

KISSING DYNAMITE: A JOURNAL OF POETRY

ISSUE #46 OCTOBER 2022: "SPINNING"

Welcome to Issue 46, "Spinning," in which the speakers in this collection of poems do all they can to find firm ground.

Issue 46 includes work by Tamara Bašić, Zeynep Dide Cavus, Emdash AKA Emily Lu Gao, Aerik Francis, Smile Ximai Jiang, Christopher Lloyd, and Rachel White (this month's featured poet). Please view The Gallery below!

We are also happy to announce in this issue our art and poetry nominations for Best of the Net 2023! Please see below.

Featured Artist—Joe Lugara

Joe Lugara took up painting and photography as a boy after his father discarded them as hobbies. His works depict odd forms and objects, inexplicable phenomena, and fantastic dreamscapes, taking as their basis horror and science fiction films produced from the 1930s through the late 1960s.

Mr. Lugara's work has been featured in more than 20 magazines and has appeared in numerous exhibitions in museums and galleries in the New York Metropolitan Area. His painting series, "Scrutiny," was recently exhibited at the Noyes Museum of Art of Stockton University. His work can be viewed at www.joelugara.com.

Artist Statement

"Scrutiny" is a continuing series that I've been working on for more than a decade. It's the most focused comment I've made so far about observing the natural world.

Observing is the key. I'm more concerned with how we observe nature than I am about depicting nature accurately. I wouldn't be working abstractly if I were concerned with physical accuracy. My purpose is to produce shapes that vaguely suggest a variety of natural forms. They should seem alien and yet familiar and should activate our imaginations as to what nature means to us. The small scale of the paintings (6" x 6" and 7" x 5") emphasizes the intensity of observation.

The shapes allude to animals, landscapes, atmospheric conditions, insects, mud slides, plants, ravines, bones, fossils, you can't be sure. What you can be sure about is that something is living, growing, decaying, regenerating, or maintaining its course through eons. Nature's inscrutable. It never stops being mysterious. The more we experience its details, the broader its overall mystery becomes. That's my goal with "Scrutiny": To bring to the viewer, through a myriad of peculiar details, a bigger—and unavoidably mysterious—picture of nature.

Poetry Gallery

"the sculptor" by Tamara Bašić

at the break of dawn, as sunlight stretches slowly
over the coasts of your body, I begin to run.

I gather precious metal in every corner of your ocean,
my personal gold rush spanning six thousand miles
before I become the sculptor, your glimmering figure my
magnum opus. ten silver-dusted fingertips tread slowly
over the bridge of your nose, as if afraid to disturb the
arches of your brows from their peaceful slumber.

when you wake, you'll search for me with a half-lidded
gaze, fingers catching nothing but air in the space where
I lay, still warm; for now, you're still in sleep's embrace
and I'm placing blue topaz and emeralds in your eyes,
knowing that gemstones and gold and marble will never
do justice to the man touched by old gods and ancient stars.

in porcelain, I carve a smile and melt gold across your lips,
pressing shimmering fingers to a spot you kiss each night
on my chest. like this, we're trapped somewhere halfway
between rococo and romanticism, halfway between devotion
and despair; if life imitates art, does this mean you'll stay my
greatest achievement? does it mean you'll kiss me forever?

at the death of dawn, as sunlight scorches a stray
speck of gold on my heart, I run back to you.

“Serenade For A Red-Eyed Possum In New England” by Zeynep Dide Cavus

the red-eyed possum disappears just as you reach for it.// you hold the piece of mohair-ish fur you managed to take from its head. the one that got away. you send love letters in possum-lish and toss them into the lake in miniature bottles. little did you know they would get smashed just because it's winter and you're smashing bottles against the cold ice. //you never see the possum again until it walks into the bar with a drummer late at night when you're sipping your no-foam triple shot caramel drizzle blonde roast margarita. the possum and the drummer start dancing a ballet you remember watching when your mom had some sanity and your dad smoked cigars in the study. the drummer looks around anxiously in the middle of the ballet. he asks you if you could be their possum queen for the rest of the night. you try to say no thanks though but in the blink of an eye he has you twirling around yourself. you don't know the steps, neither do they. the possum places a makeshift crown on your head with little animal bones and you think how considerate it is. //you worriedly realize you're still in love with the possum but then you think how could you love someone if they're a possum with blood red eyes? //you're tired and you sit on an awfully inconvenient barstool. everything is everywhere in a sudden and they're spinning like the sun spins around the earth. bloated as an ironing board. euphoric as a grieving mother. the world is upside down and you feel the dizziness getting to your head and you know it will kill you someday. the delirium has you now. hanging upside down, you smile and the possum smiles back.

