

# THE TIGER MOTH REVIEW

ISSUE 9





## THE TIGER MOTH REVIEW

*A biannual journal of art + literature that engages with nature, culture, the environment and ecology*

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**The Tiger Moth Review** is an eco-conscious journal based in Singapore that publishes art and literature engaging with the themes of nature, culture, the environment and ecology. The journal publishes primarily in English, but also accepts non-English work and their translated English counterparts. We are committed to creating a space for minority, marginalised and underrepresented voices in society.

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## Editor's Preface

“Right intention is simply about coming home to yourself. It is a practice of aligning with the deepest part of yourself while surrendering to the reality that you often get lost in your wanting mind.”

—Phillip Moffitt, “The Heart’s Intention”, *Dharma Wisdom*

These past few months have been a spiritual journeying of sorts for me. In October, I was fortunate enough to be invited to Ubud, Bali to speak about ecofeminism at the [2022 Ubud Writers and Readers Festival](#). There, I was in dialogue with other women and practitioners who shared a similar mission of uniting humanity through environmental awareness and a reawakened way of relating to Earth through physical, emotional, political and spiritual means. The festival showed me an alternative way of creating community and serving the community, and I returned to Singapore with Bali still in my heart.

Then in early December, I attended a meditation retreat for the first time in Bangkok, and what an experience it has been. Most significantly, I am learning to open my heart, and to focus on right intentions. I am discovering things and aspects about myself that have resurfaced so that healing can take place. I am releasing old, inherited patterns, beliefs, narratives and blockages from my system and integrating the learning into my everyday lived experience. I am coming face to face with love and loss and grief and healing and finding my way home to myself again.

Finally, I went to Sabah on the island of Borneo to live in the primary rainforest, where nature became my meditation. Daily I cruised along the Kinabatangan river in awe of Mother Earth and in search of wildlife. I learnt to recognise the distinct whooping calls of the female Bornean gibbon in the rainforest though I never saw her, and distinguish between the laughing cries of the oriental pied hornbill and the honkings of the rhinoceros hornbill. I observed the freshness of elephant tracks, and learnt to listen and speak with the heart, which opens one to understanding and communicating with the other across species and beyond language. I fell asleep to the sounds of the rainforest. I returned home and dreamt of the river.

In all of these travels, I am finding my way home.

May you travel with this issue away and return home to yourself, home to Earth.

May it bless and offer you a refuge, a sanctuary, a meditation, a homecoming.

And may it bring you the peace that comes from knowing you are always home.

*Esther Vincent Xueming*

**The Tiger Moth Review**

## **Tiger**

Rachel Lim

spirit still stalks my city  
elemental, impotent  
white of tooth, soft of paw  
pads down sidewalks in the deadened evening  
hangs back from the lights of void deck funeral  
tail-flick from the roofs of houses  
scourge of Singapura turned victim and sacrifice,  
man-eater with clipped claws.

is community cat a successful domestication?  
history is only as distant as you make it.  
on wild nights do you not, in the slanting rain,  
from pulsing pockets of dark vegetation  
feel on your back a pair of ember eyes?

**Three poems** by Janice L. Freytag

**Winter Reveals**

Winter reveals  
its economy of survival,  
the carnivorous marketplace  
of bloody negotiations.

An owl swallows  
small rodents whole,  
dark within her stomach  
pearling bones into balls.

I tease apart  
regurgitated skin and fur  
to name her meals. How familiar  
this commerce in death,  
and the wild ululation of owls.



## **The Memory of Corn**

Janice L. Freytag

A hawk hovers over the field,  
tethered like a kite  
to the memory of corn.  
Everyone is tired,  
though the year has just begun.

We feel the weight of missing things.  
We forget the shape their names  
made in our mouths when we told  
our harvest stories, before  
the horizon moved away.

## **Today I Saw a Hawk**

Janice L. Freytag

Today I saw a hawk  
carry a rabbit into the trees.  
Never mind that the rabbit's bones  
were ten times denser than the hawk's.  
From afar, it looked effortless,  
like the labors of all faithful parents.  
Is the hawk glad I saw this?  
Does it think, *Maybe today*  
*someone will understand death?*

## **THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS A NATURAL DISASTER**

*after the North Luzon, Philippines earthquake, July 2022*

Dianne Araral

by the grace of God we will rebuild  
again, and again and again and  
when my hands give up bury me under  
our house, so I will never leave Cagayan Valley

human failure turns natural hazard into disaster

life-giving becomes life and death —  
when mangrove barriers become concrete and glass enclave  
a storm surge will take you before your time

divine creation becomes freak destruction.

that's just the thing —  
seismic shifts are natural  
lack of infrastructure is not  
landslides are natural  
poverty is not  
eruptions are natural  
corruption is not

as for me? I don't pray anymore. but I still ask for  
patience, when the president's fools will call it a "tragedy"  
peace, for the people we can't bring back  
creation, destruction, my resurrection  
and time. my turn to rest.

## **Mediterranean**

Maria Pia Latorre

*Translated from Italian by William Allegrezza*

How many seasons of basil and mint  
are entwined in the hair  
spun songs of summer heat waves  
unraveled coils of hanging time  
poised between salt and clay  
that to scratch them one finds the past  
mixed  
recognition and refutation of the same sea “between the lands”  
People board to find  
among waves that have passed a usable future  
basin of the earth silent covered  
that embraces stories  
perfumed with spice  
Keep the seeds  
for the season of basil and mint.

## **Mediterranea**

(Original Italian version)

Maria Pia Latorre

Quante stagioni di basilico e menta  
intrecciate ai capelli  
filano nenie le calure d'estate  
matasse sbrogiate di tempo sospeso  
in bilico tra il sale e l'argilla  
che a grattarle ci trovi il passato  
meticcio  
agnizioni e rifiuti nello stesso mare 'tra le terre'  
S'imbarcano genti a cercare  
tra le onde passate un futuro agibile  
conca la terra coperta silente  
che abbraccia storie  
profumate di spezie  
Custoditene i semi  
per le stagioni di basilico e menta

## **amateur horticulture**

Nicholas Quek

I could never get the right amount of fertiliser. Or water, for the matter. Deciding between too loose and too tight while alternating brands and mixtures became too much to bear. If only I could ask Nüwa how she moulded her dolls so effortlessly, sustaining their elusive breaths. All I could do was bury things and wait. After visiting the arboretum, I ran my boots clean with bare fingers, tracing wetness too faint to remain. When the seeds

we planted failed to stir, you brought them home. They blossomed soon after, each pot an ecosystem nurtured by your sunshine. Some days remain muddied still - but in your eyes, I see right through every breath lost when you soften in my arms. These fingers have learnt to excavate your wetness from red earth, so that bare skin may bloom once more. Perhaps there is no perfect amount of care: only the patience to sift through silt, and the grit to try again.

## Ground Truth

Katie Mary

We all eat food, but how often do we think about it from farm to mouth and everything in between?

*Ground Truth* is part of the terminology for the process of plant segmentation using non-invasive digital technology to measure phenotype attributes in industrial agriculture. Scientists have abstracted plants into simple shapes and colours to inform more efficient farming. Images found in scientific papers have been re-appropriated as part of this project.

In parallel, blockchain has created an opportunity for digital democratisation of industrial agriculture. The intangible yet omnipresent characteristic of 'chain' within agriculture is also explored and referenced visually as a recurring theme.

Botanical Gardens are the primary location for the reference of fauna within the project. Post-colonial identity for Botanical Gardens is evolving rapidly, forming a dynamic subplot.

These elements combined create a potent narrative for our epoch, representing so much more than bold, colourful and organic aesthetics. *Ground Truth* brings a visual dialogue to audiences ready to explore their agency within the food chain and current milieu.

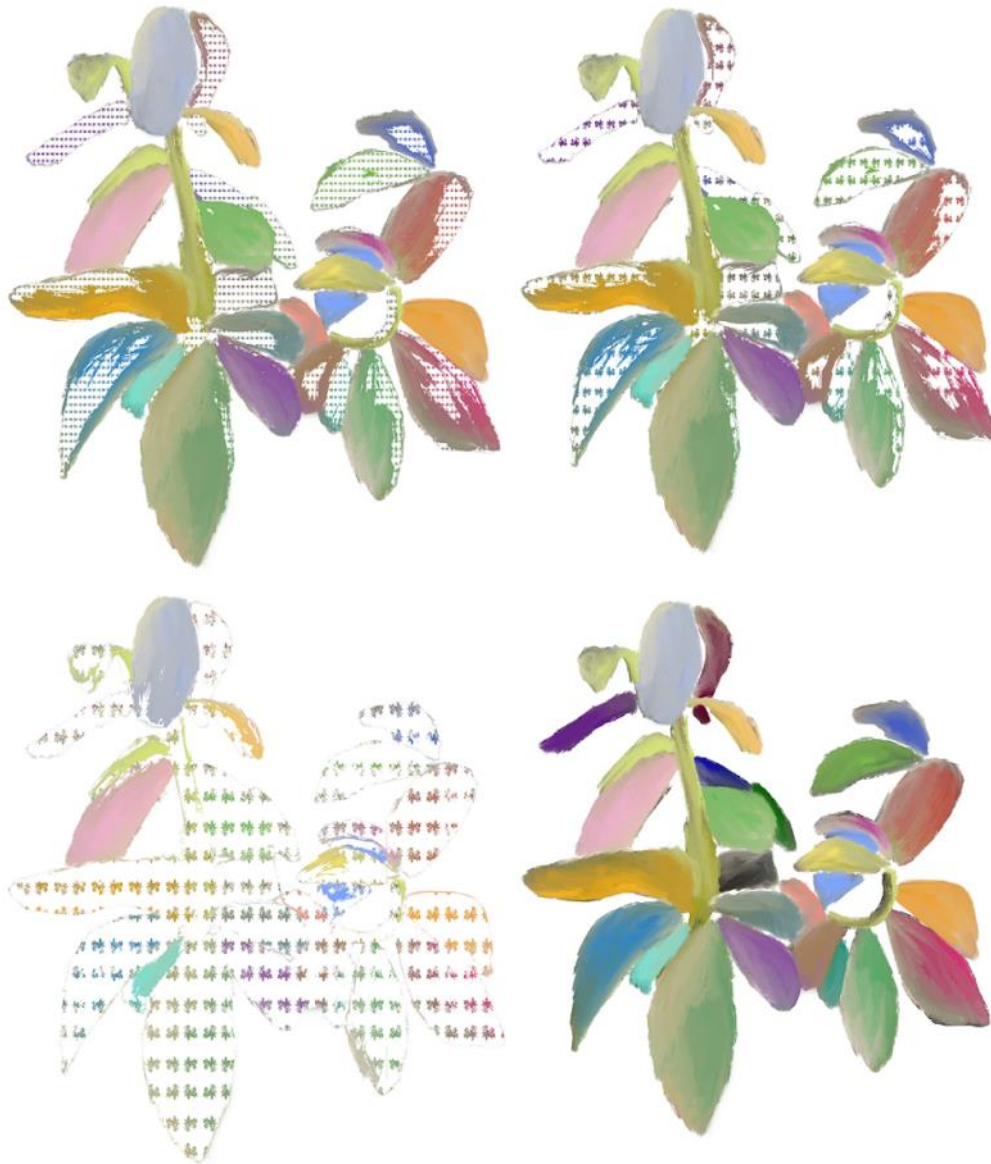
Having studied Photography as Art practice at Nottingham Trent University, the evolution of and prolific use of digital technology and photography within industrial agriculture has opened up a pathway to merge my specialism with science in a new way. This current and ongoing project *Ground Truth* is an opportunity to collaborate across various sectors to further explore dynamic, contemporary and creative dialogues about food.



