

An Elegy for Malachi Ritscher

Jacob A. Bennett



Malachi, born Mark David,
wrote his own obituary. “Reportedly,”
he says, “his last words were
rosebud...oops,”

but what he means
is that he lived his life
like a saucer-faced magnolia flower,
a quick burst of bloom and
perfume early each spring
before the pink things wilt away,
falling to the fiery asphalt
of city summer sidewalks, mashed
underfoot and nothing left of
but dark oily streaks
where the thick petals fall like
flaking, rotten-soft flesh. But,
no,
no.
It was November,
November when he died.
A late tiger lily swallowed
by flame, he made it
look like suicide.

On November 3, 2006, anti-war protester and Chicago art-rock videographer/archivist Malachi Ritscher self-immolated as a demonstration of opposition to the American wars. Near a sign that said, "Thou Shalt Not Kill-As Ye Sow So Shall Ye Reap," and in front of a steel sculpture called "The Flame of Millenium," Malachi, draped in an American flag, set himself on fire while his camera filmed his death. His actions received relatively little media coverage, despite (or because of) the poignant immensity of their meaning.

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