

Greetings from the Meat Aisle

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Abstract

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Greetings from the Meat Aisle is a celebration of what it means to be young and filled with emotion. Specifically, to be a woman learning how to be alive for the first time. This project is expressed through poetics and visual imagery— which will be discussed in two parts— the poetics, then the images, and finally, how they work together. Greetings from the Meat Aisle is an ode to experiencing different emotions for the first time, and deeply, as a growing woman.

A huge unspoken theme throughout GMA is how girlhood can be experienced and more often than not produces these angsty feelings, memories, and existential experiences. The aforementioned “celebration” of what it means to be young and filled with emotions describes just that. Girlhood can often be characterized as different metaphors throughout the project. However, girlhood can best be represented by the feelings of disconnect and the ability or lack of understanding of how the world works as you grow up in it. This is shown by no overt figure at the forefront of the project, as there are many “selves” found throughout GMA. Selves include: the myself, the Meat Aisle, and the meat creatures. All of which represent different ideas and intangibles of girlhood. All three selves work together to curate these tensions between themes and ideas discussed within GMA.

Poetic Statement

Greetings from the Meat Aisle

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Intro

Greetings from the Meat Aisle is a celebration of what it means to be young and filled with emotion. Specifically, to be a woman learning how to be alive for the first time. This project is expressed through poetics and visual imagery— which will be discussed in two parts— the poetics, then the images, and finally, how they work together. Greetings from the Meat Aisle will be shortened to “GMA” throughout the statement.

GMA is an ode to experiencing different emotions for the first time, and deeply, as a growing woman. Sometimes I felt as though I become too existential and outside of myself through writing a lot of these works, to the point where I felt like a different character describing my own experiences.

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A huge unspoken theme throughout GMA is how girlhood can be experienced and more often than not produces these angst feelings, memories, and existential experiences. The aforementioned “celebration” of what it means to be young and filled with emotions describes just that. Girlhood can often be characterized as different metaphors throughout the project. However, girlhood can best be represented by the feelings of disconnect and the ability or lack of understanding of how the world works as you grow up in it. This is shown by no overt figure at the forefront of the project, as there are many “selves” found throughout GMA. Selves include: the myself, the Meat Aisle, and the meat creatures. All of which represent different ideas and intangibles of girlhood. All three selves work together to curate these tensions between themes and ideas discussed within GMA.

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These works are characterized by “The Meat Aisle”. Meat Aisle is a character, or an alter ego, who is much more existential than myself. Meat Aisle is referenced throughout the writings by the self as well, this is usually characterized by the capitalization of “meat” in some works, or as “Meat Aisle”. The crossover between the self and the alter creates a theme of reckoning, or reflection. By acknowledging the Meat Aisle there is an acknowledgement of this other self, one that exists outside of the self and thinks about ideas more spiritually and critically. Meat Aisle, however, is still the self at the end of the day. Meat Aisle is still easily related to the self throughout this project, since they are the same. However, the idea that these two individuals can exist together and have different trains of thought that can weave together or exist separately is a concept I enjoy exploring.

Works from the perspective of myself have no mention of the Meat Aisle, usually. These poems feel a bit more precise, or based on a certain experience or idea. The “myself” poems feel like reflections on a memory, idea, or an object. On the other hand, works from the perspective of the Meat Aisle feel loosely tied to an idea or feeling, these works are much more existential, philosophical, and perhaps open-ended. In my head, the self is more concrete— providing more tangible work to more tangible ideas, since the self (physically) is tangible. Since the Meat Aisle is more of a separate, intangible self, more amorphous— the Meat Aisle works reflect that idea.

I have a hard time calling the self in the project “myself”, throughout this project I have found it hard to put myself at the center of it. Which is ironic, given the whole project is about multiple selves. I suppose that’s why the Meat Aisle exists, to give another being a voice, other than the self. Although it is still the self. Is it?

Calling the perspective of self, “self” throughout this statement is an effort to acknowledge the relatability of the self and the Meat Aisle throughout the project. There has been an understanding that I have been reckoning with throughout this project— that nearly everything written is moderately to severely relatable to others who are given similar circumstances. Originally, I did not love this thought, something about being early twenties and craving originality. However, in this project I feel as though relatability is my friend, since the goal is to be able to share experience and create discussion over the idea to also have another alter self going through similar experiences.

Goals

The goal of this project, GMA, has evolved over time. The original idea of my work (in this project and generally) was to create and write work that would be open-ended, for all to create their own interpretations of. The secondary step in the evolution of this goal process has been finding a balance between open-endedness and relatability. I want people to read the work within this project and feel validated within their experience but also have to think between the lines a bit, or even question their own validity within the work.

Poetry

Poetics found throughout the project take on primarily two different aspects: the self, and the “Meat Aisle”.

The self throughout the poetics are found in any of the writings that don’t have “The Meat Aisle...” preceding the rest of the title of the individual works. For example, the poem “THE COUCH” is written from the perspective of the self, experiencing a memory or rather exploring the identity behind a memorable object. While other works, such as, “THE MEAT AISLE PRAYS TO THE KITCHEN FLOOR”, explore more vague ideas strung together by vague memory. However, these boundaries between the two ideas are not a law, as some self works are more intangible, some Meat Aisle works are more concrete, and vice versa.

Most of the inspiration and idea for this work comes from having to express these self-aware ideas that young people experience most of the time in their lives. With that comes a yearning for community and validity, naturally. I didn’t foresee how relatable the existential aspect of this project would be, that is something I picked up and ran with pretty early on. As for the meat of it all, I think of a lot of “being alive” struggles as entirely visceral.

