

*Editor's Note*

We've heard it so often over the last two years: We live in unprecedented times. The world has been—and still is—grappling with the worst pandemic in modern history, urgent calls for racial justice, and challenges to every aspect of the way we've been living. In this time of deep change, one question has arisen over and over again: "What now?"

Also unprecedented is the rare opportunity we have now to pause and question the often-unexamined assumptions about the world as it is and as it could be. What do we keep from the past that worked? What do we jettison? What do we enlarge and embrace? The drastic changes to our individual and collective lives call on us to reimagine the future we want. That future is in our hands—our future is the future we make.

These are the ideas that we have chosen as the theme for our spring/summer 2022 issue: *What Now? The Future We Make*. We won't find all the answers here—in fact, we will probably find more questions than answers—but to reach and create the future we want, we must first imagine that future. What better way to do that than through story? Stories try to manage the tension between continuity and change, within a framework we create.

With this in mind, we asked writers to think about our futures, both personal and communal, and to explore the possibilities, and we are pleased to present fiction and poetry that does so in a variety of imaginative and thought-provoking ways. Here you'll find work that asks what we can save, whether an injured cat or our human relationships; that ruminates on both loss and possibility; that illuminates cracks in what has been considered the "normal" social order. The earth features strongly here, both our impact on the planet that is our home and nature's impact on us, as do the pandemic and how we will emerge from it. There is fear of what might come, but also joyful expectation—and always the recognition that the mold of the future is ours to create, break, and shape. In addition to the thematic works in this issue, we're also delighted to share the fine writing selected as part of our general submissions process.

This issue also contains the work of the winners and honorable mentions of our fifth annual Francine Ringold Awards for New Writers. Named for *Nimrod's* longtime former Editor-in-Chief,

Francine Ringold, these Awards honor the work of writers at the beginning of their publication careers, something we're especially passionate about as part of our mission to discover and promote work by new writers; to enter the Ringold Awards, writers may have published no more than two pieces in the genre in which they have submitted.

This year's winners are Erin Evans in poetry and Lisa Wartenberg in fiction. Evans's poems are a delicate and unflinching account of personal illness, and in her pages you'll find the three poems that won the Ringold Awards ("Bird Song," "In Patient," and "Chicka-dee") and three poems sent as general submissions and accepted in addition to her win ("Dear Life," "Perennials," and "Acceptance"). Wartenberg's story, "What Is Ours," is a deeply observed and deeply disturbing examination of a family's silence and complicity in the face of a family member's crimes. Alongside these two winners you'll find the fresh, surprising work of this year's talented honorable mentions. These are all writers to watch, and we feel certain that you'll be seeing much more from them in years to come: They are a part of the literary future we're making.