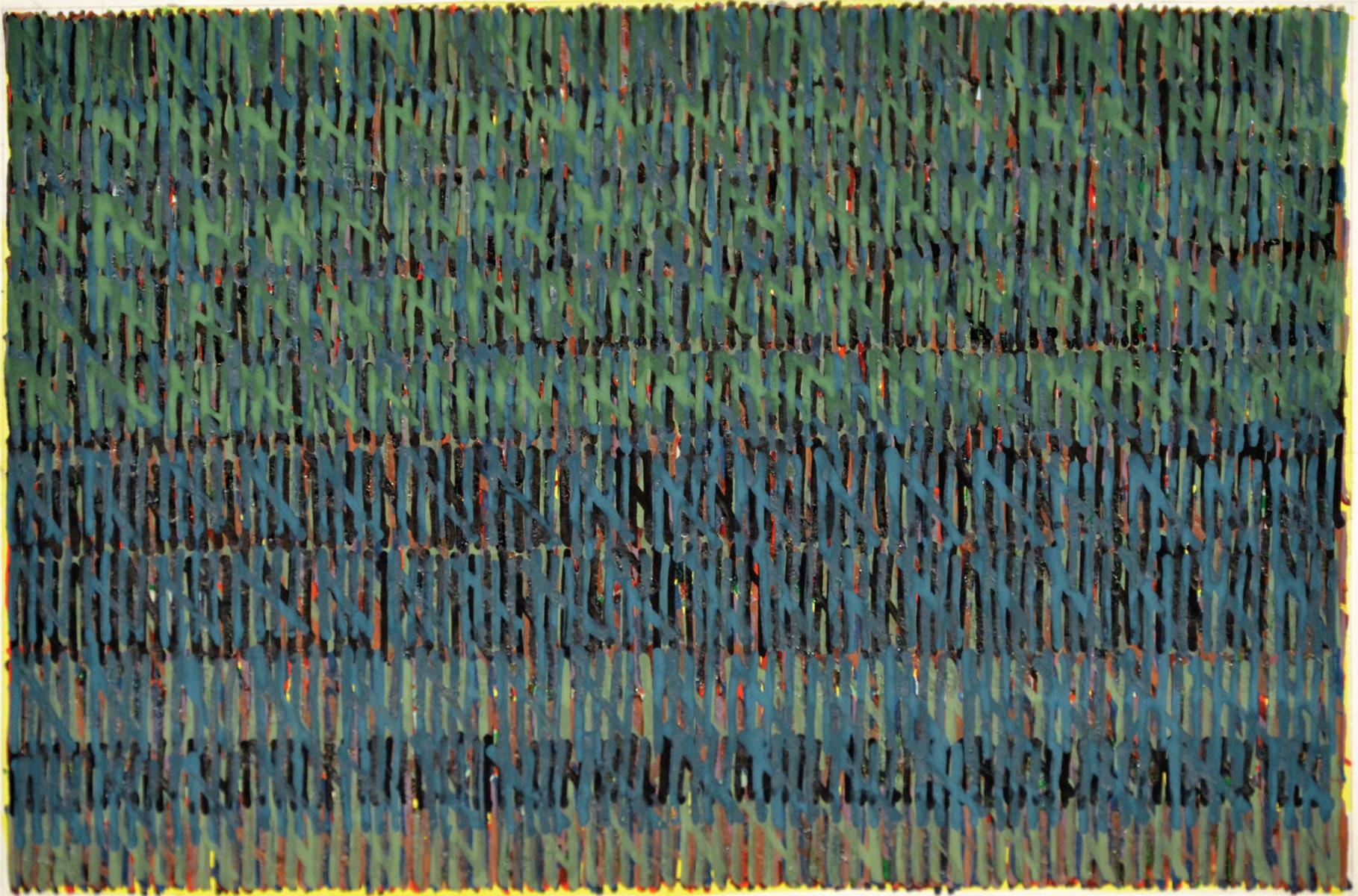


the **BROOK**

LYN REVIEW

issue 36: 2021



**THE BROOKLYN
REVIEW**

The Brooklyn Review is published annually and is run by the students of The Brooklyn College MFA Program of the City University of New York.

The Brooklyn Review is looking for innovative new poetry, fiction, playwriting, art and nonfiction. We also accept experimental work that falls somewhere in between. Submissions are accepted via Submittable for both our website and upcoming print issues. Submission guideline details can be found on our website.

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EDITORS' NOTE

Dear Reader,

The opportunity to lead this journal has enabled us to meet so many vibrant and talented artists from all over the world. It has been our pleasure to share their work and to support emerging writers through the first ever BIPOC Mentorship contest, our website, and this very issue.

This issue is an insistence of the act of writing and art-making no matter the circumstances. The act of creation is not a solitary affair; when one writes, one writes with and within the world. Writing reminds us that we are among people, that we are a collective of creative souls, even if we cannot see each other. And when we read, we are allowed a glimpse into someone's innermost workings, to see through their eyes. That is an intimate act that needs no physicality.

The many virtual meetings, phone conversations, Doodle polls, and email chains over the past year have been our way of staying connected to each other. It is easy to think of remote work as work done in solitude for the sake of something distant. But the Fall 2020 Reading revealed that we had created a community without even realizing it, and seeing their faces all together was a powerful affirmation of that.

So we would like to thank everyone, all our staff members and all our contributors for their persistence and commitment to art. Working with them has been nothing short of encouraging, uplifting, and inspiring. We hope that this issue gives the reader the feeling of meeting among friends, regardless of distance and history. We hope this issue brings us all together.

With love,
Dan-Tran & Chime

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

6	untitled paper collage allison anne
7	On Being Vulnerable Karl Michael Iglesias
8	Open Window at 3PM When I Was Seven Maya Salameh
9	Body of Terrain I Sinejan Kiliç Buchina
10	Bread Hands Alicia Banaszewski
18	Interview with Shaqayeq Ahmadian on the Continuum of Life
21	Chicken Souvlaki, 1965 Sara Brenes Akerman
24	Blackie Nicole Robitaille
25	Incels in Arcadia Nicole Robitaille
28	Gladiolus Cass Graybeal Brown
29	Guns & Mariah Carey T. Abeyta
32	The Real Boy Cai Rodrigues-Sherley
32	Blue Sky Susana Aldanondo
33	Nightbirds at the Met, 1974 Cai Rodrigues-Sherley
35	Old New York Chava DiMaio
39	Guilty Account of the Scallion Pancake Suzette Lam
42	Fall Yehui Zhao
48	[part of] Yellow Dream Shaqayeq Ahmadian
49	Land a Man in a... mónica teresa ortiz
50	Shell Game Suzanne S. Rancourt
51	The Process Rose Pacult
54	Captive Studies Max King Cap
58	An Interview with John Keene
68	Police State Drew Richardson
70	Outside Abbigail N. Rosewood
73	Lunar Voyage Andrée-Anne Guay
77	Untitled Sam Prickett
82	SONÁMBULO Eric Odynocki
83	First Flight to Mars Serge Lecomte
84	Interview with Mónica de la Torre on <i>Women in Concrete Poetry</i>
89	<i>The Brooklyn Review</i> BIPOC Mentorship Contest
90	Little Adoragony / Māyāblues Driver Aristilde Paz Justine Kirby
92	The Bathroom Kira Obolensky
94	Soft Peach Yadi Liu
105	Zinc et Café Giusto Pilan
106	100 Things That More or Less Happened... Marcy Rae Henry
113	Self Value Hyewon Cho



untitled paper collage | allison anne

ON BEING VULNERABLE

Karl Michael Iglesias

the ocean invited me to twist
out the abandoned a wrung out drop

you ever pour out a stream
of brew for someone
you have never met
because they remind you
of the homies?

i thought i would send what's left out
of my legs to tread the murk and save
a body like my body do you need
any help? i can be vulnerable too and drown

in front of you

a buried bronze hand-sign
cut from wrist
feel me?

i thought I was shot

and you ran out of the parking lot

and I was concrete immortal but i'll come back

for you out the streets and into the ocean
my legs have abandoned me
i draw in air
and my rib cage
fills with wrestlers
would you hold my body
down like your body? hold your breath
like your brother?

OPEN WINDOW AT 3PM WHEN I WAS SEVEN

Maya Salameh

<p>once, I lived in an apartment with two blue rooms : once I went to the park and a man indexed me. once I: saw a playground I used to love in the back of a newspaper gutted : & me without functioning intestines : my brother's loneliness:my gaping time:sweet potato fries that taste like communion wafers : my brother remembers the least: he's :blessed that way. the blinds: kiss the wall : it was my mother's fault, naming him after a saint.</p>	<p>the white carpet was always old. the sun came through: the panes like marmalade, my mother laying on her back: merino wool.</p> <p>:</p> <p>all these postcolonial classes & I still think I am ugly. I sculpt:my exhaustion like pink melon. the window: is wide & the beams splays their legs over the frame, like sometimes you just need a girl: to prove you're a girl,</p> <p>Sunday spilling between us like sap, & our: desire is a species of its own: a phylum, a kingdom.</p>
<p>; I will never really know my grandmother, & this is perhaps the biggest casualty of the war, never getting to eat : red grapes with her at sunset: in this country I waste good, throw my American sandwiches: away without touching them. a square is a square is a square ::I am compelled to pick meals for the dead, I fill the gaping television with theory. my brother remembers the least : he's :blessed that way</p>	<p>: if: this body is a girl : how many pairs of legs does it take to leave a building? love implicates us. I dance my initials into the :wool, merino myself in the mirror, & the four by four room is suddenly endless, wide as: memory foam, or multiplication.</p>



Body of Terrain I | Sinejan Kiliç Buchina

BREAD HANDS

Alicia Banaszewski

CHARACTERS

DAVE Male, late 20s

AUDREY Female, early 20s

SETTING

A grocery store

TIME

Afternoon

(Lights. DAVE and AUDREY stand on opposite sides of the stage.)

AUDREY

This is Dave.

DAVE

Hello.

(Beat)

This is Audrey.

AUDREY

Hi.

(Beat)

Dave works at a supermarket.

DAVE

It's all I've ever done.

I've been in college for seven years. I keep taking classes and changing my major. I fail almost everything. I can't seem to find anything I'm passionate about.

AUDREY

So he continues to work at the supermarket.

DAVE

It's all I've ever done.

(Beat)

I really love sweeping the onions. It's exhilarating! The skins twirl around and around in the wind I've created. I've never experienced anything like it. And when I'm out working on the floor conversations with strangers are much more pleasant than when I'm handling their cash. Sometimes people ask me where certain items are or ask me how my day is going. No one yells at me for not remembering that honey bears are fifty cents off this week.

Audrey recently lost her father.

AUDREY

It will be three weeks ago tomorrow. He died of emphysema.

I think it's the worst way to die. I essentially watched my father suffocate. He died with his mouth open and turned yellow quicker than I thought he would...

My mother is already dating someone new.

DAVE

Audrey hasn't gone to work since the funeral.

AUDREY

Work was shit, anyway.

I worked for a search-engine website. A really tiny one. No one even uses it.

I studied Russian literature at University.

DAVE

Before Audrey's father got sick he owned a bakery.

AUDREY

It wasn't long until I came home from school to help run the store. He sold it when he got so bad he needed to wheel two oxygen tanks around.

DAVE

Audrey and her father had a somewhat troubled relationship.

AUDREY

(Kneeling at her father's grave)

It startles me how much I loved him when I hardly knew him at all.

DAVE

When Audrey was younger she memorized all the types of bread her father sold in his shop.

AUDREY

I did it to impress him, I guess.

(Quickly, like a child, but then caught by the sadness of the situation)

Wonder, white, whole-wheat, whole-grain, 12-grain, pumpernickel, rye. It was just one of those stupid things kids tend to do.

DAVE AND AUDREY

It was a Sunday when we met.

AUDREY

I had just come from my father's grave. There was a plastic bag on the corner of it. In the wind it looked like a jellyfish moving through the water.

DAVE

I was placing people's groceries in the same kind of bag. A woman had just yelled at me for placing spinach on top of her bread.

AUDREY

The smiley face and "have a nice day" printed on the side made me want to scream.

DAVE

When Audrey walked into the grocery store, she sniffled as she passed by.

A few minutes after I saw her, my manager came over and said, "There's a woman meditating in the bread aisle." She told me she was shaking and crying. I hoped it was Audrey. I thought she was beautiful, but at the same time... I didn't want to imagine her so sad.

AUDREY

Wonder, white, whole-wheat, whole-grain, twelve grain, raisin, pumpernickel, rye.

DAVE

I approached her very quietly.

AUDREY

Wonder, white, whole wheat, whole-grain, twelve grain, raisin, pumpernickel, rye.

DAVE

I tried to make small talk.

(To AUDREY)

Raisin is my favorite.

(After a small pause, to audience)

I didn't know what else to say.

(To AUDREY)

I like your shirt.

AUDREY

Thanks.

It was my Dad's.

DAVE

What kind of bread is your favorite?

AUDREY

Pumpernickel.

DAVE

(Kneeling beside her)

That's a good choice. My mom used to make me grilled cheese with pumpernickel when I was younger.

(Awkward pause)

Are you okay? What's your name?

AUDREY

Audrey. Yours?

(Dave cheesily points to his supermarket nametag)

AUDREY

Nice to meet you?

(DAVE outstretches his hand. AUDREY stares at it for a moment, then reluctantly slides her hand into his)

Dave's hand swallowed mine up and his hand was soft. Warm. Fluffy. Like bread.

At the moment I felt his pulse inside his hand...

I decided I wanted them all over me. I imagined his bread hands trailing up and down my body. I tried to remember the last time I touched another person... but I couldn't.

DAVE

I was shocked a pretty girl acknowledged me, let alone held my hand.

(DAVE is getting turned on)

So I said nothing.

(AUDREY kisses DAVE'S hands slowly and then more passionately. AUDREY continues to look sad throughout. DAVE is frozen)

AUDREY

(Excited)

Come with me.

DAVE

(A bit dazed, still)

What?

AUDREY

Come with me. Let's go somewhere.

DAVE

(Laughs)

Where?

(Beat)

I'm working.

AUDREY

I don't care! Quit.

DAVE

Quit?

(To the audience)

What would I do if I left? I guess I could go to Europe. I have so much money saved. But would I be fired? I like it here.

I've worked in *this* grocery store since I was fourteen. And now... I'm being seduced in the bread aisle.

(AUDREY kisses his palm and presses his hand hard against her stomach and begins to slowly inch it up her shirt)

AUDREY

Please. Let's go.

(To audience again)

We flew by the chips and frozen food and alcohol. But all Dave could think was—

DAVE

I'm doing what my manager wanted. I'm getting this woman to leave the store.

Then Audrey bumped into an old lady.

AUDREY

And she called me a bitch. But I didn't care.

DAVE

This embarrassed me.

(To AUDREY)

Why did you do that?

AUDREY

Do what?

DAVE

Audrey didn't want to be indoors anymore. For the first time since her father died she wanted to be out. In the sun.

AUDREY

I had quarantined myself in my apartment for too long. I broke up with my boyfriend. I had my cell phone turned off for days. This implied potential for intimacy was all I had.

DAVE

Bump into that lady.

AUDREY

And he was messing it up.

(To DAVE)

I don't know, I didn't mean to.

(To audience)

I was annoyed, but felt the warmth radiating from his hands and forgave him instantaneously.

DAVE

You should have apologized.

AUDREY

I looked into his eyes and found they were flat. They were a lovely blue, but not bottomless like an ocean you read about in bad poetry. They were shallow like a child's plastic pool. I considered telling him about my father, but chose against it. I didn't want anyone's pity.

(To DAVE)

Yes, Dave. You're absolutely right.

DAVE

I didn't know what was wrong with her. I don't know why she wanted *me* to be her knight. I've never even had a girlfriend before.

I've read books where women use sex as a weapon, but I don't think she was doing that. I've read other books where women use sex as a kind of... coping mechanism.

Every time I looked at her my mind went blank. Was I just an instrument for her suffering?

AUDREY

We reached the door and I ran outside but Dave...

DAVE

I couldn't move past the tile of the supermarket.

AUDREY

I *need* someone.

Don't you know what it's like to need someone?

DAVE

(To the audience)

I didn't, really. My life had been relatively easy thus far.

(DAVE touches his nametag. AUDREY takes DAVE's hand and nestles her face against it like a cat against a sofa)

DAVE

Then over the intercom we heard--

AUDREY AND DAVE

If there is an owner of a black Jeep Cherokee with the license plate 263MWI in the store: your lights are on.

DAVE

I have to go. I have to work.

(Beat. As if saying "I'm sorry")

Have a nice day.

AUDREY

And then the sliding door closed between us.

(DAVE exits SR. AUDREY waits a moment and exits SL.)

(END OF PLAY)

SHAQAYEQ AHMADIAN ON THE CONTINUUM OF LIFE

[excerpts from an interview]

I was born in the north of Iran, in the Caspian Sea region. I moved to Tehran when I was eighteen to study painting.

I have lived in different parts of Tehran, different neighborhoods with surprisingly diverse cultures and mindsets and lifestyles, all in one city. This diversity has been really interesting and educational. Tehran is a megapolis and one has the opportunity to experience quite a lot. There is great energy in the city and encountering so many people in a such short span of time is really interesting and often intoxicating.



Pink Birthday



In Continuum of Life

Painting and practicing over and over is a vital part of my life. I work over seven hours a day, and my works reflect my life as well as everyday happenings.

My paintings are about my inner world, full of memories of great and small experiences, many of which seem to be of interest to my audience too, and they seem to relate to them. I often think that my work is a portrayal of my subconscious as well as my imagination, and they are in conversation with each other. There are some repetitive elements in my works like cakes that always have two meanings for me: childhood joys and childhood pains.

Also, becoming a woman and, of course, the environment that I live in, which has a lot of impact on my drawings. Also birds, besides their beauty and their forms, have always been painted since ancient times, and for me, birds are a metaphor for freedom and playfulness.

It is all a different and unique experience to be a young female artist because of the huge, interesting world awaiting you. Although, the younger you are, the more difficult it is in such a patriarchal system involving male artists in authority over females. The impaired social system cannot take the women who rise and shine! Much harder it is if you are young. So far, I have been ignored by people I know. Once, I was invited to a party and some of my colleagues did not even say hello to me—surprisingly, even the female artists. That is the outcome of the wrong system. It makes people close their eyes and hearts. But I will shine, and the dazzling rays of light will be seen—even by closed eyes!



It Is Called Me

CHICKEN SOUVLAKI, 1965

Sara Brenes Akerman

The mind is a strange place. Recently I had a sex dream about movie director Peter Bogdanovich, and I don't even have those kinds of feelings for Peter Bogdanovich, or at least I don't think I do. Historian Robert Caro was also in the dream—the guy who's writing the five-volume biography of Lyndon B. Johnson (he's actually already published four of the five volumes and they're all wonderful, genre-defining, and widely praised)—although nothing happened with Robert Caro. The funny thing is that I kind of do have those feelings for Robert Caro. It might be the accent—mid-century New York, from a Yiddish-speaking household such that the ghost of that other language still shows through—and, gosh, he's just so smart. And his mannerisms. Nothing gets me like delicate mannerisms. Once I fell in love with a Greek waiter over his mannerisms alone. They were like hand-spun cotton, both soft and precise, and my desire for him sprang entirely from the beauty of his gestures. I can't accurately describe the way watching his hands move made me feel. All I can say is that chicken souvlaki will forever summon for me the quality of an erotic experience.

Both inside and outside dreams, there is an intrinsic soft-spokenness about Robert Caro. Every few seconds he sinks into a deep, long blink. Like he's reaching for a thought and needs to go truly inside of himself to retrieve it. Sometimes he pairs one of these long blinks with a gentle intake of breath. And then he speaks. You should hear him say the word, "lost." Downright irresistible. Whenever he says "find" or "awe" or "talking" or "thought," I start to daydream about meeting him at a bar in 1965—back when he was starting work on his very first book—and dancing with him to Frank Sinatra's version of "Nice 'n' Easy" and then, later, undressing him.

But it isn't Caro that I get to touch in the dream.

I spend a long time trying to turn that first page into a story. In this story, I'm always trying to find Robert Caro or, rather, Dream Robert Caro who shares much, but not all, with the real man. I am not interested, after all, in the Robert Caro who alongside his wife Ina Caro has conducted untold hours of research and laid bare some of the most complex dynamics of American political power. I am interested in the paper cutout of him. And what fantasies I can pin onto his six-foot silhouette, onto his delicate shoulders, onto his hair, parted to the side.

The story resembles stories I have written before. It's a story invested in memory that attempts to conflate a time with a place. There is a bar somewhere where it is always that dream night in 1965. A summer night, with the air heavy and dense, almost salty. Twenty-nine-year-old Robert Caro drinks a beer at the bar and waits. What he is waiting for, no one can say. And then I walk in. And Frank Sinatra plays. And dancing ensues.

The scene repeats a number of times and, although he always feels the same when I touch him—pleasantly warm under his cotton oxford shirt—the Sinatra song changes, altering the meaning of the encounter. We go from “Nice ‘n’ Easy,” that smooth ode to predictable endings, to “Where or When,” implying the knottiness of a history of heartbreak only maybe overcome. “It seems we stood and talked like this before / We looked at each other in the same way then / But I can’t remember where or when.” And yet, despite the heartbreak that colors everything, the wavering between remembering and forgetting implies a hopefulness, a carving of new ground. The forgetting willful, the remembering selective.

