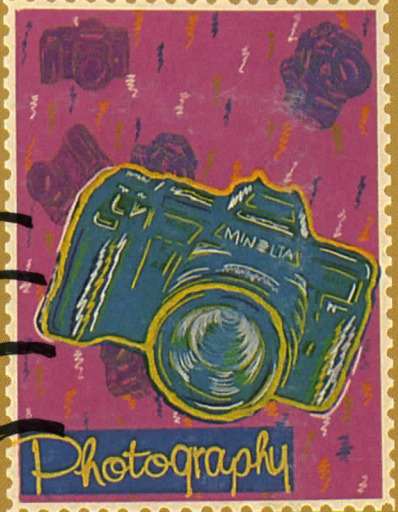


COLLAGE

FALL
1988

Middle Tennessee State University



Contents

1 Art

8 Fiction

13 Poetry

18 Photography

Staff

Rebecca Ingram Powell, Editor

Julie Lowery, Art Director

Elizabeth Hicks, Photographer

Claudia Spivey, Editorial Assistant

Pamela Stanfield, Photographer

Bob Swope, Production Director

Elizabeth Workman, Public Relations

Special Thanks

to all who participated in the "Call for Entries," without you, we wouldn't have a magazine;

to my staff for their support and dedication;

to Jackie Solomon for all her help;

to Ollie Fancher for his time;

to my husband, Rich, for his encouragement;

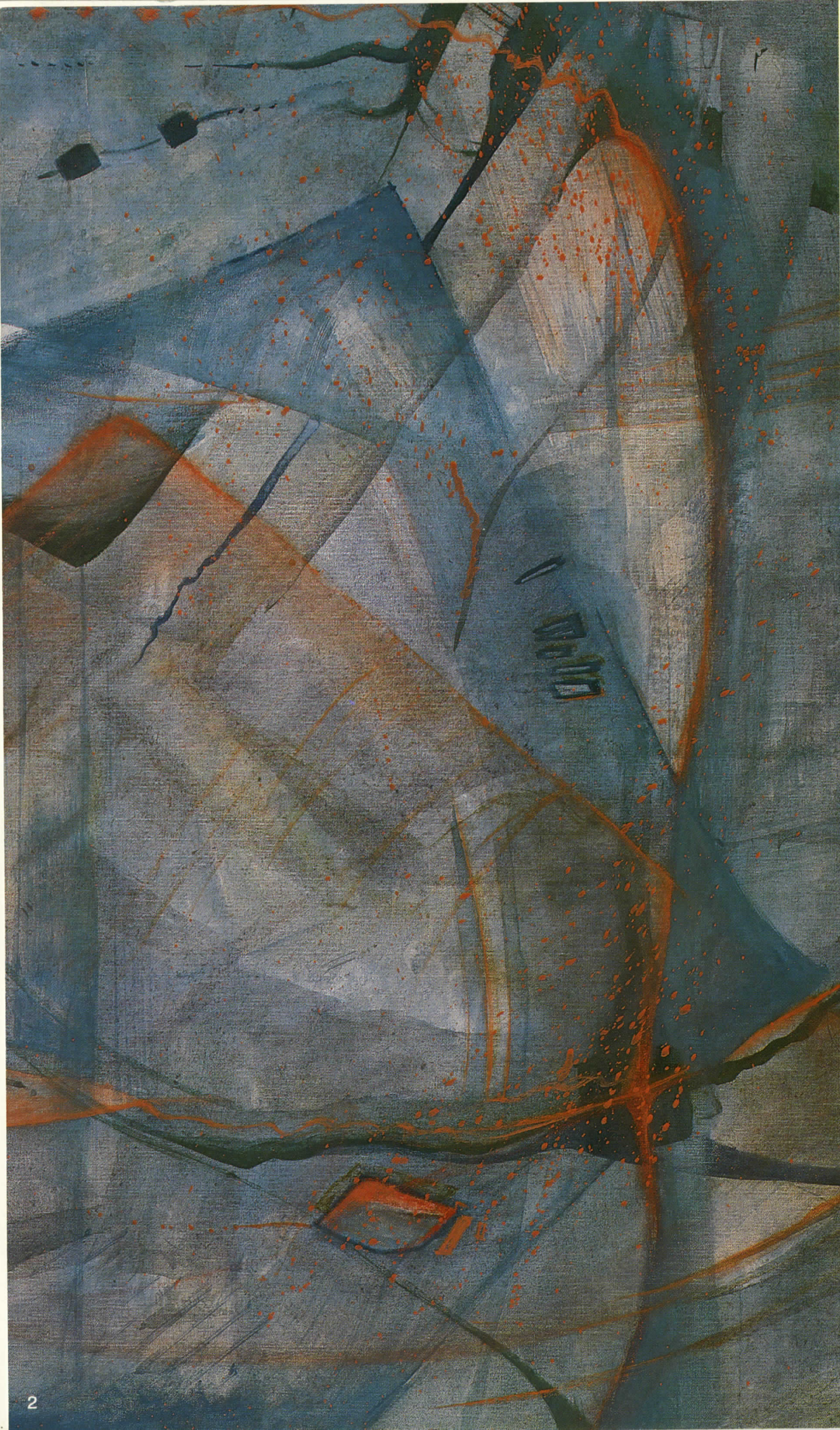
and to the Lord, for His strength.

