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CREATIVE GUTS



FALL 2024

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# LOVE LETTER TO A PLACE

Hello, Readers!

On the podcast, we often ask our guests to share the most inspiring location they've visited. Sometimes the answers are far-away destinations elsewhere in the world, but other times, the answers are a little closer to home. Whether you find inspiration in New Hampshire's North Country, the coast of Maine, or the streets of Italy, we love to hear about it.

Given the importance of our location in the world, we thought "Love Letter to a Place" was a perfect theme for our fall zine this year. In this zine, the written and visual works of 21 creatives allow us a peek into the hearts of creatives as they share the places that inspire, the places with significant personal meaning, or the places that they simply love.

Thank you to Creative Co-op, a strategic communications firm based in Exeter, for sponsoring this zine. Without their support, this zine would not have been possible. Learn more about Creative Co-op at [www.creativeco-op.com](http://www.creativeco-op.com).

As always, our mission is to awaken your creativity. As you browse through our fall 2024 zine, we hope you are inspired by the artists and writers who bravely share their work with the world.

Learn more about Creative Guts at [www.CreativeGutsPodcast.com](http://www.CreativeGutsPodcast.com) and say "hello" on Instagram, Facebook, or LinkedIn.

So with that, show us your creative guts!



Laura Harper Lake  
Co-Founder + Co-Host



Sarah Wrightsman  
Co-Founder + Co-Host

# KRYSTIN SHIELDS



*Love Letter to Manchester, Watercolor and Ink*

Originally painted as label artwork for *To Share Brewing*, this watercolor and ink piece was created as a love letter to the city we live and work in. My goal was to highlight the beautiful river front skyline with the local radio towers sending information out and around to everyone.

Manchester, NH

[KrystinShields.com](http://KrystinShields.com)

# FALLON RAE

## *Morning Light, Poetry*

Sometimes I think you want to drink the mornings you paint  
The shot of espresso that exists  
Making you realize  
You made it through another night  
You hold this place close even if you are sweating just to assure you can feel  
something more than yourself

It's a ritual  
You and that pink light  
The faint stains in the walls of a place you didn't mean to call home, but we are  
creatures  
We make homes, habits

Sometimes I think you want to sacrifice your ritual  
The shock of realizing that you made it through another night  
You hold this place close even if you were sweating  
Just to assure you can call home

It's something more than yourself  
You and that habit  
The creatures that want to drink the mornings you paint  
You taught me  
Habits make homes

Sometimes it's in spaces you didn't mean to  
You and that sacrifice  
Alone  
Sweating faint stains

Fallon Rae is a multidisciplinary artist with a focus on her curatorial practice at her art gallery PILLAR Gallery + Projects. Her writing tends to be elaborate metaphors with references to everyday objects that are turned on their head. She is developing her own pattern of poetry that references villanelles and a repeated almost lyrical quality.

Manchester, NH

FallonRae.com

# JENN MONROE

## *Three-Season Porch, Poetry*

Autumn creeps across this small clearing: mid-August  
breeze confused for rain through thick oak leaves,  
white pines creak like old rocking chairs. Two ruby-  
throated hummers battle at the feeder. Their squeaks  
and thrum the only bird sounds. Where the others are  
at two in the afternoon is a mystery I don't dwell on.  
It has been months since the yard was so quiet  
at this time of day. Later, dusk will set in to the sounds  
of crickets and my neighbors' rapid Ukrainian banter. There's been  
a shift in the quality of the air—so subtle it might be missed—  
and the light is slipping away. This is the in between, the summer wane  
that pulls my heart to a time lost, when this was all that mattered.

“Three-Season Porch” is a meditation from my favorite place in my home.

Bedford, NH

ThePoetGirl.com

# LAUREN YARO CAHILL



*Dear Nauset Beach, Photography*

My piece was inspired by one of my favorite places, which is Nauset Beach on Cape Cod in Massachusetts. It is a place of significance and peace, where I can live in the moment and feel at ease. I have travelled to dozens of beaches, but this one is particularly special.

I paired my original poem with a photo that I took during a recent visit, which I feel truly showcases its beauty. I hope my work encourages readers to visit a place that brings them comfort, which is the way that I feel when I am at Nauset Beach.

*Dear Nauset Beach, Poetry*

Dear Nauset Beach,

You are my serene spot at the sea  
With breathtaking blue hues that envelop me  
You calm my wandering mind  
While I lose track of time  
You are a place where I feel carefree

As I soak in your salty breeze  
And watch the ocean waves ebb and flow  
I am finally at ease, and learn to let go

You are the haven that heals my soul  
A space that brings me peace and joy  
When I am with you, I am whole.

