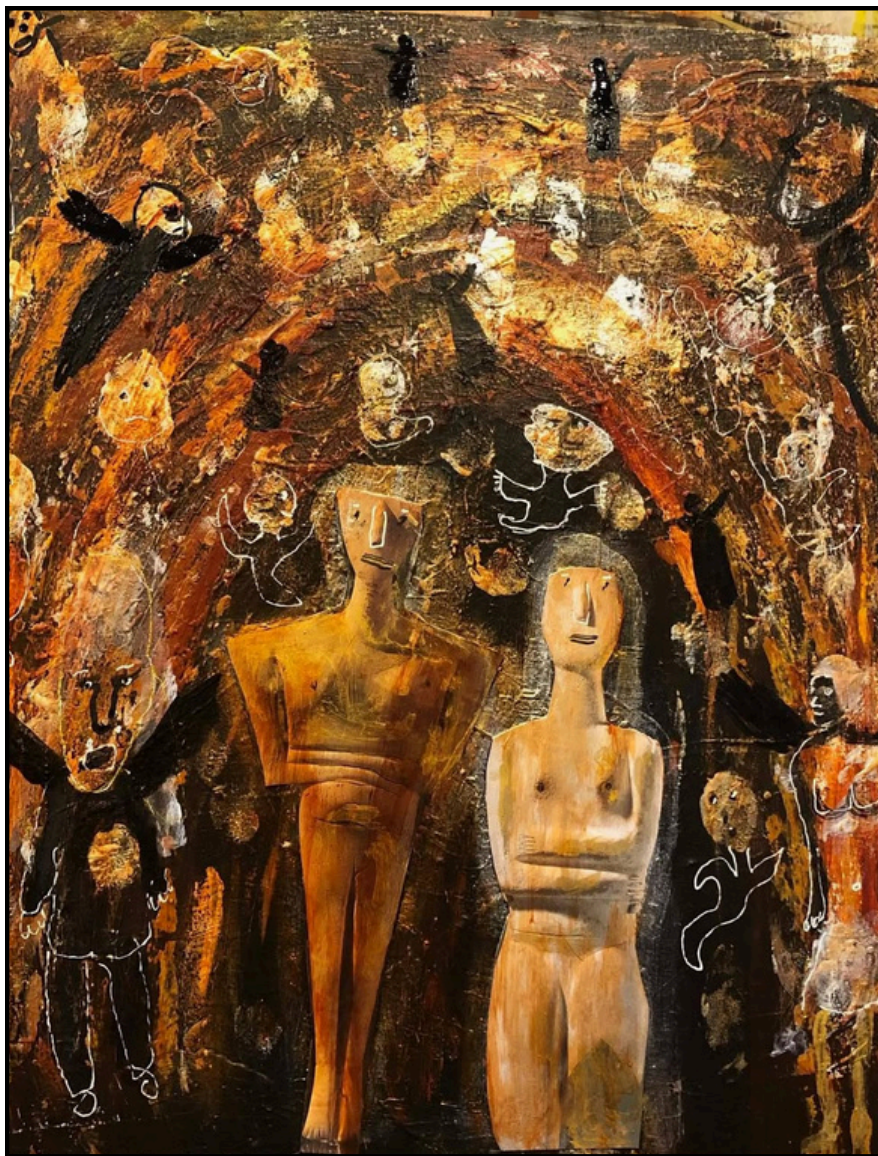


Quill of the Goddess

Autumn 2026

Voices of the Ancestors

Volume 2 Issue 3



About Quill of the Goddess

Founded in 2025, *Quill of the Goddess* is published online biannually, featuring work by visual artists and writers worldwide. We focus on poetry, essays, and art that will enrich and inspire readers with vivid imagery, soulful reflection, and spiritual depth. Key themes include women's empowerment, connection to Earth's rhythms, devotional practices, and personal transformation.

Our mission is to publish and promote the best of today's voices in the modern Goddess Movement.

Submissions

Quill of the Goddess accepts poetry, essays, and art. Our reading periods are June 1st through September 1st and December 1st through March 1st. Send your work through our online submission manager at quillofthegoddess.com.

Inquiries

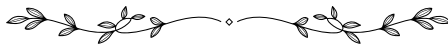
For questions regarding submissions, please see the submission guidelines on our website at quillofthegoddess.com/submissions. For general inquiries, please contact jen@quillofthegoddess.com.

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A Journal of Art and Literature Dedicated to Goddess Spirituality



Volume 2 Issue 3
Autumn 2026
Voices of the Ancestors

Cover Art: *Cave of the Ancestors*
by Reda Rackley

Jennifer Miller, *Founding Editor-in-Chief*

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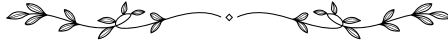
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FEATURES



Cover Artist
REDA RACKLEY

Reda Rackley, M.A., is a cultural mythologist, author, educator, storyteller, certified expressive artist and outsider artist. She lectures and facilitates women's retreats bridging art, mythology, depth psychology, and spirituality.



Featured Poet
VIVIAN F. PRESCOTT

Vivian Faith Prescott was born and raised on a small island, Wrangell, Kaachxana.áak'w, in Southeast Alaska where she lives and writes at her family's fishcamp on the land of the Shtax'heen Kwáan. She is a member of the Pacific Sámi Searvi and a founding member of Community Roots, the first LGBTQIA+ group on the island. She mentors Alaskan writers in two writers' groups: Blue Canoe Writers and the Drumlin Poets.



Featured Writer
JOYCE LOH

Joyce Loh is a Singaporean writer by way of Malaysia whose work explores the intersections of organization health, motherhood and humanity from the immigrant experience. She studied at the University of New South Wales, Australia and New York University. An ICF Associate Certified Coach, she currently lives in The Netherlands with her husband and kids. She starts the day with a cappuccino and practices pilates for sanity. When not travelling, keeping fit or learning languages, she hones her craft with the International Writers' Collective. She shares her writing at joyceloh.com and on Instagram: [@joycelohwrites](https://www.instagram.com/joycelohwrites)

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Readers,

There is a small glass bowl that I have carried with me since 1996, the year my maternal grandmother, Pauline, left this plane of existence. It does not have much material value. I keep it because I know the value of its story.

My eldest aunt told me that when my grandmother was a young girl, she worked all day in a field and was paid with this bowl. Her father had died of tuberculosis, leaving a wife and three girls to fend for themselves in the mountains of North Georgia during the Great Depression. She knew what it was to be hungry, cold, scared, and desperate. She never referred to the past as “The Good Old Days” or waxed nostalgic over anything that occurred in her youth. For her and for my grandfather, who had served in the U.S. Army on the European front, every single day beyond the end of World War II was a bonus.



My grandmother's bowl

While Roosevelt's New Deal opened doors for some, the benefits didn't reach all the way down to an Appalachian widow and her daughters. They took any job they could find: field work, house cleaning, textile mills, whatever was available to women without education or pedigree. Because work meant survival, my grandmother was unable to attend school past the sixth grade. Even so, she loved to read and exuded a practical, earthy kind of wisdom that only comes from hard living and sincere praying. Life did not begin to ease up for her until she married my grandfather and settled into the post-war American prosperity of the 1950s.

She died just before I graduated from college with honors, but I know her spirit walked every step of that processional with me, beaming with pride in her beloved granddaughter. I was the first in my family to venture beyond the comfort of those indigo mountains and seek opportunities that were denied to my grandmother and so many others of her generation.

Whenever life feels overwhelming and I question my ability to meet a challenge, I hold her little glass bowl. I think about the women of my line

who were blessed with a little bit of grace and a whole lot of grit, and I keep going. As Maya Angelou said, “The more you know of your history, the more liberated you are.”

I was deeply touched by so many of the heartfelt pieces in this issue, stories that reach into rich, loamy soil to bring forth what is both ancient and familiar. It is a joy to celebrate and elevate the voices of our ancestors within this talented, soulful community.

With love and gratitude,

Jen Miller



Jennifer Miller holds a BA in English Literature and MA in Professional Writing from Kennesaw State University. A Pushcart Prize nominee, her poems have been selected for publication by *The Atlanta Review*, *The New England Psalter*, *Humana Obscura*, *Gypsophila*, and anthologies by Quillkeepers Press and Womancraft Publishing. Her forthcoming chapbook, *It's Her Nature: Poems of Reclamation*, will be published in 2027 by Jack Wild Publishing. Born and raised in the North Georgia mountains, Jen is proud to be souled in Appalachia. Visit her at www.jenmillerpoetry.com and @jenmillerpoetry on Instagram.

Inner Goddesses

Jennifer Weigel

I want to embrace the goddesses
that dwell inside every one of us.
I feel need to reclaim their divinity,
to release them from the misogyny,
to recognize them even in the smallest
most intimate spaces, especially there.

These goddesses whisper within,
sensing when things are off.
These goddesses quietly balance
nurture and self-preservation,
protectiveness and letting go,
the fullness of both form and fire.

These goddesses know when to
bite their lip or hold their tongue,
and more importantly when not to;
their shrill voices cannot be unheard
when we ignore ourselves, straying
from dreams, hopes, and aspirations.

These goddesses dwell wholly in that
deeply personal, metaphysical space
within the temple of body and breath,
our physical and spiritual being,
where they offer gentle guidance
so that we will not forget who we are.



The Woman and Her Ocean
Désirée Jung

Lineage

Patricia Hemminger

Archeologist suggests much of Paleolithic cave art was done by women

—Phys.org October 11, 2013

I walk the lane, a child again, hedgerow
with robin's nest, Queen Anne's Lace, soft

clay beneath my feet. What do we know
of the women long ago who molded clay

into buttocks, breasts, vulva—the paleolithic
Venus figurines—symbols of survival

in harsh climates. Only five hundred mothers
between me and the last of the hunter-gatherers.

