

a fine line

TE RŌPŪ TOIKUPU O AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND POETRY SOCIETY



RONGONUI CELEBRITY

Featured Poet
Selina Tusitala Marsh

Featured Interview
Bill Manhire

Cover Artist
Lester Hall

a fine line

The Magazine of the
Te Rōpū Toikupu O Aotearoa
New Zealand Poetry Society

ISSN 1177-6544 (print)
ISSN 1178-3931 (digital)

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Quotation of the season

“Even when writing your own poems, you need to talk to people; you need to magpie around, getting words and things. I’m very against the celebrity culture that wants to say: ‘this is a genius, this is one person who has done something brilliant.’ There are always a hundred people in the background who have helped to make it.” — Alice Oswald

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Editorial



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GAIL INGRAM

Celebrity culture – I’m guessing most of you loathe it; I mean, celebrity and poet is a paradox, isn’t it? Yet, in this age of the social media, even poets become celebs overnight; and with celebrity comes inequity, so isn’t it our job as poets to call it out? Luckily many of you did, starting with our wonderful cover artist, **Lester Hall** – who playfully juxtaposes ‘cool’ with colour and humour. Lester would like to dedicate his cover art to one of his friends, and ours too, Geoff Cochrane. Lester writes:

To Geoff,
Remember the launch of Images Of Midnight City at the Murphy's in Karori Geoffrey! An occasion on which to celebrate you although we never really needed one, your hacking laugh and ever so naughty smile were such company. Most mortals never even try, so well done for staying your course and God bless you in whatever realm lucky enough to have you now, Lester.

Another well-known and beloved poet, **Selina Tusitala Marsh**, is our featured writer. She literally rubs shoulders with both local and international celebrity, and delights with her observations.

If we ever did have a celebrity poet, surely it would be **Bill Manhire** – Aotearoa’s first Poet Laureate and founder of *that* school in Wellington. I was super lucky to interview him and find out who his favourite celebrity is; his favourite word too. Go on, read all about it – I know you want to!

Wonderfully, the theme attracted some new contributors to *a fine line* – **Steve Herbert**, **Stephanie Cullen**, **Bronwyn Bryant**, along with **Rachel Miller** and **Necia Anne Zimmerman**, who lit up the mag with their fine art – a warm welcome to you. And thank you to all who submitted – my favourite part of the job is reading your sparkly creations. And remember if you didn’t make it this time, please try again because so many of you came so close.

If our poets are the celebs, then our reviewers are the reporters, finding the best books for you. We have the marvellous **Sarah Scott** reviewing *A garden is a long time* by **Jenny Bornholdt** and **Annemarie Hope-Cross**. And **Holly H. Bercusson** returns, reviewing *On elephant’s shoulders*, by **Sudha Rao**.

Tēnā koe for filling out our recent NZPS survey. We have many exciting developments, including a guest editor for our next Summer Edition and our website release. Sadly, this edition is **Erica Stretton**’s last as Reviews Editor. Erica will be sorely missed and we thank her for all the work she’s put into the role to make it what it is. Lastly, we warmly invite you to our AGM on 23 May at 6.30pm by Zoom. Our president, **Robert Sullivan** will give his address and our wonderful guest poet, **Cadence Chung**, will perform her poetry.

Our next issue is the Winter Student Edition, open theme. Secondary and tertiary students, please submit for the opportunity to be selected as our next Featured Poet as well as winning annual subscriptions to both NZPS and NZSA. Everyone, including students, please send up to four poems (40 lines max) and/or up to four haiku, plus artwork by 10 June 2024 to Gail Ingram, editor@poetrysociety.org.nz.

But for now, enjoy a little bit of *a fine line* doing fame.



Destiny | watercolour – Necia Anne Zimmerman

SELINA TUSITALA MARSH

Guys Like Gauguin

I
thanks Bougainville
for desiring em young
so guys like Gauguin could dream
and dream
then take his syphilitic body
downstream to the tropics
to test his artistic hypothesis
about how the uncivilised
ripen like paw paw
are best slightly raw
delectably firm
dangling like golden prepubescent buds
seeding nymphomania
for guys like Gauguin

II
thanks Balboa
for crossing the Isthmus
of Panama in 1513
and pronouncing our ocean
the South Seas
hey thanks, Vasco
for making us
your underbelly
the occidental opposite of all

your nightmares your waking dreams
inversion of all your laws
your darkest fantasies

thanks for seeing the earth as a body
the North, its head
full of rationality
reasoned seasons
of meaning
cultivated gardens
of consciousness
sown in masculine
orderly fashion
a high evolution
toward the light

thanks for making the South
an erogenous zone
corporeal and sexual
emotive and natural
waiting in the shadows
of dark feminine instinct
populated by the Africas
the Orient, the Americas
and now us

— from *Fast Talking PI*, Auckland University Press, 2009

On Breaking Up with Captain Cook on Our 250th Anniversary

Dear Jimmy,

It's not you, it's me.

Well,
maybe it is you.

We've both changed.

When I first met you
you *were* my change.
Well, your ride
the Endeavour
was anyway
on my 50-cent coin.

Your handsome face
was plastered everywhere.

On money
on stamps
on all my world maps.

You were so Christian
you were second to Jesus
and both of you
came to save us.

But I've changed.

We need to see other people
other perspectives
other world views.

We've grown apart.

I need space.

We're just at different points
in our lives —
compass points
that is.

I need to find myself
and I can't do that with you
hanging around all the time.

Posters, book covers, tea cozies
every year, every anniversary.

You're a legend.

I don't know the real you
(your wife did burn all your personal papers
but that's beside the point.)

I don't think you've ever really seen me.
You're too wrapped up in discovery.

I'm sorry
but there just isn't room
in my life
for the two of you right now:
you and your drama
your possessive colonising Empire.

We're worlds apart.

I just don't want to be in a thing right now.

Besides, my friends don't like you.
And I can't break up with them so...

Kingly Korero

an exchange that took place on November 2019, Government House, Epsom

I met King Charles
When he was still Prince

The palms of his hands
Squished like mince

Into thick skinned
Tanned fingers

Four swarthy sausages
Sizzling in a pan

I was kick-boxing then
He said 'You don't really kick?'

I replied 'Yes I do, Your Highness.
The head's the best bit.'

He smiled and took my gift
Fast Talking PI

He fastly changed the topic
I'm still not sure why.

Frida, the Believer

Frida was a believer
in the love of green parakeets,
bougainvillea, tulips, dahlias,
embroidered on velvet sheets.

Gardenia crowns festoon her hair,
furious fuchsia, outrageous pinks,
sunlit magnolias, fecund foliage,
Mexico's freedom unleashed.

Other crowns entwine her hair
bougainvillea thorns pierce her neck
a spider monkey, a cat, a hummingbird
pick, purr, peck.

Frida was a bleeder
from the wayward vine of her spine
to the fire in her totem fingertips
laid across her body supine

a mirror propped up by her bed
a paintbrush between her lips
pencil sketches over her breasts
painting Revolution's corset.

Frida was a feeder
sucking life's marrow dry,
resplendent bride in christening gown
married to pain and the Artist's Eye.

Her insatiable appetite
made her see within her own face
the aborted dreams of a pierced saint
wrapped in silk, cotton, and lace.

Frida was Two Fridas:
Night Day Earth Sky Moon Sun.
She wore a blood red rebozo
wrapping babies, sometimes guns.

The infinite eyes of Olmeca
stare out from her upheld palm,
breastplate of embroidered olin
fissure her earthquaking charm.

