

RIVER'S EDGE

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LITERARY MAGAZINE

ISSUE 1

FIRE 2026

Cover Art by **Mario Tauchi**
Designed by Venessa Tai Yeh, Aretha Wang, and Sadia Ansari

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EDITORIAL TEAM

Sadia Ansari Editor

Sadia is a writer, mother, and by profession a consultant specializing in user experience & enablement. She is passionate about writing on diaspora, immigrant experience, and firmly believes in the power of women's economic independence. Her editorial vision centers identity, with a particular interest in writing that challenges both form and worldviews. Committed to fostering an inclusive and engaged literary community, she believes in literature as both art and conversation. Sadia most recently published in *RockPaperPoem* and will be in the forthcoming issue of *Gut Punch Literary Journal*. She is rooted in Southern California and is currently working on her collection of poetry titled, *Grief is a Country*.

Editor **Leyda Mar**

Leyda Mar is a psychotherapist by trade, and also a mother and writer. Her lived and professional experiences call her to amplify the voices stifled by a system built to ignore them. Having grown up in the 90's as a Mexican immigrant when it wasn't cool to speak Spanish or eat tacos, she knows what it's like to hide in plain sight. She now shares her love of Juan Gabriel unapologetically with her children and husband as a way to remember the Spanish she's almost forgotten. Leyda is in the process of editing an untitled chapbook of her own work that focuses on intergenerational trauma, motherhood, and immigration.

Christopher M. Wegemer Editor

Chris is a teacher, researcher, and writer. He lives on the corner of idealism and realism, finding sanctuary in stories that illuminate the human condition. For two decades, he has worked alongside young people in activist and artistic communities, who have demonstrated the power of creative expression to cultivate personal and social change. His poetry explores meaning, love, and awe in the gravity and grace of chronic illness.

Featured Artist **Mario Tauchi**

Mario Tauchi is a Japanese artist based in Tokyo who also works in publishing as a translator and writer. He grew up observing forms of nature in a rural area of Saitama. He spent his childhood and youth in Paris, Melbourne and Philadelphia where he became fascinated by religious, tribal, street, and psychedelic art. All of these experiences shaped the foundation of his style and thoughts. He is currently working on a new Japanese translation of *The Book of Tea* by Okakura Kakuzo, a classic introduction to Japanese art and philosophy.

Venessa Tai Yeh Designer

Venessa Tai Yeh is a poet and programmer based in Southern California with her husband and two cats. She is the creator of Opol (opol.space), a quiet space for poetry. Her poetry explores the intersection of contemporary American lyricism and Taoist philosophy. Her work has been published in *Pearl Press* and *Scribe*. She is also building websites for writers and literary magazines as Sweet Leaf Studio with a focus on calm design. Her first book of poetry, *two halves of me*, is forthcoming March 2026.

Designer **Aretha Wang**

Aretha Wang is a Bay Area-based UX and graphic designer with a passion for creating work that makes a difference. She has partnered with nonprofits and small businesses alike, bringing thoughtful design to everything from full websites to icons, posters, and banners. Whether she's crafting a seamless user experience or a bold visual identity, she aims to positively impact the communities around her.

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EDITORS', LETTER

The edge is where things shift. Where the familiar gives way to uncertainty. Where risk becomes necessary. Where voices that might otherwise go unheard find space.

Inside these pages, you will find work that resists easy definition – poetry that unsettles, lingers, that sharpens the way we see the world. Each piece was chosen not simply for polish, but for presence. For its willingness to stand at that edge.

This issue covers themes of identity, one's place in the world, and the space we occupy in our own minds. Fire, heat, ash were all repeated themes in our poets' minds; we saw their words come together as movement or transition and so we present this movement to you as our Fire issue.

River's Edge exists to create an engaged community that brings together a collection of voices in our living current. We, like you, are part of this same current, and so you will find our own poems in dialogue with our contributors for this first issue. We hope these poems speak to you as they have spoken to us.

Launching a literary magazine is an act of belief. Belief in writers. Belief in readers. Belief that language matters deeply – perhaps now more than ever. Thank you for reading. Thank you for supporting independent literary publishing. Thank you for stepping to the edge with us.

– The Editors
River's Edge Literary Magazine

Every issue has a playlist of its own. This is music we listened to as we put together the issue, or posted online. It reflects us, it reflects the poems contained in this issue, it reflects our times. We hope you enjoy!

(On Qobuz or SoundCloud)



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IGNITE

“The river tells me: / you are never whole— / only a congregation of
ghosts / that refuse to drown. / Still, I drink:”

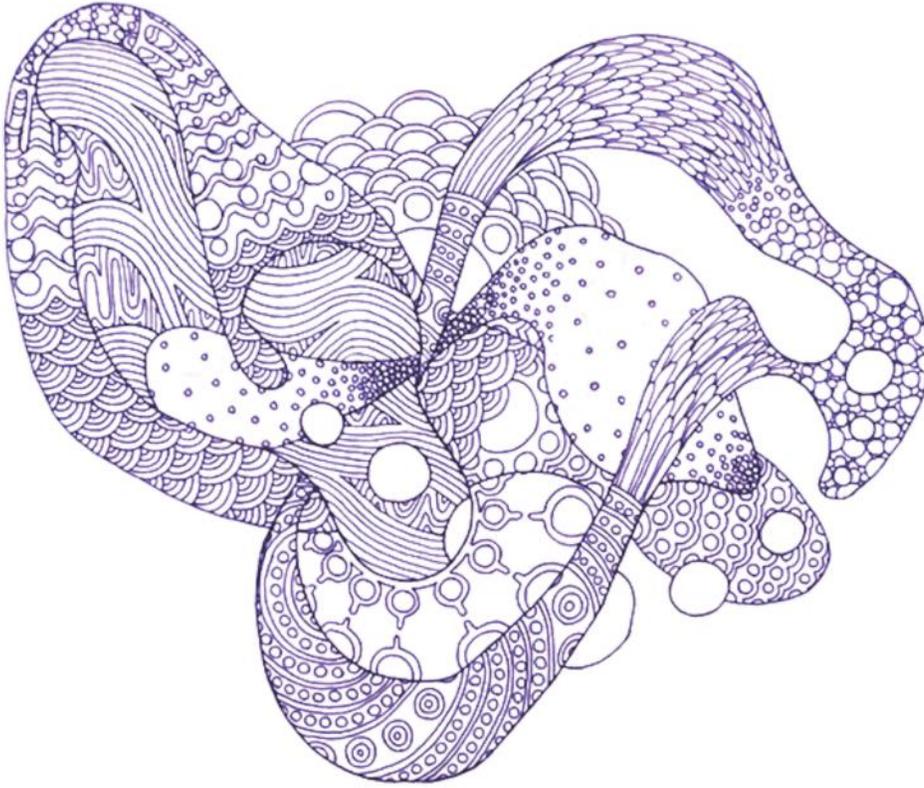
an excerpt from *Where the River Breaks its Mirror* by Joshua Walker



ALL THE PLACES I'VE FOUND POEMS

By Cypher

The country of mechanics, waiting to repair me. My headset, held with duct tape. The strums of my air guitar - electric, of course. Every art piece that made me a human-sized God. The July sky spread like a stomach, stratus clouds for stretch marks. The sandbox where thambi plays. The times appa cleaves the base of an onion and leaves behind a colosseum. My first heartbreak. The heartbreak after that, and the heartbreak after that. The screeeeeeeeeeeech of the elevator as it reaches the psych ward. A felled tree, branches laid like the legs of a centipede. Every detail lost. The kind of truth that a lie tells best. My dinners with Death- horizon on the doorstep.



WHERE THE RIVER BREAKS ITS MIRROR

By Joshua Walker

I stand at the bank,
my face rippling
into twelve faces.

One belongs to the child
who slept beside monsters.
Another, the man
who buried his laughter in silence.
One is nothing but water
turning into sky.

The river tells me:
you are never whole—
only a congregation of ghosts
that refuse to drown.

Still, I drink:
every fractured reflection,
every mouth that is mine,
until the taste returns—
salt, blood,
myself.

VICIOUS CYCLES

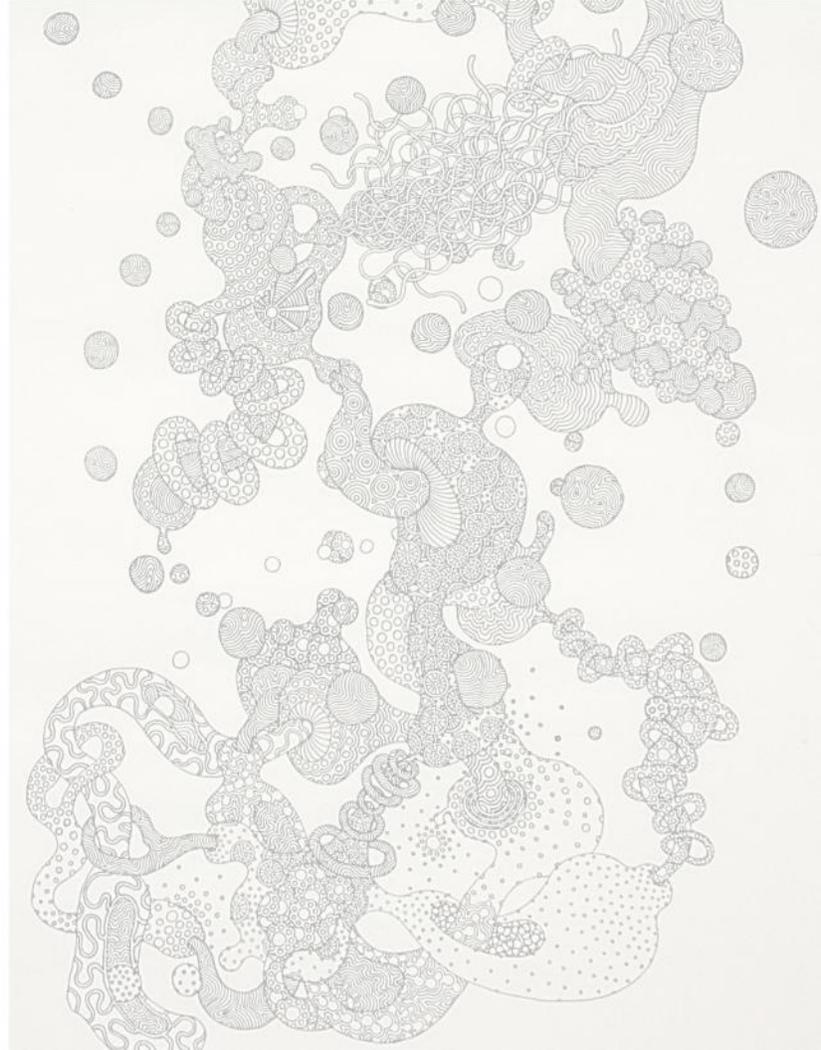
By Diana Pleasant

My mind's alive
but I don't wanna be inside it
the leaf leads me astray every time

