



Germinate VI

Germinate

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Table of Contents

<i>Guidance</i>	
Marissa Cameron.....	7
<i>Dreaming in Panopticon</i>	
Alex Bertsche.....	9
<i>Lowell Offering</i>	
Caroline Kenworthy.....	11
<i>The Statue in Madison Square Garden</i>	
Becky Bernstein.....	13
<i>Catch and Release</i>	
Marissa Cameron.....	14
<i>Photography (Excerpt)</i>	
Ian Karbal.....	16
<i>Daniel and the Jungle Gym</i>	
Becky Bernstein.....	21
<i>Parenting</i>	
Caroline Kenworthy.....	23
<i>Ransom</i>	
Vanessa Mendenhall.....	25
<i>When Saucers from the Old Family Dishware Look Like the Moon</i>	
Alex Bertsche.....	27
<i>Untitled</i>	
Ian Karbal.....	29
<i>Kudzu</i>	
Marissa Cameron.....	30
<i>Transliteration (Excerpt)</i>	
Caroline Kenworthy.....	32
<i>To the Peeping Tom</i>	
Marissa Cameron.....	37
<i>Bucolic: Sheep's Milk</i>	
Caroline Kenworthy.....	39



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Cover design by Marissa Cameron

A Letter from the Editors:

The book you hold in your hands represents the cumulative efforts of the Media Arts Department. Each year, we come together to design, select, edit, format, and print an anthology of our best work. It is never an easy process—tough choices have to be made, and we can never include as much of the work as we would like.

Every volume of *Germinate* is a reflection of the class that puts it together, and every volume is fabulous in its own right. But we feel that this collection of poetry, fiction, and videos marks a turning point for our department, for many reasons. We have changed the format from that of previous editions, for the benefit of our readers. And we cannot help but believe that every year our work gets better than the last.

And so we are proud to offer up *Germinate IV* for your perusing pleasure. We hope you enjoy our new format, and hopefully, a renewal of creative energy from our department.

Alex Bertsche
Becky Bernstein
Caroline Kenworthy
Vanessa Mendenhall

Guidance

Go get your sturdy box
of meditations
for me, will you?
Slip a lead marble from it
past my prattled eardrum,
acquaint me with your
advice, and motion
them further
until I listen.

I have not been taught
how to discern
the worth
in these words
moving through
these canals
to my nerves.

My purpose
is not
your tight knit keepsakes
but it is
those moments
alchemized with my own,
steadfast and golden
that will propel me.

Marissa Cameron

Dreaming in Panopticon

She does not wish to dream the way she does, swathes of color and streaks of noise that linger on her pillow and in her hair after she wakes.

So she gathers these ribbons together, braiding and tying knots as she goes, until the ribbons are a single cord. But the cord is weak, could fray or snap if she hangs on.

It becomes, under her prodding, a web— not delicate or precise like a spider's, but a web, still— and as she tests her weight against its strength, it supports her. But the web is not well made. It sways and buckles, and collapses in on itself.

It's impossible for her sort each piece and mend the web, so she picks up what she can reach and melds it together with the heat from her palms.

Her dreams are solid, a lump of clay, and she can hold them in her hands and mold them as she pleases— a cube, a tea cup, a snake— but the shape will not stick; the dreams have taken on a life of their own, and they slip past her fingers, grains of sand, water.

And soon the dreams rise up, past her ankles, knees, waist, neck, eyes, and she is floating, suspended in the dreams, and she spins slowly in the currents, the vast ocean filling with the low calls and dark silhouettes of whales.

She doesn't know how long her dreams are like this, but the currents are stronger than before. They draw everything around them in, winding themselves into tight cables, spinning her into cartwheels between them. The water level drops, and deposits her on something firm. The cables writhe, winding tighter, until they are the same heavy ribbons in her hair, ones that drag on the floor, catch on her pillow.

Alex Bertsche

Lowell Offering Worth Square Gallery

Their fingers picked and strung the looms,
thrumming repetition making miles of cloth.
Bits of thread carpeted their throats.
The overseer's eyes and the shuttle
sheared back across the taut strands—
the work was delicate. A cough
or clumsy hands could snap the strings.

