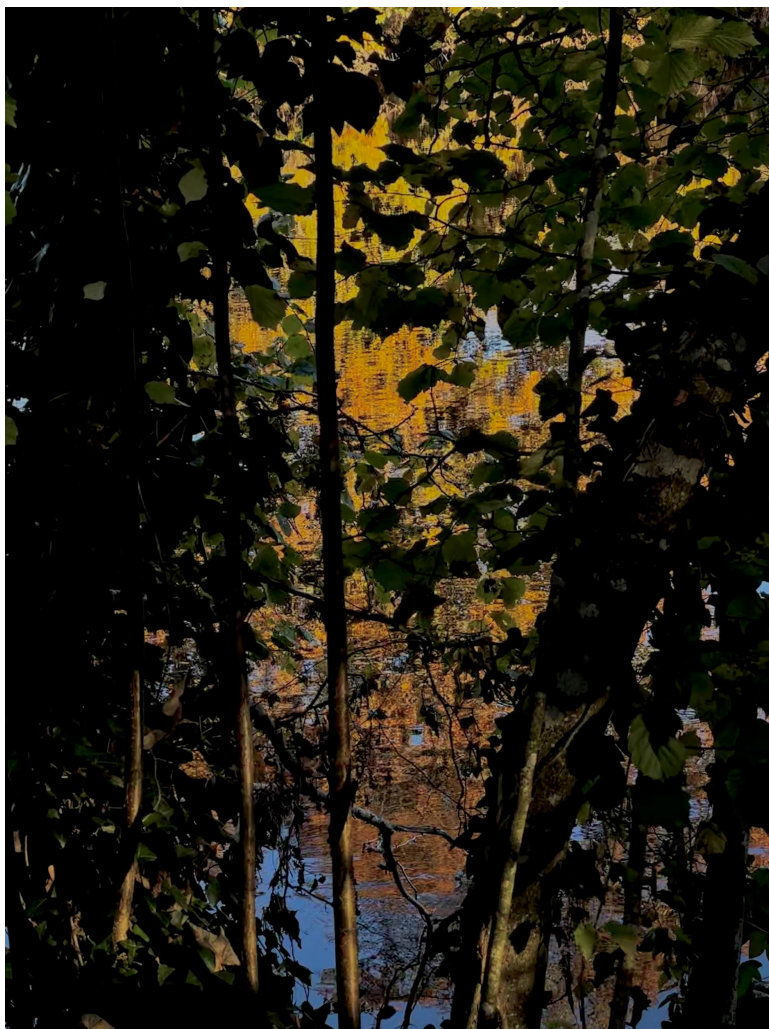


The Apostrophe

Issue 14 | Q3/2026 | Gold



This publication brings together work from authors and artists around the world, and is edited by members of the Hong Kong Writers Circle.

In The Apostrophe, the five points of the bauhinia flower (Hong Kong's emblem) are paralleled each quarter by exactly five original pieces.

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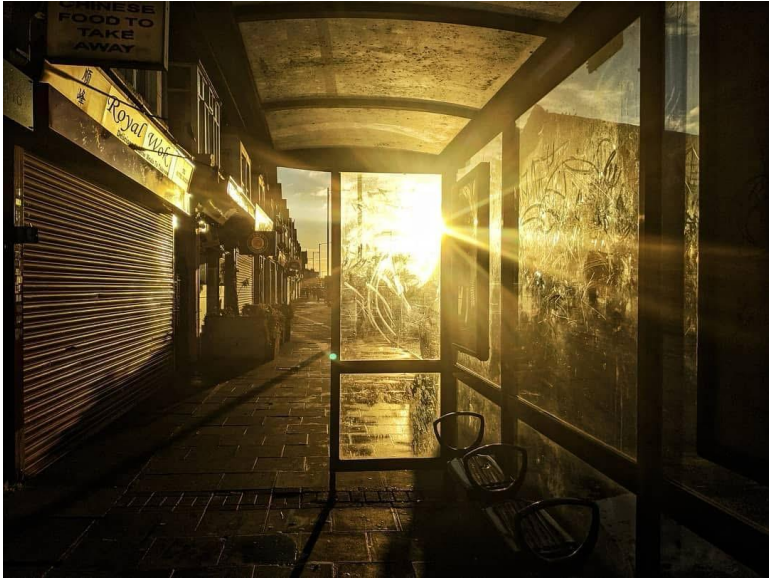