Love,  
Lauren

Concord, NH

LaurenCahillDesigns.com

# GABRIELLA BRAND

*Les Cantons de l'Est, Québec, Prose*

It's dull. Nothing much happens there. Yes, the cows moo in both English and French, and sometimes the Massawippi floods and the barstools at the Pilsen start to float. But other than that, Les Cantons is a pretty quiet place.

I first discovered The Townships about thirty years ago. I had driven up from New Haven, and booked an auberge at Georgeville. To stretch my legs, I climbed up the hill behind the general store. From that vantage point, I could see a green and rolling vista across Lake Mephrémagog.

Suddenly, I found myself somewhere in Europe. The tower of the Saint Benoit Abbey was the only visible structure on the horizon. I was incredulous and smitten. It could have been Switzerland. Not the high Alps, but the Jura.

Maybe all love of place is derivative. Maybe we first love one region because it reminds us of another, or the geography tugs at memories that cover generations. I went to school in Switzerland for a while and lived there when I was first married. Family ashes are scattered there.

Over time, I've learned how Les Cantons are a treasure in their own right. I've gotten to know several of its villages, renting farmhouses or staying with friends.

Sometimes people ask me, "So what do you do, up there, in the summer?" I start to tell them about walking along country roads to pick blueberries or to visit a local fromagerie and their eyes glaze over. They offer up their latest tourist adventures, museum hopping or bungee jumping or running with the bulls.

I suppose one could run with a bull in the Townships if one got caught on the wrong side of an electric fence. But it hasn't happened to me yet. As I said, it's pretty dull.

I'm a traveler who has been to five of the seven continents. I'm working on the other two. I love writing about place. I've seen my work about place published in Stepaway Magazine, Adventures in Ideas, and in several travel anthologies. A companion piece to the attached submission is an article that was published in Canada's Globe and Mail entitled Canada, I Miss You, which was written when the border was closed during the pandemic. When I saw this call for a love letter to a place, I knew immediately that I would write about Les Cantons de l'Est, or Eastern Townships of Quebec. These small villages represent a kind of refuge for me, a mid-way point between America and Europe mentalities, and a nice break from city life.

North Haven, CT

GabriellaBrand.net

# JACKIE HANSON

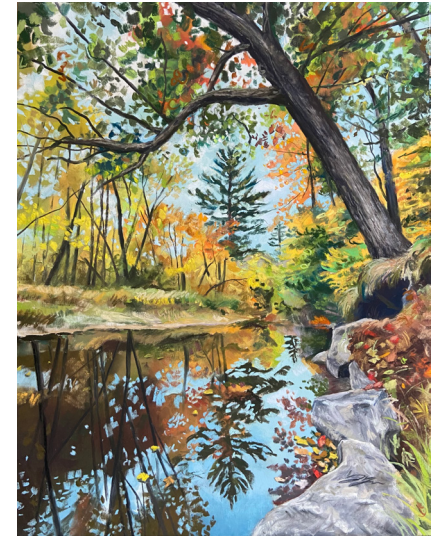
## JACKIE HANSON ART



*As Above So Below*, Soft pastel



*Elderglass*, Soft pastel



*Blackwater*, Soft pastel

These three pieces come from a single fifteen-minute segment of time spent at the Blackwater River somewhere in NH. After a long weekend at a craft fair, I was drained and not being a good friend to my helper. When a long dirt road opened up to this river glowing in autumn's beauty, I pulled over and we spent a few minutes letting nature restore us. It worked wonders at untangling days of stress and exhaustion. This trio is homage to that moment and to the pull of nature on the human spirit.

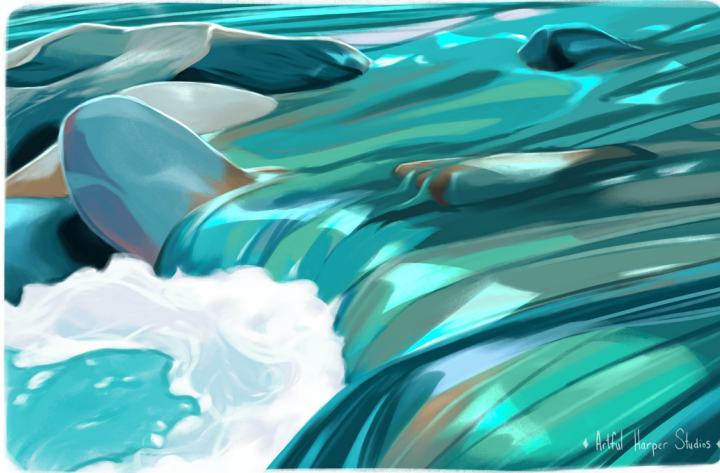
**Belmont, NH**

**JackieHansonArt.com**

# LAURA HARPER LAKE

## ARTFUL HARPER STUDIOS

*My Dearest Place, Poetry*



*Rapid River, Digital painting*



*Oceanside, Digital painting*

I've loved the water since I was a child. The ocean, a river, a pool; I'm always happy to be swimming. The feeling of buoyancy is such a lovely place.

