

FOOTHILL

poetry journal

VOLUME 9



FOOTHILL

poetry journal

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Claremont Graduate University

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Engage

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Editors' Note

Gatekeeping

The job of the editor is the job of the gatekeeper. The word alone has a heft to it, correct in assuming its responsibility. But gatekeeping is both a duty and an opportunity. To gatekeep, we think, is more than just the work of manning a barrier. It is also the work of greeting, cultivating, and tending to new voices. To say, *please, come in—we've been waiting for you*. To those we must turn away, we say, *come back soon*. And we mean it.

Almost always surprising us, each issue tends to develop a distinctive character and voice, seemingly of its own accord. This journal's theme, oddly, works against gatekeeping writ large. The deliciously strange poems in this issue address uncomfortable moments of transformation and transgression, forcing us to listen to truths we might not mention in polite conversation. The ethos of this installment inhabits a usually shrouded, all-too-quiet space.

And the birds. They kept arriving in ways that avoid poetic cliché, which is a difficult thing to do (perhaps more in poetry than anywhere else): These are not quotidian birds. To be in flight is a violent shedding of traditional bindings or a tossing off of conventional forms. It is a rejection of previous tethers and holds the ingenuity of desperate motion.

It is a rewarding puzzle to consider how these two elements routinely interact on the following pages and to trace the vacillating connections between flight and the limits described in so many of these poems.

We mean it: please, come in.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Emily Schuck Brock Rustin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Emily Schuck & Brock Rustin
Editors-in-Chief

FOOTHILL

Winner of the 2019 Editors' Prize

ENCANTO

D.S. Waldman



There isn't breath enough to pierce
the black rubber blossoms
fallen
and whirring over us,
not enough listening
to warrant a revolution.

“The pitch and torsion of ‘Encanto’ blesses what it curses, in a language beautifully poised between rapture and indifference. What’s between is a delicate resilience, that of the hummingbird, that of a small beauty, insisting on being there. ‘Encanto’ shows that though there’s despair in our world, there is also something ‘more affectionate than hate’ which remains. And we must find the rage to praise it.”

–Ishion Hutchinson, Judge

Finalists

Sliding into Scutes

Bridget A. Lyons

My Mom Was a Picture Bride

Dani Putney



Congratulations to the winners of
Claremont Graduate University's
2019 Tufts Poetry Awards.



2019 Winner
**Kingsley Tufts
Poetry Award**

Dawn Lundy Martin
Good Stock, Strange Blood

The black in the black body,
a tremor so tender.



2019 Winner
**Kate Tufts
Discovery Award**

Diana Khoi Nguyen
Ghost Of

Why should we mourn?
Isn't this the history we want
one in which we survive?

Save the Date, April 16, 2020

Please join us for a public reading honoring the winners of the 2020
Kingsley & Kate Tufts Poetry Awards.

KINGSLEY & KATE TUFTS
POETRY AWARDS



Claremont Graduate University

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Poems

JANAN ALEXANDRA

Indiana University, Bloomington
MFA Poetry

bell

& what do you mean when you say
you have me—by the buckle of the belt
by the little raw hole ?

My body sings with a singing
that wants to be answered.

Last night I pulled a black moth from your mouth
& I think I prefer to walk toward my own hanging bell,
I would rather hush the lip, cover it with my hand
than let it continue to ring.

I opened my mouth,
my small feathers fell.

Perhaps you cannot locate my middle,
my spooling core & honey-dipper orb.
So slide out of me—like every time I pulled glass
from your heels. I know it will be bloody but when
I turn the shell of my body over, my back floating in water,
I will find an answer, washing my bones under fresh clouds.

ghazal for a kiss

My girl. I love, in the morning, a kiss that walked us down a steep
road in fall.

In the coping dark, give praise to your good hours of sky & a street
swept red with fall.

You are carrying little suitcases packed with clothes & in the night
they sometimes fall.

Thin sheet the self slips along, small daughter, clay-cold you spin
before each fall.

Why does tenderness eavesdrop around shame when there is no one
to watch you fall.

Remember white feathers, factual as any dove, lips apart while breath
will rise & fall.

The kiss you love presses its mouth to a slim band, opens the edge of
a waterfall.

You birth quietly, it is not sad, more emptybright, liquid sphere who
bursts but does not fall.

In the night your blood grows tall & quiet, you kiss the paper before it
falls,

thread your hands to thighs to throat, wander the finger in the wound
of one more fall.

Do you want to be romantic, small-town nana, reminisce your beauty
before this fall?

You forget yourself, so busy with thought & thought that keeps you
coming home to fall.

silent room of lost tongues

there at a family table with a long cloth scroll
an Arabic newspaper embroidered in red & gold.
& in each thread a kind of time & in each time a pair
of hands folding upon the marble table that was hauled by sea.
& you too will haul things, the carpets kept in a silver trunk,
& you too will enter what was only ever half-given,
this metric of inheritance, this inheritance of dispersal.
Don't worry. In a room of windpipes restless & dry as your sleep,
your mother will always be your mother. You have saved her voice
in the telephone, you have held it in your hands like the blue & white
eyes of her favorite mug, so these will always be your hands
& you will learn how to speak from the throat & the gut,
in the language that knows how to measure the thickness
of blood & knows how to say & how to say you bury me—

JAI HAMID BASHIR

Columbia University

MFA Poetry

On Lightness

During the blackout, we gather
storms from a lone cloud
loitering soft above
electric wires. Worried by the sad calls
of night, mad ringing of things
dropped in the sink

foraging for pale candles beaming
like spider's laced eggs once ignited.
How cruelly evolution rendered your heart
a flightless bird. Condemned to bite

each thorn off the crown, to order them
like fossilized teeth. You fish out
a flashlight, clapped against the palm
as if to give it back life. The sound awakens

the kitchen lights. The birds.
What if you are divine enough
to have this one, quiet love?
In a delicate game of just listening
to unseen genius of our lungs

between songs as if everything
was eternally reversible,
changing the record over,
as if placing the sun
into another day.

