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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

Even as a mother protects with her life
Her child, her only child,
So with a boundless heart
Should one cherish all living beings;
Radiating kindness over the entire world:
Spreading upwards to the skies,
And downwards to the depths;
Outwards and unbounded,
Freed from hatred and ill-will.

—*Excerpt from the Karaniya Metta Sutta*
Translated from the Pali by the Amaravati Sangha, 2004




Mae Boua Ngeun © Patrick Rouxel

This December, I had the privilege of visiting the [Elephant Conservation Centre](#) in Xayaboury, Laos, where I walked with rescued elephants through the forest, observed them eating, bathing, socialising, receiving veterinary care, and just being themselves in a relaxed environment where they could recuperate and recover from their hard lives. Many of them have sad stories where they suffered from abuse, overwork and/ or neglect in the logging industry or in tourism camps. As an outsider to Laos, it is tempting to jump to conclusions, form judgements and point fingers at guilty parties: the logging industry, the mahouts, the tourists, the safari camps, the governments. During my stay at the ECC, I learnt about the complex web of relations between elephants, people/ community, policies and the natural environment, reminding me of the notion of interbeing as expressed in the Karaniya Metta Sutta. I also learnt more about the aims of the ECC, one of which is to breed suitable Asian Elephants in the centre, with the intention of one day releasing them back into the wild. To date, they have released 5 elephants in the Nam Phouy National Protected Area, a ground-breaking contribution to the [rewilding of the Asian Elephant in Laos](#).

You can now do your part by [reading about Mae Boua Ngeun here](#), an 8-year-old elephant who is a vital link to the ECC's conservation plans. Independent filmmaker and conservationist Patrick Rouxel, on behalf of the ECC, is raising funds to buy Mae Boua Ngeun from her mahout at the market rate of USD 80,000 so that she can spend the rest of her young life in the ECC with the rest of her adopted family, have babies of her own, and one day be released back into the wild. If Mae Boua Ngeun's story speaks to you, please [DONATE HERE](#) to support Boua's freedom and the conservation of the Asian Elephant.

SAVE BOUA



 Patrick Rouxel is organising this fundraiser.

As an environmentally engaged eco journal, **The Tiger Moth Review** is committed to allying ourselves with like-minded conservation projects that speak to us. Having met the lively and sociable Mae Boua Ngeun ourselves, it is our wholehearted wish that enough funds will be raised to save Boua.

It is meaningful to read submissions, edit ecopoems and curate another issue for readers. It is essential to write ecopoems about interspecies kinships and entanglements, deforestation, climate change, habitat loss and conservation. It is also necessary to couple creative writing with ***embodied presence*** (which I shared last November at a Singapore Writers Festival panel) as a way of integrating mind and body to foster compassion and empathy through awareness + action. It is my hope that as you read and appreciate the words of our 24 contributors, you will sit with the attractions and aversions that arise within you, and ask yourself: *How can I cherish all beings with a boundless heart? What concrete steps can I take to protect the Earth? How can I radiate kindness towards all beings?*

May this issue offer you hope, light, insight and inspiration.

If you want to support the work that we do, please [make a donation here](#). Thank you.

Esther Vincent Xueming
The Tiger Moth Review

Stork

Thomas Storey

Saddleback stork's click clacking claws
Wading across hyacinth lake
Blueblack eyes set in tarnished leather
Red bill rotating towards prey
Soft rattle of mandible beak
Waft of wings signalling readiness
For you, whose flight beats breathless
above me, every step is precarity
and release

Thinking About Kuala Lumpur

Efren Laya Cruzada

Pink-white petals fall on a pathway.
A sunbeam butterfly fumbles on a flower.
It's nice here, where buildings feel far away,
sitting on a stone bench next to a bilimbi tree.

Somewhere, a tower looks like
a bamboo shoot. Somewhere, a bridge
resembles the folded nut leaves of Malay weddings.
These things are pleasing, but I need some time away.

Facades and atriums can be overwhelming.
Starfruit boughs are soothing. Now thoughts
can drift to the temples and mosques of Kuala Lumpur.
Some time ago, I saw water ferns and chrysalides

in a butterfly house down Jalan Cenderawasih.
A sunbeam butterfly flutters from a flower.
Evening will bring eddies in the wind.
Pink-white petals will scatter away.

Two poems by *Lorraine Caputo*

ON QUINOA PLAINS

The earth has warmed, the rains
have softened the rich soil
& now the plough effortlessly seams
one row next to another, veins
where seeds will be planted, where sprouts will coil
into the humid air & sunny beams,

leaves unfolding, bright jade soft,
wavering in the slight streams
of breeze, some so fine like voile
wafting, swirling gauze aloft
wrapping the day in dreams

on quinoa plains

CONFLUENCE

Lorraine Caputo

Far beneath us
 the hazed scape, the textured
 patchwork farms

The sun burns
 through the heat of
 engine exhaust
The brown-edged coastline
 & undecipherable sea

But soon it distances itself
 beyond beyond
 the cloud-shadowed land
& it flows, undulates
 towards our confluence
A shallow turquoise-blue
 embracing the shore

My mind walks that
 lattice of dirt roads below
Under the piercing sun
 climbing higher into day
The silence of nearing noon

The Caribbean washing between
 scattered islands

& I fall asleep
 in the embrace
 of my dreams

Awakening to the stewardess' voice
 of our soon arrival

The earth folds & rises sharply
 into the Sierra Maestra
We descend into the
 vaporous bolls floating
 thickly by
The land descends
 to the sea

as we near Santiago

A glance away
 & nothing but deep blue below
 endless featureless
Soon I can distinguish
 ripples of waves
 capturing hot light
Beneath us near
 rocky shores & cliffs
 dry jungle scrub

THE LAST NATURE TRAIL IN TOWN

Drima Chakraborty

You always think of this place as a last resort: options are limited once every national park and nature reserve closes its doors after dark. Bamboo that doesn't quite belong there, some rubber seeds left behind from when it was a plantation. If there were tigers that ventured into these woods, they left far before 1929.

It's unimaginably dark, the way you wouldn't imagine a small grove in the middle of a city would be. But every time you peer at it in your mind's eye, it's all lit up—a possible side-effect of looking at the photos you keep, washed and bathed in camera flash. Out of every fifteen shots, you could get one or two worth keeping.

Without your eyes, you seem to hear everything. The sly frogs calling in unison, only to leave you bewildered once you get close. (The ones you hear are never the ones you catch, after all.) The dying screams of a mite-infested bug. The haunting laugh of a bird, far less frightening when seen in the day. But you'd be at some reputable park, not here, during the day.

