

CREATE | ENCOUNTER



JULY 2024 |

**8TH ANNUAL CREATIVE ISSUE
OF LIFE MATTERS JOURNAL**

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Our music and video winners are published online; you can find them at rehumanizeintl.org/create-encounter.

Scan the QR codes at the end of the magazine for direct links to each piece.

MUSIC

- 21 1st Place: *The Father's Lullaby* by Michael Forrest
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SHORT FILM

- 21 1st Place and **Best in Show**: *Would've, Could've, Should've* by Nick Sansone

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Reader,

Every year, I and the rest of the judging panel are amazed by the thought-provoking work submitted to *Create | Encounter*. The artists featured within these pages skillfully manage to take their complex emotions surrounding very heavy topics and turn them into something inspiring and beautiful. I am reminded yet again how vital it is to encourage artists in the Consistent Life Ethic movement. It seems that art, in any form, can reach the depths of the human heart in ways that arguments often fail to do. As the title of the image

on the cover of this issue says, “Heavy is the human heart.” We need creatives who are willing to bear that weight and use their talents to transform it into something more manageable if we ever hope to change hearts and minds.

Yours for peace and every human life,



Creative Director,
Rehumanize International

CREATE | ENCOUNTER

is a special edition of
Life Matters Journal

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Judging Panel Members

Francis Ittenbach

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Joseph Antonello

Executive Director of Rehumanize International

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**REHUMANIZEINTL.ORG/
CREATE-ENCOUNTER**

This journal is dedicated to the aborted, the bombed, the executed, the euthanized, the abused, the raped, and all other victims of violence, whether that violence is legal or illegal.

We have been told by our society and our culture wars that those of us who oppose these acts of violence must be divided. We have been told to take a lukewarm, halfway attitude toward the victims of violence. We have been told to embrace some with love while endorsing the killing of others.

We reject that conventional attitude, whether it's called Left or Right, and instead embrace a consistent ethic of life toward all victims of violence.

DISCLAIMER

The views presented in this journal do not necessarily represent the views of all members, contributors, or donors. We exist to present a forum for discussion within the Consistent Life Ethic, to promote discourse and present an opportunity for peer-review and dialogue.

I Choose Therefore

I Am, 2023

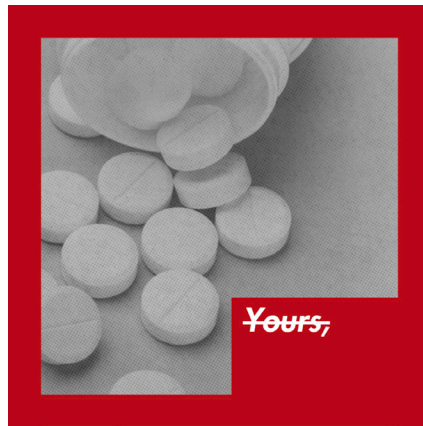
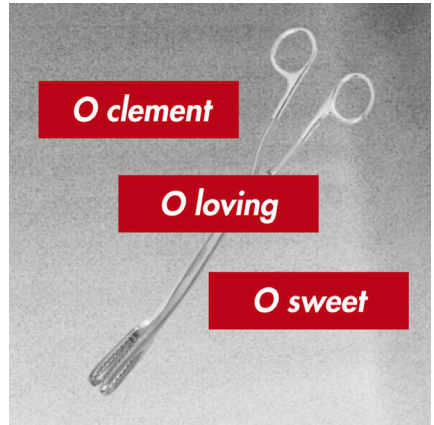
by Michael J.
2nd Place, Visual (2D)



Artist Statement

In *Untitled (Your body is a battleground)* (1989), Barbara Kruger confronts the viewer with the determined face of a woman, and the piece has become a favorite among abortion-tolerant

feminists. This series of images appropriates Kruger's distinct visual language to confront the viewer with the reality of abortion, its violence and its victims.



Warning: due to the nature of the issues addressed by the Consistent Life Ethic, many of the pieces featured in this magazine will contain descriptions or depictions of violence and other heavy matters. Please view and read at your own risk.

Tophet

by N.C. Krueger
1st Place, Poetry

Death has lost his honor—
no one mourns terrorists, or tissue, or blobs
of caricature or cells. A fetus

stretches her brown hands and rolls
against the womb-slope, the sand-slope,
the desert where no one is human;
a scythe jerks back her neck, gleaming
like drones in sunshine or warheads
flashing skin from bone and bones to carbon,
while the chemical smell burns her nostrils, her eyelids, her veins.
In the medicinal blue buzz of operating theater
fluorescents and bunker blacklights,

our heroes work the graveyard shift
with forceps and RPAs
—and her fetus head tears loose, scraps
of burnt flesh scattering, spattering
the inside of another's body, no scream
stamped on the womb-walls to indicate
who grew here alone.