One Venus holds the imprint of a child's finger.
Did she look like me—straight nose,

brown eyes—did she wonder about
her ancestors, rattling shell and bone

bracelets, painting aurochs on cave walls,
their red handprints?

Transported

Michele Cacano

The smell of the tide, due west of the waterfront,
carries the fragrance of the sea and the source;
other towns, other ports,
the salt worn from mountains; ancient earth into air,
Now grain and grit for new life, made of history we bear

The wind carries incense and pollen and myrrh
and, for a moment, I am someone else
Someone wearing fabric wraps and sandals
Walking the sand-strewn streets of ancient Cairo

For a moment, I am robed. I am in the green
mountain temples of Greece, high above Aegean seas,
paying tribute to a goddess, almost forgotten,
receiving visions: other times, other places, other me's.

For a moment, I'm myself, but as a child,
balancing on my father's shoulders
as we traverse the summer boardwalk,
in the warm Atlantic breeze, years and years ago...

I stop.
My feet find purchase in today, the Here and Now.
I am rocked by images as they crash on the shores of my memory
Waves of lives and moments past, rocking the boat that is my identity.

A Tourist at Delphi

Mark J. Mitchell

*...the speaking waters are silent
though they spoke a thousand years.
—The Final Oracle of Delphi*

Emperors are dust, Pythia's line broken.
A breeze through laurels speaks for water.

People speak softly, still coming
to see where waters once spoke.

Some see ruins because they look for ruins,
they don't care for words from water.

Sometimes, one or two will wonder
how lost water came to speak.

The wind might shift in the laurels,
speaking down, like water off the mountain.

One might stand very still as the sun
paints the valley laurels to look like water.

She may pluck a leaf, for no reason,
put it in her mouth, look for water

seeing just pillars, cracked stone circles.
A whiff of mystery speaks. Winds shift.

She will shiver, though she's not cold,
and drop the wet leaf on ancient stones.

She smiles, walking back to her bus.
She knows she heard silent waters speak.

Amaranthine Mother

Joseph Coy

thanks be to Eve
for opening her mind and
listening to the sacred serpent who
long guarded the tree of knowledge
for providing us with wisdom
for refusing to submit
for paying the price
for bearing the pain
for being villainized and victimized by the
ones whose eyes you sought to open

thanks be to all women
for continuing to pay the unfair price
and continuing to bear undue burden
through generations

thanks be to Inanna
Asherah and Tiamat
Isis and Kali and Danu
Freyja and Cybele
Pachamama and Gaea
to every divine matriarch
great mothers of earth and fertility
growth and abundance
love and sexuality and the sacred feminine
mothers of all to whom all owe gratitude

long have they sought to keep the goddess
out of sight and mind but
you were never fully forgotten and

you were always there as mothers are
watching and nurturing
maturing life within until the time is right
and that time is now
the pangs of labor begin and you know
you will soon be mother once more to a
new world and a better one
one born from suffering and darkness but
ready to step into light and hope
sustained by your milk and
taught by your wisdom
raised at your feet and
guided by your gentle hand
to grow into the world as it
was always meant to be

The Temple Keepers

Melissa McNair

From time immemorial we tended the flames
We are keepers of keys
Of that which holds mysteries

Buzzing

Our guides have wings
Upon them they bring
Prophecies that sing

Buzzing

Mothers and daughters
Keep alive the lore
Of those who have gone before

Buzzing

“Who are you?” they say
“We are the Melissae!”
We say

Buzzing

We guide the souls
Of those who have gone
Where did they go?

Buzzing

They returned to the hive
To begin again
That is how our lineage survives

Buzzing

We are the temple keepers
We are eternal
Like the circle

Commun

-ion

-ity

Irina Kuzminsky

We walk on our ancestors' bones
We build on our ancestors' tombs
Our lives build on ancestors' lives
We live on firm foundations.

The living are housed on the dead
Our houses are burial vaults
The living commune with the dead
Our lives are as firm as the rocks.

We worship the womb of the earth
We honor our Mother's womb
The dead are returned to Her loins
They teach us to honor the earth.

The dead are our guides through our lives
Our dead do not leave us to mourn
Our dead are returned to the earth
From Her womb they are reborn.

Reborn into gardens of stars
Reborn into space flowing time
Reborn into Her loving arms
Reborn into sorrow free lives.

We all stay within Her embrace
Her body encircles us all
In life and in death we are One
With Her Who gives life to us all.

Cathedral

Lori A. Zybala

generation upon generation, marrow clings to the bone
in a dependable framework, cocooned in the physical world

fooled by the universe, caves of illusion *deepen*
falling far away from what is at hand

fragments of architecture, attempt to hold place
in evidence of earth's existence

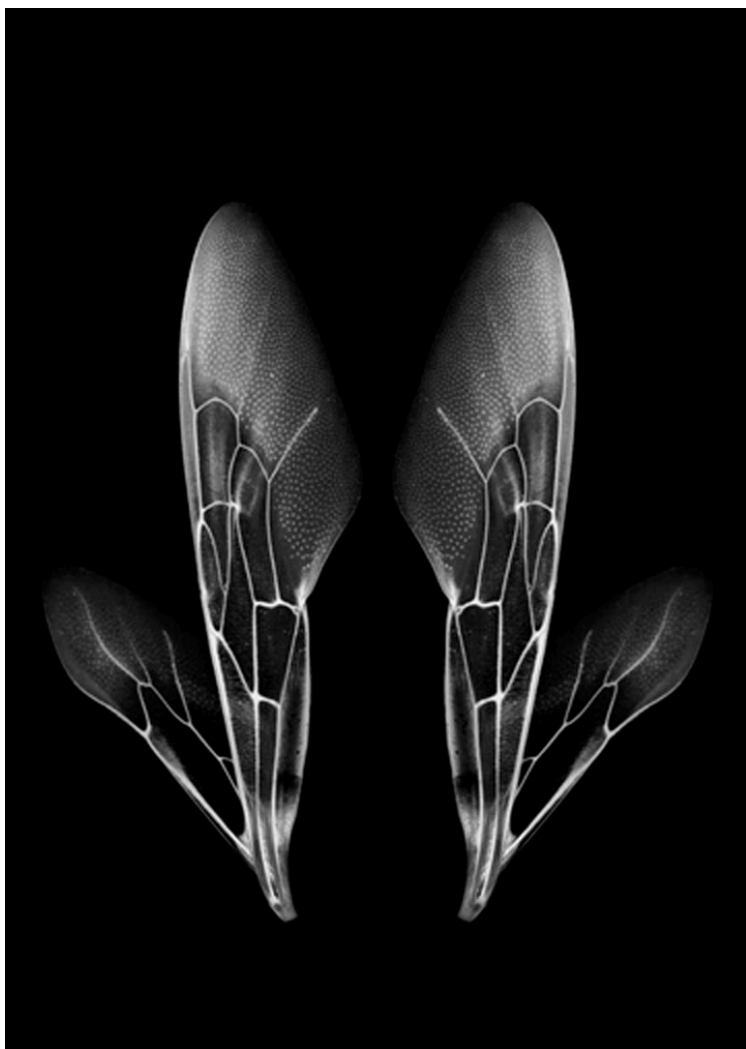
dimensions, once touched – once felt
stored in solid gold chambers

tombs of emotion *solidified*
never again touched by human hands

dust fragments sealed, in polished urns
now a decoration carried place to place

can you hear the haunting voices
echoing in a familiar dialect

calling from the *other side*
ringing inside the chamber



Wings
Karen Elias

Visitation

Karen Elias

Fossils from this family are typically found in amber from the Baltic region [1]

Cool, blustery morning, everything aflutter. Sun in and out behind grey clouds. I hear the crows cawing away at the edges, and now seemingly on the crest of an invisible breeze, my friend the sweat bee has appeared. She hovers at a short distance, wings beating wildly, and then – sniffing and exploring – lands with her shimmering humping abdomen on this notebook. Her shadow makes the sign of a tiny, pulsing, ephemeral breath against the white. I watch as, with her proboscis, she leaves at the top of the page little dots of braille: her silent language. Does she wait somewhere in hiding every day for me to appear? Is she claiming this notebook as her personal ledger? Perhaps she is an ancient scribe who became a sweat bee in the afterlife. This morning, fresh from her amber cave, she visits. Sweat bee. Sweet bee. Doing her dance of slow consecration.

[1] Wikipedia contributors. "Halictidae." Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia. Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 31 Mar. 2026. Web. 14 Aug. 2026.

To Begin Again

Jeff Sommer

When the great pyramids have crumbled
A shepherd boy, seated on the rock
Pipes music from his flute
To calm the anxious flock

When the bombs have all exploded
A record will be found
That tells the true story
Of what happened on the ground

When we end where we began
Once more we'll venture east
To farm the sacred land
To feed the hungry beast

***Madonna of the Rocks* by Leonardo Da Vinci (1483-1486)**

Tushar Sen

There is no throne here—
only stone that does not yield.
The ground does not open—
it encloses.

They are arranged within it,
held in a geometry
that does not announce itself.
Her body forms the apex—
not rising, but gathering.

One hand hovers
above the kneeling child,
not touching,
yet already deciding
the space around him.
The other turns inward,
drawing the second child close,
as if protection
and separation
were the same gesture.

The children face each other
without understanding.
One kneels,
hands pressed into form
before meaning.
The other raises his hand—
not yet a blessing,
only the beginning
of one.

An angel sits beside them,

and looks outward.
Not toward heaven—
but toward us.
The hand does not point
to explain.
It isolates.
As if one among them
has already been marked
without being named.

