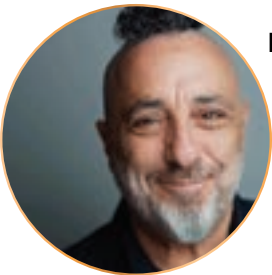
OUR INSTRUCTORS

**Amelia Barros** is a graduate of Harvard University and the MFA Program at Rutgers University - Newark. She is the author of the story collection *Vestiges* and various other short stories and essays. Her most recent essay, "The Anointing," was published in *Harvard Review* 62.



**Lucas Maas** is an author specializing in personal non-fiction. He is an MFA candidate at Saint Mary's College of California and the author of the short stories "A Ribbon in the Sky After Stevie Wonder" and "Shared Sacrifices," the latter of which is published in Vol. 21 of *As You Were - The Military Review*.

**Sophia Laurenzi** is a journalist and writer whose work has been published in *TIME*, *The Washington Post*, *StoryQuarterly*, *Slate*, and *WIRED*, among others. She is currently working on a memoir about her time as a death row investigator in the aftermath of her father's suicide.



**Robert Galinsky** is a writer, actor, and spoken word poet. He serves as a guest lecturer at The Juilliard School and teaches literacy on Rikers Island through a program called Literacy for Incarcerated Teens. His critically acclaimed solo performance *Everything in New York Goes BANG!* is currently touring and has played at the Lee Strasberg Institute in Los Angeles, Jefferson Market Library, and the Parsonage in NYC.

Where I'm From

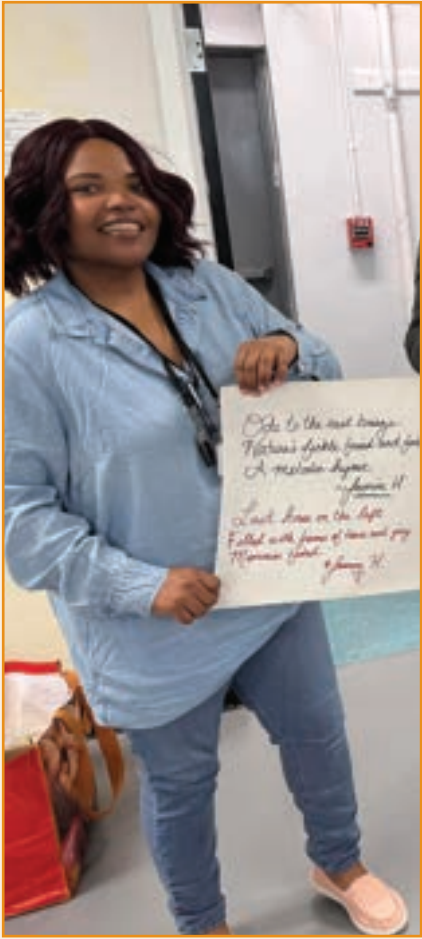
Jasmine Hairston

I am from floor TV's with sharp edges,  
and from "Just For Me" perms and quarter waters.  
I am from Little Bricks projects where bigger dreams profit,  
and mosaic gardens filled with sad roses.  
From tattered wood chips whose sharp edges pierced my sole,  
and from project reunion cookouts and Sidekick phones.

I am from Aunt Steph and Cousin Shirley.  
I am from big-boned Sarah Bartman bodies  
and single mother syndrome.  
From melanin, kinky curls, and thin eyes,  
and from patent leather shoes  
with click clack button heels on Easter Sunday.

I am from IGA Mall and Fox's Liquor Store,  
from pungent pickled pig's feet and paprika on the potato salad.  
From Carolyn Hairston, a secret in my grandmother's garden,  
and from Princes and Princesses who bear only daughters,  
becoming matriarchs.

I am from gingerbread houses on Martha's Vineyard,  
from hot combs in the kitchen,  
and from Barry White and Jersey Club music in the backyard.  
I am from moments that made something of nothing,  
from black clouds amidst the rainbow dreams.  
I am an arc of new hope, a Jersey girl at heart, a Newark woman in soul.



Jasmine Hairston displays her Haiku poetry.



Artist Spotlight: Jasmine Hairston

Jasmine is a poet, teacher, educator, and aspiring novelist. Her work explores themes of poverty, adversity, and resilience and often draws on her experiences growing up in Newark, New Jersey. In addition to long-form fiction, Jasmine enjoys writing notes of morning gratitude and daily Haiku, both of which "help her connect to the stillness of the world."



## Growth

Samaad Terrell

I grew up in a place where concrete was more common than grass and sirens often sang us to sleep. To someone on the outside, it might have looked like a hard, gray place full of broken windows and broken dreams. But to me, it was home. It was where I learned how to be tough, how to love fiercely, and how to survive.

We lived in a brick building that always smelled a little like bleach and old food. The elevator barely worked, and when it did, it creaked and groaned like it was carrying the weight of every struggle that passed through those floors. Our apartment was small, sometimes too cold in the winter and too hot in the summer, but my mother made it feel like a fortress. She worked two jobs and still found a way to help with homework and cook dinner most nights. She was tired, but she never let it show too much. Her strength taught me everything.

Outside, the block had its own rhythm. There were kids everywhere playing double dutch, shooting hoops on busted rims, or riding bikes up and down the sidewalk. We made games out of nothing. We didn't have much, but we had each other. We also knew what danger looked like. We knew when to go inside. We knew the sound of arguments that might turn into something more, and we knew the faces of people we had to stay away from, people who were lost, or trying not to be.

School was complicated. Some teachers cared. Others didn't even pretend. But I remember one, Ms. Carter, who used to pull me aside after class and tell me I was smart, that I could make it out. At the time, I didn't believe her. Nobody in my family had really "made it out." Most people were just doing their best to stay afloat. But her words stuck with me, and over time, they started to feel possible. I won't lie and say it was all pain. We laughed – a lot. We threw cookouts in the summer where everybody showed up with something to share. The old heads told stories while kids ran around with ice pops and sticky fingers. Even in the middle of struggle, there was joy. Real, deep joy. A kind of joy that comes from knowing you've got people who understand you, who live like you, who'd give you their last dollar if you needed it.

Growing up in the projects didn't break me – it built me. It taught me about loyalty, about hustle, about keeping your head up when the world tries to keep you down. It taught me that love doesn't always look soft – sometimes it's loud, sometimes it's stubborn, but it's real. And it taught me never to forget where I came from, no matter how far I go. It also taught us to see beauty in broken things, to appreciate moments of peace in chaos, and to

keep pushing forward, even when the system seemed designed to hold us back. We learned early how to survive. We learned when to speak up and when to stay silent. We saw things we shouldn't have, and had to grow up faster than most. But we also developed grit. We learned the value of hard work, of loyalty, and of having heart. For many of us, our mothers, grandmothers, or older siblings were the backbone of the household, doing their best to provide for us with limited resources and unlimited strength.

These adversities changed me for the better. I was the quiet one, the kid who sat in the back of the classroom, kept his head down, and avoided drawing attention. I was timid, always second-guessing myself, always worried about saying the wrong thing. I thought being kind meant never saying "no," and I mistook silence for politeness. Deep down, I was afraid – afraid of rejection, of conflict, of disappointing people.

But over time, I realized that staying small wasn't helping anyone, and especially not me. My name is Samaad, and the person I am today is a world apart from that shy little boy I was back then. I've learned that there is power in setting boundaries, in speaking up, and in being true to yourself, even when it's uncomfortable. Becoming assertive didn't mean becoming aggressive or selfish. It meant understanding my worth and honoring it.

I had to unlearn a lot of what I thought made me "good." I used to believe that if I always said yes, people would like me more. But in reality, constantly saying yes left me drained, resentful, and disconnected from who I really was. Learning to set boundaries was one of the hardest things I've ever done, but also one of the most important. I discovered that I could still be kind and generous while protecting my energy and peace of mind.

This personal growth didn't just change how I saw myself; it changed how I showed up in the world. Once I stopped trying to please everyone, I had more space to focus on the things that truly mattered to me. I started helping in my community, not because I felt obligated, but because I wanted to. Whether it was mentoring younger kids, helping with local clean-up events, or simply being present when someone needed a hand, I found fulfillment in service rooted in sincerity, not fear.

Today, I walk through life with confidence – not arrogance, but quiet assurance. I know who I am. I know what I stand for. And I know how to say *no* when I need to so that my *yes* has meaning. Looking back, I'm proud of that quiet little boy. He did the best he could with the tools he had. But I'm even prouder of the man I've become – the man who uses his voice, respects his limits, and shows up for others from a place of strength, not obligation.

This is my journey. I'm Samaad, and I'm still growing – but I'm no longer hiding.

On My Way Here Today

Steven Mounts

On my way here today I had to let it go.  
The perceived madness will not let me grow.  
My past has been holding me back.  
Every haunting moment knocked me off track.  
Anger and sadness has become all I know.  
I am tired now and moving so slow.  
Motivation and confidence is what I now lack.  
In pain and alone, my heart has turned black.

On my way here today I went in a new direction.  
I followed the word to change my perception.  
I have decided to fruitfully obey his every command.  
I will bow down and consent to any demand.  
My God will guide me away from transgression,  
as I travel a path without regression,  
for I am saved by God's hand.  
I may be received into the promised land.

On my way here today I created a new me.  
Letting go and aiming up has set me free.  
I can now rejoice in my new life,  
as I follow the Lord with no strife.  
My conscience is clear and now I see.  
The great man I was created to be.

The "here" I was on my way to today  
...was simply a quiet place to pray.

Compassion for Others

Steven Mounts

To love another as Christ loves me,  
this compassion for others will set me free.  
To enter His kingdom, God expects nothing less.  
There is but one path to righteousness.

Forgiveness must come above all,  
as close-minded judgment will be my downfall.  
Compassion for others is an absolute must.  
These teachings of Christ I have to trust.

My past had blinded me, I was not aware.  
My soul, enveloped in darkness, had no care.  
Who those others are I could not see.  
How sad and alone this all made me be.

If I am to truly repent  
my genuine compassion for others shall not relent.  
In doing this my spiritual strength grows.  
My God lifts me up and comforts my sorrows.

Do unto others as you want done unto you.  
These words of Christ could not be more true.  
I am no longer blind, my eyes open wide.  
Compassion for others has removed my sinful pride.