We are sucked clean and free
to kill—“To gain dark transcendence we cut
the umbilical cords that bind;
we will neither be born nor die,

for murder is activism.” Naked death
is dancing on barren dunes,
barren wombs, while Molech's maw
stretches to accommodate our excess of violence.
Innocent blood
pools in rivers we tiptoe over,
saying, *forget them, forget them.*

Artist Statement

Tophet

Systemized evils like abortion and unjust war can only exist because of dehumanization, like when unborn children are called “clumps of cells.” I wrote this thinking about how, when justifying both abortion and drone strikes that affect civilians, people use euphemistic, medicalized language to avoid the humanity of their victims. But in the end, freedom bought at the expense of innocents only cuts us off from our own bodies and our own physicality.

This is a demonic impulse — to divorce the spirit from the body so that the body can be subjected to any violence we choose — thus the reference to a Tophet, a valley in the Ancient Near East where Moloch worshippers sacrificed their children. By incorporating visceral, explicit violence in the poem, I want to force the reader to look straight-on at how innocent bodies are degraded and destroyed.

Abortion

Iz Fascism

by Anti Abortion Vandals
*Honorable Mention,
Visual (2D)*



Artist Statement

Abortion Iz Fascism

The abortion industry and our elected officials are controlling the lives of others to the extent of allowing their murder; this is undoubtedly an act of fascism. All people deserve to be free from oppression from conception until natural death. We must reject hate, violence, and control and fight for total liberation; the preborn are people and must be included.

Harriet's Soliloquy

by Christine Novelero

1st Place, Prose

“Look! An artist made this beautiful picture of Harriet! Her eye is open! She will always be looking to us for justice! She will be looking to be vindicated! She will be looking at us!”

– Kristin Turner, April 2022

? – LOOK

Eyes which would usually open to amniotic fluid perceive the walls of a plastic crib instead. It's no substitute for the warmth of her mother's womb, but it does just fine. Soft padding, mellow lighting, and a thin blanket patterned with angels are all that's needed to keep her fragile body content.

Beyond the blur of plastic walls, a figure emerges. Blue. Harriet knows nothing: colors, shapes, letters, anything at all, but she knows this. Blue for peace. Blue for sky. Blue for the sleep from which she has awoken. It's a lady. Not her mother; Harriet would recognize her mother anywhere. But she does have a motherly aura around her. She's beautiful: not the kind of beauty discerned by human eyes, but an intangible radiance marked by love.

The figure bends down to Harriet's level, her luminous hazel eyes piercing through the plastic. “Do not be afraid. I will do you no harm.”

Harriet cries. Not because of hunger, thirst, fatigue, or any physical need, but because of the weight. The sheer love contained in those words is palpable; they bear the blessed burden of billions of children to whom they

have been spoken before.

“Shh...” As if compelled, Harriet's cries fade into contented cooing. “Go back to sleep, my child. You have beautiful dreams awaiting you.” The beautiful blue lady walks away. Her motherly aura remains, but the blue morphs into another meaning. Blue for rain. Blue for sorrow. Blue for tears.

Harriet feels this, but closes her eyes before she can know what it means.

5 – AN ARTIST MADE THIS BEAUTIFUL PICTURE OF HARRIET

The sounds trickle in slowly through the blanket. The daycare worker's exasperated voice. The chattering chorus of children at play. Plastic blocks clatter, wooden beads clunk, and the wheels of kiddie buses going nowhere grate as they spin.

An eager voice pierces through the wool: “Hari! Hari! Wake up! Look what I made!”

Harriet grunts softly and turns away from her friend's pleas. Undeterred, [redacted] stomps up to the sleeping mat and pinches Harriet's ear.

“Oww, meanie!” Harriet flails her arms, trying and failing to hit [redacted] back. “What was that for?”

“Sowwy,” [redacted] mumbles. Her pout quickly reverts to an unabashed grin. “But I wanna show you something! You're gonna love it!”

Harriet takes [redacted]'s hand and climbs out of her blanket, albeit reluctantly. “My ear's still ouchy, but okay.”

The two friends skip past castles, trucks, and empty apple juice boxes to the place where all the quiet kids go: the art table. Markers, glue sticks, and paper scraps are all strewn about in a lackadaisical mosaic. The colorful display is occasionally interrupted by white sheets with no more than nine lines drawn on them, discarded and forgotten.

Harriet and [redacted] silently examine the art table for several seconds before Harriet turns to [redacted], unimpressed.

“You said I’d love it. Where is it?”

[redacted] crosses her arms. “You can’t tell which one it is? Hmph.”

Harriet stomps her foot, but she takes a second look nonetheless. This time, her eye is caught by a drawing in the table’s center. She picks it up. Two girls, their features as meticulously drawn as a five-year-old could manage, hold hands inside a heart outlined in red pom-poms. A sunset surrounds the heart’s outline: an ombre of pink, orange, yellow, and blue. Cotton balls spread across the background like clouds. At the bottom of the page are these words, messily written in glittery ink: “Thank you for being my best friend :D”. Harriet stands there in silence, admiring the masterpiece before her.

