

SPRING 2018

October Hill

MAGAZINE



October Hill

M A G A Z I N E



Volume 2, Issue 1

Welcome to October Hill Magazine

Welcome to the one-year anniversary of *October Hill Magazine*.

It's been an exciting and eventful year. We are pleased to present you with an issue that we feel extremely proud of and hope that you will enjoy. First, you may notice that the design of the magazine has changed. It is one of our goals as a publication to keep advancing and to strive towards what makes us better. Just the same, we are committed to publishing some of the best short stories, poems, and visuals from authors and artists of all experiences.

In commemoration of making it through our first year, we would like to forego our usual introduction and instead present to you a Q&A session between the Editorial Director, Richard Merli, and Editor, Samantha Morley.



This is a very exciting time for *October Hill Magazine* and for me personally. We've cleared the hurdle of our first year and are poised to broaden our editorial offerings and grow into new areas in 2018. I feel as if we have already gone a long way toward fulfilling our mission of creating a platform for new and aspiring authors of short stories and poetry. It's certainly gratifying to see how the literary community has embraced us.

Table of Contents

Fiction

He's a Lucky Man	1
By Ann Ormsby	
Night Flight	5
By Mollie Reznick	
La Fiesta de San Felipe	14
By Rosalina Diaz	
Repentance	25
By Pei-Hsuan Hsieh	
Colored Compulsions	32
By Maeghan Suzik	

Poetry

Godiva	43
By Megan Anning	
Adoring You	45
By Rodney Paige	
Leaving Rome	47
By Paulette Guerin	
My River Never Runs Dry	48
By Milton Ehrlich	
By the Creek	50
By Shawen Greer	
Night	52
By Assad Ali	
The Moth	53
By Christina Manubag	
To My Dad	55
By Lorraine Damonte	
Invitation	57
By Joan McNerney	
A Street in Union Square	59
By Hannah Bub	

Visuals

Robert Cosmar	13
Annaick Caraes	38

A special thank you to our volunteers:

Tim Brinkof

Adam Dicce

Hester Malin

Mai Tran

Kelly Garriott White

Visuals by Robert Cosmar



Cleansing by the Creek



Powder Blue Softness

Robert Cosmar is an amateur photographer specializing in High Dynamic Range photography. His interest has been lifelong, but now is a passion to express his feelings in images at this stage of life.

La Fiesta de San Felipe

By Rosalina Diaz

The town of San Felipe was picturesque as a postcard. Festive lights glittered from palm trees surrounding the town square, adding to the brilliance of the star-filled sky. Sounds of splashing water emanated from a fountain. The band played a lively mix of merengue and salsa. In the midst of the square, Isobel could make out a swirling sea of brightly colored skirts. Her uncle, Marco, walked her over to one of the *kioscos* selling café, dulces típicos, frituras and other Puerto Rican specialties. They ordered virgin coladas and *alcapurrias* and joined the couples sitting on stone benches. Isobel's eyes wandered to the Spanish Colonial-style cathedral that dominated the eastern end of the plaza. Wreaths of hibiscus and bougainvillea flowers hung on the doors. The façade was white with a soft blue trim and renaissance-style windows that glowed from within with an unnatural red light. The building was very old and appeared to be standing guard over the plaza. Marco noticed where Isobel was staring.

“Beautiful, isn't it?”

“Yeah, but kinda creepy.” Marco looked at the church pensively. The few days he had spent in the sun since their arrival in Puerto Rico were already reflected on his skin; the bronze glow visible evidence of his indigenous ancestry. In spite of the tiny lines at the corners of his intense gray eyes, Marco looked more handsome than ever. Coming back home had definitely agreed with him.

“Hmm...actually, *el Catedral de San Felipe* has a very compelling history. The locals think it's cursed by demons.”

“Seriously? People still believe in demons here?”

“You'd be surprised at the superstitions that survive in these small isolated *pueblos*. Spanish settlers built the Cathedral in the mid-17th century, but they unknowingly built it over a *Taino* burial ground. According to locals, the ancient God of the underworld, *Maquetaurie Guayaba*, sent an earthquake to destroy it in November 1787. It was not rebuilt for almost 60 years, due to several

‘suspicious mishaps’. Then three days later, another earthquake struck, causing significant damage to the structure. That time, it took almost a half century to repair, only to have the vault collapse in the earthquake of 1918.”

“You gotta be kidding, *Tio*. Three earthquakes?”

