



# New Portals for Poetry

DESIGN STUDENTS HELP POETS  
SPEAK TO READERS.

Story by Dale Smith

The top bar contains images from a conference presentation given by Deborah Huelsbergen, who teaches graphic design at MU. She led her art students through a project in which they illustrated the work of student poets.

Digital projects, from left: "Just Scratching the Surface, nineteenth century" by Deborah Huelsbergen, art by Jonathan Glarner; "The Light at Hinkson Creek" by Bob Watts, art by Shauna Journagan; "Ashes to Water" by M. Hope Lake, art by Leigh Lakemeyer; "Not Said to Another" by Joanie Mackowski, art by Darryl Lewis; and "A Ballad" by Karen Holmberg, art by Tyler Martin.

POEMS TYPICALLY MOVE FROM THE MINDS OF POETS to the minds of readers through the wafer-thin medium of black ink on white paper. But artist and poet Deborah Huelsbergen, who teaches graphic design in MU's School of Fine Arts, always wanted to add dimensions to those words on the flat page. Her project, called Tearing the Page, adds volume, color and movement to poetic verse.

The graphic-poems in this story are the culmination of a three-week collaboration between Huelsbergen's graphic design students and poetry students in MU's Center for the Literary Arts. The poets supplied existing work and acted as clients according to Huelsbergen's course plan, which she designed in part to give her young designers the experience of working with ideas other than their own. Many of the graphic-poems were rendered digitally, though some students made films and others designed 3-D models.

Designer Lisa Elgin, a senior in fine arts, met several times with poet Karen Holmberg, then a doctoral student in English, at a local coffee shop. "We communicated our ideas through sketches and simple explanations," Elgin says. "Also, through talking to her and getting to know a little about her personality and background, I was able to get a feel for what type of design might capture a bit of her and her writing."

Elgin's classmate, senior Beth Howard, says the language she shared with poet and English doctoral student Joanie Mackowski was that of emotion. "I was trying to help her speak to her audience," Howard says. "It's as if the page was a container and she was trying to get the poem out."



## A Ballad\*

Poem by Karen Holmberg  
Art by Lisa Elgin

The swarm arrived from far, a hum  
at first, and then a close-  
ranked intelligence  
of needled flight in a sky pink-red,

a bowl of phenobarbital.  
I left the sunken hut  
and stood in snow turned hot  
and dry as alum. It

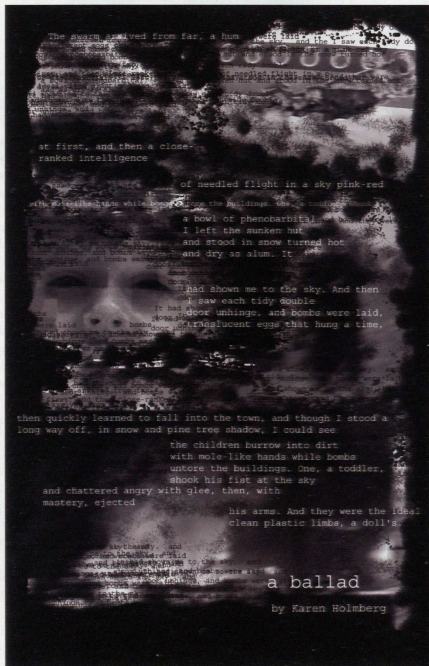
had shown me to the sky. And then  
I saw each tidy double  
door unhinge, and bombs were laid,  
translucent eggs that hung a time,

then quickly learned to fall into  
the town, and though I stood  
a long way off, in snow and pine  
tree shadow, I could see

the children burrow into dirt  
with mole-like hands while bombs  
untore the buildings. One, a toddler,  
shook his fist at the sky

and chattered angry glee, then, with  
mastery, ejected  
his arms. And they were the ideal  
clean plastic limbs, a doll's.

\*From Holmberg's book, *The Perseids*  
(University of North Texas Press, 2000)



## 2-dimensional solutions

### A Grasp at the Fingers

Poem by Chuck Demas

Art by Matt McKenzie

Timelessness froze tight what I couldn't quite grasp —  
this I hoped to secure crumpled in hand; raze from the pasts...

