Inscape

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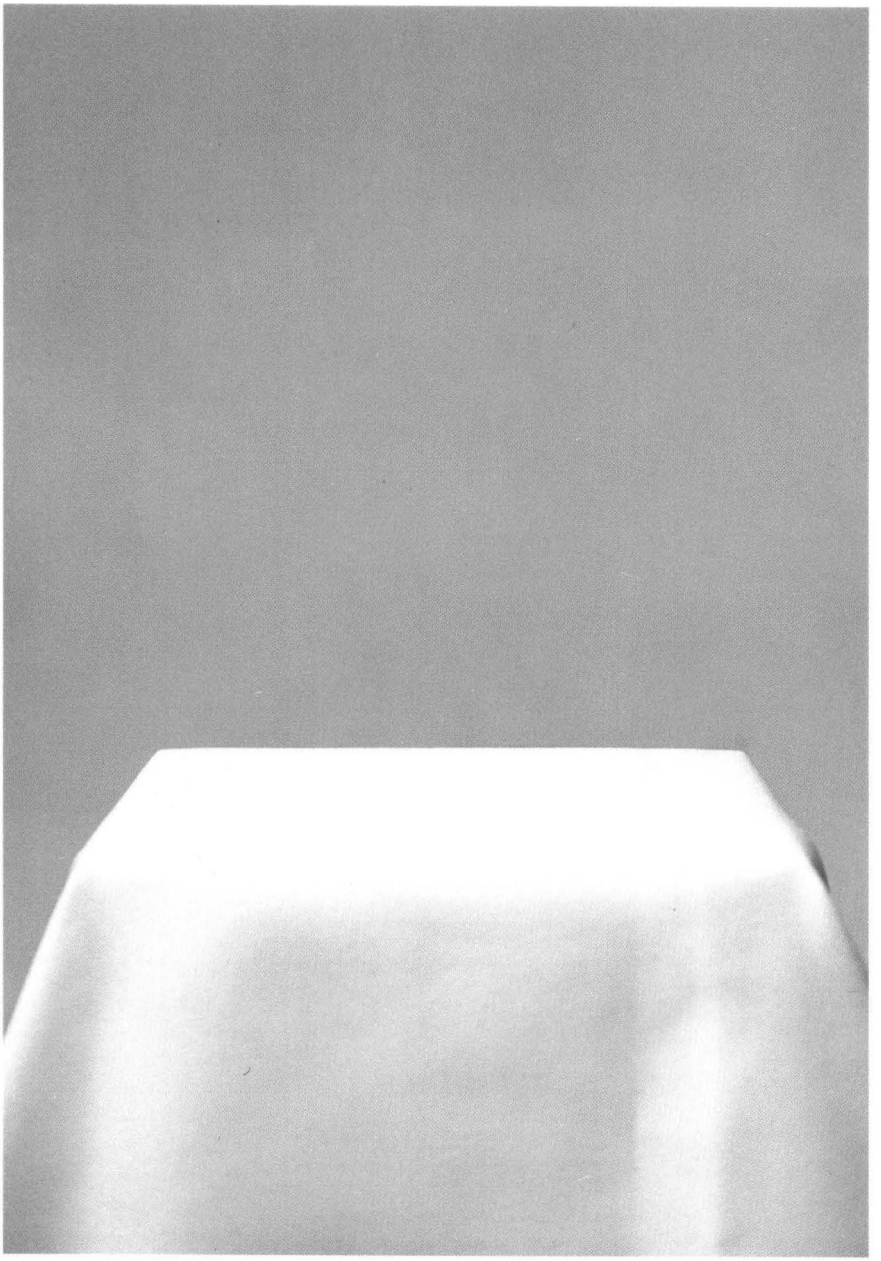

INSCAPE

FALL 2016

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Front cover by Bryan Hutchison, "Empty Pedestal Before."
Back cover by Bryan Hutchison, "Empty Pedestal After."

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Inscape is the inward quality of objects and events as they are perceived by the joined observation and introspection of a poet, who in turn embodies them in unique poetic forms.

—*Gerard Manley Hopkins*

FALL 2016

POETRY

PORTRAIT OF A PEAR TREE

FICTION

NONFICTION

INTERVIEWS

Editor's Note

If you become the aliment and the wet, they will / become flowers, fruits, tall branches and trees.

Roots and Leaves Themselves Alone
Walt Whitman

... do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? / ... Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. / Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.

Matthew 7:16–20
King James Bible

You've no doubt come for something. Why else would you be reading this now. I'm certain you've picked up this book looking for something. Maybe a small meal, or a slight repreive, a poem, a large cat for the lap, widgets, wonder, an orphan to minister to. Isn't the mind always reaching, at the very least for breath. Haven't you felt alone at least once in your life.

Weeks ago, I placed each pear on the page, one by one, like any writer or artist would do, each young, each shriveled, each melting, each crooked, each green, each cute, each brown, each irregular, each typical pear. I looked at each of them, and all these pears from one tree spoke to me in the kind of way that only several hundred pears can speak to you, with their faces, with their bodies, with what they are. Doesn't language always come from the inside out. Does that make it the closest thing to our hearts, issued from the lungs.

The other day, I was in the back room of a barbershop making language portraits of visitors. I had an easel and a stack of printmaker's paper. I invited each person into the room and they sat down. He looked at me. I looked at her. Each shared something, and I tried to capture that, tried to tack it down on paper and then hand it to each entirely present person. Sometimes I felt I had done a service, other times I felt that I needed more time, a whole day, five more minutes, wait come back, I only just began to understand you. No doubt we were both looking for something.

I realized, afterward, as I was packing up my easel and papers and stools, notebook, pen, and such, that I had been working with these people, and elsewhere with these pears, and even a few weeks prior on a self-portrait, and it all came to me at once: how was it that all this portraiture had happened so close together, how was it that it had not occurred to me until it had accumulated, here in the dead hours of the night as I drive home through the canyon, how is it that we had been given a whole collection of pears, of poems, of fictions, essays, interviews, and what was yet to come of it, what discoveries were to be made, what could be found in this issue, what would we miss until it grew a little more, until we looked a little closer, until we lived a little longer.

At times, I lay in bed and hope I've no doubt been alive for something. I've looked thoroughly in the face of each day that has come into my room, and, on rare occassions, the day is in the room just long enough for me to capture it.

December 2016
Zach T Power

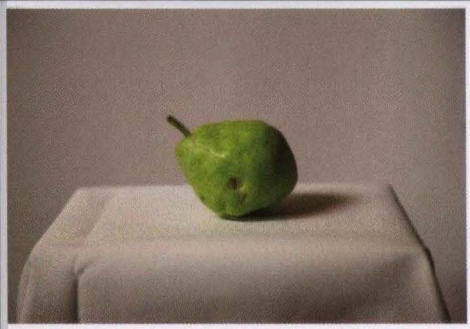
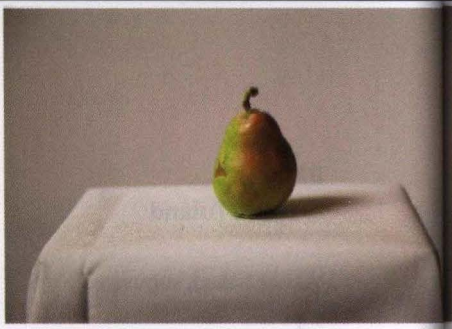
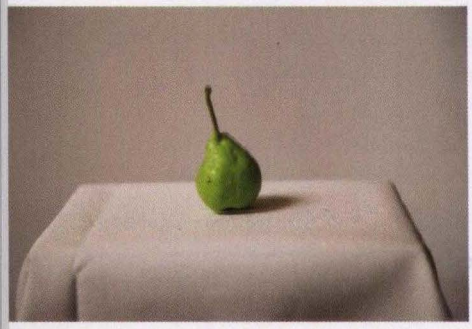
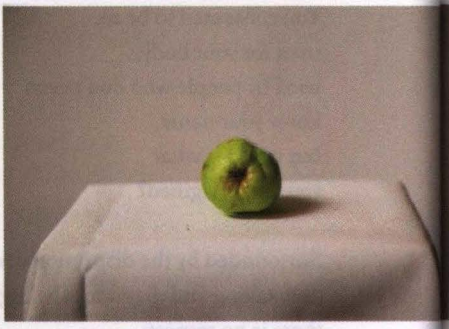
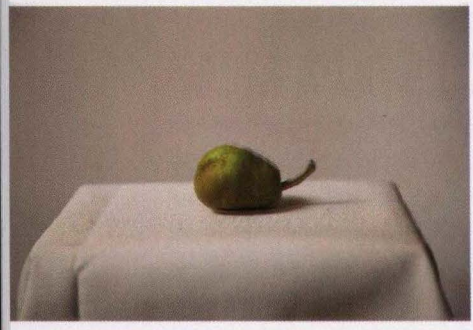
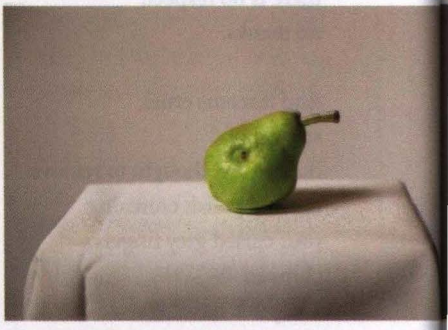
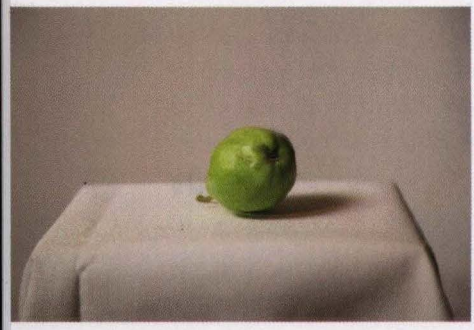
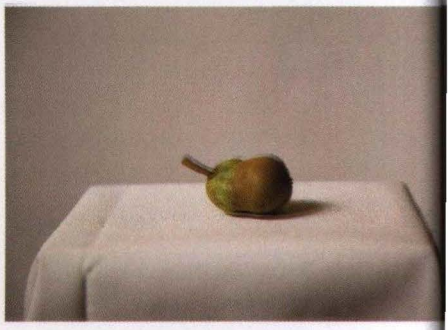
OPEN LAB

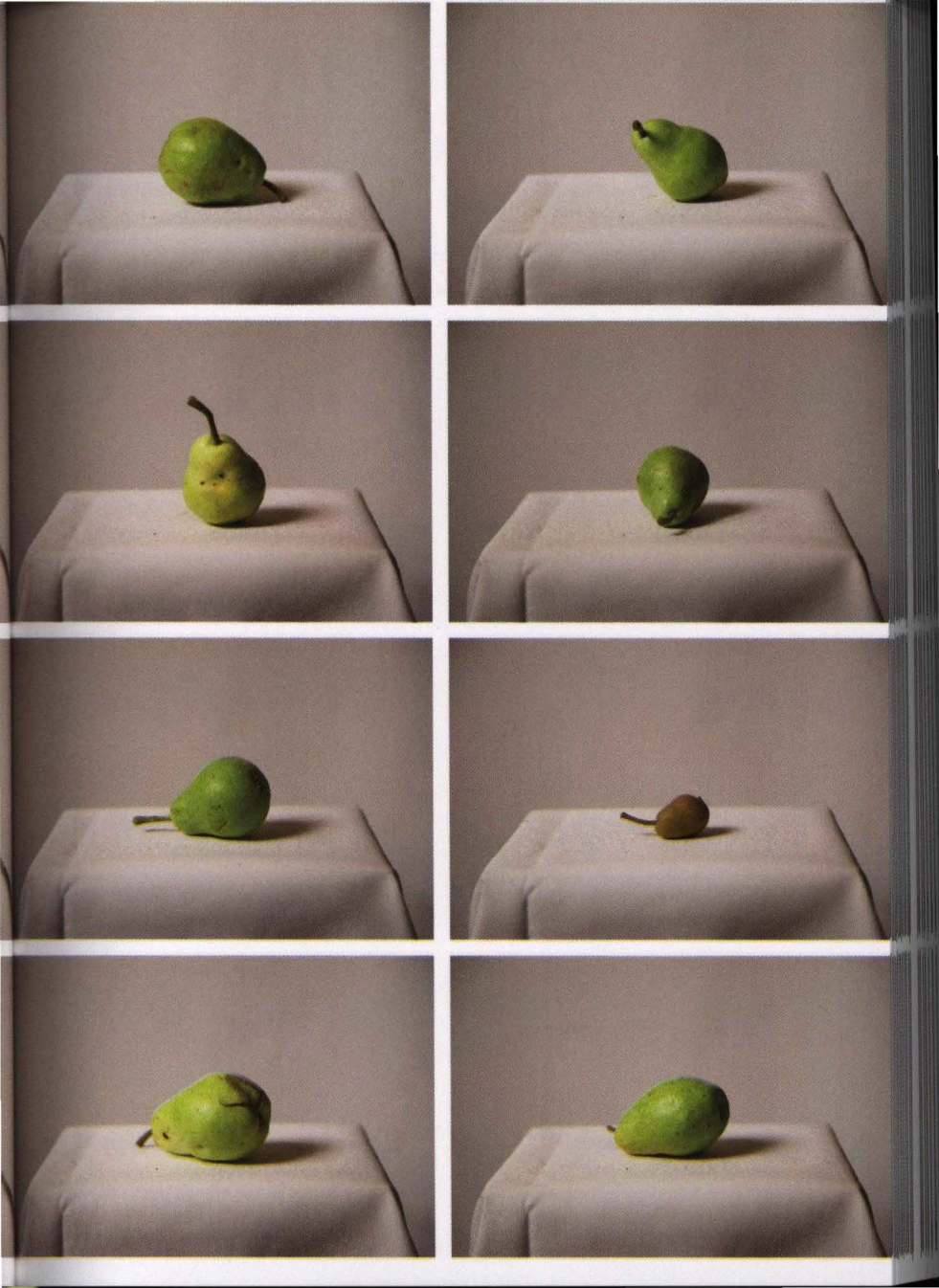
by **Laura Toland**

You lie naked, supine,
exposed.
You consented to be so,
used for your body,
used by people who don't even
know your name,
but was this what
you had imagined?

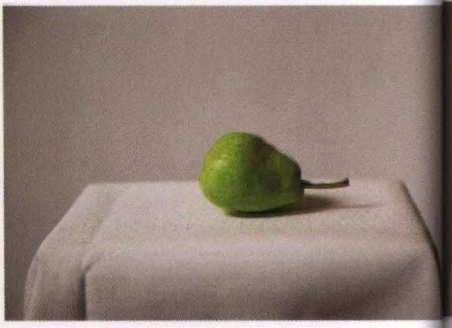
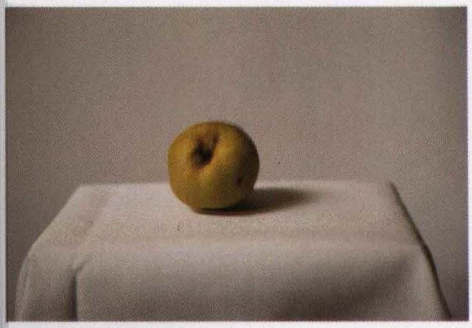
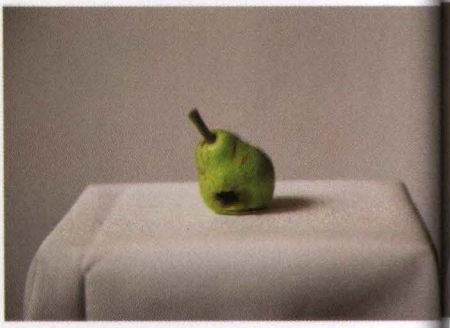
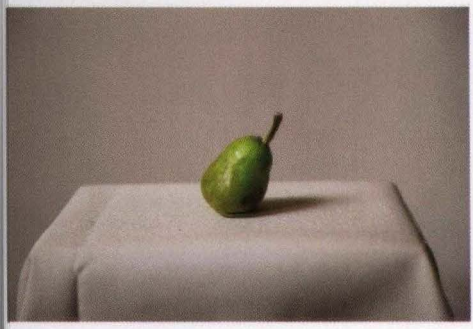
Surrounded by the dispassionateness of
note taking and diagram labeling,
there is no respect;
no thanks.

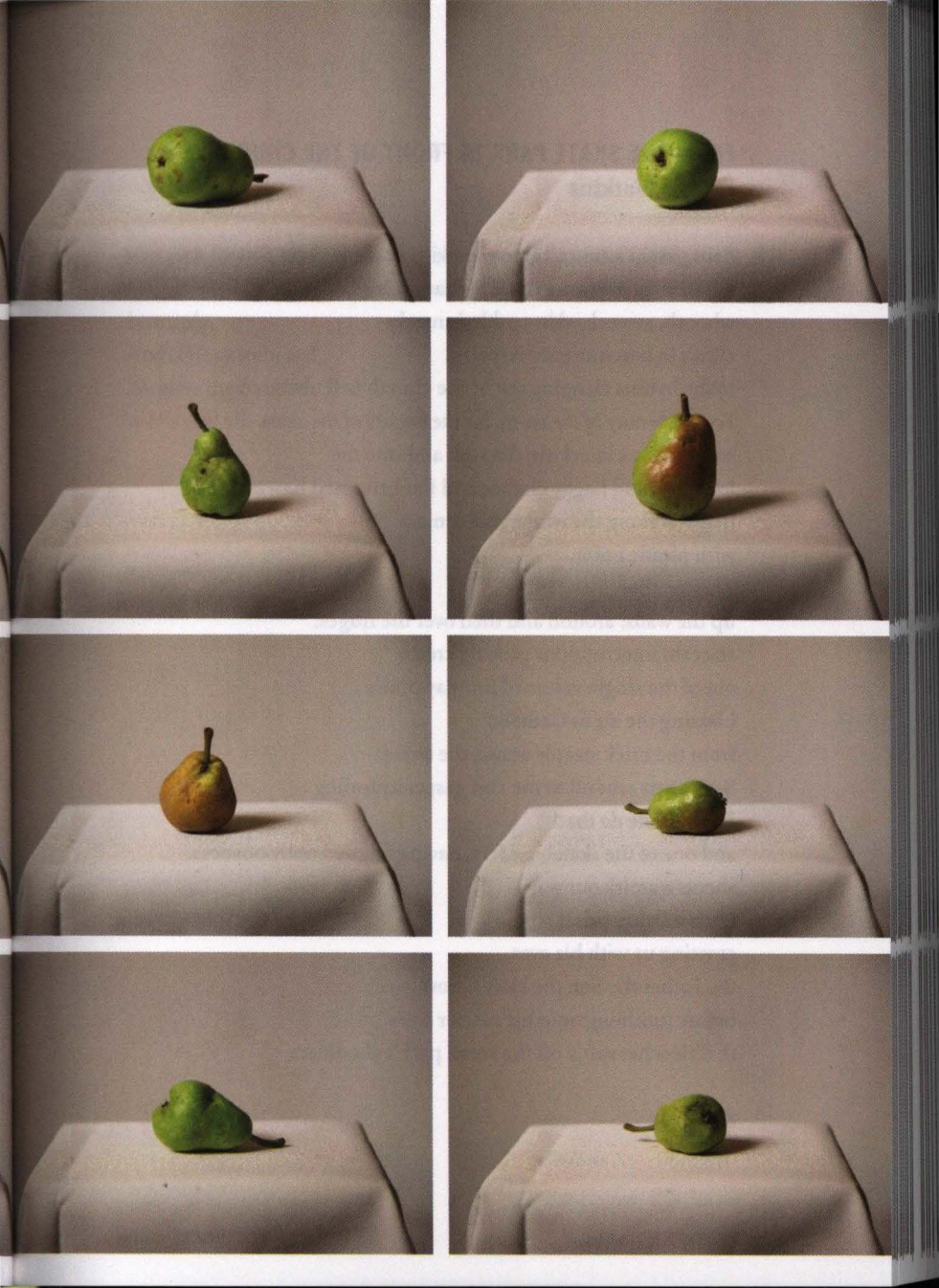
And it seems cruel,
somehow,
that no one thought to remove
the nail polish crowning
your curled grey fingers,
chipped
and pink.





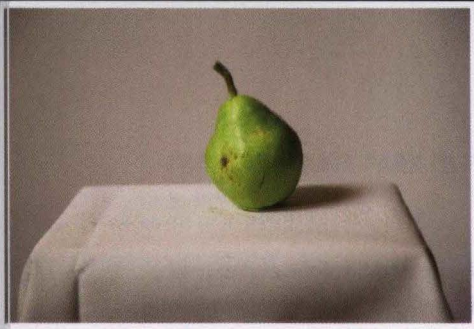



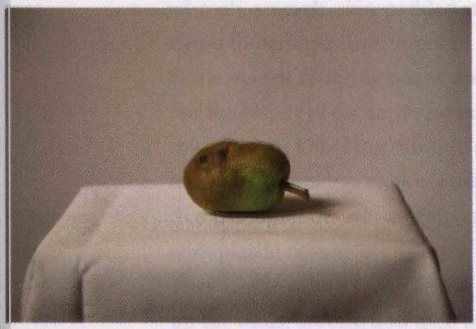
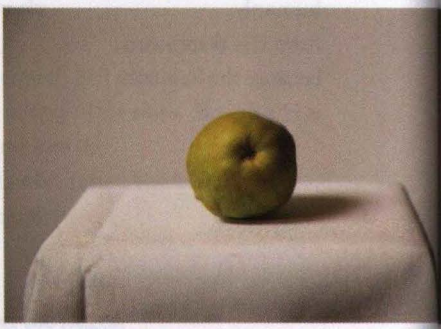
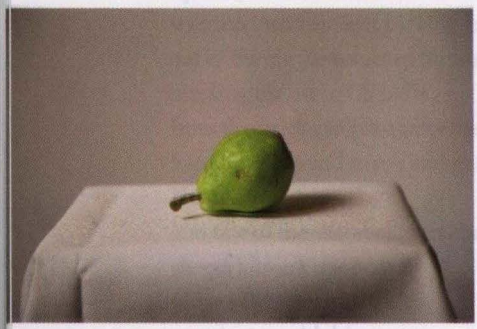
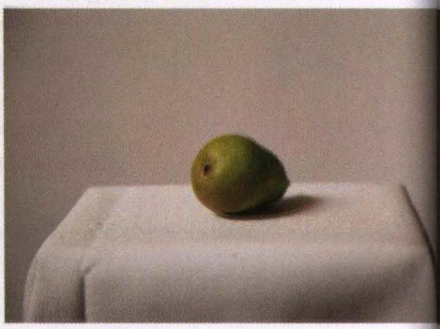
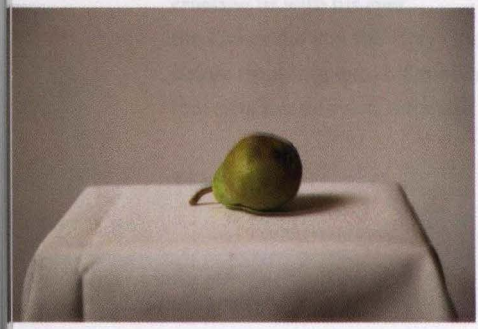
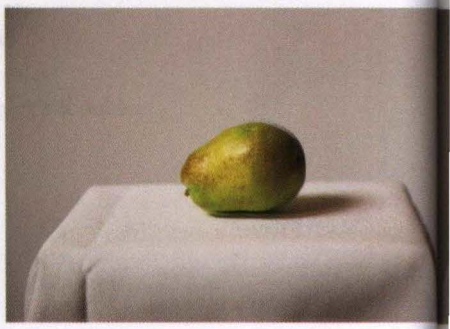
FROM THE SKATE PARK IN FRONT OF THE CHURCH

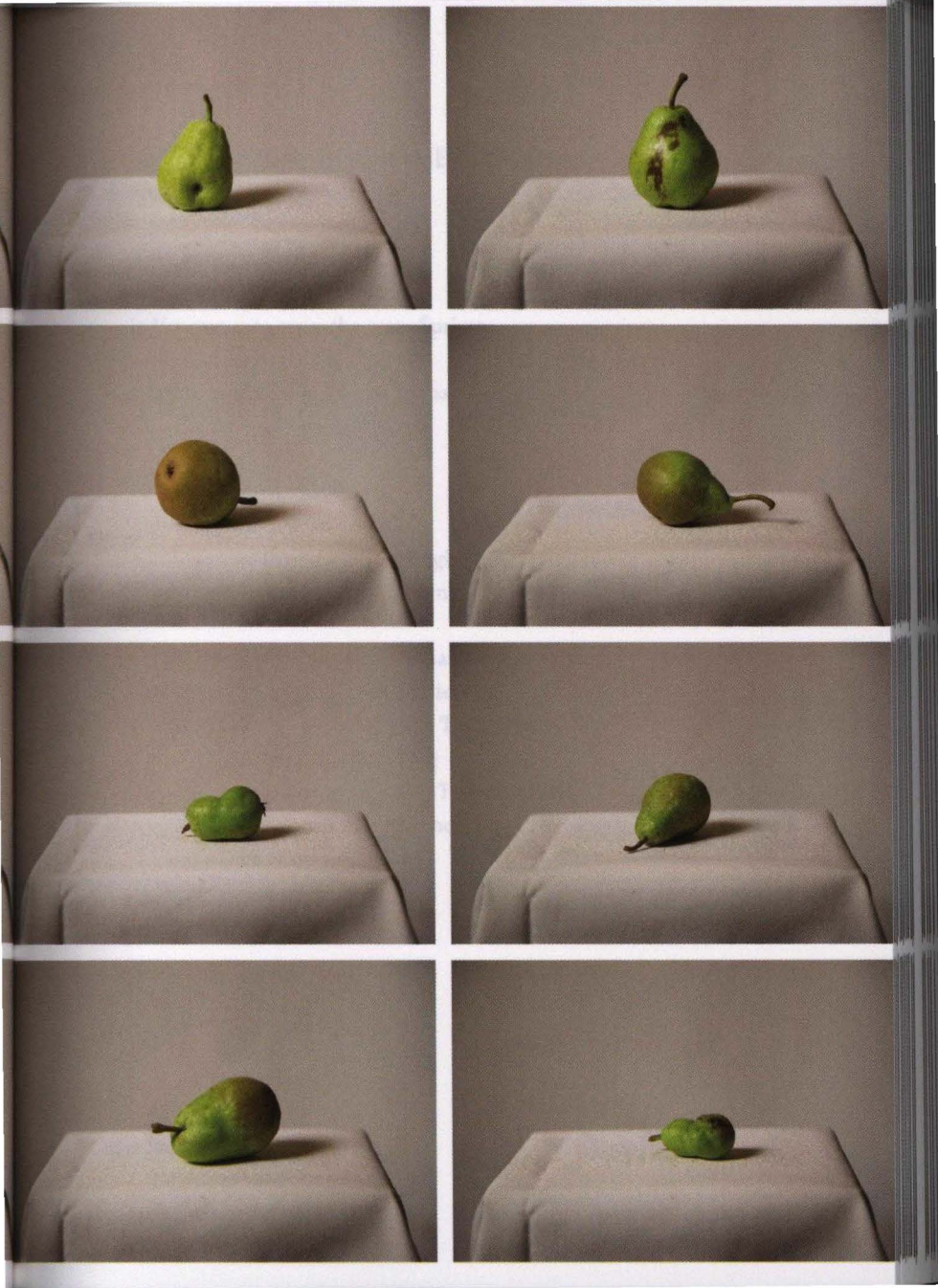
by **Bryn Watkins**

Sam sits on a concrete pew, picking at the pigeon poop,
sometimes watching the skateboarders whose
whoosh, screech, skin-padded smacks
climb in baroque counterpoint
to the hymns clanging out of the church bell tower.
For the beauty of the earth, for the beauty of the skies,
sound waves knocking through and into the
long hair and baggy clothes and flat-brimmed baseball hats
that roll along the white-gray cement
with plastic noise.
They're all—
up the walls, around and then over the ridges,
staccato interruptions picking crests
out of the single-volumed Sunday praise
blessing the air in Catholic
from the brick steeple across the street.
Sam turns around to me and gasps, squealing
How did he *do* that!
and one of the skateboarders, having feigned obliviousness,
shoots a smirk our way.
He is a flying priest
crossing us with his eyes,
the Father the Son the Holy Ghost
before tumbling onto his rubber soles
that ricochet softly off the small park's shoulders

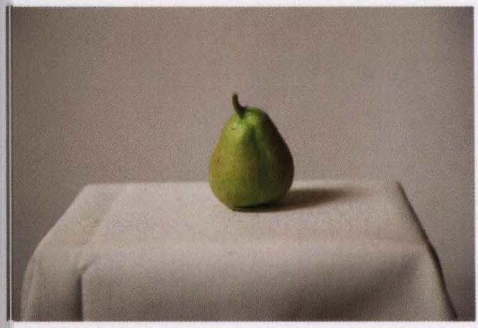
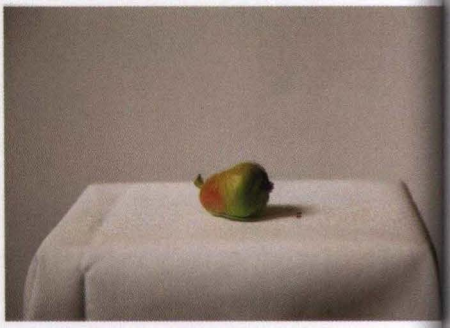
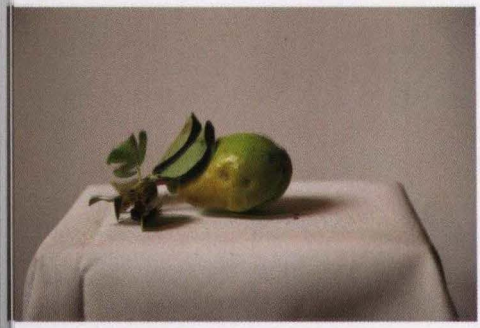
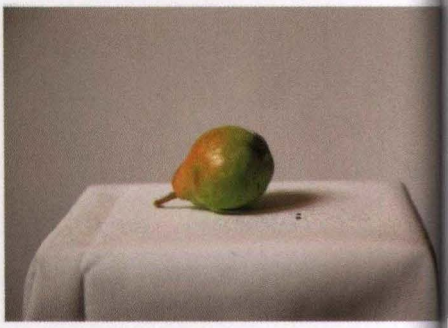
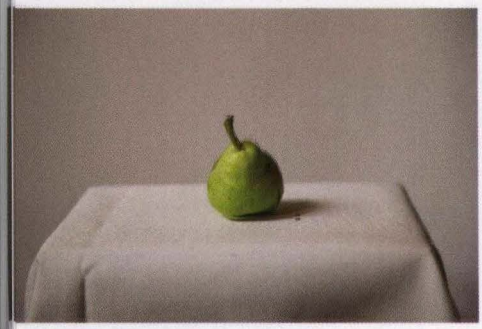
like sock feet on kitchen tile in the quiet middle of the night,
God careening onto the earth musically,
humanly,
from His skateboard,
because the Sabbath
is His day off.








WHILE CHEWING, THEY SEEMED GRATEFUL

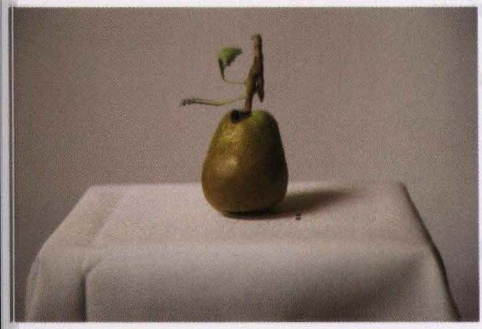
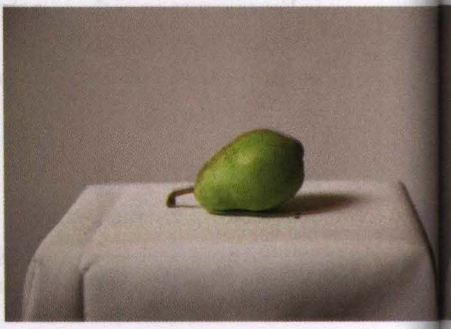
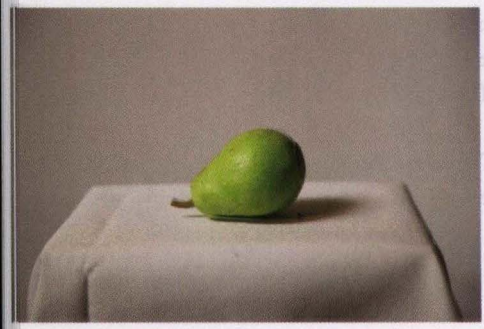
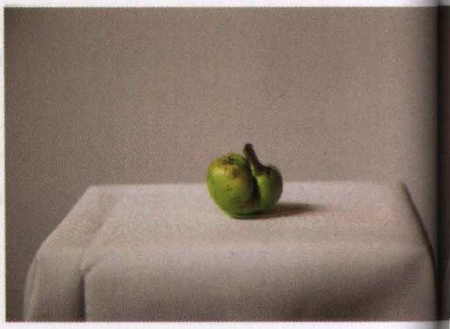
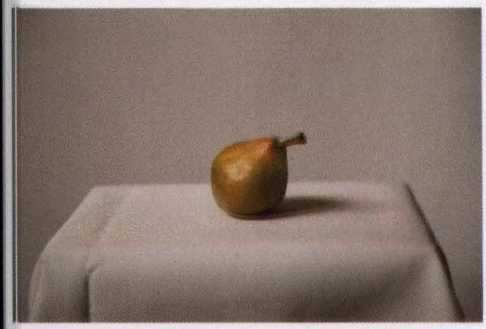
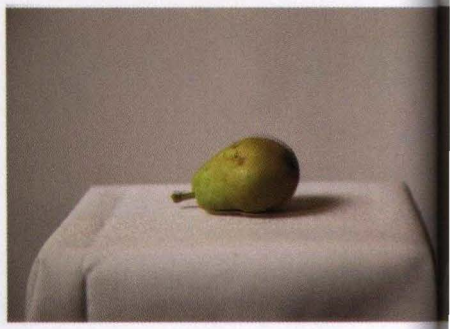
by **Joanna Ellsworth**

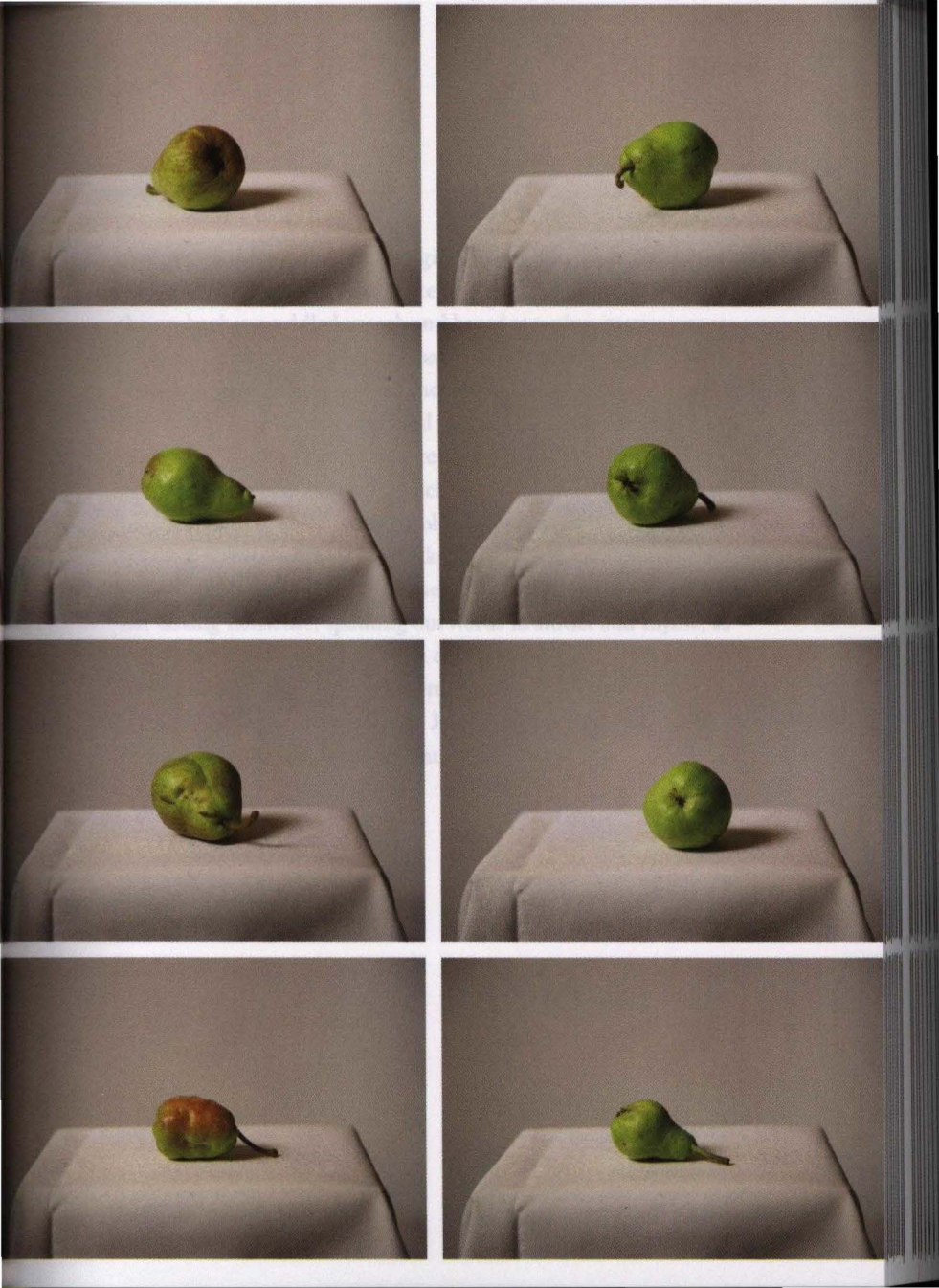
A caterpillar took out a second
mortgage on his bungalow
in Vancouver to cover the cost of private
preschool for the larvae. The ink
on the paper assaulted his antennae
with the scent of sacrifice.

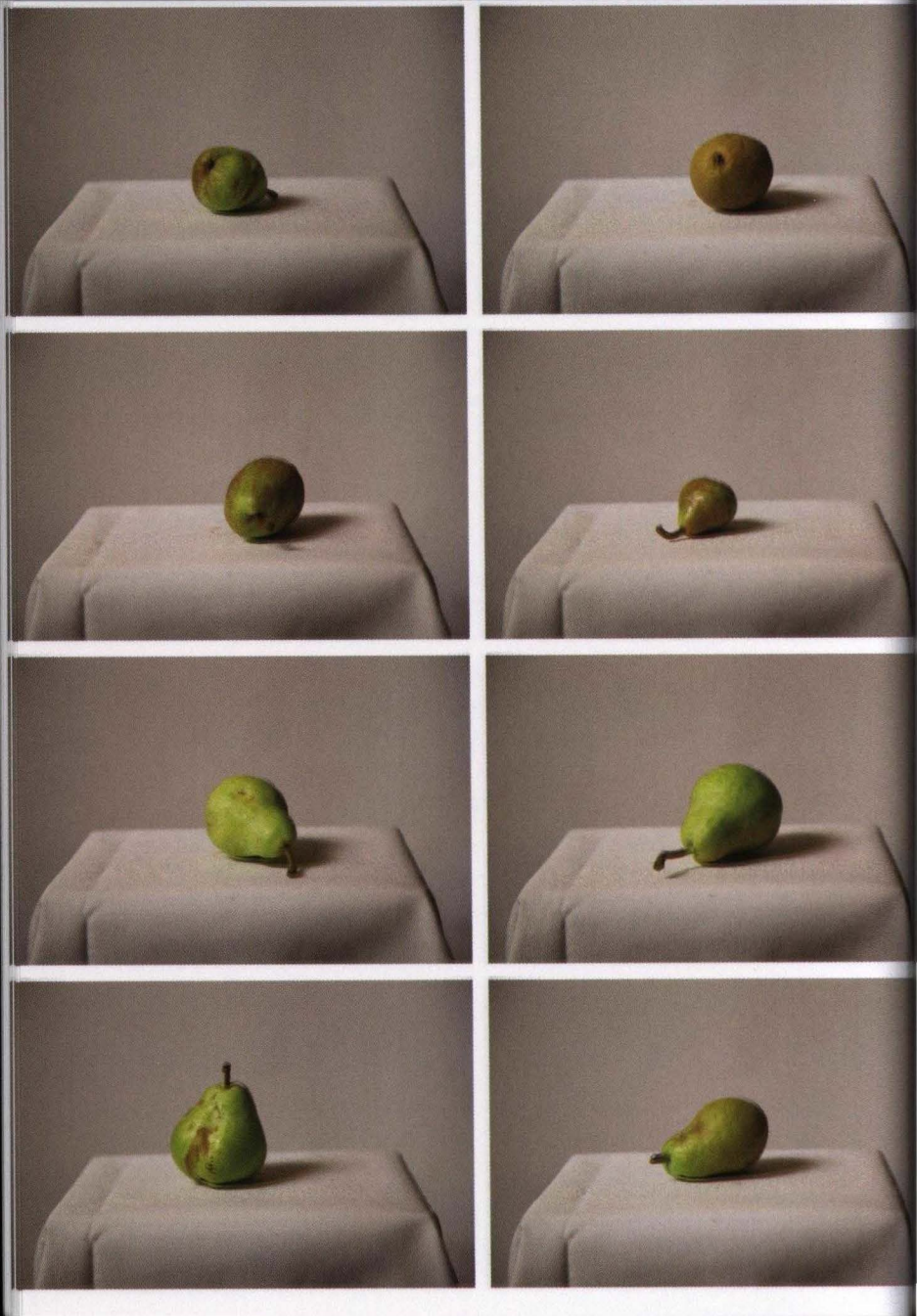
He sets his alarm for odd
increments of time and wants
nothing more than to sleep for eight
consecutive hours and thirty-seven minutes.

Second mortgages are cheaper than first
mortgages. Mostly because you die
before you have to pay it all back. The larvae
slithered through the yellow shag
carpet to ask for a drink of water. The caterpillar
folded the bank forms into a funnel and fed
the signatures to his young.



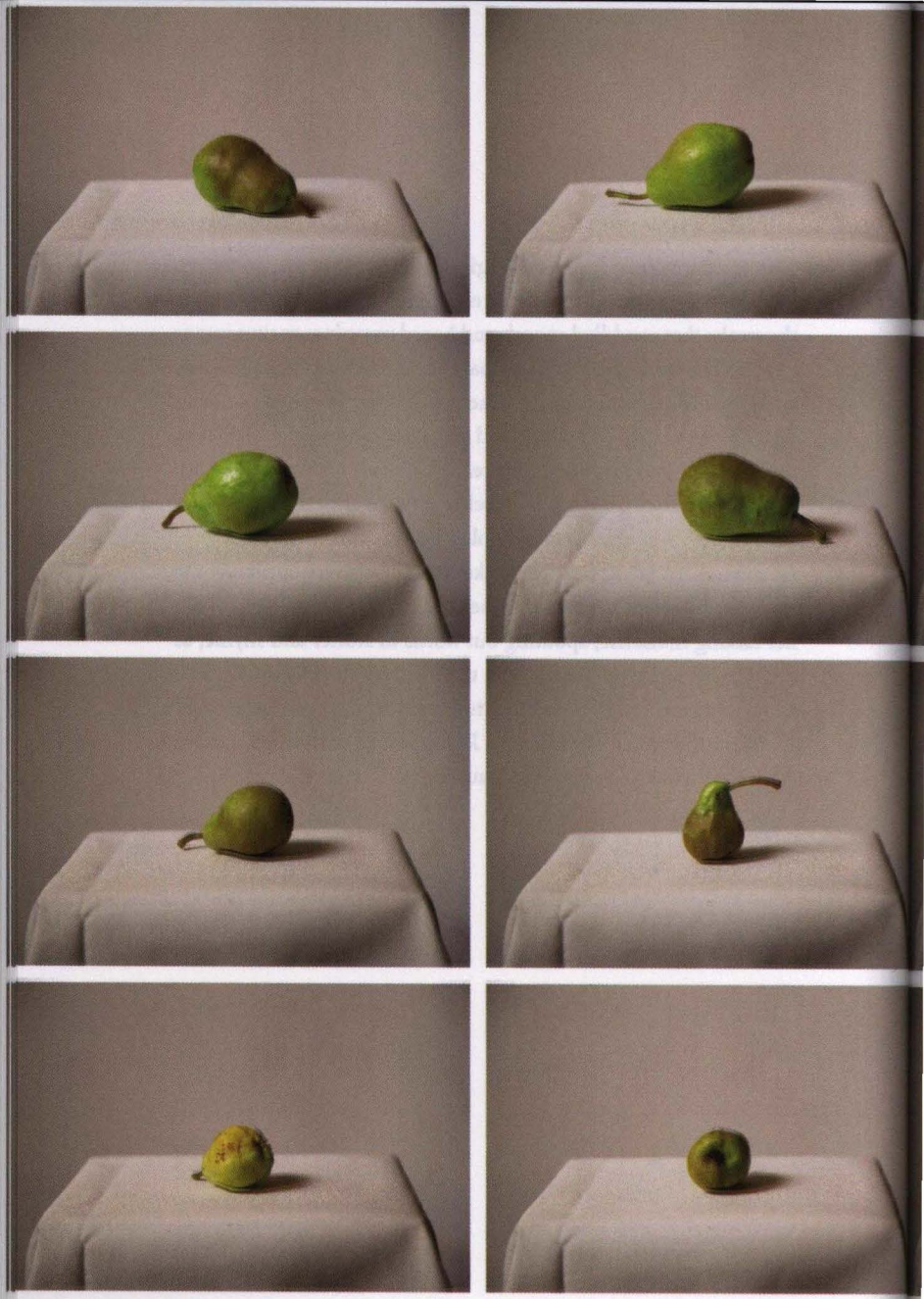


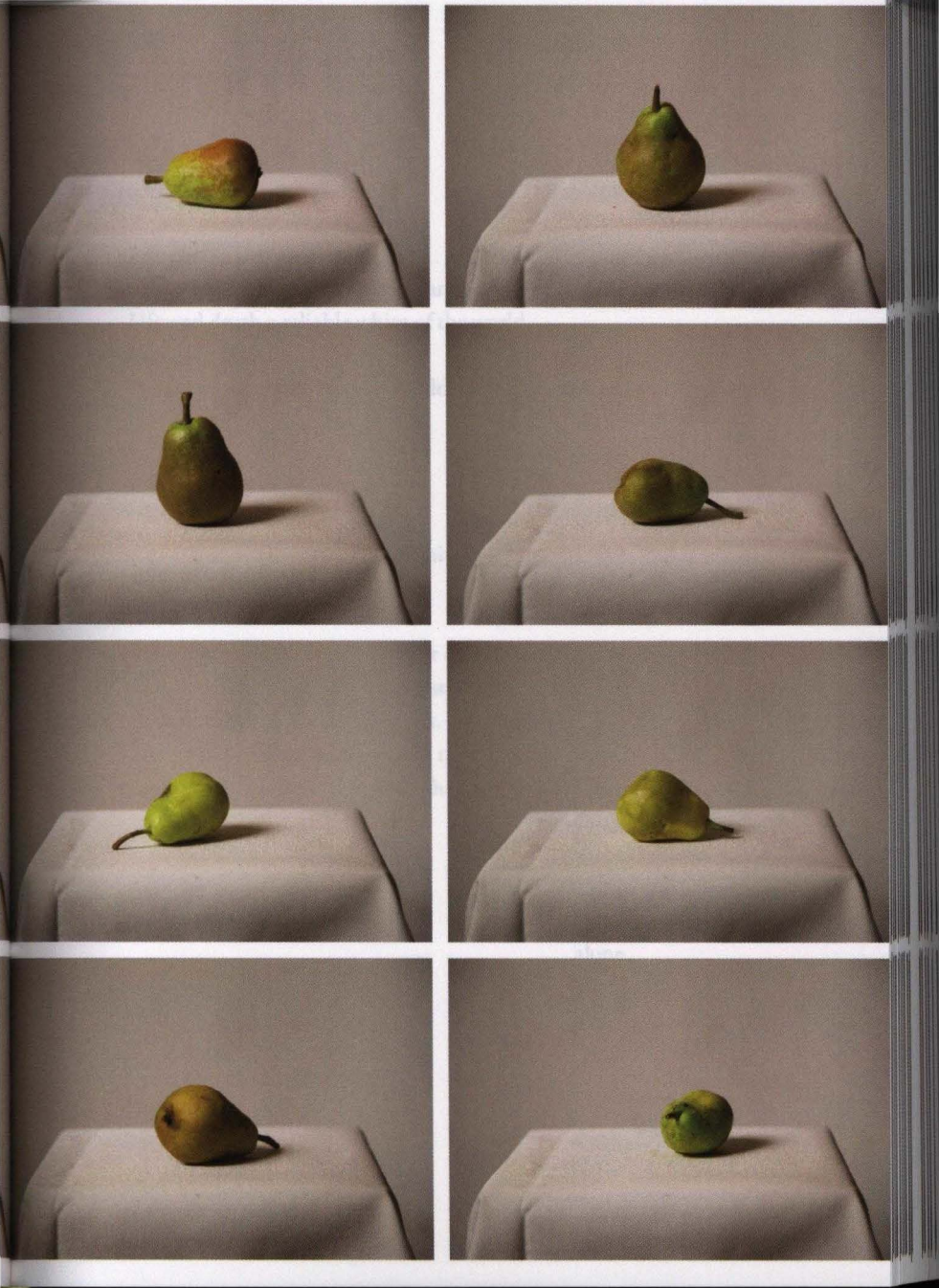


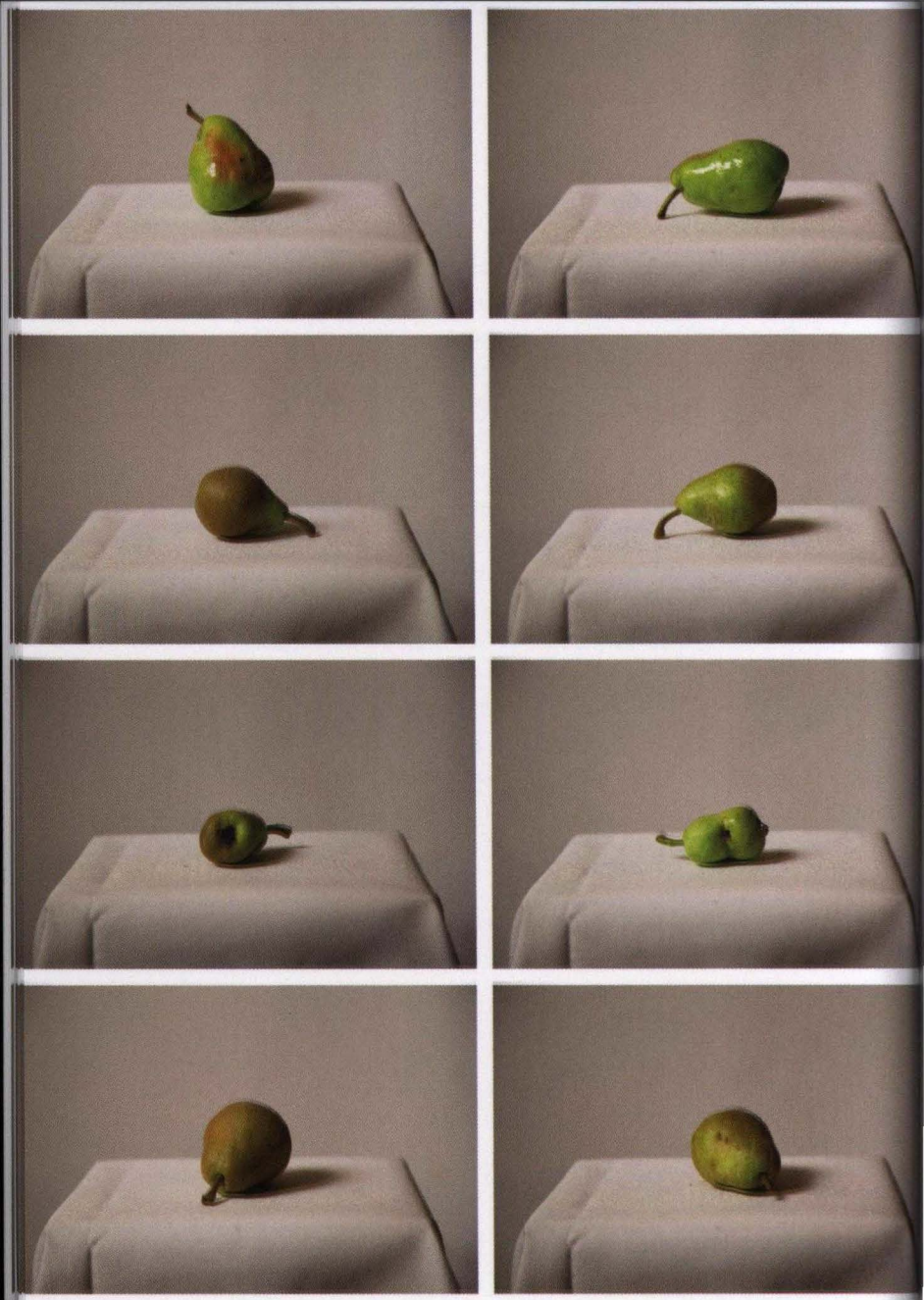
MAUVE

by **ShelliRae Spotts**

The dress was purple. An aubergine, eggplant purple, but when she called it mauve no one corrected her. The words jumbled since the stroke that muddled speech and hazed meaning, mauve was as close as she could get. This was part of the recovery—the naming and labeling and classifying, reteaching old words in new patterns, tightening the grip on sounds and shapes and meanings. And how different is mauve from purple, really? A shade or two; a faint tint of red, a splash of pink, a hint of ochre staining the edges and plum becomes periwinkle, becomes violet, becomes mauve. Not so very far then. A simple line crossed, like the faint shivery outline of the shadow that crept over her mother brain while she slept and left her talking nonsense, spouting out words in stutter and rhyme, as if you could make meaning from the feel and shape of them, as if you could read recovery in the return and sense in the symbol, as if you could shiver away from the Jabberwock with a word, a dawn dusk dusty pink of a word like mauve.