The bubble of silence is broken by a beaming, expectant [redacted]. “So? Do you love it?”

Harriet sets down the drawing as if it were a glass mosaic, prone to shatter in the face of something solid. She throws her arms around [redacted] and squeezes with all the strength her little arms have to give. Her voice comes out muffled, buried in [redacted]’s shirt: “I love you too.”

15 – HER EYE IS OPEN

There is no pillow, no blanket to filter out the world. There is only the hard wooden desk, the warm shadow beneath her hoodie, and the dull whir of a venting computer.

Harriet jolts awake. Following muscle memory, she presses the computer’s power button. The time is 2:15 AM.

Damnit Harriet, this is the third time you’ve fallen asleep at your computer this month. And you still have half a month to go. Anyway, what assignment kept me up this time?

The answer appears as a digital pamphlet on Canvas, in progress. The blinking cursor taunts Harriet in its usual fashion: “You’re not even done.” Harriet rolls her eyes, then glosses over the pamphlet’s text.

Note: this prose piece has been abbreviated due to limited printing space. The rest of Harriet’s Soliloquy is published online at rehumanizeintl.org/create-encounter.

Artist Statement

The first idea I hope to convey with this work is that every life is irreplaceable: not only for the sake of individual lives, but for those whom they would’ve touched with their existence. When a preborn child is killed, their children, the friendships they would’ve made, and all the imprints they would’ve left on others—for better and worse—die with them. I thought the length of this piece was necessary to emphasize two other themes: life is worth living amidst both triumphs and trials, and elective abortion is an inherently violent act that can never be justified.

Special credit for this piece goes to Kristin Turner. Her speech on behalf of Harriet and the DC Five was the cornerstone upon which these words were built.

Reach Out

by Zaina Alam Piya

Honorable Mention, Visual (2D)



Artist Statement

In this artwork I tried to express the importance of our mental health and how each and every one of us should ask for help in need. If someone feels they are mentally suffering, they must prioritise their safety.

We should never feel like we are out of options or it's too late to seek help. We should remember our safety is paramount, so we should seek assistance from professionals who can help address the situation appropriately. We can talk to friends, family members and seek help from them. Our mental health matters.

Scorpion Tower

by N.C. Krueger
2nd Place, Poetry

I.

God is jealous, and His Heat
is dread to those who despise what He has made.

II.

The Elders once vultured
over the Scorpion Tower, red dewlaps swelling like bubblegum;
the monolith twined—a girl's braid from where she hangs
upside-down, white dress over her face—and clanked upward
while they sung: "We will rip through the sky's swollen arteries
And unmake our batlike wings." Bells snorted horseylike and
sons fell through infinite stairways, dead doves shot
from tessellations of double predestination,
foundation sacrifices and bull-
bellies inflamed with child-blood and orgies at harvest time
—but a spine which chains its notches to lust
and snapped baby skulls will break its neck
as innocent souls erupt from burial mounds
and God overturns Earth with His plow.

III.

The holy sun is heaven only to the poor.
The heat of Love is hellfire to the proud
who tumbled, wings dripping wax like dyed fruit,
as the heavens closed in—
and at the tower's heights, its mirror glinted, reflecting
fields of bleeding tomatoes and strawberries.
Deep Heaven burst from their throats
shattered and split
so their jaws hung slack with gore hanging raw,
and their teeth scattered like Babel's sound.
Then came the gong-cry from the heights:
My Spirit has always coursed between your skin.
You hung in space upon My Word alone;
only I can unmake.

Artist Statement

Foundation sacrifices were a practice across multiple cultures in the ancient world, where children were entombed in the foundation of a building to ensure its stability. Child sacrifice has not ended — abortion still exists. We still are subject to the lie than stable civilizations can be built on a foundation of blood. This poem is a story of such a civilization, and how such civilizations end.

Nightmare in Red, White, and Blue

by Sarah Terzo

Honorable Mention, Poetry

On battlefields in the New World
bodies lie among the refuse.
Tied up in plastic bags.
Faces frozen in silent screams.
Disembodied hands reaching for something
they will never grasp, something
they will never even see.
Hands that will never pick a flower or pet a dog.
Tiny feet that will never run.

What a travesty.
All those plastic bags
polluting the environment!
New Jersey passed a law.
No more plastic bags at grocery stores.
The clinics will have to use something else.
Maybe nice biodegradable cardboard boxes.
We must save the planet
for future children.
(No, not those children).

When Dr. Beverly McMillan quit
she gave as a reason:
“I couldn’t stand to look at
the little bodies anymore.”
And where was I?
Laughing with my friends in high school
Having my first date, my first
innocent kiss.
I didn’t realize.
Where were you?

Facts of science
reduced to opinions.
Life relegated in importance
to a casual conversation
between two friends over a cup of coffee.
Media sound bites, bumper stickers, and slogans.
Propaganda machines,
Lies, lies, and lies.