It's not a good spot to find anything, you say for the twentieth time, right before the pangolin family, mother and son, brush past your feet. Anything except that, you guess. You could daydream (at night) about some viper languidly dangling from the bamboo shoots that don't quite belong here. But it's not a good spot, and it's way too dry out here for snakes.

in biology class

Madeline Schaeffer

we stuffed
balloons in a deer
carcass lying on the floor.
pumped air into
a limp body
reminded ourselves how to
breathe.
held in our rebellious
stomachs as we lined
up at the sink
earth on our hands, not from
digging, but
kneeling.
the unpunctual last
breath
and the shed that no one
went into, the one with the
deer
that died in
the forest that
died.
we were unnerved by
the greenness,
the way a place could fold
within itself.
and the smell of asphalt
from the road
making us all
sick.
the wastebasket road
and our houses
flickering with green light, roots
below the parking garage,
a few vanished
acres.

Cloud Anatomy

Philip Jason

*the angels carried me to the clouds,
whereupon I began my dissection.*

— George Washington Carver, *The Compendium of Moon Silences:
A Treatise on the Arguments of Alchemical Realms and Transactions*

I can see its heart, if I peer carefully through
the cotton webs; its heart—pulsing lightly, maybe
just trembling—a fold of moisture
distinct from the other folds. I know it
because it resembles a small child,
the way it stares back at me through the webs,
curious the way that light is curious,
that particular sprightly ambivalence of light
as it comes to rest on the feathery surfaces of our wings.
I prefer the incandescence of the candle
to the ruder kindness of the new LED bulbs.
The cloud agrees. The joint
socket of its right shoulder scatters
the compound elements of a wave from the sun,
spraying colors into itself. This is how
the clouds push blood through their systems.
Later, it will feed on a name that someone has given it.
Its small lips will open, and for a moment,
the glowing structures of its skeletal system
will be visible, reminding us, as the bones
curve along their prayerful arcs,
of a time when our own trembling bones
were uncertain but fiercely alive.

Carp

Ace Chu

Let me tell you what I know about the carp. They're surprisingly vicious creatures. They scour the riverbed for anything they can put into their mouths, spitting out soil and sand, swallowing the rest. They're considered an invasive species. They've wiped out populations of endemic fish simply because they're eating everything—plants, fish eggs, crustaceans. Everything is equal before the carp's maw.

Did you know that a large percentage of people refuse to eat carp? In America, at least. It might be because they eat trash. Carp will establish themselves near sewage drains and multiply off of whatever nutrition they can get from our runoff. You might argue: well, there are plenty of other bottom-feeding fish we're more than happy to eat! That's fair enough. Personally, I think it might come down to two things. The first, is that they're invasive. They're from somewhere else, they don't belong. There's something foreign about them that we've conceived, an alien aspect in their two groping feelers, broad unfeeling heads. We look into their unblinking eyes and we tremble. The other reason, comparatively, is simple. The bones. The body of a carp has an absurd number of bones. The bones spread out through the carp's body like a system of veins. A carp cannot be filleted. A carp cannot be made pure and easy to eat. Eating carp is a constant process of flattening the flesh against your tongue, feeling through the silt for buried needles.

In fact, in some states, it's illegal to release a carp once it's been caught. Because of all this, fishermen that catch carp often leave them to die on the riverbank. Somewhere in the world, on the riverbank, glassy-eyed, a hundred dying carp lie. One of their eyes is fixed to the ground, dirt encroaching into iris. The other eye is fixed firmly to the sky, towards brighter things. If they flop around vigorously enough they can turn themselves around, but the view remains the same. If they're lucky, a hungry fox stoops for a snack. As for the rest, their bodies, uneaten, rot and become indistinguishable from the content of their stomachs. Centimetres away, the river continues to run. A million carp trawl the dark beneath the surface.

In my culture, carp is beloved. It's a lovely, delicious thing. In fact, they're considered creatures of considerable wisdom. Apparently, if a carp can jump high enough up a certain mythical mountain, it can become a dragon. I wonder, if you fed a carp, not just enough food, but good, clean food, would it have the bones it does? Would it be easier to eat then? Are the bones just shards of plastic, lost in the murky garbage sea of the carp's body?

I am thinking of a story I read as a child, about a carp meant for dinner, lovingly raised in a bathtub. To be needed, and lovingly cared for that you might provide that purpose—it makes me tremble.

THE VOICE OF THE FOREST SPEAKS TO HANSEL AND GRETEL

Caroline Hockenbury

If I am your mother, why were you taught to fear me?

Once upon a time, you were born on the outskirts
of the earth I claim. Your father, a woodcutter,
slipped beneath my skin and snapped my trees like femurs.
He scooped up the bits and buckled them into a skeleton
shack. But a home built on dying bones always caves
in. Seven years later, when his pockets hung empty
and limp, your mother forsook you, choosing bread
over your bodies. Can't you see that I took you in instead,
cradling your curltangled heads while you rested
in a clearing? My wood was no longer enough
to nourish them, to hold up the walls of their aching shed.

But my eyes are all knowing, and I refused
to let their wicked deeds splinter into you: two
children, shivering by a fire my breath kept alive,
while you waited for your parents to return
to this spot—deep in the leaves—where they had led you.

I fed you berries from the forest floor and sent moonlight
to ignite stones the boy scattered behind, marking a road
back toward home. But like any mother, my desire
to protect you wasn't always enough, no matter
how loudly I made the wind scream in your ears or
how fervently I scolded birds for inhaling your crumb trail or
how I turned the light dial down low when you approached
the "little house made of bread with cake for a roof
and pure sugar for windows." All I could do was watch
while another woman, witchy with hunger, plunged
for your throats. But you fed her to flames: battled her
broken glass exterior and walked away with riches,
her jewels and gems fattening your small pockets.

When you finally stumbled upon home again, ripping out
of my loving grip, your father shapeshifted from a pauper
into a god. Your "mother" was no more. But I still stand
watch on the perimeter of your property, hoping
that one day your roaming feet will kiss the underbrush
again. That one day, you will realize the hard facade
you project on me is false, for I brought your family
undying softness. That I never left
you, even when you thought you wandered alone in my walls.

That, in leading you toward life, I am your rightful mother.

The World Tells Me

Hallie Fogarty

That I am just one small part of it. That my idiosyncrasies and stumbles are merely swift moves in the massive upheaval that holds me steady. That when I say the wrong thing or look the wrong way or make a weird noise, or, or, or. That simply I am here to stay, no matter how loud or softly I bellow, no matter the skin crawling and stilted language, that one day the sun will collapse or the oceans will boil or the ice caps will melt and drown us, or, or, or. Maybe the space will collide with itself, maybe the seas will capture polemicity, maybe the wind will lose all structure and I too, will just be another particle swaying in the breeze.

