

NICOLE IRENE ANDERSON

ANNETTE GOODFRIEND

ASH HAY

C.K. ITAMURA

NESTOR TORRES LUPERCIO



# DISCOVERED

Emerging Artists of Sonoma County

LEILANI CLARK

ERNESTO M. GARAY

CHELSEA KURNICK

JOY LANZENDORFER

NICOLE R. ZIMMERMAN



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Presented by



# DISCOVERED

Emerging Artists of Sonoma County

November 19, 2019 to February 2, 2020



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# DISCOVERED

Emerging Artists of Sonoma County

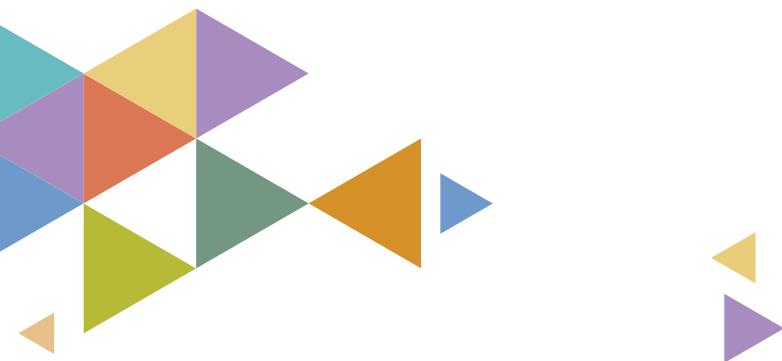
Visual artists speaking stories with their images. Literary artists painting pictures with their words. Truth tellers, scribes and archivists—these are the ten artists of **Discovered: Emerging Artists of Sonoma County 2019**. At first blush, the distinctions between them appear stark—in genre, medium, and content. But a closer look uncovers commonalities, from an underlying urgency for reinvention to a clear-eyed reveal of the previously under-exposed.

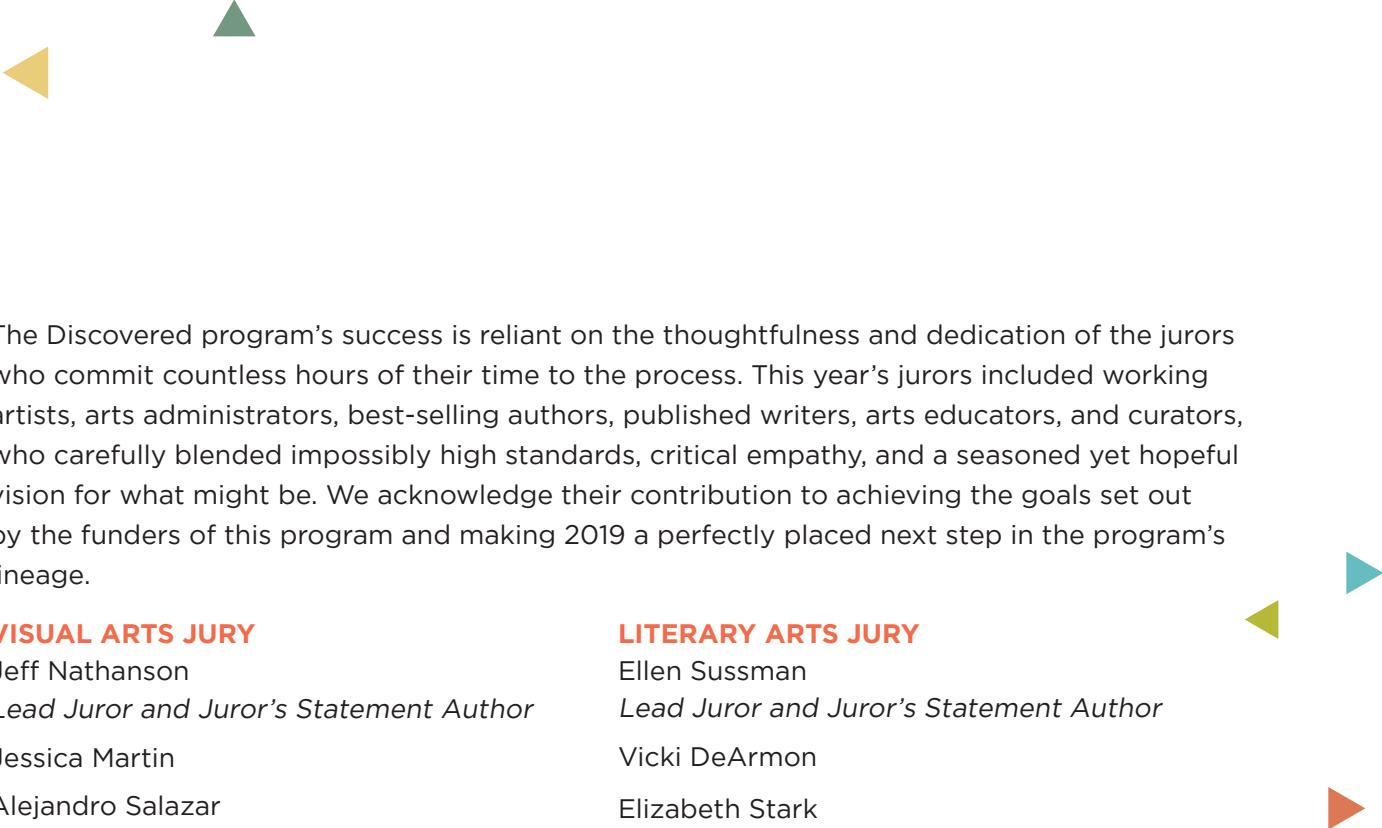
These artists invite us into their personal adventure of self-discovery. But it turns out that the doorway into the depths of their work is a two-way portal. As we peek into their hearts and decipher their messages, their work insinuates itself into our souls, taking up residence in the soft tissue of our hopes and fears, squatters on the edges of our emotions. It is an intoxicating act of quiet connection—the better we come to know our artists, the more powerfully we come to understand ourselves.

The title of this program, “Discovered,” suggests a conclusive destination—the end point of a journey. In this context, it is quite the opposite, simply a temporary way station where these ten remarkable artists have alit for a brief, shared moment in their otherwise unique explorations.

In the end, the Discovered artists of 2019 show themselves to be a fresh and distinctive representation of our complex and captivating Sonoma home. **As we join them here on their parallel, but divergent sojourns, we can all surely find a place of welcome.**

Creative Sonoma





The Discovered program's success is reliant on the thoughtfulness and dedication of the jurors who commit countless hours of their time to the process. This year's jurors included working artists, arts administrators, best-selling authors, published writers, arts educators, and curators, who carefully blended impossibly high standards, critical empathy, and a seasoned yet hopeful vision for what might be. We acknowledge their contribution to achieving the goals set out by the funders of this program and making 2019 a perfectly placed next step in the program's lineage.

#### **VISUAL ARTS JURY**

Jeff Nathanson  
*Lead Juror and Juror's Statement Author*

Jessica Martin

Alejandro Salazar

#### **LITERARY ARTS JURY**

Ellen Sussman  
*Lead Juror and Juror's Statement Author*

Vicki DeArmon

Elizabeth Stark

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#### **DISCOVERED ARTISTS SINCE INCEPTION**

##### VISUAL ARTISTS

|                       |      |
|-----------------------|------|
| Stan Abercrombie      | 2014 |
| Nicole Irene Anderson | 2019 |
| Todd Barricklow       | 2006 |
| Erik Castro           | 2014 |
| Julie Cavaz           | 2008 |
| Tramaine De Senna     | 2010 |
| Cathy Ellis           | 2012 |
| Sarah Frieberg        | 2008 |
| Annette Goodfriend    | 2019 |
| Jenny Harp            | 2016 |
| Maura Harrington      | 2014 |
| Peter Hassen          | 2012 |
| Ash Hay               | 2019 |
| C.K. Itamura          | 2019 |

|                        |      |
|------------------------|------|
| Laine Justice          | 2010 |
| Ryan Lely              | 2012 |
| Dayana Leon            | 2016 |
| Nestor Torres Lupercio | 2019 |
| Seth Minor             | 2006 |
| Catherine Richardson   | 2006 |
| Catherine Sieck        | 2016 |
| William Smith          | 2012 |
| Andrew Sofie           | 2010 |
| Kala Stein             | 2016 |
| Esther Traugot         | 2012 |
| Geirrod VanDyke        | 2008 |
| Miles Votek            | 2014 |
| Jaynee Watson          | 2106 |

##### MUSICAL ARTISTS

|                 |      |
|-----------------|------|
| Robin Beeman    | 2009 |
| Jim Corbett     | 2009 |
| Eliot Fintushel | 2011 |
| Joan Frank      | 2011 |
| John Harden     | 2009 |
| Steve Pile      | 2011 |

##### LITERARY ARTISTS

|                     |      |
|---------------------|------|
| Leilani Clark       | 2019 |
| Ernesto Garay       | 2019 |
| Chelsea Kurnick     | 2019 |
| Joy Lanzendorfer    | 2019 |
| Nicole R. Zimmerman | 2019 |



## ARTIST BIO

**NICOLE IRENE ANDERSON** was born in 1993 in Cambria, California. She studied at Cuesta College in San Luis Obispo, where she received an A.A. in Studio Art (2015) and an A.A. in Art History and Professional Practices (2015). She then studied at the California College of the Arts in San Francisco, where she earned a B.F.A. in Painting/Drawing (2017). Anderson's work has been shown in exhibitions throughout the San Francisco Bay Area and New York. She earned the Louis and Lundy Siegriest Memorial Scholarship (2015), and the Ted Doyle Scholarship (2016) at the California College of the Arts. Anderson works at her studio in Santa Rosa, California.