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A Golden Opportunity

Editor's Note



The whole point of gold is that it is valuable, and rare. But more importantly, once it is collected, it can take many intricate, wonderful forms: a wedding ring, gold-washed cutlery, or gold leaf on paper or furniture ... or gold-etched letters on a dagger.

In this issue of *The Apostrophe*, we see many of these forms, both in the written word and in visual art. In her “Three Haiku” (the first haiku to appear in this magazine!), Jay Bond has mastered the art of evoking without explaining, as has Si Chen in “Can’t You Teach Her Some Math” – where what is not said holds more weight than what is. In “You Must Be This Tall To Ride This Ride”, Vin Berardi conjures a horrifying, intriguing future. And our two final poems, “Fourth Grade Feral” by Tina Posner and “Notes on Gold” by Zoe Dulay-Peña, provoke contrasting emotions on the wildness of childhood and the complexities of womanhood.

The editors were also delighted, over the past several weeks, to recognize the richness of painting, drawing, and photography that a golden theme can bring out. From trembling flowers to brazen sunlit vistas, to fantastical landscapes and humble domestic scenes, to disturbing portraits (whether realistic or otherwise), the artwork featured in this issue is a virtual gallery of gold. It complements and sometimes even illustrates the written work, but speaks for itself.

All the same, this issue was one of the most difficult we've ever had to curate, because of the enormous number and excellent quality of submissions. It is a lesson in humility to examine piles of gold only to put so much of it aside. Our great thanks go to the authors and artists who submitted, and to the Assistant Editors for this issue, who provided a second set of eyes for all of the submissions during the review process.

The gold we deserve, after all, is intrinsic to what we write.

Jan Lee, Editor-in-Chief

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Three Haiku

Jay Bond

our first headmistress
has that bright hair, red to gold
my mother hasn't left me

gold mandarins glow
in rows, scent reaches
citrus heaven

here comes gold again
breath of freesias
as your neck bends down



Can't You Teach Her Some Math

Si Chen

"Let me grab this," Miyun said, getting up from the dinner table and taking her ringing phone to the couch. "Lottie, sweetie, why don't you hang out with Daddy for a while? Mommy needs to take a call."

"Daddy, I want to draw. I'll be quiet."

Li Jun signaled an "okay" and started clearing the table. He stacked up the bowls in his hands like a circus act as Lottie skipped off to get her pens.

"Hey, girl! What time is it over there?" Miyun was unconscious of the sudden lift in her voice.

"One p.m. Just got back from Amy's riding lesson. I'm exhausted. How's your husband's job hunt going?"

"I saw your Instagram post. Congrats!"

"Thanks. Three hundred kids applied to that school, and they only took two."

"That's crazy! But I knew she'd get in. She's already doing double-digit math, right?"

"She's got the two-, five-, and ten-times tables down pat."

Miyun started to sit up but leaned back again. "Amy's so smart." She glanced at her own daughter, the small figure bent over, lost in coloring her own world. "Does she like horseback riding?"



“She’s okay with it. She loves cats, but we don’t want one, so I take her horseback riding once a week instead. I try to get Lingfeng to take her, but he never does.”

“How’s the weather in Texas? All those wide open spaces are good for the kids’ eyesight. It’s so dreary here in London. And Lottie’s preschool’s so small. There’s no view, and Ma Qiangjun won’t even chip in to renovate it.”

“Ma Qiangjun? The billionaire?”

“Yeah. His wife came here two years ago with their son. She enrolled him in the same preschool Lottie’s attending now. The teacher-student ratio is great, but the teachers seem to specialize in letting kids have a good time. Lottie still can’t do subtraction with numbers over 20.”