INFINITY IS A FIELD

by **Aly Northrup**

Infinity is a field of cerulean flax
Blooming, broken golden stalks and seeds,
Life and death a reliable whim of the world,
Earth recycled,
Horizon to horizon, blue then gold, then blue again,
No beginning

No end

Waves of useful,

worthless,

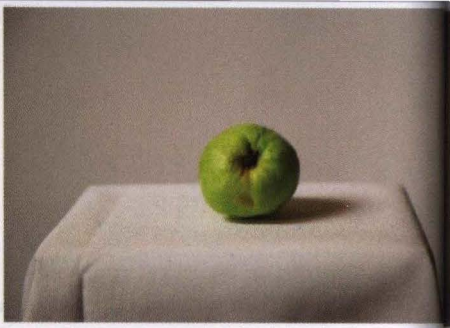
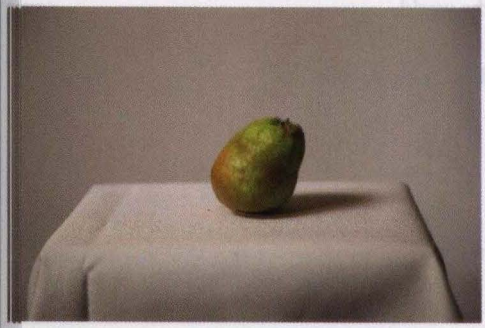
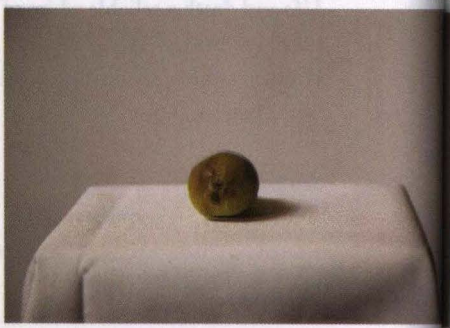
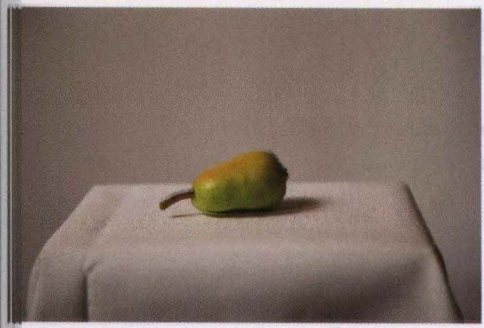
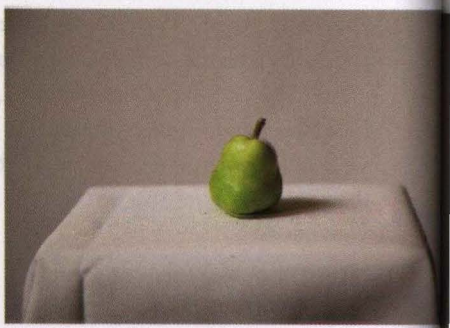
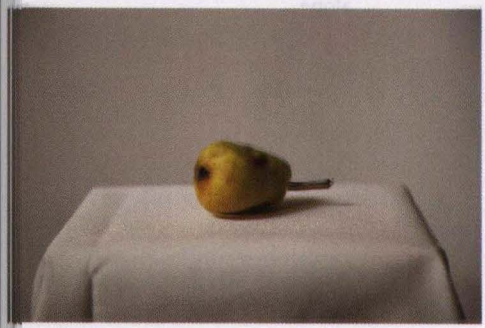
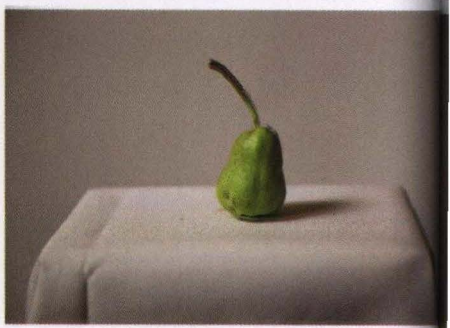
infinite

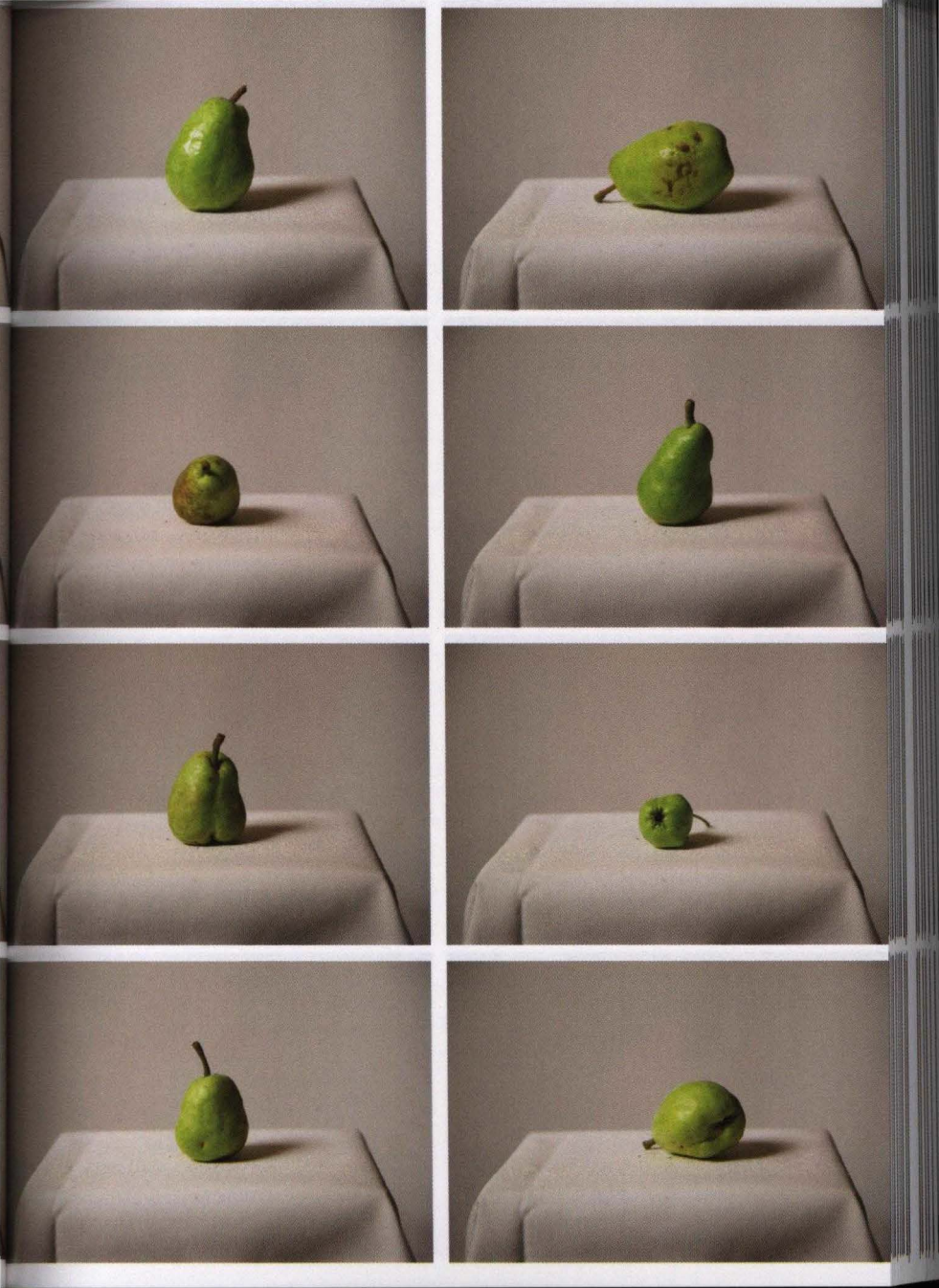
gold.

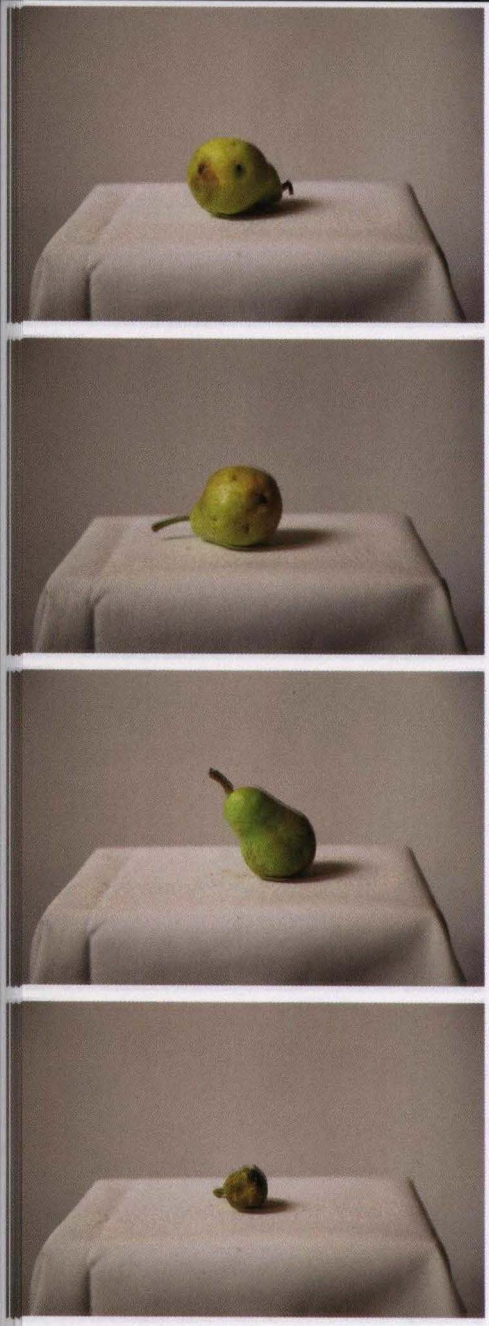
And I run my fingers through her deep-rooted hair,
I play with the stuff of the universe—
Stringy, tangled, quivering fibers,
Matter and shadow enmeshed in matter and shadow,
Amiably drowning in the ocean that never ends. And

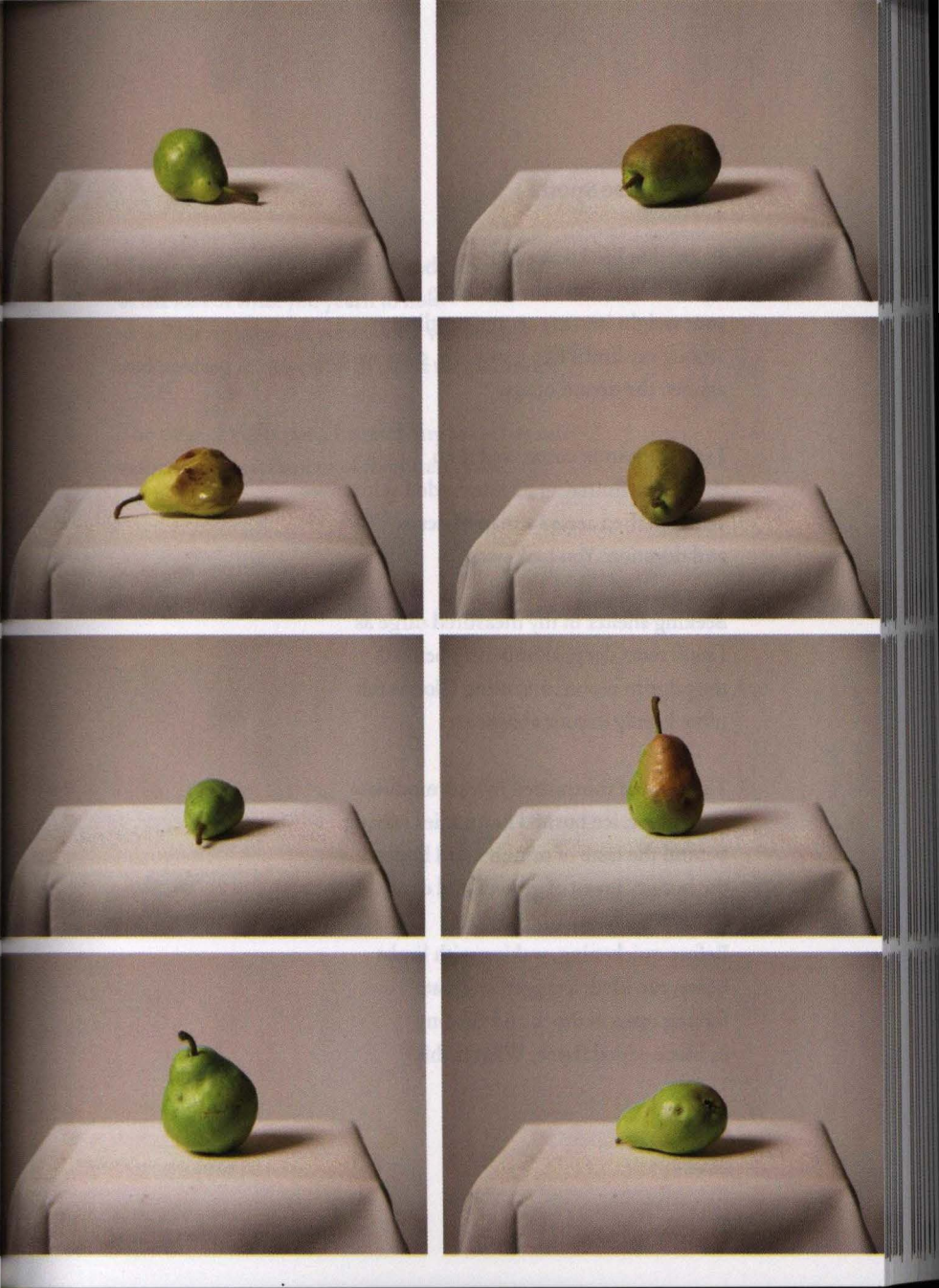
I am

alone.







LITURGY

by **ShelliRae Spotts**

In another life I was a tree, and
you shook my branches, pulling
your weight into my center, nestling
among my limbs like a swallow, dark-winged
against the dream of sky.

I saw the winter come, and then
the leaves, fluttering like discarded skins,
veins stitched across a map of desire
and devotion. You took wing,

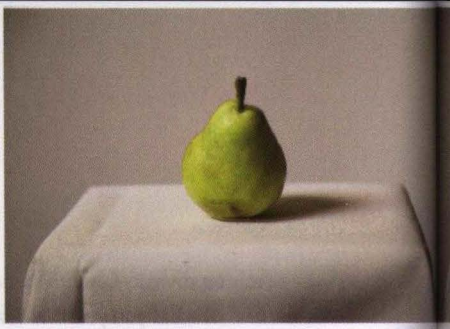
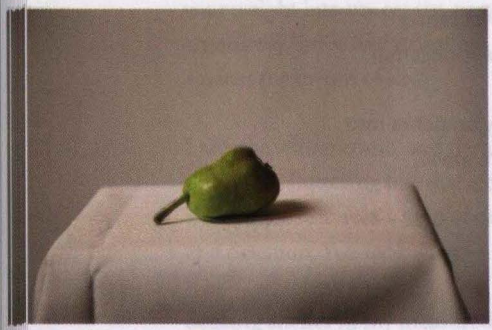
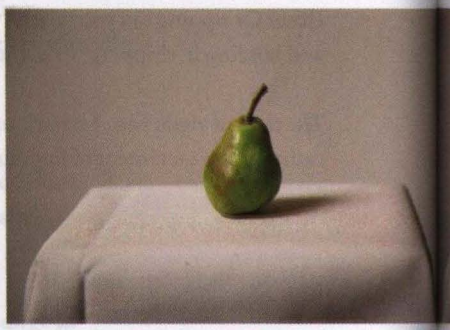
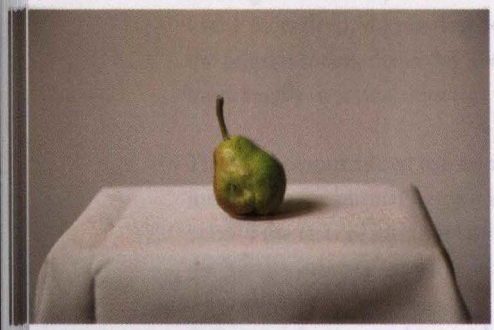
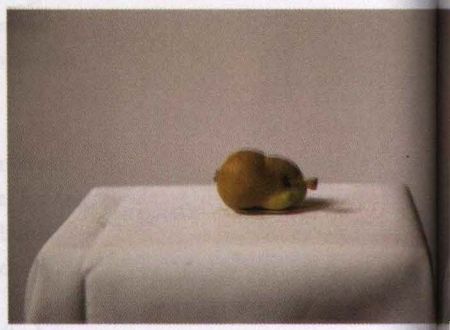
Seeking shelter in my measured dirge as
I sank roots deep, slumbering beneath
the pilgrim moon, dreaming Glorias felt
more keenly in your absence.

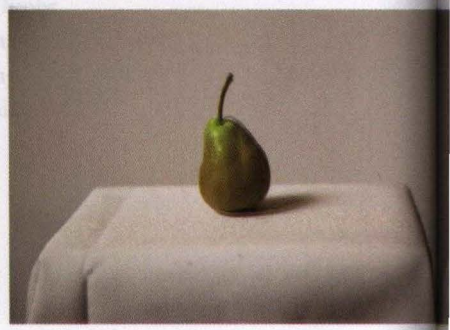
The hush of murmured hymns modulate
into minor, ice burned harmonies leaving
behind the taste of minutes and hours,
the hungry green of growth and decay,

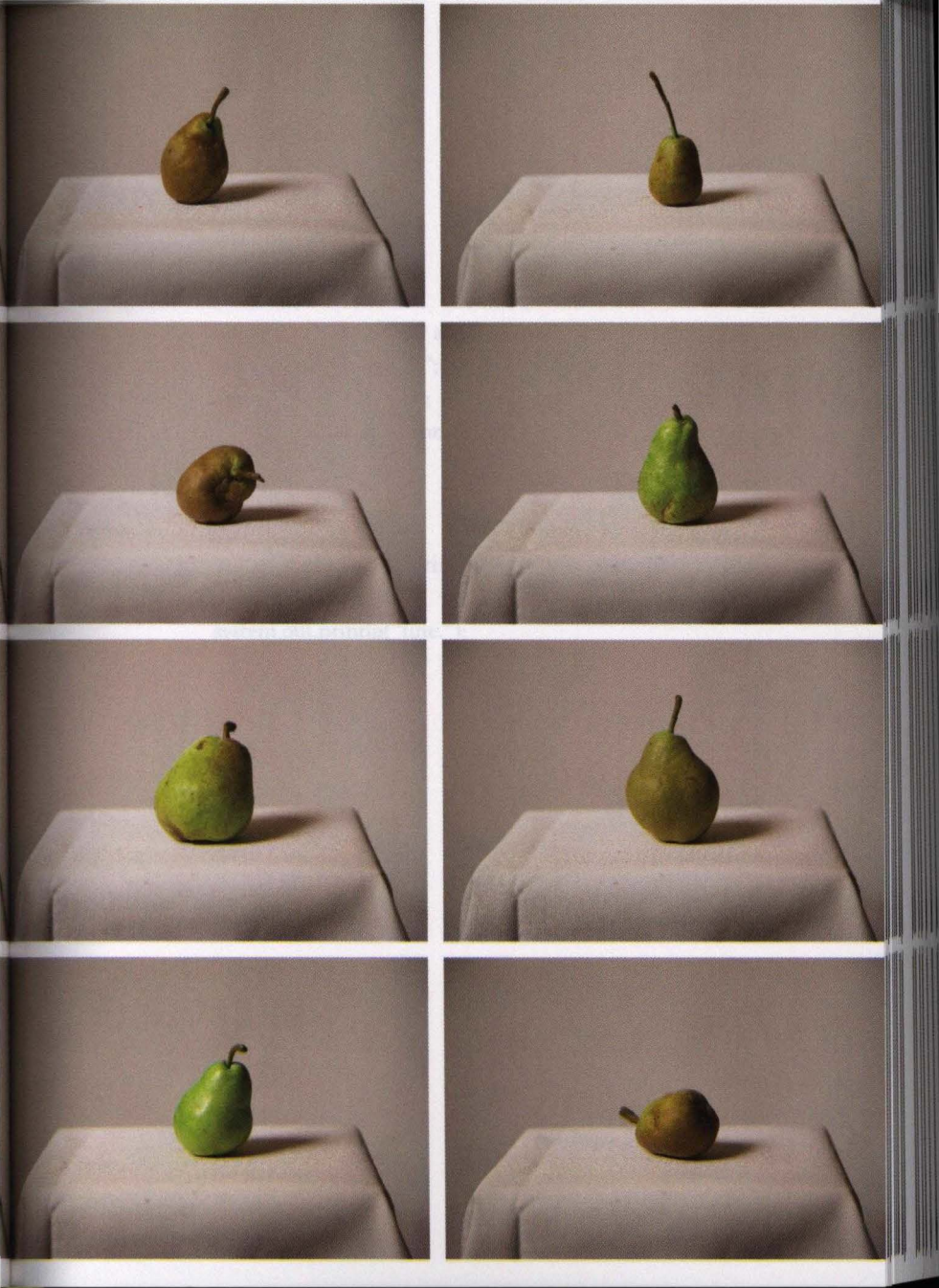
Before quickening, waking with limbs
heavy, sap bled; a ragged stigmata
forcing open bedrock and floating
in black-edged flame. What is this

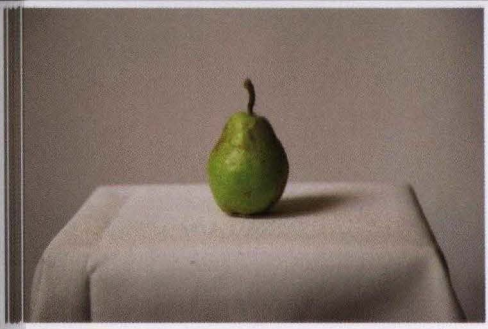
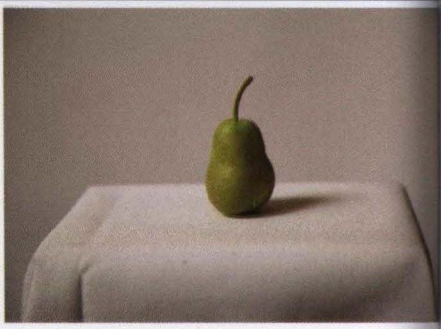
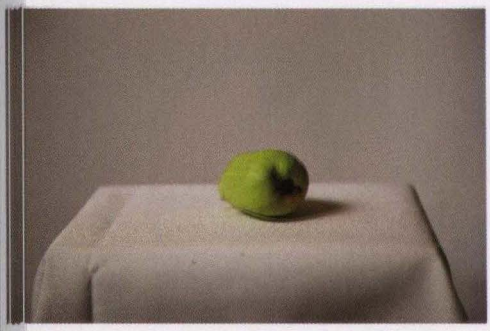
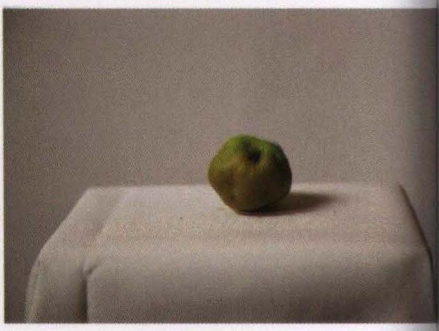
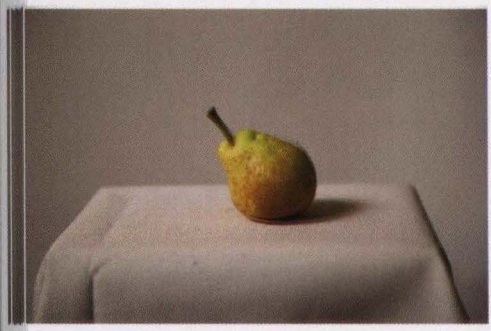
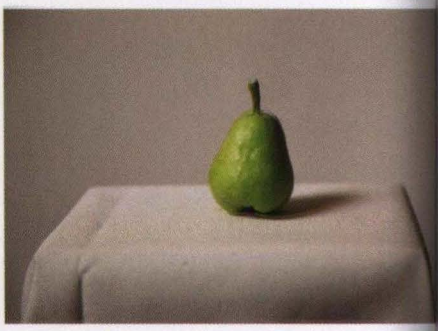
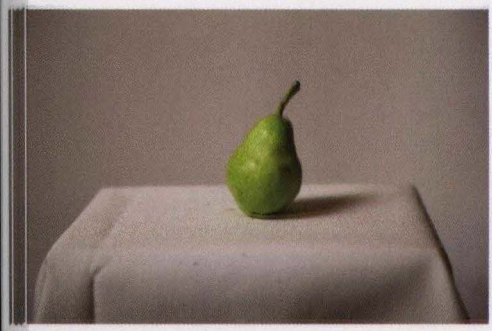
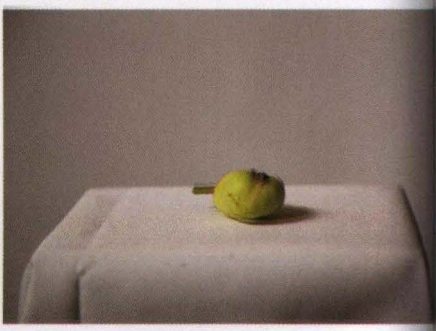
sky-reaching divinity? Is it to stand, stricken
at the loss of what you yearn to hold
close? Or ripping out your warm, wet center
and holding it, dripping, in silent supplication?

The time of vigils past, I stretch my branches into
cathedrals, a sacrament of forgotten grace.



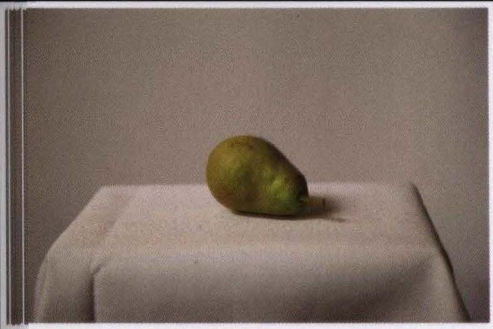
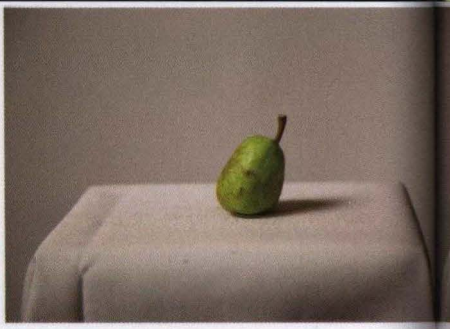


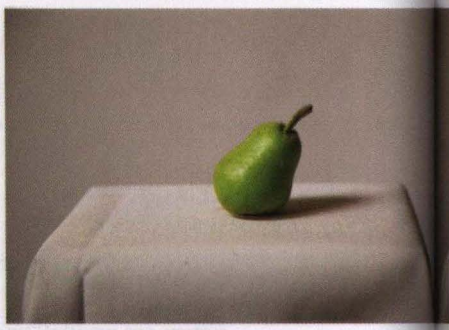
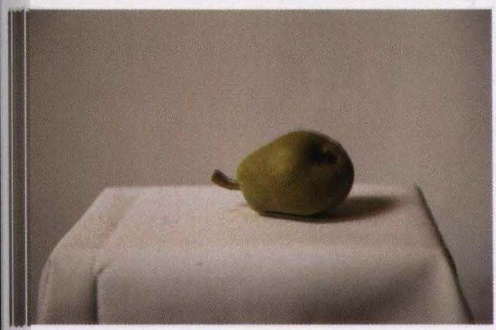
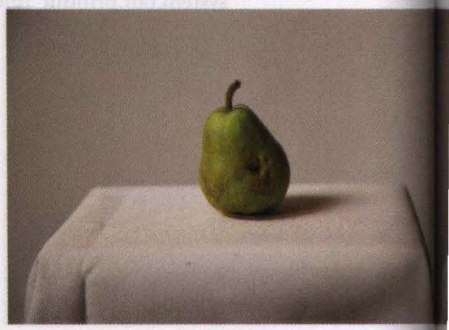
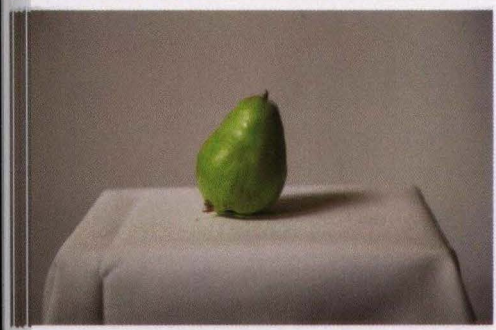
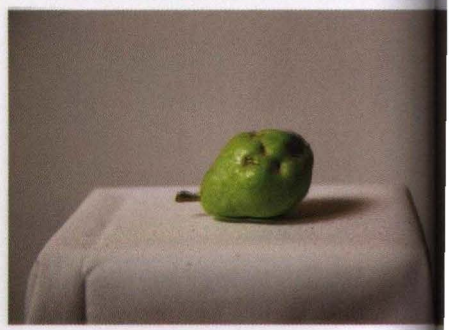









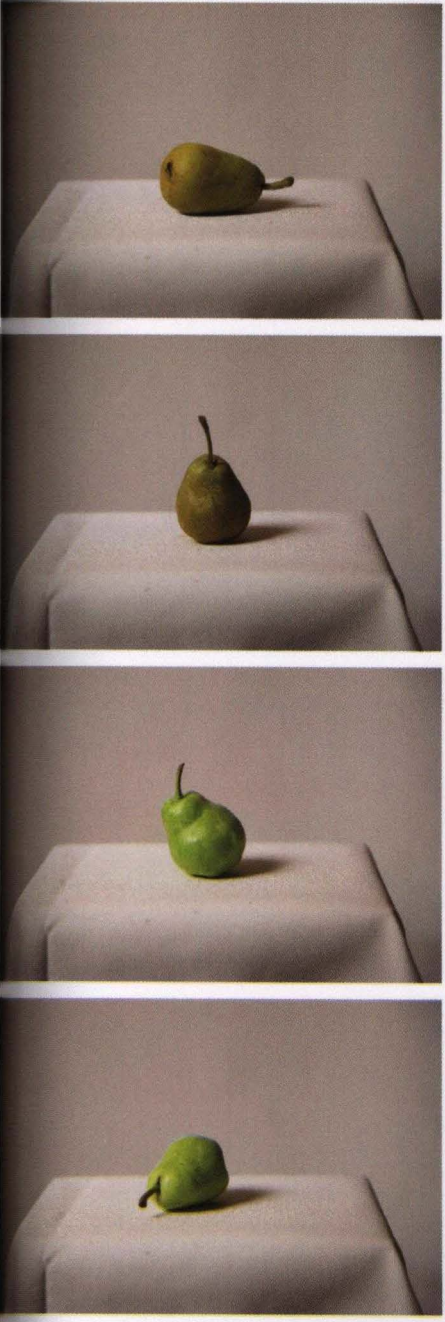
RESPONSE

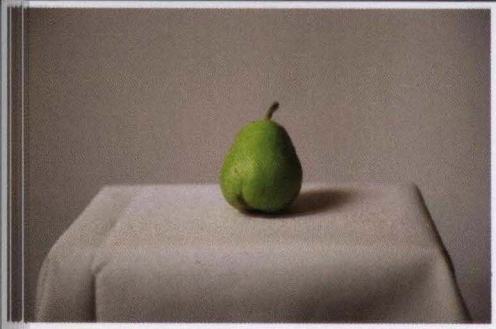
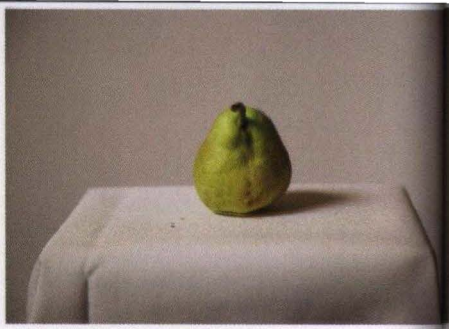
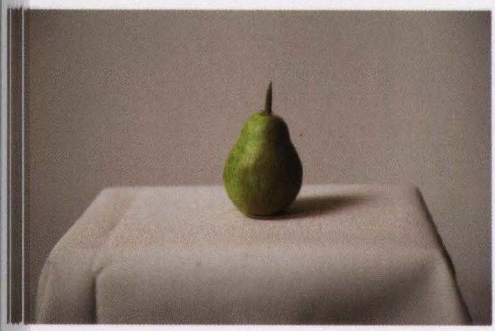
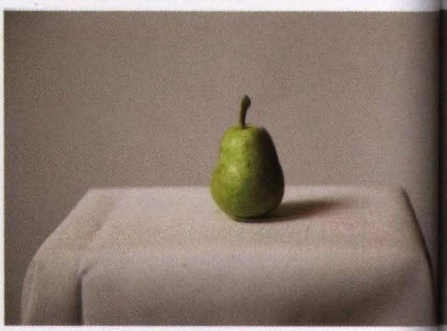
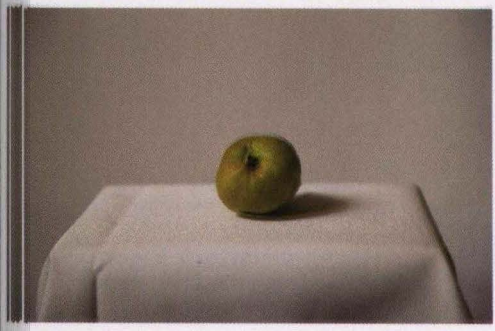
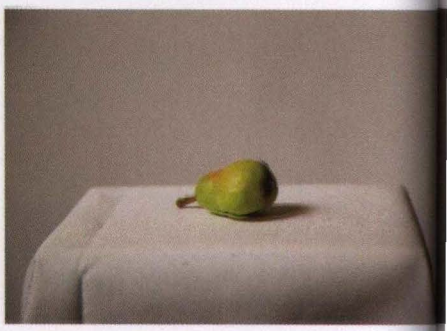
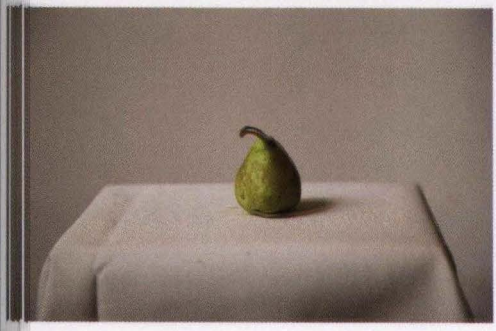
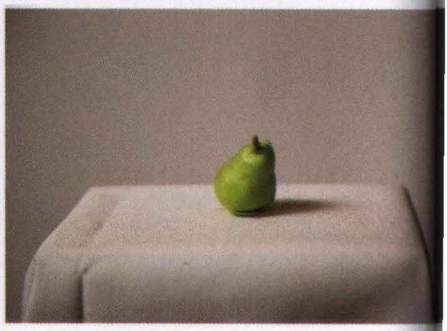
by **Sarah Farrar**

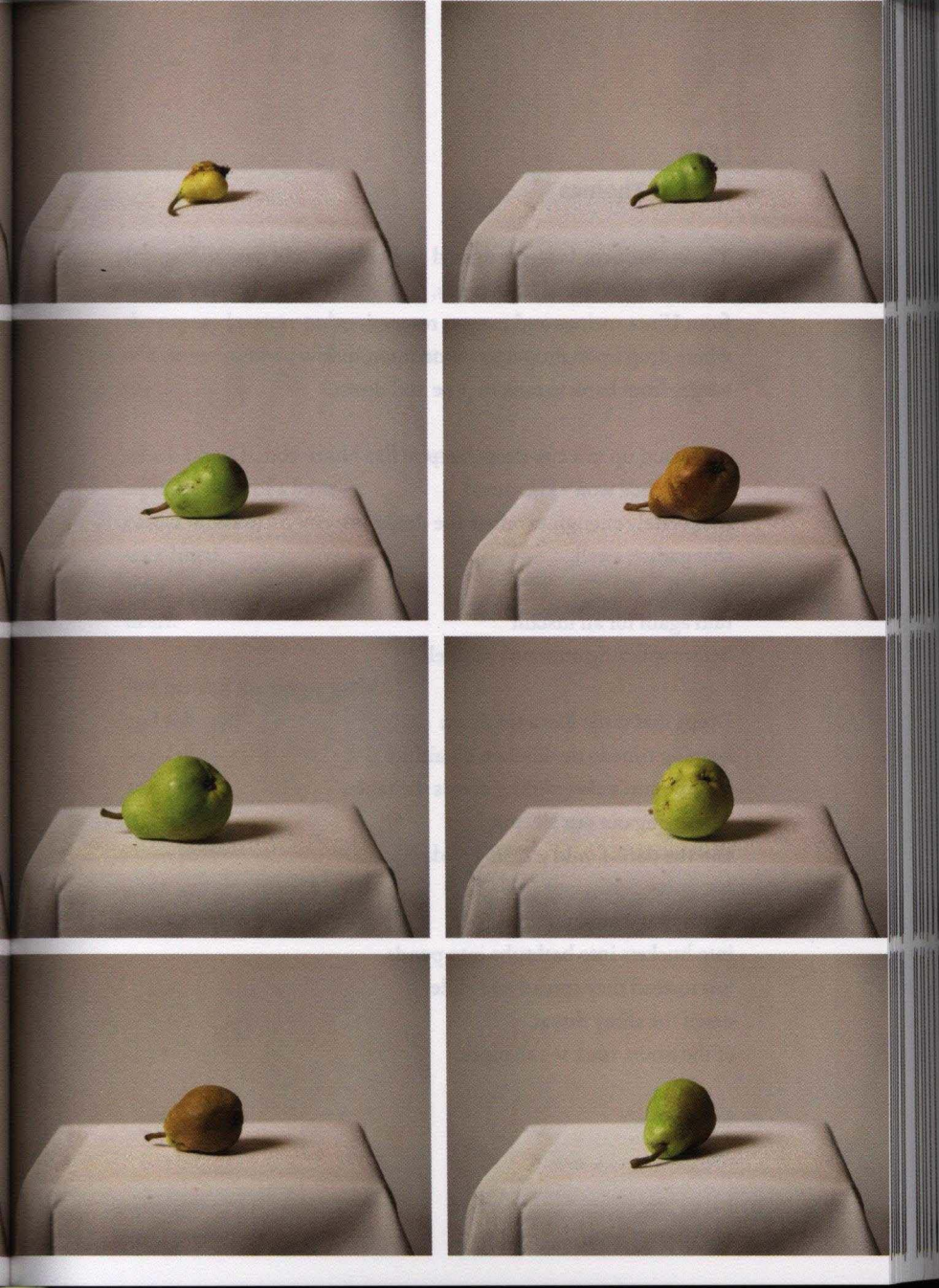
```
Void response ( )
{
        string question = "How are you?";
        string person = "friend";
        string honest = "never";
if ( person == "friend" && question == "How are you?")
{
        if ( honest == always)
        {
                system.out.println("not okay. empty.");
        }
        system.out.println("fine.");
}
```





LEAK

by **Anne Thomas**

The incontinent faucet is dusted and crusted
with minerals licked from pipes,
from Uinta springs and canyon reservoirs,
where drop upon drop upon sand upon rock
surges from bank to tank to pipe and down,

down and up to a city-deep faucet
where metal won't kiss metal
desperately enough to refuse the drops
that gather, swell,
freefall,
rain again for an instant
before splatting on stainless steel.

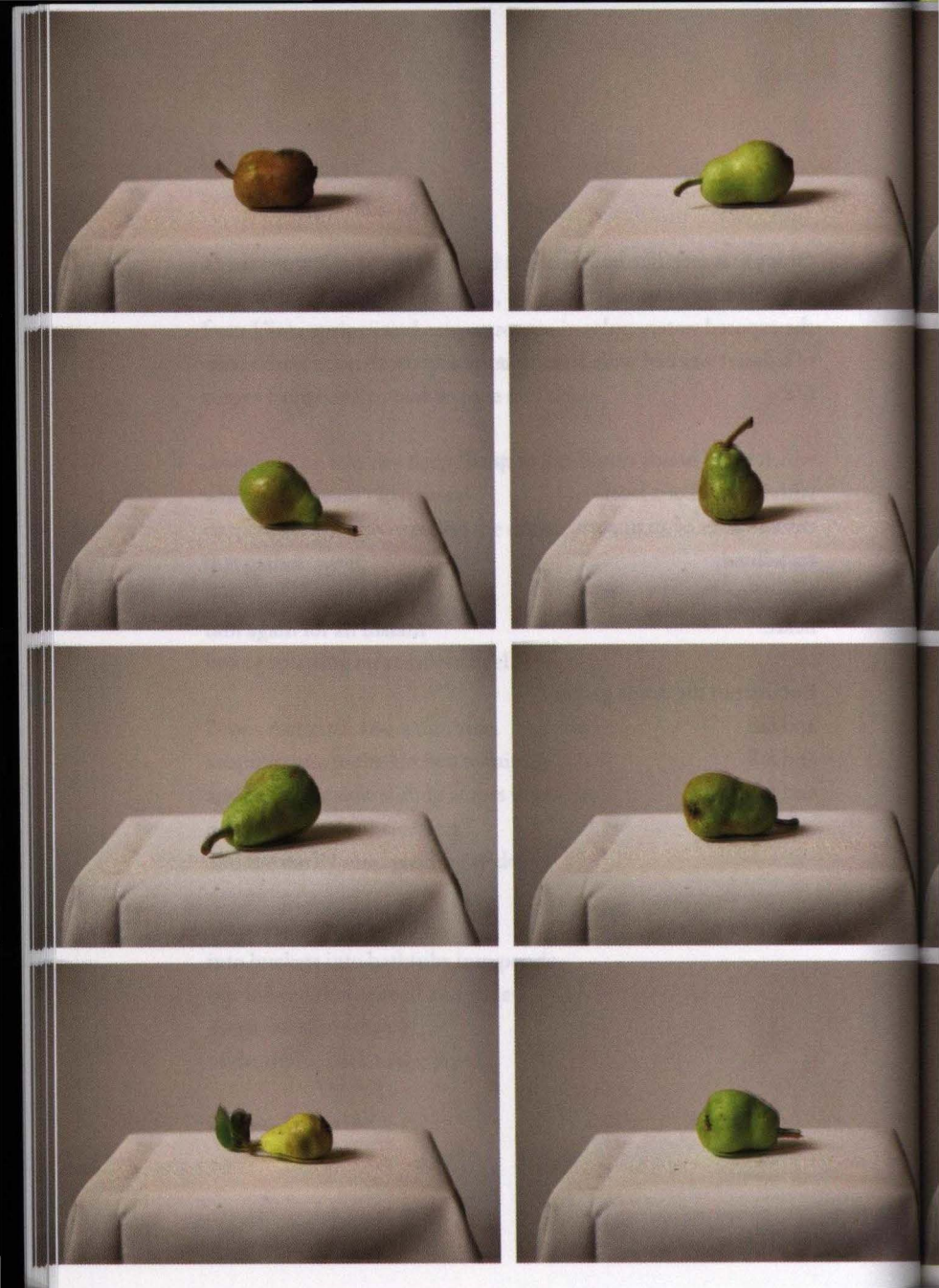
Drops that rattle like a tin drum
keeping time to the kitchen's waiting
and the sun's slow sliding across the table,
measuring out our sleeping
and the dark's mild yielding to day.

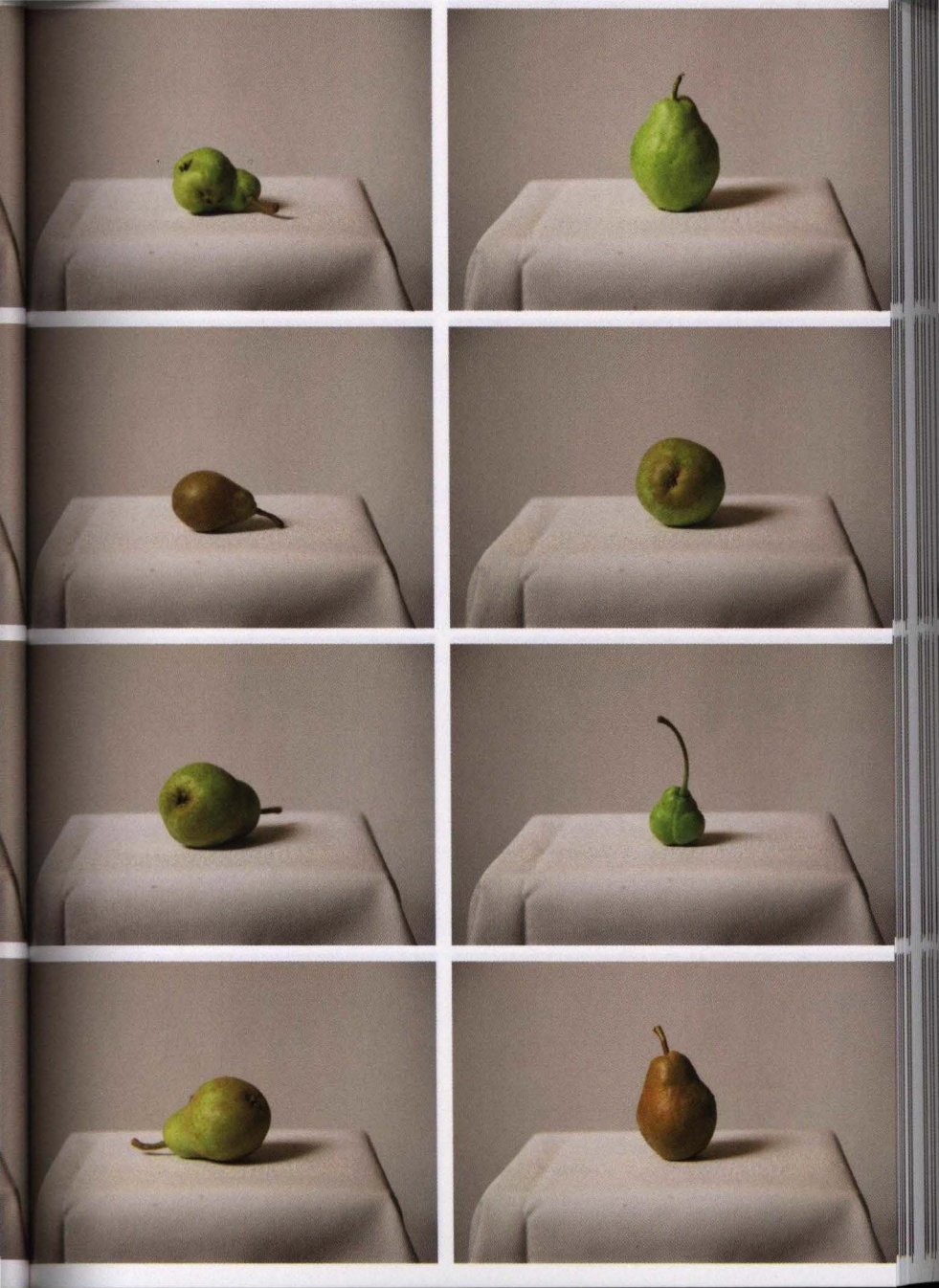
Drips that would puddle
into buckets into bathtubs into ponds
but instead they spread and slide
down the slimy throat
of the drain, back to the pipes.