## JUROR'S STATEMENT

**Nicole Irene Anderson** creates expertly crafted paintings that are surprisingly complex. Painting in a narrative style, she works from a social-environmental-psychological perspective—creating multiple layers both in content and in technique. We visited her studio at 33 Arts and were immediately drawn to the rich layered surfaces and complex imagery. She is articulate and confident in describing her process, how she travels to photograph and draw in various locations, looking for landscapes that are clearly altered by human activity. The paintings are evocative, seductive and unsettling, with a narrative that is left to the observer to interpret. Reality and the subconscious co-exist in her paintings in an unexpected balance with architectural elements, figures engaged in questionable activities, and an environmental subtext.





▲  
As part of my process, I travel  
to locations to sketch and take photographs  
of architectural forms and landscapes that are  
highly altered by human intervention.”  
▼

## Nicole Irene Anderson

**M**y paintings depict complex environments where reality and the unexpected converge. Working on panel, canvas, and paper, I combine painting and drawing media to create intricate, painterly surfaces where thick paint, textured glazes, and delicate graphite drawing coexist. My subject matter revolves around evocative, melancholic landscapes and enigmatic, figurative imagery. As part of my process, I travel to locations to sketch and take photographs of architectural forms and landscapes that are highly altered by human intervention. Coming into contact with these real places serves as an emotional and nervous starting point that functions as a stage, or “movie set” in a composition. The stage undergoes manipulation and its place of origin obscured. In some paintings, the stage becomes populated with anonymous people engaged in questionable activities. The narrative qualities of these works are not intended to have a singular interpretation. Alternatively, they aspire to imbue a sensory response and to evoke ethical ambiguity.



**You Had it Coming**, 2018, oil, casein, and graphite on panel, 22" x 85"



## NICOLE IRENE ANDERSON PAINTING

Anderson's images in this catalog are representative of her work, but do not specifically reflect artwork from the exhibition.



Pay Dirt, 2016, oil, casein, and graphite on panel, 26" x 43"



Acquirement of Knowledge, 2017, oil on linen, 30" x 26"



Whistleblower, 2017, oil, casein, and graphite on panel, 32" x 46"



You Surpass Them All, 2017, oil, casein, and graphite on panel, 18" x 76"

**NICOLE IRENE ANDERSON**



## ARTIST BIO

**ANNETTE GOODFRIEND** was born and raised in Northern California. She completed her undergraduate degree at U.C. Berkeley, where she studied Genetics and Art, and she received her master of fine arts at the California College of the Arts. Goodfriend is a winner of the 2018 international art competition Premio O.R.A. Italia, and was awarded a solo exhibition at 3)5 Arte Contemporanea, a contemporary art gallery in Viterbo, Italy. One of 18 artists from 15 countries, her work was chosen for the YICCA International Art Competition, and exhibited at the HDLU Pavilion in Zagreb, Croatia.

Artist residencies include the Morris Graves Foundation in Humboldt County, and the Headlands Center for the Arts, as an affiliate. Her sculpture has garnered multiple awards having been exhibited in solo and group shows locally, nationally, and internationally.

## JUROR'S STATEMENT

Upon entering **Annette Goodfriend's** studio one cannot avoid drawing a comparison to a biology lab. At first glance it appears that there are body parts and strange, unidentifiable organic specimens placed in a semi-formal arrangement throughout the space. Her work is anatomical, with numerous human and biological references. But these pieces, mostly in white against a dark wall, also have the formal presence of classical figurative sculpture. Talking about her work, Goodfriend is friendly and upbeat, as she describes her interest in the relationship between humans, nature, and science. But, in spite of her down to earth manner, her themes and concerns are complex and serious. Goodfriend uses silicone rubber, gypsum, and resin to create her compelling works that address politics of the body, genetics, the human condition, and our relationship to nature and the environment.





Photo by Sarah Deragon

▲  
“My goal as an artist is to continue to create engaging and enigmatic work that stimulates conversation and broader questions about science, nature, and the role of humans.”  
▼

## Annette Goodfriend

I am fascinated by the perversity of nature. My current work casts a critical, scientific, and humorous eye on the mutagenesis of form, from the cellular level to the limb. It examines and celebrates that moment of translation from cerebral to visceral. The concept behind each new piece informs the materials that I choose; the character of the materials—silicone rubber, gypsum, and resin—each carry their own emotional language which complements the themes explored in my work. Natural objects are introduced as I examine the intersection between humans, nature, and the scientific eye.

My goal as an artist is to continue to create engaging and enigmatic work that stimulates conversation and broader questions about science, nature, and the role of humans. The art that I find most intriguing requires of the viewer a mental jump to bridge the synapses: from the concrete to the metaphysical to the sensory; scientific to abstract to imaginary. I aim for my

art to effect a visceral reaction, both literally (in actual space) and conceptually (the space between your ears). In that fraction of time between first seeing and then feeling the trajectory of the work there is a joyous mental “aha” moment. Beyond its conceptual genesis, however, I aim to create work that can reinvent itself according to the viewer’s own experiential connection, and as such becomes universal, transcending a single interpretation.

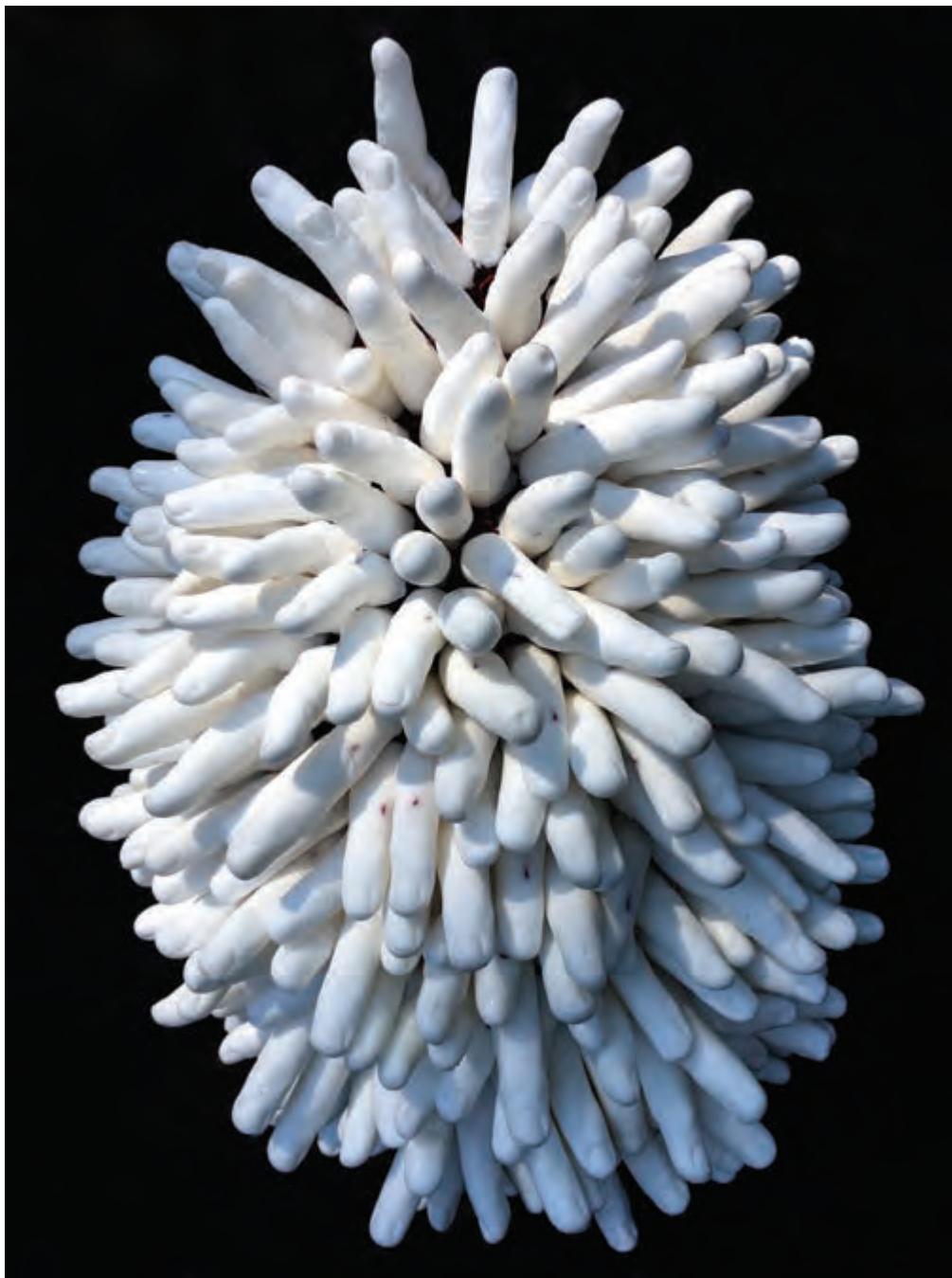
More about Annette at [AnnetteGoodfriend.com](http://AnnetteGoodfriend.com)