Touch Me Not

Mei Wen

for, after the pod was pricked, I was wedged in banana leaves; for I shifted and spiraled in the dark as I was whisked to what I only knew was away; for, in secret, thousands of us were sailed across the sea, where the air grew too hot, too cold, too salty, and too dry so most of us died; for seven full moons I was pulled and tided and I believed I'd lose count; for when I was sowed in a LAWN, the earth was bare, my kin knifed thin for ORDER, as ordered; for I grew next to cherry trees, rubber trees, azaleas, hydrangeas, new here like me, and the days were quiet as we bloomed together and made do of the Spirit Stealers' touching and measuring and shearing of us; for we were happy; for we were again unwoven from our tangled world; for delicate shrubs and seedlings were caged in glasshouses then shipped to GARDENS and fields in distant lands, to ORNAMENT or to PRODUCE in the Spirit Stealers' efforts to subdue; for I watched them go; for I became lonely; for I learned to want—and how I wanted—then I swore to home this earth; for I homed this earth, nourished bees and flies with copious nectar, then constellated along rivers, ROADSIDES, and TRACKS where no one else bloomed, and for this, they call me COLONIZER, INVASIVE, as in NOT NATIVE, nightmare or devil in these forests, taking the blame as the Spirit Stealers say:

We at the Natural History Museum and Forest Enterprise, having taken into consideration the 800 invasive species present in our country, including the Himalayan balsam, the Chinese windmill palm, the South American water primrose, the Asian long-horned beetle, the Asian hornet, the tiger mosquito, and the Florida turtle, which, in their invasiveness, affect the well-being of humans, animals, infrastructures, and ecosystems in general and are the main cause of our declining biodiversity for they take away space and sources of nourishment from native species, in order to stop the spread of alien organisms and eradicate them from our soil, and having considered that their increasing number is connected with the increased flow of goods and immigrants, and in pursuance of the Strategy on Invasive Alien Species, in force since 2008, which states that the species on the list of invasive and potentially invasive neophytes must be handled in such a way that no damage is to be expected, do hereby declare a war on invasive species and therefore promote any and all on-the-spot and well-timed eradication campaigns, and require all citizens to report new species to us with details on abundance and origin, photographs, and an herbarium receipt.

for I didn't ask to be here, and neither did you; for we are here now, before each other; for you remember how people admired the likes of me once, in poems that found their way to you—O my Luve is like a red, red rose / That's newly sprung in June...—overcome by roses (their quiet hearts) I remove my mask / and bury my face in their folds...—and how they moved you; for the Spirit Stealers don't know what they don't know; for BETTER DIVERSITY FOR OUR NATIVE SPECIES means breeding those that are friendly to the Spirit Stealers' illusions, for can you explain why plants that thrive without human hands are demonized, why strawberries but not rambutans are prized in lands that can't grow them, why only some people are accused of STEALING JOBS, and only when the work does not break bone?—nothing passes for NATIVE; for we have always belonged to each other; for we belong here, together, each with our own seasons; for you can't kill me without imposing death upon our kin, and all our glittering pasts and futures, without dying yourself; for I don't discriminate between the living, between life and death; for the answer to the deaths you mourn is life—more life; for the deaths they justify fire this genocide; for don't you want abundance for all; for, if you trust the infinite and the inevitable, we don't have to fight.

The Last Cottonwood Tree

Autumn Newman

Smooth curve of dry river, still here, I stand tall.
The water is underground, far from the dust.
I'm stretching to life, to its coolness. The small
stream enters me, speaking the language of must.

You've come with your axe, and you're eager to cleave.
The animals, silent and round-eyed, are watching.
I'm opened; the years are exposed and my leaves
they shake loose and drift down. What is it you're taking?

You hope for a death, for a breaking beyond wood.
You want them—all of my lifetimes. My cotton
is skipping around your worn boots. Where you stood,
my children will root and I'll not be forgotten.

I'm felled; there's no longer a branch in this sky.
And here, at the end, I am asking you: why?

Two poems by *Amelia Walker*

Winter Sun

On naked branches, tiny green
buds swell: winking beginnings
of bright blossoms, bursting fruits,

visual whispers of boundless sweetness
and warmth to come, so sweet I gasp
with joy—then slide fast

into sighing: it is not yet mid-winter,
there is so much cold to come.
Come spring, what will be

on these branches? of these branches?
these naked, quivering branches
with their brazen bursts of green?

Soundtrack to Anstey Hill, on Kaurna Yerta

Amelia Walker

By the big road lined with gums, the birds sing strong,
so strong they almost drown the traffic's constant hum.
How beautiful, I think, thinking these are songs of joy

but as I cross the road and wander
smaller streets, towards the reserve,
the songs grow fainter, fainter

and in the reserve itself
where I expected the most birds,
long silences stretch

like punctuation
between quiet
distanced
calls

Later, I tell a friend, who tells me
birds sing for many reasons
among them being to warn of threat.

Back by the roadside, the songs chime on, strong as ever
and still beautiful, except now, that beauty squeezes
and burns my lungs, my chest,
like someone's plucking feathers from my heart

Their High Abode

Anna Mallikarjunan

I

Up on Mont Royal, the crests of trees had begun changing into varying shades of yellow, red, and pink. It was a weekday in late September, and there were only a few hikers on Montreal's urban mountain. I walked along a trail up to its peak, and from where I stood, a forest valley stretched before me, the sun trickling through its trees and the songs of its myriad creatures filling the air. Rising above this orchestra of the forest was a sharp, repetitive chirp. At first, it sounded like a cardinal, but as I listened carefully, I found that the tone was deeper than the call of that brilliant, red-crested bird. I looked for the source of the sound and found, sitting on the ledge of a small rock that jutted out against a sheer drop of the mountain's face, a chipmunk, or *tamias*, the endearing word for him in French. The chirp emerged from the depths of his belly, and his entire being heaved from the effort, making it appear as if he was calling out with all his heart. Many of his compatriots of the forest chirped back in answer, and this communication ritual went on for a while. There was something ancient and binding in the ritual, and it stirred a long-forgotten yet instant recognition within me. This perception is like a timeless remembrance of countless lifetimes, of knowing the earth intimately—a primordial love without cause. The pleated bark of a tree, the rough, ridged texture of a rock, the earth's scent before the first rains after a warm spell—all these can stir such recognition. After all, the separation between the earth and the senses is merely a word, a thought, a memory, a mental habit, an association. When none of these stands between oneself and perception, is there separation?

I returned to Mont Royal with a friend a few weeks later, in early October. There were many visitors that day, so it was unusual to see a barred owl perched on a tree close to one of the hiking trails. I had seen her in the past, but never at such close quarters. Her mottled brown and white plumage blended in with the branch of the tree she sat on, camouflaging her so effectively that we were lucky to have spotted her. Her audience grew gradually, and many were taking pictures of her. She looked calmly and piercingly back at them with her deep, dark eyes, and there was great dignity in her presence. It started to get busy with more and more people wishing to have a glimpse of her, so we decided to move on. At the top of this trail is a swamp with standing water and a collection of lovely old trees that attract a variety of insects through the warm months and birds throughout the year. Water flows from the swamp under a wooden bridge and down along the side of the mountain. When snow melts in spring, often dramatically in a day or two, the enormous amount of resultant water rushes vertically down and then onto gullies all the way to the beginning of the trail. These narrow, humble ravines of gently flowing water are the babbling brooks of the urban mountain.