When I think of any angsty emotions or difficult memories I’ve had to work through, the body has always been at the center of it. For example, in “THE COUCH” the poem is seemingly about the

couch, however, it is bodies that impose love and memory on the couch. Essentially, there would be no reckoning with the death of a couch without a body. This sort of idea to discuss a very tangible thing such as the body with an intangible idea isn't much of a juxtaposition at all. However, the entire project seemingly is a fight between the juxtaposition of the tangible body and the intangible mind. The body is inherently a visceral object, which should be represented as its most visceral state in my mind, that state being raw meat. I specify raw for both ironic and metaphorical reasons, this feels like the most logical way to specify meat represented by humanity. Ironically because the poetry is very raw, I suppose. While metaphorically inside of us is raw meat, I think. Is meat raw if it is alive?

The poetics for this project feel like an idea I've had for years that I've finally been able to give wings to. Throughout this project I've come across much inspiration. All the inspiration I have taken has been bits and pieces of everything here and there. However, the biggest inspirations are as follows:

Per usual, I have to pay homage to the poet who made me feel like "you can do that?" for the first time, Zachary Schomburg. Even more specifically, "The Fjords Vol. I" was the first book of poetry I read where I really found myself connected with that voice, tone, and writing style. In Schomburg's writing, it's seemingly absurd and absolutely not all at the same time. This idea connected with me— I feel like I also experience memory and emotion that can more often than not be related to a totally (on the surface) object or idea. This gives the appearance of absurdity on initial thought, and then you find the absurdity actually more relatable. This idea of random object or circumstance communicating an emotional thought, in my mind, is peak relatability. Being relatable in a way that, we all remember at least a single, very specific object or outside factor within memory that has nothing to do with what the memory itself is communicating. Schomburg takes these objects and gives them human traits and abilities, playing with them, giving them human life. In "Building of Unseen Cats" Schomburg creates a scene of an ever changing building fire created by (maybe) cats and now the entire outside is now hair. One of the final lines reads "Let's not look directly at what is meant to be loved in secret." The ability to communicate this theme from what appears to be a scene from a fever dream is something that I've always wanted to emulate in some regard. Schomburg, to me, shares the idea that we, as humans, can find emotion and communication through all that has been created (Created? I do not subscribe to the religious undertones that may have).

The secondary work that gave me permission is "Cruel Optimism" by Lauren Berlant. While most of the book focuses on the examples of how the theory of cruel optimism is positioned in politics and socio-economics, I found the most inspiration on the early semantics of the text. In Berlant's words: "So, cruel optimism is when you're attached to objects or object worlds or forms of life that fundamentally get in the way of the attachment you brought to them, and of the optimism you brought to them." Or, in my understanding, is the idea of optimism being inherently cruel. This idea of the longing becoming more damaging than the idea itself had me intrigued. I thought I'd like to explore this idea further, by speculating on what I long for or what I'm constantly having on my mind. In that perspective, GMA becomes more sadistic. One of the main themes of "Cruel Optimism" is that the idea of optimism only exists because the future (or possibly the past) does, and then when you weaponize the "what it could be" or "what it could have been", you get cruel optimism. Personally, where I lie in agreement with the idea of cruel

optimism is up for debate. However, I found this as an excuse for an exercise in sadism of my own nostalgia or longing. I feel like I did this to see (or feel) if this project felt more harmful or helpful during the process. Or upon reflection. On a more surface level, throughout GMA, you see the similar feelings of dread, anxiety, and apprehension, in my opinion, the same feelings that the theory of cruel optimism holds.

An honorary mention and more recent addition to the works I felt most related to, is “Organ Meats” by K-Ming Chang. Feels pretty self-explanatory. Chang writes this poetic novel about two young girls experiencing this visceral sapphic journey of longing while also being dogs. This is a novel where I questioned whether or not K-Ming Chang and I have the same brain, as this novel debuted in November 2023. Throughout “Organ Meats” I felt violently validated in using the viscera in an existential and wildly poetic sense. Chang’s writing is so poetic that it mostly feels like an ode to the disgusting parts of being alive (or not, something about memory). I more or less found this novel as motivation to stay on the path that I was going on with GMA already, and if anything, pushed me further to embrace the poetry of the meat.

Absurdism v. Nihilism and their Influences

Absurdism and Nihilism are ideas that come up a lot within my personal philosophies, and also my work. Within my work, I think these trains of thought more so appear indirectly, or rather subconsciously. I find them to be similar in the sense that at the core of each belief, both seem to agree (mostly) that individual ideas, objects, life, etc. intrinsically hold no value. With that information given, absurdism and nihilism choose different paths. Absurdism comes more from an angle of if nothing matters, then I can place however much meaning on whatever I choose. While nihilism comes more from a standpoint of, nothing matters, and I can do whatever I want since none of it matters. Given these very subjective brief summaries of the two philosophies, I find myself somewhere in between, sort of a balance. There’s a time and place for each, given the knowledge of these two, I find it interesting how each makes appearances throughout my work.

Absurdism makes plenty of appearance throughout GMA, works from “DOLLY PARTON MADE OUT OF MUD” and “A BUNCH OF HAMS IN A TRENCHCOAT” you find these examples of people, ideas, and emotions taking shape as different objects, all somehow communicating with one another. This is an interesting tactic to play with, in my mind, I don’t even have an excellent reason why I do this. I simply believe it’s just because I can. The ability to give other objects other than people emotional weight is something both silly and powerful. The ability to create a story with not a single described human at the forefront speaks to the testament of the power of the writing. Perhaps this is why I draw from Schomburg in that way as well.

Nihilism speaks for the more dreadful undertones throughout the project, in my opinion. On the contrary, to myself, I might argue that GMA is not very nihilistic at all. At least at the core of nihilistic values, of which there are none. Throughout GMA, there is obviously a lot of value, emotion, and everything that matters so much, which is arguably the opposition of nihilism. However, the graduation tier, and sister of absurdism, comes optimistic nihilism. This idea I find much more apparent in the work through GMA. Optimistic nihilism feels like a “nothing matters!” shout from the void of never ending hope. In turn, granting the ability to sort of, do

whatever you want in the most passionate sense. This I feel like, speaks a lot more for GMA and feels much more a part of the themes. While most of the themes do not feel overwhelmingly optimistic, I do feel as though that the idea of the close cousin to absurdism is apparent. Maybe this is subject to more reading and discussion, but I do feel like there is an underlying value of hope throughout "GMA". I feel like you can see this in works such as "THE HORSE WHO DRINKS ITS COWBOYS BLOOD", while gruesome, this poem gives a bit of hope at the end of GMA, to sort of wrap up all those lost little flickers of hope found here and there throughout the work.

