

MAKE

a Chicago Literary Magazine



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Fact Sheet

Print Magazine: MAKE: A Chicago Literary Magazine

Web Address: <http://www.makemag.com>

Address: P.O. Box 478353 Chicago, IL 60647

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Founding Editors: Sarah Dodson, Mike Zapata and Ramsin Canon, and now joined by several other departmental and contributing editors.

Founded: 2004

Frequency: Bi-annual

Circulation: 2,000

What They Publish: Short fiction, creative nonfiction and personal essays, interviews, poetry, book reviews, visual art.

Submission Guidelines: Unpublished work under 8,000 words, preferably submitted using the MAKE online submission database. Simultaneous submissions are welcome, given notice. Each issue is published with one particular theme in mind; submissions are encouraged to extrapolate or contradict each upcoming phrase.

Submission Period: Year-round

Contributor Payment: Copies of the issue in which they appear.

Not-for-Profit: Yes

CLMP: Yes

Why I Chose MAKE

Every issue of MAKE has a distinct focus on aesthetics and an omnibus embrace of every literary form possible; each issue features everything from short stories to visual art, poetry, interviews, book reviews and creative nonfiction. The magazine not only also publishes its own share of local and emerging writers, but creative nonfiction stories frequently carry well-defined portions of cultural commentary and context within them.

Beyond the components that comprise it, MAKE is an established local literary magazine. I decided to investigate how these local editors, collaborators, and authors of the magazine so frequently get it right.

Comparison of Issues Over Time

	Issue 8	Issue 7	Issue 6	Issue 5
Prose Writers: Male:Female	8:6	5:3	5:4	4:1*
POV 1st 2nd 3rd	11:0:3	6:0:2	6:0:3	2:1:6
Writer's Credits Book:Magazine:First	5:8:2	3:3:2	6:2:1	4:0:1

*Issue 5 features five short stories by John McNally.

MAKE consistently features slightly more male authors than bodied ones, but just ever so slightly (Issue 5 being the exception), that these numbers seem to owe more to male submitters outnumbering females.

A quick glance at the point-of-view ratio found in stories published over time is able to point out that first person heavily outweighs all over points of view, in fiction or nonfiction, but this has to be taken with a grain of salt. MAKE editors are open to all styles, and unconventional ways of telling; however, they do gravitate towards what they consider to be the strongest narratives.

MAKE is a magazine that does solicit established writers for particular stories, notably those with social, political, cultural or historical context; Issue 5 features five stories by John McNally that are each fictional portraits of dead men of Chicago, altogether titled “Five White Guys: A Short History of Chicago”, which fits the issue’s theme of “City in Biography.”

Most authors published in MAKE are not first-time writers; very frequently, they have been published several times already and/or have published work.

Prose Reviews

Issue 8, This Everyday | Summer/Fall 2009

Mouth by Molly Tolsky is a plainspoken fictional story about a girl, her mouth, and her sexual identity and experience. At the office job the narrator works at as an adult, she frequently rolls her tongue through her mouth, feeling each tooth, and considering the boys who have caused her to become orally fixated. When she was in college, a roller-skating accident on a date with a boy called Tushy prematurely killed one of her front teeth. In her present job, her boss mistakes her act of touching her finger to the affected tooth as something sexy, and asks her out. She agrees, but only because, as she states later in an e-mail to herself, “you’re too busy thinking about your mouth instead of thinking about what your mouth wants to say.”

The female narrator of Tolsky’s *Mouth* doesn’t know what she wants. She seems capable of dating any man simply because he asks. She dates her boss because, “Mr. Bloom is an attractive man. All of his limbs and appendages are appropriately sized ...” Because he isn’t a mutant. She can critically recognize all of this about herself, but she can also recognize that she is not going to change. As nuanced and unique as that decision appears within the story, I appreciate it more because it also seems like something that is actually universal—people really don’t always change. The narrator remains self-affirming, however, typing an e-mail to herself that ends with the demand, “Be a man! Take charge! Do what you want to do!”

