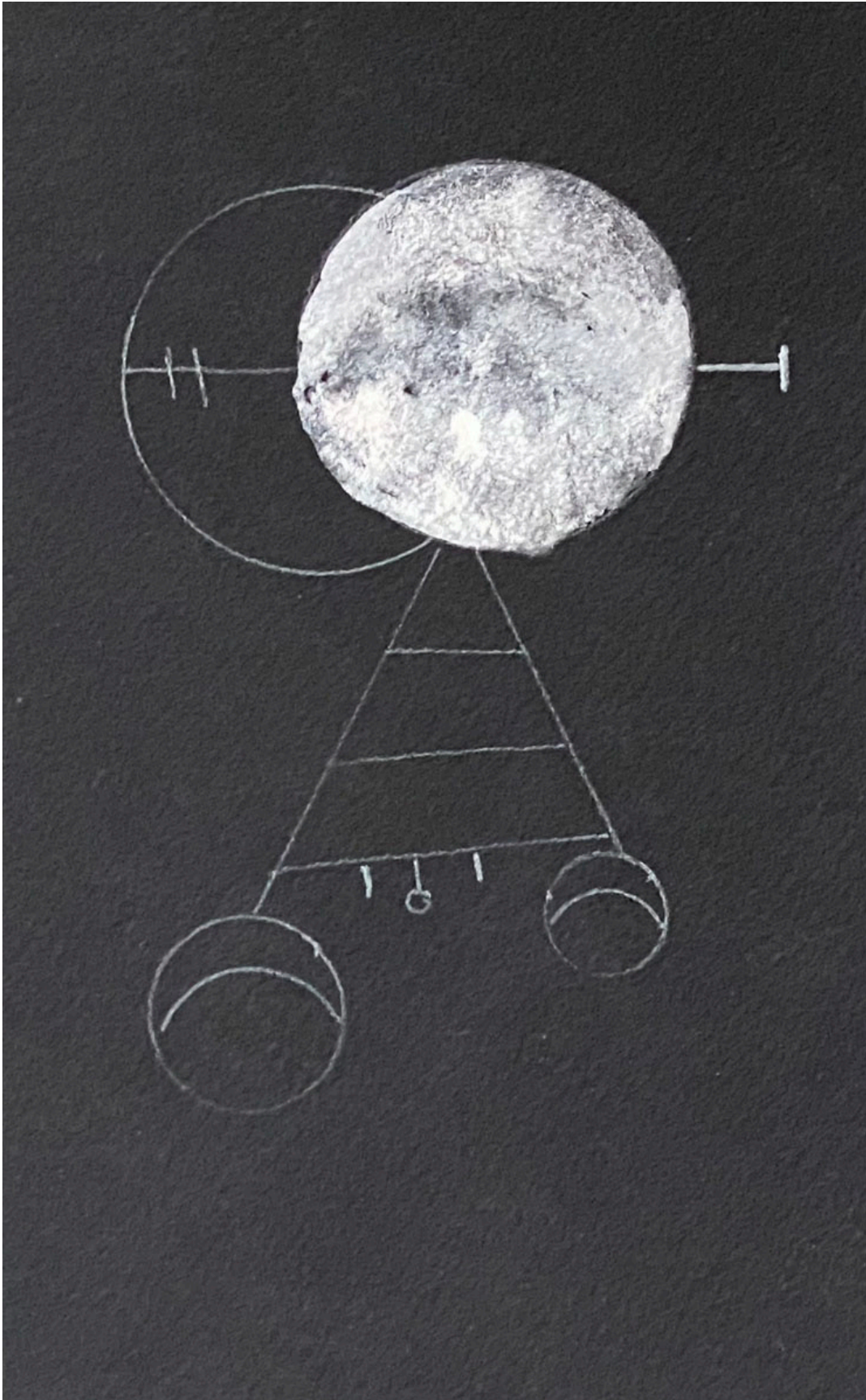




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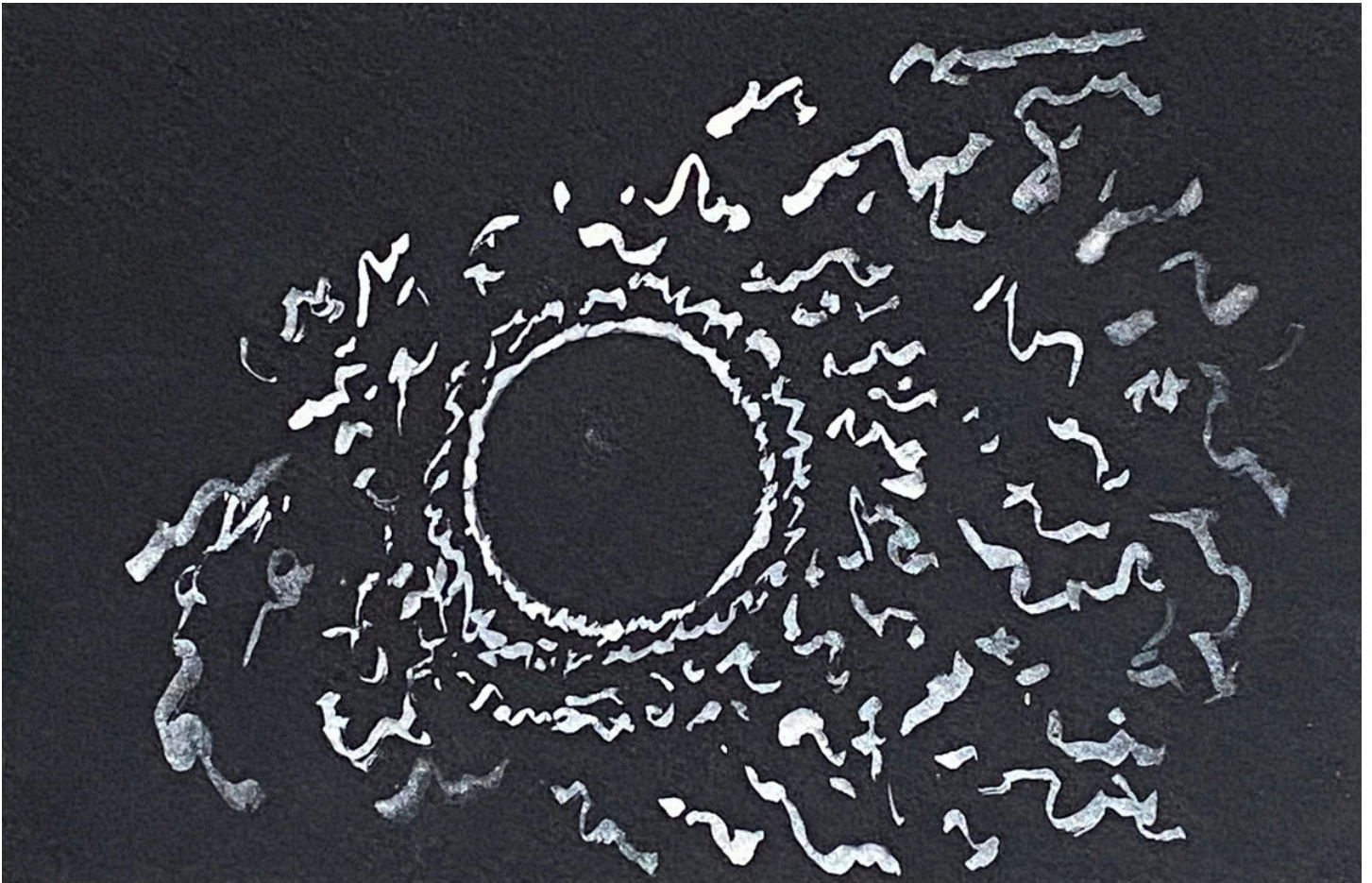
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Alexis Fedorjaczenko  
Hiram Larew  
Lin Lune  
M.P. Pratheesh  
stephanie roberts  
JP Seabright  
Shloka Shankar  
Katy Wimhurst  
Jill Zheng