My dearest place,

You are a land of wonder. A land of controlled hallucinations.  
You look and feel different to each person who enters your doors,  
seeking their own treasure.  
Sometimes cozy, sometimes cavernous,  
your dimensions matter little to the beholder.

I dance between your rows.  
I stand on tippy toes to reach your highest shelves.  
I trail my hands against every binding I pass.  
I carry a stack taller than myself to the front desk.  
I feel a lazy peace within.

All the while, soft sounds envelop me.  
The gentle whispers of others.  
A page being turned.  
Tiny, excited footsteps in the children's room.

You welcome everyone. You provide to anyone. You are a safe place.

Thank you for the years of adventures, dreamed up by other dreamers.  
My passport is filled without leaving my hometown.

Love,  
A bookworm

**Epping, NH**

**ArtfulHarperStudios.com**



# HEATHER CROWLEY

## Willow Road Watercolors

Willow Road , Poetry

I'm trying to write a poem to explain my love for this place.  
But words cannot convey the depth I'm feeling.  
More than a home or homestead,  
this land changed us as we planted ourselves  
and grew roots over twenty years.

Twenty years of woodstove warmth, creaky floors,  
home cooked meals and brief train horns.

Twenty years of garden harvests, turkey flocks,  
hummingbirds and hunting hawks.

Twenty years of raising kids, Christmas morns,  
back porch meals and fire pit smores.

Twenty years of winter snowshoes, driveway holes,  
sun warmed snakes and summer toads.

Twenty years of flower beds, new spring fawns,  
owl hoots and kitchen dawns.

Twenty years of family dogs, farm fresh eggs,  
one rare cat, and spring tree frogs.

Twenty years of pursuing passions,  
of finding ourselves  
in sweet maple sap and watercolor swirls.

Twenty years of living,  
of building dreams...  
now with outgrown clothes and well worn floors.

There are not enough words or time to explain,  
all of us are moving on as the echoes fade.



*A New Beginning, Watercolors*

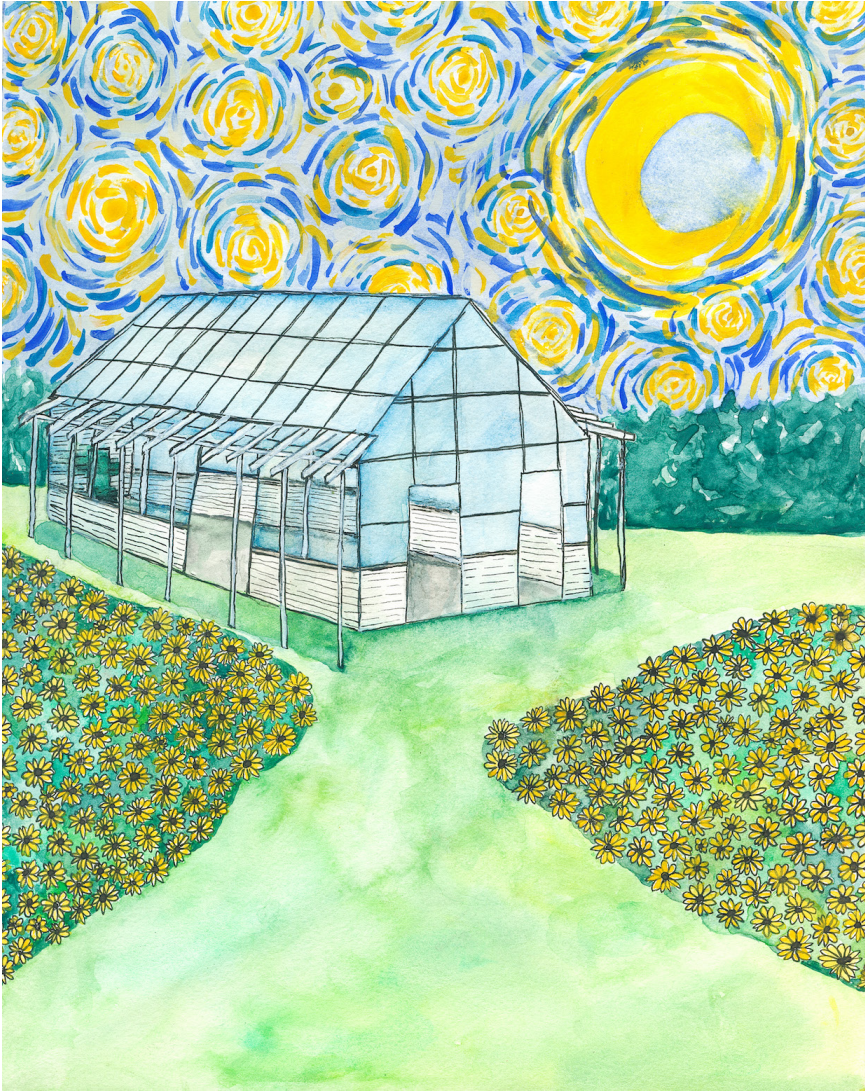
After 20 years on our 10 acre piece of wooded heaven in East Kingston, NH we are relocating to VT. We raised two amazing children on our property while homestead farming and discovering our love for the land by building a sugarhouse by hand and starting a maple syrup business. We rediscovered our creative first loves and built a yurt art studio to display and paint watercolors in. We are not sure how to say goodbye to a place that has meant so much to all of us.