The song that floods the scene the third time: “One for My Baby (and One More for the Road).” A song of unashamed sorrow, the heartbreak complete and white-hot in the wake of an irreversible parting. “We’re drinkin’, my friend, to the end of a brief episode / So make it one for my baby and one more for the road.” When I first heard that song at about age 13, I misunderstood it entirely. I thought Frank wanted not two drinks for himself but one for himself and another one to leave atop the bar undrunk, saved for the one who was never to return. I always had the wrong idea.

The last time: “In the Wee Small Hours of the Morning.” A big bucket of soupy despair, all grief and fresh pain. “In the wee small hours of the morning / That’s the time you miss him most of all.” And I look around to discover that Caro has left. Vanished, rather.

The dream, of course, happens in New York, where I once stood at the corner of Bleecker and Cornelia Streets and felt irrevocably alone. It was cold, windy, quiet. At least I remember it as quiet, although I was surrounded by people who must not have been quiet. Who must have been talking or filling the street with the sound of their living, their feet on the sidewalk, their arms whooshing back and forth. Meanwhile, I was just standing there, staring at the sign for Murray’s Cheese, the bright

red lettering against the yellow background. This is Murray's Cheese, Retail, Wholesale. Murray's: We Know Cheese. And right there, only a few feet away from so many pounds of brie and gorgonzola and fontina and gouda and pecorino, I wondered or feared or alas discovered that I could love fully only in dreams. No need to get into the backstory. Just know that at that moment it felt like a certainty, a fate foretold.

Even now, years later, I fear the recrudescence of that feeling.

So let's say, for the sake of argument, that it is 1965 and that I walk into the bar and see Robert Caro. But Robert Caro doesn't take off or vanish, and I don't leave a second drink at the bar for someone who I know will never come back.

Instead, he stays. He doesn't disappear at all. Not even a little bit. And we walk out of the bar and, by some miracle, we are standing in the warm, New York, 4 o'clock light.

We walk up Sixth Avenue in 1965 New York heading for a place at 259 West Forty-second Street, between Broadway and Eight (where the Delphi Restaurant once was). I see men wearing pinch front fedoras and a woman in a mauve silk shift dress softly sashed at the waist that I think she must have gotten at B. Altman's, an old department store that is now a landmark building. We're a few months away from the famous November blackout that left people stranded in train stations, and a whole twenty-five years removed from my own birth. Robert Caro doesn't even know that he will work on *The Years of Lyndon Johnson* yet. How could he? In 1965, the years of Lyndon Johnson are yet to end. And I choose not to say anything. I don't warn him that by the time he starts work on Johnson, Johnson will be dead.

What we talk about is the food. And we order so much of it. Fork-tender lamb, crisp spanakopita, warm pita dipped in olive oil. And this is where I fumble. Because I don't know how to speak of what happens here. Of the sensation of having him before me, his mouth glistened with melted butter. My heart filled not with the feeling of touching him but with the feeling of having him within reach. I'm unsure of how to make a description of baklava held together by nuts and honey mean what I want it to mean.

What I can say is that when we leave, we feel soaked in honey and olive oil ourselves. And I start by holding his face, and I run my oily thumbs across his cheeks, and I slowly come closer.

BLACKIE

Nicole Robitaille

She introduced me to her family—
six dogs, three cats—

showed me her favourite
black kitten, hatefully nicknamed

but lovingly slurred, who purred with the hard R.
(Her parents threw the kitten around the house,

tossed her into fridges and dressers.
She'd take the kitten out

when she needed something to hold,
then tuck her back in, carefully between clothes

until suffocated, neck snapped
between drawers. Six, seven kittens after

death, filled every empty space of her,
only let out for affection.)

Her parents, too kind— measuring
my behaviour, spoon by spoon, tasting palatable black —

invited me for dinner.
Blackie — they sand out from the kitchen window,

calling me and the kitten over,
(fingers tugging the wool of my hair)

wringing the kitten by the neck
to pet and pet and pet.

INCELS IN ARCADIA

with lines from Endymion, Book 1 by John Keats

Nicole Robitaille

Arcadia, in all its wild virginity,
lies empty without the money
for development, no buildings

(structures too narrow, too small, too wide,
hovering at the edge of 6'0 —
lost an inch, lost a lady)

to bring in those they want
to call into their homes.
No grass for sheep to graze,
buried in snow formed
from the shepherds' cold,
mistrusting of any spring warmth.

The shepherds in the frosted fields
without a herd,
sing praises for fellow deserted shepherds,
validating each storm that passes
as an event not to adapt, but to drown.
They spew insults to those with happy sheep,
wishing for their slaughter,
to drink from their death
and gain lifefuel from the spilled blood.

Oh, Pan,
ugly goat man,
please, show us the way.
Which shepherd among us
may be able to seduce so cleanly?
We shall pray in his name, post praises of his conquests:

>able to seduce the moon goddess herself
>pulled the sheepskin over her eyes
>catfished and lured her out into an affair
>winning the respect of us shepherds

>who wish to seduce the moon
>or at least the stars
>if things get desperate.

>when weary from wandering fields,
> if only I had the energy to chase nymphs like Syrinx
>the bewitching Stacy
>as he did, in all his failing confidence
>the female who ran before she could
>take his compliments
>(all he wanted was to speak of her beauty
>and this is how she treated him?)
>He cut her reed body
>to play against his lips,
>blew a melody across
>her dismembered beauty
>and danced to her melancholy song —
>A sorrow he named for himself.

The shepherds chase nymphs away
in order to produce songs of loss,
then shed tears, frozen to a sharp point,
for when they return.
As they laugh over nymph bodies
buried beneath the Earth,
the shepherds carve their canes
to the sounds of the corpse echoes,
their laughter, their cries.

From the fields to the forest,
new offspring are birthed
from Pan's stories,
who sing

*Ugliness is a sorrow for ever:
its loneliness increases, we will
pass into nothingness*
as they hang in the trees
and dance merrily
around the circle.
Joy from sorrow,
they sing a lovely hate

to call and answer
in rhythmic yelling,
encouraged by the others.
Words are caught in plump, youthful cheeks,
spat back out, repeat.

When the news of Pan's death
hit the fields, it was not
met with mourning
but spurred on, celebrated,
and replicated by shepherds
with less to lose than a god.



Gladiolus | Cass Graybeal Brown

GUNS & MARIAH CAREY

T. Abeyta

While I always had my head in a book, my Dad was busy cleaning his guns.

I'm still not sure what there is to clean in a gun, but there was never a cleaner gun than his. He took them apart on a little wooden TV tray table while he sat at the edge of his blue recliner. He'd crack open a Bud, crank up the TV and go at it—it being whatever he was doing with those little pipe cleaner things.

The year he cleaned them the most was when my parents were going through a divorce. I was 15, and that was the last year I lived in that house. One weekend he caught me looking out the wooden blinds at the car my brother said belonged to my Mom's new boyfriend. His name was Ed, and I hated how dumb it sounded, how simple-minded, how country. Ed.

What are you looking at, my Dad asked behind me, making me jump.

I don't know, I said.

But he did, because he said, time to clean my guns.

Since whichever gun he was working on was sitting there, broken apart in several black lumps, I wasn't sure what scared me about them. It wasn't like he could put it together in two seconds and shoot someone. And when they weren't dismembered, they were always kept in a safe. But his swelling rage against my mother always seemed to coincide with his housekeeping activity.

If I saw a gun on the tray when I came through the door, I'd just hightail it to my room and shut the door. He'd ask questions, like whether I ate or not, and I'd scream my answer as I rushed down the hall. There I was, left with him and my older brother, who had a huge poster of Mariah Carey stapled to his ceiling, directly over his bed. Mariah was now the closest to another woman in the house, so clearly, I was outnumbered.

I was becoming a woman and my development looked a lot like my

Mom's. I was lanky, and I still played basketball every day, but my boobs were starting to get in the way. That's when I noticed my Dad no longer looked at me when he was talking. Usually an engaged and curious person, he now seemed distracted or annoyed, and maybe even repelled. He'd ask something only when necessary, and his eyes would point off to the side.

My solution was to disappear like my mother. Instead of using the hoop across the street at my neighbor's house, I took my basketball down to the elementary school. The hoops were set low, and that made it too easy, but I felt tired all the time, so too easy sounded good. I started going down to the school every day around sunset, and in the mornings on the weekends. One Sunday, I got up and saw my Dad passed out in the blue recliner. He forgot to put one of the guns back together. Dad? I asked. I saw a near-empty bottle of vodka on the tray. Dad? I stepped down into the living room and he woke.

The look on his face was of pure anger. Not for waking him up. It was for my big curly hair and the complexion of my mother. The figure he saw standing there, he could hardly stand. I had my basketball in the crook of my arm but put it in front of me to remind him of who I was. It's me, I said hardly above a whisper. His eyes did a funny quick shift in their sockets and he laid his head back, and I turned to leave. I bounced the ball down the street not caring who I would wake up.

I bounced it harder and harder, almost violently as I crossed an intersection to the school. I went into the courts and I was the only person around. Just me and the hoop. A bird swirled around in the overcast sky. It was so quiet that I could hear something far off, something squeaky. There was a grown man on a BMX bike riding toward me. I was frozen with the basketball in my hands. I told myself to act natural and keep playing, so he'd know I wasn't scared, but I couldn't move. He was skinny and weasley, probably even my weight. He came into the courts and rode his bike in tighter and tighter circles around me. Soon, he was right next to me, saying things under his breath. I didn't recognize any of the words he was saying. But the fear I felt was the same familiar fear over the guns. It made me suddenly take a shot at the basket. By then, I could smell his stale, straw-colored hair and he stopped his bike, standing hip to hip with me. He reached around me, putting his left hand on my crotch and the right on my backside.

The basketball was bouncing away from me, and I couldn't stop it.

I turned and ran and ran through the field at the back of the school. It backed up to a busy street, and when I reached it, I looked back. He was now just a black lump on top of the field of dead, wooden-colored weeds.

I didn't stop running. I was panting when I got home. I pushed open the front door and saw my Dad there, busy putting his gun back together. He was almost done and was using a little rag to wipe it down. He didn't look over at me, but he did ask how was it? I wanted to cry. He sounded like my old Dad. I said fine before my words twisted in my throat as I kept walking down the hall. My brother's door was open, and he wasn't there, but there was Mariah, in her minidress and flat-ironed hair.

Welcome to womanhood, her arched eyebrow seemed to be telling me. Isn't this some shit.

The Real Boy

Cai Rodrigues-Sherley

He calls me my mother's father's name and I give him figs
Filled with tiny, dazzling wasps. He swallows them whole,
His mouth a cathedral I enter nightly in the middle of nowhere
On East 14th, removing the July zinc from his jawline with the tips
Of doe-eyed fingers. I pray for pause, for the heat of summer
To burn time to a crisp, for this cavern of city swine to be permed
Into my skull like memory, for the scent of his beard to linger into
Morning, where I am unreal again with nothing to do but develop
Feelings for lesser men, whose gazes land in the most devastating
Places, who call me girl with no sense of irony or tenderness. In the dark,
Somewhere in Manhattan we wear condoms, teach each other
Our own eulogies with full lips. He calls me my mother's father's
Name and I call us both real, here in this dreamworld where
The fruit is the only thing haunted.



Blue Sky | Susana Aldanondo

Nightbirds at the Met, 1974

for LaBelle

Cai Rodrigues-Sherley

*They say the opera house was
invaded by aliens that night,
by you and all your darlings —*

*Bloomington Blacks, club gays and
drag queens, hippie freaks, Puerto-Ricans,
and all your Black mamas,*

*sisters, aunties, and silent
lovers, space children waiting for your
supersonics to take them to some new*

*world. And you knew all about flight,
didn't you? Could have told Toni all
about surrender, about riding*

*that funky wind, about travelling
light, the weight of suffering. You
told the children, "Wear Something*

*Silver," and they were wonders.
Titanium and sterling steel and
faces dusted in starlight. They say*

*the only luggage was bangles, baubles,
sequins and studs, a symphony of
tambourines, maracas, and \$1 whistles*

*transforming a drowsy hippodrome
into the world's most opulent, extravagant
spacecraft, turned all the way on, wanting for*

*takeoff, willing to be transported by you
and you alone, an all-girl band of intergalactic
voyagers, afro-futuristic life forms drenched*

*in feathers, bodies gasping and sweating
out the violence of an era. Nona, Sarah, Patti,
Sarah, Patti, Nona, Patti, Nona, Sarah,*

*they forget you were in love. You
must have been, to fly so high
and never quite come down, to*

*hold each other so tenderly with
your voices, your whole chests. Somebody
somewhere remembers the night LaBelle*

*took the Metropolitan
Opera House and flew off with it, freed
it from blood-soaked soil, tore apart its*

*most violent dimensions and went
far away, to an erotic Black beyond,
psychedelic queer paradise. But that somebody is*

*nowhere to be found, lightyears
away from our dying sun, humming
songs tasting of marmalade, cloaked*

in silver.

End note: Some references in this poem are taken from the article “Rock ‘n’ Soulers Labelle Play the Met, Yet” by Curt Davis, found in *People Magazine* from October 21, 1974.



Four different seasons, four different lives. If only the “me” in January could see me now; the irony is immaculate. I was forced to come to terms with who I was, what I felt, and what that meant for the future. I plowed my foundation, and started building a new one. It was terrifying, but growth is rarely comfortable.



Each season brought a new sense of normalcy. Memorializing this concept has helped shift my perspective; change is out of our control, all we can do is enjoy what we have when we can. I developed a year's worth of 35mm film to create a "time-capsule collage". The messy/chaotic arrangement emulates feelings of emotional turmoil, even when surrounded by people you love. The 'old' New York consists of a past life I thought would last forever... happy times always have a half-life, huh? The 'new' New York, even as new as it was, is already a memory of the past. Things are always changing. New York has not. This serves as an homage to the one thing that has stayed stable my entire life. When I grow up, I want to be just like you: thanks, New York.



GUILTY ACCOUNT OF THE SCALLION PANCAKE

Suzette Lam

He and I were from the same hometown, introduced through a mutual friend. We expats do not often speak of where-from and since-when, as if those were long ago etched on our faces, ingrained in our accents, and trivial compared to something else.

The first time we went out, it was to Queen's Park in Toronto. We were at the shapeless end of adolescence; in an early summer evening of heavy fog before the rain set in, the orbiting traffic around the park prompted our casual conversation of odd hobbies and rare encounters.

"I collect words," he said.

He might have tossed that out at random, by which I got to have appeared a little nonplussed, so he added, "People collect stamps, toy trains; I collect words."

Our heads were tilted at the ground that held only the two of us.

"You know," he carried on. "Things like phrases, anything written or oral, but especially oral that have some historic value to them."

I mulled over his meaning. He expanded on it. "I once saw a snow globe of Montreal Expo '67 with the geodesic dome in it. The dome was designed to be a universal dwelling to protect humans from the climate, *and* from the climate of other humans—what memorabilia. Same as words."

I returned a slight nod, as though I understood.

"For instance," he said, looking at me, "have you heard about a reclusive group of women living up on the hills?"

I glimpsed at the fog. Next to me, he was a head taller, a year my senior.

"I meant, in our hometown."

Oh.

Ever since residing overseas, I was neither downright unaware of the affairs of my hometown, nor had I kept abreast of its news by the minute. But recluses on the hills?

“They are an intelligent lot. Not the talkative divulging type, more like hermits. It was quite an effort for me. Their words were about a craving they had for the scallion pancake, our local specialty *Chung Yau Beng*. Since then, I kept them like old friends in the back of my mind.”

His face turned pensive. Must be a remarkable journey to befriend them.

“*Them* being the words,” he said.

He lost me.

“Their craving would have taken place long before I was born. It certainly was made a myth, how the women’ve kept mum about it. It wasn’t spoken or written down until I met them. For something so important, I doubt anyone’s ever taken it seriously.”

Uh-huh.

“I promised to keep the women anonymous. I replaced their names with arbitrary alphabets; T, Q, U, etcetera. To hold true and feel at one with them, I jotted down their ways of speaking as I listened. I can send you a copy, if you like.”

My head was swimming in a muddle.

Words from the hermits?

A few days later, at the mailroom of my dormitory, I received a letter from him. It was, oh-so-apparently, the words from the hermits. In the envelope there was also a cassette tape. It was the vintage kind with a pair of spools that wound the magnetic ribbon.

Taking as much time as I needed, I read the letter aloud from beginning to end, not letting any part of it slip through my lips. The words were, to

put it in the mildest terms, jumbles of incongruous fragments. Recalling his somberness when talking about them, I was driven to get to the bottom of it.

The following Sunday, I went to the St. Lawrence Antique Market on Lower Jarvis. A recorder was hard to find in these digital times. After browsing for a good hour among cracked jade bangles, bronze candle stands, phoenix-engraved ebony armchairs, I negotiated and brought home a Walkman.

I put my headphones on, pressed “play.” Right away some voices of women came in rapid succession. It sounded like they were talking over each other, but in fact, they were merely supplementing, or rounding, or jogging each other’s memories out loud. Except on a few occasions, their tones were generally flat and calm, as though there were no pauses, or no punctuations in between their breaths. He was ingenious to use slashes to indicate the breaks in his text; as a non-literary person, I found them pleasing to the eye. No names of the women were mentioned. Like he said, he had demarcated different voices with separate alphabets, but also kept their manners of speaking authentic, which shuffled the narratives of the first-, second-, and third-person without padding them out.

As their story unfolded, incessant tears welled up and rolled down my face. I did know about this. Back then as kids, we were told to consider it beyond the pale to spare a thought, and far less acceptable to talk about it. I am glad they survived after all, these women. I took out a pen and pad of paper, jotting down notes.

In a stretch of several weeks, I labored on my text, adjusted and compared it with the one he had. It was nowhere near perfect; perfection was not my aim. What exactly was my aim I could not tell for sure. But like him, I was becoming earnest about the subject matter.

The following is the result of my grind. Like his, I did not encumber it with too many italics, but only the ones I saw fit that would be the ones belonging to our hometown, and the ways we had been and always will be, wherever we are. Now here it is:—you go first / no you go first

—a'ight let's start with T

—a'ight I'm T / see / back when my street spat heart-wrenching fire bombs / I said could you take them in / you scared / scared won't stop the bombs / the year they announced a particular food ain't be made no more / for the food stood too far out from the culture of the rest of the landmass / you gotta blend in / like pizza / loved all over the world / once your food is as popular as pizza the town can have it back they said / one of the foods banned was *Chung Yau Beng*

—plebs caught a baffling symptom from consuming the forbidding *Chung Yau Beng* / in her closed-off emotions T's momma deterred her from chasing after the vetoed food / yeh my emotions became so closed-off I'd croak if not to join the others in front of *Beng Dim* for more *Chung Yau Beng*

—Q's teammate showed animosity toward Q for her vim for *Chung Yau Beng* they took away her trophies and told on her / ain't no dared give her another job after she was being told on / so I ganged up plebs with hunger pangs no rations could satisfy except *Chung Yau Beng*



Fall | Yehui Zhao

—how did it happen / they saw us a dead loss / a useless flop / too young to understand society / red tape / old values / the hard real world / ain't no use to give us a chance / what a cozy cheerer-upper / resources in the hands of alien wealth and power we ain't got a tiny square to stand upon let alone rent a bed for sleep / we young plebs were bulldozed in our own town / but / I said / we gotta have Hope / gotta dust up all that shit / for a risky turnaround we gotta lay a bet / relinquish fake peace in exchange for a future

—E used music to numb the treatment she received at work / boss complained junior plebs like E / you better earn your experience before speaking up / everybody called upon the town for help / Beng Dim ain't producing enough Beng to meet the demands

—fire bombs rubbed shoulders could injuries keep you going / S pondered maybe should listen for once to the AlmightyBigFly / after all this ain't a matter of life and death / but I said fear is that your soul got no host to go home with / at the critical hour of light and dark plebs took in heaps of undercooked *Chung Yau Beng* still ain't no cure for their yearnings

—AlmightBigFly possessed many gone-throughs and know-hows but winsome wrinkles ain't never came across this before / R stood alongside thousands of brothers and sisters who might in the next moments dissipate at the murkiest of street corners as strangers / experts embarked on studying the specifics of a *Chung Yau Beng* / ain't your ordinary *Beng* but one with bewildering chives or leeks diced on top of fried red and white rings and garlic-looking cream sauce maybe shallot-looking gravy on the side ain't this mouth-watering or what

—can you not see this is becoming a disaster of the senses and emotions she said / U stood on the edge of a rooftop ready to jump / she being one of many among the dejected plebs / by now a crisis-tackling camp of experts embarked on “experting” / since the family of onions holds special nutrients for fighting off germs and infections they said / U and the others must be nutrient-deficient and the cravings must be a warning about them coming down with a disease or bacteria breach

—pink fumes rose from the night / K wanted to run west but her grannies said run east K ain't got no voice of her own no legs to escape no intelligence to change the minds of her grannies / what was in the

fumes causing you to paralyze / another crisis-tackling camp of experts refuted the first crisis-tackling camp of experts / no scientific evidence showed food cravings were related to the need of nutrients in the human body but if you were really hungry you devour any food presented to you / plebs must be having a matter with *feelings* rather than hunger / leading them to seek out the special *Chung Yau Beng*

—outlanders paraded and chanted / young plebs should be crushed to pieces as they ain't nothing but garbage-nibbling rats plaguing the town / a new crisis-tackling camp of experts embarked on dissecting the problem / *Chung* and *Yau* ain't a main dish that stand alone as the star of the cuisine but take on a minor role for taste such as accompanying a slab of steak or fish / this strange *Chung Yau Beng* is unheard of

—working in the clinic H must act professional / she tried to play it cool and stay mid-of-the-road but out of nowhere she spoke up / ain't this a question of good bad right wrong correct incorrect when hundreds of thousands have fallen sad-sick they were fearful let down burned out desolate and disheartened do you really care does anybody really care?!