“*Imagine!* Local government officials were ready to give up on the church, but a prominent founding family intervened and funded the renovations. To me, the church has always seemed more a monument to European stubbornness and persistence than to God.”

“But is the story true, *Tio*?”

“Well, the history is very real. As for the rest of it, who knows? I think all stories have a seed of truth in them and, apparently, the locals agree. They leave fruit offerings every day to appease the ‘*Op’a*’ bat spirits, guardians of *Coabay*, the underworld.”

“Cool. Sooo, the *Taino* history and culture survived too, right?”

“Yeah, I guess that’s right, Isa.”

“What are the bat spirits supposed to look like?”

“Like you and me, but better looking. According to *Taino* legends, they wander the forest at night trying to lure unsuspecting humans. They engage you with witty conversation, but follow them at your peril. Those who do, never return.” Isobel stared into the night thoughtfully. “There is one way to identify them though. They have no belly buttons.” Isobel looked at him incredulously and laughed aloud.

“You had me going there, *Tio*.”

“What do you mean? I’m not kidding, Isa. They don’t have belly buttons because they are not born of human women.”

“Yeah, right,” Isobel responded sarcastically. Before Marco could explain further, Luis Miguel’s *No Se Tu*, began playing over the sound system. It was one of Isobel’s all-time favorite ballads. Then, almost as if she had willed it, a devastatingly handsome guy was standing before her. Isobel almost choked on her drink. He was dressed all in black and wore form-fitting jeans and a *guayabera*. It was open slightly at the neck and the sleeves were rolled up exposing strong well-defined arms almost completely covered by an elaborate ivy tattoo. His hair was pulled back into a

ponytail, which accentuated his strong jaw, full mouth and midnight blue eyes.

When Isobel looked at him, his mouth opened ever so slowly, his tongue darting out to moisten his lips. Then, as if catching himself, he closed his mouth quickly and looked away, purposely avoiding eye contact with her. Unable to speak, Isobel glanced over at her uncle who was openly staring at a petite young woman standing next to the guy.

“Adan, it’s good to see you.” Marco extended his hand to the young man. “I don’t think you’ve been formally introduced to my niece, Isobel. She’s visiting from New York City for her summer break before starting college.” Adan shook Marco’s hand and then glanced at Isobel for only a second, barely acknowledging her.

“Dr. Ortiz, I just wanted to make sure you were alright.” When he spoke, his words, deep and resonant, caressed Isobel’s skin like crushed velvet and left her tingling.

“Thank you, Adan. If you hadn’t come along when you did the other day, I would probably still be sitting in that junk heap of a car in the *Cordillera Central* praying for a miracle,” her uncle added.

“It was our pleasure,” the young woman responded, her voice deep and sultry. When Isobel turned to look at Adan, she caught him staring, but he when their eyes met he quickly looked away. His behavior both troubled and intrigued her. He seemed indifferent to her presence.

“This is my sister, *Irka, Señor...*” Adan dropped his eyes and paused for a moment to gather his thoughts and Isobel noticed that his cheeks reddened slightly. “With your permission, *Señor*. Isobel, would you honor me with this dance?” His request caught Isobel off guard. How could he ignore her so completely and then expect her to dance with him?

“I’m sorry but I don’t dance.” Isobel responded curtly.

“*Por favor*, Isobel,” Irka insisted. Isobel noticed an unusual accent. “Please say yes. Otherwise, I will have to dance with him all night. He will not let me dance with anyone else.”

“Well, we certainly can’t have that,” Marco responded too quickly. For a moment, they all stood in awkward silence and time stood still. Isobel could suddenly make out the sounds of a group of men playing dominoes just outside the plaza, the *bones* hitting the table with a jarring crack. Then Marco laughed, breaking the tension, and gave Adan a small nod of assent. Adan took

Isobel's hand and led her out onto the dance floor. He pulled her body toward his gently but firmly. Her arms instinctively went around his neck. She felt herself tremble and hoped he could not feel it. Adan stood a full head above her. His arm around her waist felt like a steel vise – solid and unbreakable. Isobel allowed her head to rest gently on his chest. He responded by pulling her closer and she suddenly felt very conscious of herself as a woman.