In a world where justice yields to politics.
politics yields to public opinion.
Public opinion yields to wealth
and wealth springs from exploitation,
it all comes down to power.
The power to reshape our minds.
The power to corrupt our souls.
The power to rape our wombs.

To toe the line,
it takes no courage.
only white lies, black robes
and a habit of
indifference.



Heavy Is the Human Heart

by Haley Hartsfield Spencer

1st Place, Visual (2D)

Artist Statement

This piece is layered with human tragedy large and small. The background is collaged articles from the local paper spanning one month. Each was chosen for content that weighs on the heart. War, civilian casualties, neglect of children, homelessness, lack of healthcare, our poisoned earth and water, arguments over abortion and capital punishment, racism, hate and suffering. Between the cracks of

the news articles are gold flakes; treasure buried and hidden deep underneath. This represents the helpers and the healers. Layered on top are mono prints of texture creating a tapestry related to human impact on our world, and highlighting our relationships to each other and the rest of the planet. The foreground is a mono print of a human heart, still radiating and gilded in gold.

Graveyard Shift

by N. C. Krueger
2nd Place, Prose

The ghostly light from the six computer screens envelops us, turning our uniforms an eerie seafoam-blue, and my brown skin gray. The only sound is the blacklights' buzzing.

"Sensor, ready?" I say, my voice even.

"Ready?"

Then I feel it again. His cold breath, pricking the hairs on the back of my neck, and his silent fingers, tracing their way between the notches of my spine. It's now, in the lonely moments before I send the warheads flying, that the shadow comes creeping by. Invisible, unnamed.

I glance over at the sensor—she's intensely focused on the all-consuming blue glow. Behind her spreads a cartoonish mural—the only decoration in the tiny bunker—where our squadron mascot, the grim reaper himself, stands grinning, his black cloak sweeping over mountains, trees, and deserts.

Quickly I look back to the screen, flickering with the spy-camera image of a real desert and a gray compound. And a man, dressed in white, talking on the phone, so small I can see the pixels he's rendered in. From here, it doesn't look real at all, I think, and the shadow's fingers trickle up my neck and press against my skull.

Click. The sensor's locked on.

His breathing comes again, faster and faster on my neck. I shiver.

Click. I release the bomb. His fingers crawl into my ribs, tightening like a vice, and as time slows cold hands wrap around my body, fixing my feet, locking my jaw; there's a rush of darkness and distantly I hear the sensor counting to five—

I'm standing in a desert. The sun is high, but I'm cold to the bone. Above me is the glint of something curved and shining, and his fingers are still at my back.

"Dreaming," I manage to murmur. Then, "Where am I?"

Don't you know? His voice is gentler than I'd expected.

"No."

Look, says the shadow.

Then, I see the man in white, talking on the phone.

We lock eyes.

The next instant, we are engulfed in a whirlwind of fire. And then the roar, breaking my ears, then the searing heat, the smoke filling my lungs, and still my eyes are locked with the man in white.

But now, his skin melts off his bones and his bones carbonize to ash. Somehow, only his eyes remain, ever-burning into mine.

Far away I still hear the blacklights humming, or maybe it's my drone, my reaper of steel and circuitry, high in the sky, far from the desert, father even from the bunker, always too far to know. Always, too far to understand. But I know we're burning from the heat of its gaze.

I see the shadow for the first time, looking too solid and real to be a shadow, eyes black like a night without stars, curly hair silhouetted by the inferno. The crescent of his scythe, shining silver and white. The beating of his dim, purple wings as he flies to the crumbling man.

"He saw me," I whisper. "He understood."

I look up into the man in white's eyes. "Didn't you?"

There's no answer, and his eyes roll from his sockets, dropping into the sand.

The scythe rises like a moon above him. The Reaper enfolds him in his wings. They are like curtains falling, falling like shadows, stars, bombs, grains of sand . . .

My head spins. I'm floating backwards through the smoke. And then I see that the smoke is far away, a column of black smoke rising on a flickering screen. I'm sitting in a desk chair, in the bunker with the blacklights and computers.

The sensor peeks at me from behind her square glasses. "Are you okay?" "Yes." I'm shaking. "I am."

As I get up to leave, I stare at the mural on the wall. The cartoon Death winks at me with his empty eye-socket. I shudder and look away.

Hate and Morning Glories

by Aimee Murphy

Honorable Mention, Poetry

“hate has no home here”

Okay, well that’s all well and good to say

But hate isn’t usually an invited housemate;

It’s more like the morning glories out back.

Unassuming when sprouting,

(you’re honestly not sure what it is,

have you seen this one before?)

and once it’s blooms,

could seem attractive as f*ck.

You might even get compliments “oh how lovely it looks” from your friends (happens every year).

But while you’re busy about your goings-on,

it’s reaching it’s long, strong tendrils

Around Everything

(And I mean EVERYTHING.)

choking out the fruit you’d planted,

stealing the richness of the soil you’d tilled.