TARA FIETZ

University of St. Andrews, Scotland
MFA Poetry

last sunday i found myself

sitting on a rock discussing platypus
paws with a seagull. intertidal
zone water stepped out and left
folds of stone so i sat in kelp and
debated with avian gusto as he,
lucius, floated whitely beside me. and i
told him a dismembered platypus mitt when
held to the light, with a preference
on south-facing exposure, each long
thin bone within webbing stands out.
umbrella struts and tissue seal. not
unlike his own wedged feet, i said, those
bones are like my father's
fingers, strung through my hair. and he,
lucius, understood my emphasis by dipping
his juvenile beak and dropletting
my shoe.

MITCHELL GLAZIER

Columbia University

MFA Poetry

Coventry

The slit latex bulls of Vice
still husk on beds of coal
& crush in West Virginia.

I lived once, in a violet
year of sin & syrup.

Nothing written but blood,
unrehearsed—curling from darlings
beneath Sunday.

Ancient fish
nosed in blind circles through the grinning
tanks of shag & vacancy.

We crept as strays,
pocketing carnival cakes,
furred laundry quarters.

For farmhands in another raw
century through parted corn, our dead opened as children—

played *Lady Godiva*
for a soft grip of mane.



WILLIAM GODBEY

*California State University, Long Beach
MFA Poetry*

Paris is Burning

*“and then you think . . .
you’ve left a mark on the world
if you just get through it”
—Dorian Corey*

If only once, lift
a sequin painted
pomegranate dark
to a ballroom’s star.

Light will taste the edge
of your plastic jewel
then spill to the ground,
scattering away.

Yes, this is lonely.

In hungrier days,
the dream of eating
God was beautiful.

They’ll sweep your ashes
with a velvet dress,
as if they knew fire
was brilliant in heels.

Welcome to the Stoop

where we hunt genie wishes at the bottom
of bottles chugged empty, and fidget
scratcher-dust from our nails.

This is how to swallow evenings, a diet
of brown bag fries and butane flicks.

Light trickles from our eyes onto the steps
as our sockets hollow into potholes, weeds
sprout erratic on our jawlines. Rest a hand
to one of our chests—feel a heart's thump
choked by smoke and rebar: the pulse
below the boulevard. Hours spent here rattle
in bike spokes, rolled across broken leaves
and greased newspapers. We hum to make air
quiver, boys careless to think we could lasso
each night with barbed wire.

JACOB GRIFFIN HALL

University of Missouri
PhD English

Corporeal

Morning staggers through its passing.
A track of ice on glass like a mass of earth
in a cradle, hospital
gurneys and their sterile way of leaving
the body muted.
The sun stalls white-gowned
and tied with a needle's bite, counting
the ways in which the room
could be an empty skin.
Ways to abandon a new beginning.
Branches bend through light
catching air like electrostatic. In this quiet
I produce a paperclip, sculpt
the metal into the sun's wrist, close my eyes
methodically. Each willow glitches
as I project myself into myself, the dirt
below me like a bed with pressed white sheets.

ELLIE JACKSON

*The University of Edinburgh
MSc Creative Writing*

Portrait of a girl

based on the contents of her pocket

her eyes sit in their sockets
codeine pills in the packet

her nose is a paper point
a perfume sample
(the discontinued scent
of her mum at the kitchen sink)

her cheeks flush: a copper-change
tudor roses, penny-petals rattling
against each other

her lips are cut
like keys
chapped notches of lip-skin
waiting to click

BRIDGET A. LYONS

*Northern Arizona University
MFA Creative Writing*

Sliding into Scutes

So lucky am I (I think)
to march unsurveilled into the epoch of
leathery skin

where furrowed intentions and
age-spotted strategies can remain
unscrutinized.

I can lie
relieved in a bed of headaches
unfaked and blanket-treaties unnegotiated

knowing peace
will reign o'er me and my toilet seat—
sanitary, settled, simple.

It's just that
I can't get the sunscreen to reach the pale heart
of my back where the sun's
rays pierce and

the selfie stick won't extend
enough to watch me flounder into
that same trench
just beyond the stoop.

Tonight my legs sprawl
like splayed scissors on the sheets
threatening to cut off any future
merger of utensil drawers.

And just yesterday, I kept watch
for the mailman, needing more
muscle to move that chest of

dormant fishnets and sidelined silk.

In time,
skin molts to armor, then
armor to scales, and scales to
scutes.

I will make a handsome armadillo (think I).

CARSON MCCAIN

*University of Rochester
MA English*

Carrying

He's dozing on the living room rug, pink tongue peeking out like a petal dropping from a secret lotus growing behind his dog face. His eyes are not fully closed as if the effort to pull the lids shut is simply too much, and I can see slivers of cloudy blue cataracts glowing there at the jagged edges of his lashes, the milky galaxies of blindness that they are. The vet agrees he is spent. If I have him cremated, I can pay extra to have him burnt up alone and get just his ashes—no doggie-kitty dust, no amalgamation, twenty or thirty little bodies in the making. They promise me—just him. Then I can carry him—sealed in a silver locket, heaped in a blue-calico ginger jar. I can carry him a little longer like my old poems, like my shame. At Tuesday's appointment, my midwife asks if I will keep my placenta. When she asks this, I remember my first placenta scooped into a plastic container. It was the kind of container you might carry a quart of egg-drop soup in from Han Noodle Bar. It was flimsy and diaphanous with my dark soupy organ inside.

M. DANIEL MCCROTTY

*East Tennessee State University
MA English*

Full Day Blow

At some point in the shower I'll turn in
towards the house where mist
won't cloud my eyes and I only
hear the suck of the side door
in accordance with the draw and whine of May rains,
unsatisfied pulsings of faded winter,
and the warm reckless blow of wind against
my weakwalled trailer holding back the cold.
Does every relationship leave a scar, a stone crack
widened by the freeze-thaw of another season
in the hill county of a trail's meandering?
The weatherman says another storm arrives tonight
after dusk, a full day blow. Take the windchime down
from the porch and hide your trash can
behind the North side of the house so it don't spill
all over into the kudzu where I won't go catch it up.



ANA PUGATCH

*George Mason University
MFA Poetry*

Orange, Truly

I fed my brother
an orange nasturtium, and
my parents thought I wanted
to poison him.

Orange is inside the womb,
the color of broken bones.

Picasso's lesser known painting
Plate of Oranges was stolen,
but recently recovered.

Orange is the real color of
a robin's breast, the real color
of Mars. The robin
doesn't give a shit, but Mars

is hoping that in the future,
people will realize it's orange.

And even though it has no oceans
it truly has potential.