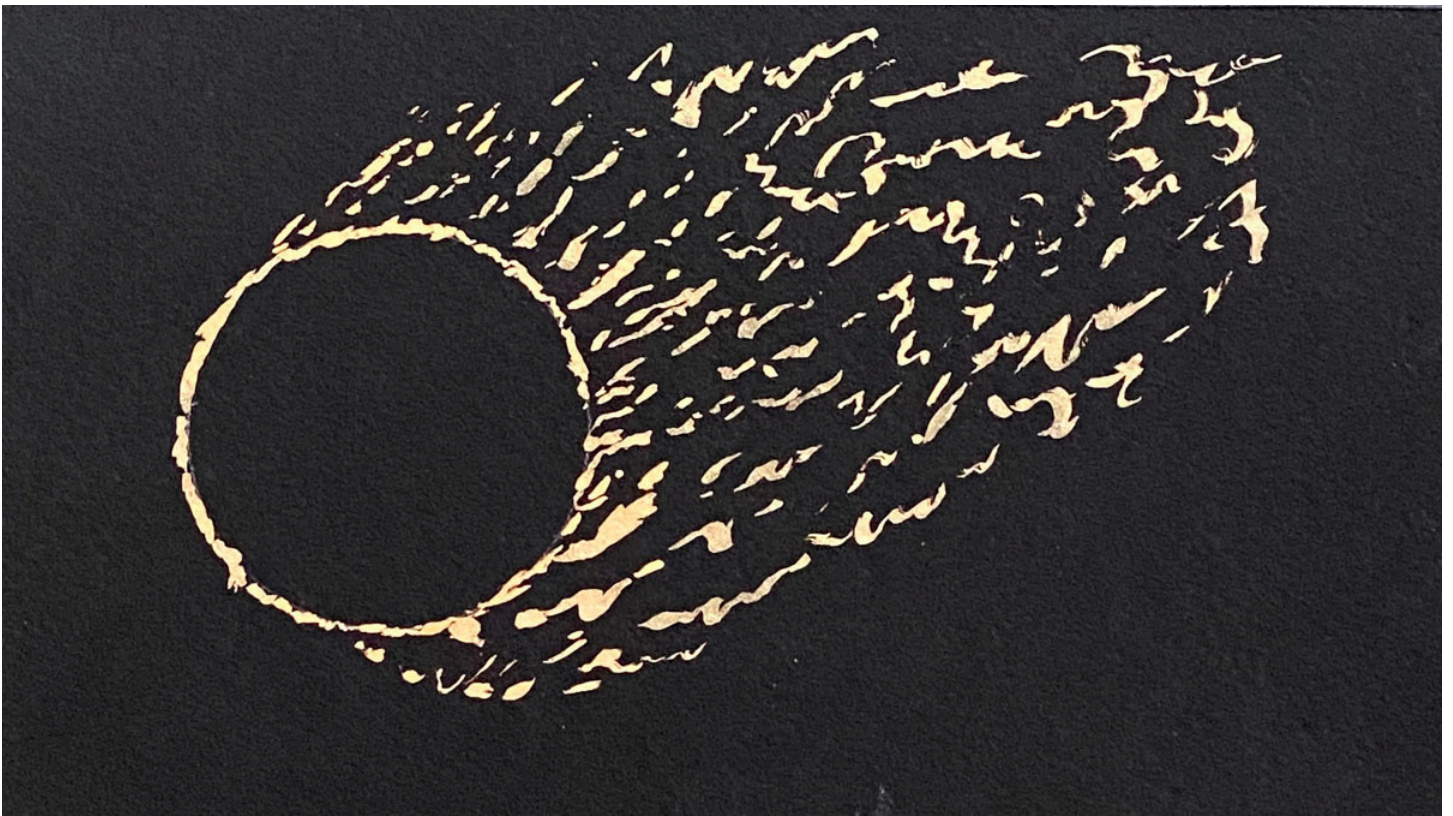
*for the strange*



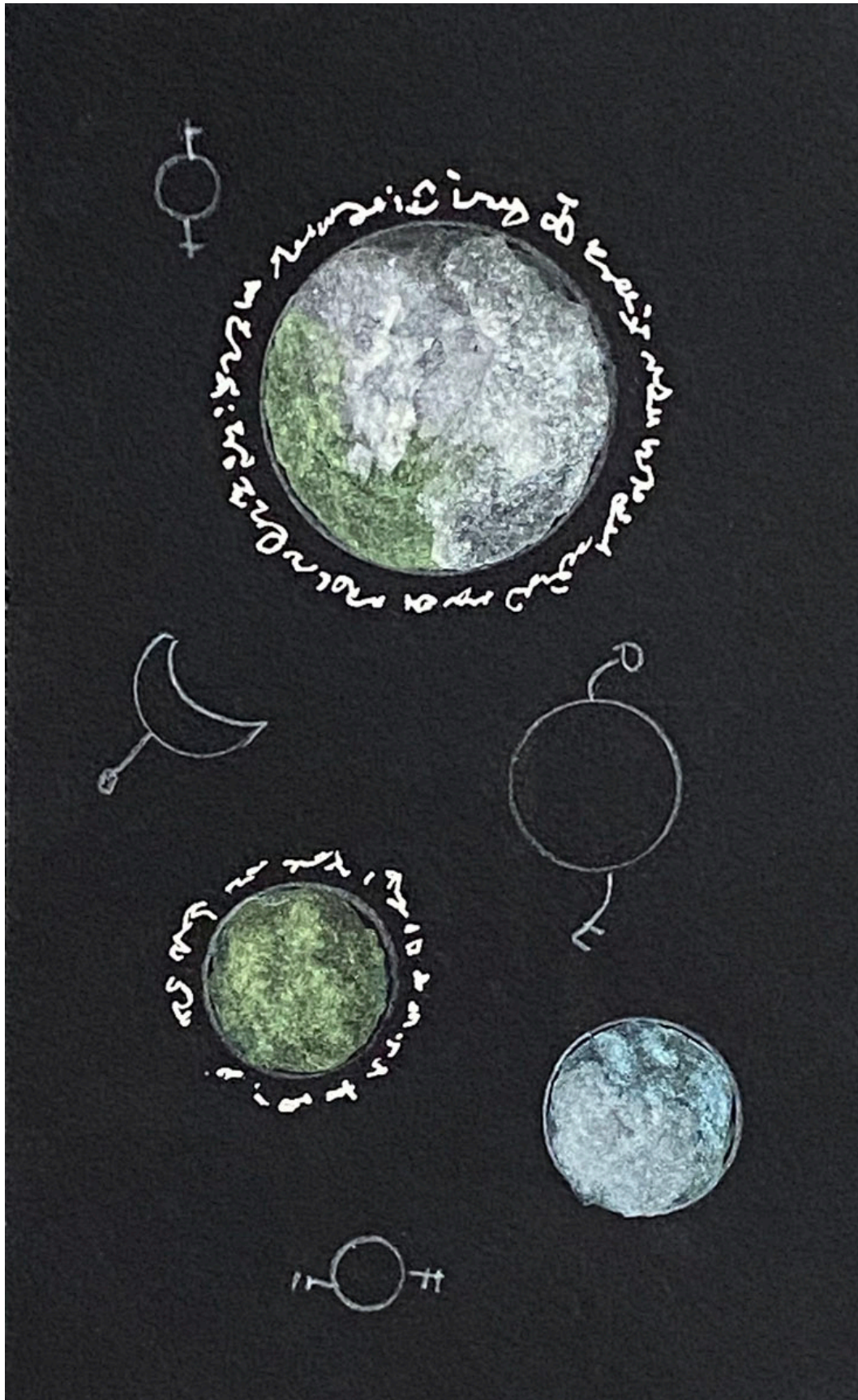
perfect is not perfection

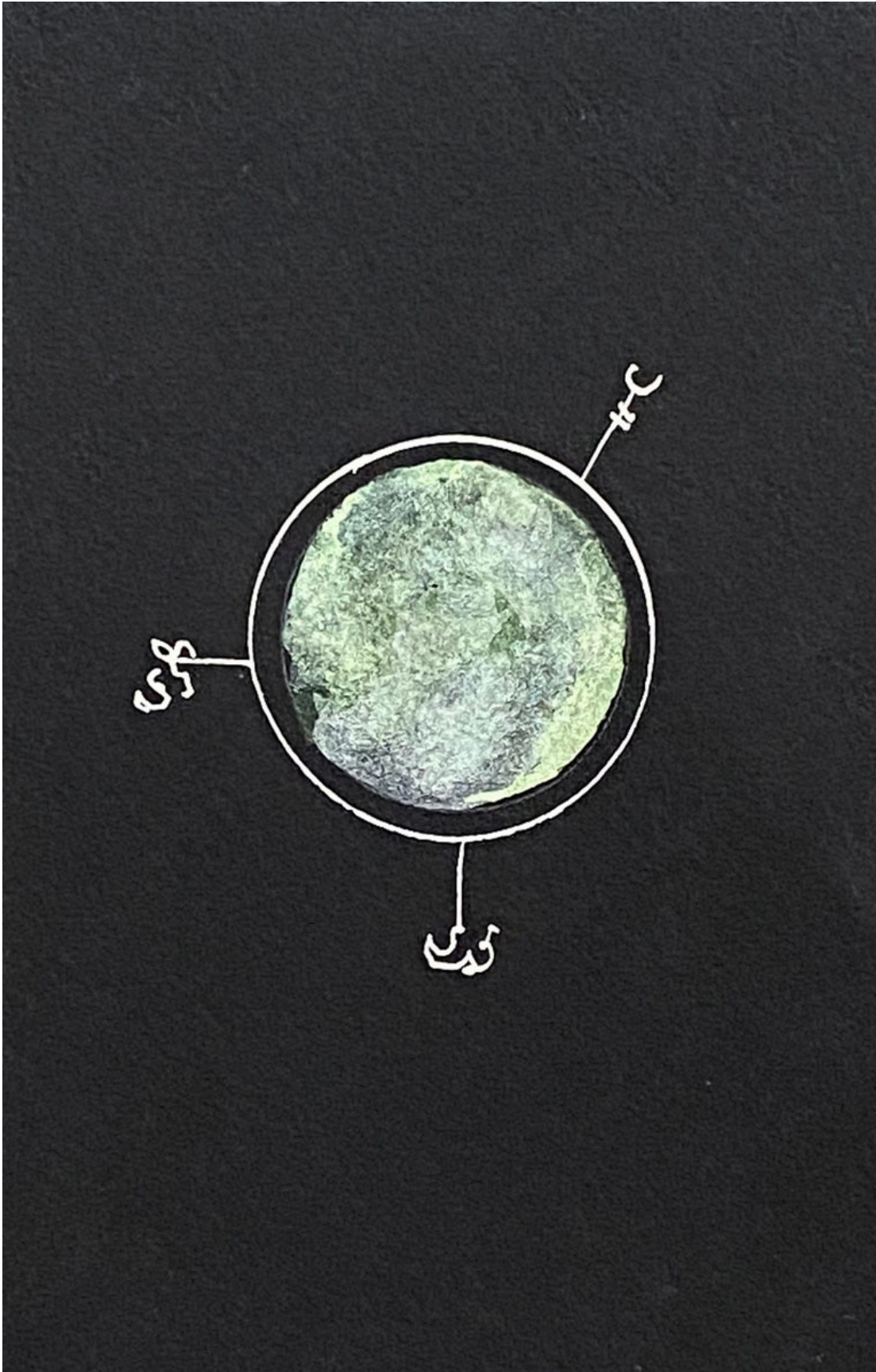




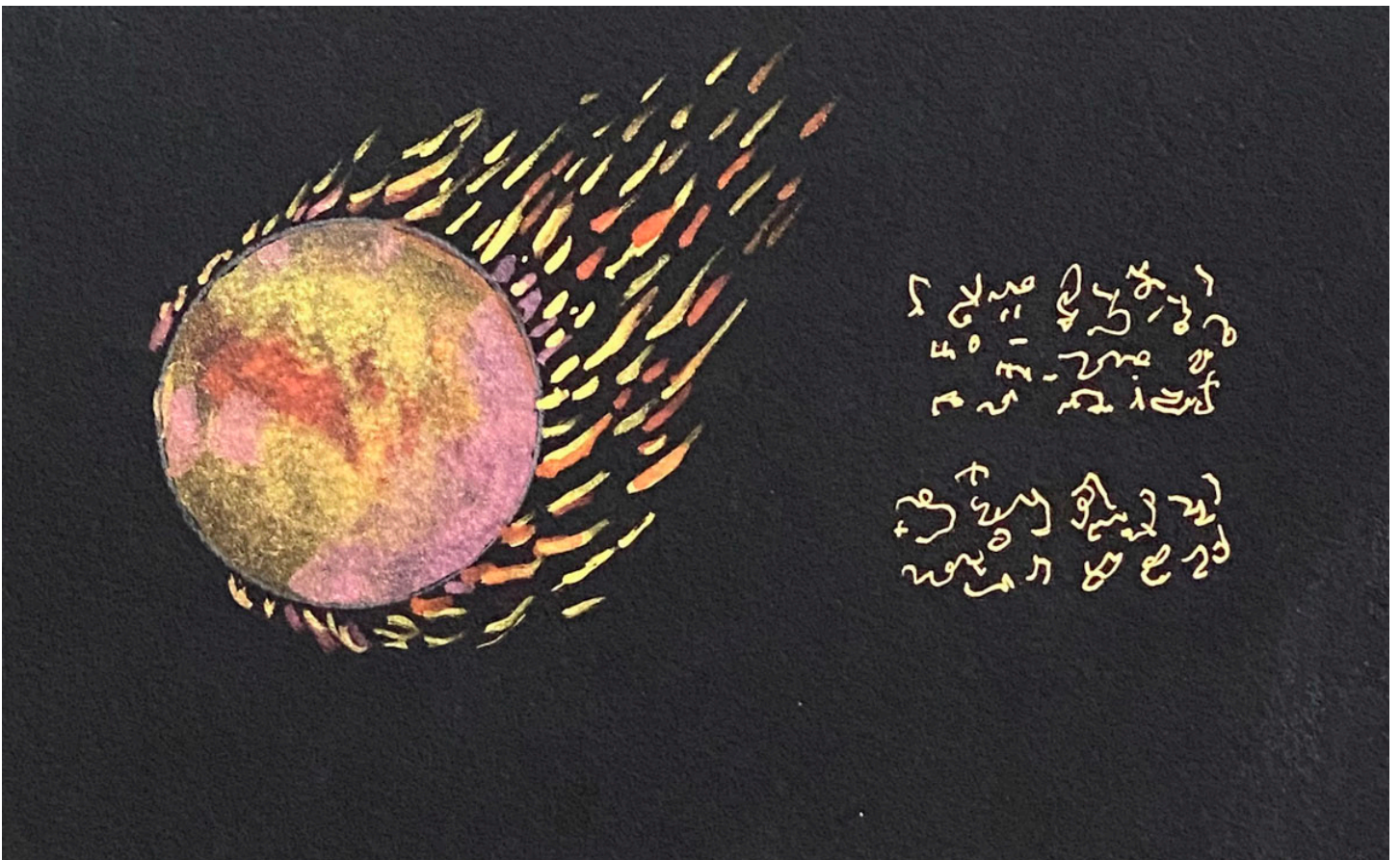


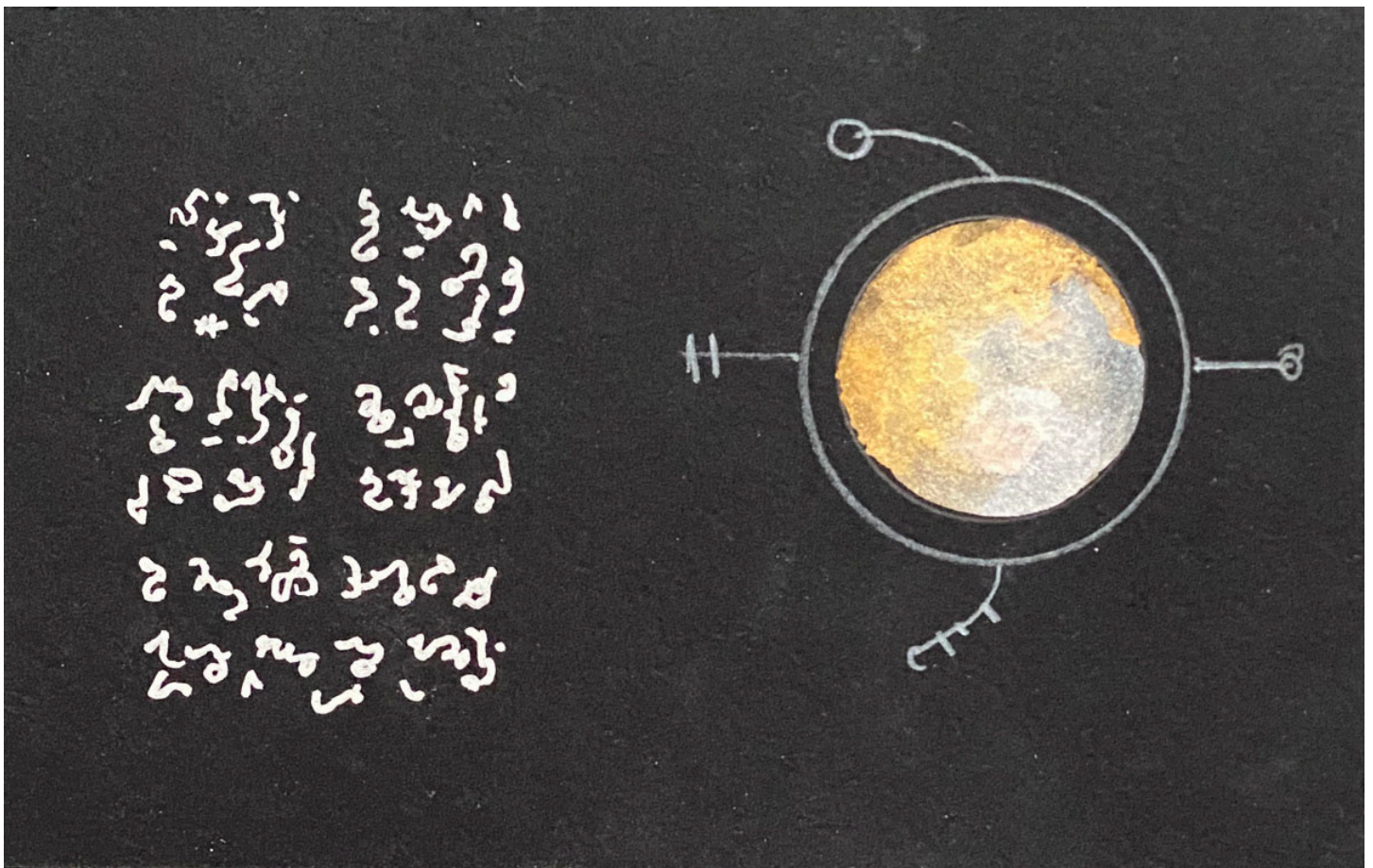












## I. That Was When

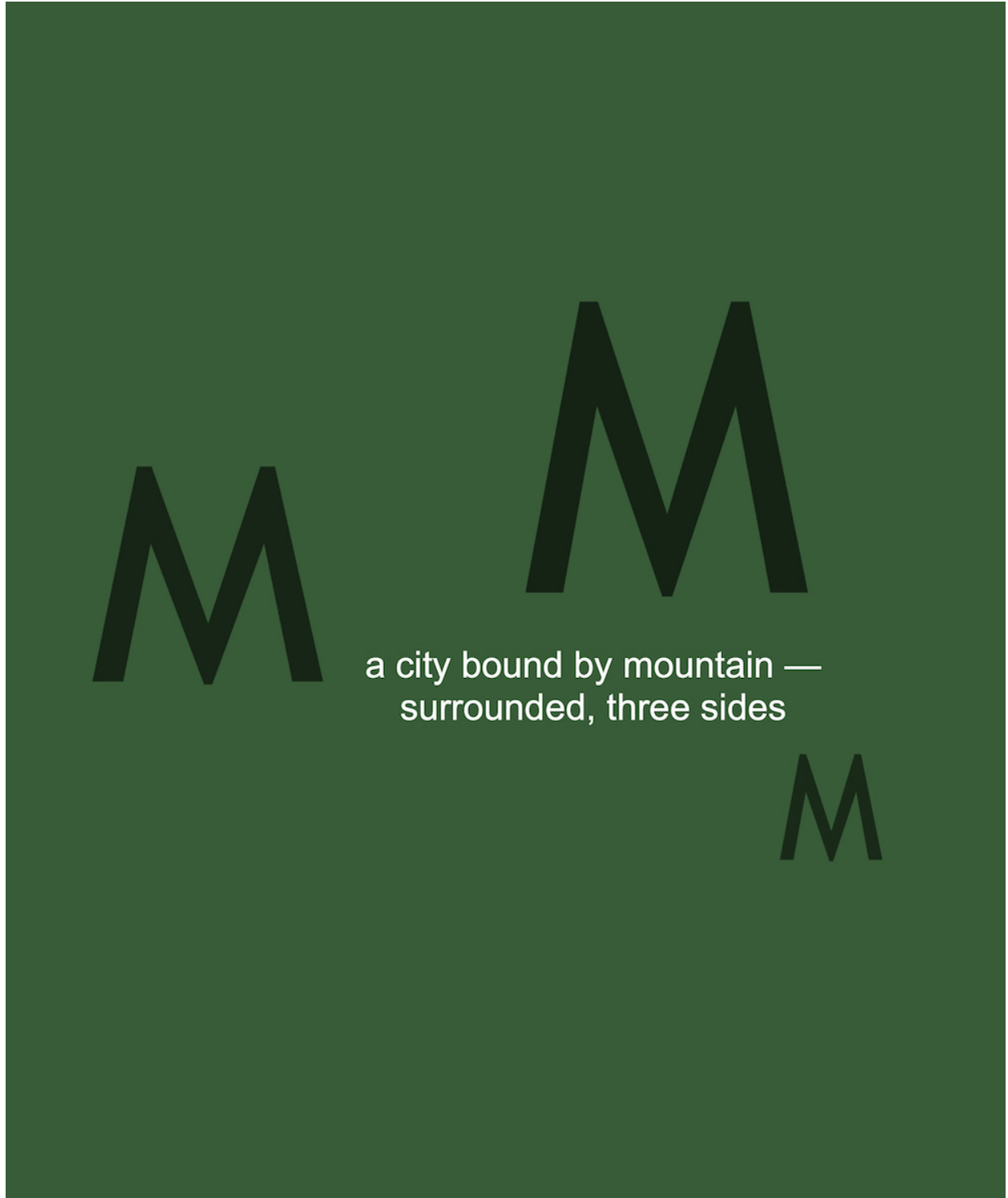
your head was so filled with darkness

and I mistook your arrival

[illegible]

## II. That Was When

I became a pile of stones  
and carried myself o n e b y o n e a c r o s s t h e r o o m  
to lay my message in your shadow





Ponto-chō Alley narrow

in Kyoto's valley wide

Where?