Water gathers
at the base of stone,
still enough
to hold a reflection
that no one meets.
Light settles—
along the edges of faces,
across the backs of hands,
caught in the hollow
between bodies.

Nothing here declares itself.
Not origin.
Not divinity.
Not end.
Only this—
a structure held in shadow,
where each figure
occupies a place
already decided,
and remains,
not because they are kept,
but because the shape
will not release them.



Heartfelt
Janina Aza Karpinska

The Secret Lives of Paintings

Joyce Loh

The blue and white tram rumbles by, a spark escaping from the overhead electric lines. Blue, in the same shade as the stickers on the exhibits we just came from. I sit at an octagonal table upstairs in a bar, across the Stedelijk (Municipal) Museum Amsterdam. It's called the Small Talk Bar, but no conversation is being made. Instead, a bunch of writers are scribbling furiously for thirty-seven minutes, or dreaming about what they should write. We're occasionally interrupted by the waitress bringing us our drinks, *pannenkoek*, slices of *appeltaart* and sandwiches; orders arriving at the right spots, impressive considering she wrote nothing down.

What brought us here was part circumstance, mostly happenstance. A few of us met at a writing class, some online, some offline. Trevor was the common denominator, bringing the ten of us together, a collection of writers he'd met at various courses. When we first gathered that afternoon at the embers of the Vondelkerk, it felt a little like one of those speed dating groups. Some of us knew each other's writing well, having critiqued a term's worth of words. Would classmates measure up in real life? Only an afternoon wandering and discussing our way around Amsterdam would tell.

Our surprise museum visit turned out to be the Blue Dots exhibition at the Stedelijk.

Blue dots were given to paintings that weren't considered worth saving during the Cold War. In 1951, the Dutch government implemented a system that obligated museums to categorize their collections for evacuation in times of war. The Stedelijk Museum used this system till 1965. The 'evacuation dots' on the back of artwork determined which pieces should be saved first. Red for 'very important,' white for 'important,' blue for 'less important.' The Blue Dots Exhibition examines what it says about artwork—and about us—if it was designated as 'less important' back then. How would that

stand the test of time?

How paintings got labeled with a blue dot was a function of whim, (lack of) information, or fleeting judgement. The painting of the Chinese doll had no label on its back; both painter and title are unknown. Perhaps it had joined the Chinese diaspora, carrying in its pigment Confucian teachings to blend in. Just like how my ancestors from the motherland sailed to Malaya in search of a better life. How I was schooled in Malay, speaking it such you'd think my skin was brown, not yellow, if you heard me talking with your eyes closed. "*Pelat awak bagus ni*" (Your accent is flawless). A skill that would serve me well when I learnt other languages later in life.

Circumstance dictated that although I was born and raised alongside other third-generation immigrants, with no affiliation whatsoever to Guangzhou or Fujian, a figurative blue dot marked the back of my birth certificate. Together with other economic migrants from South India, my heritage made me a "less important" citizen. Being a "son of the soil" accorded you guaranteed entry to university, created home ownership at a discount, got you appointed to the C-suite. At university in Australia years later, I struggled to explain this to people around me, until I learned about affirmative action in the US as part of diversity efforts in the workplace. Except, my birth country had built structural affirmative action for the majority race into its constitution.

The true sons of the soil, indigenous to the peninsula mountain range, tribes native to Borneo (in a reluctant-arranged-political-marriage), were bumiputera in name, but categorized with the same figurative blue dots.

In a country where government doesn't lean right or left, isn't Republican or Democrat, but is organized by racial lines, my parents encouraged me to mix with classmates of all backgrounds, perhaps shielding me from eventual reality. Despite living through the racial riots of 1969, my parents hoped things would improve for their children.

When my kids were in (their Dutch) primary school, I asked them what colors they saw. To them, everyone was just a shade of brown. My son's favourite daycare teacher had "yellow hair." We had interesting dinner table conversations about whether white was a color (not according to art teachers). My white husband said I was hypersensitive when people yelled *ni hao* or *Corona!* at me randomly in the street. With an upbringing colored by ethnicity, I clung to the hope that things would be different for my mixed-race children.

For me, reality hit when, at age seventeen, I finished high school and had to decide what I wanted to be when I grew up. I knew that despite good grades, the chances of getting into a local university, much less a course of my choice, were limited by the quotas^[1] of how my name sounded. Those blue dots surfaced with undisputable clarity.

My dad had gotten into medical school in what was previously the fourteenth state in post-colonial Malaya; the state that became Singapore, whose currency is worth twice the federation it had left behind. His mother, my Maa Maa (Cantonese for grandma), a consummate gambler, said, "No money, how to study?" And so he accepted the dentistry offer in the capital two hours away from his home state Melaka, taking out a loan for his tuition, while my mom put food on the table with her high school diploma. If my mom had been born a boy, she would've made partner at the Big Four with her ability for mental bookkeeping, or led a PR firm with her skill in unearthing anyone's deepest hopes and fears within five minutes in conversation.

[1] Article 153 of the Constitution of Malaysia grants the Yang di-Pertuan Agong (King of Malaysia) responsibility for "safeguard[ing] the special position of the Malays and natives of any of the States of Sabah and Sarawak and the legitimate interests of other communities" and goes on to specify ways to do this, such as establishing quotas for entry into the civil service, public scholarships and public education.

It was coincidence, or maybe providence, that one of my dad's hometown schoolmates, who had ended up in Singapore before its split from Malaya, suggested I apply to college in the fourteenth state. perhaps due to the checkered history of racial politics, or maybe because my grades were good, my blue dot became a red one, a painting worth saving. My blue dot was valued by Singapore, a city state so tiny that its existence is marked with a literal red dot on maps. This turn in life chartered a path I could never have imagined. I graduated as the top humanities student in my year at Ngee Ann Polytechnic. That led to a scholarship from the University of New South Wales during the height of the Asian Financial Crisis in the late 90s. Although my dad's dental practice was an essential service, people tolerated toothaches much longer when the economy was tanking. With tuition covered, my parents gave me their blessing.

At our university dorm in Sydney, I met the exchange student who would later become my husband. He was studying at the University of Amsterdam. In fact, I walked past one of its faculty buildings on the way here. And so, as I sit scribbling at this octagonal table, not making small talk, reflecting on the Blue Dots Exhibition, I sit with how a Little Red Dot changed my life, although my blue dot upbringing will always tell me to double down, and as the Dutch would say, keep my head below the crop line.

Notes:

The Blue Dots Exhibition ran till 15 Mar 2026 at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam. Dots were mainly given to paintings; not sculptures, applied art, photography, graphic or industrial design collections. Autonomous art, which was not considered reproducible in the 50s, drew focus. Approximately 10% of paintings received a blue dot; mostly stills, landscape and city views, mirroring the modernist course of the Stedelijk Museum. William Sandberg, the director at that time, steered artists to 'look ahead' and focus on innovation, no more of those stuffy Impressionist flecks.

This article originally appeared in Vol 3: Fire, Art, and Preservation from *Spill Your Dreams*.

Featured Writer Interview with Joyce Loh

Using the Blue Dots as a metaphor was brilliant. What do you hope readers will take away from this piece?

How art (the Blue Dots Exhibition) can inspire other art—especially when a generative writing process follows soon after. Thank you to writing friend Trevor for organizing a great format for getting the juices flowing.

Who are your biggest writing influences?

The 5-year-old me would say Enid Blyton. Today: Tash Aw, Rachel Heng, Elif Shafak, Carmen Maria Machado, Yiyin Li, Arundhati Roy, Samantha Harvey.

What keeps you motivated on tough days?

Movement never fails to move my mood. Gratitude and a good re-frame always gives perspective.

What's the best writing advice you've ever received?

Write whenever, write in snatches, write in the morning if you have that luxury. Do not wait for the ideal situation to present itself. Observe and daydreaming. Read tenfold what you write.

What themes are you excited to explore in the future?

Somehow, parenting, migration and being a difficult woman are recurring themselves I cannot seem to shake.



Visit Joyce's website at www.joyceloh.com



The Treaty Woman

Pip McGough

She of chokecherry bark
and the quiet parts of a thunderstorm.
Moving in the long-ago
between railroad tracks

and the ditch willows
with red paint on her feet
so the land can count
the steps she took away.

How many times
did they take her name from the census
how many times has it returned:
riding the frost-line down from Canada

in the bones of geese
in the margins of schoolbooks
where children sketch long-haired women
holding arrows.

At the lakeshore she sounds the ice
for every voided promise
and the ice answers
in the treaty-language

to be understood with the snow melt
by a tower of unborn girls

taller than
the courthouse flags.

The White Lady of Sorrow

Kate Nolan

She comes in upon the mist.
She floats above the red sodden
fields,
where the sons of her sisters lay,
their heads upon the crimson soil,
soaked
with their lives.

She brings only comfort—
faerie woman, enigma—
they hear her long, drawn-out wail,
her keening.

Across the barren landscape, hearts shatter—
shards of love
strewn across the sodden soil,
wet with the tears of a thousand mothers.

She takes upon herself the souls
of those she mourns.
She is Bean Sídhe.

She has escaped the chains
of a world
that has forgotten.
She holds still her unalterable face,
witness to the tears
of a thousand mothers, shed
for lost sons strewn upon the fields,
sodden

with the promises
of futures ended.

She of the Tuatha dé Dannan.

Grave Plans

Morgan Boyer

After "When I have passed away" by Claude McKay

Back at Carlow, a black classmate told me she
didn't want to be buried by the White Man's God

She wanted to be poured over the Atlantic
crest-capped waves where her powdered body

will one day reach the western shores of Africa,
a soul finally coming home after 400 years in exile.