Photo by Dana Davis



Tongue Ball, silicone rubber, vintage glass millinery stamen

ANNETTE GOODFRIEND SCULPTURE



Anemone, 2016, silicone rubber, Fiberglass, & Twine



Handwork, 2017, silicone rubber



Knot, 2017, silicone rubber, 48" x 14" x 8"



## ARTIST BIO

**ASH HAY** grew up in the San Fernando Valley among a large family of makers and creators who nurtured their interest in art from a very young age. Hay moved to Sonoma County to attend Sonoma State University where they received their BFA in printmaking and currently lives and works in Santa Rosa.

For Hay, visual art is the most natural way to explore and express ideas of identity and communication in a way that connects them to the skills and craft that they have been honing since they were a child. Hay continues to expand their work among a supportive network of local artists who create opportunities for themselves and others.

Hay has created work for SOMO Village, has participated in numerous community craft fairs and festivals, and hosted a local Drink & Draw program. Hay's deep connections to community play a large role in their work and they are often asking "How does the experience in my body reflect that of the collective body?"



## JUROR'S STATEMENT

**Ash Hay's** studio is a small space, somewhat cluttered and full of doll-like soft sculptures that initially evoke a smile. The works are whimsical and easy to like. But, it doesn't take long to discover layers of meaning about gender, identity, form, and relationships. Hay works with fabric to create the large sculptures with the human body as a primary focus. Additionally, works on paper and clay objects, dominated by the color pink, address a theme of softness as power. Hay speaks about the work—and life—very openly explaining how fatness impacts peoples' lives. The work conveys a deep interest in exploring gender, body acceptance, and how the size of one's body, especially large bodies, impacts how one navigates the world.





Photo by Isabelle Garson

▲  
“In my work, I explore ideas of  
gender expression, body acceptance,  
and radical softness.”  
▼

Ash Hay

**M**y art is diaristic and centered in the body; how it communicates with the earth, itself, and bodies around it. In my work, I explore ideas of gender expression, body acceptance, and radical softness. Fatness, my own and others,' comes up often as I am continually confronted with how fat bodies are treated and how they navigate this world.

My use of large soft sculpture, working with paper clay, techniques of paper layering in my paintings and works on paper, and a color palette rooted in the color pink, all support my overarching theme of softness as power.



**Heavy Heart** (detail), 2019, rice, muslin, pompom trim, and acrylic

More about Ash at [ashhayart.com](http://ashhayart.com)



Three Graces 2019, gouache and watercolor on celuclay



Little Angel 2018, soft sculpture, 11"x 5"x 4"



Self Sabatoge (detail), 2019, rice, muslin, pompom trim, and acrylic



## ARTIST BIO

**C.K. ITAMURA** is an autodidactic interdisciplinary artist. Her work blurs the lines between mediums as she combines tangible materials, sensory prompts, space, time, book arts, language, and photography to create visual work, participatory projects and conceptual installations. Itamura is co-founder of Book Arts Roadshow, an artist member of The Center for Book Arts, a former director of San Francisco Center for the Book, a board member of Healdsburg Center for the Arts, and an Artist-in-Residence of Chalk Hill Residency and In Cahoots Residency.



## JUROR'S STATEMENT

**C.K. Itamura's** studio is clean, well lit, and impeccably organized, much like the elegant and minimalist installations at the heart of her art practice. She is an interdisciplinary artist, writer, and designer who blurs the lines between mediums as she combines various materials, book arts, language, and photography to create visual art, participatory projects and conceptual installations. Itamura develops her work conceptually and about her Discovered installation she explains that she does not want the work to be static. Her aim is to challenge the typical concept of an art exhibition, in which the art is installed, is on view for a time, and then de-installed. In this exhibition her installation will continue to evolve and change by her regularly working on it over the course of the exhibition. This adds a performative dimension to her installation; there will be times when the public will be able to observe, and on occasion, participate in the process.





Photo by Conrad Praetzel

“...foreshortening of perceived time, made possible only in part by technological ‘advances,’ has developed into an epidemic of time-sense myopia, which is deteriorating consideration for the future beyond ‘Now.’”

C.K. Itamura

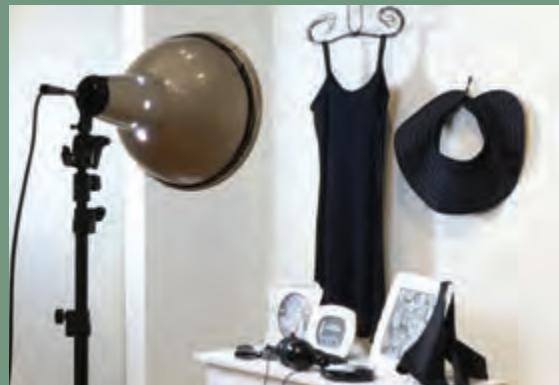
In the Current Era the future is increasingly considered in shorter and shorter measure— frequently in months, weeks, days, the 15-minute increments of calendaring systems, the couple of seconds it takes to pick an emoji and hit send—and only sometimes in years, rarely in decades, and almost never in centuries. This foreshortening of perceived time, made possible only in part by technological “advances,” has developed into an epidemic of time-sense myopia, which is deteriorating consideration for the future beyond “Now.”

Remember: to what end are we racing and why?

What notable changes have occurred during the past 2019 years of the Current Era? Which of these changes were planned for and expected, and which of these changes were unexpected? What changes will occur in the next 2019 years? What changes will be planned for and what unexpected changes might occur?

Visual art is often understood to be static. Once installed, the art is seen, the exhibition continues, the exhibition closes, art is de-installed. What would happen if the sequence changed such that once installed, art is seen, the exhibition continues with the art evolving each day through a brief intervention by the artist, the exhibition closes, and the art in its altered state is de-installed?

*s+oryprobl=m :: changed conditions* offers a dose of time-sense hyperopia as a lease to contemplate, over time, the relationship of the present with past outcomes with which to move consciously into the future.



Widows Weeds, 2016, life-sized diorama audio book, 4'w x4'd x 6'h

More about C.K. at [peachfarmstudio.net](http://peachfarmstudio.net)

## C.K. ITAMURA INTERDISCIPLINE

Itamura's images in this catalog are representative of her work, but do not specifically reflect artwork from the exhibition.

All photos of **s+ory probl=m :: changed conditions** and **s+oryprobl=m :: fragile vessels** by Tibidabo Photography.



**s+ory probl=m :: changed conditions**, 2019-2020, paper installation, approx. 144 sq. feet



**s+ory probl=m :: changed conditions**, 2019-2020, paper installation, approx. 144 sq. feet



**s+ory probl=m :: changed conditions**, 2019-2020, paper installation, approx. 144 sq. feet



s+oryprobl=m :: fragile vessels, 2017 paper installation, 5'x28'



s+ory probl=m :: changed conditions, 2019-2020, paper installation, approx. 144 sq. feet



## ARTIST BIO

**NESTOR TORRES LUPERCIO** was born in Sonoma County during the nineties in a family that emigrated from Aguascalientes, Mexico. He was raised in Sebastopol, California where he would wander the apple orchard where he grew up.