The hairless, wild Itzcuintli
patters by her side
Aztec guardian of the underworld
loyal and lynx-eyed.

Frida was Frida and Frida
a mirror turned upon itself
untamed wild braids unfurl the way
stalking death with stealth.

Le Casa Azul crammed with the beauty
of pre-Columbian selves
60,000 objects bedeck
the blue house walls and shelves.

Frida's now a million Fridas
on pens and cushions and hats
books and clocks and ceramic cups
crucifixes and tops and mats.

The religion formed around Frida
has eclipsed the husbandly sun
a ring upon each finger
encircles vows never undone.

For Frida had a fever
that burned for 40 years
pencils, charcoals, brushes
could not draw away her tears.

But by being all her true selves
almond eyes piercing the frame
we too can wear gardenia crowns
as we paint our lips with her name.

– first published by *The Spinoff*, *The Friday Poem* 13-01-2023

Tusiata Avia Stole My Boyfriend

I saw him first
Well, he saw me
and greeted me like an old flame
in the Green room at the Writers Festival
and she, just sat, open-mouthed, perfectly still in her ruffled
red feathers, oogling his celebrity-self openly fan-girling me. He said
his mother was in love with me, most likely displaced affection, after all
we were both taken. So, when I was asked who I'd like to interview me, he,
the only white man in Aotearoa to 'get' Pasifika women-activist-goddess-global diva-poets,
was first on my list. But then I discovered she had taken him, for her own interview spotlight
and that their conversation was intimate and rigourous and ground-swelling and crowd-
groaning and rhythmically politically and poetically pleasing and got a standing ovation,
including by Mr Himself, I just thought well, that's that then. I don't do seconds. Damn you
John Campbell! Damn you.

Luckily
there ain't no seconds
when it comes to best friends.

Featured Interview



Rachel Miller – *Cocktails at the Nightjar Bar* | Mixed-media collage drawing

Bill Manhire

a fine line interviews one of our most celebrated poets

Gail Ingram (GI):

Thank you for talking to us. It's a delight and wonderfully apt to be able to feature you in our "celebrity" issue of a fine line. You are certainly one of Aotearoa's most well-known and beloved poets, our inaugural poet laureate, an editor and a teacher. When did you first consider yourself a poet?

Bill Manhire (BM):

Well, I wrote a little rhyming poem when I was 7, but writing poems only began to feel like something I wanted, even needed, to do when I was 16 or 17. I wrote a lot back then. It seems such hubris, though, to actually *call* yourself a poet, and I didn't really use the word poet until I'd published several books. And even then, it was only on the Electoral Role. Lord knows why, given that the Electoral Role is one of those official listings that nobody actually reads. But even so, it felt like a big threshold moment, making a big claim like that in a theoretically public, official space.

GI:

If you had to choose a favourite book of the fifteen original collections you've written, which one would you choose? . . . and why?

BM:

I'd have to say *Lifted*, which was mostly written in Menton in 2004 when I had the Katherine Mansfield Fellowship. Individually, the poems are pretty strong, but they also reinforce and enhance each other without ever feeling forced. This was the first time I'd had the opportunity to do nothing but write poems. Each day I would wake up and wonder whether I would start something new, or try to carry on with the last day's work, or go back and edit things I'd written a couple of weeks earlier. It was an amazing six months for me as a writer,

though I'm not sure that I recognised that at the time. That said, I think a more recent book, *Some Things to Place in a Coffin*, would run *Lifted* pretty close.

'It seems such hubris, though, to actually call yourself a poet.'

GI:

Where do you get your best ideas?

BM:

Leonard Cohen says that if he knew where the good songs came from, he'd go there more often – and that seems to be the only true answer. Things like that remain mysterious. You often end up writing a poem that's entirely different from the one you had in mind. I once stayed in a Copenhagen hotel that had an Emergency sign on the wall: "The fire alarm sound is given as a howling sound. Do not use the lift." I've always liked found poems, and I wrote this down, thinking I might make something entertaining out of it. But I ended up writing a poem called "Hotel Emergencies" – it's one of the *Lifted* poems – which is not remotely entertaining. I realised later that it came largely out of the horror-world of the Iraq war, but it could easily be a response to what's been happening much more recently in Gaza.

Hotel Emergencies

The fire alarm sound: is given as a howling sound. Do not use the lifts. The optimism sound: is given as the sound of a man brushing his teeth. Do not go to bed. The respectability sound: is given as a familiar honking sound. Do not run, do not sing. The dearly-departed sound: is given as a rumble in the bones. Do not enter the coffin. The afterlife sound: is given as the music of the spheres. It will not reconstruct. The bordello sound: is given as a small child screaming. Do not turn on the light. The accident sound: is given as an ambulance sound. You can hear it coming closer, do not crowd the footpaths. The execution sound: is given as the sound of prayer. Oh be cautious, do not stand too near

or you will surely hear: the machinegun sound, the weeping mother sound, the agony sound, the dying child sound: whose voice is already drowned by the approaching helicopter sound: which is given as the dead flower sound, the warlord sound, the hunting and fleeing and clattering sound, the amputation sound, the bloodbath sound, the sound of the President quietly addressing his dinner; now he places his knife and fork together (a polite and tidy sound) before addressing the nation

and making a just and necessary war sound: which is given as a freedom sound (do not cherish memory): which is given as a security sound: which is given as a prisoner sound: which is given again as a war sound: which is a torture sound and a watchtower sound and a firing sound: which is given as a Timor sound: which is given as a decapitation sound (do not think you will not gasp tomorrow): which is given as a Darfur sound: which is given as a Dachau sound: which is given as a dry river-bed sound, as a wind in the poplars sound: which is given again as an angry god sound:

which is here as a Muslim sound: which is here as a Christian sound: which is here as a Jewish sound: which is here as a merciful god sound: which is here as a praying sound; which is here as a kneeling sound: which is here as a scripture sound: which is here as a black-wing sound: as a dark-cloud sound: as a black-ash sound: which is given as a howling sound: which is given as a fire alarm sound:

which is given late at night, calling you from your bed (do not use the lifts): which is given as a burning sound, no, as a human sound, as a heartbeat sound: which is given as a sound beyond sound: which is given as the sound of many weeping: which is given as an entirely familiar sound, a sound like no other, up there high in the smoke above the stars

from *Lifted* (VUP 2005)

GI:

What is your process? Do you write every day? Do you use the exercises from The Exercise Book (VUP 2011) you were a co-editor for (and we highly recommend!)?

BM:

I try to write every day but ... well, you know. I like to follow phrases that work for me musically, rather than write “about” something. But sometimes I’ve enjoyed writing poems “on commission” – like “Erebus Voices”, which I was asked to write for Sir Edmund Hillary to read at a commemorative service in Antarctica for the victims of the Erebus disaster. A very specific commission like that isn’t so far from the writing suggestions in *The Exercise Book*. You’re being pushed sideways from, even beyond, your predictable self, and with luck you rise above your routine assumptions about language and experience.

‘Read lots of other poets. Don’t be ashamed of imitating the poets you love.’

GI:

And as a teacher that has influenced so many of our wonderful poets, what top tips would you give to our new-poet members about writing ... and about the job of being a poet?

BM:

Don’t preach, don’t talk down to the reader. Let the poem find out what it wants to be. Be willing to be surprised. Remember that a poem is made out of words, and let them lead you to what the poem wants to say. Risk a bit of rhyme, especially if it pushes you off balance. Read lots of other poets. Don’t be ashamed of imitating the poets you love. Children learn to speak by

copying the adult voices around them, and learning to write imaginatively involves the same imitative process. Eventually – surprise! – you sound like yourself.

