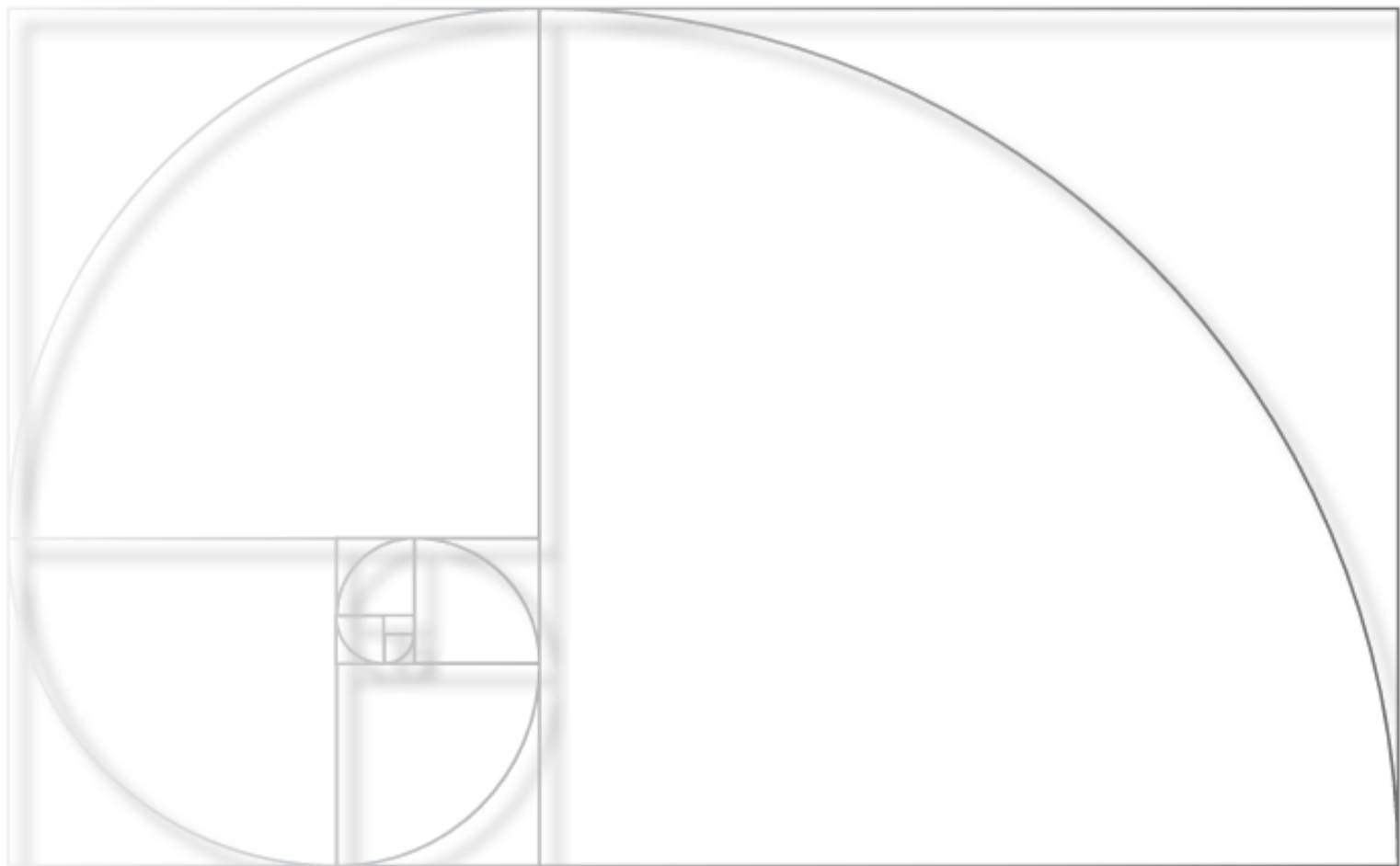


Artemis

2024



Illuminating the Darkness

Artists & Writers from the Blue Ridge Mountains & Beyond - Volume XXXI - 2024

Artemis 2024

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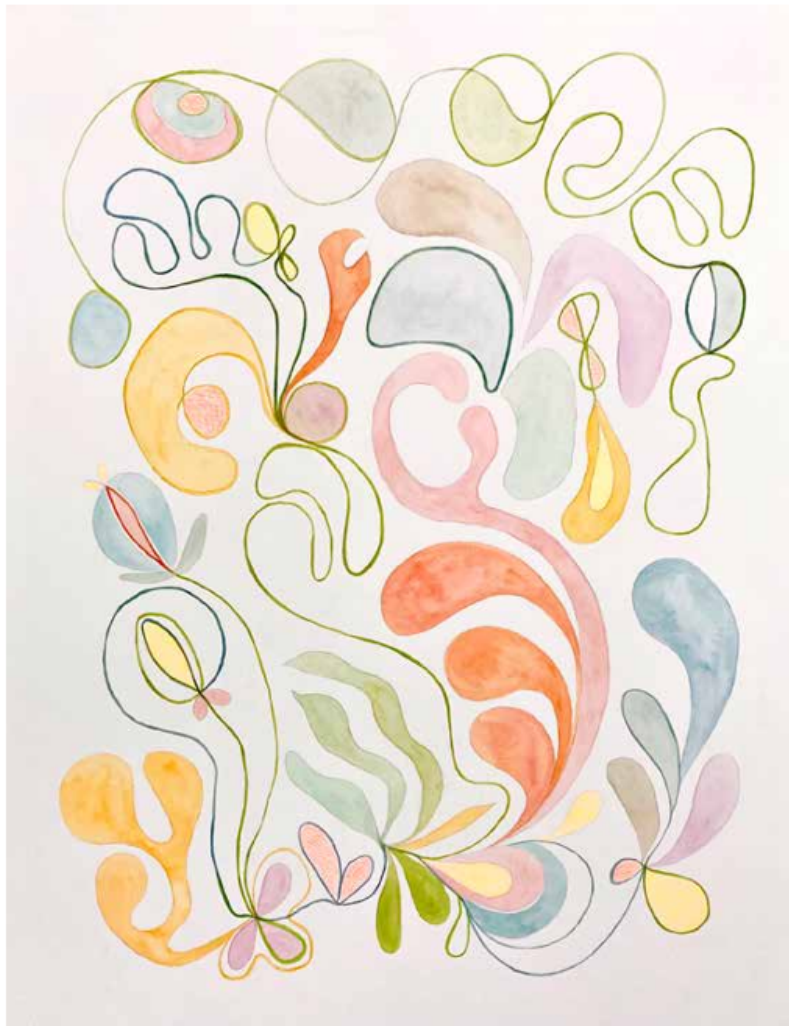
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Monument Valley Sunrise

Gwen Cates



LOOKING FOR AN OLD FRIEND'S VULVA PAINTINGS

Emilee Kinney

I dig for portraits she posted years ago. Close-ups of the female sex. Labia dressed in bright greens, the opened pelvis a sea of pink and orange. The clit always a clear cerulean blue. But I'm not here for the watercolors and acrylics, the palette knife edges carving the body's ripples and folds, vulvas stacked as trumpet blossoms. Each painting hosts the canal, a dark tunnel expanded for wildflowers to thrust through, queen anne's lace and bloodroot coated in vermillion, dripping cadmium and ochre. Petal and stem bursting from skin. Some portraits recreate the third eye: a purple iris stark within the black cavern. Another has hands reaching from within, stiletto-shaped nails painted black, prying open vagina, the hymen stretched. I look at them the same way I look at my Lovers tarot card: female creatures, naked and spiraling, each with a basil-colored hand on the other's basil-colored breasts. Paintings all so wholly alive, so wholly woman. I am woman. I want to be whole and alive, bare and bright, un-shamed. And yet, the mirror between my thighs declares my womanhood lack-luster: a cave echoing the sound a steel blade strikes against concrete, an unsafe root cellar, an exit wound, the space between accelerant and lit cigarette. Only a threat. This place is not barren, rotten body and blood—*anything born will be broken, as you are, as those before*. I scroll, half-clothed and cold, searching for some reminder of female divinity, something I can point to and say *I share that power too*. I find a photo of my friend and her daughter, the baby's fist a perfect fit in her palm.