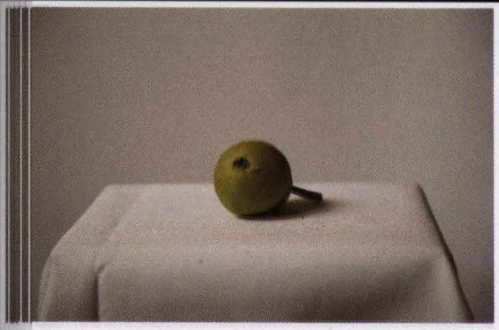
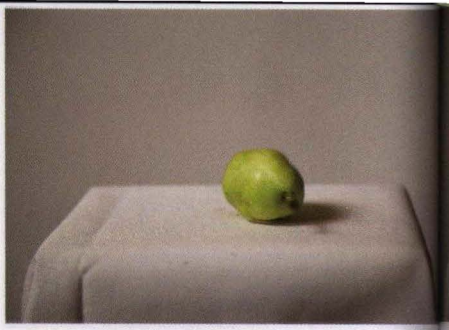
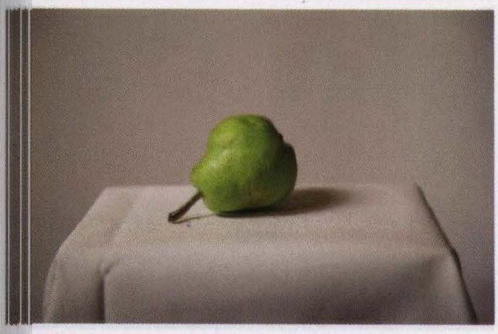
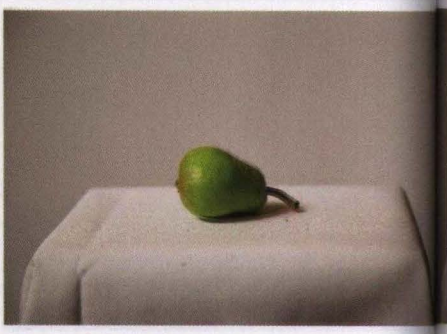
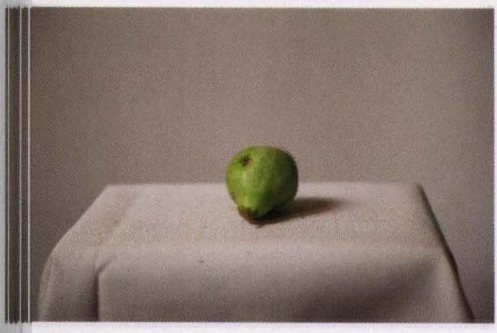
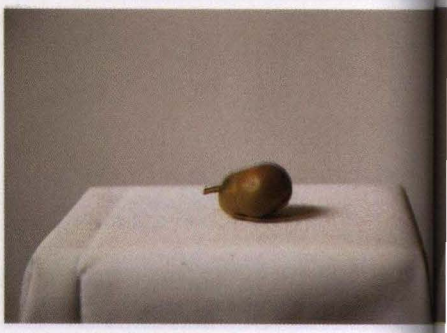
Drops that seep like blood
from a gapped capillary,
the exposed watery pulse
of a desert webbed with pipes that draw to us
life

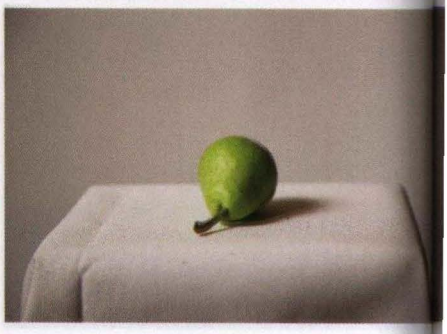
which blind hands would call or quell
with the twist of a lever—
casual valves of an unseen,
rock-lined,
rust-veined
heart.

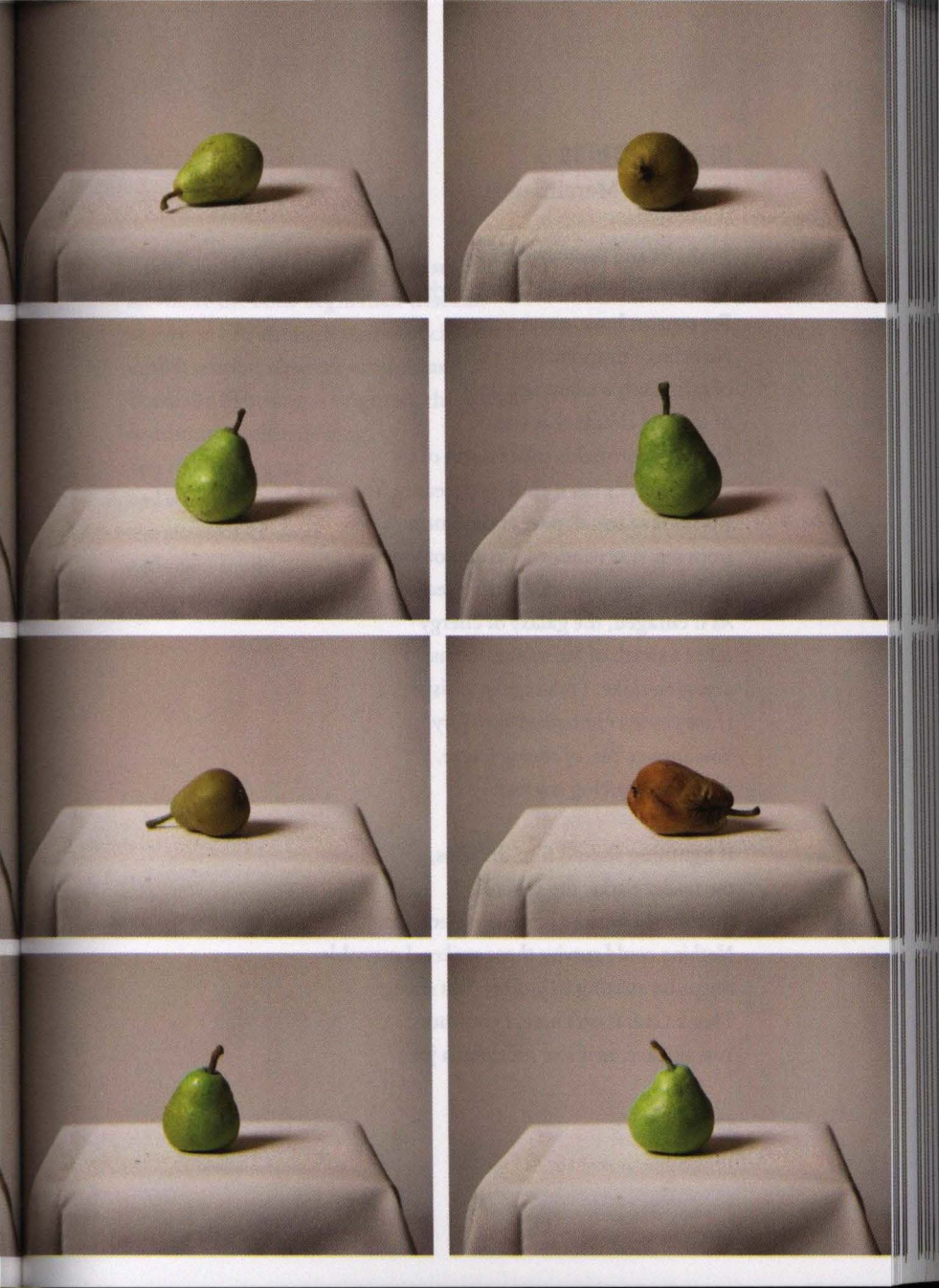
But instead the drops gather
and fall
and fall
and fall.









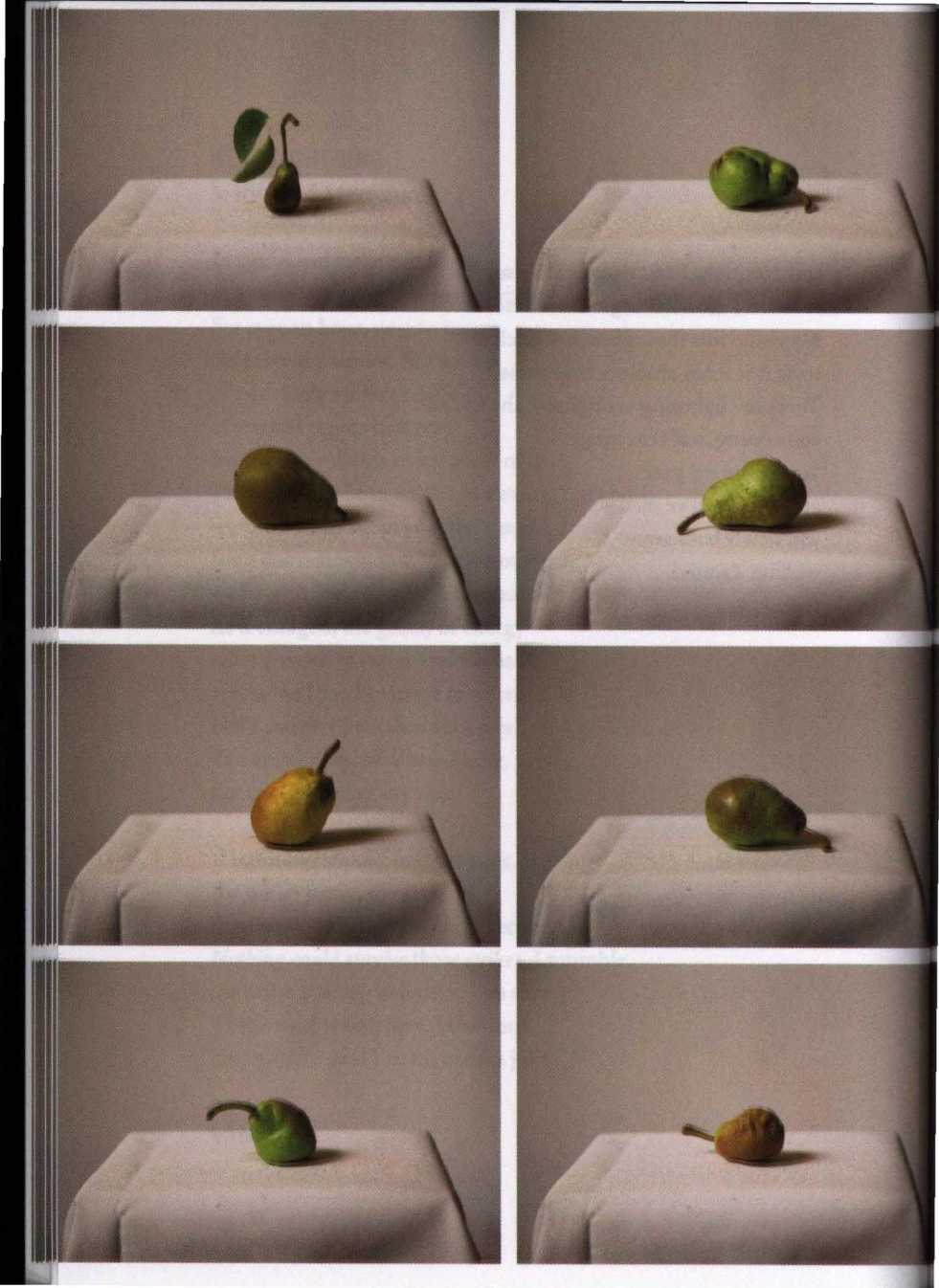
HEAT LIGHTNING

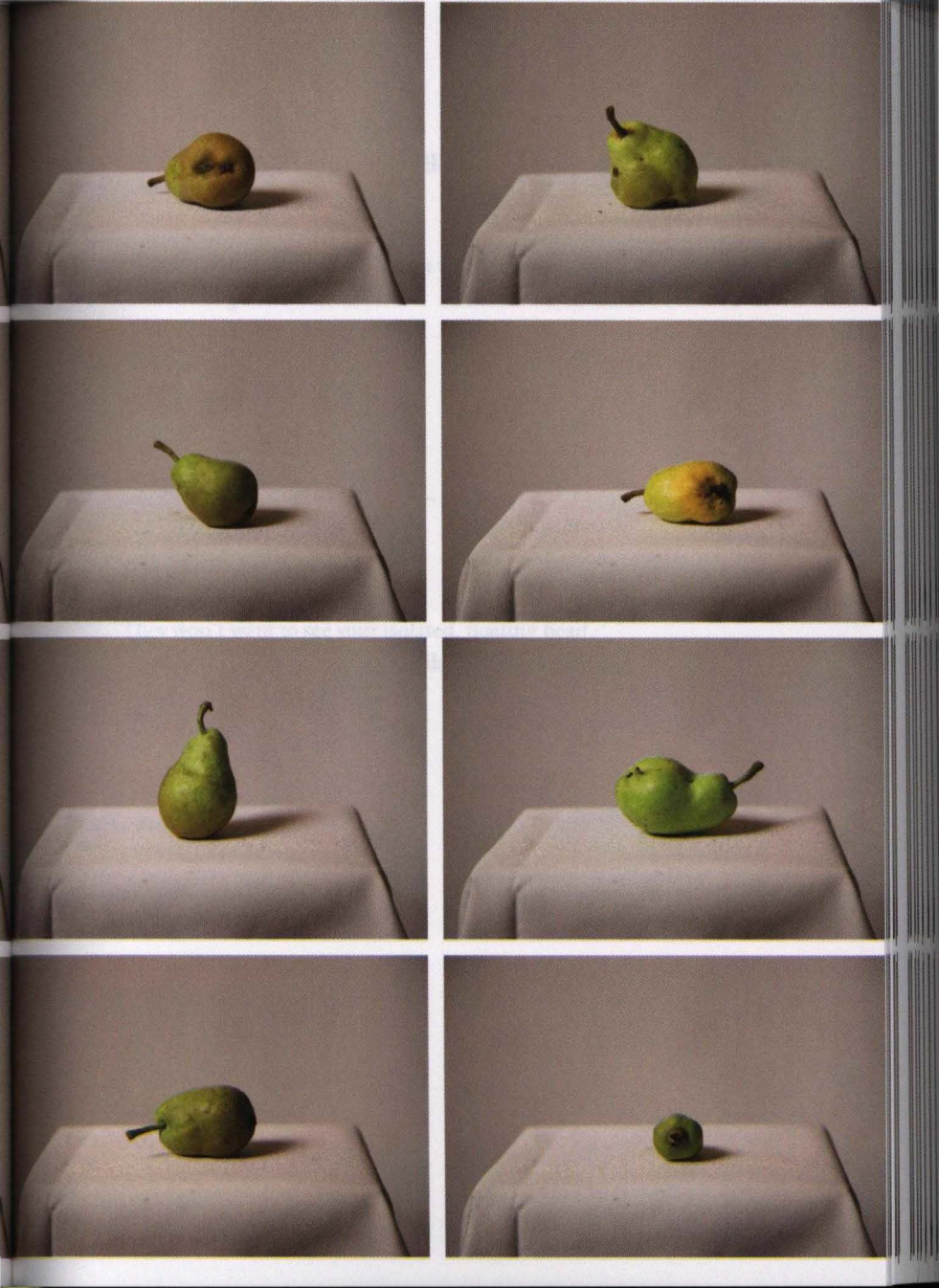
by **Richard Merelman**

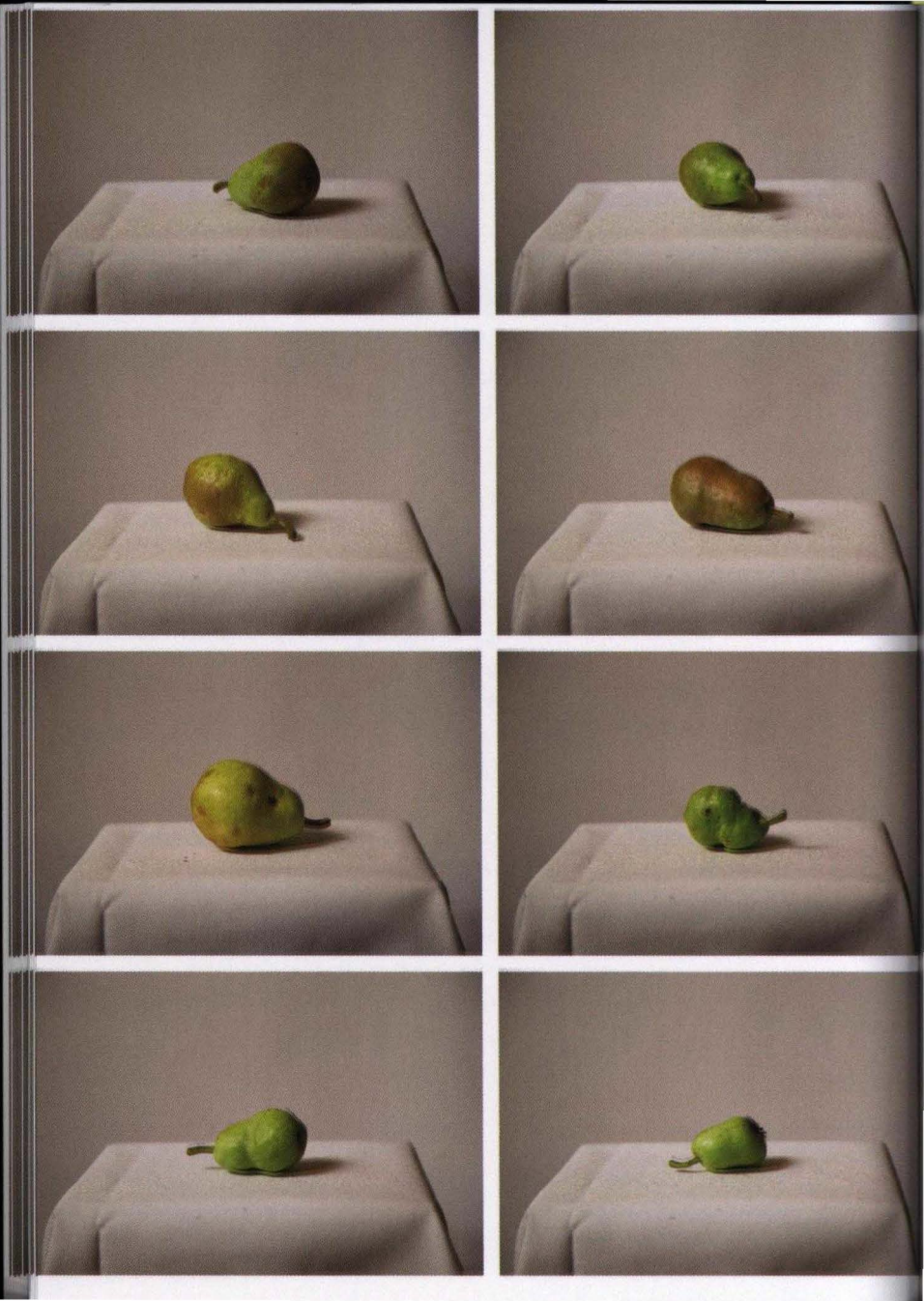
In shafts and forks and loops
lightning whitens the ashen horizon.
For over an hour, never a pause.
No echo of thunder. Not a drop
of rain. Only a silent rending
of stacked clouds that rise
from the cornfields miles north of us.
The weather's been endlessly steamy. You and I,
wordless as usual, peer at the storm
from our rear window. We do not touch;
we haven't for weeks. A funny season.
As if enraged, the galaxy of energy
rakes a swath of farms and towns
across the lake. I manage to whisper
Have you ever imagined such fury?
You answer *Yes, of course I have,*
not once glancing my way.

If lightning should find the silos,
the trailer parks, the schools,
they would burn to cinders in seconds.
Nothing could survive those strikes, I mumble,
my pulse starting to judder. You shrug.
Thank God, it isn't here, I continue.
You snicker, as if I've hit upon a joke

unknowingly. I crane my neck to search
for where the bolts begin their descent.
My vision lifts through scrims of clouds
until it reaches absolute emptiness.
There the lightning is brightest, the fire all-
consuming, self-renewing.
You follow my gaze
and when you've seen enough
you slowly back away
without a sound.



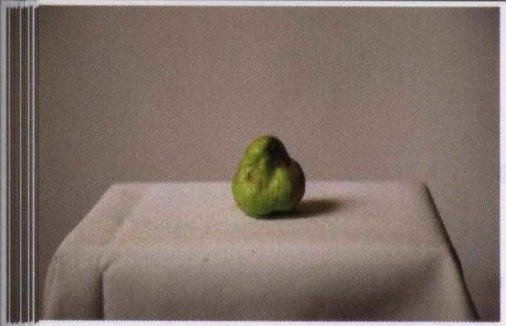
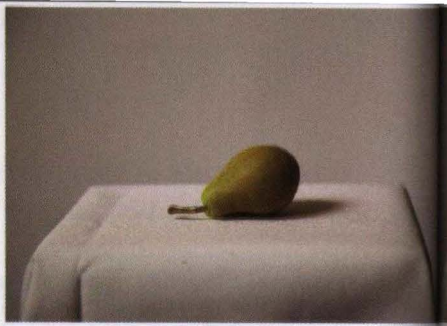
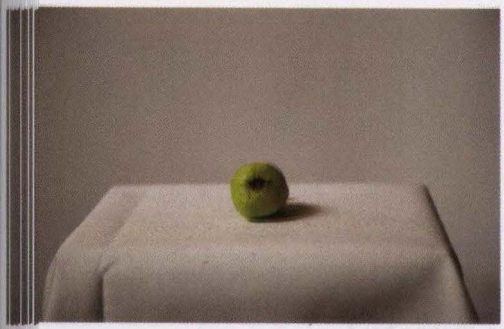
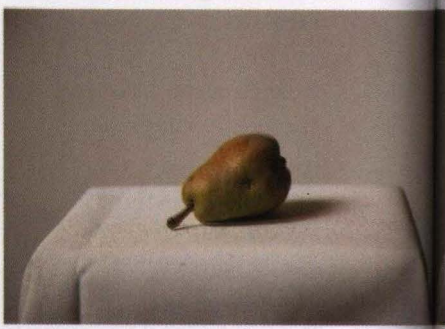
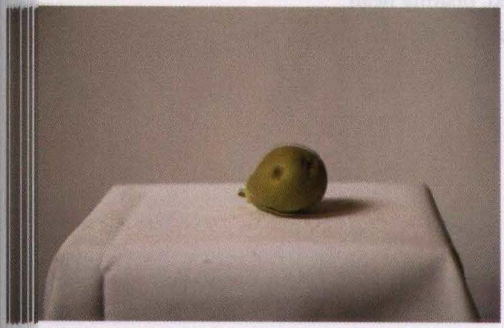
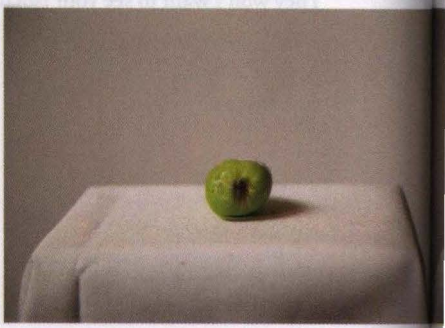
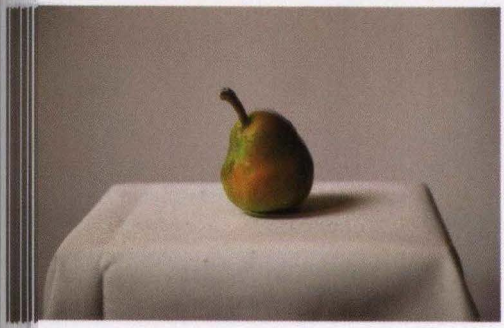
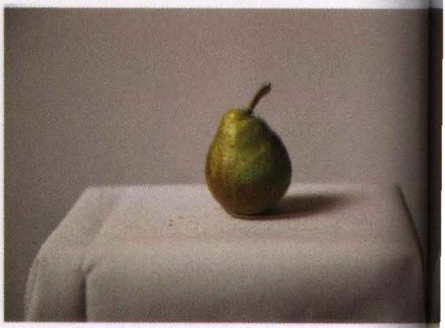


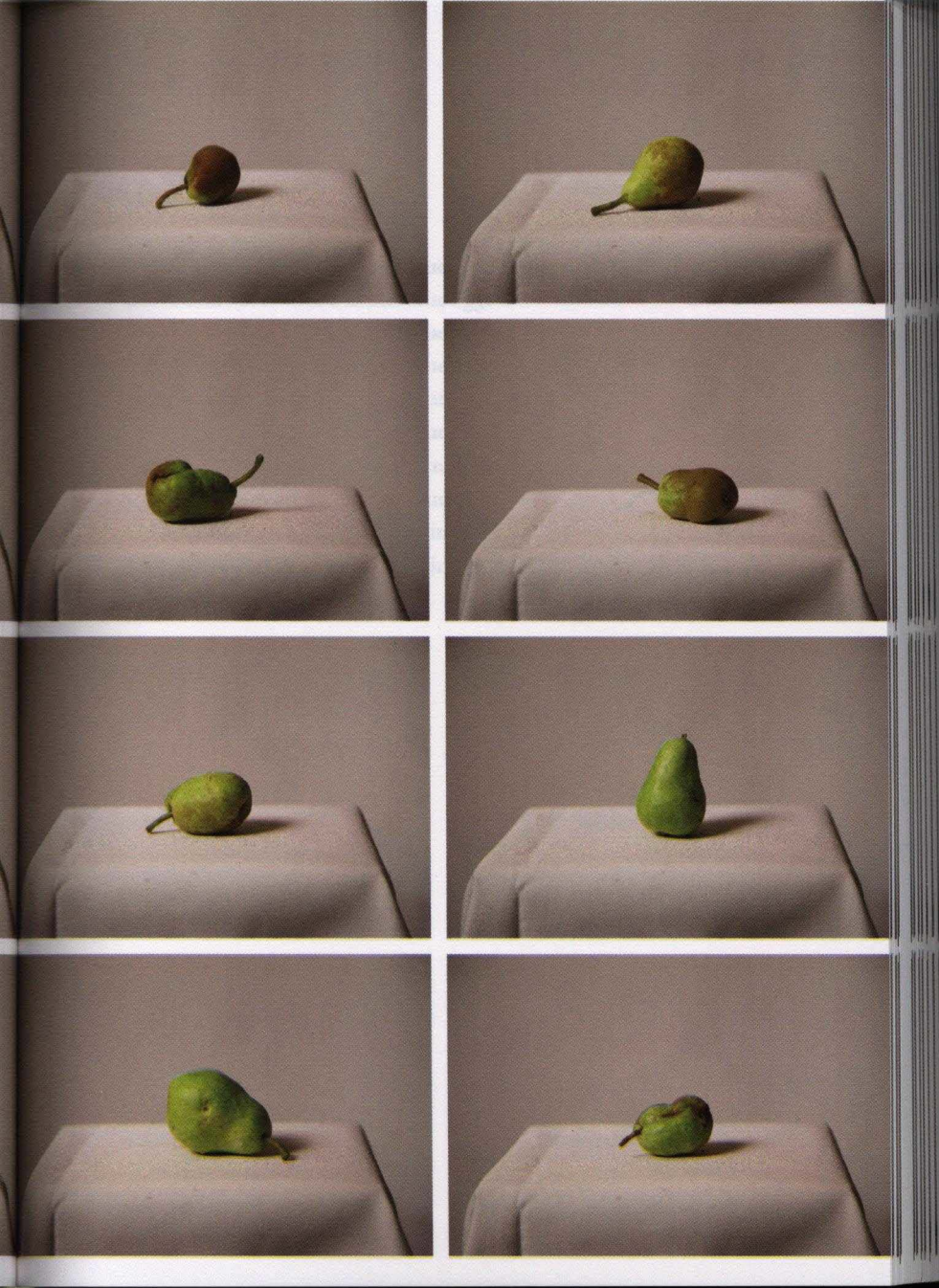


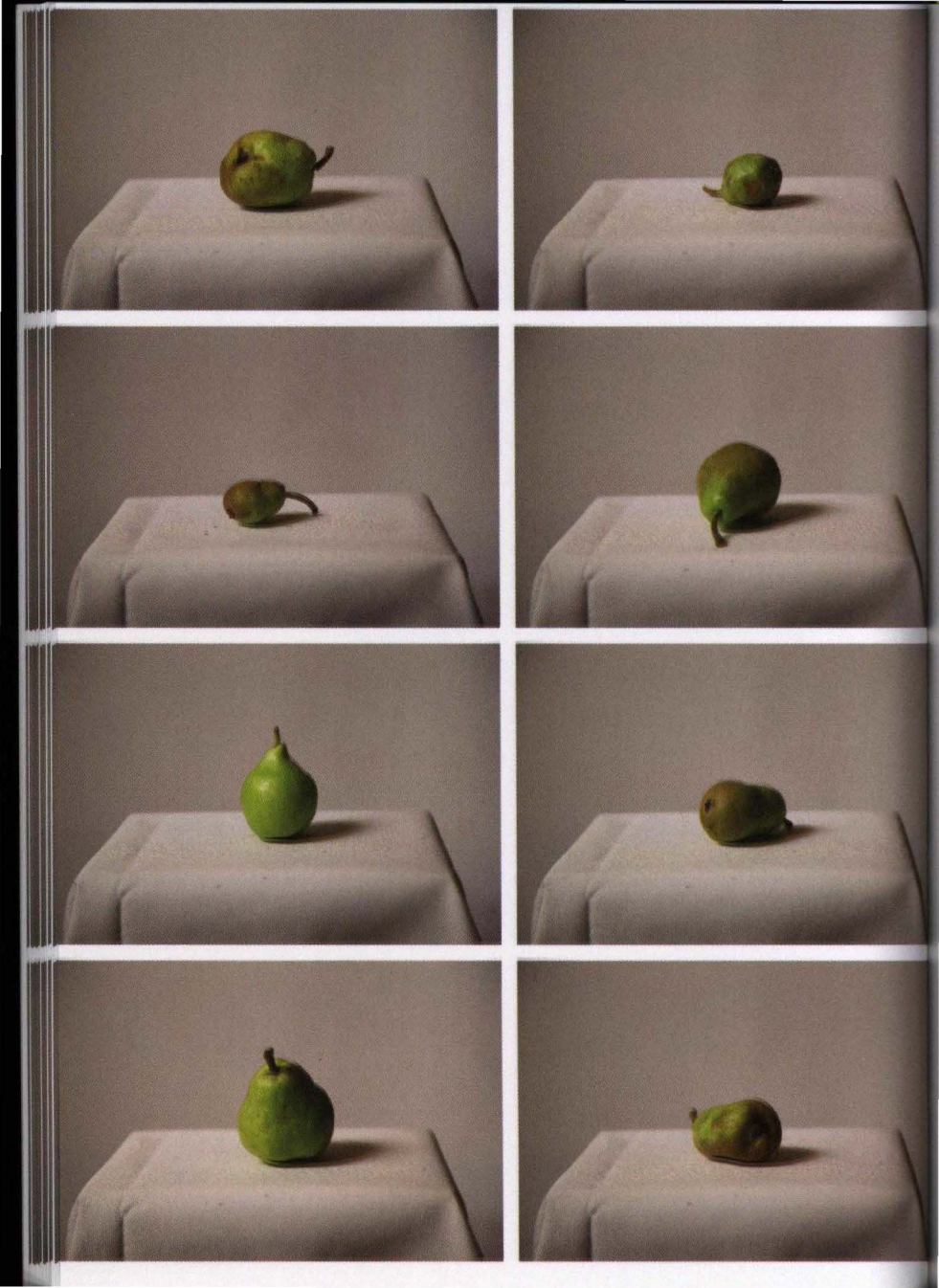
THE LOGISTICS OF WALKING THROUGH WALLS

by **Laura Toland**

When walking through walls, you must consider
several things.
Take into account,
for example,
the audience on the other side.
Are they expecting you?
If not,
consider starting with your feet—
put them through slowly—
give the other-room-dwellers
time to adjust.
They won't want to see your isolated, floating head,
sticking through the dry plaster like a grotesque stuffed animal,
nostrils flared,
eyes shiny and dead.

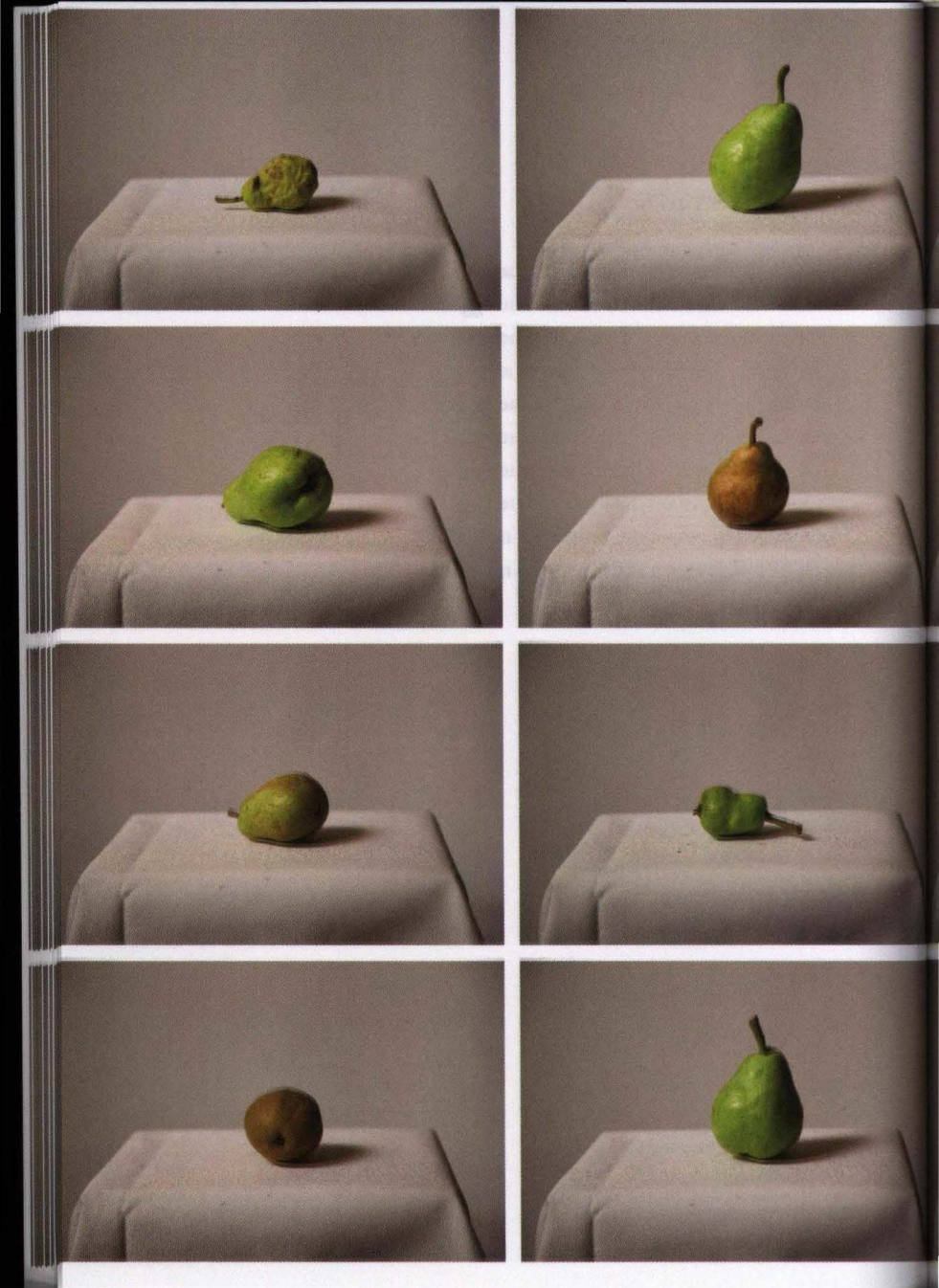


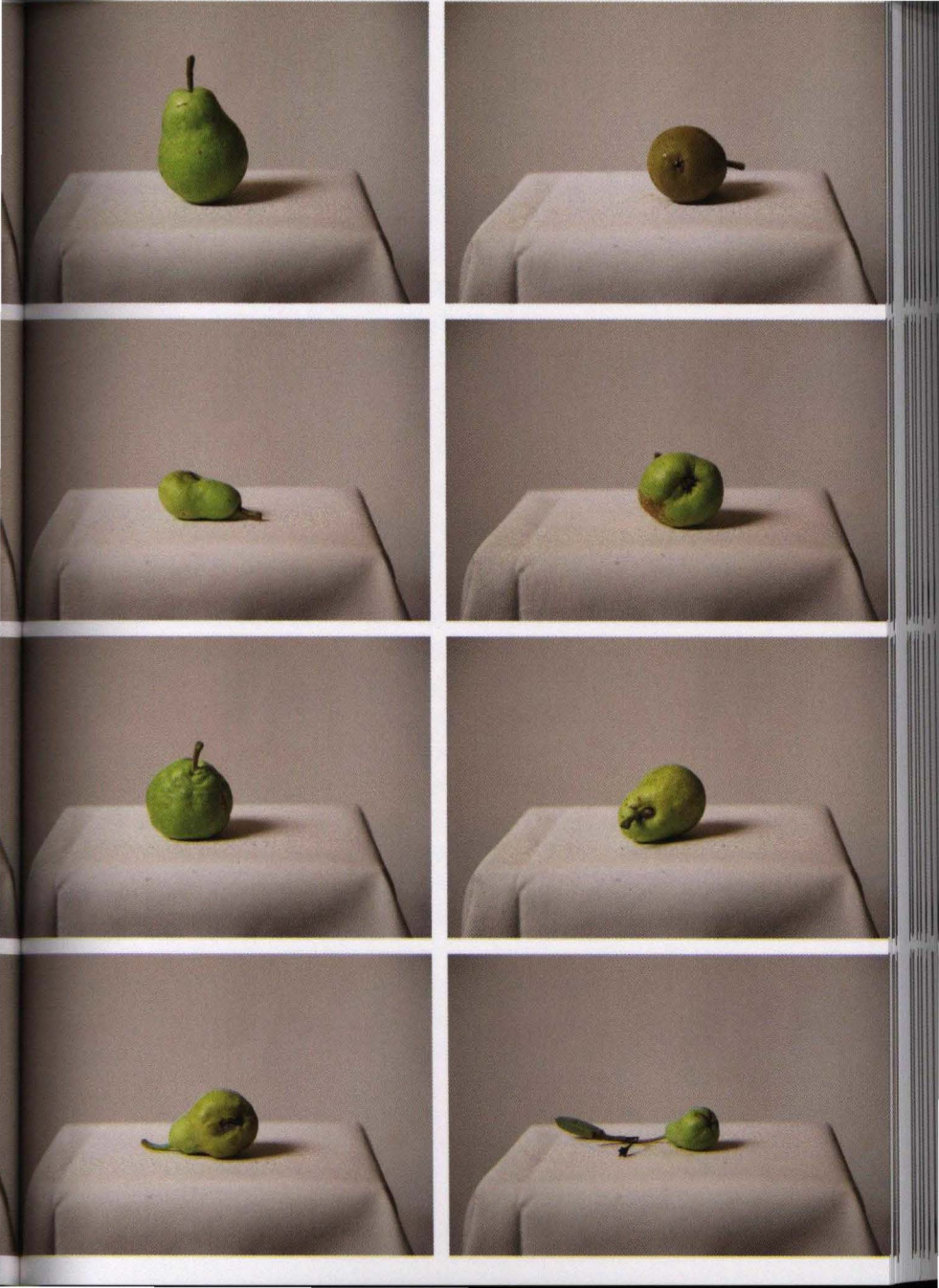


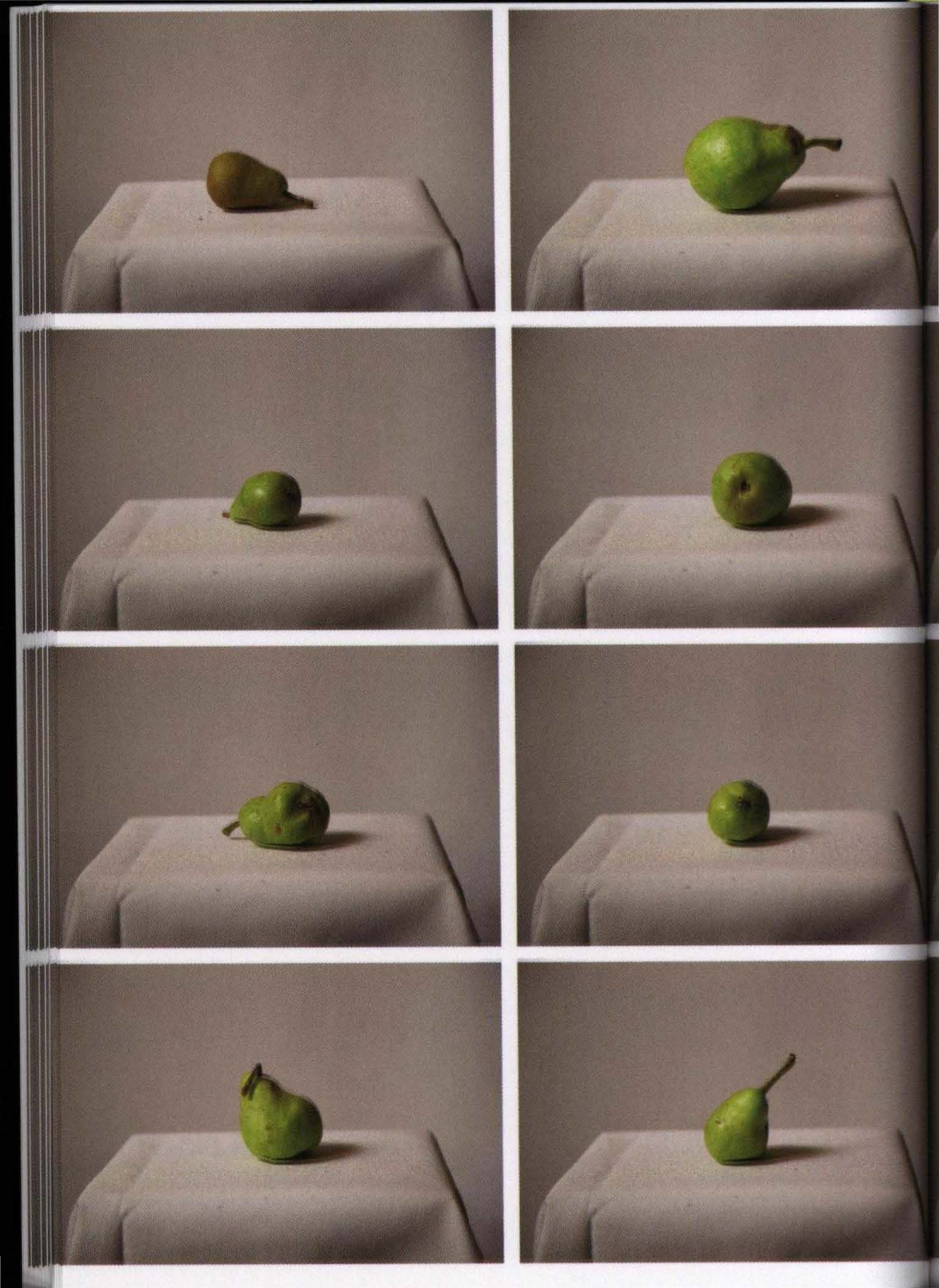
UNTITLED

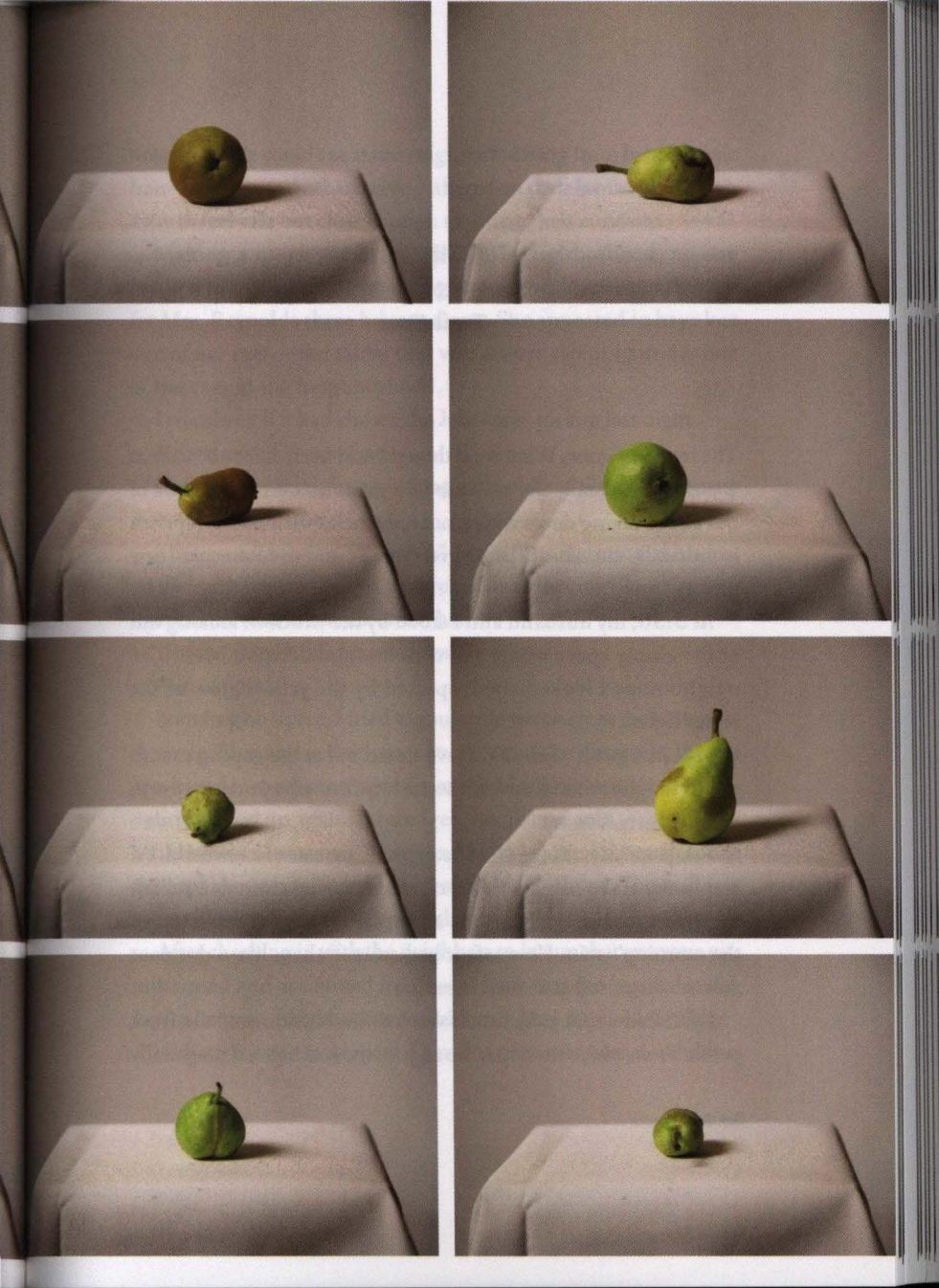
by **Michael Turner**

And I came over with a dozen blue eggs
Or I came over with a dozen blue eggs
Or he came over with a dozen blue eggs
Or he fell over with a dozen blue eggs
Or he fell down with a dozen blue eggs
Or he fell down on a dozen blue eggs
Or he fell down on the dozen blue eggs
Or he fell down on the ninety blue eggs
Or he fell down on the ninety plain eggs
Or he fell down on the ninety plain words.









THE SINKHOLE

by

Tesia Tsai

The road was gone. What we'd thought had been an earthquake at 3 a.m. was actually the collapse of a giant hole in the middle of our street, taking down with it not only the asphalt but also pieces of sidewalk, chunks of spring green grass, and the Johnsons' new pickup truck.

At 3:30, my husband and I stood by the window, looking out at the empty space where flat concrete should have been. The neighborhood looked alien, spotted by the yellow glow of the street lights.

"It's just gone," Jim said as we stared out at the gaping mouth in our neighborhood. It was about sixty feet wide and very deep, maybe thirty feet or so.

Just yesterday, the hole had been small, the size of a sewer lid. I'd seen some of the neighborhood children playing around it, rolling the gravel in their sticky palms and splashing in the remnants of the morning's rain. How safe it had seemed then, like a dormant volcano disguised as a small campfire.

I grabbed a thin jacket and followed Jim outside onto the front porch. From where we stood, the edge of the sinkhole sat diagonally

to our left. We could see some neighbors staring from behind their front windows and others were gathered on their lawns, far enough away to feel safe but close enough to satiate their curiosity.

Making a quick visual sweep of the neighborhood, no one seemed to be panicking or crying about hurt loved ones. Except for Mrs. Reynolds three houses down. She appeared to have lost one of her cats—the tabby that was always sleeping under one of the cars in the neighborhood.

I wondered if it had chosen the Johnsons' pickup last night.

I wondered if it was dead.

(A gruesome thought, my therapist would say. She was dramatic that way.)

"The ground feels pretty solid," Jim said as he stomped his feet on the earth next to the flower patch, almost looking like a dancing leprechaun with his shock of red hair.

"It felt pretty solid yesterday, too."

"Good point."

Standing on tiptoe, I tried to gauge the wreckage at the bottom of the hole. Blue and yellow pipes stuck out of the dirt walls; the top of a bicycle wheel protruded from the black mess at the bottom; debris leaned up against the edges, rough and cold. From here, I could see the alternating brown and black layers of the earth below the asphalt, parts of it smudged with a rusty sheen. The wall was not unlike the side of a German chocolate cake.

After checking in with the neighbors to insure that everyone was unharmed and accounted for, I went back into the house, leaving Jim to help the neighborhood men locate Mrs. Reynolds's tabby.

Although it was barely past 4 a.m., no one aside from the children

were in the mood to go back to sleep, so we all began our morning routines a few hours early. Mr. Smith had called the officials,but coincidentally, a fire had erupted in a complex across town, and the limited task force we had was occupied. Seeing as our sinkhole wasn't an immediate threat, they estimated that they would arrive in roughly two hours. "Stay away from the hole" was all they said.

I wondered what we would do for two hours as I pushed eggs across the pan in the kitchen. The bright color of the yolk blended into the white, solidifying into a puffy, yellow cloud.

Jim came back as I scraped the eggs onto a plate. They hadn't found the cat, and Mrs. Reynolds was beside herself. But then she, as usual, had been since Mr. Reynolds left the picture.

We sat across each other at the square dining table, eating our eggs with toast, crunching quietly, lost in our own thoughts. I broke the silence first.

"What do you think they'll do about the hole?" I asked.