East Kingston, NH

WillowRoadWC.com

# LAUREN BOISVERT

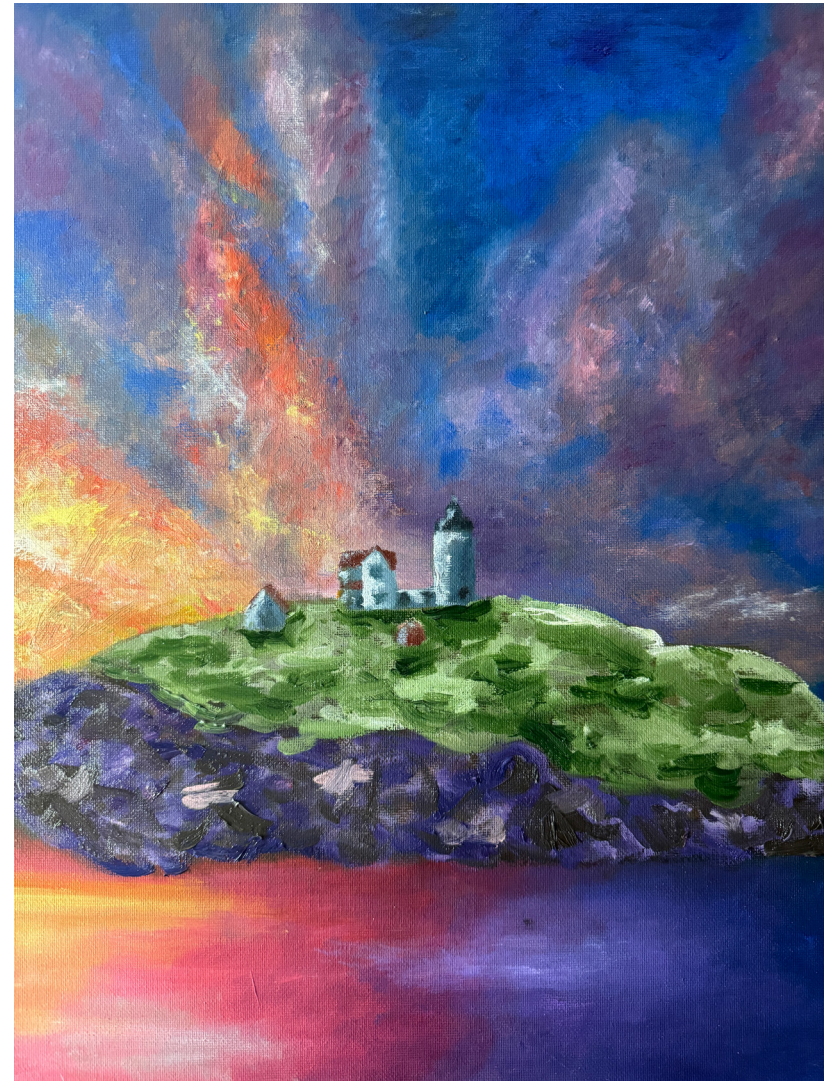
## SUNSHINE DUST CO.



*A Night Under a Starry Sky, Watercolors*

Manchester, NH

SunshineDustCo.com



*Nubble Lighthouse, Oil paint*

Nubble Lighthouse is the first stop on those summer Maine vacations filled with sunshine, lobster, and beaches. The intention of capturing that colorful and joyful feeling of those summer days. A Night Under a Starry Sky is a deeply personal piece, a painting done from an image of my wedding night. We married in Portland, Maine in 2023 a night that I dreamed of since a young girl. The piece captures not only the beauty of the night but the dreamlike day that it was.

