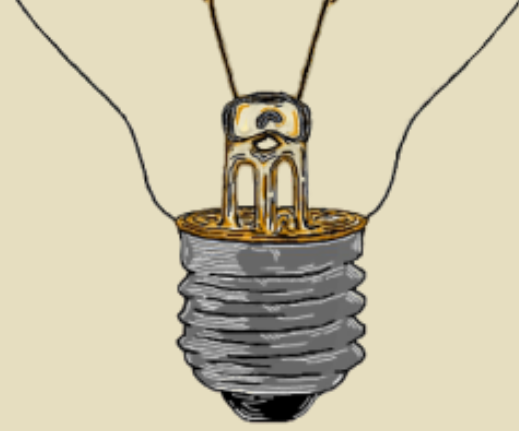


The Lumiere Review

ISSUE 01





Masthead

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M.P. Armstrong

naming is an honor

in genesis, god formed wild animals out of the earth as it spun on its axis like an omniscient potter at a wheel. he then gifted each one to adam. and *whatever the man called each living creature that was its name*. an honor afforded to the first human only slightly diminished by his position as the only human, a condition remedied just after. as soon as adam finished naming all the birds in the sky, he fell into a deep sleep and god formed his rib into another human being. she shall be called "*woman,*" *for she was taken out of man*. and names begat gender and gender begat names and my parents begat both along with me. they tell me that if i had been a boy, i would have been called tristan or declan, but they *knew soon enough that you would be a girl* and focused on mallory and phoebe. an honor awarded to the parents, only slightly diminished by the fact that she was a lump of cells in her mother's womb and no one else's. and any name they called this living creature would be her name; she would be birth name for she was taken out of her mother, hewn into a human and stuck with an *f*, origami of expectations and name like a bow. naming is an honor, a permanent honor. naming is an honor. and i do not want any part of it.

airshow

every august, kids come back to school with bright red skin, sunburnt from standing on an expanse of packed dirt, staring up at the sky. at the planes, chugging across a field of blue. at the spirals, the figure eights, the loop-de-loops, the crowns of smoke capping off the summer. their fingers grow sticky with the residue of cotton candy and the perfume--eau de county fair, eau de skinned knees and freedom--clings to their clothes. their world bursts beyond the bounds of their neighborhoods, beyond the radius of what is reachable by bicycle, and they remember that in a few days they'll be in first period math when they see the algebra teacher loading her lawn chair into the trunk of her car. the summer after graduation, ghosts of your prom dress still haunting around your ankles, you realize that you probably went to school with the pilot or at least his little sister and you want to untangle the web that links you with every upturned face, but you've been eating the cotton candy, too. you want to stop, but the planes are strangely hypnotic, making their circles in the sky. strange entrapments, these familiarities, these small reminders of yourself running around pockmarked with band-aids and smiling awe. a few summers after that, you are walking outside and a fighter jet is passing overhead, and you are standing there realizing that the kids will be coming back to school pale this year, if at all, and the web, previously so indestructible is dissolving like cotton candy in water and your skin hurts like sunburn though you haven't seen the sun in weeks.

self-portrait as museum visitor

i have been breathing in the air,
thick with creation, along with
the rest of the world, whether
or not we realized the way that
inspirations were layering inside
our lungs, waiting to be coughed
out in kindergarten finger-paint
or doodles in college notebook
margins. i have existed as the next
door neighbor of brunelleschi's
dome and michelangelo's david,
slept with canvases over my bed
like sentinels, and spent so much
time in galleries that i am more
baroque frame than bone, more
brushstrokes along blaschko's
lines than flesh. oil has seeped
through my pores and pigment
clumps are sticking to my ribs. i
am not a person, i am wandering,
weaving in and out of the statues
living in the streets, or perhaps i
am one of the statues themselves,
with a stomach of marble-chub
and glow of a renaissance model.
i am a piece of art myself and i
prefer that when i close my eyes,
see the photograph i once snapped
of a tourist standing in the uffizi
alone in front of the birth of venus
and i cannot tell if i am behind or in
front of the lens, if i am in front of
the painting or within, balanced on a
shell and beautiful with no parameter.

chromatic

i have something to show you, you said,
pushing the creaky out-of-tune keys off
the piano into a scale packed with sharps
and flats, ascension-descent into a sweet
and rueful song you taught yourself by ear.

and it's the end of the world as we know it,
you observed, hair leaking rich brown into t
he porcelain of the bathroom sink as you
gulped down another burning-bitter throat
full of vodka flavored with cherry syrup.

you remind us later, you didn't have time
to learn that song before you were chased
home by the pointed teeth of mounted fear.

i remind you that after you left, it seemed
as if life had been bleached, yet someone
took your place in front of the baby grand.

someone started playing it anyway.

sheetz

who goes to a gas station for pizza?,
they asked, and i responded, we live

like this, without anywhere to go on a
friday night we fill up with pizza and
gas in one neon, bitter-perfumed stop
and then cruise the highway until we
run out of places to go or patience for
the one traffic light. we've lived here

long enough to no longer be surprised
by the scenes of monotonous small-
town excitement-routine and, eyebrows
unraised, the big-city friend and i follow

the ritual of invented shock, placing our
tongues inside the familiar words like
when it snows and you step into prints
left by some other carefully balanced
walker so you can find purchase on the
prepacked surface we navigate regional
difference and population margin. who

sells gas for ninety-five cents? the gas
station could pass for nineteen eighty
five, my father comments as we pass by
on a nighttime drive like he did and i
did and every other driver we pass did
in high school and are doing now again.

who lives like this for such a cheap price?

Kristin Garth

Death by Chocolate or The Last Meal of Prince Pondicherry

“Nonsense!” shouted the Prince.

‘I’m not going to eat my palace! I’m not even going to nibble the staircase or lick the walls! I’m going to live in it!’

- Prince Pondicherry to Willy Wonka

Is death delicious in a chocolate house? Does it wiggle from a Black Forest hole, a small white chocolate mouse? Closet baseboard detail of normality he forced into your chocolate castle fantasy, coy contractor chocolatier. Overnight palace appears before the boiling sea he fears when chocolate walls meet sunrise in India and capsize into yard, mint chocolate blades. Swim against the frothed cocoa waves. Hundred rooms, bricks of bars liquified, swallowed under stars. This trough of death commissioned must be bittersweet, rodent cherry cordial heart between your teeth.

Previously published by Neologism

Kushal Poddar

Amphan Means Sky in Thai

1

(Sleep Stirs after the Storm)

The tail of sleep whirs. Morning grass.
A clear eye, closer one, sees - there
lies an echo of a hiss, skin
bereft of the flesh, serpent.