"Probably fill it up with concrete or something." Jim washed his toast down with a large gulp of milk. "It's pretty inconvenient."

I rested my chin in my palm and gazed out the window. I could just see the shadowy edge of the sinkhole. "Sometimes it happens."

Jim stared at me until I turned to face him. He looked apologetic. I knew what he was thinking about. The baby. The baby that never was.

Oh, that, my brain said.

I smiled, cleared the table, and put everything in the sink for later. "I'm going to take a walk," I told him. "See if I can find Mrs. Reynolds's cat."

"With that hole out there?" he said. "It isn't safe."

"I'll keep my distance."

"Diane," he said.

"Jim," I said back.

A heartbeat.

Two.

He sighed. "Let me get my jacket. It's weirdly chilly this morning."

"I'm fine by myself," I said.

"I can help find the cat," he said, though we both knew he didn't really care. (To be honest, I didn't really care either.) "I'll be right back. Wait for me, okay?"

"Okay."

He disappeared upstairs. I didn't wait for him.

Outside, the neighborhood was clear. A little girl—Julie, I think her name was—stood at her living room window, palms pressed against the pane as she stared at the hole. Seeing her curiosity kindled my own.

I moved to the edge of a cliff. Or had the cliff moved to me? For the first time, my stomach twisted at the sight of it, and I worried the hole was still hungry for asphalt or a tree or a woman taking a walk. But after tenderly stomping my foot as I neared the hole, the fear evaporated. It was just a hole. Gaping, large, frozen.

Approaching the edge of the hole, I lowered myself to the ground and let my legs dangle over the opening. Rocks skittered down the forty-degree slope. I recognized the cherry red rear end of the Johnsons' truck. No sign of a tabby pelt anywhere.

The neighborhood kids would love playing around in this hole if it wasn't so clearly dangerous and if their parents permitted it. I imagined a rope ladder trailing down the cliff, a tiny pool at one end of the hole for watery entertainment, and jutted walls for boys

to hide behind as they played war games.

I blinked and the hole returned to its apocalyptic form. It was so still. Peaceful. I felt blank just staring at it.

The gravel bit into my palms, and I pressed harder, daring the hole to stir. It remained a coffee-colored mess of dirt, blood-rusted pipes, and crumbled concrete. I stared until my eyes lost focus and my vision blurred into a swirl of brown, red, black. Until it felt like the hole seemed to widen and deepen, drawing me into its mouth.

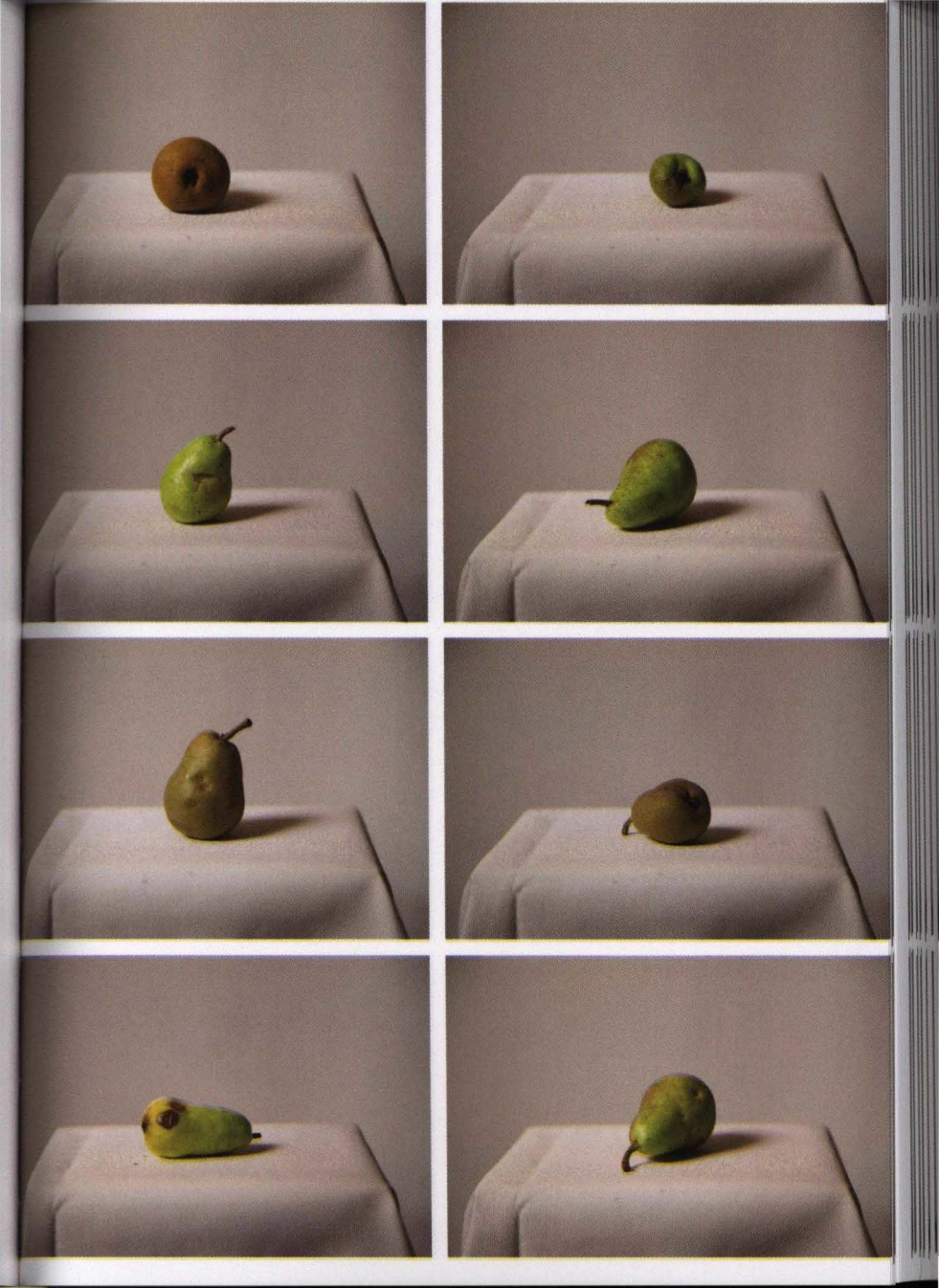
"Diane."

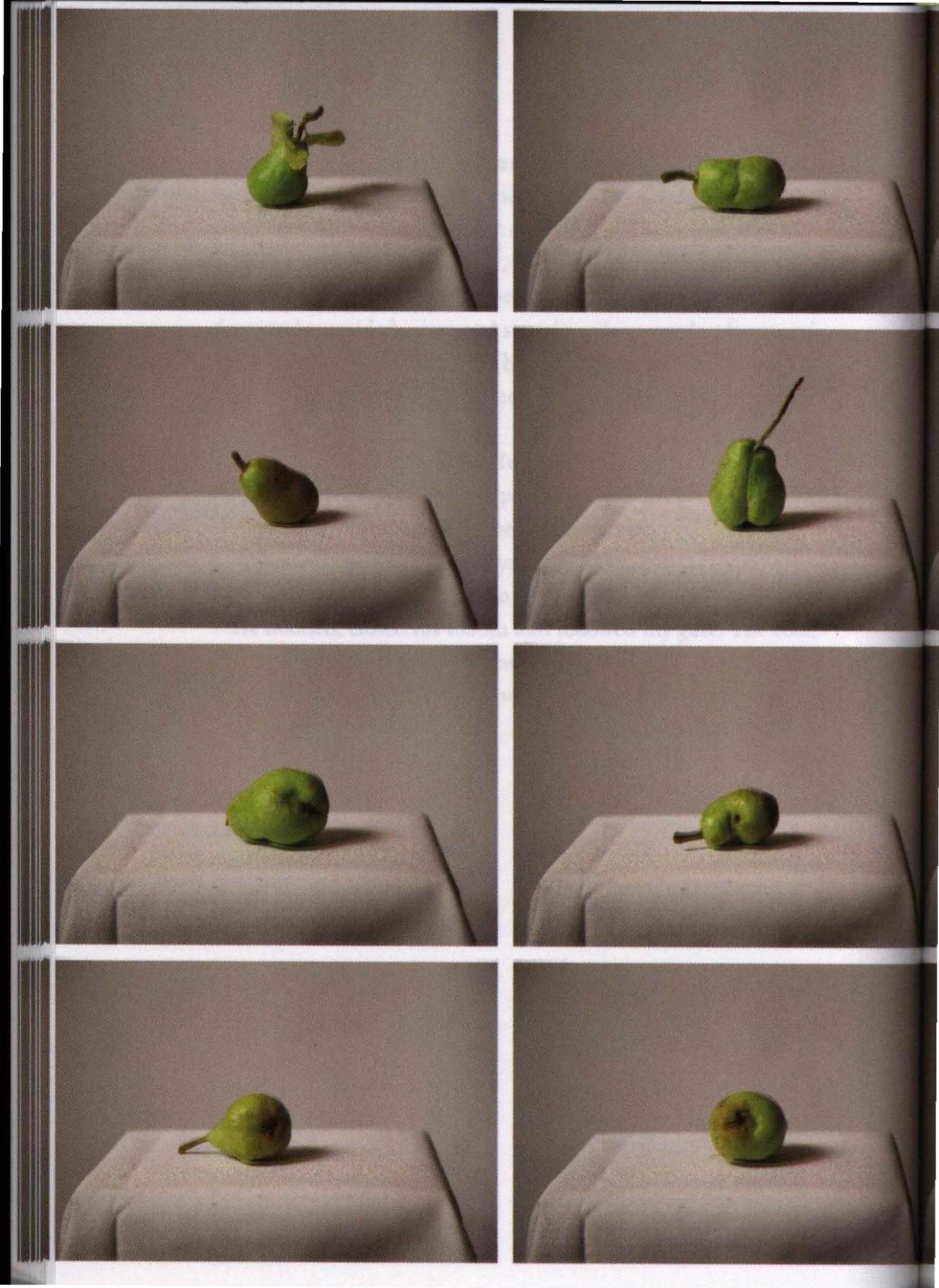
I turned to look up at Jim. He stood with his hands buried in the pockets of his forest-green parka, the one I'd gotten him for Christmas. His eyes flicked to the hole, then me.

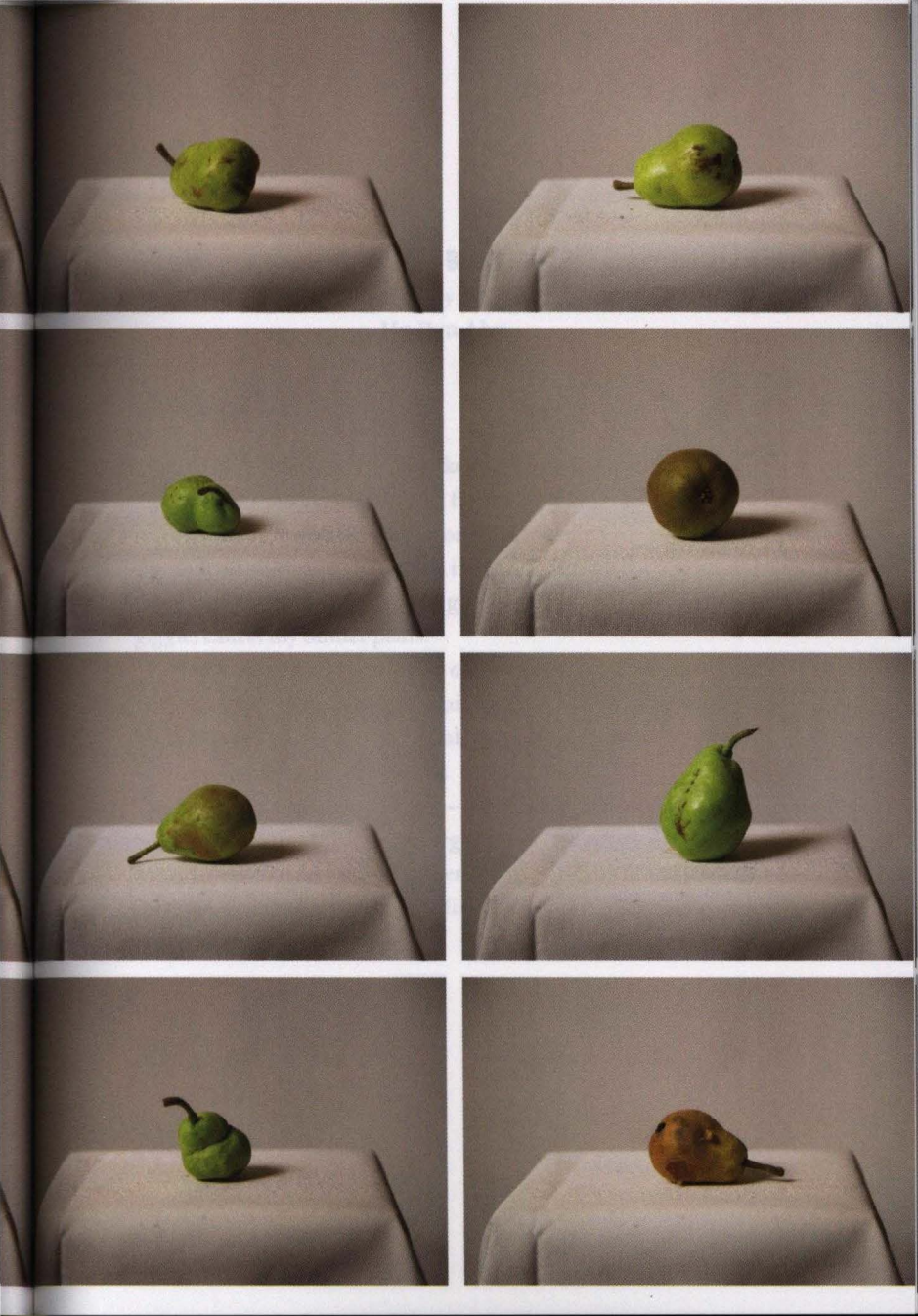
"What are you doing?" he asked.

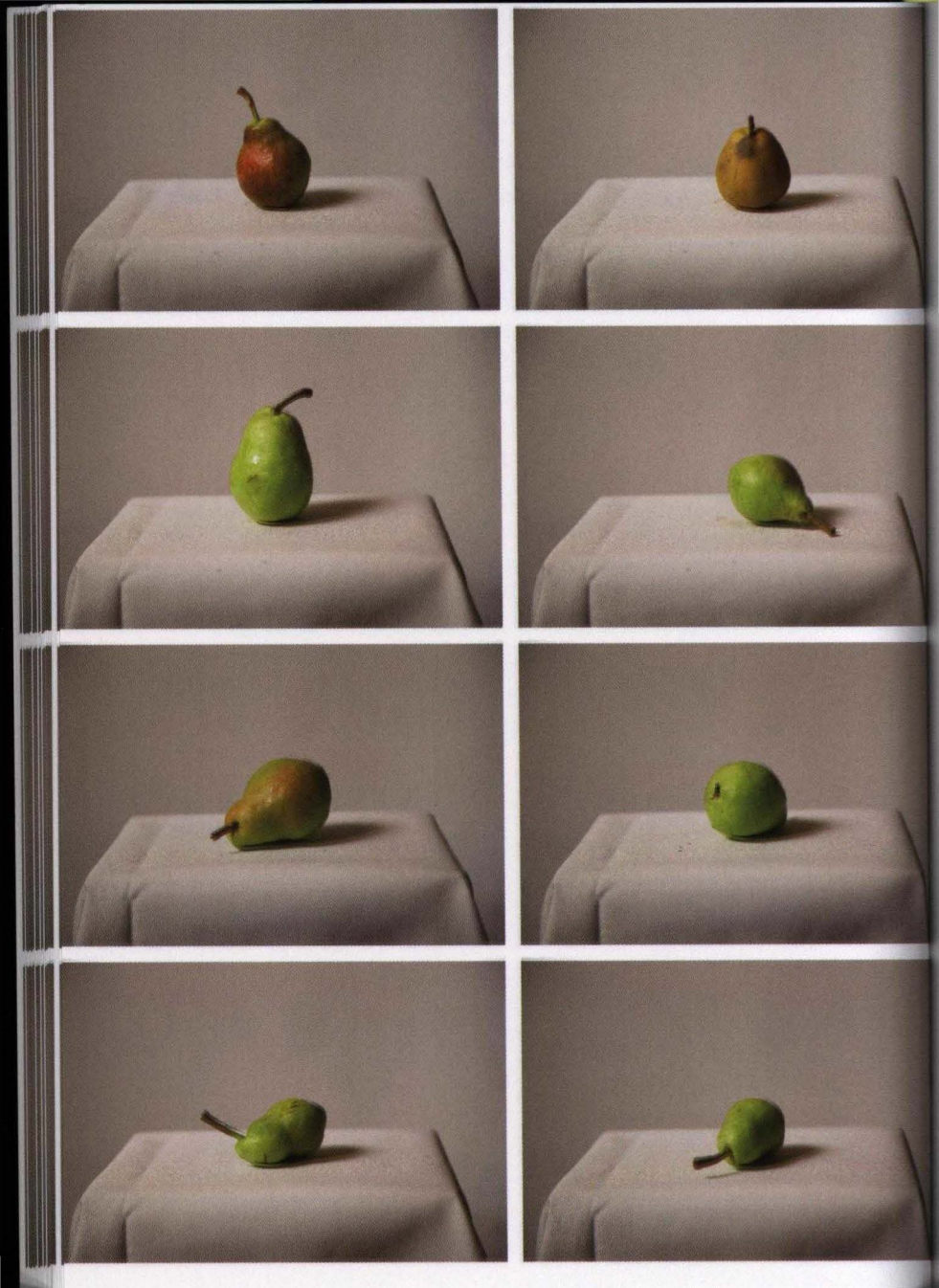
I looked back at the hole. "I'm not going to jump."

He nodded, closed his mouth and followed my gaze. The cool, silent morning draped over the two of us as we considered the void below. We were both thinking the same thing. It was a big hole.









FIRE BIRD

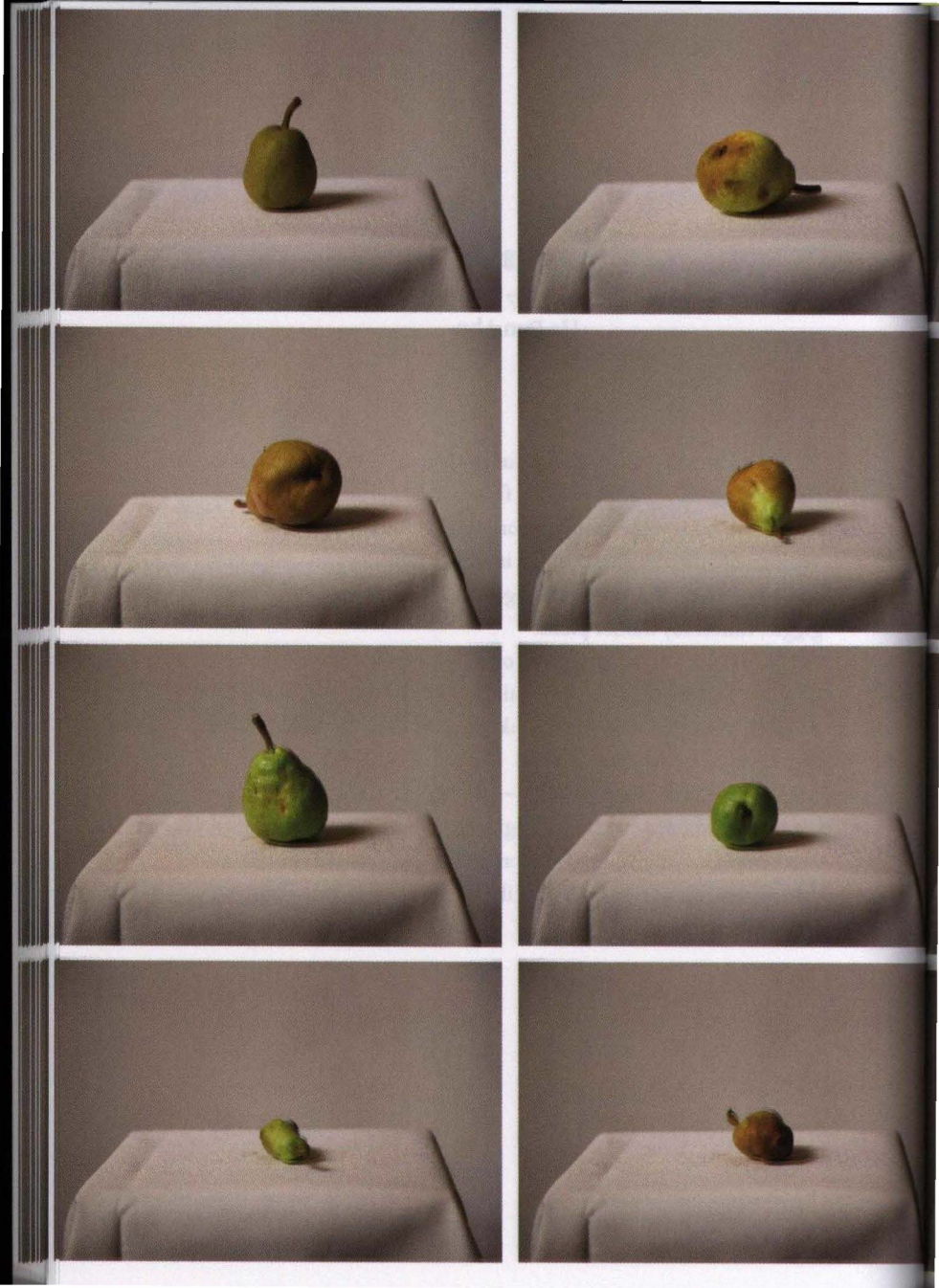
by

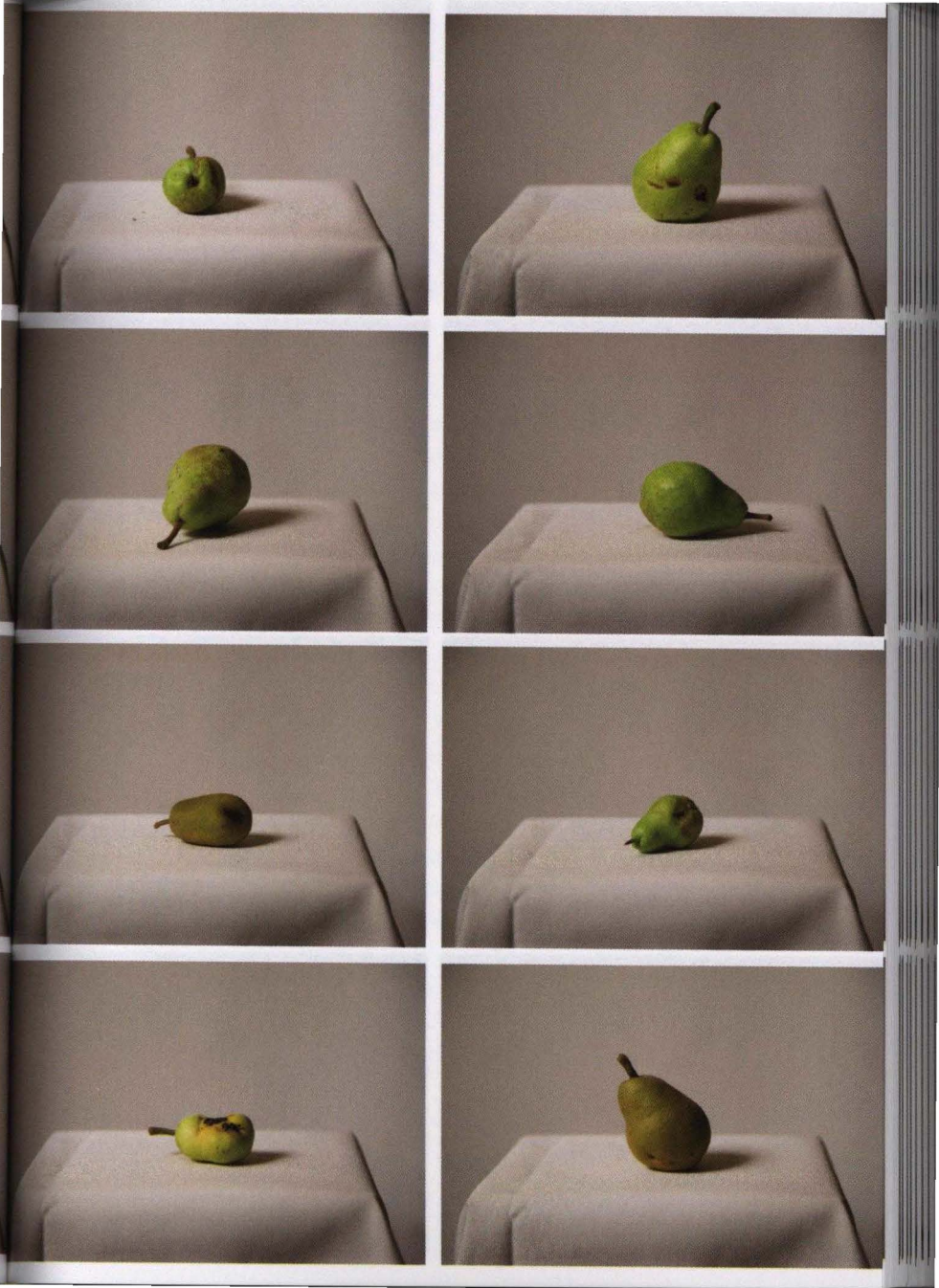
Ha Ryn Ahn

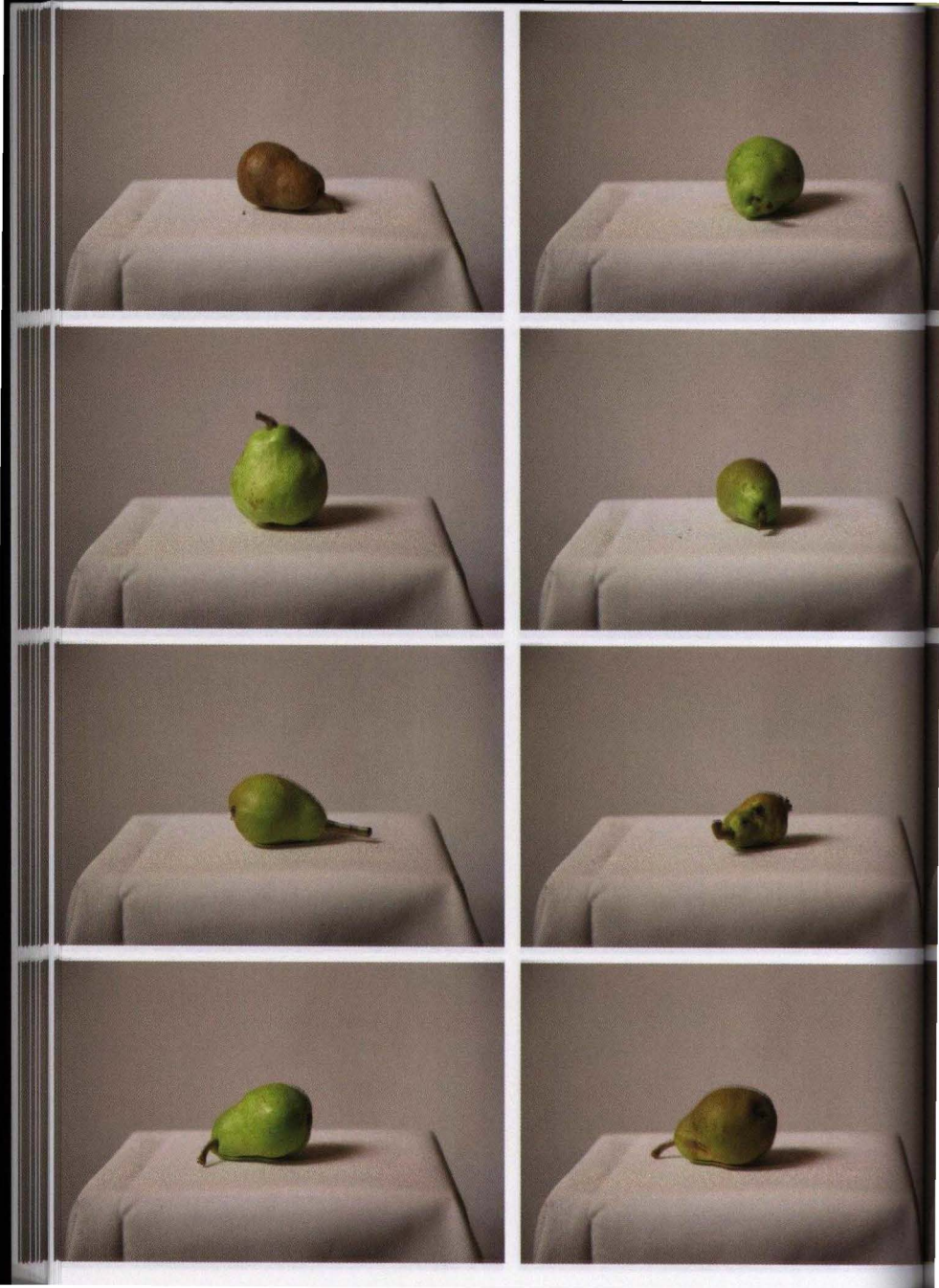
I see a flamingo perched on one skeletal leg, the other cocked back. He is eating strawberries plucked from a tourist. I approach, praise his work—his revolution of lawn ornamentation in North America. We hit it off, discuss our common interest in shrimp and temperate climates. He suggests we should go someplace more private and I giggle, cancel my dinner plans.

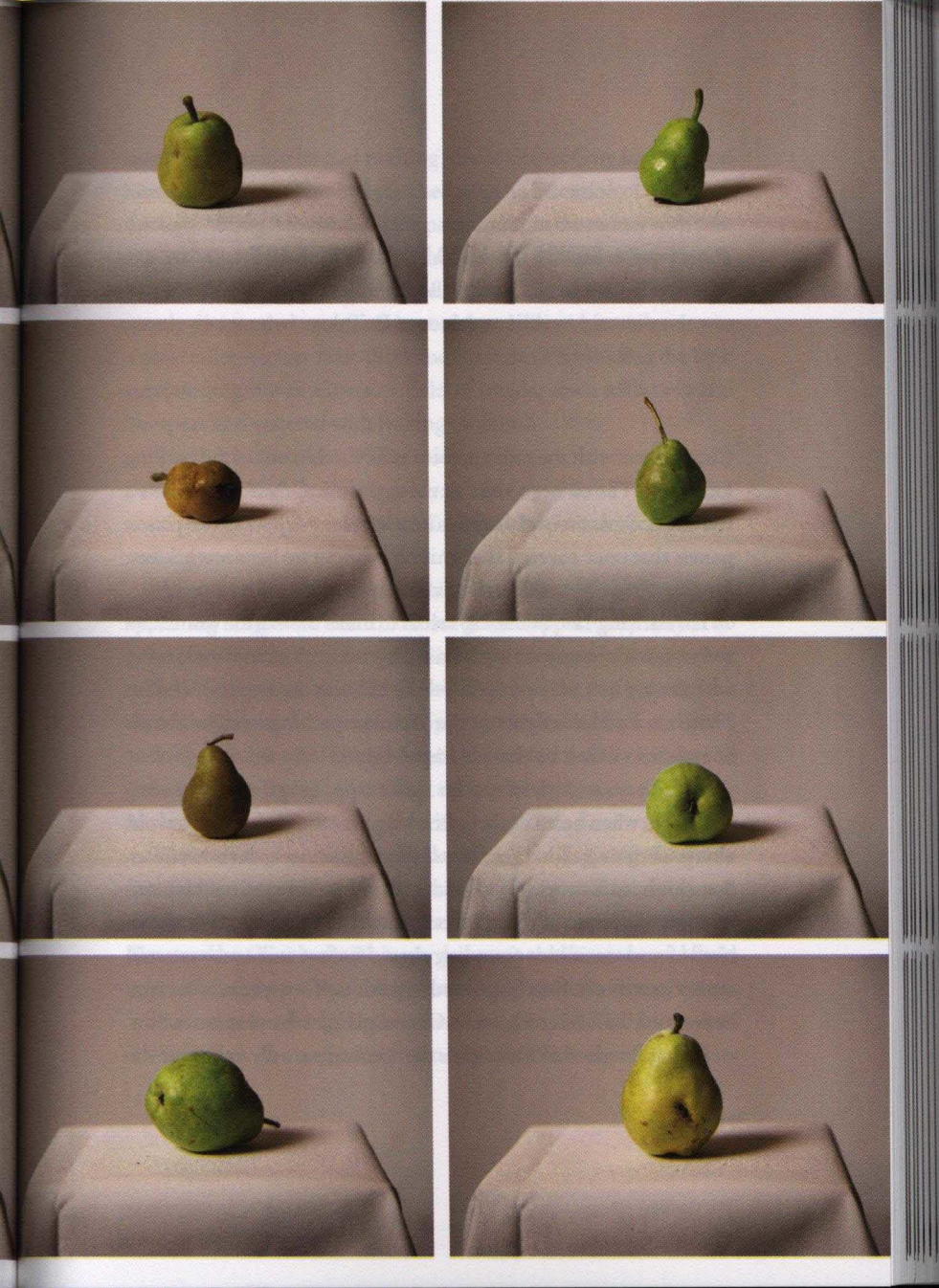
We go back to my timeshare, lay on a chaise overlooking the sunset. He curls his long neck towards mine, wraps his wings around my body. His feathers at my back make me feel like Icarus, his warm breath singeing my goosebumps.

He tries to kiss me, but can't—his beak is black and soft, my lips pink and hard. We are all fighting to become what we once were, trying to find what we haven't lost. I see one of his feathers drift away. It rises toward the sun like kindling off a flame, smoking into white ash.









SONGS TO SING TO FUTURE BABY

by

Alison Maeser Brimley

Clint fidgets with the radio presets as he lurches out of the parking lot. Habit. The owner's taste in music is unimpressive; he scans a few soft rock stations playing bland '80s chart-toppers. The plastic panels that once covered the ignition cylinder lie between his feet, leaving wires exposed like the ticklish underbelly of an animal.

He's driving fast, but not so fast as to make the engine whine, not so fast as to draw anyone's attention. It's two o'clock in the morning and already he's too noticeable—the only car on the road, almost. There are a couple of cars in the Walmart parking lot. The couple of cars from which he'd made his selection.

He tries consciously to stop his hands tapping against the steering wheel, but when he holds them firmly against the leather the nervous energy slides up to his shoulders, then to his neck, then his head. Soon his head is swaying back and forth like a wild-eyed bobblehead, nodding and cheering himself on. And he does, in fact, feel a little swell of pride inside his pounding chest. His first time and he started the car in seconds. He's impressed with himself—especially because he was only half listening when Gary explained the process to him.

He had listened to his uncle's demonstration only to humor the

man, and because he had nothing else to do. As Gary had showed him step by step, Clint had watched with no intention of following through. "Bring it to me. I sell the parts and split the money with you. 70/30," Gary had said from the driver's seat of a low-riding Honda hatchback with its plates removed. It was part of the collection of mostly dismantled cars Gary kept strewn behind his trailer. It was a nice trailer—nicer than Clint and his mom's house. But the land surrounding it was a mess. A field of weeds, sown with tires and bumpers and watered with leaking motor oil.

"No, I don't think so," Clint said.

"65/35, okay? Don't be greedy; it adds up, Clint."

"No, I mean I don't want to. I don't think I could do it." That was the truth.

"Now if you find one with the window down," Gary continued, appearing not to have heard, "that's a golden opportunity. All you do is—." He stood up, grunting, and shut the car door. Its window was rolled down just an inch. He slid his fingers in the gap between the top of the glass and the weatherstripping and pushed back and forth, rocking with his whole weight until he had worked the window all the way down. He turned to Clint, raising his eyebrows and holding his hands out at hip-level as if inviting applause.

That was two weeks ago, the day after Thanksgiving. Gary had had the family over for dinner, and by nighttime Clint's mom was too drunk to move. Gary let them stay the night. He liked company. The next day Clint had nothing to do but sit on the same couch he'd spent the night on, watching America's Funniest Home Videos without ever laughing. In the afternoon, Gary had led him out to the junkyard. No one had ever actually told Clint where all the cars

came from, and he had never asked, but at some point in the last couple of years he had begun to understand. Gary was mainly an auto-repair guy which was probably why his collection didn't arouse suspicion. He didn't make a lot of money, but enough to get Clint and Rhonda out of jams. Now Gary was standing there offering Clint the chance to contribute to the money coming in, and Clint felt almost ashamed refusing.

But then he wasn't refusing on moral grounds; he wasn't being a hypocrite. Clint didn't think he was above grand theft auto; he just didn't think he could get away with it. Something in his growing-up had instilled a fear of getting caught breaking the law, a fear that no one else in his family seemed to have.

But maybe, if he could sidestep that one decisive, loud, jarring obstacle—cracking a window—he could.

The car he picked tonight had its window cracked.

He has a good memory for mechanical, physical things. He congratulates himself on this. Each second the car remains moving is another cause for celebration. He lets a tense smile pull across his face. Now passing the state college campus, he reaches to grab the half-cylinder panel still rolling between his feet. He flings it into the back seat and is surprised to hear a nasally whine, followed by a sharp intake of breath, and then another long whine. Again and again and again the sound repeats like a busted machine—whine, breath, whine, breath, whine. But it's not a machine, it's a human—a baby! An infant in a car seat rudely awakened and revving to life.

For an instant Clint slams on the breaks—he feels he cannot drive and process the baby's existence at the same time. But before the car even has time to slow down, he remembers he cannot stop—not

here, less than five minutes from the scene of his crime. He swears, smacks the steering wheel. He wants to pull over to get a good look at the thing, to make sure it's okay, but instead he speeds up, grateful that there's no one else on the road except for a gleam of taillights far ahead of him. His eyes dart back and forth between the rearview mirror and the road, trying to glimpse the baby's face. But he can't see any part of it. The car seat is facing the rear window. The baby's not even thrashing, not even kicking out a small bootied foot for Clint to see. Is it a boy or girl? he wonders. It could be a year old, it could be a day old, there's no way to tell. Briefly he entertains the thought that it's not even a real baby. It could be some kind of tricky car alarm designed to mess with a thief's mind. It really could be, its wailing sounds so mechanical. What kind of person leaves a baby in a Walmart parking lot in the middle of the night anyway?

He chastises himself for judging the owner of this car for their questionable ethics when his are—. Still, mysteriously, he does not feel guilty. Terrified, yes, but not guilty. He feels somehow deserving of this car, deserving of the money.

He checks his mirrors and glances around even more madly than before—twice each second, it feels like—because he's sure someone else can hear the crying. Some mother somewhere, probably still picking up whatever the hell she was getting at Walmart at 2 a.m., can sense her baby's crying. In his heart he knows it's a real baby. And its mother will be on his trail now, or probably she'll have the cops on his trail. He pulls onto the highway, and two other cars pass by in the other lane as he merges. There is some relief in that—in being one of three.

The baby's cry changes. Rather than a one-to-one ratio of whining to

breathing, the baby starts releasing two shorter whines at fluctuating pitches, followed by a breath. Clint reminds himself to keep breathing. Without waiting for permission from his brain, his right hand flies off the steering wheel and pokes at the radio button again. He hits the preset buttons one by one until he lands on something he knows, as if he deserves to be able to listen to his choice of music on this illicit road trip, as if he, like any other driver, just needs something to help him pass the time behind the wheel. Perhaps he is trying to drown out the sound of the baby. Perhaps he is trying to distract himself. It doesn't work. The baby's two-to-one crying mingles with the sound of radio ads talking too fast and the DJ talking too slow, and they all seem to be arguing with each other. Finally Clint's finger strikes a button that replaces the talk with actual music—The Doors, with their tense keyboards and anxious, driving drumbeats. It makes Clint feel even more panicky. The baby, however, slows its crying—like it's heard Jim Morrison's command to break on through to the other side—and then breathes out hard and stops altogether.

He wishes he could just see it. The baby is frightening and yet a little familiar. It gives him a feeling he has felt before, once, though he can't place it.

Is it a boy or a girl? Clint wonders again. His eyes burn from forgetting to blink; he feels like he might tear up. The song ends and another one starts. It's still the Doors, but a more obscure song Clint hasn't heard before, or at least one he doesn't remember. Clint was never as big a fan of The Doors as his father was.

When the song ends, the radio station plays a little jingle to announce itself and Clint recognizes the tune. It's as familiar as if he'd recorded it himself.

It was funny—seventies rock music colored most of Clint's childhood memories, even though he'd grown up twenty years after it was popular. It was his father's music, and so it became his music. When he pictured himself as a child, he pictured himself grouting tile or removing painter's tape, an oldies radio station playing not in the background but in the foreground—his father liked to turn the radio up loud enough to compete with his power tools. It always felt like Clint's father let him work unsupervised, but in retrospect Clint could see that his father always put him on a job close by. And every time the song changed, his father would quiz him. "Who is it, Clint?" he'd call, keeping his eyes on his own task, spackling a ceiling or something, and Clint would respond "Fleetwood Mac!" or "Jefferson Airplane?" and his father would give a single nod of approval without looking away from his work.

The construction jobs took up most of Clint's eighth, ninth, tenth, and eleventh summers—from the time his father decided he was old enough to help to the time his father left Milton. When Clint was twelve, his mother had fed him a tear-ridden revisionist history, and he'd re-learned who his father really had been. He'd eaten it up until he started middle school the next year, where there were computers that could browse the internet. *Schizophrenia*, Clint had typed into the search engine. It was a word that floated around his house like a pesky fly that could never be swatted. He had heard it, seen it in the mouths of his uncle Gary and aunt Patricia, but never when his mother was around. Clint had read the common symptoms: *Paranoia and a sense of always being victimized.*

With this he could put a label on her, on what had happened to her. And then he had two versions of history in his head. In one, his

father was good and seemed to jive with his actual memories. This version was hard to square with his father's sudden and unexplained departure. In the other, his father was the villain, which didn't match Clint's memories but had quickly gained ground over the other for the simple fact that his mother—who had stayed, who he needed, and who quickly grew to need him—told this version of the story. When he'd learned that this version could be little more than a symptom of what was wrong with her, he again didn't know what to think. All his teenage years, though he had never thought of those years this way, had been a struggle for supremacy between one story and the other.

It wasn't until last year that one version finally gained a decisive upper hand.

Last May, a week after he'd turned nineteen, Clint had gotten a call from his father. "You have a job right now?" his father had said.

"Not right now, no."

"Well then welcome to the Davis Construction crew. We've got a job in Pace starting next week rebuilding an old dentist's office. I don't guess you got anything going on this summer. "

"No," Clint said.

Because he figured his mother would notice if he was suddenly no longer lying around the house during the day, he'd told her that he'd gotten a job. She was sitting in front of the television when he handed her a bowl of box macaroni and cheese he'd made her for dinner and said, "I got a job, Ma. I start tomorrow." He hadn't planned to tell his mother *whom* he'd be working for, and, conveniently, she didn't ask. She just turned her face toward him, her eyes peeling reluctantly away from the screen, and a watery film of tears started to pool below

her eyes. Her voice, though, betrayed no emotion when she spoke.

"Thank the Lord," she said.

In the nights before he started work, as he lay down to sleep, he fantasized about his reunion with his father—of kneeling next to him to lay tile like they used to, his father turning to him to apologize for the last eight years. Sometimes in these fantasies Clint acted first. He would approach his father installing insulation, maybe, and ask him *why* in such a way that would break his heart. In one dream—one that he replayed often—when Clint asked *why* his father looked at him hard and said, "I didn't leave my wife. That woman wasn't my wife. She'd turned into someone else." After months of replaying the scene, the sting of the revelation wore off because Clint knew it was true. He could remember a time when she hadn't been the way she was now, when she had cooked him dinners instead of the other way around, when her face had reflected something other than the TV screen.

What made Clint fume now was thinking about what his father had said to him when he showed up at the construction site for the first day of work. He'd made a joke. Said, "Can't believe you gave me all those free hours of labor back when you were a kid." Then he took slow steps forward toward Clint, holding his arms out as if welcoming him into a hug. "Guess my jig is up." And then he let his arms fall to his sides.

Clint and his father had spoken on the phone several times each year since he'd moved away. When he was fifteen Clint had received a postcard from Miami. It was signed, "Dad & Tammy." That was the first time his dad had hinted at his remarriage. In the next phone call, maybe six months later, his father spoke of Tammy as if she had

always been there and needed no explanation. That was the way it'd been in every call since.

When Clint finally met Tammy, though, last summer, his dad had given him an almost too proper introduction. In the middle of the workday he'd taken them both to Waffle House. But he hadn't left much time for them to get to know each other if that's what he was hoping to accomplish. He'd spent the whole hour telling the story, in great detail, of how they'd met, keeping a mouthful of hash browns perpetually tucked in the pocket of his cheek. The air conditioning had seemed to freeze the construction sweat on Clint's back and neck and drove him to eat his lukewarm waffle like a maniac. Tammy and his dad had met at a Chick-fil-A grand opening in Gulf Breeze. They'd camped out overnight, aiming to be two of the first one hundred people in line that would earn free sandwiches every week for a year. Their tents ended up next to each other. "And the rest is history!" Clint's dad had boomed, shoveling another forkful of food into his mouth. He was living in Pensacola at the time and had gone because the new restaurant was so close to his house. Tammy, on the other had, was something of a habitual Chick-fil-A camper; she'd traveled three hours to be there. Her passion for the sport had infected Clint's dad. "We've been to thirteen grand openings since then," he'd said, looking lovingly at Tammy. "If it comes within two hundred miles of us, we'll be there." Tammy had gone red and smiled. "It's just a fun thing to do," she'd explained.

Clint wants nothing more than to pull over and look at the baby, now gurgling contentedly to itself. But his hands remain welded to the steering wheel and his foot doesn't let up a bit on the pedal. Still, every moment he stays on the road feels like another nail in

his coffin. He can't go back to Milton, of course, but he can't keep driving with this baby, either.

He remembers suddenly why this all feels familiar. Once, a few years ago when his grandma died and Gary's daughter by his first wife was in town with her three kids, Clint was assigned to cart the kids from Gary's house to the church for the funeral. He had never driven with a child in a car before. The kids were old enough to not need car seats, but he'd still been nervous. In part, he'd felt a pressure to talk to them, entertain them. And in part he'd felt a responsibility heavier than anything. He'd taken his turns cautiously. He'd turned the radio down. He'd parented his own *mother* every day, but these kids were different, fresh, full of promise. They were quiet, anxious, blond, buttoned up. They had lives ahead of them.

Clint finds himself turning off the highway, frightened at the thought of what he is about to do. The pavement beneath the tires turns into loose gravel and then into gray dirt and his headlights carve holes in the perfect black ahead. He's passing the turnoff that leads to Gary's and wonders if it's probably too late—he could still hand the car over to Gary for a few hundred dollars. But it *is* too late. Instead he turns onto Larrabee Loop and parks in front of the trailer, angling the car so that the headlights cast a little light on the trailer but don't shine directly through the windows. He gets out of the car, leaving it running, and creeps to the north side of the trailer to Erin's window. He taps quietly at the glass.

He can't see her through the window, but he knows where her bed is, where she'll be. He knows the soft rapping will not wake her. He knocks louder. He starts to jostle the windowpane, trying it to see if it can be forcefully removed so he can enter the room, when

the light in the room flips on and he catches a glimpse of her by the light switch in the corner. She's wearing a white tank top, no bra, and a pair of boxers with little multicolored stars printed all over them. She has her arms wrapped around her as if to shield herself from something, and then she turns to face the window and hisses, "Clint! What the *hell*?"

"Yeah, I didn't think you would be that happy to see me," he says, trying to smile, then stops when he remembers all the times she used to tell him how stupid his smile looks. "I really, really need a favor."

She looks behind him, squinting against the blare of the car's headlights. "Who is that in the car? Tyler?"

"Nobody. I drove."

"Whose car?"

"Uh, I—"

"What the hell are you doing here in the *middle* of the *night*?" She is standing at the window now, bending at the waist so that her face will fit into the window frame, arms crossed over her chest. Her long red hair, knotted from sleep, falls over her shoulder, and her face looks paler than usual. Her limbs seem to glow white.

"Erin, I need to ask you a favor, and I need you to promise you'll do it, no matter what it is. Will you promise me?"

"No," she spits. "I won't."

Clint closes his eyes and lets them roll back into his head as if searching for another strategy. Of course she isn't going to promise him that. She isn't stupid, and she doesn't trust him. When he opens his eyes again, he tries to let them burn with earnestness, to let her know how much he doesn't care about anything that happened before with them and how much he needs her right now.

"Okay, listen, and don't—just don't freak out, okay? I have a baby in the car. It's not mine—I mean, obviously. I . . . took it."

By the end of the sentence he is staring into the corner of her room, unable to keep eye contact.

"You took it?" she repeats.

"With the car," he says. "I took the car. From a parking lot."

"Clint, you *idiot*."

He hasn't spoken to her for months. He remembers now how much she annoys him, how much she has always annoyed him. He hates her habit of overemphasizing certain words, slowing them down and moving her lips so emphatically it was like she was trying to teach him how to speak.

"I know," he says.

"I mean, I knew you were desperate, but not *that* desperate."

"Well it's not—I mean, it *is* for money, but not like you think. I worked last summer for my dad and he—. Look, I'm not selling it—I just need it to get to Valdosta."

"What's in Valdosta?"

"A Chick-fil-A grand opening, tomorrow morning."

Her eyes open into perfect circles and she lets her head fall to the side, as if to say, *Really, Clint?*

"Listen! My dad and his wife love those things. That's where they met and now they go to every one within a thousand miles or something. If I've got any chance of tracking him down, that's where I'm going to find him."

"Clint, I don't care."

Clint feels like reminding her that she was the one who asked him what was in Valdosta, but decides against it. "Yeah, anyway—I

need you to take the baby. Please. I'll be a car thief, whatever, I'll deal with it, but I don't want to be a kidnapper."

"Take the baby *where*?"

"Just, I don't know, take it back to town, to the police, make sure it finds its mom."

He had known she would be a hard sell. But for some reason he isn't prepared for the narrowness and hardness of her eyes, the firm thin line of her mouth, the face that makes him feel so ridiculous he can hardly keep talking. It's a feeling he remembers well from when they were together, though at least then she treated him like her pet idiot. At times her hard-pressed lips would break into a smile and she would tilt her jaw up to kiss him under the ear. He imagines that happening now. It doesn't.

Instead she folds herself in half and climbs out the window. She goes to the back door of the car and pulls it open. She looks down at the baby.

"Is it a boy or a girl?" Clint asks.

"Can't tell. It's bald," Erin says. "And it's wearing yellow, so . . ."

"How old do you think it is?"

