

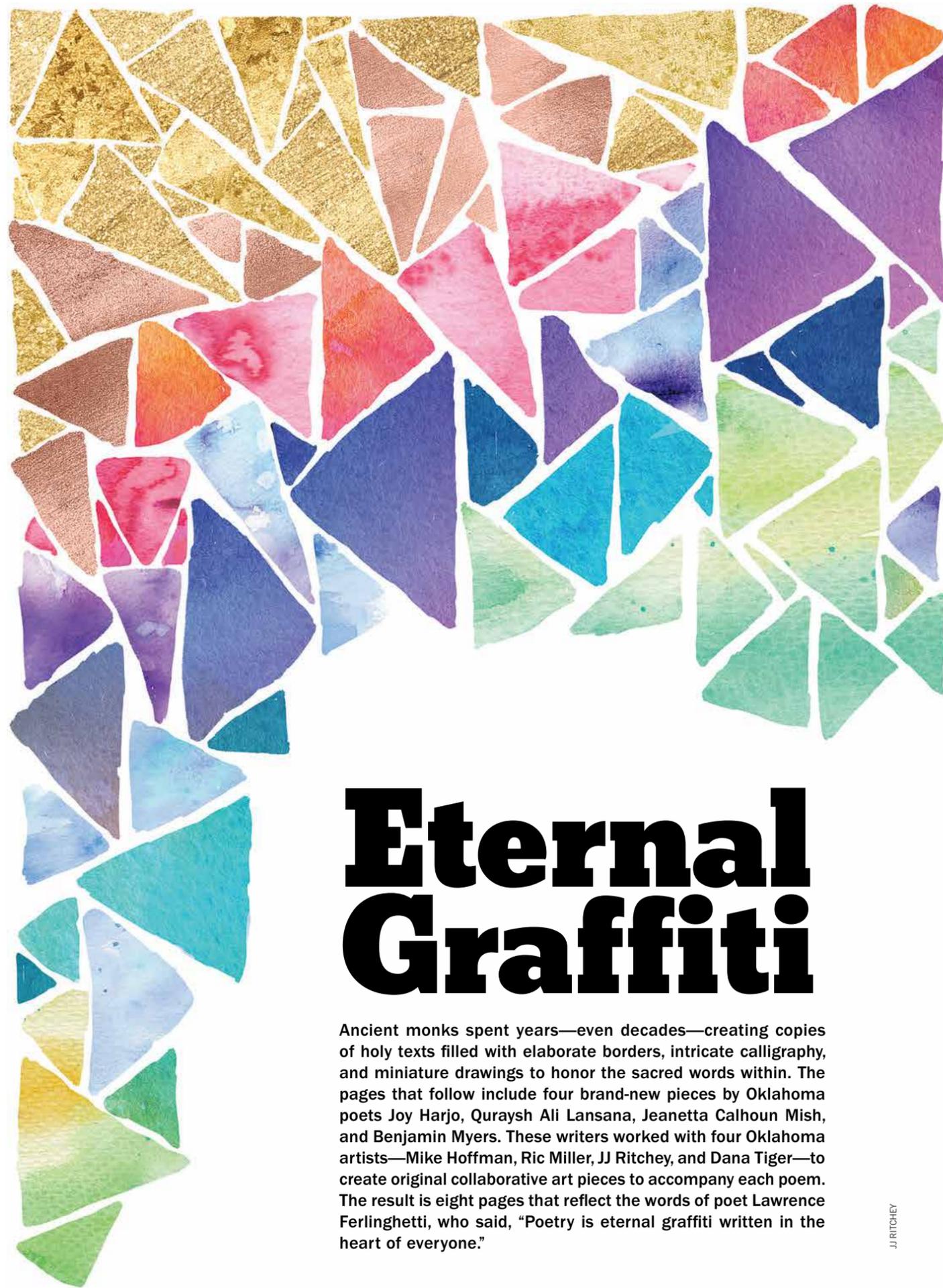
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THE RED EARTH
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Eternal Graffiti

Ancient monks spent years—even decades—creating copies of holy texts filled with elaborate borders, intricate calligraphy, and miniature drawings to honor the sacred words within. The pages that follow include four brand-new pieces by Oklahoma poets Joy Harjo, Quraysh Ali Lansana, Jeanetta Calhoun Mish, and Benjamin Myers. These writers worked with four Oklahoma artists—Mike Hoffman, Ric Miller, JJ Ritchey, and Dana Tiger—to create original collaborative art pieces to accompany each poem. The result is eight pages that reflect the words of poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti, who said, “Poetry is eternal graffiti written in the heart of everyone.”

