

THE SIGH PRESS

ISSUE 6 • AUTUMN 2015

NOTE FROM THE EDITORS

The heat has lifted and the rains are coming. In fact, they are coming right in through the roof in *Shivaree*, a new story this issue by Isabella Ronchetti. You'll find all kinds of "architecture" in the fall journal. Our current theme—"Inner Architecture"—was largely inspired by the work of visual artist Ilaria Leganza whom we met at the Stibbert Garden *Art in the Park* event, co-sponsored last spring by The Sigh Press. From Jessie Chaffee's musings in *Autumn Window* to Brenda Porster's take on a "curve," all of the work in this issue addresses the theme in different and unusual ways. And, as always, contributors' bios and more can be found at the end of the journal.

After our standing-room-only poetry event in the spring, The Sigh Press will again partner with Florence Writers on October 22nd to host an Open Mic Poetry Night at the St. Mark's Cultural Association. Writers are invited to sign in when they get there, grab a Negroni on the house, and participate in the local poetry scene. The previous weekend, on October 17th, editor Lyall Harris and Sigh Press contributor Elisa Biagini will hold a poetry and book art workshop.

You can now find Sinéad Bevan's winning story *My Big Fat Modelling Career* also in audio format, read by the author. Sinéad's funny, poignant story was The Sigh Press winning entry in the spring short story competition held with The Florentine.

Please visit www.thesighpress.com for our Winter Issue theme and deadline, and don't miss us on Facebook where you'll find the details about events, Sinéad's reading, and more.

Lyall Harris & Mundy Walsh

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MILLIONI DI MILLIONI

ILARIA LEGANZA



THE CURVE OF THINGS

BRENDA PORSTER



SI SALE O SI SCENDE

“These things do tend to take a certain curve” –
so what do you do at the end of the curve?
get off, I suppose, or, better, are let off,
stepping down to a point off the line,
a bleached and empty landscape, displaced
you look around you and can find
no horizon, no axis to refer to, only
vast suspensions of space
and time with no direction to follow,
except backwards,
where you cannot, will not go
though your body’s every fiber
be aligned
to that pull.



AUTUMN WINDOW

JESSIE CHAFFEE

I am a visitor to this view out the window of the kitchen where I sit each day. I write here because of the view, the depth of it—the stacked homes and scalloped roofs, the single cypress, the far-off hills, and then sky, sky, sky, all reflected in the two glass panes that open toward me like hands, dripping with reflections. In the distance, planes drift down and shoot up, sharp arrows, as tourists come and go through September and October and now into November, though it doesn't feel like November, the air still warm, the only sign of autumn the early-setting sun and the fire-red vines that hang from a terrace halfway between me and the horizon.

With the window open, sounds cut cleanly to me. The shrieks of birds, the slicing of stone, the couple shouting in the apartment below—their voices crescendo as though this battle, repeated each day, might be their last. It has rained for weeks, pulling smells from the crevices, polishing the roof tiles, and slickening the slotted stones. But now the sky is clear, a momentary break, as I look out to the soft melancholy of evening where a woman is slowly drawing in her laundry. I turn away, disappear into words, tap tap tap at my keyboard, pausing only at the bells to turn back to this view, to the fast-approaching dark, to remember where and who I am.



LA DONNA VOLANTE

!

SHIVAREE

ISABELLA RONCHETTI

My parents' voices made the sky parlor cave in so lamps hung from clouds and rain ruined rocking chairs and napkins.

No one heard me let the Soulstealers in through the bathroom window, no one heard the whirr and hum of their bustling thoughts spread through the house, whispers faint as wolf's groans swallowed by vapor. They clogged every gap and crevice and those that didn't have room began a blind shivaree of kettles and wooden spoons in the kitchen, darkness leaking in through cracks in the walls.

They crawled into the sitting room and tore upholstery with their sharp teeth and claws, begetting billows of down that drifted through the rooms and settled in forgotten corners. Letting fly feather-confetti, they capered through the corridors and cachinnated and crooned.

"Come and play," they sang, "Come and play."

Their hymns and canticles were in a tongue only I could fathom, a tongue of yearning, of vengeance, of thirst.