Those little green wheels
follow me all day

All too soon
the embers turn to ash
Shame
got to stub it out now

Time to roll another one



WHAT A CLICHÉ

By Leyda Mar

I'm the Fuck Me Shoes

Valentine red suede

4 inch stilettos

Low vamp, toe-cleavage-show-off shoes

Present her pliant shape

The gentle curve of her calf muscles

Undulating to grip the earth

I stomp

beneath me

Sleek and sure

the Corvette equivalent of his formulaic

mid-life crisis

But supple, soft, and measured

Worn at her pleasure

She whispers that *I'm pretty cute*

Innocent as seventh grade cherry chapstick

Liar

Why else would she covet me

bring me home

When I make her soles tender

Numb her into secret choices

That make men lose their bearings

Poor souls dashed to lust

they swallow with my siren call

Even as she catwalks with daggers &

blood trailing

The little mermaid of dark fairytales she once adored

FLOATING IN THE WHITE SPACE

By Michelle Brown

Letters precede a cursor,
Looking to find words to
Share/tell/confess/describe/don't tell

White space post-dates white noise.

Audience silence bears weight,
respect/confusion/no comprehension
eyes slide away,
silence sibilant in discomfort,
waits for more tasty conversation

That teeth can tear into in relief.
Speaker sighs within, but speaks
His name,
his reality,
Their discomfort belongs to them
Choice

always

lingers

in the jasmine

of her smile.

BENEATH THE FURZE

By Christopher Power

Leaning toward the bog,
falling forward to tufts,
bog reed, Curlews, Skylarks,

Coconut scented petals
in full golden bloom.

Narrow lean tracks trace
Slaloming flattened grass
Through dens hidden beneath
the clustered canopy.

Safety in summer.

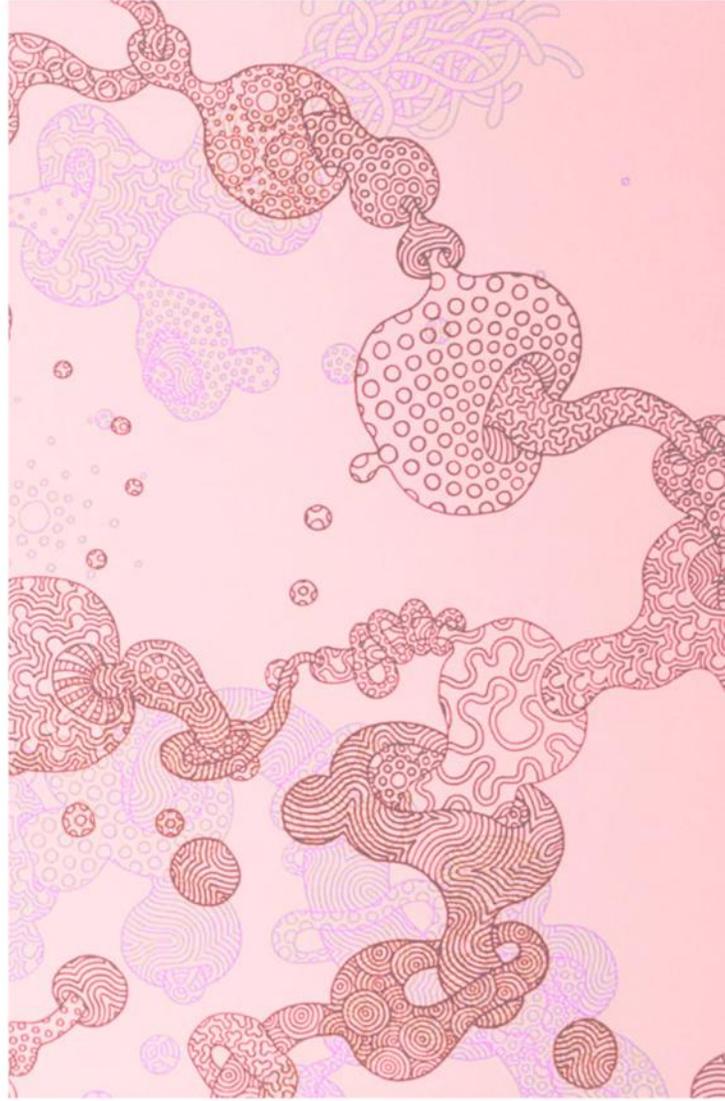
By November, prey sniff
Search. An army of black
And tan hunt. The cavalry close,
Watching, waiting, readied

For a signal by horn.
Its bass-like roar booms with
Hungry hounds hurrying,
Scurrying, panting toward

a faithful meet and greet.
Uninvited into
Homes left unguarded by
Winters savage hunger

for flora. The dens doors
left ajar enough for
pillager to plunder.

Summer but a memory.



A LETTER TO MY SISTERS ON MEANINGS OF MASAAWI HAQOOQ

By Sadia Ansari

1

Sister, I see you,
in courts,
asking permission
for what the body should never have to justify.
You whisper about Roe like it was a ghost.
But for some,
it was never fully alive.

Rights are being written away—
by white men who wear suits like armor,
and women who smile as they vote against themselves.
 When they banned abortion in Texas,
 when they turned neighbors
 into bounty hunters,
 you were surprised.
 We weren't.
 We've seen laws used like knives.
 We know to live under the weight
 of someone else's belief.

Sister, you are learning
what we always knew:
that the law is not neutral.
That scripture folds into bullets.
That the echo of a gaze
always sees us as vessels
before it acknowledges
us as human.

*The body knows
when it is not its own.
The skin knows
when it's been claimed.*

2

Sister, you once looked at us like we were behind.
As if history moved in a straight line,
and you had simply walked farther.
You framed lives in metaphors—
honor, shame, oppression—
and your own in progress, autonomy, light.

You called our battles cultural.
 Yours: political.
 Ours: ancient.
 Yours: modern.

You wrote books, made films,
 stood on panels and said we were silenced,
 oppressed,
 veiled—
as if we hadn't already named the weight on our backs.
As if our resistance needed your vocabulary to be real.

You, too, are bound—
 By wage gaps masked in polite meetings.
 By motherhood painted as fulfillment.
 By a system that praises your ambition
 until it's inconvenient.

This is not a hierarchy of suffering.
 We are not competing wounds.
 We stand beside you,
 not beneath you.

3
 Sister—
 we have always been covered,
 all of us.
 By laws,
 by shame,
 by the myths they feed us about what it means to be free.

We know the law is not a savior.
 That whiteness does not shield.

We are with you—
 in streets,
 in clinics,
 in courtroom steps.

But understand:
 we brought our own fire.
 We didn't wait for you to teach us how to burn.

*Masaawi Haqooq.**

*This ekphrastic poem responds to Lala Rukh's *Masaawi Haqooq*, a protest poster challenging laws restricting women's rights during the '80s in Pakistan. This poem is an expansion on the meaning of *Masaawi Haqooq*, (Equal Rights), reflecting on the layered struggle for equality faced by women of color—navigating both cultural and religious constraints within their communities and the exclusions of mainstream feminism—while calling for a sisterhood without racial hierarchy.

HOMEGOODS

By Charlotte Otremba

Do I “need” a picture frame for my friend
 Who is getting married soon?
 Or do I simply want an excuse
 To get in my car
 Blast a podcast on 1.25x speed about a forgotten fad
 Soar into a 3-level parking garage at an egregious speed
 Park (diagonally, sloppily) and
 Grab my purse, switch my phone to Do Not Disturb,
 Race through those Red Sliding Doors
 So that I can
 Stop
 and
 Saunter down the brightly, brightly, *brightly* lit aisles of
 Faux greenery
 And seasonal pumpkins and trees and wreaths
 And pillows and pillows and pillows and huge comforters and pillows
 And stacks of square paper napkins with phrases like
 “My cat lets me drink here” or
 “I’ll peep your tom” or
 “One martini, two martini, three martini ~~floor~~ MORE BITCH”
 And smell candles with scents that combine food and nature like
 “Lemon and ocean,” “cranberry and fir tree,” or “rhubarb and wood fire”
 And sit in too-small chair pairs and turn on large lanky lamps that are missing shades
 And browse faux bamboo outdoor table sets and plastic placemats and tiki straws and
 endless
 themed
 items
 that weasel into my imagination and create a colorful, attainable, carefree life of knick knacks
 and casseroles and wine o’clock and a mug for every day:

 affordable comfort

BLAZE

“A living river of red hats and camo jackets and Jesus Saves banners surges forward, / singing hymns to the holy livestream of relinquished reality, / *Guernica* with patriots baptized in hot tear gas, / lungs full of Covid-is-a-hoax and take our country back and lock her up 1776, baby.”

an excerpt from *January 6th, 2021 (And Other American Dreams)* by Christopher M. Wegemer

