



The Archive

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There is the one drop rule in mixing paints: just one and stir and let the colors coalesce before you drip one more until

red is pink is flush as flesh. In genetics, though, rules behave more like general guidelines. The color wheel spins out of control,

hues suffuse instead of sum, and sometimes a Czech and a Syrian add up to a fair-haired, freckled American. It's all a matter, according to Mendel, of dominance. Do you have what it takes? Are you so potent as to stain the whole human race

with one iota of ovum, of sperm? Imagine the face of the world's child, one in whom all pigments converge, and the muck that would surge up from the tawny tans and whites, reds, yellows, blacks splashing over like a riot into the streets. Don't you see yourself?

You emerge random and elegant from the chaos like a Jackson Pollock slapdashed there, chromosomes frayed into brushes, each drop of dye dolloped haphazard in a moment of disaster and of pleasure. Accidents spill in like an oil slick so we never get too alike, so that the paints don't mix quite through, and we slip in ourselves in every color like kids gotten into the art supplies and not knowing the rules.

Mendelian

Elizabeth
Beam

ERROR



“Accident causes fracture of third and fourth lumbar vertebrae, three fractures of pelvis, eleven fractures of right foot, dislocation of left elbow, penetrating abdominal wound caused by iron handrail entering left hip, exiting through vagina and tearing left lip. Acute peritonitis. Cystitis with catheterization for many days..... Sensation of constant fatigue and at times pain in backbone and right leg, which now never leave her.”

—Dr. Henriette Begun regarding his patient Frida Kahlo, 1926

[Rap-a-tapping the beat on the floor, she hums a *balada* amid the engine’s rattle and rumble until—hush. She gasps as the trolley comes slowly closer and closer—a crash, a jumble,

a steel rod in her

neck,

ribs,

pelvis,

uterus,

piercing soft red mango flesh,
jutting from the lips between her legs.

Her pupils, seeds of the peeled and juicy fruit,
dash,

dart in a panic
about the lucid vision of a nightmare.

She’s maimed, but she dances—

a *bailarina* flush

to the bus floor, her *merengue* partner
she guides with writhes. The moans

that are her music,

the blood red pain,

the flashes of hands,

lips, tongues, throats,

metal slicing flesh like a knife through melon,

all stop—

flecks of dust drift softly, lightly,
yellow in the whitewash of sunlight.
A gold nimbus, metallic flakes cascade
onto the prima *bailarina* as a spotlight
having flared from one white paper cup
when a man, cradling brushes and oils
and the precious chalice of gold, jerked
by *el choque*, flung up arms in surrender,
baptizing the saint in a shower of gold.
Just like so, the painter passed on his art,
sprinkling what was left for him to paint
onto what was left of Frida.

Now look at the broken china doll dancer,
arms twisted in a halo through a craze of hair,
thighs thrashing through pooling red
like thick skirts sticky with sweat.

Baila, Frida, baila

on your mechanical pole axis.

But she only poses there, contorted
like a cripple, or a *bailarina*, posed.