When he was eighteen years old, an interest in photography was sparked. After that, he decided to take photography classes at Santa Rosa Junior College; as Lupercio transitioned from school to entering the workforce, he studied light, composition, and equipment on his own. While spending years practicing capturing portraits, nightscapes by the coast, and street photography in Mexico, he noticed that photography was a healthy outlet to deal with unresolved depression, chronic pain, and bicultural identity crisis.

For the last three years, Lupercio has taken solo trips to different parts of Mexico to practice street photography and as a way of honoring his Mexican roots. In 2016, He was featured in the bilingual newspaper La Prensa Sonoma for his work inspired by the Mexican board game La Loteria. In 2017 The Press Democrat named him as a “Notable Sonoma County artist.” He has presented his work in a variety of art exhibitions such as Dia de los Muertos in Petaluma for the last two years and more recently a solo art exhibition, Paleteros De México in Santa Rosa.

Photography has become Lupercio’s go-to medicine to cope with different aspects in his life physically and mentally. Lupercio continues documenting in Mexico, capturing various traditions and aspects overlooked or culturally appropriated and give a deeper look and appreciation from a perspective from a first-generation Mexican American artist.



## JUROR'S STATEMENT

Meeting **Nestor Torres Lupercio** was a memorable experience. He lives in a comfortable house with his parents, his sister and her family, who were present during our visit. Lupercio showed us his photographs in a small room off the front hallway that he uses as a studio. Then, we enjoyed an unexpected surprise as his mother served us a traditional lunch with homemade tamales, rice, salsa, guacamole, and other delicious treats. The culinary aspect of this studio visit, plus the presence of his family, provided the perfect cultural context for Nestor’s very personal and moving photographs. He has spent the past two years documenting life and details leading up to, during, and after Dia De Los Muertos in Mexico. In his numerous trips to Mexico he has beautifully photographed Mexican tradition. He explains that he was born in Sonoma County but his parents are immigrants and for him, there is a spiritual connection that draws him to Mexico and inspires his creativity.



“I am planning to photograph different cities and towns in Mexico to document Dia de los Muertos traditions. I would like to show that there is more than just sugar skulls and Catrinas like the commercialization of our Mexican traditions such as the new Catrina Barbie doll.”

## Nestor Torres Lupercio

**M**y photography over the past two years has centered on documenting life and details leading up to, during, and after Dia De Los Muertos in Mexico through photography. I have made sequential trips to Mexico to photograph the tradition that is very personal to me. Being Mexican-American born in Sonoma County, I felt an instinct to migrate back to Mexico like monarch butterflies; a feeling almost guided by my ancestors’ spirits. I migrate back for the necessity of completing a spiritual life cycle, like my parents immigrated to the United States for the necessity of our family’s safety and well-being. I am planning to photograph different cities and towns in Mexico to document Dia de los Muertos traditions. I would like to show that there is more than just sugar skulls and Catrinas like the commercialization of our Mexican traditions such as the new Catrina Barbie doll. I feel this is important as newer generations become influenced by the mainstream culture like Disney’s movie *Coco* as our customs evolve and change over time. The love of my heritage is strongly represented in my photography even though my biculturalism is often under attack. I find it empowering to document what is often not understood but rather feared.

More about Nestor at [nestortlphoto.com](http://nestortlphoto.com)



*Lagrimas Guardadas*, 2017, Candid family photograph during prayer and exchanging memories, Aguascalientes Mexico

NESTOR TORRES LUPERCIO PHOTOGRAPHY



Algún Día, 2018, digital, photograph print, 13" x 19"



Pensamientos llenos, 2017, digital, photograph print, 13" x 19"



Abrazo del Viento, 2017, digital, photograph print, 13" x 19"



Vida y Muerte, 2018, digital, photograph print, 13" x 19"

**NESTOR TORRES LUPERCIO**



## ARTIST BIO

Raised in Hawaii and Los Angeles, **LEILANI CLARK** received a Bachelor of Arts in English Literature from the University of California San Diego. She played in indie bands and traveled for a few years, before settling down to teach middle and high school English in New Mexico and Oakland. In 2008, she received an MFA in Writing and Consciousness from the California Institute of Integral Studies.

Clark's writing has appeared at *The Guardian*, *Mother Jones*, *Civil Eats*, *The Press Democrat*, *The Rumpus*, and other publications. A former staff writer at the *North Bay Bohemian*, she was a 2014 California Endowment Health Reporting Fellow, and her feature story about a federal crackdown on Northern California cannabis dispensaries won a California Newspaper Publishers Association award. She currently makes her living in nonprofit communications and as the editor of a regional food magazine. She lives in Santa Rosa with her family.

## JUROR'S STATEMENT

**Leilani Clark** writes with a searing intensity about her struggles with alcohol addiction. She pokes and prods, looking for truth in the dark and complicated spaces of her life. She's willing to expose both her weakness and her triumphant spirit, all in search of a greater truth. It's ambitious writing; we applaud her courage and her talent.

Clark's prose is strong and versatile. She's able to capture the gritty moments of her life with language that feels raw and true. And she's able to access a more elegant language for the loftier moments of her storytelling. The writing has energy and verve. We learn so much about her and her world because of her unwavering eye.

Memoir has to transcend the personal story in order to succeed. Clark tells a deeply personal story in both of the essays she submitted for this grant, and in both cases she reaches far beyond her own personal experience in order to impact the reader. She has a way of suggesting: do you know my story? Do you see yourself in my actions? Can we take a hard look at alcoholism, at forgiveness, at the MeToo Movement, at our search for heroes? Can we find a glimpse of a brighter future?

We're excited to read more of Clark's powerful writing in the future.



Photo by Jacques Law

▲  
“I write to sort the weight and influence of the environments and ecosystems, natural and human-created, into which I was born...”  
▼

## Leilani Clark

I was born in East Los Angeles, but spent the first six years of my life on the Hawaiian Islands. My family returned to Los Angeles when I was in first grade; I lived in Southern California for the next twenty years. The life and pulse of growing up in these places, with complicated histories of colonialism, domination, and environmental degradation, inform the questions that rise up through my writing.

Much of my work arises from an urge to figure out a homeland, a place to land. My story begins with a convergence into California. On my mother’s side, four generations past, from Sweden. On my father’s side, two generations past, from the Sonoran Desert of Northern Mexico and Arizona. These bloodlines found their confluence in Los Angeles, a scrubby desert turned surging metropolis, where freeways pulse through the ghosts of neighborhoods.

I write to sort the weight and influence of the environments and ecosystems, natural and human-created, into which I was born; the widening circles of addiction and recovery; the tender anxiety of raising a child through climate catastrophe; and to explore borderlands while challenging dominant neoliberal capitalist narratives.

My writing draws inspiration from West Coast history, music, “outsiderism,” the work of writers like Rebecca Solnit and Gloria Anzaldua, narratives of addiction and recovery, an abiding love for the natural world, and working-class consciousness.

## Last Drink (essay excerpt)

I had my last drink on February 26, 2017, the night of the Academy Awards. My last sip of wine entered my throat right around the moment when *La La Land* was announced as Best Picture. I remember a man sliding onto the stage, whispering in Warren Beatty's ear after he opened the envelope and announced the winner, how surprised the actor looked, and how a second later he declared *Moonlight* to be the real winner.

I remember—the awards were over; I was in my friend's dark, cramped kitchen, ranting about cancer, marriage, the Trump administration, toxic masculinity, climate change—whatever recent terrors rose up in my muddled, wine-soaked brain. Our daughters, both four, were playing in the living room. They stopped and watched me with concern.

"Why are you crying, Mommy?" My daughter said.

Then: "Mommy, stop talking, please."

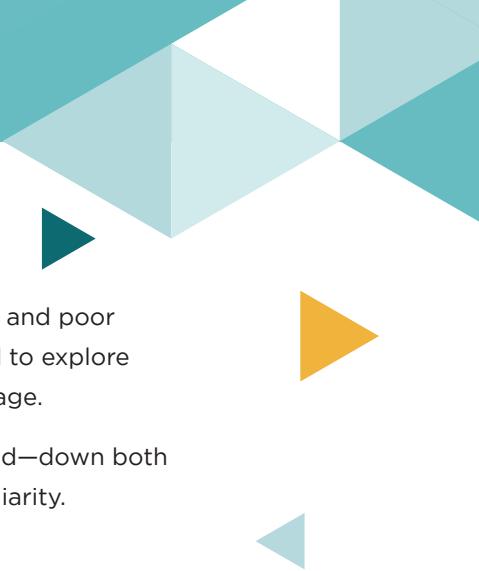
We left a few minutes later. I was drunk. I strapped my daughter into her car seat and drove us to my mother-in-law's house, where we were staying for the week. The line between lanes wavered as the red wine coursed through my body, having its way with my pre-frontal cortex.

