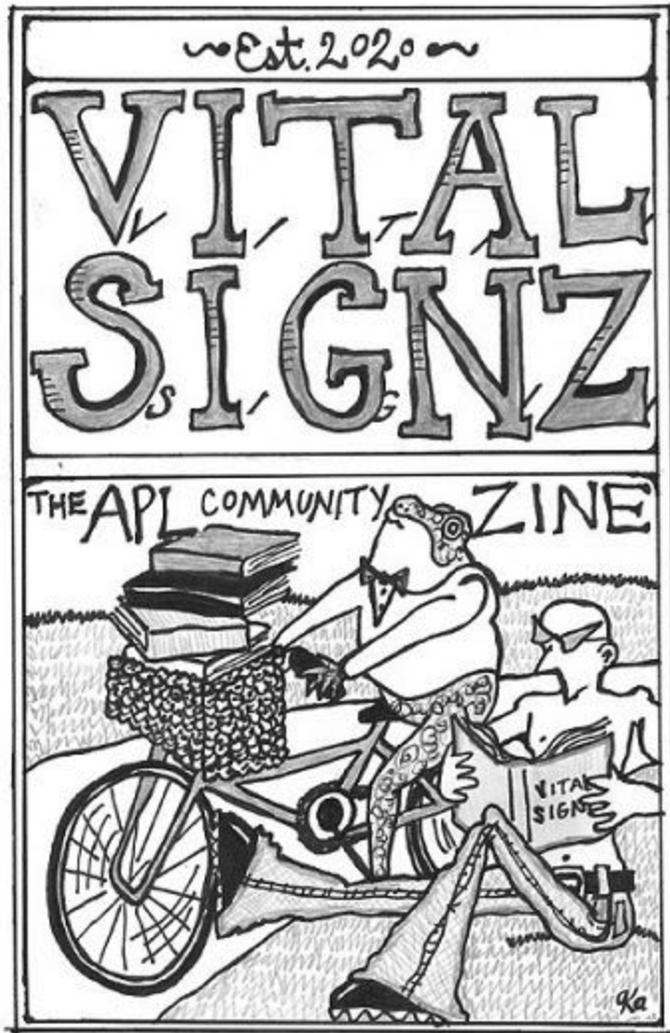


Vital SignZ: The APL Community Zine - Issue 2
February 2021



1.

What is Vital SignZ?

Welcome to **Vital SignZ: The APL Community Zine**. Vital SignZ is a collaborative zine made by and for users of the Austin Public Library. “Vital” because art is essential to life. “Signs” because we make art as signs of our existence and humanity. In short, art is both vital and a sign of life. The final capital Z stands for “zine.” Vital SignZ showcases the literary, visual, audio and cinematic artwork of our library’s creative community. Everyone is creative, and everyone is invited to bring Vital SignZ to life and keep it pulsing.

Fast Facts

- Dedicated to our creative forebearers at Dallas Public Library’s [DalLibZine](#).
- Aesthetic: lowercase catholic
- Motto: “We make art in order that we may not perish of the truth.” (Apologies to Nietzsche and Schopenhauer.)

The Vital SignZ Zine Team

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Katherine O’Brien
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3.

Introduction

Welcome to the second issue of Vital SignZ. Each issue has space for themed entries and general entries. Technically, the theme this time is **Desire Comes, Desire Fades**, but to tell you the truth, none of our contributors apparently felt this notion resonating in their pieces. The idea was that it would come out in February, when everyone is surrounded by themes of love and romance, with a little splashback in the form of anti-love or anti-romance counterthemes. We figured life's often a little more ambiguous or confusing or cyclical than that, more like desire comes and fades and returns and changes and so forth, so why not devote some space to that idea? We guess it didn't really work out as intended, but we think some of these pieces do fit the theme, even if their creators didn't have that in mind, so we've marked quasi-thematic entries with a ♥, and you're welcome to submit on this topic in the future. No deadline, it's all cyclical, but remember that you can never step into the same river twice.

Throughout this zine, you can click on the images to view them at their original file size or access the creator's website or portfolio. We'd like to keep this zine train rolling, and we'd like it to be as varied as possible, so we are keen to represent the work of more people unknown to us, perhaps such as yourselves. While we remain forever grateful for the submissions of our pals, our moms, our most beloved patrons, and our cousins' hairdressers, we especially beseech you, utter strangers, to join us: [Vital SignZ Submission Form](#)

4.



Blossom by Debbie Schneekloth, 2020 ♥

5.