An invasive species

That must be uprooted

from the very deepest parts.

Artist Statement

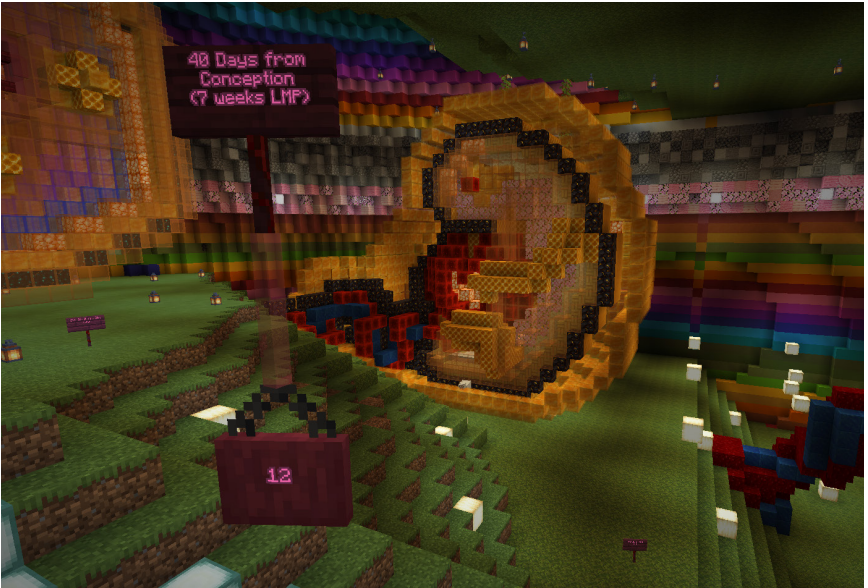
Graveyard Shift

I once visited a military base which they flew MQ-9 Reaper drones out of. In the drone piloting bunker was a mural of the Grim Reaper, and there was something disconcertingly self-aware about that. The drone pilots I talked to were candid about the strange kind of trauma that comes from killing as a 9-5 and then coming home at the end of the day. I wanted to examine that trauma, and the moral complexities of drone strikes, so I wrote this story.

Artist Statement

Hate and Morning Glories

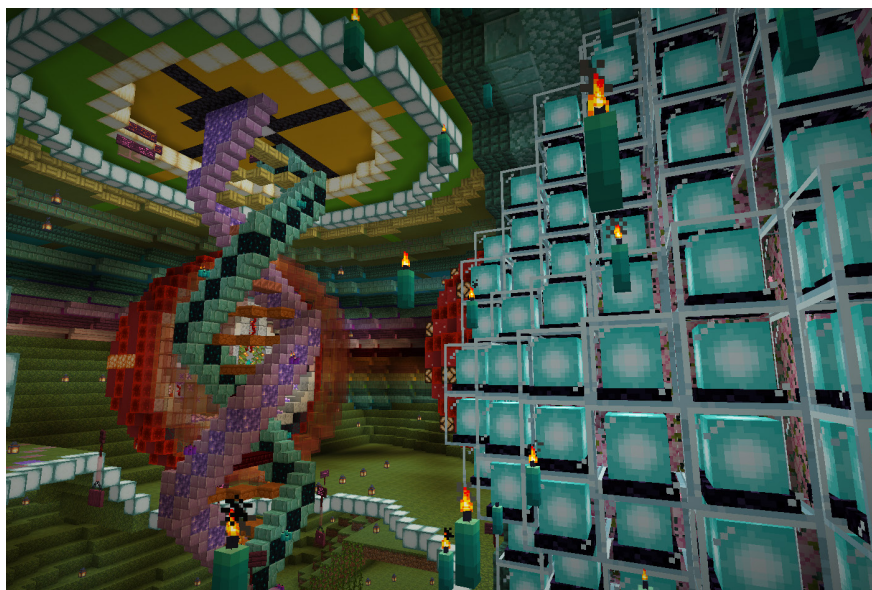
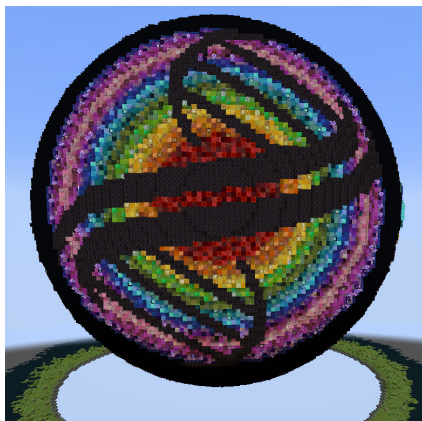
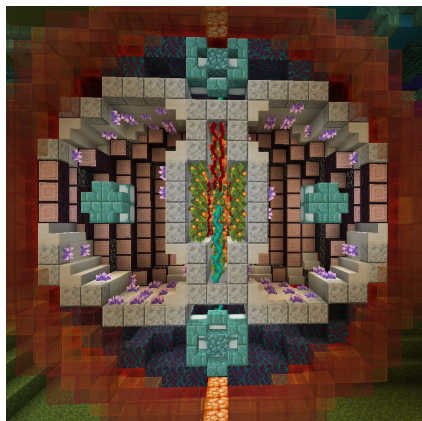
This poem came to me after a day hard-spent in the garden, tearing out countless vines that were choking out my vegetables and fruit trees. I suddenly saw how people that I have loved have come to embrace hateful and sometimes violent ideologies like racism, ableism, and sexism: because they grow so slowly and then could even seem “beautiful” and “smart”, but they choke out the good fruit we could be growing in our lives, essentially trading one for the other.