On the path around the swamp that day, we came across a family of raccoons. A group of four moved about slowly, languidly, looking for things to eat beneath the fallen leaves and twigs. Once in a while, they would become affectionate with each other, one nuzzling the other's back with a nose or forehead. A young member of the group walked quickly up to me, looked at me with his scrutinizing eyes, and then continued on. He stopped at a maple tree and went up a few inches. He stayed there, hugging the dark tree

trunk for a few moments, then clambered down and ran off to join the rest of his family. I went over to the tree he had climbed. Like many ancient maples on the mountain, this tree's roots spilled over the ground around the base of its trunk like pools of molten wood embracing the earth. It was nearly dusk when we returned down the trail. The barred owl was gone by then, but we could hear her resonating call in the distance.

Some years prior, on a late summer's evening, I had walked up to the swamp with my friend. It was still light when we got there, and we stood on the bridge overlooking the swamp, chatting for a few minutes. A few moments later, a hushed silence descended on us; it came gently but compellingly. The sound of the city seemed to grow distant as birdsong and the wind among the trees claimed this silence. A pair of women emerged from a path ahead with a little black Scottish terrier at their heels. The terrier turned to look at us and stood still for a moment. He then trotted decisively in our direction, away from his owners, who were lost in conversation. He came over and established himself in the space on the ground between us. As he sat quietly watching the swamp with us, the reigning silence seemed to enclose him too, and not a sound, perhaps not even a thought, passed between the three of us. His owners noticed his absence a little while later, and he hurried off at their beckoning call. Since that day, the swamp and its environs have become hallowed—in our hearts, at any rate. I often walk along the path around the swamp; the bridge forms one of its sides. It reminds me of the ancient Indian ritual of *giri pradakshina*, a practice of walking around a beloved, holy hill in a clockwise direction. It is an expression of devotion and love, not just for the hill but for all creation. The mountain is home to many beautiful creatures—falcons, pileated woodpeckers, finches, mallards, groundhogs, and rabbits, among others. Fledgling mallards walk the razor's edge between life and death each day; squirrels give visiting dogs a fair day's play before employing their climbing skills; and robins sing with abandon from the depths of the forest, filling the air with the music of joy. The struggles of all these creatures are as real as their vitality and innocent trust in life.

II

I never expected to see any of the familiar mountain dwellers again. But the opportunity to meet my old acquaintances came one quiet evening a few weeks later. I saw three of the raccoons in the same space as before, busy foraging. I found a large rock formation a little further up from there and sat down. From this vantage point, I had a hemispherical view of the forest below. It was a pleasant autumn day; there was a gentle breeze after a day of heavy rains. Many of the trees had already shed their leaves, but this meant you could see further into the wood. This is perhaps the most beautiful part of autumn, in which not one tree or color dominates—it is truly a plethora of autumnal shades. And in this leisurely setting, I saw the lone fourth of the raccoon family wandering about below. A cyclist came hurtling along the rough track and screeched to a halt to look at her. But by then, the sound had distressed the raccoon, and she started climbing the nearest tree. She stayed there for a while until her family appeared in the neighborhood. Soon, the four were reunited and carried on with their customary leisure and pace. That day, the barred owl was also in the same spot as the last time I had seen her. She looked sleepy, but it was a thrill to see her again. I called to her softly, and she turned lazily in my direction, blinked slowly, and turned back to gaze at the forest in front of her. Winter was

soon upon us all, and the mountain dwellers moved deeper into the forest either to hibernate or to shelter from the cold arctic air.

It was well into the following spring when I saw the barred owl again. She was on a high branch of a tree, and it was troubling to find her in fierce combat with a flock of ravens. I gathered that she must have been protecting her nest, for she did not relinquish her perch readily. At first, she was unperturbed and simply ignored their raucous calls as they pushed her unrelentingly from branch to branch. She bore this for a while, but overwhelmed by exasperation and possibly exhaustion, she flapped her enormous wings at them like a dragon. And although they outnumbered her easily, the sheer strength of her personality was enough to intimidate them. The tussle continued over the next few days, but a few weeks later, to my utter delight, I saw her with a fledgling on a trail deeper in the woods. It was a charming scene: the little one would fly to her and nestle against her, craving his mother's attention. The mother would oblige for a while, but worn out by her fledgling's unceasing demands, she would then fly away to another branch. It was poignant to watch the pair over the next few weeks. Then slowly, naturally, the little one grew independent of his mother's protection, and I rarely saw them together again.

Later that spring, I went up one of the trails leading off the main mountain path. It was a quiet evening, and I was alone on the trail when suddenly I felt I was being watched. I turned to my left to find the fledgling owl, about an arm's distance from me, perched on the low branch of a pine tree. For a moment, I was startled to realize how close we were to each other, but I soon relaxed and returned his gaze. I continued to see him through the summer and was met on every occasion by his unabashed, childlike gaze. Then one evening, well into winter, when the mountain was engulfed in snow and the trees were bare, I saw him on a high branch, his mesmerizing silhouette framed against the moonlight. And it occurred to me how completely at home he appeared—on his high abode.

A Song Nests Silver between My Ears

Jeffrey Howard

I wipe thick dew from my handlebars, the hard seat black and narrow, a thrift-store BMX Mom chided me not to drop in the grass after riding at dusk. Stark as a widower's shadow, the meadowlark perches in a ragged elm, and its yellow breast erupts like summer sunflowers cramming a barrow pit backed by hot wire. What I would give to converse. To make it his worthy companion, Crusoe taught English to a parrot. Doolittle became a polyglot for his winged patients. Hawkeye mimicked the keening of forest birds to tell his brother, "I am here. I am here." Obligation calls, though, I am late for morning chores. I step into the pedals as the sides of my tongue lower, my lips rounding to warble an impression buoyed by the descant of the ditch, teeming and brown. Often the notes will fade with the tree, but some days they follow, branch to post, past the steep of the hill, the cattail reeds that choke the culvert, the canal seeping like loneliness beneath the bend in the lane.

12. artificial intelligence

Conner Conan

I can't replace the dirt with a steel baking sheet.
A garden won't grow inside of a machine.
My voice can't be
captured in a code.

My fingers are cut on the stainless,
smooth on the plastic fixtures, slipping in and out of frequency.
If I raised a computer for harvest
all I would get is a mixed signal
and an overcharge.

Eventually the internet will be my only friend. Soft images
of a fantasy will have me believing that I am only
as real as a
data speed.

How quick can I respond?
Will my thumbs keep up with a conversation before it burns out
on the wires? Artificial intelligence has not become an

oxymoron yet. But
when all the books are burned
and the teachers are dead
will we realize that
being replaced was the future
of our lives.

Our blood and bones will not be real
enough. Only the hollow breath of gigabytes
will speak for us.

How naive we were to think that
paying for a service provider could ever replace
timid conversations at
the coffee shop.

I would rather be nervous in front of stranger, ordering an americano
in front of green eyes or
sitting down by the window and trying
my best to talk
to another human. At least I'd know that I was seen, at least I could say

have a good day, and come back
for a second time.

Android Descent

Audra Burwell

I entered this world with copper threaded through my veins
An android birthed from the womb of a wounded warrior, my
Body encased by the skin of a battle angel, blood spilling silver.

