

MONOGRAPH

YEAR 6. VOL. 9



A STUDENT LED MAGAZINE FOR THE ARTS

Table



of

Contents

Editor's Note

Ritobrita Mukherjee

Covergirl tips

Ayana Bhattacharya

I see the worst in
you

Shreya Datta

{REDACTED
TITLE}

*Chandrashmita
Mittra*

Artworks

Manish Chandra

GRAS-Fed Us

Jenna V Wray

Rewiring the
Occipital

Jenna V Wray

Photography

Sanjeev Kumar

Period Eye, and
the Many
Attempts at
Reflection

Catherine Chernova

**The Mathematics
of Nothing**

*Oyebami
Iyanuoluwa
Oyeyemi*

Artworks

Ajibo Ikechukwu

Pioneers

Lisa Perkins

The Piano Boys

*Margarita
Sharapova*

Origin

*Daniel Iturrizaga
Cubas*

Human

*Daniel Iturrizaga
Cubas*

Photography

Milind Atkale

Reflections

Sonia Nicholson

Artworks

*Peter Vukmirovic
Stevens*

Failed Appetites

Ella Chase

EDITOR'S NOTE

Ritobrita Mukherjee
Editor-in-Chief

Do you recall the punchy residue of lemon drops resting on your tongue in the deep recesses of a summer holiday that came without bank statements and unpaid bills, because I always did and lately, I seem to be forgetting what it was that made them taste like forever homes. The dumb box warbles out the latest headlines, slowly catching up with other obsolete artefacts from the first few decades of the modern man aching under the weight of his own yoke. It is perhaps simpler, to think back to times when all this and you and me were little things dotting the expanse of this ragged planet. It hasn't aged, they tell me, the good old girl has a few millenia left in her, but the one condition her parents gave her was to keep changing her skin when it went out of fashion in the mothy closet of this galaxy.

Eat, be eaten.

Every margin of my journal is clotted with inexplicable commentary on the state of events in the valley of death, but this refrain is the highest bidder, offal resting on plates lined up for the evening's appraisal of general discontent plaguing the planet, the war-starved cries of orphans stifled by the latest philharmonic prodigy's love letter to dead men.

Eat, be eaten.

Fly on the wall is a pleasant turn of phrase, and an even more pleasant position to find yourself in as the apocalypse approaches, but I digress.

Eat, be eaten.

There's work to be done here, in the rotting marrow of our nation state's poorly preserved body, and the evenings are withering away.

Eat, be eaten.



COVERGIRL TIPS

AYANA BHATTACHARYA

All but my best doll sat stiff, folded into 'L's, taut at ninety degrees exact. A real gymnast she was, with her bendy knees and delicate wrists, a flick of which threatened fracture. She was all gloss: plasma-coloured hair past sculpted underwear, choking-hazard stilettos unfit for balance. I put the others through lousy surgery, suspending limbs akimbo, inspecting seams for tears. Some I amputated and plunged in paint. I was a mean warden. Once, I coated her mouth with marker and splotched her teeth red. Funny I thought she'd make it out unscathed.



I see the worst in you

Shreya Datta

In Punjab 1947, a woman was separated from her family while escaping a dangerous and violent armed mob. A woman in Punjab 1947 was an asset, an asset for those who were violent, a liability for herself. Unsurprisingly, the mob kidnapped her a group of teenage girls and took them to their new home, the brand “new” country across a border that was drawn arbitrarily across villages. She ended up marrying her kidnapper, a twisted tale of Stockholm syndrome, but she fell in love. Five years passed, she had four children, three daughters (liabilities/assets) and one son (asset/liability). On no such occasion, someone arrived on her doorstep and announced that he was from India, her home. Her family longed to see her, longed to find out if she was alive, longed to bring their daughter home. She feels conflicted, beyond overwhelmed to know her family is alive. She packs her bags and brings her family along, to go back home? She does not know what to call that place anymore.

She arrives but struggles to remember any life she spent at her home. Some things remind her of Pakistan, the rock filled uneven roads, the two water pumps in her village, the semi-permanent houses with roofs that were hole-filled, left to cool their terracotta dwellings. She remembered the voice of her mother, ingrained in her mind, a clarion call to action, to leave, to run away, to save herself, when the mob arrives.



The home she goes back to is uncharacteristically familiar, simple in its layout- two rooms, one bathroom constructed outside on the persistent insistence of her mother with little to no furniture. The reunion is joyful, tears were shed, laughs were shared, blessings were given and taken, names were introduced, handis of pulao were distributed, meat fell off the bone. A week passed, it was time to go back home. But could she?

The day of departure was evidence of a distorted belief society has regarding women (liability/asset) and a contorted visualization of home. She was not allowed to go back home, she was restrained. There were negotiations. Keep the son, send your daughters and husband away. The husband was introduced on the negotiation table, he refused to go back without his children, his wife, he could sacrifice.

Negotiations come to an end, the man's word is taken as the full and final settlement. He goes back to his home, without a part of his home. She stays back, considered impure and damaged goods by society. But her parents add a rejoinder during negotiations, a widower with a twelve-year-old son wishes to marry you, consider yourself lucky, young woman (liability/asset)!

50 years pass. Simran is visiting Boston to visit her son. Her son has other plans. He has put an advertisement in a Pakistani newspaper, wishing to reconnect his mother with her home. She does not ask him why, she does not reprimand him for taking her life into his own hands. She goes along with it, praying and reciting her five children's names every night to fall asleep. In a similar tale told by a young "sharu" years later, Google Maps reconnects Simran to her home.





Her husband has died, but her daughters and sons are alive. A joyful reunion takes place, again, in a new country (or was it the same?). She refuses to leave her home, for once a decision she takes for herself.

This tale was narrated by Urvashi Butalia in a rainy Kolkata summer day in August, 2026. A conversation between two women historians about how the presence of women is felt by their absence throughout history, is cinematically concluded by this Partition story. Such a tale brings into perspective the importance of oral stories, often discredited for fear of inaccuracy, to retell and recount the experiences of women in history. Such a reflection of women in the histories of our present gives rise to an alternative knowledge system, an epistemological shift from the current narratives of history.

So, who do I see the worst of?



{REDACTED TITLE}

Chandrashmita Mitra

The city does not make sense on a night like this, when the gibbous edge of the moon's craters oozes ominous shadows. A bullet fits a rib in one of the many alleys set within the skeleton of the city. Blood tilts into the drains placed like a cross-hatch of latticework. The Revolution has seeped into even the poverty of the place.

I'm writing this from my matchbox of a room. It was the only place I could rent out, growing out like a parasitic limb, from one corner of the squat government housing two-story buildings they have here in this dilapidated district of the city.

You will never know my name because I myself have long forgotten it by now. Names are a thing of the nascent past, the Old World. Ever since the Revolution Evolution (the nth of its name), humanity did away with the tradition of naming. You see, names are revealing. Not modest enough. They have power and hold authority in their utterance. They can beholden you to your existence, which is detrimental to your existence itself when you're forever a work in progress.

[EXCERPT FROM A DECOMPOSING JOURNAL]



Being nameless is beneficial to my line of work, which happens to be writing for underground magazines and making pamphlets littering the walls of the metropolis. It was a strange feeling initially, but I was too young before the Revolution Eve to remember mourning the loss of a name.

Yet today I'm subverting the intentions of my pen. I'm putting down a story, weaving a sequence of illusions instead of lacerating through the immediate swell of reality.

[SOUND OF SOMETHING COLLAPSING]

It is a moment of complete worldly abandon. True and absolute thoughtless focus.

"They are faces becoming reflections of their faces staring back at them from behind fractured mirrors," I begin, "Their faces are becoming more mist than flesh..." Wasn't I going to write a story? Am I so accustomed to writing the truth (word heavily scribbled but assumed to be "truth") that I can't seem to orchestrate anything else? Later when I find a picture of me sliding on ice, from way back in 20XX, I will instead remember the sweet swell of limbs on an idle summer's day. Intertwined, lazy, noncommittal in the face of inevitable and impending doom.