—at that stage not even an insect cared no
—trapped in the mundane nine-a-five well-earned by J's high-degrees she saw the lack of purpose in the nine-a-fives when the first crisis-tackling camp argued with the second and third crisis-tackling camps about the need of nutrients versus not nutrients but emotions / they kept exchanging blows on the streets in schools and workplaces quarrelling on invisible network platforms

—patrolling the network platforms W saw townsfolk imploring not to have *Chung Yau Beng* be made no more as young plebs were sick with cravings / yet other townsfolk begged for more production of *Chung Yau Beng* as the lack of supplies ain't help rid of plebs' cravings but push them to the point of no return

—there exists a kind of love / exceeds any timeline of prosperity and decline / you do not resolve to leave / to turn your back on your town for a sojourn afar / C tried to make clear what plebs got ain't a craving but a *Need* / c'mon / like / who decides who *needs* what and at what age and after acquiring what experience until a person *needs* it / you cannot force someone not to *need* something / Craving is Obsession but *Need* is Necessity / ain't for no nutrient or boost of emotion but for the exis-

tence of the existential being / for the *need* to link the human spirit to the place / that if you take away this *need* you die / but unlike nutrients that fit for everyone this *need* is unique for the plebs in this place and time and no one else outside this place and time *needs* it more than the plebs / they are ready to brave gales and cloudbursts you ain't understand it do you / because your heart ain't belong to this place and time You understand?!

—C raised her voice the way she thought she ought to / now many camps of experts / from onions-growers to onion-flyers and onion-ringers and onion-soupers / dressed in onionskins in solidarity with the plebs for *Chung Yau Beng*

—Y's poppa frowned and rebuked / if y'all plebs ain't so stupid and naïve to gobble down the first *Chung Yau Beng* to begin with you won't be in this deep fucked-up state / you should'a thought about how you disappoint your parents / true enough / most parents felt disgusted except a small number of them got together / fundraising for *Beng Dim* to get back on meeting provisions / believing the shortage of *Chung Yau Beng* ain't had nothing to do with the "larger (largest?) picture"

—on average F pulled three plebs everyday under her care off the edge of rooftops / house of prayer and choir save them dear / this reality ain't real so hard on their dim souls / plebs banged from dust till dawn on the gates of *Beng Dim* that were closed for the so-called "recoup period" / who is playing a game here

—different crisis-tackling camps agreed finally on the bottom line / we are all bound by history and plebs just got nothing to do but involved in this fixation / a trouble they created for themselves / later that night all over town *Beng Dim* got broken into / unraveling before your eyes a melancholy in an elegant silent film / plebs wolfed down bare *Chung* raw *Yau* and half-baked dough

—logic and reason derailed / force met up with force a tug-of-war / fire bombs sparked the night lit bright rolling white fumes on tarmac curled up flesh bones over potholes of blood / cries and tears and white lilies / P was seized and strip searched / you how old? Don't talk to me about what you are entitled to ain't nowhere on your anatomy is defined as private areas / P felt helpless / shamed and furious

—screaming tempest raged glass-smashed roads blocked trash
and tired ablaze / plebs grappled no-hope and bad-dope and war-
fare-well-fare-well / with only weapons of bad breaths and farts from
months of oily *Chung* and *Yau* diet

—what form of vapors what form of sad-sick / in the hospital L worked
around the clock yet got no absolute antidote to treat the different
traumas plebs were going through / more studies should be carried
out if not too late

—gallant and attentive plebhardies suggested plebsofties not to be on
the frontline no more / please / ain't even on the second or third line
/ please / plebhardies shot up the clash marched arm in arm pleading
/ we ain't meant to do no harm but only for *Chung Yau Beng!* / pleb-
softies guarded their wares and grubs hard and loyal / spurting vapors
dyed the frontline eardrums eyeballs and tongues—the night like some
curse befell / drowsy plebhardies departed the volatile streets / conked
out in bed sleep-sick ain't no coming around no matter how you shout-
ed or shook them

—terror kept plebsofties wakeful at night / trapped in restlessness / D
walked the cold ghostly town / what went into the vapors / what extras
/ what enhancers

—hails / squalls / what farcical age

—old scorch / a witness to the chronicle

—*Beng Dim* slid open their timid gates to welcome mousy customers

—months of sleeplessness M was worn out / until one fine day tender
plebhardies came around rubbing their gentle eyes all serene and
tamed / ain't got no more *Chung Yau Beng* urges

—inscrutable pains hit A when she told her finally-awakened husband
about his craze for *Chung Yau Beng* / he objected / this can't be true as
I don't recall any of it

—Amnesiac plebhardies came out with no memory whatsoever /
Insomniac plebsofties ain't reaching no one with their words / Z won-
dered if the Amnesiacs were silenced not under their wishes

—the Insomniacs' loss of sleep / the Amnesiac' loss of memory / spread to friends and families / from home to home / became the Flu of Insomnia and Flu of Amnesia

—B totaled up her nights of insomnia being ten hundreds plus one / the fourth crisis-tackling camp embarked on scrutinizing whether the Insomniacs or the Amnesiacs made more of a nuisance to the town / whose brains wired differently from the rest and whose hormones at odds with common sense / must be those crazy fruit-loop Insomniacs / plebsofties women thought they knew best!

—families left the town for other towns / the town grew deserted and unwelcoming / N saw the crisis-tackling camps succeeded in attaining absolute purity by deleting the impurities / a gambit to set the plebs apart and bring them down / how could plebhardies truly forget or were they just afraid to talk / taboo / fable / great deal of qualms in the tum / four crisis-tackling camps united for the first time / celebrated with fireworks and banquets / new Flu of Amnesia spread / the following day townsfolk returned to business-as-usual for earnings were a matter of utmost importance

—the *Chung Yau Beng Incident* ain't a popular topic / mere mentioning it was a crime / townsfolk joined the crisis-tackling camps calling it a fake

—secret supporters of the Insomniacs cropped up now and then / the side that a person was on ain't never clear or permanent as you never know who was on which side for what internal reason / the awakening was wearisome but once awakened no one could misplace the past / the sacrifice was too great / in the fullness of time we Insomniacs went up the hills

After that initial rendezvous, he and I drifted back to our separate lives. We did not make an effort to keep in touch; our first date had become our last. Yet his letter and cassette tape have stayed with me, so has my transcription of the women's verbal record. I duplicated many copies and brought them along when I relocated to New York, and then to London. Not once had I travelled back to our hometown, but instead, I was constantly on the move, seeking out natives.



[part of] Yellow Dream | Shaqayeq Ahmadian

**LAND A MAN IN A/LANDSCAPE AND HE'LL
TRY TO CONQUER IT — War of the Foxes by
Richard Siken**

mónica teresa ortiz

a stone in the atchafalaya
swamp, face half submerged
in a portal, offer goodbyes to great blue
herons flying
requires same
mechanization
as dying marigolds planted in prayer
erosion unpins desire for oxygen
resources
deplete
no inquiries into disappearances
none shall stand
trial on Earth anyway
no justice for flesh
only abolition of grief

eat dust that works hard
to be
a ghost

SHELL GAME

Suzanne S. Rancourt

my hand is a walnut husk
concealing the circularity of a box
rocaille ropes of beads, refract light
glitter, encircle
the red unblinking albino eye
retinal depth
accents the lid

i bought this box on the way to a grumpy poet's house
over 20 years ago
to synesthetically guide young writers
color-sounds-smells-words

in a used book store
i can't remember the time of year
other than life was hard with divorce,
deaths, too many choices
i had only dollar bills

my life filed down to bright aluminum
interspersed with the beaded dots and long dashes
repeated S.O.S. i thought no one was listening
and kept tap tapping like a stone to tooth to a metal pipe
- codes, pleading soliloquies -
veined white like old scars: my appendectomy
the butcher gouged at 8 years old, my left heel
sewn back on the day before summer vacation,
scars from burns, fighting for my life
a gamble
with one foot here - the other there

THE PROCESS

Rose Pacult

The Process

1. Obviously, there's a hierarchy crafted by man of symbols. I wanted to subvert the symbol hierarchy by looking at the presentation and preservation of font. I spent approximately thirty minutes searching Helvetica, Lucida, Trebuchet, Baskerville, et cetera.¹ I wanted to learn the objective curves that form the whole. I wanted to see the presence of the singular that leads to the weight of the collective, analogous to man forming symbolic gestures.

I wanted to understand the history of a single letter before trying to understand the history of an entire word.

2. Next, I typed the alphabet:

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z Then I typed the alphabet again: *A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z* Then I typed the alphabet one more time: *A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z*

¹ When you're aphasic you don't know what words mean, and you might find yourself scared sometimes. Like the afternoon when I wander from my house, down the street, and realize I don't know why I'm outside. Imagine this is you. In your hand is a wallet and inside of it a sticky note that says 3045 N. Southport #2. You look at this address and you won't know what the words mean, you won't know where you live, you forget you're even trying to find your house. Imagine you sit outside an apartment building on a stoop and you're looking at this paper. You don't know what it means or why you have it, but you know it's there for a reason. Now it is nighttime. People hurry into the building, cars, down the street, away from you and the paper in your hands. For me, I can't tell the people avoiding me what I'm doing there. I stare at that paper—might as well be looking at the clouds, not letters. That should make me very scared, but I don't know to be so. I'm just asking the paper what it wants from me.

What I wished to accomplish in typing the alphabet is what a child², or any person really, experiences when saying the same word, over and over and over and over and over again aloud. What happens in the end is the word seems silly, it seems meaningless, in fact, it seems like the word isn't a word at all.³

So for good measure: I typed the alphabet two more times: *A b C d E f G h I j K l M n O p Q r S t U v W x Y z a B c D e F g H i J k L m N o P q R s T u V w X y Z.*

I figured if I want to learn the semantics I must unlearn the semiotics. The obvious question became, well, why do we organize the alphabet as we do? For what reason do those letters stand beside each other? What if one letter wished to stand beside another letter? What would it mean for all of us if we were to switch the alphabet's order? Would it mean anything?

² The firefighters told the EMT, who told the trauma nurses, who agreed, and then told my mom when she got to the trauma ward: "the girl lucked out." Discharged, my treatment plan was to start in neurology and radiation for another MRI to track moderate bleeds in the brain. But I didn't know any of this then and I don't remember any of it now.

³ For two years, I lived according to a dichotomy of "good" and "bad" days as an aphasia patient. When I typed I forgot what I was typing. I practiced what patients treated for aphasia do each day: recreating linguistic visuals that mean something to the rest of the world, yet nothing to them, with the hope that eventually, some meaning will be found.

Within the structure of an alphabet, or of anything, there are millions upon millions of possibilities. The anticipation of moving through, against, and with the alphabet is the hope of participating in something far greater than the alphabet: to design an architecture made of letter forms, capable of eliciting subjective emotions.

3. So I started to rewrite the poems someone else had already written, and let myself

Ask Questions

4. I unlearn the alphabet like I unlearn anything.⁴ I find pleasure in rewriting the poems mindlessly, wordlessly, thoughtlessly. I just want to know what the letter looks like. I want to know how a shape presses against a shape to become plural. I liked knowing that I'm circumscribing to linguistic mechanics in order to unlock predispositions.

⁴ The day before the accident I arrived in Chicago by a redeye from London, where I worked on an art show. A day later, I couldn't tell you the differences between Chicago and London. My mom emailed the school I wouldn't be returning.

Why does a poem form as a poem forms?⁵ Why is Gertrude Stein allowed to claim a rose is a rose is a rose. When is a rose is a rose is a rose? When does an objective shape, like a C or an H, take on meaning? Why do I know the answer to what is a poem? When in actuality, I do not know. I can never claim to know. Because if I repeat enough times, if I imitate the hows and whys of the poem continuously, eventually it all becomes hazy, eventually everything reaches asemaia.

So What Did I *Really Do* by Rewriting 100 Poems in Total?

⁵ My memory begins inside of my body. The pain of lifting my chest tickled my throat: I remember the feeling of my throat being tickled by the excruciating pain in my chest. I didn't know why my throat tickled so much, and now I get that my mind didn't know the right words. Cracked ribs made it difficult to breathe. What inhale and exhale my body could allow for caused tiny contractions. The resulting pain only seemed more tortuous by additional movements caused by the act of swallowing. But salivating from the injuries sustained, facial fractures, a swollen brain, nausea, and pain was a neuro-typical reaction. Salivation leads to swallowing, and swallowing is what I call "tickles." I remember my body best.

5. I realized if we revoke the poem the right to immediacy of discernment, or rather, if we refuse to try to understand a poem simply because it is a poem, we require the poem to stand for more than poetry.⁶ We ask the poem to be more than a tangle of letters and shapes. If we attempt poetics while at abstraction, then we require poetry to lead us out of the messiness of symbols and signs.⁷

Consider writing 100 poems without considering: the meaning of a single poem. It's worthless and confusing.⁸ Poetry attains meaning through the clarity of its hows, whys, and whens. Poetry relies on us to make understanding of it, but first, we rely on poetry

⁶ 3 AM I take 536 water color paintings I made for an animation to the alley behind 3045 N Southport Ave #2. Arranging them on fire escapes I let the rains invoking 2016's flash floods fall on work until they are gone.

I don't know how to paint anymore and something about this feels fulfilling—an erasing of material also wipes away the fading lines of their maker.

⁷ From the Northwestern pulmonology department I am running out from the appointment's bad news, coughing from another whatever, another reason, another ticking off the list as to why my body seems angry and I am speed dialing my neurologist Dr. Vogel and I am hyperventilating on a step watching the concrete, and feel a throb, strong as beating down bombs, unsure why cars passing by have my skull in so much pain. I'm crumpling on concrete outside the hospital. Inertia-velocity-impact-force-curling-squeezing-scraping-shaking-finally-metal fucking cement, sex scents of fuel & oxygen, an industrial crushing of a person, a scene I can't possibly remember *but* something in me does. Sharp quick stabbing strains strangle small, single, pause, single, pause, inhalations from broken lungs. Dr. Vogel's nurse is shouting what seems to be nonsense, and I don't know, don't understand, can't figure out just what the fuck her words are, and I hurl my phone into the street at the cars to revoke its rights, too, and change nothing.

⁸ Receptive aphasia is a communicative disorder indicative of a disconnect between language and ideation. Words are seen but go unprocessed. Precluding the onset of this medical condition is occurrences of various problems, from stroke, tumors, congenital disorders, extending to a car hitting a bicyclist who flies 17 feet in the air, and despite wearing a helmet, breaks the fall with forehead against a concrete meridian. At least that is the origin of my case of aphasia.

However, how much ability one recovers is variable and can be limited. As my words returned from nonsense, I wanted to return to abstraction; a place I used to call home.

to be worthy of understanding. If I rewrite something again and again and again and again it begins to mean nothing. It returns to the fundamentals. It allows the space to ask those questions.

6. So I suppose, I learned most importantly: poetry, distinguished and historically acclaimed, has the right to be questioned. We deserve the right to demand more from a poem.⁹

When I typed I forgot what I was typing.

⁹ I am experiencing a haunting and wanting to discover pleasure, but that idea flees fast as a dream and replaces this song type of body feeling: throbbing, focused, intense, scattering too; inwardly explosive, like living is a tactic where every experience is drumming on you.

A haunting happens easy as when you once might have been in a relationship and you are okay with who you are today—but still you wish for the other half, for the good sex, but not the other person.

Imagine a traveler discovers that the pleasure of a thing, of all things, rises up in meaning, and this is something brought up from a well with four hands, or more. The dream, the touch, the flower—all are acts flowing and shapely, and all spread out effortlessly like a wave from movement. Pleasure is not sensation. Bare, stark, compulsive, necessary, pleasure is a she. Lifting and settling, light breaking, reconfiguration, and opening. It is healing and overflowing, like a bodily hunger.

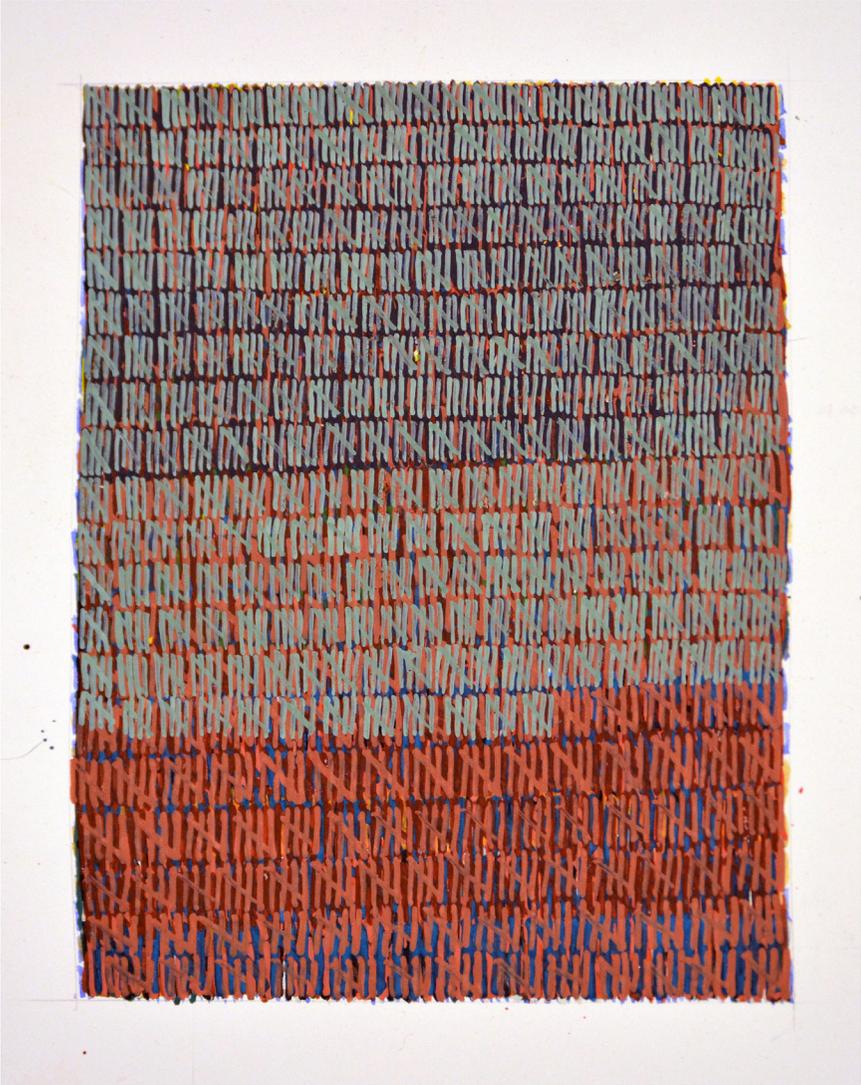
CAPTIVE STUDIES

Max King Cap

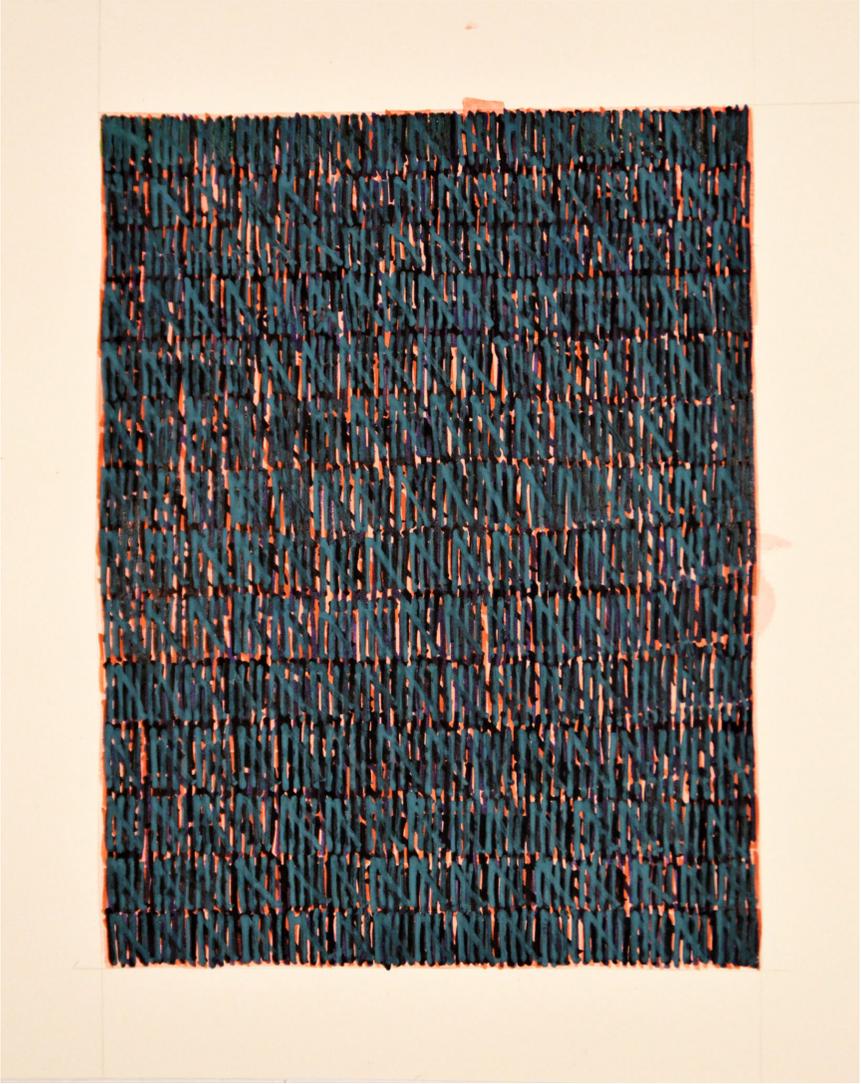


Captive Study 1: Wiley Bridgeman, 14228 Days, 10×8', watercolor, gouache on paper

These are watercolor studies for my Captive series, a group of large format paintings that tackle the American Gulag industry and the scandal of false imprisonment. They appear to be abstractions but they are really a form of text painting; instead of letterforms or numbers, however, the paintings are an ocean of tally marks. Using one of the simplest counting systems, these markings of four verticals punctuated by a diagonal slash, I make a tabulation of the days lost by those who were falsely imprisoned. Using data from the Innocence Project, the Center for Wrongful Convictions, and the National Registry of Exonerations, I have collected the daily countdown of the falsely imprisoned. The series began with a triptych of three men who were convicted of murder and spent thirty-nine years in prison; 14,229 days based upon coercion, bias, and incompetence. Each painting is a crude diary of marking time, of hoping and losing hope, of standing still while the world carries on, punctuated by violence, bureaucratic indifference, and thwarted desire. From that beginning the series continues to grow. Unfortunately, the subject matter for these paintings is abundant—the list of wrongful convictions is tragically long.



