

NATURE NURTURES

ANTHOLOGY
2024



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**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**



LY London
Youth



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Preface

by **Bobby Nayyar**

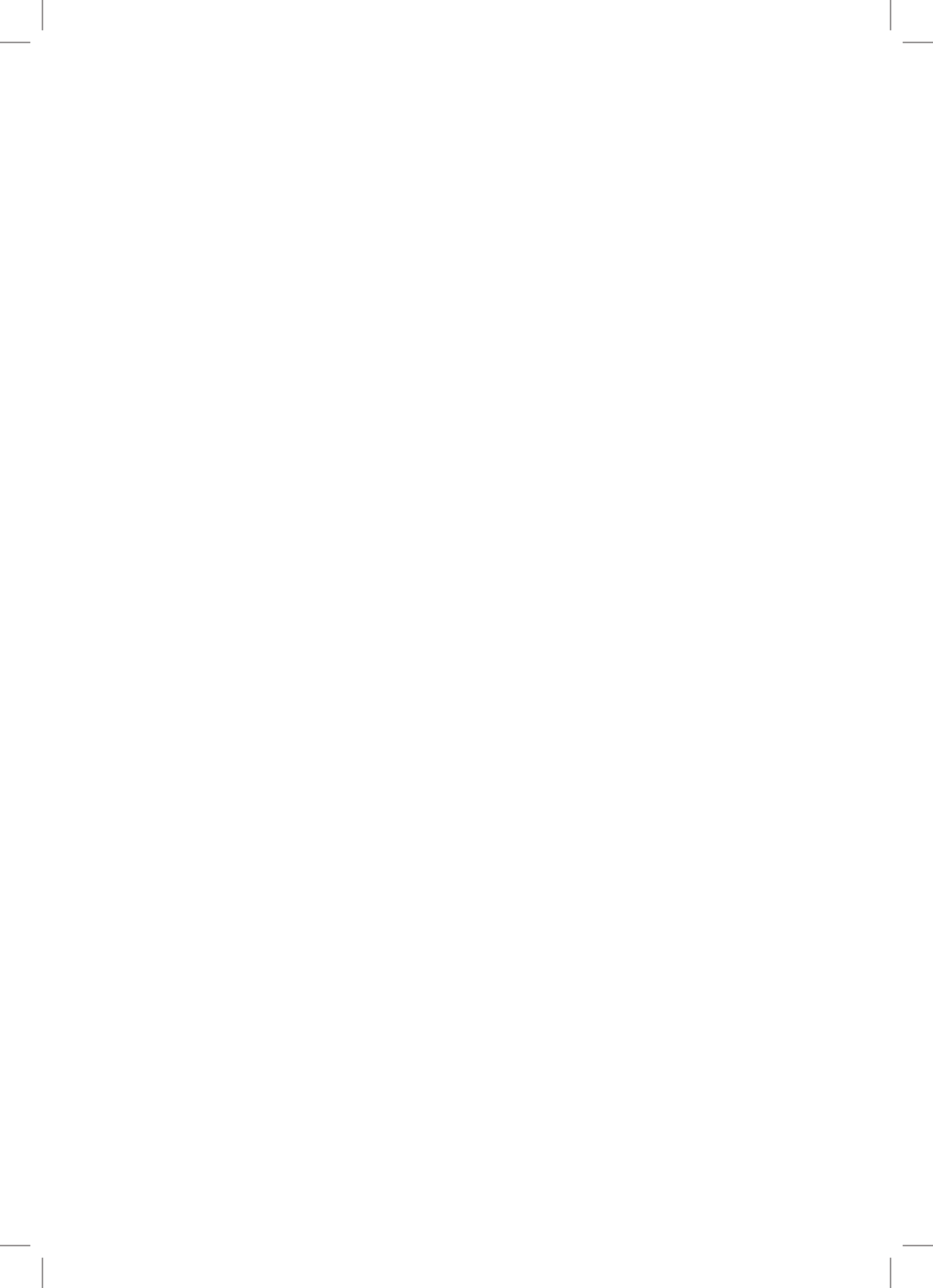
Now in its second year, the Nature Nurtures programme has built a community of young people actively engaged in nature, conservation, and the arts. The partners in the project: London Wildlife Trust, Black Girls Hike CIC, London Youth and Spread the Word have put on 55 events and workshops over the last 12 months with over 300 people taking part. This anthology features work from 39 of these people, shining a light on the talent and creativity of London's youth.

As a programme manager at Spread the Word, my role in this project has been to organise craft and creative writing workshops, and one film project. It has been a pleasure to work with a diverse group of artists who have brought something new and refreshing to the programme. All whilst exploring the wonderful London Wildlife Trust nature reserves.

There have been many highlights to the year from catching up with young people who took part in year one, meeting new people who have discovered the programme through their friends, as well as making new ones in the workshops. One of my favourite memories is of a young person, who attended a poetry workshop having studied sciences at university. They were quite open about not being sure they could write. By the end of the workshop, having given it their best, the young person read their poem with confidence, pride, and happiness, and told the room that it was the best one they had ever written.

This year we have not only created this anthology, but also three short poem films that you can watch on our YouTube channel (@spreadthewordwriters5836). I can't wait to see how these young people hone their craft to become the writers, photographers, illustrators, and film makers of the now and the tomorrow. I hope you enjoy this anthology.

Bobby Nayyar
Programme Manager
Spread the Word



Introduction

by **Charlie Nwanodi**

Forty thousand years ago, a human being (or perhaps several) decided to adorn a cave wall with paintings, breathing life into abstract art as we know it. This early evidence of symbolism and abstraction showcases our innate ability to form complex worlds inside our minds. Our first step towards artistic freedom. Whilst human civilisation has rapidly moved on from caves to settle in this land of capitalism, neo-feudalism and globalism, we have still held onto this beautiful ability to create.

It's not always easy to recognise our power as human beings, let alone as artists. Some of us have been able to continually nurture our creativity despite society taking more and more time and energy from us. Some of us are in the process of tapping into an instinctual urge to explore our creative selves. Nature Nurtures has provided a space to build that community together.

Supporting Nature Nurtures over the past two years has given me the chance to witness an immense amount of growth within the collective and luckily some of that has rubbed off on me. It's been nourishing to surround myself with young people in nature whilst they rediscover a passion for writing, develop a keen eye for photography, and characterise vast imaginative worlds. The stories they have created through their photographs, illustrations, songs and poems speak to the hopes, dreams and insights of young people.

Keep your eyes, ears and hearts open to their wisdom.

Charlie Nwanodi
Youth Volunteering Coordinator
London Wildlife Trust



A Giant World
Caroline McHardy



Bramble Bashing

Brenn Phimi

I never did like ya much.
Always doing whatever you please
Both root & thorn dig beneath skin
Just to rest atop my last nerve

You're inconsiderate.
Always taking up far too much space
Yes we can see you're here already
So please do us all a favour and
JUST STOP SPREADING!!!

Far from a sight for sore eyes
These sore hands found delight
Putting you in your place//
Bashing your existence
Into biodegradable waste
Bash, Bash, Bashing away
At a life, blinded by animosity

Wearing goggles to mask myself
From such painful truths
My rage had been misplaced

It's been clear, as that cloudless summer sky
We traded our first blows beneath

That you & I
Are not so different.

The natural history museums are growing

Leela Watt

In case we don't pass through days like doors,
or feel deeply disturbed by the climate,
ageing with cop twenty-somethings,

In case we cannot hear the life of things,
the humming that won't pause,
or the running footsteps of the red queen
in the evolutionary race.

We can gaze into the history of nature,
growing as we add to it,
marvelling at this tragicomedy,
moved by this acquaintance,
the collective act of applause,
the orchestration of the trees.