An Excerpt from Home

Brian Pell

*I picked up my guitar for one of the first times since I'd left my home at the shore nearly nine years ago. I'd played most of my life prior to packing up for college and sealing it in the case that just as well could've been a coffin. The strings felt strange pressing into my fingers. A childhood of countless hours of practice had previously hardened my fingers with thick calloused skin. Now, so many years removed from my last performance, the thin metal tore my softened skin much like the emotions that inspired my music had torn at my heart years ago. I quickly found myself returning to songs that reminded me of home, and a state of melancholy consumed me as the notes entered my ears and filled my head with memories of a place I'd long left forgotten.*

I grew up in a calm, upper middle class town most people would kill to call home. We lived in a beautiful two-story house with enough space for my sister to have her own room, leaving the other for me and my brother to be unapologetically boyish in. Each summer, tens of thousands of tourists would participate in a pilgrimage past dozens of Parkway exits to have the privilege of spending only a week or two in the town I called home. Or at least that's what you'd expect me to call it from an outsider's view of a seemingly picturesque childhood setting.

Someone once said home is where the heart is, but I don't think they meant that it's the place that makes you *feel* the most. For most, home is where the people who love you reside, but I spent much of the first two decades of my life wondering where that was. So in my experience, my home, or the house I grew up in, was the place I felt the deepest emotional ties to, and it just so happens the feelings I felt most often were fear and pain.

It wasn't always that way, though. Families can be complicated like that. It shook me to my core trying to understand my relationship with my father, who on one evening would sing my brother and I to sleep, and the next threaten me for getting between him and my mom, who he'd just ripped from their bed in a drunken rage. It's funny, the house was usually the calmest the days after nights like those, with my father staying at whichever motel his friends on the force would leave him at after removing him from the house...home. The days following felt safer, but never calm. There was never a break for us to process those kinds of nights. "Life goes on," my mother would say, and in the next breath tell us to carry on and "just do the next right thing."

One morning after a rough night, my brother left the house for his friend's Bar Mitzvah, and my sister for her audition at Julliard. I was only eleven, so of course I tagged along with her. Briefly, our home became our old Honda Odyssey minivan, a place that contained

Artist Spotlight: Steven Mounts

Steven, a South Jersey native, discovered his passion for writing (and his hidden talent as a painter) while enrolled in Integrity's Creative Arts Initiative. During his time at Integrity, Steven used writing, especially poetry, to process feelings of confusion and regret and to explore his faith in God.





many happy memories from my earlier childhood. Memories of watching *Harry Potter* and *Star Wars* on the way to some vacation destination. Most trips had their own episodes of dysfunction, but overall, back then, things had been simpler, and such episodes were overlooked. The more my parents had grown apart as I got older, the less easy it was to look past the now more serious and commonly occurring fits either parent performed when they became unable to handle their own emotional pain. Soon after, when I became emotionally overwhelmed myself, home shifted to a new location: the imaginary places where I ventured in my head where I could get lost in and not need to feel for a while.

*My fingers ached almost as much as my heart did the first few times I tried to play again. The memories of countless hours of mandated practice flashed through my head alongside the echoes of my parents' voices ensuring they happen. So many days spent inside my room, running over scales until my callouses began to tear. The alternative of daring to ask to be excused from the practice to go outside was nearly always denied and met with admonishment. The immense expectations placed on me (and both my siblings) had materialized as an awful habit of tearing apart any music I performed for any flaw, either real or imagined, no matter how small. I never missed this habit during my absence from playing. Despite the discomfort, the familiar medium by which I'd composed my emotions into the music of my life made the long-repressed memories tolerable enough to break free from the corners of my brain.*

My sister didn't make it to Julliard, though I know very well that she should have. The audition went well, but was nothing compared to how she typically played. Music was a coping skill for all of us; we'd each picked up an instrument at a young age. But, since it was a requirement in our house, the most important performances were marked more by feelings of pressure than support.

My father was home a few days after the Juilliard audition and things were tense. At least until the time came for bed and he'd start to ring out his renditions of *Time in a Bottle* by Jim Croce or *Cats in the Cradle* by Harry Chapin. Usually the nights were safe if we made it to that point. Already by that age I understood his choice of songs. Some nights my father handled his overwhelming emotional turmoil by exploding in anger. Most nights he did his best at being a father in the only way he knew how, singing messages of longing for time lost or a story of a father's regrettable relationship with his child. Though I doubt he believed we understood, I'm sure he knew the story fit both his own with his father as much as it matched his story with us. I'd like to believe singing these songs helped him process his pain in a way other than exploding, but even on the nights we made it to those performances, I still slept with a bat, and only slept peacefully once lost in the safe imaginary worlds I'd venture to in my head.

Life followed that same pattern for quite some time, most evenings capped with my father expressing his sorrow through music, days spent translating my own onto a fret board. Now and then the music of our lives was interrupted by a coffee mug shattered on the wall beside us, or the seemingly prearranged screaming insults traded between my parents. Later on, I'd jokingly attribute my physicality and prowess on the rugby pitch to the physical battles I found myself in the middle of ... to make it feel more normal.

By this point, home had always been the place where I felt the most intense feelings. The one I wanted, however, was the one that could make me feel safe. Shortly after his return, my father had one of his biannual attempts at fixing his relationship with one or all of us. But with my sister almost out of the house and my brother finding his safety in the homes of others, only I was left.

*My fingers, as if by a mind of their own, had found themselves far up my fretboard, only inches away from my picking hand as I wrapped up the outro riff from "Time in a Bottle." As I found myself lamenting my own lost years spent searching for home in the worst of places, I felt eerily similar to how I imagine my father felt, and couldn't help but understand him more than I had prior. This feeling only lasted as long as the song, as I began picking the intro to one of my favorite tunes growing up, "Thunder Road" – a song I hadn't listened to since before packing my guitar up that last time years prior.*

The adventure that we planned to use to work on our relationship started as a road trip to Philadelphia to see Bruce Springsteen on a Friday night. I only found out what he had planned about an hour prior to leaving. The concert was incredible, so much so that we decided to follow the tour the next night. The evening ended in a hotel, with me in bed by eleven and my father, like usual, returning from the bar long after I'd drifted off to one of my imaginary lands that began to feel like home. This pattern was so normal for us that it made perfect sense to stay the following night so he wouldn't have to drive back drunk. Or at least that was the reason he gave.

We followed the Springsteen tour to old Giants Stadium and then a week later into the city. A total of six shows, three weeks in a row, all incredible. For a time, life felt good. I felt safe, even loved. The final night, my father came back from the bar and woke me up in an absolute breakdown. The details are foggy to me still and something I prefer to forget.. Ultimately, it was clear something had gone terribly wrong. I got home the next day. We left late so I went to bed immediately. The next morning, I woke to my mom giving me the cold shoulder. I asked her what was wrong, as prior to this she had usually been very kind and loving to me, spare her occasional episodes. She responded with one of the longest sentences she'd utter to me for the next decade: "I think you need to go talk to your father," while pointing me down the stairs.

In those days, I never spent much time down there, as it had been the place where my father worked. The trip down the steps was uncomfortable to say the least. I entered the office and saw my father in a similar state of disarray as the other night. A short conversation followed, and I learned my father had been having an affair, and our trips had been a cover to see his mistress. So much for wanting to fix our relationship.

My mother blamed me because my father manipulated the situation to make it seem like I'd known about everything. I didn't understand at the time, but later in life I recognized this as an attempt to keep someone in the family on his side, close to him, even if it meant I'd no longer be welcomed by others. For the next decade, my mother barely spoke to me unless necessary, and any semblance of warmth or nurturing was gone. As for my father, I found it hard to trust him enough to talk to him, given how much pain his tricking me had caused and how easily I'd fallen for it. From then on, my house was never a home, and any time I ran elsewhere it stopped feeling like I was running away from home, but rather running in a desperate search to find a home.

For a few years, the most stable home I had remained those places I'd go to in my head. Until I met a girl I found my shelter with. Things were so great we spent nearly every moment together, spoke of a future, a life, and a home we both felt we missed out on. Her parents had split many years prior, leaving her with an unstable home environment as well. Her mother took me in, and I no longer felt the absence of a nurturing presence in my life. To some extent, I had a home again. Great things rarely last, though, and things ended with Child Protective Services whisking her off to live with her father in Florida following her mother's relapse. I found myself once again back in the house that had always left me feeling homeless.

I bounced around after that, my parents separated, and my father moved out. I went with him of course, because even with the increasingly common drunken episodes his was a more welcoming presence than the mother who made it clear I wasn't wanted around. My house became a winter rental of a summer property, one of many abandoned at least eight months out of the year. My home remained in my head. That spot didn't last long; my father got drunk and in a moment of anger got physical to the point of nearly pushing me off of the balcony that overlooked our parking lot. Soon after, I wound up couch surfing for a bit or staying on the boat that was a long-forgotten remnant of one of his early attempts at reconciling with his family.

Unfortunately, by that point in my life the myriad psych meds I'd been cycled on and off of had muddled my brain and the home in my head started becoming too far to travel to. I'd already been experimenting with drugs, starting at 12 with the lines of blow my brother offered me to distract me from my parents fighting on Christmas Eve. As the last places I

tried to feel at home in disappeared, I dove further into my use. I could no longer hide in my head, and by that point my sober mind had begun to torment me. All that seemed left for me to do was shut my thoughts off entirely. The first time I ever bought Xanax began with five hundred of them. As the next few weeks of my life disappeared almost as if I'd time-traveled, I fell in love. Pills and coke turned to meth and sniffing dope or whatever research chemical I had gotten my hands on that made me feel anything but how I would normally feel. Being high was like the home I'd always searched for, it made me feel warm, safe, and happy.

Through this period, I dated a few women, many of whom were everything I'd wanted and who cared for me deeply. Sadly, by this point, I only had enough love left for drugs. While I never put my hands on anyone, I quickly found myself matching my father's pattern of alternating vitriol and sorrow. It was hard to get high around them, so nearly all fell victim to falling for the "me" that showed up high, pleasant, and happy, just to be left with the monster who remained once I'd come down. Although, now I realize that, even while high, I failed to make up for who I was to them when not high. I did little more than shower them with empty affection and gifts that could never cost enough to be anything but worthless.

*My fingers had become slippery across my frets from wiping away the tears I shed while recalling the past I pretended had never happened. The memories were some I'd experienced in flashes over the last decade. Each one had been resolved with a cut straw and a pile of powder that varied in content month to month, but never fully expired.*

For almost ten years, I'd denied who I was and where I'd come from entirely. Instead, I played the lead role of my own personal tragedy, destroying my life with my own hands because that felt safer than risking it being destroyed by the fears I'd instilled deep within myself from such a young age. I couldn't help but feel sympathy for my father again, someone who, though responsible for many of those fears and pains, lived with just as much, if not more, pain and fear than me.