Waterbody mirrors

the Sun

the Skies

Manish Chandra



GRAS-Fed Us

Jenna V. Wray

*FDA designation GRAS means
“generally recognized as safe.”*

The planet is a good dog
& sits when we command it;

a good woman, yielding her
breasts, her mutable intentions.

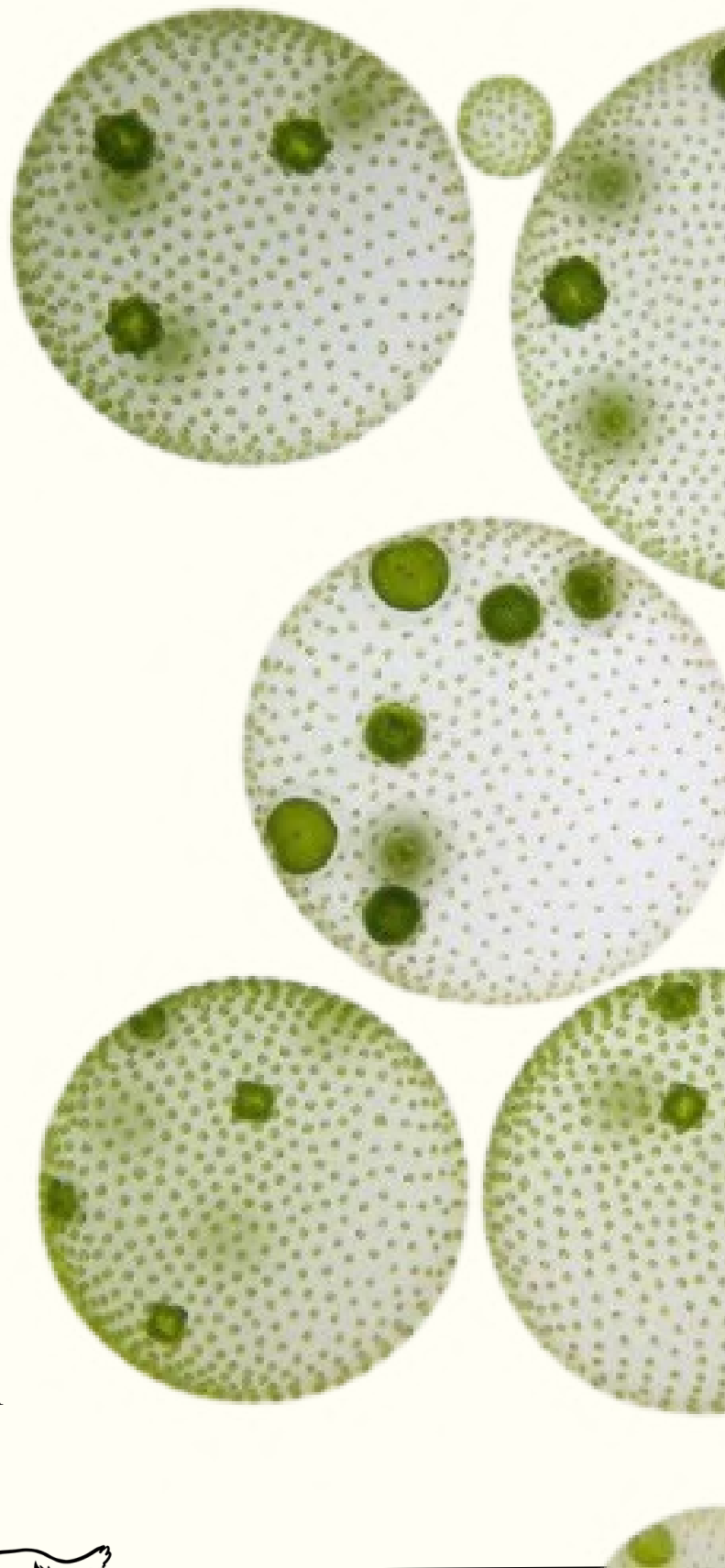
Our fruit grows large, larger
than Eden’s, & we eat our fill.

I wash it down with infused
water, water infused with

fluoride, & I rattle like a pill
bottle when I take my daily walk

beside the glowing river.
Meanwhile, at the preschool

by the chemical plant, the children
are sent home with forms,



*They were not lying when they said Ireland is green but
that doesn't mean they're not lying about everything else*

I'm sure they make the clouds
in a machine inside a hill,

& these white windmills spin
like a hypnotist's wheel

to push the clouds across
a ceiling so wide & so high

that if I didn't know better, I might
believe it's sky.

I've climbed twenty hedges
& rounded seven bends

to find the end, but no luck.
I want to find the flat horizon,

peel back the fabric of the sky,
touch the sheet-metal underbelly

of the lie & know
for once I'm right.



Rewiring the Occipital

Jenna V. Wray

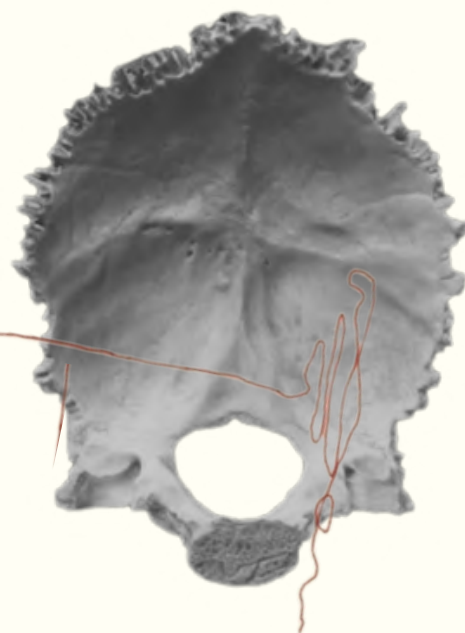
after "Homage to Alberti, Landscape #5"

by Tarrence Corbin, 1974

certainties unfold like origami
a dollhouse open on one side
vulnerable to every front that
moves across the retina and
understands the image in reverse

concepts float like paper boats
beyond my reach; presumably
they meet the ocean somewhere
the earth is flat and on its edge
hypnogogic shapes parade; I try

to follow but I fall and when the
rollercoaster breaks the wonder's
that it worked so long and yet
I feel betrayed; pillars I thought
were holding up the sky are not



and neatly packaged meaning
rides the airport carousel, is
loaded in a different plane asc-
ends a strange horizon where a
perfect-looping gif depicts a face

emerging from a mouth; what's
real and what's perception? I
only know it matters; am power-
less to stop epistemology that
steals the shadows from a scene
leaves heaven flat and empty



Sanjeev Kumar



Sanjeev Kumar



Period Eye, and the Many Attempts at Reflection

Catherine Chernova

Firstly, the “period eye” is meant to precede everything we recognize in visual art. Secondly, as a prevailing condition of seeing, the “period eye” is in turn conditioned by everything that constitutes the “cognitive equipment” of the day – including visual art, economic environment, levels of education, and proximity to the Divine.

Arguably, this double a priori principle is not as amenable to scholarly inquiry as Michael Baxandall expected it to be when he published his study on European Renaissance art and its perception by contemporaries back in the XVth century; but what he describes is how particular conformity and consensus of Quattrocento influence the way we see our world through paintings, sculptures, multimedia scenes and backstreet murals. Remaining the irritating shadow over the academic assessments of art, Baxandall’s conceptual creature tranquilly produces images and ideas with enviable confidence. This productive mechanism weirdly remains the visual efficiency of a mirror.



When surrealism becomes popular again in the 2020s, it is a consequence of “cognitive equipment” having changed enough to perceive and produce something new within the surrealistic frame. When the early-2000s shaggy web design becomes popular, it is the millennial nostalgia in charge. Each time it is like gazing closely into a mirror and recognizing what has changed over the last eight hours or ten years.

