

From the Executive Editor:

We leave it to the storytellers and the poets, the haunted observers among the masses, to explore the wreckage the rest of us forsake. As a collective body, we tend to carry on, paving over the past, building new moments and an occasional monument, while the writers in our midst carefully comb through the dust and ash reconstructing the narrative, presenting the hypothetical, and conjuring romantic machinations. Even when, as Anthony Ceballos suggests in the poem “Glassful of Prayer,” *There’s nothing there, all/the relics have disappeared*, there is a shadow, a dream, an inheritance, a visceral imprint of the moments the rest of us leave behind and the writers, the artists, the activists hold shaky light up to the ruin, point to the chalked outline of what was, and make us remember.

It is an exploration of power and of freedom, of regret and of joy, of shame and of celebration. It is an amalgamation of imagination and memory. It is the attention to the most minute detail and the patience of unearthing the next emotional artifact. That is what it means to survey the *wreckage of once was*, (another remarkable image from Ceballos’s poem). This is what it means to engage with this collection. It is patiently sifting through our castaway moments,

our abandoned visions of a future, and everything in between.

At the heart of his final essay review for *Water~Stone*, Stan Rubin leaves us to consider the impact of artificial intelligence on poetry specifically. While we may worry about intimacy and empathy being coopted by algorithmic impersonation, Rubin contends that no computer mind can replace the nature of human attention because it requires patience. To bolster his claim, Rubin folds into the essay the work of Jessica Hines,

[Attention] requires us to trace the brittle edges of our connections to other people. To witness their pain and have them witness ours; to wait and gather ourselves together to hear what's coming next... Attention is the word that reminds us of the painful reality of existence—to always be waiting and inextricably stretching outward to see and be seen. (“The Discomfort and Difficulty of Attention,” *Ploughshares*, March 10, 2021)

This is the work of the writer: to sit quietly in our collective ruins and scan for the remains. To create and rebuild, or to reimagine entirely, from the *wreckage of once was*. This intimacy and connection can never be replaced.

Thank you to Stan Rubin, for this final true and hopeful thought, and for his years of devotion to the art and state of poetry everywhere, but especially in the pages of *Water~Stone Review*. We will miss the wisdom of his voice and the precision of his craft. Cheers to you, Stan!

Thank you to our editorial team this year, our contributing editors, January Gill O’Neil, Juliet Patterson, and Libby Flores along with our assistant editors, Rachel Guvenc, Diedra Purvis, and M.L. Schultz, who worked tirelessly to create one of the loveliest and fullest collections in recent memory. All of it reverberates with an insatiable pulse we cannot wait to release into the wild.

Thank you to the production team: Parker Sprout, Logan Myers, and Anne Kelley Conklin. The handsome book in your hands, the words arranged on this page, and the gorgeous conversation with photography is due entirely to these highly capable and beautiful minds.

Finally, thank you to the WSR support crew of Rachel Guvenc, Jenn Sisko, and Robyn Earhart who all had a part in keeping the ship afloat in an ever-churning sea. Without their devotion, eagerness, and nimble flexibility, the *SS WSR* may have found wreckage itself this past year. Thank you for weathering it all with me.

Meghan Maloney-Vinz