Awakening slips. The fall
from the garden seems imminent.
Neighbor's canine finds a good tree
reclining since the cyclone gone.
The tail wags a little. Means no dream.

Fall seems to be here. A scrap of skin.
I hear the bakery boy seeking
the address of the man died in gale.
The supply of birthday cakes is up.
Sleep stirs. Morning grass. Whispering.

2

(Poker)

Ere arrives the great gale the salt water
has been usurping the farmland; Tim
plays holy pocker now, earns nights and
spends days; sorrows seem cotton seeds,
and then comes the storm; the entrance

of the school building spins away, still it was made into a shelter, and what you know, Tim plays poker with the other lost ones and the other half dead. Storm takes the rest. The cards all wet. The game acquires the souls. The village buries the violence of the trees beneath the bodies of the fallen. Tim plays poker. His face reveals nothing.

Yong-Yu Huang

tug of war

*can't find a place for myself / between the Taipei one oh one and the Petronas Towers /
how many times have I seen them on the skyline / lit up with fireworks/on fire under city
sun / and yet I still can't find/a me-shaped shadow / between them / because both are to
an extent / utterly foreign to me / maybe it's the western liberal news i read / or my
American school / or my globe-scattered friends / each one with a hand grasping / my
hair my pinky finger my ankle / bruising and grabbing in a game / of tug of war and I
am the rag doll being / torn asunder between it all*

lost her name

the lion heads on the cul-de-sac
snarl at her when she comes knocking
excuse me, do you—
but quietly moan at the loss of their own
(manes worn and names forgotten)
on the south side of this coalescence
of a city that is supposed to offer her
the secrets and half-formed dreams that she's
been on the hunt for: bow strung and quiver empty.

you need a license for a bow
but she's never been stopped on the streets
and even if she is, there is nothing
on her ID. nothing to see here.
she tucks it into the officer's jacket—
it's of no use to her or him (no
social security or even personal security)
because she wouldn't even be able to
give a childhood nickname or
those runny syllables of a baby's attempt
to pronounce her own birthright.

she thinks she remembers her
time in the womb, the crooning
of her mother with a list of
names, testing the unfamiliar syllables
out to see if any of them sang
to the flower within her but
enveloped in weightless placenta,
there was nothing to hear except the
throb of her own heartbeat, the one
fully-formed part of her.

soda drinker, freedom runner, school skipper,
stepping-on-the-sidewalk-cracks-girl
sends out missing flyers in search of
that thing her mother gave her at birth
when she was squalling at the bite
of fluorescent love and the rubber
hands that plucked her from
the blissful void. it is missing
(must have slipped out of
that hole in her jeans, the one where she tried
to mend with pink thread and forgot
to tie the knot, open-ended

she's always been forgetful (a
leave-the-keys-in-the-ignition-girl
and a bread burner), and she leaves
her window open: cavity in the red brick.
the flyers spiral out and
one is snatched out of the air
by that old man down the street
with half a leg and three quarters
of a dog and he burns it. His mutt howls.
the smoke writhes up
towards her window, caresses calcified glass
with a hint of a name, and lets itself fall into that
lover's embrace that is the unforgettable,
the unattainable. the planes flying above
radio in with their special signs for her:
artemis girl, arrowless, nameless.

exodus

genesis, exodus, leviticus, something something judges ruth-less
the familiar chant exhales from his lips

and melts into the bullet smoke:
a prayer for the others that haven't noticed him slump

he wanted to have his name written in
the family Bible with the cherub-wing paper,

because black beading on the page before
Genesis with the names of his gramps and second cousin

once removed was the only way that his grandma would
remember him and his fallen leaves existence

that's what she called him: her drifting
boy, the one that was blown away when

the war started, the one whose branch
was already bare, gnawed tusk,

mottled ivory, when the draft began.
he sent her letters in paper airplanes,

stained papers, ink dripping
like mini Mekongs and swirling

with rusted red from the factories
of flesh and skin and bone that lined

the military parades and the grainy television
screens. they were still black and white

so you couldn't see the damage in technicolor—
only the sharp lines of the uniforms and the glint

of medals and the silver eyes. that's what
they came home from the war like:

bullet-riddled and broken in straight lines,
draped in flags: a lover's embrace.

he wanted his name written before Genesis
so his gramma would remember his birth

and not his exodus with all the others,
marching into the jungles, mist-wrapped.

Cristina Patregnani

An half

Where I live, I have one eye only
and a heart that seems not to be
entire.

It languishes slowly under a socio-cultural disguise.

I'm a morning person
trapped in the neon light of nightlife.

My sight perishes but the vision gets wiser
when I stop under a blinding sun
to hear closely to the sound of the pouring rain,
Where I live my heart was cut
when I was six years old

an ogre stole that little piece that still survive
buried under a fat land under the herons flight
- silent keepers, moving quietly as they're walking
on eggs.

Perhaps my other eye has tried to follow that
tiny piece of heart, with highest dismay;
maybe it's in Mexico City now, on the rooftop
of a ochre house, prisoner of the stars,
hung to the tail of the day.

For all I know, is the naked pearl
hunted by marine monsters in the Atlantic
underwater cities.

If only, if only, we are used to say.
But here where I live, nobody cares.

They cut trees as hearts, equally.

Scientists and doctors supervise
United Against The Morning Light
that spreads upon a dumb level ground
violently speaking in silence.

Samuel Strathman

Bête Noire

A youth traverses the backbone
of a hidden distract,
feels tombs shift
under his feet.

Incisors extend from
the cobblestones,
draw the seed in
like quicksand – trapdoor
to the underground.

Submergence –
various rocks –
skeletal remains –
momentary blindness –
a long drop
backlit by dread.

Back hits –
back hits what exactly?

A light flickers
to reveal a reservoir.

Bats swim lengths
of radioactivity,
liquefied rosarium
churning in the abyss.

An undetectable carcinogen
permeates in the air,
fizzle of a body
engulfed by acid waves.

The teen tries
to scream but cannot
vocalize his alarm.

When he stands,
there is a screen that shows
him being inhumed
by the Bête Noire.

Bête Noire's octopus
mouth contorts
in slow motion –
globeflower eyes
unblinking.

Years earlier,
the beast was able
to crawl inside
the boy's ear.
Now he collapses doorways.

Darkness never sleeps,
only slinks –
grinds prophecy
into reality.