Then they called to the others, who gathered round that bathroom skylight and pushed and fought to get in first. They broke mirrors and disarranged my closet of dresses and costumes and masks; then they held hands and climbed up the walls, juggling knives and ceramic apricots.

And they brought in more darkness that trailed behind them as they skipped through the house and lit fires under the beds.

My parents' voices droned still, oblivious to the Soulstealers and their frenzied jubilee, to the spreading caliginosity and the crumbled garret.

"Come and play," they sang, "Come and play." And the rug grew wetter still as the nimbostratus layer continued to cry through the hole in the roof.

I wasn't afraid of *my* soul getting stolen: I'd already lost it anyway.



RICORDI

!

THE CORNERS

ISABELLA RONCHETTI

Five empty slots in the box where the cookies should be, five empty corners in me where my guts, femur, vocal cords, carotid glands, heart once were.

Those two cats that stole them used to cry in the night and I remember lying there, listening. They sounded like human babies. I remember lying there, listening, and feeling the pulse of my bed's young heart and the faint vibration of my sofa's tired, tired vocal cords.

When I was little I was given a pocketknife and made a small slit in my grandmother's upholstered chair just to watch the intestines squirm out. No blood; back then I didn't understand why. The intestines slid to the floor and more kept coming, oozing through the thin cut I'd made and forming a puddle that little by little expanded and grazed the fringe of her Persian carpet. So I sewed the thick floral skin back together with black thread and burnt the guts that had leaked out, afraid she might be angry about her ruined rug.

Once, grandmother brought me five vanilla cookies on a paper plate as I sat on a frail yellow beach chair by the pool, neglecting the rattle of its weakened bones. It was that very afternoon, while I was observing a family of wind-up cardinals nest in huckleberry bushes, that my femur was

taken by those retched cats. I raided the closets and searched through her entire collection of umbrellas; I persevered until, months later, I was not only searching for my femur but also for my stolen carotid glands and guts.

It was years before I lost my vocal cords, then my heart. So long a time passed, in fact, that I almost believed the cats had given up. I was living in an aluminum tree house with a wooden bed, breeding wind-up birds. And they stole my vocal cords first so I wouldn't be able to call for help when they took my heart.

No one has ever noticed the five empty corners in me, like the slots in the box of my grandmother's cookies.



LA STANZA PROIBITA

TWO SKETCHES FROM TROY

NICHOLAS CHAPMAN

Criseyde

Her beauty, so bright as to blank our gaze,

Empties the room.

In her presence we know ourselves most

Ordinary. She stands apart, is left alone.

A widow – with no child – and now a traitor's daughter.

She knows what this means for her.

This is a small town.

Troilus

Young soldiers – who've seen a thing or two

These past seven years – swirl down the street.

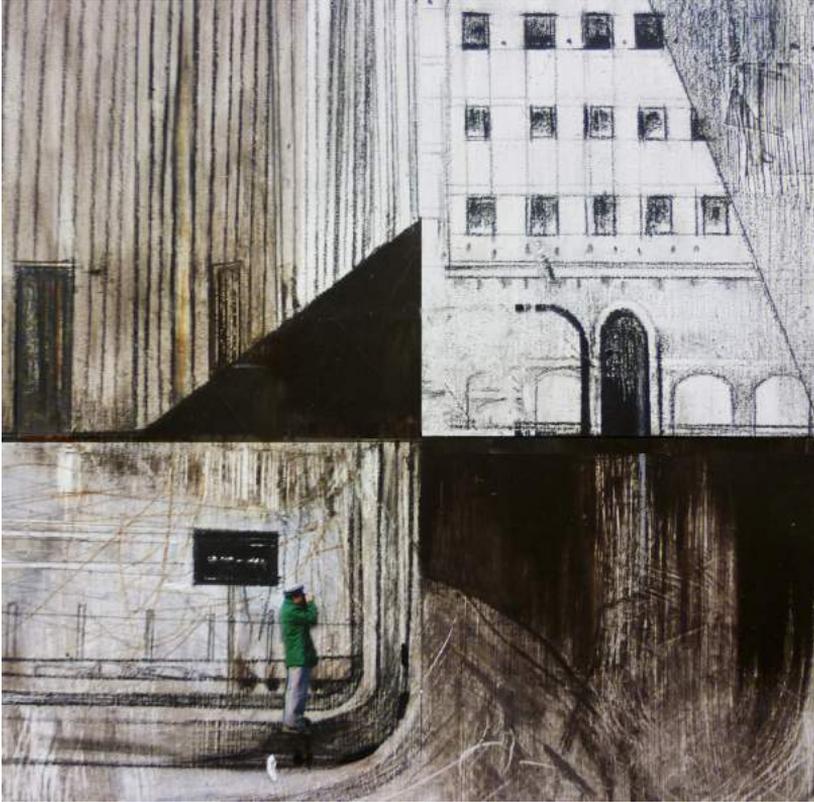
It's a feast day, and here comes the sun

