



the
signal house
edition

#4



king of the road
acrylic paint on wood, 2019

tom leamon

issue four | september 2020



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contents

| | |
|--|-----------------|
| <u>welcome</u> | the editors |
| <u>interview</u> tom leamon | henry martin |
| <u>poetry</u> bras | jo morris dixon |
| <u>perspective</u> staycation pasadena, california | diana stahl |
| <u>audio</u> requiem | xana chambers |
| <u>essay</u> behind the red curtain | alexis d. lea |

welcome

Another video call.

The light flooded in behind them, through some large window in the new Southern Hemisphere spring.

"Where are you?" I asked, keeping my guess to myself.

They tilted the screen and the room came into focus and my guess fell soundlessly out of my back pocket. They were somewhere else entirely.

Where are we?

For most of us, this year has brought an intensified familiarity with our immediate surroundings. It's also cut us off from places and spaces that until recently we had perhaps taken for granted as being available to us. Our sense of distance - what's near and what's far - has warped. What places remain open? To whom? Who gets to belong safely in them?

The pieces in September's issue let us into private worlds that may have become shuttered, or strange, or remote, or redefined, but which nevertheless persist in some new form. If we come to know ourselves through the spaces we inhabit, what new lessons can be drawn from our altered environments?

What hidden doors will we discover in rooms we had thought familiar?

The Editors



tom leamon

interviewed by
henry martin

The Signal House Edition meets Tom Leamon, artist and co-founder of The Beekeepers, a handmade artist retreat in the Algarve, Portugal.

Henry Martin: Describe your current surroundings.

Tom Leamon: I am in a dark green room with a wooden ceiling. I am sat on an uncomfortable wooden Ikea chair and surrounded by an array of found objects and paintings. In front of me are a series of dirty windows disguising a clear view of the North Atlantic Ocean. The sea

in the Gulf of Cadiz is sparkling, and the temperature is hot; maybe 30 degrees. I can hear the sea, and children playing on the beach. They sound like they are having fun.

Henry: Introduce us to King of The Road (the featured artwork of Issue 4).

Tom: King of The Road was a painting I made in 2019. It came at a time when I was becoming more and more disillusioned by painting on canvas, so I decided to begin building in wood and integrating the frames. The figure stands proud, but there is a decaying grandeur both with its surroundings and sentiment. I was attempting to portrait the idea of a lost soul on a journey of discovery. And that moment in time when everything feels too much, identity is lost, and you find yourself profoundly isolated and alone.

Henry: Can I get a response to ‘art now’.

Tom: I respect those who are truly able to make impactful works of art in this day and age. Art mirrors culture, and right now I believe there is a huge transition happening like never before throughout the world. It’s incredibly difficult to stay present and ride that wave within art, both with integrity and purpose, and the more I switch on to the world (and the art world), the more I see insincerity and complacency.

Henry: Space—specifically, the construction of artist spaces using reclaimed sites and materials—is a throughline in your artistic practice. Can you give us an insight into how these spaces fit into your practice overall, or indeed individual artworks?

Tom: I have always been a control freak. I have always needed to be involved with not only the creation of the work of art, but also how and where it was shown. I would always exhibit in unique spaces, as I felt this added a new dynamic to the viewer’s interaction with the work. This soon led on to me developing spaces—not only to exhibit the works—that could inspire a work’s creation. I found myself much more in tune with my creativity when I was interacting with likeminded

people within interesting and unique surroundings. I developed this in London with Studio 180 where we took on a large four-story Georgian house and turned it into art studios and a venue, which then led on to gallery 223, and eventually a shift to Portugal where we were fortunate enough to get the freedom to build and develop The Beekeepers. Throughout this time, I worked with what I had around me, always with a fascination for recycling and reclaiming objects, giving them a second lease of life. I love the idea that someone can view a work of art that hangs on a wall that is built from the same materials, by the same hands.

Henry: What ingredients make up a good human being?

Tom: Integrity, honesty, openness, self-belief and a good sense of humour.

Henry: What's your inner landscape looking like right now?