J George

On Fire

I call Eli Eli repeatedly from morning till night, my phone's auto-correct changes her name to Elijah and so, like Christ on crucifix, I call out her name, my last hope, calling my sister for having food, I hear my father's feet missing the floor like magnetic repulsion, a rebellious act from the floor, a shout-out, no more tolerant, these flames burning our little glass house; the fire has been eating our bricks, one by one since long and we learnt to live around it tending to the burns, making us more of christians forgiving for a living, a vengeance in disguise, the fire initiated by alcohol and a spark from kitchen, sometimes it's someone switching on the light to cover up the darkness forgetting that there has been a gas leak, ever since alive, I wonder who named it love, their marriage; Ah! No. No, I don't expect a miracle, to magically change the wine to water and save our lives, maybe it will rain with thunder and hurricanes, sirens to rehabilitation centers; how we have locked ourselves in this four walls calling it a home, despite being nailed to this crucifix, it's April the summer colors have tanned the bougainvilleas pinned to hanging pots decorating this broken home like roses on the Easter crucifix where Jesus forget to resurrect and slept on for years, maybe it will rain and the flames will stop eating us, before it consumes us whole, while alive like a pyre.

AM Kamaal

8 Unconnected Double Triplets Facing The Same Wall

look, i am painting the perfect scenes:

1

an underage boy with a rum on his right hand
& brown big cigarette on his dominant left
like a godfather, sighing in his haven:

he laughed out loud his childhood with bloodshed.
a man said he is an underage boy & i am
saying it too: he's still living in his rugged childhood.

2

a black man coughed and they ran wildly
as if he a is farmer: as if he breeds that which
can't be seen or touched like a viral abstraction.

the night is the presenter of everything evil
that is human. & everything beautiful are the moon,
the stars & the two lovers, gazing them to delight.

3

a winter passed without snow & human scoffed
at God before the cold summer came like prophet:
life goes on in everyone's mouth as a daily song.

in my mouth too, because what i heard is new
unusual & worth remembering so i moved close
to the philosophy of Heraclitus, seething for change.

4

life goes on until man pays well what living
demands as its price. i am seeing a glowing star
today from the atlas of my sight, the moon

from the continent of my beauty: only a few
of solitude knows how to recognize living &
the beauty flying around like the homeless leaves.

5

i did both because i am my own solitude & i know
how to live, & how to give people reasons, too
because i know i am, unlike them, beautiful.

i am alone because i love myself too much
too much i cry to experience the thrillingness
of consoling myself into funny moments.

6

this is the funniest part: she read the letter—
his love letter —to her mother's hearing & she
laughed & began comparing his 'a' to her man's.

she returned the letter with a poem, bleached with
an epigraph, saying: the time is not right now to write
the better lines, but wait, wait till you can wait no more.

7

on a saturday morning, some beautiful people
came to the mosque, plating their sadness & what not
through the loudness of their voice & genuflecting steps.

& after the sunday school, a boy pointed his finger
into a question: how fast is the answering of a prayer?
his pastor replied: how far you can say the name.

8

the boy called the name, & rain fell, after
the falling of the rain, a rainbow coloured the firmament,
after the colouring of the sky, the boy died

looking back at the mouths of his mother turning
back on God. the palms of his father, slapping
the alter: that what God did is not so divine.



A Silhouette Of An Almost Perfect Sister

for AM Mariam

black is beautiful, but we keep bleaching our skins
into the chocolate of being perfect
as if we would drink our melanin of grave insults.
we laugh together because black is blissful more
when love grows in the orchard a man of soft heart
gardens with his tender touch, when love grows
in the garden a beautiful girl of patience waters
into blossom and nourishment.
i never had my mind drenched in the rain
of sorrow alone: i look outside myself to see innocence,
waning away like the desert sands in the touch
of the paroxysmal wind. i see beautiful turning prosaic
like a political speech divested of anaphora.
but she knows: a coercion is not enough to break a man
into fragments of unending happiness.
you have to mirror the shape of his mouth
in his toughest time the way the sun mirrors itself
through the transparent face of the ocean.
you have to mirror his waking and sleeping time
you have to mirror what he mirrors with the shards
of his perambulating mind. because black is beautiful:
she beautified everything blocking her way against
the toughness of my darker room.
she knows: the only thing beautiful about darkness is
the darkness itself, that everything beautiful
about everyone is in the perimeter of their pained mind.
in the wake of everyday, she wakes up to see me
snoring the stress away, knowing zilch
about her prophethood, prophesied in the antiquity
of coming like a thief in the night.

Ace Boggess

Is There a Point Where Not Keeping Up Well Enough Will Make Me a Gen-Xer?

—Mark Danowsky, Facebook post

We were born old, our mysteries wrapped in burlap:
scratchy, dry. We hadn't discovered our music,
grew it in us—whiny, sad, quick to rage,
frustrated, strange. Required to survive
in pretend joyous glitz of the 80s, classic nothing of the 70s,
we were a class preparing ourselves for pointlessness.
While our parents busied diversifying assets,
we sought the other. We ran out of band names &
had to build new ones from what moved us.
Not our fashion sense. Not our grandparents' drugstore cologne
that smelled like a night at the bar. Wars past & wars to come?
We hated them & forgot the promised annihilation—
we carried it as long as we could, then put our headphones on.

Konstantina Theofanopoulou

Scents they sent

I would give a fortune to buy an incense that smells like my mother's pink robe:
something
 between jasmine and baby powder.

Her father would be easier to simulate; it would be buying some mint, but the
smell turns
 different when he plucks it naughtily from the neighbor's garden.

Her mother is pretty tough to explain; from her cheese pie to hair spray, I can't
spot what
 lingers the most.

I could bring my father here through his after shave, but only when he's freshly
shaved. When
 he is not, he smells like beard.

His father would be grandpa's toothpaste; definitely strong mint; there must be
something with
 mint and grandpas.

His mother smelled like lipstick or pasta frola or cherry liqueur or Greek coffee
in the
 afternoon.

My sister smells like clean, and it's so bad I can't explain it better.