Bubo by Amalia Litsa, 2014

Dear SignerZ: Wouldn't this wise owl make a beautiful cover for a future issue of Vital SignZ? Wouldn't you love to see your own masterpiece on the cover? We can make that happen. Share it here: [Vital SignZ Submission Form](#)

6.



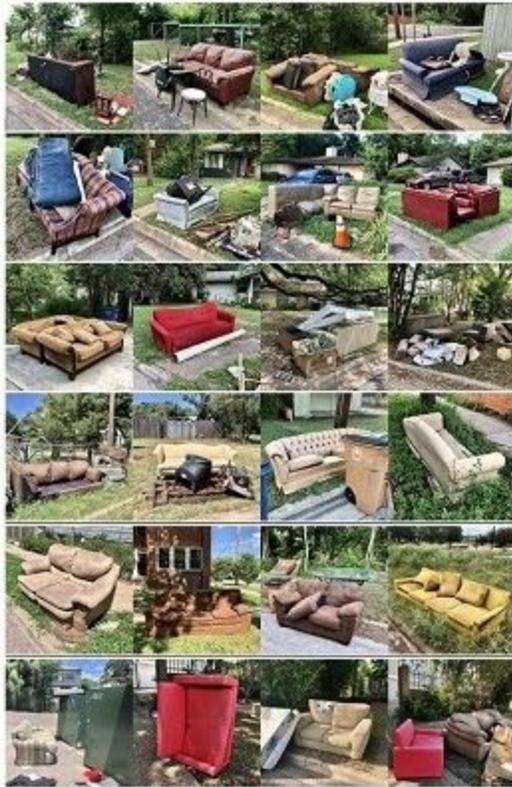
*Cathedral Windows by Vija G. Mendelson
quilt homage*

7.



Davenport Discards, October 2020 by Katrin Abel ♥

8.



Davenport Discards, September 2020 by Katrin Abel ♥

[Dying Traditions](#) by Bryce Wilson ♥

Like a lot of nerdy young dudes I was quite taken with the show *Lost*. In a way it is strange to claim that the show had an impact on me; I haven't revisited it since it aired. I quickly

9.

grew disenchanted with Damon Lindelof's oeuvre and while I think back on the show with genuine fondness, it's precisely the fondness of distance, a capsule of the mid two thousands, not just in its style and preoccupations, but its very nature. It is a relic from the days when you couldn't just binge a show; where the process of being teased about a mythology could go on for years, the denial of gratification which is so rare in entertainment these days.

But in a very direct and particular way *Lost* did influence me, ironically enough in regard to the concept of the denial of gratification itself. In the second season we're introduced to the character of Desmond, a young Scottish man who has been essentially living in a Skinner box for the last decade. Desmond carries with him a copy of *Our Mutual Friend*, which he refuses to read despite being rather hard up for entertainment. The reason? It's the only book he hasn't read by Charles Dickens and he wants it to be the last thing he reads before he dies.

Reader, let me tell you that I thought that this was *neat*. I started to put the concept into practice almost immediately. Maybe not quite to the extreme that Desmond did, I wasn't aiming to hit the bullseye of my death bed, but I started purposefully squirreling away works of art by artists I loved for the future. Books I wouldn't read, movies I wouldn't watch, albums I wouldn't listen to, saving them for the hypothetical day when I would really need them. When I could break the glass and find them waiting for me.

A decade and change later I happened to read the John Irving nonfiction collection *Trying To Save Piggy Sneed*. In one of Irving's many musings on Dickens, he happens to mention that the only one of Dickens' novels that he hasn't read is *Our Mutual Friend*. That he was saving it. So he could read it on his death bed. So it could be the last thing he reads before he dies.

The sense of vertigo, adolescent-flavored betrayal, and rueful amusement I felt as I came upon this little factoid is difficult to convey. Of course Lindelof stole the one idea of his I've ever liked: that's just what he does. As a result my faith in this approach to art was already tottering when 2020 hit.

I think the most tangible effect that the coronavirus epidemic has had on my own personality is an enlarged sense of myself as a peripheral figure. Not that I saw myself as particularly central or important before, but I at least thought of myself as a survivor. Then again, when one finds oneself living in the midst of a disaster it becomes extremely clear just how easily one's luck could go bad. I found myself thinking of myself like the kind of person who would die in the second week of the blitz, hit by a flying brick on the way to the shelters. It turns out the image of one's lungs liquefying because you went to get Pad Thai on a Wednesday rather than a Tuesday is a hard one to shake. Even as someone who has always had a, let's call it a healthy sense of my own mortality, the idea of my death bed became a lot less abstract in 2020. I suspect I'm not alone.