Sometime after the concert incident, I had been to a live showing of the U2 tour movie, where I first heard the song that touched me deeper than any I'd heard in my life. I played along as I heard in my head the sorrowful cries of Bono to his father, who he'd had a similarly challenging relationship with:

*"We fight...all the time...you and I, but that's alright, we're the same soul."*

*"If we weren't so alike, I'd like you a whole lot more."*



Where I'm From

Jennifer Paulsen

I am from Danish flag Christmas garland,  
from ruby red banana bikes and bathing suits,  
and from open windows and cool bay breezes.  
I am from sea salt and sand in your hair,  
and from the Barnegat Bay,  
whose warm waves kissed my sun-soaked skin.

I am from Planters cheese balls and Bicycle playing cards,  
from Paulsen and Montgomery,  
and from hardworking hands and silent struggles.  
I am from empty beer cans and stinky, overflowing ashtrays.  
From Christmas Eve Mass,  
and from the Lighthouse guiding our fisherman home.

I am from Fricka Dilla and bananas foster French toast casserole,  
from the story of Old Blue,  
and from building high rise hotels.  
I am from those moments where I lost myself...  
...only to find my faith again.

Artist Spotlight: Jennifer Paulsen

Jennifer is a poet and visual artist from Ocean County, New Jersey. Her writing balances humor and heartache to depict the realities of her upbringing and her struggles with addiction and alcoholism. When not painting colorful abstract patterns and designs, she enjoys composing handmade greeting cards for her friends and family members.



Day Trip

Noble Roberson

It was the summer of 2010 and Robby's parents had left for Florida again. His place in Jersey was more like a frat house than a family home judging by the number of people constantly going in and out throughout the day. It was a tan two-story home with an enclosed back porch on a street called Moonraker Court. The town it was in was surrounded by a wildlife nature preserve. A few of my friends and I sat on the porch then, pondering what to do on this beautiful summer day, when our answer happened to walk in the front door.

"Eric!" I shouted. It was my close friend who was on spring break from NJIT, walking in with the excitement of a Golden retriever seeing his owner after a long day of work.

"Guess what I got!" Eric said as he pulled out a nasal spray bottle.

"Allergies?" our friend April answered, confused as to why he was so excited.

"This bottle contains 2CI and 2CE!" he said enthusiastically as I stared at him, waiting for the English version. "It's the two main chemicals synthetically made from the derivatives of the Peyote plant that cause extreme hallucinations!" he explained, pushing up his glasses with his index finger. "Do you guys wanna daytrip?"

April was hesitant as she made eye contact with me, looking for my reaction, waiting for a sign that it would all be okay. She wasn't the type to ask questions, but she wanted answers.

I smirked and slightly nodded my head towards her. He tossed the bottle at me and told me "Only take two!" Feeling like a seasoned vet, I went against his advice. I squeezed the tiny bottle 7 times. My lucky number. I passed the bottle to April. Then I laid on a couch, waiting patiently for something to happen.

Three minutes later, revelations of clarity were instantly dispensed into my brain as all the questions I'd ever pondered were suddenly answered. Are we alone? Why am I here? What's the meaning of it all? Everything seemed so clear, everything made sense. I understood life, death, love, hate, strength, weakness, fear, anxiety, care, compassion, connection, and understanding, the emotions from every living creature! "Why?" was no longer a question.

A Godly sensation took over my body as I felt the weight of the universe pressing firmly on my chest. Almost to the point of not feeling myself breathe, I felt the meaning of it all.

It was almost too much for my body to handle. I was all powerful, all knowing, I could feel life in everything! An energy made of knowledge and understanding coursed through me as I became one with the universe. Running wasn't an option as this unfamiliar feeling was radiating from the depths of my own soul.

"What did I get myself into?" was only an afterthought as there was no end in sight. Options? This previously limiting word was stripped from my vocabulary as options were nonexistent. I was fixed into a new reality as it was constructed around me in dimensions I never knew possible; foreign, but a making of my own. Geometrical shapes permeated the madness of my mind, unfamiliar fixtures in a familiar place.

The walls, breathing with such diction that I was convinced life had been poured into them. The floor, an ever-changing disarray of waves and hills that would elevate slightly and then put you down as moments passed, ever so leisurely, as time stood still. Colors never witnessed by human irises danced around with grace, as if the space had feelings. Everything was alive.

I tip-toed ever so gently, trying my hardest not to disrupt any of the newly discovered life I had uncovered in my expedition. "If it's all in my head, where did I come from?" A question circling my mind for quite some time now after observing the otherworldly productions born from the complexities of my own mind.

The music! Oh, the music, living in the background with a soul of its own, with melodies that would make a heartbeat jealous. Wordless, but fully understood through the feelings it created inside of me. Tears of joy, with an understanding of a new league of language. Hairs raised at the drop of a bass chord followed by a silence – a silence full of unthinkable sensations and anticipation, followed by the most perfect melody that seems to surpass all of your expectations.

A love you've never felt as frequencies course through the fabric of your being, reshaping your inner sanctum into a place worth living in. This perfect world of unfound knowledge and understanding built inside a man with tarnished thoughts.

I toiled my way up the staircase toward the second floor of the house where my vision changed and I found myself immovable in purgatory, lying face down on my hands and feet, trapped in-between Heaven and Hell. All of the decisions I'd ever made, good and bad, flew through my mind. The time I was on stage for the Who's Who List of American Middle School Students with promises of scholarships. The first time I was arrested for manufacturing

and distribution of Schedule 1 drugs. My first time saving someone's life from an overdose instead of leaving them. The time I was 10 and surfing an eighty-foot swell with nobody in sight in an area well-known for shark attacks. The time I was left for dead after being shot a block away from my mother's house in Paterson, NJ.

Every moment of my life flashed before my eyes.

*How did I get here? Which way do I go?* I'm not ready for judgement. The change in scenery wrestled with the breath of the staircase, the colors fluctuated from dim to inconceivably bright with the deepest tones of red to the truest blue ever witnessed. I could feel heat coming from below me, screams and cries of agony just below my feet. Yells of pain and sorrow echoing towards me as I peered down into the depths of Hell.

I switched my gaze above and felt a pleasant breeze. Everything that was peaceful and joyful filled me with contentment. A calmness that I've never experienced before. I teetered on a Libra scale, weighing my sins and forgiveness. At that moment, I made a choice. I crawled towards the light, getting brighter and brighter. The air became cooler as I began to reach the peak. A weight seemed to be lifted off of me. I felt weightless, confirming I was freed from this limbo. I arrived at the top of the stairs, with the afterlife a thought at the forefront of my mind. A life altering event has been woven into my eternal memory bank. I made my way to the back porch, an enclosed extension on the second floor of the house made of Balsa wood panels and encased with enormous bay windows. A dose of nicotine was the goal. I sat in a beach chair by a clear glass table and sparked a lighter.

The burst of flame ignited a flash of brilliant beams of light amplifying my understanding of colors, lasting far longer than the average flicker. This sudden array of fluorescence transferred me to what appeared to be a menu screen. A tablet of my memories. It contained countless videos of different episodes of my life. The semi-transparent images contained in neon outlines. Though astonished by what I was witnessing, I seemed to be a natural navigating this previously suppressed contraption. I began swiping with my fingertips through the endless array of clips; third person views of my life.

Snippets of each video would play as I swiped across this seemingly endless menu. My first time riding a bike without training wheels, on a red and black Magna in a cul-de-sac. Exploring my first cave system in Mauna Kea. *If it's my memories, how am I viewing me from another point of view?* The answer is neither here nor there. I clicked on one of the recordings.



A beautiful bright sunny day lit up my eyesight. A slight breeze whisked over my skin giving me just the slightest goosebumps. The scent of barbeque drifted past my nose. The smell of ocean winds and a slight coconut aroma. Tall palm trees on the most beautiful day you could imagine along a beach front. The finest grains of sands that almost feel like silk to the touch. I was there, back home, Honolulu. Then I noticed a baby crawling in bright green grass with an incredibly cute smile. It was me! This couldn't be possible, but after everything I'd been through, anything was possible. I observed bright colored houses, blues, greens, and pinks. I saw the home that baby me was standing in front of. I watched baby me race through the yards turning on the neighbors' water hoses. Then, in the blink of an eye I was back – under a glass table, in a beach chair, on an enclosed porch, with half of a cigarette in my mouth.

Awakening from my stupor, I decided to call my mother at three in the morning to confirm what I had just seen was real. I reported every single color of each house in order. I even remembered what I had been wearing – a Barney onesie. My mother, dumbfounded as to why her son was asking these peculiar questions at such an odd hour, confirmed the authenticity of the memory and details. At this moment I was awestruck. Time froze for a moment as I was filled with clarity. I felt complete.

My vision had begun to return to normalcy, if this is normal. My perception had been spun into a place of disbelief. *Which place is real? How do I continue on knowing of that vanished land?*

A calmness covered me as a realization came over me. A feeling of connectedness with everything had been gifted to me. I had witnessed life in its rawest forms. Emotions, feelings, colors, shapes, sounds, and a duality of dimensions have been blended into a concoction of singular sight, into a bigger picture. I continue on with the forbidden knowledge of another realm, where everything seen and unseen is connected.



## Artist Spotlight: Noble Roberson

Noble is a songwriter, short story writer, and poet from Paterson, New Jersey. His writing often focuses on memory, consciousness, and trauma, and he employs a unique rhythmic style which makes his writing and performance art appealing to a diverse audience.

## Where I'm From

Janet Jackson

I am from the big door in my bedroom leading to a balcony,  
from Vic's Vapor Rub on days I wasn't feeling well,  
and from Mario Brothers on Super Nintendo.

I am from the scent of fresh-baked bread  
coming from the bakery attached to my home,  
and from a football field where I played when I was little.

I am from a cherry tree next to my house,  
whose fruit tasted sour.  
From a pool in the backyard with a swing-set beside it,  
and from potato pancakes and cabbage rolls.

I am from loving and caring people,  
and from Church on Sundays, sometimes.  
I am from Oma and Tanta Rosie,  
and from a woman in a wheelchair who raised my father  
and then raised me,  
the same woman who hid from allied bombs, telling us  
"they never hit the same place..."



Writing instructor Amelia Barros and her students hold printed manuscripts of their personal essays.

Family! Who we got!?

Francis Smith

These red and brown bricks are starting to feel like home. The daylight's lasting longer, almost through winter, through the cold and the snow, I'm starting to recognize the roads comin' back from wherever we go. Things are seeming slow, calm, more like I used to know. I come from the city of Philadelphia. I moved to Cape May at 12 years old. Just like in Philly and Cape May, my days here are numbered 'cause we all gotta go, gotta go, but I've got a real feeling these red and brown bricks are now part of my soul, both with the family and when I travel alone.