The Cubed Sphere

by Sara Leonard

1st Place, Visual (3D)



Artist Statement

This artwork is a 3D sculpture and models of the first trimester of pregnancy. Using the popular video game Minecraft I have built this sculpture. The imagery on the outside of the sphere, include: The Rehumanize Logo, a Preborn Child, images that represent Science and how it points to God and my faith in God. And finally a quote by J.R.R Tolkien. If this sculpture was to scale it would be over 11,2013 feet tall.

Inside of the sphere I have 15 models of the

preborn child during the First Trimester of pregnancy. Follow the DNA stairs and find each model.

Last year artists had a theme of interactive art pieces. With this piece I wanted to create something big and beautiful that anyone could access and view first hand. Anyone with the Java edition of Minecraft can access this map and explore the artwork for themselves.

Trespass

by Sara Leonard

Honorable Mention, Prose

Harriet walks home, late one night. Tired and worn from a day of work and play. She doesn't see them lurking in the dark. She doesn't see them stalking her in the night. She doesn't see anything until they jump her. A man and a woman. The Man grabs her from behind. He smells of alcohol and weed. He wraps his arms around her, holding her tight, while the Woman steps out in front of Harriet. The woman lifts the gun in her hand, aiming it right at Harriet's face.

Harriet freezes in the grip of the stranger. Tears drip down her cheeks in fear, her very short life flashing before her waking eyes. All that it has been, all that it is and all that it could be. But the woman doesn't pull the trigger. She has a drunken smile plastered on her face.

"You're coming home with us, you won't fight, you won't run. If you do, I'll kill you," the Woman says.

Harriet can't argue, she wants to live. She nods out her compliance. She'll do anything to survive.

Harriet is well behaved, going where she is pushed, being still as they wrap a chain around her ankle. She has just enough slack to pace the small living room. To sit on the couch and hide behind it.

The Woman leans forward, the gun still in her hand. She presses her cheek against Harriet's, the gun slides under Harriet's chin. "You cause me any inconveniences and I will kill you."

"Bang," she whispers into Harriet's ears.

When Harriet is left alone, she hides behind the couch, as small as possible, anything to not be seen, not to be noticed. But it's impossible when the parade of men trip over her chain. It's impossible when she's slapped and berated for stealing scraps of food half eaten and half forgotten off the floor. It's impossible when the drugs are coming in and out of the house, smoke staining the ceiling and the inner lining of Harriet's lungs. Harriet survives and hopes and dreams of being free from under the reign of the Woman.

It's impossible when the Woman complains about the food Harriet eats and the space Harriet takes up and the spotlight and fault always falls to her shoulders. The months are hard and hungry, sickly and barely surviving. But Harriet makes it out to the other side. The other side of so many hardships.

Then one day, the same as so many days of so many months. The woman shoves and pushes Harriet from her hiding place. Forces her into the center of the house, the living room, the center of attention. And it's the worst place to be.

"You are trespassing," the woman says, on that day. On the last day of it all.

"You brought me here against my will!"

"You eat my food, take up my space and waste my money. You're a parasite," the Woman says.

"I wouldn't be eating your food if I wasn't here. But you brought me here."

"You're an invader, invading my place," the Woman says. Her hand lifts up, the light reflects off the metal of her favorite pistol. "It's time for you to leave. So get out of my house."

"You're letting me go?" Harriet whispers, tears springing to her eyes in joy. She can... leave? Harriet stands up and runs to the door. But of course, before she can make it her leg is pulled out from under her and she falls onto her face. The chain still wrapped around her ankle. She pulls and tugs. The chain twists and presses painfully into her skin. She reaches, her arm outstretched, but the door is too far away. And it's closed and she is still chained.

"You don't have permission to be here. I don't consent to you being on my property. Get out, this is my house, you are trespassing," the Woman repeats, stepping closer. The woman slowly raises the gun. Slowly, she makes her way over to Harriet. Slowly she towers over the intruder.

"Please," Harriet cries. "Please, I don't want to die. I want to live. You just... You just have to let me go."

"No one is sad when a parasite is cut out and thrown away," The Woman says.