GI:

Why do you think poetry is important?

BM:

For the same reasons music is important.

GI:

What’s something you’ve learnt recently?

BM:

Not so much learning as realising: I was born in a place people called New Zealand, and I’ll die in a place most inhabitants call Aotearoa New Zealand, or – depending how long I stick around – Aotearoa. There’s something oddly satisfying about that.

GI:

And rather profound. What projects have you in the pipeline – poetry or otherwise?

BM:

The “I” in my poems is sometimes me, but quite often the speaker is imagined. I’ve been writing poems recently in the voice of the sort of old bloke who used to drive me crazy when I was a kid. I grew up in country pubs, so I guess I’m thinking of people who had had a few drinks and were pretty unedited in their opinions. Maybe the sort of characters who used to turn up in Mainland Cheese advertisements. They thought they knew best about everything – hair, music, the general state of the world. I imagined I was taking long overdue revenge when I started, but the process has made me develop a bit of sympathy for them. Maybe this is because I’m now – at least in years – one of those old blokes myself.

The End of the World

Some people think the end of the world is coming,
they think they know everything but they don't.
Yesterday I got a thing in the mail
that says hundreds of gorgeous women
are waiting to chat with me.
I don't think I'll bother this time round.
The electric toaster keeps me going,
it can do six pieces at once.

GI:

Thank you for "The End of the World" which of course in classic Bill Manhire style, is not as simple as it seems.

What's a question you wish an interviewer would ask but never has? And what's the answer?

BM:

Q: Why do you hate the word "fulsome"?

A: Because most people who use it don't know what it means.

GI: *And because this is the celebrity issue, we couldn't resist a pop quiz:*

GI: *Favourite celebrity?*

BM: Bob Dylan – partly because he's so bad at being a celeb.

GI: *The weirdest place you've read a poem?*

BM: Maybe a penguin colony in Antarctica. Or on board the Cutty Sark.

GI: *What keeps you up at night?*

BM: Deadlines, though I don't have many of those these days.

GI: *A favourite word?*

BM: Guddle.

GI: *Paper, scissors or rock?*

BM: Manhire is a Cornish name, and a variant of the word menhir, so I'm pretty much obliged to say rock.

GI: *Tēnā koe, Bill, lovely to korero.*



Rachel Miller – *Eve's Hollywood* | Mixed-media collage drawing

Robert Rinehart

Tasting the sweetgrass

The colts feel
it, the power & play
of shoots
green, & sweetened,
like arousal
come midmorning.

In the sweetgrass, you lark,
prance & dance, leap
& bound, lift &
whinny. So much
behaviour is thus expected,
meant as hunger,
a test of soul.

It's the taste of the moon,
the gentle pull from night,
pawing at the earth, like
tidal surges feeding
soil, seasoning the grass. It's
rain, its sugary sweet
charming away any bitter.

It only lasts
an instant – two
evenings & a day –
at best. After, munching
memories, the mares gaze
skyward, their eyes
glazed, recalling.
Cavorting in their base
but placid thoughts.

I wonder, while twiddling
my pen, collecting my
thoughts, searching for
confluence, just what might
haunt your sweetgrass?

Aine Whelan-Kopa

Bruce Willis of Māngere

Ngahuia keeps watch
while Nikura steals the money
Ngahuia has sweat drops
Nikura has fast hands like Muhammad Ali
and hair black-blue, like tui wings

in a room filled up with punches
three breathing rhythms
and the swift sound of polyester
Nikura crosses the floor
Ngahuia closes the door, closes her eyes
and spends the money

a bus trip
a burger and an ice cream
dipped in chocolate
at the movies to kill time, to see
Bruce Willis on the big screen
where some yellow-haired lady is the hostage

Ngahuia likes The Civic
and the way the darkness feels
when the lights dim
closed in and safe as if
she was under a tui wing

away from stealing money
and forgetting to keep watch
whuuu
Nikura has the wallet
yippee kai aye, mama papa
they're going to the movies!

Sandra Fraser

Celebrity

Poor girl
strung out on the internet
a moth on a spider web
your tendons secured through servers
you are stretched out so fine so thin
star stuck
flashing lights
a thousand thousand lenses
sucked you dry

If I were your Mum
I'd cut the cables pick
each glittering moth-wing scale
from the sticky silk
reassemble
your fragile body
cocoon you in a duvet
feed you with darkness
honey and silence
hold a while

Tim Jones

Tuesdays

On Tuesdays
when we should be making love
we sneak off to the movies instead.

You hold my hand.
I eat an ice-cream
that I don't need and do not deserve.

It isn't art: *Van Helsing*.
Hellboy. *Harry Potter 3*.
But it's what you like

and I tag along, looking
for the joins in the CGI
and enjoying this escape

from the sunlit outer world.
Where we blink. We kiss.
Adult again, we go our separate ways.

The Hedgehog Heart In Conflict With Itself

I had always wanted to do a project with her. She had always wanted to do a project with me. Her people met my people. We fell in love with the script.

It's a reboot, not a reimagining. It's indie cred on a studio budget. It's a four-quadrant movie. It's a summer tentpole.

This summer, adventure has a new name.

This summer, ennui has never been more personal.

We open on a hedgehog in the hallways of the Chateau Marmont. His fur is blue.

Diegetic sound at first: his running feet. We fade into The Jesus and Mary Chain, to Thomas Mars. We see the planets, the night sky. A traveller from far places arrives, holding her secrets close.

An initiating incident. Rising tension. The hedgehog heart, the human heart, in conflict with itself.