22

Lauryn Grant

As I step over
Tiny corpses of summer
Sole against crisp brown against concrete grey
And greener hues when from the path I stray

I reminisce on the summer passed

A swim for grief in Hampstead Heath
Holding a med in Postman's Park

Take shelter beneath a canopy of trees

Chipping to soca in Horniman's Pleasance
Giving piggyback rides through Bethnal Green Gardens

On darker days, I wait for rain

To Live a Life

Liz Muntunkaye

To live in skin that moulds
And stretches and flakes
Wrinkles and tears at the mere
Sight of a thousand sunrises
Many more sunsets

To feel the pinch of one's guilt
Like a bee sting
Or the absolute destruction of
A broken heart,
With what resembles shattered glass

And believe that not much more can
Be done, but fall into weeping well
Only to find yourself levitating above
Preconceived understandings
Only to find you have awoken to another day

To live a life, is to look for joy
In the sheen of wet blade of grass
In a breath taking, wildly meadow.
Where resides dandelions and bluebells
And more flowers that the eye can see
That blade of grass catches your attention
Invites a sparkle to your eyes

Somewhere you'll find
That darkness was not your demise
But your resurrection
From the root to the surface
Spring is calling, spring is calling

drips, drops, and mushroom tops
Kasey Renaghan





Can you hear me?

Eleni Gkrintzou

I listen to words come out of my mouth not intended to be spoken out loud.
So mean, so loud, so hurting.
Is this voice even mine?

I can remember my voice as light and playful as drizzle,
telling you how much I love you, wishing you good luck for a meeting,
singing I'd put another egg in the omelette for you because you should not leave
the house without breakfast.

I can recall my voice soft as autumn rain tapping on the windows,
whispering how handsome you are, how nice you smell.
And I want to stop, to shut up, but the words come like vomit, and I cannot help
but continue.

I think of the rain, nurturing fields, meadows and gardens
patiently and tenderly for weeks, even months on end,
until she suddenly gets impatient, dissatisfied.

Does she feel like the fields take too long to bloom?
Does she not like the shape of the flowers in the meadows?
Does she feel unseen by the gardens?

Is that why the skies are teared apart by her claws?
and the water that has been nurturing whatever is bound to the ground
threatens to drown it,
to suffocate it over night?

Does she know her own power?
Does she enjoy it?
Or does she like me wish she could shut up?

I run towards her, to feel her pulse,
and it is the same as mine.
Am I a part of her or is she a part of me?

My voice comes out as delicate as a prayer, as gentle as a plead.
Let me hold you, let me understand you,
Help me understand myself.

Paradise

Leila Biggs

The sun is beating down on me,
It's possibly too much but I don't mention it
In fact, I push my face in it more,
Desperate for it to taste my freckles,
Endure them and nurture them.

Your summer looks a bit different to mine
Yours aches with rolling hills
And pleads for a speck of rain to feed what is needed
To maintain your small paradise.

Mine looks like skyscrapers bent backwards behind scattered branches
Begging to be seen, to not be overshadowed
But, still, the branches are adamant,
Stubborn even, to form a tear in the skyline,
Bigger than the buildings themselves.

Stuck in a summer that feels forever,
Even I know that this feeling won't last long
So I'll sit in it silently,
Dreading its sweet escape.



Streetlife
Alex Edwards

Urban Echoes of the Self

Carola Romero Fernandez

I open the door to the back of the building. I just took the bin out and noticed the wind was out for a stroll. The wind is always out in this part of town. It plays aggressively between buildings. It is the only reason I sometimes go to the more expensive Co-op beneath the building than the Tesco two blocks away.

As I walk into the silly wind, I see a pair of little eyes.

“Fox,” I say loudly and excitedly, even though I am alone, talking to no one.

As if I have never seen one before. Same reaction I have had for the last two years since I saw one from the front window of the top floor of the bus. That place we always look for on long bus rides.

The fox lifts its paw off the ground as it stares at me. It is young and I am young. I am certain that we see ourselves in each other’s eyes. Youthfully scavenging London for new things to see, good but cheap. Hopefully not so touristy.

I know we have both been there.

The back streets that sit by Bloomsbury St. or the alleys behind restaurants at Covent Garden. We both have walked through rubbish, avoiding puddles of that never ending drizzle.

Quick is something that we have learnt in this city.

We both break our stare. You don’t look at people in the eye on the tube.

The fox goes through the bars of a gate of a new-build not yet unwrapped.

I wonder if it has a family. I don’t have my family here.

I sigh, relieved, knowing that the fox is probably as independent as I am. Hopefully neither of us is alone within that freedom.

After a few years, I am not. It has taken a while to build both inner and outer company. A wild encouragement out of my comfort zone.

But now I have built a circle around me. No more hospital visits by myself, no more distance from the community I have always desired.

London tastes differently now. It tastes like a kiss from a well-known person, maybe someone who has broken your heart in the past.

It is nostalgic, that strange way the present moment can feel like sometimes. Romantic in the slightest way.

Yesterday, I sat beneath a willow tree. As romantic as it can get. Instead of foxes, I saw ducks flowing through the water at the Wetlands reservoir.

This is my spot.

People stared as they walked by. An old lady told her granddaughter to look at the nice young-lady sitting under a tree.

“That is what the youth should do with their time,” she mentioned quietly but loudly.

I could hear her perfectly fine. It echoes there.

My thoughts also bounced against the leaves, the branches, and the spiders on those droopy branches.

The night, though, is a different setting. Here I consolidate who I am when no one is seeing.

Here, like the fox, I seek shelter in this big city, and better yet, I seek myself.

London is big, but my need and my deep desire to find who I am within this vast freedom is bigger.

My willow tree will grow. It will cast a vast canopy above me as time goes by, expanding the places that I allow myself to explore in London and within myself.

The fox cries in the night. It has found its home.

Stewards

Lauren St.Aimee



To Be Transformed

Fowsia Kadiye

I see a home, many homes, maybe my own
I see the ocean advance, ready to engulf
With a breath out, fingers grab
And with a sigh, we are taken out

Amidst the waves and whispers
I come to blows with her cryptic nature
I wonder if she is my saviour?
Before I have time to speak I am underneath

Suddenly, weightless
Cradled in the womb of the deep
Constricted, still able to breath
Ready to be lulled to sleep

Will I forget my home here?
Will I be forever in the sea?
Does she even want to keep me?

Before I have time to speak
I am pushed out of my safety
A different woman looking back at me
Alone on a crowded beach

Hide and Seek

Nancy Sangare

“This isn’t fun anymore! We’ve been looking for you for ages...”

“I’ve been hiding for just as long”

“We only see parts of you between the bricks”

“Others have found me quicker”

“Impossible!”

“I was once vast – colossal! Not oval and meek”

“Really?”

“Stretched across all the lands, I shone with colours
and sang songs of all kinds of animals”

“All the lands? Sang songs? Animals?!”

“that’s what gave my hiding spot away”

“That’s no fair, *you’ve* made it harder for *us* to find you!”

“have *I*?”

Rain

Lara Yanak

Rain is cleansing, purifies the land in more ways than one.

First the natural landscape is nourished with its hydrating dewy warmth. Plants and trees alike rejoice and cheer as they dance to the wind of their mentor and guide. Rain, rain come again, reunite with us another day. It's also a cleanser of the soul, halting you to a ... STOP.

For you have to see, its droplets spitting out from the clouds, stopping anything in its way with its light and tranquillity.

Rain brings the peace of mind in many things – when it is raining you stop and hide away under the covers or perhaps stop work and go for a rainy stroll.

It connects us and grounds us.