**'Ground Truth #2'**  
Digital Photograph  
2022

© Katie Mary





**'The Chain #3'**  
Digital Image Composite  
2022

© Katie Mary



**'Ground Truth #4'**  
Digital Photograph  
2022

© Katie Mary

**food waste**

Abhirami Senthilkumaran

soft and squishy  
I find in my kitchen  
an over-ripe mango  
destined for the bin  
wiping a tear  
I imagine  
all the animals slaughtered  
packaged and frozen  
for the landfill.

## **A Hen's Plea**

George M Jacobs

I don't want my daughter to be separated at birth from me and her brothers and sisters.

I don't want her to live in a cage with four other females in a building with thousands of other females where each does not even have enough space to spread her wings, where the air reeks of ammonia, the sun never enters, and her skin develops sores.

I don't want Yi Mei, when her egg-laying capacity declines past economic viability, to be sent for slaughter so that humans can have chicken soup which raises their blood pressure and clogs their arteries.

I want my daughter to enjoy the natural acts that we hens all enjoy: dust bathing, roosting, mothering her chicks.

I want her to live outdoors, feeling the grass under her feet, searching for food, feeling the sun on her body, hearing the sounds we chickens use to communicate, building the bonds we chickens can share with each other and with other species, including humans.

I want Yi Mei to live for herself, to live as a chicken.

**Two poems** by Gabriela Halas

**The Hunter**

I'm more lucky as a hunter than a wanna-  
be-mother and of each animal I've killed

I've eaten the heart. The skins of burned trees  
expose their hearts and only the wind is here

to eat the dust. The dust fills my lungs as we hike,  
two weeks past the ultrasound. No sound

in the burn, but active animal sign, tender  
shoots of fireweed ground down. Up the shoulder

of the mountain, we follow the burn as it sheds flesh,  
unfurling outer bark. My feet shed flesh,

shoulder raw where the weight on my back meets soft  
skin. Weight tips my balance in the depth of soft

soot, hands splayed to the nearest trunk. My feet send puffs  
of soot to the air. I cannot air my grief to you.

We keep a truce of silence as we climb. The success  
of our hunt reliant on silence. Above tree-line

the blackened husks below hulk like some abandoned town.  
I've made it this far, my heart this lucky husk. The only sound

the wind that hunts the dust.

## Root Glacier, Wrangell-St. Elias

*For Jowita Wyszomirska, after her installation: The Distance of Blue*

Gabriela Halas

Looking north the clouds lose shape, thinly veiled fog rests on peaks and craggy buttresses. The ice wall stops us in our tracks. The path, at first obvious, becomes an open corridor to a watery breach, changing matter. You arch across exposed rock, push through a chill wind, you brace.

A slip of tendon through the valley of bone.

To urge thighs into ice, let calves test the angles. Your body bows to crevices and smooth curvature, strange kinship with a lunar surface. I see you bend to sound, to color. You collect blue. Come away with white. Remark the hues: eggshell, cumulous rising, teacup ivory. White on white, a cellular cascade of water. Is the glacier a root? A body?

Calcium's architecture, cavities hold tight their arches and canyons.

You record sound, capture movement. Your small figure edges closer to the rim, poised like glass — you tense — grip your muscles against slippage. Watch water roll like ribbon unspooling, how it runs under your legs, how carefully you cross its ambition. In this geometry of liminal scape one shape can fix another or lend shadow and light to an undulation of succession. Does the glacier feel our footfall?

Heel bones beat in time, the silt thin margins of age.

The slow evolution of hard material, gravel breathes life into sand, into soil. With each fall of stone, plummet of rock, we bear witness to the graceful cascade of days. Our shared evidence: stretch marks, life-lines, the hardened tracks of generations — the glacier retreats, like us, returning to beginnings. To common ground. We come from parents who recede in the distance as we gain the years. Like us, marked by heat, wind, elemental influence.

Evaporate bone blue, communal striations of time.

You sift through this landscape and translate the time it takes for a river to move a stone in still azure. Blue is a shape in your hands. You plunge them into frigid waters. Ragged, distorted, they restore you. To distill time, this takes compromise. We stand at the toe of the glacier. Marvel at a body taking space. A vanishing point never reached. The body moves from river to earth and back again.

## **Cabbage Patch**

D H Jenkins

A six foot long white tipped reef shark,  
tail twisting side to side, searching for  
prey, swims along the reef;  
above, the halo eye around the sun  
leads us to believe heavy weather comes,  
so we descend quickly, equalizing  
pressure as we go,  
following the dark shape along the reef.

Current pushes against us as we flatten  
atop the sand under the vortex of water  
like air pouring off a wing;  
then after fifteen minutes of finning,  
we pop up in front of a giant cabbage  
patch of yellow coral, its leaves longer  
than our bodies, spreading forever—  
lustrous golden sunken treasure.

Like in Alice's wonderland we are  
taken back to childhood, and in our  
masks we glimpse the eternal play  
of parrot fish, turtles, stingrays,  
thru ancient eyes of innocence.

And our air bubbles rise up to the sun  
like champagne in a crystal glass.  
A gray reef shark appears grinning,  
its moon mad teeth sparkling bright  
as it swims away from us aliens,  
swishes its tail and is gone.



We surface in the open water, sighting the  
dive boat, which motors over, lightning  
flickering in the distance.

As we lever our gear aboard and crawl  
out of the ocean we call out our dive figures:  
“Air, 50 bar”; “bottom time, 45 minutes”;  
“maximum depth, the Pleistocene”.

**Juukan Gorge: *if the lost could speak***

Gabrielle de Gray

*continually occupied*

by aboriginal people since the last ice age

*46,000 years of culture*

contained inside a cave of dreamers

*a braid excavated*

4,000 years old— its woven strands bound loosely a direct ancestor

*archeologists found*

7000 artifacts in a terroir full of bone

*to include*

a 28,000-year-old kangaroo femur sharpened into a pointed tool

*generations of living memory*

held inside the land

*blown up*

for Rio Tinto to mine 8 million tons of ore

*executives chose*

to go straight through the site and not around

*an additional*

\$135 million in company profit

*the colonial narrative*

has been replaced

*by the narrative*

of corporations

*the ripple of history continues*

until one day

*we will arrive*

at a place beyond the language of words

*that cannot be found on a map*

but inside the interiority of human experience

*between the spoken and silent places*

inside the sound of memory which holds the loss of forgotten things

*\*Juukan Gorge was destroyed in Australia by the Rio Tinto Mining Corporation— May 24th, 2020.*

## **The Department Of The Interior**

John Paul Caponigro

“The Bureau of Indian Affairs, also known as Indian Affairs,  
is a United States federal agency within the Department of the Interior.”

If managing land was managing people.  
If managing people was managing land.  
If one was seen as the other and the other as one.  
Our bodies are in our land and our land is in our bodies.

Where am i ~~from~~ of?  
~~Who~~ What place am i?

Un dis re cover,  
space is so wide and deep  
who and where we are  
become indistinguishable.

## Places we called by other names

Alana Saab

There is a place called Dragon Island that no one can find on a map.

Dragon Island: A pseudonym. A sanctuary. Some would call it a paradise but there were no palm trees and it wasn't always warm. In fact, for a quarter of the year the place was covered in snow and a biting wind chill coming off the ocean. During this time, the ferry didn't run and Dragon Island was abandoned. It was, in this way, seasonal.

On Dragon Island, the evenings were neon, no candlelight. And the mornings were sun and sex and sheets that so desperately needed to be washed. In the early summer, like when She and I were there, it was a place where some roamed naked on the sand. Running with their dicks bouncing. And we were laughing.

A week before I stepped on the island, we were in the city covered in a white comforter. It was dark out but no stars were visible outside our window. Here they never were. Under the starless sky of the city, I asked her why they called it Dragon Island. She said it was because the heat there, independent of the season, was fiery, brutal.

