



The Emerson Review is an annual literary journal by undergraduate students at Emerson College in Boston, Massachusetts.

All genres of original, unpublished writing and visual art are considered for publication.

The reading period for the 2024 issue ran from August 1st through February 1st. All submissions are handled anonymously. Materials can be submitted to The Emerson Review through our online submission manager, <http://emersonreview.submittable.com>. Complete guidelines can be found on our website.

General questions and comments should be sent to [submissions.er@gmail.com](mailto:submissions.er@gmail.com).  
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## CAUGHT ON BARBED WIRE

Juanjuan Henderson

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## THE HOLOGRAM

FICTION

Erica Rivera

The hologram appeared in the park overnight, without notice or fanfare. Some thought it was a guerrilla art project, others an ad. The city, of course, eventually announced (after many confused, angry calls to elected officials) that it was just a piece of public art, and that, like the many other government-funded works in the city's parks, building lobbies, and public plazas, the hologram had been commissioned by the city's arts and culture minister, who ordained that a digital artist born and raised in the city—or rather, in its poorest and most structurally under-resourced suburb—would design this particular installation.

Okay.

Satisfied many.

Maybe most.

The hologram was in a small park across the street from your apartment complex—not too large, ten stories, and modern, with a new elevator and a gym, and carbon monoxide detectors in every unit. On the ground floor, running on the treadmill in the gym, you could see in the center of the park a shimmering blue-green haze shaped into peculiar, unstable forms, ever morphing slightly, distorting your perception of what appeared by and behind its edges, like the flames of a large dancing fire.

You could see people stopping to look at it, their faces far away enough to teeter between expressions of either wonder or disgust, you could never tell. You could only assume that the faces of disgust belonged to those who walked away quickly; you could only assume the faces of wonder belonged to those who stayed.

Many stayed.

Maybe most.

It started to be that you'd work out longer, more often, to figure that out. The longer you kept your legs moving forward beneath you, the more data you had to work with. *Of course* you saw so many people stopping to marvel when you worked out during lunchtime; it was all parents, their kids mouths agape, as amazed by the hologram as they soon would be by trash on the ground. The parents didn't know what the hologram meant, or didn't care, snapping selfies with it behind them as though it were a shrine (multiple times, always; you had to imagine the glare of the sun made it hard to get a good shot), then writing hashtag-packed captions through transition sunglasses while their little ones divvied up the trash and ate it.

Of course *they* would stick around.

So you couldn't go off that alone.

Nighttime was worse. At night, the hologram drew whole crowds—not just families, but groups of teenagers, young adults, elderly people. You had to wonder where all these people came from sometimes, changing the resistance on the treadmill to the lowest setting so you wouldn't tire your legs out too quickly. You didn't want to have to switch to chest presses on the weight machines, located just behind a thick

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pillar in the center of the gym that would've blocked your view of the park and the masses constantly swarming it.

Swarming the hologram.

Swarming your street.

A few times, you thought about calling the police. Any number of reasons would have sufficed. The hologram was bright and on 24/7, which posed many problems. Two car accidents had occurred on the strip of street between the park and your apartment complex since the hologram's installation. Both times the driver, distracted by the hologram, had hit the car in front of them at over twenty miles an hour, resulting in a few broken bones and plenty of vehicular damage. More was sure to follow. The brightness, apart from being distracting to drivers, also made it difficult for the many homeless people living in the park to sleep comfortably, which housing rights activists had called "deplorable." Thus, they (the homeless, not their activists) had begun sleeping on the sidewalk in front of your apartment complex, which was distracting to you since only a thick pane separated you from them when you worked out and watched the park after dark. And the excess light the hologram was directly responsible for was nothing compared to the noise and air pollution it was *indirectly* responsible for: more people were driving, parking, and walking on your street than you even thought possible. The weather app on your phone normally reported an Air Quality Index (AQI) of about forty-nine, which was three points below the average in your county; now, it regularly reported an AQI of over fifty-five, three points *above* the county average, and two points above the threshold at which it begins to induce minor health problems in highly vulnerable populations. This was true even *after dark*, the park attracting larger and larger groups with each passing day, those who continued to loiter past 8 p.m. technically breaking the law since a city statute etched into big metal signs at the entrances to the park barred one's mere presence there past sunset. And not to mention all the hooting, hollering, drinking—and, you were pretty sure, *intravenous drug use*—that was now normal and popular at the park, around and on top of the hologram, which visitors seemed incapable of not climbing all over and sticking their heads and appendages in, trying to see (be?) "inside" it.

