



— The King had perished —
and a Queen blossomed in his place.



Hello Readers,



This volume has been a labor of care. As our inaugural issue, we wanted to center the wide variety of artists in the Westerville and surrounding areas, and the individual voices they each bring. We are all here as a community, and art (visual and written) brings us together even further as a way to communicate. In times of struggle, we are still here for each other, and will continue to be.

Our hope with this zine is to encourage consideration of the many views of the LGBTQIAP+ community, and to engender further appreciation of our creatives.

**With Love,
Westerville Queer Collective**



*Thank you and please enjoy our first
volume of gINKgo!*





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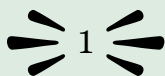
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Let no one take your wings

K Rossi | 2025



K Rossi

Some
bodies
look
like
this.



Some Bodies | K Rossi | 2024



“Illuminated” by Katie Cohan

When witnessed from far up above,
our world appears illuminated,
our earthen homes cradled by
the deep glowing ultramarine
nestled below swirling brushstroke clouds,
the glimmers of sprites
and lightning bolts,
auroras plum and emerald,
sunshine ever chasing us
across this intricate porcelain.



May we always remember that
we are all here together,
each of us as worthy
as every feather of the mourning dove,
as every root of the sapling,
as every wave in the sea,
just as we are,
here in the light.



Amy Caldwell



"Blossom" Evelyn McBride

Evelyn McBride



Nicole Valentine



The Cost of the Closet: Anxiety and Shame in Queer Lives

By Chuck Junkin, MA, LPCC-S

I didn't come out until I was almost thirty. Even then, it was quiet — not a big announcement, not a celebration — more like slowly peeling back a few layers and hoping the world wouldn't flinch. I grew up thinking I had to edit myself to stay safe, to stay accepted, to belong. That editing didn't stop when I came out — it just changed shape.

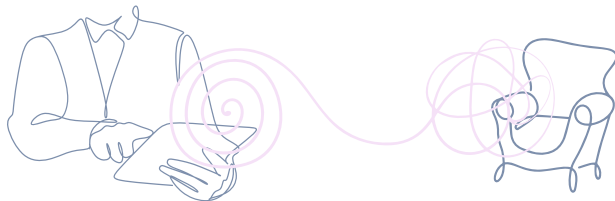
As a queer person and a therapist, I've spent a lot of time sitting with people who feel the same weight I carried for years. The closet isn't just about hiding who you love — it's about hiding who you are. And that comes with a cost.

Closets are built out of fear. Sometimes that fear is justified — many of us grew up in homes, churches, or communities where being ourselves felt dangerous. So we learn to perform. We adjust our tone, hold back our opinions, keep parts of our story off the table. But when we do that for long enough, we start to believe that those parts of us aren't worthy of being seen at all.

That belief — that some part of you is fundamentally wrong or unlovable — that's where the shame starts. And shame is heavy. It gets into your body. It messes with your sleep, your confidence, your ability to feel joy. It tells you to stay small, stay silent, stay safe.

Anxiety loves to ride shotgun with shame. When you've been told — directly or indirectly — that your truth is too much or too dangerous, you start to second-guess everything: "Did I say too much?" "Will they still want me here?" "What happens if they know the real me?" That hypervigilance becomes part of how you move through the world. And it's exhausting.





In my work, I see this all the time — people who are smart, kind, funny, resilient — and completely burned out from trying to be palatable. And I get it. I've done it. Some days, I still catch myself doing it. But I've also learned that there is no peace in pretending. There is no freedom in hiding.

Coming out — in whatever way makes sense for you — isn't a one-time event. It's a process. A million tiny moments where you choose to be just a little more honest, a little more brave, a little more you. And each of those moments matters. They add up. They build something. Not just a more authentic life, but a more connected one.

If you're still in the closet, or halfway in and halfway out, I want you to know there's no shame in surviving. You're doing what you need to do. And when you're ready to take the next step — whatever that looks like — you're not alone. There are people in this community (me included) who will meet you where you are and walk with you the rest of the way.


Because life outside the closet? It's still hard sometimes — but it's also real. And that realness, that truth, is where healing begins.