"I'm fine, I'm fine, nothing to see here," I told myself, pushing away the fear that my luck was about to run out. I'd finally get that DUI I'd somehow avoided for the last twenty years. I'd been driving under the influence off and on since the age of 21, when I'd launched like a cliff diver into a lagoon of binge-drinking.

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Why did I drink? For one, alcohol was a quick fix for my persistent generalized anxiety and hypervigilance. I experienced the first sensation of unclenching immediately after my first sip of alcohol when I was 16—a sickly-sweet berry wine cooler at a friend's house in Hacienda Heights, Los Angeles. "How Soon is Now" by The Smiths played on the stereo. After two wine coolers, I found myself rolling around on the floor, cracking up at crushes, with my best friend. Grumpy Goth boys in black t-shirts and black eyeliner gave us dirty looks but we didn't care. We'd found liberation thanks to Bartles and Jaymes.

Alcohol lent me an easy bravado for the price of grueling hangovers. Drinking—heavily—became my favorite key to the door of the landscape of not giving a fuuuuuck. Sucking down whiskey straight from the bottle felt like a feminist act; for a few hours, the self-loathing dissipated, as did the uglies that had



plagued me since junior high school when I learned from the other kids that I was too fat and poor for anything but disdain and severe bullying; It allowed me to make passes at people and to explore my formerly repressed sexuality; It became a potent and dependable form of liquid courage.

It is also my genetic inheritance. The list of problem drinkers—active, recovering, and dead—down both family lineages is long. When I took that first drink, my neural pathways sighed with familiarity.

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My daughter and I survived the two-mile drive that night of the Oscars. “It’s late,” my mother-in-law said, frowning as she opened the front door for us. With her help, I got my daughter to bed, and then went into the guest room where I slept on a thin mattress under a pile of blankets. I watched an episode of Grey’s Anatomy but struggled to follow the plot; everything was blurry, and neither the television or the wine salved the pain of being. It was always the same. A warm, blissful, euphoria followed by a crash back into the anxiety, self-loathing, and anger—the next morning’s shame.

I passed out halfway through the second episode of Grey’s. A few hours later, I woke to my daughter’s screams. All week, she’d had furious nightmares. I stumbled to her, my mouth stinking and sour, my brain like a house of crumbling stone ruins. I wanted only to sleep—fuck, let me sleep— but I had to soothe a hysterical child. My mother-in-law got up from the couch and came into the bathroom, where I was trying to get my daughter to sit on the toilet as she screamed and writhed across on the yellowish linoleum floor. I was shrieking on the inside.

“I can’t deal with this,” I said, stumbling back to bed. Fading back into a thick, drunken sleep, I heard my mother-in-law soothing my daughter, walking her back into a safety and calm with a soft lullaby. Quiet descended in the darkness. I was nothing but a horrible mother. I’d walked away from my one absolute responsibility. But I wasn’t capable of soothing myself, much less another human.

I woke the next day, as to be expected, with a searing hangover and the shame to match. Cotton-mouthed and nauseous, I somehow got dressed, ate breakfast, and prepared my daughter for pre-school. I hid how awful I felt with small talk. My head pounded and my gut churned. The wine seemed to have burned a hole in my stomach.

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## ARTIST BIO

**ERNESTO GARAY** is an award-winning poet, performer, teacher and social activist. Garay holds two Masters Degrees: one in Comparative Literature and the other in Ethnic Studies. He is a widely published poet in both Spanish and English. Garay teaches poetry to children, teens and adults living with intersectional vulnerability, in schools and organizations in Sonoma County.

Presently, Garay is finishing his book of poetry: *Reverberating Voices*. Traversing the borders of El Salvador, Nicaragua, Mexico and California, it speaks about the experience of immigration, racism, healing the spirit, displacement and love during the Central American Civil Wars of the 1970s and 1980s.

He is passionate about social justice and advocating for the Latino immigrant community. Immensely creative and accomplished, he inspires us and moves among us with unfailing humility, generosity and grace.

## JUROR'S STATEMENT

**Ernesto Garay's** poems take us to the border, to the streets, to the desert, to abuela's kitchen. They offer us love and anger, hope and despair. They speak the language of the people. And they tell the stories of Central American immigrants struggling to find a home in the United States. Garay is a brave storyteller who doesn't shy away from difficult material. In fact, he makes real poetry out of human suffering.

These poems both open our eyes and lift our spirits. We can't look away. The Salvadoran Death Squad lives in the same world as the melodious Toucan birds. A boy runs. A woman makes pupusas. A man cruises the Mission. Immigrants fight for life at the border. Garay gives voice to these human beings living on the edge. He finds poetry in their daily existence. And he uses the language of the people so that their stories aren't lost in translation.

We found these poems to be surprising, alive and vibrant. And we were impressed with Garay's range, not only in the stories he wants to tell, but in the craft itself. He's an important poet for our time.



▲  
“By taking in stories, from Ernesto, my father, and Rosa, my mother, I learned that my cousins, aunts and uncles had been categorized as communists during the Salvadoran civil war.”

▼  
Ernesto M. Garay

**R**everberating Voices, my manuscript of poetry, was written on account of stories conveyed to me by my Central American parents, while growing up in San Francisco. I speak about the Central American Diaspora: multiple stories representing the various oppressions, such as racial and class oppression, experienced by Salvadorans during the civil war in the 1970s and 1980s.

By taking in stories, from Ernesto, my father, and Rosa, my mother, I learned that my cousins, aunts and uncles had been categorized as communists during the Salvadoran civil war. I recreate these narratives into poems as in “Betrayal” and “Crossing Dreamers,” both of which also represent the thousands of Salvadorans forced to flee their homeland due to war.

Poems like “Bilingual Love” symbolize how Central Americans on both sides of the US-Mexican border are diverse people with fluid identities, involving language, race, culture, etc. They are multi-perspective narratives rewriting the violent stereotypes projected onto the Central American subject during the civil war. Although Central Americans have faced oppressive struggles, both in the US and in their homeland, they are represented as subjects of history speaking collectively about this history.



## Crossing Dreamer

I want to live in the United States, among the American Dreamers, the green-tailed Humming Bird, gentle rain drops on the roof in the spring time, not among the garbage dumps, the inflated dollar and devalued peso. Not even in the windowless house where I live in, along the plant where we work like the savage black mule. But I dream out loud and I sing to you: José José's bolero: "Amar y Querer" until my heart bursts, and the yellow and speckled stars appear tonight. And, I strap on my white Nikes and cross myself. Before I cross over to the other side of the grated fence, I finish this poem written to you. In my fluttering heart, I see your glistening eyes and turn into a Lioness. There's no turning back to where I have no name!

## How to Make Pupusas

Tip the sun into the bowl you can honor and remember, your Mayan ancestors who never faded away or disappeared like the mist in the morning. You fill it with 1 cup of vegetable oil, corn masa flour, 3 lbs of grated Monterey Queso and 1 cup of water, mixing it in. You start kneading the masa like Mamá does it with her soft-smooth hands that have gently rubbed your forehead, to rub away your migraine headaches; she rolls the masa into balls, makes an indentation with her right thumb, and fills it with the cheese or other ingredients (I love the combination of cheese with loroco, the herbaceous flower bud). With Mamá's therapeutic hands, she pats it into a round tortilla. Then she grills the pupusa on the comal until it browns on both sides.

Eat the hardened rainbow with your crimson sky mouth and celebrate Easter Sunday. Hide the milk-chocolate Easter bunnies behind the blueberry bushes that stand tall above the cheery children, and serve the pupusas with Horchata and a plate of rice and beans.

Since Dad and Mom are laid off—don't worry—pupusas are on the cheap to make. Dance Cumbia and

Salsa and make more. This is how we party!

## Lost in the Desert

We get desperate as the fierce Sonora Desert, sears as it  
somewhere hides the wells and become withered trees in its heart.  
Our water supply, drying—

Now, our bottles are history and twelve Salvadoran compatriots, died  
and lost forever:

They were swallowed up by the fierce heat despite their efforts.  
Desperate we have become: we have drunk our deodorants,  
perfumes and even drank urine like orangutans.  
Abandoned in the desert by our Coyote,

Listen!                                 *eight of us lost as  
sheep eight of us lost  
as dogs*

for two days as the fluttering feasting birds fly above,  
waiting for us to become prey.