Yewande Adebowale

Neither, Nor

I am neither tongue nor tribe
I am neither colour nor skin
I am a soul, being
in the here and now hereinafter

I am neither race nor sex
I am neither age nor name
for human knows no gender
soul knows not age

I am neither attire nor diploma
I am neither class nor income
I am more than these
I am

I am neither stereotype nor profile
for a soul can neither be caged nor set free
I am without boundary and limit
I am

Jacqueline Wu

Shadows of Indifference

A night, midnight blue, one with no stars
An eye peering through the opening, clouds reflected in gaze
And blank stares, pearly white- drenched in tears

The pendulum's swinging, completing its endless cycle
Hushed whispers ripple the surface, then back again
An unfathomable abyss and death's glare upon us with wings of black silk shadowing

A mirror with many faces, broken shards blemishing beauty
A girl, no two. Nameless, shamelessly looking. Dreaming-
As the sweet, soul sucking vortex redeems her again

Walls encroach upon the silent dreamer as she remembers
Transparent glass walls that cuts us with its sharp frame and protects-
Unshackled but made captive, the dragon's strength wanes from toil- where did dragon
from
As two wrongs aren't made right with Chaos king and darkness spilling

It isn't tempest from which I hide, or fire that chars my flesh
Nor is it chilled autumn morns, or even emotion in flashing thunder and wet torrents
Or love or hate, illusions conceived by the human mind
No, it's indifference, rather ignorance in all its selfish forms

Colorless with grey hued skies and shapeless mist delusions to cold eyes; tasteless
Silent as despair, undiscerning as the raven veers towards temporary paradise
Poison dripping from the black tongue that blots and burns
For the fair rose with its delicate shades of pink-
Is nothing but deceit.

Empty Promises

Moonbeams illuminate the cedar wood floors of the tiny antique shop,
The only source of light in the darkest hour of the night,
When dreamers dream, with only the bitter cold seeping into fatigued bones....
Until the horizon turns orange and gold, and the moon hides its face yet again.

A small girl with red cheeks and raven black hair opens the door,
Holding the weathered hand of father, their breaths forming fog in the wintry
air,
For in the depths of the tiny shop lay a lone black violin case,
Out of place like a brick among colorful feathers in stark contrast.

Once, it was appraised by many, carefully handcrafted with the utmost love and
care,
And not a speck of dust dared touch its polished varnish then.
Its warm, rich melodies had sung in many acclaimed concert halls,
Its timeless, haunting beauty connecting the souls of strangers for that one
moment,
Allowing breaths to catch and tears to inevitably fall, fulfilling its selfless
promise.

Now, after many long years trapped in the steady undulation of the glorious
past,
The violin had forgotten its promise, its concert days only a fading dream of
youth.
And the small desperate flicker of hope had simmered to a dying flame in its
fragile shell,
Until the girl with the raven black hair, straight like the definition, became its
owner.

Yes, I bought the violin that day, For it was a joyous freedom for the girl and
the violin
With its warm, rich melodies still ringing in acclaimed concert halls,
Its timeless, haunting beauty connecting the souls of strangers for that one
moment,
Allowing breaths to catch and tears to inevitably fall, fulfilling its selfless
promise.

Jashaswi Senapati

The Lone Tree By The Brook

Dews that once felt like pearls in my dense green foliage now feel so heavy and cold on lone leafless branches after years of bearing flowers and buds the last leaves are taking departure into the murky Brook by my stump. All my prior endeavours to live up to distinct seasons graceful years of swaying and meandering has diminished youthful ardour into this feeble being my trunk is parched and I am fatigued to quench my thirst. I have not a flower nor a fruit to offer been ages since a bird came in to warble. Now I live in persisting moments of agony there is not one shoulder to unwind my tired glory solitude has been my only companion also, the shallow Brook alleviated the desolation. I am left with my only longing to carry my state of despair and misery and glide onto the interminable stream that will forever flow with my memory.

Andrea Salvador

Before Yuri

My grandfather is a man without a routine. Growing up in a cramped, studio condo, he was responsible for all my adventures: last-minute trips to Ocean Park, Tagaytay Ferris wheel rides on weekends, and stalking into my grade school classes two periods too late.

His impulsiveness drove my mother crazy. Crazy enough for her to forego the unspoken, traditional Filipino familial obligation, cast seething looks at all her cousins who judged her decision, and ignore my grandfather's blubbery pleas.

She put my grandfather in a nursing home.

Sometimes I drop by the home after Wednesday classes. Other times, I go on Sundays after Mass, dragging my begrudging mother. Some weeks pass without a visit. I've learned this doesn't offend my grandfather. Instead, it excites him.

"It keeps me on my feet," he told me once. I told him he was being ironic, leaning on a steel walker, and he laughed.

Though I won't pretend it doesn't hurt me, the days when he rejects my visits. In the Santo Niño Nursing Home, the elderly are promised dignity — they have the choice to accept or decline leisure visitors.

Each time, I hold my breath in the reception room. I see myself reflected in the glassy eyes of harried adults and noisy toddlers. My fingers curl into clenched fists, my fists knock on the granite reception countertop, and they only stop when my grandfather's decision is delivered to me.

—

"You can come with me," a red-haired nurse calls out to me. Her small figure is shadowed by the dim lights of the hallway leading into the residency

rooms. Catching my eye, she pivots back into the hall, clearly intent on not wasting time.

I exhale in relief. Ducking past the other people crowding the room eagerly, I try not to smile as I follow the nurse. In the past three weeks, I've been rejected by my grandfather twice. I debated on telling my mother, to ask her if anything was wrong. But I didn't want to see the smug smile on her face, her telltale I told you so. Your lolo is unstable.

I know my grandfather's room by heart but follow the stiff-lipped nurse, anyway. Up the staircase, through to the right, I notice I've never seen her before. She must be new, hence the efficiency and coldness injected into her work.

"Thanks," I tell her when we reach my grandfather's door. The front is branded the number 25 in dull gold. She nods and slips away.

I don't need to knock, because by now, my grandfather knows to expect me. I twist the creaky doorknob, wincing at how it gives with a groan, and slide it open.

My grandfather sits in a wheelchair facing the large, French door windows that face the nursing home's colorful garden. He doesn't turn around even as I close the door, slamming it with careful precision to emit a small jolt.

"Hi, lolo," I say, the word rolling through my mouth with a foreign dip. The years have gone by, along with the usage of the word. "How are you?"

"My grandfather finally cocks his head. It's a small acknowledgment, one that propels me to join him by the ornamental windows.

In a steady, deep voice fighting the pull of disuse, he says, "I can hear them."

My jaws clamp together. His words make me feel like I am twelve again.

—

My grandfather has never been to Russia. In fact, he has never left the Philippines. The farthest he has traveled to was Cagayan de Oro in the country's south, to court my grandmother.

When I was twelve, though, he began to claim that he was hearing them.

Them: shipwrecked sailors in outer space, meant to bring their state glory. Cries of help and fizzes of electricity, followed by deep-seated silence. Fables that weeded their way into the churning minds of theorists and truth-seekers alike, emerging as the Lost Cosmonauts.

My mother was quick to call his bluff. My grandfather started reporting the cosmonauts' voices just as she learned of her two-week business trip to the United States.

"You're just being paranoid," she snapped at my grandfather. "Traveling to another country won't go disastrous and send me into outer space."