Tom: I am hungry to paint more, explore, and learn new things, and try and understand what it really is that makes me fulfilled. I have a daily battle with my own demons but attempt to turn them into positives.

Henry: What lessons have you learned from establishing and running The Beekeepers?

Tom:
Don't build in the summer in Portugal.
There is no such thing as perfection.
Everything always evolves and creates new challenges and forms of satisfaction.

Henry: What is the route from vulnerability to strength?

Tom: Self-belief. I remember hearing my great uncle speaking to me a few years back. He was old, maybe 80. And I was in my late 20's. I had always been taught to respect my elders, and that had translated into

me believing that with age you knew more. That is not always the case. Many people go through life without purpose or real self-made goals. I think strength comes from following your own internal guide even when it's difficult. Learning and growing from your mistakes and not getting complacent with your victories whilst staying humble and inquisitive along the way.

Henry: If I could give you one, would you choose peace or happiness?

Tom: Right now, happiness.

Henry: What is your advice to a young artist?

Tom: Explore everything that turns you on and understand that what matters to you now won't in five years' time, so don't be too hard on yourself. Grow thick skin, but know when it's important to be vulnerable. Practice daily and don't create firstly for the money, but because it excites you in the act of doing.

(Photo credit: The Beekeepers by Paulo Ribeiro, 2020)



bras

POETRY

jo morris dixon

*you wish you could buy bras in a bike shop
next to the racing bikes, handle bar tape in
every colour: urban pink / dusty pink / cork
pink / scholar pink you wish you could buy
bras in a bookshop next to the travel guides
intersectional volumes on queerness and
colonialism which give you hope you wish
you could buy bras in a café next to the sugar
cubes and mille-feuilles social distancing
before the macaroons got put on display*

(Image credit: Bicycle Lot (cropped) by Octavio Suarez, 2013)

staycation

pasadena, california

My feet need shoes today. Soft pink heels that zip up the side. I put on my new summer men's shorts. A t-shirt and a sweatband. I light my candle used for divination then burn the lavender wrapped sweetgrass. I clean my Pasadena bedroom, bathroom, and balcony pretending I'm an Airbnb host with a paid guest arriving at noon. I pour myself two



PERSPECTIVE

diana stahl

glasses of water. I scrub the bathroom, which is what I do when I feel overwhelmed. I pray that I will be able to let go for seven days. To rest. I promise my body a summer vacation.

I fantasized about driving up to Marin County to visit my aunt. She left a voicemail two days ago and sounded so much like my mother

I cried on my bed more than expected. I miss my mother. After four years I thought her death would feel normal. Then again, who am I to judge what's normal? My aunt sounded scared and talked about the fires. She ended her call with, "I hope you're well". I have not called her back. Pasadena will have to do.

Pasadena sits in occupied Tongva territory south of the San Gabriel Mountains. I try to acknowledge this because truth has always released me. I make a list of what vacation and summer means to me. I take my last CBD gummy and make eggs for lunch. I spend ten minutes certifying the last two weeks of unemployment insurance. I respond to an email from a potential employer. I make a note of the amount of money I've donated. The timer on my phone goes off reminding me to stop working. I think about calling my aunt back. I wonder if hearing my voice would make her cry also.

My stomach releases, the day goes on, and the game of pretending is working. I have now flipped from being the Airbnb host to the guest. I am relaxing. I am appreciating this city at the foot of the San Gabriel Mountains.

The heatwave. I'm reading "Visit Pasadena" websites. I'm drooling over the local dumpling restaurant that's, "Very tasty!". I am trying to accept my sadness.

My lungs crave the outdoors. The goal this week is to pick a new place to roller-skate each night. I can't stop thinking about roller skating since my mother died. My legs choose a parking lot tucked next to the Community College. I strap my skates on next to a cluster of succulents under a waxing moon. The CBD has relaxed me. It has not interfered badly with the Lexapro. The sky is pink. I sit for a while praying. I skate for ten minutes and my ankles feel weak. I want to leave my body. I choose to stay present.