Ursa Major





Tomorrow
Harper Thorn

I have existed in a shadow, under the pelting treads of a machine that can give less than a penny of thought for my existence. I have tread here so long my breath is sooty and my skin ashen. And yet I persist. The sheltered life helps no one. The farm and pens we had been corralled into for a country and not for community is appalling.

I am sick of rolling around in the dirt with the pigs for the sake of buddying up to get the core of an apple, tainted with cyanide that the other barn yard animals hope will kill me. Better to blame me that I took the bite than they the ones who fed it to me.

The packed earth and lost memories can be counted as stones in my boots. Weighing me down from the ever impending doomful step of the regime. My tongue of blood and smoke tortures out my melodies of strength and fear and wanting.

The machine whirls on, drowning out my singing- I sing not for the tears streaking down my face, running vallies into my cheeks, but for the hope of hearing a second verse sung by a voice that sounds not unlike my own. I heard them before, when their steps weren't so far behind.

We both knew the very same "home." Having been stuffed into the closet kept in the corner of an attic, left for so long the moths had begun to pity us. They ate away at the clothes to make us space but it only felt more isolating. But at least we could see each other in the light from the crack each dawn. As we prayed in unison for our next day to come.

Remembering the field in which my childhood home was kept I always mourned the flowers. They die to spread hope and health for their next generation- why must my elders die for me to continue on.

Each day I understand less and less as to how we got here, as tendrils of poison ivy cover the windows of my home. A mess I cannot touch, cut away, or burn- unless risking the infection and swelling in my lungs and hands which I need to breathe and crawl and sing.

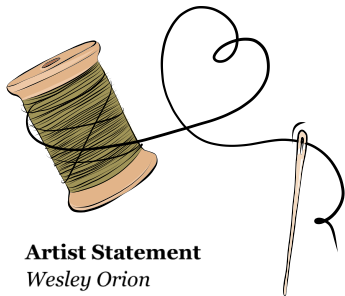
I have existed in the shadow that was designed by the penthouse bullies; built on the back of my queer siblings, and parents and children. When we all bemoan, and scream, and wrench out our voices and insides until the sky turns grey. Mighty high up there they close their windows, saying "the wind is quite a nuisance" and draw down the curtains.

I am left here remembering the first time a person understood why I don't say "I love you" with my lips but with my hands... cupping their cheek into my scabbed palms and begging them to not let go just yet. My voice croaking as my calves give in. The machine whirls mercilessly on and the shadow grows darker. I let it all fade until I can only feel their fingers gently rubbing my tears away. And in unison we pray for our next tomorrow.





Marley T.



Artist Statement
Wesley Orion



I was told I type like I am playing a piano; from then on I think of every word and stroke as a rift or chord, making my writing into symphonies and arias

Why couldn't I make all my creations this beautiful? As even the act of creation itself is beautiful

Ruthless, dirty, raw and tear stained but beautiful

"True" art is comfortably held within the frame and marketed to pass cash from filthy hands to filthy hands; not dirty with creation but with the grime of another man's boot

When I write I tear myself open, give out ribs as souvenirs and let people see into my heart so they can feel something

I have learned to carry a needle and thread with me wherever I go because art doesn't schedule it's time with me

I pour out poetry like water, my fingers dehydrated from writing

Looking to my memories like glaciers as they tear open scars that were closed so long ago

That I bleed tears

My rivers of stories and self sacrifices streaming into the ears of media and being filtered out for I am a walking violation of their "truth"

A canvas of joy and pain, my body a living document of poems and polaroids and paintings

People attest meaning to it, other's take down name and rebrand it, make it finer and more contained





Cover up the queerness and the joy in my existence and the hopes I carried from those
who haven't made it this far

They may have taken my story but I am the one writing it

I may be a pacifist but I am not powerless, my pen writing more sincerity and virtue
than their gorged tongues waggle

Fear unites us all, I can scream in every language, and people will hear it and they will
listen

We Are Resilient

Art is a medium of our future, it reads and breathes like the life that makes them

No amount of blood funded money can ever present me on their wall for them to prod,
question and laugh