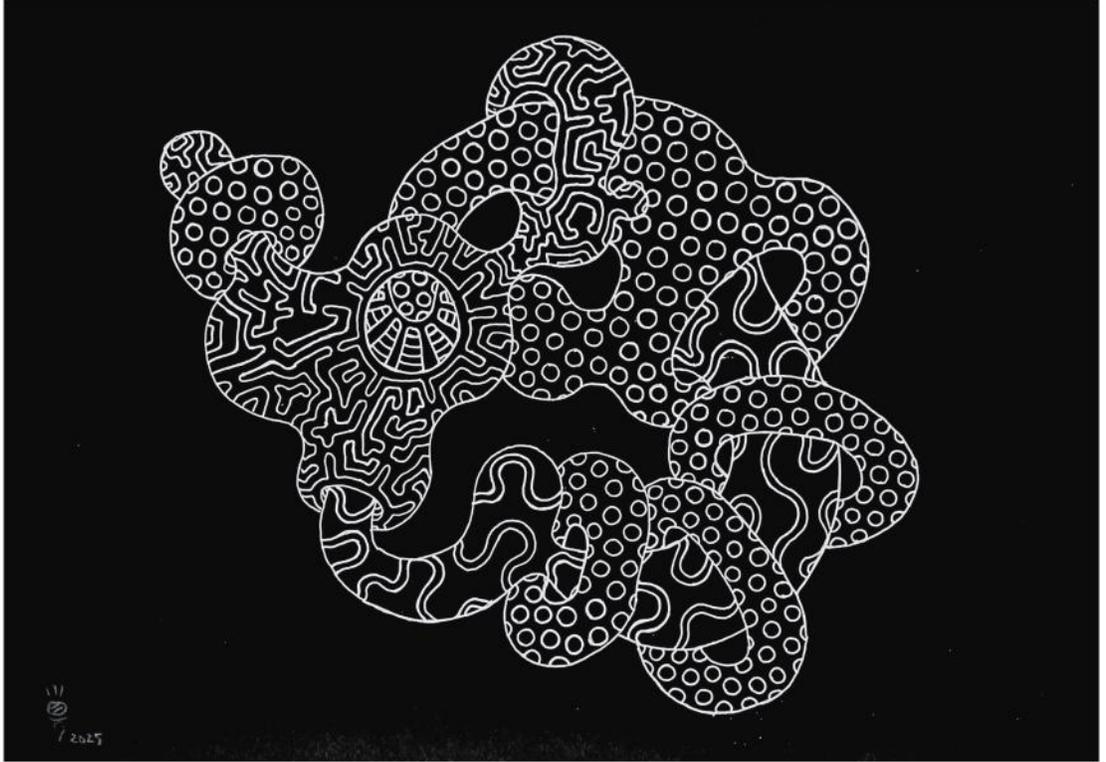
UNTITLED

By Sabrina Tolve

Everything dark is the scythe,
it is you calling me from other skies,
opening wounds in the bed.

You whisper kites and sails
into the black of September.

The sky will lower itself,
the *garbino* will be smothered
in a trembling of leaves —
only courses of roads and pyramids
to mirror ourselves in rivers
of explosions.



NEWS REMIX

By Priya K. Gill

hi. this is *Jennifer*.

~~Gen~~ *Jen* for short.

bringing you news of

Genesis: Reborn

and, it's clever this

churches with origins

in ~~Gaza~~ no that's *generous*

be *gentle* cuz

we've a narrative to sell.

meanwhile

three *generations* of rock have

been pictured in a field.

the weather is extraordinarily

general. a bit about *generic* sports.

gentleman getting all the attention.

Breaking: Imane Khelif does

not contain *genetics*.

There are only two *genders*.

Thus, thought occurs from *genitals*

Salford is the latest city to *gentrify*

genuine olive oil grows in the same

origin as *genesis*

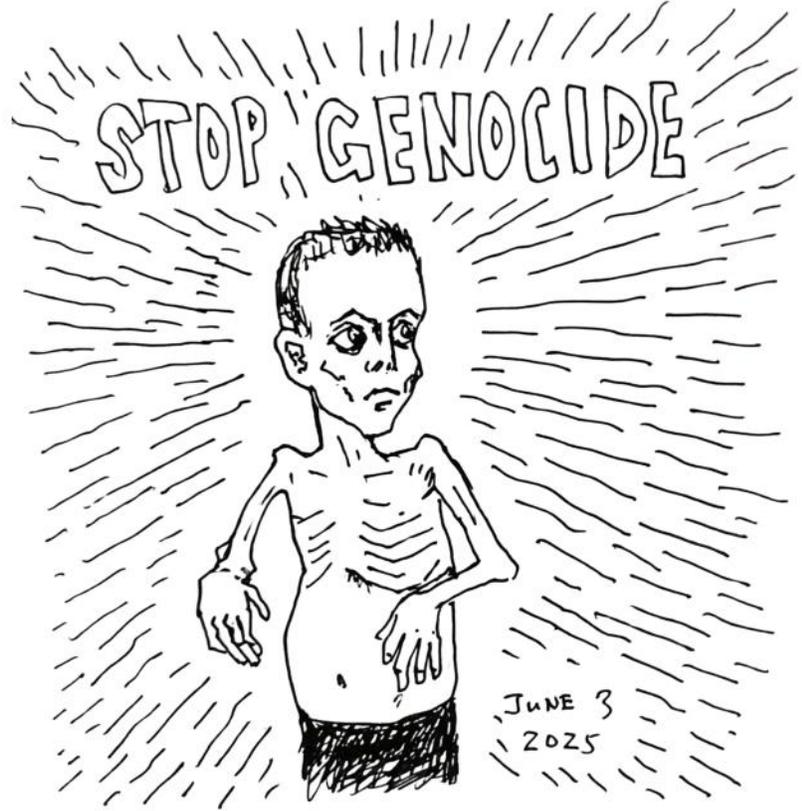
in the place called ██████████

which is undergoing a *GEN*-

gen, *gen*, **gen**?

War.

Back for the late news at 10.



JANUARY 6TH, 2021
(AND OTHER AMERICAN DREAMS)

By Christopher M. Wegemer

"They stormed the Capitol, waving flags as weapons." – The New York Times

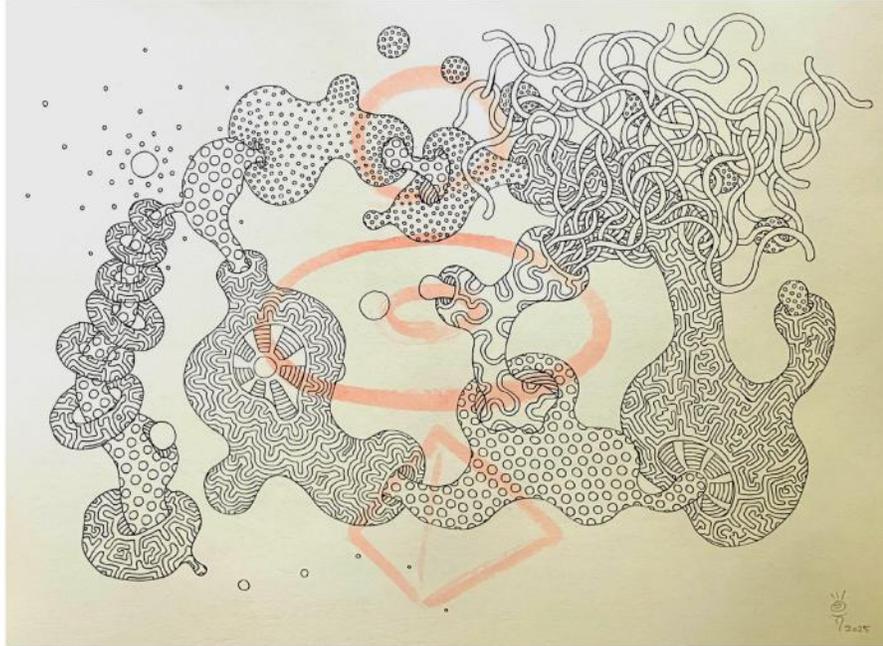
The first window cracks like a spiderweb,
a fragile barrier trembling between collapse and defiance.
For a moment, I think: This can't be real.
The unmasked man drives the flagpole through again,
Old Glory drilling a nationalist hole, as shards rain down like freedom confetti
like shredded ballots tumbling from hidden suitcases
like emails burned in Hillary Clinton's pizza dungeon WITCH HUNT.
A living river of red hats and camo jackets and Jesus Saves banners surges forward,
singing hymns to the holy livestream of relinquished reality,
Guernica with patriots baptized in hot tear gas,
lungs full of Covid-is-a-hoax and take our country back and lock her up 1776, baby.
Cell phones, raised like Klan torches rewriting their own histories
of the blood pooling along the marble veins of the Republic.
It'll come out in the wash, with bleach and hydroxychloroquine and hoarded toilet paper.
I'm not a racist, but stop the steal with a George Soros wall and Hunter Biden's laptop.
The screen flickers like a simulation glitch, eagles circling above the Capitol dome
and pixelated fighter jets painting the sky with a rainbow of stars and stripes
as the camera pans to the shaman who stands for law and order
and a senator's voiceover says:
"Rigged machines stole Christmas and Jewish space lasers twist my words!"
Click next. Murderers of Capitol guards in orange jackets
who followed the orders of the commander in chief to fight like hell
cry on a stage with tight handcuffs in front of 12 of their peers,
admitting to the world they were wrong
because Russian trolls are real and Antifa isn't taking your guns to Venezuela.
Pardon me, for thinking that it was over.
The smoke clears and the giant wooden doors of the Capitol creak open.
Trump emerges, radiant in a dusty fighter pilot jacket, muscled fist punching the sky as Q
prophesized
with the military parading behind him, hoisting Pence hog-tied on a spit roast
and Nancy Pelosi kneeling for mercy, confessing it was all the immigrant dark state
and China owns Biden, God chose Trump.

I restart the video and hold the phone up to the light.
This can't be real.
It looks like me, sounds like me.
But I can't say for sure anymore.

INDUSTRIAL DEVOLUTION

By Priya K. Gill

smoking was good for you
 and burning Mother
 Nature paid bills
 You take your unbirthed
 grandchild's garden
 from *her* garden
 and roll it up into a cig
 Fill a lighter with
 care-o-scene
 and light the hairs
 into clouds
 stack your baccy
 over her skin
 photograph it
 for show and tell—
 and when your
 children learn of
 history
 the photos will be
 metallic
 you machines will grimace
 and the caption
 reads
 but it wasn't us
 it was the fire



THINGS WHITE WRITERS DON'T HAVE TO ASK THEMSELVES

By Eve Xin

Which poem shall I read or submit today?
What are they most likely to ~~love~~ understand
tolerate?

