

Ramble Underground

By Justin Withem

Editor: Joseph Thomas

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Web Address: www.rambleunderground.org

What they publish: fiction, poetry, and visual art

Submission Guidelines: Electronic submissions only, pref. less than 4,000 words, simultaneous accepted

Description of publication: Attractive, smart, quarterly web journal for “unknown artists to find a place.”

Prose per issue: 3 short fiction (12 annually)

Prose Reviews:

“*Late Night*” by Joseph Thayer is a realistic story about a pair of graffiti artists at an el-train station. They’ve just finished tagging the awning of the station when two police officers exit a train and start wandering, presumably looking for the taggers. Hidden on the awning, the first person narrator’s mind wanders as one of the police officers tries to climb to the top of the awning, failing and losing his radio in the process. The stray radio shouts, “Officer down!” and the policemen run to provide backup.

The suspense in hiding from police radiates from this story. However, we’re never given a clear sight of the space being used as a hiding place - the narrator seems to be hiding both on top of and within it. The word “awning” is thrown around as if self-explanatory, as if the intended audience for the story is restricted to those who ride the train in New York City. Still, though, the suspense comes through clearly.

“*Cargills*” by J.B. Franklin is a realistic (though somewhat speculative) story told in a domestic setting. The first person narrator is the child of a jobless man who, in an effort to please his family and cheat his government, takes out a loan for a Mercedes that he never plans on paying back. The family moves into an abandoned grain silo to hide from collectors as the economy collapses and the world around them falls apart. The Mercedes turns out to be a symbol of wealth for this once looked-down-upon family.

The author so effectively replicates the dialect of his characters that I had a hard time reading it. The observations of the narrator, though, are so realistic in their youthful ignorance that I accept the difficult dialect as part of the narrator’s limited education. The story seems both to drag and to move too quickly through time, but by the end the odd use of time seems to have paid off.

Rating: 7 out of 10. Journal claims to be for “new artists.” Authors list only minimal previous publications, often none.