

James Hearst Poetry Prize

SHANAN BALLAM

## The baby pig

*for Dave Lee*

floated in a jar  
of formaldehyde  
in the fifth grade  
science classroom.

Her face was so lonely,  
eyes like elegant  
brushstrokes on china,  
mouth a fine gray line  
curved into a sorrowful smile,  
wrinkled snout no bigger  
than a dime.  
Her umbilical cord twisted  
like a honeysuckle vine,  
belly stippled with two rows  
of nipples, and through  
her nearly transparent skin  
Stubbs saw her heart,  
a ripe cherry,  
pulse and shine.

He stuffed the jar inside  
his coat. It stuck out  
like a pregnant belly.

He crafted a nest  
of quilts and sticks,  
blue heating pad in the center,  
and hunkered over the jar  
as if it were an egg,  
folding his arms along  
his sides like wings,  
scowling into the sunset,  
concentrating hard  
to sprout feathers  
and a beak.  
He would fly  
them both away  
and they'd be free.

When she was born,  
he would name her Beauty.

MARIA NAZOS

## Afraid

We were afraid of everything: tornadoes, love, skateboards,  
Shelly Cooper and the brass-knuckled earrings she wore.  
We were petrified of the human papillomavirus, how  
it was Latin for butterfly. We were afraid of butterflies,  
their migration. Pot smoke when blown into our mouths

by a boy. We were afraid of Mike Rex, the older man who spat  
rap and lived in a mobile home and had long, dark curly  
hair, a sweaty forehead, and sold whole sheets of LSD.  
We were afraid of being tied to fences, being handcuffed  
together, of parties, red-and-blue-lights. Afraid

of the Wisconsin border where people crossed to drink.  
Afraid of drinking, cigarette butts imprinted with lipstick stains.  
We were especially afraid of the older girls who had babies  
and boyfriends, whose clothes, it was rumored, they'd sliced  
to ribbons. When they laughed you could see their fillings.

When they lifted their arms to chug a beer-bong, we saw  
their spiny tattoos. We were afraid of tattoos, parties  
in cornfields, tiny white pills, the dead and the living. Shards  
of glass, mirrors, and the fallen salt we tossed over our left  
shoulder where our grandmothers told us the devil lurked,

waiting to enter our bodies. Bodies were frightening:  
Couldn't banish the memory of the man who emerged  
from Hamell Woods, stark nude for us to see. The way  
he held himself in unashamed offering. The world  
opened and offered itself, and that was terrifying, too.

There were so many things we didn't see but believed.  
Black ice, slick sidewalks, falling in love, or just falling and being  
laughed at. Being the center of attention, eye contact, suburbs  
named after cut-down trees: Timber Estates, Maple Falls—  
We were afraid of leaving them. Becoming lost and adult.

Nail salons cropping up like corn. Nipple-hair, Dutch Elm  
disease, and yellow tape circling a tree. The smell of cow  
manure when you drove out too far. Pigeons and how they'd stare  
with inbred-red eyes. Afraid of standing, alone, in the middle  
of America's heart: its beat that called us to a place that burned.