Marco watched Adan lead Isobel onto the dance floor and then immediately redirected his attention to Irka. She was staring out at the dancers in the plaza. She was a rare beauty; impossibly smooth, porcelain skin; dark, luxuriant hair; lips so ripe and moist they seemed about to burst, and a petite frame that disguised a sinful voluptuousness. She turned to him, her large eyes black beyond all imagining. He felt himself falling into that darkness to some unknown doom. Mercifully, she lowered her eyes, coquettishly fanning her long lashes over pale cheeks. And then she smiled, a shy smile that sent a jolt of sensation through his body. She dipped her head and turned away, as if embarrassed by his frank appraisal. He leaned over and whispered in her ear.

“How about a walk?” She nodded her assent. He took her hand and led her away from the plaza and the crowds. Her hand was warm and moist like the Puerto Rican night air that surrounded them.

“Where are you taking me?” she asked.

“Does it matter?” He watched her as she stared off, as if in thought, before responding.

“No. I would go anywhere with you.” She leaned into him and her breast inadvertently brushed against his bare arm. He felt a tingle race through him, igniting long buried desires. He watched her expression and caught the briefest of smiles flit across her perfect features. There was no doubt in his mind that she knew exactly what she was doing. They walked through the labyrinthine narrow streets of *San Felipe*. The town was well maintained and constructed in *reticulos*, a well-organized grid system established by imperial decree and set forth in *Las Leyes Indias*, for all towns built in the New World prior to the 19th Century.

But the outskirts were abandoned and desolate, the structures crumbling and in severe disrepair. Marco began to doubt the wisdom of walking in this part of the *pueblo* at night, and was

just about to suggest they turn around, when they reached the edge of town. They followed a small dirt road that climbed into hilly woods. Within moments they had lost sight of the plaza and were surrounded by forest sounds; the whistling of coquis, the hum of insects, the occasional beep of the Puerto Rican Tody.

Irka leaned back against a huge Ceiba tree invitingly. Marco placed his hands on the rough bark on either side of her. He leaned into her slowly, carefully gauging her reactions. He could feel her warm sweet breath at the base of his neck as she arched her back very slightly, suggestively pressing her breasts against him. The smell of Patchouli, and something else, wafted up to him from her silken hair. He felt drunk, his senses overwhelmed. He closed his eyes, considering his next move, when she suddenly slipped under his arms and ran off into the woods, her deep throaty laughter trailing behind her. He fell against the tree and leaned his forehead against the cool bark to regain his equilibrium.

“Marco...” He could hear her calling him in the distance and stumbled forward, feeling compelled to follow her. He thought he saw her running between some trees just ahead, but she moved so quickly he thought he must have imagined it. And then the thick brush opened into a small clearing by a creek and there she was, sitting by the water, waiting for him. Her blouse had fallen off one shoulder, exposing more of her perfect porcelain skin which seemed to be glowing in the moonlight.

She reached out to him, eyes hungry like a wild animal, and he rushed forward catapulting himself on top of her like an untried schoolboy, pressing her into the soft grassy earth with the weight of his body.

“Am I hurting you?” He mumbled while his lips trailed kisses along the smooth column of her neck. She only laughed and pulled him closer. The rational part of his mind watched critically from afar. This sudden urgency he felt startled him. His experience told him to go slow and easy, but something was driving him hard, and it dawned on him that if he did not slow down this would be over before it even got started.

Suddenly, Marco sensed that something was very wrong. Before he could think twice, he was thrown backwards onto the ground. Black clouds swallowed the moon and the night slipped into

complete darkness. Marco could barely make out Irka's silhouette, as she climbed on top of him. He felt her fumbling with his pants before a searing pain made him convulse and spasm uncontrollably. The pain was so intense, his vision blurred and his limbs grew weak. What the hell had she done to him? He reached out blindly and grabbed a handful of her silken hair. She easily escaped his grasp and his hand dropped uselessly to his side. He had the strangest notion that he should have checked her for a belly button. He laughed weakly and surrendered to unconsciousness, as black soulless eyes watched over him dispassionately from a blue iridescent face.

Isobel looked up to find Adan studying her with penetrating blue eyes. His expression was cold and distant. She responded indignantly.

“Why did you do that?”

“Excuse me?” Adan answered, confused.

“I mean asking my uncle permission to dance with me? I do what I want. I don't need anyone's permission.” Adan studied her for a moment before responding.

“Honestly, Isobel, I am not concerned with what you want. It is a matter between men. You are a female in his charge and, as such, I owe him a measure of respect. It has nothing to do with you.” Isobel was momentarily too flabbergasted by Adan's words to react. What the hell was with this guy? She pushed on his chest and turned to walk away but Adan quickly reached out and caught her by the upper arm.