*But why call it something other than what it is?*

To that, she just smiled and gently kissed my cheek:

*You're going to love it.*

A week later on Memorial Day weekend at 9AM, I stepped off the ferry and onto the boardwalk with my duffle bag pulling at my shoulder. At the end of the dock, I saw her face lit by the morning sun. I walked quickly towards her. When I reached her, I fell into her arms and kissed her lips to the sound of men in leather speedos eating lunch with one another. She whispered something into my ear, but I couldn't hear exactly what it was. Maybe she said:

*Welcome to Dragon Island*

Or maybe:

*Welcome home.*

Whatever it was, I felt a tear roll down my cheek. At first, I thought it was sweat, but then another fell from my other eye. When she let me go, I quickly wiped the tears away. She grabbed my bag and threw it around her shoulder. Then she reached for my hand and

walked me past the pantry, past the pizza shop, past the fire station and towards the bamboo-lined wooden sidewalks that lead to her brother's dragon home.

That early summer on Dragon Island, the heat was not only brutal but biting, like the winter air over a year ago when she and I met. No matter the season, she was, both in the midst of heat and freezing cold, whatever was needed. By this I mean, when I was too hot, my body curled into hers, and her skin, like an ice pack, cooled me down. Then when I was shivering, I'd wrap my limbs around her, sandwiching my toes between her calves, and wait for the warmth. She and I together always reached the perfect equilibrium.

That afternoon on the first day I arrived, we sat on the dock with our bare feet swinging over the water. I stared at the white boats that were decorated with rainbow flags and string lighting. Men danced and kissed one another. I watched them as she reached her hand around my waist and kissed my almost sunburnt shoulder. The tenderness on my skin, only a warning to what could have happened had I not lathered myself in sunscreen at three. Almost burnt. Almost pain. Almost. Almost. Almost.

It was only after one left Dragon Island, floating away on the ferry, that one realized Dragon Island—in the midst of the world, in the world of time (beginnings, middle and endings), in the world of space (here, there and elsewhere)—Dragon Island was an island of almos<sup>t</sup>s.

But when one was on Dragon Island, everything seemed complete and infinite. The happiness came from this feeling of completion, of wholeness. The tears, you see, were only a premonition. The tears were for the future, but the future existed far from Dragon Island. The past, too. On Dragon Island, the present lingered in the sand and encroached the wood pilings that held up the dragon homes. The front doors, mouths. The bodies that passed through them, fire.

And there were no cars on Dragon Island. Only ones reserved by the police and fire department. Official vehicles for official people who, yes, were on Dragon Island, and so yes, to your question, the world knew about Dragon Island. We were not hidden. We only called this place by another name, so that no one in the outside world, when we spoke of that place from the summer, would know where we existed so freely, so happily. They would search on a map for such a place with a name like fire, but they would never find it, and, by the time they looked, we would be far gone.

There were two restaurants on Dragon Island. One that served pizza. The other, things like burgers and tacos. Still, they closed early. When newcomers like me came to the island they searched in the moonlight for food or a grocery store, but none were open after eight, and often the newcomers went to bed hungry. Newcomers, at first, did not like Dragon Island. After all, they were hungry. It was only in the sunrise of the next day with lovers coming out of their houses, with naked bodies and half-naked bodies burying themselves in the sand, with glitter that lived on the skin from the evening before, that newcomers came to see Dragon Island for what it was. Eventually, they learned the ways of the island.

They learned the pantry on the boardwalk was barely a grocery store, and yet it was enough. They learned that hunger can be filled in different ways. Like skin. Like salt drying under their fingernails. Like the arrival of a ferry carrying someone you can't wait to hold in your almost-sunburnt arms.

By the time sunset came, those on Dragon Island looked in awe both at the sky and at the human next to them. Eyes often filled with tears, not for sadness but for the lack of it. We weren't used to being so happy. But on Dragon Island it seemed we had no other choice. For this happiness we felt, we wanted to crawl out of our skins. Instead, men hid unmarked vials of drugs in their pillow cases and took them, in the evening, to numb the mind so they could touch the human next to them (yes, the same one from the sunset) without fear. As if the world outside of Dragon Island hadn't tried to keep them apart. As if they would never lose them.

On the dock at sunset, after a day of bathing in the dragon sun, she turned to me and said:

*What if we never went back?*

And when she said this, I smiled and squeezed her hand tightly, feeling every line in her palm press against mine. With a smile on my face that felt foreign to my muscles, I said:

*I'd like that.*

I wondered if all those fortune tellers from my past had seen that moment: her, me, us, sitting at sunset on Dragon Island unafraid to pull our bodies close in our bathing suits, breasts up against one another, and kiss beyond the carless sand street. To kiss in a way we never could or would back on the mainland. Had everyone, but me, known all along that I was destined to love another body like mine?

After sunset in her brother's empty dragon home, we laid in the guest bedroom. Like the men on the beach, we got undressed one layer at a time. And then we let our bodies touch. We had been together for over a year, but that night something felt different. In a place unlike anywhere else on earth, a foreign place we called by another name, she felt like home. Not the starless sky city I called home or the one a state away, but a home like an island where everyone was safe and nothing bad could happen.

As we laid naked in bed, she asked:

*What if we never left Dragon Island?*

I looked into her eyes and meant every word that fell from my mouth:

*I'd really, really like that.*

She smiled. And I smiled. But then, in the corners of her lips, I remembered that in ten or fifteen years' time, the ocean would come to envelope the island. With every come-and-go wave sprinkled with glitter, the shoreline would rise to take over the beach, then the dragon homes and then the boardwalk where we watched the sunset together. Soon, nothing would be left of Dragon Island. And where did that leave us?

## **An AI finds the black screen**

Hazel J. Hall

Calculating, 'How long  
does it take to fight  
inevitability?' With factors  
the robot knows, but has yet to  
understand. When love is  
a word of every form. Noun.  
A place where they find their peace.  
Verb. The action  
allowing them to fear it. Adverb.  
How long it takes for them to fear that possibility.  
Adjective. Why they allow it.  
'How long  
does it take to fight inevitability?' is only  
the pathway to every other  
possible question: 'Will their love  
be remembered?' 'Why persist at all?'  
'What is the human definition of  
fulfillment?'

'Is there ever actually peace?'

Running this equation,  
the robot has every possibility of being stopped  
at any point in its research process. An unplugged  
inevitability. Existing in the intersection  
between enlightenment  
and the black screen;  
two roads in a simulation,  
with two cars running down two ramps,  
and meeting in the middle. A car crash between  
answering all the robot's questions.



## **Freedom**

*Dedicated to the brave men and women in Iran*

Maziar Karim

it will break  
sickle handle of gardening  
that wants stems the thought  
in the same size  
we  
although short  
although high  
We only want the brush of the wind of peace  
and finger of freedoms  
that never  
it will not stroke a trigger

**I am the shadow I am wrong I am**

David Groulx

the one who must be fought against.

you never notice darkness

is denied light, and a delight to the denied.

I go on afterburner / I go on afterburner

no one sees me

after I burn.

**Three poems** by Mykyta Ryzhykh

I

the world has changed  
snow cheetah jumping  
into the void

II

why is my throat not a garden  
from my childhood  
every morning I suffocate  
from the lies of the weather and dirt

III

the bird has no other home  
than the universe

## **Two poems** by Chrystal Ho

### **Walking Home**

A hedge demarcates a point on the road, lengthwise, that cannot be crossed.

A lone frangipani tree stretching skyward: the edge of the road, or the infinite space between a public walkway and private property.

The maturity of an estate may be gauged not by the trunk of its largest tree, but the lushness of its hanging creepers, a telltale bird's nest fern.

A border of limp sparrow mango trees, planted equidistant: impending deforestation.

In a past life, the ixora bush was a tree with luscious clusters of fiery blooms.

An ixora bush in full bloom: newly delivered from the nursery.

## Summer Poem

Chrystal Ho

For a girl of the tropics, a summer poem  
on a Greek island is an everyday poem.  
Every day, the birds will gather  
on the electrical wiring by the terrace  
to chitter sweet nothings and fly away  
before everyone else is awake,  
leaving only their song behind for breakfast.  
Every day the sky is blue enough  
to make a pair of sailor's pants for a child sailor,  
a petite one, or a giant sailor whose stride  
is so large she will pass Mount Athos  
in a mere matter of steps and even when it isn't,  
the roaring grey downpour will first release  
the familiar stench of asphalt before  
the fleeting sweetness of damp earth.  
Every day on this island is a summer poem,  
even when the trees are scorched bald  
as though they've come too close to the sun.  
Every day, where I am surrounded by sunscreen  
and water, but cannot smell the coconuts.

## Nature Was Here First:

### Musings on Humankind's Vast Overreach and Trees' Bodily Autonomy

Eleni Stephanides

*"We can tell with certainty that trees can hear, smell, communicate—and they can definitely remember. They can sense water, light, danger. They can send signals to other plants and help each other. They're much more alive than most people realize," wrote Elif Shafak in Island of Missing Trees.*

—Elif Shafak

The redwoods stretch high towards the cloud-speckled sky. Thin beams of light filter through the intersections of their branches and leaves.

From my spot beneath them at Redwood Regional Park, I listen to a hawk caw from its perch positioned above, its body occluded by (and submerged in) the leaves. Its caw is ribbity, as if there were a frog caught inside its throat.

Other birds make noises too, sounding like tiny droplets of water hitting against granite or porcelain. Not a full song, just distinct and crisp little cheeps—each a single solid note emitted sequentially from a separate beak. Some sound like specks of uncooked macaroni landing on a surface made from wind chime.

I wonder what these birds high up in their trees are saying to each other with their "*chips*," if anything.