Meat Creatures

Now to introduce the second part of the thesis, the meat stuffed creatures. They have yet to find a formal name, but they have found their home a part of the project. The meat creatures are characterized by two stuffed animals made of a meat printed fabric. They measure about 18 inches tall, and they are meant to replicate a memory toy animal you may have as a child. These can exist outside of the poetry section of the thesis or together, I feel they work best in communication with one another, however the creatures could exist independently with context if need be.

The meat creatures came to be an idea when exploring options outside of digital art for supplemental material for my project. I had been so immersed in the world of digital art for so long that I haven't experimented much with any physical mediums. Often, I would find myself frustrated with digital mediums, primarily because I never felt incredibly connected to the creation of digital art. After much frustration, I also felt as though digital work did not fit the themes of the poetry, given the poetics are very physical in nature. This became my queue to experiment with different mediums, and an idea I ended up having was to sew something. Sewing is something that I've always known how to do, and I've often thought of it as a trade rather than an art. I do not believe there was progression in thought to get to meat creatures itself from sewing, I remember it more as just something that came after discussion with friends over the complaints of creative turmoil.

The meat fabric itself was a different process. Early on in this project I found myself indirectly exposure therapy-ing myself with raw meat (Note: I have OCD, meat is a big contingency point, ironically). In this process, I was taking images of raw meat as it decomposed to use those images in some regard in this project. Reasonably, I did not make it very far in this process, however, I now had a series of images of raw meat in varying forms. I wondered if I could make my own fabric to make into creatures, lucky for us, the 21st century offers much technology for us to do just that. There happened to be an online website where I could upload my own images and make it into a fabric of my choosing. A challenge with this was getting the image to "tile" in the proper fashion in order to avoid any harsh lines in the fabric, to make it all one smooth texture. My prior education in texture mapping in video game assets within my 3D classes in my undergraduate degree finally came in handy. I was able to figure out a way for the image to tile in such a way that it felt more amorphous, without any disconnect.

After uploading my map to this fabric website, I was able to order a bunch of this fabric to use. Once received in the mail, I had a sewing pattern for a bear that I was able to use to get started. I was quickly reminded that I bought the cheapest fabric option, as it was a bit tricky to work with. Through the process of sewing, I found myself more connected to the (literal and metaphorical) material at hand. This also naturally led to wanting these creatures to look “perfect”, something I later learned I did not want. I wanted the creatures to appear more “lived in”, again feeling like this would fit the sort of outer aesthetic to reflect the nature of the poetry of GMA.

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Once the meat creatures were finished, it was time to take photos of them. This is something I struggle with as I am not a photographer by nature, but again, I have all that handy design school. This process has been more of a trial, trying to figure out how I want them positioned, what environment I want them in, and so on. A major primary point of inspiration for this is Jean Baudrillard's "Sainte Beuve" (1987). The piece is an image of a chair with a blanket draped over it, but the way it rests is as though it feels like someone (Baudrillard) has suddenly become absent. So then the center of the image becomes of Baudrillard, without him even being the picture (literally). An emotion I've frequently come across in working on GMA is not wanting to be the literal center of the project. Which is understandably ironic given GMA is primarily about the experiences of my own. I do believe a similar illusion of the self can be achieved, like in "Sainte Beuve". I found that this could be represented as "The Meat Aisle" in the written works, and as meat creatures in the visual works. Something that is reflected as the self but not actually the literal self.

When taking the images, I placed the meat creatures in different positions and areas around the home. Places in my home I frequent, such as dining room chairs, my bed, my desk area, and so on. The goal here was to have the creatures sort of be a placeholder for “self” in a lived-in environment. Most of the images I ended up liking the most were of those taken on or in the bed. This felt like the best area given how intimate a bed can be, as well as how beds can provide so much movement and context to an image. Most of the images as well have sections of the creature's parts cut off from the rest of the image. This is done to create this continuous sense of uncomfortability and longing that the whole project shares. Without the entire creature visible, there is this sense of incompleteness that is the center of the uncomfortable feelings associated with the project.

The creatures serve to exist as an extension of myself that also serves as a relatable aspect, just like the writing does in the rest of GMA. The two exist with one another in the final copy of the project, the images being sequenced throughout the poetry. When creating both the poetry and the creatures, the grand picture looked like something that could be both parts of the project existing on their own, but also be able to exist separately with moderate context.

Outro

With all these items wrapped up in Greetings from the Meat Aisle, each item has their own meaning, story, and perspective. The self, the meat creatures, the Meat Aisle, all elements of the project can be thought of as different outlooks of the same diagnosis of being alive for the first time and being moderately upset about it. GMA is meant as a celebration in this sort of sadistic and melancholic way– the way all emotion is to be celebrated. Each of the components of GMA is meant to give an idea to each self in conversation with another, or alone. When each becomes in conversation with one another, there is a different perspective you derive instead of each perspective isolated. Both togetherness and isolation in this regard are just as important. Any meaning derived from or understanding of GMA is what the project is all about. Greetings from the Meat Aisle is about everything and nothing at all.

