

Zalia Griffiths

Portraits

My pieces are
bleach and olive oil

dead plants and misplaced words
coffee-breath and hot wax

fear and homemade talismans
tarot and turmeric

saints and skepticism
I will always be made of these things

patchouli and blackberry jam
so many cardboard boxes

I dissect myself constantly
labeling, bottling, I *identify*

myself, hiding in film strips
and thrifted easy chairs—

the romance, the grit, the aphrodisiac stripes of dusty sun--
Why can't you figure me out?

C. Hiatt O'Connor

Murmurations, Wildflowers

Where horses once were, grass
now grows to the unstained sky:
the cranberry tree frowns in its years.
The wide arc of the hawk finds no mark.

From winter's hard earth comes a tremble
of leaves on naked trees, the jeweled
tangle of Oxeye Daisy, White
Clover, Dandelion, Violet Deadnettle.

She died five years ago. Soft fragments

of that past - starling murmurations,
wildflowers knotting as they strive - turn
soft and sour like patient woodrot:

fallen from horseback, a broken collarbone;
winedrunk mother, wrested. A dead dog's
collar kept in dust on a shelf. We sat to watch
hawks in high ellipses from the porch.

Barefoot I have walked that field, alone
but for the hidden fox, the hawk
who eyed for absent mice. The wind,
in allay, carried only itself.

I saw her only once: leaping
from the tangled grass, from rot
and wildflower. Crescent of crimson, a bow
of live rust. Away, away; softer as she went.

Joshua Price

Summers

I yearn for the summers from my childhood
Where I sat at my rickety desk
Filled with clutter and junk
Staring at the classroom clock
Each tick feeling like an anxiety-driven heartbeat
As I sat in anticipation for summer vacation

I yearn for the summers from my childhood
Where fireflies lit up the night sky
Each having their own dance with darkness
I bolted around their dance floor
Catching one at a time
Then releasing them again into the night sky

I yearn for the summers from my childhood
Where the waves roared and crashed
The sand feeling like molten lava
While I dashed across it
The pungent taste of salt water
As the ocean took me under

I yearn for the summers from childhood
Where the summer sun would beam on me

While I watched America's pastime
The crack of the wooden bats
Balls hitting the back of a glove
And the cheers and jeers of the crowd

Summer eventually winded down
Days got shorter, nights got longer
Time spent became an embedded memory
Autumn came around, and all I could do was
Stare out my window
And yearn for summer

Samah Rash

Maghrib

I sit quietly on top of a floor-cushion, intricately
stitched with gold & turquoise threads. Sounds
of worship pervade the air—the sun is setting:
Maghrib.

Behind the tall, twisted pines, She sinks like warm honey
into the hills, horizon pinkly-glowing. I hold
two strands of thread, one black & one white, up to the sky
& cannot tell the difference. That is how I know
it's time.

I hear *Maman* in the kitchen attacking the bottom of the rice pot
with a metal spoon; scraping out the crispy delicacy
for us children to eat, while my sister stands in front of the stove
and pours blisteringly-hot tea into crystal glasses.

The house is heavy with the smell of saffron & sour cherry rice.
I sit and watch the elders pray. Their foreheads are flattened from years
of prostration—continuous & repetitive motions. My mother walks in,
gesturing for me to come taste the *sheer berenj*. I say,
why does *Maman bozorg* still pray?
Is she not God by now?
I'd rather worship her anyway.