"I don't know. I don't know about babies, okay? It's not a newborn. And it doesn't look like it's gonna be walking around anytime soon. But I don't *know*. Why are you asking me about this damn baby? It isn't mine."

"But you'll take it?"

"*No*."

Erin strides back to the trailer. Clint stands facing the baby, as if he expects it to explain something.

It was about this time last year that Erin had gotten pregnant.

Clint had started a running list of songs to sing to the new baby when it was born: "I Will" by The Beatles, "Don't Be Shy" by Cat Stevens. Erin had skipped school for a week and hadn't answered his calls. "It's not fair," she'd said one day, about two months in, after reconciling with the fact of her impending motherhood. They'd been at the mall shopping for new clothes. Clint had tagged along dutifully. He'd sat on the bench in a tiny dressing room while she pulled her old jeans off. "You have your fun and I get all stretched out by this thing inside me. Everyone that looks at me will know while you go on like nothing's different, 'cause nothing *is* different for you—you deal with the baby if you want, don't if you don't want."

"I'm gonna deal with it. I promise," Clint had said.

"What I don't understand is why can't it be fair? Why can't men have half the babies and women have the other half? Why do we have to suffer through one-hundred percent of the babies?"

"I'd have this one if I could," Clint had said. He'd wanted badly to make her laugh. He hadn't been able to do that much since they found out.

She'd turned to face him full on and glared. She might have looked funny with her pants off in this attitude, but she didn't. "Wow, Clint, that's *so* sweet of you." Her lips had pulled back from her teeth when she spoke, like a dog about to attack.

Two weeks later she lost the baby. Even though she had never wanted it, she cried, and nothing Clint could say to her after that was right.

Now he stands looking into the hard face of the woman he had almost shared a tiny person with. Instead, there is nothing between them but a warm wind blowing in the dark. "Erin, I need help. I

know you hate me—though I don't know why, actually—but I just need you to have some compassion on this freaking baby and realize that I can't take care of it. You are literally the only person I could think of to ask."

For the first time that night, she stands very close to him. He can smell her shampoo. He misses it. He wants to reach out and put a hand on her pale, spotted arm.

"Clint," she says, "I am not an idiot. I am not going to show up at the police department with a kidnapped baby. Sorry, but I just don't feel like getting investigated right now. This is your problem." She goes to the window and hoists herself up onto its frame, slithering back into her bedroom. The car door is still open, and the baby starts to whine.

She turns to face the window and puts her hands on the frame, ready to push it closed again. Clint's breathing grows quicker. "So you're getting out of here, huh?" she says. "Going to stay with your dad and his new girl?"

"No, not getting out. I just need to find him and get my money."

"Mm. We'll see."

Clint stands in place, silent. He had held out hope, still, that even if she hated him, she would take pity on an innocent, kidnapped child. He figures the best way of letting that pity work itself up in her is to stay silent.

"Good luck, Clint!" she says , her voice thick with mock enthusiasm. "I always knew you'd be a terrible father."

Back on the road, Cream on the radio, Clint tries to decide what to do next, but all he can think about is that time, a year ago, when he'd wanted the baby—the other baby. It was near the end of senior

year, and Erin wasn't going to have to drop out of school or anything. He was ready to get a job, to struggle to pay the bills, to come home to Erin every day, to wake up for the baby in the middle of the night. He was eager for his dad to call again, his twice-yearly call, so that he could tell him what he was going to do. In a strange way he was eager for his dad to call again every year for the next twenty or thirty years because, while his dad would be calling from a different house every time, Clint was going to be in the same house with the same woman and the same baby, growing older and older, and it filled him with a thrilling sense of superiority to think that. Then, two weeks after those visions had begun to fill his head, they stopped. When he closed his eyes it was like he could see his future stretching out before him in a long, unbroken roll of tape; when he had found out there would be no baby, the tape broke off and fell to a grand cosmic floor and became an amputated, alternate future to be swept up and thrown away. He could no longer see what was coming.

Clint had lived in a sort of dread that at some point during his year-long relationship with Erin his father would come into town and meet her. His father would not like her. For everything he had done to them, the fact remained that his father was an almost gleefully abrasive person—the kind that always wore a full beard and maybe seventy-five extra pounds, the kind that you couldn't imagine ever having been a young person, like Santa Claus or John Goodman, the kind that wouldn't understand the appeal of a person like Erin. He was the kind that understood the appeal of a person like Tammy, Dolly Parton-like in her looks and liberal with her hugs and kisses. Tammy couldn't have been more unlike Clint's own mother—that had been Clint's first, unyielding thought when he met her. His

own mother, waiflike during her marriage, had swollen around the middle from the beer and self-imposed confinement since being abandoned, but there was still something cadaverous about her.

Soon he has driven out past the houses of anyone he might possibly know and is on his way over the county line. It looks as though the baby is staying with him. He feels like he has been on the road for hours, though it is still dark outside. The road cuts a thin swath through a forest, yet the only trees he sees are those caught by the edges of his headlights. The baby remains mostly quiet in the backseat, gurgling occasionally as if it is trying to say something. When it starts to fuss, Clint turns up the radio and the baby calms down.

Yes, the weight of an undersized body in the backseat is familiar to him. He is becoming almost comfortable with it. But he is realizing now that there is something else that makes this eternal, late-night drive feel a little like a dream he has had before: it's a revenge trip. If trips could be placed in genres, like songs, this would be the genre of his journey—revenge trip—and it is the second of its kind he has taken. He is reminded of a recent yet nearly forgotten drive he had taken with Tyler—his childhood best friend he now seems to have little in common with except for the fact that they are always together. He'd been with Tyler at a party, a little bit drunk, in the middle of the night—though Clint didn't enjoy parties, he enjoyed them more than being at home—when this girl that had never talked to Clint before approached them and asked Tyler where Angela was. When Tyler said he didn't know—Tyler and Angela had broken up the week before—the girl swirled the beer around in her red plastic cup keeping her eyes down on her drink while she raised her eyebrows. "Maybe you should go ask Darwin Jefferson," she had said, and the

name fell hard on Tyler with all the force she had intended.

Tyler had laughed lazily, but it was a ruse. He rolled his head around on his neck and by the time it fell forward again he had a violent gleam in his eyes. Darwin Jefferson was a black kid, second-string lineman for the football team, arms as big around as milk gallons. Tyler was like Clint—people thought they were brothers—thin, toneless, washed out. They walked around like shadows of one another. But now, against all reason, the beer-swirling girl, who Tyler seemed to know, had given him the idea that he needed to find and fight Darwin Jefferson. So Tyler became fixated and he and Clint left the party in Tyler's truck, on the hunt for Darwin and Angela.

It felt like a crazed, doomed mission. Tyler drove, spurred on by revenge and a fearlessness borne by alcohol. They drove in the dark for hours. Clint persuaded his friend to stop for a break at Taco Bell, but he couldn't distract him to the point of quitting. They never even found Angela or Darwin—together or otherwise. What would they have done if they had? Maybe nothing. But Tyler's revenge trip and Clint's own are the same. He sees it now. They are missions to hunt someone down and tell them, "You gave me the best time of my life and you didn't let it end the way I wanted."

Or maybe that wasn't it. Maybe it was a trip to say, "I gave love to this endeavor and I was not compensated."

Of course that's it, he thinks. Don't try to complicate it. That is what this trip is for: compensation.

He imagines arriving at Chick-fil-A, picking his dad and Tammy out of the crowd—he hopes they will be sitting in camping chairs and not inside a tent—and approaching them with the baby in his arms. He will have to say it is his. And then what? Keep it forever?

He knows that he can't go back to Milton. Ever. He has burned that bridge by taking the baby. He'll have to start a new life now, whether his father invites him to stay or not. For this he feels a gentle surge of something like gratitude for the baby.

He decides he'll call his mother in a week or so. He'll probably call her at Gary's house. That's where she'll go, almost certainly. He'll call and check up on her every few months. Not too often, because there won't be much to say, but often enough to know whether she is okay.

Pink Floyd is on the radio and the baby seems to have fallen asleep again. This is perfect lullaby music, Clint thinks, and adds it to his mental list of songs to sing to future baby. This is what he thinks just before he sees lights behind him flashing red and blue with the rhythm of a casino sign. He sees the lights even before he hears the sirens. It's like watching a firework and waiting what seems like forever for the audible crack that matches the spray of light. He fully intends to surrender himself. To pull to the side of the road, step out of the car with his body tensed and ready to be flattened against the car window, his wrists twisted behind him and cuffed. Instead his foot falls harder on the gas pedal. He doesn't know how much power the car has or how long it can outrun a cop. The car accelerates quickly, and soon he is doing 115 as he takes off down the empty stretch of highway. He comes up behind a car inching along and swerves around it. His hands are sweating so badly that they lubricate the steering wheel and make it hard to hold. The baby's awake and agitated and starts up an anxious grousing that quickly grows into a full-on howl. Clint reaches for the radio dial and turns the music all the way up, as if hoping to drown out the wail of the baby and the siren.

Run, rabbit, run, Pink Floyd urges coolly while Clint keeps steady pressure on the pedal. Cops have always been kind to him. His mother has been arrested twice and both times the cops seemed sorry for him.

He lurches to the right, dodging a car in the left lane, and then, on an impulse, takes off down an exit ramp. He's going to Crestview. He isn't sure if this is a good idea, but a real town might allow him to lose the cop. Better than a deserted two-lane highway. Then he remembers that towns have traffic lights. What do people in car chases do at traffic lights? Certainly they don't stop. Clint decides to deal with that problem when it comes.

He flies off down the exit and almost immediately hits a red light, but no cars are approaching in either direction, so he rushes right through it, making a wide, wild left turn and laying on his horn for good measure, as if the cry of the siren isn't enough to alert drivers to stay away.

Still, these streets are deserted and thin; at first there is nothing surrounding him but trees. Then some signs of civilization start to appear: gas stations, little restaurants, an EconoLodge. Then the buildings grow taller and closer together. He's flying past strip malls and billboards plastered with lawyers' vengeful faces and enormous phone numbers. He's looking for somewhere he can turn to disappear. This is not the dizzying metropolis he was hoping for. Finally, he makes a sudden, sharp right in hopes of running the cop into the curb. The further into town he gets, the more cars materialize, though still there are not many—this road has only two lanes traveling in each direction. He dodges them swiftly, darting briefly into oncoming traffic, and plows over a median to flip a split-second U-turn. His skill surprises him. He's talking through every maneuver with the

baby. "That's right . . . let's go—this way! . . . Excuse me, please . . . and thank you. . ."

The baby's screaming and Janis Joplin is shouting herself hoarse on the radio. It energizes Clint. The solitary wail of the siren now grows into a chorus. Clint glances into the rearview mirror and sees that he is now being tailed by three cop cars, the up-and-down laments of their sirens creating a horrible modulating harmony. "Let's try . . . here—" he says to the baby, swerving in a wide arc to the right of a bus stopped at the intersection. The street he turns on to, however, is not empty. There's a car stopped behind a delivery truck, and by the time he sees it it's too late. He's moving too fast and the steering wheel is too slick with sweat. Everything in his vision flashes white and he feels a crack from his collarbone to his eyesockets.

It takes someone pulling him by the arm to make him realize he's still alive. Pulling him from the driver's side window—first his right shoulder, his right arm, twisting him to get a grip on the other side of his body. There are two people pulling, shouting, trying to pull him right out the window. "The door," Clint says, and when he moves his mouth, he tastes blood.

They have him out on the street, lying in the turn lane when someone socks him in the stomach. "Don't," he protests delicately, half-stunned that the police are actually beating him in the middle of the road, and half-afraid for the baby. He cranes his neck back toward the car and is socked again, drawing his head into his chest. He cranes back once more, searching for the baby in his blurry field of vision. He sees the car accordioned from tip to windshield. He wishes he knew the baby's name—he doesn't even know if it's a boy or girl. He's socked again.

Only then does he strain for a good look at his attacker and sees that it's not an officer; it's a meaty, red-faced man, a dirty yellow t-shirt stretched across his enormous stomach, a sparse goatee covering what would have been his chin, if he'd had one. At his side is a woman, similar in girth, a fire of revenge in her eyes, shouting unintelligibly in a high, thin voice. Uniformed men pull at Clint's assailant—two or three officers on each arm, wrenching him away. The large man gets in one last punch to the stomach. The woman at his side claps like a happy baby.

At the edge of his consciousness Clint hears the sirens still. Just closer is the indistinct buzz of walkie-talkies. Now the uniforms pull Clint to his feet; his stomach throbs in protest. He lets them drag him. They push him against the window of the car and wrench his arms behind his back, thrusting his wrists together.

For a moment he forgets he did not make it to Valdosta. He looks around for the Chick-fil-A sign, a red and white beacon, surrounded at its base by a mound of camp chairs and little tents like the stem of a flower. He's afraid his father will see this, or Tammy. What would Tammy think?

With his face turned at a hard angle and his cheek against the window, he sees that the fat goateed man is being arrested too. His wife continues to squeal. Suddenly Clint understands that the car he hit was theirs. They are vigilantes, personally seeing to it that justice is served. Still, Clint stares blearily in their direction, as if listening for some explanation in their shouts—they mystify him. Perhaps they saw he was being chased and thought he would try to run. No matter now.

He turns away from them. He presses his nose, tender from the

air bag's walloping, against the glass of the window. This way he can see the baby. The pane of glass and the pain in his face seem to muffle the sound of its cry. He cannot hear, but he can see the infant's face—the hard, fierce, dimpling of the chin and the space between the eyebrows, the narrowing of the eyes, the grotesque contortion of the bottom lip. The eyes are ringed in red, shiny from tears. A string of saliva drops from the mouth. Clint stands, feeling the metal close around his wrists, watching that string grow long, then short again when the baby takes a breath. It's like watching a silent film. Nothing about it is cute or soft.

Something snapped in him when he decided to leave his house in the night and "shop" for cars in the Walmart parking lot, and it's snapping back now. It's like his brain has shifted in his head, dropped into gear, and is starting to grind again the way it is supposed to. Again he can see his future, and again it stretches out long before him, an unending reel.

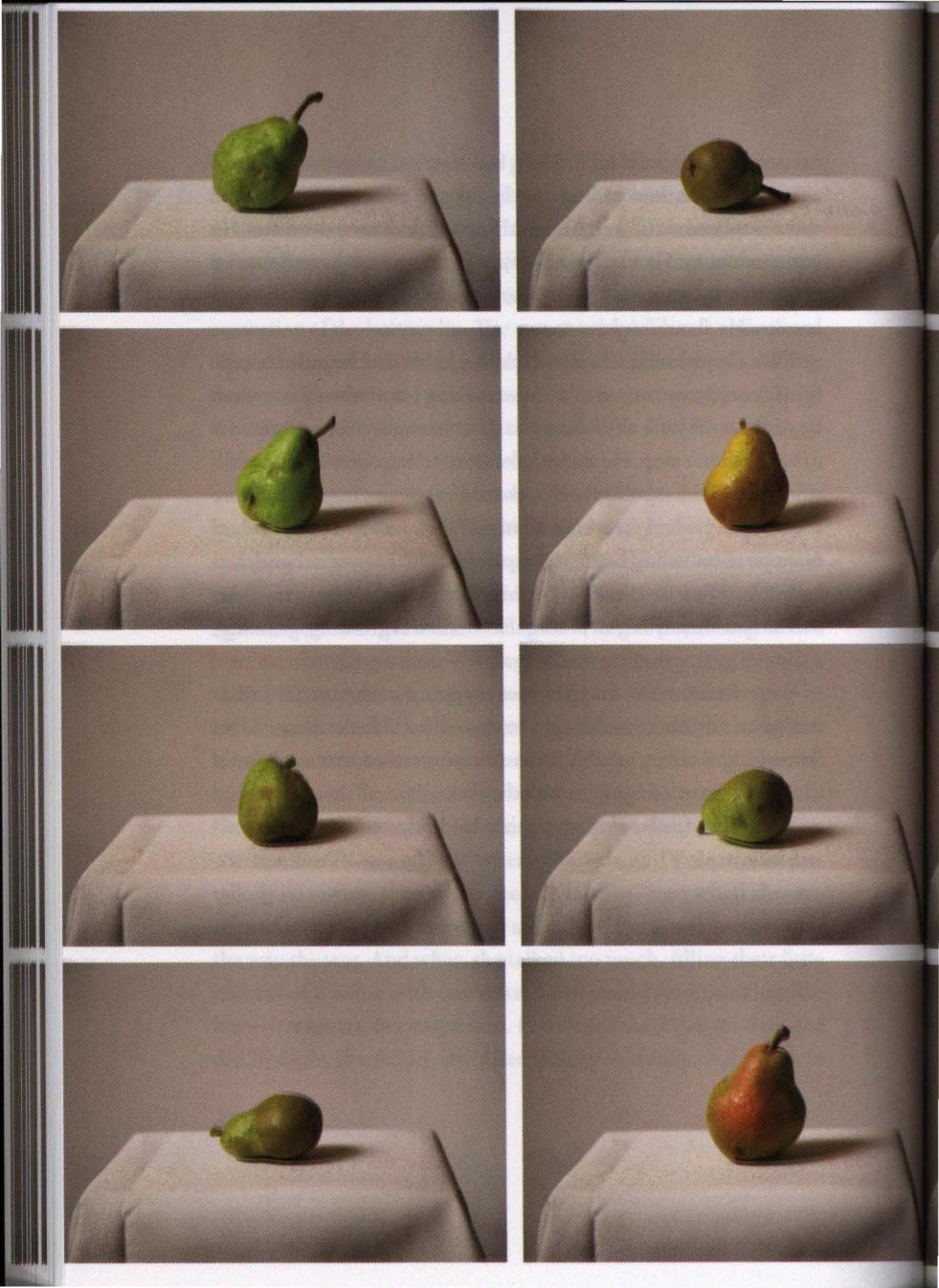
The instant he chose to leave seems like a hundred years ago—in his bedroom, unable to sleep, smoking the last joint Tyler had given him on credit, the electricity turned off. It was not the first time this had happened. Sometimes the darkness lasted a day or two before Gary could get them the money to pay the power bill. The worst part was that the TV was off, and when there was no TV she would just talk. It was worse than when she was silent—even when she was silent for days—because when she talked there was no ignoring the way she was. And when she talked too much, filling their little hallway of a house with her voice, Clint would start thinking like her—her syntax, her suspicions. He needed the TV as much as she did. Tonight, thankfully, she'd been asleep on the couch, basking in

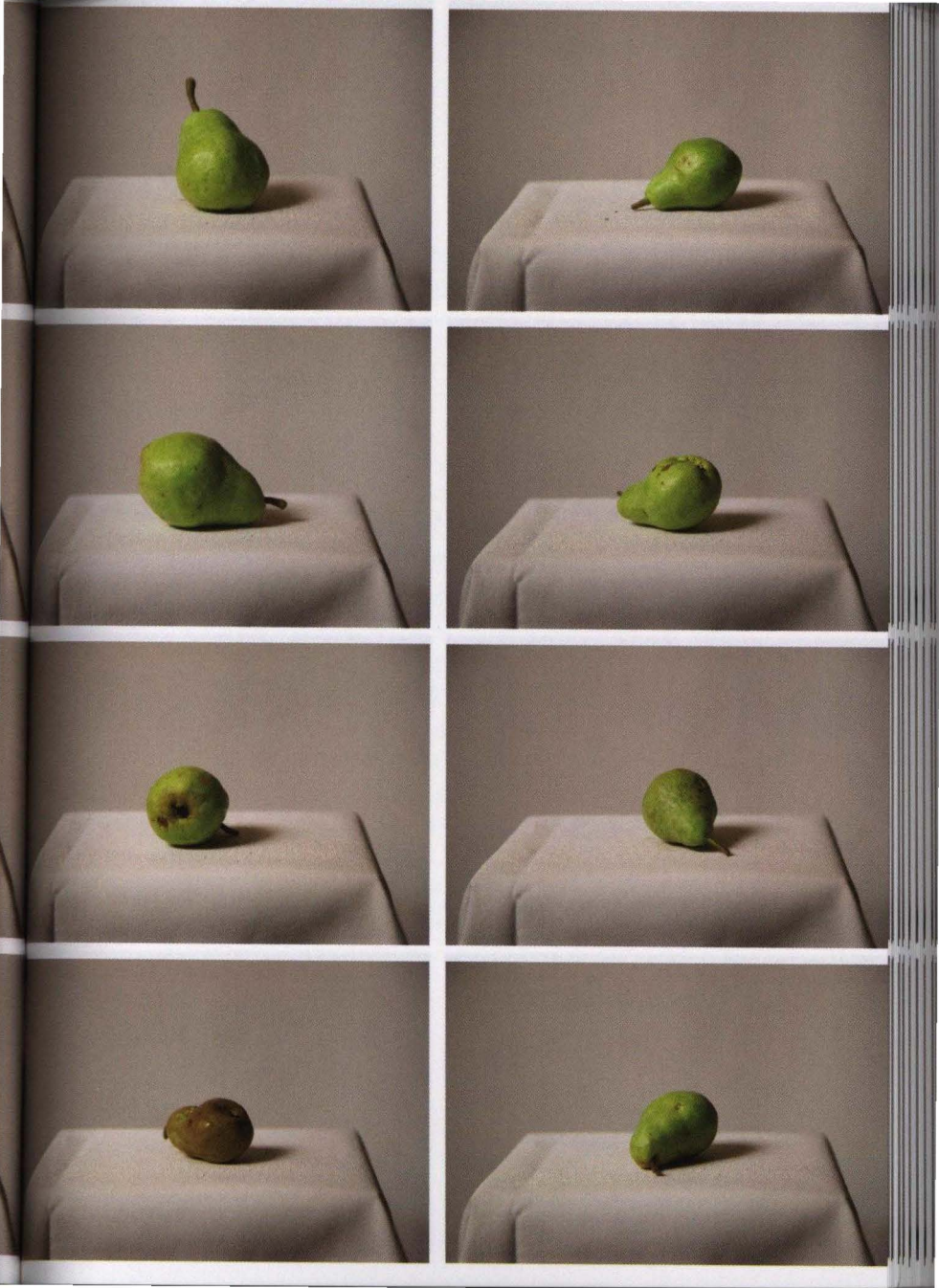
the residual glow of the TV. Clint, head bathed in his last beautiful cloud of smoke, had peered out the door to glance at her reclined there, and something in him had started to churn, overheat. He had the money. He had the money to pay for this—he had earned it—but it wasn't in his hands. Yes, he could ask Gary, but he didn't have to. He shouldn't have to.

Clint slipped on his shoes, tied clumsy knots, and bounded out the front door, unconcerned now about waking his mother. Even when he realized the walk to Walmart was much longer than he wanted it to be, he didn't stop. He walked along stretches where there was no sidewalk. He was spurred on by something consuming. Somewhere on the road he had understood himself. He'd realized that he had no hope of returning home triumphantly with money in hand, but hadn't had time to think about this. The parking lot was in sight, and he had already begun to scan. His brain was grinding, grinding, a slipped gear, grinding madly against—nothing.

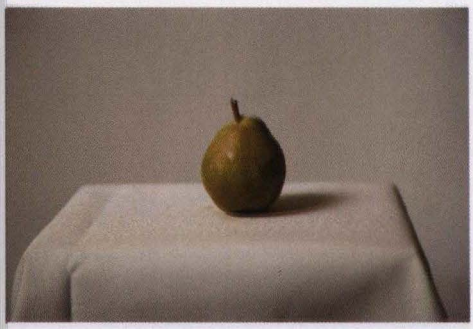
Yes, whatever had snapped was snapping back now. Oh, what this baby's mother would want to do to him if she ever saw him. Something worse, probably, than the fat, goateed man had done. Clint feels water stinging in his own eyes.

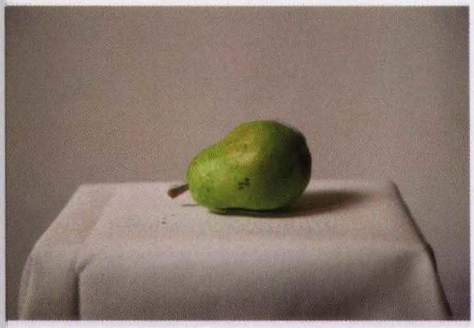
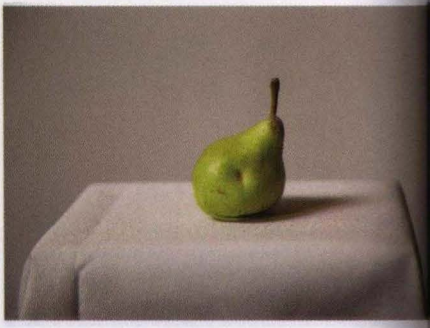
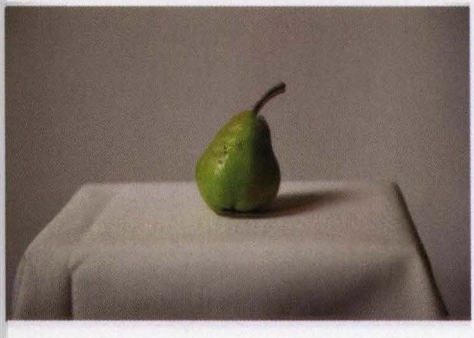
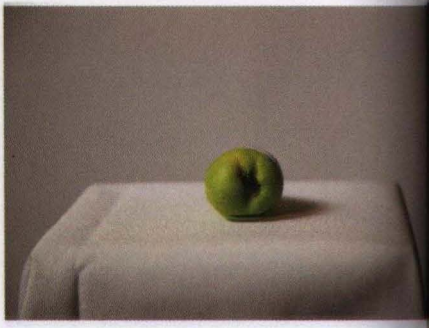
The pain is finally coming to him, he thinks.

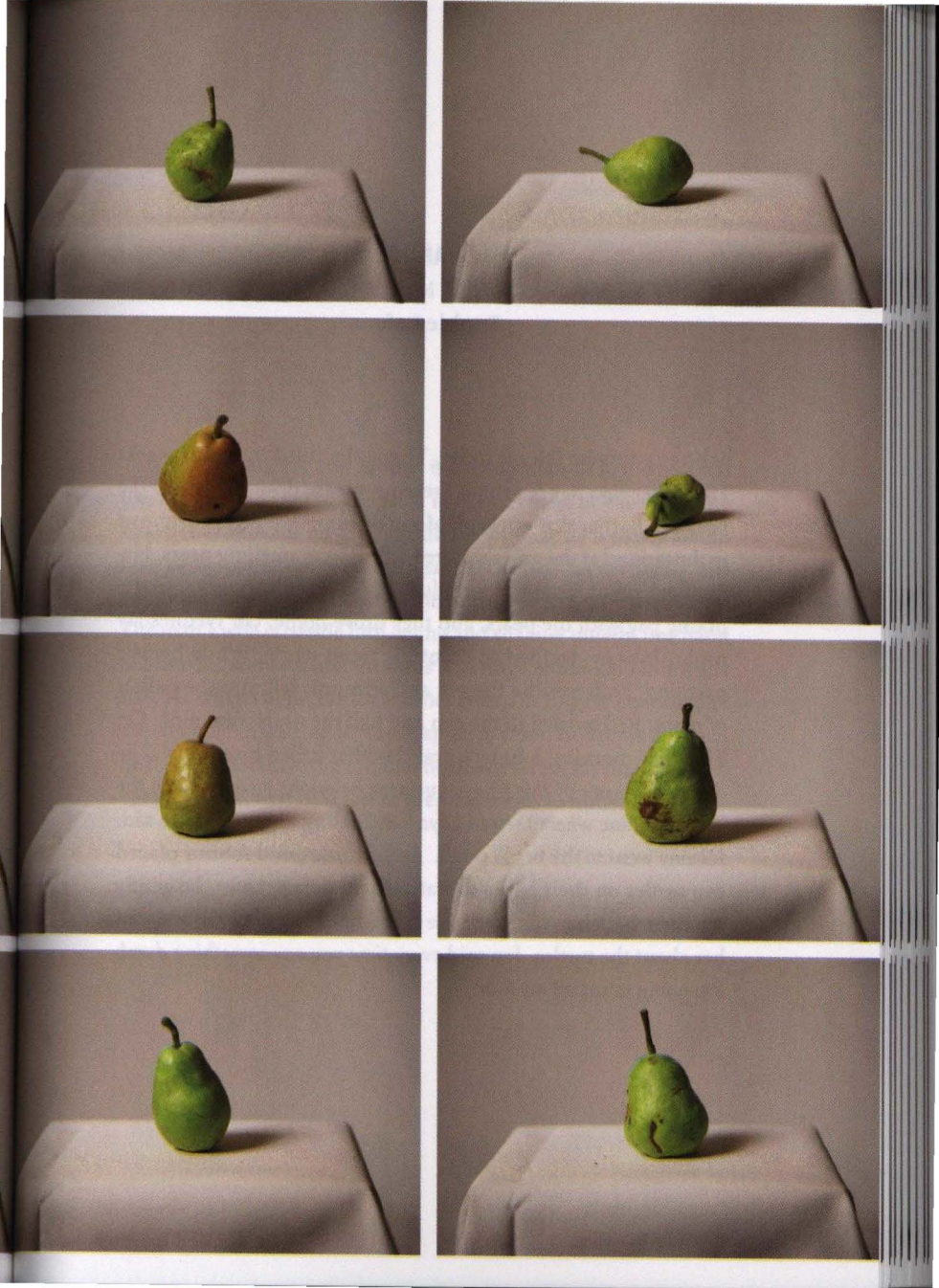










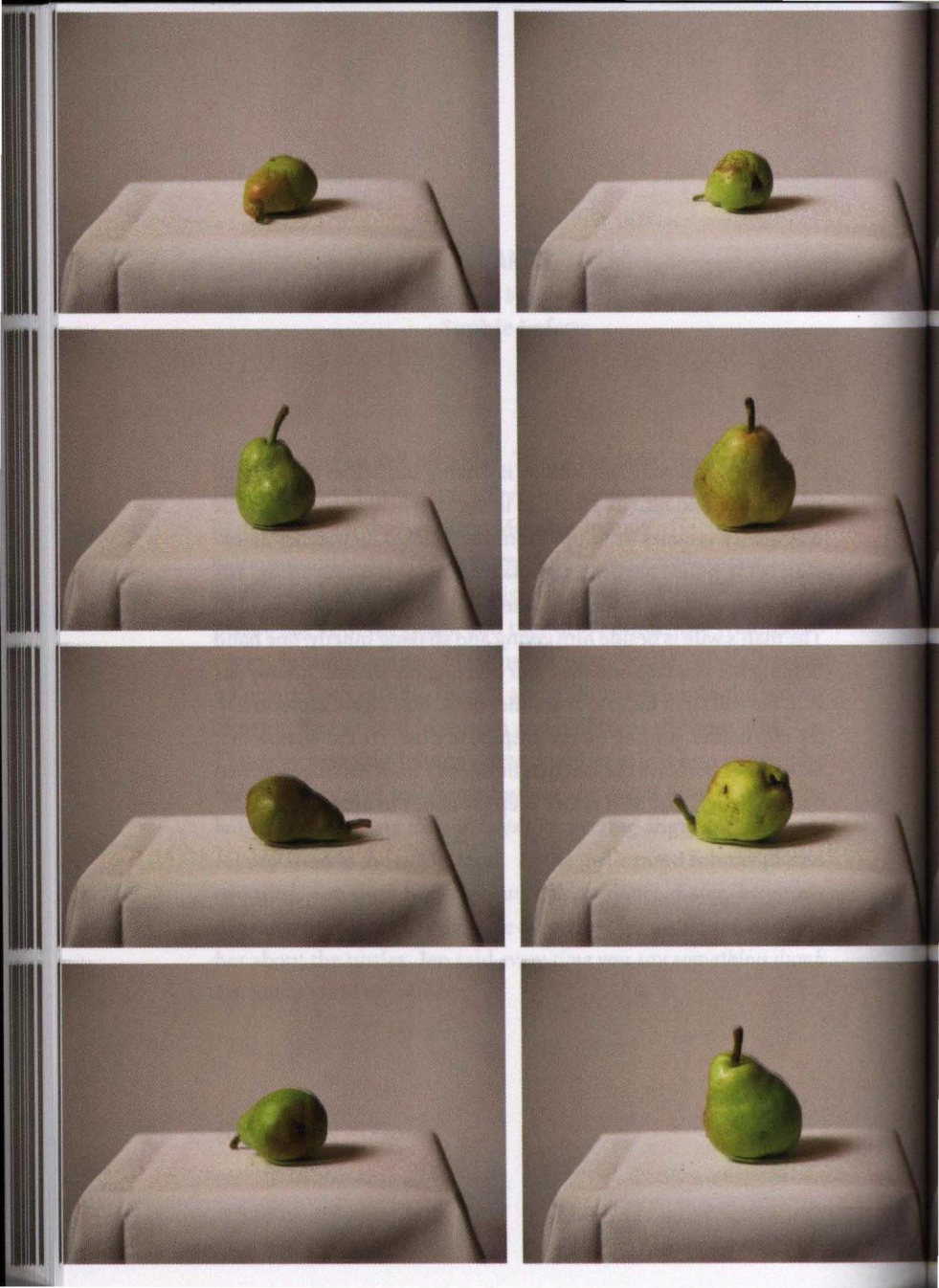
HANDS

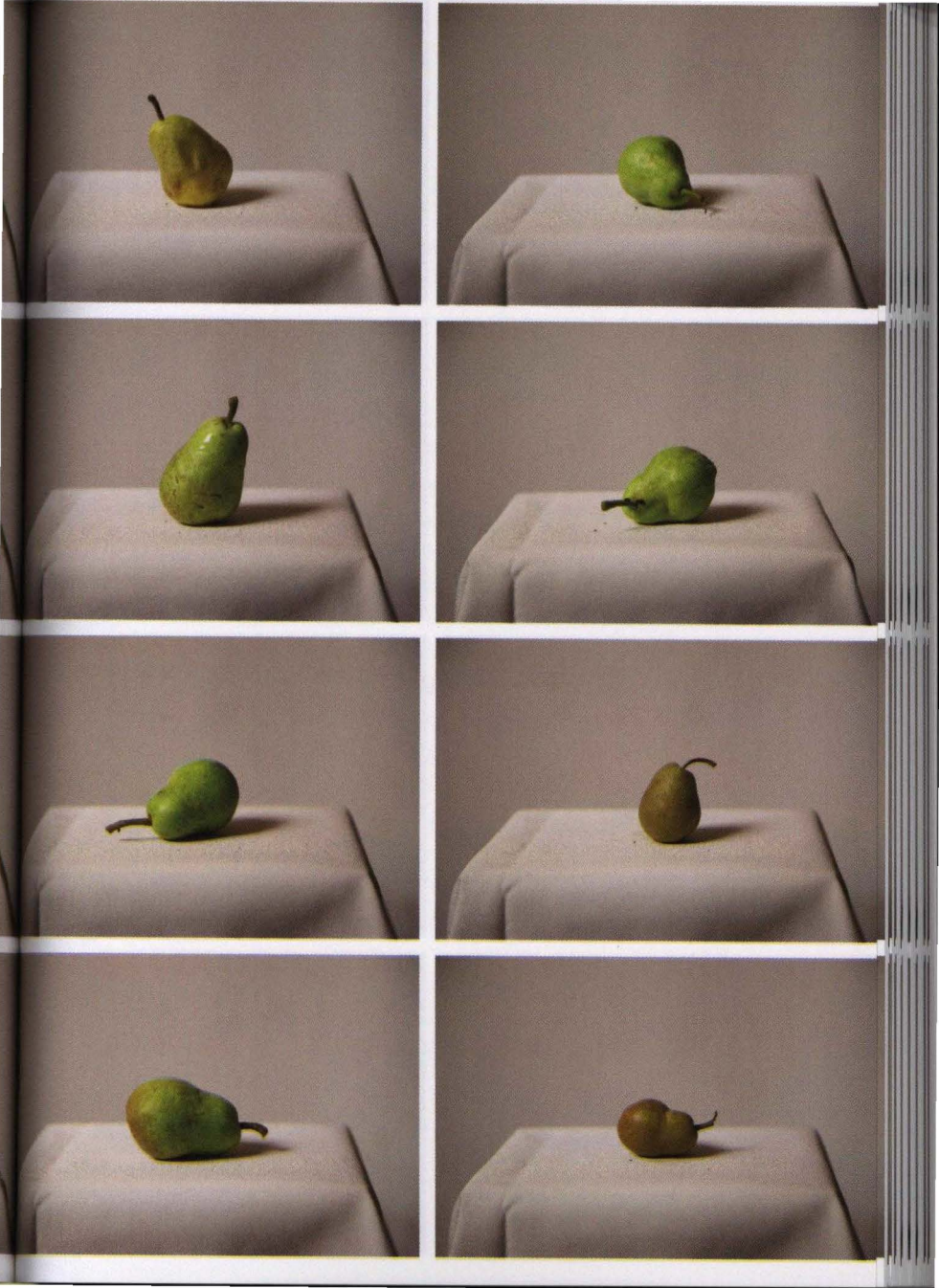
by

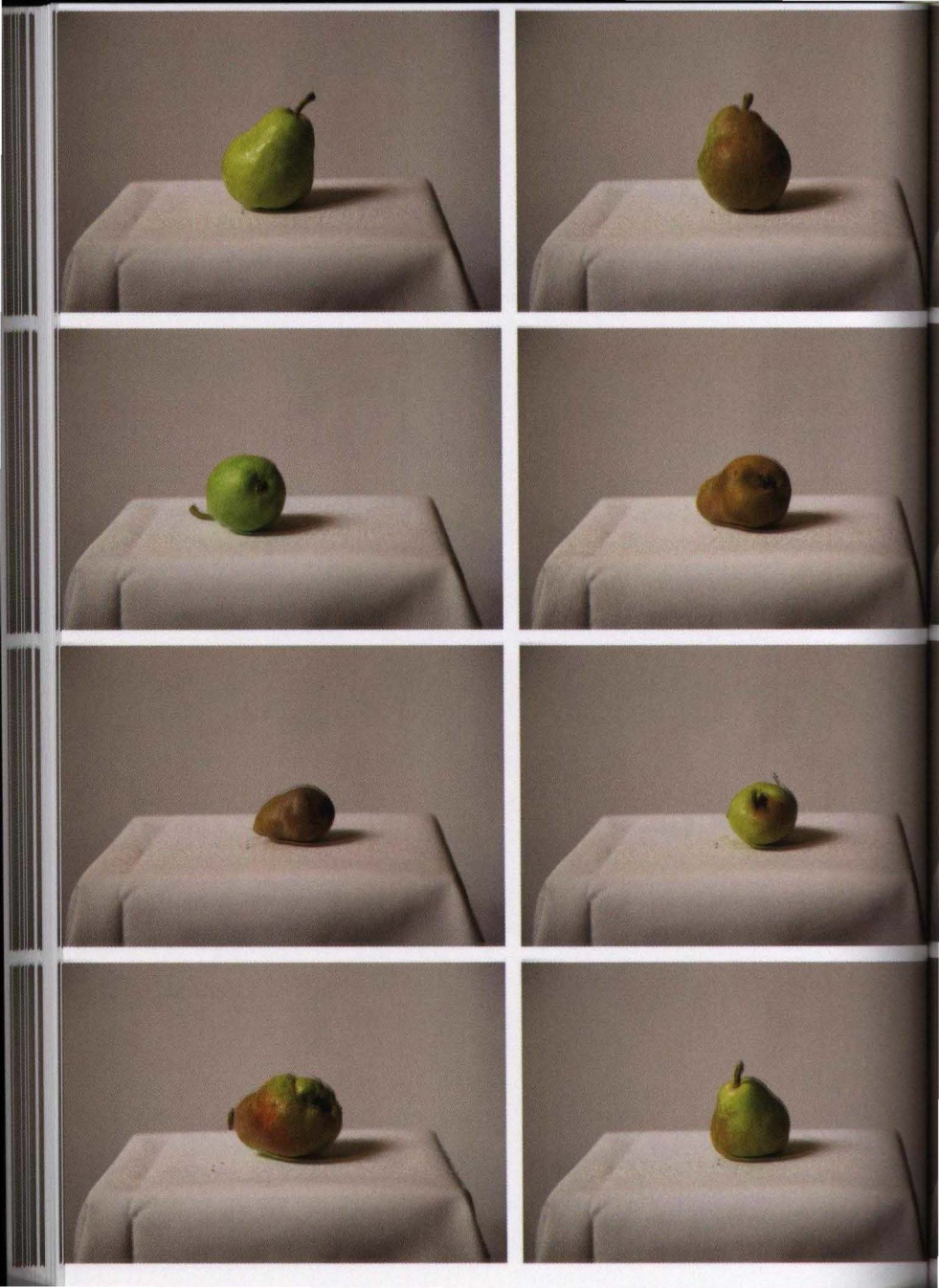
Sophie Lefens

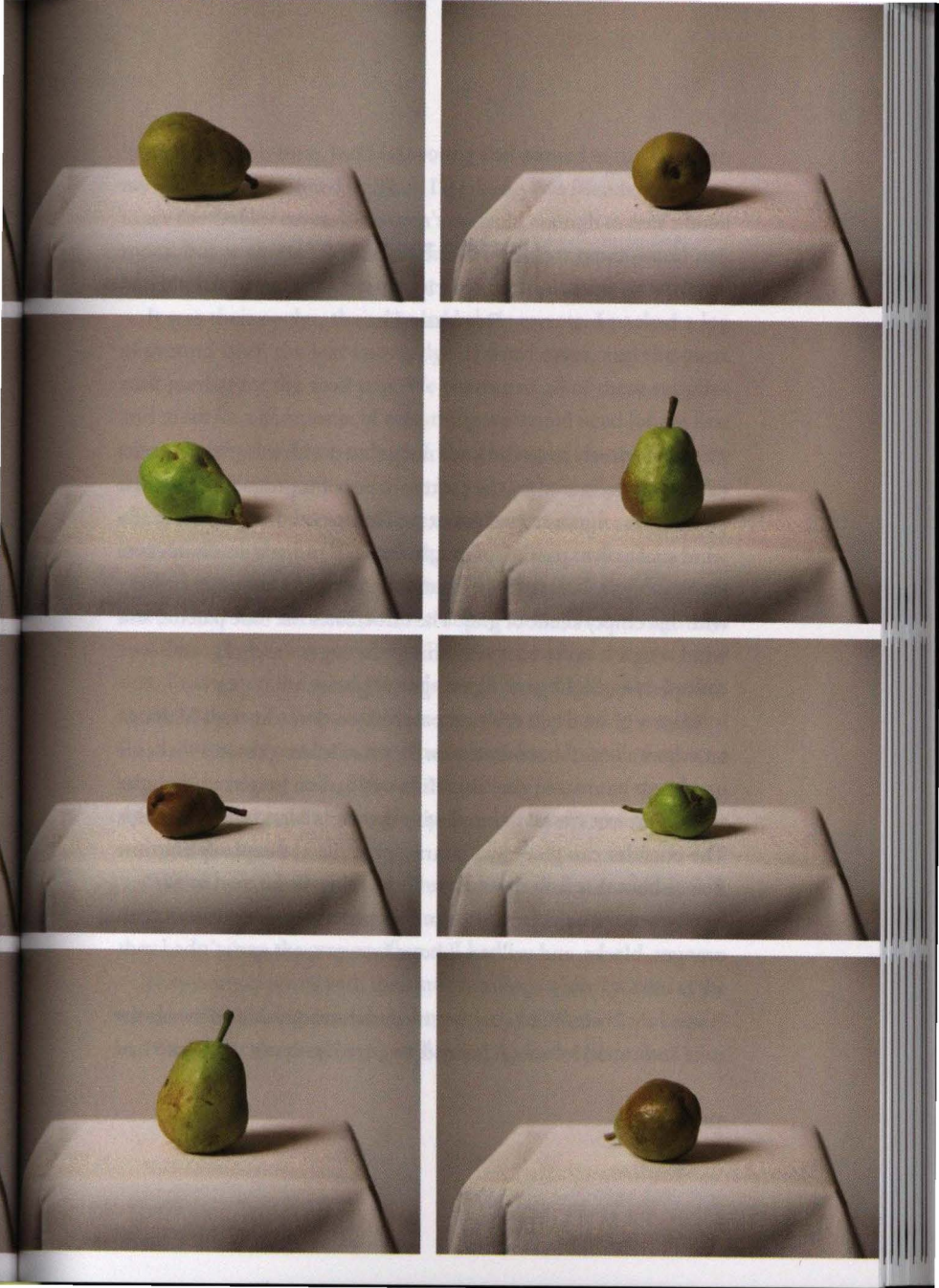
Johnny's fingers fell off today. That's the third time this week. His father says *this is getting tiresome, please drive yourself to the hospital.* Earlier that week, on Monday, Johnny's fingers dropped to the ground at the grocery store while he was smelling pears. His mother said *oh dear* and put his index and pinky finger into the plastic bag with the pears, and they drove home. On Wednesday night, Johnny decided to paint his room white. While he was painting, both middle fingers and a thumb fell into the gallon of paint. Red swirled in the can and half the walls were pink. On Thursday morning Johnny's grandmother called him to say *if he didn't take care of this finger business he might have to go to the large building where the sad boys live.* Feeling angry and also sad, Johnny went to the turtle pond. At the turtle pond Johnny placed two turtles on their backs to watch them dance. Later, he gently put them back into the water. He called Jen, his girlfriend, and told her about the turtles. Jen said *every time you say something dumb I'm going to cut off my hair.*

Now it's Saturday and Johnny is driving himself to the hospital like his dad told him to. He parks in the lot where he can watch the emergency vehicles drive up. From his window he watches an old man being pulled out of an ambulance. The man is convulsing. His hands are slapping at the air as the paramedics try to restrain him. The man's wife is beside him crying and shaking quietly, one hand holding her stomach and the other covering her mouth. Johnny sits still. He will sit in his car for another hour, his fingers Ziplocked in the cup holder, waiting for the hospital to close. He knows now that he'd rather not leave the car, that he doesn't want his fingers sewed back together, that he'd rather keep his hands to himself.









LIGHTING THE DESERT

by

Dominic Shaw

The Idaho desert looks dirty. It's not painted with the golden swaths of sand or decorated by the pretty shapes of saguaro cactuses that populate the romanticized deserts of Hollywood. Instead, the Idaho wind snakes over patches of rough, scarred land, too emotionless to display any real color. Every landscape is much the same, starting with one empty shade of gray. The dirt creates the base palette, and wind whips it up to coat everything, the sage, the rocks, and even the open sky. Light gray, lighter gray, lightest.

On any given day, a drive up past Milner, down towards Malta, or anywhere across the south-eastern corner of Idaho, presents the same gray scene, the same gray sky. Hills will vary in height, and angles will differ, but it's all painted with the same bland theme: Idaho. The outsider can glory in a sunrise or smile at purple springtime flowers, but this isn't the change I'm talking about.

I've seen the desert light up. I've seen it explode into colors: oranges, blacks, and yellows. I hope I never see it again.

It was July 26th, 2011, my seventeenth birthday. I didn't want the cake and cards, I wanted, instead, to go to the desert. My mom had

hoped for family time, but I was young and wanted to run free with my friends. So I planned it all out: I'd take my two friends, the twins, to see the Oakley caves. We weren't even old enough to rent a hotel room, but at seventeen, the twins—two indoor types—and me, had hit that age where we could face the great outdoors on our own.

It was their cooler, their car, and their carrots. I packed a log of ground beef, the lost knowledge of wind caves, and the punk rock playlist for the road trip. We combined all of these supplies and more for a composite of everything we would need for the first camping trip that I was to lead. I liked being in charge. Whether it was a predisposition, or if I just lacked that sort of control in my childhood, there was something to be said about the respect my friends afforded me as I introduced them to the outdoors.

We set out around noon and traveled through the midday heat wave. Their old, battered sedan trudged its way across highways and through the next town over. From my perch in the passenger seat, I navigated the twins towards the hills and along old, broken roads. We went from pavement to gravel, to dirt, and to ruts, until finally we made our last turn. The battered sedan pulled up on a patch of bare gray soil, glittered exotic with patches of dried and dying pigeongrass and strangletop that was always swaying in the warm Idaho winds.

"We're here," I announced. The twins sat and marveled at this, their first non-manicured campsite. I let them have their moment—they hadn't seen the gray as often as I had.

They came to terms with their surroundings while I waited at the trunk, as the glaring sun slowly burned my fair skin.

"Grab your sleeping bags, we'll go set up in the first cave."

"Where's it at?" one of the twins asked.

"Just up around the curve of this hill." They marveled again at how I could know that. I kept my smug smile to myself as I led them towards the cave.

Carrying our gear, we passed the fire pit—which sat halfway between our makeshift parking lot and the mouth of the first cave. This might have been a letdown for the twins. I'd described caves, the focal point of our entire trip, but sadly the Oakley wind tunnels are just a series of decommissioned irrigation tubes, blasted straight through entire mountains with the help of high-power dynamite. Though they are something new, their relative smallness hardly provides a break in the scenery. I led them down into the entrance of the first tunnel, which is low and thin. So thin, that any explorers who want access to the cave are forced to crawl on their stomachs over bits of broken rock to gain entrance.

The initial descent into the mouth of this hill always shoots adrenaline into my limbs, but just a few yards in, the cave opens up into its true form—jagged rock walls that open up, tall enough to stand in. No twists, no turns, no emotion all the way through until it opens up on the other side into the dry, gray desert again. After crawling in, we dropped our sleeping bags, lanterns, and backpacks.

Leading my friends around this landscape gave me something. It wasn't just the acrid smell of sweat on my brow, there was something more cerebral that this leadership position provided. Maybe it was the opportunity to see the desert through new eyes, but I felt new again on those dusty paths that took us to all of the caves and cliffs

that I had hoped to show them. It also provided me with a level of responsibility. I planned out the meals and I dictated when we would cook, tin foil dinners, to be wrapped and cooked straight in the coals.

The sun was still high in the sky at six o'clock as we walked around sharing carefree summertime laughs, but coals take time. We headed back to camp in order to refine the blocks of wood into exquisite neon orange coals—the perfect glow for a perfect meal.

"So let's get that fire burning, we won't want to be cooking in the dark."

We headed back through the caves to that old fire pit. It sat alone in the open, a primitive ring of loose rocks piled together. It would serve its function adequately, but with no extra flare or appeal. A scattered cornucopia of grasses, stemmed weeds, and thistles had grown up to the ring and then promptly died. It must have been a year or two since anyone had last camped here; it would have taken at least a season for the desert to thoroughly remove any water that remained trapped in those dried-out, dead stalks.

"We won't be able to start the fire until we clear out some of these weeds," I grumbled to my friends. So we began working at the mess of weeds around us.