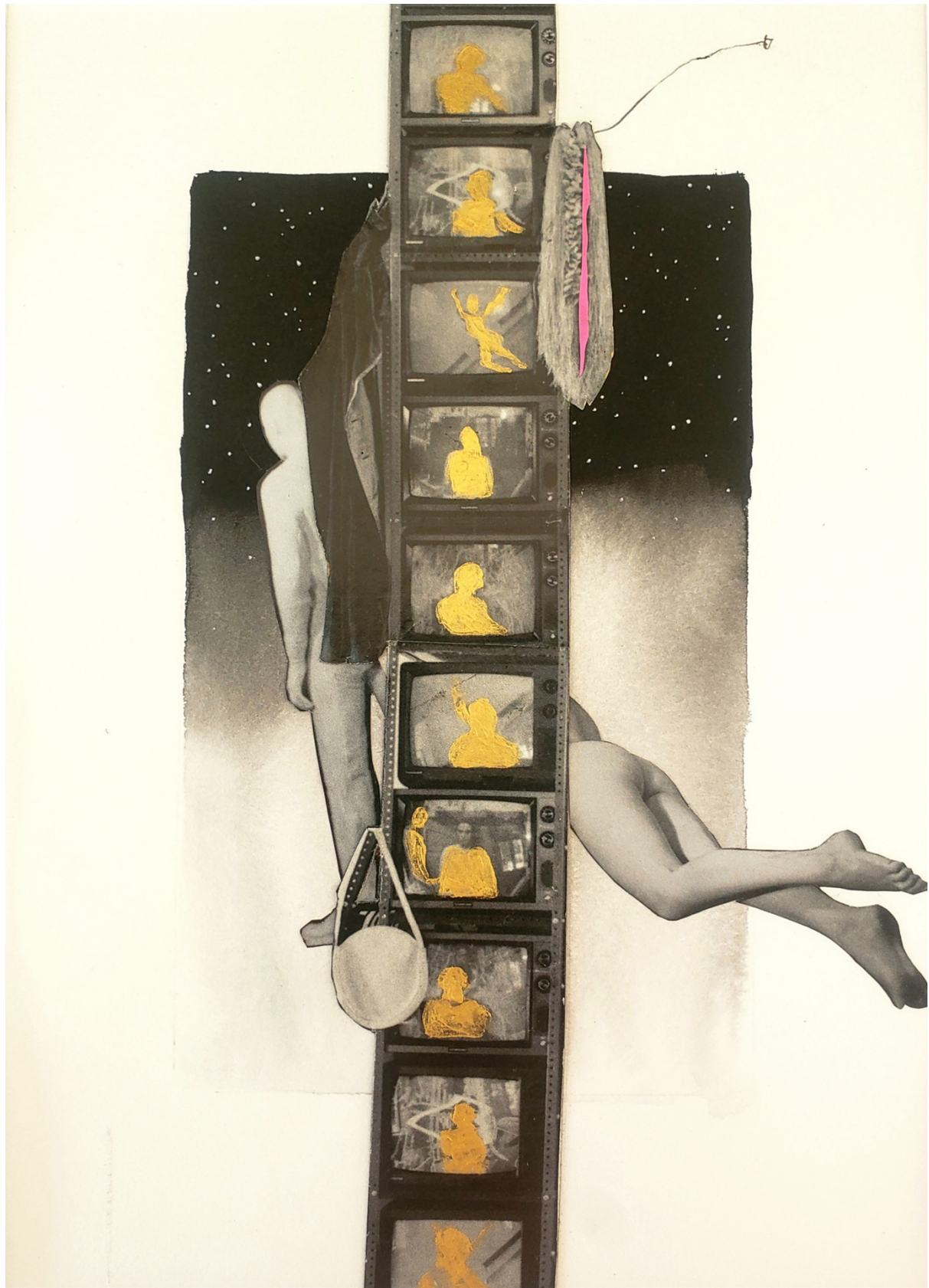
We move to the desert, suffering. Watch out for the threshold guardian - they're not who you expect!

Our run time is excessive. The best time to go to the toilet is when all seems lost.

On any creative project there are differences. The key is to manage them.

We'll never tell you what they say to each other as the credits roll. His blue quills, her beautiful, downcast face. Tears in the rain as the music swells. When tested, audiences register a strong response.

Release the competing directors' cuts. Let the tell-all books begin. That mid-credits scene was never meant to imply a sequel. I gave good meeting, she gave good meeting, till the bitter end.



Rachel Miller – *Your Entrance will be Recorded* | Mixed-media collage drawing

Lisa McKenzie

fame

her throat rattles, a network witch with a glossy mouth <slip out your filler, shave your pate, milk your silcs, babe> so avant garde (so savant lard)! she clutches her iPad but I am in her grip, hard lines, rigid plastic curves glommed under fleshy pads, I feel her turn me restlessly restlessly, seeking a crack a crevice to prise up and chew <put on ten pounds, twenty two... it's all in the fine print> I am lost in her chained neck, now, the cords and bones wrapped in gold <the ex-partner segment – it was so fire the testing audience got burnt> sweat needles my soft places along with her laugh, my mouth becomes a glassy lake of porcelain fears <trauma gets a tick, rachets ratings up super quick> her hair flicks me, colourless licorice that drags my skin, peels it back, leafy thin <a cool mill if you win plus bonuses for damage emotion-al> I fall into her feathery eyes then, the deep blackness at the back, the part that stills my brain. It turns my eyes black too and I swim in its veins, a familiar of the omnipotent beast with obsidian scales, bones shifting under a glittering hide. she strokes the inside of my wrists admiring their smoothness, looks up at me <but it has to be for real, babe>

Rachel Miller

Stardom

Eagerly she enters the spotlight of
her slim fitting room, clutching a spangled
dress which had draped so becomingly
over the storefront womannequin.

Modestly drawing confessional curtains
not quite meeting, with a steady draught
moving aside all privacy, her bated breath
misting the silvered walls.

She tugs at the frock, now shrinking
before her eyes, from plastic pegs
breaking as she fumbles,
trusting it will cover her
hitherto medium frame.

She measures the odds of
over or under? And regrettably
sleeves her quivering arms.
Encircled, trapped, blinded and
gasping towards release as a
concertina of skirt approaches
her beautifully average hips.

She smooths the taut and stranded fibres
and brings improbable rasping teeth
to bind
and nip
her down to size.
It holds, she stands.
Her hands seal-like lean against her.

The mirror blurs to reveal
a polished Baby-Grand
in a blue smoke night club haze.
The full moon rising past
a balcony of liquid notes
and her small smile
of stardom.

Jane Bloomfield

Napoleon Rode a Grey Stallion Called Marengo

grey horses are magical and also not, think thoroughbreds
how many times have you put money on Silver Shadow and not collected?
Pegasus was grey – he could flap his wings and fly as well as gallop
spying a grey horse in a field brings good luck
(so does a breaching whale looking you in the eye)
many a possessed storybook child has taken flight on a mystery grey horse
appearing in apparition beyond the rose garden's picket fence
sixth senses aligning follow me mount me
effortlessly under the willow tree Moon Stallion
ride me bareback to heaven clutching my flowing mane
the first pony I called my own was a grey mare named Wendy
I was eight, she was 14.2 hands high, almost a horse

Napoleon's grey Arab stallion, Marengo, was 14.2
apparently, he rode like a butcher
slouched with his toes lower than his heels
slipping around on the saddle so much he wore holes in his breeches
He rode for pleasure as well as necessity
I've seen Napoleon's bed in Versailles
he was really short for a guy who ate so much chicken
there's no mention of war horse Marengo on the Imperial stable records
a mystery in itself, many oil paintings and a film
but I guess if a grey horse finds you in Egypt, ride it
ride it like a butcher to battle and back
to Joséphine and Chicken Marengo
only three percent of horses are grey

Michael Gould

Fame

He had a fine face, an excellent mind, a good name; problem was, he was desperate for fame.

Existing in the background of other people's lives
like an atmosphere, everywhere yet nowhere unique
he felt unclear as to who he was, wandering
the streets feeling like someone else's ghost
and fearing that could be the most
he would ever be noticed.

Mr Nice Guy always finished last;
it was true, he had an unremarkable past
was neither outré nor queer, had no hipster beard
no earpools in his ears, and not a single tattoo.
Still, he desperately wanted to be remembered
but he didn't know what to do.

It can't be denied it was fame he wanted
and he craved it worldwide; he didn't think
it would hurt anyone, didn't care what friends would say
if only his full face and image could be seen
around town, smiling down from giant screens
that would make his day.

Sherryl Clark

Showtime

Cowboys always roam the open range, on a screen far above
our heads; they pull their horse's reins, horse teeth gleam in the spear
of light from the projector, and horse and rider whirl in the
dust floating serenely across the theatre and dropping
like cowboy dandruff into our hair. Hurray
for the popcorn, hurray for the beer sneaked in, hurray for the saloon
with its swinging doors that flap shut. Cool dark air slides
around our upturned faces, the screen turns to night and suddenly
the Milky Way and North Star blare from above: *look at me, look at me!*
The movie nears its breathless climax – *there!* gun shots ring across the corral
there! the hero spins his Colt on his fingers, and all around us, patrons
bang their western hands against the western iron, a drumroll rippling
on and on across the wide, red-brown celluloid land.

