



# memoryhouse

winter 2018

issue no. 19

memoryhouse | winter 2018 | issue no. 19

*wander*

# wander

In this issue of *memoryhouse*, we leave our map behind and **wander** into uncharted territory. The beauty of wandering comes from its lack of purpose or destination. It can take many forms, from walking through a forest to getting lost in thought. Sometimes these journeys are peaceful, allowing us to experience the beauty of our surroundings; other times they fill us with doubt and disillusionment. The poems featured in this issue tell the stories of many different wanderers and their travels, both real and imagined.

## memoryhouse magazine table of contents • winter 2018

<b>what it means to live here</b> .....	<b>9</b>
alice may	
<b>pacific dreams</b> .....	<b>12</b>
soledad caballero	
<b>estivation</b> .....	<b>17</b>
devon balwit	
<b>day like few others</b> .....	<b>20</b>
janet m. powers	
<b>uncertainty</b> .....	<b>24</b>
bekah steimel	
<b>better off</b> .....	<b>28</b>
charlotte ring	
<b>wandering in plant time</b> .....	<b>32</b>
janet m. powers	
<b>blue sky terrified</b> .....	<b>36</b>
caroline carter	
<b>the order of things</b> .....	<b>38</b>
soledad caballero	
<b>the illusion of forward motion</b> .....	<b>42</b>
devon balwit	

# memoryhouse staff

## *editors-in-chief*

meera joshi  
abbie reeves

## print

### *editorial board*

vanessa ma  
brooke nagler  
marisol sobek

## design

### *design editor*

abbie reeves

### *photographers*

estelle higgins  
cameron lam  
brooke nagler  
james young

**memoryhouse** is a quarterly student-run publication that curates the personal narratives of the uchiago community and beyond through creative writing and visual art. our performance ensemble, **memento**, tells stories through spoken word poetry.

to learn about joining memoryhouse or submitting work, please visit [chicagomemoryhouse.wordpress.com](http://chicagomemoryhouse.wordpress.com)

## memento

### *performance director*

may huang

### *performance ensemble*

kelly collins  
isabel getz  
chi le

founded 2012, alida miranda-wolff  
cover photo by matthew barron





# what it means to live here

*alice may*

I sewed buttons to my back to remind me  
of clean, but they always fell off,  
and my mother was home.

I breathed through my shoulders  
like so many young girls afraid of stomachs.  
My lungs stretched in vain for the air.

I lived on salt water, filling lungs to the top;  
air the shallow reverse, through recoiling veins--  
They fell out of my body.

I ran and my heels felt bones  
echoing through thickening chambers of skin.  
My eyes leaked lost marrow.

Grass grew in through my pores, staying  
with me long after I stood;  
This rug under my feet felt criminal.

This house was ready to let me  
go, but my feet stuck to her hardwood floor.  
I broke so much china.

I couldn't remember the last time I had  
forgotten so much; I was new in sunlight,  
it steeped hot in my hair.

Shaving cream lathered from my mouth, and I felt  
beautiful and afraid.  
Rabid dogs have nothing left to lose.



bhavesh patel

# pacific dreams

*soledad caballero*

How long since my body carried joy. Since my hands my legs plunged into the cold ache of the Pacific. How long since my bones felt the bite of the water, its sting of sand and seaweed. Strange, dream ocean. It leaves me breathless, this memory. Eyes closed, head submerged beneath the waves, dark cocoon of foam and salt engulfing everything. Beneath the waves, my whole body a muffled, quivering heartbeat.







# estivation

*devon balwit*

(I)

my face is tired of whiteness and blackness / age and youth / just as  
my body /

would rather slough penis and breasts / for ornamental artichokes /  
or the small raised

flag of a mailbox at dawn / no more allegiances // petitions can line  
the compost bin //

my organism will click nothing / but my tongue / or better yet / slide  
it over dark earth / a wandering gastropod // flicker paradiddles against  
the flue / the only barrage I duck /