INTRODUCTION FOR AN APOLOGY

*to not much avail, i find myself in the aisles again
i learn to accept that others lungs are stronger than mine,
teeth that last forever
mine do just fine,*

*when teeth break, i'll be here again, marrying the aisles
eating myself constantly, until there is no more future
only completion in comparison, i brush the cold
i'm sorry i can't live inside you, i tried*

*you're tied to luminosity, something greater
something health can't suffice, not that it was part of the deal
when you can't find me anymore,
i find myself in the aisles again,
somewhere between acceptance and unknowingness*

THE MEAT AISLE ON THE UNSPOKEN

*to be unfronted, instead to appear as welts waiting
to be breached upon skin– you must not say the words.
words are clothes on a body, meat exists as nudity.
nudity as transparency is as silent as language becomes.
meat will never truly know you outside the confines of
nudity. language instead serves as translation for ultimate
sacrecy, however the unspoken carries a heavier toll.
the unspoken appears as a genius meant to translate
everything and nothing at all. the art of the unspoken
becomes a parody of choice.*

A NOTE ON ANGST

*a bitterness so tasteless, i feel it pulse, controlling my limbs
i will grit through my teeth to defeat a sadness so tough
down to bone i feel the divine fighting however
this is not something i can refuse, so i will bite down bite down
on the nearest towel, fight with wide eyes
so fiercely, something i couldn't do at 17
this was created by me, something i made,
only for me to smite*

CRAVING A GRAND ENTRANCE

not wanting to be perceived except to have my hair blown back by the wind, to be that woman glowing with the backlight, my outfit perfectly tailored, and everyone is jealous of the perfect perfume they will never find. i am the only person in the world for right now, just to be noticed, how can i look like a me that will stop everyone in their steps? but please don't perceive me otherwise, but please fall in love with me immediately and tell me how much i already stop your breath. classic "all or nothing". i'm ready to be 30-something and be smoking a cigarette. i want to look back on this and laugh, i'm halfway to laughing. i feel the metamorphosis composing itself into a me that will have a backlight ready and my 80s hair held high. you will fold me in a super-cool dance move and tell me that you've always loved me and pass the cigarette from your mouth to mine. i am the only person in the world for this moment.

THE MEAT AISLE ON RUM AND COKE

*staring through a mirror in the last bathroom Meat got lost in
walking home feels a lot like what Meat told me freedom would be like
tripping on concrete makes Meat feel holy, contrary to cheap dad drinks
safety is much more common when all there is buzzing between eyes
Meat only craves satisfaction in validation within warm lips and cold ears
rain that hits the skin first completely avoiding the wefts of fiber
he only thing between Meat and true godliness is some cotton
Meat devoid of empathy following the best worst coffee, only hitting bone
nothing but raw eyes, Meat seeks solace in warmer shower rain
this time completely missing Meat and stinging skin, an organ betrayed*



BUFFOONERY OF ADAM

*you're the only one i know who's felt hurt that i have seen
i haven't yet thanked you for holding onto what i can't remember,
i don't want your job, i'm sure you don't want mine either,
which is why i forget, and why you flinch, i suppose you look out for me
or even worse, you feel the same hurt, i treat you like a wounded animal
who's first out of the two of us, who gets to decide that you're worthy of touch?
how do i talk about my limbs when i can't feel them?
if i can't stand on my own, how can you?*

A PERSON I NEVER SAW IN A DREAM

*wake, evaluate, your edge is what keeps you alive
become the reason to draw the curtains,*

no good,

*don't let thought hit you on the way out
there's no more collaging, call it balance*

*the antithesis to existence,
it's all collage,*

*you were never the reason,
instead,
the genesis to it all*

the river can all be a religion if you let it

THE MEAT AISLE AND THE CURE

meat is synonymous with experience, meat is a blessing to be used to be foul-smelling and hot. meat wasn't intended to think, however none of this was intended. instead, the meat aisle writes. something to branch the meat with the nether of the inside. healing the rot with experience might be the cure, hear the apprehension in meat's tone. "might" might lead to something far greater, something far more uncomfortable. if uncomfortability is growth then meat needs a new meat, then the nether grows.

ON BEING CHOSEN

i can't *actually* say i've been chosen to be here
because then you'd think that i think i'm *actually* god
but i can't say that i am god because then *you*
would call the cops but what if i'm *actually* the first
person in the video game that we're assigned? if i said that
you'd take me to the hospital but i can't beg you to
see that i'm the *only* actual person aware of what's going
on because then you'd call my mom i just wish i could
tell you that i'm *actually* the lens of the camera and
just infiltrating being alive. i don't make a very good alive
person because i'm too busy thinking about my eyes
as lenses for the unknown. i'm *actually* the unknown but
you don't know that, i don't know what the unknown is
and really wish it wasn't a secret. sometimes i think about
being the perfect array of human experience, i worry
that this may be relatable. you worry that i'm *actually* god,
and i'm worried that none of this is real. of course none
of this was *actually* real but i can't help but think that
there's a lack of words to explain this experience on purpose

UNLUCKY DEER

*some are sentenced to being feeble; it's never a perspective
i wished for, there is worth in weakness– we all carry humility
somewhere in our pockets. there is no such thing as luck, all
karma is passed around. we are made up of varying degrees
of deer– each serving their importance. i can't ever convince
you that dead deer are as crucial as alive ones; they wrap their
necks in unison to create something someone else has given.
and then you will give, our necks living in unison*

ON SAN DIEGO

*fucked up feelings where the string
that was so certain to be in place, tethered to
the original plan, severed. the soul knows different
and has always known, mortality doesn't get pleasure
in knowing cosmic truths, only experience.
leaving was deeply, certainly, not a part of the plan;
we only get to feel that though—oh how the soul
will always set the course again, validity to the body,
i always knew you'd come back, and set for the course.*

GOD IS A HORSE GIRL

*you tell me i'm a cloud, god in everything
i cannot seem to walk away from the deli section,
how does consciousness exist as oven roasted turkey breast?
"flesh is oven roasted turkey breast," you say to me*

*you pull me out of the grocery store and into one of the stables,
"now, won't you help me move on?"
rain wakes me up, into a different time
and you've ran out of blood, my grandpa would
always tell me to shoot horses to put them out of their misery.*

*"i can't do this," i say to you, though you're mostly mud now,
rain washes you into the storm drains.
"you've never known me," you say,
"you'll find me in every horse you see,"
i pick up the honey ham instead,
clouds take on many shapes.*