Any of these girls, like the novice
whose hair is still long, once sat
at the foot of the rocking chair,
took the skill from her mother's hands.

Her hair could peel back her scalp;
if her hands wander into the shuttle
thudding back, tear off a knuckle—
she could keep the bloodied digit

in a jar of linseed oil in the summer, an offering
to the mill girls roomed with her. The light
sieved through the cloth over the window. The finger
squelched in the suspension, curled
like a questioning squid.

She watched their fingers
curl around lead, cover the paper. Their eyes
repeated the lines. She tried to sleep,
the sound of shuttles and pages turning
resounding in her head.

Caroline Kenworthy

The Statue at Madison Square Garden

Her figure towers above
the skyscrapers built by men
who come home from their civil duties
only to sit on toilets, staring at her body
flattened onto magazine pages.

At their tea parties and grand balls
they denounce the artwork as tasteless,
while her silhouette is engraved
into their palms.

Becky Bernstein

Catch and Release

I can imagine
your grandfather
sits fishing

Beside him a neighbor
fishes for his widow
and pet cat

In late winter
your mother
was reeled in

spinning through the clouds
clad in gold threads
of her recollections

Now the cat paws
at your mother's line
and I feel my heart slow

I lie on a hospital bed
and tell you
in confidence:

Perhaps me knowing
what one does
to pass the time
in death
is a bit far-fetched...

But I think
that I will fish
for you one day

and that amidst the process
when the world becomes empty
and begins to flourish
without restraint
we will throw ourselves
back again

Marissa Cameron

Photography

I squinted to see the images on the strips of negatives. The pictures were from the last hike Laurie and I had taken, a series of her posing in front of an autumn backdrop. Her thick down jacket matched the boastful red of the leaves behind her. The last few pictures in the bunch were only of the scenery. I cursed myself for not having taken more of them, but Laurie used to get angry if I didn't put her in enough of my pictures. I flipped to the next page in the book of negatives. It was filled with photos I had taken for work.

I take stock photos for a few magazines and newspapers. It's an easy job, not that I don't appreciate it, but shooting stock photos can feel more like a formula than photography sometimes. To compensate, I'm one of the few stock photographers that still uses film. I like having a steady job, but I'd prefer to shoot nature. It's much trickier to work with. The randomness of photogenic events keeps me alert, and I like the challenge of coping with unpredictable weather, natural lighting, and unfamiliar terrain.

I'd put my work in a gallery, but I'm hardly prolific. Also, it would take a lot of time and effort to solicit myself. Maybe I could find the time now, but until recently side projects took too much time away from work, and Laurie.

I found myself attracted to one of several candid shots I had taken of her. I tried to make out her expression, but only her figure, hunched over a rock, was clear. It frustrated me how her posture seemed more expressive in photographs than it did in real life. Maybe it was seeing her in the past tense that made it seem that way.

I took the negative out of its sleeve and brought it into the darkroom, along with one of just the scenery.

The smell of a darkroom suits me. Chemicals covered by must. I like how each object is barely outlined by the weak red light. It takes time to learn how to move around the space, careful not to bump the door, letting light spill in and ruin entire rolls of film. Even more than taking the pictures, I like to print them. Composition and framing comes naturally for me. It takes much more precision to manipulate light and machine in a way that each second of exposure can affect the final picture.

The enlarger clunked as I loaded the film. I fumbled for the switch in the dark and flipped on the light of the machine. The image flashed onto the paper too quickly to study it. I flipped the switch again and the light flickered off. I dropped the exposed paper into the stop bath, and let it soak for a few seconds before moving it to the next tub.

The image dissolved onto the paper, faded at first. The background was out of focus, but I could see the dark of the clouds behind her. Her figure came into focus. Her shoulders were hunched and her head hung below them. It was discomfoting to see her this way. She usually held herself well, especially on camera. She must have let her guard down. Laurie was rarely in a lousy mood, but I remember that time she seemed bothered. I didn't think much of it then, but I wondered if it was a misperception on my part, or lack of insight.

The image became darker and more crisp. Laurie's expression seemed fatigued as well. I wondered what had made her look this way, and how much worse she felt than she looked. She didn't look angry, which I would have preferred, but merely weighted and sad. I remembered a time when she was interested and excited by my photography.