As a result while I was quarantining, I found myself taking down a lot of those things I'd put on the proverbial Desmond shelf: David Mitchell's *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob De Zoet*, Beastie Boys' *Paul's Boutique*, the second half of *The Lone Wolf And Cub* film series, Martin Scorsese's George Harrison documentary *Living In The Material World*. Others; the exact titles don't matter. What matters is that I cleared that shelf and I don't think I will ever fill it back up again.

Look dudes, I'm not particularly smart or special, I just got done telling you that a couple of paragraphs ago. What I do know is that we live in a random world, we did before the coronavirus, we will after the vaccine is distributed. Anything can happen at any time and life is just too damn short and arbitrary to try curating your death bed.

12.



Fall in D.C. by Sheila H., acrylic on canvas, October 2020 ♥

I used to walk in the wooded park near my D.C. apartment. The thing I miss most about the Northeast is the Fall colors, so this is my humble tribute to that wooded park and nature's beauty.

13.

Get That Off Your Chest, Part 2 by Katherine O'Brien

You quickly fill out the paperwork, show proof of your sad little salary and are given in quick succession, a box of cooling caps, instructions, and a reimbursement check from a charity for the cost. At your hair salon you ask your stylist if she can squeeze you in sooner rather than later. You need something wash and

wear. No extra product, no hair drying or styling tools will be allowed. You settle on a bob. Later on the bangs will disguise the disappearing eyebrows.

You're concerned that people will think you vain for trying to keep your hair. You have cancer. Shouldn't you be focusing on the important? But privacy cannot be overrated under these circumstances. You have so little control over your life, but by keeping your hair you are the one who gets to decide who knows you're sick. The only people at work who know were the ones you told. Best of all you don't have any well-meaning but misinformed people offering unsolicited advice.

You've been coloring your hair since you were thirty when the gray hairs started coming in faster than you could pluck them out. You have no idea just how gray your hair actually is. By the end of second month the gray roots are showing. When you are feeling well you take the time to carefully disguise your roots with brown hair powder. When you're not feeling well you cover it with a bandanna tied up in an edgy biker style and hope it tells people not to mess with you that day because you're just not having it. As the weeks go by your hair looks frizzy, limp and dull. You don't care so long as it's still on your head. A quick glance in the mirror to make sure there's

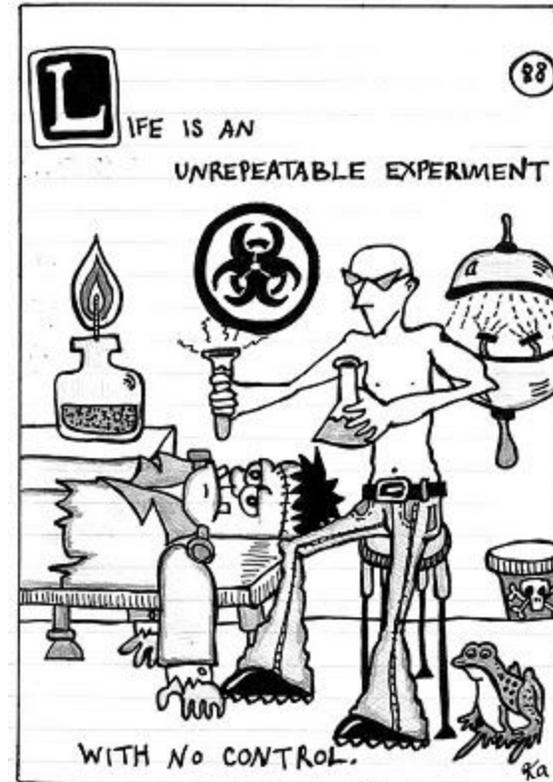
14.

nothing on your face that doesn't belong there. You avoid looking too closely. You don't need to see how sick you are.



Life Drawing (Her Eyes Must Have Been Real Dry by the End) by Amalia Litsa, 2014

15.



Life Is an Unrepeatable Experiment by Katrin Abel ♥

16.



*Merci by Vija G. Mendelson
hand-mixed pigments*

17.