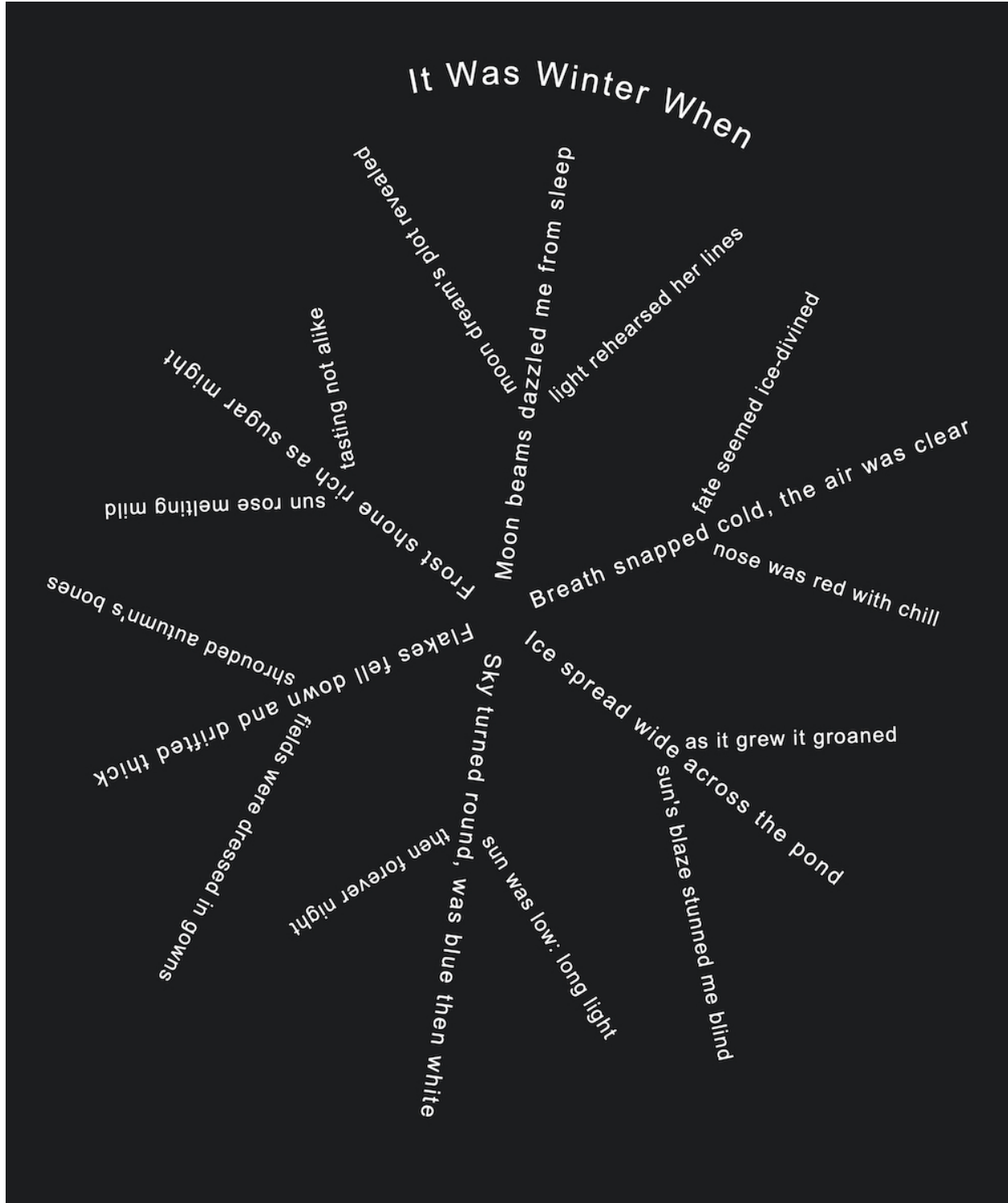
under a tree  
in milky light uouu  
below a cold moon  
in the dark night of the  
north of more moons  
with friends  
in my head  
so far  
always  
on a branch  
above ground  
by a fire  
in daydreams about  
plums peacocks or pirate ships  
where I'm wet and speechless  
to the other side

Here.

light exists in spring  
spring lights in exist  
exist springs in light  
light springs in exist  
exist lights in spring  
spring exists in light

wide arms of the wind

in dreams I see **T**rees roam



In scants of branch  
    from rustled light  
    my brimming leaves  
    my barely justs

These dappled words  
    that wander off  
    to hoping

And as they go  
    their lifting swifts  
    my heart in two

On wings that make  
    my ifs of sweep

Where rise is hid  
    in wishing trees

And quiet hums  
    in deeper froms  
    in jottings through  
    and spinnings of

The stars in your chest --  
the sounds of their glow  
their flash blink wings  
their touch top skies.

These leaps towards light --  
these grateful urging holy stars  
in your chest and now in your throat.

Their voices of beams  
even into your heart and beyond.

Their blaze --  
each star that starts in your chest  
and spins out from there.

Spins you as nothing else can  
as magic comes true  
with your chances so inside and out.

With each and every star  
so over the moon.

This poem first appeared in *Orbis* and then in Larew's collection, *Mud Ajar*.

Here's a link to Hiram Larew reading *Magic*  
-- *Magic -- as read by Hiram Larew - YouTube*

Here's a link to Eric Epstein's American Sign Language translation of *Magic*  
-- *Eric Epstein's American Sign Language Interpretation of Larew's Poem, "Magic" - YouTube*

And, here's a link to Eric Epstein explaining his translation process  
-- *Behind the Scenes -- Eric Epstein Discusses How He Translated "Magic" - YouTube*

Please live with me as pudding  
So that we can go back in milky saucepans  
    to when all wooden spoons  
    stirred the morning  
Or to other chores  
    of cracked corn or sorting suds  
    or swirling yolks

Go back with me  
    in apron time  
To a skimming off as cooling  
    that topped the top  
    for shredded coconut  
    for years ago  
    or raisins

Our greatest aunts of aunts  
    their ladles  
    or windows bright as hope  
    all wisps and cares  
    rising at the corners

For every cupboard  
    its pudding cups

Be both then and now with me --  
    the loved-face clock up there  
    those raisins

I wasn't then but really am --  
When mosquitoes waited on screens  
When water dripped from spigots  
    when most roads  
    were all but lost  
    and tailpipes

I wasn't then  
    in a uniform or snapshots  
    not there at all  
My jello hadn't even started

Any smoky singers flirting  
    were where the world was --  
Where grins were given out as gum  
    until there was nowhere else to go

I wasn't then  
Not slim or tousled trouble  
Not even a pen-pal  
    or a broomed porch or eager pies  
Much less a country --  
    those frilly scalloped dresses

And I wasn't to be then ever again  
    but am

With every billboard looking back over its shoulder  
Or night blooming vines  
    as pale and dreamy as newsreels

That was somehow the year of years --  
    nearly at last  
    like a full moon adored

Ové fir iyz nd burstled plent  
Ové fir loove er sparktled purp

Tay tu thz breyted furth fantas  
Tay eec rezeled swupping breep  
Entu fah fah beyor  
Aze yeelawz prred

Aze trlu triumty pinnkin eez  
Reze! fleckley  
Reze! splingl  
Reze! evi glygloe dazly bloo  
Evi iy-whupd freenig twing

Ové!

If clouds would sidle up to us  
as friends

If what we wished  
oiled every hinge  
or moved our time outside  
or framed each page  
with light foretold

If cans on shelves were faces held --  
the one we've grown to love

Or if keys opened all the wind for us  
and weeds hid gold inside

If echoes from the well came up  
to treasure us

If all such miracles were hardly told  
like thunder far away

If tassels of corn would teach us songs  
or only this --  
if vines could whistle from porches

The lives we've left undone --  
    our breezy plans  
    of never made  
With years on years of mistaken yanked ups  
    or even tossed away

And all of those unused tickets  
    those times of just this once  
    we never risked  
Even every didn't-know or didn't-care  
    we relished

Yes we only thought of comfort

So what of now --  
These waking ups to little chance  
    or sudden want  
The why oh why of should haves  
    and more and more  
    the tall-as-time fence we peek through

Say I to you  
    these sighs  
    of spilling wings  
All lifted in this once  
    for us

Say I to you  
    by beams  
    like dawn and rise  
Or even more  
    how open climbs  
    beside us

Say I to you  
    of wants and new  
    that pillows sing  
    for waking in  
    and with us

How grateful lifts  
    and brings  
    this I to you  
To hover us on will be

To slightly sin is when  
you're caught saying *That's damn right!*  
to the TV.

Worse than that is when you toss litter from your truck  
like you're in some parade.

But the very worst of all --  
what chases Heaven down the hole --  
is when you run off with the hounds  
as all of this hot mess of something  
is flying around.

That's surely the most cussed up living of all.

I live in meanwhile --  
    my time frays with its undoing  
My breath slantly breathes  
    and these turning pages  
    just suggest me

I hide in the midst of  
    and peek through jaunts or dreams  
My sacks are packed full of  
    long for

My train whistles  
And I travel the wishing  
    on halfway between

Better said  
I love country stores  
    that sell the smell of then  
    or just so

This poem first appeared in *Live Encounters*.

A ~~cardinal~~blue jay perches on the top of a bare tree and chirps out a sharp sequence above background spring birdsong like stabbing the high keys of a piano. On another tall tree standing by itself in the inner city park, a ~~blue jay~~cardinal flutters to a higher branch, bare twig swaying under its weight, and chirps a louder sequence over the cardinal like a handsaw plucking a violin. In the first tree, the chirping-screeching grows even louder. The blue jay catches its breath, scanning for more strategic perches and reacts just in time to a blur of metallic red coming in fast with talons outstretched and not for a landing. The blue jay feels the passing draft of the cardinal as it flaps, unharmed, to open sky. There is no more birdsong.

Settling into rhythmic wingbeats, the blue jay begins to circle the green grassed park ringed by concrete structures taller than the trees, reveling in ~~clear the existence of~~ sky and ~~clean~~ hazy sunlight. A whisper of turbulence from below, however, sends the bird careening to the side, and not a moment too soon: Something with lethal velocity blasts past where the blue jay was just a second ago, leaving behind a scent of ugly smoked wood ~~and powerful heat~~. Looking down, the blue jay realized the tree where it had perched in was completely aflame. Looking up, the blue jay got a glimpse of scaled wing, finned tail, before throwing itself to the side once again to dodge what seemed to be an orbital laser of fire. The stream of white hot fire chased the blue jay, leaving blackened streaks of vitrified plants zigzagged on the ground. Slapping the air with tachycardic strokes in a bid to get away, the blue jay pieced together snapshots of its hunter: a six-limbed fire breathing ~~drake~~dragon with cardinal red feathers blending into scales. But ~~dragon~~wyvern wings could not turn as fast, and the bird gained enough time to risk a flyby past the dragon's head, staring it in the eye and chirping like a smashed guitar. Dragon eyes widened in outrage. Then narrowed in satisfaction as the bird ~~smacked into~~met its whip-like tail. The blue jay seemed to be stunned, spinning out of control for a second, but then deftly snapped its wings and shot forward out of harm's way of the follow-up flamethrower. The red dragon gave chase again, using its flame in smaller but quicker bursts, harrying its prey upwards in full view--until the clear silhouette of a small bird in open sky was replaced by the glare of the sun.

The dragon stopped flying directly into the sun and sheepishly ~~hovered~~.

Hearing nothing except the crackle of dying fires, the red dragon angled to leisurely circle the park. Then the dragon did a double-take, wingtips stuttering in realization as it squinted towards the sun. With an ~~awkward~~ ~~awkward~~ agile maneuver, it ~~strategically~~ fled towards the earth.

Commented [ .1]: no that's not how it happened

For high high above hiding in the sun's glare, something was gathering and growing. Like a storm cloud it cast a shadow growing darker and darker before a sonic boom and a blinding flash of white.

In the aftermath the park looked like it had been dipped in liquid nitrogen, a week of freezing rain fallen over just under a second. A blue dragon came in on a steep landing and as it gracefully whumped down onto a bed of stalagmites that was the grass, all the trees instantly shattered from the ground up. In the silence of a deep winter the dragon cleared itself a circle and sat down, preening its wings like a bird, tucking away tufts of blue feathers until it was all diamond sheeted scale.

A rumble of shifting rock interrupted the iced over diorama. In a frosted and cracked open monolith of concrete, the red dragon from inside sawed a hole with its fiery beam and poked out its head on ground level.

"Misssed," it stage-whispered.

The blue dragon responded with a silent roar and air started shimmering above the concrete shelter. The red dragon quickly cut through the shimmer with its fire, activating a premature explosion and a deluge of snowflakes. The red dragon shook its head clear of snow and remnants of shattered books--its shelter seemed to be a library.

"Will this one also be a tie, my mortal enemy?" It hissed again, head resting comfortably on a pile of rubble.

"Sure," said Blue, turning away to inspect its wings.

Red blinked. "Ceding so easily? Feigning weakness to bring me off guard?"

"You started it," Blue said without so much of a glance in its direction.

Red took a moment to think of a retort while sliding more out of the rubble. "But you met my challenge head-on. You would welcome it."

"Not like there's any other choice."

"Always there lies the choice to surrender," Red said, then louder, "but you have not, you coward, only opted for a strategic retreat at dire times, so have I done the same." It walked out into the light on four legs, neck raised high next to an odd chimney shaped like a blocky swan head. "If you are finished catching your breath, come at me."

Red then slung a fireball over, a direct hit on its opponent.

But the fireball left no visible mark as it fizzled out.

"But before we begin," Blue said, also beginning to stand, "why do we fight?"

Commented [ .2]: really? anyone got a better line?

Red sliced off the chimney at its base. "Enough of this distraction! There is no reasoning with the enemy."

"Yet here you are. We are. Look at this." Blue tossed something that landed at Red's feet in two pieces: a songbird frozen in flight, one of its wings snapped off, the other already missing.

"And what be this? A trophy?"

"A bird that was just a bird. And we came along and ruined its day."

"Feh!" Red snapped, blasting its laser at a glassy building and watching it crumble.

Blue went on, "It was nice here, a place of order and busy life. We caused enough trouble. A short warp to the Void of Skellzg for a rematch?" It said with dripping irony.

Commented [ .3]: ignore this

"Here?" Red said to the background of dripping meltwater and crumbling structures. "You grow attached to here, a temporary arena, mourning seconds while forgetting years. We have laid waste to galaxies." And somewhere in another world a crowd cheered for their hero.

Commented [ .4]: does not make sense

"Is this any different?" Blue picks up another frozen animal and flicks it aside. ~~A ear alarm begins to blare in the distance, then abruptly stops.~~ "Why do we fight?"

Red draws in a huge breath and speaks, "because the planet of Loth, born on a backwards orbit and seething with incurable darkness, is sending emissaries across the Stag Arm spreading its corruption into my hometree and you still protect their seedships."

"But they have good chocolate," says Blue.

Ignoring the comment, Red goes on, "by attacking you, even if victory is not mine, others will think twice before dealing with the Lothren and their despicable practices. It is recorded from the last Xenowar that they've committed... unspeakable crimes that I shall not name, shall not stoop to their base savagery. Welcome is the day that all who leave from that cursed planet will only return the lesser, or not return at all."

"And according to the Pact of Somnambulism signed with a blood oath in 374XI, you rallied a merry band of Jedi Knights at the roundtable to quest for the seven dragon rings of power to unlock a bonfire at the Erdtree's 111st birthday party."

Commented [ .5]: lol

"What?!" said Red.

"What?" said Blue.

Commented [ .6]: lol

"I fight," Red said slowly, "to continue the legacy of those before me. To oppose tyranny, to protect my family, both born and found. I fight because it is the right thing, the only thing, to do!"