I didn't know Newark from anything other than a sign on the Parkway. I didn't know Lincoln Park from any other city with sidewalks covered with those those caps that look like tiny little buckets. I was brought here in hand-and-leg cuffs, desperate for a Newport, hungry as hell, thinking I had a 50/50 chance to walk out the door they perp-walked me through. The chicken tortellini and the coffee helped. The fact that it was 20 degrees outside, the fact that I'm broke, and the fact that I'm 3 hours from home helped too. I remember thinking this town ain't pretty, but neither am I, and neither is what I need to work on here. I decided to stay and do some real introspection. I decided to earn back my daughter's respect and be a better man.

And that starts here, that starts today.

I've seen people shoot straight, seen people swerve, and seen people's minds change with just a word of love and concern. I've seen a car explode, I've seen Yoga on the Block, I've seen buses that don't stop for shit, I've seen the weak get strong and the strong fall off. I've seen people cry, I've seen people die and be brought back to life. I've seen the family come together and fight addiction ourselves. I've seen frozen milk get swiped off the shelf. I've seen people break and build back up. I've seen the spark of determination in those who don't give a fuck. I've seen men who want to become better fathers, sons, husbands, and brothers. I've seen total strangers care about one another.

I'm distracted every day, but like Chloe, Integrity's in-house support dog, I'm accepting of whoever comes in, eventually learning to see the good in other people. That mentality is bringing me to a place where I can see the good in myself. I've been here a few months now, and I'm starting to surrender. The times I get to think and reflect are becoming more and more clear and deliberate. I'm starting to believe I can change. I'm starting to feel like I have a chance to be in the 9% of people who make it in recovery. I'm starting to understand the

assignment. I'm not confident, I'm not scared. I'm just grateful for the opportunity. I'm not looking forward, I'm not looking back. I'm learning to forgive, most importantly myself. I'm accepting responsibility, I'm owning who I am and what I want to be. I'm putting in work.

For years, I've repressed feelings. My spiritual growth was in arrested development from the day I started to use. I've been sober now for 6 months, and it's like the first time since my junior year of high school that I can say that. I'm on the back 9 now, and I'm tired of chasing ghosts. I'm ready to break out of the cage that many have tried to rattle to get me to straighten up. I'm ready to do it myself and, hopefully, help a few other people do the same along the way.

If I slip and fall, I won't worry at all, I'll just pick up the phone and call Top Dog Law. Now I can quiet my mind and put anger behind me, I can break free from the chains from that first day that bind me. I can accept who I am and know I won't be alone. I can build a new me and take him everywhere I go, and it all started right here in my home.

I've faced the consequences of my actions for 3 years. I spent 90 days in jail, and so far, 90 here. I was here when my father died. I'm here while my daughter Mary Ann struggles to take care of my mother. While I take responsibility for my actions, I'm not overrun by guilt or shame. While I look to be a better person today for me, I know the future and those close to me will take care of themselves. The Serenity Prayer asks that we accept what we cannot change, find the courage to change what we can, and gain the wisdom to know the difference. I'll need to put this into practice every day of my life. The work I do now will be the foundation I build on. I didn't really know NA, AA, or Recovery Church. I didn't know I could care so much about other people. The discipline comes from programming. The change comes from the heart. I didn't know I could belong to something bigger than me.

I've practiced serenity by accepting my family for who they are. I've accepted the rules whether I like them or not. I've gained the courage to confront others and, most importantly, myself on behaviors that are maladaptive to being a good citizen. Wisdom is a work in progress. To me, it means being smart enough to know I will always have a lot to learn.

Honesty, Trust, Friendship, and Openness replace the lies, isolation, and hopelessness. I am starting to see myself for who I can be, knowing this time it all starts with me. I've seen it play out; I've been here before, and I know if I want, I could walk out that door. Yet here's where I stand, ten toes in. These red and brown bricks are where I begin. To take my life back, to make my last stand, to not grip life so tightly that it slips out of my hand. It was freely given to me, so I'll freely give it away. *Man, give that shit away.*



I want to fast forward 25 years into my future. I've spent about that much time in one addiction or another. By then, Mary Ann will be my age. I don't want her to have to go through the struggle I had to. I want her to get it right, without having to fail over and over again like I have. I won't be able to help her with that unless I figure it out myself. I never want her to say, "Am I not important enough for you to be sober?"

I want to be able to die knowing I gave every effort I could to make my family better. That's all. If I can honestly say that I did that, I'll die happy. My priorities have been greatly adjusted. My focus is *clean*. I alone have the power to change while I'm here. I can forgive now, appreciate now. I can accept and implement criticism now. I've jumped into the water. Now it's time to sink or swim. The undertow will always be there, but now I know how to swim at an angle. Now it's my time to reach all the lonely, frightened people who come to live in my home and ask them, "Family, who we got!?"



Francis Smith reads his essay to an audience of peers and staff.

Francis Smith becomes emotional while reading.



Dirty Fingers  
Marvin Brown

I'm walking up 20th street on my quest to Clinton Avenue. The closer I get, the more my senses start to spark. I get a jolt of overwhelming anticipation that forces me to speed up my pace, almost to the point of jogging. I'm about a block away. My heart is thumping, my mind is racing, my breath is heavy. Finally, I reach the Ave. I look around to see who is there. It's a noisy, chaotic scene, people all over. Some walking, some posted up, some sitting and even lying around. Cars speeding past, some double parked, and police patrolling it all. I walk to Fabian Place and find two girls sitting on some steps across from the gas station. One of the girls named TiTi jumps up and gives me a big hug. "What's up, bro, where you been at?" I tell her, "I've been in Rehab; now I'm back." She says, "You look good, like a snack." We laughed.

Then a look came over her face much like how a cloud blocks out the sun for a moment. She said, "Don't stay here too long, don't go too far, or you'll get back too late." I thought I knew what she meant, but I needed to know for sure. I said, "What does that shit mean?" She replied, "Whatchu think it means? You're not dumb. Get yo ass from around here before you get caught up in the bullshit." So I kissed her and moved on down Fabian Place to Voorhees where the block was jumpin'. In the back of an abandoned building, the ground was littered with empty beer cans, crack vials, needles, dirty diapers, and any other refuse you can imagine.

"Hey, Mike," I hear somebody call. I wasn't sure if it was me they were calling or someone else actually named Mike, because around here I'm know as Mike. I turned to see if it was me they were calling. Yup, it's me. It's my man Muhammad. We look a lot alike so everyone thinks that we're brothers. "Wassup, nigga? Where the fuck you been? Locked up? Your weight is up." I replied, "Nah, just rehab." "When did you go and how long you been out," he asked. "I left in November and got out yesterday." Then he asked, "You got some money? I need some help." I say, "Damn man, it's been exactly two minutes and you already in my pockets....and you don't even look like you need any help. But, yeah, I got you. Here, take this." I hand him \$40. He grabs it from me and bounces down the street without a "Thank you" or anything like it. But I understand.

I watched the people around me. Everything was moving in slow motion. Right next to me, four people are smoking crack. Next to them, two people are shootin' dope, and I find it hard not to watch, because I want to see the moment when he reaches the state of being comfortably numb, a feeling I'm intimately acquainted with. I remember times when I would do some dope and all would get right in my world...for a few hours. After it was gone, though,



reality would intrude on my fantasy. BOOM! Back down to Earth. I see some guys I used to cop from. A couple of them nod to me as if to say, "Yeah, I got it." Others waive me over. And one just outright says, "I got dope. Travis Scott. Green stamp."

I disregard the attempts to get my attention. Somebody grabs my shoulder. It's Muhammad. "I didn't expect to see you no more tonight," I said to him. "What happened, you ran out of money?" I added. "Nah," he says, "you gave me enough money for the both of us." I replied, "Nah, that's all you." He responds, "Oh well, take one anyway." Here's the moment of truth. To be or not to be? This is the fuckin' question. My stomach tightens. My eyes are locked on the bag. All the slogans exploding in my head. "One is too many, a thousand is never enough." "People, places, things..." Etc. Etc. Etc. But what really stood out loud and clear was what TiTi told me earlier: "Don't go too far, don't stay too long, or you'll get back too late." Although there is a tsunami of emotions having their filthy way with me, I muster up the composure to calmly say, "No, I'm good." Needless to say, he didn't offer a second time.

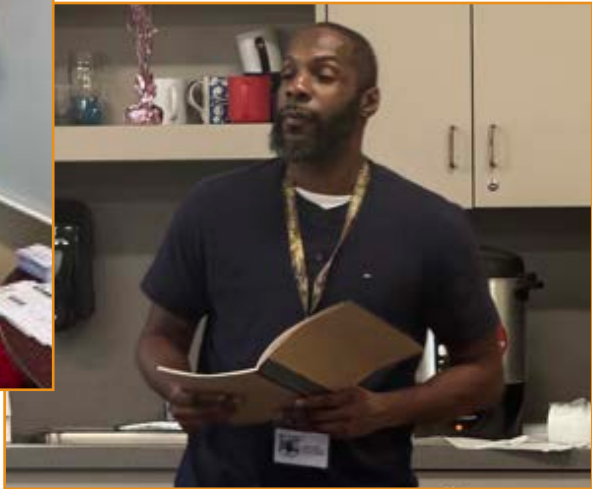
I should have left, but instead I stayed to watch him get high. It turned out to be a bad decision. I felt jealous, as if I was watching my friend make love to my ex-girl. I even said, "That's fucked up, man..." But he didn't hear me. Watching that was torture for me. It was an exercise in sadistic morbidity. I was stuck.

I couldn't take it anymore. I snapped out of it. I needed to get far away, as fast as possible. I was speed-walking like a nervous shop-lifter heading for an exit. By the time I reached the corner, I was drenched in sweat. What was I thinking? Or was I even thinking at all to put myself in that situation? If I didn't believe before, I do believe now that if a man goes to sleep with an itchy ass, he wakes up with dirty fingers.



Sophia Laurenzi talks about next week's assignment in the writing workshop.

Larone Powell reads a draft of his spoken word poem in Robert Gjalinsky's poetry workshop.