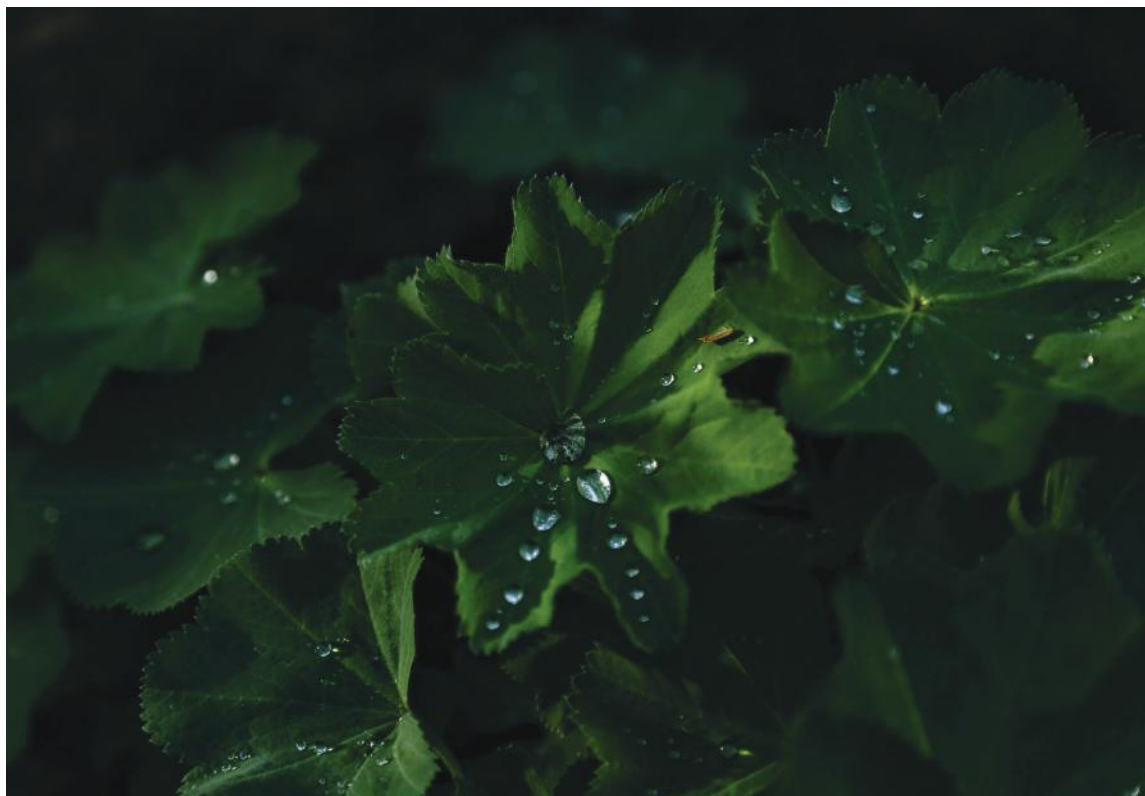
Even in the absence, its power it can still be seen, smelt, felt and heard as it leaves a trace of its delight.

The wet puddles, the moist smell of dirt and grass in the air, the droplets that pitter patter off drain pipes, the fresh delicate water on your lips.

And of course the Rainbows  

What is real is often forgotten. We will not forget.

Adella Demou



Meteor Shower

Lucy Underwood

Tonight we lie in the field
Still as a bone
Awaiting the quick deaths
of stars that already outlive us

And under us,
grass clots in the horse churned mud
while sheep chatter and scorn the cold

We sit with our shaky breaths blowing out clouds
that threaten to freeze the sky

And, like a goldfish coming up for air
Before giving way to the next

The stars line up in the sky
and forget to wait their turns



Willow
Rosa Arthur



Patagonia
Lucia Figueras Pont





The Here and Now

Najwa Favaro

The beautiful feeling of the here and now.

The rare collision of our universe intertwining together that we always try to escape from.

To look and see.

To breathe and smell.

To feel the present moment.

We tend to get caught up in our preoccupied minds.

Forgetting that we can return to the surface of the here and now.

We escape the present moment.

However, whenever we want, we can return to the beautiful, rare feeling of the now.

I feel absolute love when the sun warms my body.

Mother Earth is always looking after me and keeping me alive.

I'm in tune with myself.

I become in tune with the universe.

In tune with the animals and plants.

We become all one, all connected to the source.

My human experience fades as I become in touch with reality.

Do not harm. Show love and show compassion.

Breathe in and appreciate that we are all living together.

Enjoy life, it is beautiful to experience this.

Be present and smile. Be patient.

Red soil.

Green leaves.

Holy cows and smiling beautiful faces.

Oh, how beautiful these moments are.

The beauty of India.

I want to move to a place where anytime in the night I can raise my head and see the sky filled with brightening stars.
I want to move to a place where people in the street are not covering their heads with umbrellas and thick scarves.

I want to move to a place where the sun's warmth is on my face.
With God shining through my skin.
A place where I can hike a mountain or dive in the sea to feel alive again.
To feel reconnect with Mother Earth.
Feel her love and warmth.

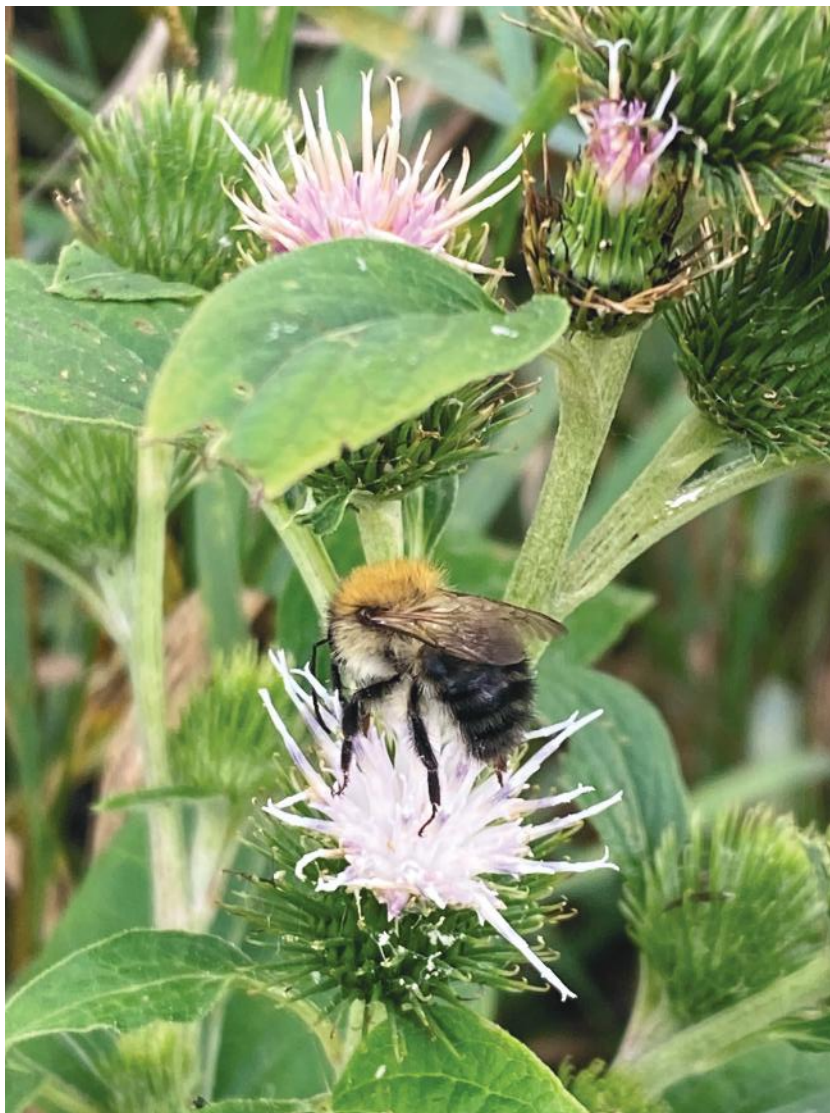
Staring at the fire flames in front of me.
My lefts and rights filled my brothers and sisters.
I looked up.
I forget to raise my head at night.
Thousands of light specks stared back at me.
Telling me I am a tiny speck too.