David Sampson

Mother

Born in 22
died in 22
moulded by the silver screen
delusions and fantasies rolled into one

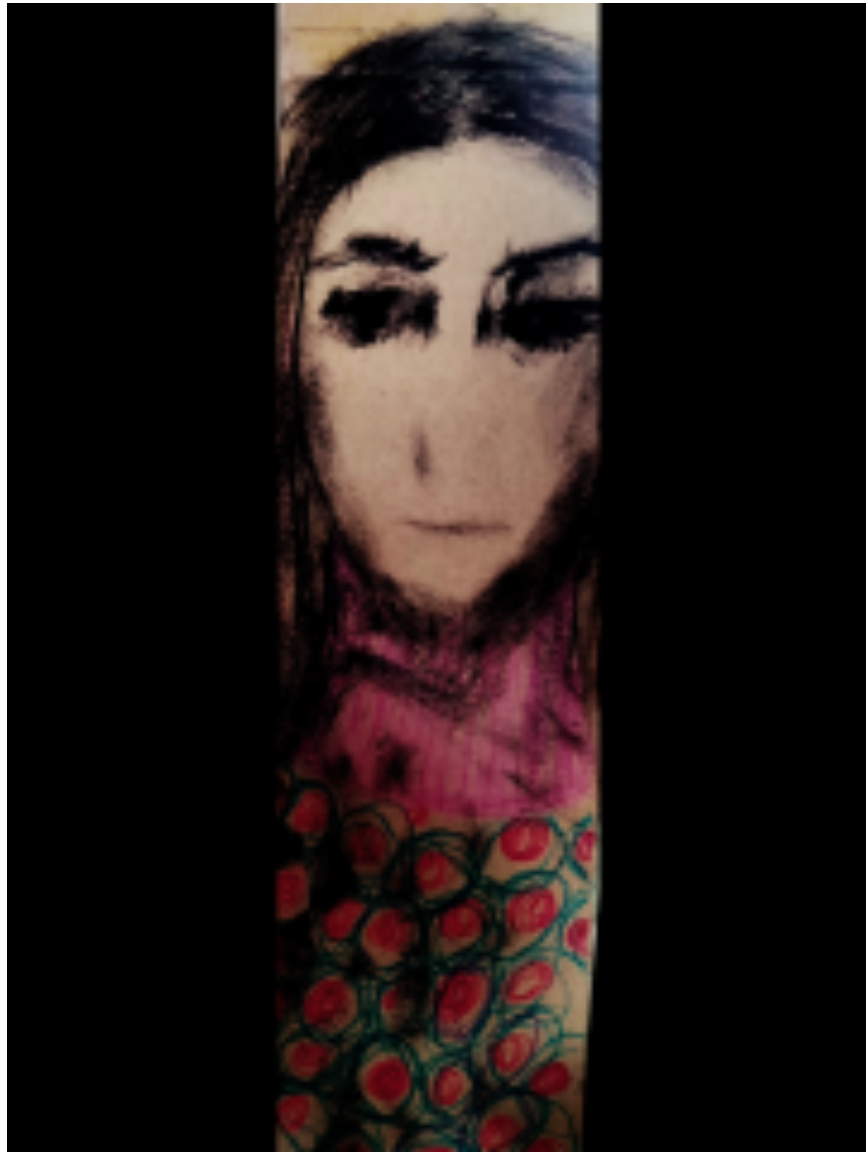
Worked for Norman Hartnell
saw his dapper guardsman visit the salon
worked under Alan Turing
secrets bravely kept safe and sound

She loved her sport
tennis and golf
bridge and sudoku
especially the code cracker

The silver screen kept her wrapped
felt her beauty was at least equal
to Greta Garbo and Hedy Lamarr
loved Dr Zhivago, 10 and Borat

When code cracking
Bletchley and Turing
became a thing
her light shone bright

She was pursued by
local media and important folk
appeared in the paper
had an audio archive
made for posterity
she died Googleable
her star will shine forever
Perfect.



Necia Anne Zimmerman – *Meredith* | Crayon and acrylic

Stephanie Cullen

matthew perry has died of ketamine

matthew perry has died of ketamine / the coroner's report reads / though
that's not where you'll read it / at last / the mystery not a mystery / is solved / rejoice

matthew perry died / of drug overdose / and drowning! / did you hear? /
my father told me / before i'd even seen it / on my feed / (is this
nourishment?) / (what / nutrients / am i getting?)

matthew perry has died of ketamine / or so the headlines tell me / though
they were so sensitive / some weeks ago / (some even mentioned / his struggle with drugs / his
efforts at rehab / his dedication to helping others / (and just one mentioned / he'd never wanted
to be known / for the battles / he hadn't quite / overcome) /

he was smothered in his spa / then floated / on the surface / on full display /
splayed out as christ / for you to witness / the sins he never wanted / you to see / him as

matthew perry / drowned today / in drugs / and admiration / and / if all the fame and money in /
the world couldn't fix a man like him / what hope is there for someone / like me

matthew perry lived / for fifty-four years / he helped people get sober / he made people smile /
to get them vaccinated / and he made me laugh / and he made me laugh / and he made me laugh

matthew perry died with ketamine / in his bloodstream / and that is the last thing that will ever /
be written

Steve Herbert

London Los Angeles

I knew you once. We met, we loved, we parted –
an accident of time and place perhaps –
and neither, I recall, was broken-hearted.
We said we'd keep in touch, but that soon lapsed
as distance, which, the sages say, has power
to bring us closer, failed. My dark tower
in grimy London occupied my years;
and there were other women, pretty, young.
Some joy was wrung
from these encounters, though they'd end in tears.

By then, of course, you'd made a name and found
Los Angeles. The lights, the crowds, the noise,
drew many butterflies, but few so bound
for stardom. How could face and grace and poise
not win the hearts of fans – and lovers too!
Oh, yes, I read the gossip columns. You
make headlines every week. With each new fling
the bitter-sweet of heaven lost, regret.
Old wounds bleed yet.
Ah, memory you bitch, I dread your sting.

CR Green

Hansel Enlightened

— inspired by two lines from Louise Gluck's *Gretel in Darkness*

No one remembers. Even you, my brother.
Through the whole of the Linden forest
we ate each soft-skirted leaf, its
hermaphrodite flowers falling at our feet.
I loved you, clever boy, who could become a man,
loved you as if you were my twin.
You offered your crumbs of bread. One by one
they fell between feathery bracts of hard green drupes.
Our shadows grew bigger in those lost hours
between daylight and dusk. Perhaps
our Future could become as sweet
as your little hand in mine. Remember
the moonlit Gingerbread House? Were we dreaming?
It appeared as Present, not Past. So tired
of eating dry, serrated heart-shaped leaves,
we licked honeyed windows clean, gobbled
cinnamon sills and candy-caned side posts and lintels.
We didn't knock or hear the witch's voice.
Caught and trapped, after many more days and nights,
our teeth began to hurt. But, the treats
of New Mother I brought to caged you
on a big plate we could share, and
New Mother noticed – I saw she had no teeth.
That was when she made her mistake,
saying, "What good are teeth? You can't eat them."
Where was Father? He hadn't found us. Then
I remembered birds love to eat bread;
I would have to be the clever one.
Our teeth were set on edge, twisted in our mouths,
our wrists and fingers swollen with too many sweets.
"I will have to be a man," I said
as that last night passed. Words bubbled,
slowly boiling, overflowing. I could taste
their sticky pleasure, my mouth drooling
to consume *that black forest and the fire in earnest.*

Bronwyn Bryant

How to Behave at the Launch of Your First Book of Poetry

Do not adopt
a breathy
eager look.