On My Way Here Today

Larone Powell

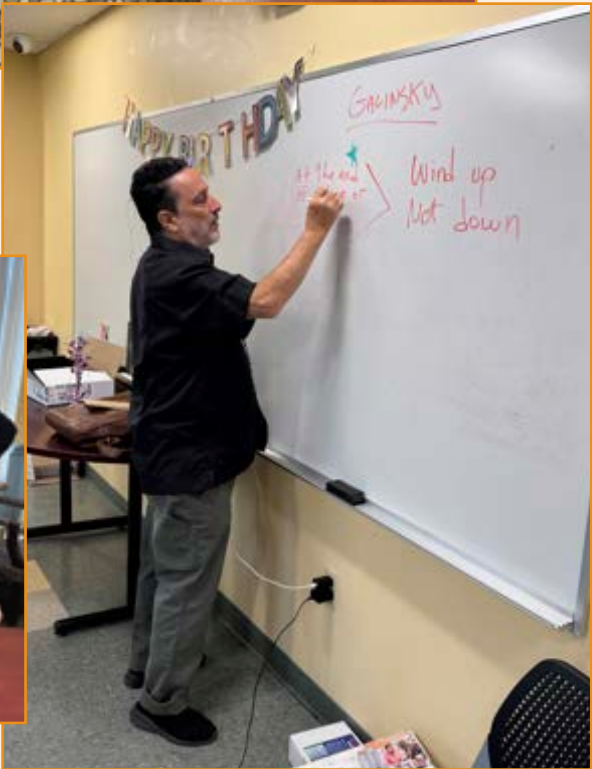
On my way here today, watching the blue skies and that glorious sunshine, the birds chirping in the trees, feeling that nice, cool breeze makes me feel one with everything. *Just being alive in this very moment.* I ask my higher power, what more do I really need? On my way here today, I felt refreshed and excited just to be on my way. The past is just that, so I'm grateful to express the words I often find hard to display.

On my way here today, I embrace change and all of life, challenges that currently stand in my way. On my way here today, I engage in life more, consciously looking out for others' best interests as well as my own, without material rewards or validation. The universe makes me feel that I'm at home.

Amelia Barros provides individual instruction to a student in her writing workshop.



Robert Gjalinsky's poetry students gather for a photo after an inspirational workshop.



Robert Gjalinsky instructs students on the pacing and melody of spoken word poetry.



## The Cat that Jumped Over the Moon

Jasmine Hairston

"Okay guys, what do you think the street car symbolizes in *A Streetcar Named Desire*?" I asked my Honor students with hope that they remembered the application of certain rhetorical devices.

"I think the street car represents freedom the way it sits outside unattached and not bound by societal restrictions. Similar to Blanche who is free-spirited and uninhibited despite the social constraints of the era," Zaire said.

"Wow, interesting. Keep that thoughtful analysis in mind when we watch Marlon Brando's interpretation in the film version of the play next week. Please pass forward last night's homework."

"Ms. Hairston, to me the street car represents Blanche's desire to be in love again and wanting to feel whole," Aniya added, tapping her French-tipped nails on the desk. I was twenty-seven when I graduated with my Master's Degree and became fully invested in my career as an English teacher. I truly valued the impact of the pictures painted on the canvas of written expression, so I eventually moved back to Newark, NJ from New London, Connecticut to give back to a community with sub-par educational standards, the same community that engendered me. This was also around the time my grandmother was plagued by the aftershock of a heart attack and late-stage dementia. I was riddled with grief and a blanket of sadness because, to me, dementia meant death and I could see that only a remnant of herself remained. Those fragmented pieces created in me a sustained fear of the inevitable.

The academic year at the Catholic High School was near its end, and I always closed my English courses with creative writing and plays from the literary canon. So, I grabbed my students' literature analysis essays, loaded them into the backseat of my car, and drove away to find secrets buried deep within the catacombs of my grandmother's mind. I had waited for the entire month of June to end to visit my grandmother at the nursing home. I awoke that morning with a feeling of dread; I was no longer afraid of what tomorrow night would bring, because yesterday brought it. When my mother called yesterday and reminded me that both of my grandmother's legs had been amputated and that her dementia had worsened, the silhouette of yesterday's bliss became the shadow of today's tears. *Did I want to see her in such a state? Will she even notice me?*

On the ride to the nursing home in Edison, NJ, the silence in the car between my mother and I was deafening. The echoes of nearby car horns muddled the chaotic thoughts in my mind. To minimize the stillness, I imagined the sound of intense orchestral music to dramatize the horror film that was now my life. As we drove down the roundabout that resembled the number eight, my mother flicked a cigarette bud on someone's perfectly manicured lawn. In that moment, I was grateful for her insolence and lack of concern for nature because it disrupted the monotony of the ride and the fear I felt for my new realty.

"Jazzy, don't cry in front of mommy [her mother]," she said with a sharpness I couldn't personalize because I knew fear inundated her thoughts despite her attempts to mask what was obvious to everyone else.

"Okay," I replied desperately, wanting to say more but incapable of finding the appropriate words to satisfy the conclusion of our conversation.

As we entered the building, the blue criss-cross pattern on the wall frustrated my initial appreciation of the building's design. I was so angry at my grandmother's deteriorating physical and mental state that a fake representation of a ladder that she had no use for deeply irritated me. My mother and I finally made our way into the entrance and encountered the big-haired brown-skinned lady at the receptionist's desk. The woman nodded while scribbling notes on a blue pastel notepad with ducks scattered on the margins. She opened up a file and began to write our names with a blue ballpoint pen. Before she could ask our names, I interrupted her motions by asking, "Do you know which room Carolyn Hairston is in?" I guess my impromptu question interrupted her usual administrative persistence because she rested her birthmark-creased hands on the gray desk. She then brought those same hands close together, made a steeple of her forefingers, and stared at us with eyes filled with water and despair.

"Ms. Hairston is in room 336 on the third floor. May the Lord bless you, Dears." The texture of her voice was velvety, but I somehow knew her skepticism about my grandmother's state was buried beneath that cloak of politeness.

The sound of Kenny G's smooth jazz songs was a stark contrast to the quiet dissonance I experienced on the way here. The elevator ride to the third floor was swift. My anticipation grew thick like curdled milk left in smoldering temperatures. Once we reached the third floor, room 336 was no more than six feet from the elevator doors, which were perpendicular to the receptionist on the floor. I gingerly entered the room behind my mother's stout stature and high ponytail. My grandmother was sitting in a wider than

usual wheelchair next to a big bay window. When I looked at my grandmother for the first time, I saw the moons. Her face was full with eyes wider than the galaxies. Her smile was crescent in shape and enveloped by a constant quiver, causing her to sporadically bite the right side of her lower lip. Her partial body frame of just head to torso was a half moon. I struggled to identify other aspects of astronomy I could apply to my grandmother's state, but the starlighting moment occurred when her unsteady voice interrupted the thick silence in the room.

She said in a whisper-like tone, "Tessy?"

Her inquisitive one-word response set off a tsunami of emotions in me. *How did she know it was me? How could her demented state allow her to remember my familial nickname instead of my legal name? Why didn't she remember my mother, her daughter?*

"Hey Grandma, it's me, Tessy," I said shakily while gently kissing her on the forehead.

She gazed out the window with a dubious curiosity while firmly clasping her hands in prayer posture. There was something familiar about her Mona Lisa smile. Of all the unfamiliar components about this room in this moment, her wheelchair, perched fastidiously in front of the window, reminded me of my childhood living room. To distract myself from the onslaught of emotions brewing inside of me, I attached myself to the monotone of her voice.

"Yeah, Tessy, there was about thirty cops up in here last night. I said, what the hell ya'll gonna do to catch 'em? He ran right on through the roof. Yup, he sho' 'nuff drove the car through the roof."

"He did, Grandma? Did you tell the nurse?" I replied with a conscious awareness of my grandmother's incoherent rambling. I didn't know if I should question my grandmother about her delusional state or embrace the zig-zag of her chaotic stream of consciousness, and my instinct engaged more with the latter."

"He ugh...ugh...he never came back last night. I was glad the cops got him. I'll be coming home soon, Tessy."

"Yeah, I can't wait, Grandma. I change Edith's dress every Sunday."

My grandmother had a childhood doll that she dressed daily to match the design of her

linen. Obviously, I couldn't keep the commitment to dress Edith on a daily basis, so I visited my grandmother's home every week to clean it, to maintain the rigorous standards she adhered to her entire adult life. Somehow, the melancholic permanence of her eternal seat by the window became a stark reminder that she wouldn't ever be coming home again.

"Marlon Brando sho' was sharp in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. And 'member him in *On the Waterfront*?" she said with certainty in her voice, hands unfolded and freely moving through the arrows of time like a zephyr. I looked at her with confusion. *Who was the lady who was just talking to me? Did my real grandmother re-emerge from behind the curtains of this imposter?* I was delighted to hear a semblance of the woman I once knew, the woman she once was; so I initiated the waltz as I danced with her scattered thoughts across her checkered dancefloor of memories.

"What was the name of that other play you used to always talk about, grandma?" I asked, already knowing the answer but totally engrossed in the marvels of how the mind works on a biochemical level. I wanted somehow to challenge those receptors and synapses in her brain that abandoned their neurological functions, causing an interruption in time. "Oh, that was *Porgy and Bess*, and I liked that Lena Horne in *Malaga*."

By the time I returned from Spring Break vacation, I'd read and graded all of my students' essays. I learned a lot about my teaching efficacy and reveled in their insightful interpretations. But there was one student whose essay triggered a painful sentiment. She wrote, "The car symbolizes irrevocable damage that drives lust's desired romances. A car is meant to contain transient beings with a navigated destination, but the essence of the car's immobility is reminiscent of a brain that doesn't store the memories obtained over a lifetime." I made a copy of her essay because its poignance coddled the tenderness my despair attempted to harden.

Weeks after my grandmother's heart attack, I isolated myself from my family, because the truth was too much to grapple with. Denial placated my ignorance, and I thought running away would help, but it didn't. So I mustered the courage to visit my grandmother before her transition to a more permanent facility.

"Eh, 'ello. It's 'bout time for ya to eat sumtin'. Here's ya lunch, Carolyn," the nurse said with a zesty Caribbean drawl. She placed two diagonally-crossed slices of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, a glass of milk, and a U-shaped watermelon half in front of her. I thought,



how comically ironic is this meal? The sardonic humor waned into subtle disrespect when my grandmother, a moon goddess in the flesh, refused to eat. At this time, my grandmother's stare was vacant. Her lip fleetingly quivered. The lucid crystalline gloss of her eyes gazed into the vague horizon of distant memories. Her past, present, and future were phantoms, a disembodied mirage of shadowed images on a slide show. She said nothing. And I, a self-coined logophile, was left with no words. The dialogue between me and my grandmother ended abruptly, and so did this trip down memory loss lane.

There she sat, legless and lifeless in her chair, destitute in spirit and swallowed by impossible yearnings. The sum of her life encapsulated by the unsolved equations in her mind. There I stood, nailed by the thorns of inertia, performing a soliloquy to a reticent audience incapable of prolonged understanding. I accepted the finality of my grandmother's circumstances. Life was making its impending exit and this curtailed moment was her encore. I acquiesced in the brevity and found absolution in the denouement. The unorganized clutter in the closet of her mind was long overdue for its spring cleaning, and the broom of the unknown swept away the dust particles of time.