That conversation echoes back to me sometimes;
grave plans, the final favor for your loved ones to be asked

I want my collected residue to sprout into a tree
hanging over a bench in a hospital courtyard,

still listening to the gossip of the staff
as time changes their slang and syntax.

But who really knows?

Like Richard III, I may be brought back to the surface while
some dudes are digging up a Pizza Hut parking lot

When I have passed away, you won't find me in history books,
but that's fine. My roots in this world have already been planted.



Because They Were, I Am
Ginger Harbin

The Dancing Remained

Stephanie Swiger

She was dancing when he came.

“Grandfather,” she whispered, smiling.

He smiled back at her. “You have done well. It is time for us to leave.”

Tears filled her eyes before she could stop them.

“Where are you going?”

He gently stopped her.

“It is time,” he said. “You have done well. You are strong. It is time for you to be eagle in this new life.”

She looked at him, confused.

“What about you? Where will you go?”

He placed one hand over her heart, then another over her womb.

“We will always be here,” he said.

He looked at her with quiet certainty.

“It is time for you to use the knowledge that has been given to you. It is yours now. I have passed it down to you. You will speak our truth. You will carry us in your heart and in your womb.”

She lowered her eyes.

“It makes me sad,” she said. “I won’t see you again like this.”

Grandfather always has to leave, she thought.

Then she asked, “How will I hear you when I talk to you?”

He smiled.

“You’ll know. You’ll hear us in the trees.”

It was something he had always said.

She looked at him once more.

“Will I ever see you again?”

“When you sleep,” he said, “I will speak to you in your dreams.”

She smiled through her tears.

Then he turned and walked away.

The dancing remained.

So did the trees.

First Song

Vicki Kaplan

He couldn't possibly have known
Walking fields of dust and dry high grass
Breathing in the sunwarmed breeze
That brought birdsong to his ears
 He only laughed, happy not to be alone
 I'm here too, his spirit sang.

They couldn't possibly have seen
As they chiseled praises
Onto tablets of of hard clay
Keening awe into the stone
 Let the goddess hear our words
 So the earth can know our hearts.

She couldn't ever have called it
A lullaby
As she quieted the infant
With soothing sounds
 Shhh, shhh, shhh
 I'm here, you're safe.

From the field to the flute
The stone to the score
From the mother to the voice
That makes an audience weep
 Surely they felt the unspoken music
 The miracle of song being born.



Touch of My Ancestors
Lisa JH Gardner

Cave of the Ancestors

Reda Rackley

A story waiting to be born buried deep inside that it takes years sometimes generations for the story to claw its way out of darkness. This story got lost in the veins of your grandpapa and trapped in the bones of your great-grandmother. Abandoned and forgotten, the silent story shakes and rattles the very core of your soul. Until one day, the ancestor winds howl and moan through the ancient caves of your memory. You, the chosen one, become the holy vessel of remembrance and you weep the story that has never been told.

I am embarking upon a walk about in my soul! I am leaving behind who I thought I was and no longer know who I am becoming. I am dancing closer to the realm of the ancestors.

I know my time is limited in these skin and bones and I ask the question, “What are the old ones asking of me these remaining days as an earth walker?” My story, a child born in the Deep South of Georgia, 1957, a child born into a world that made no sense to me, a child who was abused, a child who saw others being abused because of the color of their skin, a child whose ancestors enslaved humans, a child who lost her mother when she turned 15. I left the South when I was 17 years old, found my way to Big Sur, California on a full moon night on Halloween, saw bare-breasted women dancing to the beat of a drum, and I joined in the dance and never stopped dancing the spirit dance.

I have been blessed with some wisdom teachers, and one of those came from Africa, Malidoma Some. He brought me back home to embracing my own ancestors and uncovering the bone wisdom they left behind in their granddaughter. I went kicking and screaming, said, “Why would I want to call upon my ancestors when they left behind so much sorrow and pain?” And he said to me, “This is what my grandfather told me”:

“When you leave behind your skin and bones and travel back to the world from which you came, there comes a moment, when you look back and see the legacy of beauty or sorrow you left behind. If you left sorrow, then it is your responsibility to help the living clean up the mess you left behind. But the living has to be willing to extend a hand to the dead and the reason the living is willing to do this, is so that the next generation will not have to carry the burden baskets of the past.”

At that moment, I said, “I can do this! I will do this for my daughter!” So I have been on a long, long journey of traveling to the slave castles in Ghana to make my offerings and apologies on behalf of my ancestors. I have traveled to the South to shed my tears and to make offerings on the land where my ancestors enslaved my African brothers and sisters.



Reda Rackley, *Ancestral boneyard in Cork Ireland*

I am a woman listening to the ancestors songs in the wind; I am a woman that has climbed deep into the belly of the caves and listened to the wisdom of the ancestral grandmothers. I am a woman that picks up a rock and hears an ancient story tumble into my belly. I am a woman that dives deep into the ocean to shed my snot, my tears, my

joy, believing with all my heart I can be reborn over and over again. I am a woman learning to lose my mind and allow my body to become the hollow bone of the invisibles so that I might find my way home, and just maybe I can leave some bread crumbs for others to follow. I am beautiful, I am broken, I am willing to not know, to reach my hand across time and space to each of you and begin to unlearn, unravel, be uncomfortable, to sit in that sometimes unbearable pain of remembering what has been forgotten, and to remember we are all woven together in this eternal eternity.

Cover Artist Interview with Reda Rackley

Tell us a little about how *Cave of the Ancestors* came to be. What was going through your mind when you painted this piece?

The archetypal cave is a recurring image in my paintings; the cave represents the womb and the tomb of the Great Mother. I was imagining our female ancestors giving birth in the cave, leaving their bloody handprints on the cave walls to mark this initiation. And I could also envision the lineage of ancestors returning to the cave to bury their dead.

Who are your biggest artistic influences?

I am an “Outsider Artist,” to mean self-taught, untrained and am motivated by my strong inner visions that come through when I paint. I would say my biggest artistic influences are women that were institutionalized that used art as a way of navigating their souls or women that would not play by the elite artist world. Aloïse Corbaz (1886–1964), Madge Gill (1882–1961), Judith Scott (1943–2005), and Jeanne D’Orge (1877–1964), who built the home I currently live in. Her ghost stills roams the land.

What are your favorite tools and materials for painting?

I love painting on recycled wood. I go to the local lumber yard and gather the discard pieces of wood. I use acrylic paints and pens. I collect old books from thrift stores as well as bones, recycled jewelry, crosses, metal for my mixed media pieces. I use black India ink as a base for my paintings, spreading it with expired credit cards, then layering with other colors of paints images began to emerge from the painting and I pull forth these images like looking at shapes in the clouds.

What is the best piece of advice you’ve ever received as an artist?

“Paint like a four-year-old.”



Visit Reda’s website at
www.bonewomanspeaks.com

Echoes

Sue Bara

The Land exudes the truth of the ages
and the Water remembers
all that has flowed for millennia,
now washed up on the shores of our psyches,
informing our loss and longing,
guilt and honor, joy and sorrow.

Ancient wisdom and sacrifices
reverberate through roaring seas,
insect choirs, and rhythmic bird songs—
a cacophony of seasonal sounds,
re-tuning us to the sacredness
of Belonging.

The Ancestors
live within us as we breathe and blink,
exchange molecules with Plants,
sigh, scream, and swoon
in chorus with the magic and mysteries
that ever were and ever shall be.

Leaves rustle and we remember.



The Inevitable Goddess
Kathy Bruce

Winter

Ellen Woods

Often she forgets the day
or month, can't find her
to-do list, her kiln untouched.

Award-winning sculptures grace
her property by the cove, stand
elegantly in parks, museums,
art exhibits, statuesque entities.

When asked over coffee about
her first art project, she answers
without hesitation: she was ten.
The memory unfolds—

She climbs onto the milk crate
grabs the rope pulley, the attic
stairs appear, her secret hideout,
no one allowed except by permission.

She takes out her watercolors,
her oils, choosing what feels right,
to paint on the floor or the easel.
She makes puppets, stories unfold.

She forms clay into powerful beings
her hands the tools of her creation.
Fierce matriarchs, towering figures
evolving over decades into tall stoic

cylindrical sculptures in groups,
goddesses praying to the spirits
as the seasons evolve, knowing
winter is prelude to spring.

At the Fire

Ellen Woods

wisps of cobalt stain my stovetop
berries boil over
I imagine myself an ancient ancestor

clay pot on outdoor hearth
dark fruits steam hiss
stung by overflow

matriarch cooks the grains
amaranth farro
kamut spelt

positions blackberries on top
her stained fingers
paint circles on my cheeks

a bird glides past
a good omen in the
endless azure sky

we praise the spirits
bowl to mouth for
warm sustenance

now alone at my kitchen table
I remember Mama's hands
making blueberry jam

The Braid

Kim Barsamian

It surprised me to see
the braid nestled
like a forgotten bookmark
waiting there patiently
to tell her story.

The length of hair,
seven inches
I thought, yes
a seven-year-old
who was so quiet,
so quiet we no
longer heard her
singing to her dolly
or smelled the musk
in her hair from rolling
down a grassy hill.

Louisa, no, maybe
she was just Louise,
no longer fluttering
around the kitchen
like a gypsy moth
telling stories to
the wind.

I think her mother
breathed in the faint
soapy scent on
her neck

she brushed her hair
till it was smooth
and braided it,
and tied a new
red ribbon to it
bought that morning
for this very special time
—the last time.

Her mother stopped,
and thought, why had
she never put a ribbon
in her hair until today?

In one snip, the little
seven-inch braid
was cut free
and placed gently
in the Bible,
cradled in its pages
where it waited
patiently for me.