Go inside yourself
and don't come out
till you're ready.

Only answer questions
with yes, no
or mmhmm.

Limp slightly
as though you have sustained
a hip injury in a fall.

Make statements
"the best place to be angelic
is close to the sky" or

"I could frame it
and hang it on the wall
if I hadn't eaten it".

You are pulling together
the threads
of your next oeuvre.

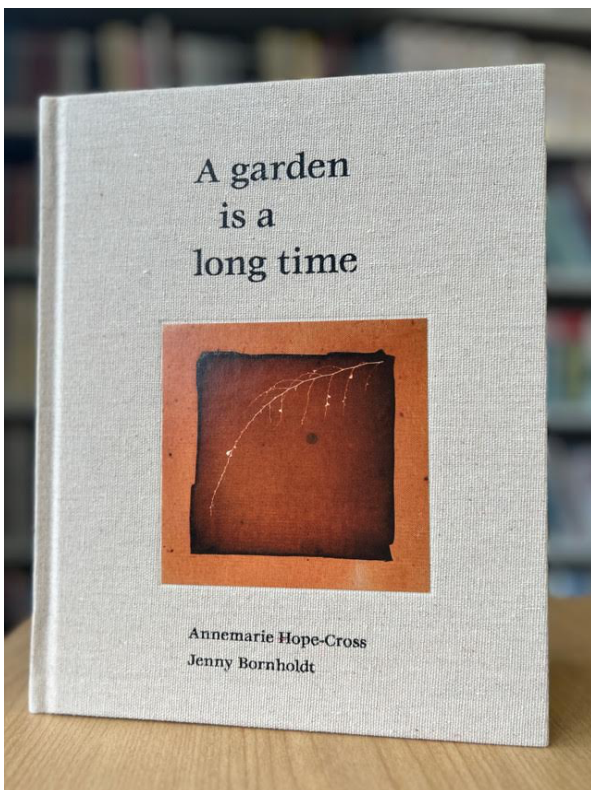
Ignore the sales table
and don't be too friendly
as you sign books.

Congratulations
You have
arrived.

Sarah Scott

A garden is a long time – Jenny Bornholdt and Annemarie Hope-Cross

(Wellington: THWUP & Rim Books, 2023) ISBN 9781776920839. 152pp.



To see beauty is to risk being moved, and *A garden is a long time* is a lesson in how to look deeply. It creates a slow wash of the effects of finding beauty in everyday things and how that makes us feel. It brings to mind the writings of the Tao Te Ching which suggest that it is 'the softest of things' that 'overrides the hardest of all things.'

“A garden is a long time’ is a lesson in how to look deeply. It creates a wash of the effects of finding beauty in everyday things and how that makes us feel”

This stunningly produced collaboration between photographer Annemarie Hope-Cross and poet Jenny Bornholdt features hand-made, sun-exposed photographs alongside spare, brief poems and the poet’s atmospheric prose.

Jenny Bornholdt has published over a dozen books of poems, edited a number of anthologies and worked on many book and art projects. Annemarie Hope-Cross studied wet and dry plate collodian and the daguerreotype technique at the Fox Talbot Museum in the United Kingdom and her photographic work has been exhibited in numerous exhibitions in New Zealand and internationally.

‘I hope there’s a sense of stillness,’ Hope-Cross says of her photographs. In 2017-18 she created her ‘Still’ series which includes medicine bottles containing flowers and herbs as part of a process of thinking through healing, history and herbology. A sense of stillness imbues the poems, too, allowing the reader to partake in the moment, rather than it being rushed through, barely tasted.

‘Shadows take / so long to lengthen / they become smoke //’.

(“Time”)

Part poetry collection, part artist monograph, part elegy (Annemarie Hope-Cross passed away of breast cancer as this book went to print), this hybrid new work is calmly contemplative. An almost religious transcendence reminiscent of the photographs of Anne Noble (an influence in Hope-Cross' work) is echoed in both image and text.

'this is merely about the joy of shadows and
sunlight and how you want that to be'
("Shadow")

Of Bornholdt's many collections of poetry, this is perhaps her most serene. It is as if the ethereal photographs have influenced the poetic response, softening its edges. Fragments of conversations between the artist and poet create a quiet, gentle tone. 'I cut the plants I want to use and put them on the paper and see how the shadows look in relation to the light.' So too in the making of a poem, or in trying to untangle the events of a life.

Some of the photographs are brightly lit. The bone-white florals on charcoal and inky blue backgrounds appear as constellations or fireworks. Indeed, this book highlights light. My favourite of the photographic series is shaped as cloister windows:

'a place where dark is transformed into
light'

framing our view of the enclosed foliage and
flowers:

'santolina rosmarinifolia, 'the holy flax.'

The naming and claiming of forgotten plants, memories and histories remind us to pay attention to the small things and rehabilitate our

capacity for beauty. There is the act of salvage that may act as a sort of salve. The reclamation of botanical names in the text echoes the rejuvenation of age-old photographic processes such as the hand-made, sun-exposed cyanotypes: 'vipers / bugloss, wild sage.' (from *Central Otago*). And the ephemerality of the garden, of artmaking and indeed of life itself, is flashed softly up in front of us in both the text and the images.

The shape of the book is a series of photographic plates interspersed with poems and the poet's prose. The latter respond to and outline the creation of Hope-Cross's unique, botanical photographs. The persistent creativity grown in a life of making is like a character running through the text: a reminder of the importance of following curiosities, no matter how unlikely or against the grain.

*'the ephemerality of the garden, of
artmaking and indeed of life itself, is
flashed softly up in front of us in both the
text and the images'*

Some of the poems are like pieces of landscape
– uncomplicated and mysterious.

'poco a poco / falls the snow'
("Road Trip")

Photosensitive and receptive, tendrils of poems
appear between the beautiful plates:

'(sound of foliage) bible leaf they used to
press it / in their books'.
("Garden at Larch Crescent with
Annemarie")

The prose too, is unmistakably through the lens of a poet. ‘... Orchids bridal in mesh.’

I loved the hybridity of this book. It made me think that this is what can be done in art-writing and ekphrastic poetry – an inter-germination between artist and poet, photograph and poem. Rather than the art being merely a prompt for the writing, it is the *atmosphere* of the artwork that gently infuses the poems, solidifying both genres in new, fresh ways.

‘ideas / coming through the leaves.’
 (“Garden at Larch Crescent with
Annemarie”)

This is a bold book in many respects. It is genre-busting, radically quiet, haunting and intimate; the ‘I’ of the poet partly sublimated by the deep power of friendship, collaboration and the natural world. It slides into a compassionate look at the photographer’s love of creative process and into the slower timeline of nature, perhaps embodying *ekstasis* – a standing outside of oneself¹ – as a potential bridge to tenderness and insight.

‘the sudden violet / nub of green’
 (“Thanks be”)

Mary Oliver says in *Upstream*, ‘attention is the beginning of devotion’² and *A garden is a long time* is a devoted elegy, legacy, and celebration.

It posits beauty as an actual process – not a capturing of what is seen, but of *how* it is seen.

And reminds us that the ‘(t)he shadow of beauty is not ugliness. The shadow of beauty is loss.’³

It honours the risk we take in really looking, intertwined as it is with impermanence, by illuminating (like a photograph) if only for a moment ...