DANI PUTNEY

*Mississippi University for Women
MFA Poetry*

Imago

Team-building activity:
anonymously submit
your greatest fear.
I think about lying,
everybody loves
a predictable untruth.
Hail Mary, I scribble
the word on a scrap,
place folded sheet
into circulating box.

*Incest. Frown.
Who thought
it would be funny
to write such a thing?
Take this seriously.*
I nod, look down
at my hands—
 they were a boy's once, untouched—
hope nobody mistakes
tremors for guilt.

I listen to
heights, spiders, the ocean,
excuse myself, *my stomach is upset.*
I race to metallic home,
 sterile stalls, lineup of mirrors,
can't make it, vomit
 erupts,
for a second
I'm happy. Release.



Less bile means less
flesh, means I'm closer
to a skeletal physique.
If I shed myself,
I can be rid
of the memory
of his touch,
my pupa can realize
 imago.

My mirrored gaze
betrays me, reminds me
he lives within.
On cynical days I think
it's all Freudian,
his hands on me
the reason I have a daddy
complex, why fantasies of sweat
mixed with leather excite me.
 Mostly I have nightmares.
I can't remember
how it felt,
sometimes I don't remember
it happened.

*Mirror, please tell me
 I didn't like it.*

My Mom Was a Picture Bride

I fell into her stereotypically Asian dress
cherry blossoms Mandarin collar slit skirt
(later I'd hear cheongsam)

& my blood blossomed into a mango tree outside Manila:
each fruit a photograph
mailed to Golden Coast vets itching, *the good years*
buried in brown pussy

I was his bride
middle-aged face above me
wait-
ing to be fucked
womb filled with imperialism-turned-
globalization but I wanted it
more than future children know
more than parents who paid to place
my body in American ads

I tell others
her cheongsam connects me
to my heritage
though I mean
it makes me feel pretty
when I want to be bought
& if people are lucky I'll say
the dress matches
jade earrings my mom gave me
when discovering womanhood
beneath
a half-boy



HARMONY SCAGLIONE

*Southern Connecticut State University
MFA Poetry*

Dancing for Degas

In the right light I signify
everything the painter wants

to believe. The reach of my arm,
the numinous curve of my calf,

my ankles, wrapped in ribbons,
my feet, arched, en pointe,

reveal all he has hungered
to know. As I leap my grand jeté

and imagine a fleeting release from gravity,
so he dreams

he leaves the studio's glow
to enter the shadows

in my turning cheek, my scooping bones,
between my expert legs. He receives

my ritual of movement,
my practiced incantation; I become

his oblivion and fame,
the vibration in the strings

and the stillness overtakes them.
Later he paints me, again and again.

KIMBERLY ANN SOUTHWICK

*University of Louisiana at Lafayette
PhD English & Creative Writing*

A Cyclone of Her Own

my mother, a storm, the word *other* never
near the tip of her tongue, she could strip
a PC to its parts, lie on her back in the grass
changing the oil, stand up, still beautiful.
strumming the guitar, her quiet voice
now so often my own, she showed me labor
only sometimes means fruits divine.

my father, an orange, harder to peel. nothing
rhymes with him, like if she were the apple,
well, you know the cliché. his needy heart
& the art of the watch, the game, its tick, clock,
kick, no storm about him, sometimes rain though.

—

& why should we not obsess over the myth
of Eve when held true by so many—capital-T truth
declared a fiction, the gravity of Einstein, yet their book
reigns royal & right to so many. hail mother, box of lace,

the chords be with you. blessed are we
who come loudly, not the quiet eye of the storm
but its gale, hoping the neighbors can hear, amen.



TAYLOR SUPPLEE

*Columbia University
MFA Poetry*

A kind of wingage

Lost to a gamble of loaded dice
tossed on the table beside the spun
revolver, smoking—flightless, dwell
there, with the fatal wound
where a wren-fae will
emerge from the blackberry branch
of a clavicle, devastate to blue.



MCKENZIE TETER

University of North Carolina, Wilmington
MFA Creative Writing

Garlic Grew from the Ceiling

In my dreams I find myself in your kitchen.
My hands small. My face young. You, alive.
You carried our history like seeds stored
In fists and tucked into apron pockets.
Took them to the garden, opened your palms
And whispered *cresci*. Tomatoes climbed
The fence, peppers lined the paths, wine grapes grew
Between your toes, up your thighs, around your
Spine and out your fingertips in perfect purple.
In the kitchen, garlic grew from the ceiling—
Perfumed limbs offering ingredients.
You plucked a bulb, flaky and whole, pressed it
Into my open palm and whispered *cresci*
As the roots intertwined with my fingers.

D.S. WALDMAN

*San Diego State University
MFA Creative Writing*

Encanto

Fuck off, mockingbird.
 You've lost the air.
The fight for sound is over and
the concrete hills have unfurled their
golden banner of constant music
 dying slowly
 around you.
Why have you not left the lamppost?

There isn't breath enough to pierce
the black rubber blossoms
 fallen
 and whirring over us,
not enough listening
to warrant a revolution.

Air is compressed and spewed
through greased cylinders.
Pistons fire with Olympic authority.
And the ethers escape,
 dressed as wind,
 into the lungs of daylight.
So what is it you tell yourself
about sound and purpose? —

You know the voice you hear above
the hawthorn tree near the lamppost
isn't your voice. There is no voice
in this neighborhood.
 Only trauma
masked in
 metal-blue shadows.
Sullen mutts caught in the stillflow
tease of trucks forever passing
just out of reach.

You know behind each neighbor's face
the city dissolves into a muss
of stone-lidded eyes propped open
as if by decree. As if attention
is bought and sold at the speed of
silence,
prices set by stray cats,
black with yellow eyes,
shooting through alleyway steam.

You know. You steal.
You euphemism for nature.

Each white feather
that bands your wings in flight
is an insult to the pavement
bruised cold beneath you.

But in the thrall of muffled skies.

In the soft violence
of a distant overpass.

Inveterate stream of steel.

You specious promise of morning light —

Please excuse my anger;
the cement
around my mouth
is still setting.