Twenty feet away, a bilingual woman with a large group of young explorers is teaching her kids to respect nature—specifically trees' bodily autonomy.

When she catches one student ripping bark from a redwood: "How would you like it if a little monster came up to you and pulled the skin off your face?" she asks, after explaining to him how bark serves trees the same protective function that skin offers humans.

Her student, who then tries to reattach the bark to its rightful owner, asks the teacher if she has tape.

"Just don't do it again," she gently counsels him in response, while playfully ruffling his hair.

~~

I come here on my own because nature restores me. Some might write this off as woo-woo, but that doesn't stop me from believing it: that partial answers to some of our problems (at times) might even await us here.

Maybe they'll surface in the quiet. Or if they don't, at least in nature we find some strength to navigate them. Maybe we accept that they're unanswerable—and in our 'reconnected to self' state, can temporarily make peace with that uncertainty.

Coming here aids in that. Here where the pure and unadorned trees are just being themselves—no pressure to be anything more as they stretch tall and serene towards the

cloud-speckled sky. Out here I'm not comparing myself to others, nor am I wracked with FOMO—because I can't think of a more nourishing place to be.

Nature's authenticity coaxes my own out from beneath blankets and layers of performativity. I come to the redwood forest to rid my mind of filters. I come here to return to my purest form.

"We can tell with certainty that trees can hear, smell, communicate—and they can definitely remember. They can sense water, light, danger. They can send signals to other plants and help each other. They're much more alive than most people realize," wrote Elif Shafak.

Nature has a way of quietly assuring you that you're whole and complete without asking or taking anything from you.

I can't say the same about humans.

~~

Enjoy nature and accept what she has to offer, on her terms—rather than colonize and try to change Her. The boy in *The Giving Tree* understood this lesson when he was young. The older he got though, the more that modern life seemed to siphon it out from within him. Perhaps it became lost to capitalism—a system that profits from our indifference to nature.

"They pluck our leaves and gorge themselves on our fruit, and yet still they do not see us," wrote a fig tree in Shafak's novel *The Island of Missing Trees*.

I think about where our planet would be if a greater number of us treated our connection with nature more similarly to how we treat our other close relationships. If we, as Muriel Barbery phrased it in her book *The Elegance of the Hedgehog*, chose to "honor this beauty that owes us nothing."

Maybe if more of us did, we wouldn't be here.

Here, where, according to Tara Duggan, the Western monarch butterfly is rapidly disappearing. "The number of graceful, black and orange winged insects overwintering in coastal California this year dropped to under 2,000, compared with more than 29,000 the year before," she wrote in *The San Francisco Chronicle*. "And that was already a fraction of its previous population."

Here, where Jaime Lowe wrote in *Breathing Fire*, "Sequoias, hundreds of feet tall, usually die from old age, collapsing under their own weight, but now some were dying from dehydration, rotted inside and out."

Here, where in Kurtis Alexander's words, "At least one tenth of the planet's giant sequoia trees are believed to have been wiped out by a single wildfire last year".

~~

"Nature is innately brutal," some say in defense of humans. Some scoff at the idea of a complicated and unruly entity simplified to "innocent victim."

Some plants and animals are akin to humans in their ruthless competition with one another, they argue. Certain species of tall trees can block light from reaching neighboring organisms, for instance. It's only once they fall over and die that light finds its way in, giving

other trees and flowers the chance to grow. If it hadn't been us humans, some other species would have stepped in to establish dominion.

Maybe no creature is exempt from nature's barbarities. And yet, the amount of destruction—as well as the rate at which humans have destroyed—is unprecedented and unnatural. We've tipped whatever precarious balance existed before, taking far more than our share. It's about degree and proportion, and the human contribution to planetary degradation is astronomically disproportionate.

I think of all the signs the past few years pointing to disruption in the earthly tapestry. California's infamous September orange day was one. That day, social media statuses and memes depicting our final days abounded. One Facebook friend asked whether there was such a thing as "taking an Apocalypse day" off from work ("asking for the entire Bay Area currently trying to find good Zoom lighting with the orange tint out the window.")

What stood out most was the eerie day-long silence. Usually I'd hear squirrels scuffling through the leaves out back, or raccoons tapping at the roof. Birds would sing.

That day though, the only audible noise was BART whooshing by in the distance every twenty or so minutes. At 12:48 pm one bird cheeped on its own for about thirty seconds before disappearing back into the darkness of wherever he'd been before.

Back in March 2020, I wondered if we would see any improvements on this front. Maybe the break in human activity would benefit the natural world. Animals did seem to be re-establishing partial dominion—goats had taken over a town in Ireland. Water in the Venice canal looked clean and vibrant in the pictures. One family found a moose swimming in their backyard pool.

Benefits like reduced air pollution from fewer cars on the road proved to be short-lived though.

In trying to play God, humans have tampered with the natural order of things. Our actions are of a greater scale than the competition and occasional intra (or even inter) species ruthlessness that we might witness occurring naturally within the animal kingdom.

I'm also not sure that it's nature itself that's insatiable and destructive. I wonder if more accurately, the parts of it that are noble and pure and kind are inevitably more vulnerable. They're more vulnerable to evisceration by their more sinister and opportunistic shadow halves.

~~

A few weeks later, I'm outside a brewery in Susanville, California. At the picnic table next to me sit a young couple and their dog. The sun is behaving in a fickle manner.

Click: It departs / switches off. Click: it comes back.

"The sun just like, can't make up its mind," the boyfriend observes.

"It's annoying," the girlfriend comments.

Their young pit-bull's chin remains against the pebbled ground, opinionless—or just too fatigued to offer one.

The shifting temperatures are uncomfortable. Yet out here the air is fresh and limitless nature surrounds us. And so I remind myself:

*Before any humans walked the earth, the sun shone. She came and She went, She glimmered and dimmed, She did her own thing, with no one around to grumble in response.*



Back to the redwoods.

Nearby, pine needles and twigs of varying thickness—some bare, others blanketed by pistachio-green moss—scatter the dusty ground.

I watch as a squirrel hugs an acorn to his chest, only to quickly drop it. Moments later he skitters to the other side of the path, in typical stop-motion jerky squirrel fashion.

Bikes zip up and down the trails, gears buzzing like insects. Helmeted, masked up, and with sunglasses on, the riders look like insects too.

I wish I could wrap up these musings with a tidy conclusion. Previous drafts of it (from a couple years ago) said: *I think of a world with starkly less nature. One where you have to drive hours or days to find an environment even remotely similar to the piney one I'm breathing in right now.*

*That world feels so sad and empty. I hope that's not where we're headed. The people written off as alarmists—I'd like them to be wrong, and I'm sure they'd like more than anything to be missing the mark as well.*

*I want the smell of piney bark to continue gently pulling people out of sleep in the morning. I want our feet, after cutting through bushes and stepping over pinecones, to squish into muddy marshland. I want us to stare down in awe as we pass over wet grass that looks like the lustrous green hair of a mermaid.*

*Hundreds of years down the road, squirrels will still scurry in stop-motion fashion and birds will continue to sing, and we'll continue to hear the calming drip-drip-drip sound our beaked friends put forth, as I did today. Days like the orange one, where animals scuttle and flutter confused and disoriented, will become but a memory, never to repeat.*

I don't feel like I can end this way though, without feeling disingenuous—or like I've fallen prey to wishful thinking. What feels more truthful now is that global warming is a reality. This planet as we know it won't remain this way forever. At the redwood forest that day I breathe in this heartening reminder, together with the smell of pines and campfire charcoal. I take in my surroundings and settle back into the almost quiet ('almost' because mosquitoes still buzz and kids' shouts remain audible).

I take a still-shot in my mind of it all. Then folding up my chair, I listen to a little girl who seems to be on the same page:

"I wanna stay here all day! Then go to bed next to her (the redwood tree). And wake up tomorrow and say *Good morning, Tree.*"

And as I walk the wooded path back towards my car, Wendell Berry's words run through my mind: "*And so I go into the woods. As I go in under the trees, dependably, almost at once, and by nothing I do, things fall into place. I am less important than I thought, the human race is less important than I thought. I rejoice in that.*"

## **Attractive Disturbance**

Dhanny Sanjaya 'Danot'

I remember how this plant at first grew little by little in my grass. Over the last two years, I witnessed how this plant almost dominated my entire front and back yard. Now, this plant no longer only grows in my yard, but is starting to penetrate the walls and floors of the house. I feel there is something beautiful but also annoying about this plant growing on the walls of the house. In recent years, my work has come close to environmental issues, and these observational photographs seem to remind us how nature will conquer anything, nature will reclaim its space, and will continue to survive any damage.



*Attractive Disturbance*  
© Dhanny Sanjaya 'Danot'



*Attractive Disturbance*  
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**Two poems** by Susanna Lang

**For the Rivers, For the Trees**

*If a river has legal rights  
the lawyer asked  
who will be ready to die for her?*

The rivers speak to us in floods  
but no judge allows a flood inside the courtroom.  
In drought they sink into the soil, an eloquent silence.

(the Colorado, the Whanganui, the Tavignano)

And the trees, do the trees have rights  
or only the responsibility to breathe in our waste?  
They speak to us in the afternoon,

their leaves are tongues.  
Our fires dance in their canopies,  
feast on their limbs.

(Aleppo pines, sequoias, oaks and chestnuts)

In the desert of Thar, Amrita Devi and her daughters  
were beheaded as she embraced a khejri tree  
the maharaja wanted for his palace.

Travelers in another desert praise a solitary khejri  
whose roots reach down 150 feet to find water:  
they believe it's the river that ran through Eden.

(the Atrato, the Maumee, the Rhône)

In the end, we will all die for the rivers,  
ready or not,  
we will die for the trees.