‘these things we love / each dangerous day.’
 (“Thanks be”)

¹ The Canadian poet Anne Carson talks about this concept in *Decreation*, Penguin Books, 2009

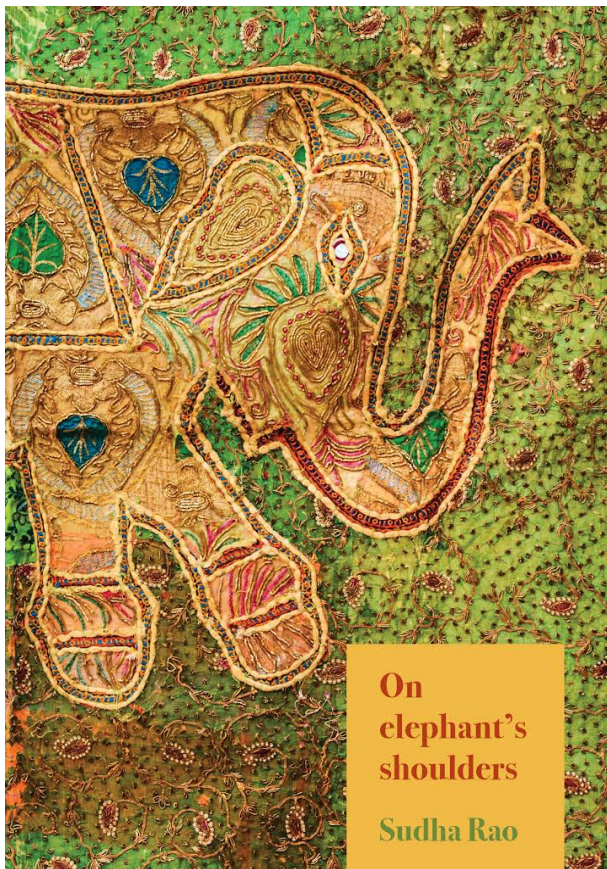
² Oliver, Mary, *Upstream: Selected Essays*, Penguin Books, 2019

³ Dowrick, Stephanie, *In the Company of Rilke*, Allen & Unwin, Australia, 2009, p.219

Holly H. Bercusson

On elephant's shoulders – Sudha Rao

(Wellington: Cuba Press, 2022) ISBN 9781988595580. RRP \$25.00. 82pp.



They say music starts where words fail. It is fitting, then, that Sudha Rao's debut collection, "On elephant's shoulders", a meditation on the migrant experience, blurs the boundary between the two. Because, as an ex-pianist whose top Spotify artist has been J.S. Bach for three consecutive years, I experienced this collection as a masterclass in the art of the fugue. Possibly an obnoxious analogy, but an honest one.

A fugue starts with a theme, restates that theme in a succession of voices, then weaves those voices in

and around each other into lush contrapuntal harmonies. The opening poem "Warp and weft" introduces the collection's main theme, migration, using motifs which flow throughout the collection, contrasting tonalities and overlapping voices. These include, but are not limited to, movement, paths, breath and song, braids, water, birds, shadow and soul.

'They say music starts where words fail. It is fitting, then, that Sudha Rao's debut collection, "On elephant's shoulders", a meditation on the migrant experience, blurs the boundary between the two.'

If that sounds complex ... it is! But do not mistake complex for excessively cerebral. Rao uses rhythm and gesture to give the book a sense of motion throughout, not only evoking the central theme, but often lending the poems a downright hypnotic quality when read aloud, such as in "Watching ants":

'She is now a string across the shiny floor,
hundreds of feet drumming and humming.
Blind faith, a fast-paced race across an endless
terrain.'

Many Kiwis have a very recent history with migration, especially in my city, Tāmaki, where nearly 40% of the residents are foreign-born. I too was born to a migrant family with relations dispersed across multiple continents and will be one of many who resonate with Rao's theme on a personal basis. However, the act of migration is a part of human history that predates spoken language and, while very salient to 21st century Aotearoa, this collection embraces the timelessness of its theme. Traversing the dextrously woven continuum of motifs, Rao takes us on a journey through space and time. In "Fragrant dream" we go from watching the

sparrows dance in the Aotearoa drizzle to being a sparrow ‘free among shaken branches’ and ending up in ‘a land of forgotten gestures’ where her grandmother’s hands twist braids ‘like sparrows hopping from one strand to another’. Poems of this ilk, which lean heavy into the sensory, can tend towards the impersonal – but not in Rao’s hands. There’s a strong sense of who her grandmother was to her – ‘her rituals, her household’s spine’, weaving garlands for the ‘deity holding her universe’. Even the Pōneke sun is ‘shy’ in relation to the sun of her childhood which ‘muscle its way in’.

‘Ultimately, what makes a fugue exceptional is when it exceeds the sum of its parts, while at the same time showcasing the beauty of each individual part’

Rao establishes a clear perspective, while staying true to the closing words of “Warp and weft”: ‘I am warp and weft/on a long loom/leaning into reflection/of being’. It really felt like Rao was in a constant dialogue with her reader, like I was just another of the many distinct and interdependent perspectives she incorporates throughout this collection, from the personal to the mythological.

And just as I find when listening to Bach, different parts resonate on each reading. On my first trip through the collection, “Watching ants” and “Psyche” slid past each other. On a second read, though, I was reminded that in some iterations of the myth, Psyche is tasked by Aphrodite with sorting a pile of grain in a night. Overwhelmed and despondent, a sympathetic ant takes pity and directs his colony to her rescue. In “Watching ants”, did Rao intend the unnamed ‘she’ to be read as Psyche? I don’t know. But when I went back, the voice worked. This collection is littered with such subtle suggestions that gave the feeling of being guided, but not domineered.

Ultimately, what makes a fugue exceptional is when it exceeds the sum of its parts, while at the same time showcasing the beauty of each individual part. While the collection taken as a whole is complex and polysemic, there’s an abundance of lines that on their own remain simply, plainly beautiful:

‘A bird leaves a branch swinging, a lonesome thought
given its freedom.’
 (“Partition”)

‘Among the trees’ fallen grace, we pick at a language yet to be born,
the journey’s breath, you might say.’
 (“The circuit”)

‘I am a bracelet of memories bearing the weight
of your bones’
 (“Treads across waters”)

It bears mentioning that although this is Rao’s debut collection, she did not start seriously pursuing writing until later in life, following a career as a dancer. Woolf, in her “Letter to a Young Poet” (1932) advises to publish nothing before the age of 30. Maybe too harsh a constraint to be taken literally these days, given the diversity of publications and poetic communities that have developed in the last century, but the spirit of her warning stands: ‘if you publish, your freedom will be checked; you will be thinking what people will say; you will write for others when you ought only to be writing for yourself.’

There’s a preponderance of Very Clever Poetry out there – poetry that feels like it is written to impress others. Some of it I even like. But I doubt whether most will stick with me in ten, twenty, fifty years. Sudha Rao is clearly a very clever person. Perhaps emboldened by her years, she uses that cleverness to elevate her poems, rather than the other way around. And in this collection, I know I’ve found a lifelong companion.

We gratefully acknowledge the support of the Windrift Haiku Group. Their generous donation to the NZPS will support ongoing haiku projects, such as this haiku feature in *a fine line*.