Rebecca Ingram Powell



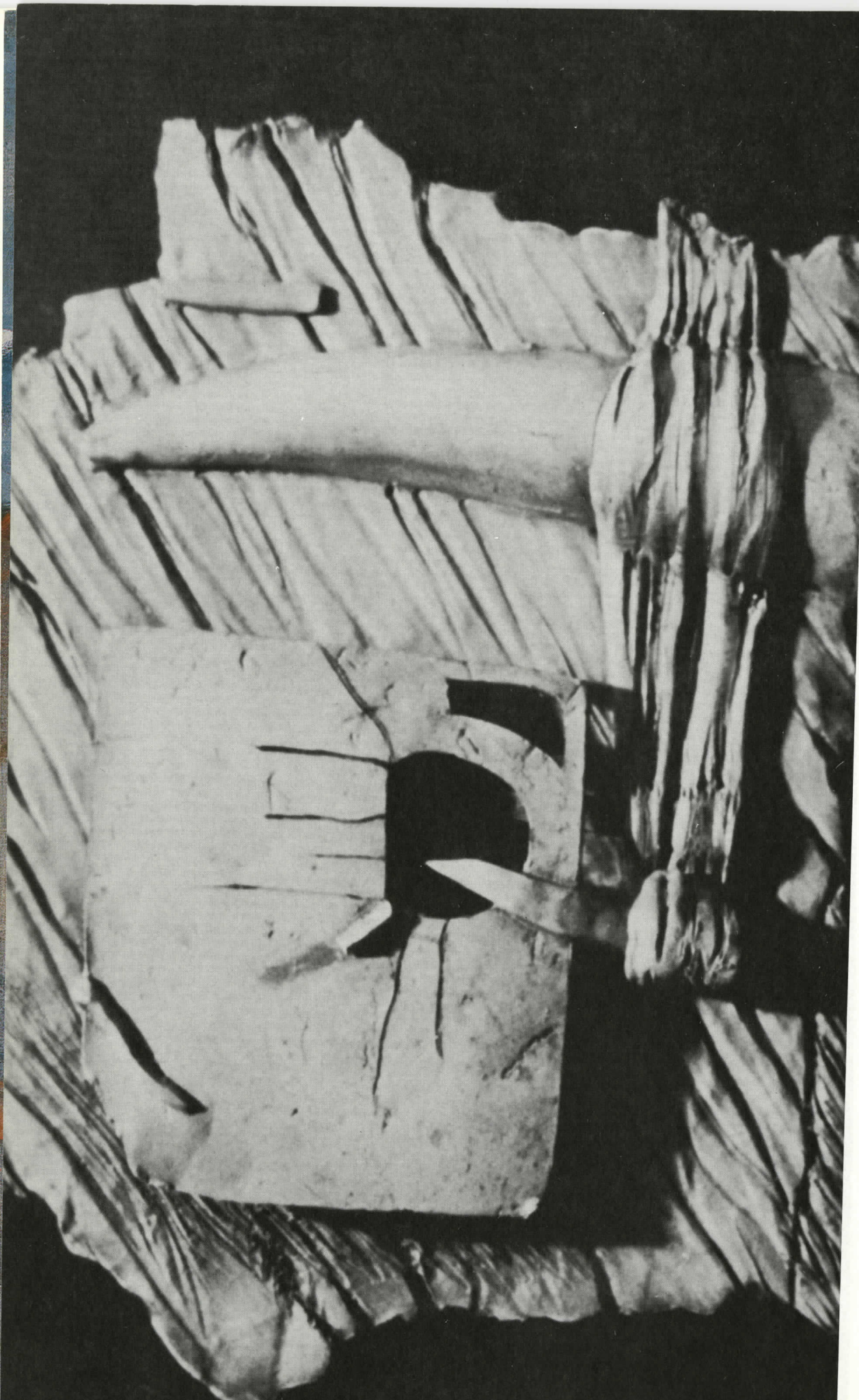
Coordinators: Julie Lowery, Bobby Swope, and Elizabeth Workman