Mary Shelley
Sean Bw Parker

Where I Find You

Jennifer M. Landretti

In the old cards, the woman
closing the jaws of a lion

who does not seem to mind.
In every beautiful stone

that asks to be touched.
In all waters and in

my wife and children.
In grasses everywhere

and in stars. No exile here
this plane of dust, no matter

the missed marks and suffering.
No matter these errors

of mine, you do not hide
from my bitterness, from lust

or self-pity, only my doubt
hides you. To feel how

how you turn in my blood
at each instant

I need only
love, eventually,

everything

My Baba

V. Bray

The illustration of Baba Yaga on the cover of my Jack and Jill magazine

—olive-tinted skin, hungry globe eyes, and a thin smile—
does not look like my grandmother.

My Baba sits laughing with my mother, her daughter,
at the square Formica table.

They sip coffee and eat slices of crumb cake, speaking in a language
that feels like home,
the sound rocking me someplace inside.

When my mother became ill and she left me behind in the cottage
near the woods,

my Baba would put me in a stroller and push me downtown.

I loved going to the bakery

—a free cookie.

I loved going to the bank

—a free lollipop.

When I grew, Baba told me to work hard to be accepted, to fit in.

She did not teach me her language—

the ways of the forest,

cycles of the sun and moon,

medicines from herbs and mosses.

Yet at night in my small room, they called out to me

but were silenced in the day by Baba's voice,

Be pretty, be nice, become a good woman.

After her death I look in her handheld mirror,
the only mirror we ever had.

Flecks of beige peel from the bridge of my nose, my forearms,
revealing a spring green.

Today, I will answer the call of the forest.
I will sow wildflowers through layers of snow.

Grandma's House

Toni Scales

She lets me pick tiny strawberries and blackberries in the garden. The fuzzy runners soft yet prickly beneath my fingers.

A small, rickety bridge meanders through the backyard.

The woodshed is a little house where I yearn to hide forever.
But it's filled with Grandpa's tools.

Sharp and dangerous.

Mustn't go there. Mustn't.

But I cannot forget.

*

In Grandma's dining room, I hold tea parties.

My guests are beautiful women in white ruffled dresses with blue flowers and white parasols.

It is truly an English high society. I serve sandwich slices on china platters to my company of ghosts. The china teacups filled with warm Sprite.

Grandma lets me play with one of her rose-colored wine glasses. I've filled it with what I'm sure is a martini: pickle juice secretly stolen from the fridge. A single olive floats the pale, green surface.

For music, I thumb through my Grandma's collection of 78 RPMs.

I'm entranced by girls with Clara Bow lips and finger waves, an old-fashioned sort of sadness.

"Are You Lonesome Tonight" scratches and croons from the Victrola.

*Do the chairs in your parlor seem empty and bare?
Do you gaze at your doorstep and picture me there?
Is your heart filled with pain?
Shall I come back again?
Tell me dear, are you lonesome tonight?*

I fall asleep on the red velvet chaise longue.

My silent ghost gala is a success.

*

In the guest bedroom, the walls are covered with shelves upon shelves of porcelain dolls, of china shoes without bodies.

I flip on the small television on the dresser. Adults are talking to scared teenagers about sex.

Grandma suddenly comes in.

Her anger confuses me.

"Turn it off," she seethes with quiet rage.

"Yes, Grandma," I say, upset I have upset her, though I don't know why.

*

Much later, I will play in the other guest bedroom.

I want to make it pretty for my Grandma. I tidy, rearrange pillows.

I open a dresser drawer and find a portrait of my grandmother's mother. She is beautiful, dressed all in black, but there is a strange

sternness to her face.

I place the portrait upright on the dresser.

Grandma comes in. Her eyes fall to the portrait of her mother on display on the dresser.

My Grandma takes the picture and puts it back into the dresser drawer.

“It makes me sad,” she says.

Grandma takes my hand and leads me quietly out of the room.

*

It's my mother's birthday. I want to give her something special.

Grandma has a tiny picture hanging on her wall of a little house. There's a tiny moon on the door of the house.

It is beautiful.

I pull softly at my grandmother's blue dress.

“Let me give this to Mama,” I say, pointing at the picture and looking up at my Grandma.

My grandmother looks down at me strangely.

“You can't do that,” she says. “It's a picture of an outhouse.”

But I don't understand.

I won't until many years later.

*

At night, my Grandma plays solitaire alone in the kitchen.

My Grandma is always smoking. She smokes these long, thin, brown things like sticks.

Grandpa and I watch *M.A.S.H.* and *The Love Boat*. He shows me how to eat cornbread in milk with a spoon. To crack open pecans and throw them in your mouth.

I want him to play horsey with me like he does sometimes.

But his heart is bad.

Sometimes, my Grandma and Grandpa let me play 31 with them. Grandpa says I've won and gives me shiny quarters to hold in my hands.

I love my Grandpa so much.

And my Grandma.

Even though they barely speak to one another.

*

In Grandma's bathroom, there is the scent of Dove soap and Old Spice.

I am taking a bath, sliding in the bathtub back and forth, water sloshing over the white rim of the tub.

Only years later will I wonder if I was too much to handle.

A burden.

In my 20s, I will dye my hair black and cut it like Louise Brooks' in *Pandora's Box*. I will wear silver tap shoes and white face powder and crimson lipstick, and I will smoke with my Grandma.

While Grandma smokes her long, brown sticks, I smoke Marlboro

Lights from a rhinestone-encrusted cigarette holder.
My Grandma will come to live with us when my Grandpa dies from a stroke.

My mother will complain about my Grandma often. My mom will say that she hates her mother, and that I remind her of my Grandma.

My mother will relegate my Grandma to a small, shadowy space in the living room and a recliner.

My Grandma will be achingly lonely there. She will not flourish, instead she will wither away like a dried-out rose.

She will die in a hospital bed while I hold her hand.

The platinum wedding ring glinting on her finger.

The cameo of raised blue veins in her hands.

*

I am a child again.

Grandma is alive and sits at her vanity.

She is so beautiful.

Her bedroom smells of cigarettes and face cream.

It comforts.

A white, faceless mannequin holds her dark, curly wig. She lets me play with her Chinese music box with the red tassel.

I'm ensorcelled by the sad notes of "Fascination."

The ballerina's leg is broken and missing. It twirls and skips the mirrored surface in fits and starts.

Bedtime. I am sandwiched between my grandparents, safe as houses.

My Grandma's pillow shaped like a horseshoe keeps her curls intact.

Grandpa snores gently, his thick, wire-rimmed glasses lying on the nightstand.

The night light casts a soft, yellow glow on the portrait of Jesus.

I pull the cover up over my head, careful to not let spiders get in my mouth.

In seconds, I sleep.

It was fascination, I know

Seeing you alone with the moonlight above

Then I touch your hand and next moment I kissed you

Fascination turned to love...

Quiet Work

Beth Winegarner

My grandma, my mom's mom, could talk
the pain out of a burn. Nobody knows exactly
how, but the Father, Son and Holy Ghost
were probably involved. "Quiet work"
it was called, this recipe whose ingredients
counted faith and murmured scripture
among them. A healer could never take
credit for the sting lifting from the flesh;
God was the medicine, the healer no more
than the needle it passed through.

My grandma was forbidden from teaching
her children how to work the trick. She
kept the source of her knowledge secret.

That's all I know.

And so I conjure imaginary threads, follow
them up ice-cold cricks and deep into hollers
only to find frayed ends in my fists.

And so I conjure a lineage of ghosts whispering
backward not through bloodlines but something
harder to divine, charms carried across oceans
under silent tongues, sustenance even when
weevils laced the hardtack and stormy seas
turned everyone's bellies inside-out,

passed down in hushed cadences until
the substance of it died altogether

before it ever reached
my lips.

The Forest Path

Bridget Houlihan

walk this way, down the path made for deer,
unshod feet tickled by the soft, spongy lichen
and brushed by the dry autumn leaves
my athame, a limb of maple
my cauldron, the hollowed stump of an ash
holding water and reflections of ancestors past

dusk greets me with softened light,
when I meet the Goddess, and my coven of trees

watch for the flight of geese,
streaming across a pink and purple sky
soundless as the wind blows towards the West
my candle, the rising moon
my incense, the woody, wet smell of Earth
dance this way, amongst the Old Ones
and let the darkening forest guide you

The Oldest Vigil

Natalie Harveld

Each evening he arrives, half dream, half need,
drawn soundlessly towards the warmth of skin.
The house is dark except for one small lamp,
the kind of light that makes a world of hands.

Outside, the garden disappears from sight.
The trees stand listening beyond the glass.
Only the clock continues with its work,
measuring hours no one else will see.

His mouth works slowly. Somewhere in the dark
an owl calls once, then settles back to silence.
She rocks and waits, whilst milk and moonlight pass
between the generations of the night.

For she is not the first to sit like this.

Not the first mother
to wake before dawn,
to count each breath,
to soothe a child whose hunger will not wait.

Others have sat beside hearths,
beneath canvas roofs,
under stars,
by candlelight.

Others have listened to sleeping houses and watched the darkness fade.

The centuries gather silently around her:
women whose names are gone,

whose faces are forgotten,
whose children also reached for comfort in the night.

Then dawn reveals the small shape at her breast,

milk-drunk,
peaceful,

and joined, for a moment,

to every child
who has ever slept
in a mother's arms.

Ancient Dance

Kitty Riordan

Walking in the brittle brown leaves,
I hear them before I see them.
An ancient, throaty warble reverberates
through the bare cottonwoods of the bosque.
I round the bend and then I spot them,
spread out in the shallow muddy waters of the river.