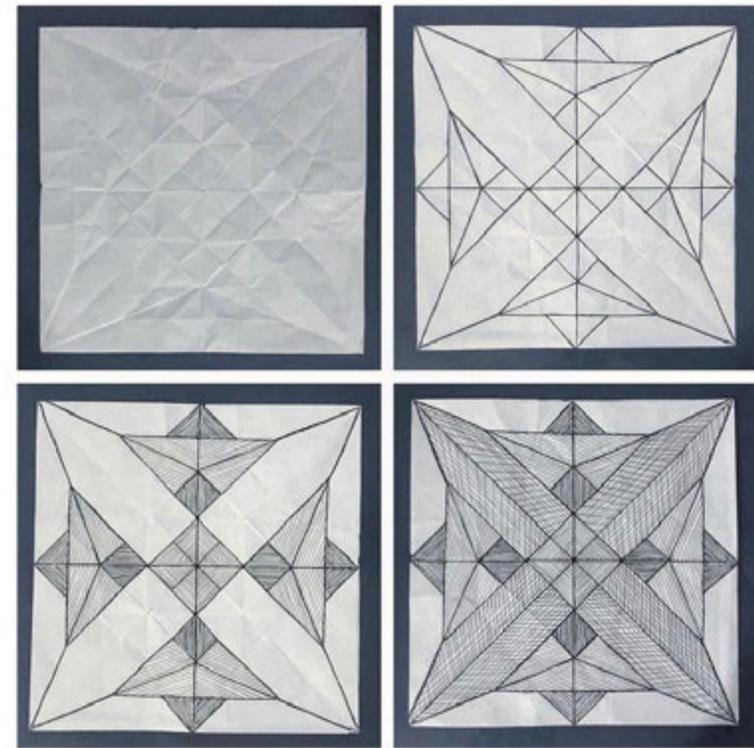
Murals & Signs, August 2020 by Katrin Abel ♥

18.



Murals & Signs, September 2020 by Katrin Abel ♥

19.



Origometry by chris_clear_33

Essay

[Other People's Authors, Part 2](#) by Bryce Wilson

And yet, it would be just as much a mistake to define Amis as a rowdy firebrand as it would to dismiss him as a misanthropic relic. A crank on the right side is still a crank. The fact is,

despite the jet black humor, merciless plotting, and occasional cartoonish character, Amis' fiction, even at his weakest, remains undeniably human.

Take this passage from *The Pregnant Widow*, not a very well regarded novel, but that is to my point. This is a book that even Amis's supporters would admit is second tier (if they're feeling polite) and all of a sudden as it's entering its final turn it hits you with one of the most moving descriptions of sibling love that I've ever read:

with a perceptible spring, as if helped by the toe of a boot, [he] leapt into the brown ocean of riverine slime...Which wasn't so remarkable, perhaps- except that an hour later, after Violet, with buckets and towels, had stripped him and sluiced him and somehow reassembled him he went out and did it again...

...Keith sits reeking in the tiny galley while Violet refills the buckets.

"Vi you must've done that once or twice by now."

"Oh I lost count ages ago," she says.

And attends to him, with patience, with humour, with infinite forgivingness. With sisterly love, in short. And it makes him think that if their roles were reversed then Violet would go all the way—that it would be possible, all your life, to do nothing out again, and clean them up again.

Critics often object to a sense of imperiousness in privileged authors (which Amis, who was virtually born into the trade, certainly is). But the core of Amis' artistic persona, beneath the caustic burn of his sentences and the undeniable glow of his intellect, is insecurity, not invulnerability. There is none of the imperiousness of his long time friend and foil Christopher Hitchens. To read the hideous slow motion apocalypse of *London Fields*, or the hellish thought experiment of *Time's Arrow*, or his near physical disgust when writing about nuclear weapons is to read the work of someone who is just as vulnerable and lost here in existence as you are. He's just able to articulate this discomfort better than just about anyone on the planet. This sense of bewilderment is the key theme to Amis' work. I don't think it's any coincidence that I started really responding to Amis's books when I met my wife, got married, started the job I love, and had to decide whether or not to try for children. The question at the core of his work seems to be, "How can anyone try to build something in a world that seems so fixed on tearing itself apart?"

Perhaps now that those decisions are behind me, Amis will begin to fade from my rotation, until he's just as remote from my reading material as Philip K. Dick is from mine today. But I suspect as long as that core question remains pertinent Martin Amis will always be the first kind of author for me.

I have mixed feelings on that.

22.