Necia Anne Zimmerman – *Olivia Screenshot* | ink & acrylic

Sue Courtney

walking the Walk of Fame
the stars and the stars
and the stars

paparazzi crowd the runway ...
migration

seaside performance
the first star appears
in a rock pool

Peter Free

photo shoot
adjusting her strap
just enough tension

spring premiere
shells full of sudden
wonder

Rachel Miller

smoke wreathes
her creased eyes
strumming the bass

your old coat
brings home the pub
beer, chips and chat

Emma Duncan

alone shining bright
hard to see
one of many stars

Heather Lurie

reading about
booming kakapos
in silence

breaking dawn
the tui sings
from his phone

Jenny Fraser

summers gone ...
our grandmothers campsite
flowering flax

Nola Borrell

deathbed
time at last to watch
the moon

requiem for a singer
the face of a botticelli angel
in the choir

Honor McKellar, 1920- 2024

funeral over
her sister's rings cover
both hands

Anne Curran

summer bliss –
fly fishing in Montana
with Brad Pitt

Jenny Pyatt

a swoop of swallows
fly over the house
black magic

Julie Adamson

holding on to summer
children chase the waves

Debbie Strange

busker's hat
a child offers coins
of dried lunaria

1st Place, 2022 Bloodroot Haiku Award

foreclosure
a barn spider ties up
loose ends of light

Shortlisted for Presence #75 Best-of-Issue Award

Contributors



Rachel Miller – *The Price of Fame* | Mixed-media collage drawing

Julie Adamson lives in Wellington by the sea, always changing and inspiring her. She has been published in *Kokako*, *Island Writer* (Canada) NZPS Anthology 2020 and *a fine line*.

Tahuna Queenstown based writer, **Jane Bloomfield** is a recently published poet. Her work has appeared in *Tarot*, *Turbine*, *Kapohau*, *Does It Have Pockets* and forthcoming in *MEMEZINE*.

Nola Borrell writes haiku, tanka, and haibun in particular. Her work is widely published here and overseas.

After retiring from classroom teaching, **Bronwyn Bryant** taught adult writing classes in Uxbridge Creative Leisure Centre, REAP, prison, mental health trusts and community arts groups. In 1999 she completed Whitireia's Creative Writing course where she discovered a passion for poetry.

Sherryl Clark has been writing poetry for more than 30 years. She was a co-editor of *Poetrix* magazine, and writes verse novels for young readers.

Sue Courtney lives in Orewa beside the estuary where her surroundings inspire many of her haiku. She is one of the organisers of Haiku Down Under 2024, being held via Zoom on 16-18 August 2024 <https://sites.google.com/view/haikudownunder/>.

Stephanie Cullen is a long-time writer and a lamb-legged poet living in Christchurch with her demon of a cat.

Anne Curran writes haiku inspired by the landscape, seasons, people, and events of Hamilton. She remains grateful to writing friends, mentors, and family members who nurture this hobby.

Emma Duncan lives on Auckland's Hibiscus Coast after spending 8 years living aboard the family boat. Emma volunteers in the Reading Revolution program which has inspired her to start writing again. Family and reading are two of her greatest joys.

Alexandra Fraser is an Auckland poet who has been published for years in magazines and anthologies both in New Zealand and overseas.

Born in the Waikato, **Jenny Fraser**, nature lover, musician, artist and poet, now lives in Mt Maunganui. Her haiku, senryu, tanka, haiga and haibun are published in New Zealand and International Journals.

Alexandra Fraser is an Auckland poet who has been published for years in magazines and anthologies both in New Zealand and overseas.

Peter Free is a Maths teacher from Wellington. Born in Nigeria, Peter has spent many years travelling and working in Asia. He writes haiku to relax.

CR Green lives in Christchurch. Her poetry and short stories were published recently in *Meniscus*, *Inspired*, *Silver Birch Press* and *Quick Brown Dog*. Emma Neale wrote of her work, "It skillfully interweaves the philosophical and metaphysical with concrete, contemporary reality."

Michael Gould was awarded a mentorship by the New Zealand Society of Authors in 2021. Poems published in Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia and England, he is a queer Canadian/New Zealander and the author of "Surrealism and the Cinema: Open-eyed Screening" (1976).

Lester Hall "My work is a combination of click, paste, collage and hand painting over constructed ideas. I love ink and paper and the power that it gives me to see what arrives in my mind."

Holly H. Bercusson was born and raised in Tāmaki Makaurau with a love of letters. Add to that a complicated childhood, a personality disorder, a dash of Jewish neuroticism and you pretty much have a poet.

Steve Herbert was born and raised in Northland. A lifelong teacher in NZ, Singapore and Queensland, he's a late arrival to writing with a few bits and pieces published. Now living in rural seclusion at Parakao.

Tim Jones lives in Te Whanganui-a-Tara / Wellington. He was awarded the NZSA Peter & Dianne Beatson Fellowship in 2022. His recent books include poetry collection *New Sea Land* (Mākarō Press, 2016) and climate fiction novel *Emergency Weather* (The Cuba Press, 2023).

Heather Lurie grew up in America, and has lived in New Zealand for the past 18 years. She has always loved haiku, and discovered two years ago that she loves writing haiku as well.

Bill Manhire has been publishing poetry for over 50 years. His first book, *The Elaboration*, with illustrations by Ralph Hotere, appeared in 1972. His most recent poetry collection is *Wow* (THWUP/Carcenet 2020). He founded the well-known creative writing programme at Victoria University.

Rachel Miller is a visual artist and poet living in the Hokianga. She has had poems published in *Te Kohu*, *Fast fibres* and NZPS.

Selina Tusitala Marsh “I perform poetry for primary schoolers and presidents (Obama), queers and Queens (HRH Elizabeth II). I’ve worked with Gucci and graffiti artists, corporate leaders and community activists, and everyone in between.” Selina Tusitala Marsh ONZM FRSNZ is a New Zealand poet, academic and illustrator, and was the New Zealand Poet Laureate for 2017–2019.

Lisa McKenzie was the winner of the *Face the Truth* National Poetry Day competition 2024 run by the NZ Institute of Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy for her poem “Salt Damage”. “Paris is hollow underneath” was published in the *Poetry NZ Yearbook 2021*.

A retired teacher living by the beach in Hawkes Bay, **Jenny Pyatt** has had a number of teaching resources and poems published. She enjoys writing poetry for pleasure, along with pursuing her interest in photography.

Robert Rinehart has had work included in *Mayhem*, *a fine line*, *Tarot*, *Chelsea* and *Sky Island Journal*, among others.

David Sampson is a retired medico who has always loved words and their interplay in poetry has been a lifelong fascination.

Sarah Scott’s poems have appeared in *Ōrongohau|Best New Zealand Poems*, *Landfall* and *NZ Poetry Shelf*. Her recent work on the paintings of Rita Angus was awarded runner-up in the 2023 Kathleen Grattan Poetry Prize for a Sequence of Poems.

Debbie Strange (Canada) is a chronically ill short-form poet and artist whose creative passions connect her more closely to the world and to herself. Please visit her archive: <https://debbiemstrange.blogspot.com/>.

Aine Whelan-Kopa based in Waitakere, is a post graduate student at Auckland University. She enjoys both art and poetry and an active imagination. Any similarities in her poem to a Bruce Willis of Mangere circa 1988, are purely coincidental.

Necia Zimmerman B.A.Ed. Dip. Counselling. Aged Care support. Portrait painter. Clay sculptor. Internal genogram creative. Poet. Calm stories for children. She lives on a small acreage that faces the mountain. Renovates her little house. Mum to five boys, now men.