Receptionist by Christen Enos is a plainspoken essay about life after art school working in the media. Enos answers the phones at an unnamed PR firm, a job that makes her interrupt the celebrity gossip of staff meetings to politely speak over the intercom, “Phyllis, Tom Hanks is calling.” The story expands to give readers a broad view of publicity work, comparing celebrities, coworkers, and erroneous mistakes. The narrator doesn’t fit into PR and doesn’t think she is fit for a job that only seemed to entail answering phones, but begins to learn anyway.

Receptionist is predictable to casual fans of the nonsense of celebrity-obsessed pop culture, yet smart and reflective. The story is rife with self-deprecation, but still keeps a hopeful, lively tone: “At my graduation from NYU in the spring, my film school classmates started chanting

‘Sterns sucks’ in the direction of the business school graduates of the same name; the kids who would be millionaires before age thirty called back, ‘We have jobs.’” It is frequently funny throughout, but simultaneously sad to see the faltering dreams of a heartfelt idealist.

Issue 7, Property Lines | Winter 2009

Nobody Knows Your Name by Eula Bliss is a plainspoken personal essay that reflects on heritage, the history of Irish immigrants, and physical cultural boundaries in Chicago. While driving through the city with her husband, Bliss’s husband mentions that he is researching Irish names. It might seem merely like an apt remark for an afternoon car ride, as her husband has a last name that is also the name of a town in Ireland. But Bliss begins to reflect on not only the mash-up of her own names (Her first name is Greek, however she is not Greek, and her last name is English), the history of Irish immigrants in major American cities, and the understanding or lack of understating that cultural identity in America now does or does not receive.

Nobody Knows Your Name is not only a quick, personal essay with a history lesson. Bliss mixes present-day scenes of her and her husband driving through the Southeast Side of Stony Island Avenue with a multi-faceted cultural commentary and dense meditation on modern American identity and the idea of so-called ‘whiteness.’ The story picks up strength when she mentions the lyrics of Nina Simone, white suburban teenagers who embrace hip hop culture and a billboard her husband passes while driving through the city, reading, “I See Black People.” It becomes stronger, yet, when the history lessons and pop culture references round into a broader perspective, when Bliss muses on the coming cultural heritage and whiteness of her own future children. “Perhaps I will tell them that your race is like your own name—” she says, “it is given, and you must define your own name so that it does not define you.”

My Mother in Permacapsule by Alissa Nutting is a first person story set in the distant future about mothers and daughters. However, that mother is an imprisoned, murderous criminal by the name of Debbie ‘The Destroyer’ and her daughter is a lonely intergalactic delivery girl who calls herself ‘CargoBabe’ and kills long hours in a vacuous space capsule by checking her e-mail and texting a boyfriend she has yet to see; a man who calls himself ‘FluidTransfer.’ Out of a twisted sense of duty or pity, CargoBabe decides to buy her mother’s frozen permacapsule and thaw out the body, dreaming of a new life spent with a wonderful boyfriend and a grateful, liber-

ated mother. Yet, Debbie ‘The Destroyer’ stabs her daughter in the chest with a handmade knife fashioned from a pork and beans can, and when CargoBabe struggles to reach her console to send a goodbye text to FluidTransfer, she notices that he had already talked to her mother about her murder that morning, ending their short conversation with, “I love you, sicko.”

The protagonist of *My Mother in Permacapsule* is a pathetic individual from beginning to end, capable of falling in love with a man she has never seen (Whose messages become no more romantic than, “Where were u? Missed our AM freak fest”), and able to forgive a woman sentenced to four-hundred and fifty years in prison for a long career in crime that included murdering her own father. Yet the simplicity of her character is both hilarious and brilliant when plopped within a “distant future” in which people still laugh at perverted photos and use stupid abbreviations and intentional misspellings in their own text messages. CargoBabe wants to reunite with her mother, and believe that love exists. She will go to any extent for either of these, which seems uncommonly pathetic, but in every embarrassing, universal way, it really isn’t. Everyone wants to find that. It’s both funny and pathetic, and within Nutting’s story, these are both presented with equal depth.