Art

Jonathan Yacoub





Prospect

digital photography on
face-mounted acrylic
20 x 20"
2018



Briefcase

digital photography
2018





Drive

digital photography on
face-mounted acrylic
24 x 36"
2018





Vigor

digital photography on
face-mounted acrylic

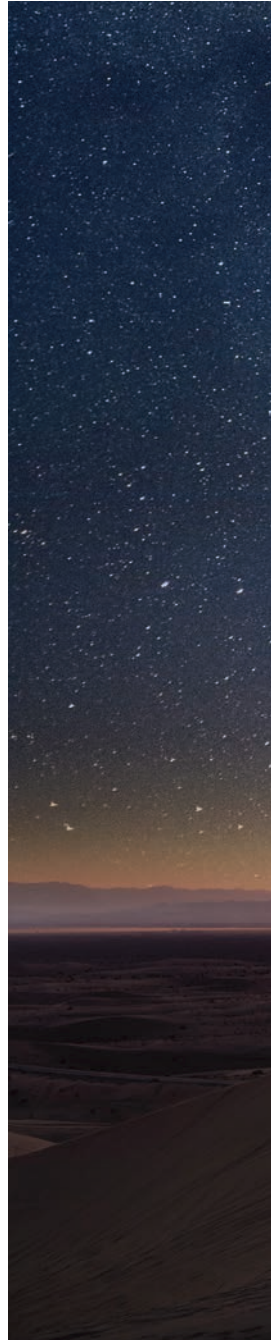
24 x 36"

2019



Odyssey

digital photography on
face-mounted acrylic
40 x 40"
2019







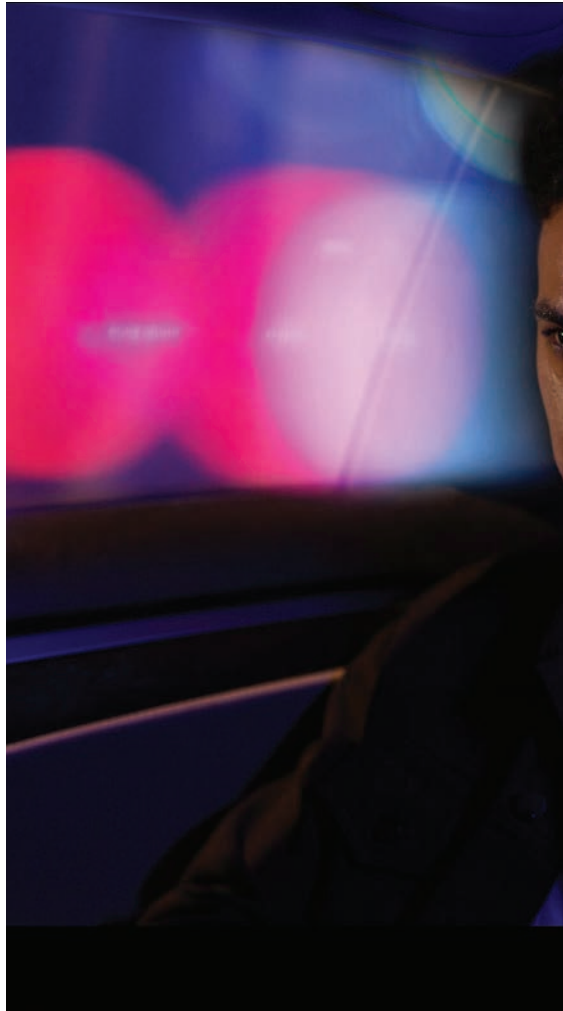


Zero Gravity

digital photography on
face-mounted acrylic

24 x 36"