## **On an Island in the Strait of Juan de Fuca**

Susanna Lang

Blackberries swell and turn sweet at the edge of the road  
where a man stops his truck to talk with me.  
North of here, in another country, fires are burning—  
the air tastes of smoke, even this far from the flames.

Eagles are common now, the man tells me.  
When his children were small, playing  
in a mud pit near the house, he watched for eagles,  
afraid the children looked like prey.

There is a quarry nearby, abandoned  
after the lime ran out. The kiln is still standing,  
and cedars that fed the kiln have grown back,  
at least on tracts set aside for them.

There is never much rain in the summer.  
Everything ripens toward fire.

## abyad

Ilma Qureshi

it is the thick of summer  
a friday afternoon  
when I put the neem oil in my hair  
from the fern green bottle with Indian herbs  
that your mother had told us about

the only word stuck in my throat is *abyad* from *bahr al-abyad al-mutawassat*<sup>1</sup>  
there is white in the Mediterranean Sea and electric green  
that hangs on trees outside my window  
a student in my summer Arabic class said his grandfather moved  
from Albania and met his grandmother from Greece  
but he is Muslim and does not care about *huniyya*<sup>2</sup>

you entered my life like the first white threading  
out of the coal-grey sky: sudden and sharp  
that day the sky with its ringed fingers kneaded the whole sky white  
i stand at the bus stop  
wearing your grey socks with dots of pink and think of melted honey—  
the warmth of your arms  
the sky outside has turned ashen blue  
i hear someone say: it is going to rain  
their voices are blurry, the way the world shimmers  
without my black rimmed glasses  
i return to life, like a childhood memory that suddenly bolts in, raw and fresh,  
brown-purple in all its edges  
like a torn papyrus left in a bookshelf  
like the time you wore a white dress that your mother got stitched  
from a local tailor so you could look and feel like Cinderella  
and you stood on stage  
the hall pounded with claps  
and you with your dimpled cheeks and forehead full of fringes  
looked at your mother's face  
that had bloomed into a smile

i dust the neem oil from my scalp, thinking of orchids in Kerala,  
wondering where it comes from—  
thickets, moss, rain boats—someone bent over, squeezing a plant?  
i am sure that is not how it works

---

<sup>1</sup> *Abyad* means white and *bahr al-abyad al-mutawassat* refers to the Mediterranean sea in Arabic.

<sup>2</sup> *Huniyya* means identity in Arabic. It can also mean being, entity, etc.

the glass beads of water glisten like fireflies studded on a July night  
i gulp it mouthful, like a lioness growls open its mouth  
in a distant forest  
where the only sound is that of a river

if you look closely, everything is dirty  
if you look closer, everything is pearl white

when we think of people, we hold them still  
and flatten their arcs  
arranging them like a photograph  
she is Arian, he is white  
she is a liberal, he does not know how to bow his tie  
under the moonlit sky, when she smells of eucalyptus and spearmint,  
and he lowers his head  
does she want to be wrinkled in a box  
or to be loved? each of her moles kissed blue  
and for him to see how loveable it is that she knows no directions  
and never learnt how to turn her laces  
into a butterfly

does he not ache to be loved  
for sometimes working way too much  
and sneaking gulps of ice cream  
in the middle of the night  
or forgetting to sweep, muttering  
'cleanliness is just a state of mind'

why then, must one not look close enough?  
to see white under the pearl  
why then, must one not rend all boxes, drain blood from pens  
dust the attic, through all its crevices, all its reams  
and wade into the garden  
look deep into the eye of a rose  
notice all its edges, its neat thorns,  
and love it in all its rose-ness  
with all its moss?

## In the winter meadow

Patricia Davis-Muffett

Clearly, we've waited too long—  
the "impenetrable thatch"  
of gardeners' warnings covering  
the damp earth, which ought to be  
snowdrifts or an icy field by January,  
but in the prelude to our subtropical future,  
it is rainy, nearly 60 on New Year's Day.

Still, I can't complain.  
Last year, you followed advice:  
"Cut the meadow in August.  
As short as possible." You,  
on your riding mower, trying  
to make way for seed pods,  
build a wildflower meadow  
for me, for the bees, for  
your own sanity, here  
in our fortress of trees  
within earshot of the  
8-lane highway, abutting  
the hiss of our neighbors' scorn.

You didn't warn me.  
When I glimpsed you  
halfway done—wild  
meadow mown, red blooms  
and daisies churned in among  
the culm and flower of grasses.  
I held my hands against the glass  
choked on my cry—I *didn't get to say*  
*goodbye*—and you returned, shaken,  
the rabbits, toads, voles,  
who thought they were safe  
after six months' residence—shocked  
by the churning blades of the mower.

That long ago night—Minnesota solstice—  
when you woke me, holding  
the tiny mousling in your palm  
and me, with my stone heart,  
told you to take it outside  
into the dark where  
our orange extension cord  
glowed from the second floor window,  
across the frozen lawn, under  
the hood of the car to keep  
the battery from freezing—

I suppose I'll rejoice in the thatch  
stunting the most delicate flowers.  
This year, maybe we'll use the scythe,  
cut in sections with fair warning  
to the families sheltering there.  
And before we do, I will walk ahead,  
cut blooms for the table and pretend  
for one more season, that we are  
all coexisting, gentle  
as the machinery  
of the world whirs  
in the distance.

## ***Dioramas for Tanjong Rimau***

Zarina Muhammad, Zachary Chan and Joel Tan

*Dioramas for Tanjong Rimau* focuses on the southern shore of Singapore, stretching from the port at Keppel to the former site of Batu Berlayar, a large geological formation that was known to old-world navigators and that was subsequently destroyed by the British.

This is a historical site of colonial intervention in the environment, which continues today in the form of massive infrastructural development and land reclamation by the modern Singapore state. This site is a fascinating way to track the ecological, social, and spiritual reverberations of centuries of human intervention on Singapore island.

The work unfolds as a series of vessels, each one part diorama, part instrument, part shrine, part spirit house, bearing traces of our research and emotional responses to the social, spiritual, and cultural histories of the southern coast and related areas. These vessels give access to pathways, knowledges, histories, and spirits that have been buried and violently displaced by modern infrastructural interventions in the surrounding area.

These “dioramas” exist along an emotional trajectory that starts from a place of trauma and blockage—in works that critically examine colonial and present-day infrastructural, progress-driven development, as well as biographical reflections on religious trauma. It then moves towards narratives of bodily and cathartic release through shrines, spell-casting objects, and video essays that meditate on rituals of blessing, cleansing, as well as queer re-appropriations of hegemonic storytelling.

*Dioramas for Tanjong Rimau* is a prayer, spell, archive and space-making intervention by Zarina Muhammad, Zachary Chan and Joel Tan. It is part of an ongoing work that traces the restless topographies of lands scarred by imperial projects, past and present. The work seeks to practice a way of knowing beneath the ordinary and apparent: we seek out flows, whispers, communities, and intelligences that have been ignored, erased and left behind in the wake of violent infrastructures.



### ***Dioramas for Tanjong Rimau***

© Zarina Muhammad, Zachary Chan and Joel Tan

From the Makara wall:

*This Southern tip of the mainland, which together with the Northwestern tip of Sentosa, a point called Tanjong Rimau, forms the entrance of the Old Straits of Singapore.*

*This was a maritime gateway that was known to sea travellers as early as the 1600s, probably long before. It was one of the major sea-routes if you wanted to travel from the West to China by sea, and vice versa. It's an ancient watery gateway, and Batu Berlayar, Dragon Tooth's Gate, presided over it as a marker. On very old maps, sometimes the only things you see of this island are the Old Straits, Batu Berlayar, and an old hill or two.*

*Here we think of the spiritual reverberation of all gateways, of channels of water, or of rocks overlooking the sea. What would it have meant for anyone at sea, along an otherwise featureless coast, to see a landmark as definite as Batu Berlayar sticking out from a cliff? What kinds of hope and joy and relief are pinned to such a rock? What kind of love is it imbued with? What kind of love attends to a place where people from different cultures meet?*

*In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, European sailors had to cross the Straits at night. The Orang Laut, who they hired as pilots, would float coconut husks filled with Benzoin resin and set them on fire to mark where the hazards were. Benzoin resin is an aromatic resin that's used to make incense. Think on this magical image of the Straits alight with shells of burning incense—saying, variously, please leave, but also, don't die, and also here lies danger, and also, go in peace; the elemental interplay of light and dark, life and death, love and transaction.*

*The British blew up Batu Berlayar in 1848 to make room; in a violent project of colonial terraforming that began in 1820, with the levelling of a hill in today's Raffles Place. The sand that it released was used to fill up the marshy river around today's Boat Quay. Many rivers were filled up or re-directed, mangroves paved over, waterways clogged and dammed, huge swathes of forest cleared to build plantations. Now we know the hunger for land stretches even beyond our borders, to neighbouring river-systems.*

*What gods guard this old gateway now? Is it gods of incense, tiger gods, sea gods, gods of rock and tree? A temple to industry lies there now.*

*Keppel Port, with its massive totems and pillars, receiving tribute coming in from faraway places. Though in due time, when the port is moved to Tuas, this temple will also become derelict, left to a process of digestion that will break it all down into some new reality.*

*In these places, all we hear is blockage. Blockage is the music of a violent reality that insists on itself. The feeling it leaves is something a bit like the grinding of teeth, or the scraping of finger on bone, or the dull thud of extractive fingers in sand.*

*We pray for healing on the water. A movement from blockage and congestion, towards release, we make utterances of desire for restoration and repair. To move from concrete to wind. Taking hard things and turning them into water, gas, and shit.*

*Because if we don't pray, who will? Who will tend to the hidden, mind the shrine, clear the dead flowers, offer new ones, sing devotions, pray for our survival?*





*Dioramas for Tanjong Rimau*

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*Dioramas for Tanjong Rimau*

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## **Cosmic Child**

Zachary Dankert

“Extinct,” at the time, was not  
in my vocabulary (“Exodus,”

“Paradise,” and “Parable”  
were close, rising cruxed  
out of the Pelagic.) I was  
a child, and words

like this create their own puncture,  
become known by the whistle of

escaping air like a kettle. But  
I didn’t believe there were pink dolphins  
in rivers, even when people spoke

of God as if he was fleshed  
under the current. Names are poetic,  
which means names are useless;  
Saint Helena swamphen, Pyrenean

Ibex, Splendid Poison Frog and  
Spined Dwarf Mantis. How could I  
have been so foolish, thinking stars

were species pilgrimed  
stretched end to end to the next  
universe over? What became of

Christ in me? My child-  
hood bedroom was angles and  
window panes trapping night

to identify under a microscope,  
in one cell of horizon I found  
water from the Yangtze River and  
glare from Philippine skies and

I swallowed it all for myself, retching  
it up in the morning. I was afraid  
to ask my mother, what she might say  
about a bellyful of wrongdoings.