Idaho's a dusty place. Stomping through the desert, one's foot will carry a thin layer of dirt up into a cloud that follows them. This had always led me to believe that Idaho soil was soft and loose. It's not. As we tried to yank these golden grasses out of the ground, we found it held tight, like trying to rip hair from its scalp. We yanked and pulled and ripped at the stalks of grasses and grains. The grasses came easily, but the stalks of other weeds refused to rip either inside or outside the soil. In addition to the heat working against us,

the Russian thistle also left barbs in our hands. We exhausted our strength in the harvest; the July sun will do that. We were dripping and dehydrated, our hands started to callous, we couldn't possibly continue on.

Sitting down and catching our breath, I said, "You know, we could probably just stomp down the rest of this. That should be good enough."

The twins spoke in turn.

"Yeah man!"

"That's a great idea!"

"It will save us so much time."

They couldn't help but agree with me: I was in charge.

I had displayed my mastery again. I had found the solution. My head dropped to hide my smug smile in the fire pit as I stacked sticks in the form of a log cabin, stuffed full of paper towel tinder.

I huddled in close, hoping to shield the unripe flame from the wind—no small task on the Idaho plains. A spark leaped from the match and moved onto the first balled up paper. The first piece ignited the next, and I watched the fire grow. I lifted my head and let the twins revel under my smug smile-turned-grin.

Then the wind picked up.

An ember was lifted out of the fire pit. My heart stopped and my blood grew still as I watched this little piece of flame lifted by pressures great and incomprehensible to me. It landed on a thick patch of weeds, stamped together for optimal conduction. A flame spread across this bed of weeds as quickly as the wind could carry it. My heart exploded back into life and I screamed the twins into

action. We were all stomping at the fire as we felt the flames caress our calves and melt away our budding leg hair.

The flame was dying. We were so close. We just had to keep stomping.

Then another gust came. It lifted the fire off the scorched earth and set it back down in an even larger patch of shrubs and weeds.

"GO GO GO. You go grab our stuff from the cave. You go start the car," I made the split-second assignments.

I ran with one twin to clear out the cave. We had to get everything we wanted all in one trip. The next thing I remember, I had jumped into the backseat of their car with all of our supplies still in hand. I remember untangling myself from unrolled sleeping bags, a lantern still gripped by white bloodless knuckles, the fire still growing behind us.

There was a numbness, I remember. It grew up from my groin and spread across my torso. My hands tingled as my friends asked me what to do.

"We've got to report it," I said, bouncing down those same dirt roads, the fire still growing behind us.

So we did, but I can't recall who dialed or what was said. I simply remember a numb feeling as I was jostled around the back seat of the car. What little I can piece together is the emergency responder telling the twins to drive a safe distance away and to wait; they'd have an investigator out to talk with us shortly. A few minutes went by until we found what felt like a "safe distance" from the inferno behind us. We got out of the car and I turned and looked at the hillside we'd just escaped from. The sun was setting now, but the orange-yellow flames kept the mountains bright. Only the clouds of black ash,

rising over the valley could blunt the flames's gaudy rays. That sky, marked by those ominous colors, was the only time I've ever seen that desert change. No longer would it sit a still, lifeless, pale gray.

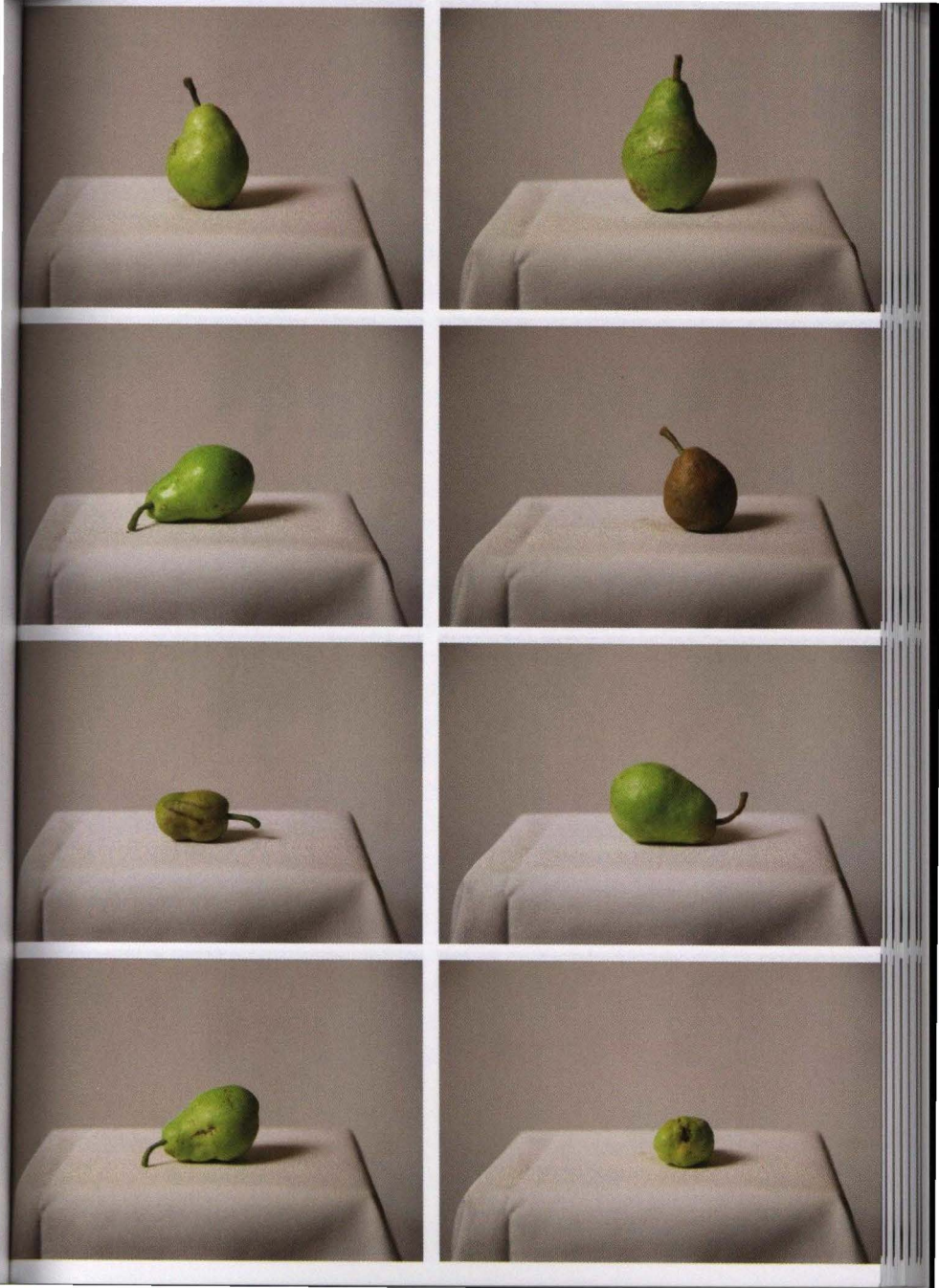
I didn't cry until my parents arrived. I didn't cry until I could hand over the reins and release my title as leader.

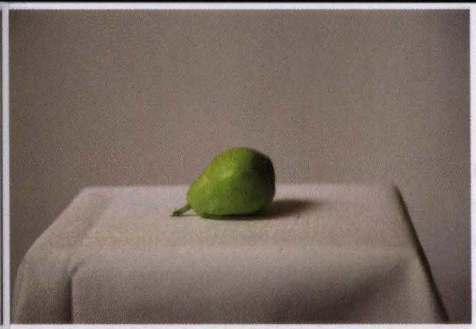
The investigators came and went. Six hundred and sixty acres were erased over the course of five days, painted black. But it was ruled an accident—a misfortunate culmination of circumstances. Still, I knew that I hadn't gotten off scot-free. I watched that entire night as countless emergency vehicles rushed past our little spot on the road and for five days, I watched smoke rise from the unquenchable fire. It was thick and dark enough to see from my home two towns over.

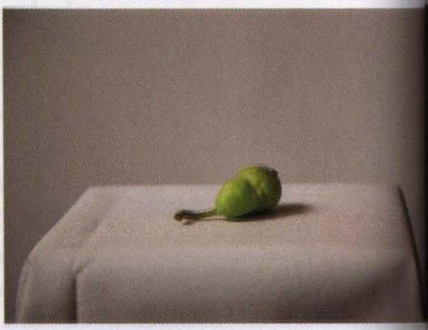
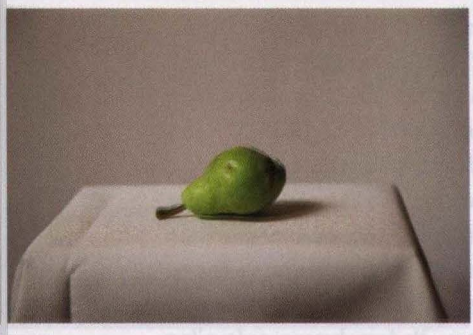
A few years later, me and each of the twins were served with individual letters from the USDA. The return address was somewhere in Arizona. Apparently it was their helicopters and their fire crews that had finally doused the goliath.

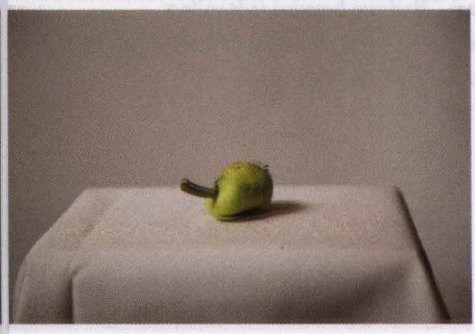
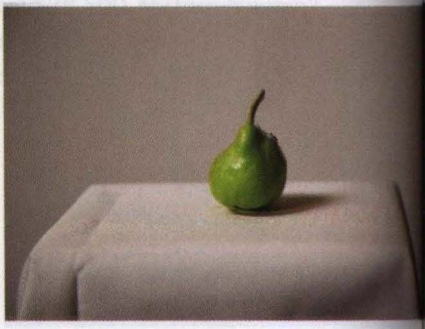
They had a grace period of three years during which they were allowed to collect their compensation, and they did after waiting until we were all finally eighteen years old. Our families decided to split the lump sum down the middle, a solution that worked well for me, as my family had some obscure clause in our insurance policy that covered our half—a cool $28,500. My friends weren't as lucky or as affluent. I never found out how they paid the USDA.

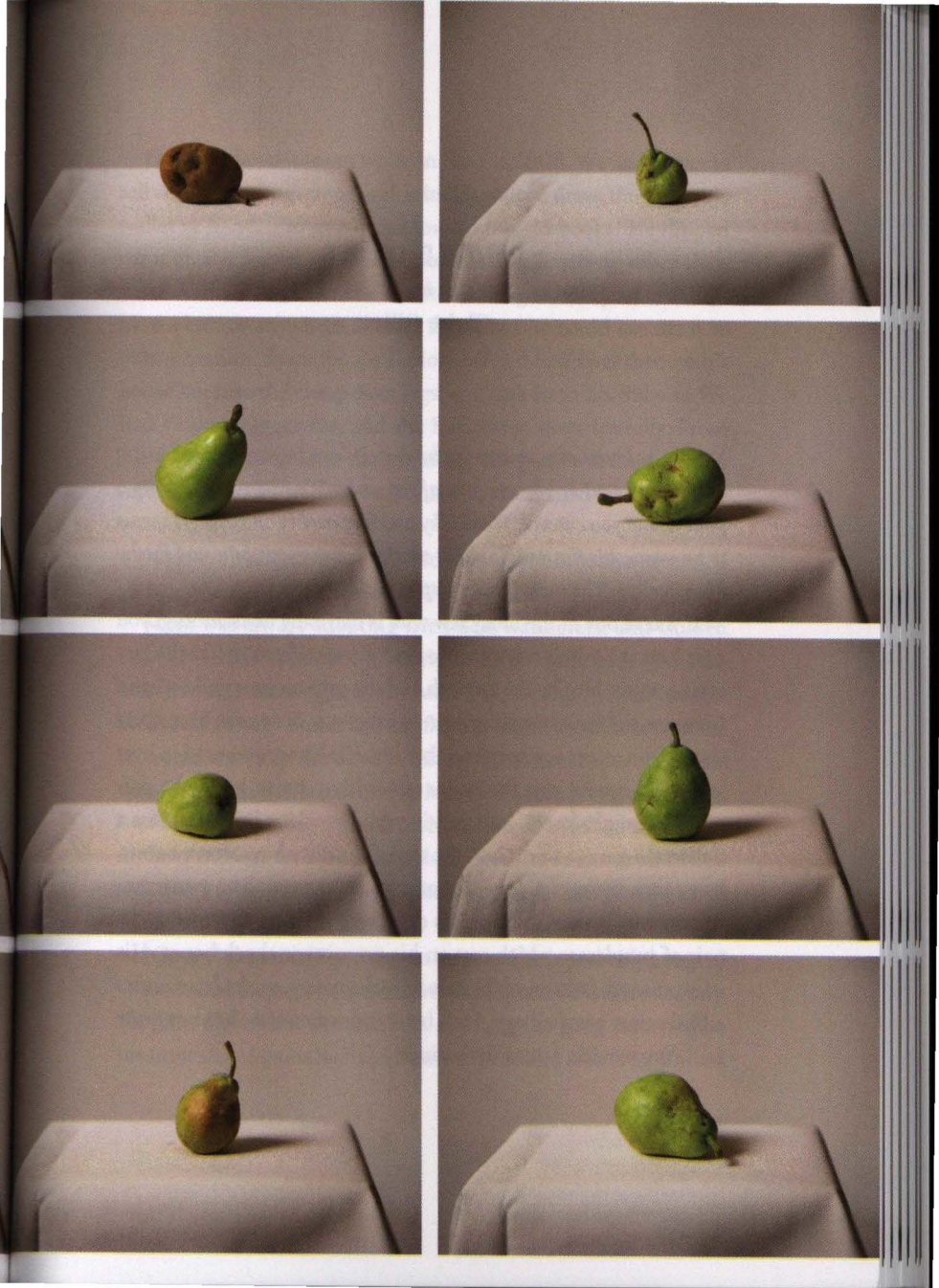
I've never worked up the nerve to ask.







GOLDEN DELICIOUS

by

Claire Gillett

You never know why your mom buys it. It lays in your fridge until it either goes bad or you run out of red ones. It's ninety-nine cents a pound, and you can tell. It's chalky and forgettable and always seems to be warm. It's the middle child, nestled between the fujis and flashy honey crisps. The most boring apple. Golden Delicious.

If you're one of the lucky few who is naturally unassuming, you pass him at Smith's without a second glance. If you're like the rest of us, you see him by the spinach and the grip on your child's hand becomes tighter, your stare more suspicious. He wears blue sport shorts with an orange stripe up the side. His legs are covered in liver spots and extend past the seams of his blue shorts, bend at a pair of underweight knees, and end in white sneakers he bought for a dollar at a garage sale. Over the top of his dirty long sleeve t-shirt, he wears a down vest. It's rusty orange and it used to be expensive, so he wears it even in May. His deep-set eyes peer from behind a pair of sunglasses which rest on his prominent cheek bones. His wiry ponytail, strawberry blonde in earlier years, peeks from under a Budweiser baseball cap. He's bent and womanish, but not quite frail. You wouldn't guess he's ninety.

He meandered into our world in June of 2005. We had clutter to sell and an empty garage to sell it in. He walked down the driveway, wallet in hand, and gravitated toward the old books. He flipped through the pages, not really interested in anything other than a distraction. But then the bar stools caught his eye. He didn't have a bar, or anywhere to store them, but he could use them as gifts sometime down the road. Mom offered to deliver them to his house because the cheap Ikea legs wouldn't fit in his Subaru. We had a much bigger car, and she has always been friendly. From their conversation later that evening, she gathered the essential information. His name was Donald Packard, and he lived alone on Wren Road.

"But don't call me Don," he said in his thick Brooklyn accent, "I go by my radio name. Golden Delicious."

Mom was always adopting friendless wanderers, and Golden was the perfect candidate—lonely and ripe for reform. Over the next few months, we got in the habit of bringing him dinner. He eventually came to expect it. Every Sunday night, around six or seven, he would warm up the stove in his dank basement apartment and wait for a delivery. Each of my siblings took a turn going to the door. I was eleven when my time came. Mom was in a rush so she waited in the car. She must have trusted him from the start, but all I knew was that I weighed sixty-five pounds and he looked like the child molesters I had seen on Dateline.

"Go on," she said, "I'm right out here, and he is probably hungry."

I rounded the steps with the heavy paper plate. I think it was curry. He didn't let us use the doorbell, so I rang the gong stationed on his front step. I guess he liked hearing the sound of it. It took him a

long time to answer the door, but no time at all to invite me in. My wary and judgmental core screamed: "No, Claire. No! This is how you get raped." I wanted nothing less than to cross that threshold, but Mom was outside and I trusted her. She was right. Apart from the pornographic calendars hanging on his wall and the gentle waft of cigarette smoke, his home was cozy. He let me sit on his new bean bag chair and then he gave me a stuffed tiger. He bought it the Saturday before during one of his rummages, and he was proud of it. One of the eyes was missing, but the tail was in great condition. I was too old for the toy, and I didn't really care about tigers. I liked it anyway. I kept it as a reminder that I had been wrong about him.

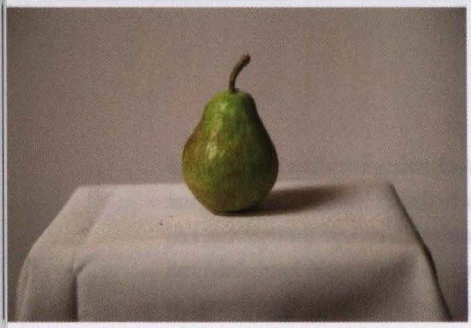
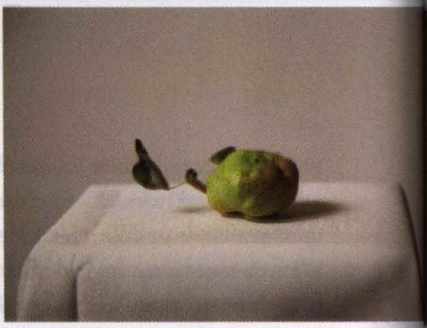
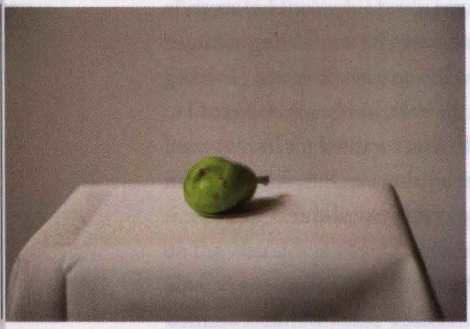
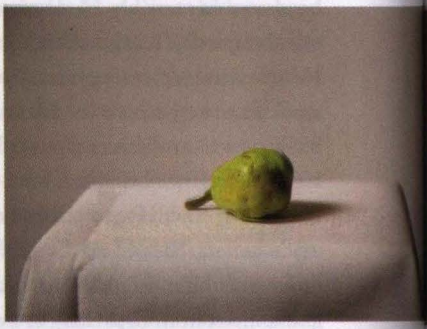
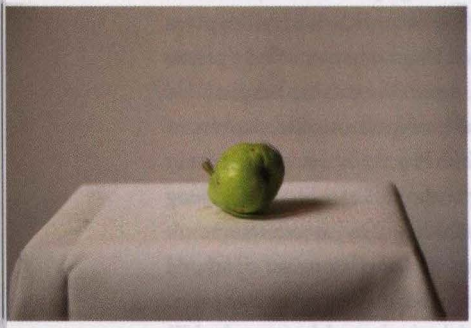
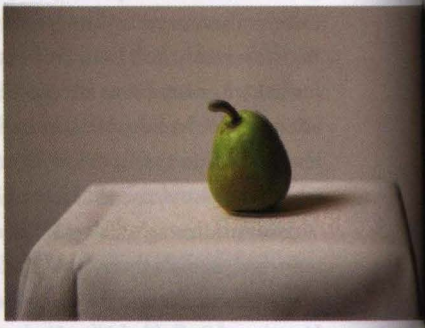
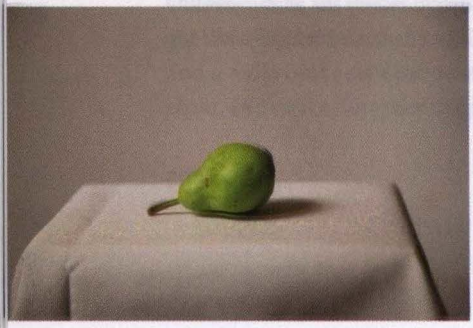
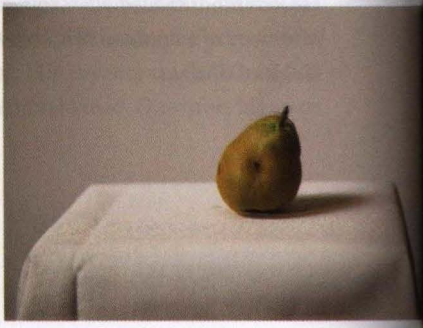
At some point, he took his place at our dinner table. He always sat on the west side, one seat next to the head. No one sent an invitation. He just seemed to be there every Sunday afternoon. I didn't mind. You could call it charity on Mom's part, but for me it was something more selfish. I was a budding chef, and he was never one to mince words when it came to food. If something needed to be criticized, he was there to deliver criticism. But, oh the gratification I got when he sat hunched over his plate, fork in his left hand, swooning at the meal I had placed in front of him. "Oh wow," he rasped, "This is great. No, I mean it. This is really great." I'll never know how he got the reputation of having good taste. Maybe he gave it to himself. Maybe he never really had it. It probably doesn't matter.

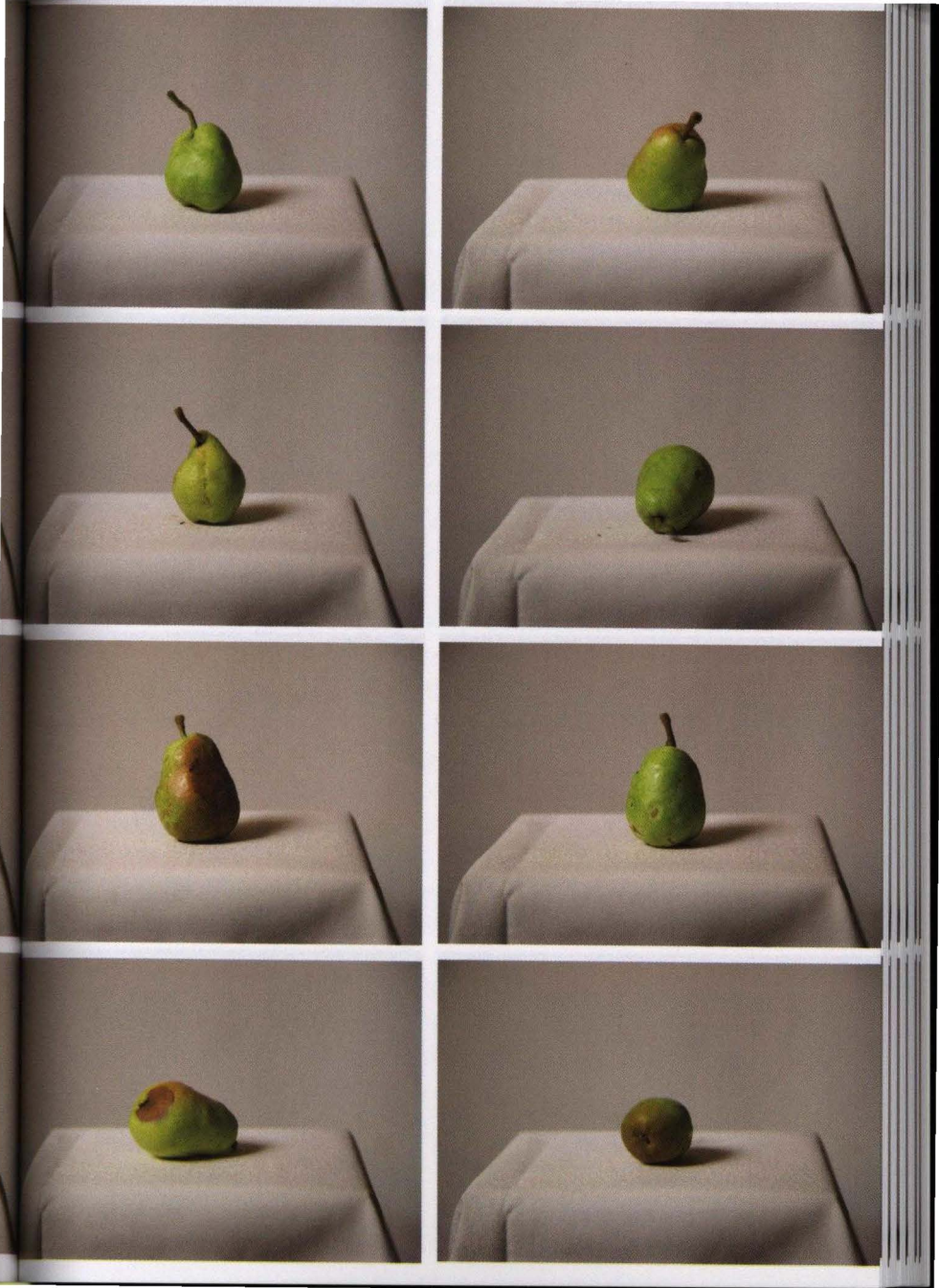
No one else spoke when he was around. He demanded attention. Over the years, his stories began to repeat themselves. Sometimes I got annoyed, but mostly I just listened. He used to be a tap dancer and a radio host and a movie star. His parents taught him to lie, cheat, and steal before they taught him to read. One time, his mom

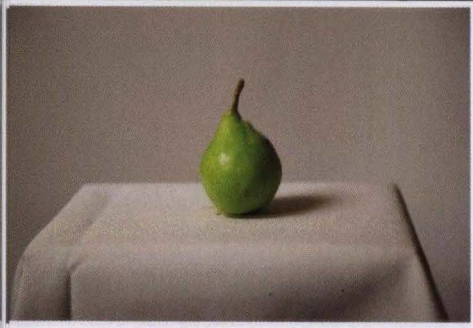
threw a fork at his older brother for chewing with his mouth open and it got stuck in his left shoulder. He didn't learn a nursery rhyme until he went to middle school. He stayed in college for twelve years. When he was forty, he had a sixteen-year-old girlfriend. He took her to Europe after she graduated high school, but other than that he treated her terribly. He smoked marijuana up until his seventy-eighth birthday. It calmed him down when he was feeling anxious. He talked to his tomato plants. He had a cat with no name. He hung stuffed animals in his trees. He was a writer, but he never seemed to know how to work his computer. He never wanted ice in his water. He told me I was beautiful, but I needed to wear my hair straight. He said my friend Payton had a boy's name, and when I told her, it made her cry. He told me I would make a good slave.

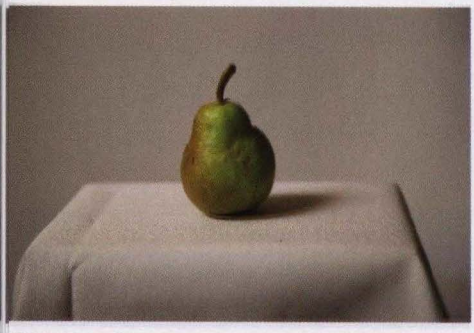
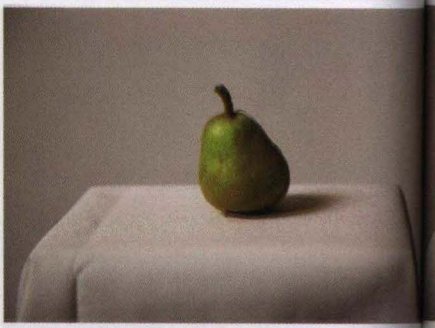
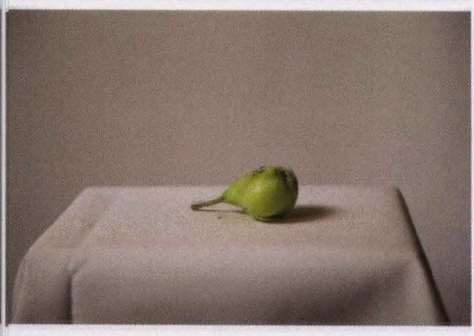
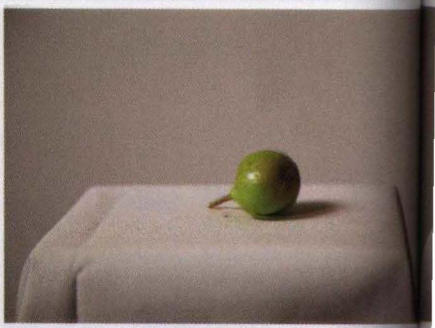
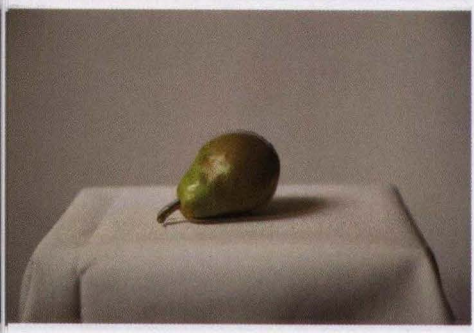
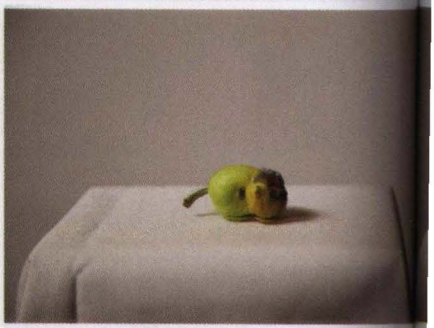
I avoided him in public and called him crazy when my friends had to meet him. Especially in my teenage years, I always seemed to be embarrassed by him. But I remember that his birthday was March seventh, and I remember that he gave me a stuffed tiger, so I cried when my mom checked him into the mental hospital. He cried too. He had dipped into one of his bipolar, manic, depressive lows, and didn't want to live anymore. Braced by two attendants in white coats, he watched us leave him behind the sliding glass doors.

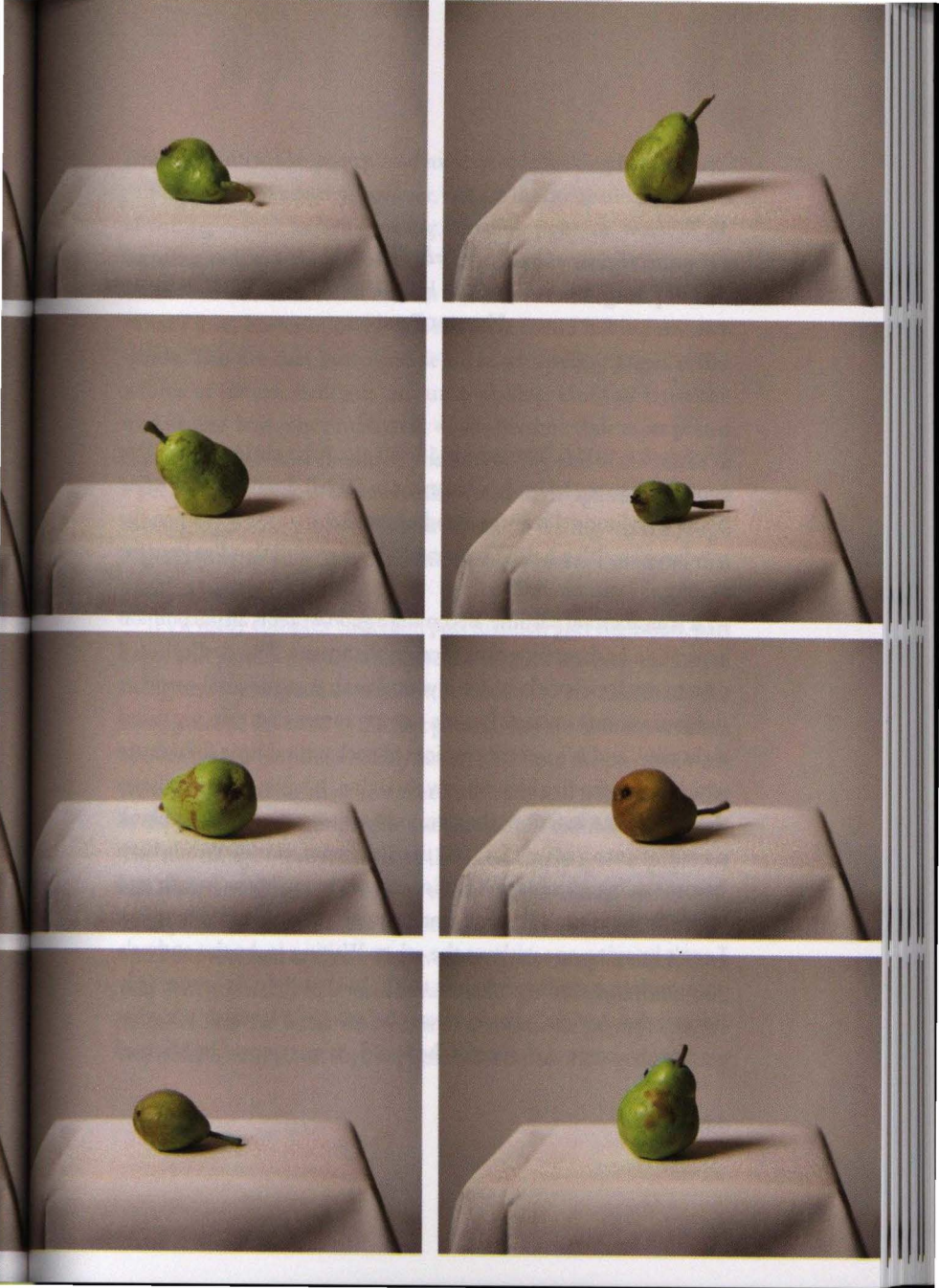
I never knew why Mom befriended him. He came to the house uninvited, and always stayed for dinner. He wasn't raised right, and you could tell. He was blunt and mean and laughed at his own jokes. He was a hardboiled New Yorker, dying among the young wealthy Mormons of suburban Salt Lake City. The least boring friend. My Golden Delicious.







VIS-A-VIS

by

Hunter Buxton

It's July 31, 2016. The time is 11:58 am. After six long days, I've come back to my lakeside apartment in Slidell, Louisiana for a few hours of solitude. I retrieve a pad of graphing paper and a pen for my thoughts. It's a habit I keep every few days and that I've kept for as long as I can remember.

It is an aberrant pastime. Becoming a good writer is an uncommon aspiration and an even rarer accomplishment. The dedication I give to my own words is, for a young man in a material world, a dubious venture at best. But it's not my career that's on my mind right now, and it's not the caprices of such a tired time for culture which lights the fire between my thoughts. It's just this right here: the action, the inaction, the dream of writing. For me, the blank page is at once a search for, and the artificer of, clarity. Words have become as inseparable and indispensable to my life as breath and water. To live is to understand, and to write is to seek understanding. I can't imagine one without the other. Writing is, by the author's assumption, a venture towards truth. In that light, it seems only normal that "writer" should always be a bit of a byword. It's what we already accept as the way of the world. As was quoted by Michael

Lewis, "Truth is like poetry. And most people fucking hate poetry."

People who like poetry, however, will see the occupational hazards of writing—such as being wrong, or being right, or, worst of all, learning to know the difference—as necessary evil. Writing is a refiner's fire for the mind and an automatic ontological purifier. What I love, however, is the power I have found behind my own words. The fire that burns inside these whispering pages is like a force of nature, brilliant and unstoppable. Only an artist can understand how, once mastered, words become your most prized discovery, your most treasured possession. My pen is the bridle of a pet dragon, a map of an uncharted world. I will spend hours here turning each idea over and over in my mind, feeling out the rough edges, trying to see which of all the strange puzzles I've found that it might belong with.

It's a vastly complex endeavor: part instinct, part cognition, part copy, and part creation. I think the similarities between the acts of living and writing are so obvious because they are essentially the same process; observed in the first person, they are both the creation of what we imagine individually, assembled from the pieces of what we comprehend together and then ruthlessly and persistently sold to the world with the imprecise maladresse of a toddler's first steps. The two things I love most share the same challenge: on paper we call it communication, in life we call it self-actualization. Levinas, in *Esquisse d'une théorie des émotions*, said there was no difference, and I feel inclined to agree. The two hopelessly complex disciplines may drift arbitrarily close to our reach with age and experience, but, since we lack the linear discretion of quantifiable perceptions, we will never obtain them. Ergo my belief that the secret to good writing

is the same as what Lao Tzu called the secret to life: simplicity in everything.

This is the first thing I learned about writing, and it has held true for nearly all aspects of truth and poetry—or, as the philosopher would describe them, love and solipsism. Lately, though, I've come to think that this, like most appealing aphorisms, is a bit superficial. A writer's attempt at accuracy by complexity misfires not because complexity must misrepresent nature, but because he or she defines complexity by the number of individual pieces in his or her creation and, in the act of creation, loses sight of the whole. Then we learn how quickly truth is lost in isolation. It is a habit of a rational mind to see things, which mean nothing in themselves, while it is the habit of the heart to see the spaces and relationships between things, which mean much more.

The environment of the written page is the same. It's the relationship between the words, not the words alone, which projects the strongest onto the heart. Each syllable reaches out in a thousand directions, like neurons in a vastly complex cerebrum, until the sentence is no longer just a syllogism. It's as if your ink were a seed, and you had only half-intentionally grown a living soul from the white cold press, an act of creation no less miraculous than raising a man from the clay of the earth. If there is a God, I feel inclined to think that writers, along with mothers and teachers, might be some of the few people who can relate to Him.

It is significant to note, in the context of this thought, that there is a great similarity between the world of fiction, which we visit by choice, and the "reality" we inhabit regardless of our own volition. This is, once again, something only an artist will understand. The

similarity is in one ever-present and never-answered question. People who write long enough will eventually find it hovering somewhere in the back of their minds. They feel hunted; the question is as persistent as a hound, and it emerges faithfully to worry their thoughts through the spaces of silence that were once filled comfortably by the pride of their work.

This is the main reason for the unique feeling of unrequited love that follows the completion of a masterpiece. By hours, by days, by hearts-full of labor, the idea, which artists have done their best to translate into words, or paint, or stone, has become as dear to them as if it were their child. Soon, like parents who consider their role in a larger plan, they feel a vague sense of guilt at their pride. They want to know whose masterpiece they have constructed. Where is it from? The rendering is theirs beyond doubt, but the idea they expressed in their chosen medium is oddly unmarked. It feels, ninety percent of the time, as if it were just pieces of their past, a recombination of such via algorithm or accident, and still, ten percent of the time, as original as the child of a virgin, like a spark from a cold darkness, ex nihilo, ex machina.

Why they should assume this, or want it one way or the other, they can't ever say. The trouble is not in what is known or unknown alone, but in the space where what is seen and what is believed do not overlap. We are used to knowing, or assuming that we know, why we believe a thing. The discomfort and confusion of realizing that you don't know how you know all that you think you know, and believing it nonetheless, is another occupational hazard of the kind of people who look too hard for truth. In lieu of explanation, they believe in a "paradox" of the sentient mind that is common to art

as much as it is to theology, and not necessarily because they share a source in the human subconscious. The strange observation, in as much simplicity as Lao Tzu could have wanted, is this:

"There is, in the mind of the author, a black box, which produces all the truth he or she will ever commit to paper."

"There is, behind the laws of the nature, a black box, which produces all the truth which has ever been committed to our earth."

"This realization is the strange trouble of being a writer. Masters of words feel at odd times that they might be a God, at others that they are a charlatan, and at most times as if they are the only one who understands how little there is in an average lifetime, which stands to be understood at all."

Good rhetoric has a way of stealing comfortable assumptions. I imagine Socrates must have been an excellent writer, understanding as well as he did how words could be the "midwife" of the mind. I can also see how he was unpopular. After all the unknowns have been exposed, one is sure of almost nothing. Only one thing ever appears clearer. It's an idea, which James Salter expressed succinctly, a short time before he died:

"Life passes into pages, if it passes into anything."

I don't personally like to keep the company of writers. They tend to be horribly bitter people. So, when I first read that phrase, I recognized an idea which I had never heard coming from outside my own head. It wasn't the approach of his final destination that prompted Salter's discovery, although it made the statement more poetic in context. It's something you learn every day as a rhetor or a

poet: there is so much more in a story which is real than that which is not. It's not uncommon for me to find, lost in my notes or an unfrequented corner of the library, stories which are far more real to me than life. In classical antiquity, great thinkers sometimes measured the "reality" of a thing by its inability to change or pass away. In this sense, my story is more real than I am. I am just a man. I will die and become whatever men become when they leave the earth. Measured in terms of transience on our physical canvas, my mortality means there is nothing less real than me. But an idea is immortal, and so is a story. Stories exist without time, and ideas, having never been born, can never really die.

Whether the stories you love are "true" or not seems unimportant, if you believe them. A story can be true because it takes part of its substance from reality, but it is at best a crude representation of the original: two-dimensional, with little relationship to past reality after being mistold, mistaken, and misunderstood. We still believe that the past is real, but what is the past, in the present moment, other than a story? In the range of human perception the two are the same. They are both just ideas, which belong to no one and nothing in particular. They are only as real or as unreal as we believe them to be. The measure of our belief adds another dimension of reality that belongs to a story, seen only in retrospect; it seems so much less important what a story takes from reality than what a story gives back to reality. The inspiration of good stories has been changing lives for as long as there were people to tell them. If you can believe in a story enough for it to change your life, then it is real in a very tangible sense. We give a story life, in a simple way, if we let it change us; we give it a part to play through us on the world's stage.

There is much to be observed here and little to be understood or debated. After the little that can be said on the subject, the words of James Salter are perhaps the truest thing you will ever hear. What am I to you, but a story? What I know, what I've done, where I've been, is all just an idea in your mind, clumsy, but beautiful, and that is as corporeal as I will ever be in your life. The story of a man you never knew, or even of someone who never existed, is, in terms of its effect on your reality, only less real to you if you believe it less, and that is as close to my control as it is to the control of the author of your last novel.

My sojourn in rhetoric has made my life unexpectedly simple. I now know the limits of my ability, and thereby I know the limits of my responsibility as a student, as a teacher, and as a man. They say you cannot write well if you do not write honestly. It is the same with my life. All I can do is speak as honestly as I write, act as passionately as I compose, and be to you a story as colorful and rich as any you've ever known.

I want desperately to be real to you. I want my life, like my story, to be true enough for you to believe in. I want to live so honestly as to leave my color on your thoughts, to someday have lent you a little of the light that sparkles behind your eyes, and become the inspiration that makes you make your life a story worth telling. I want to be so real to you that even after I'm gone you keep my story written on your heart the way you hold on to a good dream or a hope for the future. In life or in death, to everyone but myself, it will be the same. I was once, and will again be, immaterial by every other measure.

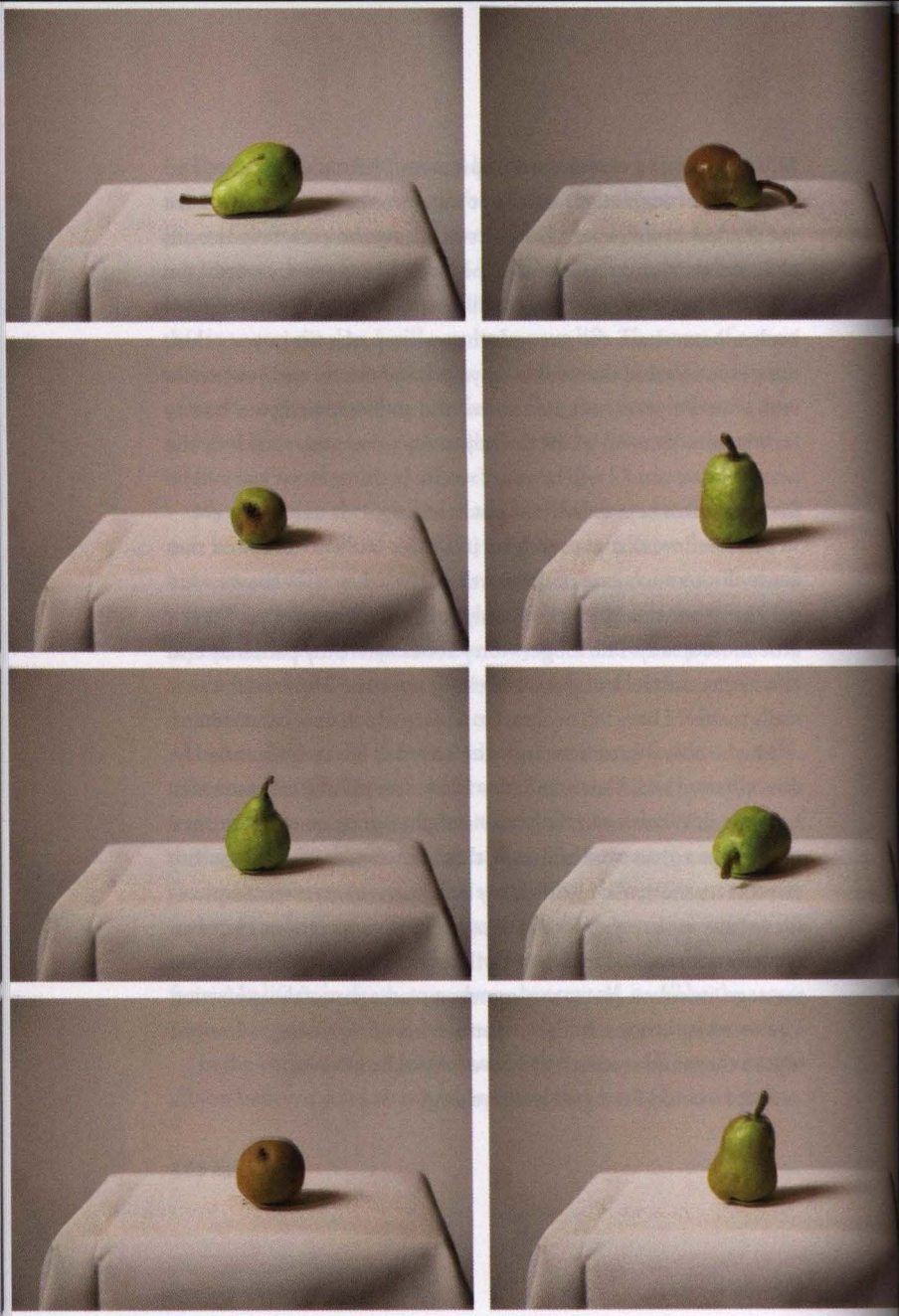
In the end, we are all just someone else's story. All I ever was was all you believed you saw in me, and now that is who I have become.

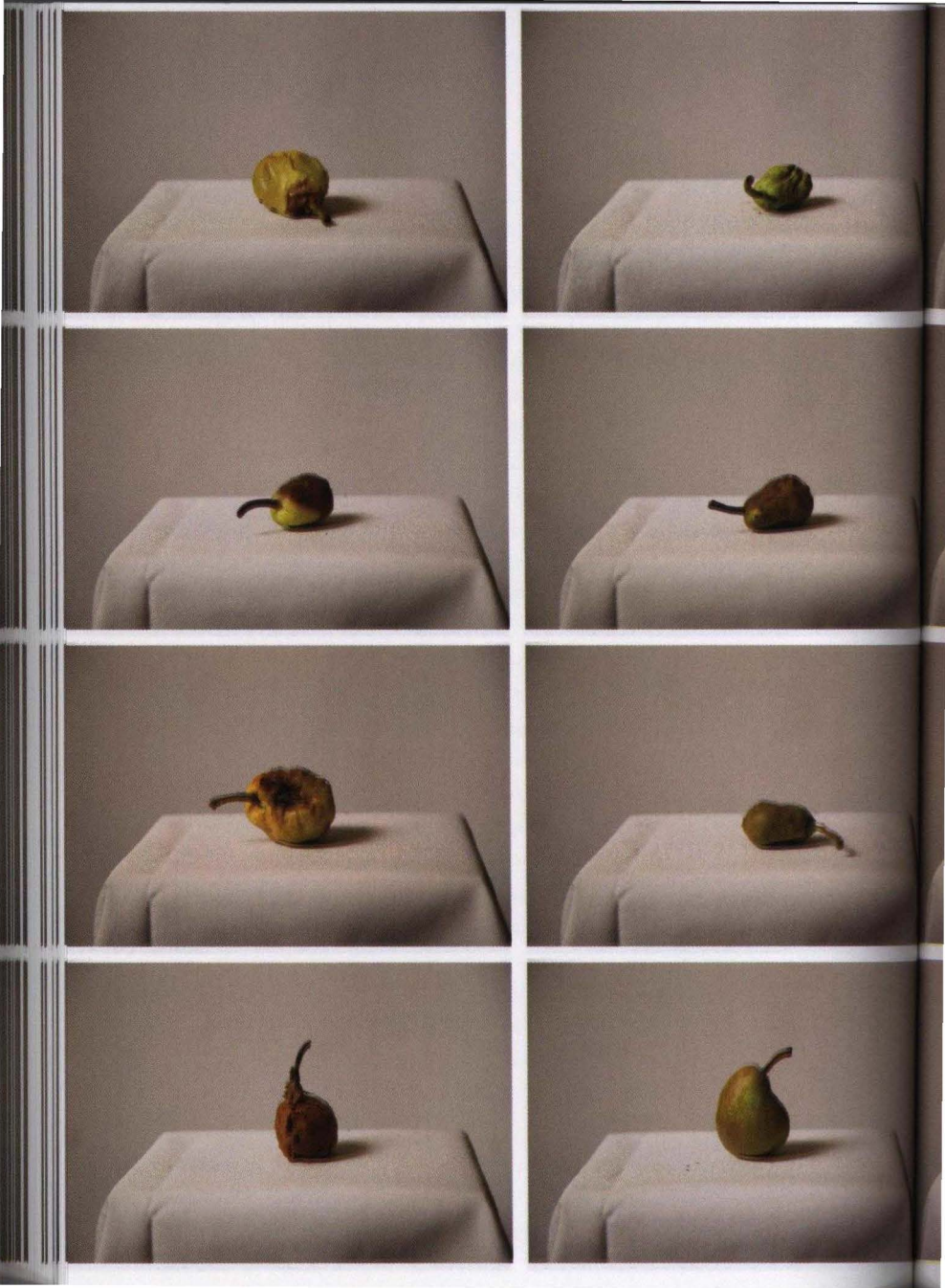
All I ever am is a tear-shaped impression I left on your heart, and you are the rough edges that kept mine from slipping away. I am the shadow in your eyes when the sun goes down every seventeenth of September, and you are the hope I weave between my words, the truth behind every small hour I'll spend healing someone else's broken heart. I am the strength in your step, the tilt in your chin, the peace of mind that will keep your hand steady and your smile real, after the years have run down, and you've traded your beauty for wisdom. You will be the melody in my voice every time I say the words "I love you." I will be your favorite bedtime story; you will be the one I can't bear to live without believing.