Elizabeth
Beam

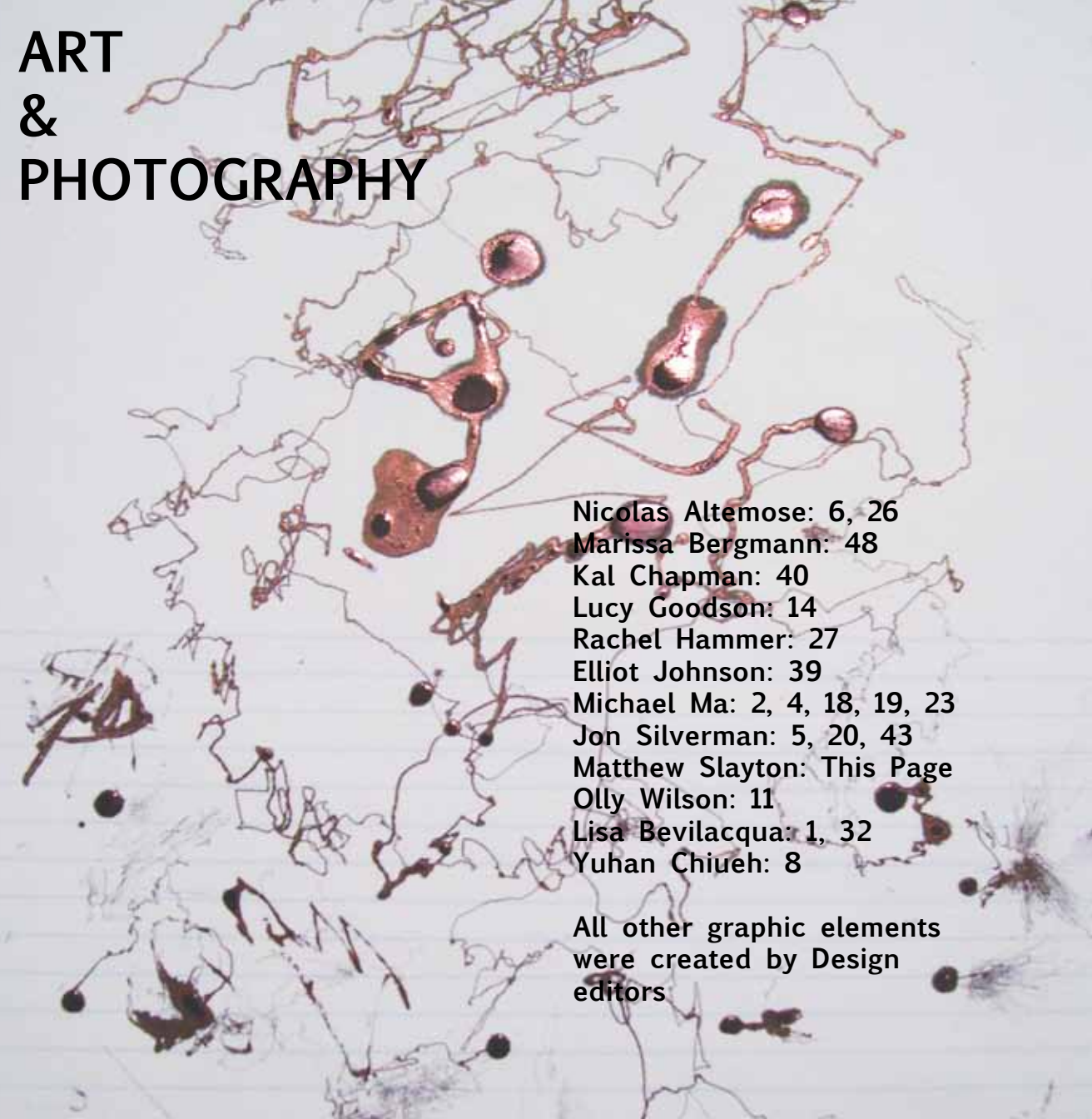
ODE TO EL CHOQUE



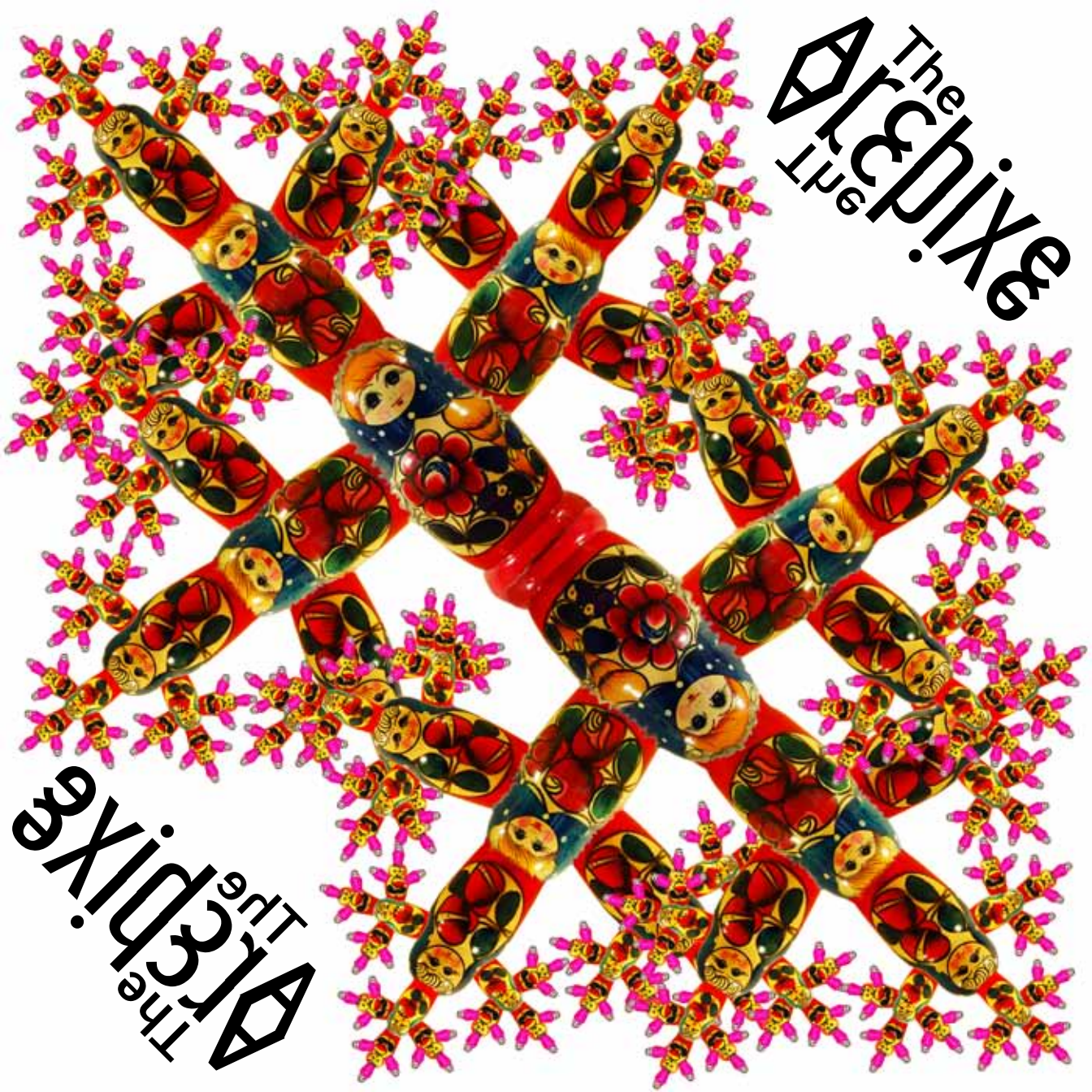
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