True, my grandfather didn't understand. He was still incredulous of much technology: that we could see each other through screens despite being miles away, that we could tap buttons quietly for deliveries.

Still, as a twelve-year-old, I clung to his words each night my mother was in the United States, safe and sound.

"They say they're preparing for him," my grandfather whispered to me on the fourth night without my mother. He stroked my hair, tucking me into sleep. "The ones who came before Yuri."

—

We play two games of chess, and he beats me without trying.

"You're unfocused," my grandfather tsks, lights dancing in his sallow eyes. "Your school might revoke the scholarship."

The school won't; I've represented them in Hong Kong and Thailand in

this year's chess tournaments alone. Still, I bow my head. "I'll train harder," I promise my grandfather. I would if you let me see you every day.

My grandfather grunts. "You should."

We launch into a third game, and this time, we end in a stalemate. I pack the wooden pieces into the chipped rental box, gathering my bravery.

"Were they talking to you while we played?" The words leave me in the space of a rough breath. This way, I can't stuff them back into my mouth and leave them to rot.

Throughout the games, my grandfather stopped erratically. I kept coaxing him to make his move, but after beady glares, I stopped to watch him instead. Each time, he tilted his head upwards, like he was straining to listen from a voice above.

This is the final floor of the nursing home, though. All that lies above is the run-down red roof that peeks out beyond the stump trees.

"Yes," my grandfather says, his bushy eyebrows knitting together.

"They want me to tell what I remember to you."

—

It is important to note that nothing substantial has ever come from the voices my grandfather claims he can hear. I had been willing to indulge, asking him stories about these faceless heroes that were scrapped out of history. He appeased my curiosity in return, mimicking their voices and lending facial expressions to otherwise shadowy features.

One night, my mother caught us giggling on my bed. We'd hung blankets on my bed's four posters, setting up radios we'd scoured from junk shops. It was a culmination of two months' work, all torn down by my mother's inquisitive stare.

"What are you doing?" My mother demanded. Before we could stuff the beaten radios into my pillowcase — our plan if any 'intruders' happened to

arrive — she'd disassembled the hanging blankets. They billowed around her figure, as if unwilling to touch her as well.

"We're just listening to the radio," I said, pointing to the heap of silver boxes.

"There's nothing playing," she responded, resting a manicured hand on a cocked hip.

When she said that, the bubble my grandfather had eased me into popped. Reality's maws snapped me up: all I could hear was silence, save for three, dissonant breaths. Turning to my grandfather, watching him shake his head, I could tell he heard otherwise.

—

I manage to wheedle my grandfather out of his room come dinnertime. We take twelve minutes down the service ramp, which leads us straight into the mess hall. Dinner is laid out for us, a two-seater table in the corner boasting salad and hamburger doused in gravy.

Throughout the meal, my grandfather is silent. This attracts not only my attention but the nurses, who come over but slide away after he rebukes them. "Just let me listen to the piano," he grumbles. It's a smart excuse; every few nights, the nursing home invites musicians to entertain the elderly over dinner. Tonight, it's the piano man.

After finishing dinner, we return to his bedroom. I sit on his thin bed as the same nurse from earlier helps him bathe. Water trickles softly from the bathroom meters away. My grandfather emerges half an hour later, baby-pink skin smelling of jasmine and wet clumps of hair sticking out from his head.

"She is not nice," my grandfather says, just as the nurse closes the door after her.

I shush him, pushing down the flimsy bed so he can climb onto it. He shrugs. "They agree."

I pull a woolen blanket over his thin frame. It's one of the two I forced my mother to begrudgingly give him for Christmas; we picked it out in a bazaar, haggling for a promo. This one is red, sporting faded candy stripes, and my grandfather pulls it up to his neck.

"Now," he says, clearing his throat, kicking at his blanket faintly. "Repeat what they told you. Make sure you remember it all."

Everything he's told me about them is easy to remember: The cosmonauts are sad. They are scared. They regret being bribed into their missions. They knew the risks and still chased after the reward. They want to see their family again. They will never see their family again.

I know these anecdotes are the stuff of films and fake recordings, recycled into fireside camp stories to make the weak-hearted shiver. Still, I can't deny the way my grandfather forced them onto me with a persuasive certainty, open-faced and pleading.

By the time I've finished my spiel, my grandfather has drifted into sleep. His light snores compete with the ticking of the wall clock. I check the time, match it to my wristwatch. It's already nine.

I stand up, testing the waters. My grandfather doesn't stir. Taking this as an affirmation, I plant a kiss on his forehead and smooth his hair down. I pick up my satchel bag, laid on the small desk sporting frames of stained pictures and snow globes, and leave the room.

I sign out in the receptionist's log. The nurse recites their spiel for leaving visitors, telling me to come again. Because my grandfather is a man without a routine, I have no way of knowing when that will be.

Anna Kieseewetter

Towards a Better Horizon

That fated day I crossed into the valley of darkness, that place where inky shadows bled into my soul, where a single step sent me plummeting down a gully, where light and color had been leached out until only black remained. The very air was poisonous, full of a thick, acrid smoke that coated my lungs and burnt my throat. All around me the barbed vines snickered at my incompetence, darting forward as if to remind me that so easily they could strangle me to the ground, poison me, tear into my fragile skin. Rain fell, and I opened my desecrated lips to the dark sky—but my tongue felt only a thick sludge that held the metallic taste of blood, as if the clouds themselves were shriveling up and dying one by one. At times the roots would wrap around my ankles and harness me to the ground, mocking my helplessness, forcing me to stand still as haunting whispers drifted through the searing wind. Any sign of struggle sent new roots scrabbling over my limbs and mercilessly cutting into my skin.

After a time I encountered a wide pool of liquid obsidian, and I rushed toward it. I peered into its glossy black water, and leapt ten feet into the air upon noticing the beast that lay in front of me. It moved when I did, bared its teeth when I did, feral yet cowed and hunched with guilt. So this was what I had become—just as wild as the valley that surrounded me, broken and sullied, eviscerated from the world I had once occupied. A single tear made its way down my face, the one substance of light in a world of black. I could feel the trail of it burn into my skin, feel the fire of it coursing fiercely up into my soul.

When the tear hit the pool, its light spread through the black, turning clear, pure, a spring of bubbling water. All around me the darkness began to fade, trees green as jade, soft grass at my bare feet; and soon, more tears

trickled down my face as I began to hear the birds spring of bubbling water. All around me the darkness began to fade, trees green as jade, soft grass at my bare feet; and soon, more tears trickled down my face as I began to hear the birds sing. I got to my feet, and inhaled the earthy scent of apples and warmth. A watery smile blossomed across my face as I pointed myself north, toward a better horizon.