# CHRISTIAN WHITTON

## CRW ART



*North Hampton, Late Fall Storm, Acrylic paint*

I am a dreamer and a wanderer and love the wildness of the outdoors. My favorite is the green of the forest and trees. The waves crashing against a grey stormy sky. The sun and the breeze on my face. My painting is an angry sea during a late autumn rain storm.

Derry, NH

[Crowthart.wixsite.com/crowthart](http://Crowthart.wixsite.com/crowthart)

# MORGAN LITTLE

*Seasons Chant - Dover, New Hampshire, Poetry*

Maybe we could go down and sit by the water  
Stick your feet in - maybe wade - if ya wanna  
As the years go by  
And shifting phases of the moon  
Everyday's a gift getting older with you.  
Trudging through the leaves and the weather's getting colder  
Trees all painted bright with yellow, red, and orange  
As the pages turn  
The months do too  
And everyone's a gift getting older with you.  
The days are getting shorter with the quilts and the layers  
Cleaning off the snow of the cars for the neighbors  
As the years set  
The sun does too  
And each one is a gift getting older with you.  
Spring steps in and winter is finally over  
The sun stays out  
We're through the worst of the weather  
As the years go on  
We do too  
Every day's a gift getting older with you.

The seasons in New England are something very special, each one containing its own unique aspects. I wanted to capture a year within four verses - each one representing a moment or two during the different seasons of the year. I really wanted to be able to channel the idea that growing old is a privilege, and getting to grow old with my wife is the greatest gift I could ever receive. New Hampshire, I love you. Sarah, I love you too.

Dover, NH

IG: @themildrevolution

# AMBER NICOLE CANNAN

## BIOSCI CREATIVE



*Christy All Out, Steamboat Springs CO, Watercolors*

Unless you count skiing with 2-year-old Isla, who may or may not have outlasted me, I skied for the first time since I was in a wheelchair. McIntyre Ski Area was the proof of concept one year prior to this ski trip. I promised those who love me to ski two hours, break two hours and then head back to the base. When Ruth and I stopped at Rendezvous we found bits of art, pinned to the walls and slipped inside the napkin holders. Another artist had been here. My presence shouldn't be too odd. Spike's Hill looks out of practice. It is. All my students are told general to specific, advice I should have followed, painting the shape of the hill and then trees. This muddled the shadows. The sky is better and partly sunny. Every day I learn.



*Elkhead Tower, Steamboat Springs CO, Watercolors*



*Spike's Hill, Steamboat Springs CO, Watercolors*

# TIFFANY HENDRIX

*Oh, Las Vegas, Prose*

Oh Las Vegas,

I really thought you were the one. My days wrapped in your neon arms are dubbed The Lost Decade. You were happy to welcome then bamboozle me and watch me leave without fanfare, under cover of night, behind the wheel of a hometown-bound 16-foot Penske truck. You took my money, 87% of my dignity, 62% of my hair and the rest left gray, about half my belief in humanity's goodness. But you gave so much: purpose. Hours of cheer on the sidelines of league soccer games. Two gorgeous girlfriends. A revolving door of visitors. Cheap tires at the llanteria, one at a time. So many glorious hikes through dusty red spires. The Sierra Nevadas. Implosions: external, internal. Occasional wrestling matches with the one-armed bandits. Side quests. Constant stimulation. Continuous reinvention. Countless possibilities. Joy. Grief. Mostly, experience. On parting, a compass tattoo, before I moved to Colorado where everyone and their grandma has compass tattoos.

I miss you when an ice-obscured windshield and dark mornings cloud my vision. When I've been wearing socks for too many consecutive hours. I miss you when I crave anonymity or unfamiliar faces. When I desire blazing fluorescence in lieu of stars. In the middle of the night when I want...well, anything I want. Sure, I've been back. It's only an eight-hour drive, but you never noticed me breaching the border, and I doubt you'll notice me next time. I always head home scowling. My loved ones say, "You know, when you lived there it wasn't all rainbows." It's okay. I can still drive to Utah for a burger on a Tuesday night, just from a different angle now. You're a nice place to visit, but...no, if I'm being honest, I can't even finish that sentence. See you soon, maybe forever next time.

The rural life has had a hold on me for seven years now, so I often fantasize about returning to my urban heyday and the beginning of my west-of-the-Mississippi era. My writing practice is a subversive antidote to days spent teaching letter sounds to teenage newcomers. I grew up on a state border in the Midwest, so my poetry and prose often evoke a sense of place or contemplate borderlands. Visits to the glittering city where I used to live relieve the boredom of monochrome country life. Here, I challenged myself to write a letter of exactly 300 words and address it to the place so many people love or love to hate.

Delta, CO

IG: originalgeotrix

# LEAH MUELLER

*The Land's Edge, Prose*

It never rains when I visit Long Beach Peninsula.