sheltering between one word and the next / safe in the not yet  
made//

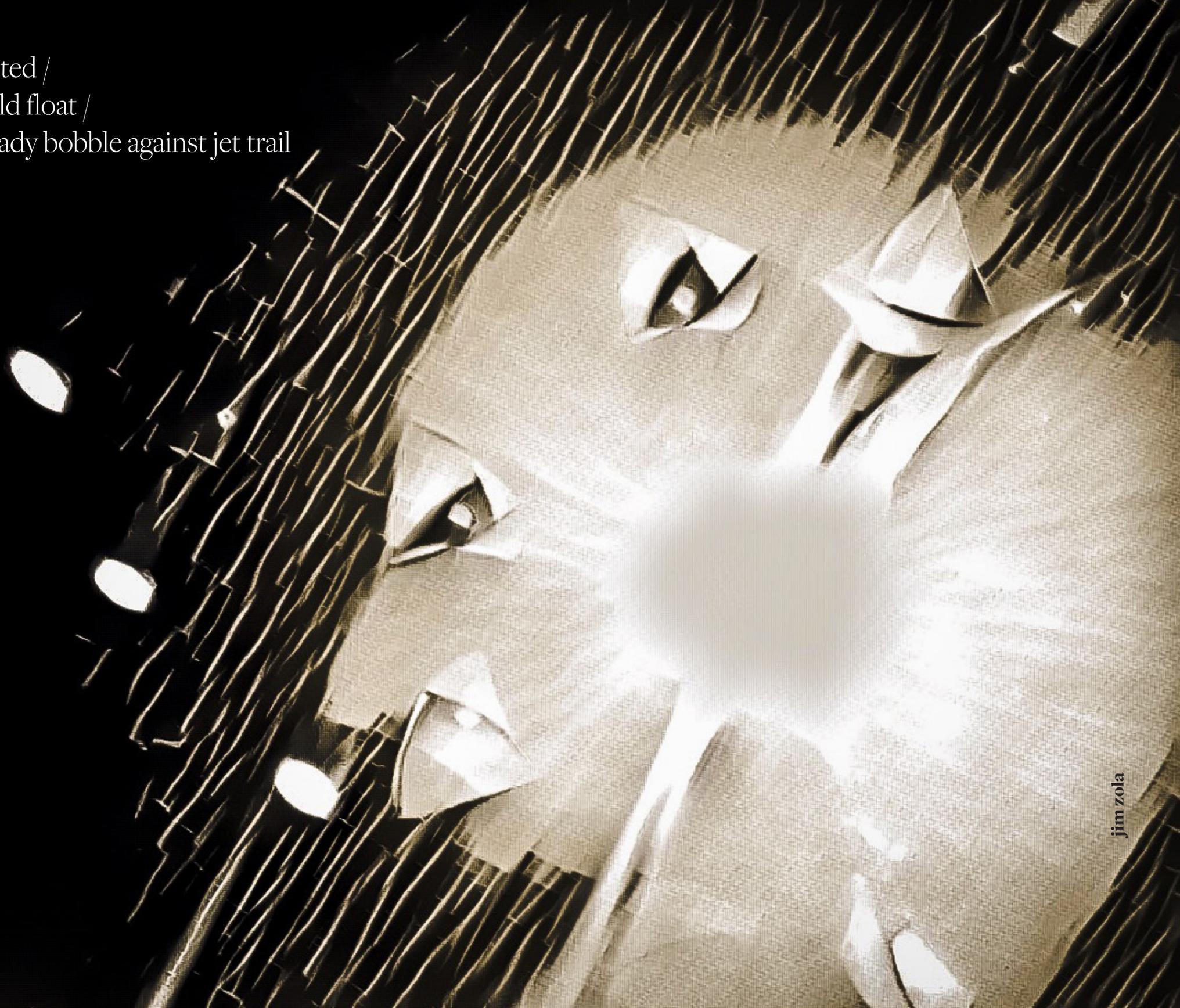
(II)

why rush to identify // would a small placard—*helix aspersa*—shield  
me from beaks? // would congregating / beneath the same slab / make  
me more of something / than a trail through leaf mold? // perhaps / if  
permitted / ego would float / an unsteady bobble against jet trail / more  
than shell / more than love dart//

(III)

to speak / means to propagate fiction / a tentacular groping / from  
an ever-diminishing whorl//

if permitted /  
ego would float /  
an unsteady bobble against jet trail



# day like few others

janet m. powers

Plodding her morning circuit out  
to Robert E. Lee's horse and back,  
she found it a day like few others  
(deep blue sky, cool, bright breeze),  
so she just kept walking, shocked  
at herself in setting off suddenly  
without water, sandwich or fruit.  
But she was charmed by the corner  
of a cornfield and how it angled  
green against a tongue of golden rye.

The paths belonged to her that day:  
twenty thousand people elsewhere  
re-enacting one bloody battle  
of the Civil War, as if we hadn't  
violence enough in our own time,  
smart missiles so much sleeker than  
minie balls (both deathly wrong).  
Speed is how this epoch finds its  
ecstasy, but her *ekstasis* springs  
from grander things: the way the wind  
whinnies through the boughs of one  
ancient ash or slides in waves through  
ripening hay; how a Charolais stands  
patiently as cowbirds dine, picking  
their fill of insects from his head.

As if by grace came woodland gifts:  
for her hunger first, wineberries;  
then a fawn bounded from a thicket,  
his spotted back arching russet;  
a woodpecker appeared, red-headed,  
patriotic drummer pounding on a tree.  
For hours she walked without stopping  
in the spirit that brought ancestors  
out of Cymru to these shores, then  
out across the country to Kansas.  
Something she had not done before  
in her own country: breaking routine,  
letting her feet go where they would.  
What the ordinary shape of that day,  
had she not just kept on walking?



melinda bonnett

Speed is how this epoch finds its  
ecstasy, but her *ekstasis* springs  
from grander things

gretchen gales

# uncertainty

*bekah steimel*

Am I sitting on a mountain  
or a landfill?  
Basking in the sun or bathing in radiation?  
My death will speak honestly  
and spill the answer like oil  
in the waters of my confusion  
these chemicals are aborting my potential  
or birthing ability  
these chemicals are the question mark  
the age of my death  
the shelf-life of my poetry  
Your opinion  
is the response.



jim zola



Am I sitting on a mountain  
or a landfill?