2017

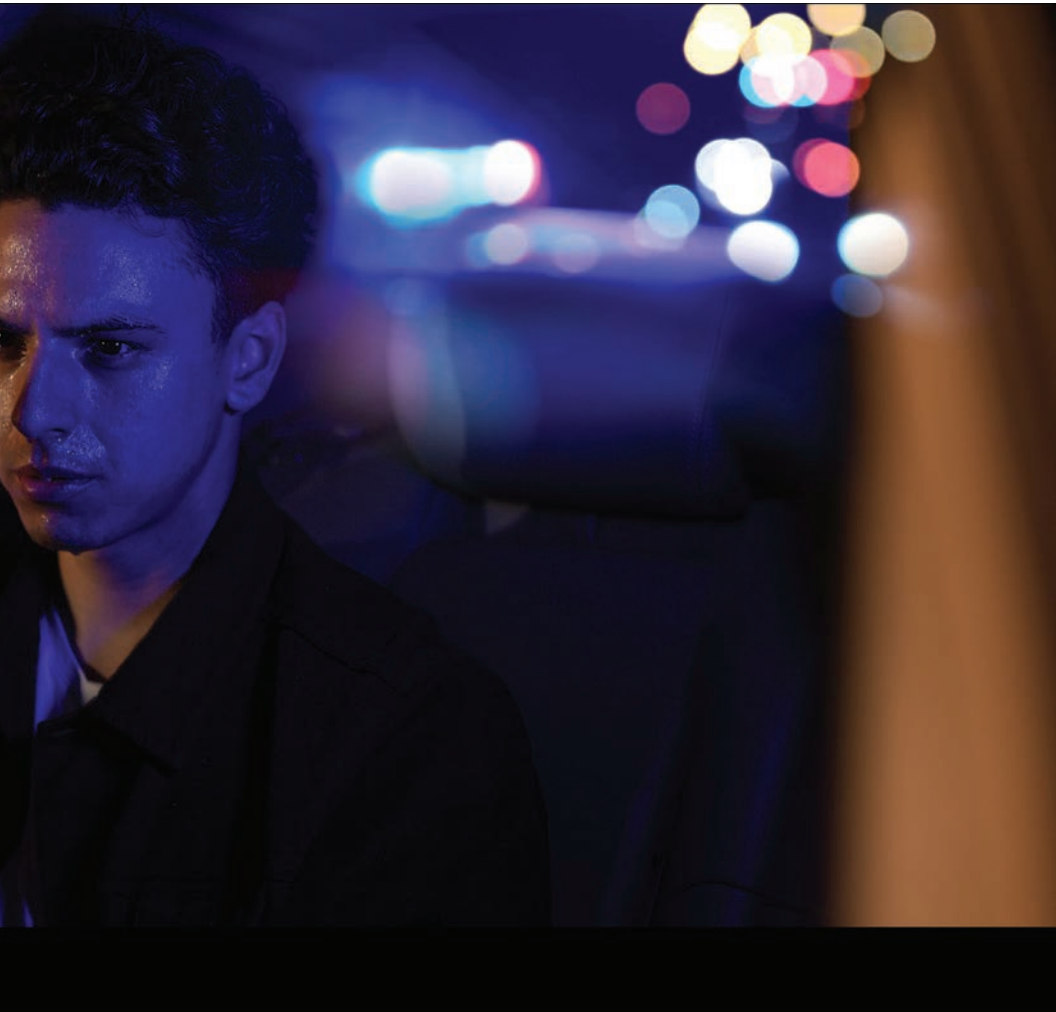


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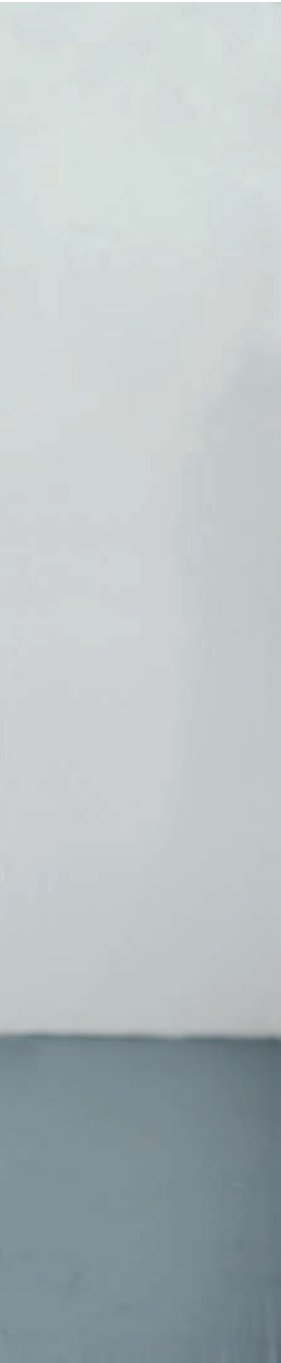
digital photography on
face-mounted acrylic

24 x 36"

2019







Call of the Void

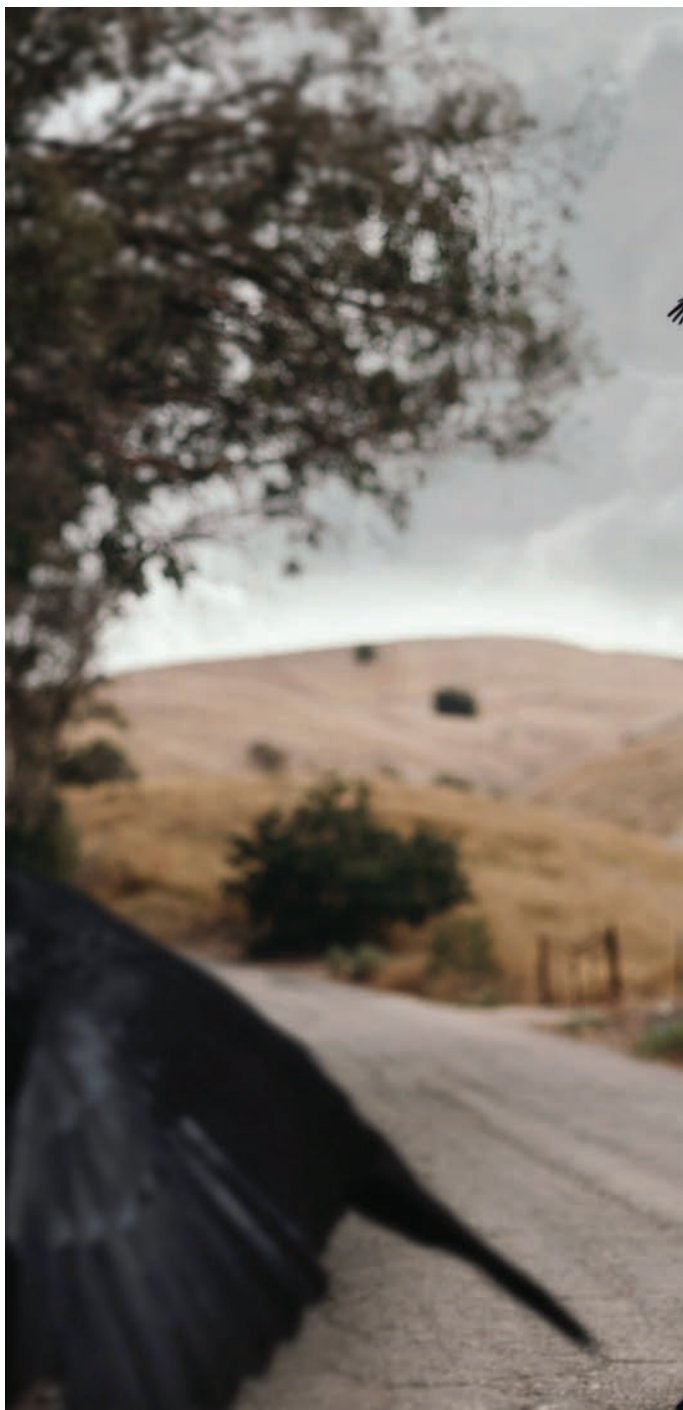
digital photography on paper

40 x 40"

2017

Calamity

digital photography
on canvas 24 x 36"
2017





Untitled

digital photography on
face-mounted acrylic
40 x 40"
2018





Interview

Luis J. Rodriguez



LUIS J. RODRIGUEZ has 15 books in poetry, children’s literature, fiction, and non-fiction. He’s best known for the bestselling memoir *Always Running: La Vida Loca: Gang Days in L.A.* (Atria Books, 2005). He is also founding editor of Tia Chucha Press and co-founder of Tia Chucha’s Centro Cultural & Bookstore in the San Fernando Valley section of Los Angeles. From 2014 to 2016, Luis served as Los Angeles’s official Poet Laureate. His latest poetry book is *Borrowed Bones*. (Curbstone Books/Northwestern University Press, 2016).

FOOTHILL

You served as Los Angeles’s Poet Laureate from 2014–2016 and your poems present a very real Los Angeles, exploring hidden lives, the working class, and criminal narratives. This is an underbelly far from the starry Hollywood that is a fallacious stereotype of Los Angeles. Your “Love Poem to Los Angeles” addresses this very well: “To truly love L.A. you have to see it / with different eyes, / askew perhaps, / beyond the fantasy-induced Hollywood spectacles.” You have elsewhere written that “the City of Angels is indeed a city of poets.” What is unique about the Los Angeles poetry scene, and how do you feel its culture interacts with poetry in general?