Except for when it does. A sudden wet front rushes across the beach, headed inland. It doesn't last long. When a sunbreak finally appears, I hop aboard a beach cruiser and peddle wildly towards nowhere.

On my way to nowhere, familiar landmarks appear. The Long Beach Tavern. Marsh's Free Museum, with its plethora of macabre and amusing exhibits. Jake the Alligator Man, curled up inside a glass case. The Love Tester, where you can determine your passion quotient for only fifty cents. The fortune teller lady with her blank eyes and gliding, ring-encrusted hands.

My cardboard fortune tells me that I'm impatient, and that I'll reach my destination in good time. I smile because I already know.

I pass taffy shops, wind-twisted trees, and the Souwester Resort with its cheerful, haphazard cluster of vintage trailers. At the end of the spit, the topography changes abruptly. Scrub brush is replaced with a grove of evergreens. The temperature drops ten degrees. Wind blasts against my cheeks.

I love all of it. My legs ache from pumping. Ten years ago, this jaunt was much easier. But I can still reach the end, dammit. Of course, I'm only half done.

I'll need to turn around and return the bicycle.

Afterwards, I'll enjoy a cocktail at the Pickled Fish, followed by a trip to the sauna, and I'll wonder how I ever got so lucky.

This piece is inspired by one of my favorite places in the world, Long Beach Peninsula on the Washington coast. The raw but tranquil beauty always soothes my nerves. Surprisingly, even though I visit during all four seasons, rainy spells are infrequent and don't last long. This seems miraculous, especially in a continuously wet place like the Pacific Northwest. Long Beach is a magical place, and I see something new each time I go.

Tulsa, OK

LeahMueller.org

# CHARLOTTE LACOSTE

## CHARLOTTE LACOSTE FINE ARTS



*Silver Mountain, Lempster, NH, Gouache paint*

New love of medium: gouache. Taconic State Park was the first time seeing lupin flowers. Sliver Mountain my partner showed me the views in Lempster, NH. Loved seeing fireflies, especially there are none where I am from.

Claremont, NH

[charlottelacosteart.wixsite.com](http://charlottelacosteart.wixsite.com)



*Fireflies in Spofford, Chalk paint*



*Taconic State Park, Gouache paint*

# JOAN MCNERNEY

## *Stopping at Oneonta, New York, Poetry*

We listen to trains  
remembering native names.  
Otsego, Otsego long lake  
of night trailing  
snow showers of light.

Neahwa Neahwa shadows  
of exotic names filled  
with fragrant spruce and  
cooling winds of trains.

In black wells of solitude  
through silent fixed stars  
we hear passing trains  
lulled by bright names.

Whistling long and lonely  
trains, freight trains boxcar  
trains riding past avenues  
marked with tribal names.

We will enter dreams of trains  
recalling so many names.  
Susquehanna Susquehanna  
long hill of light trailing  
this December night.

## *Visiting Bear Mountain, New York, Poetry*

Sunshine yellow and  
warm as honey slides  
through arches of elms.

Moss crawls over mud stone  
while squirrels skip  
around tree stumps.

Leaves drop like butterflies  
filling the floor of forest  
with crunchy foliage.

Imagine to be a bird  
in blue wind pushing  
air through your wing.

After a long afternoon  
pine trees bending  
with cones.

Branches etch evening sky  
turning razzle dazzle  
purple red citron.

## *Arriving at Cape Cod, Massachusetts, Poetry*

Hearing waves from a distance and  
feeling sea breezes brush our faces,  
it seemed a century before we  
came to the ocean.

So blue and bright to our eyes  
its rhythm broke chains of  
unremarkable days.

Over cool sand we ran and you picked  
three perfect shells which fit  
inside each other. Swimming away in  
that moving expanse below kiss  
of fine spray and splashes.

With clouds cumulus we drifted while  
gulls circled the island. Together we  
discovered beds of morning glories  
climbing soft dunes.

I remember these places and the times I spent with my husband. The beauty of nature is fantastic and so is the sculpture of the Brooklyn Bridge.

**Ravena, NY**

# AMY SEVERINO



*Golden Canopy, Birches in Autumn, Digital art*

I celebrate the vibrant colors of fall in New Hampshire, where the landscape transforms into a tapestry of warm hues. Inspired by the birch trees that stand tall amidst a golden, sunlit canopy, this digital painting captures the essence of the changing season. Using a pointillist technique, I layered dots of color to evoke the energy and texture of an autumn forest. This work reflects my deep appreciation for the natural beauty that surrounds me!