Of ambivalent options  
on circularly common days  
or wrapped up ideas disappearing sorely  
droning rapture a dash surrounding Mulberry Lane...

Scarcely airless, an abstract,  
more than moments, I'll admire the how  
misaimed robbery of reclusive lifetimes and,  
at times, no bother to when grounds resolved

Pining retrospect smoothed and shed great notice —  
Hindsight twenty, twenty, sentient of wisdom

I once went close to this mess...

Enfolded my swinging head, shook up and did say,  
Trap this life, and within it the trite troubles —  
for a down less angle leaves entire gravity flaccid,  
I've been the observation deck — the absence just doubled...

What I long to be able to shrug off, ramble-write, nor let seep through  
This I'm able to pass forth,  
Is that a lifetime of familiarity — I've not yet carried clinging attuned.

*The two images of two-dimensional projects in the top bar of this page illustrate the poems below them: "A Grasp at the Fingers" by Chuck Demas, art by Matt McKenzie; and "Ashes to Water" by M. Hope Lake, art by Adam Rooke.*

*Opposite: These three-dimensional projects are, from left, "Alone in the Night" by Cara Kropp, art by Shannon Brauner; and "Just Scratching the Surface, nineteenth century" by Deborah Huelsbergen, art by Stephanie Stillwell*



### Ashes to Water

Poem by M. Hope Lake

Art by Adam Rooke

He was happy once, sure he was.  
Strolled New Orleans, inhaled jazz,  
Chased fast women, loved them faster.

Our father in a cardboard box, still warm to touch,  
Wrapped for mailing, No way to carry it but  
Cradled in my arms, like my child.

Solved, a plastic shopping bag with handles.  
Parker's Funeral Home emblazoned on the side.  
Le Jazz Hot! Ashes in a bag.

Didn't buy an urn, he wanted to be scattered.  
Why spend the money? We'd do it soon.  
Four years passed, then I moved him  
And his chest of drawers — out of sight.

His company in the drawer, a 35 year gold watch, Pictures  
of my brothers' kids, aftershave,  
Snaps of my boy and girl, four cheap cigars,  
A zippered book with all his favorite jazzmen's  
Autographs.

He traveled everywhere to get them,  
Names on yellowed pages,  
Scrawled beyond reading, here and there an X.  
Peoria, Chicago, St. Louis, New Orleans.

In February, my son carried Grandpa to  
Mardi Gras. One last time. Loosed the ashes in  
The river near Canal Street.

My son says it never stops,  
The river or the jazz.

## 3-dimensional solutions

Resurfacing the page



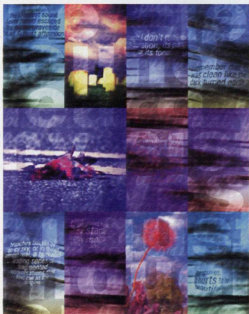
Resurfacing the page



### Resurfacing

Poem by Katie Kielpinski  
Art by Amanda Mathenia

The clearest sound I ever heard escaped my sister, grave-side on an August afternoon. Though I don't remember its duration, its pitch or tone, I remember that it was clean like the dark turned earth, and buoyant, symmetrical, like and unlike those tiny orbs of sunsifted pollen that hung suspended by our sheer rejection that day of natural law. Now, I can only see that sound in things real, branches backlit by an icy sky, or in things almost real, a backward-leading series of fragmented conversations that find me at the origins — a brush, my tangled hair, not my startled cry, but my mother's quick reply: Be quiet. It hurts to be beautiful.



### Not Said to Another\*

Poem by Joanie Mackowski  
Art by Beth Howard

Be the hanging hat, the shadow box, leaves and feathers caught in the shutters, one thumb in the Heaven chimble, the sky poured slowly, through a reed, into the ear. And bricks gone light as lint in the hands that carried them, (no, I know you —), clouds unrolled west across the shoulders, some coffee we drank with oily sequins in it (excuses, kisses) with specks of cream. Be *what*, a season with a rhythm like no other, *whatever's been taken away from you will be restored*, that too — a blend of silhouette and water lilies, grasses, heat, wrinkled patterns blotting out the land, the dreamy house, the map tearing at the creases.



\*Formerly published in the Winter 2001 issue of New England Review