We say our prayers,  
praying to the highest power  
and we apply toothpaste and makeup  
to our sunburned faces.

We hope for a miracle as a twig that bears flowers.

I continue to stagger like a fallen pug, beaten.  
But as my eyes partly close and sight becomes a mist,  
my heart pounds against my chest and my spirit rekindled.  
I see the Jeep approaching and hear someone cry behind  
me: we are blessed...we are blessed...*we are blessed!*





## ARTIST BIO

**CHELSEA ROSE KURNICK** (she/her) is a writer and artist from southern California living in Sonoma County. She earned a BA in Linguistics in 2010 from University of California Riverside, where she was also editor-in-chief of *Mosaic: A Journal of Literature and Art*. In 2013–14, she created and hosted *The Casserole*, an online literary reading series that aired live on YouTube featuring remote guests from all over the world.

Kurnick began studying the craft of poetry at age 15 and began curating literary arts events at 20. She attributes most of her education in writing to community workshops and weekly open mics, which she has sought out since 2005 in every city she's lived. Kurnick believes that poetry and storytelling are powerful tools for building empathy and are at their most vital when experienced in person.

In Sonoma County, Kurnick has continued to produce arts events with activism at their core. She is Vice Chair of the Board of Directors of Positive Images, an LGBTQIA Community Center of Sonoma County.

Kurnick's work explores longing and loss, sometimes personal and sometimes global in scope; she writes of messy partnerships and humankind's tenuous relationship to the material world we inhabit.

## JUROR'S STATEMENT

**Chelsea Kurnick** shows a remarkable gift for language in these brilliant poems. She asks us to listen closely, to tune our ears so that we can hear sounds that we never heard before. Sometimes she moves us through her poems rhythmically, sometimes haltingly, and always, we fall under her spell. We learn about the natural world, the sensual world, the world of love and sex, of family and of animals. She often finds the surprising word—fricative, masticator, quake—that jolts us awake and demands our attention.

Because she has a lot to say. She demonstrates great range in form and content, stretching in new directions for each poem and prose piece. We also found humor here and a playful delight in language. Her imagery is often haunting and memorable.

We look forward to reading more of Kurnick's work in the future. And we were pleased to see that she reaches out beyond the page and into the community, creating opportunities for others as well. Brava.



Photo by Jeremiah Flynn

▲  
“I seek to feel and inspire the shared relief that can emerge from recognition of shared human experience. I write in an effort to reach beyond the boundary of the self. I write to deepen my capacity for empathy.”  
▼

## Chelsea Kurnick

I write to create connection. My work focuses on processing loss, queer love, and humanity’s impact on our environment. In exploring the connections integral to those topics, I find myself building and interacting in community spaces.

Creating poetry is a process that allows me to explore concepts or feelings that, at first, I feel I can’t explain using words. Unless I’m writing a poem in a prescriptive poetic form (e.g. my exploration of villanelles—see “Pure Chrome,” for one example), I expect that each new piece I write will require me to find a new form to express it. Writing and editing feels kindred to sculpting, with poems emerging via subtractive sculpture and prose works being built and shaped like additive sculpture. For a piece to succeed, I want my voice to surprise even myself.

While my writing is often focused on deeply personal longing and desire, its focus is not inward. Instead, I seek to feel and inspire the shared relief that can emerge from recognition of shared human experience. I write in an effort to reach beyond the boundary of the self. I write to deepen my capacity for empathy. When scrutinizing intrapersonal feeling, I sometimes pull in so close to render the person unrecognizable; “Delta: hers & mine,” is an example of this effect. By contrast, when I write to explore humanity as a collective, I zoom out so far out that the individual is indistinguishable.

I consider curation a part of my craft, as important to me as the individual works. When sequencing pieces for an audience, I always aim to open with some of my most approachable narrative writing, to establish trust so that a reader feels comfortable venturing with me into more lyric territory. There’s a powerful feeling of intimacy that emerges when a poem or story commands repeat attention from a reader. The writers I admire most create work that feels increasingly knowable over time spent with their oeuvre, because their use of language or form is singular without ever being opaque. I aspire to this in my own body of work.



## To The Fin Whale

I was trying to listen to your song  
but I didn't realize my computer doesn't  
support the audio file format on the Wikipedia page

So I kept thinking that I could hear you  
but then it was the horn section of a jazz band  
playing through the speakers in the cafe

and then again, "Oh, it started to play,"  
but this time it was an ambulance  
outside, siren bleeding in through the window

The saddest thing about you,  
the thing I can't help imagining with my human mind  
is your loneliness

that as the decades pass, your cries become  
muffled, inaudible over the roar of a louder species.

## Pure Chrome *for the Duwamish River*

The fishes' bright metallic color, chrome  
their bodies glinting, propulsive and strong  
innate urge impelling them upstream, home

a memory hazy, glistening through foam  
of losing count of the moving through  
the fishes' bright metallic color, chrome

more lustrous than the nearby sandy loam  
whose yield shows promise of prospering long  
innate urge impelling them upstream, home

a chromium plant where toxins are grown  
senescence triggered after salmon spawn  
The fishes' bright metallic color, chrome

The nuance between forgotten and  
unknown winding of an estuary redrawn  
innate urge impelling them upstream, home

blood drying on wood looks black in the gloam  
air smells of creosote and denouement  
The fishes' bright metallic color, chrome  
innate urge impelling them upstream, home



## Delta: hers & mine *for River*

I like to feel your name in my mouth  
its short vowels and rounded edges  
I want its liquid consonants. Your name  
occupies the space between my tongue and  
soft palate, gliding. The fricative V,  
where my front teeth graze my bottom lip  
for an instant. The act of saying is so quick  
but the *R*s never quite tell my mouth  
they are finished, so it is not easy to hold  
your name in, but it is easy to *River* on  
repeat like water carrying anything downstream

And I want to savor, with the same precision,  
your body in my mouth. I want to know its edges,  
its liquids, what vowel sounds I can cull from it  
I could grow roots in you but I would rather float  
my tongue along the stream of your veins,  
As if I was a sculptor and could use the soft tool of  
my mouth to shape you, the sharp blade of my mouth  
to extract a new form from the raw matter of you

And I want to take your mouth in my mouth,  
name-saying machines enveloping one  
another. I confess: sometimes  
kissing makes all the sense in the world, but  
other times, it seems like the apparatus  
that a mouth is (language-maker, masticator)  
doing an obtuse thing. It's then I need reminding:  
we can make a different kind of meaning

And if I ever finish kissing you,  
I want to leave my name in your mouth  
*Chelsea*. The *ch-* rubbing your tongue as  
your breath makes a tunnel from behind teeth—  
beginning as a stop, then releasing,  
preparing you for the vowel sound that  
spells the letter *L*, another liquid  
that pours forth at the alveolar ridge  
and then recedes like tide into the *-sea*





## ARTIST BIO

**JOY LANZENDORFER** is a writer living in Petaluma. Her first novel, *Right Back Where We Started From*, is forthcoming from Blackstone Publishing in 2021.

Lanzendorfer's essays and articles have appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Atlantic*, NPR, *The Washington Post*, *Ploughshares*, *Smithsonian*, *Longreads*, *Poetry Foundation*, *Journal of Alta California*, and more. Her short fiction has appeared in *Tin House*, *The Guardian*, *Hotel Amerika*, *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *The Maine Review*, *Raritan*, *The LA Review*, *McSweeney's Internet Tendency*, and others. The short story, "Sleep Disturbance," will be included in *The Best Small Fictions 2019* this fall. She has received awards and residencies from the *Hypatia-in-the-Woods*, *Speculative Literature Foundation*, *Wildacres Residency Program*, *Cuttyhunk Island Writers' Residency*, *Tin House Writers' Workshop*, and others.

Lanzendorfer started out writing for alternative weeklies, including local publications like the *North Bay Bohemian* and the *Pacific Sun* in Marin. In 2005, she received her MA in Creative Writing from San Francisco State University. Prior to that she received a BA in English from University of Oregon.



## JUROR'S STATEMENT

**Joy Lanzendorfer** writes like a dream. She takes us so thoroughly inside her fictional world—a small Michigan town in 1927—that we don't just follow her characters around, we see the world through their eyes. We feel their terror, their grief, their joy. Lanzendorfer's writing keeps us riveted, page by page. We can't wait to read the rest of this powerful novel!

*The Bath School Disaster*, a novel about a school bombing that killed forty-five people, starts by dropping us into the heat of the action. Lanzendorfer's compelling narrator was killed in the event and in some ghostlike form tells us the gripping story. The author has established a terrific voice for the novel. And she has a formidable skillset that enables her to fill her pages with rich characterization, vivid scene-making and emotional depth. She finds exactly the right detail: "Their screams were high and shrill, each a small steaming kettle. Inkwells shot to the ceiling like bullets." Lanzendorfer knows how to find the grace in quiet moments as well as big drama.