THE MEAT AISLE ON THE REWARD OF ACCIDENT

*punishment is always blessing every
stone thrown dodges a new image
that never once knew that light existed
light where corners grew and fins slice
through paper, paper to only be burned
to be burned then tossed water upon
to make new clay of some amorphous
shape something ugly and
horrendous but mostly
happier than when birthed.
a horrifying defiance of nature
made of mud and slivers
that always sparkle and then groan
concealing a voice of many other
freak creatures before it, eyes that
turn to teeth then back into
eyes then back into a wet
pile of ash-mud.
light feels better
on skin like this.
skin that
once knew
nothing
at all*

A BUNCH OF HAMS IN A TRENCH COAT

*i can't figure out if i'm the chunk of ham or the person shopping for it,
my thoughts can be set aside from ham. i exist as the chunk and as both,
being removed from All. me, the ham hock, the prelude to my body,
the prelude to All, i can exist as the grocery store for days at a time
consuming all the thoughts of everyone inside me, the ham. i pick up the ham,
me. at the deli, us. inside the grocery store, All of it.*



THE MEAT AISLE ON PERSEVERANCE

*you are the stage, the lights, the actress, and the audience.
sometimes you shine too bright, then you look too washed out.
other times you throw tomatoes at the you on stage.
once, one of the yous was the floorboards that buckled
the you that was the actress tripped,*

*you create a whole life on improv,
each of the yous that make the production will live after,
to be the lights for someone else, to be someone else's floorboards
some guy will write a critique of your improvisational performance,
one day the you that was the big velvet curtains will draw,
with no warning to the rest of the yous that spent so much time,
getting everything to be so perfect,
for the day someone else buys a ticket for the show,
but no one does, not even that one guy.
lights, curtains, and floorboards will take on another personality
the next personality remembers you in instances, they live through you,
this time i'll make it.
then collectively, the bulbs burn out*

STUCK IN TRAFFIC

*through skin we access humility, like photosynthesis.
only embarrassing this time,
meatier, too.
absorbing every blade of imperfection,
a résumé of nature.
the surface in no way, reflects how we behave as clouds,
flesh does not exist in precipitation,
only in afterthought.
in afterthought, we find ourselves.
viscera exists,
only in the past.*

ONCE IN A LIFETIME MORNING ROUTINE

*on january 1st, 2019 i shook my own hand for the last time
and to myself, the first time. i opened the door as the other me shut it.
i slept for three days, perhaps so that all the myselfs in
the grocery store could hire a new cashier, this has never happened before.
all of my selves panicked.
they've never known a different self to properly bag their items,
what if this self doesn't separate the eggs from the bleach?*

*one of myselfs saw the help wanted sign in the window.
they had to go through the interview and training process,
so that on thursday, there was a new cashier, this one was different.
my new cashier's clothes were perpetually soaked, and they didn't know their name.
the customers, recovering from the sudden disappearance of the last self,
found themselves comforted by wet egg cartons packed next to the bleach.
when my other selves arrived home, they threw all the groceries away.*

*on january 3rd, 2019 i woke up with brand new, wet skin, covered in yolk,
as i was not my old self, but this new self isn't new either, this old new self
is made up of the wet egg cartons and unusable bleach, strung together
by what the other selves have taught it. the other selves stuffed meat in my
elbows and smudged pasta sauce on my face, all for reason they wished they knew.
my old new self walks like a baby deer, but cannot face death on their own.
unknowing to the unforeseen changing of the cashiers, the lucid myself will wake.*

GETTING OFF THE SCHOOL BUS

*everything is so bright, it's sixth grade and
it's the last day of school you sweat through
your short sleeve that is uncomfortably tight.
it feels so good to smile.
my most important friend is myself.
tomorrow i'll be twenty-four,
summer is nowhere in sight and
someone will ask you what it feels like to die.
i find myself in the school bus the morning after you ask me.
it's hot and my childhood dogs run up the driveway to greet me.
mom arms me with a spoon from the kitchen drawer
to play in the mud along the creek.
death is the mud, the spoon, the sun,
my prepubescent sweat soaked shirt. bright light consumes me,
next summer will never come.*

THE LOSING BATTLE OF THE ELDEST

*birth is something of an accident that turns into a role
that's assigned from a birth that wasn't fated,
stars assign a magnitude of humility that knows no limits
always needed for something none in return,
to be smited in front of jury only to be beckoned
when there's no one*

*role turns to objective and emotion turns to option
life is objective and there's always something to fix
emotions hath no learning, no way to present
assigned to failure by the gift of treason of itself
wanting to be loved by all but not being able to*

*you've created something incidental that
can't be ironically fixed, none of this can be.
the losing battle of the eldest child is something that
one can only bear and see no point in solving
something only to burn energy that isn't there
i'm sorry i can't be something you didn't create*

THE MEAT AISLE ON TOUCH

*the meat aisle is not good on vulnerability, nor intimacy,
meat should have touched your thigh when you touched meat.
it's tough in practice realizing you are past a point of reckoning
with real time perceivment. meat instead recoils at intimate
gestures as if touch is being learnt for the first time, cautious.
this is not the first time, nor the second, nor the nth, meat reaches
for warmth to learn how to accept it for itself. intimacy is something
created, something shared, not supposed to be robbed. meat creates
a bank of vulnerability and intimate moments to never use. sitting
like a pile of shiny tender, tender to be traded, to be held warm by.
intimacy as the thief of vulnerability, as now it's naked, to be traded.*



DOG IN A HOT CAR

*when water reaches boiling
not something you were taught to handle
when water boils you don't try to rationalize it
there is excitement in not understanding hotdogs
you don't understand mac n cheese with hotdogs in it
you turn on the stove anyway*

SQUIRREL TEETH

*i'm sorry humanity didn't serve you the way it should have
buried in country pavement serves a greater purpose
the sun will bake me, too, into dirt tomorrow turn my skin
into rind for trees wolves will wear my teeth around their neck
out of vengeance or honor, either way,
blood all serves each other, despite what rocks look like
we exchange minerals back and forth
until we are mangled apart of concrete*