The trigger is pulled. A loud bang fills the house.

The New Consent

by Elise Ketch

Honorable Mention, Visual (2D)



Artist Statement

The New Consent

In a world beyond abortion, a promise to stick around and parent if a baby is conceived is a requirement of positive informed consent before sex. Partners agree before they are in crisis that they both value human life. They swear to themselves to never resort to violence out of fear. In this world, we're free to love with no reservations and sex is hotter than ever.

Minerva's Coma

by Helene Ryles

Honorable Mention, Prose

Since my twin sister Minerva went into a coma and my life had taken on a nightmarish quality. At first a young dark haired youth came to visit regularly. He played Minerva classical music on his flute to no avail. I think they met at this orchestra but I couldn't remember anything about it. I had no idea how the youth had got to know my sister. I think he must be her boyfriend.

All I could assume was their had been a terrible accident but I couldn't remember anything about it. I had no recollection about what had happened at all. Obviously their must have been an accident since people didn't just die like mother and grandpa or go into coma's did they? Or break their arm as I had. However I could not remember how that had happened either. Even though the healers soon mended my arm. If only my sister was so easy to repair.

The youth handed me a metal box. When I plugged the rubbery like substance into my ears I could hear much better without needing to lipread so much.

"They are called speech amplifiers and were based on a similar machine called a hearing aid. Only they ran on these little metal discs called batteries which don't exist on this world. Since you are human un-magical you will have to get a magic user to regularly recharge your speech amplifier for you," the youth explained.

Some of the healers also donated a number of flowery dresses. As well as telling me that I needed to eat and wash more since I was getting scrawny and quite smelly. I wasn't used to people being so personal but faeries were not known for their tact. Since the accident, which I couldn't even remember, everything felt so hellish. Life felt like wading through treacle. If Minerva died, I wanted to die too.

Unfortunately, after six months with no improvement the youth lost interest. He paid for the next three months. After which Minerva was still in a coma.

Note: this prose piece has been abbreviated due to limited printing space. The rest of Minerva's Coma is published online at rehumanizeintl.org/create-encounter.

Blind

by Sarah Terzo

Honorable Mention, Prose

Recess was over, and, as always, Kelly was first in her seat. The classroom was a refuge from the teasing, but she wouldn't be alone for long. She heard the other kids tapping in the hallway.

With a sigh, she pulled out her reading textbook. The raised bumps were rough under her fingertips. She usually read the assignment the day before, but yesterday had been spent in the doctor's office again.

"Mrs. Hart, maybe you should just accept the way things are," the doctor had said, not realizing that Kelly was standing next to him. "I mean, she can have the surgery, but I don't think it's advisable.

"I think she needs it," said Kelly's mother. She had the strap that tied together her long robe in her hands and was twisting it and twisting it. Her mother had been doing that a lot lately.

The doctor said, "Her condition is very rare, but it's not unheard of. Most people in her situation lead relatively normal lives."

"But the other children," protested her mom. "They know she's different. You know how they are at that age. Kelly never talks about it, but I can tell. When her brother was her age, he played with the other children every day. He was invited to their homes; he attended their birthday parties. Kelly never goes anywhere."

"Children can be like that. Lots of kids get teased."

"But it's the adults too! They don't know what to do with her. She unnerves them, I think. And I know it upsets her."

"She is very young" the doctor said, "She'll learn to adjust. I know it must be difficult. But think about what you're considering. Kelly really isn't in pain."

A nurse walked into the room. Kelly stayed as quiet as she possibly could. She held her breath. The nurse walked past Kelly without noticing her. She went over to the desk, her cane tapping on the floor. She rummaged through a drawer. Kelly focused on her mom and the doctor.

"But sometimes she is," her mother said. "She says the light hurts her eyes sometimes."

"Yes, these children perceive light differently than we do. It's far more extreme to them. But like I said, most children like this adjust."

"Kelly wants to be normal."

The doctor said, "This is extreme. We're talking complete removal here. The trauma, the risk of infection alone- all for a procedure that, from a medical standpoint, isn't really necessary."

The nurse walked toward Kelly and the door. Again, Kelly held her breath. The nurse walked right past her.

"Doctor, I really think the operation would be best. Kelly really wants friends and wants to fit in. I'm just thinking about what's best for her."

The doctor sighed. "Well, Mrs. Hart, I see I won't change your mind. I can give you a referral to a doctor who'll do the procedure. But please think this over carefully before you make the final decision. Once the eyes are removed, there is no going back."

Kelly looked at her mother's face. There were wrinkles on her forehead, and her mouth was scrunched up. Her face always seemed to be like that when she was talking about Kelly.

"To tell you the truth, I'm at my wit's end. It's so hard dealing with her sometimes. She talks about such strange things. I can't always blame other people for being unsettled. It's difficult having a child who's..." Her mother's voice trailed off.

"Different," the doctor said. "She's just different."