“Your husband’s still looking for a faculty position, right? In the UK or US?”

“Not even close. His current contract’s about to end, so he’s looking everywhere he can for postdoc positions. How’s Lingfeng doing?”

“He’s doing well—he’s secured some funding and is setting up a lab. He’s already hired a postdoc and a Ph.D. student.”

“He’s so brilliant!” Miyun glanced toward the kitchen, where Li Jun was washing dishes.

“Mommy, look at my drawing!” Lottie ran up and threw herself into Miyun’s arms, holding up her picture.

“Mommy’s on the phone now, with Amy’s mom. Remember her? Go play by yourself for a little while, okay?”

“Alright.” Lottie dragged her drawing back to the table.

“Here’s the thing,” her friend continued, “there was a university back in China that offered Lingfeng an annual salary of a million yuan, but he didn’t want it. That university has been hiring a lot lately. It’s second-tier, but the pay is great. I don’t know if your husband could get an offer like that, but he should give it a try.”

Miyun switched the phone to the other hand. “He probably isn’t interested. His Ph.D. is from a top 20 university in America, and they just opened a faculty position that matches his expertise perfectly. His former advisor encouraged him to apply, and even offered to write a recommendation letter. But he never did. I don’t know what’s going on with him.”

“And you don’t bother asking? You’re really taking this easy.”

“Sorry, honey, Lottie needs me. I’d better go now. Talk to you soon.”

The endless rain tapped at the window. Through the glass, Miyun seemed to catch the familiar murky scent of the London air—a damp mixture of laundry detergent and disinfectant, maybe with a hint of dust and butter. She’d caught the scent for the first time when she stepped onto the jet bridge at Heathrow.

A thought struck her. She sat up straight, grabbed her phone, and went to her friend’s Instagram page, where there was a photo of Amy on horseback. She gave it a like. No—she unliked it.

“Mommy!” Lottie stuck her drawing—now covering the paper—between Miyun and the phone.

“Beautiful. Let’s put it in your folder.” Miyun took the drawing and placed it on the table. Then she strode over to Li Jun and snatched the dish from his hands. “Why are you doing the dishes?”



“I didn’t want you to get too tired.” Li Jun kissed her and scooped up their daughter. “I’ll go play with Lottie for a while.” He showered his daughter’s face with kisses, and Lottie giggled, propping her little hands against Li Jun’s stubbled face.

He then picked up the drawing and sat on the couch. “Hey, who drew this? It’s really nice!”

“I drew it!” Lottie said, bouncing on Li Jun’s lap as if she were riding a horse. “That’s Mommy, that’s Daddy, and that’s me. That’s upstairs and downstairs!”

“Upstairs and downstairs? So this is our own home?”

“Mhm.”

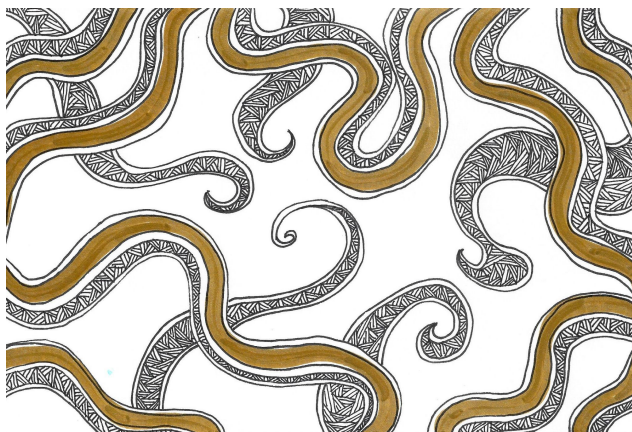
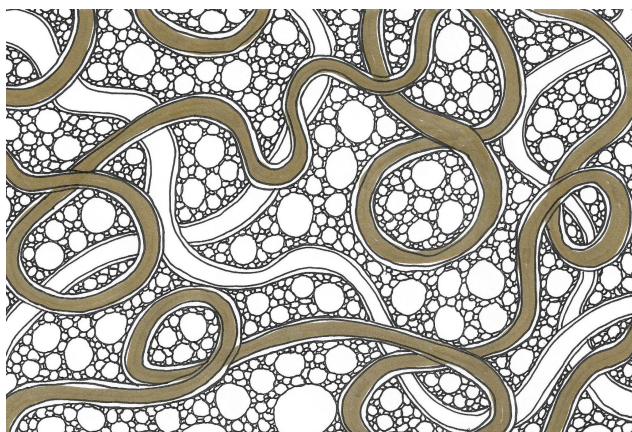
Li Jun stared at the picture, as if he wanted to burn it into his memory, or as if he’d already imagined it a hundred times before and was seeing it in reality for the first time.