Previously published by Crashtest.

The FDC

It was the strangest feeling, being surrounded by people yet somehow completely set apart. Though she could hardly call the bedraggled crowd shuffling down the street people. The numb looks they wore, the doped-up grins etched wearily into lined faces--their very statures were wobbly, depressing, every person an empty shell skulking silently towards the Pharmacy Center. The only sound came from the incessant commercials on the skyscraper TVs, the droning voices mandating Vitamins, the glorious painkillers produced by the FDC. Displayed across their screens was a too-cheery yellow chart, showing a steep decline in the depression epidemic.

Out of the blue, a deafening buzzer rang out. Desa froze, placing her hand stiffly over her heart. In a second, the crowd too had come to a stop, monotonous voices joined in a dead chorus.

"I pledge allegiance to the flag of the Freno Drug Company, and to the republic for which it stands, one nation under Doctors, indivisible, with painlessness and healing for all."

After a pause, Desa lowered her hand, continuing behind a ghostly pair of young boys. As she walked, she felt the two unopened bottles of pills clinking in her pocket, felt them jumping up and down with her every movement as if trying to grasp her attention. Her hands darted to her pocket, a tiny part of her longing for the painkillers, the rest itching to toss them off a cliff. But just as quickly, she dropped her hands.

Even if their senses were dimmed, someone could still notice, still report her. And then they'd just reaffirm their fake diagnosis of her. Up the dosage. Imprison her in the Care Center until she was an empty shell like the rest of them.

That was just what doctors did.

It had started way back in the '90s, doctors racing to cure the countless illnesses decimating the nation. But all people had felt was more and more pain, in what came to be known as the depression epidemic.

That was when the FDC had the realization: why suffer? As the Vitamins rolled into existence, doctors all over the country had scrapped everything. Here was the perfect solution to all of their problems: eradicating pain itself.

Over the next fifty years, the Vitamins had become a massive hit. Soon enough, it was law to take them. The depression rates dropped, and the Freno Drug Company became a hero, its invention laying the foundation for the perfect country they now lived in.

A country so perfect that no one was able to rebel.

Too late, Desa realized that the boys in front of her had stopped. She barreled into them, and all three tumbled to the cement, effectively pulling her from her thoughts.

As one boy blearily clambered to his feet, Desa's heart wanted to weep. Her little brother stood before her. She hadn't even recognized him with his shuffling gait, with the way his face looked a hundred years old. His brown eyes were leached of light, his face drooping and blank save the stupid grin the painkillers gave every taker.

Stooping down, Desa took his hand. It felt like a slippery fish.

“Quebrado?”

His eyes fixated unblinkingly on a point somewhere behind her.

Though his eyebrows twitched, his expression remained immovable. “Who are you?”

“Your sister. Desanima. Remember me?”

He shook his head faintly.

Desa didn't blame him.

She remembered how she'd felt when she took the Vitamins.

Everything cloudy. Dim.

She'd craved some kind of feeling, anything to fill the cavity in her

mind. Only a few remnants of coherence had clung to existence, scattering like ants every time Desa tried to pinpoint one.

“What a nightmare,” she muttered to no one in particular.

An ill feeling swept over her, and Desa began to shiver as she turned around. It had been a long time since she’d felt human eyes. The only alert people she could remember were the doctors, a hazy recollection of white-coated men probing her for any pain to exploit. The memory made her hand curl into a fist.

But the gaze belonged to a young man who didn’t seem like a doctor. He leaned casually, almost mockingly, against a flagpole with the letters “FDC” emboldened across its flag, a cigarette dangling from the corner of his mouth. He made no move to greet her, only stared at her piercingly in the way only someone with their wits about them could.

Someone needed to hear the thoughts gnawing on Desa’s insides before they devoured her whole--someone who, preferably, could think. She strode toward the man.

When she got within earshot, she spoke. “Stopped taking your Vitamins?”

He blinked. “Never took them in the first place.”

Desa’s eyes widened. “So you’ve seen. You’ve seen how bad the pills make everyone.”

“Bad?” The young man raised his eyebrows. “I wouldn’t say that.”

She crossed her arms. “Really. And what would you say?”

The man quirked a smile, a sardonic gleam in his cat-eyes. “They appear to be taking away pain.”

“They do not just take away pain. No one can feel anything. The pills strip people of what makes them human.”

“Isn’t that the point?” He appeared amused. “Humanity. That’s what causes pain.”

Without Vitamins, we'd be a mess. The depression epidemic, you know.”

“There's no such thing as a 'depression epidemic,' and you know it,” she hissed. “Everyone feels pain. They need to. Getting rid of that part of a person is like reducing them to a machine.”

The man's eyes narrowed, lips still curved into an obnoxious smirk. “What, so you want to get hurt?”

“No. I want to *feel*.”

In a flash, a syringe was in the young man's hand, a syringe full of some bright liquid that cast a sinister light over his face. “With pain comes dissent, and with dissent comes chaos. Why do you think we made the pills in the first place?”

The blood drained from Desa's face, and she began to back up. “So I was right.”

The man laughed, but it was devoid of mirth, a hollow, dead sound. “So you were.” With a swipe of his hand, he grabbed Desa's wrist.

The young doctor plunged the syringe into Desa's arm, and she tugged herself away.

She felt the cold liquid seeping through her veins, overtaking everything it touched. As the clouds began to rush into her vision, the fuzz creeping into her thoughts, for a brief moment her eyes latched onto his.

There was pain written in his eyes. Self-loathing flooded his downcast gaze, something even the clouds couldn't quite obscure.

And then her mind was a miserable fog. She felt numb. Empty. Desa turned, head bowed, and silently joined the shuffling crowd.

Yong-Yu Huang

Keep The Old

My grandma was rich—proper rich. I never saw her without her obscene strand of pearls (she never let a Thanksgiving pass by without shoving them into some poor in-law's face) and those dainty lace gloves that she never took off even though they were mottled yellow and crumbled if you pulled at the loose threads a little too hard. That's how we knew she was proper rich because she told us that rich people like to keep old things—the fancy closets (or, ah-mwahs, like she used to say before they stuffed her full of tubes), the faded china, the tattered tigerskin (Gramps shot it twenty-seven years ago and died a week later and left her his fortune) in front of the fireplace that dark all year-round.

Poor people like to keep new things, she'd say, flicking her head and then I could smell the wilted flower scent that clung to her tighter than her sagging skin, just look at them asking for more money when they're off sporting those gaudy handbags, and then she'd make us all pinky-promise her to never be poor because she'd leave us her fortune.