“Let me go, Adan. This dance is over.” She struggled to free herself but Adan's hold on her was too strong.

“Be still, Isobel. People are staring. I apologize if I offended you. It was not my intention. At least allow me to escort you back to your uncle without shaming us both.” Isobel stopped squirming and turned to face him. Her anger was softened by his remorseful expression. She suddenly felt a strange warmth spreading through her limbs and found she was having trouble focusing.

“Are you alright, Isobel?” His voice sounded very close to her ear and she realized she was

in his arms again. How exactly that had happened she was not sure.

“Hmmm? Oh, yeah. I’m fine. Just a little dizzy.”

“Isobel, would you permit a personal question?” He inclined his head slightly so she could hear him over the music. Adan’s scent was overpowering, a blend of woods, the ocean, the night and something deeper. He smelled like the Earth itself, natural and primitive. She was finding it increasingly difficult to focus on his words.

“Uh huh...”

“How old are you?”

“Seventeen.” She felt his body stiffen slightly. “Why? How old are you?” Adan did not respond or even acknowledge the question.

“Are you alright, Adan?”

“Your uncle and my sister seem to have disappeared,” he responded, looking around distractedly.

“No worries. Your sister is perfectly safe with my uncle.”

“It’s not my sister I am worried about. Irka can be very impulsive, unpredictable. I wouldn’t want your uncle getting hurt.” His words seemed to be coming at her from very far away and her body felt strangely light. Isobel closed her eyes.

“Isobel...?” When she opened her eyes again, Adan’s arms were wrapped tightly around her, concern etched on his face.

“What happened?”

“You fainted. We need to find your uncle. You should go home, immediately.”

“What? No, I’m fine. I don’t want to ruin my uncle’s evening. Can we just sit down for a minute?” Adan nodded and led Isobel to an unoccupied bench near the fountain.

“Shall I get you something to drink or eat?”

“No. I’m fine.”

“Are you comfortable? We could go into the *cafeteria*. It’s air-conditioned.”

“Please, stop making a fuss.” Adan’s sudden concern for her was disconcerting. In fact, his rapid-fire mood changes were starting to give her whiplash. Isobel leaned back and closed her eyes, but Adan’s silent presence at her side was unnerving.

“Where are you from, Adan? You’re not originally from San Felipe, are you?”

“Yes... and no. We have no home to speak of. We are *gitanos*... like gypsies.”

“What about school?”

“We’ve never gone to school. The world is our school; Life, our teacher.” Isobel considered his words. Her life had been built on the premise that academic success was necessary for a secure future. The lifestyle he spoke of now challenged that belief. It was a foreign, but intriguing, concept.

“What about dating, falling in love, marriage, kids?”

“We don’t marry outside our own people. It’s forbidden.” Isobel was suddenly distraught. She noticed that he was staring at her face intently again, as if searching for a reaction.

“You don’t look well, Isobel. We should find your uncle and Irka.” This time Isobel did not argue. The air between them had grown thick with tension and Isobel was suffocating. Adan helped her to her feet and they began walking silently back to the dance area. She looked around and noticed that the door to the church was ajar. The light that escaped beckoned to her. She broke away from Adan’s side and ran toward the church.

“Isobel... wait!” She did not look back. He did not follow. No doubt he was relieved to be rid of her. He had probably only asked her to dance out of some misplaced sense of social obligation. Had she only imagined the chemistry between them? How utterly humiliating.

Isobel dipped her fingers in the holy water and made the sign of the cross on her forehead before walking down the center aisle to the sanctuary. An old, partially damaged wooden crucifix hung just behind the church altar. The Christ figure was wearing a loincloth draped across his narrow hips, as was the norm, but the right side was broken off, exposing the full length of a lean but muscular thigh and hip. Brownish-red blood ran down his sun-bronzed face from the crown of thorns on his head and down the side of his pale body from the deep gash in his side. Scraggly dark

hair partially obscured midnight blue eyes that were down cast and pained. Isobel, drawn in by those eyes, was suddenly overwhelmed by unexpected emotions - anger, bitterness... betrayal? She was startled from her reverie by someone tugging on her arm and turned to see a tiny white haired old woman. Her crinkly pale skin stood out in sharp contrast to her black dress, and her white hair was pulled back in a chignon at the base of her skull.