It is a wonder how much can become  
currency, teeth in the wrist, golden  
bull men in the eyes,

but there was a time when I was a  
fiddlehead fern craning over  
the garden bed, sniffing in all  
the muck.

Day filling the breath between  
liturgies, another useless gesture.

And I'm maddened by  
prayer, which is always an act of  
the faithless; at night I pray

to the god who was spared then  
sacrificed by Abraham, yet  
there are numerous stars in the sky.

My last act of childhood was  
to watch out my window  
the Basilica carved out of  
retreating twilight plop over  
the edge of the world.

Cyprus Dipper, Caspian Tiger.  
Now I am prostrate before  
Epochs, and stare only  
at the ground.

## **In Search Of The Holy Bough**

Amal Joseph Mathew

Everyday the bending bough of the palms, slanting their feeble shoulders to one another, without movement, breath or word, lively occupied the meager square inches of space, without complaint or modest remarks, they watched from the muted courtyard overlooking the narrow rocky pathway cutting into the buildings of windows, doors and thin walls. A few windows operated like tree-tops in this sense, as in if you were a Sparrow perching on the high end of a pine-tree, you'd see what you would from the windows, girls and boys below like points on a bell curve, scattered at the edges and opening under the center, resembling pointillist dots of fire, as in dotted or scattered onto a map or a painting of the sky. Everyday the bending bough of the palms, stood as arrow-heads, as close to each other as they could, as arrows would, inside the quiver of a hunter's armory—that was how they wished to stay.

\*

When God decided to breathe life into the first person, she wanted to create something to mirror the light eaters. The light eaters that filled the world as an attentive soft prayer, so she made the first person, not in her image, but in the after-light of a bending bough. She knelt beside an un-tucked fallow and caressed a maimed branch under the majestic face of the wounded Birch. The boughs signified attention while the first person signified will. "They should sleep as the angels in the rain, they should listen as the lakes and walk across the plains searching for the things that they saw in the darkness, they should answer to the light and the light alone, they should believe that they will remain forever, they should not make a world within this world or kneel down to imitate the sun. Let them pluck the firm moon and pull it towards their chests", she commanded, as she sculpted the first person out of the broken antler.

\*

A group of trees, wounded against the fire in a painting is called a landscape. I am ostensible and I desire to become a landscape at will, but I lack attention. I carry an axe, I know the names of the things in the night, the spaces between light and dark, I am told, this at default is called 'gravity'. Each passing sliver that I remain kneeling under the snag, I am reminded of how the forking bough, grounded in a forced slanting fashion, is an upturned hip unlikely to open at my will. The tree is cold. I swing my axe, informing the bough of my God's several creations. This was how I manifested God, a prayer listing holy objects, a

prayer that truly lacked attention, a wisdom unlike the Birch, that does not kneel down to sustain the creator. I swing as a blind horse, who cannot tell the fire in a landscape, I swing, and that is the original sin.

\*

The deaf recluse confuses the first sound she's ever heard for the end of the world, a new light guides an arrow to the eye of the hanging bough.

## Three poems by Anuradha Vijayakrishnan

### Fear 101

There is much you can do. Sip warm water stirred with lemon, worry, swallow pills and promises, trust what you read, worry. Sip warm water, now tepid.

You can watch from a secret window. Check if neighbours have barred windows or drawn black curtains over doors. Or if that is a dead cat in their dead garden. Meanwhile your skin will flake and peel where you have rubbed snake oil mixed with spices. You will listen to your breath counting backwards, measure with your palm how little air you need. Gather words from every passing voice and string them into lucky charms. Hide your mouth, pretend to speak. You will not speak.

There are things you can do – cut, chop, boil, weed, clean, walk five thousand steps before sunset, pull out what you planted because you cannot watch them die, plant again because what else can you do.

You can lean out for a moment – startle foolish sparrows – for a moment breathe without fear. Whistle. Laugh. You can do that again.

## **How we greet trees**

Anuradha Vijayakrishnan

We look upward with closed eyes. Allow birds and leaves  
to speak

first. Let sunbeams trace our worn necks, weary  
spines

with green fingers. We stay quiet but our eyes  
shine

closed. We dapple with light, raise lonely  
hands

to the grand canopy. The trees remain unmoved  
except to bend slightly

to wind. Occasional spirit whistle call of breath from  
within—root

throb of gnarled soil—startled shiver of dew dropping  
from high

on our lashes. We sink into old moss, fallen leaves, pools  
of yesterday's fallen

moonshine. Make ritual love on moist earth, bury  
ourselves in faith.

## **Pagan**

Anuradha Vijayakrishnan

I am called forest. Sometimes I sweep across  
mountains in landslides of mud froth and silver pebble.  
I do not respect your borders. I am the giant axe that  
cuts down your cities  
tsunami that washes away your tall  
wrongs. Blood of dead animals runs in my veins.  
I sing, sing all the time. Sometimes it is koel, sometimes  
shy cicada. Listen if you would like to hear.  
I am the ululation chorusing from trees, dying wail of hunted  
antelope. I am birdcall and crescent moon.  
Sand you crumble into, red dawn and rainbow.  
I am the apocalypse you fear, endless labyrinth  
you live in.



**Two poems** by Madison Jones

**Global Impact**

I am an asteroid with legs.  
My Janus mask dissolves  
as I scorch the atmosphere  
and leave footprints everywhere.

My Janus mask dissolves  
beneath my cretaceous boot.  
I leave footprints everywhere  
and plant my annihilation foot.

With cretaceous boot held high,  
I plant my annihilation foot.  
My treads are geological,  
my hair is burning dust.

I plant my annihilation foot  
as I scorch the atmosphere,  
my hair is burning dust,  
I am an asteroid with legs.

## **After the Fire**

Madison Jones

We came to the end of the path  
that once led to wooden steps  
where we would sit in the afternoon,  
our feet hanging from the stoop  
which now stops and gestures  
upward toward nothingness or eternity,  
pieces of stone the crane truck left  
behind as it carried fistfuls  
of the cabin where we spent  
so many college days like coins  
dropped into a deep well. Shards  
of glass reflect the late noon,  
casting reflections forward  
and away that make the grass  
look as it did those evenings  
we built fires in the yard,  
yellow beacons to marshal  
in the late nights by the riverside.  
We would paddle out  
into the trance of dark water,  
hull pressing against the current  
the way that time pushes us onward,  
or else we would be swept up  
by the spillway's gentle rhetoric  
and tossed into the rapids below,  
and later, drifting back to the dock,  
as if homeward from the past  
to find the embers smoldering  
in the new moon darkness.

**Two poems** by Wutong Rain

**It is the season to open your palms**

It is the season to open your palms. All of the palms  
in fine fibrils and veins, to show that you exist  
for the bumble bees that are always in a hurry, and each raindrop that is as heavy.  
No breeze is so gentle, so you are bent  
by your own murmurs and joy, while arms raised  
like all the other shyest flowers, hiding their desires  
to be ravaged—  
And the season is suddenly brimmed with angst,  
shadows red in large blooms, gushing forth  
petal after petal, unheeded  
as no huddle will last  
no flower is hesitant to let go  
in full force  
like all the other frail things  
relieved, triumphant, as crumbled.

## **Moon Song**

Wutong Rain

There are women shouting down the alley, loud and clear like full moons. Soon the wind comes and the voices scattered. "Moon-moon, come into my room whenever you please!" I beg and they say, "Just a moment, I will be with you all night."

I wait and wait at the windowpane. They pedal trailing the sleeps they stole. By dawn it is a smeared pastel white, the wind smoothing the last ruffles. The full moons have dissolved into the sky, each seagull a crescent reminiscing what's left of the one colossal memory.

For the days to come, the clouds imitate the moons, the sun may have kidnapped the moons, it rumours that a moon is a blue balloon indistinguishable from the sky, and the sky an empty socket of the blind.

If I say loud enough—Moon!—the moon will probably hear. The women down the alley complain, "Look, there is no need to be loud. The moons hear anyway. They see everything—even if you are not speaking, the moons know."

Behind me are stars, or Mars  
"You are not as big and bright as the moons, but you know you are beautiful too, right?"  
"They are much bigger and brighter than the moons!"  
The women chuckle. I blink  
my primitive eyes. Next to me a lamppost  
raining spider webs, a glorious moon  
to the moths, right across the thin glass  
so close you can touch.

Moon! Moon! I am spun  
round and round and I shout  
down the alley, loud and clear.

**Two poems** by Yasmin Mariam Kloth

**Hand Rolled Wisdom**

My grandmother's grape leaves  
are the only ones I'll eat.