What shall I see in the mirror? If looking takes place in a fitting room, I should be convinced that every garment is conventionally good on me. The bathroom mirror is a completely different one. The reflection adjusts to a particular mode of consumption I’m expected to participate in. Every feature I notice is a glimmer in the deceptive mist produced by the spatio-temporal conditions of reflection, every detail is part of consumer dramaturgy.

Nevertheless, our perception of our own faces, bodies, outfits, voices, gestures is predetermined. There’s no stable mode of selfhood, there’s a situational one. That’s why it is always so weird to hear my own voice recorded or to see my body spontaneously captured without my awareness – because there’s a rupture between an internalized sense of self and a vision of the self as an Other. Actually, we have got used to crisscrossing this difference while producing images of ourselves and recording our voices in messaging apps.



Until recently, the rupture between inner and outer appearance felt way more abrasive, performative, and even investigative, but today the line to cross is still there, though it has become much more discrete.

But the perception of an image in the mirror still amounts to cherry-picking. It could not be otherwise, because the “cognitive equipment” is conditioned not only by the cultural context but also by the psychological profile.

If we push the concept of “period eye” further and narrow it down to the level of “death of the author” (or, to use a newer and perhaps more accurate term a “niche eye”, conceptualized by Jussi A. Saarinen), given that every moment of perception can transform the perceived image, we may try to follow the idea to its logical consequences – to a stable mirror reflecting what never stops changing. If it is not the mirror but the reflected body that is the Barthesian ‘author’ and if art is produced as a space for noticing, not scanning, then a piece of art itself can never be seen in its entirety. While remaining a stable art object, it appears performatively as an affect – as an elusive reflection in a mirror.

Now that we’ve exaggerated this situation, it has finally become absurd enough.



One artist from the Fluxus movement, who, in his early career, sought to follow Yves Klein's experimental operations with the void, tried to create an art installation and make it as situational as possible: he took a human-tall empty frame and brought it to the Côte d'Azur. The content of this ephemeral "picture" contained the precious void inside it, along with the shades recalling the International Klein Blue. The artist was Ben Vautier (he passed away in 2024). Although his Nice actions were captured in black and white, we may assume that his performative picture by the sea was suffused with azure – as the accurate naming was crucially important for him later on.

The artwork was titled "Je signe la vie" ("I sign the life"). It certainly had content: everything that could be captured within the frame became a piece of art by Ben. While the frame was installed on the lively embankment, people passed by, seeing strangers as images in a mirror: slightly distorted, yet caught up in the hurry, surprised or amused by the artistic action. The invitation to step in establishes this binary reflection: the viewer/subject of the artwork sees a stranger, an Other, instead of seeing themselves. Thus, the artwork functions as an inverted mirror, so the viewer plays the same social role as the Other.

Though it is up to social psychology to prove whether we act in such a synchronized way (actually, there are some experimental results that prove the assumption right: for example, the "self-fulfilling prophecy" studied by Robert Merton, and the shocking degree of "obedience" discovered by Stanley Milgram).

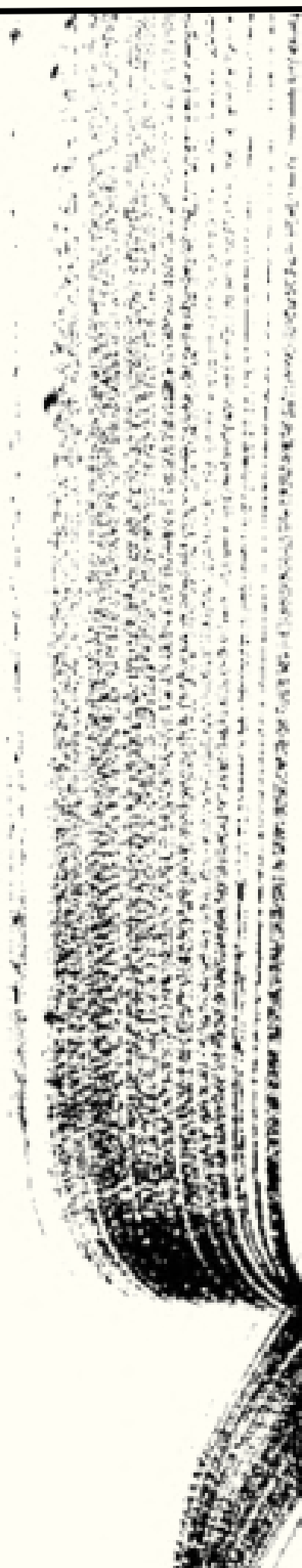


Maybe “Je signe la vie” should also be regarded as a social experiment that studies the impact of conformity on viewers’ reactions to the art and the conjunction of the “period eye” with the “niche eye” – but Ben didn’t regard it so as he left no data on the correlation between people’s behavior on the two sides of the mirror. Because the mirror is meant to be temporal, affective, elusive.



While the palpable body of art remained almost motionless, the only image and performance were produced by its audience. This principle of performative art that takes viewers as content has spread across countries today, but maybe it was Ben back in 1972 who made the statement particularly clear – emphasizing the reflective interaction with art, the mirror-like actions of those invited into a frame.





If the content of visual art changes with every glance, then the content of visual art literally evaporates and becomes a reflection. As a kind of performative approach, the reflection exaggerates the “period eye” to the point staring into zero, but it has its roots in art history, where the spatio-temporal context matters, sometimes even more than the depicted narrative.

This reflective component (foregrounded by performative art practices) is essential to art as an idea: it is an impulse toward impossible capture, an enduring lamentation for elusive reflection in the mirror. The lamentation is not for the changing narrative but for the narrator whose existence is finite.



The Mathematics of Nothing

Oyebami Iyanuoluwa Oyeyemi

The first zero I ever knew was not philosophical, it was mathematical, it sat on my test paper like an insult, a perfect circle, nothing inside it, nothing around it, just enough ink to convince a child that he was nothing. I hated mathematics in secondary school, not because numbers were difficult but because zero was merciless, it didn't negotiate, it didn't reward efforts, it didn't care whether you almost got the answer. Twenty nine still looked like hope, one (1) still looked like hope, one still looked like possibility but zero looked like judgment.

I remember watching classmates celebrate eighty- three, ninety- one, ninety- eight, while I quietly folded my paper into smaller and smaller pieces, hoping if I folded it enough time, the zero would disappear. It never did.

I realized mathematics had lied to me, zero was never just a score, it was rehearsal, and life had been preparing for it. Adulthood is simply discovering that everything eventually return to zero. Not sometimes, almost always. We all begin there.



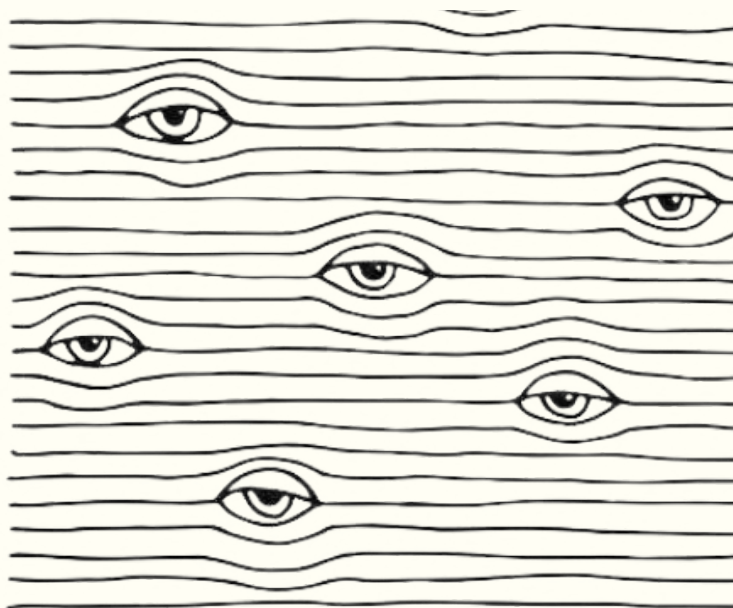
A child enters the world with no language, no money, no reputation, no possessions, and no influence. The richest man alive once arrived unable to lift his own head and the poorest child begins at exactly the same coordinates, Zero. It's strange that the only place humanity is truly equal is the place everyone is desperately trying to escape, perhaps that is why poverty hurts so deeply. People describe poverty as lacking money, I don't think that is true, poverty is being introduced to zero long after everyone else appears to have left.

