Foreward

Renaissance was established in 1980 as a project initially intended to be a one-off publication. Managed by art teacher Joan Koblick and English teacher Sophie Ravin, along with students like Calvin Chou, Rishona Zimring, and Sarah Morrison, the first edition of Renaissance was put together with just glue and scissors. Since its conception, Renaissance has remained as Lab’s only creative arts and writing magazine, but despite how much the world has changed in forty years, the goal of Renaissance has never shifted from highlighting the artistic and creative talents of the students at Lab.

In honor of the magazine’s expansive history, Retrospective exists as a homage to the roots of Renaissance and contains works from the writers and artists of Lab’s past. Here, Renaissance editors have chosen works from past magazines published in the years of 1980 to 1989 that we find meaningful on a personal level and relevant to today. With each of these pieces, we encourage you to appreciate the unique circumstances under which all of these works were created.

In the 1980s, personal computers were just beginning to enter consumers’ homes with their iconic vintage box monitor designs, and the concept of a global internet was still in its early stages of development. In 1981, the AIDS virus was identified for the first time in the US, and five years later, the Chernobyl nuclear reactor exploded in the USSR. The 1980s marked the last legs of the Cold War as well as the beginning of tensions in the Middle East with the Iran-Iraq War. Students at Lab during this time would have been watching Michael Jordan beginning his career with the Chicago Bulls and collecting Swatches. Our current arrangement of distance learning and the technology we use on a day to day basis would have never been possible forty years ago. Just as all of us are currently living through history during this coronavirus pandemic, we hope that you can also appreciate the history that inspired the stories and art from the magazine’s past.
1980
The Roof
by Sarah Morrison

There is a roof beneath my window,
   hovering over the door
Like a mother-wing.

The rain drumming its fingers
The humming rasp of branches
Lull me at night.

On warm blue days, I once
   Crouched on my roof,
Hidden by fanning leaves
As five little robins opened
   their comic-strip Mouths
For Mother’s worm.

And Below on wide knowing streets
   Walked people who knew their
Business.
They could not see me on my safe
   gentle roof, behind soft green.

My sister and I sat on the roof
   One glowing night
When future loomed too close,
And tears jewelled in the moon.

Then, from leafy tree branch
   dropped silken threads
   gently, swinging
Tiny spiders below.
We watched as
   Silently they spun their shimmer
And in happy peace
   Went about their Business

The moon streamed down
   Silken shafts
From the glowy night
And showed us the street below
   In warm darkness.
New Year
by Laura Salenger

My eyes crack open.
Splinters of sunlight sting.
   They shut again.

Somewhere in my mind
I heard a clock ticking.
   A kitchen clock
But it had stopped. It had broke
   Days and dust ago.

I twist in my sheets.
Keeping my sticky-
Sleep eyes closed.
   It's heavy over me.
   It covers like a blanket.

   Eleven forty nine--
In day glow green.
   Neighbors snow lawn
Paste mouth,
   Dry radiator heat.

Stretch and scratch.
   Yawn.
   Ticking.
It wasn't a dream.
The clock was fixed,

For the New Year.
Snowflake
by Paul Fox

Sitting on a rock outside in the crisp, cold, frozen barren, he noticed,
By chance, a small snowflake slip down gently from the sky.
He watched its ever so slow descent carefully, closely.
Looking deeply at into the flake, he discovered its Many facets. Amazing.

He began to think,
That a little white Speck was not so little afterall. Cold and clear, with the

Crystalline brilliance of a shiny silver-white ball, was the snowflake; so
Deceivingly innocent, falling from the far above sky.

Now, a raging snowstorm suddenly was beginning to bury the Man.
1983

Author's Statement

“This poem reminds me of the intense nostalgia I was feeling at the ripe age of 15, a reaction to the uncertainty of adolescence. Many of the references had antecedents in real life: I had spent my early childhood in a white house on Maple Street in suburban Chicago (Homewood) where we did things like chase fireflies in the evening. The “Restaurant” is a reference to Arlo Guthrie’s “Alice’s Restaurant,” while one of the other lines is a clear echo of Supertramp’s “Logical Song” (“When I was young / It seems that life was so wonderful”). I was also really into meeting strangers, and recall meeting a Spanish woman on a bus.

The last stanza is about a crush I had at the time on a classmate—a parallel between the elusiveness of the past and the elusiveness of love.

At the time, I was reading a lot of T.S. Eliot, Dylan Thomas, and Kenneth Patchen, and they clearly influenced the phrasing. During high school, I moved from poetry to fiction, and then, after college, to non-fiction. As silly as it sounds, I think I sub-consciously wasn’t sure I could top this poem. I am glad *Renaissance* has revived it.” -Mathew Scheurman
Some Lost Suburban Memory
by Mathew Scheurman

I.
Dark into the quiet winter
night
I run up wooden stairs
stretching my arms
past my head
Looking for the
friend
I met
in Iowa
riding the bus.