LUIS J. RODRIGUEZ

The Los Angeles metropolitan area is mostly made up of working-class people, immigrants, survival-seeking migrants, the desperate, lost, pushed out, and forgotten. The region sings with all these voices. Hollywood is fantasy ideas, fantasy people, mostly depictions of idealized white people (even if they are “bad” or “good”)—with people of color, gays, and more brought in as “others,” as caricatures, as scenery. Yes, sometimes amazing films, theater, and books are

released that get closer to the layers that make up this city, but the great output in movies and TV and much of theater is white, white, white. The poetry scene, on the other hand, reflects the multiplicity of voices, tongues, and realities in L.A. It's cross cultural and fluidly sexual, especially in the open mic venues, the spoken word havens, the high school slam poetry events, and what may get published in zines, chapbooks, the Internet. When I finished my two-year tenure as the city's Poet Laureate, I spoke to around 25,000 people directly in libraries, schools, festivals, conferences, bookstores, graduations. And millions more through English-and Spanish-language media. Poetry is burning bright, like elegant suns, in Los Angeles.

FOOTHILL

Some poets shy away from the word politics; your poetry does not. We tend to think that poetry needs to be political, and perhaps particularly in the current volatile state of America. How is your poetry political, and why do you think we should think about poetry as (or at least an opportunity for) a radical act of resistance?

RODRIGUEZ

First, poetry is transformative in all kinds of ways. Personal, familial, communal, and societal. Politics is about the power relations in any society (including inside a person, since we are the micro of the macro). These are real—and poetry is one genre that can touch upon any aspect of the real, including the political. Does poetry need to be political? Not necessarily. Although in one important sense all poems are political. If you ignore the glaring political dynamics of the day, that's a political decision. I choose not to do that. Now, should craft and rigorous attention be brought to bear in writing poems with politics or otherwise? I would say yes. But intention and direction—source and destination—are important here. Politics is organic, not static or imposed. I will always do poems with political chords to be played. Resistance comes in all forms—poetry being one of the most powerful.

FOOTHILL

More specifically, as a Mexican/Native American poet, it is unsurprising that your work engages with cross-cultural themes, and among them border crossings. With our current administration's policy that enacts gross (and sometimes deadly) injustices on migrants, we are hoping you can speak to the way that poetry can engage, specifically, with this conflict.

RODRIGUEZ

It's said we are dealing with conflicting narratives in the country. But I say we are dealing with lies vs. truths. Any narrative that does not reflect the truth, I'm against. Even if situations and characters are made up, stories can still embody the truth. My narrative, my truth, is that I'm not an immigrant. My mother came from the Rarámuri people of the Chihuahua state of Mexico. Also known as the Tarahumara, they are the largest tribe north of Mexico City in North America after the Diné (Navajo). They have been on this land for at least 10,000 years. The Raramuri are linguistically and culturally tied to the Hopi, Pueblo, Shoshone, Arapahoe, and many US first peoples. The border that crosses the Chihuahua desert has only been there since 1848. When my mother crossed the International Bridge from Ciudad Juarez, Mexico to El Paso, Texas, to have me born, as I've stated many times, she went from our land to our land. My poetry since I first began writing in the early 1970s has delved into this along with other issues, battles, and themes. The official narrative is that we're "Hispanics" (which derives from Spain), foreigners, aliens. My poetry, essays, stories, and talks make clear that our roots (even if this includes Spain) is widely varied, with the indigenous being the most profound and radical. That's one truth I'm compelled to bring forth as much as I can. It links me to the more than 500-year sovereignty struggles of Native peoples across any and all borders.

FOOTHILL

For four decades, you have been doing work in prisons, and incarceration and law-enforcement certainly have a presence in your poetry. Your poem "to the police officer who refused to sit in the same room as my son because he is a 'gang banger'" is just one example.

How do you see your poetry and your social justice work as overlapping?

RODRIGUEZ

The first poets that opened my eyes politically were Amiri Baraka (once known as Leroi Jones), Haki R. Madhubuti (formerly Don L. Lee), Sonia Sanchez, Jayne Cortez . . . mostly African Americans. They often addressed police violence, incarceration, and the captivity of mind, body, and spirit in the prison house of nations and peoples we call America. I also loved to read Adrienne Rich, Jack Hirschman, Allen Ginsberg, Jose Montoya, Raul Salinas, Pedro Pietri, Felipe Luciano, and many more. In the 1960s and 1970s, I listened to the Last Poets and the Watts Prophets. When I discovered the Chilean revolutionary poet Pablo Neruda, I discovered myself. I lived in barrios under police occupation, restricted covenants in housing, bad schools, and the most exploitative jobs. So, my first words—even when I didn't know they were poems—cried out against these injustices. What pulled me out of the madness of heroin, gang violence, and jails was the activism of that time. I became part of the radical wing of the Chicano Movement, the working-class conscious wing. What I wrote and spoke, even poems, arose from my new visions and aims. My work in prisons, jails, and juvenile lockups over the past 40 years is linked to these visions. I'm an abolitionist—it's time to get rid of mass incarceration. There are time-honored ways to deal with all manner of trouble in people not predicated on punishment that we should re-imagine and renew for the times we're in.

FOOTHILL

On top of all of this, you founded the fantastic Tia Chucha Press (TCP). What was the impetus for creating a new publishing space when you did, and how has it grown and/or changed since its founding over 30 years ago?