You wake up every morning not trying to become successful, you are trying to become visible, trying to convince life that your existence deserves arithmetic. Every meal becomes addition, every transport fare becomes substraction, every unpaid bill becomes multiplication and every night ends where the morning started. Zero

People romanticize hustle because they rarely discuss its mathematics, the mathematics of beginning every Monday from the exact place Friday ended, running endlessly without moving, zero to zero. Even success has this habit, a business grows, a market crashes, a career blossoms, one restructuring email, Zero. A company you've served faithfully replace your twenty years with an automated response and a farewell package, for years they called you, family until accounting remembered you were payroll, no job is secure. Only change has been unemployed, we imagine achievement as a mountain, life treats it more like sand, you spend years building castles, the tide clock in for one shift everything returns to the beach.



Sometimes, the cruelest zero is not losing what you have, it's not knowing where to begin, you know you could write the book, build the company, paint the masterpiece, start the movement, love again, leave, stay, become, you know you carry enough fire to light cities, yet every morning you stare at an empty page that somehow weighs more than mountains, potential is heavy not because it is impossible because it keep asking the same question, where do I start? No one teaches us that confusion has a geometry, it's perfectly circular.



Friendship has its own arithmetic, you call, you check in, you remember birthdays, you forgive, you stay, until one day you notice something uncomfortable, consistency doesn't guarantee permanence, some people leave despite effort, some betray despite your loyalty, some forget despite your love. We were taught that investment guarantees returns but relationship refuse that equation. Sometimes you pour life into people only to discover they had already packed their bags emotionally, you keep watering a tree that quietly decided to become firewood.



Dreams also disappear quietly, no one announces the funeral, one day you stop talking about becoming a filmmaker because survival became more urgent, you stop writing because rent developed louder opinions, you stop painting, stop singing, stop imaging, not because you stopped loving them, because reality became expensive, there are dreams buried inside living people that never received a proper burial, only silence, only postponement, only another year, then another, eventually the dream doesn't die, it simply forget your address, Zero.

Parents, some lose them to death, some lose them to distance, the second kind is harder to explain because everyone keeps asking, but they're alive, yes alive but absent, alive but unreachable, alive but strangers, grief becomes confusing when there is no funeral, how do you mourn someone who still answers phone calls? How do you explain that the body survived while the relationship didn't? There are living ghosts walking through family photographs, there are children carrying parents who no longer carry them.

Then comes the loneliness no language has solved, being misunderstood, not disagreed with but misunderstood. Standing in a room full of people while your inner life remain untranslated, you explain yourself until words become exhausted, you become fluent in smiling because explaining stopped working, silence is often what misunderstanding sounds like

The body you've trusted for decades suddenly negotiated against you, one diagnosis rearranges your future, one pain changes your personality, one hospital bed teaches you that independence was temporary that health is something we only notice after it resigns.



Loss keeps repeating this lesson, people die, money disappears, home burn, relationship dissolve, government fail, currencies collapse, memories fade, names are forgotten, history itself erases its own handwriting, perhaps the greatest illusion we were ever sold is permanence, because nothing keeps its shape forever, everything circles. Everything returns, everything kneels before zero but here is the strange thing, mathematics tells us zero means nothing, creation tells us something else, every seed enters the ground looking exactly like loss. Covered, hidden, buried, it resembles an ending but nature calls it beginning, perhaps we have misunderstood zero all along, perhaps zero is not emptiness, it's is permission, the universe itself began from what scientists still struggle to describe but faith tells another story, it talks about the beginning of life, how God didn't begin creation with abundance, how he began with what looked like formlessness, darkness, emptiness, void. Creation has always been God's favorite response to zero, maybe that is why he keeps allowing us to return there, not to punish us but to remind us where miracles usually begin The world teaches us to worship progress, God repeatedly invites people back to dependence, Abraham had to become childless before becoming a father of nations. Christ emptied himself before resurrection filled history, perhaps heaven has never feared the way humans do, because God has never confused emptiness with impossibility and maybe this is the secret, life is not a journey from zero to one hundred, it is an endless pilgrimage from zero to zero every chapter ends where another begins, every certainty expires, every identity gets rewritten, every possession changes owners, everybody returns to dust, every life eventually becomes memory.



The question was never how to escape zero, no one does, the question is this: what survives every return? Money doesn't, titles doesn't, youth doesn't, beauty doesn't, applause certainly doesn't, not even the people you expect to stay.

Strip away every possession, every achievement, every friendship, every certainty, every dream, every year, every strength, and every breath, keep subtracting until nothing remains. When the arithmetic of life reaches its final equation, who are you?

If your answer is anything that can be taken away, life will eventually return you to zero but If your answer is God, then zero has lost its meaning, you finally possess the only thing that cannot be nothing and maybe that is the freedom we have spent our whole lives looking for, not escaping loss, not avoiding suffering, not preventing failure, not guaranteeing tomorrow simply discovering that beneath every zero life hand us, there exists a presence that never returns to nothing, so if today you find yourself beginning again, if everyone else seems miles ahead, if your friendships have collapsed, if your dreams have become too expensive, if your body is tired, if grief has made your house feel unfamiliar, if your heart has become fluent in disappointment, welcome

You have arrived where every human being eventually does, you are not standing outside the story, you are standing at its oldest chapter, zero. Do not fear it too much, God has been creating worlds from there for a very long time.



Lean on Me (Brother, Brother)



Ajibo Ikechukwu



The Silent Growth 2



House Rent in Lagos



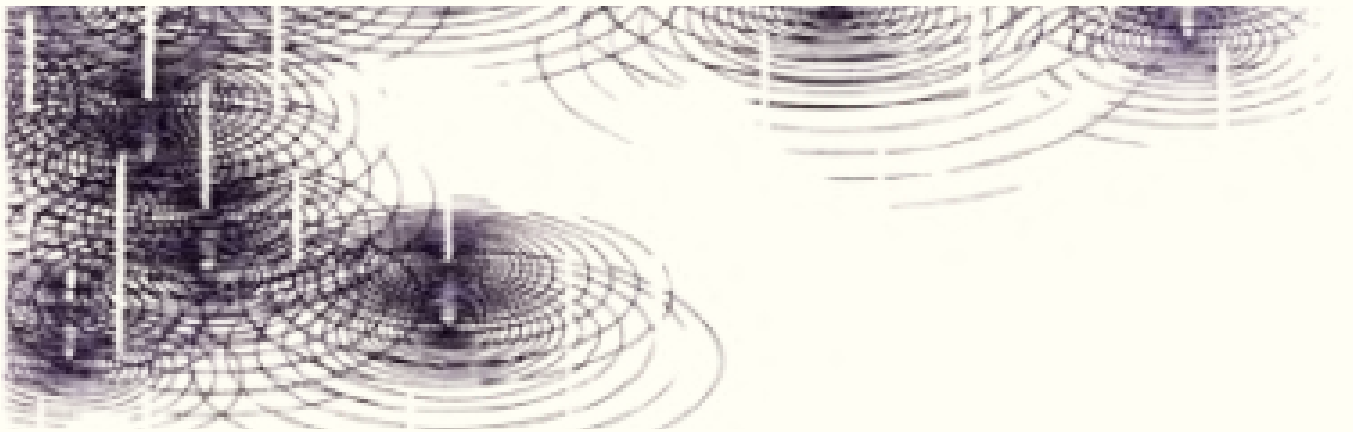
Ajibo Ikechukwu



Pioneers

Lisa Perkins

Outside is on mute, a soup of edges, the ground barely exists
My boy says fog is cloud without its skin. His saucer-wide
conviction sparks candles where my ribs cup melting things
I tell him the sky is gushing stories, her mother tongue is dream
Our nodding stirs the air alive, he is a spark-scape
on the settee



We're watching a show about the Pioneer 10 spacecraft. How
30 years in the star bowl leads a fade into the deep, 7 billion
miles from its maker. We gaze at the skinned skyline, just to lay
the weight of grasping any place but down. I show him
every journey taken tails the shadow of a myth. Apollo jps
the chariot dust while a big bear rolls the sleeve of night
'Has space gone quiet now?'