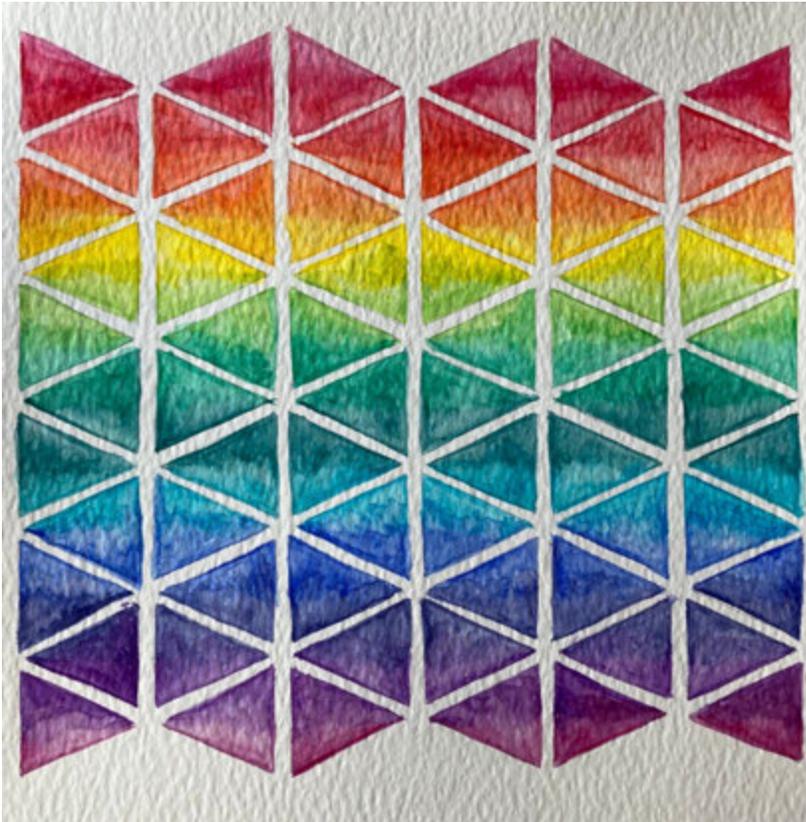


Painting for Late Cambrian by Amalia Litsa, 2014

23.



*Pandemic Watercoloring, Week 2 by Vija G. Mendelson
Watercolor on paper, September 2020*



*Pandemic Watercoloring, Week 3 by Vija G. Mendelson
Watercolor on paper, September 2020*

Flash nonfiction

[Remove the Humans, Restore the Earth](#) by Katrin Abel ♥

In these times of unprecedented environmental, public health, economic, political and social collapse, one simple, elegant solution to all of these problems stares us in the collective, ailing face: voluntary human extinction. Understand, there would be no “death squads.” No one would be killed, and no one would be required to die on any particular schedule; rather, the human race would be allowed and encouraged to stop reproducing and expire naturally. *Homo sapiens* has had a long run, peppered with legitimate ups and devastating downs. Let’s do our planet and every other species a favor and give ourselves a permanent rest before it’s too late. Under Voluntary Human Extinction, if you want to die, you can do so safely and effectively at any time, without stigma. If you want to live, you are welcome to do so for as long as the heavens allow. If you want to have a kid, eat meat, drive a car, whatever, you can do those things, too, if that’s what you’re into, just please be moderate, and plant a few trees while you’re at it. As with our mayor’s Stay at Home, Save Lives order—the longest-standing such order of any city in the world—compliance would be voluntary but extolled and ultimately expected. In the words of Austin Police Chief Brian Manley, in reference to the pandemic, “We just need the community to cooperate.” For a brighter future and the greatest good for the greatest number, please cease procreation, legalize euthanasia for all, and remove the humans to restore the earth. Find more information about the Voluntary Human Extinction Movement (VHEMT) at

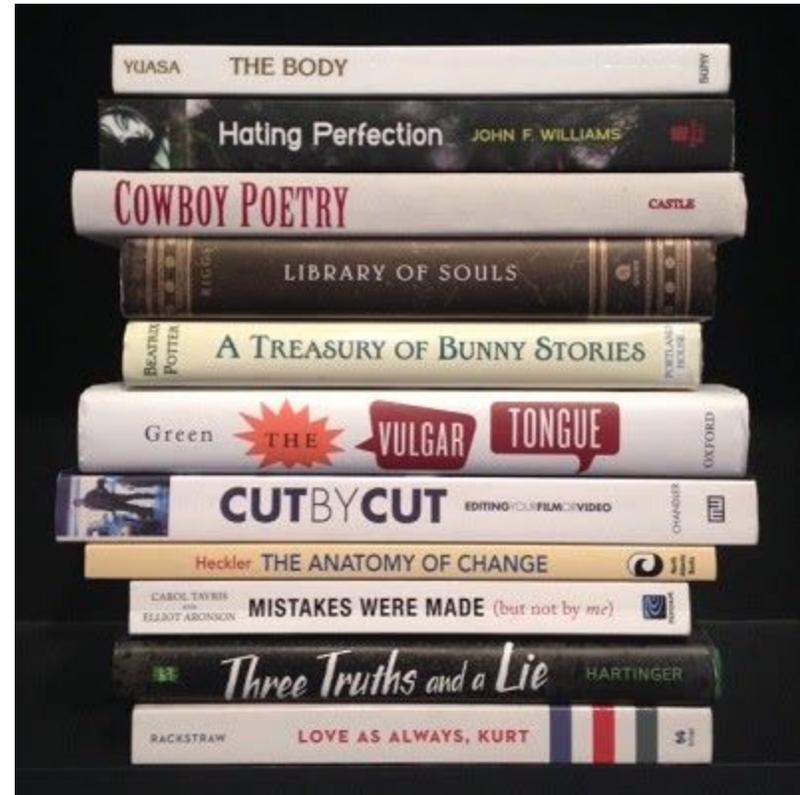
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vhemt.org, and show your support for the fervent wish that we may all “live long and die out.”