Lucas Maas (on screen) discusses the basics of creative nonfiction with his students.

## An Excerpt from **The Story of Domingo** *(Translated into English from Spanish)*

*Jose Antonio Feliz Rodriguez*

### Chapter 1: His Childhood

This is the story of a boy who grew up happy, a boy with cinnamon-colored skin, of medium height, black eyes, black hair, good looks, and who was always smiling. He was born on a Sunday, July 15, in a beautiful country, rich in culture, poor, full of humble people who had many traditions and were very devout. They named him Domingo (Sunday) because he was born on that day of the week. The name was given to him by his grandfather, Antonio Rodríguez, who was tall, strong, and known by everyone in the town for being a good person and a hard worker. The grandfather loved Domingo very much because he was his first grandson, a boy, the firstborn son of his first daughter, who resembled him a lot physically.

His grandmother, his mother's mother, was named Andrea. She was a robust woman with a very loud voice and a strong personality. She loved Domingo very much — so much so that she gave him the nickname "Anual," the name she had wanted them to give the boy. Since she called him that, everyone in town and the children he played with also called him by that nickname.

Domingo's mother was a woman of good character and a big personality. She was tall and cinnamon-skinned too, with long and beautiful black hair. His father was named Máximo Feliz, a hardworking man. He did all kinds of work just to earn some honest money. He worked in construction when jobs came up or on the farm cultivating the fruits of the earth. Or else he worked as a cameraman because he really liked photography and had his own camera. He was a man with cinnamon skin too, strong, and with strong family features like his color and his brown hair. Unfortunately, his father—Domingo's paternal grandfather—had passed away many years before Domingo was born.

Domingo's grandmother on his father's side was a dark-skinned woman, strong and business-minded. She always had all kinds of goods she bought to resell. She had a corner store where she sold a wide variety of things like food and drinks, candy, and other items. When the boy Domingo was two years old, a relative of his mother proposed to help her so she could leave the country for a foreign land with a better economy. That way, she could help and support her family financially from abroad. Since she and her family weren't

doing well financially and her country was a poor one where people struggle and it takes a lot of effort to support a family, his mother made the hard decision to separate from her young son and her relatives. She believed that was the best way to help her loved ones and offer a better future to her beloved son and the rest of her family in the years to come.

When his mother left for another country, his father had to take care of him, since Domingo's mother was no longer there to do so. But his father had to work to support both the boy and the household, as the mother had not yet found work to help them. Because of this, and in order to keep working, he took Domingo to his sister Gloria María Feliz so she could care for and look after him while he worked. In the home of his aunt Gloria María, Domingo stayed with her children—his cousins: Tinita, Kervin, and Manolo—who were already grown. Also staying there was his cousin Deli, daughter of Carmen, another of Domingo's aunts and his father's sister. While he was with them, Domingo made some childhood friends and played with them, having fun along the way. Domingo's aunt was a very good person, friendly and cheerful, a little chubby and short in stature, but very charming, with light but not white skin. Her children were tall and had mulatto skin. But Tinita was short and had slightly darker skin, and Deli was a bit fuller-bodied and also mulatta. With them and with Gloria María's husband, they lived in a remote town in that country, with people who cared for and played with him.

Gloria María's husband, his aunt's husband, was named Tino Rodoli. He was a skinny and tall man, with hair white from graying, who liked playing dominoes, just like Domingo's father and Domingo himself, who learned that popular game from them. Tino worked in a salt mine and also in a gypsum mine, where he operated large tractors. When he was nearby, he would pass the house in some of those machines. Sometimes he drove a grader or a backhoe, and he almost always gave little Domingo a ride in them. Domingo loved it because he could feel the vibrations, the noise, and other sensations—like the height—since the tractors were so large and tall. Whenever Domingo heard the noise of those machines in the distance, he would always go to see what they were doing.

One day, they were building a baseball field for the town, where both kids and adults would go to play ball. Domingo, hearing that familiar sound, went to see how they were building the field. Amid the rising dust, he lifted his eyes as the grader passed by. When he looked closely, he saw Tino operating it. Tino saw Domingo, stopped the machine, and called him up into the grader. Domingo, excited, talked with Tino and asked him what each lever was for. Tino explained what each one did. Domingo stayed with him the rest of the day until the job was finished. Happy with the experience he had that day, Domingo told his little

friends that he had helped build the baseball field where he and everyone in the town would go to play.

When Domingo was five years old, his mom, who was still living in the new country, sent him a small bicycle with training wheels in the back. That was his first bike. It was blue, with a metal bell on the handlebar. He still didn't know how to ride it, which was why it had training wheels to keep him from falling. Even though he didn't know how to ride, he got on it with fear but was determined to learn. Little by little, he pedaled until he rode fast on it. After he had learned to ride well, they removed the training wheels so he could learn to ride without them. They held him up so he wouldn't fall until he learned to ride on his own, going out on it every day.

One day, he fell off the bike because, while coming down from the curb to the street, the handlebar and front wheel twisted. When he hit the ground, he scraped himself on the pavement, hurting himself badly. He went to his aunt to have her treat the injury. They poured alcohol on it to disinfect the wound, and it stung a lot. That happened when Domingo was six years old. He enjoyed the speed, the wind hitting his face, and riding around with other kids who also had bikes.

That same year, his mother came to visit the country. Domingo was very happy that she had come to see him, though at the same time confused and a bit scared, since he didn't remember her—she had left when he was very small—and he didn't know what she looked like or how he should behave. But at the same time, he was happy to spend time with his real mother, the one who loved him so much and whom he loved too. The one who had to make the difficult decision to separate from him and go work hard to support him and the rest of the family. With his mother by his side, he began to study more, since she helped him a lot with school, and he paid attention and enjoyed those moments with her. At the same time, she taught him manners, good behavior, and many other things so he would grow up to be a good man in the future.

## Artist Spotlight: Jose Antonio Feliz Rodriguez

*Jose is a poet, visual artist, and musician residing in Atlantic City, NJ. Born and raised in the Dominican Republic, much of his creative work expresses an affinity for the history and culture of his home country while highlighting the struggles of Latinos in the diaspora.*





## My Love

Steven Mounts

I liken you, my love, to an orchid  
among a garden of flowers.  
How beautiful you are, my love.  
Oh, how beautiful  
you are. So very special,  
Not just an ordinary flower,  
but a lily among thorns  
is my love among other women.  
How delightful is your love.  
How much more pleasing is your love than wine.  
Your lips drop sweetness like a honeycomb, my love.  
Milk and honey are under your tongue.  
Your eyes are like stars in the night sky,  
shimmering like diamonds.  
How beautiful you are and how pleasing,  
my love, with your delights.  
You have stolen my heart, my love.  
You have stolen my heart.



Steven Mounts  
performs his poem to  
an audience of his peers.



Larone Powell  
performs spoken word poetry at  
Integrity's semi-annual poetry SLAM.

## Compassion

Larone Powell

I look at others as a mirror  
of myself, compassion.  
I hope that endless love for others  
is the way, compassion.  
I fight with all my heart  
to end all suffering,  
compassion. True spiritual  
growth is a personal transformation,  
compassion. My heart is a masterpiece  
of creation, compassion.  
I choose joy, love, and kindness  
without any limitations. Compassion  
lets me be open to other feelings  
and emotions. I calm  
my mind of all negative  
commotion, compassion.  
Positive affirmations flow  
through my mind like the waves  
of the ocean, compassion.  
I choose to keep an open mind  
and an open heart and always  
choose compassion for others.  
It feels so good to my soul.

## Smooth Criminal!

Natwari Martin

"Givin' him somethin' he can feeeeeee!" Aunt Dot sang drunkenly from the kitchen.  
"What if I give ya'll some wigs and you wear dresses?" Aunt Dot interjected. "Or ya'll can do  
Diana Ross and the Pips!" she added, laughing to herself.

"Man, why you keep tryna put us in dresses?" my little brother whined.

"I ain't doin that...you know they gonna record it..." Jacqui, the youngest of us four, said.

I sat quietly grinning while I pictured us dancing in drag. We needed costumes and  
dance moves in less than 3 days.

"This is it, right here," my brother Tyriece shouted. He is a semi-professional  
choreographer and had years of experience putting together shows. He handed me an  
earphone and started grinning at me.

"Ty...no," I said dryly.

"What is it?" Jarred asked.

"What if we each pick a song and mix 'em?" I said. He didn't answer, because he was  
already in his zone, doing all the moves from the video.

"What song is it?" Jaqui asked.

"Nah. Ya'll can just do the background. Ya'll already know the moves to this," Ty said.

"Yo!!! What song is it?" Jarred and Jaqui screamed.

"My bad! Damn....it's *Dancin' Machine*," I replied. "But I'm saying he (meaning Ty)  
can do that and we'll all pick our own MJ song and..."

"Bet!" Jaqui cut me off. "I'll do 'you got me workin' day and night dih duh dih duhn!'"  
he said, mimicking the beat and a few moves.

"Well, I got 'You been hit by...doom doom. You been struck by...boom! A smooth  
criminal!'" Jarred said.

I was slow to respond due to the mixture of cheap vodka and the nostalgic effect  
MJ had on everybody. I was mentally scrolling through all of the hits and videos in my  
memory bank. A grin spread across my face like the Grinch who stole Christmas as I  
relived a million moments from our past. There were countless hours spent crammed  
in front of an old medium-sized TV with a hanger for an antenna, which sat on top of an  
even older, bigger broken floor model with missing knobs. Imagine, 13 kids, some standing,  
some sitting criss cross style in complete silence. A dead roach trapped in the glass of the  
screen projecting MJ's newest video. My mother, dead to the world, erratically twitching  
while snoring after returning home from a week or two (or three) of drinking and drugging.

"Yo, Twari, pick one so we can start! Damn! What? You drunk?"

I probably was, being that I can't recall who said that. I felt like a black Marty McFly,

only MJ's hits were my DeLorean.

"Yo, you gotta do the lean move, Jay," Tyiece said, still dancing.

"How?" we all said as if we had rehearsed it.

"I got you," is all he said and went back to dancing. I decided I'd do "Scream" by MJ and Janet. We practiced our moves three or four times before we parted ways. We planned to rehearse every day until Christmas, but we never did. Jarred had a full time job and I had a business I was running. Two nights later my aunt Lisa called asking how our show was coming along. I told her we hadn't practiced since the night Jaqui flew in. "Well, why Jaqui poppin shit if ya'll aint even practicin'?"