The sun yawns behind her blister to mirror a hole in our tv screen
as a street lamp stutters into time. We make an act of listening,
outrun the labouring light
What goes up leaves a howl in the dark



The Piano Boys

Margarita Sharapova

Apple and cherry tree blossoms.

Once, I lived not far from this garden, and my friend Will lived in that old three-story house over there.

When we were little, we used to take music lessons together from a private tutor who would come to Will's apartment.

I remember the piano with its bronze candleholders. Will and I used to play it four-handed. Our inexperienced boyish fingers were always getting tangled, bumping into each other. I can still feel the boyish warmth of my friend's palms. I felt a deep tenderness and grew still. Many years have passed since then, and now I have returned to the apple and cherry tree blossoms of an infinitely distant childhood.

I walked up to Will's house. I entered the building and slowly climbed three flights of stairs. There was the door to his apartment. Did he still live here? I stood there, afraid to press the bell. Finally, I did. A long silence. I couldn't bring myself to touch the bell again. I was almost leaving when the door suddenly flew open:

"Alan!!!"

This man had recognized me. But I looked at him closely and—no, this wasn't Will. Will was a small, rosy-cheeked boy with sunny curls and soft red lips: little angel Will. But on the threshold stood a gaunt man's visage, with unshaven cheekbones, sunken eyes, and dark, drink-worn shadows beneath his lower eyelids. And yet—this was him, Will.



“Hello, Will,” I muttered.

He stepped back, and I had to step into the entryway.

Stale air, thick with smoke and wine.

“She left me, she left me, went away with another man,” he suddenly sobbed and sank down onto his heels. His shoulders were shaking.

“There, there...” I touched his shoulder, and he went still.

“Sorry,” he said, getting up abruptly.

And we walk into the room.

...The piano!!!



But—yikes! On it, a seashell littered with cigarette butts and ashes, half-eaten tins of sprats, a half-empty glass of murky liquid. The piano’s polished black surface is smeared with greasy fingerprints.

The whole room is cluttered: empty bottles lying overturned, smoked-out cigarettes, scraps of food.

And on the stale, rumpled bed lies a wedding dress, pristinely clean.



Noticing my gaze lingering on the dress, Will picks it up carefully and, kissing it, presses it to his chest.

“It’s been half a year since she left... Why? Why did she leave? I loved her madly... I still love her! Today is our wedding anniversary... Back then, it was spring, too, and the apple and cherry trees were in bloom!”

I stay silent. After all, many years ago, the apple and cherry trees were in bloom just the same. And he stays silent, burying his face in the white fabric of the dress.

I go to the bathroom, take a bucket, and fill it with water.

“Where’s your mop and a rag?”

He comes over. Confusion in his eyes. He still holds the wedding dress tenderly against his chest.

“What’s a mop? Oh, right! Over there, in the corner...”

“Take the broom and sweep the floor,” I say quietly.

And now the apartment is clean, and the windows are wide open to the scent of the blossoming garden.

I go down into the yard and break off apple and cherry branches, then bring them into the house. Together, we decorate the room with the branches, scatter petals over the table with the bottle of champagne, the clean bed, and...

...The piano!!!

Will goes to the bathroom, and when he comes back—fresh and clean-shaven—he gasps.

I am wearing the wedding dress and holding two glasses of champagne.



He stares at me for a long time, hesitates, and then—takes a step toward me.

We drink the champagne.

I turn on the music—a thin, flowing blues—and we begin to dance.

I offer him my lips, and he kisses me, shyly at first, then with growing abandon.

We spin and spin and spin in the petals of the apple and cherry blossom blues.

“I was in love with you back then,” I whisper.

“And I think I was, too,” he confesses.

Late that evening, we light the candles in the bronze candleholders on the piano of our childhood and once again, as in the distant past, play four-handed. And again our awkward fingers get tangled, bumping into each other, and we go still...

And the apple and cherry blossom petals fall onto the keys, fall onto the keys, fall onto the keys...



ORIGIN

Daniel Iturrizaga Cubas

Before the pronoun,
inert density.

Scattered dust.

Time without elbows
to bend
its first orbit.

A cut
in the virgin womb of the void.

Something faceless
gropes
the depth that wounds.

When the universe
folds its vertex,
what has weight
leans back into itself.

Without outline,
without reflection.

Naked.

There are no bones
to break.

The viscera burst.

They tear us away.

The current descends.



Two human curves
raised their sanctuary,
praying my air.
They ignored
their ancient pact.
They were slain
by the very fire
that speaks them.
Their spell
invoked my name
before entering the body.
I touched the first membrane.
Mother in the density of water.
The cervix beating,
wrapped in her pond.
There is no fear.
This is not the beginning.
It is entering again.
What remained outside
holds me.
My other inside.
The limit
became necessary.
I persisted.





Not as image,
nor as thought,
only the minimum balance
before the spill.

To live
would not be opening,
but permanence.



HUMAN

Daniel Iturrizaga Cubas

We return here,
to the basin
where the sky
rests.

That instant
when light
hurts
as it enters,
splitting
its radiance
across the iris.

A bolt of lightning
spits black:
the descent
begins.

Form yields
at its center.

It weeps to be two arms,
two sides,
a pulse
that aches
when it stops.



MONOGRAPH

Water drinks
the fasting of the air.

It resounds
like a crystal
held still
at the moment
of breaking.

It opens fissures
in the trachea
of the present.
It pours itself out.
Fire devours
matter.

It exhales the exhaustion
of mutating into body,
of being an angel
without shadow,
without sleep,
without a knee
that aches
with clumsiness.

Its face
melts,
sweating
the profane.



And once again,
substance folds
over its three silences,
kneading
the brightness of air
into clay,
to become salt.
The wound opens
its red depth
so the hungry cold
may enter.
God observes
the human
and does not understand
why he sins.



Why he stopped
shaving.
He laughs.
Someone turns off the light
without noticing.
The universe
cleans its nails
of its own flesh.
It falls
onto a puddle
where its reflection
distorts
its waiting.
It sits.
Looks down.
Scratches itself.
And thinks.