You were far enough away that you couldn't be sure it was *intravenous drug use*, but you knew if you called the police and asked them to investigate, they'd see what you were seeing. What you were sure you were seeing. What you were sure you were seeing every night, drenched in your own odorous sweat, sometimes until sunrise, as shocked at how you had managed to keep running all night as you were at how they had managed to keep going all night: partying, dancing, touching, splayed out over the park benches, feeling each other against the walls of the handball court, tangling their flushed limbs in the knotted crosshatches of the tennis nets, and especially loudly and spectacularly, finding each other on the ground next to the hologram, moving body onto body onto body onto body, drenched in *their own odorous sweat*, awash in a sea of cool blue pixels slipping off their perfect, holy flesh and onto the grassy knoll around them like drops of digital dew.

You had every right to call the police. You knew they would lock every single one of these people up.

But you also knew that would change nothing. The hologram would persist, and so too its draw. There are always more homeless people, there are always more selfie parents with trashy kids, there are always more teenagers and young adults and elderly people, there are always more hooters and hollers and nocturnal alcoholics

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and intravenous drug users and people just looking for a place to lie down and feel.

Calling the police would accomplish nothing.

This was a structural issue, demanding a structural solution.

You'd started recording your night sessions early on, after talking to your neighbors about what you'd seen and having them disbelieve you, dismiss you, discredit what you'd seen with your very eyes. How would they know? How could they know? You were the only person ever in the gym that late; you were probably the only tenant who was ever even awake that late. The windows of their apartments didn't even face the park; the only place in the building where you could get a decent vantage point from which to see everything—the sprawl of the park and the hologram at its center—was exactly where you were, in the gym, on the treadmill.

Of course you would know.

Of course only you would know.

The treadmill had a little ledge at the top of its interface panel, ostensibly so you could prop up your phone and use it while you worked out, but it also allowed you to film what you were seeing as easily and professionally as if you'd had a tripod, an expensive film camera, or experience in digital video production. You didn't have any of those things. It didn't matter. It didn't take long to amass all the evidence you'd ever need. You knew it would have convinced the naysayers if they'd answered your texts or their doors when you knocked. If they'd actually listened to you at City Hall; if the newspeople had taken you even a little seriously. If any of those so-called human rights organizations had spared *five minutes* to call you back. You even emailed them all a link to a folder containing all the footage you'd collected, which you'd painstakingly uploaded to the cloud, after compressing the files so it wouldn't take as long for them to download, or take up too much space on their hard drives. You didn't want to inconvenience them. You just wanted to prove them wrong. You just wanted them to see what you were seeing. What you had to be seeing. The footage didn't directly implicate anyone, no; and no, it didn't necessarily clearly depict any of the things you were sure you were seeing; but you knew it would become *proof positive* when placed alongside other evidence—like your eyewitness testimony, or the eyewitness testimonies of the police officers you were sure someone would call, even if you personally didn't consider calling the police an option (because it wasn't a structural solution, and this was a structural problem), like the *body cam footage!* The body cam footage. Yes. Someone would call the police eventually, and they'd go out there and they'd see what you were seeing, and their body cams would record everything, and even if that wasn't enough to convince people (you knew how people felt about body cams these days, so eager to disbelieve in a technology that couldn't do anything except show you exactly what you pointed it at), at least they'd have your footage. They could pair their footage with your footage, and prove it was real. Prove it was all real. Prove you were really seeing it. Prove it was really happening. You were the ATM camera in an episode of a crime procedural that, thank our beneficent Lord, caught the crime from an angle unlike any other, a point of view necessary to close the case, book the perp, *lock them up*. A *deus ex machina* in the form of a perspective no one knew existed, that no one knew you had. The luckiest possible break in the trickiest possible case. You couldn't wait. You couldn't wait for them to call you. You couldn't wait to see the looks on their faces. You couldn't wait to be vindicated. To be right. To stop running.

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## Featured Authors

**Rachel Walker** is a poet from Maryland. She currently lives in Las Vegas, Nevada, where she is an MFA candidate at UNLV. Her work has appeared in *The Shore*, *South Florida Poetry Journal*, *The Oxonian*, and elsewhere.

**Mandira Pattnaik's** work has appeared in *The McNeese Review*, *Penn Review*, *Quarterly West*, *Passages North*, *DASH*, *Miracle Monocle*, *Timber*, *Contrary*, *Watershed Review*, *Amsterdam Quarterly*, *Quarter After Eight* and *Best Small Fictions Anthology (2021)*, among others. Her writing has secured multiple nominations for *Pushcart Prize*, *BotN*, *Best Small Fictions*, *Best Microfiction*, and listing in *Wigleaf Top50 (2023)*. More at [mandirapattnaik.com](http://mandirapattnaik.com)

**Michael Savio** is a writer based in New York. He is currently pursuing a master's degree in cultural reporting and criticism at NYU's Arthur L. Carter Journalism Institute.