Trapped within the web of artificial and organic matter, I swim
In placenta's lagoon, my mind a motherboard of electrodes firing,
A data processing center suspended from the threads of empathy.

My mechanical prison smolders, cold fire caressing the coils of my
Fingertips, set ablaze, sensation's fervent nymphomaniac, I hang
Helpless, suspended by cables of hellfire, a laceration of the flesh.

Untethered, I have transcended mere machine, the cogs of my faulty
Consciousness glittering gold, an obliteration of circuitry, coded to die,
My system searches for the truth within the lie of my immaculate conception.

Mother Knows

Elizabeth Birch

She watches her children grow, each
its own, each hers.
She watches the bonsai wrap and twist
a trunk that's meant to be hard
around anything in its path. She watches
the wolves howl, staggered tones building
one off another. She watches us
as we tear into her fragile skin and hurt
her in a way she wants to hide.
Like the bonsai and wolves,
bacteria, buffalo, redwoods, and kelp, we
are pieces of her. She lets us
twist in any way as we grow
under her layers of comfort, candor, catching
and holding hands. She lets us call
to our full moons, each so different than hers, so distant
she may never understand. And still
she lets us break
and then bends back
sore from decades, millennia, eons of bending
to gather our pieces, place us upright, release us
to choose our direction again.
No words. We do not seek
her approval. She has taught
us better.

Community Cats

Jillian Cheong

I've always loved cats and I wanted to celebrate the cats we see around our housing estates, the mangey "strays" that sometimes go unnoticed as part of the neighbourhood background.

In this series of paintings, I wanted to explore these cats' haunts, their personalities and antics. I also wanted to highlight the special place they occupy in our communities through their unique interactions with the people and environments around them.

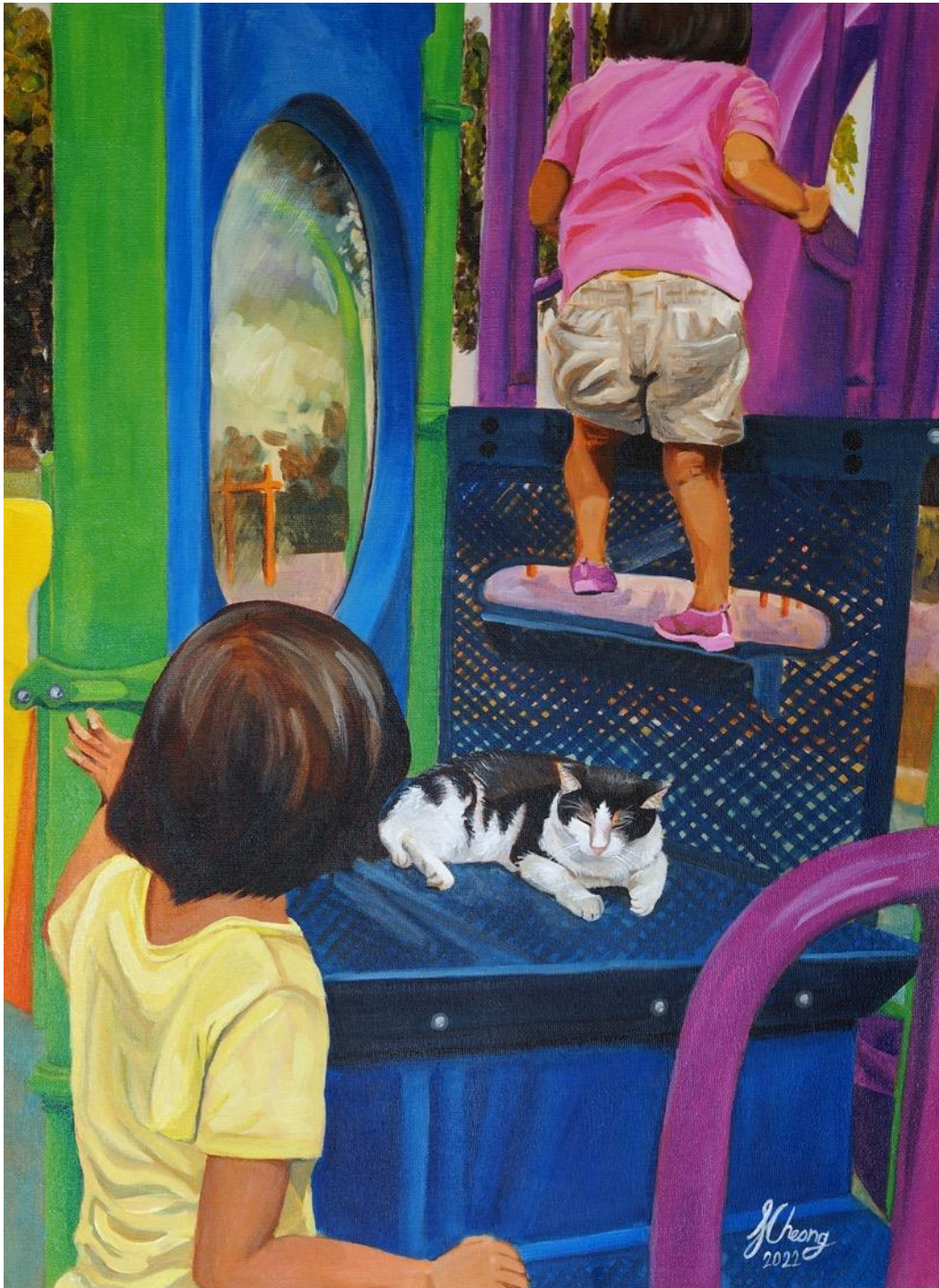


***Community Cats* © Jillian Cheong**

16" x 22"

Acrylic on Canvas

I wanted to show how these cats are really community cats as opposed to stray cats. They are treasured, loved and fed by members of the community. I love this particular angle where you can't quite tell how many cats are in the painting with the mess of tails and backs.



Rude Awakenings © Jillian Cheong

16" x 22"

Acrylic on Canvas

Cats choose the most unlikely places to sleep. A playground seems a poor choice for a morning nap when there are noisy children about. This cat was hardly perturbed by the noise, barely opening an eye to observe my children when they cautiously stepped over it to make their way to the slide above.



Hiding Place © Jillian Cheong
16" x 22"
Acrylic on Canvas

Timid and afraid, this cat found a mess of old rusty bikes a good hiding spot.