# better off

*charlotte ring*

the streets take up their mirrors,  
and consider the reflections of sullen night-lights  
reversed in puddles, well-versed in lonesomeness

oh, they call down the rain from the sky  
and narcissists, enjoy the images in duplicate

oh, they call my tired feet to march along them  
my mind a loud with a thousand threads  
woven into something dark and shivering, in the wind  
woven into something, familiar, like your coat

the strangest thing, your absence is as cool as  
the mists on my face, barely there, a dampening  
but altogether unimpressive show of rain

an upward glance to towers unchanging,  
how long I have aspired to the spires of  
the steady cathedral  
limestone standing bulwarked to our  
invisible battles  
but I, eroded into steam, rising  
to a sensitive victory  
it seems I've won, in this terror of a night  
some sense of independence  
some sense of iridescence  
like oil on pavement  
this solitary beauty taken from  
your crossed arms  
(you were never here to share my wonder)

(and I have wondered long)

Last year, giant cornplant stalks  
startled me like a band of aliens;  
this year they are thirsty and short.

TRAIL

# wandering in plant time

*janet m. powers*

I walk the length of this little creek  
greeting magenta wild geranium,  
hailing pale yellow pulcoon;  
finding Indian paintbrush startling  
red-orange in the grass, and blue  
the berries of the grape holly  
growing edible, low to the ground.  
I also collect a few gooseberries,  
red in the heat of July, and finger  
scarlet penstemon waving  
like grand flags in late afternoon.  
Last year, giant cornplant stalks  
startled me like a band of aliens;  
this year they are thirsty and short.  
Here the heavy rosette of mullein  
begins its journey toward the sky,  
though I won't be in this place  
when it is taller than I, flaunting  
its bright yellow flower stalk.  
Aha! something new: seedpods  
of what can only be sego lily,  
yes, more, I find dried flowers  
on similar spikes of leaves.

This year I've come too late  
but make it my business  
to scatter seeds up and down  
the stream because I am here  
imagining June, too aware  
that timing is everything and I  
will never ever be here just  
at the season of their bloom,  
but I can imagine them:  
brief, impossibly delicate  
white cups filled with pollen,  
gourmet feast for the bees.



charlotte ring

RESTRICTED AREA  
NO UNAUTHORIZED PERSONS  
BEYOND THIS POINT

# blue sky terrified

*caroline carter*

i'm blue sky terrified  
it's claustrophobia turned inside out  
where i lie on my back  
knees to my chest  
and stare

watching

my scabbed-up knees say the blue is above me  
and above the spruce  
and above the gothic stone

but i know that it's on me too

an unsheddable coat rippling on its own

and before i can cry out  
it threads my skin  
and slips from my lips to my lungs  
to crack open my thoracic cavity  
and spill out through the hole in my gut

i get sick

the kind of sick that drowns your soul  
by choking your entire universe until you are just  
your bones  
because what am I  
compared to a blue that stretches infinitely into the  
sky  
that composes itself and me  
and escapes ever being mine

i'm blue sky terrified

an exoskeleton submarine  
trying not to flood on the inside  
squinting upward for the shadow of a cloud  
if only to assure me of myself

# the order of things

*soledad caballero*

As with all things now, I want order. I want to take the strings of chaos, the lonely stamp, the left over paper, the bruised, too ripe peach, the thick flyaway grey hairs and stack them. Stack them in a row. Put them in a box. Label each part, taking time to make sure I noted the skin of the peach, the wire tangle of the hair, the missing colors on the faded stamp. I want to make them whole again, full and not dead or dying. Order is a place of rest and stopping. Long ago I said I wanted to be light, the way silk feels light against the heat of the sun. I imagined floating in this world, always sure of how beautiful the mess would be.

But I have learned cells can grow to wild proportions. Along the inside pulsing parts of the body, carving their path with serrated blades along muscle tissue, the pink inside of the breast. Under the arm, reaching for the small, jellyfish glands. This was more than a mess. Those cells, an aching mouth of angst and blood, urgent for the rest of it, the rest of me. And I alone in this jungle of living, a stumbling wanderer. This is not the story I wanted.



cameron lam



And I alone  
in this jungle of living,  
a stumbling wanderer.

# the illusion of forward motion

*devon balwit*

I would like to say I've traveled,  
but have only toured myself, body

hauling me like a duffel across  
borders. No escaping the same

chorus, yapping like roof dogs  
outside whatever three a.m.

window. Why rush towards maguey  
and nopal, cobbles and ochre?

My shadow pins on, a little songbird  
peering through bars, dreaming

of canopy, but only its cage  
moves, from this house to that.