When I close my eyes, I try to seek God.
My identity fades as my intention to feel the light.
The ego, our real enemy, the distractor to feeling the source.
Mother Earth blesses us every second, we just cannot feel it.
We don't acknowledge Mother Earth enough, acknowledge her love.
When I close my eyes, I try to seek love.

Mediating on top of Indian sand.
Sea waves crashing in front of me.
Feeling loved by the universe.
Mediating beside my friend for life.
Breathing in healthy loving thought.
Breathing out things that do not serve me no more.
What a wondering moment.

Nature Walk

Martyna Balniute



The Fool

Solana Talenti

Beware the drone who brays
its services survive;
Your duty is mute
When the hive decides
the buzzing fool's colour will not endure
the coat of a cruel winter

My femininity, a weapon
Euphoric in male submission
Whether in:
Eight furry legs or dual bright wings
My compound eye or guiding bulb
Avenge my sisters on concrete land
Coddled wronged and wrung out
I, the scorpion, the bee, the mantis shall never back down;
and continue, to reign as queens
Till justice is found

Meditations from my Garden

Nicole Kolawole

I am fully basking in this slowness. It is allowing me to receive and integrate all that I have been soaking up. This feels like a functional kind of hermit mode; different to that which I've been used to. I am deepening, multiplying, maximising all that I already have within me. No need or desire to accumulate, just a new light shining itself on my roots to see what other potential is there.

Now I know this ground is so fertile. I have the tools and I am using them to dismantle any residual overwhelm. I am building these formidable structures of life-sustaining magnitude and wonder.

Initially, I felt like I was at a crossroads within my Self again. I once would have called this a split, but it isn't. I have slowed down to meditate on my needs, desires, and true values, asking what is truly authentic - to and aligned with me.

I *wandered* to find what I would create next (knowing I was never lost). I no longer felt like recreating survival, so I searched. The curiosity has led me beyond the question of whether I am capable of holding what my Spirit feels called to manifest. The journey so far has landed me in the memory that I do not exist in a vacuum. Community is life. Knowing my why is essential and exploring it in the context of ecology has been so supportive of who and where I am in this process. Within this symbiosis is where I thrive. Exploring Self goes hand in hand with being in communion with "others". Rastafaris say "I" and "I" – I have become so much more aware of what that means.

I value deep listening. I want – I intend – to listen more deeply to the voices, thoughts and feelings, passions, motivations and soul-callings of people beyond their surface. And I will connect on the level of love, upon grounds fertile enough for all the fruiting seeds of sweet abundance that we hold. I will create what Spirit gives me and has given back to me even after I've tried to put it down or pass it on not knowing or feeling worthy of the fact that it was mine to hold all along.

A point of summary, of clarity, a reminder:

“Step over fear; it is smaller than I.”

Capturing the Beauty of Walthamstow Wetlands
Johnathon Miller-McCall



Wild Studios

Sadatu Futa

Everything we are is borrowed
from lineages of growers, weavers, potters;
crafts women never die.

We used to pick pawpaws from grandmother's garden.
She made heaven in the hearth of process,
communed with her sow
beyond seasons of doubt to growth and harvests.

I remember crawling towards her,
moving my gaze from her *chalewote* to the peacock
African wax print, wrapped gently on her waist.
In between her silken left palm, she held a pestle,
in her right, the granite mortar fixed in place.
As she willed pawpaw seeds from homegrown greens
into fine powder - rhythmically, like a master of drum.

Home is where we make the Earth. Now I gather clay
to the centre of the wheel, with my fingers I pinch,
press a hole in the middle, pinch and press
to carve vessels, mortar and pestle
alike and distinct from grandmother's own.

San sa Muekene "Be Happy"

Muayuma Yese

♩ = 100

Harp

Musical notation for Harp, measures 1-3. The piece is in common time (C). The right hand plays a sequence of quarter notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4. The left hand has whole rests in measures 1 and 2, and a whole note G3 in measure 3.

Hrp.

Musical notation for Harp, measures 4-6. The right hand plays quarter notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, followed by a whole rest in measure 5, and then quarter notes: B4, A4, G4, F4 in measure 6. The left hand has whole rests in measures 4 and 5, and a whole note G3 in measure 6.

Hrp.

Musical notation for Harp, measures 7-9. The right hand plays quarter notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F5, G5 in measure 7, followed by a whole rest in measure 8, and then a sixteenth-note triplet: G5, A5, B5 in measure 9. The left hand has whole rests in measures 7 and 8, and a half note G3 in measure 9.

Hrp.

Musical notation for Harp, measure 10. The right hand plays quarter notes: G4, A4, B4, C5. The left hand has a whole rest.

My father is the Thames

Rose Meadows

One ripple changes everything.

Medieval pottery tills in the current, rounding and rounding.

Soft enough to swallow. There is time underfoot, every tread. My father told me so.

The river never takes anything forever, it's a placeholder. Things never leave quite the same as they went in.

My father used to tell me to watch the tides, the in and out, sometimes I would sit and watch for hours waiting for him.

For some treasure he had found from a time only he could wish for.

The sandpipers arrive with their probing and bobbing, ignoring the gulls and corvids who circle and chase. Then a gaggle of geese cheer, excited for the show.

I try to speak in shingle, but my words catch. The fishermen watch.

Then a bottlecap comes up, a net, two plastic bags.

I'd stretched from the Thames' mouth to its head.

Nature massed upon grey stone, the moss crawls back and the pavement splits open to a thin green stem.

I once saw a seagull devouring the body of an eel – the Thames itself being swallowed.

My father once said the Thames would rise and rise and rise and take me with the dunlins.

My father once said that nature is cruel.

But I know the river.

Answer me, Father*

Zet Roper-Blackman

“Now, what did you do for work?” The question was laced with false sounding accusation, the kind a bad actor might employ when reading through a script. It was weirdly delivered, void of conviction, and did not come across remotely threatening, as it was supposed to. But after all she was only sixteen. What normal sixteen year old had learned how to interrogate or to sound serious. Certainly not one reading from a script in a time like this...

But because of that, her father sort of sat back, and scoffed. “This is ridiculous.” He said, folding his arms and fighting to look away.

Across the room, not sitting at the table but in a chair in the corner, not totally involved in her children’s interrogation of her partner and instead reading a book, was the girl’s mother. She tutted. The father almost bit there and then.

“Excuse me, I’m talking to you.” The daughter said. Calling for his so far divided attention. Now this time it sounded better because unlike in the first instance she actually did feel annoyance. This was serious. It might not sound it while they were here in the comfort of their home, but it was. “What did you do for work?” She asked a second time.

“I provided for my family.” He said dryly, folding his arms as if he had just set up a checkmate. It was clever you see, he had provided for them so what right did they have now to question how he did so... Perhaps it was that he wasn’t doing so now which spurred on his childishness. Perhaps the fact he hadn’t left the house for a month, not that he wanted to, not that he could, was the reason for feeling that this intervention was a waste of resources. Or maybe it was just that a sixteen year old was interrogating him about his past, like she had any grounds.

“That isn’t going to cut it.” The daughter said. She cast her eyes down at the table, aware of what ‘not cutting it meant’ and drew circles around their oak topped six man expanse.

In the corner there was the forceful sound of a book closing.

“David please take this seriously. Listen to your daughter.” The girl’s mother said passionately. She had obviously been thinking about consequences too. “Miru from work said-”

David threw his hands into the air, bringing them down to cover his face.

* Trigger warning: violence

“Oh for god’s sake, if I hear another word about lord Miru from work I might just go outside anyway and call it a night!”

But, his partner was not willing to be dispelled by him simply raising his voice and talking over her. Those were rookie tactics, ones she’d dealt with all her life. “Miru from work, only made it out alive because she explained it so well!” She snapped.