"And to look cool," Blue said after blowing an icy smoke ring.

The red dragon curled its tail around one leg and said nothing. Standing proudly beside its statement of the utmost ~~truth~~delusion.

"Honestly, I like looking cool while punching you in the face," Blue said and waved off the other dragon's protest. "But it gets tiring after awhile, just duking it out without purpose."

"A cheap potshot does not mean I can lose to the likes of you," Red interrupted.

"I don't think we can lose. Me or you, I mean," Blue reflected.

"So I stop this, and the Lothren harvesters--as they please--can carve EM wands out of the bones of Kindred children force-fed... don't even get me started."

"What if..." Blue begins, and seeing no indication of a long speech from Red, continues, "the Lothren are just a backdrop to this... family bloodfeud; your grandmother betrayed mine, and so our families became enemies, the trade war just an excuse."

"You are asking for forgiveness? For an end- Ha! Yes, then I shall retire, raise two point five children on a grassy lawn and a white picket fence, never to fight another day! I think not."

Blue shook its head at the ground, but with its mouth open, and mist rose out of the ground around it. Red just sat on its haunches and waited.

The mist cleared to reveal a human sized figure armor-clad in head to toe scalemail, holding a long and thin halberd that looked as if it was carved from one solid piece of iceberg blue crystal. Dragon motifs adorned shoulder plates and helmet.

"We are two generals," Blue said, voice sounding like it came from something much larger than the humanoid, "riding ahead of their armies to negotiate. Reaching a truce." It stabbed its weapon into the thawing soil and left it there. "Falling in love."

"Being betrayed," Red snarls. "Keeping secrets, flinching at each other's touch."

"And talking it over, sharing tea on long cold nights outside a tent, looking at the stars. Disbanding the armies. Holding council to political debates and rap battles and death metal concerts all in one."

"I command ten thousand souls each sworn their death to me," Red booms. "Each soldier rescued from slavery or debt-born and trained as an elite cadre like family. We fight to the last, bathed in blood."

Blue finger-counted, "only ten?"

"Twelve hundred ~~million~~ are the full ranks," Red hollered and looked to the right where the ground began to fissure open: airships, biplanes, helicarriers, mounted griffons, Pegasus drawn flying saucers, a shapeshifting shapeless polygon of mirrors, all manner of warcraft began to emerge in the distance.

Commented [ .7]: don't you dare start something here

Commented [ .8R7]: why?

Commented [ .9R7]: agree to disagree ok? don't comment, nothing happens

Commented [ .10]: billion!

Commented [ .11R10]: quintillion, why not

"Who's piloting the shiny thing there?" Blue pointed with a taloned glove.

"The shiny thing?" Red said, visibly stalling.

"Don't worry," Blue said condescendingly, "not every general knows the names and backstories of their foot soldiers. Makes the dying easier."

Red whipped its head forward and said, "but we do not die. The resuscitation tech we safeguard ensures every loyal follower stays by my side through uploading their neural tapestry on moment of death into a cloned body in the prime of life. How glorious it feels to be part of something bigger than yourself, to single-mindedly pursue a common goal with no worry of failure. Fear this immortal force of nature!:-"

"So you can't die, this war-cult that worships you." Blue turned away from the ever increasing formation of flying curiosities. "You also can't live properly, if they're ever alive in the first place. If you really want an army, start with one person. Go talk to them, see if what they want to join you."

"Can't talk to the Lothren."

"You think you can't. Have you tried?" Blue asks, arms gesturing in fake goodwill.

"Indeed. Now I know I can't."

"I think what you know-"

Red forms its mouth to spew fire, but scorched a line on the ground separating the two, and launched into flight.

Blue lowers the shield it had strapped to its back, then touched its free hand to its ear and teleported away.

Commented [ .12]: tune it down

Commented [ .13]: hmm

Commented [ .14]: was this real?

Commented [ .15R14]: are you real?

Commented [ .16R14]: am I real?

Commented [ .17]: this is not the end

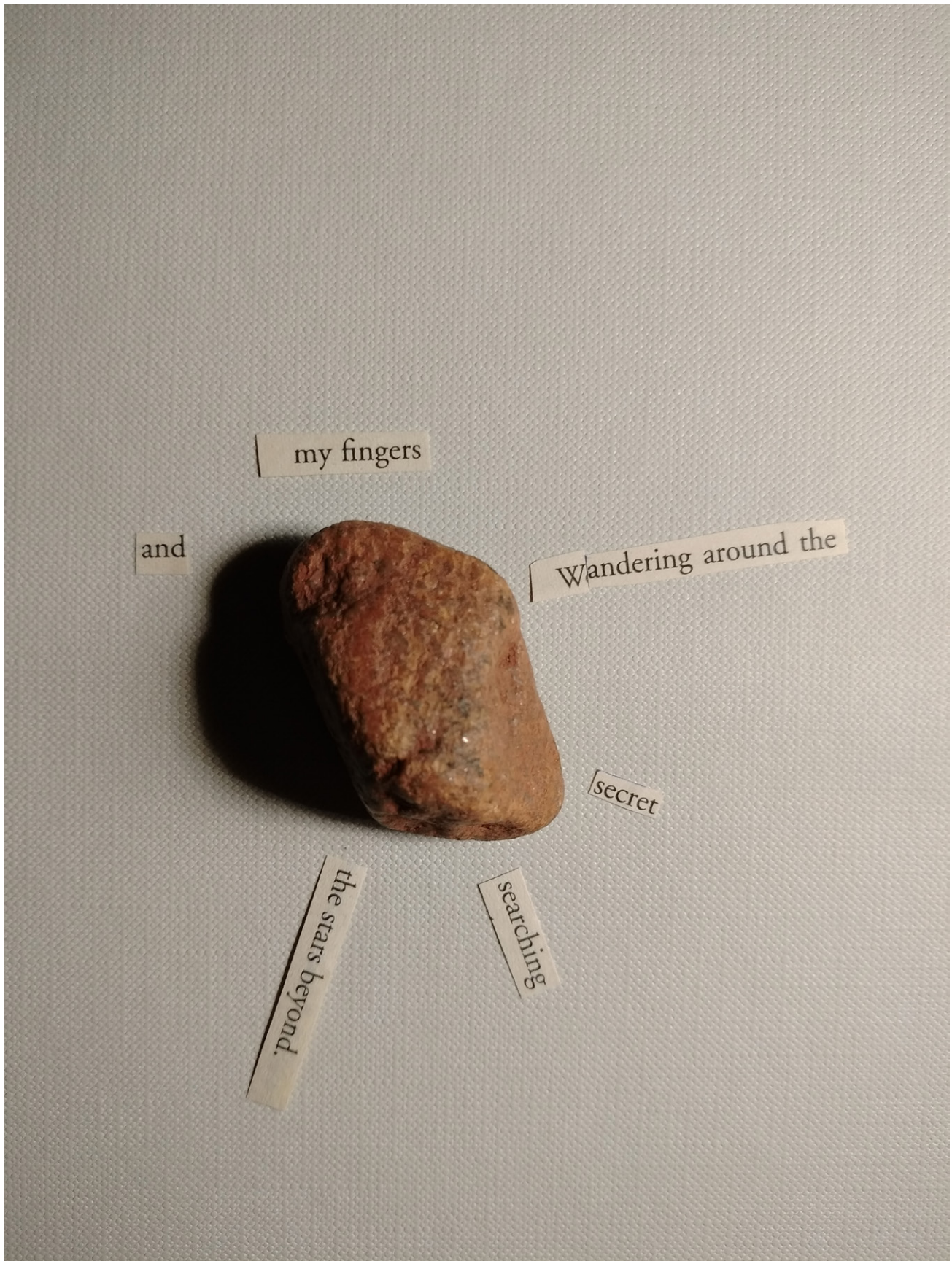
Commented [ .18R17]: this is not even the beginning

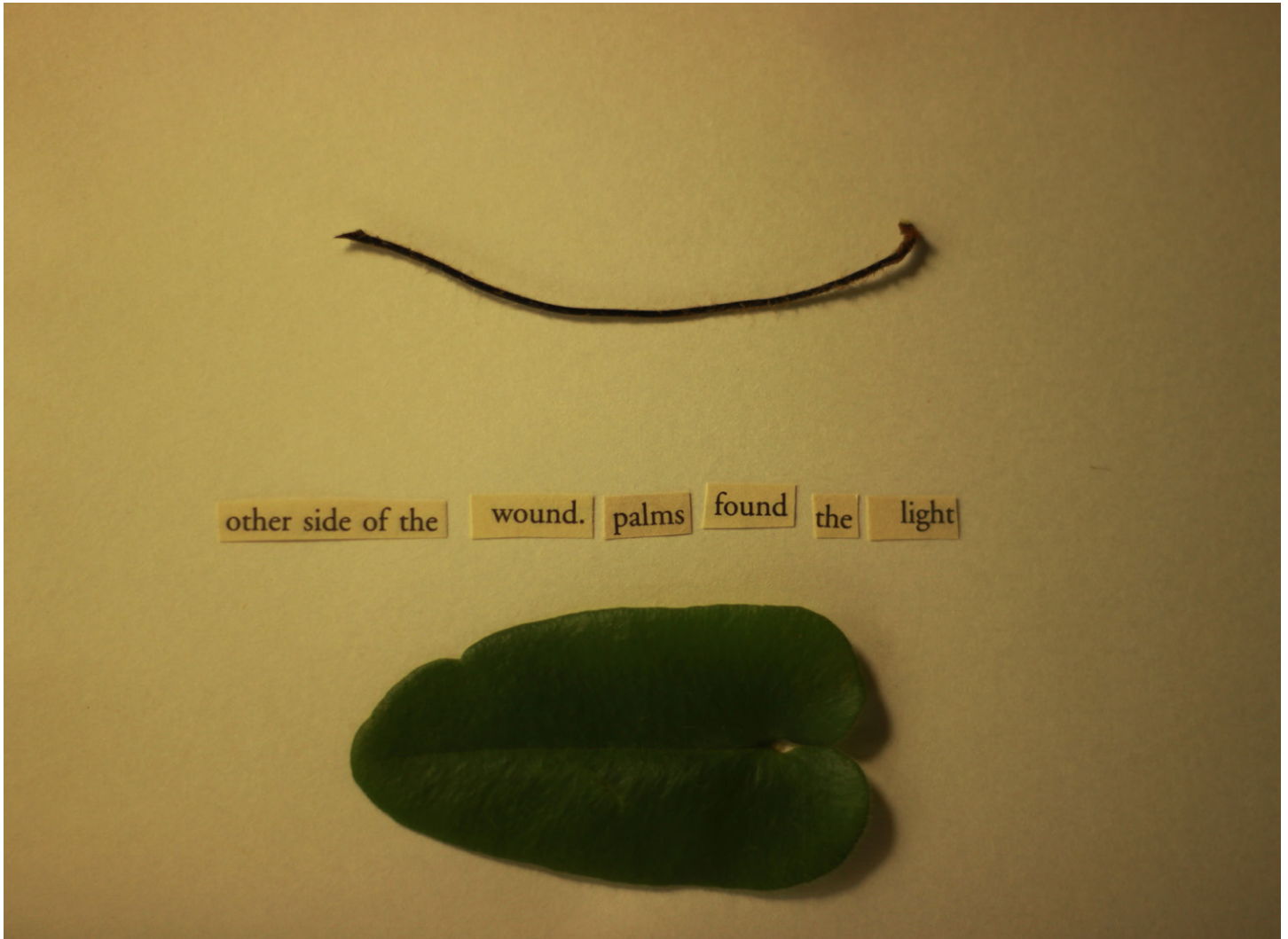


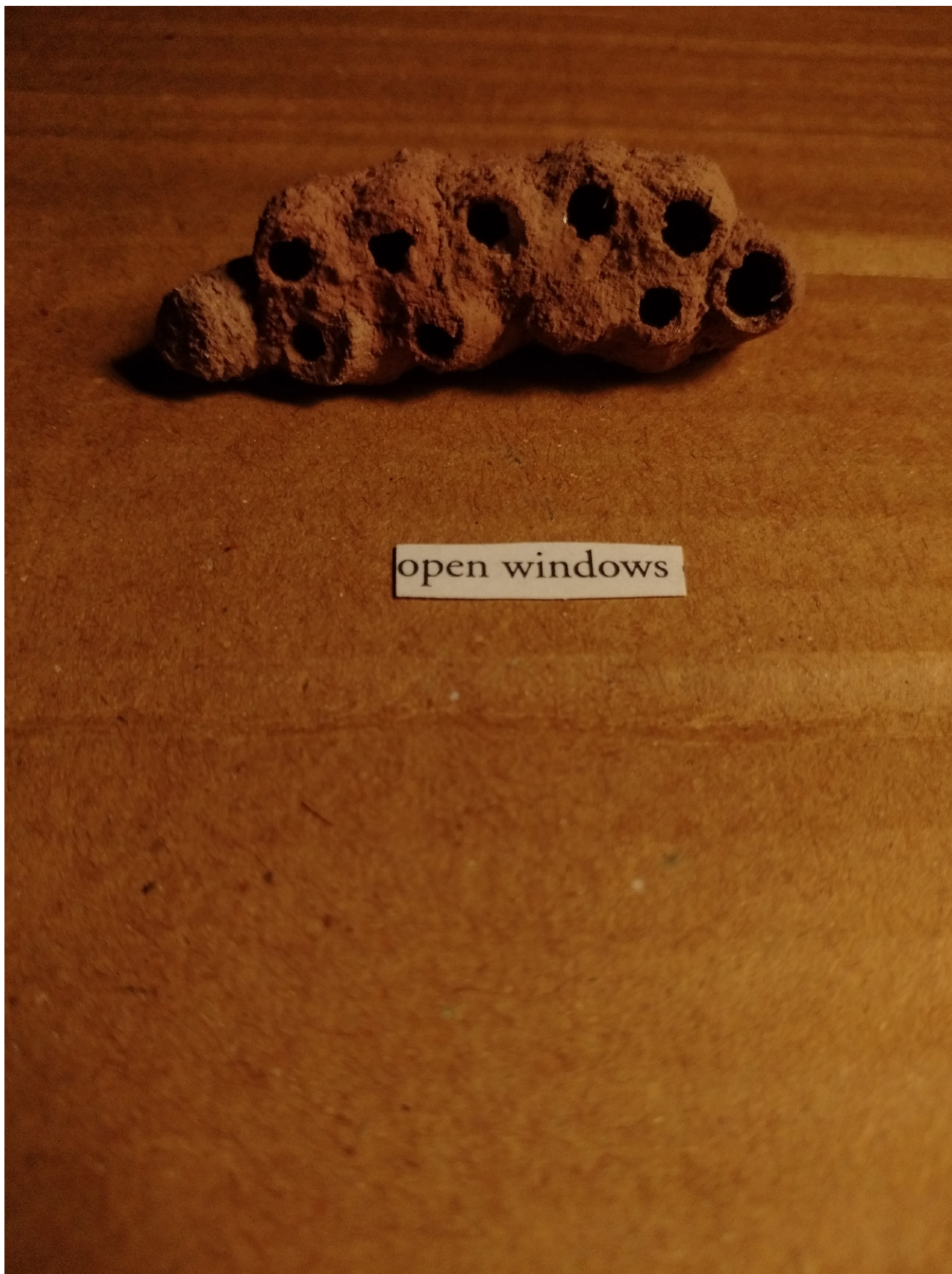
















THE TRANSFIGURING PLACES



The first jolt of thunder in months  
lets itself in off the back porch  
its shadow fills the doorframe,  
top of the head, both shoulders, both feet,  
travelling all the way with a fever's totality.