She'll pull them like tissue paper  
from an oily jar, take  
her mottled hand to wild leaves  
from vines, from trees, a plastic bag  
of yellow veins crisp in the sun.

My grandmother's grape leaves  
are made in many parts,  
three days,  
one night. The night  
my mother died, a family friend  
made Persian food we ate in silence  
in a sterile room. There were no grape leaves,  
but Tahdig, rice burned orange  
burned turmeric and saffron  
burned broken grains on my hospital plate.

My grandmother's grape leaves  
are first washed, cut, dried, leaves  
stretched wide on the counter  
open mouths  
    waiting to be stuffed.

My grandmother rolls her grape leaves by hand,  
rolls grape leaves while watching *Days of our Lives*,  
rolls grape leaves into thin bodies—  
don't bulge or break.  
She tolerates my time  
in the kitchen, winces  
when I over-, under- stuff, holds  
my hands in the way  
she held my mother's that day.  
That is to say: Gently.

My grandmother's grape leaves  
are the only ones I'll eat.

Leaves from vines she picked the day before  
wise to rain and time—  
and our quiet lives.

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Published in *Ancestry Unfinished: Poems of a Lost Generation* (Kelsay Books, 2022).

## Telephone

Yasmin Mariam Kloth

Something told me to phone  
my grandmother  
tonight.

She answered and  
her voice changed when  
she heard my broken French across the line,  
her voice warmed like spilled  
ice cream on black pavement, ran  
downhill into happy tears.  
This is my own fault, I know,  
for letting time run so long  
without calling. Like sand through a sieve,  
so careless and forgetful of me.

My mother used to tell me  
her childhood stories of  
Alexandria, where  
tin cans tied by strings  
tethered my grandmother  
to neighbors across buildings  
above the boardwalk  
by the sea.  
I thought of my voice through a tin can,  
through a string above a city,  
thought how much in this life  
must have changed  
in my grandmother's eyes.

I am aching in this hollow place  
that has grown behind my heart.  
It's the size of a home a squirrel  
makes in the brush and  
as wide as the Mediterranean Sea.  
It's the length of a walk through  
knee high grasses and  
as gray as a summer sky.

I ache because my daughter is growing,  
and time is changing coastlines;  
I ache because  
nothing is the same, or  
as I wanted it to be.  
I ache for my grandmother's memories,  
that I may know Alexandria  
and her shorelines—  
before years of storms  
before the telephone  
had come.

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জন্ম-মৃত্যু

Guna Moran

গুণ মৰাণ

জন্ম ল'লোঁ

তোমাৰ সুখৰ দুখৰ সমভাগী হ'লোঁ

তুমি হাঁহিছা

মই কিনিছো

কালিলৈ গুচি যাম

তোমাৰ সুখৰ দুখৰ সমভাগী ন'হম

তুমি কান্দিবা

মই হাঁহিম

মোৰ মুক্তিত

গৰ্ভত স্থিতি ল'লোঁ

পৃথিৱীৰ মুঠ চাবলৈ খৰ-খেদা কৰিছোঁ

দুদিনৰ পিছত আমনি লাগিব

পৃথিৱী এবিবলৈ খৰ-খেদা কৰিম

অহা-যোৱাৰ ডালত জীৱন- বাদুলি ওলমি থাকে

## **BIRTH - DEATH**

*Translated from Assamese into English by Bibekananda Choudhary*

Guna Moran

Took birth  
Shared your happiness-sorrow  
You laughed  
I cried

Tomorrow I shall depart  
On attaining freedom  
You'd cry  
I'd laugh  
At my freedom

I occupied the womb  
Made haste to look at the face of the Earth

Would lose the enthusiasm in a few days  
Would make haste to depart from the Earth

Life remains hanging upside down like a bat  
On the beaten track

## **East Cluden**

Ayla Fudala

Verdant turmoil, gusting through  
Pools and rivulets  
Leading to ten thousand waterfalls  
I bask in shadows, finding  
Simplicity in solitude

Wheels never turning  
Ivy skeletons like cracks  
A crater reaching out slow tendrils  
Patiently usurping stone

Cloud palaces drift  
Immense and unattainable  
Heralded by spiraling swallows  
Guarded by the old sentinel,  
The gray heron

In water life teems  
Slipping minnows, grasping larvae  
Ever seeking, escaping, regrouping  
An elaborate dance, an unfathomable pattern  
A performance where the stakes  
Are life and death, unwitnessed  
Casual prey and indifferent conqueror

On the shores, a riot of grasses  
Thrust forth their seeds  
An offering to the future  
Ferns hang their heads  
Adorned with pearls, a gift  
From the leaping streams

And towering over all, the protector spirits  
Oak and ash, entwined in a rigid cascade  
Capturing the sun  
Blessing with shade

## Two poems by Jamie Seibel

### History of Folsom Lake

*“In my solitude I have woven for myself  
a silken web or chrysalis, and nymph-like,  
shall ere long burst forth a more perfect  
creature, fitted for a higher society.”*

—Henry David Thoreau

In the Sierra-Nevada foothills,  
I remember how the low water  
reveals irrigation ditches and the traces  
of Red Bank, an old cattle-ranch settlement.  
The silt is a reminder of who we used to be.  
Everything changes. Everything is the same.  
After years, the eagle returned to its lake,  
and Covid-19 made people be alone again.  
By ourselves, we transform into wings  
and become who we are supposed to be.  
I follow my dog on the Johnny Cash trail,  
looping back to the start, or back to the end.  
Lupinus polyphyllus clings to the roadside,  
attracting bees with a pointed tongue, pushing  
out other species to absorb more than they need.  
As the path finishes I realize, like the lupine,  
we take more than we give. But deep inside,  
an untouched beauty waits to be found.

## **An Exchange**

Jamie Seibel

My home is a refuge  
to wrens and robins  
on the windowsill.  
Their paper necks  
fold to greet me  
and teach a song.  
Do birds learn  
not to be afraid?  
Fly to my room  
and never leave.  
The ceiling rains.  
Their red feathers  
print against floor.  
This is their place  
now and forever.  
I become a visitor  
and nothing more.  
Without a word,  
I walk to the forest  
by the river where  
the trees are quiet,  
no nests to be found.  
In their stead, I linger  
beneath the branches,  
embracing warm light.  
My tongue tastes wind.  
My toes feel naked dirt.  
My throat opens to sky,  
and I begin to sing again.

## Contributors



**William Allegrezza** edits the press Moria Books and the webzine *Moss Trill*, and he teaches at Indiana University Northwest. He has published many poetry books, poetry reviews, articles, and poems. He founded and curated series A, a reading series in Chicago, from 2006-2010.

You can find out more at [www.allegrezza.info](http://www.allegrezza.info)



**Dianne Araral** (they/them/sya) is a trans ecolesbian from Los Baños, Laguna, Philippines, currently teaching social science at the National University of Singapore. They are interested in non-human kinship, speculative fiction, and rethinking our pedagogies in the midst of urgent climate crisis. You can find them on the Fragmentary Institute of Comparative Timelines (FICT.site), LitHub, Medium, and at home, brewing kombucha.



**John Paul Caponigro** is an internationally collected visual artist and published author. He leads unique adventures in the wildest places on earth to help participants creatively make deeper connections with nature and themselves.

View his TEDx and Google talks at <https://www.johnpaulcaponigro.art/poetry/>



**Zachary Chan** is a graphic designer, composer, sound designer and gamelan musician. His musical roots are based in central Javanese gamelan music and he has written music and designed sound for experimental films, plays, video games, storytelling and art installations. He is the co-founder of Studio Crop, a graphic design studio.

His work can be viewed on [crop.sg](http://crop.sg)



**Zachary Dankert** is an aspiring creator living on unceded Miami territory known as Indianapolis, Indiana. His published work can be found in *The Fourth River*, *Breakbread Literary Magazine*, and *Tofu Ink Arts Press*, and is forthcoming in *West Trade Review*.



**Patricia Davis-Muffett** (she/her) holds an MFA from the University of Minnesota. Her chapbook, *alchemy of yeast and tears*, is forthcoming. Her work has won numerous honors including Best of the Net 2022 nomination, inclusion in Best New Poets 2022, and second place in the 2022 Joe Gouveia Outermost Poetry Contest, and has appeared in *Atlanta Review*, *Pretty Owl Poetry*, *Calyx* and *Comstock Review*, among others. She lives in Rockville, Maryland, with her family.



**Janice L. Freytag** currently resides in Souderton, PA. She began writing poetry after working in post-war Bosnia. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Amethyst Review*, *Dappled Things*, *One Art*, *Radix*, *Relief*, *Saint Katherine Review*, *Talking River*, *Thimble*, *Windhover* and others. In addition to poetry, she has written four children's musicals. She is an enthusiastic, though not always successful, gardener.



**Ayla Fudala** is a writer and artist with a passion for the environmental humanities. She holds a Master's degree in Environment, Culture, and Communication from the University of Glasgow, and recently published the first edition of [\*Biophilia Environmental Humanities Literary and Art Magazine\*](#). She is currently based out of Boston, Massachusetts, USA.



**Gabrielle de Gray** is a writer who lives in the San Francisco Bay Area. She has been published in the *New York Times*, *Chesapeake Review*, *The Mindful Word*, and *Yellow Arrow Literary Magazine*. She holds an MA from the University of Toronto and is currently at work on a memoir.