“Oh I’m sure perfect Miru did wonderfully.” David rolled his eyes and then rubbed his forehead. This was all ludicrous.

“You petulant childish bashf-”

The daughter turned her eyes to the window, to their riverside view, as their argument began. Outside the Thames was bloated, reflecting a warm gold back up at them. The sky was thin with clouds, it was shaping up to be a beautiful evening and the urge to experience it was strangely strong. But she couldn’t, not until she got his story straight.

Her parents were still arguing.

“- what about when I had to go to work all those years and-”

“What, when I was here with our children!” Her mother snapped back.

David scoffed loudly. “Like that’s fair, like that should automatically give you a free pass because-”

She nudged her brother who was seated beside her. He had been remarkably calm, remarkably patient, though she suspected that was because he was smitten with his responsibility. ‘Go, go and do it’ her eyes said. And so he jumped down from the table, ran around to the other side, and jammed the cattle prod into his father’s ribs. Safe to say that argument was quelled quite quickly. David fell to his knees, convulsing, his screams not at all nice to hear, but, given what she was trying to prepare him for, not at all rare nowadays.

But somewhere amongst David’s gasping cries for mercy, and the relentless jabbing of the prod, her brother’s lanky growth spurt ridden hands must have slipped from the trigger for David managed to scurry to his feet and began swiping desperately at his son for control of the weapon.

“Give me that you!” But his twelve-year-old son was far more nimble than he, and so when the prod found his quadricep he doubled over in pain. Relenting at last to the chair, and to sniffles.

As the cackle of the prod faded and David’s sobbing settled to silent shakes, from their mothers corner was the subtle sound of a page being turned.

“Who gave him a cattle prod!” David cried eventually, clutching his leg.

“He got it at school darling.” The mother said coldly.

David’s face was all the more outraged. “At school?! Give me that-”

His daughter chimed in again. “I’ve been trying to tell you, David, things are different now.” She pulled out her own cattle prod from a pocket she’d learnt to sew into her trousers and showed it to him.

David laughed, steeping in disbelief. “You have absolutely no idea what you are doing. Your generation are going to cause irrevocable damage if-”

“I think that’s only fair, don’t you dad? Going by what you all did, I think every generation gets to do something they simply don’t think about, and chalk it up to ignorance after the fact.” Now this was proper anger, her words were potent and sharp but she cooled herself. In a more measured tone she said, “This is why we’re here dad. This is how it works. You made decisions you didn’t ask the consequences of, and are judged by the next people to come along.” And the determination with which she parsed her argument finally shut him up. Again she looked down out onto the river. Apparently there used to be a time where, at high tide, it wouldn’t break its banks and flood Bermondsey. A time when it was not thirty degrees in October, when birds flitted about happily, not sparsely, yet a time when her dad drank beer, bought a new phone every year, and got the train to work to do what, exactly.

“What did you do for work dad?” She asked again, this time her voice was void of anger but laced with disappointment.

David, across from her, shook. Perhaps he too acknowledged the river and the heat. The seasons all jumbled up and what it could possibly mean.

“I provided for you both.” He said softly. With a teary eye he looked at them in turn, he even sent a sidelong glance in the direction of his partner.

“By doing what?” She repeated. The coldness of her disappointment was palpable. She knew the answer and also knew that it wasn’t good enough, not unless he could spin it.

“I worked in the film industry.” He mumbled. “Special effects.”

She knew but, “What did that entail?”

“Um. Smoke, wind, rain, fire, we’d go to locations and make them look however we were asked.”

Her quiet said, elaborate.

“Sometimes there would be an explosion and we’d need to go and plumb gas fires in or maybe there would be just a smoky room, or a misty field, we’d—” For a fleeting second his eyes lit up with a warm memory. It faded, he cleared his throat. “We built props and specialist one off mechanical pieces too.”

He'd said enough to satisfy the question of What. Now, to satisfy the question of How.

She glanced down at the sheet of paper she had printed from the internet. "And was what you did environmentally sound? I.e. was it of no impact, or a positive impact."

She saw in his eyes that the answer was no. If even she could see it, what would they see?

"We once had to do a beach landing scene. I er- I remember we went to this old quarry and set loads of charges to mimic grenades, along with some small gas fires and smoke. The charges were small things but loud, I remember feeling tremendous guilt for the mice that darted about in the tumult. We came into their house and did whatever we wanted."

And of what use that anecdote was for proving his innocence, she would not know. It felt honest though, how could she argue against that.

"Jennifer, dear" he said suddenly, quivering, "do you think I'll make it?" He looked up at her and she avoided his eyes. She'd told him not to use her name for she wasn't his daughter but a faceless drone of the revolution.

"Do be honest." He pleaded.

But what kind of father could ask that of his daughter, when he already knew the answer himself.

With a growing anger she burst into tears. When he reached tentatively across to comfort her she snapped. "Do you know what your problem was, your generation!" She glared at him as tears ran down her face. "It was that you never actually expected to have to answer to your children." And she kicked away her chair and stormed out of the room.

There was, again, the sound of a page turning and the seemingly audible guilt of a man who'd waited until it was far too late.

Parakeet Oh Parakeet
Nicole Valente



Contrasts
Oliver Yu Hurst

Yearning future memories
 escape passages of time
 in search of comfort
 with fellow kin
 Comfort,
 now more than ever
 a luxury
 Like these light-vented bulbuls
 take flight oh, dancers of
 kinship where

time
 is nothing
 but a figment of
 sonder

Like a shield bug,
 get curious, courageous,
 against tides of systems
 who
 traumatise

Like a mountain,
 embody Earth's
 skin

forever, wherever,
 in solidarity,
 with fellow
 kin

^ Lumin Park,
 Woodberry
 Wetland's
 faraway
 partner?