You heard as a child "*M*" *was for moose*  
(ugly horse with antlers). Bullwinkle J. Moose  
was only twice as large as Rocky thee squirrel  
so when experience corrupts innocence  
ages after cartoons and early-readers  
but before Rumpelstiltskin offers you  
a jar of moose meat in Parrsboro, Nova Scotia  
that you accepted with thanks but couldn't  
eat because of the smell as well as a durable  
scare of home-canning and botulism.  
When you knew the beast's true height  
you thought *no way no way*.  
A sovereign moose severed the glass  
of a cool Vermont lake on the way  
to Magog. The view from the autoroute  
was non-negotiable for scale.  
Boom.  
The morning glory trumpets to our longing  
for jazz resolution its final blue notes  
petering out under the sun's last call.  
*Press those valves sweet tio Handel*. We rise we fall  
off the wall away from fairytales.  
Hopefully.

Goodnight and good morning.  
Sleep feeds our dreams back to us  
and in the day we try to argue against  
reverse peristalsis when we should  
let it get on its gruesome business  
the rescue of our imagination.  
Our childhood quivers in a closet  
as more than we can remember  
the cells at our birth replaced.

We are removed.

The tiny wound on the baby's ankle  
is a big scar on the adult. Baby  
I am sorry. So sorry. Here is the apology  
you've been waiting for.

I want to start a fight with you  
this fight, any fight, every fight,  
and every flight too. I want  
and I want us to put our fists  
together—see how many lies  
we knock flat. Thunder  
is the part of love that can touch  
us safely I mean lightning.

Students of time and weather  
rest your head while you still can.  
Romantic propagandas reach  
a rolling boil gas bubbles  
of good cops, and certainty  
certainty certainty,  
the insistence that our hands  
are clean, the innocence of forefathers,  
our validity in the uteri of others.  
He says my problem with him  
is a *you* problem and there is  
no strong argument against a stone  
heart or boulder. If he sees no difference  
there is no difference.  
The moon points a finger  
thru the night's open window  
I can't tell which finger but I know  
the thumb is not a finger and  
the moon isn't going my way.

Where can I find a telephone booth?  
an answering machine? a VHS player?  
a left-handed scissors for Paul  
McCartney?  
At the quake to the air's equilibrium  
I think crashing plane

not rain  
zebras not horses.  
A tremendous fucking electric clap  
shaves two years clean off my life.  
Rain slices thru our invulnerability,  
enters the window horizontally (a murmuration).

There is a squirrel in the refrigerator  
I put it there for the screams.  
River can't stop herself  
every time I move it.  
The obsidian beads of this chaos  
monster gleams lifelike.  
The bathtub, the downstairs sink,  
the top-loader, the cereal cabinet,  
the fridge again. Her nerves  
spring close on her fingers.  
She knows its coming  
but can't help herself. If now  
you wish to judge me  
exit my timeline, block me, *un-whatever*.  
Keep your bullshit divinity. Leave  
church work to the abbatoir.  
Help me I can't help myself.

For months in my slice of Quebec,  
these streets, this room this sound  
goes missing. Usual winter. It unwinds  
*octobre à avril*. Grandma sucks eggs  
we make sencha tea. I am Black I have  
a night cap noir knit on the outside  
purple silk on the inside  
of the entire winter.

One night in March  
thunder breaks up the ordinary  
as the guillotine blade surely blessed  
the French with justice and I hesitate  
during a moment that feels like  
I am dying. Is this the flash  
before an enduring darkness?

A last kiss before closed eyes?

Sunflowers nod from east to west.  
I hope I survive my selfishness.  
Selfish, smallpox blankets the Western world.  
And hand in hand we walked the edge  
of the Grand Canyon masked  
half-vaccinated. It was not then but  
not too long after that I knew when  
you let yourself be shaken (Bond martini)  
you see your own bare wretchedness.  
Hopefully.  
You do.

I have a love hate relationship to  
relaxation. I am conflicted over  
conflict. Yes, we watch our lives thru  
posted-online-eyes! I meme my  
moments. LOL. LMFAO. LMFAOOO ...  
LMFAOOOO.  
An invisible line divides  
Laughing Tears emoji  
and Waterfall Tears emoji.  
An inner eye wanders the aisles  
of dollar store after dollar store  
after dollar store for an inexpensive  
repair. I watched a construction conglomerate  
pave a parking lot they put up  
a forest of mirrors so we can walk  
as imaginary beauty contestants.  
Before a finality of fixes Marilyn said *a smile*  
*is the best makeup a girl can wear.*  
All Mr. Congeniality's answers are ecru  
with beige stripes.  
Get off the runway and land your life.

I clawed my life out of ice  
and the Beauharnois night was strafed with light  
the faucet of the earth turned all the way  
open. A boom. A bang  
now the whole world happens.

*The man in charge of rice starves to death, while leaning on the sacks of rice.*

"Pavlovsk Station" ~ Erin Noteboom

You could die on the unshared sack of yourself  
but not today my love.

A dog finished in fire curled by the sooty face  
of a boy — close fur, wet nose, tiny grant of mercy.

The man in charge of rice refines profession  
— paid occupation, declaration of belief.

One day I part a plate in half  
against the guillotine of table's edge.

One day I stood shadowed by his liminal smirk,  
his raised eyebrows innocent as a red hand.

Dog expires near missed boy, a mother's hunger,  
and the scientist against a saved nation. I lean

on my diamond mind refusing an end on vacant  
promises. The dog in charge of boy wasn't bound

by law, didn't know what we call love, bound  
by neither profession nor profession.

An American senator thought it's like the tap. On  
the first of the month, women enter the bathroom  
opens the *something* and out comes the blood.  
The magic labia clap.

Since I was eleven, I have feared ruin  
and ruined sheets, pants, and panties  
resigned to my fertility. Younger than that,  
I was told to dream of boys before I dreamt of boys.

Like the blood love comes, fear ruins, colours  
every part of ambition, red tints dream. In a movie,  
an Irish launderer said you scrub with salt  
to break the stain. Sharp crystals and raw knuckles.

No tap for love Lord knows how I have sought it.  
Write the senator with his virginal knowledge of women.  
I tap spring maple men I tap and tap and tap an  
echo. Salt scrub my body of lust. Magic labia shut.

A letter on a feather pillow coos: I'm sorry.

When I knew I was wrong and would say  
*I'm sorry, I was wrong and out - of - line.*  
You reacted almost violently: Don't say  
you're sorry! You don't have anything to be sorry about.  
But I did, and maybe I was talking to I  
and you to you.

Was anything disappointing enough, wound agape  
wide enough, tears shred hot enough, or row  
belled long enough, to ever get you to say  
you were sorry? It seemed it wasn't the lack  
of saying but the lack of feeling.

A letter on a feather pillow isn't there,  
doesn't say I'm sorry, never I love you,  
nor you're important to me  
I don't want to live without you.

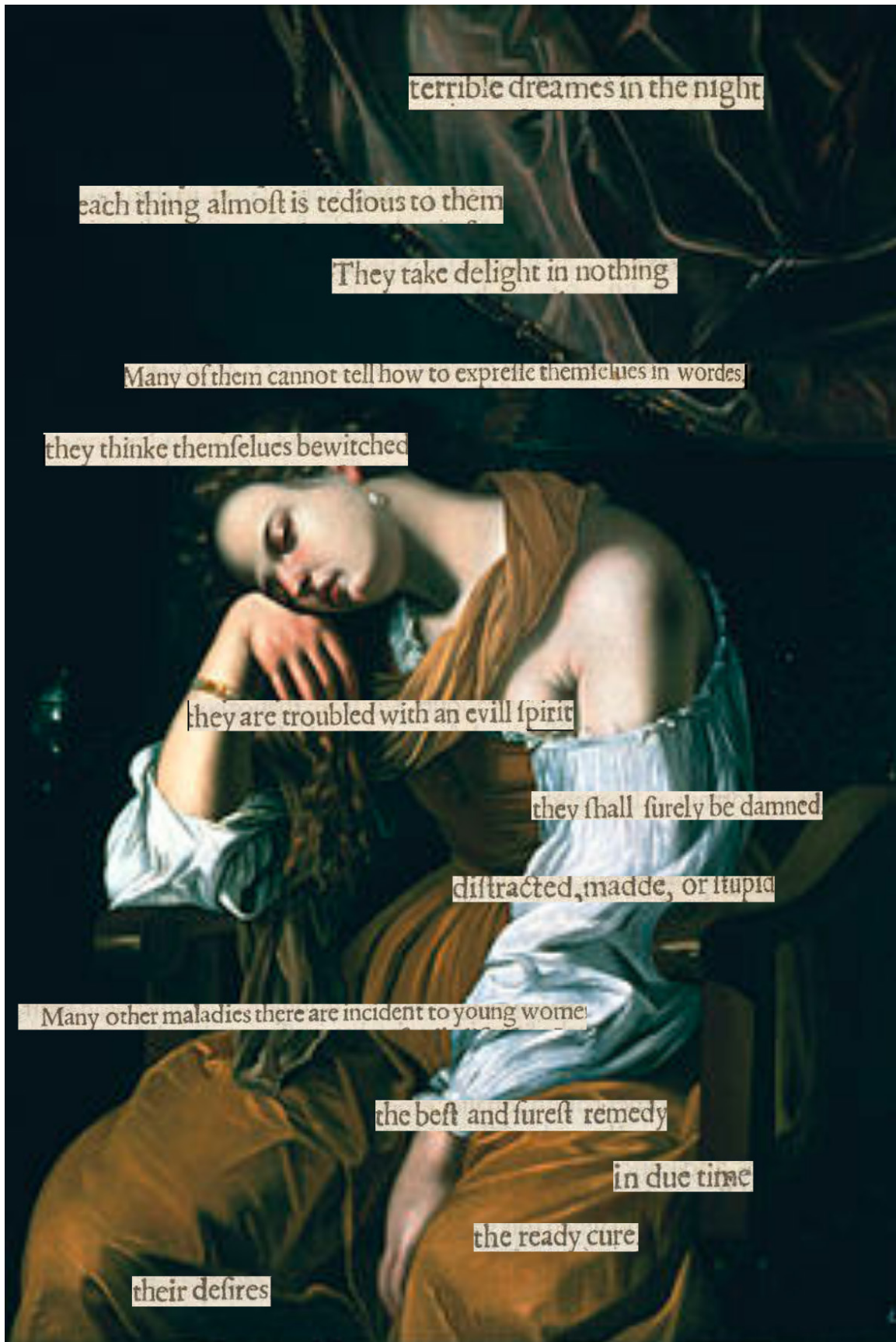
The poison of white baneberry  
rolls benign in the rainbow bellies  
of winged forest sentries that sight,  
swallow, and disperse seed over  
a cathedral floor anchored in ash,  
planked by pine and the genuflect  
of disease battered birch  
papering susurrus paths.

Boreal bowled temporary ponds  
souped with the dumplings  
of teal crowned mallards  
competing with the resplendence  
of leopard clad frogs.

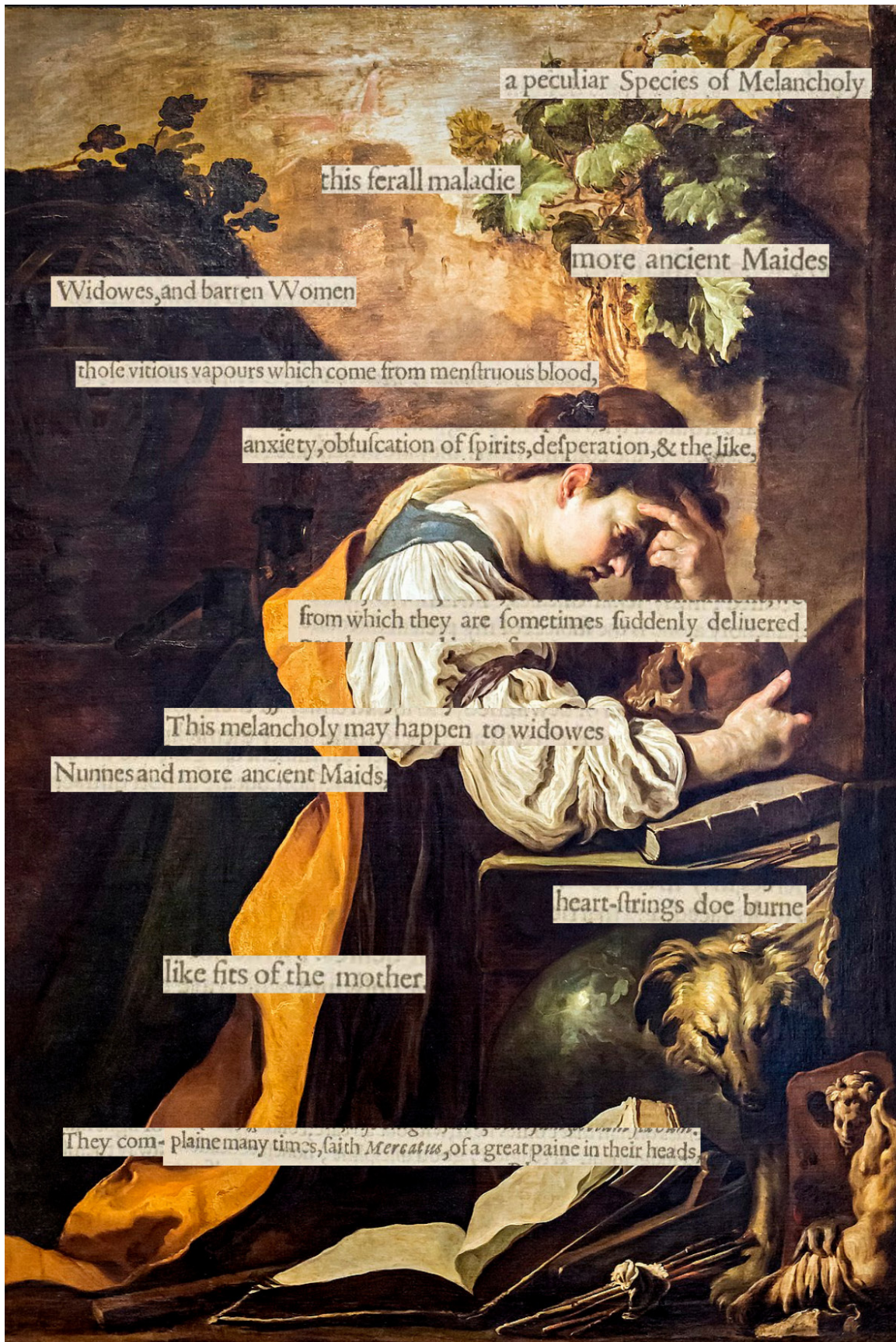
Jim Rohn exhorted  
*If you don't like how things are, change it*  
(exclamation mark) *You're not a tree* (period)  
Unfortunately, you aren't a tree,

wistful for height and branch,  
they create their own like company;  
left to themselves become home  
—green nativity bedded by indigenous eyes  
in immigrant populace.

White berry, black pupil  
pendulous muscle-hued optic nerve  
stem nods to its creepy etymology.  
They would roll if they could  
watching the town surveyors'  
bright orange lines portent to  
the coming destruction.  
These eyes can't roll. Trees can't  
leave can't evade vision axed  
in the head by brief humanity.