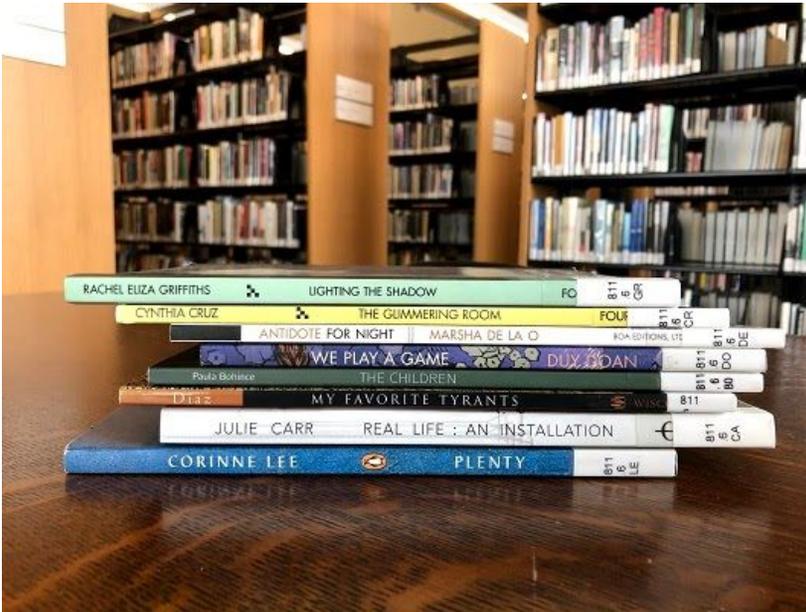


Something About Potatoes by Amalia Litsa, 2014

27.



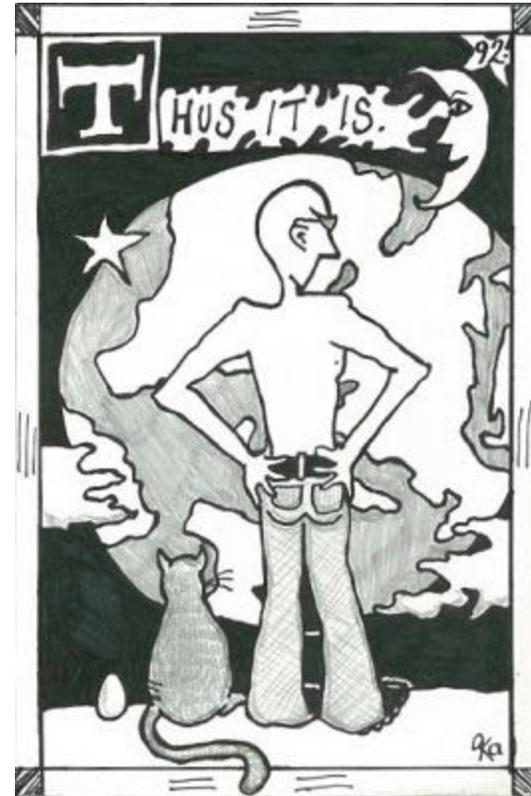
Sorted Books à la Nina Katchadourian by Katrin Abel