Arts of disguise

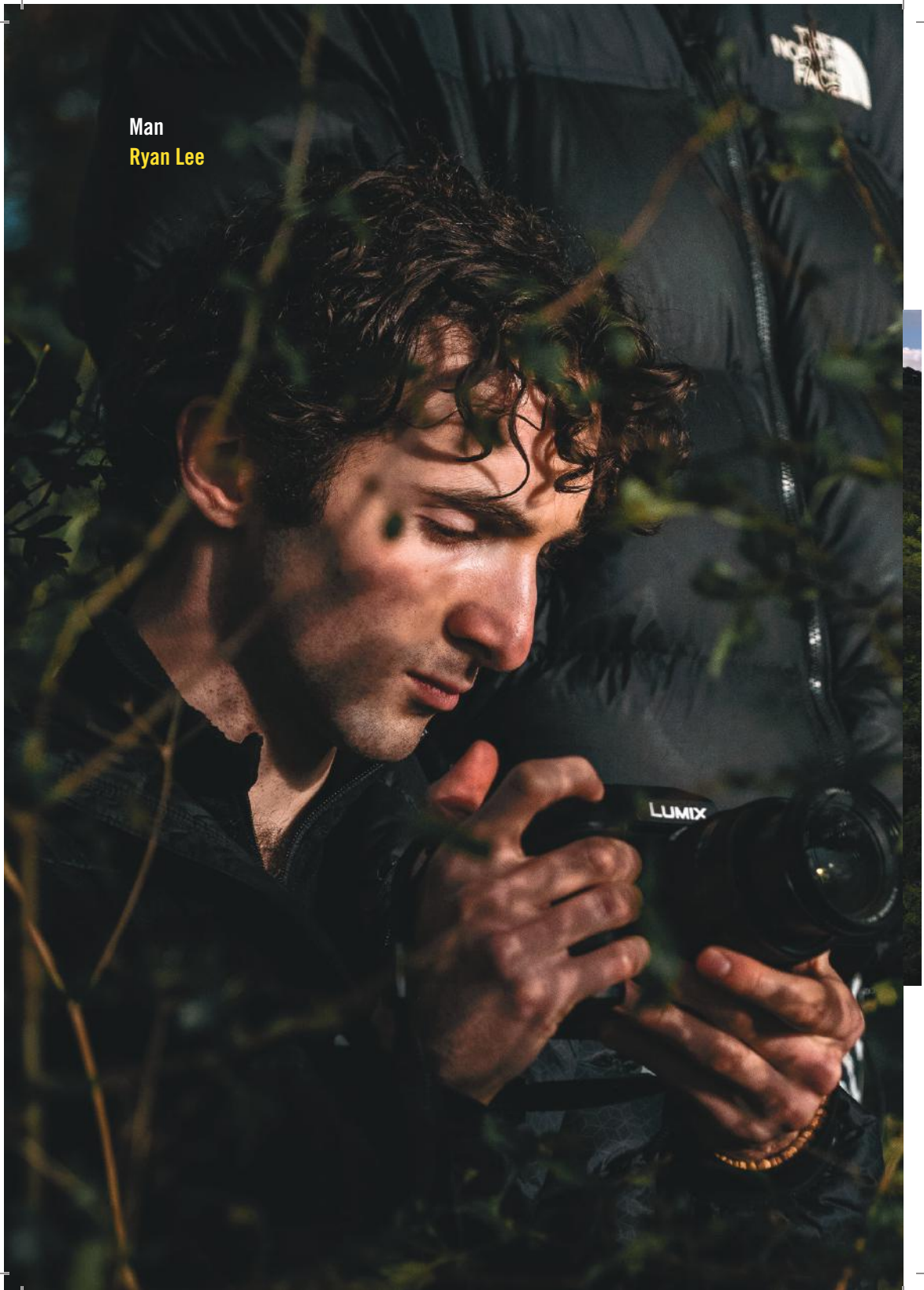
Predestined

Qas Hassan

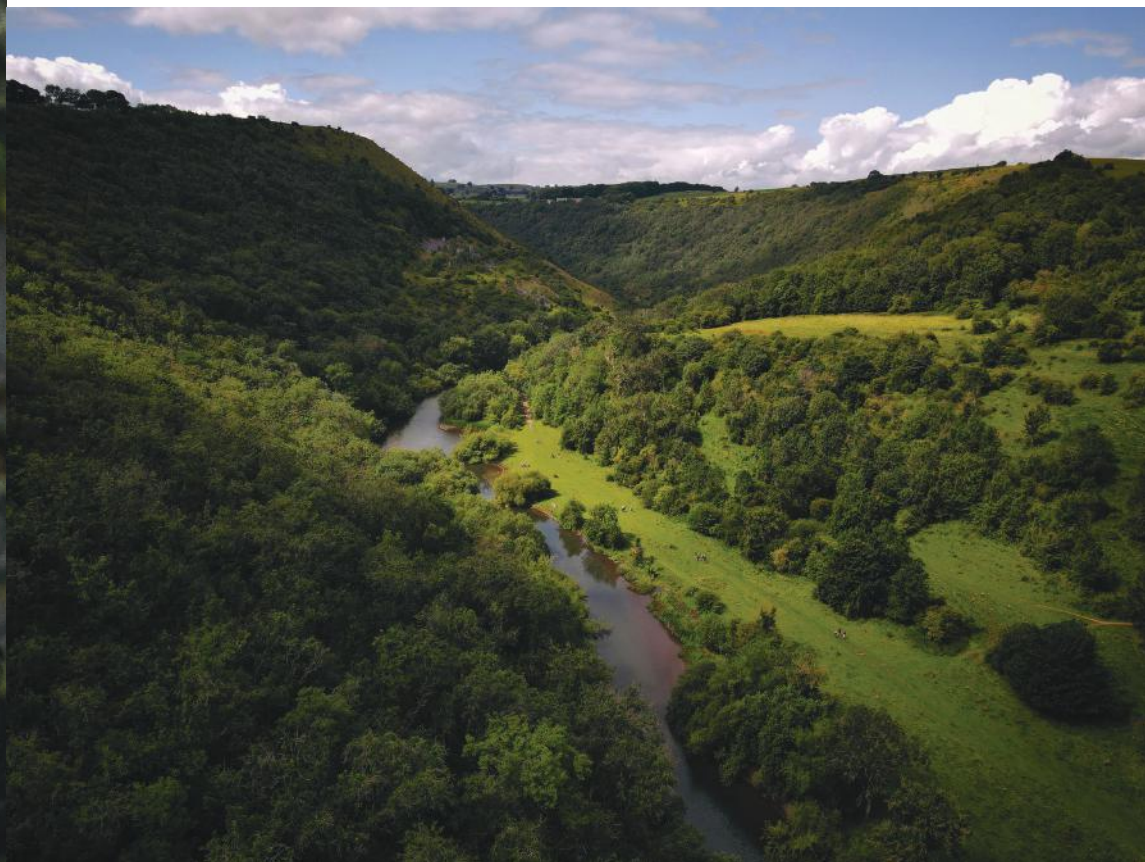
Your life is over.
Your lover's dead.
And you have also died.
Only your bird sings on.
What does the bright bird say?
That all is complete?
Beauty will die away, suddenly and at any time!
From sky and earth, and limb and eye.
All will crumble before you.
For all is over, only the child is to be born
And then you will know what to do...

The bird did sing for her,
Her purpose nearing completion and freedom on her lips!
Alas, the same could not be said for me.
Since I fulfilled the purpose of my life at the moment of birth,
When my grandma first held me, it was done...
There was nothing else left for me to do,
But spend the rest of my life roaming like an ewe.
Going from place to place, near to far
Across a desolate landscape.
Yet understanding naught,
Lost, adrift, confused, unsure
Till my final breath, on the last of my days.

Man
Ryan Lee



Nature Photography
Adam Daniels



The Observer by a Pond

Zoe Mebude-Steves

Beside a pond, I stand, absorbing it all,
Leaves whispering secrets, an earthy chatter.
Pond water ripples silently, telling tales of fleeting moments,
A plane roars above, prophecies of a vanishing future.

Muted greens, not clamouring for attention,
Brown leaves, in earthy tones, blanket the ground,
One leaf, yellow beneath, lying flat in acceptance,
Its season aloft the slanting branches, a bygone memory.

In nature's quiet, a distant plane's intrusion,
A paradox of "progress" against this timeless backdrop,
Yet, the pond remains, a mirror reflecting both end and start,
A witness to the dance of nature and humanity's changing heart.

On ageing branches, a leaf shares its tale,
A story of surrender, yielding to the whims of the wind,
The observer, eyes on the pond's subtle sway,
Witnesses ripples attempting a dance, mimicking leaves on the mend.

A conversation unfolds, observer and leaf in discourse,
Empathy extended for the leaf's grounded position,
Yet, the leaf, wise in its fragility, gently rebuffs,
"I've embraced both highs and lows, in life's transient transition."

"I once bathed in the sun's warm glow,
Now grounded, I befriend ants and earthworms.
Rejoice with me; each phase holds its own,
In the fleeting waltz of existence, true wisdom forms."

Moved by this dialogue, the observer turns to the now-still pond,
Chemtrails, an afterthought in the distance.

Look, see!

A face, beardless and free from the weight of the decades,
Reflection smiling back, gaps in the front teeth,
A celebration of moments, in the quiet pond's mirrored cheers.
The end of the beginning is the beginning of the end.

Coppermill

Will Wright

Light is lifted from beneath a thin veil of water, dancing on the verdant current.

Trickling out of the Lockwood reservoir, to become something much more wild in body and spirit - even if just for a short while.

A submerged tapestry drifting unannounced, carrying with it a pattern of ardent substance.