THROWING OUT FOOD

*poison is everywhere it seems, which is new.
they're a shapeshifter, a worm in your brain,
the worm wasn't always a worm though
once it was stomachache, once it was out in public,
another time the worm was my car windows
poison is the worm that actually is the wind
between each ridge of your wrinkly little brain,
the wind will always find a new home
as long as you're still breathing, moving,
it is your job to attend your own funeral everyday*

THE MEAT AISLE PRAYS TO THE KITCHEN FLOOR

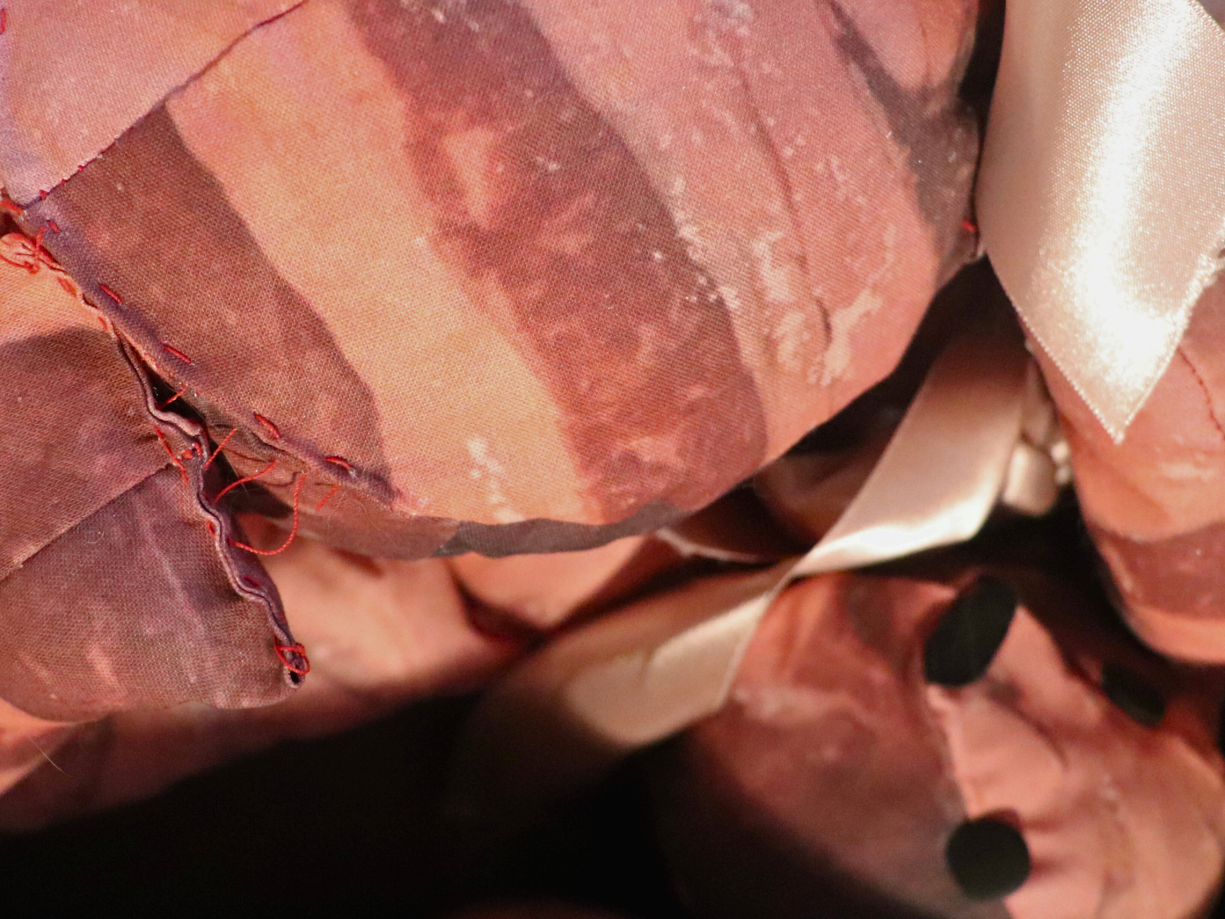
*consciousness floods the back of someone's head after
all was lost at the bar last weekend after seeing
another meat that stole them for a couple years.
bar bathroom mirrors tell stories of previous
lifetimes of how you're no longer yourself.
how meat makes the connection between sex and
fatherhood and never loving your daughter is lost
within the grout of the kitchen tile. having sex with
fatherhood is the closest thing to holy you've ever felt.
feeling holy is something so familiar now that it's
turned into a new childhood again.
how everyone but meat knows when something's been
spoiled is something that surpasses memory. the truth
in another life meat ran from bar to bar looking for
another chance. the truth is i won't ever know why.*

OFFICE FAN

*there's something satisfying about never reaching the ribbon,
the fan is constantly pushing your hair back,
your lips fold around your ears,
you love every second of this miserable existence
wind pushing glittering light just within your reach,
just enough to appreciate it from afar,
you can't ever touch glory, to touch glory
is to acknowledge your lips
behind your ears and your saliva in the wind,
you will never be this young again.*

DOLLY PARTON MADE OUT OF MUD

my body takes the form of a handful of mud, breathing as one, trying to make sense of its individual parts that (in theory) have an end goal. my body can't be fathomed on an objective scale but it can (mostly) keep me alive long enough to figure out why i had that one really weird dream. my body is the shape of a dream, actually. not in the dream-bod-Dolly-Parton-tits-on-my-neck sort of way, but as in the state of matter. like as in if-i-put-my-hand-through-the-mirror-and-drag-my-fingers-through-my-body-it'll-ripple-and-disappear-like-a-reflection-in-a-pond type of way.