RODRIGUEZ

Few publishers were publishing the verses and voices I was interested in. Living in Chicago at the time, I became active in the slam poetry born there. This movement brought a flair, a stance, a highly politi-

cal stream of poetry that had kin in conscious hip-hop, beat poetry, and the griot traditions of Africa (and similar traditions among all peoples). I created Tia Chucha Press first to publish my first poetry book. The book was beautifully designed by my friend Jane Brunette, a Menominee/French/German writer and book designer, who has been designing Tia Chucha Press ever since, now for 30 years. Soon other Chicago poets wanted their own books. This expanded to writers from all over the United States—not just Chicano and Puerto Rican, but Blacks, Asian, Native Americans, Italian American, Irish American, queer, straight . . . you name it. In 1991, TCP became the publishing wing of Chicago's Guild Literary Complex, the leading literary arts organization in the Midwest (which I also helped found). Northwestern University Press became our national distributor through the efforts of people like poet/professor Reginald Gibbons, who was on our editorial board. When I returned to Los Angeles in the year 2000—and helped create Tia Chucha's Cultural Center & Bookstore a year later—I continued to be TCP's editor. In 2005 the press became the publishing wing of our San Fernando Valley-based center. Now we've published over 70 poetry collections, anthologies, chapbooks, and a CD. Our authors have gone on to win a National Book Award, Pulitzer Prize nominations, Jackson Poetry Prizes, Whiting Writers Fellowships, Lannan Poetry Fellowships, a Kingsley Tufts Poetry Prize, and more. This is literature that tries to fill in the immense gaps within US letters.

FOOTHILL

"Don't Read That Poem!" rather explicitly addresses something we think a lot about at *Foothill*: does a poem make you uncomfortable and if so, why? In this poem, you've managed to navigate both the heart-wrenching reaction of hearing a painful truth and the—what we think is somewhat underrepresented—desire to escape the pain that this particular kind of poetry can inflict: "Don't read that poem! / The one that entices me / to crawl under her skin, / to be her heartbeat . . . But I can't leave. I need to taste the salt of her soliloquy, / to be drunk with the sobriety / of her verse quaking beneath my eyelids." What work do you think these kinds of troubling poems do in the contemporary poetry scene, and how does it differentiate itself from a more classical, traditional archetype?

RODRIGUEZ

Poetry is pleasant. It's ecstatic. It also jars you. Awakens you. Even enrages you. And a lot of poetry can bore you. "Don't Read That Poem!" is about compliantly sitting in a bar on an open mic night, not moved much by who's on the stage, and how when one least expects this, a poet reads something that reaches deep inside you and won't let go. Doesn't happen all the time, but you have to be present in mind and soul to take this in when it does. With all our diversity, what unites us, among many things, is loss and the capacity to heal. Poetry that swims in these seas, bringing out the blood and verve only language can do is what I hunger for.

FOOTHILL

Louise Erdich has said "I write to save my life. If you are a writer, that will be true. Writing has saved my life." We know that you've had life-changing (and saving) experiences with poetry. What were they and how have they changed you?

RODRIGUEZ

In my teens—even in jails, homeless spots, or the dankness of a dark room without running water or heat—words became feed and fuel. My earliest scribbles were weak, unformed, without much music. But they became seeds for what later sprung out of me in more mature expressions. The first time I heard poetry read or performed, I was 18 in Berkeley, CA, strung out, trying to find a way to leave the café I was in to score. However, the three poets who read that night—Jose Montoya, David Henderson, and Pedro Pietri—were the leading spoken word artists of the day. When they graced the stage, one after the other, they cast a spell on me that has never left. I wanted to know more about this poetry thing. In a couple of years, I was done with drugs, violence, and jails. In five years more, I embarked on a writing career that included poetry as well as journalism and other genres. If poetry ever saved a life, here I stand.

FOOTHILL

In addition to writing poetry, you also write non-fiction, fiction, journalism, and children's books! Does your process change with each genre you approach? Are there different challenges associated with each?

RODRIGUEZ

The key dynamics of every genre should be respected. For example, there may be narrative in a poem, but the chief energies in poetry are language and voice. There may be poetry in a novel, but the driving force is story. Of course, plays and films can have both, but you have to move everything through dialogue, action, character tensions, and crisis. What can be seen and heard. I write now with intention—I'm clearer now about what I'm trying to do with a piece of writing. I've even made prose out of poems and poetry out of my prose. Each genre has its own challenges and a good writer should know what these are and meet them—even to subvert them.

FOOTHILL

The question we always have to ask: What advice do you have for emerging poets?

RODRIGUEZ

It's similar to what any good writer or teacher of writing would say: Read as much as you can; write as much as you can (it's a practice, like any art); and whatever happens don't give up. Of course, get the skills, learn the craft, but always remember to put your own imprint, your own character and stamp, on whatever you do so anyone could say, "Only you could have written this!"

FOOTHILL

Finally, what are you working on now, and what can we look forward to from you in the future?

RODRIGUEZ

I've recently finished my first speculative fiction story for an upcoming anthology of Los Angeles writings in that genre that I'm

excited about. I've also finished adapting my best-selling memoir *Always Running* into a fully staged play with Hector Rodriguez (no relation) who co-wrote and directed the play. Casa 0101 Theater in Boyle Heights, Los Angeles, has scheduled a six-week run of the play for the fall of 2019. I'm also working on a handbook for teaching poetry in prisons for the New York City-based PEN organization. And, most importantly, I have a book of essays to be released in early 2020 from Seven Stories Press in New York entitled *From Our Land to Our Land*. I turned 65 years old in 2019. I'm not about to retire—I'm going to re-fire!

Contributors

JANAN ALEXANDRA is a Lebanese-American poet in her second year at Indiana University. Born in Nicosia, Cyprus, Janan has spent her life creating home in many different places—a central theme and preoccupation of her work. Janan is the recipient of fellowships from the Martha's Vineyard Institute for Creative Writing, the Provincetown Fine Arts Work Center, and the Bucknell Seminar for Younger Poets. She currently works as associate director of the IU Writers' Conference. You can find her work in *Ploughshares*; the *Adroit Journal*; *Mizna: Prose, Poetry and Art Exploring Arab-America*; *Cosmonauts Avenue*; and *Rusted Radishes*, a literary journal coming out of Beirut, Lebanon.

JAI HAMID BASHIR is a Pakistani-American poet and ecologist from Salt Lake City, Utah. She currently is an MFA candidate at Columbia University in the city of New York. Her work has appeared through *Palette Poetry*, the Asian American Writer's Workshop, the Academy of American Poets, *Sierra Magazine*, and others.

TARA FIETZ is a graduate student at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland, working on a book of poetry that explores bodies—the minutia, the nitty gritty, and what makes people tick. Her poems tend to meander through childhood memories, historical events, and mythologies, while trying to uncover meaning in a life lived with trauma. Tara's work has been published previously in a few Canadian journals. She enjoys Spanish red wine and is somewhat afraid of star-nosed moles.