Remembering the sacredness of land is a crucial part of roller skating. I consider black culture. How much black lives matter, and without black lives the US would not have roller skating. I skate wondering how to keep talking about that. I skate wondering if I'm not doing enough. I skate missing the roller rink in my hometown. Missing the way Friday nights felt there. I skate thinking about how many times the police have kept black people from skating. From living. From

breathing. I skate to connect with the concrete near my house in Pasadena.

A parrot flies by making a brazen sound through its green body. It flies to the roadside hotel that's on Route 66. "I think, 'Wow. The road by my house is Route 66,' my enthusiasm surprised me." I consider all the travelers who've driven Route 66. How three roadside motels are parked less than a mile from my house, which now feels ridiculous and meaningful. The parrot reminds me of this.

My guts beg to relax. I hold them nearly as much as the furrow between my brow. Early mystics claim that the world was once soft, now hard, and will soften again. Like breathing. A carousel or wheel. This might be why I've held my stomach so tight. It feels real in its hardness, even though it's naturally soft. The other week I spent two hours on Google Maps looking through my hometown, remembering, there were some pockets that were not painful. There were some parts I will love forever. Something terrible can also be something sweet. Something sweet might also be terrible.

My night ends with a walk home. Astonished with the new love I

have for Pasadena. For this pod I live in. How it reminds me of my hometown, for better and worse. I wonder what life would be like if we created a world that was based on love and acceptance. How much strength it will require. I miss seeing the homeless man who usually sleeps at the edge of our street. I hope the Pasadena mosquitoes don't bite me tonight. I come home. I make some dinner. I try to get some sleep.

(Image credit: Alistair Case)

requiem

from the album *'the circling of the birds'*



Audio

xana chambers

[click here to listen](#)

(Image credit: *Softly Falling* by Pedro Vit)



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Hangover Day on Costinela's Balcony in Bucharest,
Vicktor Hübner, 2014

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All donations go towards the production of our issues. Donors of £100 or more will be listed as a friend of The Signal House Edition on our About page (unless requested otherwise).

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submissions

We accept submissions in non-fiction, fiction, essays, visual art, and audio. Follow us on social media and subscribe to our newsletter to hear of submission deadlines for other categories, such as poetry.

We encourage submissions from individuals from backgrounds and identities underrepresented in art and writing, particularly with regard to race, gender, sexuality, class, and disability. We welcome works translated from other languages into English where both writer and translator hold rights. Contributors retain copyright of their work. Please note, we are currently unable to pay contributors.

We read all the work sent to us and aim to respond within two months if we feel there is a place for it in the journal. As we are a small team, we do not respond to each individual submission.

submit work



*...this is how we said hello last night
| a flurry of backstage readiness |
you gave me this*

behind the red curtain

ESSAY
alexis d. lea

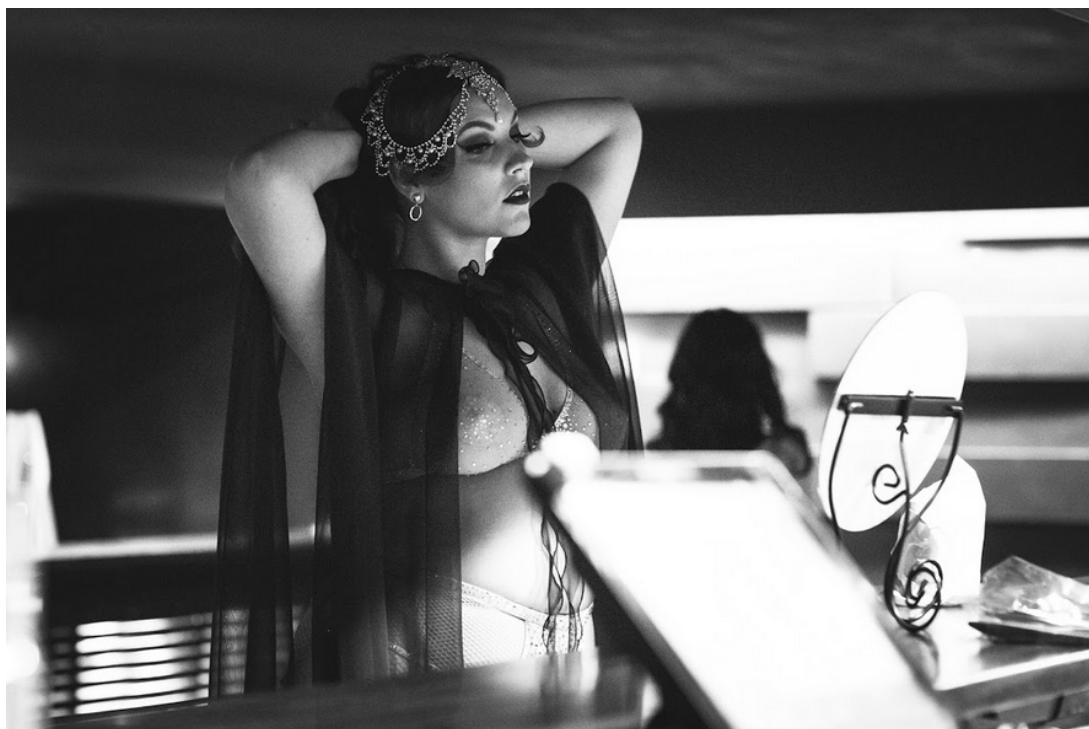
For as long as I can remember, my parents would take my twin sister and me to the theatre and the cinema.