She spoke Spanish.

I wonder
about some lost memory
of Suburbia:
looking down
the autumn sidewalk
past white
houses and brick
houses with indoor swimming pools,
and brightly painted trees,
The road turns
before a golf course.
Or is it a cemetery.
Or park.

II.
Meandering
among corn fields
on my way
to the Restaurant
by the railroad tracks
I found
a young stranger
speaking my dream.
“I’m gonna
be the finest tenorman
this side
of the Mason-Dixon line.”

III.
If only I hadn’t moved
away from the white
houses
and ice cream
bars
of Maple Road.
I could be All-American
at the soda fountain
Saturdays:
late afternoons.

Life could be so wonderful:
catching
lightning bugs
in a jar
with no success
they slip away
as I grope
in the air—at nothing.

Searching in my mind
for my past life. I
can think
but I cannot feel.

IV.
yesterday
I met a Jewish
girl
with pretty red
hair

girl—
where are you
Today
Summer Day Reflections
by Will Rosenbaum

As I lay on the prickly summer grass, watching the rainbows on my eyelashes, I wondered if I really could look straight into the sun and not go blind. Then I looked back across the street, where old man Aikers was still sitting in the shade of his maple tree, staring at the ground.

Why didn’t he just cry? That’s what everyone else did when someone had died.

Meanwhile, sunlight filtered down through the leaves and bounced off his little round glasses as he shook his head slowly from one side to the other. I got up and ran to look for a magnifying glass to make a fire with.

After supper, I wandered back outside to see if anyone on the block was interested in a game of “kick the can.” When I came to the end of the yard, I saw that Mr. Aikers had moved. He was leaning on his fence post and watching the slowly sinking sun.
1985
Grapes
by Cindy Sigal

Take me
like grapes.
Lay me
outstretched
in the clammy cradles
of your mammoth palms.
With only
a bitter coat
of painted skin
to protect
Bite into me
Submerge your fang-
like glare
tearing me open
to you
you like a savage
Dionysus lost
for centuries
in a desert
of thirst,
Greedily suck
the wine of my blood
as if it were merely
the water to quench
the obscenity
of your endless thirst
And drink me dead.
One Precarious Instant
by Deborah Dowell

I thought I heard you call my name,
The delicate thread
    of your voice
Washing over the AT&T line

For an instant I trembled,
Swept back for a thousand afternoons
To the fountain where we splashed
    with sun and water,
And to late-night whispers
    over the lapping of lakefront waves.

My lips moved, but the still
    and tremulous hush
Only reverberated with a thousand tubes
    riddling tired veins
And echoed screaming cancer cells
    you tried to cough up
    from a collapsed lung.

Then I knew you were beyond
    a thousand miles
    and a thousand years
But you lingered there with the wrong number
For one precarious
    instant.
Author's Note

“I don’t have a distinct memory of what I was upset about, but I do recall getting a glimpse of myself in the mirror over my dresser after a good cry on my bed and thinking “geez, you look awful... red-eyed and snot-smeared” and having this help break the hold of whatever John Hughes film (Pretty in Pink? 16 Candles?) I had been mentally starring in — it restored perspective to “you are just a regular person having a regular moment of feeling, and it’s ok.”

I appreciate being reminded of the poem and being able to glimpse myself at 17. My English classes, and particularly the introduction to creative writing I had at Lab, planted some of the early seeds that helped me find my way to the work I do. I am not a writer or an English teacher, but as a psychologist working with people in therapy, I am listening in ways that are similar to reading a poem — for how language is being used to say some things and obscure others, to notice things that may not be consciously intended but are important to see, and to play with possibilities. In helping people find their way towards feeling what they do feel, rather than what they imagine they should feel, I guess I am also helping them find their own version of the “happy ending” of the poem.”

-Alice Michael
Happy Ending
by Alice Michael

I always wished that
I could learn to cry
like they do in the movies.

I could sit on the edge of my bed,
in a flowing white gown,
with tears, sparkling in the moonlight,
runtime gracefully down my tanned, golden skin,
clutching a linen handkerchief in my hand.

I could wear gobs of make-up
and not even expect a smudge.
No wet trails of black mascara
to be hopelessly blurred by crumpled kleenex.
My eyes would not be red and puffy.
My breath would come easily,
no choked back sobs,
or ragged coughs,
but perhaps a calculated, voluptuous sigh,
now and then.

And when Prince Charming came,
(as he always does in the movies)
he could smooth back a fallen lock of shiny hair,
take my handkerchief and wipe away that lone tear
and kiss my perfectly colored lips,
without having to wait, while I
turned away
for a moment,
to blow my nose.
Our father built
by Carmen Mitchell

Our father built us a gold castle near the shore. As mighty as a mountain, tall steps spiraling to the sun, and seaweed green ivy clinging to its buttresses. Deep below an arched doorway, lived an invisible dragon. Behind another we kept a maze of damp hallways and secret rooms. Every day the windows at the very top would fill with tears from the sea, and we would try to scream through the thick walls. Running from the limbs of dead children that washed through our castle.