How much energy do I have to be visible
For my voice to represent my entire race?
How ~~angry~~ honest do I feel safe *enough* to be?
How much stone cold silence can I carry?

Am I the only coloured person in the room?
Did they *really* invite me because I was good?
Are they waiting for me to teach them something,
say something wise? When they look at me
do they see a whole person
or just my skin, my hair, my eyes?

Do they want Queer without the migrant?
My culture and food, but not our people?
The ways I was oppressed *back home*
but not how small I feel here
in new and different forms?
Do they want to hear the ways I kiss, touch
and fuck, but keep at arm's length
this body, in the same room?

Do they want a love poem
that doesn't talk power?
To hear my grief without systemic violence,
or a story about motherhood without disclaimers
that every child starts on a different line?
Do they want poems with universal themes
when what they claim as human
centres their experience & emotions?

Do they want to hear about Palestine
as a violence far from their shores
but not the racism in their own villages?
Do they want to protest against ICE and Trump
but only with the ones they call *good immigrants*?
Do they want to talk about how the Earth is dying
and all of us are fucked, without admitting
that some of us are *more* fucked than others?

If I ask myself all these questions
every time before I walk into a room,
am I complicit in their comfort
and therefore, their violence?
But if I really had all the answers
(*and sometimes I think I do*)
Would I still want to be in the same room?

THE BENIGHTED OWNERS OF A NATION

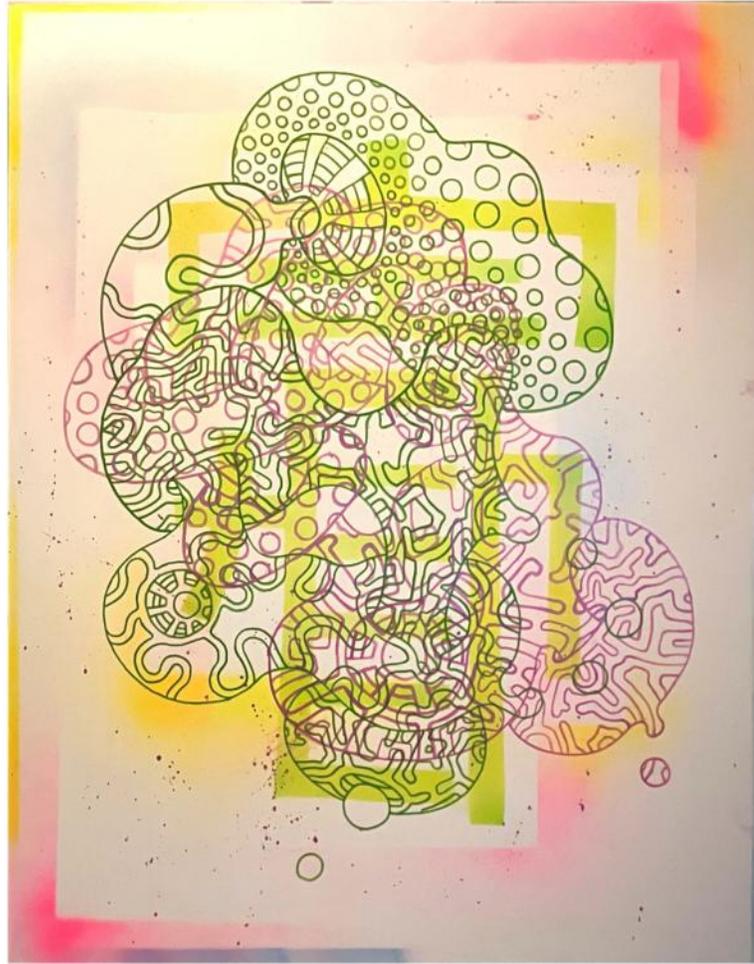
By Virginia Choate

*Scheme a Creature
The she-owl-wolf*

Who gnaws who survives lawless who interrogates
carcasses. Clenches talons, grasps whatever & whoever,
marks territory, drops prey feathers on anyone who walks

close. Multi-fanged wonder yaps, nips ankles. Beware, this
land's people now traverse a shadow-lane
beneath the glory. While the leaders of the creature proclaim this, this
Our Own, Our Golden Hour

**Golden shovel, after "The Owner of the Night" by Mark Doty*





Photograph by Daisaku Oozu

Q

FEATURED ARTIST:

MARIO TAUCHI

+

A

“I think feeling and understanding are interconnected. Feeling is essential, but before relying on it, it’s important to grasp sense of understanding. For me, understanding context matters—not only in art, but in how things are felt and made sense of.”

~Mario Tauchi

Interview by Sadia Ansari

Mario Tauchi is a Japanese artist based in Tokyo. In addition to creating art, he works in publishing as a translator and a writer. He grew up observing the forms of nature in a rural area of Saitama. He spent his childhood and youth in Paris, Melbourne and Philadelphia where he became fascinated by religious art, tribal art, street art, and psychedelic art. All of these experiences shaped the foundation of his style and thoughts. It was while working as a literary agent, specializing in foreign literature for Japanese translation, that Mario began making abstract drawings in October 2001 (shortly after 9/11). He now works as both a translator and an artist, and is currently working on a new Japanese translation of *The Book of Tea* by Okakura Kakuzo, a classic introduction to Japanese art and philosophy.

PROCESS AND THEMES

Q: Can you walk me through what usually starts a new piece for you—an image, a feeling, a question, or something else?

A: A question, I suppose. I start a new piece from a personal need to confront absurdities—both out there and inside my own mind.

Q: What part of the process feels most alive to you: the initial idea, the struggle in the middle, or the final resolution?

A: The struggle in the middle. I don't know if I enjoy it, but that's where I'm forced to think over the question again and again.

Q: Do you see your art as more personal, political, or poetic—or does that distinction not matter to you?

A: I see my art as personal. As a person, I have my own political thoughts and sense of language, or taste in general. I don't really know what the right thing is, but making things based on what comes to me is something I can't avoid.

Q: How much do you want viewers to “understand” your work versus simply feel something from it?

A: I think feeling and understanding are interconnected. Feeling is essential, but before relying on it, it's important to grasp sense of understanding. For me, understanding context matters—not only in art, but in how things are felt and made sense of.

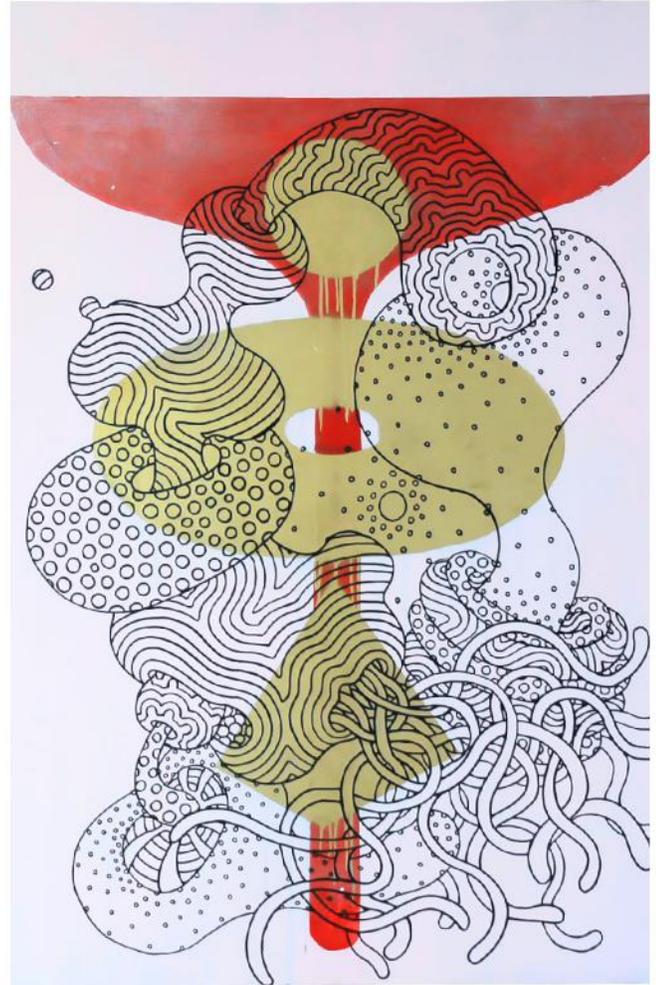
INFLUENCE AND ARTISTIC JOURNEY

Q: Which artists, writers, or thinkers have most shaped the way you see the world?

A: Many artists have shaped the way I see the world, often by showing me different perspectives. There are so many that I cannot name a single artist who influenced my way of understanding the world. As for reading, I return to Albert Camus's *The Stranger* again and again, perhaps every five years without fail. There are many great authors, but if you haven't read Yoko Tawada, I recommend trying *The Emissary*. Several of her works are available in English and other languages. I think she's a current peak of Japanese literature.

Q: Is there a piece of music, literature, or film that feels spiritually connected to what you make? Or does it change with the series you are working on?

A: Yesterday and today, I was listening to Markus Popp and Ryuichi Sakamoto, particularly his piano



works. In film, among many great directors, Ken Loach feels particularly important to me. His work taught me manners to look at people and society. At the same time, a scene from *Poor Things* stayed with me: the moment when the protagonist, Bella (Emma Stone), looks down at hell from above. That distance—the act of observing horror without being able to intervene—left a deep impression on me. I grew up in a suburb of Tokyo, in a rural area more than an hour to the north. Nearby is the Maruki Gallery for the Hiroshima Panels, a museum that houses an extensive collection of paintings depicting the victims of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. The local government tends to underestimate its value, but it is one of the most important cultural sites in the region. Growing up with such a place nearby affected me in ways I may not have fully understood at the time.

ART AND POLITICS

Q: If we place Stop Genocide in context to the rest of your work, do you consider this series a chapter, or a turning point or rupture, in your artistic trajectory? And why do you think that is?

A: Before starting the Stop Genocide series, what I was making are all abstract and I never thought of working in a figurative way, and I wasn't particularly interested in it either. I began drawing the people of Gaza because I couldn't look away anymore. It reminded me—though I probably already knew—that what I want to express through drawing is human life itself. In that sense, I see this series as a turning point.