I quickly responded, full of false bravado: "Aint nothin' poppin' but da peas in da pot. And they don't pop if the water aint hot." With a little southern drawl for effect, of course.

"Oh, no the fuck you didn't!" she screamed while laughing.

Christmas day came and we filled my Aunt Lisa's house and garage. The air was permeated by the smells of the smorgasbord of food she prepared and the random happy sounds of my family. "Aiight ya'll!" Tee Tee Lisa said into the microphone. "It's going down in 15 minutes! In honor of the house ya'll were raised in, it's 437 dollars and 33 cent in the pot! Let's get ready to rum-boooooooooooooooooo!!!le!"

We went to the basement and changed into our costumes. We decided to go over our moves and as we stumbled through them, overhearing someone else hit the last notes of Patti Labelle's "Creole Lady Marmalaaaaade!" my confidence plummeted. Everyone clapped and I just knew we were going to lose. We started to head upstairs and as we entered the kitchen Jarred yelled "Damn!" and turned around and ran back towards the stairs. "Yo!" was all I could get out when we heard the intro to our mix coming on. He was notorious for catching stage fright. I was pissed, but as they say, the show must go on. I ran inside and jumped into it, praying that the three of us would be enough to win. I didn't miss a step and I ended my part by kneeling in the place my brother had told me to. I kept my head down and said a silent prayer for Jarred to show up.

Jaqui knelt near me as my brother entered the room to the breakdown of "Dancing Machine." Du-denn den duh-du-deh dun. Du-dennn den duh-du-deh dun!!! I didn't even have to look up because I knew Ty was killing it just by the shouts from the crowd. His part was almost over.

I whispered, "Where is Jarred?!" to Jaqui. "I-ont know!" he said.

In my mind, I saw us three kneeling there looking dumb and I couldn't help shaking my head in disbelief. I was mentally preparing myself for the anticlimactic ending when I heard, "Twari get ready." I opened my eyes and Jarred was actually doing it! He stopped in the middle of us and I reached out and grabbed his left leg and braced myself. I looked and Jaqui had his right leg and Tyiece had a grip on the back of his shirt.

He leaned forward, staring directly into my cousin Tavia's face, almost close enough for their noses to touch. We pulled him back up and he moonwalked over to my other cousin Latrisa. I shouted, "the baby powder!" He dug in his pocket...

POOF! A cloud of smoke blew into her face and we all grabbed our crotches as we sang, "A SMOOTH CRIMINAL!"



A student in Sophia Laurenzi's personal essay workshop reads aloud from his first draft.



Sophia Laurenzi answers a question from one of her workshop participants.



# through our eyes

## photography and cyanotype printing

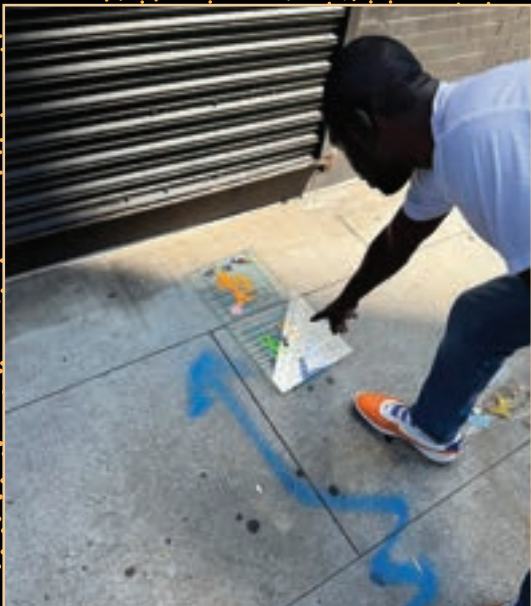
The Creative Arts Initiative continued its collaboration with Project for Empty Space and Obscura Darkroom in Downtown Newark, offering Integrity clients an enriching series of workshops in analog **photography**, **digital photography**, and the alternative photographic technique known as **cyanotype printing**. Clients learned basic film chemistry from professional photographers and gained hands-on experience in an actual darkroom while printing original 35 mm black and white photographs. In separate sessions, they worked with cyanotype artists to create original blue-toned cyanotype flags, also known as “sun prints.” By combining the rich history of analog photography with the experimental nature of cyanotype, these workshops helped Integrity clients rediscover the magic of creating something tangible and lasting, one print at a time.



Stafford Woods of Obscura Darkroom teaches students how to expose photography film.



An Integrity client reviews his photographs on a light projector.



A client prepares his cyanotype design for sun exposure.



Cyanotype artist Lisa Conrad teaches Integrity clients how to wash cyanotype fabric after exposure

# through our eyes

35 mm photographs



Friends by EW



Lincoln Park by Anonymous



The Stoop by Anonymous



Faith by JP



Side Profile by Des Aronson



# through our eyes

paper and fabric cyanotype prints



Butterfly Effect  
by Evan Weiss



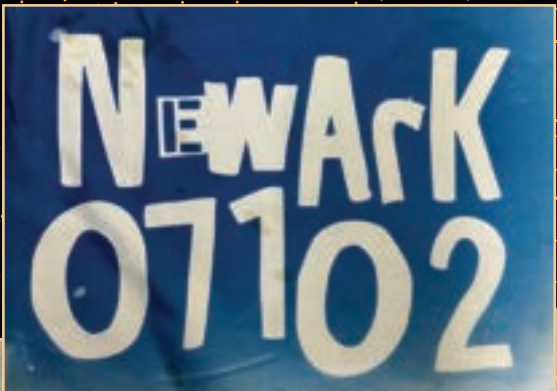
Mom  
by Brian Beatty



Blessed  
by Steven Mounts



Keeping Hope  
by Marvin Brown



Hometown  
by Anonymous



Love  
by Samaad Terrell



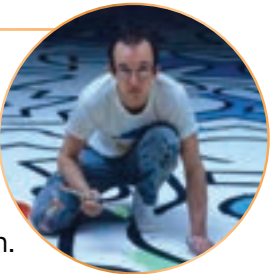
# with our hands

painting and illustration

This year's Creative Arts Initiative curriculum emphasized art history as a means of exploring identity and voice. Throughout the year, clients engaged in a series of structured workshops centered on the lives and legacies of groundbreaking contemporary artists like **Keith Haring**, **Jean-Michel Basquiat**, and Harlem Renaissance painter **Aaron Douglas**. Participants explored the social and political landscapes these artists navigated, their use of art as a form of resistance, and how each one spoke to, and for, communities often silenced or ignored. In creating their own artist-inspired paintings, the participants experimented with some of the symbols, abstract designs, and layered meanings contained in the iconic works of art they learned about. Some reimaged these iconic pieces; others transformed what they learned into deeply personal expressions of their own stories.

## OUR INSPIRATION

**Keith Haring's** style is recognizable for its bold lines, bright colors, and simple cartoon-like figures that often convey social and political messages. Emerging from New York's street culture in the 1980s, his art challenged elitism and brought attention to issues like AIDS, apartheid, and LGBTQ+ rights, leaving a lasting impact on pop culture and art activism.



**Jean-Michel Basquiat** fused raw, expressive lines with abstract imagery, text, and symbols, drawing from street art, African-American history, and jazz to create powerful, layered works. Rising from the New York graffiti scene in the late 1970s, he broke barriers as a young Black creator in the art world and used his work to confront racism, inequality, and oppressive power structures.

**Aaron Douglas** blended African-inspired motifs with modernist aesthetics, using bold silhouettes, rhythmic compositions, and radiant light to depict the Black experience and heritage. As a leading figure of the Harlem Renaissance, he helped define a visual language for African-American identity and inspired future generations of Black artists to use their work as a vehicle for cultural expression.





Spreading Hope with  
Haring Figures

Pray For Me by El-Hajj Hampton



Meditate by Anonymous

Here's My Heart  
by Janet Jackson



I Did It!  
by Janice Anderson



Free by  
Crystal Nunes



Bold  
Basquiats



Robust and Free  
by Janice Anderson



Dangerous Minds  
by Hakimah Clowers



Basquiat-style  
Dinosaur by  
Dustin Probasco



Commodified  
by Anonymous



Basquiat-style  
Cat by  
Dustin Probasco



Setting the Mood  
with Aaron Douglas

Jose Feliz Antonio Rodriguez



Gregory H



Neal Frazza



Al-Muta Thomas



Daouda C

Other Visual Art  
Activities

In addition to the artist-focused sessions described above, clients participated in an array of workshops focused on other visual art activities, including **Neurographing**, **landscapes**, **splatter art**, **wood-painting**, and even **sustainable art** using discarded wood and other recycled materials. These activities involved the use of various watercolor and acrylic painting techniques. Watercolor's versatility and unpredictability encouraged free exploration, often leading to beautiful, and sometimes surprising, creative outcomes. In contrast, the rich coloration and quick-drying nature of acrylic paint prompted participants to plan their designs thoughtfully, occasionally inspiring them to take bold artistic risks.



Natwari Martin focuses on the details of one of his paintings



The Watcher by Natwari Martin



# with our hands

The term **Neurographing**, coined by Dr. Pavel Piscarev in 2014, refers to the creation of free-form lines and shapes that highlight connections between unconscious and conscious processes in the mind of the creator. The activity also encourages mindfulness and emotional regulation through artistic expression.



Neurograph by Anonymous



Neurograph by John Calathopolous



Neurograph by Daouda Coulibaly

Our work...  
in progress!



# with our hands

Painting **landscapes** allows us to imagine new environments or to recreate familiar ones. Landscapes also encourage us to connect with the calmness, beauty, and regenerative potential of the natural world.



On the Trail by Christine F



Watercolor Landscape by Blady Diaz



In the Wilderness by Anonymous



Lakeside by Unknown



Purple Sunset by Anonymous



with our hands

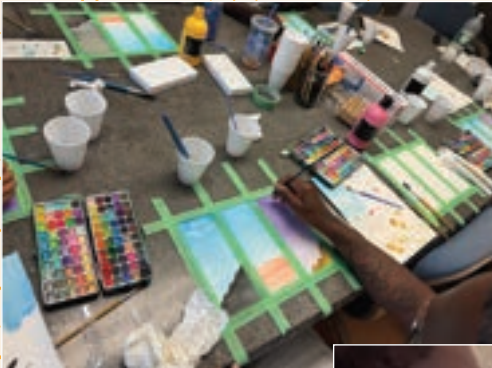


The Cove by Steven Mounts



Stormy Night by Jennifer Paulsen

Our work...in progress!



with our hands



Ohana by Lisa Arsenio



For my Brother by Kollin Oaks



Untitled by Anonymous

**Splatter Art**, also known as Action Art, was popularized by Jackson Pollock in 1940's and 50's. It involves the use of brushes, spoons, or one's own fingers to apply paint to a surface in abstract patterns. The unstructured nature of Splatter Art is fun and freeing, allowing the artist to create beautiful imagery without relying on restrictive methods and techniques.