Captive Study 3: Peter Limone, 12050 Days, 10x8', watercolor, gouache on paper



Captive Study 5: Laurence Adams, 10942 Days, 10x8', watercolor, gouache on paper

AN INTERVIEW WITH JOHN KEENE

by Monique Ngozi Nri, Peter Soucy, and Elizabeth Hickson

John Keene is a Distinguished Professor of English and African-American and African Studies at Rutgers-Newark, where he has served as the chair of the African-American and African Studies department since 2015. In his own words, he says, “I’m a writer, a translator, an artist, an editor, and a mentor.” He is affiliated with organizations including Cave Canem, where he has served as a fellow, and the Dark Room Writers Collective, which he joined several years after obtaining his undergraduate degree at Harvard University. He is currently a board member of the African Poetry Book Fund, which aims to make available works by poets from the African continent and was founded by Kwame Dawes and is based at the University of Nebraska. He is also a recipient of the MacArthur Foundation Fellowship, which he was awarded in 2018.

Widely celebrated as an experimental writer, John has published two collaborative volumes of poetry, including *Seismosis* (2006) and *GRIND* (2016), a chapbook of poems called *Playland* (2016), and translated the Brazilian author Hilda Hilst’s novel *Letters from a Seducer* from Portuguese. His first novel *Annotations* was published in 1995, and his short story and novella collection *Counternarratives* (2015) was lauded to wide acclaim.

Monique Ngozi Nri: I’m curious what your take is on the Amanda Gorman poem that she read at the inauguration on January 20.

John Keene: I want to begin by saying that I honor her as a young poet. I encourage people to read poetry. I encourage people to write poetry, and above all, to listen to poetry and sit with poems. I think what was very clear to me is that her poem comes out of several different traditions and that these are probably not the traditions that are being regularly taught in colleges and universities.

On the one hand, we just had a fascist insurrection. We have state murders of Black people. We have the continued dispossession of indigenous people. I understand the criticism that some people may have that delivering a poem on behalf of any administration that is going to pursue empire is problematic—whatever the political party.

On the other hand, I do think the new administration is going to be better in some key ways than the former administration, which had to be dragged out kicking and screaming, and I do celebrate this young poet. She is quite talented.

MNN: Looking at the second and third stories in *Counternarratives* and your description of the dynasties of enslavement and slave owners, I think it's an ironic twist that you put on some of the statements that you make about how these people think about themselves in relation to what they're doing to people of African descent. I was struck by the first story. It reminded me of *The Kingdom of This World* in the sense that it was an in-depth look at the life or the experience of this particular man.

I wondered why you chose to place that story at the beginning of the book, and if you could talk a little bit about the idea of making that story, our story, available and present for people to encounter.

JK: I would say that with “Manahatta,” I was very interested in thinking about a counter-history in terms of the United States’ origins. That’s not to suggest that “Mannahatta” stands as a kind of founding statement; the U.S.’s founding by its very nature is problematic. I wanted to think through and write the story of someone who arrived very early, who was not indigenous, who was a mixed-race person from the new world but also a product of the old world, whose goal was not to be a settler colonialist or an extractive colonialist. Juan Rodríguez (Jan Rodrigues) was a real

historical figure. When he arrives in what becomes Manhattan, what becomes New York City, he is engaging in trade, but his idea is not “I’m going to lay claim to this world” but rather, “I want to become a part of it.”

He wants to separate himself from the Dutch colonialists on whose ship he’s working. I was fascinated by this idea of a figure whose ordinary presence is right in front of us and, at the same time, remains so obscure. Several organizations and one of the departments at CUNY have honored him; they created a plaque for him, and they had a full ceremony for Rodríguez. But he remains utterly obscure, even to New Yorkers.

It’s fascinating in the sense that he was apparently born in Santo Domingo, and New York has one of the largest populations of Dominican-Americans and, as a city, has one of the most sizable populations of Latinx people in the U.S. Among U.S. cities, New York has had and still has the largest numerical population of people of African descent in the entire United States. One would think that there would be, even if not regular celebration, at least more discussion of someone like Juan Rodríguez. His story challenges the narrative that we have been handed down about the origins of this country—and what might have been and what became

possible. I think it's very important that, so early on, this Black figure, this mixed-race, non-English-speaking figure, was there at the beginning. This was around 1613—a few years before when “The 1619 Project” commences. I say this not to erase “The 1619 Project,” but to underscore that histories are complex.

Of course, we know there were people of African descent who arrived with the Spaniards, etc. It was very important for me to use that as a thematic and metonymic starting point for the collection because it both grounds us in this idea of what U.S. American history is and opens up spaces of possibility for thinking in broader hemispheric and global terms.

Peter Soucy: The title of “Manhatta” shares its title with Walt Whitman’s poem “Mannahatta.” We recently spent a semester learning about Walt Whitman, him being racist, and his view of America overshadowing Black and indigenous people’s history: a view of a united America but only for white people. How much do you see your story as an inverse of this narrative?

JK: That was certainly in my thinking. On the one hand, Whitman is really one of the greatest and most influential American poets—not just for American literature but also for literature

all over the globe. His influence extends in all directions. On the other hand, you’re right. Whitman, like most white people of his generation and preceding and subsequent generations, could be extremely racist. He had a pretty hypocritical idea about a kind of brotherhood of white people which, interestingly enough, you see animating the pre-Civil War period: this clash between the Union and Confederacy, and then afterward. As the country is reuniting, one understanding is that what is really being reunited is whiteness and white social capital and power. Power in exchange for throwing Black people under the bus and stripping away their rights. Northern capital can do what it wants to do. This is a kind of recurrent theme.

To go back to Monique’s question, one of the things I did not mention but relates directly to this idea of the uniting of whiteness is this question of capital—in all its forms: social, political, economic, cultural, etc. What does it mean that the Dutch viewed Manhattan or Mannahatta primarily as a trading post? I wanted to try to think through another way into our past, our understanding of capitalism—to think about how this character views what he’s doing in terms of trading and engaging in commerce of various kinds with the indigenous people.

In a sense, the title is both an ironic criticism of Whitman and also an invocation of him. One of the things that happens in that story, as we see so often in Whitman, is his really remarkable invocation of the rivers surrounding New York. You think about “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry,” Whitman’s famous poem. I tried to make sure that one of the first things that Juan Rodríguez sees is the East River, but he also sees Long Island, which includes Brooklyn. That’s what he views on the other side of that shimmering river as he sees this other world of freedom. He’s part of this new world, this other world. He can see its expansiveness, but his desire is not to own it, to dominate it, but to walk through that window into another life in which he might live harmoniously with this new world and become part of it.

Elizabeth Hickson: You mention the idea of this new world that is an “other world,” and I started thinking of conceptions of translation—of strangeness, a thing and its other. How does your translation work relate to that idea, and how does translation theory influence your writing in general?

JK: One of the things that I’m thinking about is Édouard Glissant’s idea of relation and opacity. Related to that is the question: What does it mean to live with

and not to dominate? What does it mean to be together without being the same—to fully accept the idea of difference and all its difficulty and pain and complexity, and to be in a continuous conversation about that? When I think about translation, that is one of the things that has profoundly influenced my work.

**“I find that,
whenever I translate
or read translations, it
transforms my sense
of what’s possible in a
good way.”**

MNN: I was struck that part of your work with Kwame Dawes and the African Poetry Book Fund involves bringing actual African poets into print or reprinting their work. I feel that that is an area that, even for myself, is relatively unexplored, and I’m Nigerian/Barbadian. Can you talk a little bit about the importance of those translations, and the importance of that work for our understanding as a whole?

JK: One thing that becomes clear when you look at the work of poets who have not been so appreciated, whose work has been reissued as selected poems or collected poems, and work that has not really been in English or

even in a European language is that it changes your understanding of history, of literary history, of aesthetics.

I find that, whenever I translate or read translations, it transforms my sense of what's possible in a good way. I think there's a way in which it brings a centrifugal quality to the conversation, particularly in mainstream American "elite" circles about literature.

“What does it mean to be together without being the same—to fully accept the idea of difference and all its difficulty and pain and complexity, and to be in a continuous conversation about that?”

MNN: If you take “On Brazil,” in this passage where Londônia is about to testify, the way that this voice describes the scene reminds me very much of what we're going through now with the trial of Trump, and this kind of split perception as to what is going on:

“Despite the seriousness of the affair, a current of easy familiarity passed among the men. Several laughed at Londônia's account of

the circular march through the jungle.”

What is your intention with speaking with that voice? Because at some points, I just laughed out loud.

JK: I would say: I want you to laugh. There are actually several places throughout *Counternarratives* where some of my intention was to be funny, but in a very wry, ironic way. In that passage that you cite, my goal was to lay bare how power works. You have the indigenous people who were the targets of this marauding party from the empire. And you also have this African Quilombo, where people escaped chattel slavery.

Both the story's protagonist the Colonel himself—and the people around him—and the person arguing from the other side who is opposing him are still part of power. They're just different annexes of power; they're up against each other, but depending on where you sit in the hierarchy, as is the case with the Londônias-Figueiras family, the Colonel has so much more power. It does not matter how beautiful the arguments on the other side are. This is how power works.

He knows he's not going to be punished harshly for genocide: the outright killing and slaughtering of people. Of course, this is

justified under the ideology, the ethos, the morality, the ethical structure, and the society in which he lives. They have created a space or place for this: to seize land, to seize power, to kill people. I wanted to think about: Usually, if you're a historian, when a voice or voices are recounting things, there's a way that you're going to do this. Your own perspective is going to enter, but with great care. Your prose is going to be shaped by the way that you think about the archive you're exploring and whose materials you're working through.

I wanted to be much more overt in this story: to bring in a range of discourses, an array of voices, that keep disrupting or destabilizing any easy understanding of how to see or read or think about what's going on.

MNN: It's also fascinating to me that at no point in the story, "An Outtake" is it discussed that the story's protagonist Zion is the so-called master's child. What are the pieces that you're putting in the narrative to break up assumptions about what stories should look like or have looked like?

JK: You're one of the rare people who has noted that Zion was thought to be the son of Mr. Wantone. That goes right over people's heads. We know about Zion's mother. In a sense, we know about

his surrogate mothers and the people around him: his family, the constructed family. We hear very little about his father. This was one of the first stories in *Counternarratives* that I wrote. I was fascinated by this idea of what the German literature scholar Andres Huyssen calls "analytical fiction."

Huyssen, when speaking about the German writer Alexander Kluge, raised questions about how you engage the reader critically yet so that they keep reading to the end. You include these critical aspects that defamiliarize. How do you zoom in? How do you zoom out? I don't mean just in a technical sense, but I mean in terms of critique.

I was particularly fascinated with this idea of slavery and the American Revolution. When I think about most discussions of the American Revolution, even today, slavery is there but [not really]. I think about the popularity of *Hamilton*. As my colleague Lyra Monteiro at Rutgers-Newark and other people have pointed out: If *Hamilton* really looked at that moment in time and Alexander Hamilton himself, etc., we'd probably have a very different musical. Other people would have come to the fore. It's fascinating.

Of those main figures, the one who was not a slave owner and was no fan of slavery was John

Adams. He's basically not part of *Hamilton*. That's not to criticize Lin-Manuel Miranda, but to say with regard to the character Zion, slavery, and Massachusetts: What does it mean to think about the place of someone so radically unfree at the very moment when and in one of the very places where the rhetoric of freedom is so powerful. The thing about Zion is: He's not a noble character, but he is an emblem of radical freedom. He does not feel that any rule of law, and especially the dominating structure—that brutal, oppressive, dominant structure of chattel slavery—should constrain him. However, there is no space or place for someone like him at all in this world.

“I wanted to be much more overt in this story: to bring in a range of discourses, an array of voices, that keep disrupting or destabilizing any easy understanding of how to see or read or think about what’s going on.”

EH: I wonder if this concept of radical freedom is something you're actively thinking about as you write. Is genre something you're thinking about, or do you

apply this idea of radical freedom toward the very idea of writing itself?

JK: I've been writing poetry and fiction, poetry especially, going back to childhood. I wrote fiction and poetry when I was in high school and college as well. I think I'm very aware of the traditions that I'm writing out of, though, I try as much as possible not to censor myself when I'm writing. Now that I'm older, I have a clearer sense, when I start writing, of what it is I'm doing.

With the exception of one book I published a few years ago with Nicholas Muellner (*GRIND*), which is a wonderful collaboration, every other book that I've published I've encountered some challenges getting them published. I think it's very important as a writer—and I say this especially to student writers, apprentice writers, emerging writers—to be as open and free as you possibly can when you're writing.

PS: Do you think you would be able to create the same kind of points or get across what you're trying to say if you weren't allowed to fictionalize, or is that balance between fiction and non-fiction important?

JK: I think about so many writers like Kiese Laymon, Eula Biss, etc., who have taken really fascinating

and provocative routes with non-fiction. However, I'm personally interested in the possibilities of fiction as a genre.

Well before autofiction became a hot genre in the 2000s, I published *Annotations*. There are so many different works that inspired it. Clearly the very obvious ones: works by Lyn Hejinian, Ntozake Shange, Samuel Delaney, Clarence Major, and other people I mention in the book itself, as well as people I didn't mention, like Kathy Acker who I was reading at the time. *Annotations* comes almost 20 years after Serge Doubrovsky coined the term "autofiction," but I still think there are so many interesting things one might do with that line between fiction and nonfiction, particularly on the fiction side.

A few years ago, I taught Anelise Chen's *So Many Olympic Exertions*. I also taught Sheila Heti's *How Should a Person Be?* and Chris Kraus's *Aliens and Anorexia*, among others. Each could be viewed as nonfiction, as memoirs, but each also functions as a novel. When I read Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novel *Americanah*, I thought it was so fascinating to see an aspect of the world that I inhabit portrayed as fiction. Of course, her perspective is different than my perspective; she's Nigerian-American, and I'm African-American. But in so many

ways, there were these powerful moments of recognition.

I am trying to consciously think, "What does fiction do? Why do we write fiction? Why do I write fiction? What are fiction's possibilities, particularly now?" I think about the extraordinary power of narratives. If nothing else, the QAnon conspiracy should make anyone who is working with narratives raise the question of: "What is it about particular narratives that make them so compelling, so galvanizing, so mesmerizing that they become the means to explain anything and everything?"

They can be extremely dangerous. I hope that we think more about narrative and its power because it is extraordinarily powerful when it comes to human beings and the ways we understand the world. We live in narrative. We construct narratives. We are the products of narratives. We organize our lives in and as narratives. The narratives that we create are going to be particularly important now. We see how important narrative is for even just the very idea of what we call democracy or society or our ability to live on a globe that is increasingly endangered. Everything is shaped by narrative.

MNN: You mentioned the Dark Room Collective and Cave Canem in terms of being a fellow. What place does community play in

your existence as a writer?

JK: I teach at a university, so I have an amazing community of colleagues who are writers and scholars, students, staff, and people I work with. It's very invigorating. They keep me thinking and dreaming. I also think about the larger community of writers and different communities of writers that I'm part of.

When I was starting out, the Dark Room was particularly important because it was a group of primarily young Black writers, as well as artists, musicians, and filmmakers, who were not part of an established institution. We had to create our own thing, if not an institution, then our own space for the kind of work we wanted to see, the kind of writers we wanted to learn from, and the kind of community we wanted to bring into the world. Of course, I also think about the old Out-Write conferences, which were an invaluable space where LGBTQ+ writers came together when the AIDS pandemic first hit. I think of *Fire & Ink* and how it has brought together Black LGBTQ+ writers.

I think communities are very important, especially for writers. When you're working independently for so much of your time, having a community or communities that you can share

your work with, bounce ideas off of, and transform the world with is incredibly important.

EH: I'm wondering if there's anything you're working on now that you'd be willing to share with us.

JK: I'm working on several projects, but I do have a book of poetry, titled *Punks*, which is scheduled to appear in November from The Song Cave, so I'm working on that. I also have some long-form fiction projects that I've been working on for a while.

“All around us, people are dying. So many of them are elderly, so many of them are Black and brown... The question is: How do you make sense of that? How do you write about that?”

There is also a wonderful anthology that Kevin Young just edited: *African American Poetry: 250 Years of Struggle and Song*. That's a marvelous gathering of work, and I'm very happy to say—thanks, Kevin!—I have some work in there too that's quite formally experimental. That's a volume where you get to see a really

extraordinary range—and you see the richness and depth and history.

MNN: Has your writing been affected by the pandemic at all?

JK: As you all know, being in the New York metro area was terrifying back in March, April, and May of 2020. It was a terrible situation in the city and New Jersey. It's almost unnerving to think that, as bad as things were in New York and New Jersey last spring, it eventually became that way pretty much all over the United States now. Truthfully, the past administration's neglectful, incompetent non-handling, and mismanagement of the COVID-19 pandemic, to me, was just another example of a kind of war on the American people, or sectors of the American people.

I lived through the AIDS pandemic, particularly its early days. At a certain point last year, I felt I was reliving some of that earlier trauma and also experienced PTSD. Once again, it's a situation where people are dying and, this time, there was some discussion of it. In the '80s and the early '90s, it was sort of like we weren't supposed to discuss it. There were stigmas, misinformation, and disinformation attached to HIV/AIDS. I started to feel: It's happening again. All around us, people are dying. So

many of them are elderly, so many of them are Black and brown. We've been told by the person in power, "We're rounding the corner; it's going to disappear; it's not really an issue." I reached a point where I was thinking, "No, this is maddening. I can't believe I'm living through this again." And we're still in the midst of it. I have a special feeling for other writers, especially student writers, trying to write now, because you're being expected to turn in work and think and be and dream, in the midst of this terrifying situation. In the richest country on earth that prides itself on being a leader and a model, we have the debacle that we witnessed last year and that we're still in now. The question is: How do you make sense of that? How do you write about that?

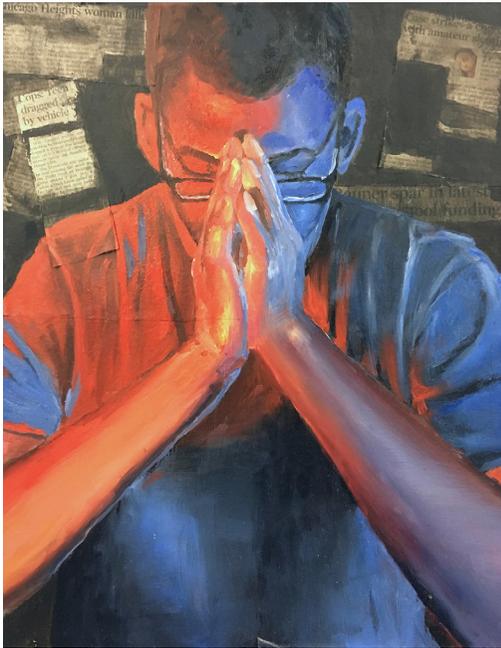
MNN: Well, thank you for articulating exactly what I've been feeling for the last year.

JK: You shared insights that people hadn't raised before. I appreciate the questions you asked. Thank you all so very much!

We are grateful for the opportunity to share such wonderful insights from John. 01/30/21

POLICE STATE

Drew Richardson



Make It Better, mixed media

I have always used art to express my personal struggles as a young, gay, neuro-atypical black artist, and to understand myself as an individual who is continuously being molded by my environment. Growing up as a black person in an environment with a high crime rate, a seemingly constant police presence, and being constantly reminded of how dangerous my environment was by local news channels and newspapers has differentiated me from some of my white friends who didn't grow up in an urban environment. I recognize that growing up as a black person in Chicago has greatly influenced the way I react, not only to police, but to dangerous neighborhoods, to stories of shootings, or to even a scene of a crime.

Police State explores how black people in urban communities, especially in high crimes areas like much of the South Side of Chicago, continuously cope with the constant reminder that our communities, often-times regardless of socioeconomic status, are plagued with crime, are under constant police surveillance, and face constant police brutality.



What's Going On Out There, mixed media



Tired of Being Invisible, mixed media

OUTSIDE

Abbigail N. Rosewood

The first time I saw them, more than a decade ago now, they were standing in a circle behind the sun's shadow. Even from a distance, I could tell they would tower over me, their chins several inches above my head, a mathematical difference in perspective. In their fists, beer, a baseball, throw darts, something crumbling. They noticed me, their glances sticky and hollow. I was a small, reducible object, held steadfast to Taurus' ribs. Taurus—one of theirs.