Kelly felt the water come to her eyes again. It trickled down her face. She remembered how scared she'd been the first time it had happened. She had ran and told her mother. Her mother had been frightened too.

"Thank you," said her mom.

Kelly hurried into the waiting room, moving as quietly as possible so her mother

wouldn't know she'd been listening. She reached the waiting room quickly, and said, "Hi Mom," when her mother got there. Hopefully, her mom would think she'd been waiting there the whole time.

They walked home in silence, her mother's cane tapping the sides of the path.

Now the kids were coming back into the classroom, and the teacher would be in any minute.

"Hey Kelly," said Tina, a small ten-year-old who sat behind her and was her only friend.

Tina's mouth was turned up at the corners and Kelly could feel her own mouth imitating Tina's. She noticed that people's mouths seemed to be like that when they were being kind or when they were happy. It didn't seem to happen very often when they were talking to her.

Tina's eyes, like everyone's eyes, were a bit like the milk Kelly ate in her cereal every morning. Kelly wondered if her eyes were the same. She knew her eyes were the problem. They were different. She was different.

"Don't get upset about them," Tina said. "You know, they're just jealous."

"I know," said Kelly.

"Kelly, what is it like?" Tina asked.

She'd asked before, and always listened in wonder when Kelly described the path, the other kids, and all those things she didn't have words for. It was so hard to explain. All she could do was make comparisons.

For example, the things that were up above seemed like pillows felt. She knew the word for light; her mother and her classmates could detect it, a little, but she didn't know how to describe that great enormous light that moved in the big up, the one that hurt so much to look at.

When she tried, it made people uncomfortable. Especially her mother. She remembered when she'd first told her mom that she didn't need her cane to avoid bumping into people. She'd thought that would make her mother happy, but it didn't.

"It sounds so weird," said Tina.

"Well, I heard my mom talking. I'm going to have an operation. Soon I'll be like everybody else," said Kelly.

"That's good," her friend replied.

Was it though? Would she miss knowing things, being able to perceive things that other people didn't? Would she miss being able to hide, to hear things she wasn't supposed to?

At first, she'd been happy to be different. It was like she was a superhero, like people in the stories she listened to. She could do something other people couldn't. She thought at first that that made her special. But she wasn't special or a superhero. She was a freak.

Kelly wished for the hundredth time she'd kept her secret to herself. But it was too late now.

Would the operation hurt? Thinking about it was so scary. But maybe it was worth it. And she didn't have a choice, anyway. There was nothing she could do about it. She might as well accept it.

Maybe the kids would treat her better. Maybe, just maybe, the best thing would happen. Maybe her mother would start loving her. The same way she loved her brother. That was the most important thing. It would be wonderful.

Kelly sighed. Her textbook sat in front of her. Soon she wouldn't be able to tell what the little bumps were like except by feeling them. Soon she'd be like everyone else.

Artist Statement

Sometimes, disability is a social construct. Society determines what is 'normal' and what isn't.

Indefinite Detention

by Aimee Murphy

Honorable Mention, Poetry

A cell block for these “clumps of cells;”

I guess it’s fitting, in a way,

since the little bits we’re made of

(yes, cells) were actually named after the rows on rows of tiny rooms men were confined to {pray}.

Tiny vials, petri dishes, straws:

These little ones (Attempts from parents at Multiplying, but now)

Held

(by the thousands) “in the glass.” (And that’s just in one freezer, 90 cubic feet, somehow.)

Vulnerable humans stuck in refrigerators:

A trope out of a comic book scene.

“But they’re just clumps of cells,” we’re told.

“It doesn’t matter if they’re starving (for love, for life), alone, and cold.”

And I’m reminded of the fact that

Once

in all of our lives

We, too were practically microscopic, A gem of life unfolding from the first {chemical fusion}

Multiplying, growing so fast it mystifies,

forming our bodies (too small for human eyes).

We all were once a clump of cells this small. But we’ve been

Held

in the womb,

Held

in our parents’ arms.

These little ones, meanwhile, are imprisoned,

Held

in a prison on ice;

Each unable to grow, unable to live

their one

precious, unrepeatable

Life.

Frozen there, awaiting ransom. Awaiting (you?), awaiting (me?),

Awaiting a chance to be free.

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Scan the QR codes below for direct links to each piece.

Short Film



Would've, Could've, Should've

by Nick Sansone
1st Place, Short Film
and Best in Show

Music



The Father's Lullaby

by Michael Forrest
1st Place, Music



Alive Without Permission

by Kelsey Hazzard
2nd Place, Music

Artist Statement

Indefinite Detention

This poem attempts to grapple with the reality that there are over one million embryonic humans currently stuck in freezers around the U.S. due to the grotesquely unregulated fertility industrial complex. Tying together the concept of justice for the incarcerated and justice for the preborn, this piece draws the reader in to remember their own origins, that “everyone you know was once an embryo,” and that every living human deserves to be loved and respected and given a chance to grow in the context of a family.