Sorted Books - *The Children* by Vija G. Mendelson ♥

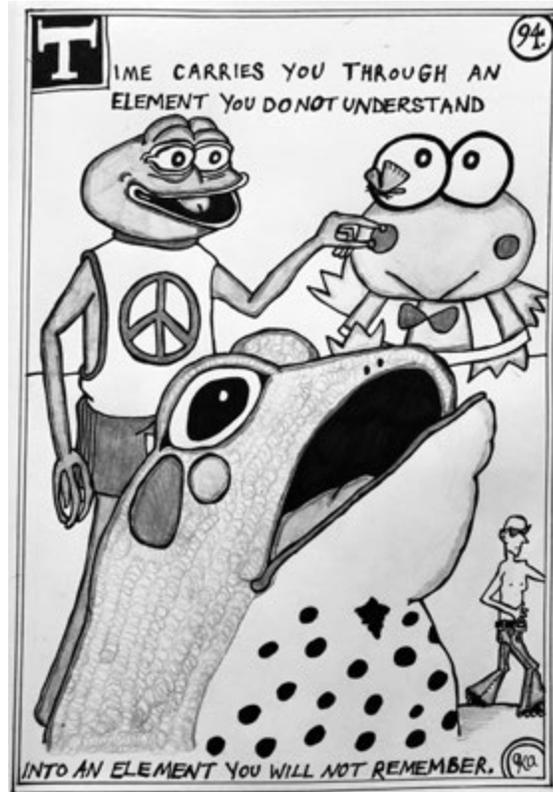
♥♥♥

Dear SignerZ: Does it strike you, too, that many of the entries in this issue do fit the theme Desire Comes, Desire Fades, whether or not their creators intended it? Perhaps meaning is in the eye of the viewer. That said, we'd love our readership and artship to fully embrace the theme sections. Have you got ideas for upcoming themes? Share them here: [Vital SignZ Submission Form](#)



Thus It Is by Katrin Abel

30.



Time Carries You by Katrin Abel ♥
#SavePepe

Check out more Peace Pepes: [Peace Pepe Database of Love](#)

31.

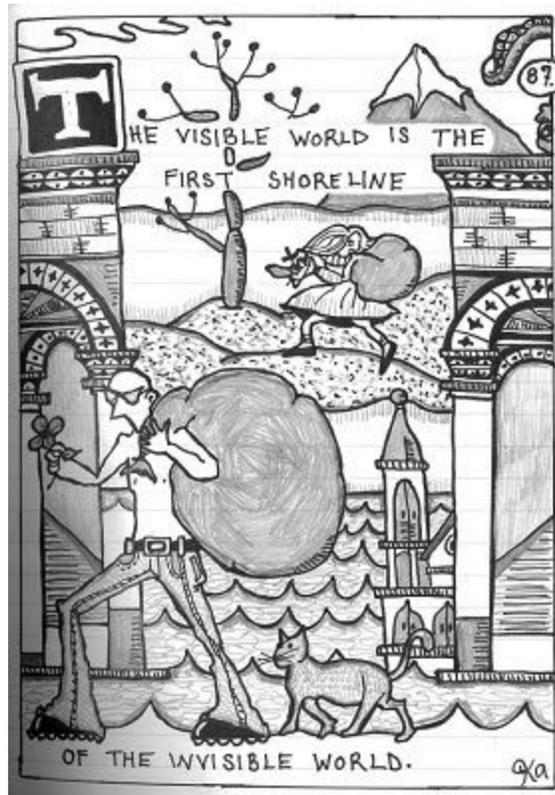
Flash nonfiction

[Virus Journals, Day 152](#) by Katrin Abel

Virus Journals, Day 152: Why Are You Screaming, What Have You Dreamt?

By: Katrin Abel

Near 4 am, I awaken us both with a series of slumber-shattering shrieks. As I try to unwind myself from the nightmare, you console me and ask what it was about. “Umm...monsters? They were trying to eat you?” I lie, chagrined by how it had really gone down: the previous borrower of my library book had torn up one of the barcodes, and I worried I’d be held liable or maybe even lose my job.



The Visible World by Katrin Abel



We Are All Mad by Debbie Schneekloth, 2020



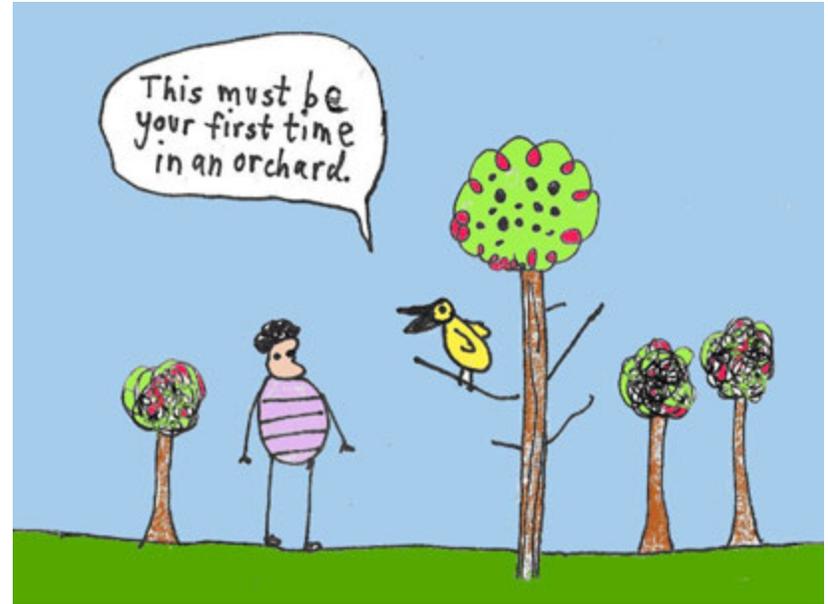
*World Salad by Palfloat (series of 8)
October 2020*