Reflections of a Parallel Reality

Milind Atkale





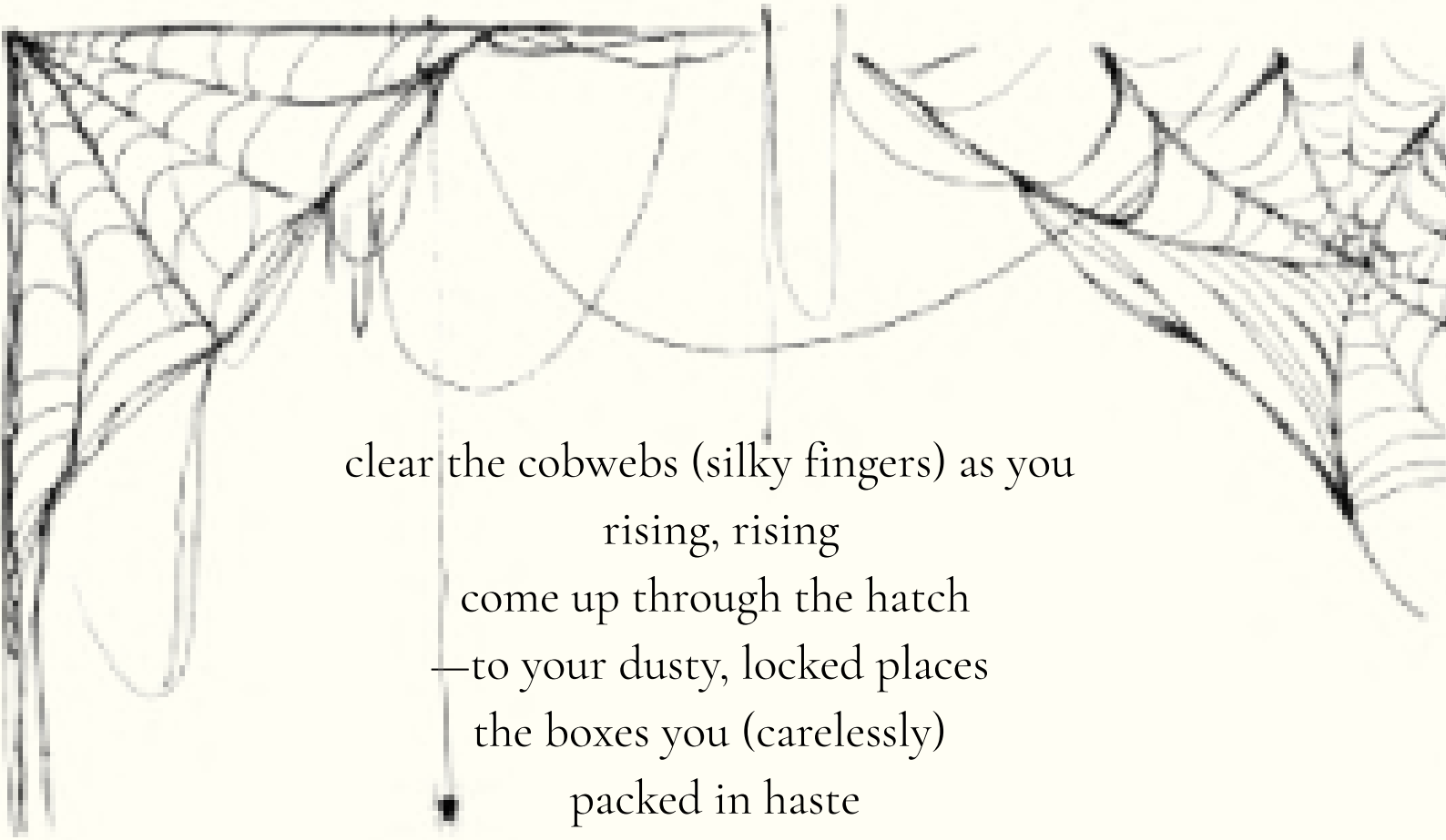
Milind Atkale



reflections

Sonia Nicholson

*after How to Be a Good Creature: A Memoir in Thirteen Animals
by Sy Montgomery*



clear the cobwebs (silky fingers) as you
rising, rising
come up through the hatch
—to your dusty, locked places
the boxes you (carelessly)
packed in haste

prop the glass full length against chimney
bricks, bricks
tarnished frame framing
perfectly every imperfection
—reflections (reflected)
recollection:



sagging skin in the hollows of your
mirror, mirror
eyes, disfigured visions of
bone and flesh clear
—complex complexions
(you) laid bare

fog and veil lift (weightless) to the
rafters, rafters
while hands your hands roll
over your hills
—Elle est belle, le monstre
(your attic instills)