MITCHELL GLAZIER was born in Martinsburg, West Virginia in 1995. His poetry has appeared in *Washington Square*, *Radar*, *Interim*, and elsewhere. He is an MFA candidate in poetry at Columbia University and a poetry editor at *American Chordata*.

WILLIAM GODBEY is completing his MFA in creative writing at California State University, Long Beach. He is the current editor-in-chief of *Rip Rap Literary Magazine*. His work has appeared in the *Chiron Review*, *Misfit Magazine*, and on his mother's refrigerator. He is 24 years old.

JACOB GRIFFIN HALL was raised outside of Atlanta, Georgia and is currently a PhD student in English at the University of Missouri. In the past he has worked as the assistant poetry editor for the *Mid-American Review*, and he now works as audio editor for the *Missouri Review*. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *New South*, the *Carolina Quarterly*, *Split Rock Review*, *Stirring*, *Poetry South*, *Santa Ana River Review*, and elsewhere.

ELLIE JACKSON is from Durham in the North East of England. She has recently graduated from University of Cambridge having studied English and is currently studying for an MSc in creative writing at The University of Edinburgh. She has published poetry in student magazines.

BRIDGET A. LYONS recently earned her MFA in creative writing at Northern Arizona University while also working as an editor and composition instructor. She also graduated from Harvard University and has had previous lives as a middle school teacher, wilderness guide, yoga instructor, energy bar maker, and graphic designer. Bridget's essays have been published by *Catamaran*, *Hawk and Handsaw*, *Atticus Review*, *Wanderlust*, *1888 Center*, and *Elephant Journal*. This is her first published poem.

CARSON MCCAIN is a graduate student at the University of Rochester, where she also teaches. Her creative and intellectual interests include prose poetry, the novella, horror, and feminism. She is the recipient of the Edward Vickers Academy of American Poets Award, and she holds a BA from Valdosta State University.

M. DANIEL MCCROTTY lives in Johnson City, Tennessee. Much of his work finds influence from his appreciation of the hills and lakes of the surrounding region, due to their natural beauty and latent harshness. He enjoys fly fishing and rock climbing throughout the Southeast and maintaining a vegetable garden. His work has been published or upcoming in *Still: The Journal*, *Jelly Bucket*, the *Red Mud Review* and the *Mildred Haun Review*.

ANA PUGATCH is an MFA student studying poetry at George Mason University, where she leads workshops for multilingual writers and reads for *Phoebe Journal*. She has lived in London, Shanghai, Bangkok, New York City, and Bavaria. She has a bachelor's degree in English from Skidmore College, and a master's degree in education from Harvard. Her work was recently featured in publications such as the *Esthetic Apostle*, *Cagibi*, and *Remington Review*, among others.

DANI PUTNEY is a queer, non-binary, Asian American poet exploring the West. Their poetry most recently appears or is forthcoming in Cathexis Northwest Press, the *Chaffin Journal*, *Juke Joint Magazine*, *Mura*, and *trampset*, among other publications. Presently, they're infiltrating a small conservative town in the middle of the Nevada desert.

HARMONY SCAGLIONE is a pre-apocalypse poet who writes to squeeze meaning out of life. A veteran traveler, she's learned that everything she sees is so much less than all there is; she's trying to go everywhere, to experience everything, before time runs out. She has taught English in Japan and Tanzania, and now makes a living as a high school language arts instructor. In addition to pursuing her MFA at Southern Connecticut State University, she participates in local environmental groups, and is the current president of her local land trust.

KIMBERLY ANN SOUTHWICK is the founder and editor in chief of the literary arts journal *Gigantic Sequins*, which has been in print for over ten years. She has two poetry chapbooks, including *Efs & Veas* (Hyacinth Girl Press, 2015). *Orchid Alpha*, her current manuscript, has been a finalist for the 2018 Moon City Press Prize in Poetry, Elixir Press's 2019 Antivenom Poetry Award, and for both Mason Jar Press's and Milk + Cake's recent open reading periods, as well as a semi-finalist for the 2019 Perugia Press Prize. Kimberly lives in Breaux Bridge, Louisiana, and is a PhD candidate in English and creative writing at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. She tweets at @kimannjosouth; visit her at kimberlyannsouthwick.com for more.

TAYLOR SUPPLEE is a gay poet from the Midwest earning his MFA from Columbia University where he serves as the Lucie Brock-Broido Teaching Fellow. A finalist for the 92Y Discovery Award in Poetry in 2019, his poems are forthcoming and have appeared in *Hotel Amerika*, *Midwestern Gothic*, the *Moth*, *Rattle*, *SLAB*, *Quiddity*, and elsewhere. He is the managing editor of poetry for *American Chordata* and lives in Brooklyn, New York.

MCKENZIE TETER is an MFA candidate at the University of North Carolina, Wilmington. Prior to her time at UNCW, McKenzie received her BA in English and Creative Writing from Queens University of Charlotte. She was born and raised in Youngstown, Ohio and often uses the traditions and values of the community and her family as inspiration for her work. Her other publications include two poems in *Her Heart Poetry's* annual collection, a fiction piece in *Italian American Review*, three poems in *Voice of Eve Magazine*, and most recently, two poems featured in *Capulet Magazine*.

D.S. WALDMAN is a writer based in San Diego, California. Finalist for the 2019 New Writers Story Prize, his work has been selected to appear in the *San Diego Poetry Annual* and has most recently appeared in *Kissing Dynamite* and the *Tulip Tree Review*. He holds a BA from Middlebury College and is currently enrolled in the MFA program at San Diego State University.

JONATHAN YACOUB is an Egyptian American artist who uses digital photography as a medium for his work. His fantastical worlds form a nuanced duality that tip-toe the threshold of existence and artifice; ultimately inviting the viewer to surrender themselves to the suspension of disbelief. Yacoub's works provide the mundane with a hyper-reality. There's a relationship of metaphysical aspects of time, space, and existence. His works treat space with a deep human intimacy by rendering the most ephemeral concepts and elevating them. Jonathan received his MFA from Claremont Graduate University in 2019.

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Directed by students at Claremont Graduate University, *Foothill Poetry Journal* is an annual print and online publication that features the work of emerging poets enrolled in graduate programs around the globe. To listen to some of the poets performing their work, visit cgu.edu/foothill.



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