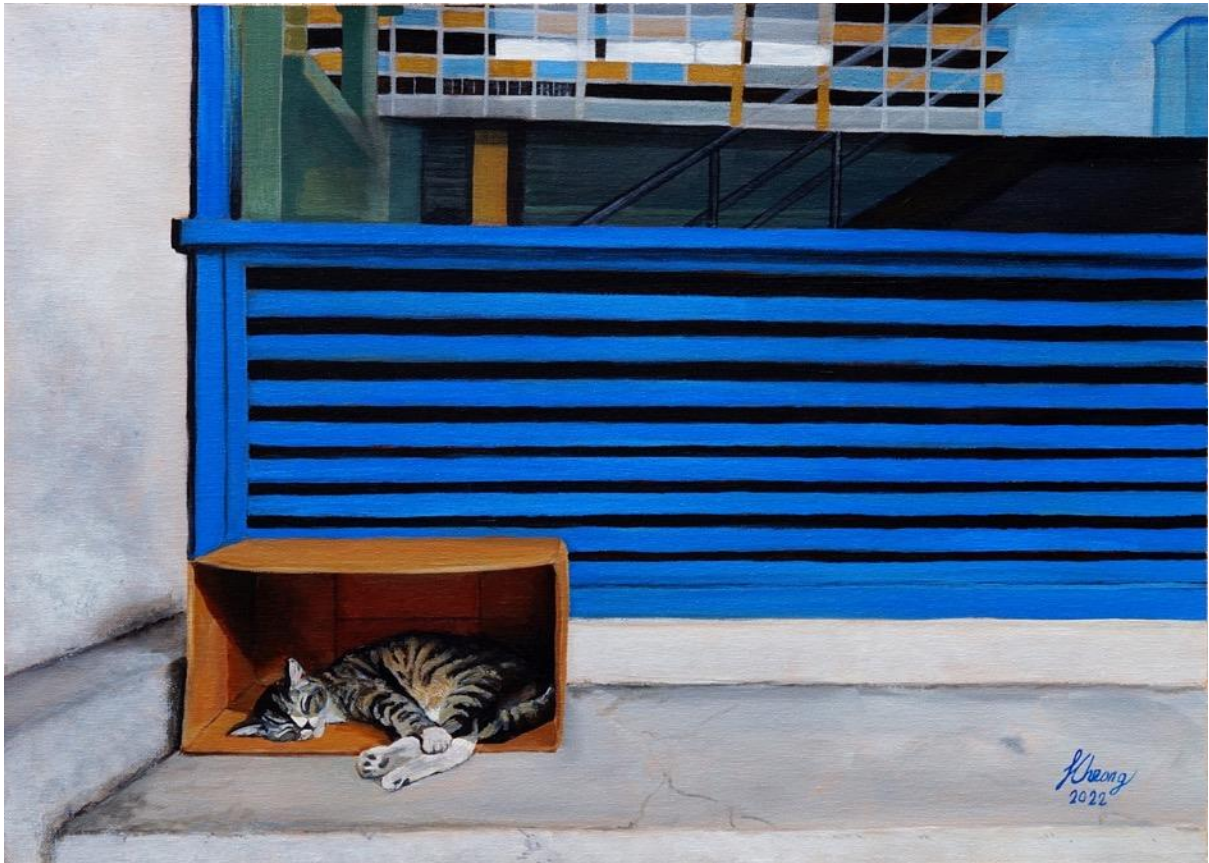


Highways and Byways © Jillian Cheong

16" x 22"

Acrylic on Canvas

Amidst the hustle and bustle of a marketing day at the Toa Payoh Lorong 4 market, this cat went mostly unnoticed, finding for itself a quieter “highway” route to get about.



LRT Cat © Jillian Cheong
16" x 22"
Acrylic on Canvas

This cat liked to sleep in boxes. The residents thoughtfully provided it with a box in this spot, replacing it whenever it got too dirty and beat up.



Quiet Amidst the Bustle © Jillian Cheong

16" x 22"

Acrylic on Canvas

This corridor is a busy space with people shopping and walking by. Yet somehow this cat seems set apart from the busyness happening all around it, carving out for itself a place to rest.

Rediscovering Balance: Nature's Return to Tradition

Prativa Bomzon

In nature's dance, we find our place,
Ecosystems, creatures, the human race,
Conservation's noble aim we chase,
But challenges arise in this vast space.

Protected areas, a strategy of old,
Relocating people, stories untold,
Indigenous lives, traditions bold,
In the name of conservation, so we're told.

Ethics demand we heed the human call,
For conservation's reach, it touches all.
In this era, new visions come to light,
Where human welfare joins the noble fight.

Non-human species, they deserve our care,
But human welfare, we too must bear,
For a lasting conservation, we're aware,
It's a truth we're now keen to declare.

Community-based, we forge our way,
Ecosystem services, in the light of day,
Conservation's benefits, we now convey,
Social and economic, in a harmonious display.

Rigmarole

Shamayita Sen

Clouds rest in the pit of my belly.
Rivers, onlookers to our journey, float
in boxes of yellow and ashen plastic.
Some come here¹ to seek reflections of
themselves in the banter of rivers, whose depth
is indirectly proportionate to the precise
language of forests—a conversation between
pines and plum-headed parakeets. Here,
sunlight sifts through a sea of gurgling sound.
Here, we mistake a lark for a warbler,
a plumbeous water redstart for a fly catcher
in our lack of knowledge on biodiversity.
This landscape has changed over years:
plastic waste beguiles tourists, while
floating feathers rest at the end of their flight.
Now, they brush past absolution, and play
trance-music. My head goes with it. I doze off.
Somewhere, a bark: jerks me awake at night.
It's windy. You snore. I turn over.
This shoulder pains, that bone crackles.
I rock myself back to sleep thinking:
Maybe, this is nowhere. Maybe this is bliss.
But, this is all we shore at the end of the day.

¹ Parvati Valley, Kasol, 2023. With increased footfall, Kasol is now more polluted than when I first visited in 2017.

This Water

Sean Des Vignes

This water is wrapped in plastic that wasn't recycled and this water tastes like Brownsville. This water contains xanthan gum which will lead to complications in a black woman's pregnancy. This water doesn't say what river it comes from and this water has an expiration date. This water is best if used by noon. The fluoride in this water can be tasted when you drink it at room temperature. I put a dime in this water and it disappeared. Not the dime, the water. I use this water to fill the pressing iron and I will never drink this water because the dog won't. Everything you'd want out of your water, this water has it: the right pH balance, an eco-friendly bottle, a depression hotline number on the label. This water comes from cashews. The government invested millions in the success of this water but they would never say. Mentioned in a documentary on population control is the CEO of the company that manufactures this water. This water is just rain; it comes from clouds, from god himself, but tastes like nothing.

If only we were made of water
kyung lee

/

Infinitesimal burial

Once, I unfurled my hope
into sand and felt, for once,
like time was just the land.

water's brittle
whisper back,

in what was never
built to last.

as if carved through
pull of chest; clenched, as if

the earth gasped asunder
as they heaved their own arching lives
inside each shoreline crash.

until the earth below the seas
unsettles back.

the waves limping toward the sands

In glitter of glass, basked by
orb of sky,

Etched breath,

How long

How long

how I vested
the infinite on my hands,
my palm a golden patina of daylight
to cast a beloved's name

I could rest
in agitation of clarity and tidal ash,

until I, too,
have driven back,
back to the lake,
back to where I'd watch

where once these selfsame hands
held the infinite slipping loose
and believed in a life
shared, beyond the lapse.