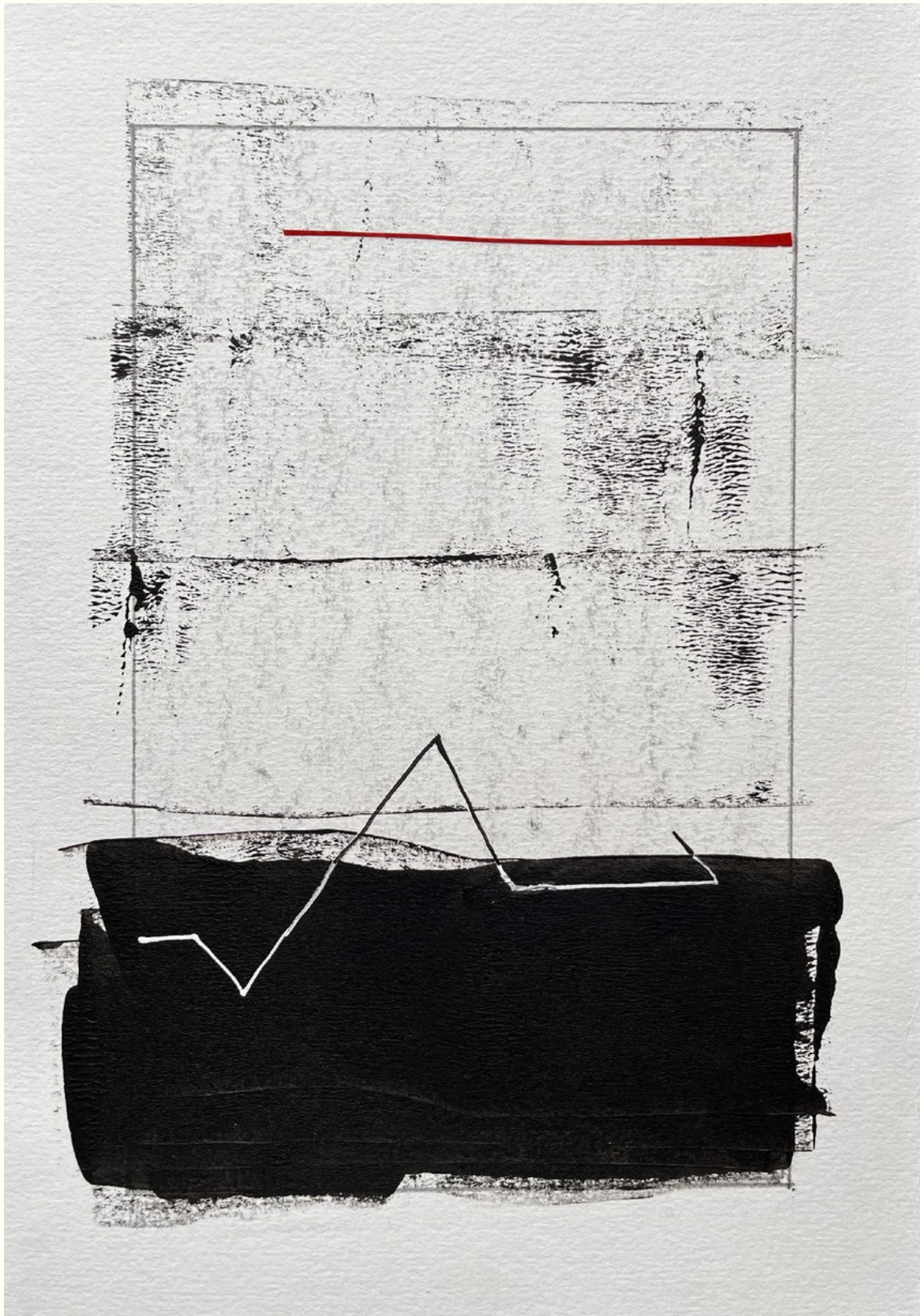
Abstract works



Peter Vukmirovic Stevens



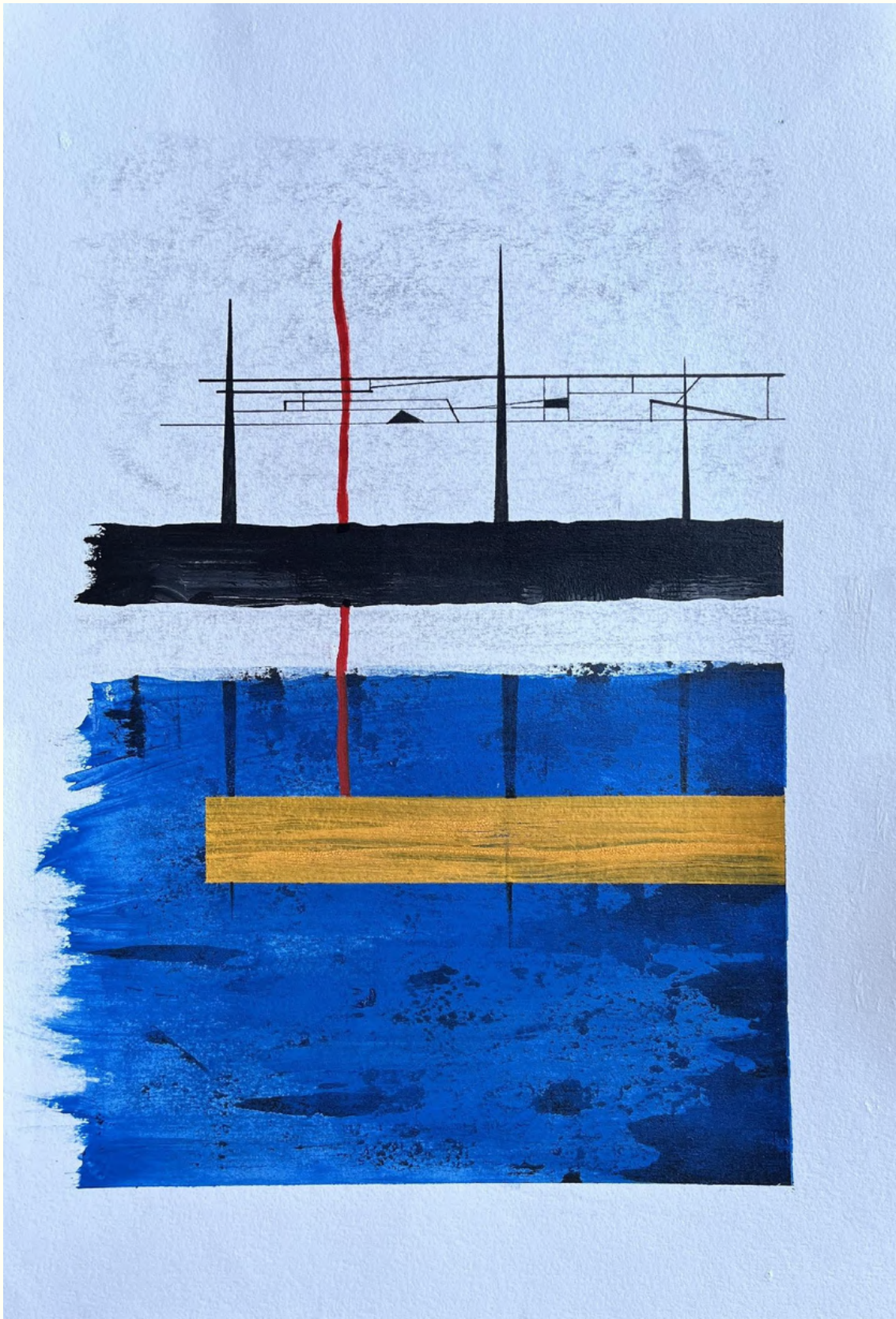
Abstract works



Peter Vukmirovic Stevens



Abstract works



Peter Vukmirovic Stevens



Abstract works



Peter Vukmirovic Stevens



Failed Appetites

Ella Chase

He skipped to the end of the road, loose gravel giving way to concrete, whizzing cars a sign of salvation instead of disintegration. After days of talking only to other animals, humanity appeared more appealing than usual. Wake loved hitchhiking: The rejection, the beating sun, the knife he kept a sweaty palm around in his pocket just in case. At the mercy of the kindness of strangers, made all the more sweet by its rare manifestation. Today, it was instantaneous. One, two, three, score. A beat up blue van, brakes screeching to a halt in the middle of the road.

“I know where you’re going.”

“That’s good because I don’t.”

As a rule of thumb, honest weirdos are better than closet freaks. Safer with a collection of bobbing Jesus’, in various stages of death by crucifixion, than a cleanliness that is hiding something. Sam is an obvious relic of the hippie generation: Beads, long hair, trust, and curiosity.

“I have a friend who wants to meet you. We’ve been looking for your kind.”

“My kind?” Maybe his luck has run out.

“Wanderers.” The clue must have been the dirt laden bag dumped in the back seat with a relieved release of shoulders. “I know you can see. The quiet ones always can.”



“I’ve never had glasses.”

“I can tell you don’t know how to be human.”

Wake has spent his whole life living among another species, more of a clueless anthropologist than participant in life.

“I don’t want to learn.”

“Please meet my friend.”

Years of drifting taught Wake how to flow with the tide of opportunity, and instilled an itch for novelty which blurred notions of danger and common sense. Sam spent the whole ride descending into an intricate history of urban insurgency, homesteading, and prison. Where she met Dale, in for a dubiously illegal concoction of drugs, and the invented experimental facility to go with it. Now only slightly surveilled, a blacked out car every now and then, but otherwise free to play around in their forest sanctuary with a paranoia that only rears its ugly head when on a particularly potent strain of homegrown sativa.

The house, cabin, shack, was set back on a maze of unmarked dirt roads, towering trees letting only dappled sunlight through. Wake was trying to calculate how long the return journey would take on frantic foot. On feet rooted to the rotting porch by a hit of Dale’s bong and the gentle swaying of their hammock. And the terms and conditions of being patient zero:

“You can’t kill yourself. You can’t run away. You must take everything I give you. You have to make friends with everyone you meet. You can only say yes.”

“The friends one might be impossible.”

“Everyone will love you.”



The hype of attracting two strangers slightly soothed Wake's doubt. There was an energy exchange occurring independent of the proposed experiment. Dale, in only heavily stained, inconveniently white pants and a camo baseball cap, had been shifting incrementally closer in tandem with the widening of their glowing eyes. Wake toyed with the idea of a threesome, perhaps inevitable given the way Sam's eyes met his on every glance, and Dale's undeterred closeness despite his unwashed stink. Alas, history was waiting impatiently for the rediscovery of man.

The hypothesis, delivered in bouts of frenzied, borderline indecipherable speech, mixed with drawn out passes for the most speculative of outcomes:

"I want to see through the eyes of a baby, without the reducing valve, with the senses wide open to receive. You know when you forget you have a body, or forget you have a mind? When you forget that time exists and can access it all at once. With you, I can tell we can go deeper, or stay there. I don't need you to remember or understand. I only want to see what you do. I can take you there if you let me. And then you can show us the way."



Wake's messiah complex is the size of Turtle Island and not deterred by the inanity of the concept. A free trip is a free trip after all. The psychedelic concoction looks more like an underaged college kid's desperate attempt to get fucked up than a scientific tool. A murky brown, with floating specks and sunken chunks that nearly force Wake to gag it all back up.

At his insistence, the experiment will take place outdoors, at a meandering creek, instead of in Dale's lab, a root cellar with a primordial energy and unaccountable clutter that would skew the results in the direction of claustrophobic panic.

By now, all natural entities are enacting a continuous flurry of excited movement, reminded that Wake is one of them and eager to welcome him home, and the nudgings of essential freedom are whispering that it's more fun to disobey anyhow. He does hate tripping with other people, a tight knot on the present when a friend is trying to introduce you to their world. Wake hides his smile, knowing Dale's keen observation would catch its mischievous intention, and begs a bathroom break. "Don't look. I might shit."

Dale and Sam respectfully turn away, and Wake crawls, out of necessity and in disguise, down a hill and up a tree before voices rise in futile pursuit. They don't even follow his tracks, saddening an abandoned Wake before he remembers that they're not playing hide and seek. A kiss goodbye to his squirrel guide and a fearfully hesitant scramble back down the tree, before bouncing away on a path invisible to all eyes but his.



On the way, Wake becomes aware, in the cosmic or attentional sense, it's impossible to say, of a matching pair of footsteps, lighter yet more assured, sometimes here and sometimes there but always a friendly presence nonetheless, no more at odds with his journey than the waving leaves and singing trees. He risks a big, "Hello," tired of the teasing. And immediately an apparition, hopping from behind a log, nearly slipping on the moss soaked surface, and becoming shy in her approach, with blooming red cheeks and dark averted eyes.