“*Mi’ja, estas en peligro.*” When Isobel did not respond the old woman tried again in broken English. “You are in danger, my child. The Demonios... they have marked you. *Me permites?*” Isobel nodded and lowered her eyes respectfully. The old woman placed her hands upon Isobel’s forehead and mumbled a prayer of protection. Then she made the sign of the cross over Isobel’s head. “If you need us, we are here, always here, in the Church. You will find us again when the time comes. *Si?*” Isobel nodded again and then rushed down the center aisle and out of the church. As she looked around for her uncle, her gaze landed upon the fountain. From a distance, she had assumed the winged statue on top of the fountain was an angel. She had been mistaken. It was a male demon with huge bat-like wings, screaming up to heaven. Inside the fountain, at the demon’s feet, was a woman, either unconscious or dead. The entire image was beyond beautiful. It was haunting and terrifying.

“It’s called *El Fuente de los Murcielagos.*” The disembodied voice almost made Isobel jump out of her skin. “I’m sorry *Senorita* Isobel, did I frighten you?” Isobel turned to see a tall dark young man wearing loose fitting blue jeans and a black tee shirt.

“I’m sorry, do I know you?” He shrugged nonchalantly.

“Perhaps. It’s a small town. I’m Angel.” His broad smile was contagious and Isobel found herself smiling back at him. “The fountain has an interesting history. Do you know it?”

“Let me guess,” Isobel responded sarcastically. “It has something to do with demons.” Angel laughed out loud and Isobel laughed with him, feeling immediately at ease.

“I see you’ve already heard some of our local legends. But the story of the fountain is really a love story. I will tell it to you some day. But tell me, are you enjoying your time in San Felipe?”

“I’m still trying to decide.”

“Well perhaps I can help. Would you honor me with a dance under the stars?” Isobel looked around nervously.

“I should be looking for my uncle. He must be worried about me.”

“Dr. Ortiz? Isn’t that him? He doesn’t look worried to me.” Isobel spotted Marco dancing a *merengue* with Irka. He looked young and happy, Isobel almost didn’t recognize him. They made a striking pair. As Isobel watched, Irka whispered something in Marco’s ear and he threw back his head and laughed aloud, pulling Irka closer. Inexplicably, a feeling of dread washed over Isobel and settled, heavy as a stone, in the pit of her stomach.

“Are you okay, Isobel?”

“What? Oh, sure. I’m great. What was that you were saying about a dance?” Angel grinned and took her hand in a spontaneous gesture as he pulled her onto the dance floor.

Adan stepped out from behind the fountain, his expression grim. He watched Isobel and Angel dancing, feeling utterly powerless. He had always prided himself on his detachment, a trait that had enabled him to survive the unnaturally long years of his life and the horror of his existence. But the moment his eyes had met hers, all that had altered. With one look, she had carelessly cracked the hard shell he had so painstakingly built around his soul and, in that instant, his world shifted. He had been driven to see her, to understand why, after all these years, he should respond so powerfully to a mere girl. But in so doing, he had inadvertently put her in mortal danger. Irka had already staked a claim, and now Angel... Too late now to retreat. If he didn’t take action, someone else would, and he couldn’t bear that – not with Isobel. He sauntered over to the church and listened beneath an open window, deriving some small comfort from the prayers of the old women. He sensed the moment they felt his presence, and one voice rose strong and powerful above the others. It was Dona Amparo, the old witch.

“*Auferetur Daemonium!* Begone Demon! There is no salvation for you here.” He sighed and whispered, just loud enough for her ears.


“*Te videre in inferos, Witch!*” and walked away bitterly.

The heat was stifling. Isobel had been floating in and out of sleep for several hours before finally rising to look out her window. The waxing moon illuminated the trees outside with an otherworldly light, enhancing shapes and shadows. She froze. A man stood under her window, his hair loose and wild, his shirt open and exposing an ivy tattoo that glowed crimson in the moonlight. It was Adan. He looked troubled. She stepped back from her window and was immediately aware of a change in the air. It was infused with a scent, primitive and earthy.

“Isobel.” She turned and saw Adan standing beside her bed, in her room. She grabbed a bed sheet to cover herself and looked at him in stunned silence. He stared back with an intensity that immobilized her, his scent, now all around her, making her dizzy.