Lichen encrusted aspens watch their own shadows undulate below. Separate realms kept apart by a film which holds the balance,

one side dressed in damp moss, brushed by cool breeze, the other held in a rolling wet.

The surface flirted with by damselflies and the summer's first swifts, uncaring of what slips by beneath.

Dawdling through the rising heat into the sharp shade beneath Ferry Boat Lane, past anglers and their assured hooks,

into a forest of weed and hornwort where patches of florescence reflect to reveal scales of the stream's original hunter.

Master of this kingdom, dominion over subservient perch, barbel and eel. A predatory eye cast over the all that meets between the surface and the murk.

The balance is again held above, as it is below, where kings draped in royal blue, and with fire in their breast face off against rotary winged dragons, birthed from the same reeds as damsels.

The quenched earth is in no need for more water here, but this stream, cutting through reservoir and concrete breathes a wildness that is clamoured for by gasping life.

Corralled into the mill, topped with its ecclesiastical archways, for a time this
brook brought with it a flow of powders, papers, leathers and oils.

Once out of reach from the racing waterwheel, this industry and its revolutions
cannot restrict the progress coursing onwards.

For now, licking at bulrushes and brambles, the Lea beckons.
An expanse illuminated by the sun's glow reverberating down the sage hill at
Springfield.

A different beast, winged by incensed cormorants, with no time for trickling but
a full blooded flood down to the chasing shore of the Thames,

leading the Coppermill away beyond its banks, much beyond.

Everything is Endlessly Made and Remade

Amber Deschamps

Lolling on my bed, I watch a mess of green on my flatscreen window. The glorious thicket of 36b. Greedy reaching tendrils make a mockery of blueprints and property lines, defiantly tangling over wooden fences in riotous curls that swallow up all they can grasp. Reclaiming. In my sleep I dream of vines slipping through the window. Pulling me into the richness of the overgrowth. Where

I would sit among the million trillion different species who chime to greet me from the chaos of their world. Vitality marching, growing, crawling, flying, slithering, tucked away. But nature has always been about death as much as it is about

life. Ancient trees used to sit forever once fallen, no bacteria or microbes to decompose them. I know that out there exists the fungi to unmake me. Strip me down back to bare bones. When my nutrients sink back down into the warm damp earth I hope my homecoming is met by blind seeking roots so that I can be pushed once more in to life, a lush curious green.

The Aspen

Muhammed Amin

On a steely cold autumn eve
Walking in a darkening wood
As the swallows and warblers leave
The shadows fall where tall trees stood
My eyes fall on an aspen tree
All aglow with shimmering light
As if the sun had set it free
It quakes and quivers, burning bright

Warped lenticel scars mark
The grey, lichen blackened bark
It leaps and flickers like an amber flame
As it shifts and ripples within its frame
Kindled with sparks from the dying sun
It dances in the dusk as the day is done

J is for January is for Jelly Fungus

Elizabeth Tatham

On a branch I tremble, swell
and cast a spell.
Light and yellow,
The sun is solid butter today.

A short and sweet ode to *Tremella mesenterica*, my favourite winter fungus. This fungus has several aliases, including “Yellow Brain” and “Witch’s Butter”. It is parasitic, eating other fungi that feed on dead wood. It can be found throughout the UK and is a bright dash of colour in an otherwise bleak winter landscape.



Flower Project 1
Divine-Favour Owoola



Bee
Evelien David



About the contributors

Adam Daniels is a filmmaker from Greater London. When Adam is not running his film production company, AD Filming, he enjoys taking photos of nature. He likes taking photographs of animals and scenery, always going above and beyond to capture the best shot.

Adella Demou (@demou productions) is a poet and photographer who holds an emphasis on storytelling and authentic expression. Adella specialises in BTS, nature and portrait photography. She is venturing into videography scenes and is enrolled in Poetic Unity's Spoken Word Theatre course 2023/2024.

Alex Edwards is an artist and writer based in East London. His work takes inspiration from the natural world, an interest in history, and a passion for the arts. He is currently exploring wildlife portraiture.

Amber Deschamps is a British-Dominican multidisciplinary artist and scholar from South East London. Although her formal education is in biomedical sciences she also experiments with poetry, weaving, ceramics, and drawing; culminating in a body of work that seeks to explore and further understand her relationship with nature, and nature's relationship with her.

Brenn Phimi is a black, non-binary poet born and raised in North East London. Their work is heavily influenced by the natural which they've adored since early childhood, crossed with the complex array of human emotions and interactions that make up our lives.

Carola Romero Fernandez is a chemistry student who is interested in sustainability and the environment. She finds joy in writing because through reading, she has gained insight into her own identity, and she aspires to provide the same introspective experience to others.

Caroline McHardy is a photographer and writer based in Bromley, Kent. Her creative work highlights her passion for the natural world and exploring her local woodlands and wildlife. She studied photography at the University of the Creative Arts, Rochester.

Divine-Favour Owoola is a Nigerian artist based in South East London. She is an aspiring creative director using photography and film to showcase her interests and passion for gender studies, nature and humanity. Her goal is to create resonating art with film and photography that empowers her community as a black woman and nature.

Eleni Gkrintzou is Greek and enjoys nature and writing. She is inspired by femininity, the relationship between the body and the mind, human nature and Greek mythology.

Elizabeth Tatham is a biology graduate with a soft spot for feral pigeons and fungi. She enjoys exploring different ways to engage people with the nature on their doorstep.

Evelien David is a non binary, Indian sixth former based in Newham with a love of all things natural history and a strong passion for creepy crawlies. With their tarantula Joltik by their side, they hope to explore and celebrate the beauty of nature in all walks of life and death.

Fowsia Kadiye is a London-based multidisciplinary artist, focusing on abstract painting and poetry, drawing inspiration from the city's vibrant energy and the tranquility of nature.

Johnathon Miller-McCall has ignited a passion for nature photography, capturing the beauty of Walthamstow Wetlands.

Kasey Renaghan notices the small and forgotten in nature; she loves frost, sun, snow, fog, and the little creatures that come out of their hiding hole in the rain. Kasey is a multimedia artist based in Surrey and 2021 Fine Art graduate from Nottingham Trent University.

Lara Yanak is an artist and nature lover based in North London. She grew up inspired by her Sri Lankan grandma, who inspired her love for writing. She also enjoys painting, reading and baking. She is currently working as a mentor helping young people.

Lauren St.Aimee is an Environmental Studies student, passionate about capturing the relationship between the environment and society on film

Lauryn Grant is a multi-instrumentalist, writer and creative producer with a passion for community arts, archives and African-Caribbean history. Hailing from North London, she is an alumna of Soho Theatre's Writers' Lab and featured in 'Writing Wrongs' with Donmar Warehouse. @earthlauryn

Leela Watt is a British-Japanese-Indian who is also an aspiring ecologist. She is currently majoring in Biology and Environmental Studies at university in Japan, and enjoys photography, illustrating and writing in her free time.

Leila Biggs is a writer and actor from South-East London, who received her training from The BRIT School. Having previously had her writing published, she continues to strive to communicate the human experience using creative methods.

Liz Muntunkaye is an East London based artist, also known as lizmnk. She blends visual arts, spoken word, and music whilst influenced from her activist background. Her music and poems delve into her inner world, touching on themes such as society, community, and self-actualisation.

Lucia Figueras Pont is a Spanish Anthropology student in London, UK. She is passionate about regenerative agriculture, conservation, and photography, which she was able to learn about during her year in Patagonia.

Lucy Underwood is a passionate young conservationist and wildlife writer. Her writing is heavily inspired by the natural world and her goal is to make nature more accessible for young people in London as living in urban areas does not have to be a barrier to accessing it.

Martyna Balniute is a Lithuanian-British college student in East London. She enjoys anything to do with the arts; poetry, literature, drawing, music, photography, everything there is, she has enjoyed.