"Why are you following me?"

"I'm the one leading."

Wake belatedly and abstractly remembers that he's aimlessly wandering in the woods, and takes solace under the wings of his, hopefully not imagined, angel.

"What's your name?"

"That's a dumb question." Shocks Wake into silence, not out of hurt, her tone was one of nonjudgmental mirth, but because he suspects why. Pigeon toes, hair wavering on a curl, skin glowing with the sun. And more than that, a certain tension with embodiment manifested in twitching limbs and shifting eyes, but untamed and unfettered, as Wake assumes he must have been before the world got to him. Or without the world to interfere at all.

"How'd you find me?"

"With a little help from our friend."

"Dale?"

"Who?"

"No one."



“I never would have found you if you weren’t looking.”

“Do you know when we were lost?”

“Not yet.”

The blank years, wherein Wake can picture the vague contours of rooms he spent stuck time in, though fading at the edges without the significant imprints of memory. He remembers now, with a nostalgic anticipation possessing the power to swim against the currents of time.

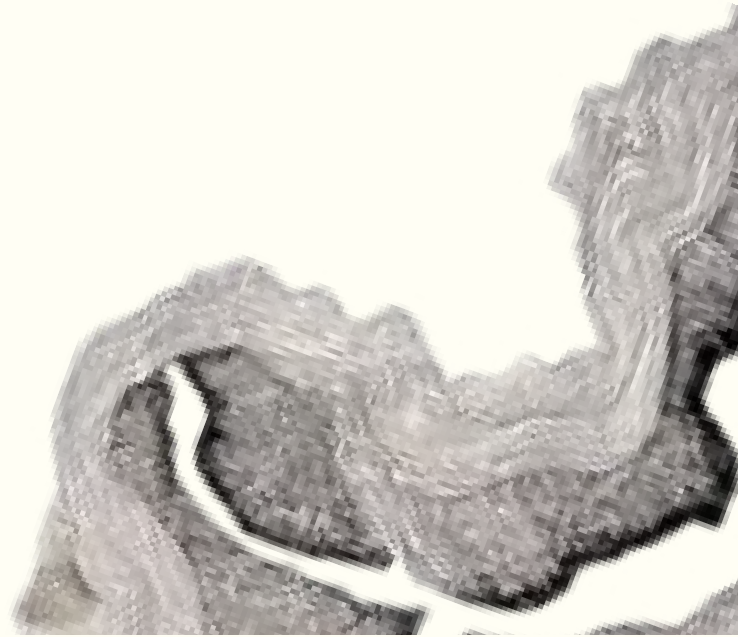
Wake has met this land before, a sense of safety echoes up from the earth as the trees peter out and grass takes their place. The clearing is unshaded and tepid with the sun watching from above, but they bustle around undaunted. Fire and the smell of roasting meat, braiding hair and berry stained cheeks, a processional ferrying Wake to the seat of honour. On a soft blanket with soft faces, he melts into the colony.

“Wind in my face, tears in my eyes, whenever trees and leaves are silent, I panic, because time has stopped.”

“Time has stopped.”

“We are here for a reunion,” The speaker announces from the edge of the circle opposite Wake. There is no head to the amorphous, gathered body, but all eyes flash between these two poles. “Time is cruel, and it is only with the coldness of naked existence that we learn how to honour those we can no longer touch. I’ve forgotten how it feels to carry the world on my back, to open my eyes every morning to the yawning expanse of the unknown, to be nameless.”

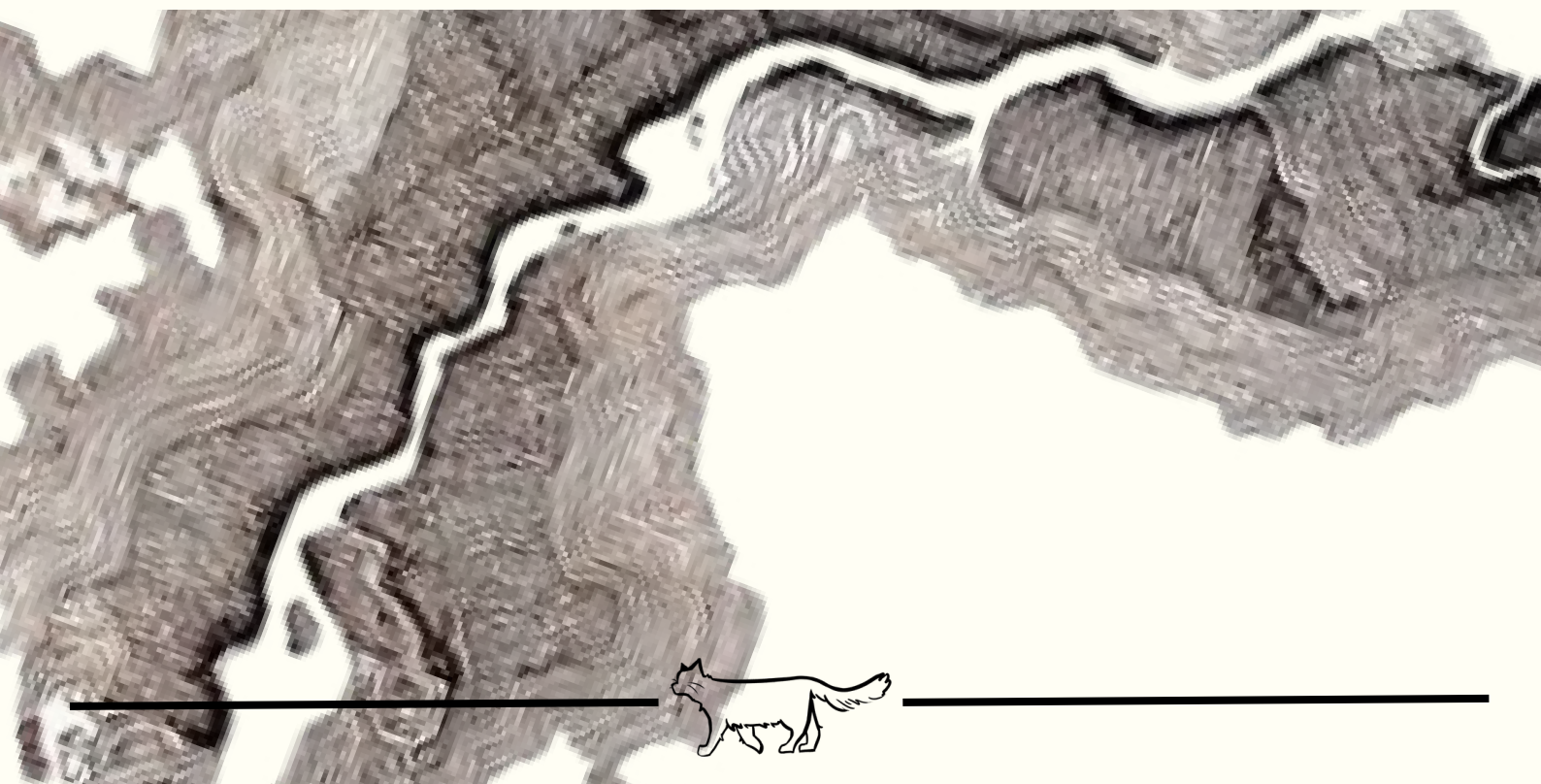




Eye contact with a mirror could last forever: They smile encouragingly at Wake, who, with the impulse of a twitching muscle, responds. “I want to see when I get happy. I want to stand still. I want someone to stop me from disappearing.”

The girl from before delivers a handful of meat, charred and dripping, to Wake, who acquiesces with the tearing teeth of an animal. Hungry gazes stick to his skin as he crosses the circle and kneels. “I don’t need to go back as long as you show me the way.”

“What way?”



Our Staff

Editor in Chief

Ritobrita Mukherjee

Senior Editors

Ayana Bhattacharya
Srijoni Nandi

Copy Editor

Shreya Datta

Cover Credits

Anuraag Das Sarma
Ritobrita Mukherjee