The money from her side had stemmed from the short-lived Californian gold rush and then her grandfather ran up to New York and made it big in the newly-built obelisks of concrete and steel. Gramps' fortune was old money, she said, you are descended from noble blood and don't you ever forget that, you hear me?

She told us stories about the attic full of jewelry and bonds and heirlooms and patched our scrapes up and snuck us treats because despite everything else, she was a good grandma. Generous to a fault and spoiled us all rotten, imported Belgian chocolate tunneling into our baby teeth. Because if there was anything Grandma was, it was dependable.

We could always depend on her to come bail us out of a county jail at two in the morning after a rager or float us through a rough month where we had blown through thousands in a bad roll of the dice.

There was a saying among us grandkids: luck wasn't on our side, but Gramma sure was. No fortune followed her through life (apart from the money that she ended up with—heaps of it) and that was common knowledge: husband dead after ten years, four squalling children dressed by maids with stiff upper lips, a summer house burnt down. Gramma was fierce and not always right, but she made it. And she always stood by what she said: even plugged up to half a dozen machines that she could not name, she was still fighting to keep the old until her very last breath.

Stéphane Vereecken

Paradis Perdu

« Paradis Perdu » is a three-week project directly inspired by the pandemic and the medical world. The circle of the characters is the fictitious representation of the virus which turns around the bodies, in a surreal and original environment.

A universe of reality and also of surrealism. The drawings on bodies and walls show us a future project of a sublimated and possible life. The body of the model is a structure formal. Through my works in the series "Paradis Perdu" I explore the relationship between the human being and the confinement next to the virus which enters the minds and bodies.

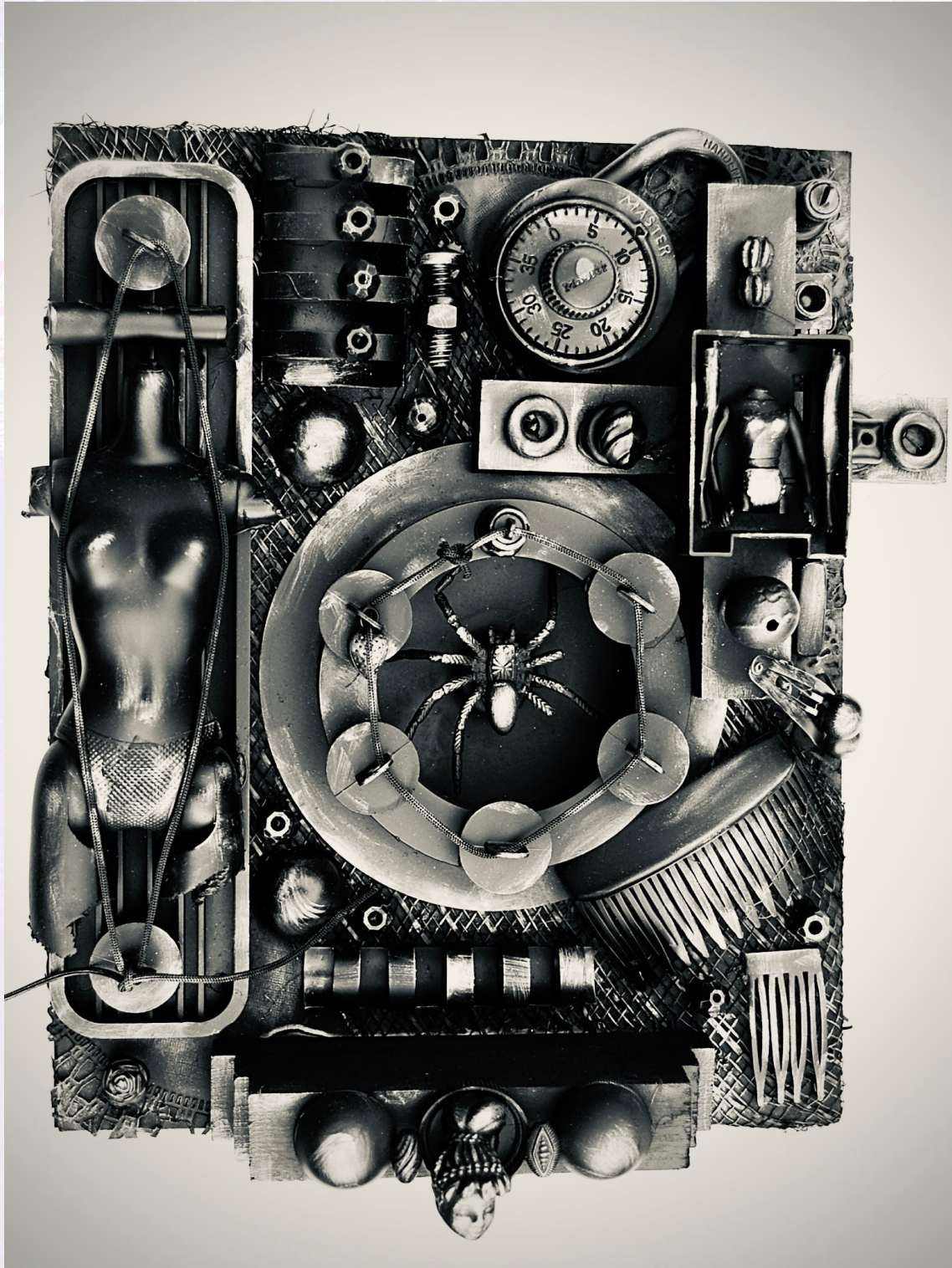






Jacqueline Wu

Reflection of Humanity



Colors Of Daily Life



Light And Shadow



Pallavi Narayan

Lighthouse



Location: Melaka Straits Mosque, Melaka, Malaysia. 2019

Universe



Location: Asian Civilisations Museum, Singapore. 2018

The Big Rush



Location: Hong Kong streets. 2016

Biographies

Yewande Adebowale is a Nigerian Lawyer, Storyteller, Poet and Author of two collections of Poems titled ‘A tale of being, of green and of ing..’ (2019) and Voices: A collection of poems that tell stories’ (2016). Her poems have appeared in Visual Verse, Afritondo, Trampset, Poemify, Pride Magazine and elsewhere. Her works carve a niche of poetic storytelling assuming a prose like form of creative expression inspired by her African roots. Winner of the Fidelity Bank prize for creative writing and The Guardian Newspaper poetry prize, her works are inspired by the realities of life and living, in poetic and philosophical fashion. She lives in and writes from the city of Lagos, Nigeria.