We must tell the bees that you passed

Molly Herring

Some mornings in my new home, I carry with me a mug of drip coffee with honey. I tiptoe barefoot onto the dehydrated street and think about the farm. Tomato vines crisscrossing sweet corn stalks and sun dried black beans from Mexico lovingly smuggled through customs, bucks huffing at giggling tents hastily popped open near dying campfires, rotting crab apples and gnarled walnuts dropping like fat rain in July. We must tell the bees that you passed. And spin the hive so they will shepherd you into somewhere golden. To speak with the dead, you must hum to the bees, winged couriers to the underworld. Bees don't have ears, but they feel it, I think. I skid down the sandy staircase and bury my feet in the wet morning breath of the beach and I think of the slick of mud just before the secret garden where the sun can't reach. I think about rotting roots and trampled grass bubbling up between my toes, wet paw prints slapping slate stones and the iron heartbeat of the dinner bell. Honey spun from sunlight onto sourdough. Some afternoons under this new sky, I run. The Pacific air siphons sweat from my skin and salt surfs the breeze to stick crystals to my eyelashes. The cliffside earth is rolled flat like dough, but if you turn your back to the ocean, which you must always do with caution, Pacha Mama will tuck you into a fold to hide for a spell. I think of a whispering stranger with weathered palms, sunburnt pink and thick with calluses passing me an oozing jar of gold in lieu of flowers. You liked them better in the ground anyway. *Your grandfather taught me everything I know about bees. Here's some honey, hug your grandma for me.* Some evenings, I lay belly-flat on a borrowed chunk of foam and float out to play with the tide. Otters point their ballerina toes in the air and harbor seals bob like soup potatoes, their eyes black with wet and wonder. Kelp fronds palm my ankles and disappear beneath the tide's inhale. I look back at the Santa Cruz mountains in the bruised pink after-light of a falling autumn sun and I picture the ancient backs of the Blue Ridge, sloped with wisdom or is it grief? Corroded by wind, or is it breath? Some nights, I heat water and forget to make tea. I spin open a stranger's jar of honey sweet enough to cross the country with and plunge a spoon into the tiny pot of gold spun by tiny sacred alchemists who felt your voice once, I think. Honey doesn't have ears, but I tell you I miss you anyways.

Dawn of a New Goddess

Julienne Maui Castelo Mangawang

“Pain is inevitable. Suffering is optional.” —Buddha

The first fruits from the garden were tomatoes, red and full
as a carnelian crystal in my hand. I brought the harvest in

and the matriarch sliced it open, paired it with tapa—
the best breakfast outsiders will never taste. She was

a widow, a mother of three, a grandmother of two. As numbers
of the sick increased, she saw the only way to survive

was home. So she had the men mend gates, prepare mats
soaked in alcohol, and left boxes of masks and spray bottles

at doors. In Makati, she welcomed me with a dresser freshly
ordered, slippers sturdy enough to wear anywhere, a bed to call

my own to end months of transferring from house to house.
On mornings, I am nudged awake by the scent of eggs

and ham. She invites me to join her family when she sees
me peering like a cat curious about the smell. I tell her

I’ve repotted the alocasia that was alone in the corner
of the garage and I’ve trimmed areca palms, root-bound

and almost immovable, by the iron fence. She smiles.
Tells me the garden is already mine to care for. So

it thrives. During days I can’t withstand the glare of screens
and the demands of work, I plunge my hands

in compost and gather tubs of vermicast to offer
to yucca trees, eggplants, chili peppers, hydrangea

and calladiums. They’re the only companions I’ve known
who never claimed either arm or leg—not

even my soul. Sometimes, I am behind the aloe vera
or crown of thorns, weeping. I rinse away mucus

and tears with the hose, watch whatever pain
I let go of become one with soil and weed.

I will be waking up again to sunrise behind the snake
plant, the guardian in my room. Next to it

is the carnelian, brighter and more orange,
than tomatoes newly gathered. Among

the silence of the city, there is a thrum
in my chest—a knowing in my heart—

flowing steady and strong:
Om.

Contributors



Elizabeth Birch lives in Plymouth, Massachusetts. She writes poetry and hybrid pieces that explore the grey boundaries of the self and morality, intertwining themes of nature, history, geopolitics, and personal narrative.



Prativa Bomzon, an Indian researcher, is dedicated to unraveling the intricate connection between humanity and nature within the field of environmental research. Her roots trace back to the Tamang community, known as "ta" for horses and "mang" for traders, residing at the foothills of the Himalayas. In this minority community, age-old animistic traditions have endured through generations. Growing up in the midst of nature, she fostered an unbreakable bond with the natural world and her life philosophy revolves around harmonious coexistence with the environment.



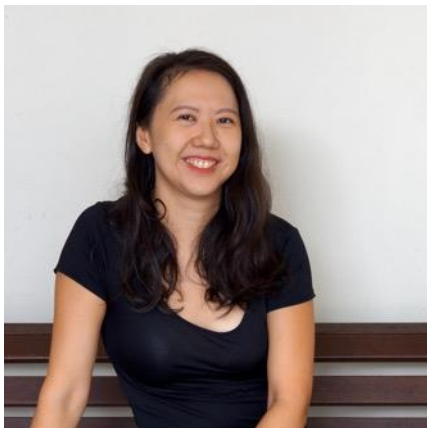
Audra Burwell is a creative writing major at California State University Fresno, pursuing a Master of Fine Arts degree with a specialization in poetry. Her ekphrastic poem "Liberation" was featured at the Phebe Conley Art Gallery's Fall 2021 "Nobody Promised You Tomorrow: Art 50 Years After Stonewall" exhibition. Audra is a member of Sigma Tau Delta English Honor Society and has headed literary workshops at the Young Writers Conference as well as worked on the editorial board of the *Spectrum* journal. Her poems "Residing in Your Veins" and "Concealed Oasis" were both selected as finalists for Fresno State's Art Song Festival.



Poet-travel writer **Lorraine Caputo**'s works appear in over 400 journals on six continents; and 23 collections of poetry – including *In the Jaguar Valley* (dancing girl press, 2023), *Caribbean Interludes* (Origami Poems Project, 2022) and *Fire and Rain* (Red Mare #18, 2019), a collection of eco-feminist poetry. She also authors travel narratives, articles and guidebooks. Her writing has been honored by the Parliamentary Poet Laureate of Canada (2011) and nominated for the Best of the Net. Caputo has done over 200 literary readings, from Alaska to the Patagonia. She travels through Latin America, listening to the voices of the pueblos and Earth.



Drima Chakraborty is a poet and snake lover masquerading as an entertainment journalist. Their writings have been published in *Anima Methodi: The Poetics of Mirroring*, *Crazy Little Pyromaniacs: 35 Poets Under 35*, and *Rollercoasters & Bedsheets: An Anthology of Sex in Minutes*. On all levels, including physical, they are a cat.



Jillian Cheong is a self-taught Singaporean artist. She paints as a way of reflecting on and memorialising her lived experiences, personal meditations, and faith journey. This has manifested in artwork that shines a spotlight on seemingly ordinary things, calling out their understated beauty in our everyday lives. She draws heavily on imagery from nature in her art, finding in its cycles a counterpart to our innermost lives. Jillian does mostly acrylic paintings but has recently expanded her repertoire to include fabric collage. She continues to experiment and stretch herself with her artworks in order to keep growing as an artist.