Issue 5, City in Biography | Fall 2007

The Something Something by John McNally is a plainspoken, third person story in a domestic setting; a fictional portrayal of Gene Siskel. The noted (late) Chicagoan and film reviewer is in the process of watching a French film in an empty movie theatre with “Roger” (Presumably Roger Ebert), and cannot remember the name of the film. For all his reverence for film, he also cannot contain how much he thinks the movie is awful. He reverts to a child-like behavior that does not stay contained to the movie theatre, pestering Roger and telling him that he must, by all means, make snow angels with him on the ground. Despite an evening spent being pushed to the edge by Gene’s immature actions, Roger agrees, and their seemingly oddly-matched camaraderie, like the loyalty they both have for Chicago, remains.

Readers of *The Something Something* might not be familiar with Gene Siskel, but they can understand that he is a dead guy, and writing about him now makes him inherently important as one of five fictional portraits included in Make Issue 5 under the group title, “Five Dead Guys: A Short History of Chicago.” The dialogue feels oddly contrived at points, but the narrative itself is inventive and original, without uncomfortable factual exposition or planted information that

underlines how important Gene Siskel is to Chicago, or how much he actually knows about film. McNally assumes a certain level of intelligence of his readers, and the story benefits likewise, following an evening that highlights Gene's hate of babies, love of the 'cocoon of sensory deprivation' of theaters, and his proclivity for childlike activities— from blowing spitballs to throwing snowballs, and making snow angels. I am surprised by the final images of the story, when Gene and Roger stand up and see the silhouettes of their snow angels on the ground, one fat and one skinny. A reader can only draw connections between them and inhabitants of the city.

The Iroquois, by Bruce Olds, is a plainspoken fictional story in a historical setting. The unnamed narrator walks along Chicago's West Randolph Avenue during December, trying to work off what he calls a 'head-fog.' He smells smoke, and runs in the snow through alleys and around corners to catch a glimpse of the cause. He sees flames in the buildings above him, objects, gaping mouths, and he "...could see but not hear the roaring winds, splat of human flesh, crunch of human bone." The narrator finds it easy to not help out, however, returning home to his notebook to merely write it down at the end of the day, stating, "Catalog these details of death, ignore the rest."

Barring any difficulty that a novel excerpt as short as *The Iroquois* has in engaging readers with historical fiction, there is an attention to sensory detail that could pull anyone directly in. The unnamed narrator watches "Melting shapes, shadow-burnt, melded with and into alley wall, oozed across and onto alley floor, mouths open wider than hippos'." And as he stares, he is a perfect audience surrogate; "They must be shrieking," he thought. "I can see them shrieking, so why can't I hear?" He stands for a couple more moments, thinking, "Death is dumb." He goes home, writes about it, and it feels like an uncomfortable, yet effective commentary on everyday voyeurism and alienation in the city when he does. The excerpt ends with a somber yet effective form of narrative reflection that frequently rounds out in the cream of the crop of MAKE magazine stories.

Interview with Sarah Dodson, Director/Managing Editor

Dakota Sexton: How did MAKE, a magazine with such strong ties to the identity and cultural context and makeup of Chicago, begin?

Sarah Dodson: We started it as a way to bring all the literary communities in Chicago together in one format. And distribute it within Chicago, as well as into the world outside of the city to say, hey, look at all these writers that are in Chicago, and they are all in different groups.

We didn't intend on uniting all the groups, we just wanted to be, like, "it's cool that there are so many types of local writing."

D.S.: MAKE states online that Chicago is a storyteller's city and that MAKE is a story's magazine. However, when so many other cities, from the Bay Area to the Twin Cities and New York City that could and would make the same claim, what sets Chicago's literary community apart?

S.D.: Chicago is a very strong city in that it's very layered, and the layers are constantly being peeled away and rebuilt and for each of those layers there are stories. A lot of authors who are associated with the city are proponents of telling the story of the people whose story has not been heard. I think that is what Chicago is well known for, for authors who are looking at the underbelly of the city and telling those stories.

D.S.: I have been told that Chicago's literary scene has been undergoing a renaissance for over ten years. As an organization that frequently throws readings, release parties, benefits, and staged readings of plays, what does MAKE want to cultivate?