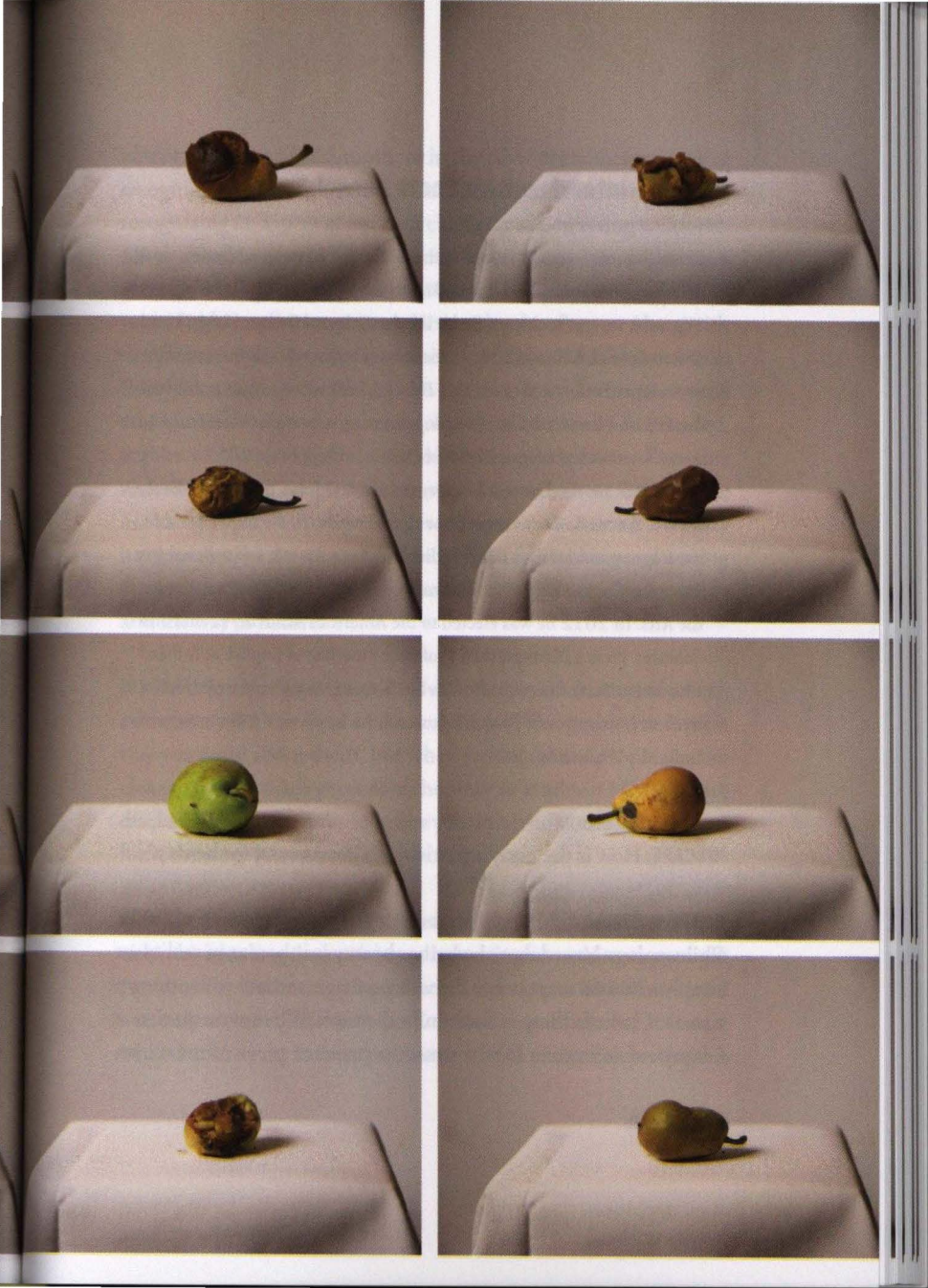
I still believe that a story exists in a place without time, and that is why I took such care of the words I left with you. What we were may have been only a feeling, only for a moment, and yet I feel a little more steady. I no longer worry about where my path may end or whether the clock might be catching up to me. How much can it really matter? I have left my heart in a place which time cannot erase.

Maybe now you understand why I live my life so immaculately: this one story is all I have, and now I know the effort it takes to make a story real. When a painter has a vision for a great masterpiece, or a novelist for a great work of fiction, they know by experience that they can take no shortcuts. My life is my best story, my great masterpiece. It's written not in seconds or in days but in the impressions I leave on the ones who walked with me. I will spend every breath crafting its message, its colors, just to see, somehow, some part of the perfection I believed in, written in the imperfections of my passage. I might write a thousand stories, but I have only one to live in.

So how could I not give it everything?







Interview with Scott Russel Sanders

Scott Russell Sanders is the author of twenty books of fiction and nonfiction, including *Hunting for Hope* and *A Conservationist Manifesto*. His most recent books are *Earth Works: Selected Essays* (2012) and *Divine Animal: A Novel* (2014). His most recent work, a collection of his eco-science fiction stories entitled *Dancing in Dreamtime* was published last fall, and a new edition of his documentary narrative, *Stone Country*, co-authored with photographer Jeffrey Wolin, will appear in 2017. Among his honors are the Lannan Literary Award, the John Burroughs Essay Award, the Mark Twain Award, the Cecil Woods Award for Nonfiction, the Eugene and Marilyn Glick Indiana Authors Award, and fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts. In 2012 he was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. He is a Distinguished Professor Emeritus of English at Indiana University. He and his wife, Ruth, a biochemist, have reared two children in their hometown of Bloomington, in the hardwood hill country of Indiana's White River Valley.

INSCAPE: How is the essay a particularly good vessel for beauty?

SCOTT RUSSELL SANDERS: All art forms are potential vessels for beauty. Philosophers have debated whether beauty is inherent in reality, or simply a human response to something that resonates with our own nature. I believe there is truth in both views. When we experience beauty—in a human face, a sunset, a poem or piece of music, an

idea or a mathematical formula, or in any other phenomenon—we're recognizing a quality that exists outside of ourselves. But we're also recognizing an aspect of our own character as perceiving creatures. The universe is saturated with beauty. As microscopes and telescopes extend the range of our perceptions, we find beauty everywhere, in vanishingly small structures and in the depths of space. Along with this pervasive beauty, of course, the cosmos also manifests violence. Every structure generated by the cosmos, from hydrogen atoms and human bodies to stars and galaxies, is eventually dismantled, and its constituents are reassembled into new structures. Even this violence is shot through with beauty—as one can see, for example, in Hubble Space telescope images of supernovas. For me, the essay has proven to be the most effective medium for thinking and writing about these matters, including the link between our own mortality and the way of nature.

INSCAPE: Some of your essays deal with the personal issues of others, even your own family members. I admire the gentle yet honest way you write about them, but when writing about people you are close to, which takes precedent: honesty or kindness? Do you give disclaimers to those people before you write the stories, or does that limit the story you can tell?

SRS: I wish to avoid harming the real people who appear in my work, either by invading their privacy or by writing something they might find hurtful. Following that principle does place limits on what I write about, or at least on what I choose to publish. For instance, while I adored my father, and wrote several essays celebrating his

character and his gifts, I was also deeply troubled by his alcoholism; but I chose not to write about that dark aspect of his life while he was alive. About five years after he died, I finally wrote an essay called "Under the Influence," about how his drinking had affected me and the rest of the family. Before I showed the essay to anyone else, I gave it to my mother, who didn't believe there was such a disease as alcoholism. She regarded my father's drinking as a moral failure. She was horrified that I had written about this shameful family secret. "If it was useful for you to write this," she told me, "well and good, but don't let anybody else see it." So I put the essay in a drawer, and I would have left it there until after her death, if she hadn't changed her mind. When she told my brother and sister how appalled she was that I had written about "Daddy's problem," they persuaded her to let them read it. So I sent them copies. They found it so helpful that they urged her to let me publish it, so that other people could benefit from it. My mother thought about it, and after a few months she told me I could send it out. It was the first essay I ever sent to Harpers, and to my surprise they chose to publish it.

INSCAPE: I really appreciated "Under the Influence," and how you took the complex, difficult relationship with your father and made it into a moving essay. How do you begin to write something that has taken a lifetime to acquire, and work through? What was the process of putting that struggle on paper, making it an essay?

SRS: As I mentioned earlier, I could not bring myself to write about my father's alcoholism until several years after his death. In "The Inheritance of Tools," written soon after he died, I paid tribute to his

character and gifts. The essay makes no reference to his drinking, however—not because I consciously avoided the subject, but because I had not yet come to grips with it. I loved him, and I love him still, and I didn't know how to write about this dark side of his character that troubled me and the rest of my family. In "Under the Influence" I was trying to convey what it feels like to be the child of an alcoholic, and, more generally, what it feels like to have a parent who is radically unpredictable because of an addiction or mental illness. A child of such a parent often takes on a sense of responsibility for making things right—for overcoming a mother's depression, perhaps, or a father's unfaithfulness. I felt that responsibility keenly, but of course I couldn't fix what was wrong with my father. While telling a personal story, I wanted to speak more broadly to people who had grown up in a family with a shameful secret. I wanted readers to come away from the essay thinking, not about me, but about their own experiences. Above all, I didn't want readers to feel that I was pitying myself, because I don't for a moment pity myself. I had a wonderful upbringing. If you examine the essay, you'll see that I write about personal matters within larger frameworks—for example, the Bible's treatment of drunkenness, or the role of alcohol in popular culture, or the many slang terms for drinking. As with most of my essays, this one was largely intuitive—not outlined beforehand, not planned in any detail. Before writing an essay, I typically make notes—hunches, images, passages from my reading, memories, cultural data—anything that seems pertinent to an experience or question that haunts me. When the notes reach a certain degree of richness, I search for an opening sentence, set it down, and then I follow where imagination and reflection and language lead. It's a

process of discovery. Readers like to sense what occasions the writing of an essay, what's at stake for the narrator. In "Under the Influence," what's at stake is the narrator's effort to face and understand the dark side of a father he loves, and to avoid passing on the burden of family secrets to his own son and daughter. While I don't consider writing to be therapy, writing may help one understand more deeply some troubling aspect of one's life, and, in doing so, may alleviate certain kinds of pain or regret or guilt.

INSCAPE: What advice do you have for young writers? Especially those who lack the life experiences that more mature writers can reflect on in their essays?

SRS: The advice I would offer to young writers is what you might expect: Read widely, not only in the essay, and not only work by your contemporaries. When you find a writer who appeals to you strongly, then read his or her work in depth; study it; imitate it; borrow techniques and insights. Creative writing workshops aid in the development of technique; but good writing depends on more than craft; it depends on life experience, knowledge, sustained reflection, lively imagination, and an inquiring intelligence. Essayists tend to produce their best work later than poets or short story writers. But that should not discourage young writers from tackling any question, issue, or body of experience that they find compelling. Even if you don't yet feel capable of doing justice to some powerful experience, write about it anyway, while it's fresh. You can always return to it later, when you may well have gained deeper insight.

INSCAPE: At your reading you mentioned that you discovered the essay by accident. How did that accidental encounter lead to your success as a writer today? And for that matter, how do you see the personal essay now; what good does the essay offer us?

SRS: I've never taken a creative writing class, so what I know about writing is almost entirely derived from reading. Since I was intrigued by the short stories and novels I read in college, I began by writing fiction, and continued in that genre exclusively for about fifteen years. Meanwhile, I had married and become a father, and I was deeply moved by experiences with my young children. Instead of turning those experiences into fiction, I wanted to write about them directly, as if I were recounting a story in a letter to a friend. One of the first such narratives was about carrying my eleven-month-old son in a backpack up a mountain in Oregon, climbing through a layer of clouds to an exposed peak, and feeling terrified. I wrote an account of the hike in an effort to understand the source of that terror. And in the process I made what I came to recognize as a personal essay. I told a true story, rather than an invented one. From high school English classes, I had come to think of the essay as a dull commentary on some abstract subject, such as patriotism or fate. But as I broadened my reading, I discovered a much more vital, inquisitive, and engaging form of the essay—in the work of James Baldwin and Loren Eiseley, for example; in earlier writers such as Henry David Thoreau and John Muir; and in my contemporaries such as Edward Hoagland, Wendell Berry, Annie Dillard, and Barry Lopez. When I began exploring the history of this versatile genre, I pulled from my shelf a leather-bound copy of *The Complete Essays*

of Montaigne, which I had received as an academic prize in college. I had scarcely opened the book previously, but now, after stumbling onto the essay, I discovered that this Frenchman had more or less invented the form in the sixteenth century. His work is colorful, cranky, and probing, and it feels contemporary, inviting twenty-first century readers to reflect on their own lives. In 1981, when I published "Cloud Crossing," the story about carrying my son up the mountain, there were only a few periodicals that even considered personal essays. Among those few were *The North American Review* and *The Georgia Review*, both of which became important homes for my writing. Back in 1981, there were no tracks for nonfiction in MFA programs. In fact, there were few MFA programs. Now there are perhaps over a hundred programs and at least as many summer workshops that allow a focus on nonfiction; there are journals and books of criticism devoted to the genre, and there are hundreds of publications, both print and online, that publish essays. Why this upsurge in the writing and reading of personal nonfiction? One reason, I suspect, is the hunger for honest, supple, inquiring use of language. Our culture is poisoned by phony speech, especially on television and the Internet. Commercial, political, and even many religious figures deliver scripted platitudes, ideologies, or outright lies. Personal essays, at their best, offer an antidote to this flaccid or deceitful verbiage.

INSCAPE: With the influx of new nonfiction MFA programs, and nonfiction readers, what is your prediction of the essay's importance and influence in the future?

SRS: The best essays convey a sense of authenticity, sincerity, and integrity—qualities rare in contemporary American culture. Much of what passes for art today feels shallow and shoddy, like a commodity manufactured for sale rather than something that comes from the heart. That's one reason the essay has gained a wider audience. This audience in turn has encouraged more and more young writers to take up the form, bringing with them a welcome energy and freshness. Like poetry, the essay requires of its audience a higher degree of literacy and a greater effort of comprehension than the mass media require. So it will always be a minority phenomenon. But so long as there are readers and writers who wish to understand their own existence more deeply, and who enjoy following the play of mind through language, they will be drawn to essays.

INSCAPE: What are some nonfiction texts and techniques that you've become an expert on?

SRS: Of the writers whom I named earlier, I learned the most from James Baldwin, Loren Eiseley, Wendell Berry, and Annie Dillard. The civil rights movement was one of the formative experiences of my early years. It made me aware of the monstrous injustice of slavery, and of the continuing blight of racism. Baldwin helped me to see more clearly the legacy of slavery, and to imagine more vividly what African Americans have suffered and are suffering. I was also fascinated by science, and Eiseley helped me see how to draw on scientific insights while telling personal stories. Berry helped me see how to write about place, community, and conservation. Although Dillard and I are contemporaries, she discovered her identity as an

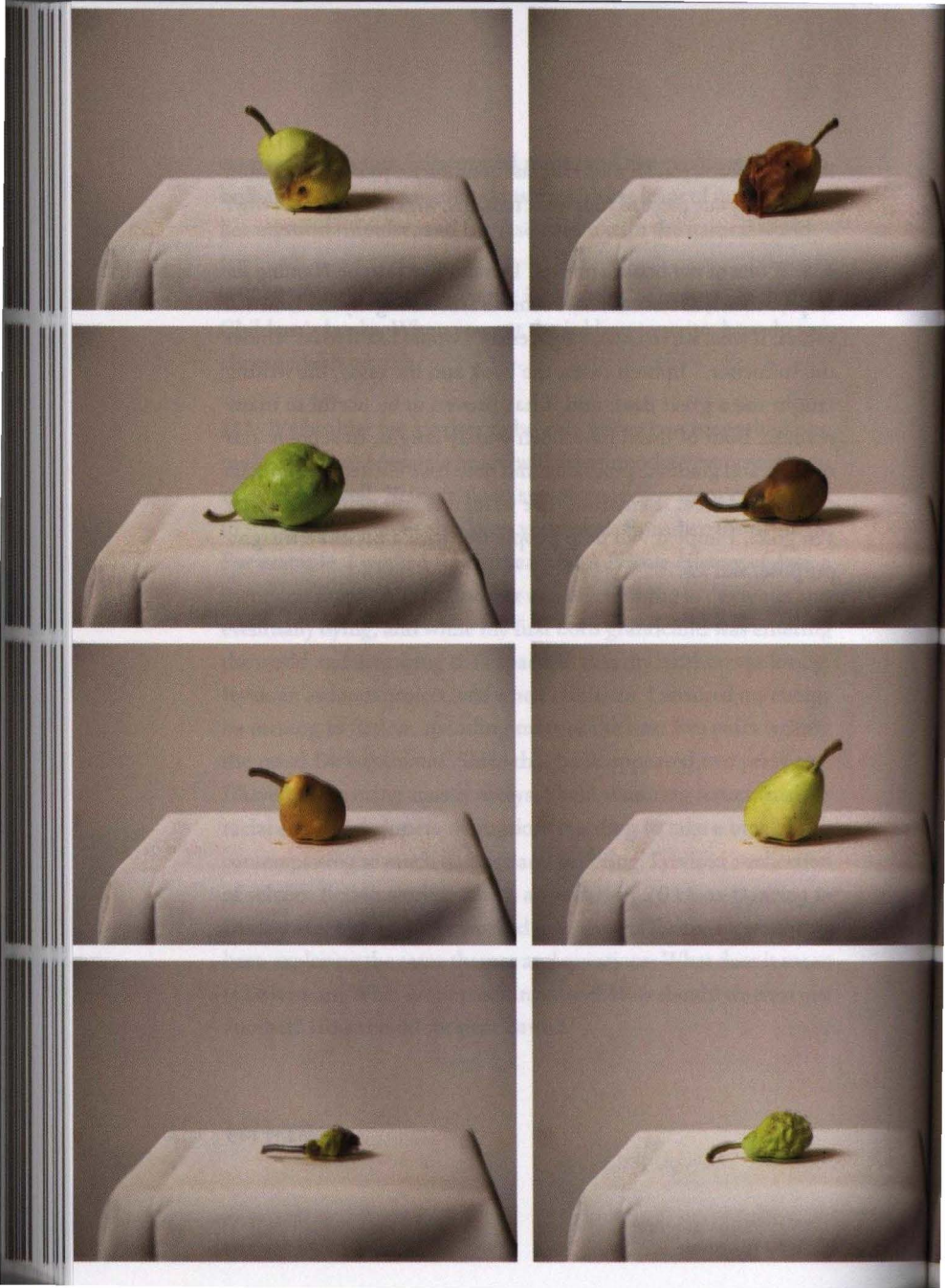
essayist long before I discovered mine, and she explored the form brilliantly. I felt an immediate kinship with her leaps of imagination, her mystical impulse, and her fascination with the natural world.

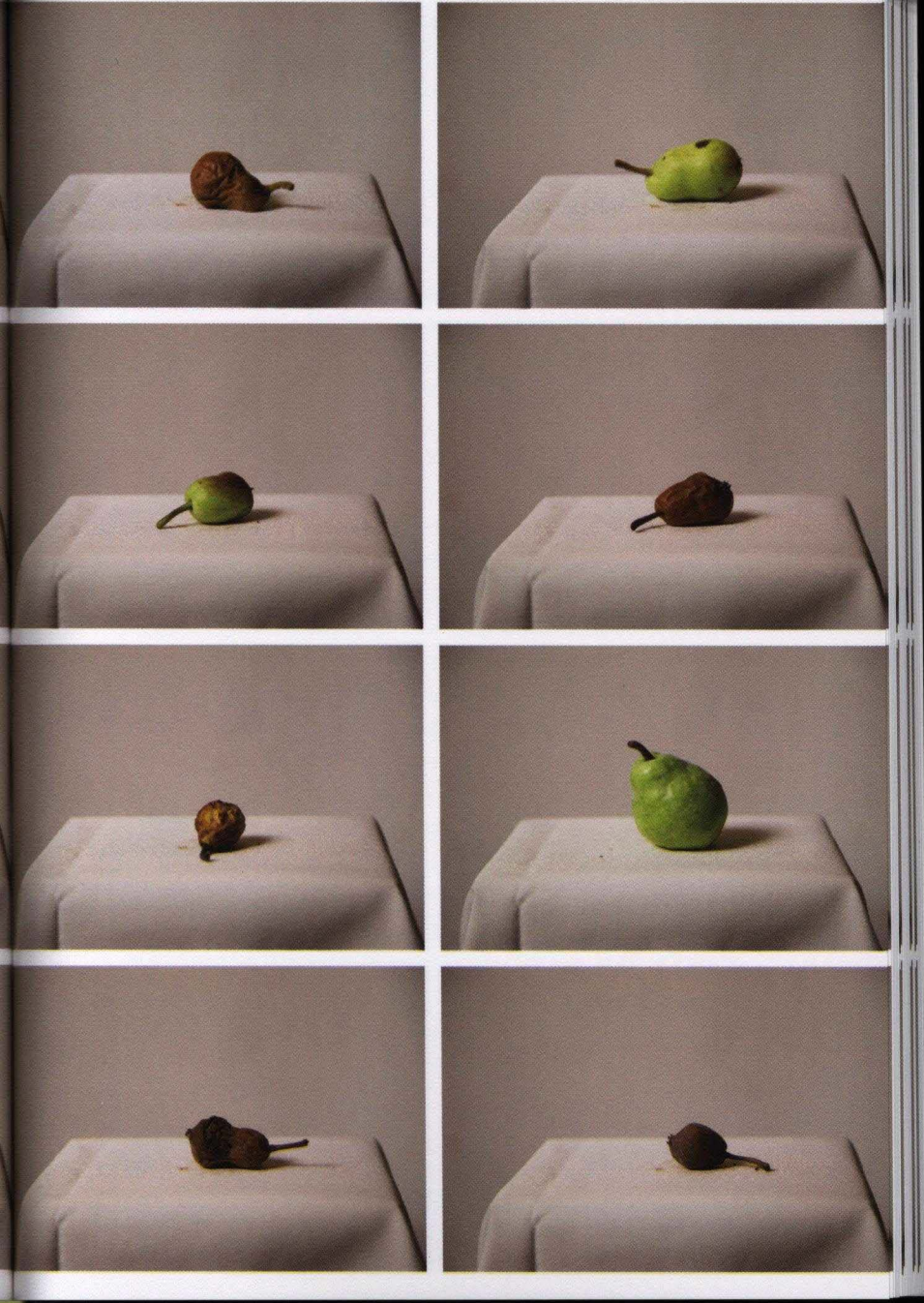
INSCAPE: You successfully write in a variety of genres, including Children's books. When you get the inkling to write, how do you choose which genre?

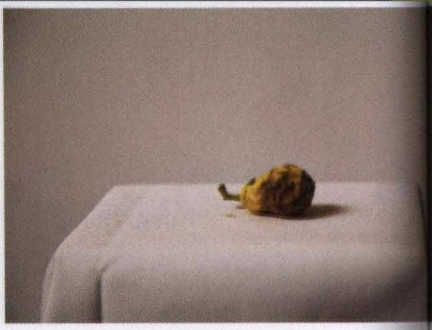
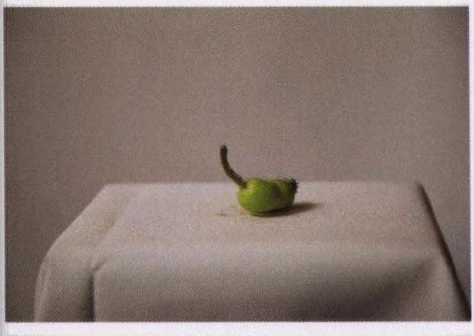
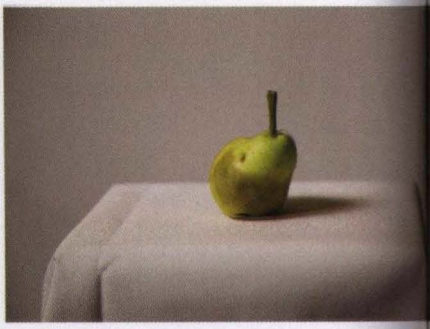
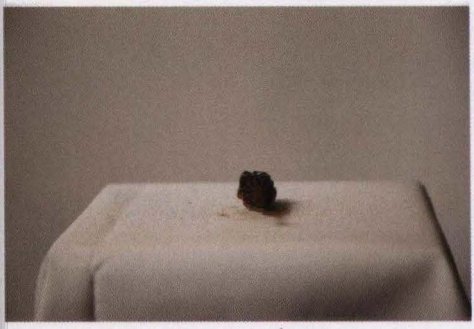
SRS: It's healthy for a writer to be able to work in more than one mode, because no single genre will accommodate every story you may wish to tell. Being able to switch modes—from nonfiction to fiction, say—may also keep your work from becoming stale. For example, I worked for five years on *A Private History of Awe*, a memoir written while my mother was succumbing to dementia and eventually dying, and while my first born grandchild was entering the world and acquiring the capacities that my mother was losing. It was an arduous project, and when I finished, I restored my energy by turning to fiction, spending most of the next five years writing the novel *Divine Animal*. Since that book appeared two years ago, I have been writing mostly essays, about daunting issues, such as racial strife and climate disruption. Needing to take a break from contemplating so much damage and suffering, I revised a collection of science fiction stories, which appeared in 2016 as *Dancing in Dreamtime*. Although I've worked in a range of forms, I have always been exploring the same themes and questions: What does it mean to be human? What is our place in nature? How should we treat one another? How should we treat Earth?

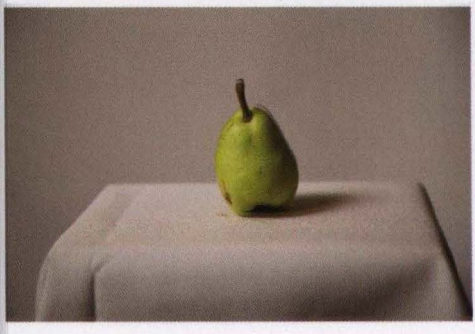
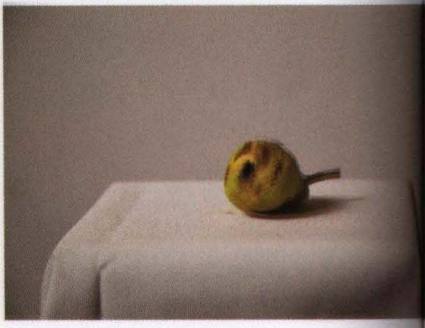
INSCAPE: Thank you for that. One last question for you: 50 years from now, if only one piece of your work remains, which would it be, why?

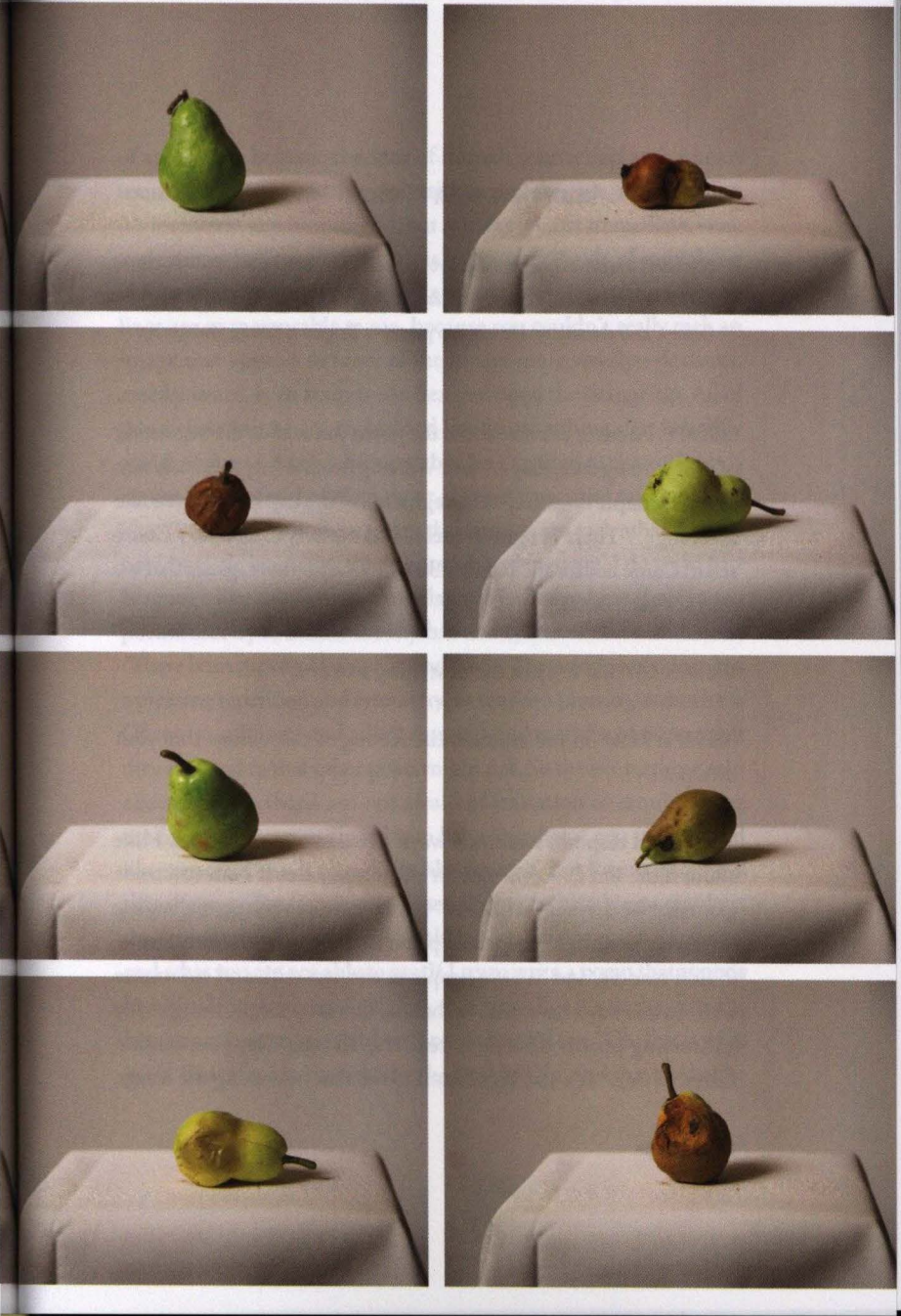
SRS: If one of my books survives, I would like it to be *Hunting for Hope*, which is as close as I have come to articulating my fundamental values. If what survives is a single essay, I would like it to be "Under the Influence." In both cases, the book and the essay, the writing taught me a great deal, and it has proven to be useful to many readers. Both of them have been widely taught, in schools and colleges and graduate programs, and both have elicited voluminous correspondence. If anything I've written is still being read after I'm gone, I hope it will help people live with a bit more insight, purpose, and joy.







Interview with Michael Lavers

Michael Lavers has poems that have recently appeared in *Best New Poets 2015, The Hudson Review, Arts & Letters, 32 Poems, Hayden's Ferry Review,* and elsewhere. He teaches poetry at Brigham Young University.

INSCAPE: I want to ask first about the poem you read at the beginning of your reading on Friday—"Just Walking Around," by John Ashbery. The last couple lines are, "The segments of the trip swing open like an orange. / There is light in there, and mystery and food. / Come see it. Come not for me but it. / But if I am still there, grant that we may see each other."

MICHAEL LAVERS: It's just the best thing I've ever read.

INSCAPE: How do you channel the feeling of those lines into your own poetry?

ML: I could respond in several ways. First, one of the things I like about those lines, "Come not for me but it. / But if I am still there grant that we may see each other," is that there's a very urgent longing that Ashbery embeds inside that poem to find *me*. And to find *you*—to find readers, and to have people to connect with and commune with. So one way I have tried to channel that is by simple things—by addressing poems directly to readers. To say, "Hey you, reader. Listen to this." It's also significant to me that he's using the image

of an orange, because the idea of human connection and human intimacy and human communication is very abstract. We know that it's important and meaningful, but to make it more immediate, vital, and vibrant he says all this stuff is happening inside of something vivid and concrete and specific and sensory—an orange. Those lines are so memorable to me, because you couldn't really pick an image that appeals to more of the senses more vividly—textures, smells, tastes, even sounds—when you open the orange up. All of these abstractions are embedded inside something that is bodily and therefore, I think, unforgettable. So I've tried to channel this is by not being afraid of rhetoric or abstractions, or of saying things like, "But if I am still there, grant that we may see each other." That's not imagistic language, that's not sensory language. I do try to pair language like that with sensory language. I also have lines in my poems that try to mimic the rhythm and syntax of those sentences, "There is mystery and light in it, and food." That tricolon of things has a pleasing repetition and symmetry, or maybe a pleasing asymmetry. Of course, all poets and all readers will find sections of poems that they respond to that other poets might not. So the overarching self-observation is that I am not afraid of imitation or emulation or modeling. We can easily fall into believing that if you try to sound like someone, you'll sound less like yourself. But I actually believe that the opposite is true; the closer and more strictly you emulate, the more immediately you'll be able to see what you are able to say and what you are not able to say. If I try to write a poem that sounds just like John Ashbery, I will fail, of course. But it's in the distance between my poem and Ashbery's poem that I'll say, "Oh, this is what *me* is. This is what I can do that he couldn't do, and this is what he

can do that I can't do." You can really see what makes you *you* in exercises of emulation. That's my working theory.

INSCAPE: When you read your poems, I felt that I needed to go out and write or draw something. Is one of your goals as a professor or a poet to help people want to create things?

ML: Indirectly it is. I'm never sitting at the writing desk thinking, "What can I say that will make somebody want to write their own poem?" But I am thinking, "What can I say that will surprise somebody?" I guess that's my most immediate and perpetual motive as a writer, and I think that a natural consequence of being surprised is the impulse to want to surprise other people. So I'm not hoping that I can spawn my own poetic grandchildren, but if I inspire other people to try to surprise their own readers, then that's great.

INSCAPE: How do you create these surprises? Are you surprised yourself when you are writing?

ML: Yes. I think the best way, but also the hardest way, to surprise readers is to surprise yourself. It's hard to do because you spend so much time inside of your own head. Of course there are things about you that you might not know, and it's those things that you should be tapping into. Any time a poem feels over-determined or over-willed—by which I mean, any time I have something to say before I sit down and write the poem, any time I think, "Yeah, you should tell your readers *that*" or "You should make *this* argument" or "Here's an observation that I bet no one has noticed before"—these are

always times when a poem fails because it feels too determined and too forced. And everything in the poem becomes padding around a thesis that probably isn't in any way exciting or surprising or original. Poems that I've written that worked are poems that, when I start, I have no idea how they'll end. Writing that way is risky, mysterious, and vulnerable, and you feel like you're walking on a tightrope into a dark chasm. But when it does work, it leads to discovery that I think is worthwhile. Or, the opposite could be true; other times I've written poems where I know how the poem could end, but the surprise, the act of discovery, is finding the path to that ending. What beginning and middle are going to fit this ending? That's a kind of discovery that could work as well.

INSCAPE: Where's the balance between having an idea for a poem, and making sure that idea doesn't ruin the poem?

ML: I don't think you need ideas to start writing a poem. You can just have a certain word in your mind, and ask yourself what word that word inspires. And then you have two words. And then, what is the third word your mind places in relation to those words? A poem can kind of spin itself, much the way that an oyster will spin a pearl out of one grain of sand. This is a way to make sure that you don't really know where you're going. You can also can do this with rhythms, saying "I just want to put some words to this rhythm," and then add more and more rhythm. Of course, down the road you'll get a sense for the content, idea, argument, or subject matter of the poem, but these could be as surprising to you as they are to the reader. Another way is to start with an idea that's enormously broad. "Childhood," for

example. You're not going to reduce or determine it too much. You don't know what the poem's going to be about, and what it has to do with childhood—just "childhood." You might start by making a list of the first ten things you think of when you think about childhood. Write them down quickly and throw that piece of paper away. Or better yet, post it above your writing desk, and title it, "Forbidden topics in my childhood poem." That way the things which are easy, immediate, common, too familiar or cliché, you instantly banish. You have to start somewhere new and different. It's difficult, because you have to do original thinking. But the idea is that the readers will be doing original reading as well.

INSCAPE: Do you have a poem-writing ritual, or a space designated for poetry writing?

ML: No. I write here in my office, but I also write at home. When you have kids you can't be picky about having the room be perfectly silent, and having your cup of tea be the perfect temperature, and having your chair be the perfect softness. So I'll find myself writing poems on my phone while I'm in the checkout at Wal-Mart. I can't get much done, but I can choose one word. If I have a line of poetry on the go, and I'm looking for an adjective, waiting for seven minutes at Wal-Mart, then that might be enough time to come up with the right adjective. I've made a lot of progress that way. I got some good advice from the editor of *The Anthology of Short Fiction*, Richard Bausch. I heard him deliver a lecture about ten pieces of advice to beginning writers. One is to learn how to write everywhere, otherwise you won't write at all. He has this anecdote about sleep-training his

baby. A common piece of advice when you're sleep-training a baby is not to be quiet. Put the baby down and then make lots of noise. Put loud music on, invite people over, have a party, bang some pots and pans so the baby gets used to falling asleep while there's noise in the house. Otherwise you'll spend the rest of your life tiptoeing, and the baby will wake up every night, without a doubt. As a writer I think that's an important skill to develop. You have to focus amidst chaos, and you have to develop flexibility. If you have a pattern—great. But you have to be flexible when your pattern is disrupted.

INSCAPE: How do you know when one of your poems *works*? Do they always?

ML: Oh, no. They almost always don't. In the moment of composition, you can tell that you're onto something good because you didn't see certain things coming. That, at least, is a signal that it might end up good. It's not a guarantee; you can be fooled, of course, in the moment, and think that you're the most brilliant person in the world. But the only way I know if something I've written is worthwhile is by getting distance from it, and then coming back to it. The best way of getting this distance is time. Every writer should find their own way, and do what works for them. I can't really advocate this as a universal method, but it's helpful for me to write a draft, and then put it away in a file called "Finished Drafts." And I won't look at it for—ideally—a year or more.

INSCAPE: That's a long time.

ML: It is a long time! Well, relatively, maybe not—Horace said you should wait ten years. I feel that it's a bit presumptuous to assume that I'll even live that long, let alone remember what I wrote ten years ago. But I'll try to give it at least a year, because thereby I develop a lot of objectivity. When I reread it after that year, instantly all of its flaws are clear as day. Instantly all of its successes—if it has successes—are equally clear. I know instantly what needs to be changed and what needs to be kept.

INSCAPE: You've mentioned before that a lot of your poetry is untrue. Do you ever feel like you're deceiving yourself or readers?

ML:. I don't feel any obligation to tell the truth in my poems. I think a novel—Anna Karenina, for example, a novel that has fictional characters, fictional stories, fictional events—certainly has to be one of the most true documents that we have. It tells us more truths about human nature than many other kinds of writings, like lists of names and dates and facts that actually did happen. I don't want to sound pompous and say that my goal is to give the readers truth, but if that were my goal I think that fiction is a perfectly viable road to truth. So no, I don't feel any remorse or guilt or anxiety about deception.

INSCAPE: When reading, how much should you decipher a poem?

ML: Absolutely as little as possible. In fact, I try not to at all. It might depend on what you mean by "decipher," but I want a poem to be beautiful and surprising and strange, and that's pretty much it. I don't need it to have ideas, I don't need it to have information. It just

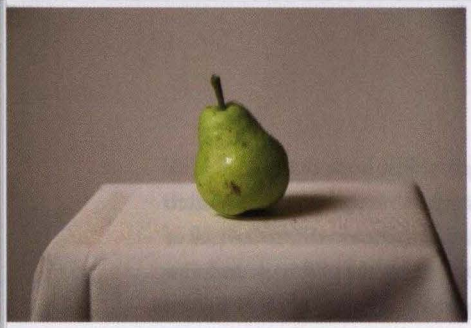
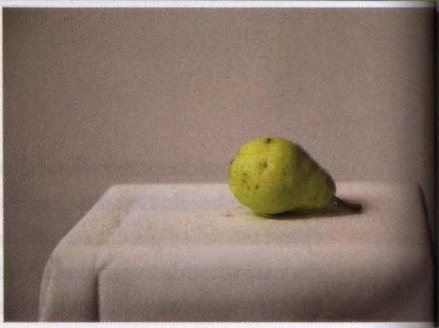
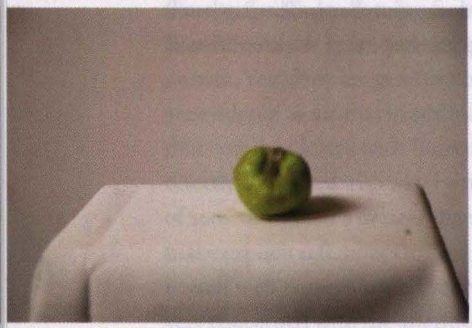
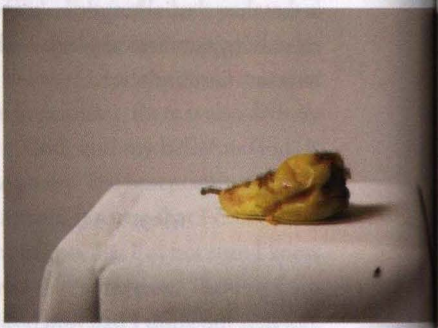
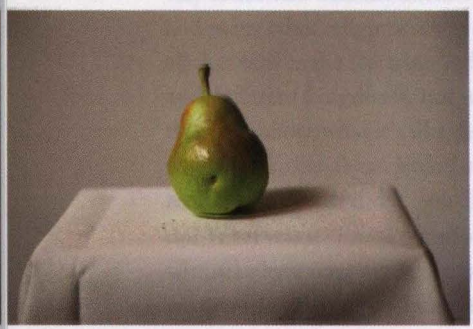
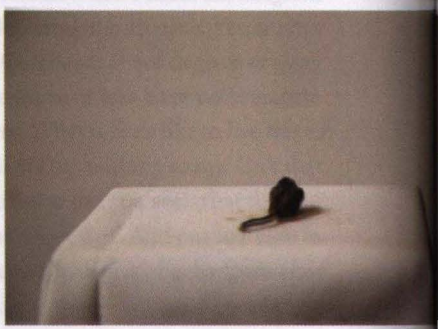
has to be beautiful and surprising and strange. Samuel Johnson says that the aim of poetry is to please and instruct. But he elaborates a bit and he says that anything whose aim is to please should please instantly. I think that's such great advice. I love poems that please me instantly. This might sound extremely elitist, but life is short and art is long, and you can't read everything. You have to be very selective. So, I will give a poem twenty seconds. And if I'm not instantly pleased, if by then—say, by line six—I have not found something beautiful or surprising or strange, I'll just stop reading. Because I know I can find what I'm looking for other places. If something is going to please, it has to please instantly. It can have multiple layers, of course, and I think the best poems are poems that can be read in different ways and mean different things to different people at different times in his or her life. The best poems are absolutely poems that reward rereading. Poems that you do not exhaust. This might involve some interpretation—noticing how certain words signify, how certain formal structures signify. But before it does all that, it has to please instantly. So when I'm reading a poem, I'm not thinking, "How interpretable is this?" I'm thinking "Is this beautiful? Is it surprising?" And if it is, I keep reading. And if it's really beautiful and really surprising, I read it again. Poems should be beautiful enough to make you want to reread them every day of your life. If they're that beautiful, they'll have stuff in them that you'll keep seeing, and you'll keep seeing, and you'll keep seeing.

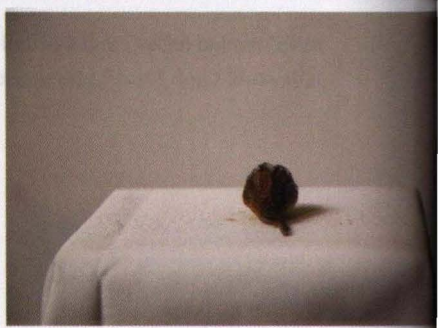
INSCAPE: You don't often directly reference God or Deity in your poetry, but His presence seems to be there. What purpose does God serve in your poetry?

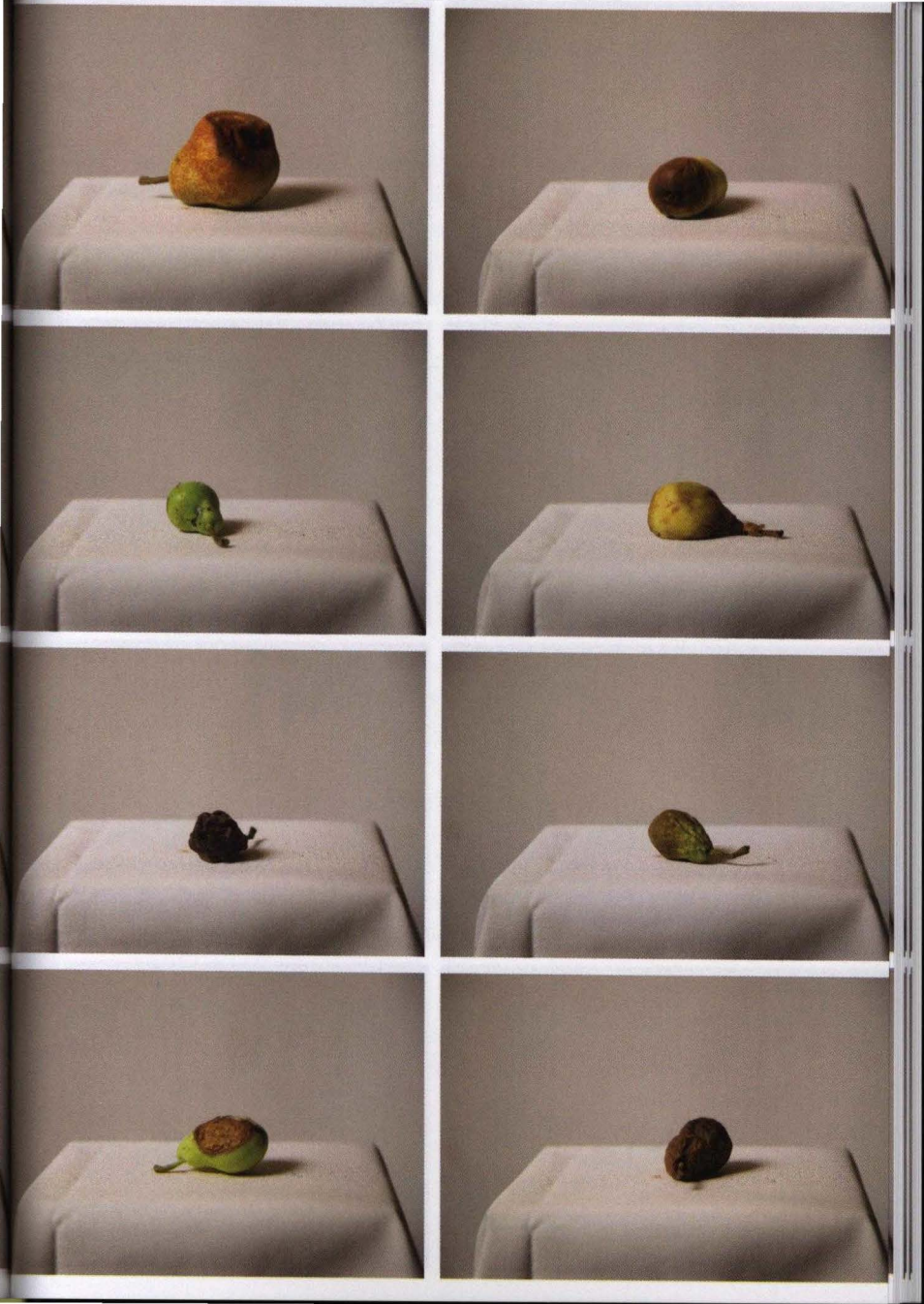
ML: He might serve a different purpose in the act of composition than he does in the actual poems. As a believer in God, I believe in inspiration, and something that's been called the Muse. But if we want to argue about the source of the "surprise" in the poem... it sounds incredibly presumptuous and arrogant for me to say that these surprises are coming from God. But in the best poems—a poem by Robert Frost, for example—the surprise is too good to be human. Yes, there are geniuses in the world, but the greatest poems are evidence to me that in addition to geniuses, there is also divinity that communicates with humans. God, and my belief in God, is directly connected with why I write poetry. The best poems are proof of something that's greater than myself. It's true that I don't often make explicit references to God in my poems; I'm not sure I know myself well enough to tell you why that's the case. Though I am very concerned with the afterlife, and how bad I think our religion, and many other religions are at depicting the afterlife. Yes, there's all that stuff in the Doctrine and Covenants about degrees of glory and different kingdoms, but we more or less have no literature that talks about what it's like there. What it feels like to live there, what it looks like there. Even Lazarus has nothing to say. Isn't that remarkable? What did it look like, who did you see, what did you do? What was it? I'm very curious about that. And our inability as Christian believers, or just as a species, to depict what happens after we die—I find that very interesting.

INSCAPE: Your poem "Coda" has a line in it that I've felt before: "Even if the next is better, I'll still miss this world," but I don't know that I've heard words put to it before.

ML: That's more praise than I deserve. I just hope that the afterlife isn't like church. Because church is great, but you wouldn't want to spend the next eight eons in church. I want the afterlife to have all of the stuff that this world has in it. And three hours of church excludes a lot of those things that make life great. A doctrine of Mormonism is that the celestial kingdom will be located on Earth. The Earth will receive its paradisiacal glory. And I just hope that the afterlife will be a very familiar place.