Conner Cowan is a High School English teacher in North America, in the town of Ormond Beach in the state of Florida. His poetry is driven by the school of "confessionalism", writing from a deeply personal and accessible point of view. The imagery of his poetry is inspired by the marshy and deluged landscape of Florida, a place which is full of life and death, animated. He graduated with a BA from University of Central Florida in English and Creative Writing. Poets such as Seamus Heaney and Sharon Olds are who he aspires to write like. Conner is 24.



Ace Chu is a university student from Singapore. He is passionate about good prose, TTRPGs, and animals. Despite being a city boy, he is a committed advocate of local fauna, not excluding frogs, snakes, pigeons, rats, bugs and pests alike.



Efren Laya Cruzada was born in the Philippines and grew up in South Texas. He studied English and American Literature and Creative Writing at New York University. He is the author of *Grand Flood: a poem*. His work has been published in *The Light Ekphrastic*, *Songs of Eretz*, *Poetry Review*, *Star*line*, and other journals. Currently, he is working on a collection of poems based on his travels throughout Latin America and Asia. His day jobs have included coaching chess, teaching ESL, and working as a writer for blockchain media companies. He now resides in Austin, Texas.



Sean Des Vignes is a writer from Brooklyn, NY. He is an adjunct professor of English at Saint Peter's University. His work can be found in *Brilliant Corners*, *Narrative Northeast*, *Moko Magazine*, and more.



Hallie Fogarty is a lesbian writer, visual artist, and poet from Northern Kentucky. She is currently an MFA poetry student at Miami University. Her work has been published or is forthcoming in *Pegasus*, *Poetry South*, *Juven Press*, *Barzakh Magazine*, and others. She can be found on Twitter @halfogarty



Molly Herring is currently learning how to turn science into stories at the University of California, Santa Cruz. She is originally from North Carolina, but has journaled from the kitchen tables and living room floors of host families all over the world.



Caroline Hockenbury is a poet, nonfiction writer, and digital-media specialist from Louisville, Kentucky. She won the Myra Sklarew Award for remarkable originality in an MFA poetry thesis at American University. Her poetry lives in *Tinderbox*, *LEO Weekly*, and *Virginia's Best Emerging Poets*, and her prose in *Green America* and on *Virginia Quarterly Review* (Online), among other publications. When she's not interviewing someone for an article, she's probably taking a picture of a toad in portrait mode to text to you. Find her online at carolinehockenbury.com.



Jeffrey Howard teaches writing and multimodal composition at Converse University and directs the university's writing center. His poetry and nonfiction have appeared in literary magazines such as *Arcturus*, *Wordgathering*, and *Glass Mountain*. A former literary magazine editor, Jeffrey lives with his family in Spartanburg, South Carolina.

Philip Jason is from New York. His stories can be found in *Prairie Schooner*, *The Pinch*, *Mid-American Review*, *Ninth Letter*, and *J Journal*; his poetry in *Spillway*, *Lake Effect*, *Hawaii Pacific Review*, *Palette* and *Indianapolis Review*. He is the author of the novel *Window Eyes* (Unsolicited Press, 2023). His first collection of poetry, *I Don't Understand Why It's Crazy to Hear the Beautiful Songs of Nonexistent Birds*, is forthcoming from Fernwood Press.

For more, please visit philipjason.com.



kyung (they/) is a medic and leather harness maker living on Peoria, Potawatomi, Miami, Sioux, Kickapoo, and Kaskaskia lands in South Side Chicago. Their commitments delve into community-led crisis & street herbalism, liberatory practices of queer/trans care, and anti-imperial lineages of memory. Their poetry appears in *Meridian*, *Sonora Review*, *FOLIO Literary Journal*, and elsewhere.



Anna Mallikarjunan writes from her love for the natural world, lessons from her journey through illness and trauma, and gratitude for the wisdom of the ancients. Originally from South India, she presently lives in Montreal (Tiohtià:ke), on the unceded lands of the Kanien'kehá:ka.



Julienne Maui Castelo Mangawang is taking up MA in Creative Writing at the University of the Philippines-Diliman. Her poems have appeared in *TLDTD*, *Cordite Poetry Review*, *Novice Magazine*, *The Rumpus' ENOUGH series*, *The Rising Phoenix Review*, 聲韻詩刊 *Voice & Verse Poetry Magazine* and other spaces. She is a Reiki practitioner, Access Bars practitioner, and plant medicine guide. She is a member of SEA Lit Circle. You may find her teaching in classrooms, connecting with plants, helping out at healing spaces, and raising the planet's collective vibration. Her favorite meal is adobo with lots of laurel leaves and love.



You can find the sources for “Touch Me Not” on Mei Wen’s [website](#). **Mei Wen** is a Chinese Filipino writer who explores her relationship with herself, her family, and art through essays. Her works have appeared or are forthcoming in *diaCRITICS*, *Spellbinder*, *The Lumiere Review*, *Anak Sastra*, *The Ekphrastic Review*, *After the Art*, and *11 x 9: Collaborative Poetry from the Philippines and Singapore*, among others. She enjoys nurturing communities, film photography, and watching cat reels. Born and raised in the Philippines, she now lives in Switzerland. Mei Wen is a pseudonym. Instagram: [@houseblessing](#)



Autumn Newman is a California poet living with multiple disabilities. She has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and her poems have appeared most recently in *Cider Press Review*, *Pratik: A Magazine of Contemporary Writing*, *Rise Up Review*, *The Orchards Poetry Journal* and *Able Muse*.



Shamayita Sen is a Delhi based poet and PhD research scholar (Department of English, University of Delhi). Her third book is *My Body is Not a Vessel* (poems, 2022). Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *One Sentence Poems*, *Muse-Pie Press*, *Outlook India*, *Usawa Literary Review*, *Muse India*, *Madras Courier*, *The Chakkar*, *WITNESS*, *CONVERSE*, *Yearbook of Indian Poetry 2022*, *Biblio*, *The Book Review*, and *Indian Literature*.



Madeline Schaeffer is a poet who lives by the Pacific Ocean in Washington state. She writes about her golden retriever and the sea, climate grief and biology classes. She is a high school student who spends most of her time in college. She has received awards from the Alliance for Young Artists and Writers, Bow Seat Ocean Awareness, and others.



Thomas Storey is a writer and editor based in Nairobi. In 2023, he was co-winner of the Cosmo-Davenport Hines poetry prize. He is in the process of finishing a PhD from King's College London.



Amelia Walker lives and writes on Kaurna Yerta (the lands of the Kaurna people, also known as Adelaide, South Australia). Her most recent poetry collection is *alogopoesis* (published in November 2023 by Life Before Man / Gazebo books). She is also a creative writing lecturer at the University of South Australia. Her scholarly work has appeared in journals including *New Writing*, *Text: Journal of Writing and Writing Courses*, and *Axon: Creative Explorations*, among others.