**A Study of
Line and Form**
By Lisa Weiss





Ecumene Series No. 3
By Bonnie Charette

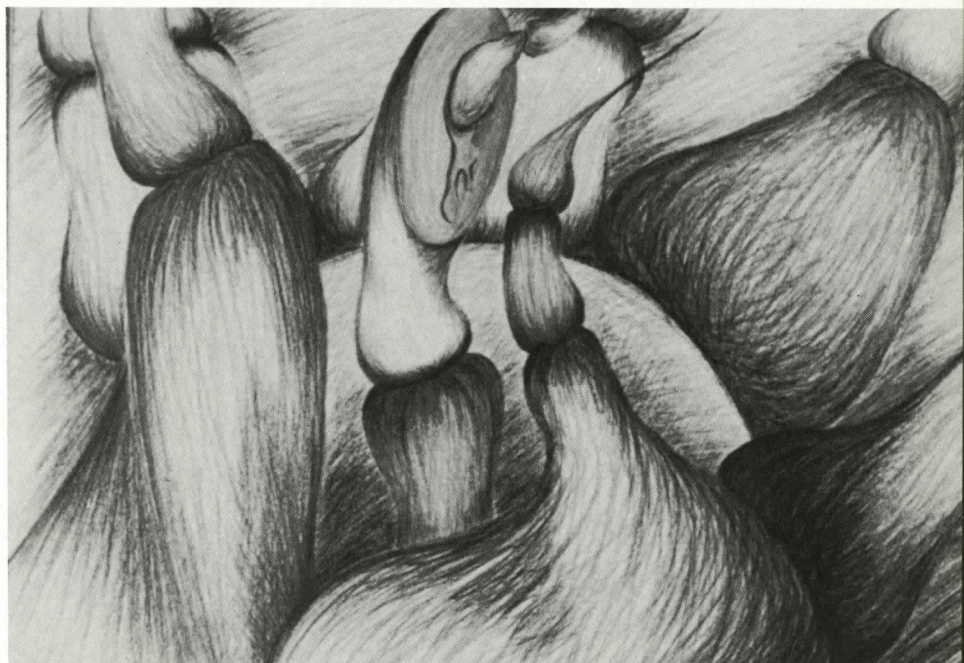


Untitled
By Elizabeth Sutherland

After Hours
By Ellen Bateman Borum



Struggle
By Boun Sayaphanh

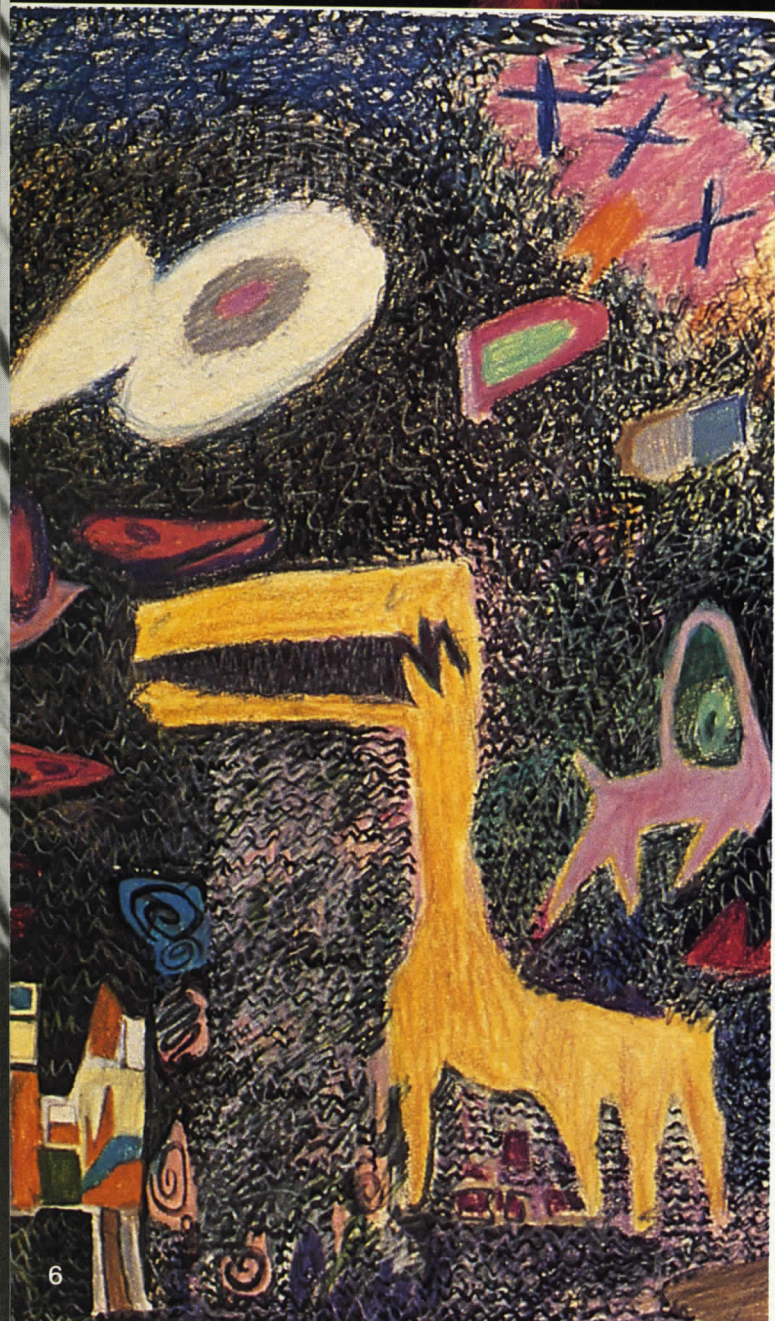


Untitled
By Chris Gerbman

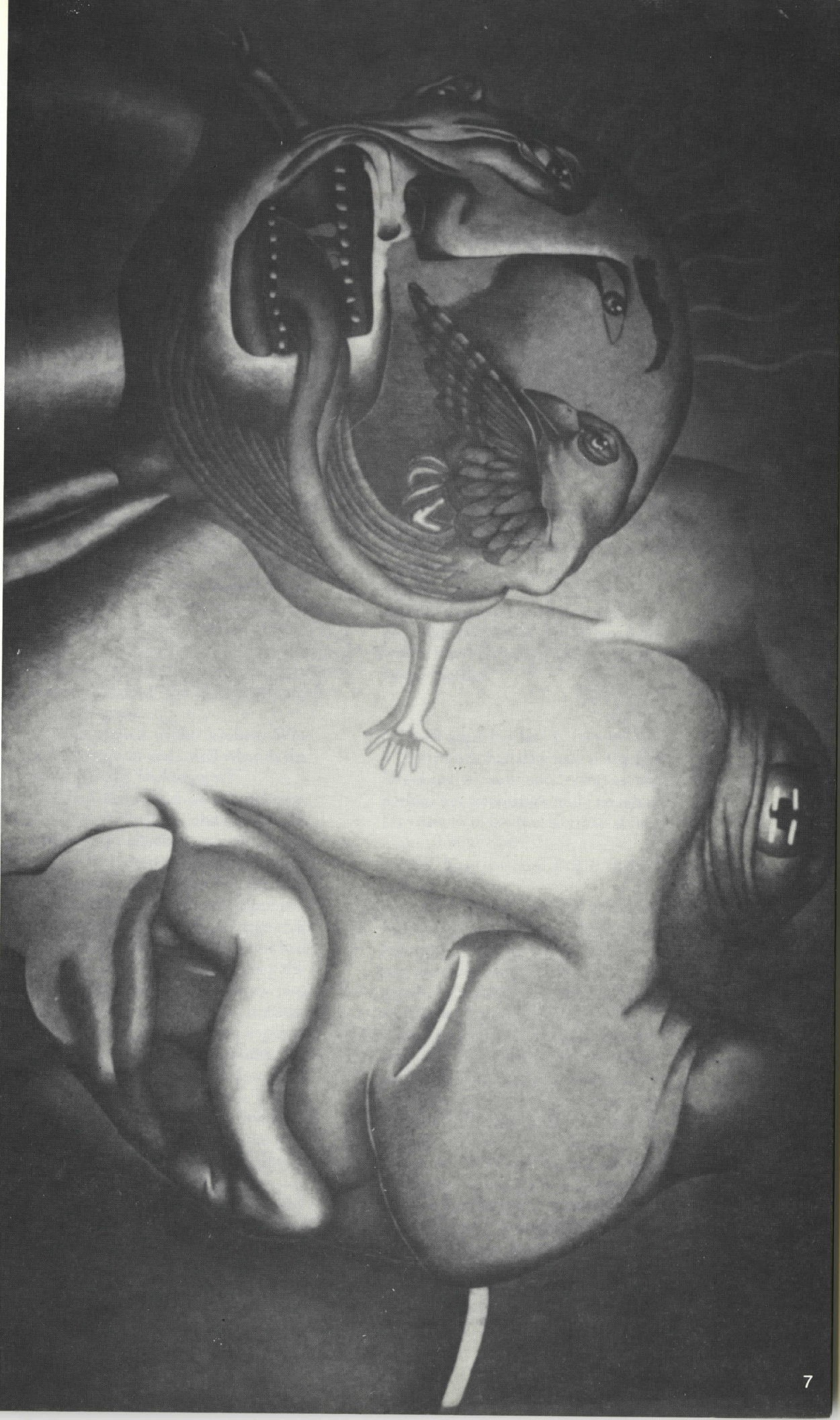




Untitled
By Patricia Tenpenny



Prince George
By Greg Phillipy



Untitled
By Allen Williams



*Coordinators: Rebecca Ingram
Powell and Claudia Spivey*

The Rotting Crutch

By Brian Hampton

They told me this sort of thing would be difficult to write about, but it seems particularly easy to me. In fact, the more painful life is, the more readily it fits into a paragraph. Inspired by their pain, some say that life is absurd. I'll go you one better. Life is an absurd play. And many people are waiting for the curtain, because they are sadly certain that afterwards meaning will abound. Well, until that time, I'll not speculate about something so fanciful as meaning, but here's a scene from the play that's just been written.

Having just entered my parents' house, I heard the sound of my mother's voice.

"Your sister's in the kitchen. Why don't you go in and...well what in the world has she broken now?"