JJ RITCHEY

Hunger

after Elizabeth Bishop

BY JEANETTA CALHOUN MISH
ART BY MIKE HOFFMAN

1. The Bass

I saw a tremendous shadow
looming above the shallows
near the muddy birthing-bank
where my fingerlings swam
frantically in diffused light.
A blue damselfly lit on a floating
dogwood stem above me—
I topped, took her in one gulp
and examined the odd animal
on the bank. Not a raccoon, those
crafty beings armed with spikes
on the end of their long front fins.
Not a bear, punching his brawny
appendage clumsily into our world
though the one-blocking-sun stood
on his forked tail like bears do.
Not a spike-nosed flyer or snake.
It was homely, the animal,
its scales motley, loose, many
missing as if scraped off
against a sharp white rock.
I looked into its eyes—no fight,
no danger, no wisdom. I swam
away, stopping only to snack
on a fat red worm adorned
with a sparkling gold gem
that caught in my gill.
I flew toward the sun.

2. The Man

My kids were hungry
so I grabbed my cane pole
headed down to the pond
stopping near the barn to fill
an empty coffee can with red
worms. Down to my favorite
spot where dogwoods bloom
near the bank, the red mud
written in cattle egret prints,
the pearly pieces of mussel shell
remainders of raccoon supper.
Where egrets wade in the shallows
and water moccasins cut commas
in cloud reflections and bear
scat piles up under dewberry
bushes. I been fishing since I was
a kid myself but today, watching
fingerlings swim in the shallows,
I wondered if they were hungry, too.
Still, I baited the hook, swung
the line out over the water toward
a passel of snake doctors floating
on a limb. First bite was this big
ole bucketmouth, scales glinting
in the sun like brand new dimes.
He didn't even fight—
he looked at me surprised.
I wish I could have let him go.

Artist Mike Hoffman, who lives in rural Payne County, created *Strange Fish* using oil paints and a thrift store landscape as his canvas. The custom frame was made from salvaged wood.



BRETT DEERING



Civility

BY **QURAYSH ALI LANSANA**
ART BY **RIC MILLER**

the first time a friend from high school
called dad by his first name, neither
of them were troubled. neither stifled

extension of hand, smile of long knowing.
when we were young he was mr. myles.
fifteen years gone, those teenage clowns grown

men, middle aged testosterone. my friend
freshly knotted, my nuptials looming. dad
wrinkling toward casket. it was an odd sting

maybe the okie twang which i never harbored
nor appreciated. six years since daily tongue
was this country music, reminder of one-way

ticket, \$23, a folder of poems. but this remains
home for them. *good to see ya, j* as they grip.
would never call his pops john to his face

or his son's, my closest homey from 1980.
i ask about his father and call him sir when
we meet. is this culture, privilege or bad

manners? my big city black fertilizing
weed where wheat and alfalfa grew. are they
dubois and me booker t.? i stand in the front

yard with men who have informed my sight.
one black, one white. i swallow. dad goes on
his way.

Oklahoma City artist Ric Miller's piece was made with acrylic and felt-tip pen. Miller also collaborated with Lansana for the *A Hiding Place* exhibit at [Artspace] at Untitled in Oklahoma City in September 2016.