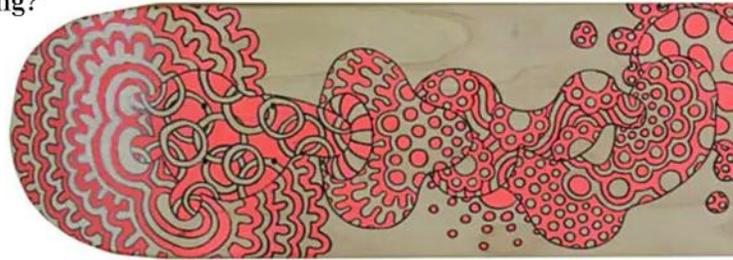
Q: Your current body of work, Stop Genocide, carries a title that leaves no room for neutrality. What moment or realization made this series unavoidable for you?

A: I don't think there is any room for neutrality in what has been happening in Gaza—since October 7, 2023, or even earlier, perhaps long before 1948. I thought I had some historical knowledge of colonialism, but the reality forced me to see how shallow that understanding was. What shocked me most was how many people seemed completely indifferent to that extreme devastation. I knew I had to do something, even with the sense that it might



change nothing. What I couldn't bear was being reminded that brutality is part of our human nature.

Q: When you titled the work Stop Genocide, were you thinking of it as a demand, a warning, a plea or cry, a line drawn in the sand? Has it been all these things, changing with the image you are recording?



A: It was more like a primitive voice, like a child screaming "Please! Stop!" It was like a prayer spoken from powerlessness, yet still driven to shout, in reaction to what felt unacceptable.

Q: Do you see this work as an act of protest, documentation, or collective memory?

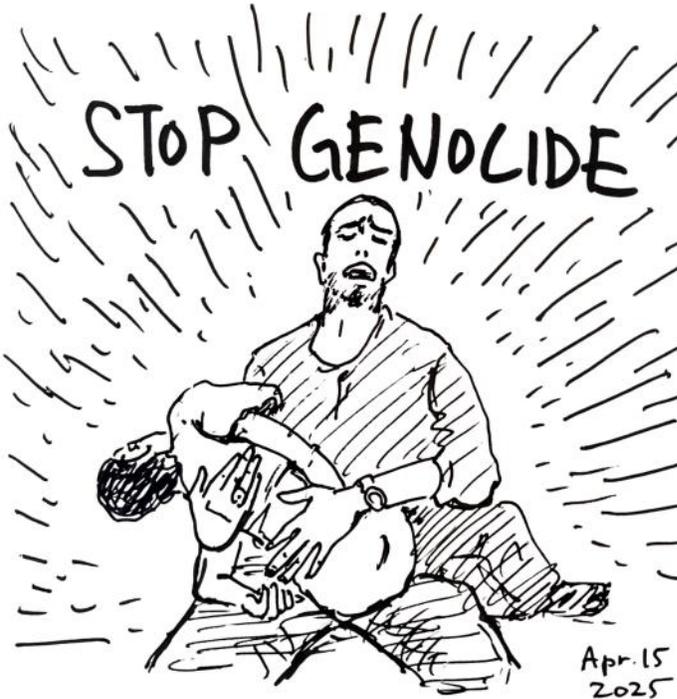
A: This is clearly an act of protest. It also became a form of documentation, as I began putting dates on each drawing. The situation in Gaza keeps changing. Every day is a new day, as it is everywhere else. But what is being forced on people in Palestine is too difficult, too inhuman, it's impossible. It is all ongoing – it is not memory.

Q: What responsibilities do you believe artists carry when responding to violence and mass suffering?

A: It doesn't have to be an artist's role, but it's our nature to react to discomfort and absurdity in one way or another. No one wants to face violence, no one can endure suffering. We all know that. I think responsibility means being truthful to that emotional response.

Q: What kind of looking does this work ask of the viewer—quiet, uncomfortable, sustained? What reactions have surprised you most so far from viewers—resistance, solidarity, discomfort?

A: My works are just quiet alerts. I'm aware that some people are disturbed by them, so I keep the tone low and minimal, but try to make it clear. Those are just simple line drawings, stripped of overwhelming impacts, but still telling what's going on. People might not be comfortable to look at, and I know that. There are people close to me who hesitate to talk about those pieces, and I am good with that, too. But when things are going wrong, I think disturbing noise needs to be there.



IMPACT

Q: This work is a testament to your commitment and beliefs. Where did this work begin for you: in an image, in grief, in anger, or in responsibility?

A: I think what's happening in Gaza is obviously very wrong. It's not only about Gaza, — this has happened again and again throughout history, and it is happening now in different places. Because of the technology, images are presented in real time now, but they are washed away in streams of overflowing information. I feel a need to somehow staple them in place. I do what I am capable of doing.

Q: How did this series change you while it was unfolding?

A: I learned about the importance of consistency through doing this work. I came to realize that maintaining resistance requires effort and consistency. I also gained a clearer understanding of the history of colonialism, and it sharpened my political awareness. Throughout the process, I was forced to think more about our human nature.

Q: What do you hope stays with the viewer after they view your work and or even turn the final page of your interview in this magazine?

A: As I keep drawing these images, a single word keeps looping in my mind: WHY? Why does this have to happen? Why do people do this? Why can't we stop being destructive? Why can't an international, cross-racial, or cross-religious consensus be formed to oppose such massacres? I think we all need to be more aware of how stupid we are as a species. Not only are we terrible underachievers, we are also destructive to the entire ecosystem—which, of course, includes our own means of survival. Humanity is facing extinction because of our own foolishness. I hope we can do a little better.

Q: In considering some of the artistic elements in this series, can you describe the visual decisions behind this series—color, scale, repetition, or restraint—and how they serve the message?

A: It's all very simple. I watch news from Palestine every day and make quick drawings of the scenes that alerts. The scenes, of course, refers to what's happening in Gaza, but at the same time, they test our humanity as a whole. Are we able to accept this? This is a hell of our own human nature.

Q: There is a strong sense of urgency in these works. How did time—waiting, repetition, immediacy—shape the way you worked?

A: There is an urgency. We cannot keep doing this. What became clear to me was that there are people who see it as wrong, but also there are people who take it as right. But how? I needed to make it clear on which side I stand on. It continues, so I continue.



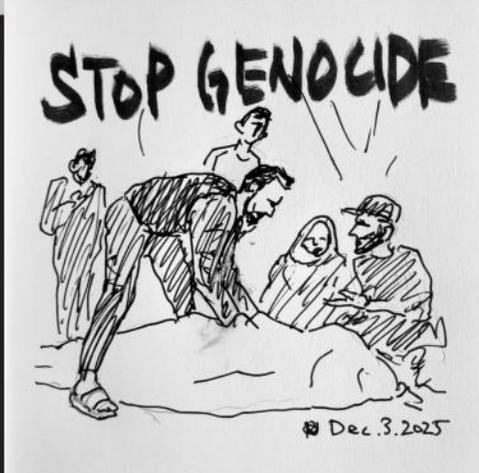


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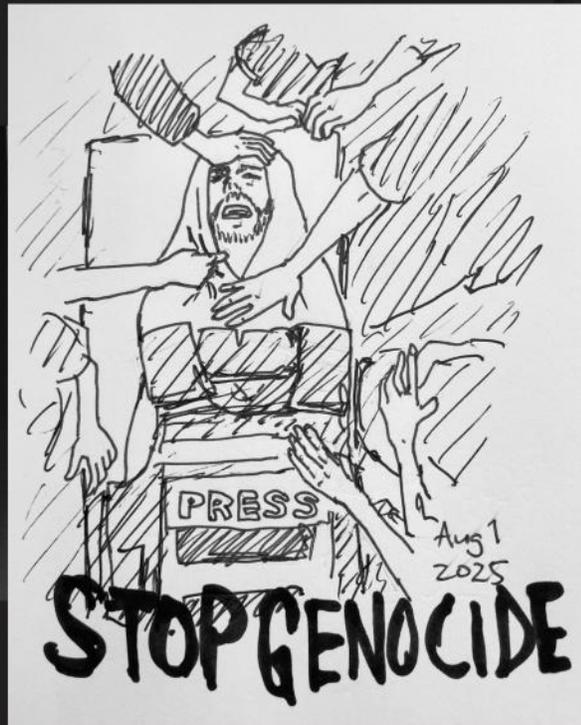
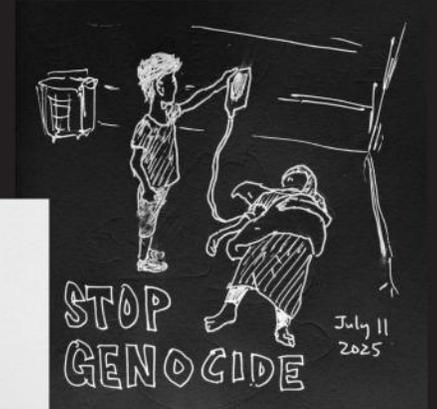
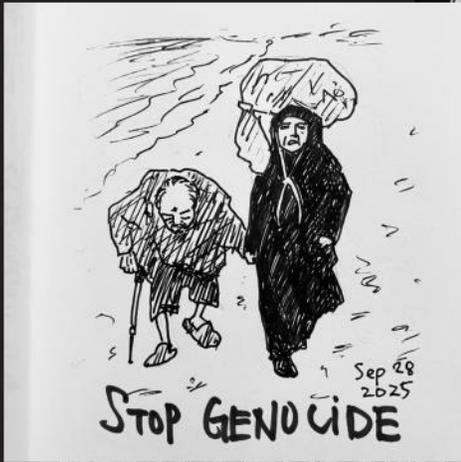
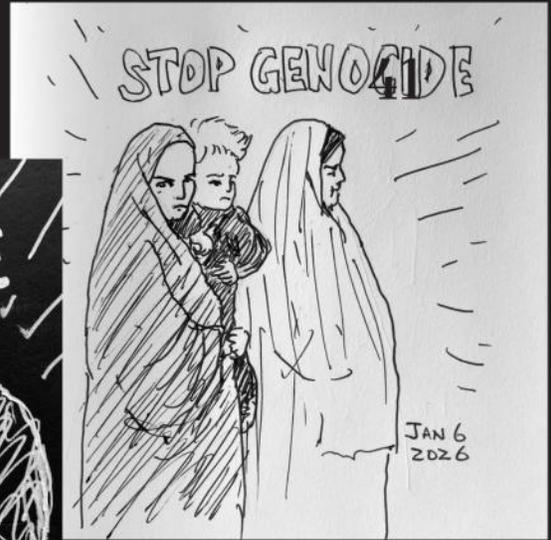