It had the sound of her delicate, almost make-believe, china marriage. I went in to check on my sister. My sister, who locked herself inside a cage and handed a man the key because she thought herself ugly and happiness a silly myth. It was her marriage that we had heard, all right. My sister had left, so I dutifully began to sweep the kitchen. The big pieces I threw into the rusty, lidless garbage can outside, but the slivers, you know, are impossible to sweep up. And each time you step on one in your bare feet, you realize that all that delicate beauty didn't come to much except you hopping around the kitchen in pain.

"She didn't drop it Mama, she threw it down."

For after five years in the cage, my sister had discovered that she is a spectacularly colored bird, and she longed to fly. The cage door was her husband's strong wing, and the hinges bled as she left. Oh, she could fit the

whole world inside the appropriate cage and still see the stars shining and feel the wind in her wings. There would be room inside to soar. So it wasn't the cage itself that she couldn't bear. We all so desperately need a cage, I think, but this one simply was not hers. No, this was a prison precisely because of his wing being the door.

"Your sister needs to quit acting a fool and put it back together, that's all."

"It was hopelessly cracked when she threw it, Mama. Hadn't you ever noticed?"

My sister thinks that because the door didn't squeak when she left, her husband feels no pain. His blood was merely a temporary lubricant; she shouldn't doubt his pain. She must know, though, for gliding above the trees in our backyard, my sister can't help but gaze at his sad feather eyes and the shattered china in the garbage can and wonder if her wings were worth his. The longer she looks, the lower she flies.

"Well am I too fat? Is that it?"

The mirror had dawned on him like forgetting to use deoderant as she packed her necessities and enough of his tears to make this suitcase almost impossible to close.

"Yes. Yes, you are. But it doesn't matter."

It was a cruel time for a sudden burst of honesty, it seems to me. She followed by saying not "I don't love you anymore" but "I never did." In return, he immediately cursed at her, wished her a speedy death, called her insane, and accused her of homosexuality. He didn't want to later regret not having said those sorts of things.

He cannot explain her departure and cannot (meaning will not, it seems to me) accept her explanation. "I helped her with the housework now and then," he insisted like a trophy as we talked in the kitchen soon after my sister had left. This is not the time for such small points, but isn't that ridiculous? Those were his caked-up underwear in the hamper. Why shouldn't he have washed them? And why would

he call that helping her? "We never argued in all five years of our marriage," he claimed frequently and proudly during our conversation. Yes, and Grandma committed a thoughtfully tidy suicide.

He handed me a piece of evidence and returned to watching her out the window. "I love you more each day," the card read, and my sister had added more about how glad she was, after five years, that she had married him. You will agree that this is puzzling. But only until I remind you that she was so good really at playing herself-knowing how to seem as vulnerable as she really was, knowing what twist she would give to "I love you" if she actually had, all the while concentrating on more interesting things, such as drinking enough water to keep her urine clear.

"So why did you marry someone you didn't love, sister?" I asked her one day.

"As I explained to him when I left," she replied impatiently, "why did someone hang my cat?"

I don't know what she meant by that, but she was referring to the time we returned from a Christmas visit to Grandma's to find her cat swinging by its neck from the hackberry tree. Without a shred of evidence, my sister, to this day, insists that it was cruel boys who did it. Cruel boys. They constitute one of the two sexes for her. Cruel boys and females created by them.

What is easy for me to see, and I don't know if my mother can see it, is that my sister is my grandma. Maybe she hasn't always been. Maybe just since coming back from seeing Grandma and finding her cat dead. My grandma. Humming guilt and rocking in our dark, unfamiliar living room. Watching cartoons with the sound turned down and the shades pulled. Leaving notes, scraps of a will, for us grandchildren to find. "Bury me here, have so and so sing at the funeral, it must be a Baptist minister, it's sinful to leave me here every night," like that. Asking us periodically to let her know when her death would be convenient.

"That sort of thing is never convenient," I once assured her. "There aren't enough hours in the day. You simply have to make the time."

Grandma, too, had forgotten about the key; she handed hers to a man at the age of fifteen, thinking herself ugly and happiness a silly myth. Her husband, who was by all accounts ruthless, domineering, and saintly, went on to glory grinning and left a pitiful wife-thing behind. Damn the crutch for rotting before the one he crippled dies. Grandpa was grinning, you see, because he had her key in his pocket.

After Grandpa died, Grandma was led from one day to the next by four game shows, two soap operas, a medicine schedule, and a large print Bible that may as well have been written in Russian for all it had to do with her life. Near the end, she was nothing more than a puddle, sitting hours on end staring at things long passed and veiled love which never really existed, unable to do anything. This was a woman not rendered helpless by grief but by a half century of dependence on vapor to take her up, up and away into realms of mere self-toleration and self-degradation which together she called, with a weary hope of eternity, humility.

Her whole life's dialogue I can convey in one paragraph of her absolutely morbid language:

Do you love me? Here's this food I cooked for you. Do you believe in me? Here's this bed I made for you--I'll sleep on the couch if you like. Do you know yourself, Grandma? Where's my life now that I've no one to serve, to submit to, to sacrifice for?