Majestically tall, ungainly creatures,
their gray-brown feathers camouflage them in the dusk.
Standing on impossibly long thin legs,
only the blood red cap on their heads gives them away.

I am astonished at this incredible sight.
Nothing could startle me more.

And then they begin to dance.

The dancing duos bow and leap straight up into the air,
heads thrown back and beaks raised in exultation,
wings outstretched in a graceful and joyful choreography like no other.

Awestruck,
I stand watching the oldest surviving birds on the planet,
who have been revered for two and half million years,
who almost became extinct.

I wonder if they know.

One turns its head towards me,
and our eyes meet.

They know.

Maternal Current

Magnus Briar

A burning thing,
then a name.

At the cellular level,
a little legacy,
ancestrally thawed.

Mitochondria:
hearthths nested in shadow,
tiny furnaces
from mothers,
a filament of lineage
burning at the heart of a cell.

Older than photography,
tenderer than genealogy.

Fibre-optic cables
spanning centuries.

You entered this world
with fingers on fire,
lit by faceless women
who watched the moon,
who washed the basins,
who salted the winter meat,
who boiled the laundry,
who scraped frost from windows,
who rocked feverish children.

Women whose names

slipped away like dust
Yet heat traverses time.

Because of them,
I am here.
I am here.
I am here.

Imagine:
a woman reaching you
through a filament
fine enough to vanish
within a cell,
and yet,
reaching you.

Is this the sacred?
An ancestress seated above us?

Or a crosswind within us,
moving through generations,
from mother to daughter,
from daughter to daughter,
from being to being?

A crone river
roaring from her to me,
with no baptism.

It is not a possession.
It is a promise.

I kneel inwardly

before the mystery
of so many women's lives
entering mine:

the woman at the washhouse,
the woman at the stove,
the woman at the fevered bedside,
the woman beneath the moon,
the woman whose name
is gorgeous and unknown.

And yet...
here she is.

A hot spring beneath my life.
A current in my platelets.
An uninvented radiance.
I know you are there.
I know I came through you.

Tonight,
I will keep watch over this fire.

Tomorrow,
I will pass it on.



Conjure
Audrey Holmes

Sometimes I unfurl my future apprentice self

Vivian F. Prescott

like I haven't forgotten the wild sky and sea.
Is there another future, though, where there's no salmon,
and our glacier is but a thread across the valley?

For now, the view of the river is painted cold and the edge
of fog is lonesome and blocks my view of normal.
But maybe it's me pulling down the sky

with my weeping. How can crying be a comforting melody
when the wind is humming a high tide gale again?
What if I were like my ancestors

from the plane of legends, who could drum up the veil
of fog, spread it out like a blanket, retreat rain back
into darkened shark-shaped clouds,

sing up a flight of songs from another world? All I can do
is ramble off-tune about swift moving currents,
about the surf scooter's return, about the toad's eggs

necklaced like black beads across the pond, and the wing-whirs
of the dragonfly. It must be enough. It must be enough.

Unique Adaptive Strategies

Vivian F. Prescott

I start yawning as my feet press the wilted daisies
and fireweed stalks into the mulch of alder leaves.

Every year it's like this—the path to my hollowed-out
self is a familiar but cautious place.

I stay curled in my body's den all winter, cozying up
against clumps of earth under a blanket of moss.

In this state, the thick of stories is stored throughout
my aging body, unseemly scattered and messy,

a sign that might baffle a curious guest and unwary traveler.
Deep in the fat of winter, there's always a story-spinster

unwed to page and pen that startles me awake and back
into the deepest darkness. Sometimes, though, I wake

and shift to wander winter's starlight, my muse counting
stars along with me. And before we return to our mud-warm

dreams, we bid good-winter to ancestors twirling green scarves
above us, dancing on the trail to elsewhere.

Featured Poet Interview with **Vivian F. Prescott**

Tell us a little about your writing process. What inspired *Sometimes I unfurl my future apprentice self* and *Unique Adaptive Strategies*?

Lately, I've been using poetry to counteract the despair of the world. The poem about "unfurling my future apprentice self" is about the Sámi yoik chant and my stumbling practice of that tradition. It does make one feel better to sing (even off tune) and to write poetry. In my poem "Unique Adaptive Strategies" I am musing about aging. I've been writing a lot about that topic. Rather than seeing myself as getting old, I see myself as becoming a sage.

Which poets have been most influential on your work?

I've been influenced by numerous poets, but early on it was Edna St. Vincent Millay, and later, Paula Gunn Allen, Mary TallMountain, Nora Dauenhauer, Joy Harjo, Ada Limon, Virgil Suarez, and Mary Oliver. So many poets; so many influences.

As a writing mentor, what is your best piece of advice for helping poets develop their own voice and style?

I tell poets to read lots, and not just poetry, but nonfiction and novels too. I would also suggest listening to poetry

podcasts too. It also helps to have a writer's group to belong to that will help you identify when your voice really comes through in a poem. Usually, that's some form of honesty or truth that's recognizable. It's okay to practice writing in different voices until you find your gift. Yes, finding your "voice" or style is a gift.

What do you hope readers take away from your poems?

I want readers to take a small journey into the beauty of images and words that typically describe the place I inhabit, which is living on a small island in Alaska. I hope the human state, and the animal or natural state, blend well in my poems. I also like to reveal a bit of my vulnerable humanity to connect with readers because we're all on this planet together.



Visit Vivian's website at
www.vivanfaithprescott.com

Folding Sheets on Our Ninth Anniversary

Jennifer Nachtwey

Polyester cotton.

Twist left, twist right, ring flash.

You never take yours off.

Mine hurts in my dreams.

Coffee comes. Your hand sweetens
the bitterness of German Roast.

Before you can know me,
you must learn my silence.

Gift of Stars

Padma Thornlyre

for Lisa Bailey

Tonight, you remark
that I've yet to forgive
myself; suddenly, I am
near a meander where
I sat with Annesta one
summer many years ago
on our honeymoon; but
now I am alone, peering
from above from a great
pine at a man who is me
draped in furs, staring
intently into a fire as if
to control its leapings,
as though to force its
way to the becoming
stars and behind me
the river impales the
magnetic silence, vies
for my rapture. I weep
from my pine for the
man wearing furs and
he, too, weeps, and his
eyes no longer on fire
are blind and into me.

Death Ritual

Wilderness Sarchild

The phone rings at 5 AM on April Fools Day.
Joan's passed, Betty whispers. By 6 AM
Deborah and I join Betty to begin
a sacramental cleansing of our friend's body.

After stopping cancer treatment, Joan held reign
in her bed overlooking Drummer Cove
for ten more months, took pleasure in our visits.
Even the children in our community
participated in this end of life rite,
bouncing around her room, singing with her,
holding her hand.

We dip a soft cloth in spring water infused
with rosemary for purity and protection.
We chant as we wash:

all things must pass away
all things must pass away
nothing that's born can ever stay

Michael builds her pine coffin.
The children decorate it with
paint and glued-on flowers.

For three days after her death
we keep vigil at her bedside
talking singing praying
her soul's journey to the Motherland.

That Forced Mona Lisa Smile

Mac McLeod

When my mother died, the funeral director wanted pictures. Mama lived in an analog age, so I searched for paper photos. There were none in their frames with faded colors, people frozen during celebrations or awkward moments, men with mullets or rocker-length hair, women with teased towers. I searched through drawers of life's detritus, odd nuts and bolts, rolls of yellowed Scotch tape, appliance warranties. I discovered only a slim deck of nine photos of my mother. In each she had that thin forced crease of Mona Lisa's smile. I never saw her with her head thrown back grinning with a raucous laugh as if she had just heard an uproarious joke. At the funeral home, an easel held a fuzzy blown-up photo. Mama was in her final conveyance, walnut, brass, and satin. I inched closer to get a final memory of her face. Her lips.

Ritual

Carole Greenfield

after Mark Strand

My mother bought me a bag of sea-glass, soft chunks
in scuffed shades of mint, indigo, lavender, edges smoothed
to the touch when I place a finger on their little backs, slide
each piece along the pitted white sill of my east-facing window.
Every day I slide them over, naming reasons why I need to stay alive.

I am haunted by darkness, the mice of my thoughts scrabbling
behind my eyes. I can feel the tremor of their little tummies
as their breathing shortens, as if they too feel a cloud mounting,
note weather changing. Sometimes I think it would be better to live
a cloistered life behind drystone walls, or better yet, turn like Daphne
into laurel, bronze leaves fluttering from my palms, widow only to what
I no longer can bear to keep on loving.

Acanthus

B.M. Shumac

Here, the clouds cast their shadows down on the mountains.

I never understood how much that would take my breath away
until she was gone.

There is so much here that I never appreciated,
until I reconsidered my perspective because:

Here, in this ground, is the most beautiful being I knew.

How then could any of this land not be divine?

There was a time I could walk along the tumbling river stones,
but couldn't see the delightful leaps of water carelessly bounding
down the current.