Lifting her skirt above her ankles. A little heat

And the fuse is lit. Except in him.

He judges some fair enough, some wanting

And does not burn in the taking or the leaving.



AVVISTAMENTO

LIFE IN THE BALANCE

JASON ARKLES



LA MIA CITTÀ

As any sculptor will tell you, the human figure is fundamentally unfit to be rendered in marble. This, despite several thousand years of trying; and the problem is one of architecture. Even the slenderest of torsos are too massive to be carried by the thin forelegs and ankles of the human body,

when cut into stone. Ankles will crack and the marble figure will topple unless some artifice is added to the art. And so Michelangelo's David gets his tree trunk, Venuses employ carved draperies or urns, Hercules his club and lion's skin. But find the correct balance of the figure by use of this third leg, and your figure will stand the tests of gravity as well as time. It will stand, and your subject has become immortalized.

The third leg is just one artifice we employ to create an illusion of reality. Cavities in the eyeballs give the effect of a colored iris, hair is treated in terms of its general mass rather than a collection of individual wisps. And we use these conceits in figurative sculpture of every medium—bronze, wood, and clay as well as marble and stone. But it is marble and stone alone, the most permanent, unmoving, monolithic (in its literal and figurative sense) material which requires of us the greatest concession, the third leg, before the immortal nature of the medium is imparted to those who would seek it.

Of course, this so-called immortality is also a conceit. Artists and their muses must die, and what is left behind is only an effigy. I like to think of marble and stone statues as *wanting* to break; as needing to leave the legacy of impermanence as much as immortality; reminding the artists that, if we seek Truth and Nature in our work, then maybe our work must die too.

?

What names do we give the familiar
yet invented places in our dreams?



LA TORRE DEI SOGNI

CONTRIBUTORS

BIOS & TSP QUESTION

TO OUR CONTRIBUTORS: *Tell The Sigh Press about a magical, curious, or special architectural aspect of your childhood home.*

*

ILARIA LEGANZA, originally from Puglia, is a critically recognized Florence-based visual artist. Since 2000 she has been engaged in organizing and conducting cultural initiatives and events as well as participating in numerous exhibitions in Italy and abroad. Academically trained, Ilaria quickly expanded her approach to figurative art. Embracing an avant-garde post-figurative aesthetic, Ilaria's image-making is experimental, independent, and personal. Recent solo exhibitions include *Nuovi scenari*, Dance Cavise Studios, NY; *Sui fili*, Gallery Frank Winkelmann, Germany; *Case e case, lo spazio dell'uomo*, Cultural Institute, Hamburg; and *Tra tetti e cielo*, Galleria Rosso Cinabro, Rome.

[HTTP://WWW.LEGANZARTGALLERY.IT/](http://www.leganzartgallery.it/)

IN MY CHILDHOOD HOUSE, I especially loved a table in our living room. I would make myself very small, sneak under it and crouch, seeking a mystical, special space suited perfectly to me where only I could hide. With a little notebook I spent hours imagining and drawing my future.

Then someone would call and I would have to run off. Some years later, that table came to represent an oasis for my inner tranquility, the symbol of my artistic journey, the place where I could always search for and find myself.

BRENDA PORSTER a native of Philadelphia, has lived most of her adult life in Florence, where she has taught English language. She is a poet and literary translator, and writes both in English and Italian. She performs with the *Compagnia delle poete*, a company of women poets. Her poems appear in numerous literary magazines and websites in Italy and abroad, including *Le Voci della luna*, *Pagine*, *Sagarana*, *El Ghibli*, *Forma Fluens*, *Fili D'aquilone*, *Traduzionetradizione*, *The Browne Critique* (Calcutta), and *Gradiva* (New York). Her work can also be found in poetry anthologies, and she has taken part in various international literary festivals. In 2013 her poem *Una lettera* won first prize in the Italian national competition *Donna e poesia*. She has translated poetry extensively from English into Italian and vice versa.