She would insist I take her on hikes, although she always seemed bored by the meticulousness of them. As long as I put her in most of the pictures she was satisfied. However

it wasn't long before that wasn't enough for her either. She started complaining about how we spent too much of our time together taking pictures, and when I stopped taking her with me on the trips, she complained that we didn't spend enough time together. So I limited my photography to the occasional hike or drive with Laurie, and work.

I moved the picture to the next solution. Her wrinkles were more prominent than usual, and her brow furrowed just above her eyes, which welled with a sort of heaviness I couldn't quite place. I must have been somewhat aware of her dissatisfaction then. Surely she couldn't have become so distraught so suddenly. I took the picture out of the darkroom to dry and went back to my book of negatives.

The book was thin. I tried to look through the more recent pictures to find a few that I liked, but it only frustrated that I had never noticed how weary she looked at the time. None of them seemed very good. Or maybe they were. I turned to a page closer to the beginning of the book. A picture of some night we sat in my kitchen, Laurie bent over the table laughing at jokes I don't remember. There were a few pictures of this, which, to me, serve as proof that we once had something interesting to talk about.

The picture finished drying. Looking at it, I could recognize the scenery, about an hour's hike from where the car was parked.

I asked her again if she was ok. She sighed before trying to reassure me she was fine and insisting we head back to the car. I looked up. A stretch of dark clouds was making its way towards us.

Ian Karbal

Daniel and the Jungle Gym

Sunday mornings, they read him the parables,
having no belief in a relation. Futile to feel
trust like Abraham, who was ready to give
his kin. He rushes home to tear off a clip on tie,
pedals to the playground. Once there,

elevated metal bars strain arms. A force
pulling through his fingertips, guiding
him across the ladder in the sky, always

descending. He lets himself fall further away
from that trust. Lacking dedication in this
divine presence. Daniel, who is one of the exiles
from Judah, pays no attention to you.

Becky Bernstein

Parenting

Train sets, she had been told, encouraged punctuality. Kids that played with Tinker Toys and building blocks grew up to be famous city planners and architects. Painting the walls and ceiling blue, she read, would calm the child's disposition. Playing Mozart near the child's crib was proven to increase his potential. She tacked wall stickers with the number line, the ABC's, and a world map up. The baseboard was painted to look like a white picket fence. His mobile dangled with accurate reproductions of farm animals. By the time the child was born, a girl, she was crammed into a corner, a footnote, a tiny, terrified bundle in a world of light and sound and color and expectation.

Caroline Kenworthy

Ransom

won't you give me the words
you hide behind your cheek
their serifs hooked
to the sides of your tongue
please give them to me
I will hold them
in the crook of my navel
in the bend of my arm
in the crease of my finger
I ask won't you tuck
your words behind
my ear you know
they will be safe

Vanessa Mendenhall

When Saucers from the Old Family Dishware Look Like the Moon

It is four in the morning under this worn roof, and
my thoughts have been turning circles since midnight,
chasing their shadowy tails through my mind.

No power lines or street lamps hum outside,
no stray dog lifts his head and bark up at the sky,
at the splinter of a moon that won't answer back.

There is a fire truck somewhere in the distance.
The growl of its engine stirs a thin film of dust from the rafters
and rattles the bone china in the cupboards downstairs,
its high, keening shriek wavering like the hot air above a bonfire.

And for a moment, the truck is
a blur of sounds and motion, and light,
framed against the dark in my window,
howling past me in the night.

Alex Bertsche

Untitled

We teeter on narrow
paths, or so I'm told.

And who's to challenge
dogma, when it's so
damn dark in here.

Somewhere
someone cries.

Maybe just me.

My thoughts can be
so loud sometimes.

I turn my head way down
anyway.

The sun has set a few hours
west. Always just west.

And what are we left to do
but fumble through the darkness.

Ian Karbal

Kudzu

You were better
than the woodpecker
and squirrels.
They were pests,
ignorant of my needs,
and offered me nothing.

You drove them out
and gave me pride.
Knowledge that
the crevices of my branches
were just as important
to you,
as they were to the rain drops
that needed a path
to slowly down on.
You eased me
with your thin
and snaking stems. It was
an unmistakable caress.