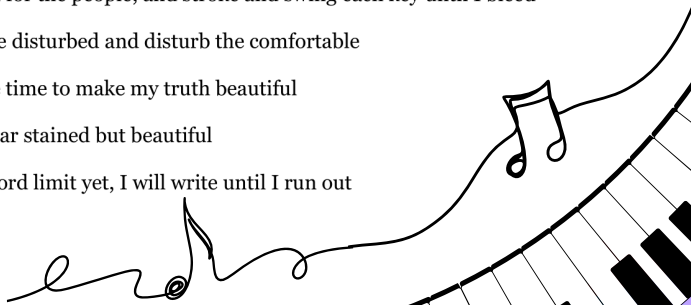
I play the piano of my soul for the people, and stroke and swing each key until I bleed

Art is meant to comfort the disturbed and disturb the comfortable

So why wouldn't I take the time to make my truth beautiful

Ruthless, dirty, raw and tear stained but beautiful

Even if I don't know my word limit yet, I will write until I run out





Artist Statements

Amy Caldwell (She/They)

Page 4

“Here, Everywhere” is a drypoint tetrapak print of my partner and I existing both in bed together and outside the confines of space and time.

Evelyn McBride (She/Her)

Page 5

Your reign remains, even if your title changes.

Harper Thorn (Xe/Xem)

Page 10-11

I may not be seen but that does not make me invisible. I rarely create art but when I do it fills me with a sense of purpose and visibility. Art is a mission statement that I intend to follow through with.

K Rossi (He/Him)

Page 1-2

I aim to showcase a wide range of body types and genders in my figure paintings with the goal of promoting body positivity. I use bright colors that celebrate the figure’s spirit, history, and vibe.

I aim to instill a sense of hope and purpose to a queer audience as we collectively endure what promises to be rough legislative terrain ahead. We are all beautiful, and we are all needed, and we are stronger together.

Marley T. (They/Them)

Page 12

To be a lesbian has often been something hidden, historically. In my studies, I have found a personal connection to foxes, and magpies have been used to reference romantic love. We will make a place for us, even in a world that refuses to acknowledge us politically.

Ursa Major (Any/All)

Page 9

When I hear people say that homosexuality is a new phenomenon, I think to my great aunt Amelia, who no one knew was a lesbian until long after she was gone. We aren't new, we're just not quiet anymore.

Wesley Orion (He/Him)

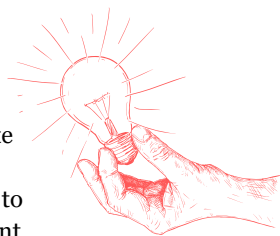
Page 13-14

I write not because I can, but I write because I must. I believe in the power of brushstrokes and key strikes, how they form and shape the experience of the creator for an audience’s view- I hope my writing helps people coax out their feelings and lay them bare so they can examine themselves and grow toward who they want to be and know they are.

Local Resources/Information about WQC

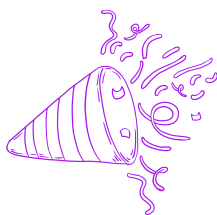
Creativity Circle

A monthly event for you to come and create with fellow community members! With an optional activity at each one this is a place to give you a dedicated space to take a moment and be creative!



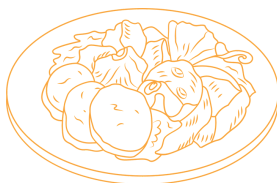
Yearly Pride

An annual celebration of LGBTQIA+ Pride in Westerville, Ohio! A little different every year, come join us in support!



Food Pantry

Located at Java Central in Uptown Westerville, we help provide free food for the community! Monetary Donations welcome!



Nature Walks

Each month, we have a guided walk and/or activity in nature with a local queer librarian and certified Nature and Forest Therapy guide.



And more!

- Monthly Queer Birding
- Drag Show Fundraisers
- Queer Quills Writing Group
- Weekly Coffee Meet-ups
- Tabling and Volunteering Opportunities
- ...and even more!





**Westerville Queer
Collective's
gINKgo 2025
*Volume 1***



<https://www.westervillequeercollective.org/>