Muayuma Yese, Harpist, composed San Sa Mukee meaning “Be Happy” in Zambia’s Bemba Language. Honouring indigenous planetary wisdom and sharing hope of happiness. The piece questions True Happiness in the midst of a culture that consumes, causing environmental challenges and conflict.

Muhammed Amin is interested in nature based approaches to mental health. In his spare time he enjoys writing and sport.

Najwa Favaro is a passionate conservationist who is based in South West London. She finds true peace when travelling to new places and camping. She writes poetry inspired by wildlife and emotions. Previously studied Zoology which made her want a career in wildlife conservation.

Nancy Sangare is currently studying for her A Levels. Her poem is structured as a conversation, the left side being all humans depicted as children; the right being the earth. The poem discusses how humans have made their mark on the world, maybe not completely for the better.

Nicole Kolawole is a British-Nigerian visual artist, writer and designer-maker. A student of life, she utilises mixed-media as one way to bring forth and amplify the subtle expressions of beauty, fluidity and complexity that exist in the unspoken realms, sharing them through her perspective.
Instagram: @moreni_k_art

Nicole Valente is an autistic animal and wildlife photographer from London. Through her photography she strives to educate, inspire and tell stories about our natural world, and with doing so through her instagram @lifeby.nixsval

Oliver Yu Hurst is a Chinese-British, transdisciplinary scholar and advocate for social, environmental, and multispecies justice and solidarities. A self-proclaimed amateur eco-poet and Chinese calligrapher, he’s passionate about zines, pluriverse futures, post/decolonialism, bird-watching/birds-watching-people, art-activism, critical political ecology, and other fields he’s yet to come across.

Qas Hassan was going through a rather tough time during the pandemic. He lost his job, his girlfriend broke up with him and his grandmother passed away, however he began writing poetry again and that's where he found his solace.

Rosa Arthur is a queer British-Caribbean poet, photographer and recent engineering graduate. They use poetry to look both inward at their heritage and identity, and outward at the world they experience.

Rose Meadows loves nature and archaeology. She is often found reading folk-horror fiction and enjoys writing when she feels like it.

Ryan Lee is a Chinese Singaporean photographer currently based in London. Through his photography, he strives to tell stories exploring the space between humans and nature.

Sadatu Futa captures people, places and movements through her lens and pens. She is interested in climate resilience and symbiosis with nature. Sadatu's poetry is featured in SPIN (Otter Barry Books, March 2024) edited by Children's Laureate Joseph Coelho in collaboration with Apples and Snakes.

Solana Talenti is a young entrepreneur who enjoys getting out of their comfort zone by exploring the art surrounding nature. When she's not doing that she's working hard in the world of film + TV.

William Wright is a photographer and writer based in Hackney, London. In his work, William tries to capture the world around him, with inspiration coming from the links between his rural upbringing and his now city-based life. His passion for environmentalism and conservation remains a consistent theme.

Zet Roper-Blackman is an artist of Caribbean and British descent, currently working in special effects. He writes on the train to work and admits to being very much confused about his place in the world.

Zoe Mbude-Steves aims to reflect diverse human experiences and explore the human-nature intersection through art. In 2022, he was selected as a fellow for the Africa Liberty Writers Fellowship Programme. He enjoys quiet time by ponds and streams - despite not knowing how to swim.

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About Nature Nurtures

Nature Nurtures is a cross-sector project led by **London Wildlife Trust** with partners **Spread the Word**, **Black Girls Hike CIC** and **London Youth**. The project aims to host a variety of exciting opportunities for young people that link natural heritage with creative arts to get more young people volunteering and taking action for nature through practical conservation and creative expression.

Nature Nurtures does this by hosting meetups for young people (aged 16-25) to allow them to join an inclusive collective of new friends, support each other's wellbeing whilst reconnecting with their sense of play, curiosity and wonder in the natural world.

Specifically, this project focuses on young people from Black, Asian, and minoritised ethnic heritage, young people with special educational needs and disabilities, and those who live in socio-economically disadvantaged areas of London.

Nature Nurtures is supported by funds awarded by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sports, via the Volunteering Futures Fund distributed by Arts Council England.

About London Wildlife Trust

London Wildlife Trust is dedicated to protecting, conserving and enhancing the capital's wildlife and wild spaces. Our vision is of a London alive with nature, where everyone can experience and enjoy wildlife. Founded in 1981, the Trust manages 36 free-to-access nature reserves across the capital and engages with London's diverse communities through practical land management, campaigning, volunteering and education in order to give London's wildlife a voice.

We work with many partners to advocate for a city richer in biodiversity and ecological resilience, through policy, planning and best practice. The Trust is one of 46 Wildlife Trusts working across the UK, with the support of over 800,000 members and 40,000 volunteers, to make local areas wilder and make nature part of life, for everyone.

 www.wildlondon.org.uk

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About Spread the Word

Spread the Word, London's literature development agency, is an arts charity based at The Albany in Deptford and an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation. Our work is focused on engaging Black, Asian, Global Majority, deaf and disabled, LGBTQ+, working class and low income writers, and young people.

We find new ways of using creative writing and reading to engage communities through programmes co-produced in partnership with diverse writers, local organisations and libraries and run inclusive creative writing programmes, offering practical ways for writers to get their work into the world. We discover Londoners who love words, nurturing those who want to write, read and share stories.

We run national programmes like the Disabled Poetry Prize and high-profile awards like the London Writers Awards which has found writers such as Natasha Brown and Tice Cin alongside programmes such as the Early Career Bursaries for London Writers on a low income and Nature Nurtures with the London Wildlife Trust, London Youth and Black Girls Hike CIC.

We have been growing the work we deliver in our home borough of Lewisham including the annual Deptford Literature Festival and community projects with Youth First, Entelechy Arts, Triangle LGBTQ+ Centre amongst others. We have a big bold vision to have Lewisham named the UK's first Borough of Literature.

-  spreadtheword.org.uk
-  @STWevents
-  @spreadthewordwriters
-  @spreadthewordwriters

About Black Girls Hike CIC

Black Girls Hike CIC provides a safe space for Black women to explore the outdoors. Challenging the status quo, and encouraging black women to reconnect with nature, we host nationwide group hikes, outdoor activity days and training events.

Our values are focused on Building Community, Development, Education, Inclusion, Diversity.

BGH develops projects and collaborations with a wide range of organisations working across the outdoor and conservation sector to increase the participation and development of black women and diverse young people, offering opportunities to engage in the natural world. Working with the wider outdoor industry to meet the needs of its diverse community, BGH tackles the lack of inclusion and representation in green spaces both nationally and internationally.

 bghuk.com
 [@UkBgh](https://twitter.com/UkBgh)
 [@bgh_uk](https://www.instagram.com/bgh_uk)
 [@bghmcr](https://www.facebook.com/bghmcr)

About London Youth





London Youth is a charity on a mission to support the capital's youth sector to improve the lives of young people. They do this with and through their members – a network of 600 youth organisations – and at their two outdoor residential centres, Hindleap Warren and Woodrow High House.

Throughout London Youth's 135-year history, community youth organisations have provided a constant lifeline and a vital safe space outside the family and formal education, where young people can develop confidence, resilience and skills. Young people need opportunities outside school to have fun with their friends, to make a positive change in their communities and to shape the city they live in.

London Youth looks to work with all young people, focusing particularly on those who wouldn't otherwise have access to the kind of opportunities they offer.

Last year, London Youth worked with 28,100 young people through their sports development, employability, youth action and involvement, mental health, arts and outdoor education programmes. Their member network supported over 601,000 young Londoners. They delivered 133 training sessions to over 1,000 youth professionals.

London Youth's vision is that all young Londoners grow up healthy and able to express themselves, navigate a fulfilling career and make a positive contribution in their communities.

 londonyouth.org
 [@LondonYouth](https://twitter.com/LondonYouth)
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