S.D.: Our mission has always been to be as inclusive as possible in the sense that we want to have a lot of non-writers interested, to really get Chicagoans to the readings and events and to pick up the magazine, who aren't necessarily in school or have any affiliations with other writers. Just people who like reading and who like being entertained.

D.S.: How do you balance the responsibilities of a directing role in the magazine with the other professional positions, motivations and passions in your life that drive you?

S.D.: That is hard. At this point, all of us have other jobs, nobody gets paid, so it's really a struggle that we're trying to resolve—how to pay the people who are working on it so that we can continue to do what we are doing. We are constantly doing something else to pay for, and be privileged, to do this. We want to find a way to combine those two things.

D.S.: How often are stories submitted, especially in terms of nonfiction, with sociopolitical context?

S.D.: Not so often. The majority of that work [included in previous issues of MAKE] is solicited. It is what we like, so we want to make sure it has a place.

D.S.: What draws you to them?

S.D.: It feels important to include those stories that resonate with us on that sort of human—that sounds so cheesy, but—human level. We have this opportunity to inform individuals in a literary way about things that are happening that we were surprised about or that we think that other people would be think is important to know about...

So we like to take advantage of that.

D.S.: Are you open to more unconventional forms of storytelling?

S.D.: Yeah. Especially in nonfiction, you can sort of tell that the MAKE editor might lean toward that but at the same time she, like anyone else, wants to read good writing, first and foremost. That takes precedent over something that fits with the theme but isn't quite there.

D.S.: In a constantly changing literary culture that is as much online as it is offline, and in which publications with limited funding have begun to focus on small, original niches more and more, why does MAKE continue to print so many different literary forms, from poetry to interviews to fiction to stand-alone art?

S.D.: We all think that there's still a demand for it, people still want it. Even though it gets a little more difficult now, even though there's a lot of movement towards online publishing, we like it. We like to have the design to be a full-on art piece as well as a magazine to read through. We're

going to try and make it more of an art object as we continue with it in print. We're not making so many copies that it's going to be in a bonfire eventually... People still want it. And we want to keep making it.

We are building up our online presence, to include more things that aren't included in the magazine and that are specific to the Web. We have interactive elements, some audio, a blog about Chicago, and book reviews. We are actually going to start having fiction between issues too, so that there is new fiction every month, instead of only every issue twice a year.

D.S.: Do you ever feel overwhelmed by having so many elements together in one, independent magazine?

S.D.: Yeah. It is hard. And the Internet demands so much more so frequently. You constantly are posting things, but then you have to follow it up so that it isn't dated—it's demanding. Even though it's free.

D.S.: Have MAKE's goals changed due to the influence of social media and a greater online presence, in the context of so much other literary communication and publications online?

S.D.: We have a Twitter account. I just started it, but we're not very good at it—I don't get it. But it's helpful, we've reached a larger audience.

D.S.: What made you choose to display a line from a featured story on the cover of each issue, beginning with MAKE Issue #8?

S.D.: That was actually the new designer's idea. He wanted to create a format that could be replicated for each issue, both establishing an identity and a look, and as another way to set the theme of the issue on the cover in tone. He was sort of playing around with the idea, "Hey, you're a literary magazine, why don't you just make it really literal and put words on the cover?" (laughs)

D.S.: Do you have any advice to emerging writers who have been rejected several times from online and print publications, besides what so many people frequently say, "just submit more?"

S.D.: I would say know exactly where you are submitting. That's good. Especially with the databases, a lot of people just blindly send stuff out without having a sense of what the magazine is really looking for. So, read the magazine.

Each magazine also has a different process for doing things. We have readers that go through submissions first—all very qualified individuals—but one of them might not feel the same way about a story as another person, and that person reads it first, so it doesn't move on to the next process. It's all kind of a gamble in a way. Most of the time a really strong story might get a second look, but there are a lot of factors that you just can't control when you are submitting your work.

Even if you get a rejection from a particular magazine, go back and see what it was that they were looking at, and then keep submitting. Because I'm sure you've experienced this too, where you read something, and then read it again, and go, oh, you have different feelings about it. You never know.