It seems you are
not the polite child
trying to make its way in life,
beaming, blinded
in awe of the sun.

There are not many things
like you, but of those
that are, I see them now.
You are a logger in disguise.
You are the product of hallmark
card and rocking chair factories.

Of manila folders, tabloids, checkbooks,
and the makers of eight and a half
by eleven slivers of my relatives.
Or did you inspire these things,
these treacherous imitations
of what you do?

And so, I am hungry and sick,
my friend. I gave you all I had:
My space in the sky, I rationed
the rain with you, and let you cast
a shadow with me
on the dew coated grass.

You are a murderous lover,
double agent, leader
of a quest to level giants,
fatal and organic
you know every part of me,
down to what made me.

Because of you, I'll be
pulled from this earth.

This is why I know
we are not the same.

So before I give way,
tell me what made you.
Tell me before I timber
into the shadows
streaming
from the grass blades.

Marissa Cameron

Transliteration

Lana sat in the desk closest to the door, and as the substitute took attendance, she leaned forward and peered into 204. Trevor looked through the window next to the door, and smiled at her, waved. Lana's lips curved back before she thought to. She looked into his eyes, and felt her head start to pound a little, knowing the two of them shared what might best be called a rapport, an understanding—they actually liked each other. Lana easily saw the surface levels of it—they both liked listening to 104.9 FM, and they had loved the same cartoons. Lana thought of it as “when they were little”—Trevor had laughed and pointed out it'd been maybe three years ago. It made her laugh at herself; that was another level they connected on. He could make her laugh, make her happy, which dissolved into that giddy, stomach-lurching feeling—the part she couldn't understand. That was the part she felt when she had enough courage to hold his gaze, or put her arm around his waist.

Suddenly his head whipped around and his mouth moved. Laughter swelled across the hall, and Lana saw Trevor's neck and ears redden. Someone had seen him staring. His gaze stayed on his desk, and Lana sat back in her chair.

“Svet-lana El—Il-yana?” The substitute sounded out her name painfully slowly.

“I'm Lana,” she said quickly, “I'm here.” He nodded and checked her name off. Her thoughts diverged, now concerned more with Russian than Trevor—how would you say “here”? “Present”? Lana couldn't even ask “what do you mean?” or “could you repeat that?” not prop-

erly. She tried to record all these questions, to ask Babushka. Lana hadn't tried very hard over the months her grandmother had exposed her to Russian, but it wasn't a class—much more a peripheral experience than organized instruction. Lana knew the names for hospital objects that Babushka pointed to, but for the most part her vocabulary was pitiful. Lana knew the parts of the body. Back was spinah; eyes, glah-zsa. Mouth: pon. The p as a rolled r, long o, and the clean, softened t felt to her like the small groove at the top of the lip, where the skin raised and reddened, laced with hair's-breadth cuts and wrinkles.

Then Lana noticed the heat in her cheeks, and was sure her eyes had to look distant and glazed over, sugary and saccharine. She looked down at her desk. Lana's thoughts of her boyfriend and the trip ahead converged, and her guts clenched, remembering she had to tell Trevor, then relaxed as she remembered her invitation. She felt her blood rush under her skin. They hadn't gone so far as to plan out their breaks, and until now, Lana had been grateful the topic hadn't come up. She would have had to tell him about St. Petersburg, Oksana, Russian. She tried to weigh the news of her leaving against her offer, and couldn't differentiate them—she was twisted into both.

Of course delaying the news was mere distraction; putting it off only heightened her fear and excitement. Until lunch her thoughts labyrinthized around the coming conversation with Trevor, questions for Babushka diverting and twisting her path. She planned the talk, dread twining with hope in her chest, wanting him to come over, that want roiled with the thought of the trip. The bell rattled shrilly and the students rushed out of the classroom. As they left, the substitute yelled that every-

one was to report to the lunchroom; outside, the sleet had iced over. There was a collective groan, but Lana sat still at her desk, knowing she had to find Trevor, so they could talk—they'd never be able to leave the lunchroom unnoticed. She had to get up and find him, she knew.