We know that Lanzendorfer is a disciplined and dedicated writer. That, and her enormous talent, should take her far in the literary world.



▲  
“Obviously, the events in Bath resonate deeply with today’s continual cycle of gun violence. Andrew Kehoe was the first person to commit this type of murder, but certainly not the last.”  
▼

## Joy Lanzendorfer

**M**y career plan as a writer is simply to work on projects that feel vital and important to me. While I enjoy writing nonfiction, my long-term goal is to be a novelist. Currently, I’m writing a book based on the Bath school disaster, the largest school bombing in US history. In 1927, Andrew Kehoe blew up a school in Bath, Michigan, killing 45 people, 38 of them children. The novel is a fictionalization of this event told by one of Kehoe’s victims, a World War I vet who’s also a ghost.

I discovered the story of Bath on my birthday, December 14, 2012, which also happens to be the date of the Sandy Hook Elementary shooting. My birthday that year became a scramble of reading news stories about this terrible tragedy that took the lives of so many. That day I learned about Bath, which at the time was the second largest mass murder in the United States. I knew right away that it would be the subject of my next novel.

Obviously, the events in Bath resonate deeply with today’s continual cycle of gun violence. Andrew Kehoe was the first person to commit this type of murder, but certainly not the last. My interest isn’t in looking into what made Kehoe the monster he was—although that will come out in the book—but to look at the effect his crime had on the families and the community of Bath, as well as the emotional fallout that comes from this kind of trauma. Through fictionalizing this tragedy, I hope larger truths will emerge.



## The Bath School Disaster (novel excerpt)

Before we could even get the kids out of the school, the automobiles started coming. Our little town had never seen the like. The two main roads through Bath were blocked for miles with honking cars and trucks. They stretched all the way to Lansing in one long traffic jam. The parents following their children to the hospital, or to the morgue, got caught in the traffic. They found themselves trapped in the stunned chambers of their Fords, staring not into the faces of their little fellows who needed them, but at a stranger's bumper with an out-of-town license plate. Many found that as exhaustion set in, the only solution was to cut across someone's farm, go home, and wait the traffic jam out.

Most of the strangers who came to Bath wanted to help at first. We needed them then, needed the emergency vehicles and nurses who trained in the war and fire marshals. But once those airplanes landed in the fields carrying the newspapermen, the bombing became national news and another group started coming to Bath. Tourists, I guess you'd call them. Sightseers. It was shocking how quickly they descended on our town like mayflies. They came to the funerals, which went on for three days straight after the bombing, Friday through Sunday, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., until the minister lost his voice from so much talking. The strangers waited outside and whenever the church door opened, they strained for a glimpse of the tiny caskets.

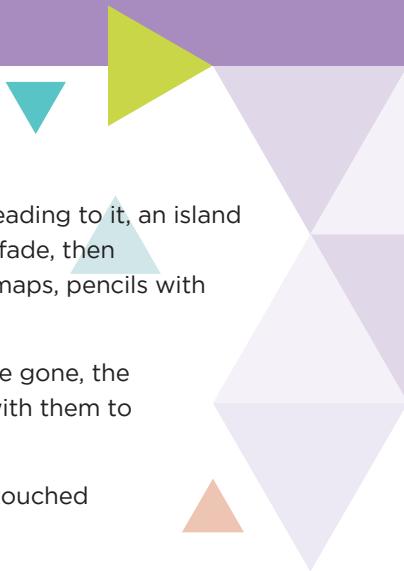
At my funeral, the commotion outside was so loud that my people had a hard time hearing my brother, Frank, giving my eulogy in the pulpit. I saw everyone straining to listen over the honking horns and strangers shouting outside. Frank's paper wobbled in his hands. He didn't know he was talking so quietly. All I felt in him was the bewilderment that he had to speak about me in the past tense, for I was no longer in the present. Whenever this thought came to him, he'd gulped in a shaky breath, pushing something like nausea deeper into his body. In front, my coffin sat draped with an American flag in the same spot where once, as a child, I was baptized in a metal tub.

Even after the world was distracted and news turned to other matters, the tourism continued. On Sundays, folks would take a spin down to Bath to check out the remains of the tragedy. They crawled all over town, scattering a litter of cellophane wrappers and paper notes that blew away and ended up in our hay bales and apple trees. Everyone in town started to loathe Sundays. The strangers would walk into the stores or come up to people on the sidewalks and ask questions you wouldn't believe people would ask.

They'd go into the grocery store and ask my sister-in-law, Leone, as they were buying an apple, "How many children did you lose in the bombing?" And every time someone said this—and it was more times than you'd believe—Leone would think of her daughter, Mary, who'd been in the school that day but hadn't been hurt, before she would think of me, her brother-in-law. And then she would feel guilty for thinking of the living before the dead.

I wish I could tell her I understand. I can't blame her for considering her daughter before me.

Of course, it was the ruins of the school that the Sunday drivers wanted to see the most. There it stood in the middle of town, a good quarter of the building open for all to see, the roof hanging like tarpaper against the retaining walls, the upper hallway gone, the desks gone, the children gone. On the second floor there was an open



coat closet where for some time the children's jackets hung on pegs without a floor or stair leading to it, an island of normalcy in the wreckage. The jackets weathered several storms and began to stiffen and fade, then they disappeared. Other things disappeared too: books, rulers, scissors, pieces of slate, torn maps, pencils with teeth bites, a sock or shoe with a red stain on the toe.

Those were the most poignant keepsakes that people carried off with them. When those were gone, the tourists began working on the piles of rubble itself, bringing pieces of pipe or plaster home with them to put in junk drawers or perch on bookshelves.

Slowly, the school receded, becoming like something polished and worn, a wooden banister touched by many hands.

Ida Hall, who lived across the street from the school, would see the tourists going in and out of the building. The high school and middle school sections were still standing, and the stranger would wander the halls and go into the empty classrooms, where they would write their names on the chalkboard. Then, when the chalkboards disappeared, they began carving their names with pocketknives into the walls instead. Sweethearts etched their initials with a heart around it and an arrow sticking out of each side. When they weren't doing that, they'd walk up to Old Man DeBar's house, empty now since his girl came and took him to live with her in Grand Rapids, and stick their fingers in the holes that the explosion had left in his jolly red door.

More than once, Ida caught them looking into her house too. Through her curtains, she saw a man in a straw hat tip open her garbage can with his cane and peer inside. Another man set up a tripod in her petunias and hunched under the black cover as he photographed the school. Once, she stepped onto her porch and found two teenagers cupping their hands on her window, peeping inside. It was a boy about sixteen, with a thin face and glasses, and a girl with long hair streaming untidily down her back. When Ida asked what they were doing, the boy shuffled his feet in the dried leaves that littered the walkway and said, "I'm sorry to bother you, ma'am. We just wanted to see where all those children were killed. Were you there that day?"

I didn't know Ida well when I was alive, but I knew that she was slow to anger.

Despite all she'd been through, she reflected that this couple was young. The girl had her finger in her mouth and was chewing on it. She looked at Ida through clear, healthy eyes as she waited to hear a story.

"I was," Ida said.

The boy looked at the girl and they smiled as if they'd found something they'd been searching for. Behind them, the wind blew the branches of a tree so that a rain of dung-colored leaves fell onto the school.

"Will you show us pictures of the ones who were killed?" the boy said.



ARTIST BIO

**NICOLE R. ZIMMERMAN** holds a master of fine arts in Writing from the University of San Francisco, which selected one of her essays for consideration in the AWP Intro Journals Project. Her Pushcart-nominated work appears in publications such as *The Best Women's Travel Writing*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Toho Journal*, *Ruminate*, *Noyo River Review*, *Birdland Journal*, *Origins*, *South Loop Review*, and *Creative Nonfiction*. She has freelanced as a reporter for *Petaluma Patch*, as a Towns correspondent for *The Press Democrat*, and as a copywriter for *TripAdvisor*. Zimmerman is an alumna of Lit Camp, a juried writers conference. She taught creative writing in after-school programs and is certified to lead workshops in the Amherst Writers & Artists (AWA) method. Born in Brazil and raised (mostly) in Northern California, she lives with her wife in Penngrove where she hosts Shut Up & Write!™ sessions.