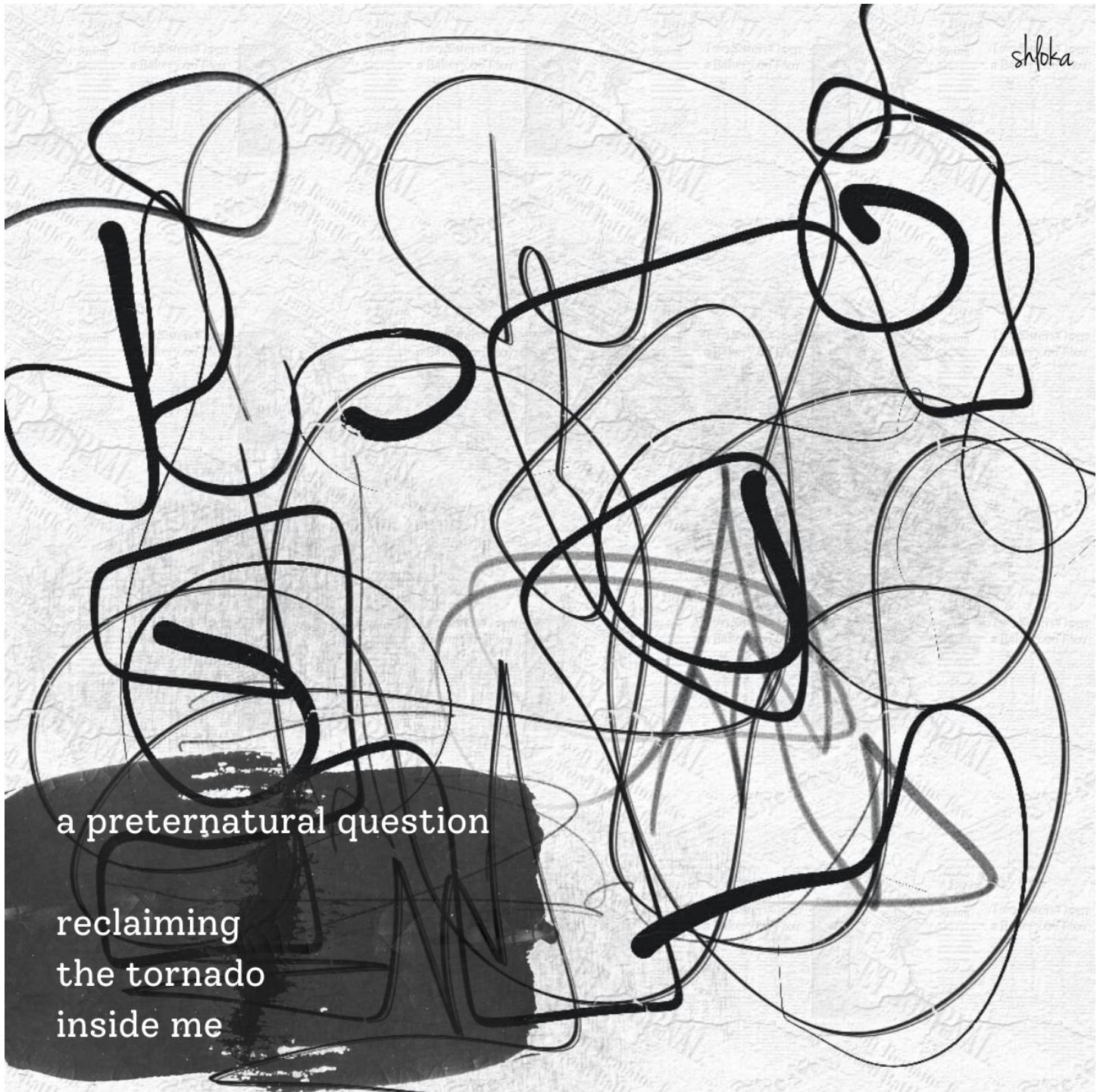




*All paintings created in or around the 1620s by Artemisia Gentileschi (except for 'a peculiar species' original by Domenico Fetti) and combined with text from Robert Burton's 1621 book Anatomy of Melancholy. (Taken from the digitised copy at The British Library)*







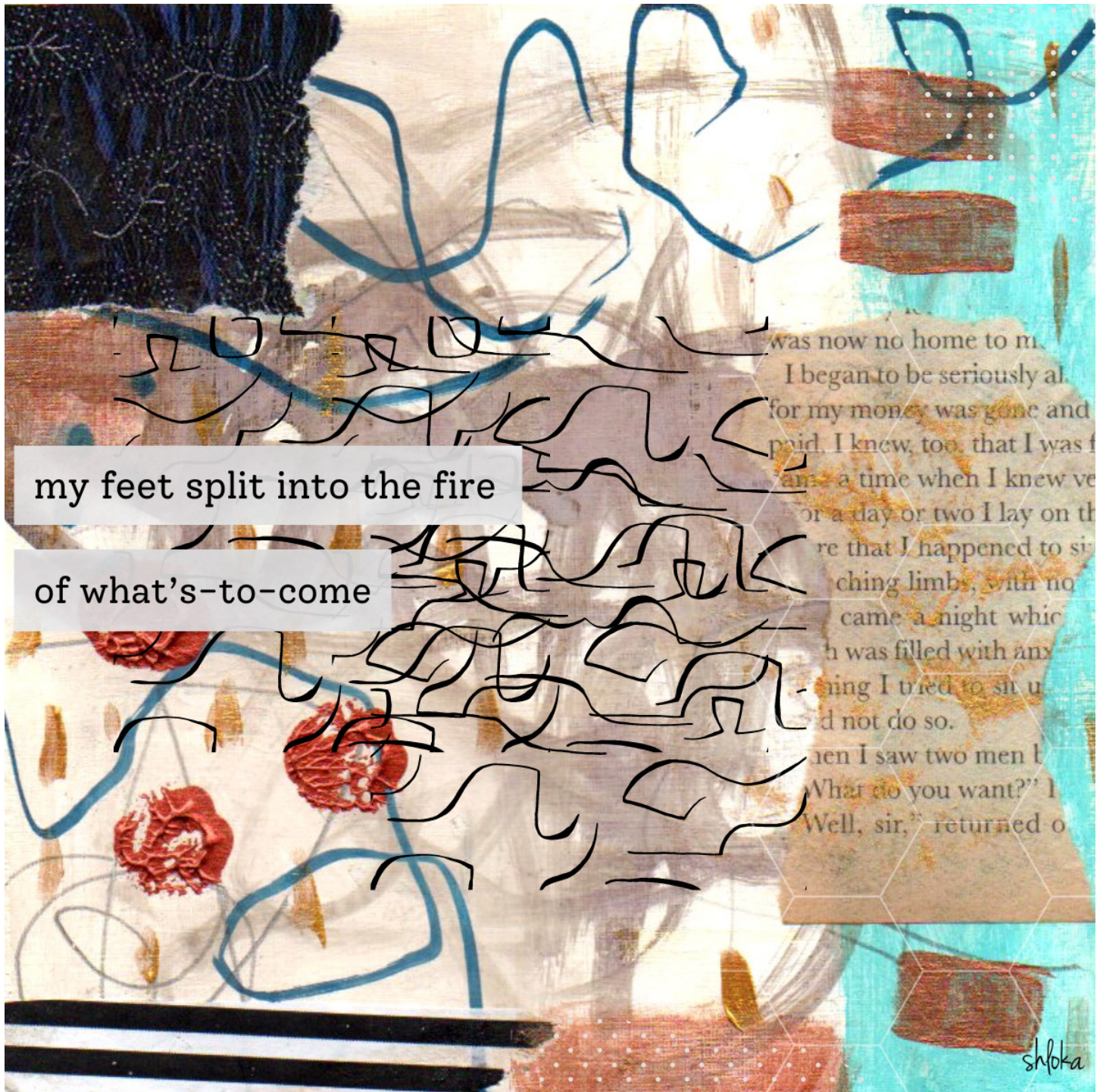
a preternatural question

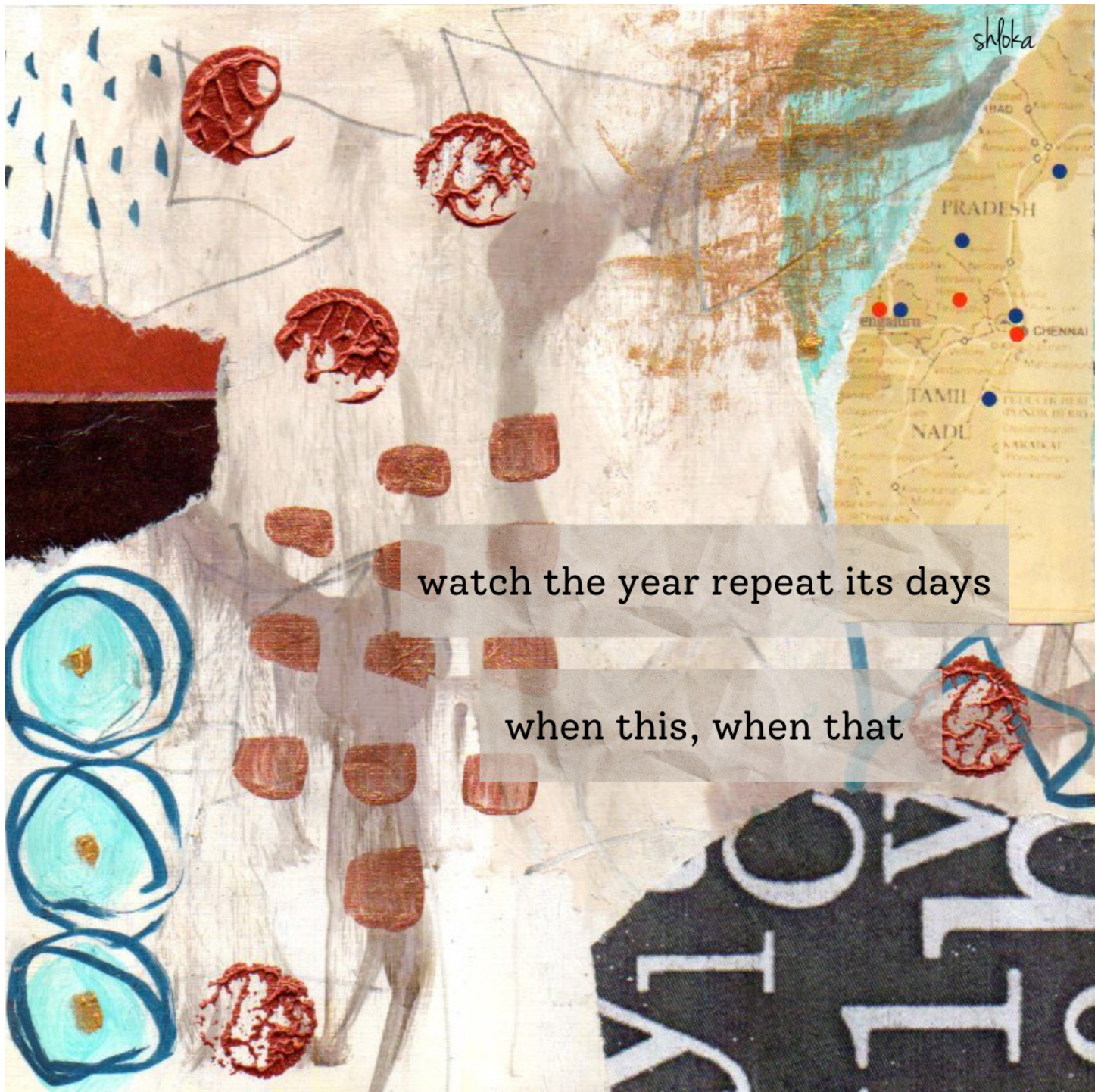
reclaiming  
the tornado  
inside me



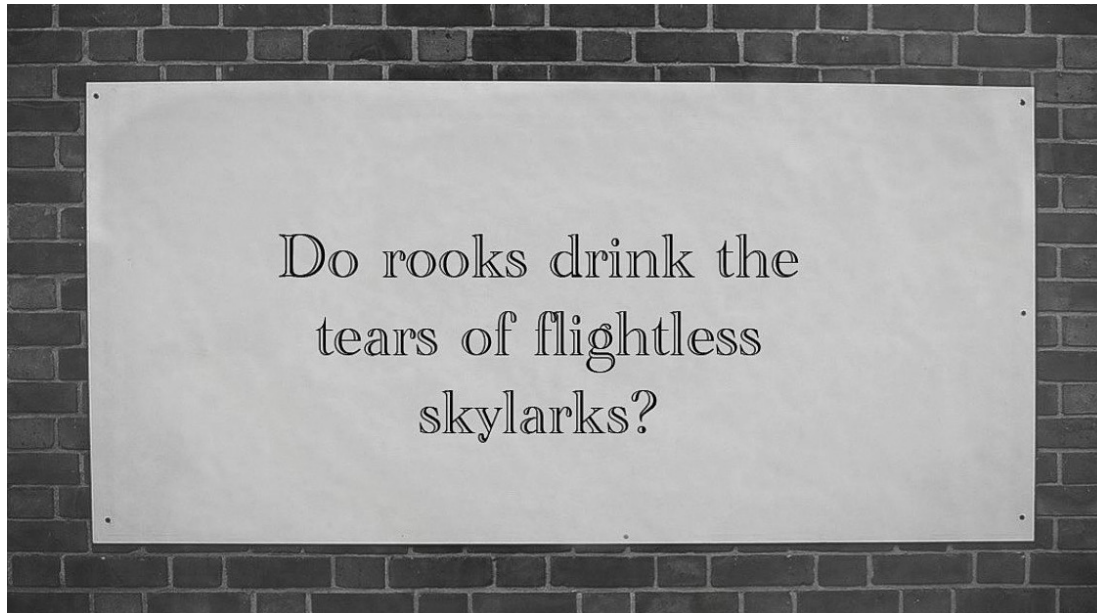








It has been drizzling forever – or that is how it seems. The November sky is bloated with grey clouds. Collar up and beret on, I make my way down Regent Street, dodging pedestrians and puddles. A billboard sign on a wall says: *Do rooks drink the tears of flightless skylarks?* I frown. No idea.



I hesitate by Café Reve but don't fancy a mid-morning tea, even to escape the rain.

A man in a black raincoat, lapel and cuffs frayed, is coming towards me. He has that look in his eyes, like he has been spun-wash in worry and grief. He stops.

'I'm lost,' he says.

'This is Regent Street,' I say.

'Not that kind of lost.'

'Oh.'

His brow furrows. 'I don't know where the Street of Ceaseless Sighs ends.'

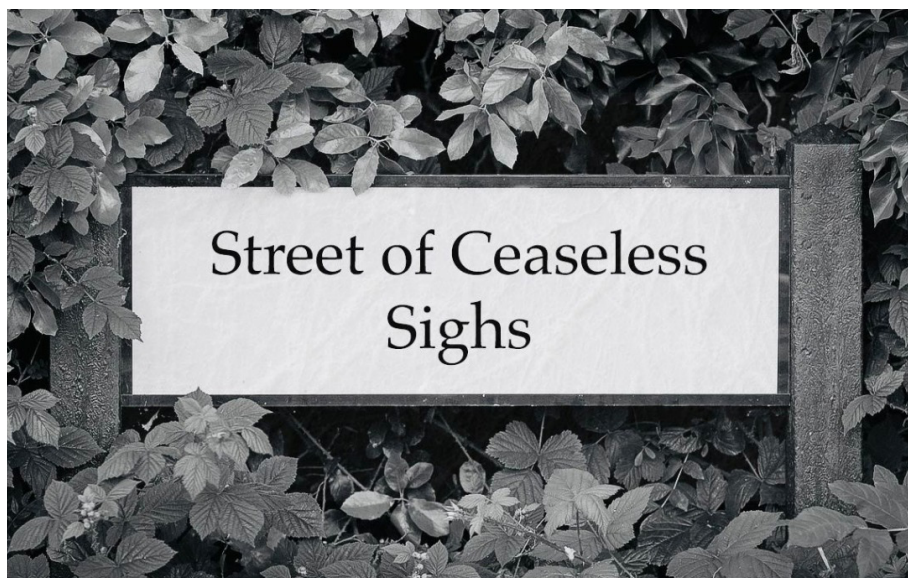
'Who does?'