“sorry, we weren't that close” (1) by Emdash AKA Emily Lu Gao

her DIY apricot jam stored in old smucker jars:

“but nainai, why 做 jam when 你能吃 already?”

i remember the “*tai hao le!*” that'd dash from her mouth
as soon as she saw us open the brown minivan
she'd nuzzle traffic-cone-bright persimmons

into my small woozy palms.

i remember how she'd play the piano Christian hymns,
the special ones 天津 missionaries taught age 7 her.

i remember pricking myself on the bb cactus
beneath her avocado trees; age 7 me was curious
to see if it would hurt me like it did for everyone else, like

the text i got from baba telling me you had died.

i recall your forgetting. do you mine? i recall
i pull over plum. i remember falling
asleep between dead and 过时. awash.

(1) Alternative title: at the funeral, people inquire what i remember about nainai

“_I Haven’t Been Writing_” by Aerik Francis

After Anne Boyer’s “Not Writing”

I haven’t been writing
about the pandemic
because it is still happening

Each morning of mourning...

I haven’t been writing *the history*
of these visions which are with me
all day & all of the night...

I haven’t been writing about sleep
-less nights flailing in bed
in painful anxious fits...

The considerations are all heavy...

I haven’t been writing about capitalism
watching it both fail & expand
watching it both starve & consume

Hating it just as much as I live it
still wondering if there is a way out...

I haven’t been writing about numbers—
I know each one is an individual
with a complex story; I am too
afraid of all the human arithmetic
operating on every order...

The sinister bigoted logic
of assault during contagion—

How systems all knot grotesque...

I haven't been writing... How I watch
as curves flatten my kin,
kindred we cannot touch & grieve
from vast lengths away...

I haven't been writing about the grief
of losing so many, so much,
the grieving & the wondering
if it will end or if it has even begun...

I haven't been writing about numbness...

I haven't been writing about the guilt
that I haven't been writing - that I may not
survive to; that I may not survive, too...

Why am I so ashamed
of the stasis that keeps me,
that keeps me alive?

& what keeps me alive?
All I want is my own permission
to write or not write to live...

I've been holding my contradictions tenderly...
I know I haven't been saying enough—

The world continues to alter daily
& it is overwhelming
seeing truly the divinity of change...

I haven't been writing, yet,
about joy
persistent as ever—

Everything is still happening,
& for better, or for worse,
anything is still possible...

& here, here is joy—

woven among
sorrows...

“In the Ambulance, Calling My Mother” by Smile Ximai Jiang

I listen to the sound of your breath lapping waves
coaxing the red digits trembling as if afraid
as if fear is fluid. Here, the swamp the press of night.
Silence on your end I fear most.

I digress I peel my limbs from sweat
plummeting dead-headed into acid of
disinfectant pooling in valleyed toe
-nails chipped like my face against the grain.
I close my eyes and listen to you whisper,
Stay calm—anger gets you anywhere but home.

So I breathe
never mind the rattle the ragged
stale air against concrete like droplets of bile
returning to the ocean— a particular death,
your breath in my ear anything but.

That has to count for something if
not tenderness if not reprieve
from the plastic the blinding haze behind my plexi cage
each hiss of movement a reminder of disease,
withering under the balm of your voice.

If I close my eyes I can almost imagine your
hands puncturing the siren sound of darkness
bare against the heart of my palm tracing
the road home.

“active adaptation” by Christopher Lloyd

you are still asleep so I down
coffee and dry toast alone,
morning breath like car fumes

I repot the ferns and palms
to give them space to shift
and unfurl, though I always

worry I am either over or

under-watering them, too
much care or too little, what

is the good enough plant
parent? how have I kept
them alive for so long

when your predecessor
said all I did was kill things?
but with you here it's like

I tend your leaves not
theirs, ever watchful of
the soil, stick a finger

in to the second knuckle
as you instruct me to do,
check the roots aren't

drowned / dry / heavy
with fungus gnats, they
flourish in the damp

and bite you at night, it's
a balancing act for sure,
this foliage balms the lounge

but trips my gut, I hear
you stir so I curl soil from
under my fingernails and

bring you a warm mug
in my stained hands

[“St. George’s Basin” by Rachel White, October’s Featured Poet](#)

we meet at the Pink Moon—danced here as kids

my sick excuses layer

it looks different now, worn upholstery

like bar crumbs on the carpet

I pull a lot of imagery from my life experiences. The bar, for example, still opens every night in my hometown. The sawing of the rope came from a newspaper article that I read about a woman who sawed her own arm off to save her life after getting stuck under a boulder in an avalanche. The field knife, from my Army days, is sitting on the dresser in my closet. My favourite drink is a martini with three olives. The dingy is still anchored in front of the neighbour's house at my husband's family's retreat at Basin View, NSW, and I have spent many hours on that body of water in contemplation.