My parents both started as artists in the theatre. I can still remember the feeling of absolute wonder getting to see back-stage after or before a show, the world behind the big red curtain was a fascinating mystery. There were sound decks with a plethora of blinking buttons, lighting rigs with all the colours of the rainbow, deep costume closets, old pianos on dusty wheels. It was here I realised that magic and play existed beyond childhood, too, and I wanted to be a part of it somehow.

*Knotting / Twisting / Zipping /
Tying / Quiet pleasures behind
the curtain / Before / Unknotting
/ Untwisting / Unzipping /
Untying / Unabashedly / to a
resounding orgy of applause*



I was fourteen when I got my first camera. I would take self-portraits in quiet places—my bedroom or the local graveyard, sometimes alone or sometimes with my sister. Looking back, this helped me process the often complex feelings of moving around to different schools and cities as my parents worked in the nomadic world that is film and television. Adapting quickly became integral to feeling a sense of home and the camera gave me a sense of familiarity and an excuse to connect with others as an introvert at heart.



*Stretching your hem to meet your
shape / you can taste the audience
in the void beyond the stage / you've
mastered us before / suspended in a
universe stripped of noise / permission
given / to collectively revere you*

When I was nineteen I moved out to go to university on the west coast of Vancouver, Canada. A friend at the time had raved about a show she saw that was unlike anything she had seen before. I was intrigued and decided to go on a whim. It was bucketing rain on a chilly winter night and if not for a buzzing red light at the end of a camouflaged alley way, I would have missed there was ever a door there at all.

My memory of this night was that of an instantaneous coalescence of music, movement, storytelling, visceral expression and a celebration of the body that I was longing for and hoped existed somewhere, I just hadn't seen it until that night. The show was a highly-politicised, inclusive, feminist FUCK YOU to a culture of policing bodies and forms of expression deemed "alternative" by the world outside the venue doors. Here, I truly felt like I belonged for the first time in my life.



*Arched backs / adrenaline bends into the night/
stomping the stage / lashes for days / a roar
that fuels / elastic bows and air kisses / to the
back row / feeding our insatiable axis /
after / alone again / a replay of euphoria perks
a smile / just under the cheeks*

It has been twelve years since then and I am still captivated by the artistry and voices of those who take to the stage but it's my belief that the magic we experience as the audience begins behind the red curtain: backstage. A world few are privy to but many are curious about.

Sometimes it's the flurry of costume change chaos or quiet pin drop moments of a pacing performer running lines in their head, eyes closed and waiting for the kettle to boil that sparks me to take an image.

Other times, it's the comedic and quaint makeshift broom closets with handmade curtains that smell of passion sweat and mixed perfumes.

It's creaky wooden floors making sounds during vocal warm-ups, it's the intricate focused faces during corsets lacing, getting to the final leg of a knee high-boot zipping or the rowdy giggles of nervous anticipation as someone's toes climb into the cage of high heels for the night that sparks something in me to capture this.