Author’s Note

“My dad has been building these extraordinary gothic sandcastles my whole life. It’s easy to imagine yourself as an inhabitant, defending them from dragons and even the sea itself. At the time, I think I was trying to express something about the end of childhood or loss of innocence. There’s also something inherently poetic about the idea of a mini civilization, and all the stories it contains, being born and dying on the same day. You can still find my dad on the beaches of Chicago every summer, surrounded by a group of pint-sized “assistants” (including his 6-year-old grandson), creating these magnificent monuments and then surrendering them back to Lake Michigan as the sun sets.”

-Carmen Mitchell
1989

U.S.S.R. U.S.A. Planes (Graphite) Marc Morgan
Paradise
By Gilberto Simpson

The Angeltones knew how to play a crowd. And when they played at the Paradise Cafe, the drinks would never stop. That's why Al, the owner of the place, kept them on as the regular band. Even with a name as corny as the Angeltones, masses of people would pour into the club to lose themselves in the music.

All kinds of people would come to the Paradise at night. Accountants and bankers, husbands who didn't want to come home to nagging wives, wives who didn't want to come home to indifferent husbands. Soon after rush hour, the Paradise would be filled with people who wanted to get away from each other and the world.

Eventually, the Angeltones would start to play. On the stage, Gabe began to blow on his sax. The hazy cool notes would wash over the people in their seats. It was like instant amnesia. Just add several drinks and stir until dissolved.

Then Micky DeAngello would come in on his drums; slow at first, with light taps of the cymbal. And then the beat would get stronger till everyone in the club was tapping their feet. Even the waiters who heard the same tune night after night would unconsciously nod their heads to the rhythm.

Next came Izzy Abrams on the bass fiddle. He was the best bass in town. When he plucked at those strings it sounded like an angel's harp only twice as mellow.

And finally on the piano sat Ralph. He was probably the most ordinary looking of the four, but his piano playing was anything but. His fingers would dance along the keyboard like they were possessed; adding just the right extra sound to make the music perfect.

While the crowd sat around drinking and talking and listening to the music, this guy walked into the club, moved toward the nearest table and sat down. He had a short beard that made him look like a prophet out of the Arabian desert. He wore those sunglasses with the circle shaped lenses that made him almost look like a wanna-be Beatnik except there was something about the way he carried himself. You just knew he wasn't a wanna-be Anything. The man sat in his chair, quietly enjoying the music.

(continues on back)
Eventually, a waiter came to the table and with an abrupt voice that interrupted the quiet man’s train of thought asked, “What do you want Mack?”

“Nothing, I think I’ll just sit here for a while.”

“Come on, you must want something.”

“No,” the quiet man replied.

“Look Mack, everyone who comes here, is here because they want something to drink. Now name your poison.”

“Maybe you could come back later; I’m still thinking.”

“At least have some bread. It’s the cheapest thing you can buy off the menu.”

“I’ll have a glass of water.”

“Look wise guy, there is a minimum on the drinks, and if you don’t order anything off the menu you’ll have to leave.”

The man was sure this time and spoke out, “All I want is a glass of water!”

The rude waiter shouted to the other side of the room, “Hey PeteY!”

Peter Stone was one of the meanest bouncers around. Nobody got past him if he didn’t let them.

He walked over to the table. The bunch of keys tied to his belt jingled as he moved. His eyes were empty looking, like they could just see through you and know every single bad thing you had ever done. His arms looked like chiseled rock and one of them reached over to the quiet man, grabbed him by the collar and “escorted” him out of the Paradise.

Outside, it was raining hard and the water soaked through the man’s coat. He looked up and back at the glowing neon sign that read: PARADISE, and made his way home.
Original Work

1980
“The Roof” by Sarah Morrison (161)
“Drypoint” by K. Sanders (33)

1981
“New Year” by Laura Salenger (12)
“The Figure in Blue” by Ellen Pollak (10)

1982
“Snowflake” by Paul Fox (21)
Untitled by Anna Reeves (89)

1983
“Some Lost Suburban Memory” by Matthew Scheurman (27)
Untitled by Michael Minn (91)

1984
“Summer Day Reflections” by Will Rosenbaum (9)
“Figures” by Jose Corpuz (51)

1985
“Grapes” by Cindy Sigal (11)
“Stairs” by Lisa Suh (63)

1986
“One Precarious Instant” by Deborah Dowell (23)
“Chicago” by Stephanie Werhane (44)

1987
“Happy Ending” by Alice Michael (29)
“Monoprint” by Chukwuemeka Okwuje (47)

1988
“Our Father Built” by Carmen Mitchell (25)
“Urban Grey” by Deeling Teng (32)

1989
“Paradise” by Gilberto Simpson (42)
“U.S.S.R and U.S.A Planes” by Marc Morgan (45)