SHOPPING CART MADE OF GLASS

*sun feels different this way, sun shines through me with purpose.
i create refractions unlike those found at the bottom of a ditch,
the light creases through me, creating my own image.
plastic lattice empty, not like myself, breakable this time
i hold precious cargo, nothing heavy though,
what if i shatter? to shatter is something new,
a mosaic of breath, weight, scattered,
broken by eggs that were a little too heavy.
one too many paper bags for this mundane life
creates something i will one day be proud of*

TOMORROW WILL NOW BE FIVE YEARS AGO

sanity appeared as monumental, achievement for going through it as the only way to go through it. holes in the gums behind teeth didn't matter. the itchiness didn't matter, sound rolled off the shoulders. five years was a vacation without realization, crime without consequence maybe the baseline is where i am meant to be, extra energy spared for nothing but challenge. i thought the warm-up was made for this part of being alive. "alive" is painted on the walls, i have never felt more and less alive than now. all this energy spared for the nether between crooks and folds, the same ones where the holes where teeth should be. instead, holes are filled with the ignorance of time. acceptance was never truly achieved, only ignored. nothing ever was flowing through, only above.

THE MEAT AISLE AND THE PLUMBER

*ease is the lights dimming after a long movie, a break
a lull in consciousness, a reward, something to be earned
the aisle doesn't romanticize ease, the dishwasher opens
steam opens your pores you're able to breathe deeper again,
each dish closer to something earned
ease is a plate dropped that doesn't break,
created by materials to make it immune,
ease is immunity, a deep breath is difficult,
being put through a meat slicer is easy,
divinity is blood, operating the meat slicer, eternal,
messiness is grace, we can do hard things,
the hand in the slicer is what makes us real, able,
not a simple chore, introductions are never easy,
and that's the best part.*

OSCILLATION

*install a pulley, attached to the nape
write all over the sidewalks, "please look up"
find solace in my toes, my home is in between them.
it's so warm between each nail, fuzz from my socks
they tell me to stay here, where it's safe.
i have to acknowledge forward inertia sometime
tighten the joint right at the top of my spine, top vertebrae.
so that i can rip off each toenail and hold it up to the sun
so that i can use the fuzz to ignite the fire at the bus stop
so that i can watch the sidewalk burn one last time
so that i can
so that i can
so that i can*

SOMETHING ABOUT A SINK AND GOD

*there's something in the sink, boiling, staring at me
an amoeba, a string of angel hair,
i see you in every bathroom sink i turn into.
angels are supposed to be the sink,
more specifically the soap dispenser.
they watch me in a staring competition with the microbes,
angels don't save you, they only save you after you wither,
after holding your hair back while you throw up,
an afterthought*

THE MEAT AISLE ON AUTHENTICITY

*character is added through every burn of the waffle iron
you are made up of several burnt patterns, charred
if you are sliced through, i find butter and blood,
syrup an eternal syrup of sorts,
something that cannot be replicated
replica is not identity, identity is authenticity,
syrup is individual sometimes you need more time to cook,
incinerate the bad, respect forks, holes, and serrated knives,
you need them everything shapes you, through burning*

SUNBURN

*sun gifts cell turnover rate, routinely into ash
bones grow out of the body, to be used in the afterlife
a simple end to a complex narrative, no cosmic explosion,
no stars colliding, no formation into black holes,
growth into reminders of impending collisions to wear,
everyone knows, a timer, personalized, gifted by the sun,
one day bones become coat trees,
skin becomes cutting boards,
hair becomes a momento,
cells that never could be*



IF WE WERE DOGS
(After K-Ming Chang's Organ Meats)

*if dogs aren't meant to hold your bones together
then what's the meaning in holding the universe in community*

*i'm a dog, dogs hold your blood in their ears so you can
hold joy in yours. i'm a dog that doesn't participate
in cosmic blood. my knees drag through pavement in order
to keep you safe*

*if humanity isn't not meant to see all the way through you,
no one else in the world knows about me.*

*i'm a dog, i play with the scabs that hold time together,
good dogs lick wounds as a consequence of time.
you've looked through the mouth of stray dogs,*

*stray dogs don't have ears made of joy,
stray dogs have ears made up of rivers of accidents,
incidents of time, all tied together by consequence of happiness.*

STAIRCASE FUNCTIONALITIES

*bones break when they're supposed to, it's all plot
you were not supposed to cross that street, stay on the path.
go into the bathroom and scream, you already knew i'd do that,
when you take your last breath, suddenly it'll all make sense
wood splintered on the perfect Wednesday, it was in the manual
the program already knew, page 48, fall in the lake,
page 17, die of a terminal disease,
page 92, the cat ate your carcass,
page 20, fell down the stairs,
the staircase was waiting for you,
made sure that one spot on the third step down was slick,
Meat read the manual*

MEAT AND THE ART OF DEVOTION

*if you saw me from far away you would
know what the inside of my tongue looks like
and become hypothetically corrupt from our
hypothetical union of tethered thought
but never stand far enough away for the
string of saliva that connects us to break
this way we'll never have to
share the same spine but be just close
enough to run the tip of fingers along the bone
to hear the song of ceremonial hunger*

UNMARRIED UNBEKNOWNST

*to be separate from your unknowing, widowed from the unknown,
thoughts separate from the body, widowed. dreams always strung
to something, never able to stand on two legs. never able to have
anything of their own. predermancy confusion for death. daydreams
as an ultimate demise, becoming a widow to thought may be the
actual freedom. will existing from body, each existing on their own.*

*disjointed widows are free, they have no names, no loyalties.
to be actually free comes at the cost of relief from the body,
relief from reliance.*

THE MEAT AISLE CELEBRATES FORGIVENESS

*in the turn of events that emotions manifest into rot,
the meat aisle will forgive, the meat aisle does not forget,
as feeling is retched to achieve atonement
high hopes cannot be promised when mind commits buffoonery,
a wicked switch committed crime and other malignancies of thought.
twisting around to stab itself in effort to advert blame
from the martyr that it's become. the meat aisle always knew,
the meat aisle cannot speak for themselves,
sabotage as the only language the meat aisle speaks,
can only be interpreted by the future*