Opening the backstage door to a waft of break-a-leg whisky shots, dusty prop relics piled high from shows past and pasty glue feels like home now. A rare and unfiltered world I've fallen in love with that encourages personal creative rituals, oddities, goodluck charms, wicked humor and cuddled conversations near the mirror with everyone vying for a last look before curtain call.



*The faint sound of torch songs /
reverberate the walls / making my
way through a backstage hall /
history is whistling / blush powder
brush blows / hello darling / a
revolutionary of our time / sits here
/ in the mirror*

It is behind the curtain where the extraordinary dynamics of what unpeels on stage begins. A profound sense of solidarity that has always been palpable in this temporary chosen family who've all shed the skin of the outside world to arrive here, together, and transform for an audience and bring to life a world of intrinsic wonderment that was thought to have only existed inside of us when we were kids.

This month marks seven months, the longest stretch of time since childhood since I've not been able to venture down a maze of dark corridors and into the tiny shoe closets of backstages.

However, the resilience, hope and community activism I've seen rise up in this time stirs the same sense of inspired oneness that I feel when I'm backstage.



issue four | september 2020

contributors

INTERVIEW | **HENRY MARTIN** [interviewer]

is author of Agnes Martin: Pioneer, Painter, Icon (Schaffer Press), Yappo (Company Cod) and contributor to Great Women Artists (Phaidon). Other publications include Irish Times, Hyperallergic, and Journal of Illustration. Playwriting includes work for Theatre503, Underbelly, Lime Tree Theatre, Bunker Theatre, and Fishamble. Henry is a 2021 Fulbright scholar at the Archive of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

website | instagram

POETRY | **JO MORRIS DIXON**

grew up in Birmingham and now lives in London. Her poetry has been published in Oxford Poetry and The Poetry Review. She was longlisted for the 2015 Plough Poetry Prize and the 2020 National Poetry Competition. Her debut pamphlet I told you everything is forthcoming from Verve Poetry Press in September 2021. instagram

PERSPECTIVE | **DIANA STAHL** *is a writer, revisionist akashic reader, and non-binary faerie. Their plays have been developed with Rattlestick Playwrights Theater, The New Group, IRT, OTE, and Dixon Place. Their writing has appeared in The Brooklyn Rail, xojane.com, and everydayfeminism.com. D hosts virtual ceremonies every six weeks affirming trans, non-binary, intersex, genderqueer, and gendernonconforming folx. They currently live on occupied Tongva territory in Pasadena, California. They/Them. website*

issue four | september 2020

contributors

AUDIO | **XANA CHAMBERS**

is a singer / songwriter, composer and sound designer from Brisbane, Australia. In 2017 she earned a MA Composition from the Queensland Conservatorium of Music. Xana's latest body of recorded works "The Circling of the Birds" was released in 2017 and weaves a path through electronic music, art music and minimalism. You can hear Xana's music here: [website](#) | [instagram](#)

ESSAY | ALEXIS D. LEA *is a Melbourne-based portrait and travel photographer and the image editor for the international print magazine, Archer. In November 2018, she launched Cat Scratch Studio, an inclusive artist-friendly studio space for hire, that provides creators of all kinds a space to flourish, collaborate and connect in order to encourage knowledge-sharing amongst diverse creative groups to bridge community and industry gaps. She pulls inspiration from nature, music, fashion, performance and in particular her travels, which have led her to Central America, Europe, Africa, adventurous road trips across the United States and camper van trips around Australia. Alexis is currently working on film and editing projects after a long hiatus from moving pictures and is soon-to-be launching interactive online workshops for the performance and photographic community. [website](#) | [instagram](#)*



COVER ART | **TOM LEAMON** our featured artist in issue 4, lives between London and Portugal, working predominantly at The Beekeepers, an Algarve artist retreat that he set up in 2014. Recent exhibitions include The Gallery Faro (2019), Casa Independente (2019), ArtRio (2017), Copeland Gallery (2017), Merzbau Gallery (2016). [website](http://www.tomleamon.com)



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