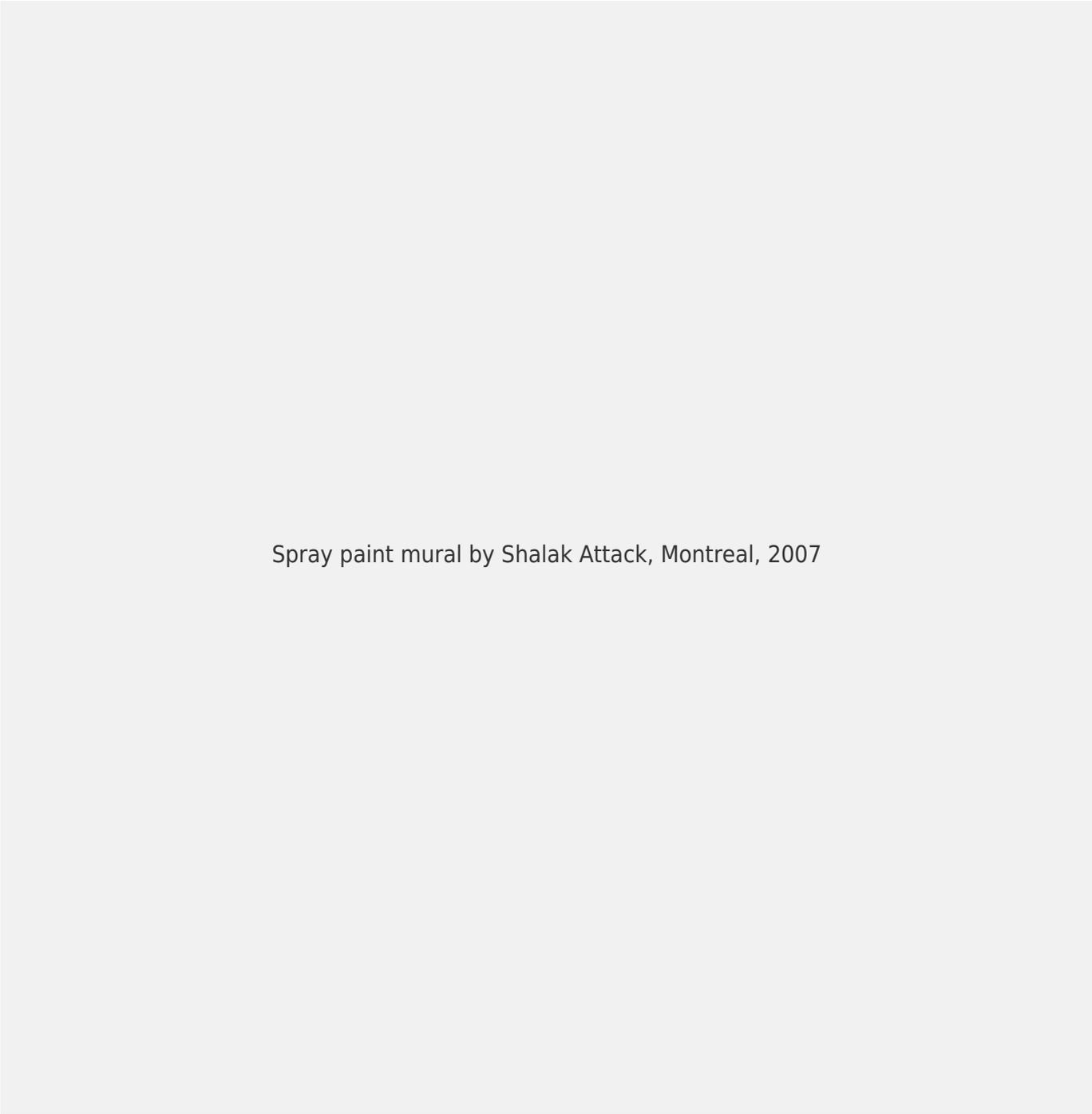


Our cover art, a spraypaint mural of a woman among ferns and flowers and trees, may not be the first image that comes to mind when considering our theme: service. But it's an old word with a long history and many variations.

*Service* originated from the Latin *servitium*, which relates to slaves and slavery. Several of the prose and poetry pieces we publish here, our eleventh issue of *Understorey Magazine*, carry this sense of service as being bound by contract or duty or societal expectations.





Spray paint mural by Shalak Attack, Montreal, 2007

[Susan Brigham](#) tells of her mother who, at fifteen years old, travelled far from her home of St. Helena to become a servant in England. Other pieces consider a more subtle form of service as *servitude*, particularly the unspoken roles of women. [Julia Florek Turcan](#) looks at how service roles are passed down through generations of mothers. [Dorothy Nielsen](#) creates a fictional “Marie,” a wife and mother who always and unquestioningly puts the needs of others first.

Many of the stories in this issue invoke a more complex definition of service, one in which roles are taken on willingly but a deep sense of obligation, allegiance, and sacrifice remains. Often such forms of service involve tending to the direct needs others. Gayle Mavor tells of becoming wound into a web of caregivers for an elderly woman. Sara Jewell writes about caring for her father, who suffered from early-onset dementia, and how this experience compares with her becoming a lay worship leader. And Savannah Sidle touches gently but deeply on the unceasing service of mothers to their children. Of course service often extends beyond personal relationships—out into the community, the country, the world. Emily Bowers writes of working abroad for many years and then returning to rural Nova Scotia to become a volunteer fire fighter. Several of our pieces look at military service, but none through the usual lens. Sheila Firth-Warlund offers three poems about her role as a military chaplain serving in Afghanistan. Wanda R. Graham tells of caring for a woman released from Canadian military prison:

she's made mistakes  
I look at her in wonder  
she's one of the country's finest  
what can she mean, what has she done?

Like Graham, collaborators Maya Eichler and Jessica Lynn Wiebe both honour and question military service. Their visual art and dialogue examines the red poppies often worn on Remembrance Day and asks readers to consider what—and whom—this symbol might exclude.

There is yet a further, broader sense of service represented in this issue, that of commitment to a cause rather than to a specific role. Liane Berry shares her story of addiction and recovery and how, through service, she now devotes her life to helping other addicts. And in Hannah Renglich's work, service veers into the realm of stewardship, caring for the long-term vitality of the land and its diverse communities.

Despite differences in interpretation, the work published here invokes two enduring elements of service. There is commitment (willing or less so), hard work, sacrifice. But there is also growth. All of the women represented in these stories are changed through acts of service. Some find a voice. Some redemption. Many find community and belonging. Even those exhausted and undervalued are stronger in some way: a small salary sent home, a single friend, a self-made bed. Service roles are rarely linear, simply giving. They start from self, change many, and circle back to self.

In this sense, our cover art perfectly captures the theme of service. The mural was created by Shalak Attack, a Canadian-Chilean artist dedicated to creativity, community, and activism. It covers a wall in north Montreal, a public space available to everyone. And although the woman in the mural is rooted to the earth, she extends out into the world. She is engaged and essential. As she supports others around her, she becomes stronger herself.

Also in this sense, we present the Service Issue of *Understorey Magazine* as an act of service in itself. We work hard to bring stories of women's lives to a wider audience. Many of the authors and artists published here are new to their craft. For some, this is their first publication. Yet all have vital stories of giving and growing as women among often conflicting obligations, desires, and communities. We invite you read, contemplate, share. As always, we'd love to hear what you think. Leave a comment for an author or artist in the comment box at the end of the articles, on [Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#),

or through our [contact page](#).

Thank you and enjoy!

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