“What is being forced on people in Palestine is too difficult, too inhuman, it’s impossible. It is all ongoing – it is not memory.”
-Mario Tauchi

STOP



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“I needed to make it clear on which side I stand on. It continues, so I continue.”
-Mario Tauchi



GENOCIDE

EMBERS

“music / wafts weaves / under my feet / wraps around
my skin / nests in my hair / becomes birdsong”

an excerpt from *The Concert* by DeAnna Beachley



THE CONCERT

*By DeAnna Beachley**Crossing Open Ground*

late October sun gentles
 the white Navajo sandstone

the fossilized dune
 waved and lined

I sit on the rock

woodwinds brass drums

music
 wafts weaves

under my feet
 wraps around my skin
 nests in my hair

becomes birdsong

a river's thunder the clash
 of shifting stone

we become one

melody

as it swirls

and circles

circles

the basin

we breathe

in the space

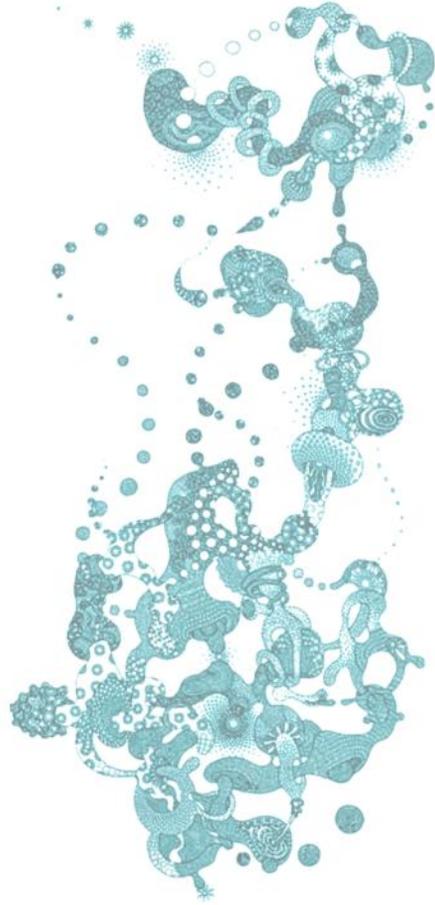
between

notes

CLEAVE

By Michelle Boulos

A line,
 running
 a long
 path.
 Over
 grown—
 hunter
 green.
 Fauna
 tracing,
 creeping.
 Shadow
 cast
 across
 dense
 growth.
 Sequoia
 at the
 fore,
 invoking
 petrichor.
 A Twig
 Snaps Underfoot.
 A doe—
 in the
 veil.
 Observe her; prey.



AGNIPARIKSHA

By Dipshika Roy

Living alone in the demonic forest,
Breathing and suffering in silent unrest.
Riches beyond imagination at her feet,
But she stayed loyal without paying it heed.

Taunts and insults attacked, but her heart stayed strong,
Waiting and praying patiently for the one she longed.
She believed in him even when all hope was lost,
No doubt in her heart, she gave him all her trust.

When her beloved came, she ran to him to embrace,
Did he run towards her, you say?
No, he asked her to prove her *chastity* to her dismay.

A pyre built to burn the impure,
Silently she stood as they built it, she endured.
Stepping into the fire she prayed,
To burn her body if she was as uncouth as they said.

She stepped out of the fire completely unscathed,
Touched by her loyalty, her husband finally embraced.
The story came to an end,
A happy kingdom where righteous king and a pious queen reigned.

You would be wrong if you think the same.
Soon the people wondered if while captive their queen had brought them *shame*.
The answer was simple: a perfect king couldn't have a *stained dame*.
Again she endured as she was thrown helplessly out of the domain.

She lived her life in the forests where no one was *impure*,
There at least she thought she wouldn't have to endure.
She thought she had finally found her peace,
Living out her days in the peaceful green abyss.

In her last days the king asked her to return,
Giving her another chance to prove her worth.
To show everyone that she can pass the trial without a burn.

This time she didn't endure,
Embittered, they had broken her hope.
She had seen enough of this world,
This time, she prayed for the end.

So many Sitas are judged everyday,
On whether their bodies are *clean* or *stained*.
No talk of their sorrow nor of their pain,
Only whether their *purity* had remained unattained.

How many times must Sita burn for Ram to turn?

THRESHOLDS

By Joshua Walker

At dusk, the streetlights
hesitate—
caught between day's last breath
and the mouth of night.

I, too, am hesitation:
half-anchor, half-flight,
a body aching for permanence,
a soul rehearsing departure.

The world is not divided.
It is stitched by thresholds—
doorways, skin, silence,
the breath held
before a word.

I live inside that stitch:
torn, mended, torn again—
but always thread,
always crossing,
always burning at both ends.



CONTENT WARNINGS

By Eve Xin

You see, trauma has a way of finding
me, when I least expect it.
The flag bearers never appear
when I am finally prepared for battle;
They lay land mines for when
the sun hits just right, and I unbind
my whitened knuckles, turn down the volume
on my nervous system. But the city is efficient;
she humbles my complacency, reminds me
of my place, the conditional nature of my safety —
Belonging — are they not the same thing?

My life is made of content warnings
for this frigid body has a way of keeping score
even when I am not counting.
My heart races me to my front door —
four limbs thrown out into the raw open
long before I am suited up and ready for action.
Is today a battlefield or just training ground?
Anything can happen, I must protect myself
Keep my head down, get to my destination
Try not to catch anyone's eye, draw attention
Was this how I always lived? (I don't remember)

The content warnings came *a little too late* —
You are in high school all over again
Bullies can sense weakness, smell your blood
People like you don't have the luxury
of white peoples' depression.
Take your meds and get your shit together:
Never shed your battle gear, a single tear
Missing out on a warm hand, a hug
is small price to pay for staying safe
when you live in the terrifying world
inside a body of difference.

I wish my life came with content warnings
so I would know when I am safe (enough)
to shed this heavy ugly monster mask.
What I would give to be loved by another —
A chance at redemption, to learn
how to be human, all over again
before everything hurt.

ODE TO TAMIZH KUTHU

*By Cypher**Thanana thanana
thanana thanana*

The car speakers
thump with Tamizh
nonsense syllables,
the voices of
Appa, thambi and I
laid overtop
like icing.
The beats woven
into our bones,
the singers' stories
we can hear
in their tones.

*Dandana, dandana,
dandana, dandana.*

These old country roads
play host
to our party for three.
Appa smiles with his eyes
in the rearview mirror, catching
my brother's ecstasy and
my carseat choreography.
The foliage reaches
towards our tires,
tickling the rubber
for a taste
of our bliss.

*Thakka thaiyya thaiyya,
thakka thaiyya thaiyya.*

The chorus carries us back
to Chennai,
dust-swept and
sweat-drenched.
Draped in
churidhars and veshtis,
our day is remedied -
teeth on murukku,
toes in hot sand, thinking:
How lucky are we

to travel the world in a song?

CAMARGUE

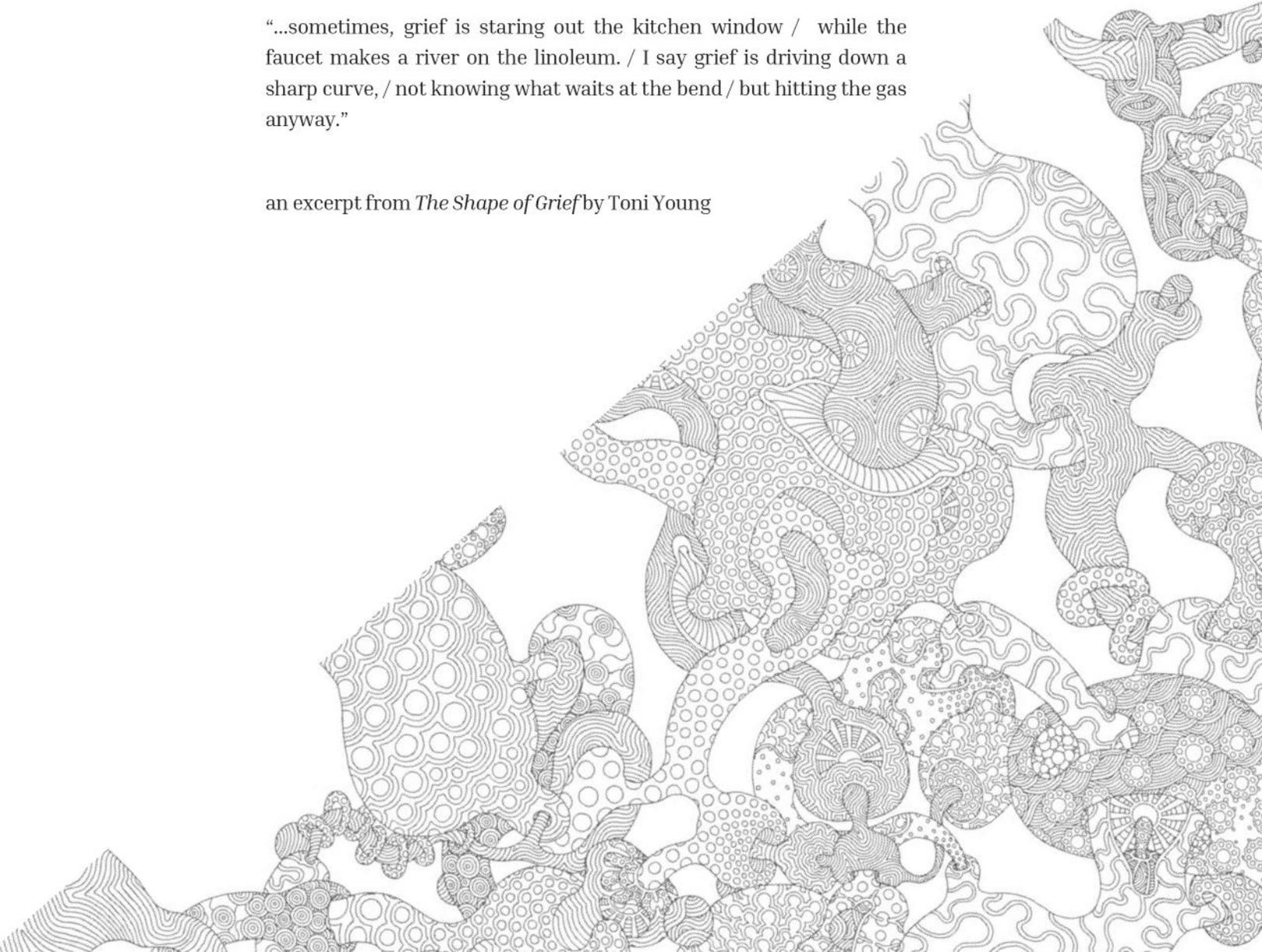
By Diarmuid Cawley

Surrounded by the tall wet reeds of the Camargue waiting for a flat bateau, overripe peaches drip from our hands, the air sticky and slow, sitting on the road next to the van, nobody else here the marshes overgrown and infested, as much peace as I have ever known, the white horses shaking their manes free of stinging flies.