My young sister is my grandma, wrinkled and always teary-eyed, never speaking of anything but dirty dishes and the garden. She sees a strange dancer on her deathlock stage of staring and turns her head, embarrassed. Even envy lies sterile in her uncombed hair and life. There was never, since the day she gave the key away, any joy, and now there are no anchors.

Reunion

By Kati Meehan

For as long as she could remember, even back to the Popsicle summers and dress-up days of her childhood, Lindsay had always envied Lisa's eyes. Seemingly transparent, the melancholy blue color held a special fascination for Lindsay. And it wasn't just her eyes. It was Lisa's hair, her slim build, her grade, even as a child, that came naturally to her. It caused the rift, based on Lindsay's jealousy, that kept them apart as sisters, right up until this very moment.

As Lindsay sat staring into her sister's eyes, only half-listening to Lisa's words, she slipped back through time. Her life, recorded in her mind like picturebook pages, flipped back quickly page by page.

Little pictures, like so many family snapshots, flashed from Lisa's eyes into Lindsay's mind. Each one, a different memory, like the time Aunt Nora flew from Georgia to meet the girls for the first time. Lindsay and Lisa were four years old. Aunt Nora shrieked, as only old maid relatives can, as the girls' father opened the car door, and she came barrelling up the walkway toward the porch where the girls stood reluctantly awaiting the stranger. Lindsay stood quietly in awe and anticipation as Aunt Nora looked past her and grabbed Lisa instead. She could be heard for three blocks as she sang the praises of the wonder child held desperately in her arms.

"What a beautiful face! Madame Alexander couldn't have sculpted a more perfect face: and the hair, oh, God, the hair, so thick, so long, so blonde — such a beautiful child!"

Lindsay fought the wave of tingling emotion filling her little head and walked hesitantly toward the woman, tugged lightly at Aunt Nora's dress, and said, as Aunt Nora turned and looked down, "I'm Lindsay."

Aunt Nora took slight notice of Lindsay, and with an amused half-grin, turned to the girls' mother and exclaimed, "Oh, my goodness, Joan, they look nothing alike!" With Lisa still clinging to Aunt Nora's enormous, three-tiered neck, the woman bent down and placed one hand on Lindsay's bowed head, fingered the thin, plain hair, and said quietly, "Your hair...it's...it's...brown. Well," she laughed, quite taken with her discovery, "Lisa was born first. She must have taken it all!" She continued laughing hysterically and got up. Lisa still clung to the woman, but had a sad, drawn look on her beautiful face. Lindsay slowly met those magnificent blue eyes through her own tearful, quivering brown ones.

Lisa's lyrical voice drifted through, permeating Lindsay's memory. The picturebook slowly closed and, as Lisa continued conversing with herself for several minutes, Lindsay examined once again her sister's perfect hairstyle, her even, golden tan, her beautiful size six clothes and, of course, the eyes. She broke her gaze only long enough to run her hand through her own thin, brown hair. She looked down at her short, bitten fingernails, and at the simple black dress, bought especially for this day from the Sears' Best Collection. Only the last sentence of Lisa's relentless drone came clearly through to Lindsay. "Well, enough of me, what about you?"

Lindsay began her "what I've been doing for the five years since I last saw you" spiel, which took all of six and a half minutes — nothing specific, nothing personal. After all, what does one sister say to another after five years without so much as a phone call? Their relationship had become one of studied indifference in which Christmas cards signified the only indicator of familial bond. It was just that, as Lindsay saw it, they had nothing in common except a mother and now-deceased father, whose death was the occasion for this rare reunion.

As Lindsay wrapped up her compulsory "catching up" routine, their mother interrupted. "Girls, it's wonderful to see you together, talking like this, but it's time to go."

Lindsay and Lisa rose, kissed their mother, and exited the kitchen quietly. Lisa lifted her grey fox coat from the rack, donned her matching gloves and scarf and opened the door into the snowy, bitter cold winter. Lindsay watched after her as she walked gracefully onto the porch and turned back around, waiting.

Lindsay frantically searched the room for her old overcoat. Her heart sank, and as she pulled the knit mittens out of the pockets, she comforted herself by the thought that at least she didn't have to wear dead animals and ran out the door to catch up with Lisa. They walked in silence to Lisa's car, a teal blue Jaguar. Despite Lisa's endless attempts to make light conversation, Lindsay kept her attention focused on the luxurious leather interior, the tinted sunroof, and the Alpine stereo, and tried to forget her '75 Dodge sitting in the driveway back at her mother's house.

Lisa parked the Jaguar very carefully in the parking space next to her mother's car, and both girls walked in strained silence into the church. Old family friends and neighbors, even strangers, seemed to come at them from all directions as the sisters made their way to the chapel. Whispers of

"We're so sorry" and "We love you" came from faces neither had seen in years. As Lindsay sat, wedged between her mother and sister, a wave began in her stomach and moved its way up to her head. Her heart was pounding, sinking. Her face was warm and flushed. Vision blurred and all she saw was the picturebook with her father's face on every page — smiling, happy, kind father, who had loved her and Lisa equally and dearly all their lives. She didn't hear the eulogy. Instead, she made her own private remembrance, honoring him through her own memories and flipping, once again, through the pages of the picturebook.