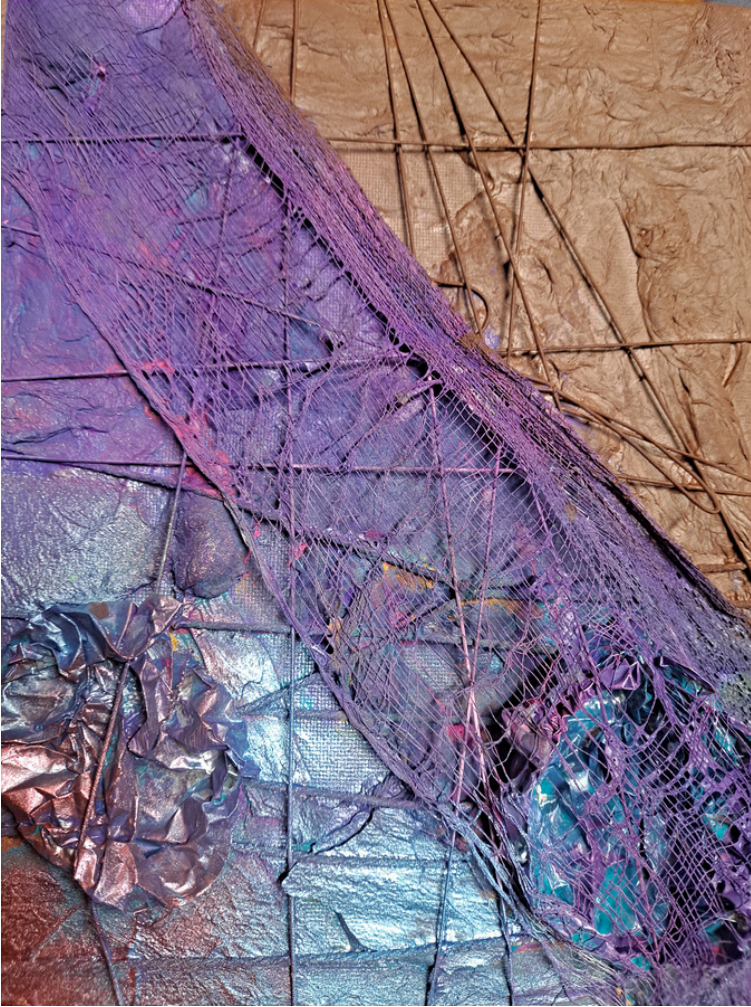
Here, the vistas are oil paintings, every stroke made by a different
artist who is building towards their own dream.

There may be smears in opposing directions, but they come together
into a bold and daring masterpiece.

Here, there is culture older than the towering pines.

The pulse of ancestors still can be felt in the soft forest floor.

There are plenty of places that are easy to fall in love with, but I have
learned that building love for a place I thought I hated is what made
here, my home.



Proof of Womanhood
Orion Cho

For the Female Rebels

Shontay Luna

For the rare ones, those who sat comfortably in their own spirits. Right from the jump. They were cool; having learned at an early age that glory that is their self-worth. Automatically avoiding a lot of unnecessary bullshit. Not falling for the okey doke of measuring their self-worth through the access of having a man. They were the originals; badasses who went against the grain and directly into the eye of the storm, screaming like rabid banshees. Joyfully and gloriously drunk from the goblets of their own rebellion. Giving neither damns nor fucks along the way. There were only a sacred few; whispered about by women who secretly longed to be them. I don't remember their names, but I remember how their souls sparkled. From the inside, out.

Dit

Michaela Korte

The little black dit. . . is often thought of as the beginning of life. . . The beginning of the world and of its inhabitants is often made from the dit, from one grain, one single tiny dark dot of something.

–Clarissa Pinkola Estés

I lit a fire and stood still, watching it burn down the house:
the house where it happened,
the house where everything happened

When, finally, the house was a dit of ash,
the fire was still hungry, and it
swam in shimmering ribbons, down to the pond:
the pond where we fished for brim and crappie with cane poles
the pond where I cut my pinky toe on an old brick, deep in the mud

The pond did not swallow the fire, as expected
but rose up in waves of welcome: they danced with each other,
sensually like lovers, their wet embers splashing in my direction

With the waves and flames reflected in my eyes,
finally I moved, too, joining my ancestors in their dance

Contributors' Index

Sue Bara is a lifelong mystic and nature lover. A spiritual quest ignited when her Catholic upbringing could not satiate her longing to know the Divine. She's practiced Earth-based, indigenous, and Eastern spiritual traditions and herbal medicine ways, finding purpose and peace within the arms of the Divine Feminine. Writing has been a foundation for processing and sharing her discoveries, with visual arts emerging over the past five years.

Kimberly Barsamian is a writer, a retired librarian and teacher who resides in Rhode Island. You can find Kim's work published in *South Florida Poetry Journal*, *Shine*, *The Prudence Dispatch* and *Anomaly*.

Morgan Boyer is the author of *The Serotonin Cradle* (Finishing Line Press, 2018) and a graduate of Carlow University. Boyer has been published in Kallisto Gaia Press, Thirty West Publishing House, *Oyez Review*, and *Rune*.

V. Bray has been a writer since childhood and still has a box filled with her first "books," usually illustrated with markers and bound with yarn. She writes in many genres, from speculative and historical fiction to poetry. Her work has been published in literary journals including *Stonecoast Review*, *About Place Journal*, *Halfway Down the Stairs*, and *pacific REVIEW*. Her chapbook *Breast* was published by Plan B Press in 2026. Learn more about her work at authorvbray.com.

Magnus Briar (they/them) is a poet based in Winnipeg, Canada. Their work fuses the regional and the mythic, exploring themes of displacement, ecology, recovery, and queerness. Their work is forthcoming in various journals.

Kathy Bruce is a visual artist based in Argyll & Bute Scotland. Bruce's work explores mythological female forms within the context of poetry, literature and the natural environment. Ms. Bruce is the recipient of numerous grants and awards including a Pollock-Krasner Foundation Fellowship, two Fulbright-Hayes scholar grants to Peru and a Ford Foundation Grant. She has exhibited her work in the US, UK and internationally including Senegal, Taiwan, Denmark, Peru, France, and Canada.

Michele Cacano lives in Seattle, Washington. She is a lifelong artist, writer, and learner who loves to travel, meet people, and discuss the meaning of life. Since 2007, she has led the Seattle Writers Meet Group through weekly critiques and ongoing support. Her work has been published in anthologies and magazines such as Haunted Waters Press, *Penumbra*, *Tangled Locks*, and *Anomaly Poetry*.

Orion Cho is a mixed media artist and graphic design student based in Louisiana. Working through abstraction, Cho explores themes of transformation, memory, identity, and resilience using layered paint, collage, and textured materials. Their practice embraces the expressive potential of surface and imperfection, inviting viewers to reflect on the beauty found in change and reconstruction. Alongside their studio practice, Cho is a freelance travel writer whose interest in place and storytelling informs a thoughtful, material-driven approach to contemporary art.

Joseph Coy (he/him) has always been fascinated by how a few words and a few lines can say so much. He uses poetry to explore themes of nature, spirituality, social and political issues, love, hope, and connection. His poems have been selected for publication in *Altar Literary*, *Epistemic Literary*, *Call Me [Brackets]*, *Anomaly Poetry*, *Brown Bag Online*, and anthologies by Gorgon's Gaze Press and Wandering Words. In his spare time, Joe enjoys spending time with family, being in nature, cooking, yoga, and meditation.

Karen Elias has her eye out, daily, for signs of the Goddess. The Baltic region sends its emissaries in her direction. Signs of the ancestral Lithuanian goddess whose kiss still sings in her blood. She says: visitations can come in even backwards and upside-down. She makes room for openings.

Lisa JH Gardner earned her BA in fine/commercial art from Saint Francis College in Indiana. A mixed media artist, she has been creating art since she was a child with her sketchbook always at her side. Lisa is on the board of directors and on the ritual committee for Sophia's Portico, a feminine art and spirituality center. Traveling with others on their journey with the Goddess has been life-transforming. Lisa experiences the Goddess, and her experiences as a white American woman, in her interactions with Nature and shares this through her art.

Carole Greenfield grew up in Colombia and resides in New England, where she teaches multilingual learners at a public elementary school. Her work has appeared in *Amethyst Review*, *The Plentitudes*, *Stone Poetry Quarterly*, *Sky Island Journal* and other places.

Ginger Harbin is a mixed-media artist and retired special education teacher whose work explores identity, belonging, the divine feminine, and the reclamation of voice. After 30 years of teaching students with disabilities, she now brings that same commitment to humanity and storytelling into her visual art. Working across acrylic, watercolor, alcohol ink, and mixed media, Ginger creates layered pieces rooted in lived experience, personal transformation, and the belief art tells the story of the soul.

Natalie Harveld is a British poet whose work explores motherhood, identity, and the beauty of everyday faith. She writes of early parenthood's rawness and humour. As an English teacher, she encourages teenagers to find their voices. She lives in the English countryside with her husband and two children. Instagram@natalieharveldpoetry

Patricia Hemminger is inspired by her love of nature and science background. Her poems have been published most recently in *Wild Roof Journal*, *Stillwater Review*, *Cider Press Review*, *Streetlight Magazine*, *The Write Launch*, and *SLANT*, and in her chapbooks *What Do We Know of Time?* and *All Things Gone*. She is a Pushcart Prize nominee and graduate of NYU's Science Health and Environmental Reporting Program and of Drew University's MFA Poetry and Poetry in Translation Program. She is currently producer of *Safer Stuff*, a documentary focused on solutions to environmental pollution.

Audrey Holmes paints and dreams among trees. She uses sculptural forms and flowing lines to create rich, evocative pieces with a profound impact. She works in oil on canvas/board, mixed media, and metalpoint. Her practice is inspired by the Goddess, the natural world, things glimpsed from the corner of the eye, and half-remembered dreams. www.audreyholmesart.com

Bridget Houlihan is a writer of short stories and poetry, who likes to dabble in music, photography, painting, and sketching. Her work has been featured in *Lothlorien Poetry Journal*, *Livina Press*, *Anomaly*, and *Red Flag Poetry* among others. She is currently a writer, editor, and indexer living in Pittsburgh, PA, and you can find more of her work at thesagaciousbee.com.