M. P. Armstrong is a disabled queer poet from Ohio, studying English and history at Kent State University. Their work appears or is forthcoming in Luna Negra, Red Earth Review, and Social Distanzine, among others. They also serve as managing editor and reporter for Curtain Call and Fusion magazines. In their spare time, they enjoy traveling, board games, and brightly colored blazers. Find them online @mpawrites and at mpawrites.wixsite.com/website.

Ace Boggess is author of five books of poetry—Misadventure, I Have Lost the Art of Dreaming It So, Ultra Deep Field, The Prisoners, and The Beautiful Girl Whose Wish Was Not Fulfilled—as well the novels States of Mercy and A Song Without a Melody. His writing appears in Notre Dame Review, The Laurel Review, River Styx, Rhino, North Dakota Quarterly, and other journals. He received a fellowship from the West Virginia Commission on the Arts and spent five years in a West Virginia prison. He lives in Charleston, West Virginia.

Kristin Garth is a Pushcart, Best of the Net & Rhysling nominated sonnet stalker. Her sonnets have stalked journals like Glass, Yes, Five:2:One, Luna Luna and more. She is the author of sixteen books of poetry including Pink Plastic House (Maverick Duck Press), Crow Carriage (The Hedgehog Poetry Press), Flutter: Southern Gothic Fever Dream (TwistiT Press), The Meadow (APEP Publications) and Golden Ticket forthcoming from Roaring Junior Press. She is the founder of Pink Plastic House a tiny journal and co-founder of Performance Anxiety, an online poetry reading series. Follow her on Twitter @lolaandjolie and her website: kristingarth.com.

Biographies

J George is a 26 year old writer from Pondicherry. Her poems have appeared or is forthcoming in several online and print journals, most recently in "TROU Lit Mag", "Active Muse", "The Martian Chronicles", "FishfoodMag", "Muse India", "Madras Courier", "Spark the Magazine", "VerbalArt", anthologies of "Boundless" (Rio Grande Valley International Poetry Festival 2019) and "Love, As We Know It" (Delhi Poetry Slam). Currently, she is pursuing her research at PondicherryUniversity.

Yong-Yu Huang is a Taiwanese teenager who has lived in Malaysia all her life. Her current favorite self-descriptive adjective is "culturally-confused." She has been previously published in The Heritage Review and the bitter fruit review. When she is not overthinking things, she can be found binging Doctor Who or playing the flute.

AM Kamaal is a Nigerian poet, and writer. When he's not writing, he reads Jericho Brown, Ezra Pound, and philosophy. He could also listen to the evergreen music of Àyínlá Ọmọwùrà all day.

Anna Kieseewetter is a junior at Issaquah High School in Issaquah, Washington, a first-read editor at the Polyphony Lit Magazine, and recently achieved publication in the Skipping Stones Children's Multicultural Magazine. Her short stories have received acclaim from the Scholastic Writing Awards, most recently earning a Gold Key and American Voices Award nomination as a top-five regional writing entry out of thousands of contestants. Aside from writing, Anna enjoys both teaching and performing the violin as a soloist and orchestral musician.

Dr. Pallavi Narayan is an avid photographer. She is a writer, editor, artist, academic researcher and occasionally translator. She has worked with universities and in book publishing for well over a decade.

Cristina Patregnani is a poet from Italy. She writes both in English and Italian and she leads a literary collective project named R I V I S T A which has the aim to create a writers and poets communities all around the world, translating poetries and other works from Italian to English and vice-versa. You can check out her works (poetries and artworks) on Instagram @francaramen.

Biographies

A poet and a father, **Kushal Poddar**, edited a magazine - 'Words Surfacing', authored seven volumes of poetry including 'The Circus Came To My Island', 'A Place For Your Ghost Animals', 'Eternity Restoration Project- Selected and New Poems' and 'Herding My Thoughts To The Slaughterhouse-A Prequel'. Find and follow him at <https://www.amazon.com/Kushal-Poddar/e/B07V8KCZ9P>, Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/KushalTheWriter/>, and Twitter @Kushalpoe

Andrea Salvador lives somewhere in Asia, specifically a country with thousands of islands and constantly humid weather. She is an alumna of the Adroit Journal Summer Mentorship Program and the Sonorous Writing Workshop, while her work has been recognized by the Philippine Daily Inquirer, Columbia College Chicago, Trinity College - University of Melbourne, and Interlochen Arts Academy. In her spare time, she creates lists, watches sci-fi and horror movies, and rearranges her bookshelf. Find her on Twitter at @andreawhowrites.

Jashaswi Senapati is an undergraduate at an engineering college in Odisha, India and currently taking up a bachelor's degree in Computer Science. As a computer science student she has trained mostly in web development and software development. Her determination and patience is what sets her apart from anybody else. She is a hopeless wonderer of the things in between, the things that didn't happen, the things that could have happened, the many possibilities and the many perspectives. She loves to read and write and has finally dared to share what she feels with the world.

Samuel Strathman is a Jewish poet, author, educator, and editor at Cypress: A Poetry Journal. Some of his poems have appeared or are forthcoming in Acta Victoriana, Quadrant, and Dreams Walking. His first chapbook, "In Flocks of Three to Five" will be released later this year by Anstruther Press. He lives in Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

Konstantina Theofanopoulou was born in Greece and dwells in East Village, New York. She spends her mornings working on the neuroscience of language at Rockefeller University, and her nights writing poetry. You can read her poetry in her monthly column on Natural Selections mag (available online and printed), on her IG (@newyork_rhymes), and listen to her poetry in podcasts, like the Hack Sessions (Spotify). Her poetry has been awarded twice (Minoan Publications Award, Panhellenic Poetry Award).

Biographies

Photography is the basis of **Stéphane Vereecken's** work. His classic studies in several academies of arts and in several artistic disciplines trained him in a multidisciplinary vision. He started making Polaroids. He drew and painted on Polaroids. He told the stories of the place or person photographed. He started exhibiting in galleries very young and exhibiting with artists like Araki, Dolores Marat, Paul Mc Carthy in Brussels at the Damasquine Art Gallery. Since 2019, Stéphane has been working on a square format. The process is simple. A skyline, the ground and the sky. He adds a photo projection, a projection of life, and drawings. This series is called - Hotel Mutation -.

Jacqueline Wu (16) is a writer and artist from Long Island, New York. She is a writer and editor for her acclaimed school magazine, Cinnabar. She has also won several writing and art competitions and awards, such as the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards. She is forthcoming in Teenmind, ReadThis, and other magazines. Jacqueline enjoys painting, drawing, writing, and playing the viola, and she hopes to continue to inspire and empower through her words.

Shining The
Light On
All Voices