ASH

“...sometimes, grief is staring out the kitchen window / while the faucet makes a river on the linoleum. / I say grief is driving down a sharp curve, / not knowing what waits at the bend / but hitting the gas anyway.”

an excerpt from *The Shape of Grief* by Toni Young





HAG

By Leyda Mar

it came upon me like a spider web
 dropped
 inescapable and
 sticky and
 disorienting
 it came upon me the cumulative stress
 how decades of dread
 could come upon me and capsize my face
 enforce this exterior change
 it came upon me clumps of hair
 in tangled nests
 jowls birthed from sadness
 it came upon me thickened waist
 skin drooping, musty curtain folds
 it came upon me my disquieting truth
 the slog into no woman's land
 it came upon me this entrenched self-warfare
 it came upon me from the womb
 it came upon me unforeseen
 it came upon me at 33 and lithe
 that my only recourse is to
 bleed and
 starve and
 grasp
 it just came upon me
 cresting on that artificial zenith year
 the truth
 of men reshaped
 as silver foxes
 while women wilt
 my invisibility
 it came upon me

ABSOLUTE ZERO.

By Patrick B. McHale

Invisible.

You know how that feels.

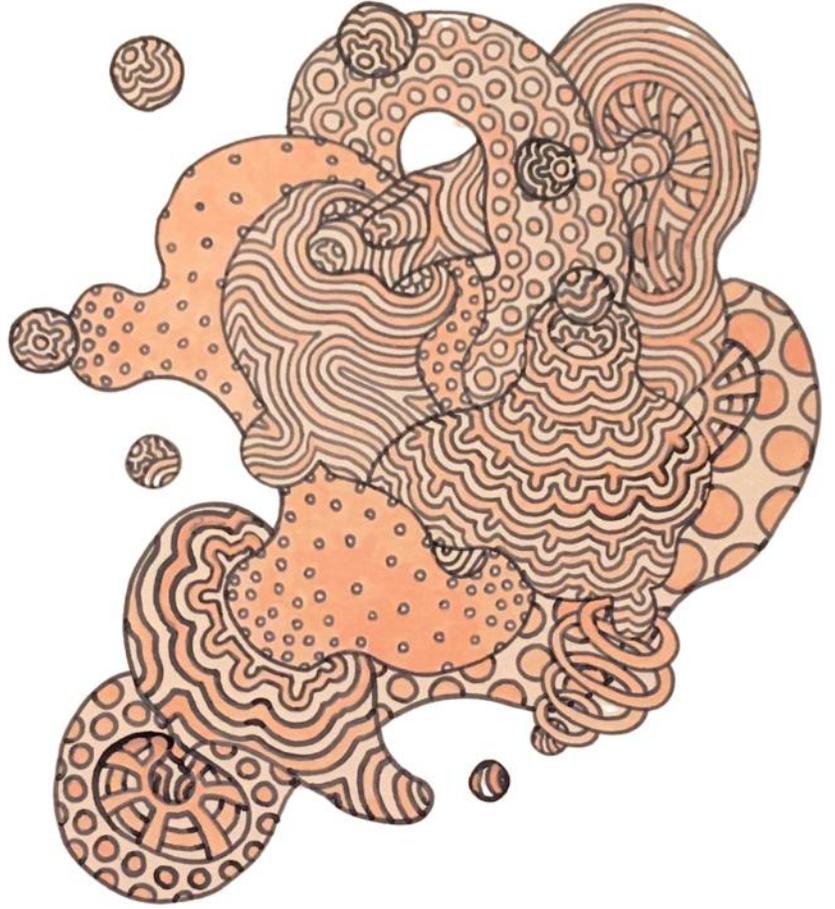
To stop and stare at your feet.

To want to claw your way into the
ground.

A ghost on a quiet midweek street.

Only it is you that is haunted, by the
minutes running out.

To share with someone all that you
have ever been or seen and heard or
never found.



یا موتی العزیز

رحمة الحنفي By

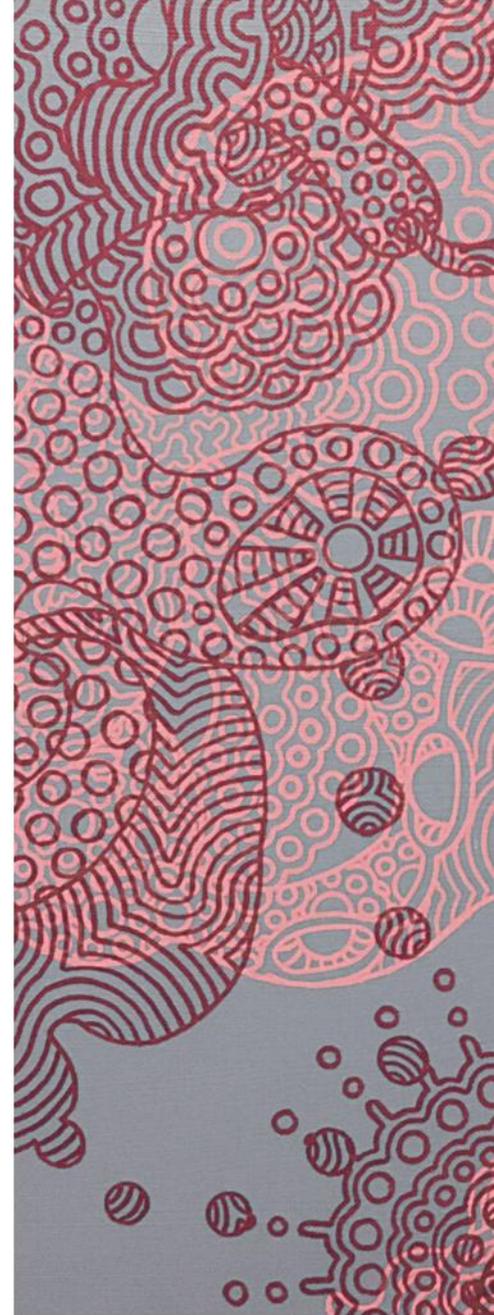
نادیتک کثیراً فلم تسمع
کتبتک فی لیلة باردة
ورمیتک فی الهواء
علک ترانی
،غنتک تحت شجرة كبيرة
،تحت القمر
لم تلتقط لحنی
رأیتک تلوح لی من بعيد
لکنک لم تقترب
،جريت أن أقترب
دفعتنی موجتك لبعید
"أیها الموت البسيط كأعجوبة"
سأفتح شبک روجی الآن
وأنظرك علی كرسيّ فی شرفة غرفتی
،فی وقت غروب
وأنا أسند رأسی علی غيمة
،علک تردّنی لأطفالی
لوجعی الأول
وتأخذنی بعيداً عن حزنی
تعفّن فی صدري
سأنتظرك فی وقتٍ حيث لا أريد
شيئاً من هذا العالم
یسوی الرحیل الذي لا یحمل فی طیّاته
إلا أملاً مطویاً
كان فی یوم
حياة مليئة بالحزن
والموت



O, MY DEAREST DEATH

By Rahma Al-Hanfi

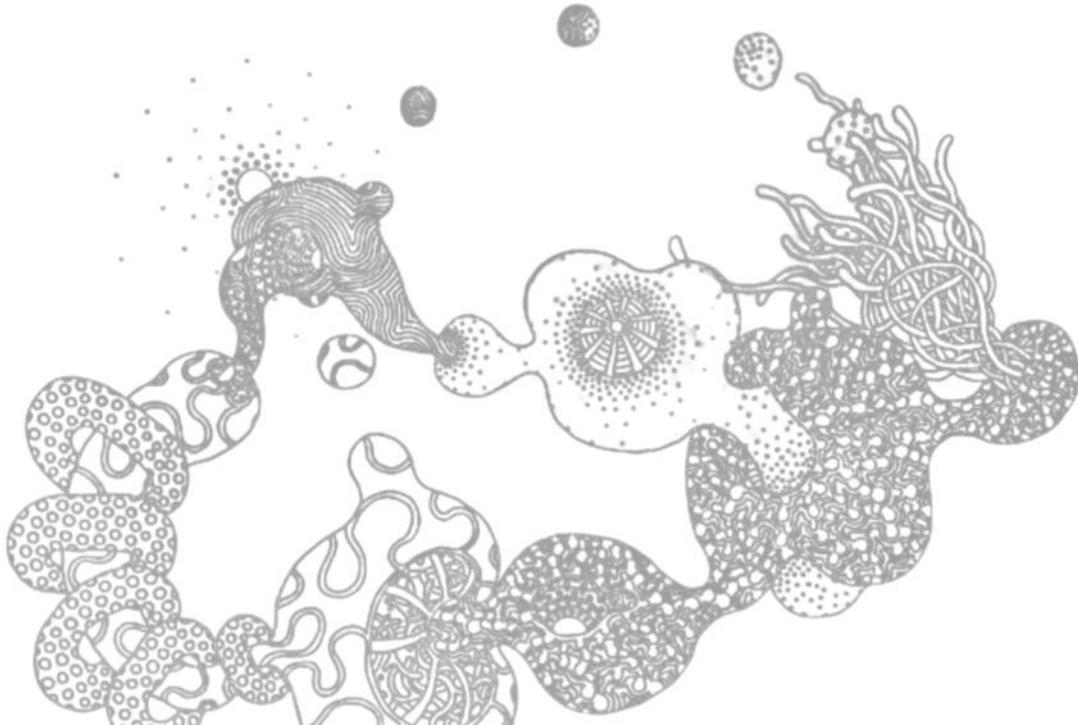
I called out to you often, yet you never heard me
 I wrote you down one cold night
 And cast you into the air
 Hoping you might see me
 I sang of you beneath a great tree,
 Beneath the moon,
 You never caught my tune
 I saw you waving to me from afar
 But you never drew near
 I tried to approach,
 Your wave pushed me away
 "Oh Death, simple as a miracle"
 I open my soul's window
 And wait for you at the balcony's chair
 At the time of sunset,
 My head resting on a cloud
 Perhaps you would return me to my children,
 To my first pain
 And take me far from a sorrow
 That festers in my chest
 I will wait for you at a time when I want
 Nothing from this world
 Save departure carrying within its folds
 a hope—
 once
 a life
 now death