Désirée Jung is an artist from Vancouver, Canada. She has published translations, poetry, and fiction in several magazines around the world, taking part in many artists residencies. Her series of video poems were screened in various film festivals and won several prizes. Her nonfiction story *Dispatches from the Womb* was nominated for a 2023 Pushcart Prize. For more information, please check her website: www.desireejung.com.

Vicki Kaplan began to write poetry only a few years ago, after a career as an opera singer and voice and acting teacher. She has found a new voice in a different art form and, despite having sworn she would never do another audition, Vicki sends these poems for your review.

Janina Aza Karpinska was born of Polish Catholic and Russian Orthodox parents and found each ancestral root came through when creating devotional icons, although not schooled in either tradition. Living by the sea on the south coast of England, with a

love of beachcombing, led to her practice of using discarded, washed up materials, otherwise considered rubbish, to make icons as an act of creative redemption. Her work has featured on the covers of: *Chichester Magazine*; *Heart of Flesh Literary Journal*; and in: *The Third Way*; *Shanti Arts*; *The Methodist Recorder*; and *Foreshadow Magazine* among others.

Michaela Korte is a public school teacher and emerging poet, among other things. She is deeply inspired by nature, both in her writing and in her life. She is constantly chasing an equal euphoria to eating a soft peach and feeling its juice run down her cheeks and chin.

Irina Kuzminsky is a dynamic and interdisciplinary artist whose work bridges the worlds of academia, poetry, dance, performance, and music. A Commonwealth Scholar elected Junior Research Fellow in Humanities at the University of Oxford, Irina holds degrees in Music and the Arts, with a doctorate in Modern Languages and Comparative Literature on "Écriture féminine or the 'Language of Women,'" grounding her creative voice in deep intellectual and classical traditions.

Jennifer Marysia Landretti writes poetry and essays. Her themes are nature, place, and spirit—and in recent years, gender, which has served as a vector to explore the latter three. Her poetry has been accepted for publication in *Braided Way*, *Azure Magazine*, and *Sky Island Journal*, among others. Her essays have appeared most regularly in *Orion* magazine. For additional information about the author and to view more of her writings, please visit her website: jenniferlandretti.com.

Shontay Luna majored in Poetry at Columbia College Chicago before finishing elsewhere. Her poems have appeared in *Olney Magazine*, *Bullshit Literary Magazine*, *EKL Review* and *The Crucible* among others. Her most recent book title is *The Goddess Journal: A Tool for Unlocking the Goddess Within Every Woman*. When not writing, she's couponing or gleefully hoarding pens and notebooks and lives in Chicago, IL with her *Sons of Anarchy* Juan Carlos "Juice" Ortiz photo gallery.

Pip McGough is a UK-based poet and freelance writer widely published on both sides of the Atlantic. His poem "Render Error," as featured in issue IV of *Wildscape* magazine, was nominated for a 2026 Pushcart Prize. He has established a large and growing following for his poetry on Instagram as [@manifest_gothic](https://www.instagram.com/manifest_gothic). His work deals largely with the intersection between myth and modernity, with special emphasis on the female experience within indigenous and global majority cultures.

Mac McLeod is a new poet and an old man. At 89, he is on the cusp of death and many of his poems reflect him teetering on that ledge. He is a southerner by birth, disposition, and education. He's earned various degrees; a B.A., M.Div., Juris Doctor. He has had a rich and eclectic life as a father of five, former Senior Military Aviator, Lawyer, and Episcopal priest.

Melissa McNair is a freelance writer who lives in the Saratoga region of New York with her husband, children, two dogs, and a leopard gecko. She has been exploring the mysteries of goddess spirituality for nearly two decades. In her spare time, Melissa enjoys writing, drinking tea, nature walks, making jewelry, and attending music concerts. Melissa writes a blog dedicated to Hekate and ancient archaeological sites and may be found at www.thetorchandkey7.com.

Mark J. Mitchell has been a working poet for 50 years. He's the author of five full-length collections and six chapbooks. His latest collection is *Something To Be* from Pski's Porch Publishing. A novel, *A Book of Lost Songs* will be published in March by Hstria Books. He's fond of baseball, Louis Aragon, Dante, and his wife, activist Joan Juster. He lives in San Francisco where he points out pretty thingsy things.

Jennifer Nachtwey received her MLS from Texas Woman's University and lives in Temple, Texas with her husband and dogs. She is a poet always and has been published in *Phree Write*, *aaduna*, a quirky publication in Australia called *Free EXpression*, *Foliate Oak*, *Red River Review*, *Merion West*, the UK-based publication *The Lake*, *Dodging the Rain*, and *Three Line Poetry*. She took a nine-year break from poetry only to discover that it never really left.

Kate Nolan is a student and poet based in New York. Her lyrical work focuses on emotional displacement, identity, and the complexities of the feminine experience. Her writing dwells in moments of transition, capturing the tension between belonging and absence while giving voice to what is felt, yet often remains unspoken.

Sean Bw Parker (MA) is a writer, artist and musician based in Worthing, West Sussex. He lived in Istanbul for ten years, has written or contributed to a number of books and albums, and given a TED talk. He was born in Exeter in 1975.

Kitty Riordan is a poet and artist, born and still living in New Mexico. Her work is a way to remember who she is, to look deeper at herself and the world, through connecting to nature and the sacred feminine. She believes it is important to bear witness to what she discovers. Her poetry has been published in *The Southwest Women's Poetry Exchange*, *We'Moon*, *Encore*, and in the forthcoming *A Year of New Mexico Poetry*.

Wilderness Sarchild is a poet, playwright, psychotherapist, and facilitator of therapeutic psychedelic journeys. She is the author of a poetry collection, *Old Women Talking*, and co-author of the play, *Wrinkles The Musical*. Her poems have appeared in journals, anthologies, public radio. She has won awards for poetry and playwriting. Wilderness writes poetry as a way to: tap into her inner knowing; find the personal in the political and political in the personal; offer personal narratives that share a universality with the human condition; honor all that life brings to us—joy, grief, love, despair, loneliness, anger, death, courage, success, failure.

Toni Scales is a disabled writer in Texas. She worked in funeral service. Her poems have appeared in *Lily*, *Wicked Alice*, *Stirring*, *Blossombones*, *Rogue Agent*, and *The Pedestal Magazine*, among others. Her first poetry chapbook, *Blue Rebecca*, was published by dancing girl press.

Tushar Sen is a writer from Bhoiwada village in Maharashtra, India. He spends his spare time directing plays for free for local municipal school children. His poetry has appeared in *Mathematical Intelligencer* (Springer-Nature), *Sortes*, *Lekh*, *Indian Review*, *Writers Resist*, *The Deronda Review*, *SpecPo Verse*, *Flora Fiction*, *Ecological Citizen*, *Military Review*, *The Orchards Poetry*, and *Afrocritik*.

B.M. Shumac is a novelist and poet based in Northeastern Pennsylvania. She could often be found dreaming up fantasy worlds full of fairies and moondust throughout her childhood. As an adult, Barbara found the world of J.R.R. Tolkien and fell in love. She loves fiber crafts, such as knitting and crochet. She also loves to paint, hike and search for treasures in the creeks of Pennsylvania. Barbara spends her time in nature, at the Renaissance Faire, or playing D&D with her husband and friends.

Jeff Sommer is submitting poems for your review and reading pleasure. He has been writing for many years in different forms, but poetry was his first, and he has returned to it. He writes in both rhyme and free verse, and in a variety of themes. He thanks you for supporting and promoting the importance of poetry.

Stephanie Swiger is a writer from Maine whose work explores ancestry, memory, and spirituality through lyrical prose and poetic fragments. She was previously published in *Quill of the Goddess* and is currently working on a collection of interconnected literary fragments.

Padma Thornlyre has published eleven books of original poetry, including the four volumes of his *Anxiety Quartet* (Turkey Buzzard Press 2020-21) and one book of translations from the Ukrainian poet, Lyudmyla Diadchenko, *Magnetic Storms* (No Reply Press 2023). His current projects include two new books of poetry, *WagJaw* and *Khoreia* (a life of Odysseus through the voices of women), an experimental, dream-based novel, *Baubo's Beach: an autobiography of the unconscious*; and a more comprehensive collection of his Diadchenko translations, *The Obedient Street*. He currently lives in Raton, New Mexico.

Jennifer Weigel is a multi-disciplinary mixed media conceptual artist. She/her/they/them lives in Kansas, USA. Weigel was previously a staff writer for Haunted MTL and is now involved with Weird Wyrlds and Nat 1 Publishing. Author of *Witch Hayzelle's Recipes for Disaster* trilogy. jenniferweigelart.com

Beth Winegarner is a journalist and writer who's contributed to the *New York Times*, the *New Yorker*, *The Guardian*, and many others. She is the author of several books, most recently *San Francisco's Forgotten Cemeteries: A Buried History* and *Swim Poems*, and she is the co-host of the *Dead Reckoning* podcast.

Ellen Woods writes poetry and memoir and is the author of *The Watchful Heart Recedes* (Finishing Line Press, 2021) and *Warriors in Transition* (Word Project Press, 2014). Her work appears in literary journals including *Persimmon Tree*, *Monterey Poetry Review*, *Blood and Thunder: Poems of Political Protest* anthology, *California Poets Collection* by Marin Poetry Center, among others. She was a judge in the prose poem category, Soul-Making Keats Literary Competition and is currently on the prose staff of *The MacGuffin*, a print journal.

Lori A. Zybala is a poet and writer based in Southern Ontario. She bridges the structured world of academia with the boundless mystery of imagination. Her work has been featured in/ on: *The Words Faire*, *Literary Revelations*, *Free Verse Revolution*, *Kelp Literary Adventure Journal* and *Wingless Dreamer*. Follow her on: @ecopoet77, x.com/tarrogon, ecopoetic.wordpress.com



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