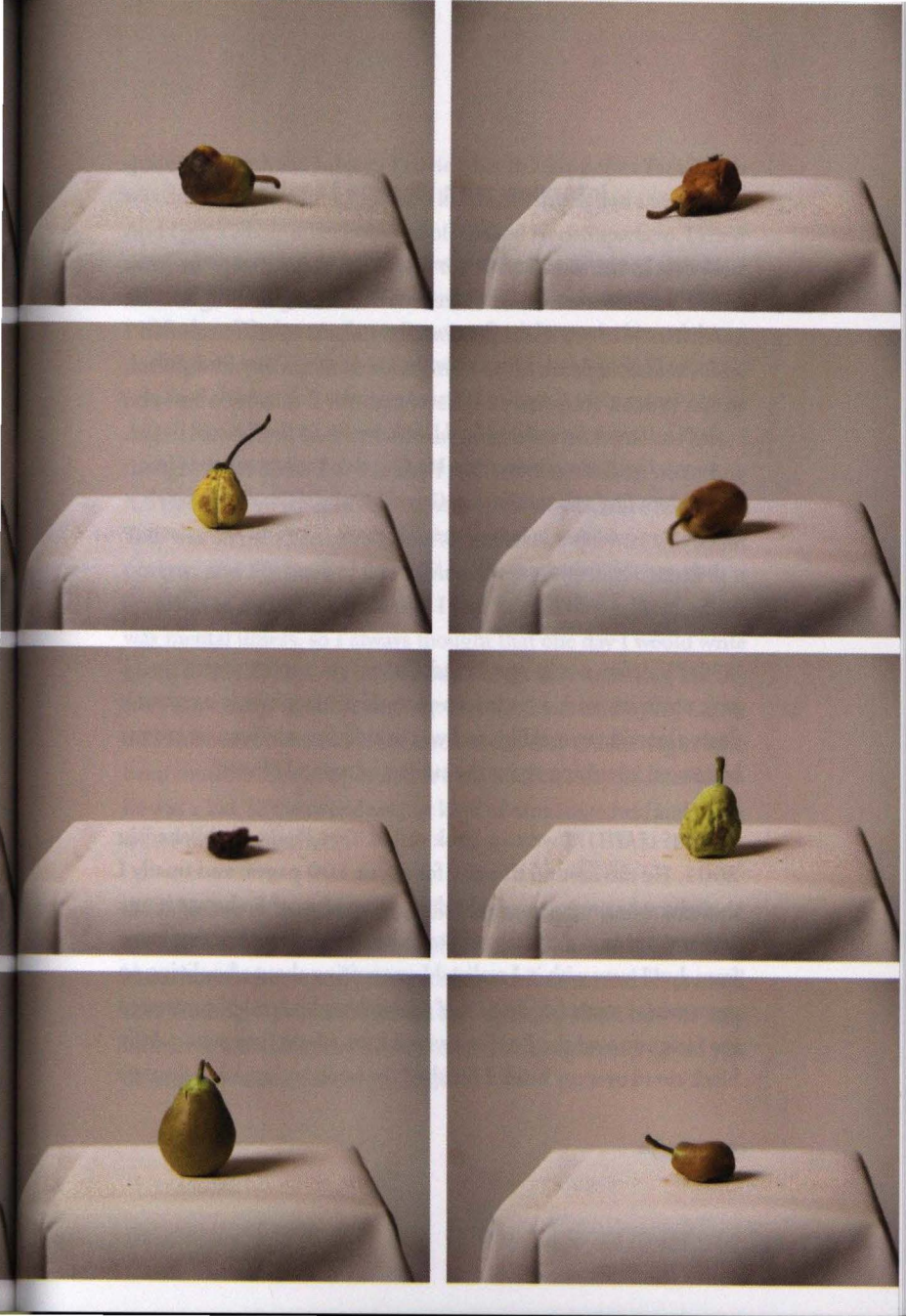










Interview with Martine Leavitt

Martine Leavitt has written ten novels for young adult readers, including *Calvin*, longlisted for the Printz Award, a YALSA Best Fiction for Young Adults, and winner of the Governor General's Award of Canada; *My Book of Life by Angel*, a finalist for the Los Angeles Times Book Prize and winner of the Canadian Library Association Young Adult Book of the Year Award; *Keturah and Lord Death*, finalist for the National Book Award; *Tom Finder*, winner of the Mr. Christie's Book Award; and *Heck Superhero*, finalist for the Governor General's Award of Canada. Her novels have been published in Japan, Korea, Denmark, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, and the Netherlands.

INSCAPE: A few weeks ago I read *Calvin*, your most recent novel, and, obviously with a seventeen-year-old schizophrenic narrator it deals a lot with mental illness. I was wondering why were or are you interested in writing about the subject of mental illness?

MARTINE LEAVITT: I wrote a book called *Tom Finder*, published in 2001. He ran around this city for about 100 pages, and finally I thought, *who are you, and why don't you go home?* So he ran home and crawled into a cardboard box. I have no idea where that came from, but I went with it. I realized I was writing about a boy living on the streets. I started to do a lot of research and it kind of consumed me for quite a while. I walked around for a long time with a little black cloud over my head. I finished the book and realized I wasn't

quite done with the subject. I remember thinking after *Tom Finder* was done, what would happen if a kid on the streets had a toothache? And I got a whole other book out of it called *Heck Superhero*. I knew as I was writing *Heck Superhero* that I really needed to also write about a girl living on the streets, and I knew based on the research I had done that I couldn't honestly approach the subject without dealing with prostitution. Most girls who hit the streets are involved on some level with it within a week. So I wrote *My Book of Life by Angel*. Now after I had written that third book on homeless kids, I thought I was done. But one day I realized that, without intending it, I had covered three of the major reasons why kids are homeless. Tom was on the streets because of abuse. *Heck Superhero* was about poverty, and *My Book of Life by Angel* was about addiction. But it occurred to me at that time that I had missed one subject, which was mental illness, so I always thought that one day I would write about mental illness. As it turns out, Calvin isn't homeless, but the story came to me in a different way. One day I was reading my *Calvin and Hobbes* comics and it occurred to me that Calvin might have been considered schizophrenic or a maladaptive daydreamer when he was a kid, so the two ideas just kind of came together, and that's where the story started.

INSCAPE: You've mentioned that the inspiration for *Calvin* was kind of threefold. You mentioned two of them: that you had been writing about homelessness and you wanted to touch on mental illness, and then reading *Calvin and Hobbes* and thinking about how he may have been a maladaptive daydreamer or schizophrenic. Could you describe the third, for our readers?

ML: Ok, this is further evidence of the reality of a living God. Because I was thinking, what would Calvin do? I came up with the idea that he'll get Bill Watterson to make a cartoon without Hobbes in it. If that happened Hobbes would go away and Calvin would get better. But how would he do it? And I thought, he'll go on a pilgrimage. I have no idea how I found it, but somehow, online, I found this story about this guy who walked across Lake Erie in the winter. And everything that happens in *Calvin* happened to that man. I just embellished a little. I saw it from Calvin's point of view. This other man actually did find cars sitting on the ice waiting to fall into the water when the ice melted; people just junked their cars that way. He also saw a fishing village and ice pillars. Calvin thinks they're snowgoons, of course, from the comic strip. Actually, they're made from pressure in little fissures in the ice. The pressure causes them to just squirt out of the ice, and then they freeze. They just get bigger and bigger and bigger, and they are luminescent. That article was a gift. It doesn't always happen that way for me.

INSCAPE: Do you think any of the three pieces that went into this were stronger than the others, or do you think they all had an equal role in creating this narrative?

ML: Definitely an equal role. I couldn't have done it without the three pieces. Sometimes I will wait. This is important for young writers to know, sometimes you get an idea but it's not quite ready. You need another piece or two before you can start writing. Or sometimes you start writing and you find those pieces as you're exploring. I was starting to make little notes and do some research before the

three pieces came together, so I think a certain amount of patience is involved when waiting for the story.

INSCAPE: What do you think was the most difficult part about creating a story about mental illness, especially one as difficult as schizophrenia?

ML: Many people with schizophrenia suffer terribly. For some the illness is debilitating and horrific. Then there are some who have one instance and never have another. There are some who manage it very nicely with medication. Some go on to do great things in the world of art, in the world of science. One of the people I researched had her Master's degree in psychology. She talked about how, when the voices first came into her mind, she went for help and was taught that the voices were hostile, that she should shut them down. But for her, the voices were teaching her that something was wrong, like a pain response when we touch a hot oven. They can actually be protective. So she stopped considering them as hostile, and she became very functional. Another woman I read about had schizophrenia but found her voices hilarious and spent a lot of time laughing. So I guess the most difficult thing for me was deciding, was I going to take my character to this very dark place where their illness is not managed and where it causes tremendous suffering, or could I write a story about a person who might be able to function. There is that story too. The same year as *Calvin* I think there were two other books about characters with schizophrenia who did go into that extremely dark place, but you know there is the danger of one story. So mine was a different way to look at it. Calvin still suffers, but his approach

is different. I think he suffers from the stigma of it. I think there shouldn't be stigma, so I think my book was reaching for that place where we say, *ok let's just not do this anymore*. Stigmatizing mental illness is really antiquated.

INSCAPE: So are you hoping that through *Calvin* maybe your readers can understand more about this stigma around mental illness?

ML: I would love it if that came out of it. But a topic is not a story, and my first ambition when I start a new project is not what I can teach people, not what my message is. I do not go there. I just want to tell a great story. Sometimes the way I feel about the world plays a big part of what the story's going to be. This year or two of research I did about homeless people for *Tom Finder* and more research for *Angel*, it bruised me. I had to heal. My stories are part of that. But I don't set out to say, *I sure hope people think differently about mental illness after this*. That would be lovely, but that's not my prime directive.

INSCAPE: I think, sometimes if people say "oh I want to write about mental illness, and I want people to think about mental illness in this way," it takes away from the story and the characters.

ML: It takes away from the reader's participation, because they don't create their own understanding. People might get something completely different from *Calvin* than I did. Young readers want to make their own decisions. They don't want the old sixty-three-year-old wise writer saying "this is what you should think about schizophrenia." I don't even know what I think half the time. I

think there's a lot of teenagers out there who have things a lot more together than I do, which is probably why I'm a writer. So I am deeply respectful of my audience.

INSCAPE: Speaking of members of your audience who don't have schizophrenia, how do you deal with creating a character that they can identify with even if they aren't struggling with the same things?

ML: Because there's no difference between people with schizophrenia and us. I read an article, actually I think I put it in the book, that said we're all on a spectrum. There are people who are extremely happy all the time, and there's people who suffer from terrible depression, but most of us are somewhere in the middle. I don't understand exactly what it feels like to have schizophrenia. What I do understand came from my research. Deep inside we are the same. I felt the same about *My Book of Life by Angel*. There was a time I was in Vancouver giving a reading and I had nothing to do that evening. I had heard of this United Church that cooked supper for prostitutes every evening, the real down and out prostitutes who spent all their money on their addictions and had nothing left to eat, so I went and helped cook. And afterwards the people who helped cook sat down with the prostitutes to eat supper, so we sat down and there was this lovely lady next to me. She was kind of my age, and there were a lot of cooks there, so I figured she was one of the cooks. She just looked like somebody at church. As we talked, I said to her, "how often do you come to cook?" and she explained to me that she wasn't one of the cooks. She was there to eat. And it made me realize that the differences between us are those of circumstance and not of the heart.

INSCAPE: Along with dealing with mental illness, *Calvin* also explores the idea of reality versus truth. How would you describe the relationship between reality and truth?

ML: I don't think I could describe it any better than the way Calvin describes it. Let's use an example. There was a movie about a man who removed bombs from war-sites. In one scene he's standing there in this desert, and he starts to pull up this rope and these bombs start to come out of the earth. And this movie was supposedly very realistic. But of course even one of those bombs would probably be too heavy for him to pull out of the earth, never mind however many there were, and I don't know how much truth was in that movie. But a book like *The Lord of the Rings*, which isn't real, but is true. That's always been an interesting thing to me. Real and true are not the same things.

INSCAPE: So I guess what you're saying is that something can be a true story without it being a real story.

ML: And something can be realism and not be true at all. Books that have pat answers for problems are not true.

INSCAPE: You've written a lot of fantasy, as well as these more contemporary and realistic novels. What makes you choose between presenting a certain theme or idea as contemporary realism or even magical realism versus a fantasy novel? Is it just how it comes together?

ML: That's a good question. I think it was C.S. Lewis who said that you choose fantasy because it's the best way to tell a certain kind of story, not for any other reason. I also don't really observe boundaries. A lot of people think that genre fiction is somehow less valuable than literary fiction, but you just have to look at Margaret Atwood's *Handmaid's Tale* or Yann Martel's *Life of Pi* or any number of fantasy novels that are literary.

INSCAPE: For you personally do you think *this is the subject I know I want to talk about. Would it be better addressed as a fantasy novel?*

ML: I often don't start with a subject, I often start with a voice. So *Dollmage* and *Keturah and Lord Death* both began with just hearing a voice in my head and I got it down and realized this would be a fantasy novel.

INSCAPE: So you try to capture the character rather than a subject or a story idea, and that character is more of a fantasy character as opposed to a realism character?

ML: It just seems that they're leading me that way.

INSCAPE: How would you describe your writing process in general? Do you think it's evolved over time?

ML: It's been different with every book. Every time I write a book and I finish it, I wonder, will I ever do that again? And every time I start a book, it's a bit of surprise, because I've never done it quite

that way. With my work in progress, I knew twenty-one years ago that I would write a book inspired by these stories of my husband's ancestors. I began by writing in journals. I've filled ten or twelve journals with character sketches, bits of dialogue, bits of setting, thoughts my characters might have. I just felt I really needed to get to know my characters, and I really needed to create my own world, so I couldn't launch in for quite some time. I often do that sort of thing but not to the extent that I've done it with this book. *Calvin* was completely different. As soon as I had those three pieces, I literally just started and wrote to the end. It was a horrible mess at first, but it was very linear.

INSCAPE: So I guess it just depends on the characters you're creating and the plot you're developing as you go, that's what creates your writing process?

ML: Yes, and I guess I can say this at Brigham Young University, but the Spirit plays an enormous role in what I do. I feel like I come to work every day to collect manna. My Father in Heaven gave me the talent I have. He helps me find and make the time to work. He gives me ideas. Sometimes He gives me the words. He's absolutely integral to everything I do. And He doesn't take away the work. He doesn't rob me of the wonderful feeling of having done a really hard thing. He gave me a ten year apprenticeship, and then when I published my first novel, I was able to have all the joy. He lets me work and develop my talent and struggle, but He helps me every step of the way.

INSCAPE: You mentioned your work in progress. It's a historical novel,

and you mentioned in your reading last week that it's inspired by your husband's ancestors. Obviously there are differences between what actually happened to these ancestors and this world that you are creating. So, how do you take this true story, or this real story, and decide what things need to be changed? Is it again what just comes to you as you create this world?

ML: That is a really good question because in the past I've never had to worry about stepping on anyone's toes, but this time it's historical. It's been a challenge. I discussed by subject with a historian who lives in the same place where the story takes place, and I told her my story happens between this year and that year. She said, "Oh, don't do that. Because everybody here knows the history between this time and that time, and if you do it wrong, they're going to be mad." I just had to let that go. I am true to the truth of that time, but I have had to fiddle with a few things to make a story. As far as I know there never was a girl who wanted to buy land and was told she couldn't. But those laws that prevented her from buying land were real, and maybe there was a girl who tried, who knows? That's something that can be tricky for writers just starting out, they can become slaves to the facts. You get boxed in. To the extent that they inspire you, let the facts do that. But to the extent that they want to kill your story, don't let them.

INSCAPE: This work in progress deals a lot with religion and God, especially as this is an LDS family. Do you ever feel that there's a line you shouldn't cross that might make your readers disinterested while reading about religion or might make you come across as preachy?

ML: Well, I'm not going to be preachy at all. As far as the religion thing, this is why I haven't written the book for twenty-one years. I thought so many times, *does it have to be a Mormon story? It's going to make it hard to sell.* I finally thought, *I'm just going to write the story, and I'm just going to have to make it so good that it well sell anyway.* It's our story. I guess I could take away all the references about being Mormon, but it's my story! Why should I? You have to be true to what you want to do as writer, whatever it is. You can't let those considerations mess with your art.

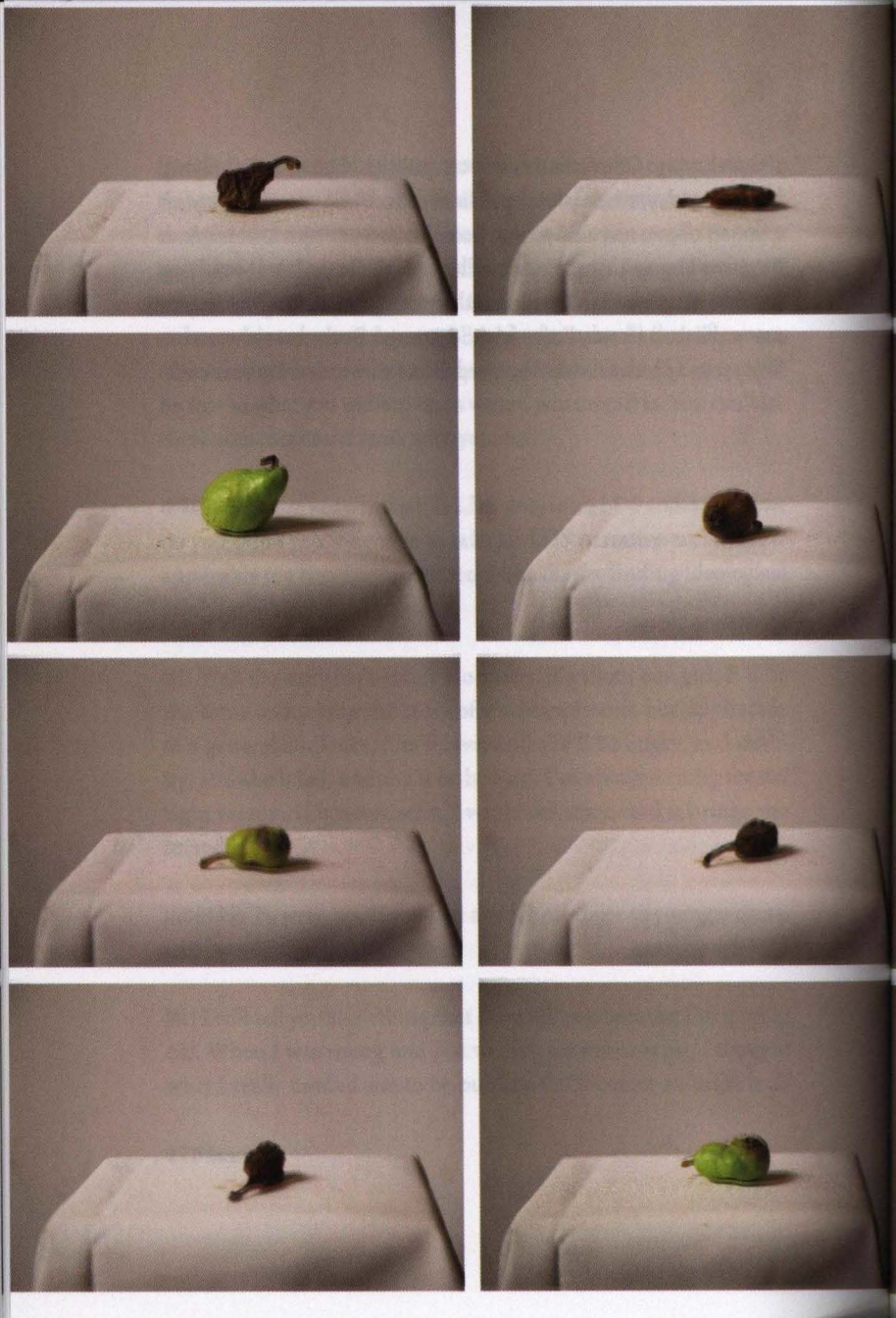
INSCAPE: You're not writing this LDS story to an LDS audience. How do you think you'll be able to take an LDS narrative and make it applicable to a non-LDS audience, when they're finding ideological or philosophical differences?

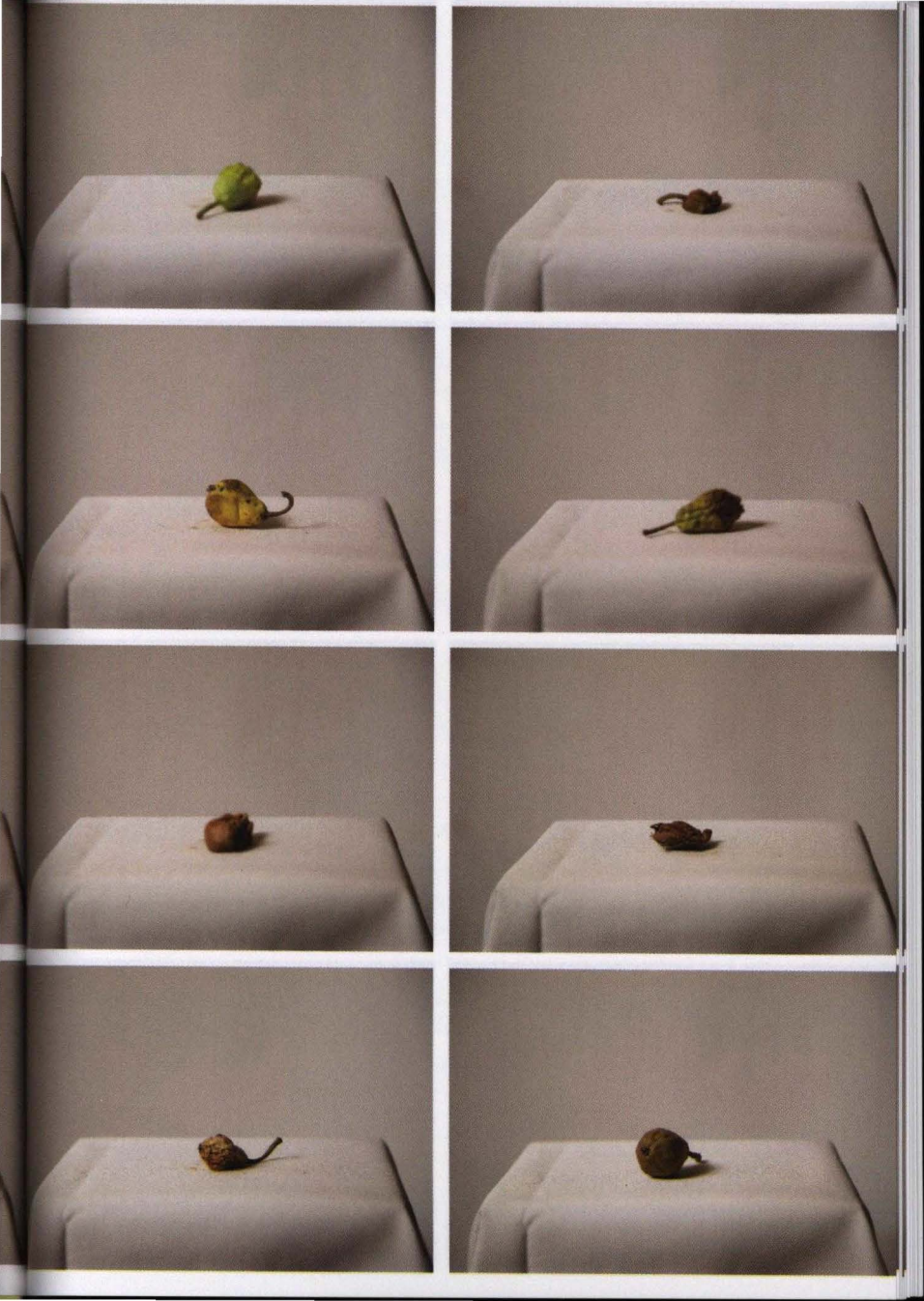
ML: Well the story isn't about Mormons, it's about one girl. It'll be the same as making the story of a schizophrenic boy applicable to a general audience. She'll love, and she'll be angry, and she'll try, and she'll fail, and she'll be human. I'm always writing for the right reason. If it never sells, I wrote the story, and it brings me incredible joy.

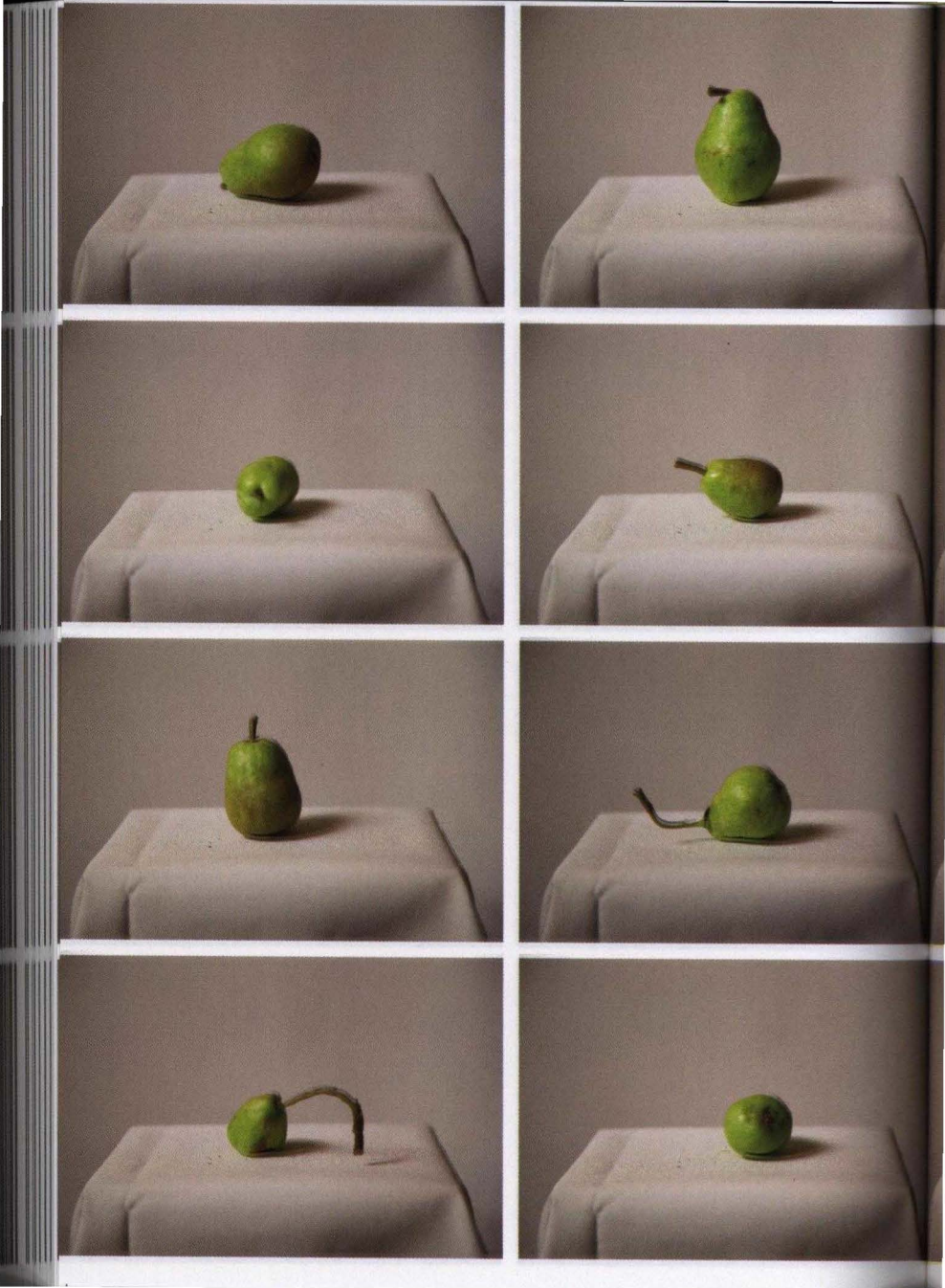
INSCAPE: To wrap up, if you had a piece of advice to young writers, what would that be?

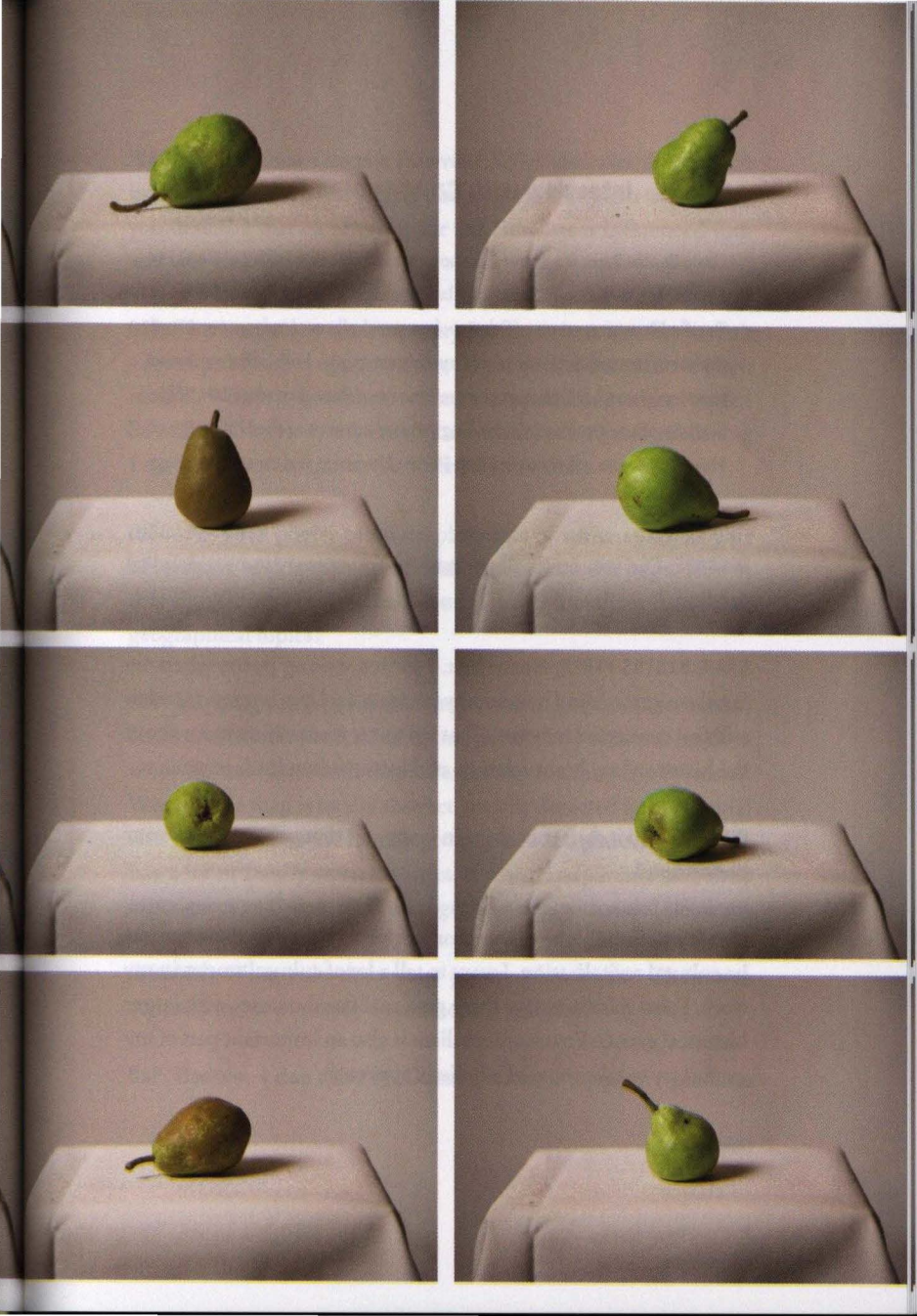
ML: I will tell you something that I can tell you because I'm getting old. When I was young and just writing for my own joy, I thought what I really needed was to be published. Of course an artist is all

about sharing. Of course you want to publish. But what I'm saying is that one day, when you've published ten books, and you've won a bunch of awards, and you've been invited to come and teach at Brigham Young University, one day you realize that the best thing about writing is still that wonderful joy that you had long before you ever published a book. Enjoy it while you can. Be the best you can be. Enjoy your apprenticeship, you need those years to develop your craft.









Interview with Craig Santos Perez

Craig Santos Perez is a native Chamoru from the Pacific Island of Guåhan/Guam. He is the co-founder of Ala Press, editor of two anthologies of Pacific literature, co-star of the spoken word album *Undercurrent*, and author of three collections of poetry, most recently, *from unincorporated territory [guma']*, which received the American Book Award in 2015. He is an Associate Professor in the English Department at the University of Hawai'i, Manoa, where he teaches Pacific literature and creative writing.

INSCAPE: Did you originally intend for your poetry to be a political medium?

CRAIG SANTOS PEREZ: Not at first. I started writing poetry when my family migrated, and it was a way for me to feel less homesick and to still feel connected to home. That led to my researching more about the history of my home islands, and history often leads to politics.

INSCAPE: Did it shift your drive in poetry — that politics drives your poetry now?

CSP: It's definitely one of the strong drivers. The other driver would be cultural revitalization. I want to tell a lot of cultural stories in my work. I also want to weave these personal family stories with larger historical events. Environmentalism is also an important part of my work. I try to take more of a holistic approach.

INSCAPE: Your new *Oceania Interview Series* indicates that you are interested in the Pacific Island poetry community as a whole. Can you describe that community for us? How has it influenced you, and vice versa?

CSP: There are many contemporary Pacific writers but there aren't a lot of publication opportunities. Thus, Pacific literature is often invisible within larger spheres of American and International poetry. So with the interview series, as well as with the editing and publishing I do, I try to create spaces for other Pacific writers.

INSCAPE: Your poetry often employs lots of white space as part of its form, and is unconventionally spaced on the page. How is this significant as you write about maps, colonialism, and other geographical topics?

CSP: Mapping can be a colonial practice as maps have been used to claim and exploit our islands. In my poetry, I try to create counter-mapping to subvert their maps. Part of that is telling family stories. Whereas the map is totally abstract, usually depicted from an aerial view, a story shows the human geographies of a place. So my work has a lot of family stories, stories of my grandparents and their experiences on Guam, and I arrange the stories with visual elements.

INSCAPE: What role does your poetry play in the Chamorro community, or what role do you hope it will play?

CSP: Because I don't live on Guam anymore, my poetry gets into

the community mainly through being taught in high school and college classrooms there. I've been able to go back home a couple times in the last few years to do public performances and visit the schools and students, as well as speak on the radio and television news. With Facebook and Twitter, I'm better able to interact with writers on Guam, and I continue to publish Chamorro writers in national and international literary venues.

INSCAPE: What is your hope on the high school level, or the non-writing community level? What do you want your writing to do for that community in Guam?

CSP: Definitely to inspire them. One of the classes I visited — it was an honors English class — had read my poetry. I performed for them, and afterwards one of the students was crying. I asked, "What's wrong?" And she said it was the first time she saw our culture in a book. She said, "I just thought we weren't worthy of literature." I hope for the students to be able to feel that we're human, too, and we're worthy of literature. And maybe they will be inspired to write their own stories and poems.

INSCAPE: That is exciting! You're playing a big part in it.

CSP: A small part! I'm like the crazy off-island Chamorro writer.

INSCAPE: What kinds of conversation does your poetry facilitate? Is facilitating conversation the goal of your poetry?

CSP: It's one of the goals. In 2010, the Guam Humanities Council brought me home. They hosted events at the schools and in the community where people would come to hear me perform poetry related to militarization on Guam, and after the reading, there would be breakout groups and discussion about the topics of the poems. That was really cool because poetry led to civic dialogue in the community. And you don't usually see that at poetry events.

INSCAPE: Do your readings and presentations often give time for you to interact and converse with students?

CSP: There's usually a short Q&A session and a reception afterwards, and I get to talk to a few students. And sometimes students will find me on Facebook and send questions because they were too shy to ask in person.

INSCAPE: Guam has a sort of dual-identity: it's an American territory with a military base, but it also has its own thriving island culture. How do these two mix? Is that something you express in your poetry?

CSP: They mix in different ways. The military took a lot of land from families to build the bases, so there's anger. That includes my own family. The military is also a major polluter on the island, contaminating the land and the water, which has also caused high rates of cancer among our people. On the other side, many Chamorros have joined the military—we have very high enlistment rates. I myself come from a very militarized family. After high school, I almost joined the military as well. So despite everything, many

Chamorros are very patriotic becuase of our ties to the military. So if you speak out against the military, it often causes conflict within your own family. It's frustrating and complicated.

INSCAPE: Which community is more vocal? Are you representing the less vocal side of the community?

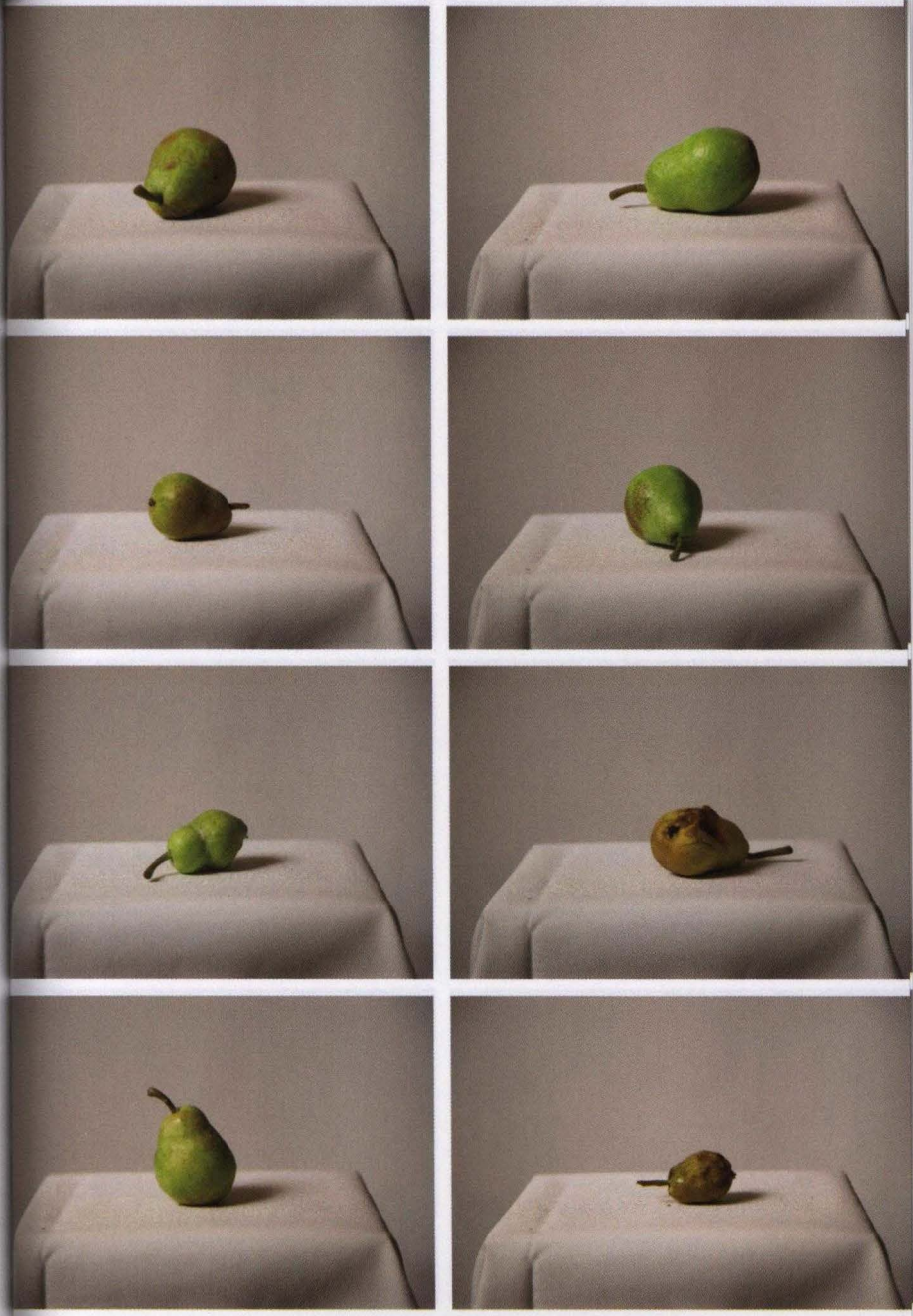
CSP: Those who are critical of the military are vocal with our concerns, but we are in the minority.

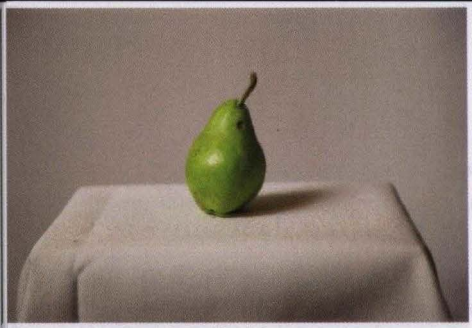
INSCAPE: How do you straddle that dynamic as a poet and as a writer? You have a very clear voice and a very clear stance, but you're also aware of the other side. I mean, it's family, too. How do you create that balance as an artist?

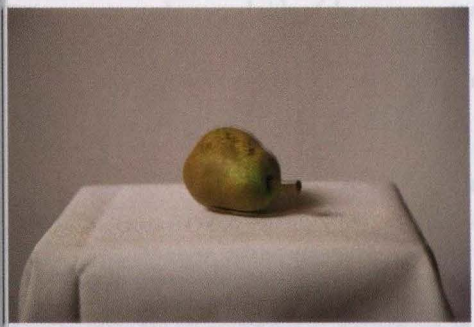
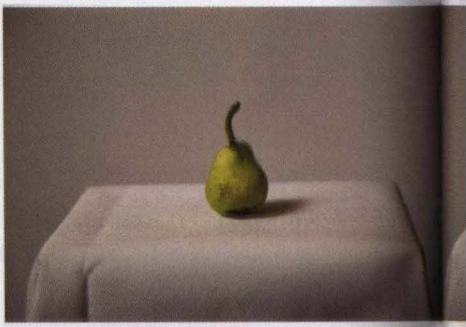
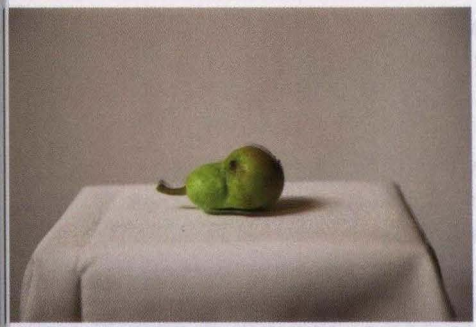
CSP: Poetry is the place where I can speak my truth. Even if you can't talk about these difficult things in person, here's a space where we can feel free to discuss it.

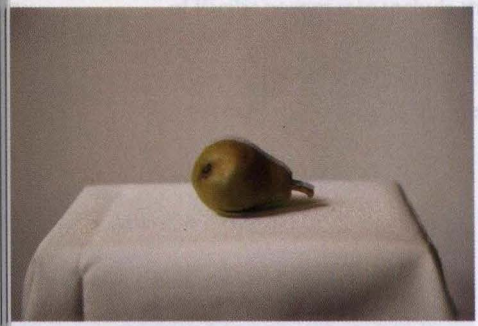
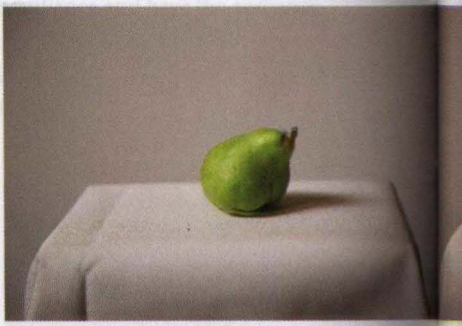
INSCAPE: Anything else? The reading this afternoon was amazing. Not very often do you have participation in poetry readings... at least for me as a writer, it's not often that I've seen poets do that.

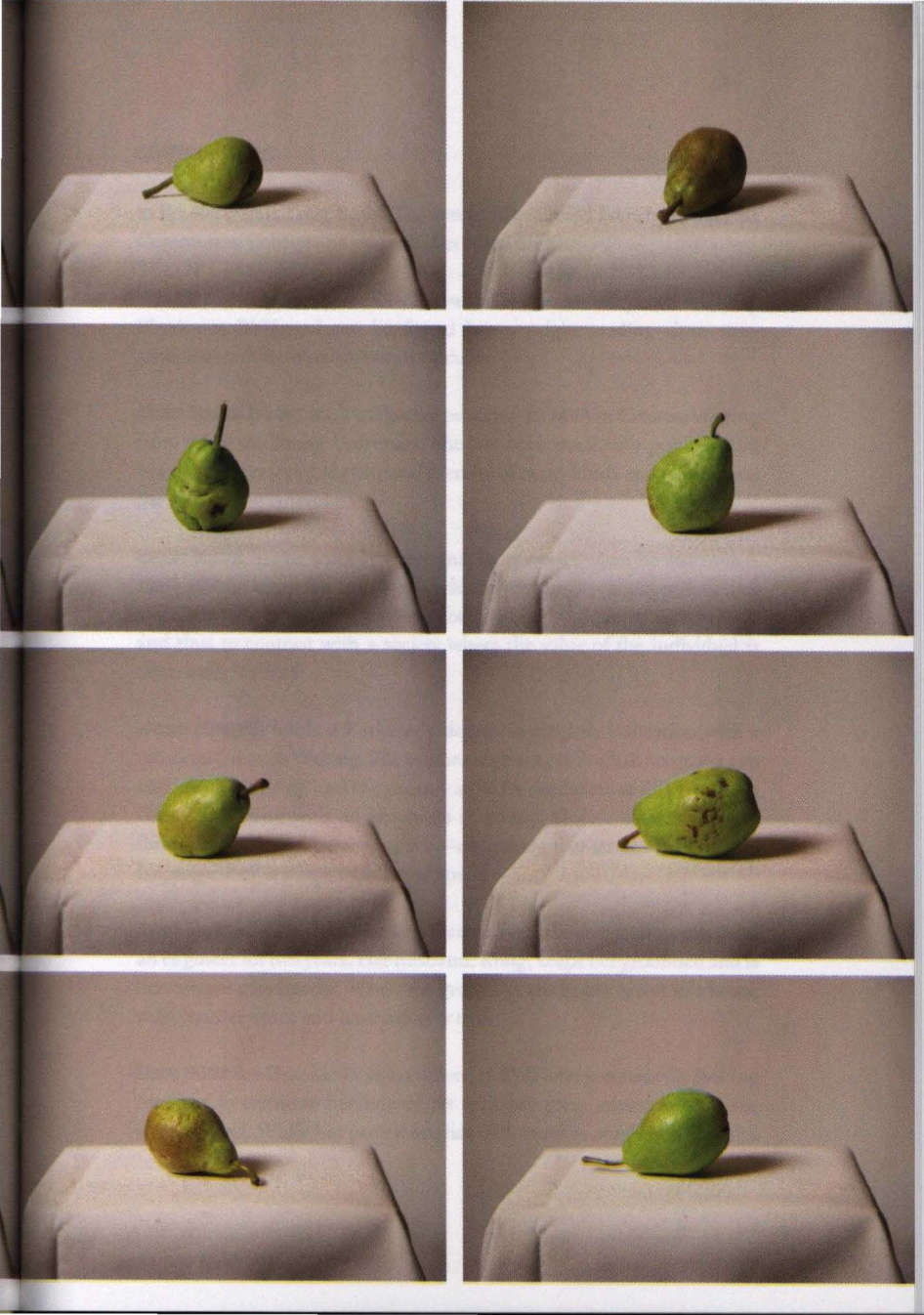
CSP: Thank you for taking the time to interview me. An important part of Pacific poetics is to include the audience and have the audience give you energy. Through call and response we're creating a poetic space together. I want the audience to be a part of it and give back and create this poetic circle together.







CONTRIBUTORS

Ha Ryn Ahn is from Long Beach, California. She studied French at Fullerton Community College and writes in her spare time.

Merril Asp hails from Carson City, Nevada. He is in his last year of studying Physics at BYU and can be found late at night reading short story anthologies or treatises on vector calculus.

Allison Maeser Brimley is a Utah native pursuing an MFA in Creative Writing from Brigham Young University. She has been previously published in *Inscape*. She enjoys daily physical exercise of many kinds and never cooks the same thing twice.

Hunter Buxton began writing poetry and short stories when he was twelve. His goal is to create ideas in words which are stronger on paper than they appear in life, highlighting what is original and unique to each person, and thus to contrast with a society where the value of the individual is often marginalized.

Joanna Ellsworth holds a Bachelor's degree in English Education with a minor in Creative Writing. She teaches high school English language arts and creative writing and is currently an MFA candidate at BYU studying Creative Writing with an emphasis in poetry. She's a wife, a mom, a fitness enthusiast, a gamer, a geek—everything that strains the fabric of language until it warps to fit her shape.

Sarah Farrar saw the light and switched to English after attempting to be an engineer for two years. Her husband, Kraig, keeps her grounded and is her current proofreader. When she grows up, she hopes to live in a house with counter space and have a dog or two.

Claire Gillett is a Graphic Design student at BYU who is constantly looking for ways to combine her love of art with her great admiration for the written word. While her preference lies with creative nonfiction, she also

experiments with poetry and literary criticism. In the fall of 2015, she was the first place winner of the Writing 150 opinion editorial contest. Her winning submission, "Mom . . . I Think I'm a Socialist," recently appeared in the new edition of *Mindful Writing*. When she is not writing, Claire enjoys hiking, painting, and spending time with her lap dog, Sadie.

Bryan Hutchison is originally from Provo, Utah. He graduated with a BFA from BYU in 2013 and completed an MFA with an emphasis in New Forms/Integrated Practices at PRATT in 2015.

Sophie Lefens is a poet and writer from Chicago.

Richard Merelman, a native of Washington, D. C., is professor emeritus of Political Science at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. *The Imaginary Baritone* (Fireweed Press), his first book of poems, appeared in 2012. In 2016, Finishing Line Press published his chapbook, *The Unnamed Continent*. His poems have appeared in *Contemporary American Voices, Main Street Rag, Measure, Stoneboat, Loch Raven Review, Common Ground Review, California Quarterly,* and *Blue Unicorn,* among others. Poems are forthcoming in *Stoneboat, Common Ground,* and *Lake Effect*. He and his wife live in Madison, Wisconsin.

Aly Northrup is a senior at Brigham Young University studying Neuroscience with a minor in Writing and Rhetoric.

Dominic Shaw is studying English and Korean at Brigham Young University. He has a passion for written language and the emotions that writing can evoke. Dominic's main interest lies in the cathartic and often redemptive quality that confessional nonfiction can provide. Despite the unfortunate events that take place within his piece, he has thoroughly renounced his career as a pyromaniac.

ShelliRae Spotts graduated with her MFA in Creative Nonfiction from Brigham Young University. When she is not teaching, grading papers, or attempting to write, she can usually be found sewing costumes, cooking

dinner, or attending the theater with her husband and four delightfully geeky teenagers. She is an unrepentant Anglophile and loves musicals, sci-fi movies, and chocolate in any form (the darker the better).

Anne Thomas grew up in central California within an hour's drive of world class natural wonders in every direction. As a result, she is studying Conservation Biology and Bioinformatics with the goal of doing ecology research. One of her favorite ways to explore nature and other daily wonders is by turning it into words, and no matter what her career looks like in the future, she wants to write. She also loves reading and playing the cello.

Laura Toland lives in Utah with her adorable family. She enjoys cheesecake, chocolate cake, and ice cream cake.

Tesia Tsai is a second-year graduate student at BYU, studying Creative Writing with an emphasis in fiction. Apart from writing, she enjoys teaching, eating delicious food, and watching multiple TV shows at once.

Michael Turner is a Linguistics student at BYU. He enjoys printmaking, typography, poetry, post-rock, obsolete technologies, and Eastern calligraphy.

Bryn Watkins doesn't know what to write about herself in this section. She feels uncomfortable referring to herself in the third person, and doesn't have much of an interesting life to report on anyway.

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