JUROR'S STATEMENT

**Nicole R. Zimmerman's** essays are infused with love, tenderness and a very sharp eye. She writes about her family, and in telling their stories, captures their world, their era, and her own deep connection to each relative. In one essay, her father, a prodigal son who left home for Northern California, needs to tell his parents that his girlfriend is pregnant. In another, the author needs to understand her grandmother's life in order to accept her death. And in a powerful essay, she writes about her challenging brother, who lives a life so unlike her own, and yet, she's able to find compassion for him.

Zimmerman has an arsenal of literary tools at her disposal. Her prose shimmers. She chooses the perfect revealing detail as she captures someone's childhood. Her dialogue is often surprising and spot-on; we hear and learn these characters through their very real conversations. And she shapes her essays dramatically so we feel the energy and drive of each story.

Zimmerman is ambitious and dedicated to her art. We applaud her and look forward to reading more of her excellent essays.



▲  
“My work relies on research and reportage to reconstruct tangible worlds. Associative imagery, grounded in physicality, conveys mood and tone: drawn drapes, a crawl space, night snow, bare flesh under a dress.”  
▼

Nicole R. Zimmerman

I write to investigate. Patricia Hampl states in her book *I Could Tell You Stories*: “I don’t write about what I know, but in order to find out what I know.” Most of my creative work falls under the category of literary nonfiction, including nature writing, travel writing, journalistic essays, lyric essays, and memoir. Whether unearthing shards of family history or examining the inefficacy of memory, I write to shape meaning from the amorphous.

My collection of linked personal essays is titled *Just Some Things We Can't Talk About*. The manuscript-in-progress follows four generations marked by sibling demise, parental delusion, and filial devotion: a family portrait of loss tinged with hope. Each story carries the weight of the past and looks to the all too unknowable future. Each considers the impact of our inheritance—which legacies we carry on, and which we discard. Mine is a retrospective narrator who in turn confides, recounts, and reflects to arrive at an emotional truth that resonates. It is a reckoning even in the absence of redemption.

My work relies on research and reportage to reconstruct tangible worlds. Associative imagery, grounded in physicality, conveys mood and tone: drawn drapes, a crawl space, night snow, bare flesh under a dress. This collection experiments with form, borrowing elements of the braided essay to weave a fragmented, nonlinear narrative. I opt for a topical, or thematic, frame over a conventional chronology, playing with scope and distance to measure dimension and the progression of time. The modular structure allows for multiple arcs to emerge and converge. This is not simply a retrieval of history but a reordering of it. The result: a meta-investigation of the stories we tell.

More about Nicole at [nicolerzimmerman.com](http://nicolerzimmerman.com)

A collection of decorative triangles in the bottom right corner: a small blue triangle pointing right, a larger pink triangle pointing left, and a purple triangle pointing right.

## Love, Unconditional (essay excerpt)

The night Nana passed away, the dimming light colored the California sky cobalt. I measured the movement of the moon between the dusky branches of an oak while more than two thousand miles away my grandmother lay still. For months she had lingered at a skilled nursing care facility in Cleveland, hardly eating but alert. Her refusal of sustenance was her only recourse to expedite the inevitable. My grandfather, steadfast in his devotion, sat and sat by his beloved's side. Only at his daughter's urging did he reduce the hours of his daily vigil. Perhaps it was his absence that allowed Nana to release her final breath, untethered. Returning to her bedside, Grandpa wept at the sight of his dear Alice, companion of sixty-seven years, her mouth and eyes agape, staring but unseeing, as if astonished to meet her maker.

My grandparents met in 1935, when she was sixteen and he was twenty. Jack served as the sports editor of his high school paper and dreamed of being a writer, but graduated early to help support his nine siblings as a bookkeeper during the Great Depression. While delivering the rent to the apartment above, my grandfather first set eyes upon his wife-to-be during one of her elocution lessons. He liked to joke that the visit cost him.

Alice was a fashion plate who believed a lady looked best stylishly dressed. Silent home movies show her flirting with the camera in red lipstick and lacquered nails with an outfit to match. In the final frame, she settles behind the wheel of a white convertible, pulls a silk scarf from her patent leather handbag, and covers her head.

My grandmother had her hair set once a week. Her iconic Ann Landers hairstyle changed little over the decades; like the advice columnist she was a strict grammarian, quick to correct and offer counsel. She gradually had her hair lightened from dark brown to blond, until her final year when she let the strands go gray. By then, still living in the home they inhabited for nearly six decades, she spent her days and nights downstairs in an upholstered armchair. After her first hip fracture her body followed a steady decline. I remember, when I last visited, how Grandpa urged her to do the exercises assigned after rehab. "Come on, dear. You cannot just sit there," he repeated in exasperation. But there she remained, her head bowed and body slumped in satin pajamas. After a second fall required permanent residence at the nursing home, their daughter took her to the beauty salon downstairs to get her hair done. For the first time in weeks, Nana applied lipstick and smiled as she held a hand mirror to her face.

After two sons, Alice's wish for a daughter was fulfilled by my Aunt Judi. Out of seven grandchildren, I was the only female. Unlike my aunt, I emulated the defiance and independence of my father who fled to the west coast after graduating from Ohio State. Throughout my adolescence and early adulthood I rolled my eyes at her admonitions to "sit like a lady" when she caught me slouching with my knees apart. I rejected the ruffled dresses she selected during shopping trips, preferring my faded 501 jeans and flannel shirts to the flower prints she pulled off the racks. Much to her dismay, I felt restricted by high heels and other trappings of traditional femininity. No matter how hard she tried, Nana could not refine me.

She was meticulous in her housekeeping, quick to fluff pillows and wipe handprints. “In this house we take our shoes off before entering,” she explained to my older brother and me. But after two generations Nana softened her stance. My father, who also was required to leave his boots at the door, who spent his upbringing sitting stiff on her plastic-wrapped sofa, watched with amazement when her great-grandchildren were given free rein to run amok and spill crumbs on the carpet.

It wasn't until visiting Cleveland for the first time on my own, just before I turned thirty, that I noted admiration in my grandmother's eyes—whether it was her recognition or my own realization, I cannot ascertain. From my Datsun hatchback I pulled out the tent I used for camping on my cross-country road trip and demonstrated how to assemble the rods. As I pitched the little yellow dome next to their white picket fence, Grandpa held his chin in his palm and shook his head in wonder. Then he humored me by crawling inside. I have the photo Nana took of us, kneeling together, our arms around each other: he in his golf shirt and pressed plaid pants, me with my backwards baseball cap. Each time we talked afterward they mentioned that tent. Nana, whose travels had taken her only as far as Bermuda on her honeymoon, must have identified a freedom long denied. Later she remarked to her daughter, “That woman has a great life.”

I hadn't seen my grandparents for nearly a year when I planned to visit Nana one last time. In mid-February I bought a plane ticket for early March. “You might not make it,” my father warned. He knew dying does not cater to the will of the living. I did not yet understand that death offers no second chances. One week before my scheduled arrival, Nana was gone.

Our family joined my grandfather in his bereavement. In the living room I relayed a dream I had, a few nights before Nana died, when she walked up the stairs of their house to greet us. Aunt Judi leapt up, flapping her hands like little propellers, and said she had the same dream that night. We bonded over our parallel vision, or visitation. All agreed it was how Nana would want to be remembered.

“I hope I don't have to set foot in that place for a long, long time,” Grandpa said. “All that sickness around.” Now our stalwart family patriarch, no longer strong enough to lift a bowling ball, was released from the burden of full-time caregiver. Over the course of his married life he had answered his wife with a dutiful Yes, dear. We wondered what would drive his days in her absence.

“I have no friends now,” he said, “They're all dead.” He lamented the loss of Sol, his best friend for eighty years.

“Everything changes,” Grandpa said with a sigh. “Oh, what I'd give to be told now to take out the garbage.”

“Discovered: Emerging Visual Arts of Sonoma County” was established in 2006 through the visionary leadership of the Arts Awards Endowment Fund at **Community Foundation Sonoma County**, and since its inception has recognized 39 artists in nine funding cycles. The forward-looking investment of these individuals has paid great dividends as “Discovered” artists have pushed their boundaries outward through exhibitions and publications, in teaching positions, and in nontraditional settings from commercial spaces to correctional facilities.

This year’s program was magnified by a grant from the **National Endowment for the Arts**, allowing for the inclusion of literary artists in the mix for the first time.



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Creative Sonoma has worked in partnership with the Museum of Sonoma County to bring this exhibition to fruition. Our missions align in supporting the creativity of Sonoma County’s artists and residents through programs like Discovered.



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Creative Sonoma is a division of the **Economic Development Board** of the **County of Sonoma** and acknowledges the remarkable support and guidance we receive from them.





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