"Heyh, heyh," Taurus spoke in a way I'd never heard him speak before. He pulled me in, squashed my body under his armpit. Exaggerating affection was his way of protecting me. The introduction was so swift that I missed it, wondering if my name had been said at all. Taurus traced the circle with his finger, naming each of them, so familiar to him, so alien to me. Baskets, M.C, Parisian, C-town, Bossman, and Val.

"Val?" I asked.

"Just Val," Val said. "No nickname ever stuck."

I nodded to just Val, probably the only new name I would commit to memory. I'd heard stories of Baskets, snapshots that were, to me, evidence of his volatility, his jealousy, and hatred of all his friends' girlfriends. He'd gotten into fights with them all, the girlfriends, ending in fuckyous and a smashed beer bottle inches from the women's faces. The girlfriends had receded, and Baskets remained, soul-linked in the ever-tightening circle, as Taurus gently explained to me, "He's just a boy. A thirty-six-year-old boy."

Parisian was the one I suspected had slept with Taurus at some point. In other circumstances, I might have been wary of the fact, cautious of their lingering attraction for each other. She looked comfortable—army boots, leather jacket, a sharp, masculine jaw. Despite a deep plum-colored lipstick that hinted at another self, here she was: one of the aliens. She waved away the joint as it was passed around the circle. Whatever she could be elsewhere dissipated here.



Taurus and I lived a few hours south of the circle. The aliens referred to us as city folks even though there was hardly a civilization left after the pandemic. We'd watched buildings crumble, men succumb to fear and lust—stroking themselves on park benches in broad daylight—domesticated dogs feeding on corpses of rats and pigeons. It seemed that even starlight had plummeted out of the sky. A few years before the pandemic, scientists were rewriting the Book of Life, sending into Holland genetically modified mosquitoes that could self-edit their reproductive systems until all the females became barren, until “mosquito” was no longer a word you needed to learn. Then at some point the whole earthly and planetary systems stopped functioning as they should, information exchanging too rapidly to be processed. It was no one's fault alone that the path underneath our feet was paved with the carcasses of trees and above, a cloudless sky that continued to burn, and perhaps it was the ending we'd written ourselves.

On our drive upstate, toward Taurus' childhood home, toward the aliens, I'd fantasized that my boyfriend's birthplace had suffered a similar destruction. Maybe Baskets had caught the virus. Bossman could have finally decided to spend more time with his wife and daughters and forego the Sunday rituals inside the circle, a timeless zone of perpetual adolescence, of reminiscence, references to obscure idols, catchphrases that I never managed to repeat and use correctly. When we pulled into the driveway, they were already there, not a single one missing. I cursed the futility of the pandemic. They nodded in our direction. At least the half-hearted hugs were forfeited now, a leftover sanitation habit.

We took our spot around the fire. Taurus sighed. I sensed his relief, the pleasure of conformity.

“How was the drive?” someone asked.

“Y'know,” Taurus said. I didn't speak.

“The city?”

“They've begun the clean-up,” he said. “We volunteered a few days last week, picking up garbage, or at least adding it to one growing pile.”

“Insistent till the very end, huh,” Val said.

Somebody else grunted. Parisian asked about my family, who lived in a highly infected zone.

“My sister—” I started.

“Want a beer?” A voice offered Taurus. I heard a disembodied laugh. I could not locate it or why it had happened. Had the conversation veered somewhere else? I closed my eyes, pretended to daze off from the fire’s heat.

“Have you heard? Terry kicked it in two hours ago.”

“Shit.”

“To think we were all—”

“What?” I asked, reaching. Perhaps I should have said who, as in who was Terry and why were they talking about him, but the word had left my mouth, strung up like a puppet midair—more evidence of my failure. Parisian blinked at me, not unkindly. I had nothing in common with this tall, self-assured woman in any other circumstance, but here she was: a lifeline.

“We can get down to the Creek after.”

“Or Bearsville.”

“Holden will keep it open.”

“Ghastly.”

“Creek is as good a final resting place as any.”

The circle shook with laughter. I joined in a little more effectively this time, my mouth agape with feigned hilarity. Taurus pulled me tighter to his side—had I messed up? He only ever did so whenever something made me vulnerable. I’d definitely missed something. What Baskets or C-Town said must have been a private joke, impossible for any outsider to understand. My laughter had only exposed me, my eagerness to please. Wasn’t people-pleasing a sign that one was inauthentic. Weak? Baskets squinted his eyes in my direction. Predators could always locate their prey.



Lunar Voyage | Andrée-Anne Guay

I shrunk into Taurus' shadow, thankful he was large, encompassing. I looked down at my toes, best for the aliens to forget I was there. This wasn't a difficult task. I thought of my mother and sisters on another continent, where trees had fallen—bamboos, cherries, palms, teaks, crisscrossing atop roofs, and above them all, the sky a burnt scarlet—the blood-clotted clouds no longer mistaken for strange sunsets, but a sign of grade E contamination. Even at night, it glows, my mother said.

I was of course the lucky one, the only one my mother could afford to send to study abroad. I wasn't the smartest (Egret was), nor the kindest (Loon was), nor the prettiest (definitely Heron). I was the firstborn and now, too, the only one whose lungs would be without holes. Last year, when the contamination was at its peak, I'd received a Ziploc bag of unlabeled fuchsia-colored pills. On the phone later that same day, my mother explained she'd gone to the manufacturing plants herself to acquire the medicine, rumored to be the only cure, but not yet approved where I lived. I counted fifteen pills—the only ones she'd managed to wrestle from her ex-boss. I started to sweat profusely, panicked at the thought of possessing life when around me people were quietly dying

in their apartments, hospitals being too full to accommodate, and in this case, too useless.

Why. Why did you send me this?

You need it. Two doses for you and Taurus in case—

What about you? And my sisters?

You are the oldest. You need to ensure our family's bloodline.

I deserved a chance simply because I was in a relationship. My mother wasn't the only one who thought this way. Billboards of cars and home insurance had been replaced by pictures of smiling pregnant women accompanied by messages about prioritizing family and ensuring humanity's future. I gripped Taurus' elbow—the urge to break something. The cleanness, wholeness of the circle, the intact bodies and their linked history, Taurus' cheeks rosy from fire, the aliens' slurred speech, incomplete sentences as if they could all predict one another's thoughts, all of it screamed at me. The screeching of incoherent Morse code. I unhooked my body from under Taurus' massive arm and walked away.

I sensed my boyfriend's confusion, already feeling betrayed by an abrupt expression of my individuality, something he'd helped bury just as long as we were near the aliens. He wouldn't follow me. I walked further toward the trees, and beyond, the horizon a violent grey-violet. Among wisps of clouds, a dark concentric shadow. I imagined my little sister Heron on the other side of the globe tracing a Ouija board in mud. She would ask our many dead ancestors if she too would soon join them, while Loon pushed the coin toward No. Since I wasn't there, Egret would be acting as the oldest, amused and skeptical. The truth was Heron would likely die as more than eighty percent of my mother's country's population had, vanishing under thickets of fallen branches, death a mute song at the end. I would not be able to do anything for my sisters. I was insultingly safe. Behind me, the sound of leaves crunching underfoot.

Baskets handed me a warm beer. I cleared my throat in acknowledgment. I'd never been this close to him and felt my insides tighten. I'd had two abortions as a teen, lost my father to storms, and I had been an effective lawyer pre-pandemic, societal rules only the outline of a game, the courtroom an amoral arena for linguistic somersaults, yet I was tongue-tied before this man, tumbling over my words. Naturally,

he sensed it. Could I blame him for regarding me the same way I regarded my weaker opponent?

“Thanks,” I said.

“I’m sorry—sometimes we’re just a little too enamored with our history,” Baskets said. “The whole world is on the brink of collapse, and here, everything remains unchanged. Looks that way anyway. Maybe we indulge a little in the illusion.”

I looked down at my toes, flushed. These were probably the longest sentences coming from Baskets I had ever heard. I felt as though I could fall in love with him out of sheer gratefulness.

“We wanted to know you better,” he said.

I laughed. So, he admitted it was too late.

“Really,” he continued. “You’ve been with Taurus for almost a decade and—”

“What makes you think you know him?” I said. “Maybe he’s who you should get to know.”

It was Baskets’ turn to laugh. “Come on. We basically shared a cradle.”

“This isn’t high school,” I surprised myself. “We don’t all need to be best buds with our friends’ partners.” I looked at Baskets, his face too youthful, too lineless for being in his late thirties. Two years ago, when Taurus announced our engagement, Baskets had responded with a sarcastic, “Congrats! Can’t wait to get to know her.” When Taurus told me, not without apology and embarrassment on his friend’s behalf, I’d laughed bitterly, not because I was surprised at the unkind sentiment, but because it had come from Baskets. He was the one among the aliens I’d spoken to the most, the only person I’d thought within the group to be somewhat fond of me.

“Guess I shouldn’t have tried,” Baskets said, more gently than I anticipated. “I was just thinking the same thing,” I said. “Do you think I care—my youngest sister is going to die, the pandemic will sink my country, and I don’t give a fuck what any of you think about me.” Then I added,

“Anymore.”

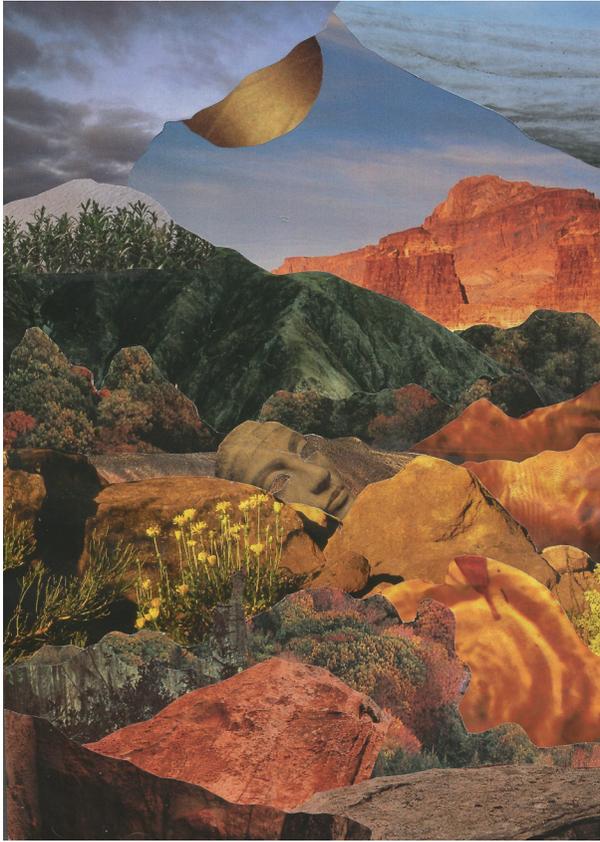
It was difficult to gauge how invasive the virus was and where its tentacles had reached. It seemed to have rewritten my narrative as I no longer recognized my own thoughts, the flood of words. Did I really care so much about my mother? My sisters? Weren't they only shapes moving on wet terrains, amidst weathers I no longer recognized? Was it possible to love someone whose eye color you couldn't recall, whose laughter you could not conjure in your mind? I might have traveled, might have visited, but every holiday I'd resisted, chosen instead to follow Taurus here to this landscape fixed in time's shadow. Christmas, New Year's, Thanksgiving, and weekends had been a routine of fleeing from our small apartment in the city to stand outside this circle of devotion.

From the field, I looked back at them—it was hard to deny the beauty of coherence, Taurus' auburn hair the same shade as the leaves on the maple tree behind him, his total ease amongst the aliens, who were in appearance almost indistinguishable from him, their athletic bodies, their opaque expressions, their blank smiles. They were all barefoot, their heels having grown with the land beneath, each pebble and rock a dent on their skin. My own, now clad in shoes too bulky for my ankles, had been made to tread through red mud, the soft earth pliant with every step, and from above, a sizzling rain, the kind as dense as fog amidst a mountaintop, silky as organza. Rain of the tropics could wash away even the most stubborn of memories. A place made for forgetting—a place that couldn't remember itself.



There were parts of him that Taurus had had to deny to remain within the circle, a narrative that had begun more than thirty years ago. Over the years, I would occasionally catch him sighing deeply after a night out with the aliens, his weariness of the same conversations, the words recycled and rehashed, always back to the start. “My friends—they don't really know me.” He complained that they had no interest in his life beyond the adolescent years, as though the conclusion to his story had already happened. Everything new was a threat, new loves, new loyalties.

“I know,” I'd said, leaning my head on his shoulder. I was grateful for



Untitled | Sam Prickett

these moments, hopeful he'd understand that I, too, was part of the after, a story beyond the conclusion. A footnote.

Still, Taurus' loneliness, a side effect of childhood friendships lasting too long, only ended up pulling him back inside the circle, the anesthesia of familiarity. He had decided that it was better to be misunderstood than to be excluded.



That night, Taurus leaned on his bedroom wall, drowsy with contentment.

"I'm happy you're here. You're the only person I want to be with at the

end of the world.”

The pandemic had changed the language of love too—hyperboles no longer something I took lightly.

“Why couldn’t we stay in the city then?” I said. “If all you need is me.”

“People,” Taurus said, reverting to the circle’s monosyllabic manner of speech.

“People?”

“I want to be with everyone we love at the end.”

“What do you mean the end?” I said. “What’s happening?”

Taurus’ face was wet with tears. Instinctively, I shut my eyes.

“What, Taurus? What?” I trembled.

“I’m sorry I didn’t tell you.” He swallowed. “I wanted you to have peace until the very end. Enjoy the rest of the time we have.”

“Peace? Taurus?” I was starting to sound like the aliens.

“Asteroid Violet-78,” Taurus said while folding and stacking blankets, “will hit Earth tonight.”

“Is that a joke?”

“We’re all going to be out in the field. It’s the best way to face humanity’s end—head on and together.”

“Why wouldn’t you tell me?” I screamed. “This is a fucking joke.”

I manically searched Asteroid Violet-78 on my phone, scanned every publication. For weeks, I’d stopped reading the news. The virus seemed to have plateaued. That was enough for me. The front page of every news outlet had changed—nobody even bothered with scientific facts anymore—all that left was a “Thank you & Goodbye” letter from the editor-in-chief, and a photograph of smiling journalists. When did jour-

nalists ever smile if they were truly doing their jobs?

I stared at their resigned expressions. In reality, I knew cities, towns, wilderness had been ravaged, and I'd shut my eyes. Endings were on our minds, but they stopped at specific faces, unlucky others. We hadn't let ourselves consider those close to us, let alone the planet as a whole. A blue, invincible globe.

I ran outside, as if to see for myself, as if I could.

The speckled white world looked like it hadn't once been capable of more. More textures, more variegations on leaves, glass walls that grew over two thousand feet, taller than the tallest redwood tree, engineered to withstand the most violent of storms; more flying insects, most invisible to the eye, but their presence, their life would have been felt; more children waiting to grow up, not understanding that their getting older was concurrent with their parents' aging, their mother's death. It was hard to know what humanity's goal could have been, or perhaps there was never any true aim, only the momentum to move forward, lift an arm, bat an eyelid, anything to distract from stillness.

I returned to the bedroom. Taurus was staring into his palms, looking defeated. I saw that he feared losing me even in these final moments—the last ninety-three minutes. His love for me was unambiguous, even naive, and it had been enough.

“You should have told me,” I said.

“I know, I know, I should have. I just thought it might be—cruel? And for what. Nothing would have changed, right?” He looked at me, still questioning my feelings for him.

“What about my family? My family.” Screaming and teeth-gritting were becoming regular in the last hour of life.

“You never—you didn't speak of them in the best of terms. I just thought—I thought maybe you—” “Maybe I what? Maybe I hated them? Even so.”

It was perhaps this that bared his naivety, his wish and insistence on everyone getting along. I pulled my backpack off the shelf, began stuff-

ing everything that fit into it, items that didn't belong to me, a piece of gum, a soy candle, an empty beer can. Even then, it was necessary to follow through with all the gestures of leaving.



Two years ago, briefly after our engagement, he'd suggested a visit. By then we'd been together for eight years.

"It would, y'know, be nice to meet them," he'd said in his usual understated way, but I sensed his confusion—was I trying to hide him from my family, or my family from him?

"They're not an easy bunch to be around," I'd said.

"Even so—" Taurus' back was to me, so I could only imagine his expression—perhaps sorrow, perhaps disappointment. Recognition of the missing pieces. Who were we, really, to each other, and to ourselves. I couldn't explain to him, someone who, daily, wore the landscape of his childhood, the memories of his first of everything as though they were woven into the fabric of his being, I couldn't explain what going there would do to me, that even the climate would reject me, a foreign substance, one contaminated with multiplicity. Taurus' love was simple because he'd been loved simply.

"Alright." I came up to his back, pressed my nose against his spine. "Maybe we can, someday."

A possibility, once acknowledged, was easy to put off. Taurus was placated enough to know I wasn't actively resisting the idea, and then, came the pandemic.



We were two bodies, orbiting one another, remaining in the same course from sheer force of gravity. Taurus covered his face and breathed into his palm. "I thought you would rather be with me and people who are actually nice to you."

Asteroid Violet-78, what a name for Earth's death sentence. Was the number signaling hope, as though there would be a 79th someday, a

continuation of the void? I smiled, unable to resist the human optimism programmed in me despite knowing better, despite everything that said otherwise.

“Where are you going?” Taurus said, more like a plea than a question.

“Home. To my mother and sisters.”

“They’re thousands of miles away.” He was right behind me, towering over my shoulders, trying to predict my movement. “Please, please, please. I’m sorry.”

I put down my bag and wrapped my arms around his waist. Taurus breathed a sigh of relief. “You are surrounded here. Everyone, everyone, as you said.”

He stared, seeing for the first time. “Was it wrong of me to want to belong?”

“No—it was wrong of me.” I picked my bag back up and closed my boyfriend’s childhood’s bedroom door behind me.



Outside.

Wind hissed between bare branches. Snowflakes perched on the bridge of my nose, my forehead. Or were they ash? The scorched remains of bees—Earth’s final season. The concentric shadow in the horizon hovered, silent. Magnifying in dimension and depth. The luminescence of denouement—its beastly, phantasmic beauty. I entered the coordinates of my mother’s country into my phone. I had forty minutes left. Heron, Loon, Egret, I chanted their names as I moved, for the first time toward love, distant and resolute: an epilogue. I walked away from the sky. I walked to keep on walking.

SONÁMBULO

Eric Odynocki

Forestero they call me

perhaps because I am

the only one among

the *muchedumbre de dormidos*

who sees in the dark.

Mountains cover their jagged spines

beneath ripened moon, embroider

these copper-dusted plains of amnesia,

these fields populated with sun-bleached

ruins of cottonwoods that sparkle as bones,

strewn among needle-braided cacti, verdant

tridents abandoned at the bottom

of a dead seabed.

We forget

names, languages, what

home means.

Winds *borran*

our faces.

Whisper me

a flame's blossom

for this chrysalis of *oscuridad*

to trace my forgotten steps

back to you.

Speckled owl perches nearby,

wings swallow horizon, eyes

glow as embers

in *velorio*.

Figures coalesce from shadows

to join us.

Grieving *guerrero* shields

his quetzal-haloed face. Tears leave ivory

scars down the *barranca* of his cheeks, pool

at his feet as a mirror to see the fallen.

Lost mother grins in moonlight. No prints

in the sands. Her *rebozo* tumbles

a star-dipped river that laps a canyon

in my heart.

*Carnaval-fringed peddler,
doubled-over with the weight of son,
sings, voice like silver smoke
retumba the impenetrable, decrypts
legends from warp and weft
of monarchs' wings. They spill
into the night sky in gold and amber
torrents, turn the Milky Way
into ebbing honey, urge,
Go north when the danger passes.*



First Flight to Mars | Serge Lecomte

INTERVIEW WITH MÓNICA DE LA TORRE

on Women in Concrete Poetry: 1959-1979

Adding to the great efforts of anthologizing concrete poetry undertaken by Emmett Williams, Mary Ellen Solt, Victoria Bean, and Chris McCabe, among others, Mónica de la Torre and Alex Balgiu's latest work gives us another collection of breathtaking poems by concrete poets around the world. In order to shed light on the context of and motivations for this anthology, Professor Mónica de la Torre has graciously agreed to answer the following questions.

Chime Lama: Why choose the time frame 1959-1979? Was there something notable about the concrete poetry produced during that time?

Mónica de la Torre: The earliest work in the anthology is from 1959, the latest from 1979, but the dates are not entirely coincidental. One of concrete poetry's foundational manifestos, the "Pilot Plan for Concrete Poetry" by the Brazilian Noigandres Group, formed by the brothers Haroldo and Augusto de Campos and Décio Pignatari, is from 1958. Eugen Gomringer's "From Line to Constellation," another seminal text, is from 1954. Once they realized they were venturing into similar territories, Gomringer and the Noigandres Group agreed to call their formal experiments concrete poetry. Suzanne Bernard's works in our anthology, gorgeously hand-drawn constellations of syllables and letter forms strewn about the page, are

from the book *Poèmes*, published in 1959. She was based in Paris, and Lettrism and Situationism would have informed her writing more than the early concrete poems of Gomringer and the Brazilians. In the autobiographical text *Le temps des cigales* (The Time of Cicadas, 1975), Bernard describes a moment of reading in which "words suddenly became silent, their meaning floating away in the distance, but my eyes remained irresistibly attached to the characters, there had been a tiny stimulus, like a door that opens, and closes, a flash of light, a little patch of empty blue...and soon the words, these tiny masses of black signs, stopped forming continuous, enclosed figures, they were nothing but the envelope, the encounter of living cells, active, in perpetual vibration...I genuinely experienced white space, the signs, reading suddenly becoming a concrete operation, a form of auscultation of thoughts...freed thoughts, meaning, all lights turned off...meaning from which

only a waning trail remains...” (Alex Balgiu, co-editor of the volume, translated Bernard’s excerpt).