Then the tears came. For a long while, she felt only the warm dripping of them onto her cold, shaking hands. Then, suddenly, she felt a gentle arm about her shoulders and a warmer, steadier hand on her own tightly clasped, wet fists. She opened her eyes, and keeping her head bowed with grief, saw the hand of her sister, but in all its familiarity, there was something new, something terrifying. Her gaze was frozen into a shocked stare as she took her cold finger and traced the scars on Lisa's wrist. A lifetime of apologies and forgivenesses ran through her head. A million needles of guilt pierced her heart. She looked up into the saddest, most beautiful melancholy blue eyes in the world and, for once, she saw herself.



*Coordinators: Rebecca Ingram
Powell and Claudia Spivey*

Rose

By Lola White

In a trailer by the river, Rose
keeps house, washes, irons, sweeps,
and grows a garden down
by the bank. The water
only flows. Dreams flood
Rose's mind. Like keeping house,
they pass the time.

Rose's thoughts drift to the time
the rain-swelled river rose
and kept on rising to a flood.
The river churned, rushed to sweep
the valley, brown water,
brown and foamy, tearing
trees and buildings down.

That time Rose's house went down.
It took a long long time
to set things right. Water
stood where the house had been. Rose
had no more floor to sweep,
no garden, nothing but the flood.

Today Rose swears even if another flood
should come, she'll go down
before she'll leave. Meanwhile,
she sweeps
a trailer; waits for time
to bring to bloom the roses
by the door; listens to the rush of water.

Rose loves the water
even now; the flood
was just a thing that happened. Rose
puts it down
to fate. She takes one day at a time,
humming as she sweeps.

Night and day the river sweeps
across the land, water
having no intent but to flow
where gravity and time
will take it. At full flood,
it fills the bottom-land
and then goes down,
recedes inevitably, as it rose.

One night it will flood again, sweep
trees and seeds and trailer
down in muddy water.
Rose will wake, not rise,
will know it's come: her time.

October

By Kelli Lee Davison

The setting sun warms my kitchen
while a cool breeze billows the curtains.
In the back lot the grass grows long
and the trees are not so full.
Light filters through the branches
like it hasn't in months
as shadows fall closer to earth.
Burning wood and coffee scents
linger throughout the rooms.
Cricket chirps and summer melodies
are gone.
In their place is the rustle of falling
leaves and discordant harmonies.
Shadows are no longer a welcome oasis,
but shunned as jacket collars are
drawn close.
Smothering wools, brushed flannel,
spicy leather and warm corduroy
clad delicate skin that sweated
tanned and naked but a month ago.
Night time frost spins its white
web across grass
while dark puddles slumber
beneath a hair's breadth of ice.
Pavement cracks grow and deepen
as ants rush madly between them.
Cheek-filled squirrels scurry
with their prizes to their nests.
And bothersome flies die.
In the morning mist lingers a scent.
One of grass and leaves, dirt and spice,
of cold and change,
...a scent of October.

The Storm Within The Calm

By Allison N. Loper

Space and time wrapped in reality's void
I'm lost in this place tired, angry, and annoyed
Death's thought enters a mind that's often misplaced
As I sink into this void, gone without a trace
I hear voices confusing my sense of direction
As I wander through this life with no connection
It's as if I've lived my life playing hide and seek
Crawling on my hands and knees as if I'm to sneak
In this void of life, I'm on the edge of my seat
Listening to the thunder of my heart's rapid beat
I'm hanging on to the thinness of the thread
Wanting to be saved, but I seem to be dying instead
Dangling in mid-air, darkness is all around
I'm lost in a void where there's no sight or sound
Blindly I walk into this empty void of time
Looking for a saviour, looking for a sign
To help ease my mind and save my soul
Keep me from a hell where I'll walk on fiery coal
This void of mine will drown me no doubt
If I can't find myself or find my way out
My void makes me feel I no longer exist
With dark angry forces I can't seem to resist
This world is my void where it seems I've strayed
It left me alone and so terribly betrayed
It's often called the calm within the storm, but
that's not my psalm,
In this void called life, I'm considered the storm
within the calm.

What would you call it?

By David Katz

I can't make up my mind
what to do
about my indecision.
The words I write
express my thoughts
with perfect imprecision.

The music that I play
is never quite in time,
and the lyrics that I sing
just never seem to fit.

I don't finish all my work-
in neglect I am persistent.
But I can be reliable;
Well at least I'm inconsistent.

My political views lean toward the left.
But I'm not sure if they're right.
I respect the words of Lenin
but McCartney's more my type.

Well this poem may not be deep,
but that's still undecided.
Just answer me one question-
Why the hell did I write it?