"Um, Sv—er, Lana?" the substitute asked. She looked up, at the rows of empty desks, and muttered a *sorry* before hurrying out of the classroom, her feet prickling. She saw Trevor meandering down the hallway, looking for her.

"Trev," she called quietly. He turned around and smiled. She beckoned to him. "C'mon, before somebody sees us..." She pulled him into the girls' bathroom.

"Whoa," he said, apprehensive but mostly intrigued. He couldn't help but look around the bathroom. Lana saw his thoughts travel from nonplussed from the lack of urinals to *so this is what it looks like*. For her the bathroom was normal, and the pink tiles were background to her brittle and twisting thoughts. Her unease made her anxious, and she snapped her fingers in his ear. "What?!" he said, his eyebrows furrowed as he batted her hand away.

Lana's arms dropped to her sides. "Sorry," she muttered. "I gotta tell you something."

Trevor tugged on his ear. "Well, just... what?" he said.

She stared at him, her twisted-up thoughts muting her. There were words sitting beneath her tongue, but they were wrong, she hated them, hated the trip and the idea of losing Trevor. She looked at his forehead, a few lines starting to crease it, and the line dividing his lips, curved perfectly, like a bow. Lana looked down at the tiled floor and inhaled. She felt Trevor's hands on her arms, and her nerves fired in response. "Lana, what is it?"

She looked up and kissed him. His back stiffened and

his hands tightened around her arms, and he pressed her body to his. Blood pounded through her ears. They hadn't had the nerve to kiss again since the first time, in Trevor's dark dining room. It had been at a party, for his parents' anniversary, just a week ago. He'd snuck some champagne from the kitchen. He held a finger to his lips and gave her one of the plastic cups. She drank the bittersweet liquid—the bubbles tickled her lips, and stung her throat—and when she put it down he touched her wrist and kissed her.

Lana pulled back and breathed hard. She found her hands wrapped around the side of his neck, and her body crushed against his. She relaxed her fingers, and saw his blood rejoin the skin she had gripped. Trevor felt her loosening, and let go, one arm at a time. He rubbed his head. Lana smiled and saw his Adam's apple bob up and down. She giggled and hooked her thumb through his belt loop. The words under her tongue were gone. Invitation first, she recalled fuzzily, and looked up at his face.

"My parents will be out of the house tomorrow," she said conspiratorially. Trevor's eyes widened and his eyebrows went up, like his whole face was expanding, making her laugh again. "Come over," she said. He nodded eagerly. Though Lana could see his excitement, his eyes still searched her face, like some part of him had sensed the disquiet that had risen up from her feet, the roil in her thoughts. It was as though he knew the invitation had only come after; that it came because of the kiss—what they weren't bold enough to call lust, the new intoxication with the embrace, the body, as tantalizing as the champagne. She would tell him then.

Caroline Kenworthy

To the Peeping Tom

Somewhere in the flora
light flicks
out and in
upon two mantids

The male
tells you:

When you let self-
preservation go

let even your knuckles
and the webbing
between your fingers go
you will learn what love is

You marvel
their claws
clamping claws

the pelvic thrum

his keen bow

and the woman
slipping his meat
into her jaw

Marissa Cameron

Bucolic: Sheep's Milk

I worry
of Your bones:
heavy
as milk, and sour
as curdle.
Your femur
in the crust
on the pail's rim,
Your ribcage
in the skin.

I break it— must—
consume that milkiness
like a dead lamb's eye:

How else can I
see You, steep
in Your figure,
in both Your whole
and your broken bones?

Caroline Kenworthy

A Letter from the Media Arts Chair:

In the past I have written about new beginnings, growth, and plateaus. This year, however, with our sixth edition of *Germi-nate*, I find we are too far along in our process and work to look back at our inception and nowhere near our end to reminisce.

Where does this leave us? In the middle, striving to meet our aim – well past the anticipation one feels at the beginning of a voyage and nowhere near the acclaim that follows a job well done. The work one executes in the middle of a larger process – as the goal begins to fog and the horizon line appears out of reach – requires strength, determination, and fortitude.

It is the Media Arts Department's commitment to process – creative, intellectual, and communal – that orients us in these phases and directs us toward our aim: to continually create original work with curiosity and verve.

Fred Schill