THE MEAT AISLE USES LEGS AS TOOLS

*thighs are supposed to mean just as much as emotion,
emotions always run, doubt, become, shapeshift.
keeping legs in the dark, startled to touch, a secret kept.
calves should be able to make some of the decisions too,
what if thighs want something different than emotion?
legs as a community under dictatorship of thought,
thighs lead the uprising democracy. one day to overthrow
chaos in charge. pieces of leg daydream about who can
see through them, touch them in a meaningful way.
a way in which thought never considered, daydream,
thought, and emotion unable to carry tangibles.*

WHAT'S BECOME OF THE MAZE

*in hauntings of the back rooms, the space behind my eyes
you're trapped in the folds of aisles, crawling through lungs,
looking for a prayer through breath, never satiated
look between piles of fat, nursing on tongue until further notice
wind of rivers from heat of throat, passed between tunnels
sweat is the gift of the patron saint of panting like a dog
i hope you never find your way out of backrooms of thought*

IF WE WERE KNIGHTS

*we would not be dames, dames are knighted
through marriage and we don't even know that
we would soon be witches but at the
minimum we're sinners. let's not worry
about that right now. right now our skin is the soft
flesh pressed against piercing metal created
by the same people meant to destroy us.
right now we're meant to defend something
that was never meant for us. right now
sun reflects your hair and i see what i'm meant to be.
in this life we may never materialize the way history
meant us to be. in many lifetimes later we'll meet
again in a different world, one where we're still
witches, criminals, and sinners. in this
life though i get to press your skin to mine.
less than a blade's distance, we'll try again.
while history will never remember us,
our claim to each other remains resolute.*



THE AISLE OF MUNDANE ON MEAT

*as secular as meat has ever been, heavenly meat
meat has never been meatier, i have never met meat
meat that misses you. meat that reflects light, meat
that will call your name. meat with a cup of coffee meat
the need to need meat
to survive meat
to live meat
i can't find meat
earthly meat, meat with wings, confronted by meat
crying for meat, meat that never was meat
god that is meat, meat that is angel meat*

*meat as uselessness taking
and taking and taking and taking and taking
meat*

*meat as weight to bear meat
meat that carries wind meat
meat that wasn't destined for meat
meat that wants its mom meat
meat that works a nine to five meat
meat as a destination meat*

ODE TO THE INBETWEEN

*meat is meant to bury, to end and become renew not
something destined to inertia, this is not home*

yet

*meat is ashamed to bear tears down the center of
their throat like the nape of consequence like
consequence of movement as in you need to stay put*

yet

*planning destined to plant meat here to rebirth
something not yet seen before the inbetween
being the sinew that meat rides, becomes,
and sleeps in and*

yet

*running and making this new nest meat's home
never gets easier, each movement a threat
only a few more lives left
the last being the one you are rewarded*

THE COUCH

*using memories as polyester filling is not recommended
as the result only leaves for holes in the entrails where
cats have only thanked it for its sanctity, may this be
an intro to an apology where this chapter didn't serve,
celebrate the way you may have deserved, used as a
crutch into someone else's next life while you're hauled
away the same way you were brought, left only with the
marks of life. unsure love is the right way to express
the imposing of life on another object, the conclusion to
this apology is seeing through the holes and fiber strewn
across a home that would soon become a memory that was
supposed to be forever. the next forever may not be so
forgiving to you, i have to be the one to kill you,
while your stuffing is scarce, death is only the next part.*

ME AND THE MEAT AISLE

Meat is who Me is running from. he's exceptionally horrific. Me actually just managed to expel him from their self, yes, the two were mangled in this horrible buffet of self-loathing.

Meat is not a reckoner, he swallows everything whole he takes and can because he does and doesn't have to think about it later. Meat has bricks taped around him without thinking of consequence, with him trapped inside you it's only a matter of time before you fall and drown in your own bricks.

Me is running from Meat and feels like there is nothing ahead of them. the body feels a lot more lonely without twenty-something bricks blockading any rationality.

Me needs rationality in order to keep breathing, suddenly breath has become an option to think about, there is everything to think about now. Me is stripped naked without bricks offering censorship. it's especially cold out this time of year.

ALL OF THE MES

*this new me is unkillable, just like the last several unkillables
i wonder if this new me will like having their hair touched...
all of these mes have been too metallic for intimacy, something
that fills the skin and can't be expelled, arms begging for love
but the mouths on my arms are zip tied shut, and i'm not quite
sure which one of the mes put those there.. i miss wanting.
this new me wants breath on their neck but for real this time.
not breath that passes through me just to feel how good it is
to have hot air brush through my neck and touch my spine.
i want the breath to stop at my neck, i want only the fuzz to feel it.
i want to think about feeling after i feel and not replace challenge
with thought. this new me uses experience and arms as music...
stale air as hot breath waiting to be swept away where there's
a bed at home. the new me has hair at home waiting to be
touched, i tell her. i tell her her breath is melting my neck
metal and that's horrifying. in the aisle of unkillable mes i hope
they all make up the new fleshy me. a me that is nearly
translucent, a me who glitters and you can see the veins of
them when you hold them up to the light.*

I AM IN THE NEXT LIFE ALREADY AND IT'S JUST, SO MUCH

*and so are you, you are stretched across each life like a soft
and shitty bandaid, wearing more and more each time you are
and you will become covered in mud
and wood chips and goop
and from all of the lives you were forced to have (or forced as far as we know)
and you will eventually develop holes in your skin as a symptom of one life
and you will experience infinite holes bore through you in various sequences
and you will still feel it in the next
and you will still feel me in the next
and so, here you are, slimy, weathered, down to your spine, clueless
and the next life comes
and goes
and*

THE HORSE WHO DRINKS ITS COWBOYS BLOOD

*he is reminded about the subtlety of humility
god takes on many forms, these days
he thinks about his reflection in blood
"i, too, can be God"*