Our work...  
in progress!



# with our hands

**Wood Painting** involves the use of free hand techniques or stencilling to create beautiful images on wooden surfaces before coloring them in with acrylic paint. Participants in the creative arts initiative used this opportunity to create door placards, ornaments, and bookends, many of them featuring motivational slogans, to remind them of their goals and to beautify their living spaces.



Three Bears by Veronica S



Charlotte's Web by EW



Best Friends by Dustin Probasco

# with our hands

Our work...  
in progress!



**Sustainable Art** refers to the use of recycled or discarded materials, including wood or cardboard, to create beautiful objects and improve blighted spaces. It aims to reduce waste and alleviate the environmental burden of mass-producing new materials for visual art projects. It also serves as an inspiring metaphor for recovery by allowing us to take something that has been overlooked or discarded and revealing its true beauty.



Aqua-themed Cardboard Canvas by AE



Sustainable Floral Arrangement by Lisa Arsenio



with our hands



Various Cardboard Canvases by Htakimah Clowers, Victoria Perednas, and Lisa Arsenio



Yang and Ash by Ashley Mc



For Tiff by Jason E



Our work...  
in progress!

with our hands

During our **Perspective Art** workshops, participants sat around an assemblage of objects, each of them viewing these objects from a different angle, and illustrated what they saw. At the end of the workshops, clients presented their drawings and reflected on the role of perspective in shaping our lived experiences. This activity reinforces how building healthy relationships and strong communities requires that we see things from other people's perspectives.



Black and White  
Perspective  
Drawing by  
Anonymous



Colorful  
Perspective  
Drawing by  
Unknown



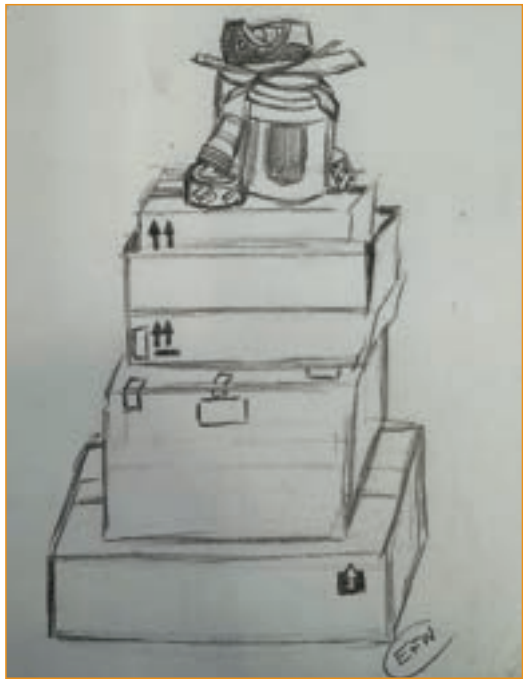
Black and White Perspective  
Drawing by Anonymous



with our hands

made in Brick City

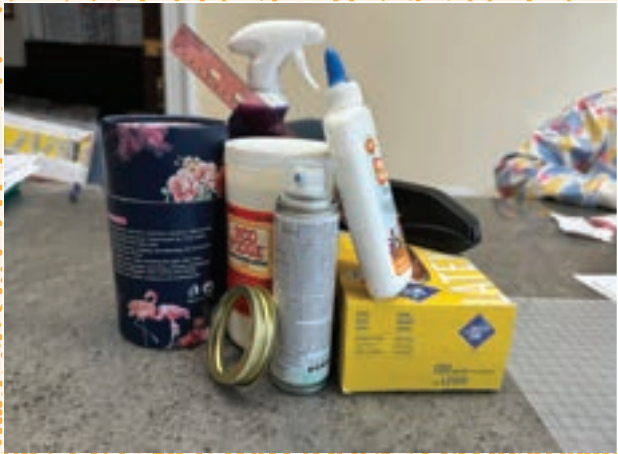
Our work...  
in progress!



Black and White Perspective Drawing by EFW



Realistic Perspective Drawing by Anonymous



honoring Newark creatives

From the North Ward to the Number Blocks, Newark has always been a wellspring of creative energy. Home to talents as diverse as Philip Roth, Jasmine Mans, and Jerry Gant, the city has inspired countless influential works in literature and visual art. Integrity House's Creative Arts Initiative honors this legacy by providing opportunities for Newark residents with creative backgrounds to hone their artistic and literary skills. In this section, we are proud to showcase several **Newark natives** who have participated actively in the Creative Arts Initiative since arriving to treatment. While their work reflects a variety of interests and specializations, these artists all share one thing in common: an abiding love for the city they grew up in.



My City by Ariel Mendoza





# made in Brick City

## Samaad Terrell

Born and raised in Pennington Court in the Ironbound section of Newark, Samaad attended Newark public schools his whole life, graduating from Malcolm X Shabazz in 2012. He was introduced to visual art in pre-school, beginning with “noodle art” and progressing to impressionist and abstract paintings inspired by his favorite artist, Vincent Van Gogh. “Art helps me to express myself,” Samaad says. “If I’m in a rut or not in the best of moods, it reads on the paper. When I’m going through something, I paint darkness. Beautiful work – but still dark.” Samaad’s current interests include pop art, textile art, and abstract designs, and his work often reflects the interplay between popular culture and human psychology.

Samaad also dabbles in creative nonfiction and written and spoken word poetry, citing Tupac Shakur’s “A Rose That Grew from Concrete” as an early influence on the content and style of his writing. Samaad’s prose reimagines the Newark of his childhood and engages with issues such as urban poverty, street violence, and the lasting impacts of childhood trauma. “It sometimes feels like I’m from a place of broken promises, but art saved me.”



Unicorn



Broken Glass

# made in Brick City



Untitled



Winding Road



## Charles Ward

Charles began making art as a teenager, drawing inspiration from hip hop culture and the vibrant street art that colored his neighborhood in Newark’s South Ward. Charles’s talent was recognized at a young age when he received an invitation to participate in a city wide mural competition at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center. Following this, he continued to draw and paint before discovering his true passion: fashion design. He is an expert in embroidery, graphic design, and screen printing, and in recent years he used these skills to develop his own independent clothing line, *Money Magnet*, which he distributes out of storefront in Downtown Newark.



# made in Brick City



A Day at the Beach

## Hakimah Clowers

Although these days Hakimah resides in Asbury Park, she is a Newark woman at heart. Hakimah was raised in the Vailsburg Section of the city, where she began coloring and drawing around the age of 8. Throughout her teenage years, she continued to learn new forms of creative expression both inside and outside of the classroom, including painting, knitting, and collage-making. These activities were a distraction from the struggles of daily life. "Art comforts me and takes me out of my head," Hakimah says. "It really does give me peace." A natural autodidact with no formal artistic training, as a young adult Hakimah relied on YouTube and social media to learn new artistic techniques. Over time, she has combined these techniques into a style that spans multiple disciplines, including abstract art, pop art, and most recently cartoon illustration. Here visual art is playful and accessible, but it often addresses the sobering reality of coping with the immense physical and psychological traumas of active addiction.



Family

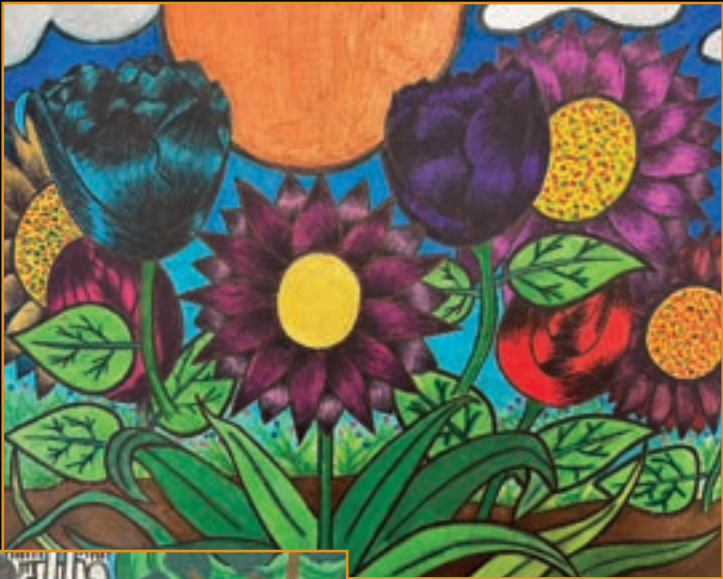
# made in Brick City

## Ariel Mendoza

Ariel grew up in the North Ward of Newark, where he absorbed the urban and Afro-Caribbean influences that flavor much of his artwork. He began creating visual art in elementary school, drawing doodles, landscapes, and human figures mostly to stay focused in the classroom. "Art helped me to stay grounded," he recalls. This hobby soon became an obsession, and Ariel was seldom found without his art supplies. Over the years, he developed an affinity for floral designs, urban landscapes, and cartoon-style imagery. He credits his upbringing in Newark with influencing his artistic style and supplying the themes for his artwork. "Everything about Newark influenced my art. [The city] is a part of me, so it's a part of my art."



Sunset on the Lake



Flower Garden



Mona in the City



# special activities and events



Creative Arts Coordinator Evan Weiss teaches landscape painting to a group of clients from the women's residential program.



Book club participants display their copies of Mohsin Hamid's widely-celebrated novel, *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*.



Creative Arts Initiative participants provide testimony on the impact of the program to the Board of Trustees of the Healthcare Foundation of New Jersey.



Students rehearse interpretive movements during Integrity's collaborative drama workshop with Newark School of the Arts.



Participants in Integrity's drama workshop with Newark School of the Arts take a bow after their final performance.



Creative Arts Initiative participants receive frames for their paintings after an advanced watercolor workshop.

# special activities and events



Book club participants gather to read and discuss Emma Cline's latest novel, *The Guest*.



Visual artist Jhailyn Mariel of Caba Creatives discusses creative art in the context of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.



Clients gather for a group photo with Jhailyn Mariel of Caba Creatives after a three-day expressive art workshop.



Jhailyn Mariel performs a sound bath with her crystal harp to kick off an expressive art workshop.



A client enjoys the community art table on Integrity Day.



Integrity's drama students plan a scene as Teaching Artist Ashley Baptiste looks on.



*“...we were here,  
at this moment in time,  
and this is  
what we made.”*

– Zadie Smith, *Swing Time*



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