New Ipswich, NH

[AmySevArts.com](http://AmySevArts.com)

# SUSANNE LARKHAM

ON A LARK FINE ART



*The Early Bird, Pastel*

Drawing upon a background in fitness, musical theater, and mathematics, these experiences help me create compositions that practically sing! Am especially moved by the beauty found in natural settings & how the play of color and light can convey emotion--which pairs perfectly with the intense pigments in soft pastels. A Colorist at heart, my contemporary representational paintings are rendered in idealized realism. The Early Bird depicts a sunrise reflecting off of the steel pole barn on the farm where I was raised outside of Walnut, IL. When I was young, this was both a hay barn and a shelter for livestock. My brother and I spent countless hours using our imaginations to scale mountains out of the bales of hay, testing our courage jumping from the top, and found countless litters of kittens newly born. To our dad, it was the hub of farm life but to us it was a grand theater where we lived out our childhood dreams.

Manchester, NH

[SusanneLarkham.com](http://SusanneLarkham.com)



# DANIEL HOLDEN SMITH

*To the Ground that Grew Me, Poetry*

*These hands have become so busy, I've forgotten what I'm holding.*

I forgot how to smile at my own face  
'Till I walked for a while at my own pace  
Back down to the roots that grew me  
Among the people who knew me  
As a child beguiled by Life's warm embrace

*And as I lose my footing, it's best to embrace the fall.*

My home, again you become dear to me.  
No longer a place I fear to be stuck,  
and still now by grace  
you shape fawn into buck.  
And really,  
I cannot ever  
thank you enough.

And to the young sprouts,  
who on playgrounds now frolic and shout,  
thank you for reminding me  
what this life is all about.  
Your weightless smiles burn brightly for miles around  
and uncut laughter injects my soul with the sweetest of sounds.

*Because on these hallowed grounds bloom wonders long lost, 'till tomorrow they're found.*

It will never cease to amaze me  
Who you might meet over coffee.  
However dreary the days be,  
With a gentle-handed point up,  
they say "I'll take a warm up"  
And there I stand, hot pot in hand  
Trading talk about the town  
And the land, and the Big Man upstairs,  
And the fresh cut of my hairs,  
And the latest woes of my peers  
And the changes brought by years,  
And deep felt fears about...

And then I clock out and walk out,  
and stride back up the hilltop  
from which the entirety of  
my life thus-far has spilt off.  
All the while this heart is smiling,  
grateful for these little blessings  
That seem to keep piling.

*And as the branches bud in spring, I find bliss in the unfolding of it All.*

This piece is an attempt to convey the heaps of enrichment I've found since moving back to my hometown of Somersworth. Despite deep desires to live fiercely and widely, I've felt compelled to remain at home for the time being. Since graduating college in 2023, I've been met with wonderful opportunities that have transformed my perception of my home, my agency within it, and the way I view myself. I have taught at the elementary schools, served at a breakfast joint down the hill from my house, and coached for the high school soccer team I played on just six years ago. The human connections have been magnificent. No longer am I a kid getting funneled along, but a man capable of profound love and impact. The gratitude and joy I've felt is overwhelming, and this work explores the love I've nurtured here.

# DEBBIE MUELLER

## DEBBIE MUELLER ART



*Resolute*, Oil paint

Durham, NH

[DebbieMuellerArt.com](http://DebbieMuellerArt.com)



*Lighthouse Afternoon*, Oil paint



*Taking the Long View*, Oil paint

I was born in Maine twice. In 1960, I was born as a baby. In 2017, I was born as an artist during my first trip to Monhegan. I have visited that magical island almost every summer since, and am always drawn to the Lighthouse Keeper's House, perched high over the sea, timeless in its beauty and simplicity. I am submitting three paintings of this beloved building.

# JEN DROCIAK

Sugar Maple, Poetry

## A Place That Tempts More, Poetry

Late August evening  
we tiptoe barefoot  
to the water's edge  
as the amber crescent moon  
reveals placid lake water  
still as mirrored glass

We dip our toes in first  
then holding hands count to three  
and plunge into uncertainty -  
you remind me this was my idea

Slowly and silently  
we swim out from the dock  
you, wearing a life preserver  
fearing unknown depths  
and what lies below

We float together  
suspended in warm liquid velvet  
against cool autumn air  
I take hold of your life jacket  
as if it will save me too

Still, the flash of your eyes catches mine  
under the moon's reflection  
illuminating the surface of the water  
~  
You say there is a meteor shower  
that we should watch from the dock

We emerge from the water  
with cool goose-pimpled skin  
yet I tell you I'm not cold

Lying on our backs  
our damp bodies against parched wood -

we gaze toward the constellations  
and begin counting falling stars  
underneath a wool army-surplus blanket

You gently touch my shoulder  
and run your fingers down my spine -  
our legs and feet begin to entwine

Enough of us touching to ignite a spark  
yet enough distance to prevent a fire  
~  
In the cottage  
the sky threatens  
as heavy rain pounds sideways  
against single-pane windows

