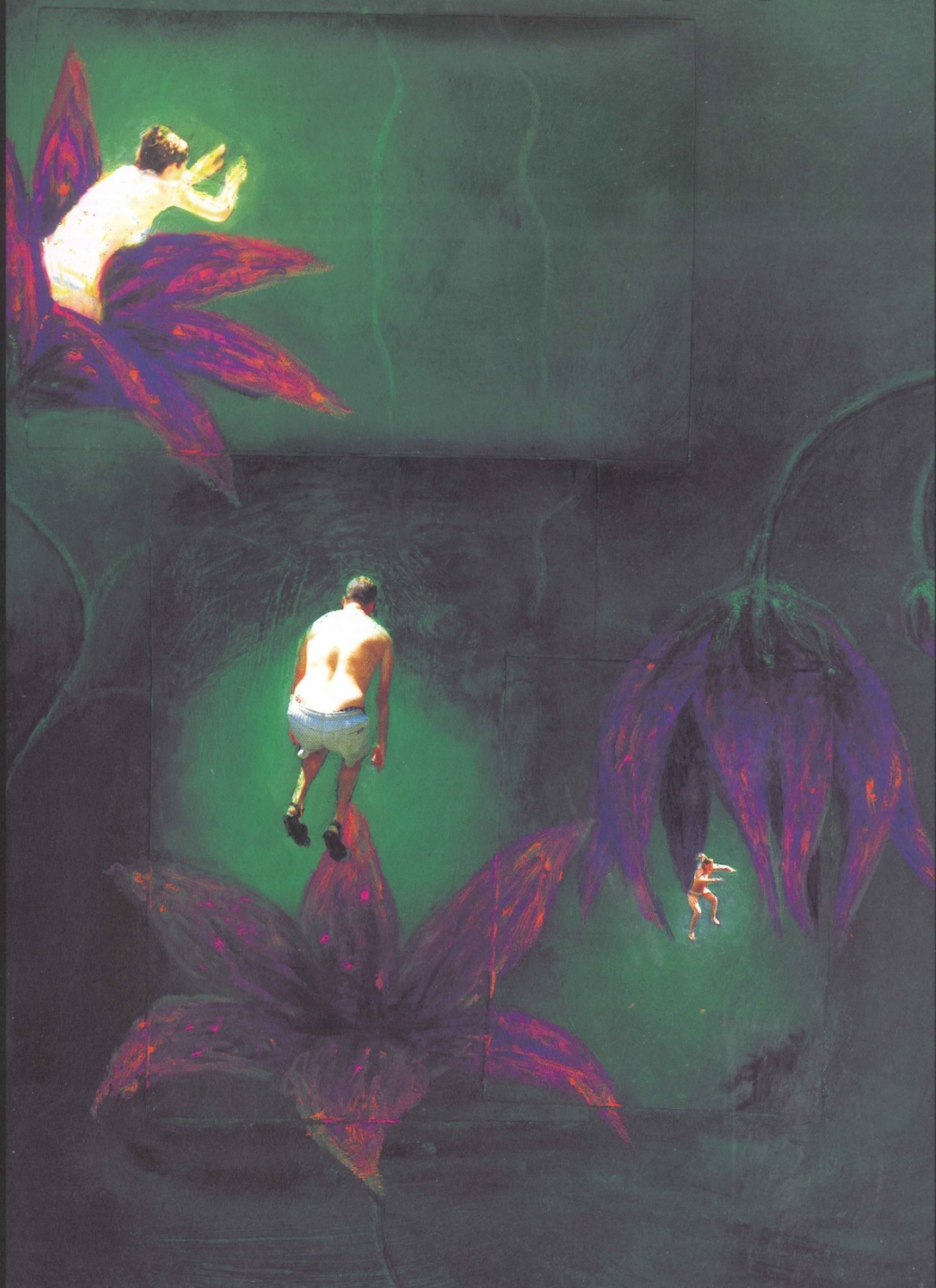


Spring 2003



PRISM

WINNER OF 2003 PROVOST LITERARY PRIZE

# MAGIC SHOW

SARAH CUTSFORTH

The storm pulls a crowd into the tiny theater  
with gold embossed walls.  
Wanting sorcery, the Orient, and snakes thrown onstage,  
they would enjoy, from time to time,  
to see a woman be cut with a sword,  
to take the red silk of a scarf as blood spilled from her throat.

At the mirror backstage  
the girl changes wigs and thinks of Nebraska.  
She paints a layer of red on her lips  
and smokes gray shadow in the corners of her eyes.  
She will vanish,  
be stabbed,  
get shot through the neck,  
have her hands eaten by tigers,  
and her heart pulled out by someone loud  
and wet with rain, someone  
with waving arms at the edge of a deep velvet seat.

Tonight it is Pearl who sucks in her stomach;  
who holds up the hanged man and smiles in the light,  
who loves New York City and the eyes of the crowd.  
She will tell the Ladies' Auxiliary how the magician sweated  
into his dark tuxedo  
how she wore her green paisley dress and ornate amber necklace,  
and how a child in black tights  
ran onstage holding a beefsteak.

When the curtain falls  
the girl clutches the meat and laughs  
thinking how she left home with the need to live  
headed for a place where she dies every evening.