36.



37.





Yarborough Flock by Anonymous

Outro - Design our next covers, choose our next themes

Dear SignerZ: Thanks for joining us or rejoining us, as the case may be. What's in store for us in issue 3? That has yet to be determined. Austin has been under a mayoral Stay at Home Save Lives Wear a Mask Don't Panic but Also Don't Let Down Your Guard order since March 24th of last year, so we're on day 307 of Quarantine Lite, as of this writing, running on fumes, and in need of your help to keep our fingers on the pulse of the community. To recap, here's your mission:

1. Choose our upcoming themes.
2. Design our upcoming covers.
3. As we enter Year 2 of the pandemic, initiate the 2021 versions of nursing a sourdough starter or recreating famous works of art from household materials, and share your works, stories and journeys with us. We can achieve what we believe.

SUBMIT

40.

Meet the Contributors

Bryce Wilson has worked in the book mines lo' these past three years, toiling to bring forth the purest veins of book ore.

Debbie Schneekloth's words for 2021 are Create and Pursue.

Palfloat is a 47 year old dishwasher that appreciates all of the animals.

Katherine O'Brien reports, "Loulou, all my friends are dogs. Cheers, darling!"

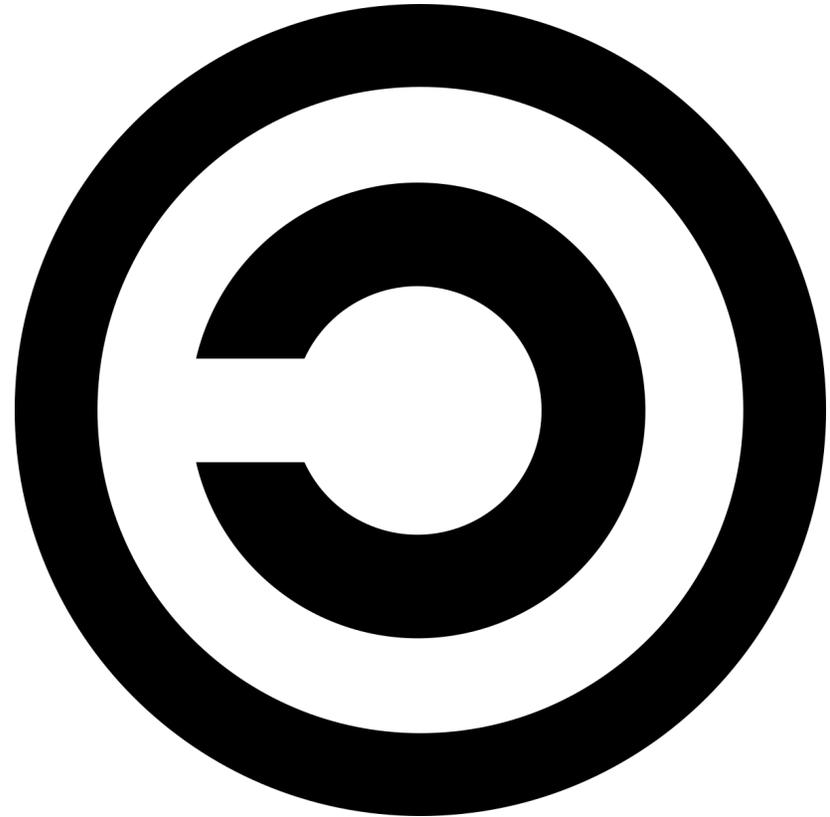
Vija G. Mendelson reads *lots* of books, finds joy playing with color, and loves to travel.

Amalia "Litsa" Litsa loves cycling and co-owns Dear Diary Coffeehouse.

Sheila H. owns four copies of Jane Austen's Pride & Prejudice and is an avid consumer of breakfast food.

chris_clear_33 is an artist and educator with high regard for smart and strong women.

Katrin Abel rides a bicycle and reveres the toad.



2021