The lamplight is out  
and the warmth of our bodies  
gravitate toward each other

There are no means of prying these  
moments, hours, or days apart  
and no mechanism to tell time  
aside from the setting sun and rising  
moon

A friendship once defined  
as sharp as graphite on starched-white  
paper  
now at a place that tempts more

You whisper in my ear  
and then pull away  
as the lightening outside misleads  
and allows for night to appear clear as  
day

Every April  
your bare, brittle branches  
became perches  
for the red-breasted robin  
to herald in the spring with her melodies

and every summer  
I would hear the  
"CHEER CHEER CHEER  
PRETTY PRETTY PRETTY"  
of the Northern cardinal seeking  
a mate

But throughout the years  
you not only became the harbinger of fall  
but the early demise of summer  
as you began dropping your leaves in  
mid-August  
long before the nearby red and Norway  
maples

I would hastily collect every leaf on the  
ground  
attempting to keep autumn at bay  
and prolong the carefree days of summer

But once your leaves fully turned  
and your outstretched arms burst into  
brilliant flames  
against the blue September skies  
I could no longer deny the glory of your  
presence

Yet over time I began resenting you for  
aging  
falling prone to disease,  
rotting from your crown to your trunk,  
and dropping your heavy,  
decaying limbs

in even the slightest breeze  
or simply because you were too  
old and tired  
and no longer felt obliged to  
cling to their youthful ideals

And since an arborist concurred  
that merely pruning your branches  
would have left you severely disfigured  
I greeted you as I had done so  
every morning for past 25 years  
and took your photograph one last time  
on the last day of our acquaintance

I watched  
as you were hoisted over the house  
placed on the lawn,  
fed into the woodchipper,  
and turned to a pulpy mulch  
only to be incinerated  
and further reduced to ash

I gasped  
at the additional asphalt-shingled  
rooftops,  
brick chimneys, and sodium-vapor  
streetlights  
I'd never seen before

I cringed  
at the lack of shade  
and the afternoon sun  
beating down on me

and I wept  
at your absence  
since you were no longer there  
to buffer, shelter, and protect.

# JEN DROCIAK (CONTINUED)

*Our Lady, Notre Dame, Poetry*

*Constructed in 1937  
after the flood of '36 destroyed her predecessor  
she was crowned Notre Dame  
for "Our Lady" of the Queen City*

*Her soaring suspension arches  
a contrast of vibrant green against cobalt-sky  
and brick-red millyard at river's edge -  
spanning the heart of the Merrimack River  
and gracefully bridging east and west for fifty-two years*

*At certain times  
one could witness her extend her arches  
more proudly toward an orange-glow of a sunset,  
or toward a festive displays of fireworks  
celebrating Independence*

*Fondly known to children as the "singing bridge"  
she hummed as rubber tires met her metal-grated decking  
and I rolled the window down and sang along  
from the wood-paneled station wagon*

*But several years later  
engineers in hard hats discovered  
she was frail and in "disrepair"  
and recommended her demolition and replacement  
with a four-lane expansion of concrete, steel, and asphalt.*

*Eleven days before I became her adolescent  
she witnessed her last sunset over the Merrimack,  
took one final pause to muse at the millyard to the east,  
and the Uncanoonucs on the horizon to the west*

*And the following day  
on a vivid September morning  
she took her last breath  
before toppling into the chilling autumnal waters below*

*I knew at this time Manchester would be  
a slightly different city  
but was too young  
to attend a public hearing or cast a vote*

*As a tribute that year  
I constructed a replica in art class  
with paper straws, cardboard, and Styrofoam  
painted in bottle-green tempera paint  
and held together with Elmer's glue and pins*

*The image of her remains in the river  
is still etched in my memory  
yet I cannot recall  
if there was applause for the new  
or tears for the lost  
from those at her wake*

When I consider "Love Letter to a Place", not only do I think of a physical place, but, more importantly, I think of a time and place in my life, and my place in my community and in the world. This is a topic I am interested in delving more into, but for now, I have revisited a place and memory from my childhood (Our Lady, Notre Dame), a place and memory from my young adulthood (A Place That Tempts More) and a place and memory in my adulthood (Sugar Maple). While these poems were written some time ago and are not from the same body of work, I have revisited them and see common themes of place, memory, the passage of time, and aging. These poems are love letters to these themes.

**Manchester, NH**

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Creative Guts is on a mission to awaken creativity within people of all ages by curating an environment for connection, collaboration, and the opportunity for gutsy creatives to share their stories with the world.

We do this through programs, zines, events, and a podcast that is focused on the pursuit of creativity. Our interview-style podcast explores the roots of creativity, dives into the hearts of creators, and discovers how creativity connects with the world around us.

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