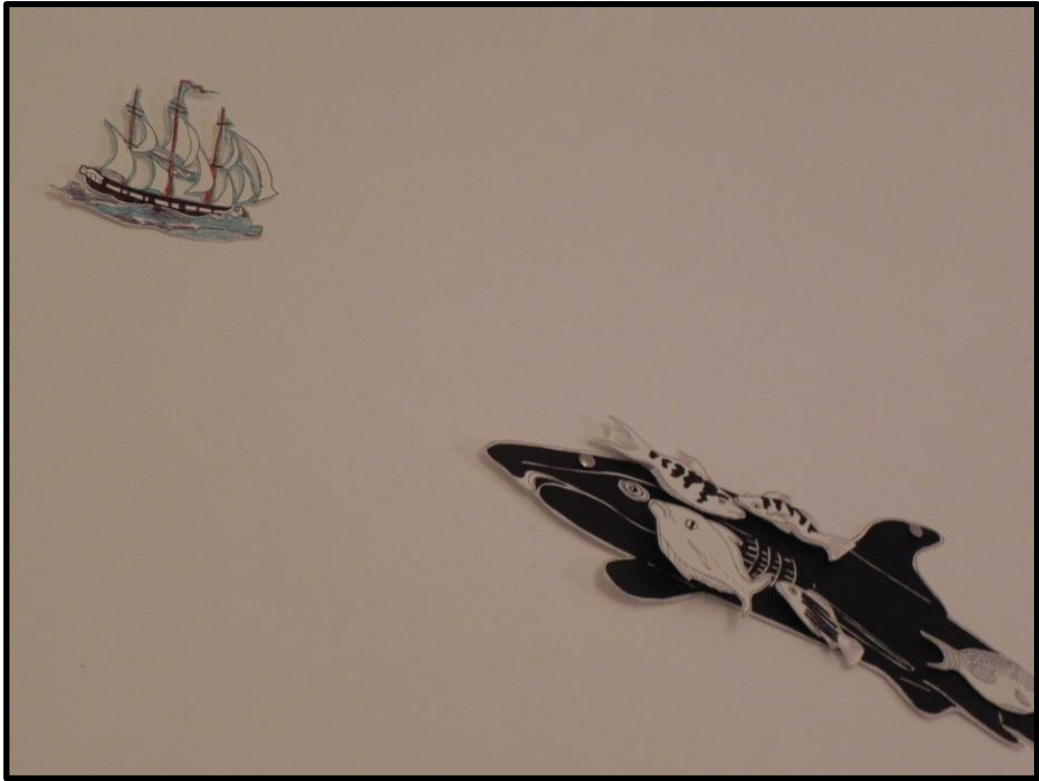
“Close your eyes, Isobel.”

“What?”

“Close your eyes, baby. You’re dreaming.” His voice was soft, sultry, seductive. Isobel’s eyes closed of their own volition and the white bed sheet slipped from her fingers. 

Anthropologist and Associate Professor, Rosalina Diaz incorporates the rich cultural history and mythology of Puerto Rico into her fiction. She has published several research articles and chapters, including a memoir, “The Amazon of Matinino: A Personal Legacy of Female Empowerment in the Greater Antilles,” and most recently, “Grito de Caguana: Identity Conflict in Puerto Rico” in *O Brave New World*’. “La Fiesta de San Felipe” is based on the complete book one of “Nocturne: The San Felipe Incubus Chronicles.” She currently resides in Puerto Rico, assisting in recovery efforts in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria.

Visuals by Annaick Caraes



The artist focuses on the simplicity of the action. There is something disturbing here, but despite the differences in size, we do not quite know why. The paper and felt materials highlight the minimalism and the fear. Perhaps the most notable aspect is the use of space.



A couple passes each other, maybe in the street. They are only going to cross but they tell everyone that they would have liked to have spoken to each other. But this spark is fleeting and captured only in this moment of misconnection. The material of papier-mâché - both fragile and strong - echoes this single moment in time.



The image of the bird: freedom as we know it. The artist's theme of birds is recurrent, and they use this old symbol to mimic this longing for freedom. It is the oldest dream in the world - to fly. This is the technique of the monotype. A form of printing that can only be done once but is painted again with different colors to emulate different birds. In this way, we are all distinct patterns and pictures, but at the core we share a basic stamp.

Annaick Canaes is a graduate in visual arts from the University of Rennes, France. She likes to play with images and mix different visuals. She works with oil paint, acrylic, gouache, and, more recently, linocut and papier-mâché. She has worked with Bordas-Larousse, the magazine Sciences et Vie Junior and Editions Michel Lebrun. Annaick also teaches drawing at the Philotechnique Association.