Decoration Day

BY **BENJAMIN MYERS**

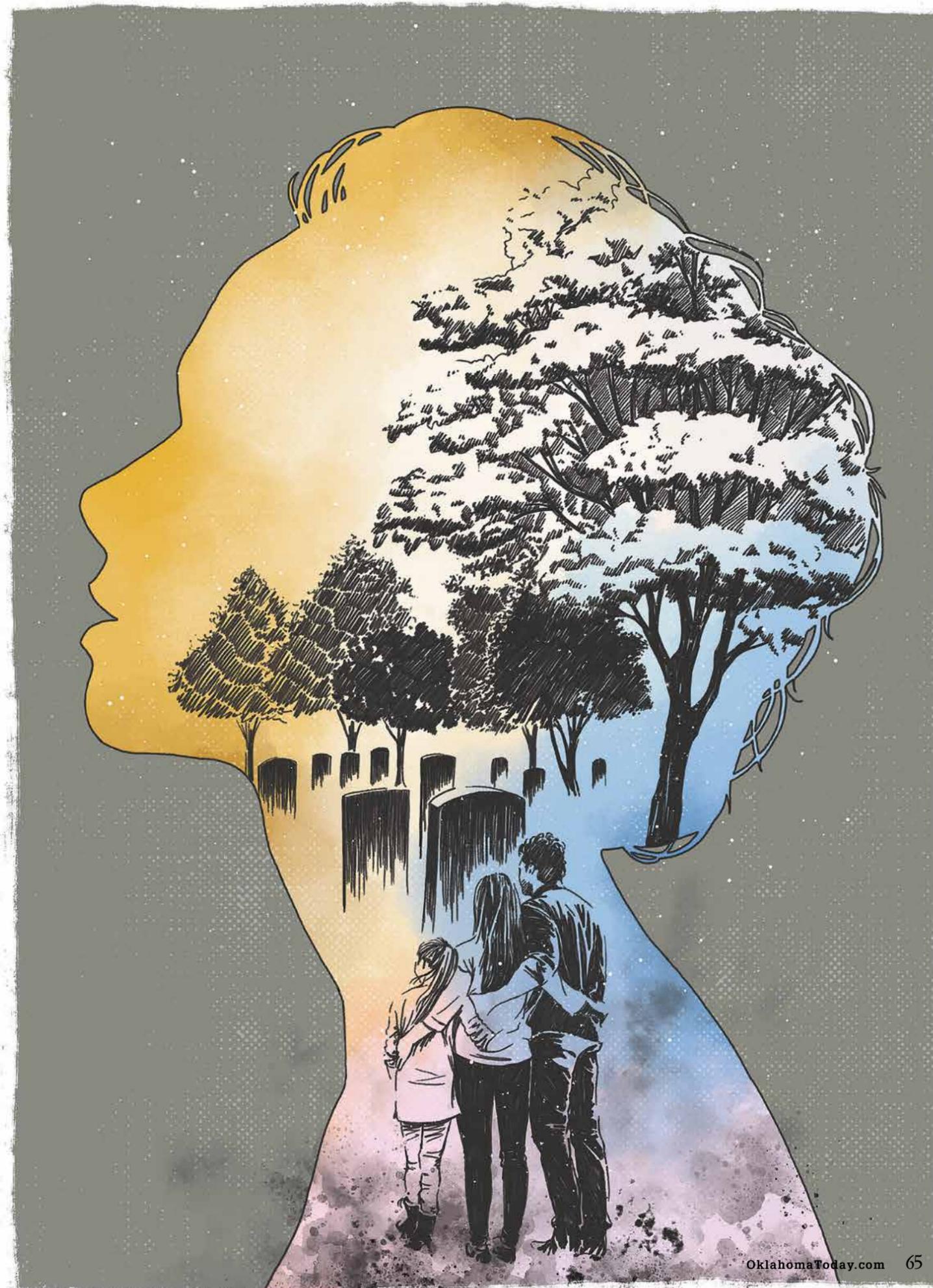
ART BY **JJ RITCHEY**

We slice thick circles of bologna, lay them on white bread beside the tilting grave stones, to picnic with the dead. Beyond the fence a mountain dams back open field where steers drink muddy pond. We've come to pin down wreaths of paper flowers, brought our old toothbrushes to scrub the grooves that spell our lost ones' names.

This holiday was started for the rebel dead, but now we come to clean the graves of all our folk. In cemeteries through these hills the Weed Eaters are whipping at pale stones to clear the dandelion, henbit, poke and years. There's not enough remembering still.

Now my 7-year-old daughter climbs the low and lonely tree grown here and sits against the light in thin top branches so that when she calls I have to reach into the sun to lift her down. I show her where her people's graves lean each way out in line. She tries to read the names. I try to teach her. Family women stoop and touch the stones with cleaning cloths, as gentle as the first women some long millennia ago to stoop and touch the rangy dogs that slinked beyond the circled huts. I think these are the rituals we've always used to tame a wild, panting animal like grief.

JJ Ritchey of Edmond—who has worked for *Oklahoma Today* art director Steven Walker since 2010 and is the magazine's primary illustrator—created this piece using a Wacom Cintiq digital drawing pad.





The Fire

BY **JOY HARJO**
ART BY **DANA TIGER**

There is a fire within me.
It is a spark from the stars
A snap of hope, a prayer of continuance
A song for sunrise.
You smolder there, just below my rib house,
Flickering, the smell of love
With each deep inspiration.
You stand taller
As you are fed with breath food
Of strong winds and good words
Reaching toward the star people
Who carried you.
We dance that old trail
In a spiral around you.
It rises from heartache
To a gathering in the distance.
There is plenty to eat,
The relatives we miss,
And the laughter of happiness.
Little fire has many brothers
And sisters.
When flames touch
There is more light.
I will search all my life and death
for the Maker
Of this fire.

Muscogee (Creek), Seminole, and Cherokee artist Dana Tiger of Muskogee created her illustration for this poem using gouache watercolors.