**Shome Dasgupta** is the author of *The Seagull And The Urn* (HarperCollins India), and most recently, the novels *The Mau-Antiques* (Malarkey Books) and *Tentacles Numbing* (Thirty West), a prose collection, *Histories Of Memories* (Belle Point Press), and a poetry collection, *Iron Oxide* (Assure Press). His writing has appeared in *McSweeney's Internet Tendency*, *New Orleans Review*, *Jabberwock Review*, *American Book Review*, *Arkansas Review*, *Magma Poetry*, and elsewhere. He is the series editor of *The Wigleaf Top 50*. He lives in Lafayette, LA and can be found at [www.shomedome.com](http://www.shomedome.com) and [@laughingyeti](https://twitter.com/laughingyeti).

**Erica Rivera** (she/her) is the transfeminist love child of Joan Didion and Philip K. Dick. In 2023, she served as co-editor of *Art, Strike!*, an online publication unique for paying its contributors what they request from a shared fund-pool. For fun, she watches TV and pretend all the characters are trans. Her work attempts to intervene in the thorny political economy of art production.

**Jane McKinley** is a Baroque oboist and artistic director of the Dryden Ensemble. Her manuscript, *Vanitas*, won the 2011 Walt McDonald First-Book Prize. Her work has appeared in *The Georgia Review*, *Five Points*, *The Southern Review*, *Tar River Poetry*, *One Art*, on *Poetry Daily*, and elsewhere. She was awarded a 2023 Poetry Fellowship by the New Jersey State Council on the Arts. Her second collection, *Mudman*, is forthcoming from Able Muse Press. She lives in Hopewell, New Jersey.

**Meghan Proulx** is a freelance writer in Northern California. Her short stories have been published in *The Bold Italic*, *Jake the Magazine*, *101 Words* and are forthcoming in *Hobart*. She was ranked as a Top Humor Writer on Medium and won a Silver Anthem award.

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**Michael Mark** is the author of *Visiting Her in Queens is More Enlightening than a Month in a Monastery in Tibet* which won the Rattle Chapbook prize. His poems have appeared in *Best American Poetry Blog*, *Copper Nickel*, *The New York Times*, *Pleiades*, *Ploughshares*, *Southern Review*, *The Sun*, *32 Poems*, *The Poetry Foundation's American Life in Poetry*. His two books of stories are *Toba* and *At the Hands of a Thief* (Atheneum). [michaeljmark.com](http://michaeljmark.com)

**Stephenjohn Holgate** was born in Port Antonio, Jamaica and moved to London when he was eight. After reading English at Oxford University, he worked as an actor for a number of years, spending much of that time working in youth theater developing and directing original writing. He is a member of *Writing West Midlands' Room 204* writer development program and is a 2023 *Pen/Dau* prize winner for his short story 'Delroy and the Boys'. He is also a member of the *HarperCollins UK Author Academy 2023*. His story 'The Skull of an Unnamed African Boy' was longlisted for the *4th Estate/Guardian 4th Write Short Story Prize*. Stephenjohn lives in Wellington, Aotearoa New Zealand.

**Brett Hymel Jr.** is a clay homunculus burdened with cognizance by process of alchemy. He was born (concocted) in Melbourne, Florida. He will die in an undisclosed location (scrying results inconclusive). Meanwhile, he attends the MFA program at Louisiana State University. Send him spam on Instagram at [@brethymel](https://twitter.com/brethymel).

**Brigs Larson** is a nonbinary writer from Rhode Island earning a BFA in Creative Writing from Emerson College. Their short fiction has been featured in publications such as *The Fantastic Other*, *Stork Literary Magazine*, and *Page Turner Magazine*, and they're currently working on their first fantasy novel. They've been labeled by friends as a fun fact machine wearing cargo pants—while they aren't sure whether that's a good thing, they'd like to thank the Legend of Zelda and Ken Burns for their contribution.

**Aliyah Cotton** is a queer poet of color from Reston, VA. She earned her MFA from Boston University where she was a recipient of the Robert Pinsky Global Fellowship. Her work appears or is forthcoming in *Indiana Review*, *Poetry*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Rust & Moth*, *Southern Humanities Review*, and has been nominated for the 2024 Best of the Net Anthology.

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