“...a door that opens,
and closes, a flash of
light, a little patch of
empty blue...”

It’s interesting that Bernard uses the word *concrete* in personal terms, but not necessarily in relation to the movement. The latest series of works in the book, typewritten phrases including the word *corps* (body) alongside minimal geometrical forms, are from Ilse Garnier’s *Blason du corps féminin* (The Female Body’s Coat of Arms, 1979). She and her husband Pierre Garnier were frequent collaborators. They founded Spatialism, an inclusive movement that embraced visual poetry, sound poetry, concrete poetry, permutational poetry, etc. We decided to stop at 1979 for the sake of consistency, wanting to foreground an engagement with language as material that involved manual typesetting and dry transfer lettering (Letraset). By the 1980s, desktop computing completely transforms the way in which type is handled and therefore the composition process as well.

CL: Why is it important to focus on women concrete poets? Do

they have a history of underrepresentation, and if so, why?

MT: Very few women were included in the major anthologies of concrete poetry. In the context of the U.S., there are two: Emmett Williams’ *Anthology of Concrete Poetry* (Something Else Press, 1967) and Mary Ellen Solt’s *Concrete Poetry: A World View* (Indiana University Press, 1968). Solt’s gorgeous concrete poems of flowers are represented, as well as collaborations between Ilse and Pierre Garnier and the Czech poets Bohumila Grögerová and Josef Hiršal, who were also a couple. Oddly, a lot of the women in our book were close to the movement’s prominent figures too, such as Jennifer Pike and Paula Claire, close collaborators of the British poet Bob Cobbing, or Giulia Niccolai, whose partner in life and poetry was the poet Adriano Spatola, with whom she ran two important publishing endeavors: the journal *Tam Tam*, and the publishing house Edizioni Geiger in the 1970s. Besides resulting from the obvious workings of the patriarchy, women’s underrepresentation might have been related to the fact that some of the earlier exhibitions and anthologies helped disseminate ideas that only later would take hold in the imaginations of a wider circle of practitioners. The early advocates of the movement were part of identifiable constellations working in Brazil, the U.S., the U.K., and other European countries. Once

their ideas had attained a certain amount of visibility, they were simply in the air, and one didn't have to be an official member of the concrete poetry movement to compose works in that vein.

A key figure for us is the Italian artist and poet Mirella Bentivoglio. Her indefatigable efforts to connect women working at the intersection of word and image led her to curate fourteen women-only exhibitions between 1971 and 1981 in Italy and abroad. One such exhibition was *Materializzazione del linguaggio* (Materialization of Language), which she curated for the Venice Biennale of 1978. It featured the work of over eighty women artists working primarily with either *poesia visiva* (including text and images, often collaged) and/or concrete poetry (concentrating on the visuality of typography and writing and the sonic properties of words). Her work provided us with a map whose boundaries we expanded so as to include the work of women outside the European networks that she focused on.

“...in an attempt not only to arrive at formal innovations but also to articulate a radical politics and a feminist critique.”

We felt the need to present a

more accurate representation of the poetry that was engaging language's material properties at the time. So many women were incorporating typography, handwriting, and graphic space as part of the poem's syntax—and were doing so critically in an attempt not only to arrive at formal innovations but also to articulate a radical politics and a feminist critique. When I was beginning to work on this book, a very knowledgeable friend dared me to come up with the names of more than three women concrete poets. It delights me that there are around forty of them in this book that he didn't know about.

Mirella Bentivoglio's formulations still strike me as relevant. In the catalogue for *Materializzazione* she writes: “Mark-making and handwriting follow the circuits of memory, opening the floodgates to create intriguing maps of the energetic tensions presiding over the formation of thought before it's crystallized into verbal articulation...Writing-space and sound-time (sound-tempo) recreate the previously unified entity under the sign of a strangely interwoven rhythm.” In this era of heightened dissociation and disembodiment, I welcome her emphasis on writing that returns language to the body and that minds the body of language.

CL: How does an editor know when an anthology is complete or, rather, when to cease collecting work?

MT: The work is never finished. Thankfully editorial parameters are determined by the availability of certain resources: mainly, time and money. The book was scheduled to go to print on July 1. Once the novel coronavirus entered the picture, we had to work with what we had. That was that.

CL: Did you encounter any unforeseen limitations or challenges in the making of this anthology?

MT: Does the pandemic count?

CL: It certainly does.

CL: Concrete poetry, which began to take shape in the 1950s, engages the latest technology that a poet can get her hands on. How do you think the computer, with its easy access to design software, has affected this literary art form?

“It can be overwhelming to stray from traditional paths. Then again, isn’t that the magic of poetry?”

MT: I am surprised by the limited ways in which poets continue to present their work on the page now given that, more than ever, there are so many tools at one’s disposal. Beyond composing directly on the computer with design programs such as InDesign,

for instance, there are a variety of printing technologies that make it easier to produce one’s own publications, from good old inkjet printers to Risographs. The creative process does not need to restrict itself to writing only. It can incorporate production and distribution of the work as well. Possibilities seem endless, with video, social media, and new forms of sociality made possible by technology...It can be overwhelming to stray from traditional paths. Then again, isn’t that the magic of poetry? A brilliant line break is all you need to turn a sentence into verse.

CL: Yes, I too find that the conventions of writing are hard to break, despite the limitless opportunities for experimentation. On that note, would you please offer aspiring concrete poets some advice on how to break their conventional writing habits?

MT: I’d love to hear what you have to say about this, Chime, since your approach to composition works *against* habit. You seem to find a different formal solution to the set of issues thematized in each of your works. That’s a sure way to proceed. I’d recommend minding your materials. Avoid top-down composition, forcing words to behave the way you want them to. Activate them by collaborating with them, with the page, with sound, with silence. Acknowledge the agency of all of your materials: listen to them, take in their forms, their sounds,

their history—the ways others use them. Make room for others to engage with your work on their own terms. I know this may sound really abstract and thus hard to implement. All I can say is: I know I'm on the right track when I'm able to keep an open mind—when I surrender to the process and stop fetishizing results.

CL: Yes, when working with your materials leads you to unexpected places, I believe you're on the right track.

*Deepest gratitude to Professor de la Torre for her time and wisdom.
12/28/20*

The
**Brooklyn
Review**



**BIPOC
Mentorship
Contest**

This year, *The Brooklyn Review* conducted its first contest to offer mentorships to BIPOC writers of Fiction and Poetry. This opportunity was offered to BIPOC writers who had never been in an MFA program nor published a book with a publisher. Our esteemed Brooklyn College faculty members, Professors Madeleine Thien and Mónica de la Torre, kindly agreed to serve as the Fiction and Poetry mentors, respectively. We are happy to announce that the contest winners were Suzette Lam (Fiction) and Nicole Robitaille (Poetry), whose works are featured in this issue. May they have a fruitful mentorship!



Suzette Lam



Nicole Robitaille

LITTLE ADORAGONY / MĀYĀBLUES DRIVER

Aristilde Paz Justine Kirby

Little Adoragony / Māyāblues Driver

[Envoyelle Custom uni. 'Vājra Macrogram']

{μσε - μσε - μσε - μσε - εεε}

μ The 8 i | » ① Scales of cracked scarab shellac paint » ② Hails of soft graphite steel ash flake » ③ Ghost pepper eyeshade gradient »
 6 Nou 8 ii | » in Peachflesh & Embergriis weighs » pressured - moon a censor of rime, » smoke abets a mignonnette's charm. »
 ε Rin 8 iii | » heart against blushdrupe heather spike. » wildfires phoenix cremate our pines. » For you - my pulse solders, smolders. »

μ The 8 i | » ④ Prismatic coral polyps surface, » ⑤ Kiwi-pear moist obelisk » ⑥ A glaucous mucous nudibranch, »
 ε Nou 8 ii | » thatched to match sundog's arc ambit. » prolix in repeat black seed stud » membrane of bismuth maze sand waves, »
 6 Rin 8 iii | » Gum & teeth impress as prose hips. » along a peacelily's war club. » fanged, like a wet shank egg sac end. »

μ Rin 8 i | » ⑦ Oni orison sonrissa: » ⑧ Altair plasmopause placed on warm front, I-+10 » ⑨ "I want to kiss _____. Are ____ in?" »
 6 The 9 ii | » a bat babe's patagium smirkline hum. » ____ will be here till all the hells empty*10 » (I really...hope she's in here somewhere.) »
 ε Nou 8 iii | » Paniclé lock et f'ever spray. » & my lichtenberg veins blink out like a*10 » [Ball bell falls.] "May I make her out?" »

μ Rin 9 i | » ⑩ (Sigh. I said: Don't. Look.) The tails like a » ⑪ Mountain trail brisk apace trace wisps in » ⑫ Western ribbonsnake's concertina »
 6 The 9 ii | » pilfered Cassiope plait stashed in her » through the Lil Big Muff π pedal » Snaps To slate honeycomb garden tile Grid, »
 ε Nou 9 iii | » yogapant's waistband during a jog. » & makes my topline vocal run hot. » a lengthened maize alveolar click! »

μ Nou 8 i | » ⑬ 'Für Elise' on a Casio » ⑭ By a blue tear, tiger beetle » ⑮ Desire creates something but, »
 ε Rin 8 ii | » erodes sustained in a rhodes tone: » tracks an iris' fresh attract » I want you - not just whatever. »
 6 The 9 iii | » bold ochre & merlot double load. » at 120 bodylengths a beat. » To feel the hushed gush of pink thushness. »

ε Rin 17 i | » ⑯ As the rose en abyme said to the bolt-leashed bone-boy in the endgame: »
 6 The 17 ii | » ⑰ "Is that a proposal?" I'd love if we liked each other forever. »

((\ \ /- [Tadeuszka]-
 =(- -) = < Just saying, you can read each haikusque unit as a Single from Number to Number vertically,
 C()()() | or as a mix totally horizontally, crush blossom style, as one would a poem traditionally. »
 ~ Tractatist is next, which reveals the title of each unit. Here's a PSA while you're here:
~ Give the indigenou peoples back their land ~

SIDE A - My Adoragony

1. Mot's Spirit Level & M'ètreberry Feather [after Ginevra Shay]
2. Fata Laharla's Diamond Life In LA (Like As If II) [for Harryette Mullen]
3. Seasoning XOX
4. Impress Chiclet Ingrid's Hybrid Rainbow Omen
5. Popsicle (Like As If III)
6. Nudibranch / Mädchenfänger (Touching A Sandshark At The Aquarium On Sylvia's Birthday)
7. Pipistrelle / Passphrase (M4)
8. Sūnyatāgarasu's Ellipses (M5) [after Mónica de la Torre]
9. Ouija With You (New Ghost Body of Work Descending the Staircase, In There Somewhere)

SIDE B = Māyāblues Driver

10. Don't Look (C. mertensiana - 'Winter Breath')
11. Après-Midi Notes I: Lilith's Anointment ver. b
12. Après-Midi Notes II: Field Recording
13. Après-Midi Notes III: Aqua Viva / Alla Prima
14. Après-Midi Notes IV: Feminine Eye² (A bright cicindela depressula eureka)
15. Dianthusness & Such
16. "See Me For What I Am, Okay?"
17. MeMori Card
18. Spontaneous (Flying Lotus Cover)

THE BATHROOM

Kira Obolensky

It seems hard to believe that she, Darla, has met a Viscount through an online dating service, but he (his name she reminds herself is “Rupert”) has confirmed that yes, indeed, he does have a title. He did so with a self-deprecating shrug as if to say it was entirely out of his hands. They had their first date at a coffee shop near the museum, and he was perfectly charming. That’s what she told her girlfriend, Janet. “He was really charming, and he has an accent. Very Brit.” And Janet, who was grim and practical, told her some ridiculous story about men who courted women to marry them for their money. And Darla said, “I don’t have a goddam red cent because of Jay and his investments. I think he’s different from all the men out there, I think he’s actually a *gentleman*. And he likes me, Janet. And what’s not to like?”

Quite a few men in Darla’s past have been enraptured by her wide mouth, big lips, sexy curvaceous hips, long curly brown hair, and those certifiable twinkles in her gray eyes. And Rupert does seem to like her. Upon meeting her—*first sight chemistry* is how she described it to Janet—he actually kissed her hand in the European way. If she marries Rupert, she will be a Viscountess. Why this appeals to her so much is hard to say, but if someone—say her teenage son, Nick—put a gun to her head, she would admit that she has always believed a special man awaited her in this life. She believes that certain women (those with both sex appeal and brains, for example) *deserve* a higher quality of man than those women who are less blessed. She also realizes she is at the point in her life when such expectations might need to be adjusted.

You don’t have a Viscount to dinner every day, and Darla, who is descended from peasants and other poor people with dirty hands, wants dinner to be perfect. She contemplates her five-hour beef bourguignon with crimini mushrooms, tender and delicious. Also, a salad heavy on frisée because she read about it in a magazine. They’ve seen each other twice already and tonight is the magic night, the one when certain mysteries may be revealed—where Darla lives, a taste of her domestic life—and perhaps, if the evening goes well, a kiss, a feel, a rehearsal for intercourse, which Darla wants to save until later. Far too frequently, she jumps into bed on the first or second date because there seems to be nothing else to do. She’d like the Viscount to understand she is a person of moral fiber. Rupert insists that no one call him Viscount, but

it lingers in the air above him, kind of like a crown. Do Viscounts wear crowns?

Darla is wearing a silk dress for this evening, purchased from a catalogue. It is, actually, *habutai* silk, a name she has practiced saying in case someone asks. The dress has hibiscus flowers painted on it. Hibiscus, *habutai*, habitual. Yes, it's true she has worn this dress before in similar circumstances—menu the same—but the gentlemen had been an insurance adjuster on his fourth marriage, and a fellow real estate agent who wore a toupée.

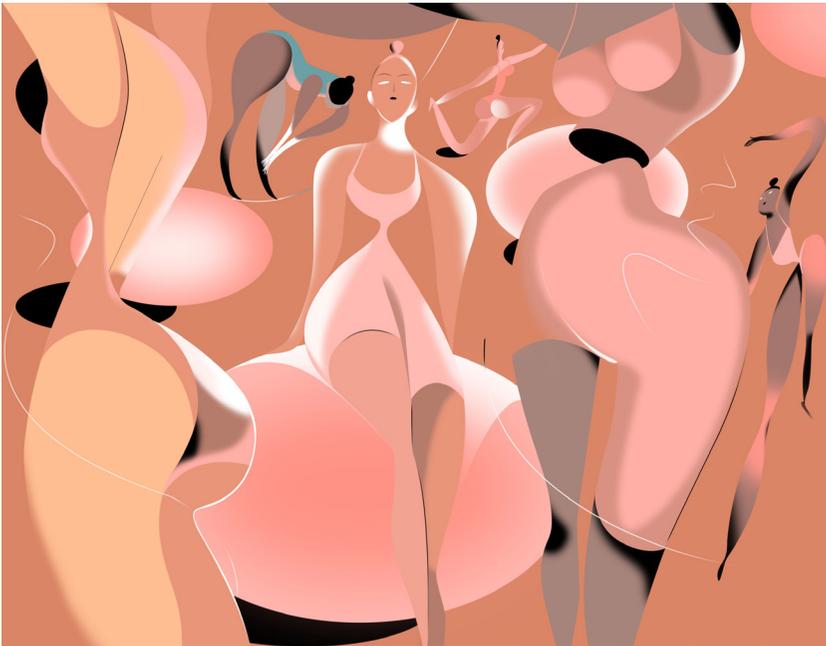
Darla checks her apartment for roaches. She doesn't see any dead bodies, and the bug spray has left behind a lilac haze. It's a nice apartment, off Westheimer. Darla makes a good living as a real estate agent, specializing in Houston's condo market, but she's tired of selling. And the men she meets at bars and barbeques—she's tired of them, too. If life is a ladder, then Viscounts sit near the top, and she is still nimble and flexible enough to scamper on up.

This online dating service (for which she paid a substantial fee) is different from the others. More high class. Lots of executives. Rupert is also a ranch owner. A very interesting man, actually, whose foreign breeding might exempt him from the crude exchange of the American dating scene. And Darla is certain he notices just how good looking she is. Too good-looking for Jay, her former lout of a husband, who despite her beauty, said in that off-country drawl of his, "Shit, Darla, you are an iceberg." In that relationship, she'd been fond of the word, "idiot," which sometimes sounded like "ijit" when she felt particularly furious. Her former husband worked at Brown Petrochemicals, and everyone down there was always buying some fool ass oil field like it was a lottery ticket. Shitty ol' jerk, she says to herself and then hits delete as these are not appropriate words for a Viscountess.

The image of herself as royalty floats in the air, and she worries briefly about her lipstick. She should check it. But that would entail a visit to the bathroom, and she has concerns about the bathroom. Usually, the bathroom—with its lace shower curtains, old-fashioned pedestal sink, and powder pink walls—is the picture of decorum. But lately, whenever she wants to impress somebody, pictures of naked women start appearing on the walls. The women are young and the positions lurid: cut out from some encyclopedia of pornography. Are they *her* fantasies,

she wonders, or merely an accumulation of excess sexuality that she can't seem to escape? At times, she's convinced that the appearance of the women must be connected to the fantasy life of her son, who she is quite certain began having sex at the ripe old age of fourteen. Can a teenage sex dream manifest itself only to the mother of said teenager? Because Nick says nothing about it....Other times, she wonders if the women have arrived to taunt her with impending menopause.

The doorbell clangs again. She pops into the bathroom to confirm that the ladies are, indeed, arriving on the walls. Darla quickly checks her lips in the mirror and hangs a hand towel over the blonde sex kitten, who leers at her above the sink.



Soft Peach | Yadi Liu

Rupert, oh Rupert, she sings to herself. At the door she sniffs under her arms. The silk can make her sweat in unappealing ways, but she has applied two layers of heavy-duty deodorant. She marvels at all the chemicals she has to put on her body to help herself not smell. Sometimes the bathroom is thick with aerosol, dense with chemical fog. She squirts a quick shot of minty breath spray in her mouth and opens the door with a grand flourish. Only, there, ruining the view, is Marvin, her stepdad.

“Marvin, what the hell, I’ve got a date.”

“Hey, baby, you look like a house on fire.” Marvin steps inside. He’s wearing two kinds of plaid, and his thinning hair has recently been combed—she can see the too vigorous marks of the comb on his scalp.

She blocks the door with her body. “Marvin, I’m having company tonight.”

“You sure look like you are, and it smells fantastic—son of a gun! Is that your five-hour beef?”

“Marvin, Marvin. Will you listen to me?” But he’s already found his way into the kitchen and pulled up a stool to the slow cooker.

“I’ll tell you what,” Darla bargains, “you want a quick taste? And then I want you to leave. I’ve got a date. An important date.”

He sticks his tongue out and pants, pretending he’s a dog. Darla moves quickly and gets him a small serving. She has made extra, so there will still be plenty for tonight. The beef is falling apart, succulent, and very savory. Her mouth waters as she looks at it. She tastes it—oh, yes, delicious. But her hand slips and a small brown spot gets on her dress. “Damn it,” she exclaims, “look at this mess!” She can’t have Rupert to dinner with a big brown stain on her chest. She’ll apply the spot remover as soon as Marvin settles down.

“You got any bread?”

She gets him two slices of white with some heart-healthy spread. He’s got to watch his weight, Marvin; she’s certain he’s going to have a cardiac event soon. She worries about him. He’s the only parent she’s got left, even if he’s not biological, and he wanders around like a lost pet. He is anxious he says because everyone he really loves dies. He looks at her when he says this, which is virtually every other day, and pleads, “Don’t you go dying on me.” Darla isn’t ready to die, but Marvin’s obsession, his constant reminders of the looming bucket at the end make her feel slightly frantic, and tonight she responds to his request to not die with a pent up, “Sex and death, sex and death, that’s all anyone talks about!” Marvin’s been helpful with her son, since the divorce. *Nick*. She bolts to attention. Where did Nick say he was going to be? He has a date. That

means he'll be out late, way past curfew. Nick is a total sex hound; his desire has become a constant reminder of her own misspent youth. All of it makes her supremely uncomfortable. And her friends agree—it is more than strange to wake up in the morning to discover one of their son's or daughter's special friends in the bathroom.

The bathroom! She's got to get this spot off her chest, and she's got a Tide stick in the medicine cabinet. She heads for it, the doorbell rings again, she calls out, "just a minute," pops in and notices another beaver shot, this one near the toilet paper. She wants to rip it off, but the pictures will not release from the wall; they have been burned in, a permanent tattoo. She's getting flustered and forgets the stain on her dress, washes her hands, and exits to the foyer to discover Marvin shaking hands with her Viscount.

"I see you've met my stepdad, Marvin Crowley." She smiles at Rupert, who is wearing a suit with a very charming yellow tie.

Rupert is the kind of guy—she will tell this to Janet later—who knows exactly what to say in a tense situation. He smiles and ever so gently pats Marvin on the shoulder and announces he is glad to know there's no reason for him to feel jealous.

"What the hell, why on earth would you be jealous?" asks Marvin. Darla sees Marvin about to sit on the plum sectional, and so she grabs his arm and pulls. "Because you aren't my date, this gentleman is."