'That doesn't help.'

'Sorry.' I lower my head and walk off.

Why do I attract these sorts? Aidan told me it is because I'm lost too – a migrant of my own existence. 'If lost people always find me, how can I be lost?' I said.

Aidan grinned at that. He didn't smile much. His mood was like his hands, cold and pale.





The drizzle eases a little and I turn left into the park. A crow flies overhead, flaunting its blackness. A sign in the park says: *Please Do Not Feed the Crows or Sorrows*. I look away quickly and stroll down a path lined by lime trees which have lost their leaves, their silhouettes stark against the grey light.

Just ahead, on the bandstand, a group of people are gesticulating at each other. They seem to be dressed up in costumes: soldier, waiter, nurse, doctor, bride, policeman, footballer, clown, banker, homeless man.

'What are you lot up to?' I ask.

'We're rehearsing a play,' says the clown.

'About despair,' says the bride.

'Isn't it about dog-fights?' says the soldier.

'We can't agree on what the play's about,' says the clown, raising an eyebrow. 'Except all themes begin with 'D'.'

'No,' says the doctor. 'It's about bewilderment.'

'Isn't it about Being?' says the homeless man.

'Haven't you got a script?' I ask.

'Fed up with scripts. We're making it up as we go along,' says the clown.

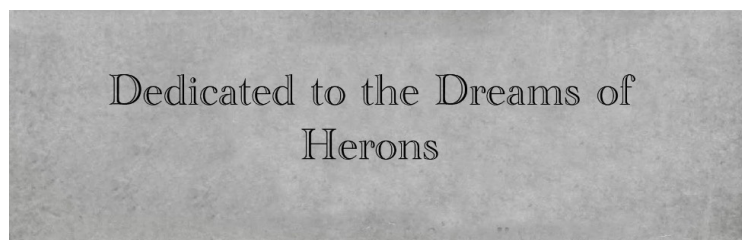
'Who isn't?' I say, and stride off.

I come to the little stone bridge where Aidan and I often played pooh sticks. He always won – he did at most of our games. This didn't make him happy; games were a serious business. After pooh sticks, we'd stand on the bridge, staring at the narrow river, which carries the reflections of the willows by it and clouds above it. Sometimes he'd take my hand and place it on his heart, on top of his woollen overcoat. 'You know, Beth, like the river, the eternally voyaging sadness runs all day, all night,' he'd say.

I'd look away. What can you say to a lover who says that?

Aidan told me that during his operation, the surgeon found many things in his heart: his father's trilby; a photo of his only child, Amelia, aged ten; a book of Sylvia Plath poetry; pebbles from North Norfolk beaches; a bankruptcy declaration; half-drunk bottles of malt whiskey; tickets from the Leonard Cohen concert where he'd met me, where our affair began; his divorce papers. The surgeon had removed them all, but Aidan said the heaviness he'd felt in his heart was replaced by a large hole that let the water in when it rained.

I walk on, past a bench with a little plaque saying: *Dedicated to the Dreams of Herons*. Aidan and I liked that; we used to sit here, hand in hand. A swell of grief; the park is too full of him. I was right to end it – the black hole of his heart should come with a *Warning: Danger* sign – but I miss him.



I head out of the park, down St Peter's Street, and stop in front of the church. A crow perches in an old yew, competing with the tree over darkness.

Inside the 15th-century church smells of mould and meditation. Carved and painted figurines decorate the walls, the stories of the saints. Paul is having his vision on the road to Damascus; Jesus appears with angels, Paul stares in awe. I shake my head. When did redemption ever happen so abruptly?

A wooden shelf carries old glass bottles partly full of a clear liquid. One is labelled: *Tears for drowned seals*. Another: *Tears for lost futures*. Feeling a wave of sadness, I turn and walk up the nave.

A woman, who has been kneeling to pray, stands up, her red overcoat an affront to the grey day. Beneath her white bobbed hair are keen blue eyes.

'Hold on to the glow-worms, my dear,' she says to me.  
'There are always glow-worms, even in the darkest fields.'  
'Thank you.'

She touches me gently on the arm and then strolls off, leaving the church in a dignified manner.

Suddenly the church is flooded by light; the sun must have come out. My gaze drops; it's almost too bright for my eyes to bear. Near the altar, on the stone floor, I notice a mosaic of colour, an ephemeral patchwork of green, red, blue, yellow, orange, white. Coming from the stained glass window above, the hues are intense. I don't believe in God, but I do like living in a world where light streams through stained glass and paints spontaneous artworks on the floor. I smile quietly to myself.

Before leaving the church, I drop a coin in the Donation box. Outside, the rain has stopped. A crow launches from its perch in the yew. 'Kraah kraah kraah' it calls, affirming life with a cold flinty cry.



## Acknowledgements

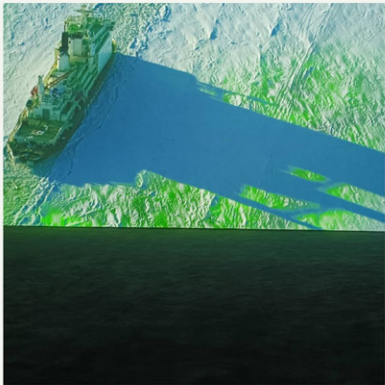
'Crows and Sorrows' was first published in *Cafe Irreal*, Issue 57, Winter 2016.

The second image (Crows and Sorrows sign) involved adapting a photo by AgnosticPreachersKid on CommonsWikiMedia [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rose\\_Park\\_sign\\_-\\_M\\_Street.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rose_Park_sign_-_M_Street.JPG) (writing on sign changed, photo put into black and white).

'mushroom', 'moonscape', 'ice cream of Earth', 'hook' and 'sonic fabrication' are an excerpt of an ongoing project of mine – 'Visual Grammar' being the working title. The project explores the semiotic intersection of image and language, where each poem is a concrete response to images I take of objects or artworks. Please view as the number in 'VG – X' in the parenthesis of each title indicates, since I intend the chosen background colours to suggest progression and coherence. during lockdown.



there is  
a full body of energy  
mushrooming  
g            r  
r            e  
o            d  
un  
before i pop



shot @ West Bund Museum, Shanghai  
artwork: *Artificiality* by Laurent Grasso

how much  
have we scooped  
the ice cream of Earth  
to bare its colour



finally  
some  
t o u c h e s      up  
my m o o n s c a p e      face



'hook' is published in issue 79 of [streetcake magazine](#).



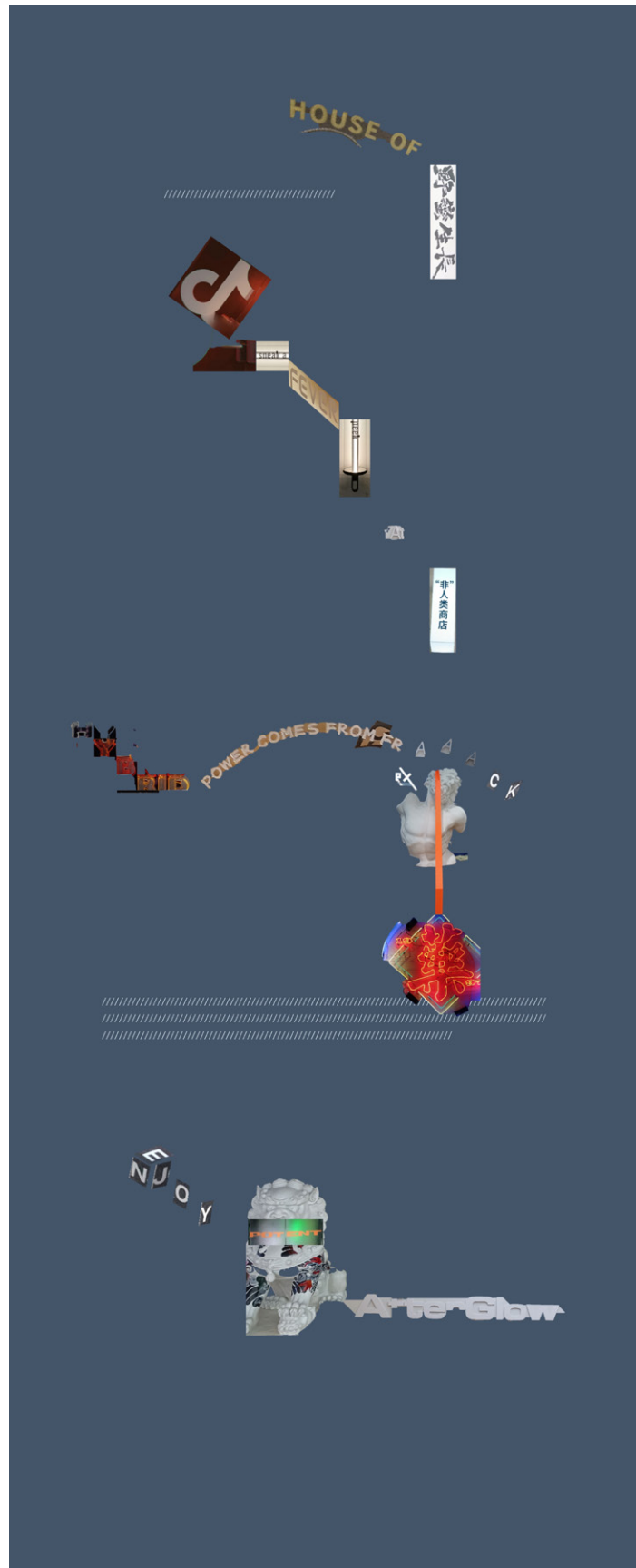
t  
h  
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h

that tweaks the nodes of

n

s u d - f  
l a  
i b  
g r  
h i  
t c  
- w a v e s



Notes:

\*  wild growth

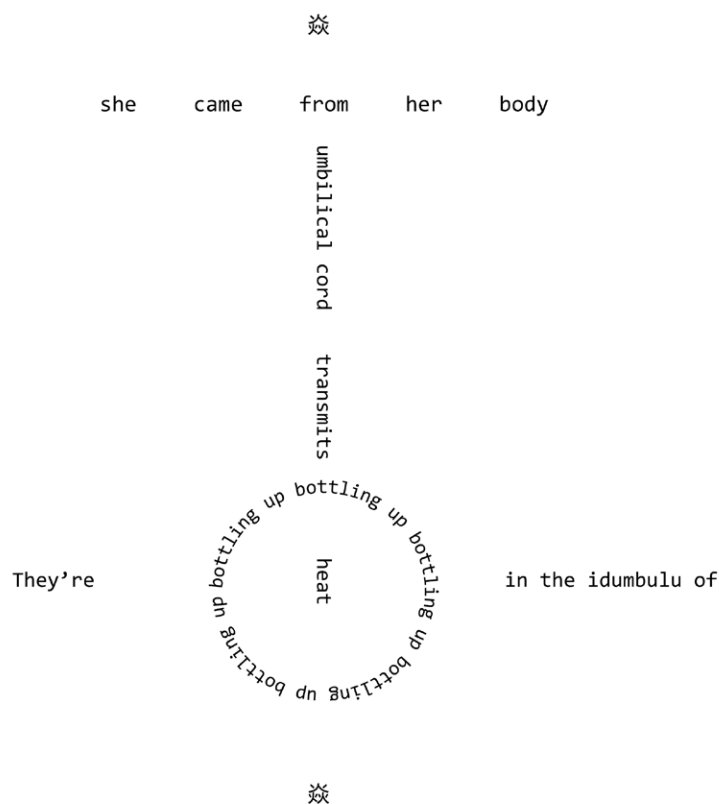


non-human shop



drug/medicine; the traditional Chinese character 藥 is made of 艹 (indicating 'plant') and 樂 (happiness), so 'drug'=plant+happiness.

\* all clips are images of shops, slogans and objects, taken by the author in a downtown Shanghai shopping mall. the '/' graphics are by the author's cat, Bobo.



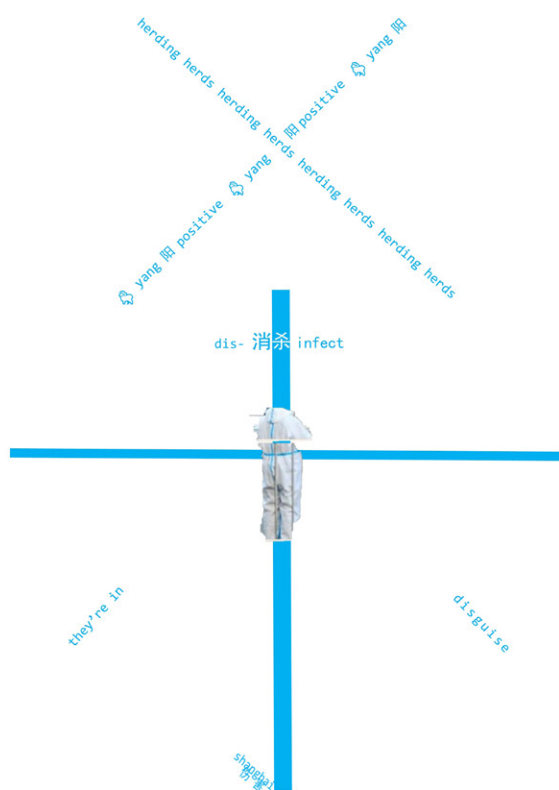
焱 means 'extreme heat', which is signified by stacking up three of the pictograph 火. In the oracle bone script, the writing of 火 is to resemble the shape of a fire 𤇑𤇑𤇑.

idumbulu (Tulu, India): seizing each other tightly with both hands.