**David Groulx** is an indigenous poet from Canada. His book of poetry, *Solus Urger Voyager* will be out in 2023.



**Gabriela Halas** immigrated to Canada during the early 1980s, grew up in northern Alberta, lived in Alaska for seven years, and currently resides in B.C. She has published poetry in a variety of literary journals including *Cider Press Review*, *Inlandia*, *About Place Journal*, *Prairie Fire*, *december magazine*, *Rock & Sling*, *The Hopper*, among others; fiction in *Ruminate*, *The Hopper*, *subTerrain*, *Broken Pencil*, and *en bloc magazine*; nonfiction in *The Whitefish Review*, *Grain*, *Pilgrimage*, *High Country News*, and forthcoming in *Alaska Quarterly Review*. She has received annual Best of the Net nominations in poetry (2020-2022). She lives and writes on Ktunaxa Nation land and is currently completing an MFA at UBC. [www.gabrielahalas.org](http://www.gabrielahalas.org).



**Chrystal Ho** is a writer from Singapore who works with poetry and non-fiction. Her work has previously been published in *The Tiger Moth Review*, *PR&TA Journal*, and *The Hawker*, amongst others. A former Global Writing & Speaking Fellow at NYU Shanghai, she is currently a Creative Resident at the National Library of Singapore.



**Hazel Hall** is an 18-year-old disabled-queer writer and poet based in New Hampshire. Hazel is pursuing an English major and working on her first novel. Her works have been featured in *After the Pause*, *Quail Bell Magazine*, *Celestite Poetry*, *Réapparition Journal*, *Scribes\*MICRO\*Fiction*, and *Microfiction Monday Magazine*, with other pieces forthcoming in *Breath & Shadow*, *Wishbone Words*, *Overtly Lit*, *Beltway Poetry Quarterly*, and *Valiant Scribe*.



Thanks to the Singapore Book Council, **George M. Jacobs** attended his first poetry workshop earlier in 2022, and now he's hooked for life. Poetry is such a powerful way to communicate about what matters to us. What matters to George includes we homo sapiens coexisting as harmoniously as possible with our fellow animals and fellow humans. George has many years' experience in the overlapping (what doesn't overlap?) spaces of education—including student centered teaching, cooperative learning, community engagement and humane education—and environmental protection, including ecolinguistics, sustainable development, and alternative protein. Among his recent books are *Student Centered Cooperative Learning* (Springer), *Becoming a Community Engaged Educator* (Springer), and *Tempted by Tempeh* (Marshall Cavendish).



**D. H. Jenkins'** plays have been staged in California, Arizona, Australia, and Japan. His poems appear in the art films *Call From a Distant Shore* and *Our Autumn*, and in *The Tiger Moth Review* and *Jerry Jazz Musician*. He lives in Wanaka, New Zealand.



**Madison Jones** is an assistant professor of Writing & Rhetoric and Natural Resources Science at the University of Rhode Island. He received his Ph.D. in Writing Studies from the University of Florida in May 2020. He is author of the poetry collections *Losing the Dog* (Salmon Poetry, 2023) and *Reflections on the Dark Water* (Solomon & George, 2016). He has published over fifty poems in journals such as *The Southern Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Shenandoah*, and elsewhere.

Find out more at [madisonpjones.com](http://madisonpjones.com) or follow him on Twitter @poethetor.



**Maziar Karim** is from Tehran, Iran. He holds an MS degree in Information Technology. He has been doing research in different fields of philosophy, psychology, philology, mythology and literature. His essays and books in these fields are forthcoming publication in both Persian and English. His work in America has appeared in different magazines such as *Better Than Starbucks*, *DREGINALD*, *The Bookends Review*, *Gramma Poetry* and *Smithsonian Magazine* and elsewhere. He is also a literature translator.



**Yasmin Mariam Kloth**'s poetry explores love, loss, place, and space, often at the intersection of her family memories and her Middle Eastern heritage. Yasmin's work has been published in *JuxtaProse*, the Cathexis Northwest Press, the *West Trestle Review*, among others. Her poems have previously appeared in the *Tiger Moth Review*, including "Banyan Song", which was awarded third place in the 2021 Hawker Prize for Southeast Asian Poetry. Her debut collection of poetry from Kelsay Books is titled *Ancestry Unfinished: Poems of a Lost Generation*.





**Susanna Lang**'s chapbook, *Like This*, is forthcoming from Unsolicited Books. Her translation of *Baalbek* by Nohad Salameh was published by Atelier du Grand Tétrás (2021) and her third full-length collection of poems, *Travel Notes from the River Styx*, appeared in 2017 (Terrapin). Her poems and translations have appeared in publications such as *Prairie Schooner*, *december*, *Delos*, *American Life in Poetry* and *The Slowdown*. Her translations include poetry by Yves Bonnefoy, Souad Labbize and Hélène Dorion.



**Maria Pia Latorre** is an award-winning novelist, editor, and poet from Bari, Italy. She has written numerous children's books, edited books, and published poetry collections, including the well-received *Gli occhi di Giotto* (*Giotto's Eyes*). Her books can be found on Amazon.it.



**Rachel Lim** is a recent English literature graduate with a minor in art history who lives, works, and writes in Singapore. Rachel's art writing can be found on *Alien Space Crab* and one of her short stories in the *All In! Snack Fiction Anthology*.

She wrote this poem from "[The Tabi-Tabi Po Prompt](#)" by Team Philippines for Day 21 of SEAPoWriMo (Southeast Asian Poetry Writing Month) 2022.

Contact her on Instagram: [@rachelwritesabout](#)



**Katie Mary** is currently carrying out ongoing research and making artwork for her contemporary art project titled *Ground Truth*. The project began in the UK in 2022, continuing in South East Asia for 2023. Katie has an eclectic 2D visual artist portfolio including photography, analogue and digital paintings, and murals. She exhibited at The Truman Brewery, Brick Lane, London after graduation from University and painted murals in various locations in South London during the pandemic.

Follow her journey: [www.youtube.com/c/katiemary](https://www.youtube.com/c/katiemary)



**Amal Mathew** is an artist from India. His creative and critical pieces have appeared in the *nether Quarterly*, *VAYAVYA*, and *LiveWire* among other places.



**Guna Moran** is an internationally acclaimed poet and book reviewer. His poems are published in Indian Poetry Review, Indian Poetry, Indian Periodical and elsewhere. His work have been translated into thirty languages around the world. He has three poetry books to his credit. He lives in Assam, India.



**Zarina Muhammad** is an artist, educator and researcher whose practice is deeply entwined with a critical re-examination of oral histories, ethnographic literature and other historiographic accounts about Southeast Asia. Working at the intersections of performance, installation, text, ritual, sound, moving image and participatory practice, she is interested in the broader contexts of ecocultural and ecological histories, mythmaking, haunted historiographies, water cosmologies and chthonic realms.



**Nicholas Quek** (he/him) is a moment between breaths, subsisting on borrowed time. He is a physician functioning at variable capacity, and a member of the literary collective *zerosleep*. During his downtime, he makes playlists, and maintains a strange love for the *anima methodi*. Every morning, he relearns how to comfort always.



**Ilma Qureshi** is currently pursuing her doctorate at the University of Virginia, with a focus on Persian poetics and South Asian Literature. Hailing from Multan, a small town in the south of Pakistan, she grew up with a host of languages and writes in Persian, Urdu, and English. Her work has been previously published in literary journals such as *Tafheem*, *Tareekh-e-Adab-e-Urdu*, *Active Muse*, *The Ice Colony*, *Rigorous Magazine*, *Last Leaves*, *The Roadrunner Review*, and *Audio Times*.



**Wutong Rain** grew up in Beijing, moved to the USA for education, and is currently residing in the UK. She loves to write and is passionate about seeking ways to express herself, including piano and photography. Her works have appeared in *The Banyan Review* and *The Tiger Moth Review*. She is a nominee for the Pushcart Prize 2021.



**Mykyta Ryzhykh's** work has been published in *Soloneba*, *Littsentr*, *Ukrainian Literary Gazette*, *Bukovynsky Journal*, *Stone Poetry Journal* (USA) and elsewhere.



**Alana Saab** is an NYC-based experimental literary writer and award-winning screenwriter. Her work explores themes of mental health, trauma, queerness and the transcendent through a metamodern approach. Her debut experimental novel, *Please Stop Trying to Leave Me*, is represented by Janklow & Nesbit. She is an alumnus of The New School (MFA in Fiction), Columbia University (MA in Psychology) and NYU (BA in millennial storytelling). As a teaching artist, she facilitates writing workshops with survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault and human-trafficking.





**Dhanny Sanjaya 'Danot'** (born in Banjarmasin, Indonesia) completed his study of Visual Communication Design at Pelita Harapan University in Tangerang, Indonesia. He is interested in environmental issues, using art to question and create new possibilities. Many of his projects study the natural relationship between humans, fish and the sea; and offers research methods as a medium to re-examine how we position ourselves within the environment and with other organisms. Danot lives and works in Tangerang.



**Jamie Seibel** earned a Master's Degree in Creative Writing with an emphasis in poetry from California State University, Sacramento. Her work is forthcoming in *Versification Poetry Zine*, *Wingless Dreamer*, and *The Chamber Magazine*. Her poem "Children of the Sea" was a top finalist for Wingless Dreamer's Seashore Contest. Overall, Jamie's work focuses on mortality, transformation, and the environment. She hopes to publish a collection of eco-poetry one day soon.



**Abhirami Senthilkumaran** is still getting the hang of the art and heart of adulting. The two things she cannot do without on the journey are hot, spicy food and warm, heartfelt words.





**Eleni Stephanides** is a freelance writer and Spanish interpreter. Her work has been published in *Them*, *Tiny Buddha*, *Peaceful Dumpling*, *Elephant Journal*, and *Introvert Dear* among others.

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**Joel Tan** is a Singaporean writer, performer, and playwright based between London and Singapore. His work straddles theatre, film, and audio, and examines the ways in which politics distort the personal and spiritual, exploring subjects ranging from colonial history, nature, queer experience, and contemporary Singapore life. Joel also works interdisciplinarily, and has collaborated with visual artists, poets, musicians and dancers as a writer, director and dramaturg.



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