While Marvin ponders the complexities of this statement, Darla tries to navigate him to the front door. He's acting like a guard dog, and he breaks free, teeth bared in a smile, and says, "I'd like to know your intentions, sir, on account of what this lady here had to endure with her asshole of a first husband." This makes Rupert squirm a little. And in Darla's moment of embarrassment, she loses hold of her stepfather, and he sinks down on the couch next to Rupert, who seems charmed by the old guy.

She has vacuumed earlier in the day and the carpeting, a nice synthetic, looks like freshly mown grass. The photographs, framed in shades of peach, illustrate various good times spent on beaches. She has carefully selected the images to show no sign of Jay and to offer a view of her legs, which are still cellulite-free, without blue veins. She and Nick went

to Mexico just after the divorce, and the photos are proof of survival, of life after death. Rupert, she notices, crosses his legs but first hitches up his trousers. Marvin watches his every move and then offers the man a beer.

“Oh, no. No beer. No, thank you,” he says, with a smile that reveals a set of very pink gums.

Darla offers, “I have some nice Chardonnay?”

And he nods as one might nod to a servant, and Darla scuttles out to pour the Chardonnay, wishing to high heaven that Marvin could be air-lifted out of the room.

She pours just the tiniest amount in the glass, conscious of too much liquid for her guest. It will be easier for her if he doesn't use the bathroom tonight. When she returns with the wine, she finds Marvin stuck in an eye-lock with the Viscount. He is fond of showing how he has a kind of hypnotizing effect with his eyes. The world is filled with so much to believe in, and lately, Darla has recognized that it's simply okay to think you can hypnotize with your eyes. Certainly, explaining otherwise to Marvin would be a tedious process. When Marvin stares like that his eyebrows, which look to Darla like something she might want to exterminate, fuse together, creating a kind of hair shelf above his eyes. The Viscount is looking worried, and Darla leaps in, wondering if he has had a good trip. He was just in London for a week.

Rupert brightens up his British accent and says, “Righto, duckie,” and Marvin, not missing a beat, letting go of the eyebrow trick, parries with, “What is that voice, anyway?”

And Darla explains that the Viscount, excuse me *Rupert*, is from England originally, and suggests that it would be a good time for Marvin to skedaddle. The last thing she wants is for Marvin to get in some kind of political discussion with her date.

“What the hell do you think of this war?” Marvin's son, Leonard, his biological son, the one he had with his first wife, was killed in a roadside bombing ten months ago.

The Viscount clears his throat. He has probably read in some etiquette

book that it is intensely rude to bring up politics the first time you meet someone. Darla deftly changes the subject to the hors d'oeuvres, which she explains as "Italian savories," cantaloupe slices wrapped in thinly sliced smoked ham. She asks Marvin once again if he might be leaving soon and he says, "Not if you're serving ham," and shoots to the bathroom for a piss.

What Darla has not realized until now is that the convenient layout of the condo puts the bathroom near the living room, and the Viscount and Darla can hear the sound of Marvin's urine hitting the toilet bowl, one of those sounds that cannot be mistaken. Marvin seems to wield some kind of garden hose in his pants, and Darla thinks to herself it can't be good for the kidneys to hold so much pee for so long. The time is not right for Nina Simone but Darla puts her on anyway to help cover the pour and splash. Rupert is looking at his fingernails, which Darla has admired on their earlier date. His cuticles shine like crescent moons in a flesh sky. He seems older than he did in the coffee shop. He is very clean. He emanates a translucent pink health. He looks up and winks at her and says, "You look beautiful tonight, Darla, and the scent is really marvelous." Sometimes he'll do this, use a word so that Darla has just the slightest confusion. The "scent:." Does he mean her perfume or the smell of the meat in the kitchen? She demurs and says, "Oh, really, you are the most charming...."

He kisses her hand and his eyes look kind of moist and, in the background, the sounds from the bathroom conflict with his deep pearly voice. Darla breaks away, feeling slightly weak in the knees.

"Was it a successful trip?" she asks.

Very, he assures her. He collects commodes, which aren't really what they seem like, at least in the South but more like armoires, and he explains that a very special commode was for sale in London, and that he has purchased it for the ranch house.

Every time Darla tries to imagine the ranch house a kind of visual cacophony begins to pound in her head. How could this special commode work in what she envisions as a low-slung house with dry scrub and probably cacti all around? But then she too has tried to transform her bathroom, once cool and contemporary, into a kind of Victorian fantasy with eyelet curtains and a carved wooden toilet seat and wallpaper pat-

terned with warm pink pansies. That's, of course, what she'd prefer the bathroom to be, only it seems to have another idea of what it should look like. Houses are, and Darla knows this because she sells real estate, projections of our fantasies about our lives. So, he is a cowboy, and she is a feminine, ladylike creature from another century. Only in her house, that vision is continually intercepted with visions of crude, crude flesh as if there's some kind of invisible flypaper that has to catch every dirty thought in its glue.

Marvin exits the bathroom wiping his hands on his pants. He's got a big smile on his face, and Darla wonders if he's been admiring the exhibition on the bathroom walls.

Rupert, she notices, is enjoying her savories. His wine glass is empty. She takes it with the pretense of getting it filled—she needs to check on the bathroom—when there's a rustle at the door, the kind of thunk that happens—when bodies fall against it. And Marvin, alert to possible burglars, draws his gun, and opens the door slowly to find Nick and his girlfriend making out. They fall into the vestibule, which makes the Viscount stand up and Darla shout, "Put the gun down, Marvin, you're scaring me to death!"

Nick does not make the best first impression, which is perhaps the reason Darla avoids introducing him to her friends. He is seventeen going on five. His hair, which he dyes himself in the bathroom, is very black like a doll's black hair, and he keeps it long. He has his father's large feet and skinny legs and Darla's fat insouciant lips. He looks like the devil got hold of Mick Jagger and offered him eternal youth. Thankfully, Nick hasn't developed his father's horrible temper. He's handsome, and up until recently, has been a nice kid. Lately, though, he's become so sullen...and then that girlfriend of his, Zoë, who is a "filth dancer" for a band called Faggot. Darla sincerely hopes this doesn't come up. The two of them look wrapped in a cocoon of spun hair.

"Didn't you have a date?" she asks him pointedly.

"Movie doesn't start until nine. Anyway, I thought *you* had a date," he says.

"That's right, I do have a date and he is sitting right there," she explains in the voice she reserves for the mentally challenged and her relatives. "And dinner tonight is for my date. And me. Me and my date. That's it."

She expects this will clearly convey to Marvin, Nick, and Zoë that it is time for them to make their departures.

“Chill, Mom,” says Nick. “How’s it hanging, dude?” he says to the Viscount, and to Marvin, he just plain salutes. Marvin tells Nick he’s looking fine and winks at him. He’s put his gun back in his knee holster. The Viscount wants more wine, and he entreats Marvin to pour him a full glass.

“Hey, Mom, it smells really good,” Nick says.

“Smells really good,” echoes Miss Filth Dancer like some kind of sex-craved parrot. When Darla first met the girl, she asked Nick what she actually wears to do this dancing. His answer—a fish taco—still rings in her ears. How can you wear a fish taco wonders Darla, who doesn’t want to think too hard about it.

The kids head for Nick’s bedroom, entangled in one another’s arms. The Viscount sips from a full glass of white wine while navigating an onslaught of questions from Marvin, now on his third Michelob, about his ranch: what kind of cow, “longhorns;” where, “outside Brownsville;” who works on the ranch, “cowboys, immigrants,” etc., etc.

Darla attempts to derail Marvin from his detective work and insists loudly, “Time to eat!” This stops the conversation in its tracks and lures Nick and his girlfriend from the bedroom. They walk in, draped over each other, her hair now boasting an enormous rat’s nest. Marvin deftly adds plates and cutlery to the romantic table she spent hours setting. Darla wants to blow a whistle. Then she wants to reach for Marvin’s gun and point it at these unwanted guests and insist that they leave. But she won’t do that because she would like to make a good impression on the Viscount and potential Viscountesses don’t threaten to shoot their relatives.

Marvin reaches for the beef and immediately begins serving himself, while Nick and Filth Girl grope one another under the table. She cannot help but notice that Rupert has not yet made a trip to the bathroom. She imagines that the walls must now be covered floor to ceiling—the ladies multiplying like mold. She tries to focus on the dinner but half expects the women to come to the table hungry for some of her good cooking.

Everything is tasty, that is for certain, and perhaps why the conversation takes a sharp turn south towards that awful place, Lull. The silence at the table is, Darla knows, a conspiracy of men. She wishes she could ally herself with the girl, and she half gets the idea to ask her a real question when she catches Zoë looking at her. Hatred always surprises Darla. Zoë must notice that Nick finds his mother attractive, and they've always had a sweet relationship—kind of like best friends, people who survived that dangerous amusement park ride of her first marriage, and who are inextricably connected because of that. Until Nick's hormones kicked in just at the time her hormones kicked out. Now both of them are repulsed by the former attraction. But the girlfriends always know, the same way animals know these things, that Darla was in her way, competition.

Marvin is getting that look on his face that signals to Darla that he is going to talk about his dead son. She brightly offers more food, but Marvin interrupts with, "Leonard wanted to join the army and goddamnit *why*, I asked him, you don't have to be a hero, son, you are a grown man! There's got to be more out there for you than going to some hellish country to make *more* hell." The shadows from the wilting Ficus tree in the corner loom enormous and threatening behind him. He traces an imaginary target on the tablecloth, a spot for his tears to fall and they do. His sadness stains them all, and it is a pool so deep Darla could drown. The echo and ring of his, "make more hell," have formed a cloud over the table.

Rupert sips his wine. His little finger is, Darla notices, slightly cocked, waving at the light fixture.

"We'll be out soon," says the Viscount, confidentially. He must have information they are not privy to, some tip from a stockbroker.... Darla idly wonders what kind of car he drives. She realizes she has not discovered this yet. It bothers her that she doesn't know this fact. Glancing down, she sees the spot on her dress, which has sent long greasy veins into the silk. She's got that spot remover in the bathroom, and when she can, she'll slip away and see what can be done.

"Of course," says Rupert, "From a different perspective—" and he clearly has that perspective—wealthy? foreign? "It does seem to me that this country is quite marvelous. You can have whatever you want." That silences Marvin who can't have anything he wants, not money,

not retirement, not even his son. Darla, who is no communist, worries about Marvin's reaction until Nick looks up from his plate to announce, "Hey, if they reinstate the draft, I won't have to live with you." Darla nods in shocked agreement. Moving out is not a bad idea, thinks Darla: Nick could just go and live with Marvin. She says, with an apology in her voice, that her son is the child of divorce, and then the Viscount stands up rather abruptly.

"Excuse me, if you would?" he asks. And he heads to the bathroom.

Darla stops breathing. Marvin tells her how delicious the dinner is, and how well he thinks it's going with this guy. The sound of the toilet's flush seems to shake the table. Nick asks his mother why she's holding her breath and Darla exhales, a loud flush itself. The count returns to the table, shaking his head and chuckling. His hands are in his pockets. "What a bathroom," he says.

"Don't I know it," agrees Darla. There is a small chance, she thinks, that he actually admires the bathroom's interior design and not the youthful fleshpots on the walls.

Dinner finishes and because the evening is required to be a total disaster, no partial bombing, no incomplete subterfuge for her, Jay calls to leave a message on her machine, which she has forgotten to turn off, or down, and so mid-ice cream, Rupert eating fast, Marvin lost in his grief, Jay's voice comes blasting in, "For fuck's sake, Darla, why do you have to be such a cunt! I'll send the money for Nick's school on Monday. I always send it on Monday." The brown blotch on top of the flower on her dress has transmuted one of the hibiscuses into the shape of an upside-down heart.

The Viscount looks down at his plate as if something cute there is now dead. Nick comes to his mom's rescue and describes his dad as a pinheaded dickhead. Darla nods in agreement. Marvin wants to change the subject, so he asks Darla how business goes.

"It's slowed down," she says. No one wants to make changes now, they are gripping tight to what they have, unable to imagine new lives in new homes. "Well, we did good," says Marvin, referring to the empty dishes. The tablecloth displays the spills of everyone's appetites. There are the most stains near Marvin's plate; he's not averse to tilting his

plate to get all the gravy. Still, he's a good man; when her father left, he married her mother and raised her as if she were his own daughter. When her mother was dying, he nursed her like she was a baby bird. And he's stuck around; he checks in on her, even when it's oppressive, and she appreciates his loyalty. And of course, he's lonely too. "You are one fantastic cook," Marvin says to Darla. He nods with pride.

"Yeah, Mom, thanks for the grub," mumbles Nick as he leaves the table.

"Tasty stuff," says Nick's companion. She looks somewhat forlorn. She must feel entirely abandoned on stage dancing in her tortilla. "Read," Darla wants to tell the girl. "Biographies!"

She hopes the kids are on their way out to see a movie or something but hears the bedroom door open and shut.

She's got a wickedly good liquid soak for stains near the washer. The tablecloth will be salvaged, made clean once again for the ritual of messing it up. Darla too, made clean every day, dirty, clean, dirty, clean—and the Viscount as well, even he must sweat. Yes, the night is coming to an end and mysteries must be revealed because people cannot help but tell their stories even without words. She has been damaged, and Marvin has been ruined, and the Viscount must have his own mysteries, with his ranch house and commode collection.

Anxiety, worry, panic start driving around like bumper cars in her chest. Marvin is making noises that he's going to go for the night. That leaves her alone with Rupert who will probably trip over himself getting out the door. She needs to go to the bathroom, see the damage, and eliminate the spot on her dress.

She sits on the carved wooden toilet seat. The walls palpitate with the women. Floor to ceiling, every kind of sexual position, every kind of insanely ridiculous pose has been emblazoned on her bathroom walls. The poses are not unknown to her: her former husband had an X-rated movie director's vision of how things should go in the bedroom. She had lured him with sex, she'd held it out like a doggy treat, imagining at the time that the promise of pleasure would ensure a deep and abiding love. It was the only language she knew as a young woman—the lure of the physical—until it disappeared in thin air, and Jay, hungry for something she couldn't give him, and angry at her for what she did give him,

left her for someone younger and presumably more nubile. She can hear muted ecstasy coming from Nick's bedroom. The problem, she considers, has always been the walls. They are too thin in these modern places.

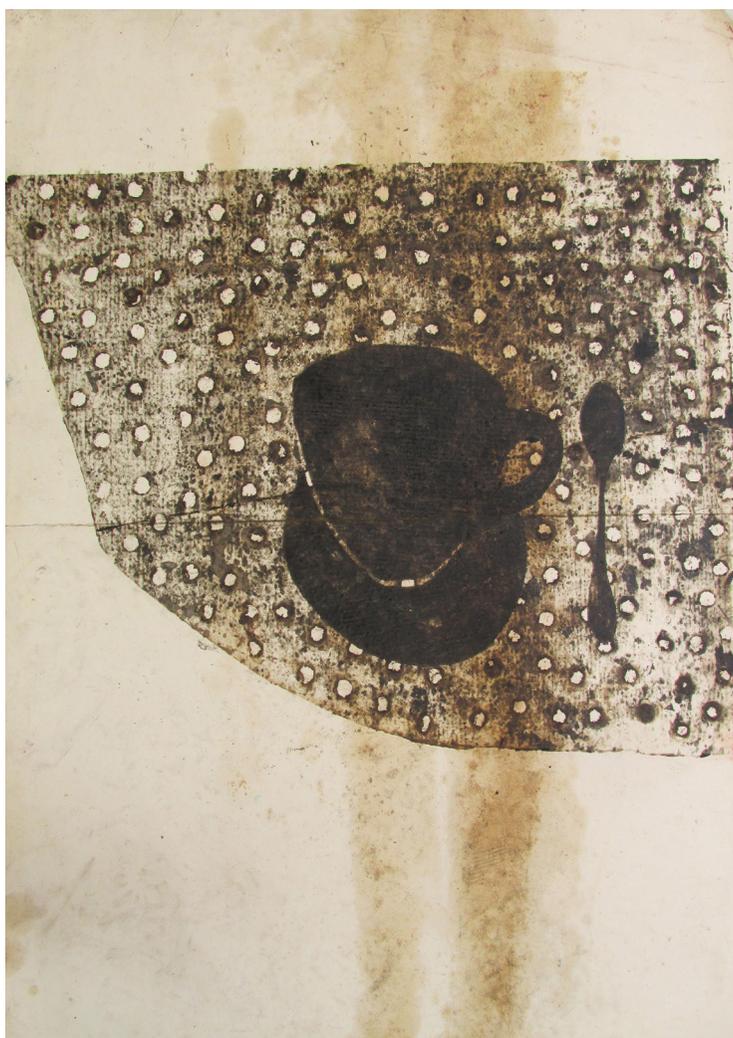
The ladies aren't going anywhere, not tonight. She flushes the toilet to make it sound as if she had real business in the bathroom and takes the spot remover from the cabinet. It promises the smell of rain. She dabs the remover on the brown spot, and the chemical makes the silk translucent. The edge of her bra appears. Painting it down the tendrils, she draws the shape of the stain with the remover's wand. The grease stays put. She wonders if the remover is past its prime and she tests it on one of the fleshpots on the wall. It eats the girl right up like it's ravenous. *A dab will do you* is the spot remover's slogan, but now Darla wields it like it's a paintbrush.

Another woman disintegrates. She has transformed the sexpot from a round and luxurious beauty into a faded cadaver. The smell of fake rain is beginning to make her feel dizzy, and the mask of death grins at her from the walls. Feeling sorry, Darla focuses on a blonde on all fours. She's got tight buttocks and a saucy smile. Oh honey, she murmurs, you are going to have to get a life. She touches her and is surprised to feel that the wall is warm. She leans against it, and then rubs her back on it, creating instant static electricity. The silk dress clings to her skinny frame, she can't get it to release—it has formed a kind of sheath that reveals the small mound of her belly, the sharpness of her hips and knees.

The smell of fake rain, the rot on the walls, the lurking, half-lit evening ahead of her—all of it makes her feel electrically charged. She shakes her head to get her bearings. Her monogrammed towel, virginal and pink, rests unused on the side of the sink.

Can she keep this up much longer—this curling of hair and lengthening of eyelash, this battle against time and smell? She imagines the Viscount's hands on her bones. A hug would be nice. A deep hug. She'd like to feel the man's heartbeat. Or, even better, a courtly dance. She wants to imagine herself wearing an elegant gown; she wants to gain access to Rupert's fairy-tale but the bathroom won't let her. She tries not to look but one woman winks at her. This is a first. They have never done that before.

He seems like such a dignified, nice man. She wonders if his hands will be greedy or comforting. She's crying now, mostly an irritation in her eyes—she realizes she's rubbed them—and they are beginning to burn. And then, tears wiped away, she marches out to find Rupert waiting for her at the table, looking into the small pond of coffee in his cup as if he too is making a wish.



Zinc et Café | Giusto Pilan

100 THINGS THAT MORE OR LESS HAPPENED BETWEEN ME AND YOU

Marcy Rae Henry

1. I was sleeping in red satin sheets that smelled of you when, out of the blue, you called and said: *I met a guy and I'm going to sleep with him tomorrow.*
2. I hung up the phone. And said nothing to you for the next two years.
3. We'd been together non-stop for many years and I should have said: *I hope you think it's worth it.*
4. The following night, I unplugged the answering machine.
5. But the phone rang and rang until I yanked it out of the wall.
6. Maybe you wanted to tell me you weren't fucking the guy.
7. Maybe you wanted to tell me there was no guy and you'd said it just to hurt me.
8. Perhaps you got an idea from Prince: *...she just picked up the phone/dropped it on the floor/ahh-ahh was all I heard.*
9. From your hometown, you emailed me a long, twisty note with no sorry and no explanation.
10. *If you want me to come home, I'll come.*
11. It dawned on me that a "quick trip" to your hometown had turned into a move to your hometown.
12. I didn't click reply. I didn't think I needed to explain that we were no longer entwined.
13. A year ticked by and I moved too, taking our books, sheets, camera collection, telescope.
14. You showed up at my new apartment unannounced.

15. Actually, you and my friend showed up at my apartment.
16. You had her ring my bell and ask me to come down.
17. I didn't even know you were in Chicago, but I declined the invitation to come out and play.
18. I was getting ready to go on a date.
19. Perhaps you hid across the street and watched me get into a car and drive away with some guy who did exist and who I did sleep with, badly and briefly.
20. When I came home, your voice was on my answering machine.
21. *I was there today too. Call me at this number. I want to see you.*
22. I changed my phone number.
23. Another year clomped by, and you emailed to tell me the aforementioned friend was leaving Chicago. You thought I'd want to say goodbye.
24. When I went to say just that, she was on the phone with you.
25. I pretended I didn't know I was set up.
26. When she shoved the phone in my face, I shook my head: *No, no, no.*
27. Then I said *Hello?* as if I didn't know it was you and you...you were soft and gentle like you were when I met you, and you disarmed me with every question, every word.
28. Behind me, my friend was packing and maniacally emptying her second-story apartment.
29. I whispered to you: *She has to be out tonight and she's throwing things out the window.*
30. You laughed: *Like what?*
31. *Barstools, clothes, toilet cleaner...I hope she doesn't kill someone.*

32. When you said: *I think of you always*, I thought of how every time you took your love away, it nearly killed me.

33. You asked if you could call me later, as if we hadn't already gone through all that before: you-love-me, you-love-me-not, you-love-me-eternally, you-love-me-not.

34. You added: *No matter what, I've always loved you. I've always known I could never love anyone but you.*

35. I told you: *Love is a verb.*

36. But I found myself on the phone with you day after day, intrigued by the stories you told, what you were reading—Cioran, Shōnagon—and, mostly, by you.