Untitled

Untitled



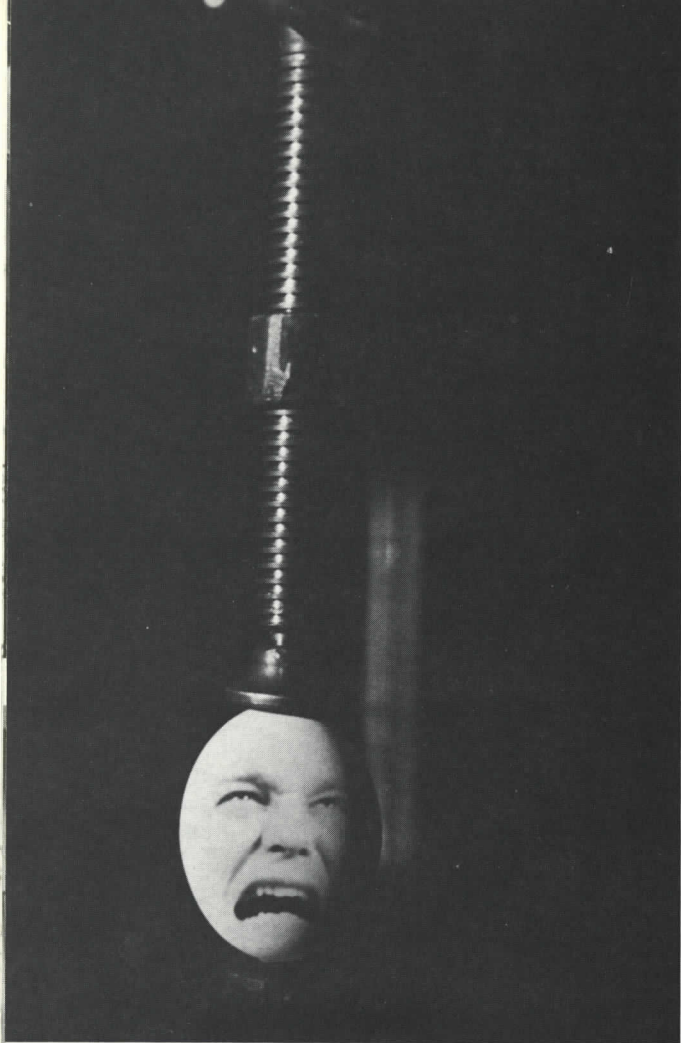
Untitled

By Bill Steber



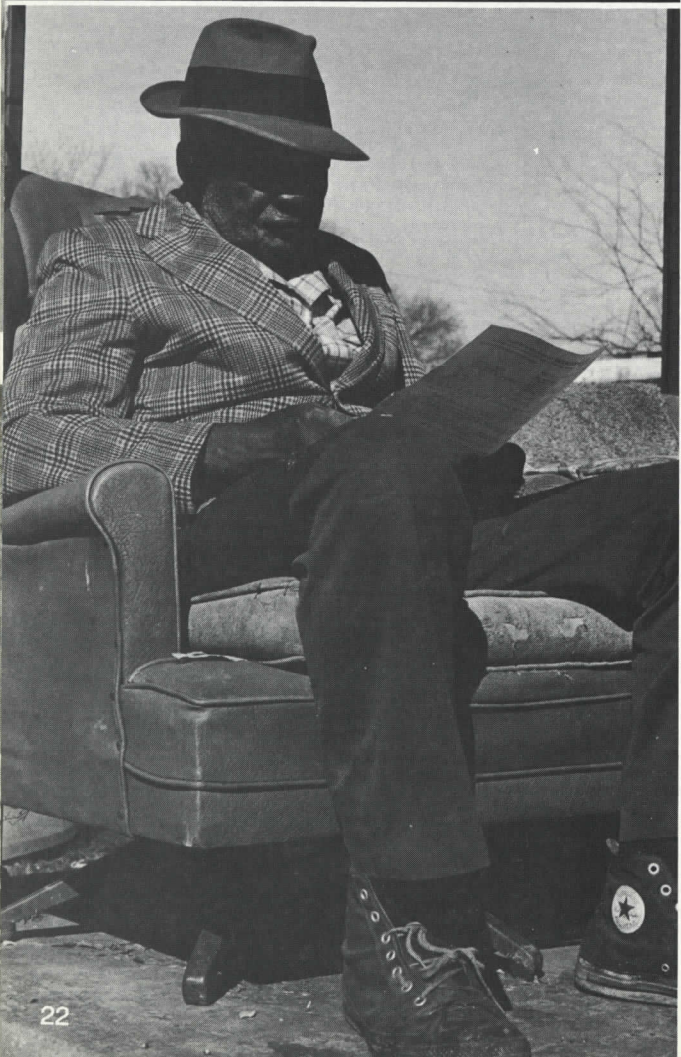
Untitled





Untitled

Untitled



Untitled

By Taylor Smith





Untitled
By Pamela Stanfield