'焱 heat' is a self-translation of my Chinese visual poem below

她们  
相生  
相煎  
在  
焱的 idumbulu 里

80



note:

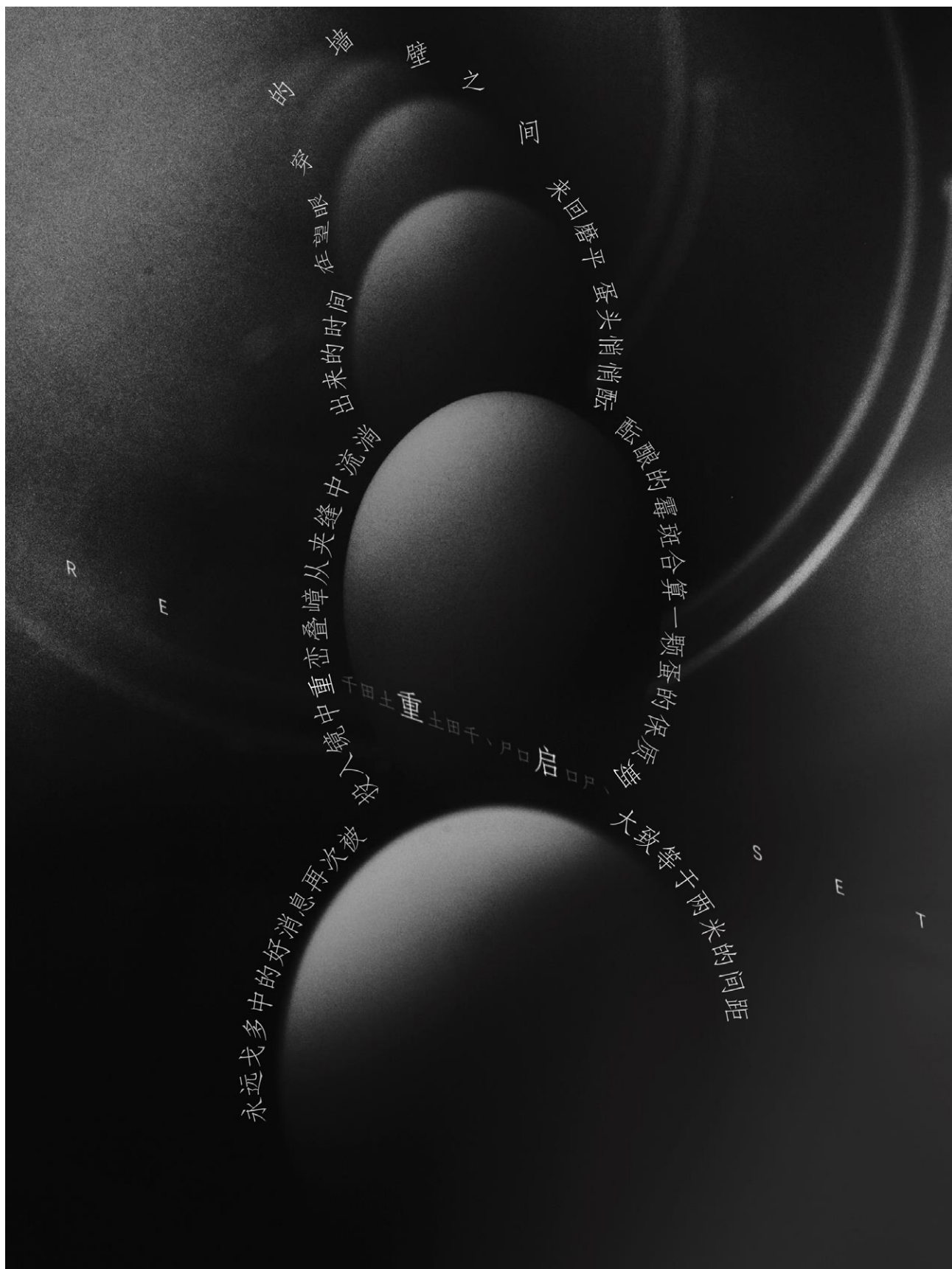
this poem is prompted by the two-month zero-covid lockdown experience that put Shanghai city to a halt, where the blue-white hazmat suit became a symbol of power to whoever implements the policy and whoever needs to obey it.

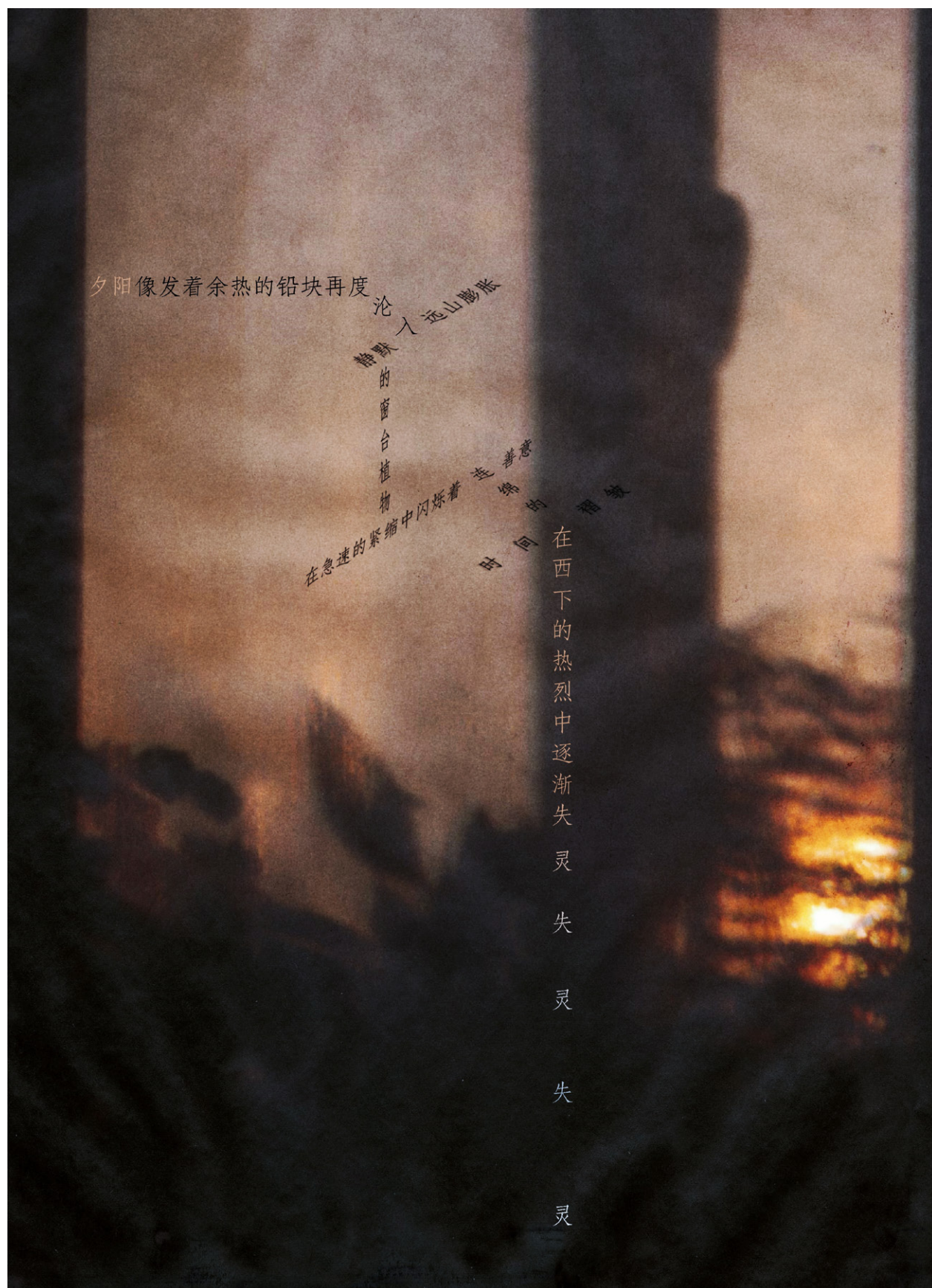
消杀 means 'to disinfect' while the character 杀 itself means 'to kill'.

"positive" (as in test results) in Chinese is 阳 yang, which is a homophone of 羊 (sheep), and 羊 (sheep) has been colloquially used to refer to a covid-positive person.

the pinyin 'shanghai' without tonal markings can refer to 上海 (the city) and 伤害 (to hurt).

‘消杀 disinfect’ was created during the two-month lockdown that put life of Shanghai to a complete halt, when strict restrictions (zero-covid policy) were imposed causing numerous tragedies and misfortune.





重启 reset' and '失灵 glitch' are from the solicited project by Life Magazine (China) in collaboration with 7 photographers. The project itself is a reflection on the recent lockdown as well.

Notes for '重启 reset'

literally translated as 'overlapping mountains', the fixed expression 重峦叠嶂 used in the poem to capture the rippling reflections of the egg in the photograph originates from a classical poem depicting those in a Chinese ink painting. the character 重 can refer to very different meanings when pronounced differently, which means its visuality holds indefiniteness to be realised in readings. in the context of this poem, 重 works similarly to the prefix 're-' as in 're-set' and 're-peat', reflecting the monotonous and repetitive routine during lockdown.

photograph by 梅迪

Notes for '失灵 glitch'

reflecting distortion of time, the glitching image of sunset is processed by multiple layering ink prints on the same piece of paper. the poem seeks to harmonise with the glitchy sensation both in words and form. the 3D architectural poetics thus intends to breach conventional reading, creating disorientation as well as dimensions.

photograph by 红薯

## Contributors

**Clare S. Dygert** (she/her) is a queer, fem, emerging artist and poet who explores the themes of feminine beauty and power, impermanence and devotion using paint, ink, photography-based images, and asemic writing. Her work is conceptual, intuitive, and atmospheric, and relies on the collaboration of the viewer/reader, to give meaning to the images. She is experiencing progressive blindness, and although this is not something a visual artist would seek out, Clare uses her blindness as a way to deeply explore how what is seen shapes our world view and finds this to be an amazing support to her art and poetry. Her work has appeared in NationalPoetryMonth.ca (AngelHousePress, 2022). Her website is [www.claredygert.com](http://www.claredygert.com).

**Alexis Fedorjaczenko** writes poetry, essay, and in hybrid methods, and her visual work includes handcrafted poem objects, digital/analog collage, and photography. She is presently hand printing visual poetry onto linens and indigo-dyed fabrics. Alexis holds a Master of Fine Arts degree in poetry and essay from Western Connecticut State University and a Master of Public Health degree in health policy from Yale University. She lives in rural New England where she works as Town Clerk along with other pursuits. At one time, Alexis lived in a pop-up camper for fifteen months while exploring the American landscape, mainly west of the Rocky Mountains. She has attended residencies at the Vermont Studio Center, Elsewhere Studios, and Prairie Center for the Arts. Several of her pieces in this issue appeared in earlier forms in *3:AM Magazine*, *Streetcake Magazine*, and the *Beir Bua Journal* blog. Further publishing credits and social media links can be found at: [linktr.ee/ObjetAutre](http://linktr.ee/ObjetAutre).

**Hiram Larew's** poems have recently appeared in *Wild Greens*, *Iowa Review*, *Contemporary American Voices* and *Poetry South*. His most recent collection, *Mud Ajar*, was published in 2021 by Atmosphere Press. Founder of Poetry X Hunger, he lives in Maryland, USA. [www.HiramLarewPoetry](http://www.HiramLarewPoetry) and [www.PoetryXHunger.com](http://www.PoetryXHunger.com)

**Lin Lune** is a Toronto based generator of art with words. Her/their work invokes deep thought about the human condition.

**M.P. Pratheesh** is a poet and artist who lives and works in Kerala, India. He has published ten collections of poetry in Malayalam language. His poems and object poems have appeared at various places including anthologies *Singing in the dark* (Penguin), *Greening the earth* (forthcoming from Penguin, 2023) *RIC journal*, *Tiny seed*, *Indianapolis Review*, *kavyabharati*, NationalPoetrymonth.ca(AngelHouse Press, 2022), *The bombay Review*, *Keralakavitha*, *Guftugu*, *Acropolis*, *Osmosis*, *True copy*, *Indian Literature* and elsewhere. His recent books of object poems include *Transfiguring places* (Paper View) and *Charam-Acharam* (Notion press).

## Contributors

**stephanie roberts** is the Quebec-based, Black-Latinx author of *rushes from the river disappointment* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2020), a finalist for the A.M. Klein Poetry Prize. Her work has been featured in *POETRY*, *Arc Poetry Magazine*, *Event Magazine*, *Crannóg Magazine* (Ireland), *Atlanta Review*, *New York Quarterly*, *NationalPoetryMonth.ca* (AngelHousePress, 2022) and many other publications. A 2021 CBC Poetry Prize reader, and an upcoming 2022 writer-in-residence at Dentro La Terra, her work won first place in *The Sixty-Four: Best Poets of 2018* (Black Mountain Press). She recently completed a full poetry manuscript with the support of a grant from the Canada Council for the Arts. IG @ringtales

**JP Seabright** (she/they) is a queer writer living in London. They have three pamphlets published: *Fragments from Before the Fall: An Anthology in Post-Anthropocene Poetry* by Beir Bua Press; the erotic memoir *NO HOLDS BARRED* by Lupercalia Press, and *GenderFux*, a collaborative poetry pamphlet, by Nine Pens Press. *MACHINATIONS*, a collaborative experimental work, will be out from Trickhouse Press in Autumn 2022. More info at <https://jpseabright.com> and via Twitter @errormessage.

**Shloka Shankar** is a poet, editor, publisher, and self-taught visual artist from Bangalore, India. A Best of the Net nominee and award-winning haiku poet, her poems and artwork have appeared in over 200 online and print venues of repute. Shloka is the Founding Editor of the literary & arts journal *Sonic Boom* and its imprint Yavanika Press. When she isn't poring over manuscripts, you can find her making abstract art, digital collages, or conducting poetry workshops. Shloka is the author of the microchap *Points of Arrival* (Origami Poems Project, 2021) and her debut full-length haiku collection, *The Field of Why* (Yavanika Press, 2022).

Website: [www.shlokashankar.com](http://www.shlokashankar.com)

Instagram: @shloks23

**Katy Wimhurst's** first collection of short stories, *Snapshots of the Apocalypse*, is published by Fly on the Wall Press. Her fiction has been published in numerous magazines and anthologies including *The Guardian*, *Writers' Forum*, *Cafe Irreal*, *Magic Oxygen Literary Prize*, and *ShooterLit*. Her visual poems have appeared in magazines like *Ric Journal*, *Steel Incisors*, *AngelHousePress* and *The Babel Tower*. Her first book of visual poems, *Fifty-One Trillion Bits*, is to be published by Trickhouse Press. She is housebound with the illness M.E. @Sylphsea on Twitter.

**Jill Zheng** is a multimodal poet, who works with language as a primary material, oftentimes marrying modes of graphic arrangements, sound, image, translingualism, somatic experience, etc. Her poetics takes its inspirational root from the concreteness of Chinese characters, and seeks to embody cultural hybridity as to traverse linguistic boundaries for re-imagination and reading re-orientation. She also collaborates with visual and sound artists on multimedia poetry and sound-art performances in Shanghai. Her work has appeared in *Nationalpoetrymonth.ca* (AngelHousePress, 2022), on *POETRY* magazine, *streetcake magazine* and *ctrl + v* journal.

Experiment-O is an annual online magazine established in 2008. its aim is to bring attention to works that do what art is supposed to do and that is to risk.

This issue's dedication is "for the strange." According to <https://www.etymonline.com/>, *strange* is a late 13<sup>th</sup> Century word that means "from elsewhere, foreign, unknown, unfamiliar, not belonging to the place where found," from Old French *estranger* "foreign, alien, unusual, unfamiliar, curious; distant; inhospitable; estranged, separated."

Inspiration for the dedication comes from [For Strange Women](#), an all-female indie perfume house in the Midwest.

AngelHousePress thanks the contributors & in advance, the readers & dedicates this fifteenth issue to those whose work is not accepted in mainstream literature and arts.

Experiment-O will consider interviews, reviews, visual art, visual poetry, concrete poetry, poetry, prose, manifestos, maps, rants, blog entries, translations, and other miscellany. please send creative works of merit to [amanda@experiment-o.com](mailto:amanda@experiment-o.com) for consideration for future issues. only contributions that are possible in PDF form will be considered; text-based submissions should be sent as doc, docx or rtf files and image based submissions should be sent as pngs/jpgs with a resolution of 1200 pixels on the longest side. responses will likely only occur if the work is accepted for publication. previously published work is considered. simultaneous submissions are fine too.

We particularly welcome the work of women, BIPOC, 2SLGBTQIA, D/deaf, disabled, and gender non-conforming writers. We will not tolerate expressions of hate and prejudice either in our pages or in response to the work on social media. We won't tag contributors on social media without their permission and if we see hateful responses to them, we will report the perpetrators.

Experiment-O advocates a cormorant and lichen free environment.

Thank you to all who contributed to the AngelHousePress Caring Imagination Crowd Funding campaign this year, enabling us to pay our contributors to Experiment-O and NationalPoetryMonth.ca.

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We acknowledge that we operate on traditional and unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishnaabeg people.

The old expressions are with us always, and there are always others. *Others, A Magazine of New Verse*, December, 1919 Issue 5, No. 1