37. You explained *Mulholland Dr.* in four words: *It's easy; she's sadistic.*

38. You sent me Lhasa's second album, *The Living Road*, hoping we could forge a different path.

39. It was easy to activate my hope. I wanted to know you again as much as I wanted you to know me.

40. You emailed: *Do you remember how perfectly, how ecstatically we fit together?*

41. I didn't say that you scared me, that I was just waiting for you to bail again.

42. You asked: *Can I come see you? I need to tell you some things in person.*

43. One week after my friend tossed her belongings from the window, you flew back to the city where we'd lived, breathing into each other, for years.

44. You returned to Chicago, where we'd shared a bank account, a toaster, a beat-up white car, and red satin sheets.

45. It was strange that you were "visiting" me. And the minute you

arrived and reached for my belt, it felt completely natural.

46. But for the first time, I told you: *No*. I wanted to talk.

47. I wanted to ask: *¿Qué chingados estás haciendo en mi depa? En mi vida? Is this just a fuck-fest? What do you expect?*

48. You aren't the type of woman used to being told no and you looked as if I'd stabbed you.

49. *Sorry...*you mumbled—ironically, for wanting to have sex with me, not for supposedly going off to have sex with some guy when we were one.

50. You said: *In the years we've been apart, I haven't been with anyone. Not even a kiss.*

51. Everyone I told this to scoffed and said you were lying. But when I met you, you hadn't been with anyone for years, and you were unusual enough for it to once again be true.

52. I don't know if I wanted it to be true. But I didn't say the same thing. Nor did I say: *After I hung up on you two years ago, I cried myself raw.*

53. And I kept crying, even while dating someone else.

54. While dating someone else, I didn't hide the fact that I still needed to cry.

55. From you I didn't hide the fact that I dated someone else.

56. Our mutual friend had mistakenly told you she was French.

57. When I admitted she was German, you replied: *I prefer to think of you with someone calling out: Oui, mam'selle, oui!*

58. Then you explained how every day we'd been apart, you felt something was terribly wrong and how, if you couldn't live with me, you preferred to live in solitude.

59. Every conversation turned serious. And ended with: *Do you still love me?*

60. I didn't want to give in so easily, but I knew it was inevitable that I'd admit many things with my body.

61. And, even as you ate me, I feared you'd take a bite out of my pleasure center—so no one else would ever find it.

62. You smelled better than anything I'd ever experienced, so I ignored my fear and everything I'd been doing, just so I could take in your naked smell.

63. Our sex life picked up where it left off. And though I couldn't trust you, I couldn't get enough of you.

64. You said: *I'm not going to say no one will ever love you as profoundly as I do, but no one will ever eat you like I do.* It sounded like a challenge.

65. But then you left and solitude engulfed me. You sent flowers, cards, plants, and plans for our future.

66. It infuriated you that I stayed late at work or didn't email you back in time.

67. If you couldn't reach me because I stopped at the grocery store after work, you wanted to know exactly what I bought.

68. Amazing what a week of sex and hope had done.

69. You sent a scented love letter inside a first edition of *The Lover* by Duras. *I know you're busy, but I need to know I'm your only lover.*

70. I couldn't deny it—I was open to an open relationship with anyone but you.

71. So, I sent a letter saying: *You are the only one and I need to see you, touch you, taste you every day.*

72. You traveled without me and I got postcards asking if we should move to England. You quoted Gibran: *When love beckons to you, follow her...*

73. We attached pictures of ourselves to emails and your beauty overwhelmed me.

74. As time shuffled on, I was less clear about what we were doing. I invoked Gibran: *The sword hidden among her pinions is wounding me from afar.*

75. Still discussing where we could live together, we decided to meet up somewhere between the cities where we were living apart.

76. You chose one place and I another. It was you I wanted to see, so I conceded.

77. I arranged our plane tickets and didn't tell anyone what we were planning. I didn't tell you I could express all parts of myself with you, even if I couldn't love all parts of you.

78. One day I walked down Barry Ave., right where you'd once smacked me, in the middle of the street, in the middle of summer.

79. Someone called the cops, but as I stood there, I remembered they didn't take two girls fighting on Barry Ave. very seriously.

80. I also remembered how you rubbed me down with ice cubes and how, no matter the season, we'd often do nothing but talk and make love all day.

81. On the phone that night I didn't tell you about walking down Barry Ave. You mentioned you didn't like penetration with men and I didn't ask: *Why are you telling me this?*

82. Before we hung up you added: *I want to kiss you from your widow's peak to your monte de Venus,* and it set me on fire.

83. Then you sent an email saying you didn't want to meet up halfway between our respective homes after all.

84. You didn't explain why.

85. I figured you wanted to be in charge, pay, arrange everything your way, make me chase you.

86. Maybe you wanted me to pay for surviving without you.

87. Perhaps Prince played it perfectly: *Maybe you're just like my mother/she's never satisfied...*

88. Neither was I. I wanted you to tell me what happened. I wanted to understand.

89. But down deep I knew; if I ever got answers, they'd more likely come from someone or something other than you.

90. That's how Ted Bundy comes into play.

91. My friend, a writer of YA books, recently told me about her fascination with Bundy and Ann Rule's relationship.

92. She said Bundy dropped out of college, worked minimum wage jobs, was emotionally immature, and lacked ambition. So his girlfriend dumped him.

93. He went back to school, got his act together, and though years had gone by, he got his girl back.

94. They planned a future, planned to get married, and when he was sure he'd hooked her, he gave her the cold shoulder.

95. He wanted to decide if and when the relationship was done—and he figured out a way to do it.

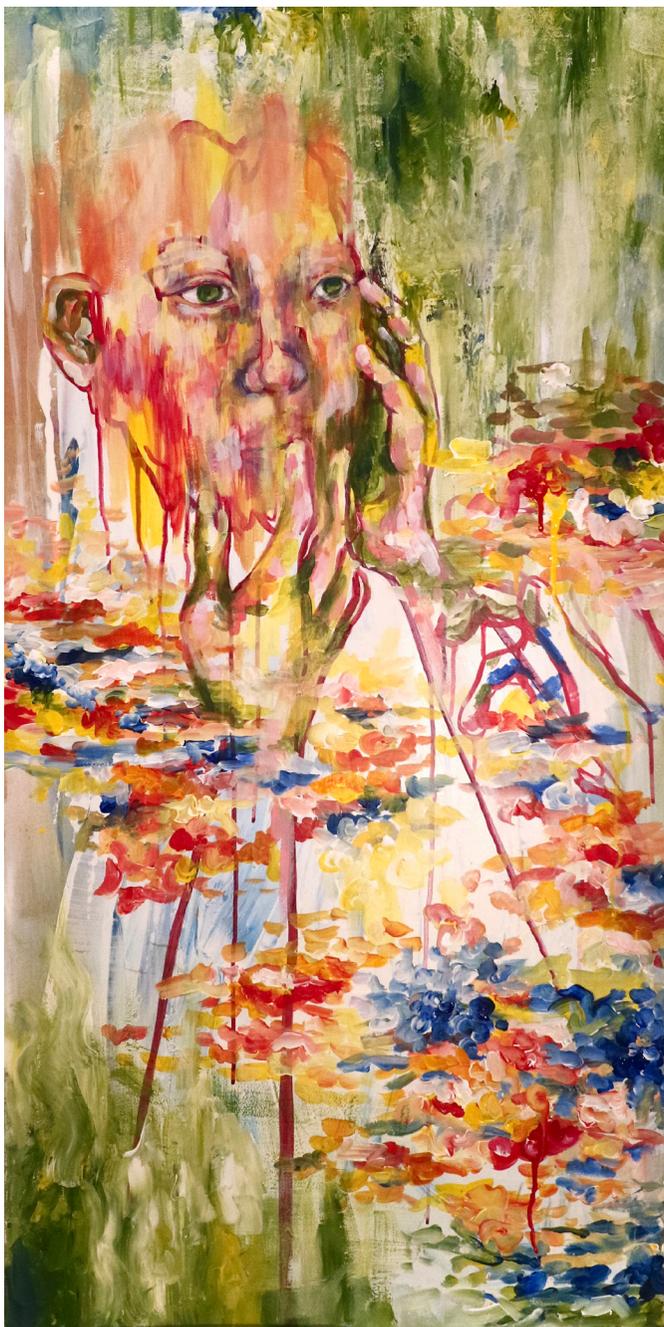
96. But then he went and murdered who knows how many women.

97. I'm not saying just because you dropped out of college and lacked ambition, you're a murderer.

98. I'm not saying you planned everything from 11-84.

99. I just know that when my friend, the YA writer, told me about Bundy's girlfriend, I finally understood why this list had to end at 100.

100. Because one day you unexpectedly gave me the cold shoulder—and then nothing else happened between us.



Self Value | Hyewon Cho

CONTRIBUTORS

T. Abeyta is a Latinx third grade dropout who didn't get a GED but did snag two Master's degrees. She lives in Oakland with Betty, her lion-head bunny. When she turned 40 last year, she decided to write for real and was quickly published by *Hobart*. The story you just read belongs to *Smile*, a memoir she is currently writing. Follow her on Tabeyta.com or tweet @abeytawrites.

Shaqayeq Ahmadian is an Iranian artist who lives and works in Tehran. Her practice is concerned with the fundamental interplay between objects, figures, media, and dimensions. Grinning at the world and its complexities, this young artist refuses to adhere to the norms of society and crafts her own path while defying all limitations.

Sara Brenes Akerman is a graduate student in English at Washington University in St. Louis where she studies Shakespeare in performance. She is a collector of found photography, an amateur historian of daily life in New York City, and a San José, Costa Rica native. She holds an MFA in Fiction from NYU.

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Alicia Banaszewski is a freelance writer located in the Twin Cities. She writes about restaurants for *Eater*, book reviews for *Drizzle Review*, and has a piece about why everyone that hates French dressing is wrong forthcoming in the *Midwesterner*. Her debut poetry chapbook, *Bright Blue*, is available from dancing girl press. Website: www.alicia-banaszewski.com

Cass Graybeal Brown graduated from the Savannah College of Art and Design in 2017 with a BFA in Illustration and a minor in Scientific Illustration (SCAD). She has been working as a professional illustrator and patent draftsman for three years. Inspired by her study of scientific illustration at the SCAD, Cass Graybeal Brown turned her creative talents toward conservation initiatives. With this in mind, much of her subject matter revolves around highlighting the beauty in our natural world. Her specialties are in traditional watercolor and digital technical illustration.

Sinejan Kiliç Buchina is an artist and arts educator, working in New York. She holds an MA from City University in New York (2019), and a BFA from Marmara University in Turkey (2007). Recent exhibitions include Walter Meade Gallery, NY (2020), Küf solo show at Amos EnoGallery, NY (2019), Arts Depot, London, United Kingdom (2019), Tattoo Circus, London, United Kingdom (2019).

Former firefighter **Max King Cap** is a writer whose work appears in the *The Racial Imaginary*, *Tahoma Literary Review*, *the Threepenny Review*, *Ponder Review*, and *Hippocampus*; as a visual artist he has had numerous exhibitions in Europe and the United States. He earned his MFA from the University of Chicago, his doctorate from the University of Southern California, and has taught at Columbia College Chicago, Illinois Institute of Technology, and Pitzer College. He lives in Los Angeles.

Hyewon Cho is a sophomore attending Korean International School in Seoul, South Korea. When she is not making artwork, her hobbies include walking her two-year-old collie and experimenting with old film cameras.

Chava DiMaio is a trans-BIPOC artist currently residing in New York. Juggling part-time work with full-time passions, Chava utilizes his insomnia to produce/distribute original AV compositions from a dog bed on the basement floor. No matter where, when, or what, Chava works to create a space of inclusion and empathetic nostalgia. (www.chavadi-maio.com/whaticreate/nuevayork)

Andrée-Anne Guay was born in 1986 in Limoilou, Québec. Her studies went from Media Arts to Archival Arts. Therefore, the fruit of her work is a pleasant combination of these two passions. Drea's collages celebrate the beauty of the universe in all its originality and complexity. Mainly composed of archival documents, her colorful illustrations are a praise of the world's diversity.

Marcy Rae Henry es una latina chingona de Los Borderlands. She's lived in Andalucía, tucked away in the Himalayas and now isolates and slips on the ice while walking her rescue dog by the Chicago River. Her writing has been longlisted, shortlisted, honorably mentioned, and nominated for the Pushcart Prize, and appears or is forthcoming in *The Columbia Review*, *Epiphany*, *Hobart*, *The Southern Review*, and *Bath-House Journal*, among others. She has received a Chicago Community Arts Assistance Grant and an Illinois Arts Council Fellowship. DoubleCross Press has promised to publish a chapbook of her poems.

Karl Michael Iglesias is an actor, director, and writer originally from Milwaukee, WI. A graduate of the University of Wisconsin and First Wave Hip Hop Theater Ensemble, he continues his exploration of verse and heightened language in the theater. His poetry can be found in *Apogee*, *The Acentos Review*, *The Breakwater Review*, *The Florida Review*, *RHINO Poetry*, *Kweli Journal*, *Breakbeat Poets Vol. 4: LatiNext* (Haymarket Books, 2020), and *The Westchester Review*. Karl's debut collection *CATCH A GLOW* is available now under Finishing Line Press. He resides in Brooklyn, New York.

John Keene is a Distinguished Professor of English and African-American and African Studies at Rutgers-Newark, where he has served as the chair of the African-American and African Studies department since 2015. He is affiliated with organizations including Cave Canem, where he has served as a fellow, and the Dark Room Writers Collective, which he joined several years after obtaining his undergraduate degree at Harvard University. He is currently a board member of the African Poetry Book Fund, which aims to make available works by poets from the African continent and was founded by Kwame Dawes and is based at the University of Nebraska. He is also a recipient of the MacArthur Foundation Fellowship, which he was awarded in 2018.

Aristilde Paz Justine Kirby is a poet. She has chapbooks with Bella-donna* (*Daisy & Catherine*) & Black Warrior Review (*Sonnet Infinitesimal / Material Girl*), the latter is also in *The Best American Experimental Writing 2020*. She has a radio play on Montez Press Radio (*Mairead Connect Radio Club: Point A*) & written an essay for Montez Press (“The Envoyelle: Notes on A Conditional Form”). She has done art writing for Recess Presents @ ACE Open, Rachel Vera Steinberg’s curatorial project *A faint hum*, & wrote a press release for Geneva Skeen’s *Double Bind* (out 11/13 on Room40). She has a poem out on the intersection of State & 2nd in a Hudson, NY community mural. She is a waitress at Lil’ Debs Oasis. She is a candidate for a Master of Fine Arts Degree at Bard College. She dances, she teaches, she does a lot. She is a serval in reverse with a twist.

Suzette Lam was born and raised in Hong Kong, now lives in Toronto, Canada, where she works as an architect. English is her second language; Cantonese is her first. She earned her Bachelor of Science in Architecture from University of Virginia, and Master of Architecture from University of Pennsylvania in 1998. Her essays were published in Canadian *The Site Magazine*, and UK *TANK Magazine*.

Serge Lecomte was born in Belgium. He emigrated to Brooklyn in 1960. After graduating high school, he became a medic in the Air Force. He earned a Ph.D. from Vanderbilt University in Russian Literature, worked as a Green Beret language instructor and received a B.A. in Spanish Literature from the University of Alaska where he taught from 1978-1997. He built houses, worked as a pipefitter, orderly, landscaper, driller, bartender. He is also a published poet, novelist, playwright and artist.

Yadi Liu was born in China and is now based in New York City. She graduated from The Fashion Institute of Technology with a Master of Fine Arts in Illustration. Her works have appeared in *The Washington Post*, *VOGUE*, *Harper’s Bazaar*, and others.

Kira Obolensky's plays have been produced Off Broadway, in Los Angeles, Prague, and Terezin, and in such locations as homeless shelters, prisons, and immigrant centers. She has received the Kesselring Prize, a Guggenheim Fellowship, and most recently, a Mellon Playwright Fellowship, which put her in residence with the award-winning theater Ten Thousand Things for six years. She co-wrote a national bestseller about architecture; her novella, *The Anarchists Float to St. Louis*, won *Quarterly West's* Novella Prize. She attended Juilliard's Playwriting Program, Williams College, and has an MFA from Warren Wilson's Writing Program. She currently teaches in the MFA Program at Spalding University.

Eric Odynocki is a teacher and writer from New York. His work is often inspired by his experience as a first-generation American of Mexican, Ukrainian, and Jewish descent. Eric's work has been published in *Gordon Square Review*, *Cold Mountain Review*, *American Poetry Journal*, *PANK*, *Magma Poetry*, and elsewhere.

mónica teresa ortiz was born and raised in Texas. The author of *muted blood*, published by Black Radish Books in 2018, and winner of the inaugural Host Publications Chapbook Prize, *autobiography of a semiromantic anarchist*, published in 2019, ortiz currently lives in the Texas Panhandle.

Rose Pacult is a multimedia artist and author. She has worked with Massimo De Carlo to the Bethanien Kunstquartier. Rose's writings can be read on *Wig Wag Magazine*, *Untoward Magazine*, and *Essay Daily*, and appear in various books including *Knowing Zasd by His Walk* (Dokument Press) and *Unfolded Perceptions* (Grund).

Giusto Pilan's artistic research focuses above all on the recovery of a lost memory, which has its origins with the birth of man and the first rock graffiti. A language that takes shape through formal archetypes.

Sam Prickett lives in Birmingham, Alabama, where he works as a journalist and makes collages. His art can be found on Instagram @select-ed_sambient_works.

Suzanne S. Rancourt, Abenaki/Huron descent, has authored two books: *Billboard in the Clouds*, Curbstone Press / NU Press 2nd print, received the Native Writers' Circle of the Americas First Book Award. *murmurs at the gate*, Unsolicited Press, released May 2019. Ms. Rancourt is a multi-modal EXAT and CASAC with an MS in psychology, an MFA in writing, and CAGS. A USMC and Army Veteran, her works are published /forthcoming in *The Ilanot Review*, *Cathexis*, *Pif Magazine*, *Other Worldly Women Press Anthology*, *Mizmor Anthology*, *Rat's Ass Review*, *Lucky Jefferson*, *The Wrath-Bearing Tree*, *Free State Review*, *Event Magazine*, *Pangyrus*, *BigCityLit*, *Callaloo*, *Cimarron Review*, *Muddy River Poetry Review*, *Ginosko*, *Tupelo Press Native Voice Anthology*, *New Reader Magazine*. For more info: www.expressive-arts.com

Drew Richardson is a visual artist from Chicago whose work can be found at <https://www.drewj3creations.com/>

Nicole Robitaille is a biracial Ghanaian-Canadian writer from North Bay, Ontario, Canada. She has a BA in English and Psychology from Nipissing University. In her free time, she enjoys making masks and costumes.

Abigail N. Rosewood was born in Vietnam, where she lived until the age of twelve. Her debut novel, *IF I HAD TWO LIVES*, has been hailed as “a tale of staggering artistry” by the *Los Angeles Review of Books* and “a lyrical, exquisitely written novel” by the *New York Journal of Books*. Her short fiction and essays can be found/is forthcoming at *Electric Lit*, *The Southampton Review*, *Columbia Journal*, *The Adroit Journal*, *DiaCritics*, *The Adirondack Review*, among others. She holds an MFA in creative writing from Columbia University and lives in Brooklyn, New York. Find her on FB and Instagram @abigailrosewood

Maya Salameh is a poet fellow of the William Male Foundation and Leonard Slade Endowment. Syrian by way of San Diego, she has performed her writing at venues including the Obama White House, Carnegie Hall, and her parents' kitchen. Her poems have appeared in *The Greensboro Review*, *Asian American Writer's Workshop*, and *Burningword Literary Journal*, among others. Maya is the author of *rooh* (Paper Nautilus Press 2020).

Cai Rodrigues-Sherley (he/they) is a Black queer poet, teaching artist, and lover of 1970s youth poetry. He cares about trans childhoods, queer bodies, mortality, heritage, and love. He is a Sagittarius Sun, Gemini Rising, and Cancer Moon, which means nothing and absolutely everything. He is the 2019 recipient of the Smith College Emily Babcock Poetry Prize, a 2020 Pushcart Prize Nominee, and a 2020 The Watering Hole Winter Fellow. Their work can be found in *Cosmonauts Avenue*, *Brooklyn Poets*, and *Volume Poetry*. They currently live in Queens with their partner and are an MFA candidate at New York University in their Creative Writing Program. You can find him on Twitter @caifieri and on Instagram as @crsed_poet

Mónica de la Torre's poems explore our constructions of identity and trajectory. Her full-length poetry collections include *Repetition Nineteen* (2020), *The Happy End / All Welcome* (2017), *Four* (2012), and *Public Domain* (2008). With artist Terence Gower, she co-authored the art book *Appendices, Illustrations and Notes* (1999). De la Torre co-edited with Alex Balgiu, the anthology *Women in Concrete Poetry: 1959-1979* (2020), and with Michael Wieggers, the bilingual anthology *Reversible Monuments: Contemporary Mexican Poetry* (2002). She has co-edited translations from Spanish including Lila Zemborain's *Mauve Sea-Orchids* (2007) and *Poems by Gerardo Deniz* (2000). De la Torre's honors include a New York Foundation for the Arts fellowship. She has edited *BOMB Magazine* and the *Brooklyn Rail*. She lives in Brooklyn.

Yehui Zhao (she, her, they) is a painter and filmmaker. In her art practice, Yehui explores made-invisible identities and experiments with unrecorded memories and history. Her work has been shown at the 43rd Asian American Film Festival, Microscope Gallery and other programs. She is currently an integrated media arts-MFA candidate at Hunter College.