WINTERING TOGETHER

By Christopher M. Wegemer

Long ago, we ran out of wine and puzzles
and electricity. We pressed the last warmth
from each other, bent like pines
in the unforgiving freeze. We still dream
of that first winter, when envious stars above
watched us catch fire. Now, burnt coals
crave friction from the dry sticks
spread wide, like begging legs. We stare
through the frostbitten glass, jealous
of the old lovers that smolder for you
more than me. Yet we hold fast,
waiting for the fugitive sun to break the ice
and wake our spring wildflowers
from beneath winter's suffocating white veil.



GASLIT

By Kate Petroskey

You arrived like a ripple,
a quiet crest breaking over
willing ankles

 thighs
 hips
 neck.

Then a riptide, gathering strength.
Sucking me in.
Pulling me under.

In knight's garb, you
whispered false oaths
under a cloud covered Ara.

The burn of sand
on my skin and salt in my throat, I broke
the moon's grip.

A fugitive.
Finally able to breathe.

WHO WOULD YOU BE NOW?

By elise tyson

I walked through Abney Park today and thought of you, as I often do

I rarely visit you.

The closest thing to “you” left on this earth, that is

It’s not exactly around the corner, just ten thousand miles between us

My visits home prioritise those who still converse, hug,

ask how life is going and plan when we’ll see each other next

I’m sorry that I’ve been avoiding you.

There’s just something unnerving about talking to marble

I preferred the simple wooden cross

before the earth around you resettled

Nestled back in for the next decade or so

Waiting to be ripped open again by your parents’ arrival

(It’s weird, I started writing this before your dad died

It’s comforting to think of you with company

I hope the only splinters in your relationship now

Derive from the oak encompassing you both)

You’re the only person there in their twenties

It always felt so cruel to see you surrounded

By those granted the time to live a life properly

Or maybe I mean to say

Were around long enough to live out the chances

You had ripped away from you

When I sat in Abney Park today, I thought of you and also the man

Whose body cracked open on the tracks last year

As I waited for the train doors to open

Only noticing him when the woman next to me screamed

I'd been high on new love
Savouring an afterglow of handholding and gazing and giggling
Until the body on the tracks cracked
And my girlfriend ran down from the station steps
To grab my hand and drag my eyes away

It was around the corner from the bench I sat at today.

I remembered how I tried to search online
For this person whose death I witnessed
I think I wanted to know who he was, to honour him
Or maybe I searched to replace the image in my head
But this is a city of 9 million people
Most of whom die without making the news

I remembered the supporting characters in your death
That girl I met two years later whose boyfriend watched you die
It was near your anniversary and I mentioned you
She relished her connection
As if it were one degree of separation from a celebrity
Rather than the last moments of someone's life
I hated her for her cheap thrill.

Anyway, all this is to say,
That I sat in a cemetery today and I thought of you, but this isn't news

Because I watch a film and a character reminds me of you
When I see a lumber jacket, I think you're the wearer
And every time I experience a death, I relive yours

After fourteen years, my greatest loss is my frame of reference
so when I go into cemeteries, I think of you.

THE SHAPE OF GRIEF

By Toni Young

They say to grieve at your own pace,
that sometimes, grief is staring out the kitchen window
while the faucet makes a river on the linoleum.

I say grief is driving down a sharp curve,
not knowing what waits at the bend
but hitting the gas anyway.

Is there a deeper ache than
coming home to their shoes no longer beside mine?
Not hearing their keys turn in the lock
while I light candles for dinner?

I brace for the turn--
it's all grass,
all meadow.

And I ache.
I ache for the vastness of your absence.

CONTRIBUTORS

Cypher (she/her) is a self-taught brown and queer Tamizh diaspora poet living in Canada. Her work has been featured by the Dark Winter Literary Magazine, The Ontario Poetry Society, Arcana Poetry Press, the Ophelia Gazette, and several others. You can find Cypher on Instagram @cypherspace_101.

Joshua Walker, known as The Last Bard, is an independent poet from Oklahoma City. His work has appeared in Potomac Review, Southern Florida Poetry Journal, and Solarpunk Magazine. Writing through the lens of schizoaffective disorder, he explores thresholds of identity, silence, and transformation for over 310,000 readers worldwide.

Diana Pleasant is an emerging poet whose writing examines childhood wounds, complex relationships, addiction and depression. Find her on Instagram @dianapleasantpoet

Michelle Brown is a writer living on Turrbal land in Brisbane, Australia. She has published in Unbroken, Under the Bashi, The Redfern Review, and the Zest of the Lemon Vols 3-4. Michelle will be forthcoming in The Cove.

Christopher Power is a part-time writer from Cork, Ireland who has self published two collections of poetry The Poets Path: Journey to Ireland and *TENEBROUS*, both available on Amazon. He's had numerous works published in journals, magazines and anthologies. Instagram- @the.poetspath

Charlotte Otremba is a comedian, writer, actor, and director based in Los Angeles. She recently moved from New York City, where she performed at Upright Citizen Brigade's *Characters Welcome* and with her sketch teams Wilburn and the Laugh Index Players at Brooklyn Comedy Collective and Young Ethel's. charlotteotremba.com

Sabrina Tolve is a poet and writer based in Ireland, originally from Italy. Her work explores the intersections of memory, body, and landscape, blending intimate imagery with visceral, lyrical language. Her poetry often reflects on the tension between place and identity, drawing inspiration from both the natural world and human experience. Her second collection, *Tulca*, forthcoming in May 2026, examines connections to homeland and foreign lands, weaving together personal history, myth, and sensory detail. Sabrina's work has been shared in readings and literary communities, and she continues to explore the transformative power of language through poetry.

Priya K. Gill is an English teacher and chair of Writing East Midlands' youth board. She is passionate about providing equitable opportunities for writers across the region. Since her tenure began the youth board projects have included; the inaugural South Asian Heritage Month Event, the Quasar Prize and Print anthology, and scribblefest 2.0. Priya is a poet who has featured as a Roundhouse Semi-Finalist 2025 been published through First Story and featured in Culture Matters Anthology 'we are all Palestinians' and Renard Press' 'Remembrance'.

Eve Xin (they/them) is a queer migrant poet writing about home, identity, queerness & decolonisation. Their work has been featured in various queer & global majority spaces, including The Seventh Wave, ANMLY, Writing Our Legacy, Thawra, the other side of hope & more. Find them on Instagram @suitcaseofpoetry.

Virginia Choate is a computer scientist, poet and mom. This poem is her first to be published. Fun fact, a camera still orbiting Mars was one of her first software test subjects.

DeAnna Beachley, a resident of the West for most of her adult life, has grown to love the Mojave Desert and the Colorado River Basin. She is a bird watcher, hiker, teacher, historian, poet, and essayist. Her poetry has appeared in Red Rock Review, Sandstone & Silver, The Nature of Our Times, Thimble, Slant, Blue Earth Review, Gyroscope, Liminal Spaces, Remington Review, and Wild Roof Journal. The Long View, her debut chapbook, was released in 2024.

Michelle Boulos attends the UCLA Writers Workshop and lives in Los Angeles, California. This is her first publication.

Dipshikha Roy is an Indian writer who wishes to become a renowned author one day. She likes to experiment with various genres to write her poems/stories but she especially enjoys writing poems on feminism and women empowerment.

Diarmuid Cawley is from Sligo, Ireland. He is widely published in journals and magazines there and also in the UK, US, Germany and Australia. His writing evokes the environment, memory, place and political history, and often includes food-related themes. He is working on his first collection.

Patrick B McHale is an Irish writer and lives in County Wicklow in The Republic of Ireland. Instagram: p.b.mchale_

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CONTRIBUTORS

Rahma Al-Hanfi "From occupied Ashdod, I was born in Gaza, and from Gaza my voice rises in my poems to you."

Kate Petroskey is a writer living in Northern Virginia. She believes in the power of words and stories. Her work explores the wonder of life through both its beauty and challenges.

Toni Young is a Filipina poet whose upbringing in a traditional culture informs her creativity. She writes to reclaim what she has lost, to rise from all the unlearning, while still enjoying her journey. When not writing, Toni makes art with acrylics and flowers, and hoards books with no regrets. Her poems have been published by *Phylum Press*, *The Cove*, *Three Panels Press*, and *Opol*. More of her poetry can be found on Instagram: @toniyoungpoems.

elise tyson is an Australian writer and filmmaker living in London. Her writing has been published in *The Guardian UK*, *Heroica Online*, *The Queerness*, *Fairlight Books*, *Tin Can Poetry & Samfiftyfour*, with upcoming pieces in *PRISM International & Fruit Journal*. Her short film *St Bernie* screened at fifteen film festivals worldwide and won Best National Film at Canberra Short Film Festival. Elise's favourite thing in the world is the colour green.

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Issue 1, Fire 2026

“Poetry Is Not A Luxury”
~ *Audre Lorde*