WWW.COMPAGNIADELLEPOETE.COM

WWW.FILIDAQUILONE.IT

WWW.SAGARANA.NET/HOME.PHP

BETWEEN THE LOWER AND THE UPPER STEPS leading to the front door, joining each pair of houses, there was a small space we called the "patio" but which was really just a stoop. And it was here that we would hang out on

summer nights, those long hot nights when we were on vacation from school and could stay out until hours unthinkable in a cooler climate. We occupied the shadowy spots to play our word-games or, as we grew into adolescents, to tell our secret stories, whispering and giggling well into the night as we rocked on rusty metal chairs, night after infinite night.

[]

JESSIE CHAFFEE spent the past year in Florence on a Fulbright grant to research a novel, during which time she was the Writer in Residence at Florence University of the Arts. Her work has appeared in *Blue Stem*, *Global City Review*, *Big Bridge*, and *Promethean*. She lives in New York City with her husband, and she is currently a resident artist at the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council's Process Space Residency on Governors Island.

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UNTIL I WAS 7, my family lived in a small one-bedroom apartment in New York City. To accommodate us all, my father built loft beds—one for him and my mother and one for me, with my brother's crib nestled below. I loved sleeping with my family close by and loved my bed that hovered near the ceiling, especially because from a certain angle—when climbing up or leaping down—I could catch a glimpse of the Empire State Building.

!

ISABELLA RONCHETTI is an artist-writer/misanthrope/sesquipedalianist who intentionally wears mix-matched socks and taught herself to raise one eyebrow. She finds inspiration in dreams, stories, shapes in the cumuli, and peculiar happenings from everyday life. Her award-winning work has appeared in numerous publications such as *Diverse Voices Quarterly*, *Canvas Literary Journal*, *Foliage Oak Literary Journal*, *GREYstone*, *Glass Kite Anthology*, *Bluefire Journal*, *The Claremont Review*, *Celebrating Art*, and *Poetic Power Anthology*.

WWW.ISABELLARONCHETTI.COM

IN THAT CHILDHOOD HOME, I lived haunted by earring-swallowing showers and ceilings dotted with glaring, sickly glow-in-the-dark stars. And I must mention the hollow railing post! I used to hide notes in there, but my father glued it shut before we moved so I never got to take them out.

NICHOLAS CHAPMAN managed to escape to Florence after completing his schooling in England. However, he's set back by reading for an English degree at the University of Durham; he plans to run away again as soon as possible, thinking Rome might be a less detectable destination next time. He is currently writing a novel about suicide.

AS A CHORISTER, I spent years hanging around churches, meaning I have a slightly strange appreciation of stained glass. Winchester Cathedral's west-

end window originally depicted the Creation, but the medieval masterpiece was smashed by Cromwell's forces during the Civil War. After the Restoration, the Cathedral Chapter decided to restore the window. With the original stained glass. The only problem was, nobody could remember what went where—and they weren't sure they even had all the glass. The solution was ingenious: they replaced the glass in a random order, accidentally creating the "collage" several centuries early.

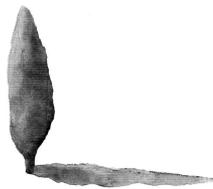
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JASON ARKLES is an American sculptor living and working in Florence. His work is grounded in traditional materials and techniques; figurative work in marble, bronze, and clay. He is also the host of the most popular podcast on iTunes for the devotees of figurative sculptural tradition, called *The Sculptor's Funeral*.

WWW.THESCULPTORSFUNERAL.COM

WWW.JASONARKLES.COM

GROWING UP IN AMERICA, I had a skewed perspective on what counted as "old." My childhood home was built in the 1910's, and wired with electrics of that time—pretty primitive stuff. I remember my father showing me the electrical innards of a room he was renovating, telling me that these connections and wires date back to the dawn of domestic electricity. To my seven-year-old mind, that time was equated more or less with the age of the dinosaurs.



ISSUE 7 • WINTER 2015 will be published in December.

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