A friend suggested trying a braided structure for this poem. I actually had no idea how it would fit together. To be honest, I was a bit timid to try it. Once I started staggering the lines, though, they began to communicate to each other in an unexpected way—a sort of comparison of the internal dialogue and the actual behaviour of the speaker. I found the structure of this poem also mimicked waves, which strengthened the internal force of the speaker even further.

Assistant Editor Matt Hsu's Commentary on "St. George's Basin":

A masterclass in split storytelling, Rachel White's "St. George's Basin" spins a narrative that begins singular, then branches out, then reconnects at the end. As the speaker enters the bar, their mind drifts to a distant memory that accompanies them as they settle in. White does a wondrous job at juxtaposing the two scenes: a sticky, weary night alone in a bar and a dramatic dive beneath the waves. There are several clever subtleties within the form, such as the section on the right being wave-shaped, or certain fragments of the two stories being aligned: "I pull a skewered olive with my teeth/& I swim up with a field knife in my mouth". The imagery is ubiquitous, giving the piece a universality that makes us readers feel as if we've been in this bar before as well. Perhaps most importantly, White captures the essence of a heartbreak that lingers inside you, too raw to share with strangers. While many of us have never visited St. George's Basin, we've all felt the ropes that chain us below the lake's rippling surface.

2023 Best of the Net Nominations—ART

Serena Piccoli—Issue 35

K. G. Ricci—Issue 39

Oormila Vijaykrishnan Prahlad—Issue 40

2023 Best of the Net Nominations—POETRY

Muiz Opeyemi Ajayi "Natation"

Chinedu Gospel "Season (. . ./ . .)"

Rita Feinstein "This Isn't an Apology"

Jack Apollo Hartley "dioscuri, halved"

Joshua Garcia "Hymn"

Lis Chi Siegel "Acclimatization—diptych"

Poet Biographies

Tamara Bašić (she/her) lives in Croatia, where she is frequently trying to pluck gorgeous sentences from her thoughts and write them down. Her writing and photography have been featured in *fifth wheel press*, *Jupiter Review*, *Moss Puppy Magazine*, *celestite poetry*, *Stanchion*, and elsewhere. You can follow her on Twitter and Instagram (@authortamarab), and more of her work can be found at authortamarab.wordpress.com

Zeynep Dide Cavus (she/her) is an aspiring poet & fiction writer based in Istanbul. In her writing, she explores the hidden, the mythical, and the paradisiacal. Her previous work can be found in *bloodbathhate magazine* and *The Hyacinth Review*. When she is not writing, she can be found talking to a statue in the local museum.

Emdash AKA Emily Lu Gao (she/they) is a poet, educator and the daughter of Chinese immigrants. She writes in order to heal, grow and decolonize—hoping to shed shame in the process. Currently, she is a Poetry MFA candidate at Rutgers University-Newark where she also teaches. Her poetry has been performed at venues like The San Diego Institute of Art, La Palabra Gallery, Historic Filipinotown Los Angeles and more. Publishing wise, you can find her neurodivergent writing in *The Agave Review*, *Curious Publishing*, *Queer Rain* & *The Good Life Review*. When not writing, she can be found hosting & organizing her open mic at WORD Bookstore JC. She lives on Munsee Lenape land (Jersey City). Send them your favorite bops on IG & Twitter @emdashesays.

Aerik Francis (they/he) is a Queer Black & Latinx poet based in Denver, Colorado, USA. Their debut chapbook *BODYELECTRONIC* was released April 2022 Trouble Department press. Find more of their work at phaentompoe.com or via social media @phaentompoe .

Smile Ximai Jiang is a student poet from Shenzhen, China, and resides in Massachusetts. She serves as an editor for *Polyphony Lit* and *The Lumiere Review*. Her work has been recognized by the Alliance for Young Artists and Writers and appears in *Kissing Dynamite*, *Palette Poetry*, *Peach Mag*, among others. Smile loves cannolis, the mountains, and her cat. She tweets at @smiii_jiang.

Christopher Lloyd (he/him) is a writer and academic based in the UK. He is the author of the micro-chap *PUT MY HEART DOWN* (Ghost City Press), as well as stories, poems, and essays published in *Fruit Journal*, *Queerlings*, *Homology Lit*, *FEED*, *Roi Fainéant*, and elsewhere. Find him on Twitter: @clloyd9, IG: @chrisllloyd9, and on his website: christopherianlloyd.wordpress.com

Rachel White is an emerging poet and artist based in South Australia. Originally from Wisconsin, she has worked in Connecticut and Australia as a visual art teacher for over a decade, and is a U.S. Army veteran. Her work appears or is forthcoming in *Third Wednesday Magazine* and *Anti-Heroin Chic*.

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