After a while, he said, “It’s so pretty! Want to give it to Daddy? I’ll hang it up in my office so I can see it every day. When you have your art exhibition someday, I’ll put it on display.”

“Great!” Lottie’s eyes sparkled.

Miyun took in the scene before her. “Hey, Dr. Li, why can’t you at least teach your daughter some math?!”

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You Must Be This Tall to Ride This Ride

Vin Berardi

He had been waiting in line for two hours now and there didn't seem to be any end in sight. He dug his number from his pocket. 722-55. Lucky number.

His feet hurt—throbbed, in fact. But he ignored them. He'd become accustomed to pretending that everything was fine.

So far, his endurance had held up. But as morning turned to evening and it started to get chilly, he couldn't help but wonder what he was doing here.

To distract himself, he returned to his favorite book: *Infantissimo* by Pietro Mosca

“When man becomes too much man, he must naturally regress. For there is no other course. He must draw his head inside his shell and wait for a boy at the beach to pitch him into the sea.”

He'd read it before, and it seemed that what used to be gospel had become little more than folly, like listening to an aged Picasso flirt with young girls.

Scanning the queue, he tried to imagine how he fit in with these people. Many were elderly—resigned and weary, but a few with twisted grins. There was a smattering of other middle-aged men, some still carrying their briefcases. The fools. And there were women with children. Children! What gall. But no one spoke up. What would they say?

Someone ahead wasn't paying attention and the line was backing up. Before long, people began to cluck and tsk, and the offender, chagrined, moved forward through the dirty looks of those

surrounding him. Slowly everyone advanced. They wanted to get this over with.

“I can’t believe it’s been seven goddamn hours.”

722-55 turned. “Excuse me?”

“Excuse you, pal,” the cranky guy said. “What d’ya think of this shit?”

“I guess I wish they’d hurry.”

“Yeah, me too. I’m hungry.”

“Yeah.”

“But we won’t be for much longer.” The cranky man looked 722-55 up and down. “When did you decide?”

When did you decide?

It was a common, almost famous expression among the people who were doing this. A variation existed, though, just as famous—plastered on billboards, broadcast on the television, and posted online:

It’s time that you decide.

722-55 thought a moment. “I’m not sure. Coulda been when I got canned from my last job. Coulda been when my wife....” He stopped, expecting the cranky man to fill in the gap, which he did.

“Yeah, mine too.” He wasn’t cranky anymore. “And my kid.”

He turned back around, and 722-55 found himself once again looking at the bald spot on the head of the man in front of him.



Time passed in relative silence. There would be plenty of talk later. He imagined what a newborn would say if he or she could speak at the moment of birth. The questions, the concerns. There would be unpleasantness in the future, but it had to be better than the present. He assumed everyone in the crowd had decided the same.

By morning, he was getting close. Every few minutes he could hear shouts up ahead, and multiple people (some of whom had been waiting for days) were passing him in the other direction, having decided against doing it. Relief was painted all over their faces, and for a second it hid the fatigue that they couldn't help but show.

It was like waiting in line for an amusement park ride, right on down to the "You Must Be This Tall to Ride This Ride" sign. This sign didn't mention height, though. It was large and ornate and elegant. It simply read:

WELCOME TO TERRARIA

722-55 walked up the ramp to the platform adjacent to the mesh deck. There were three tables, each staffed by an executrix in a gray suit. Finally, he was in the front of the line.

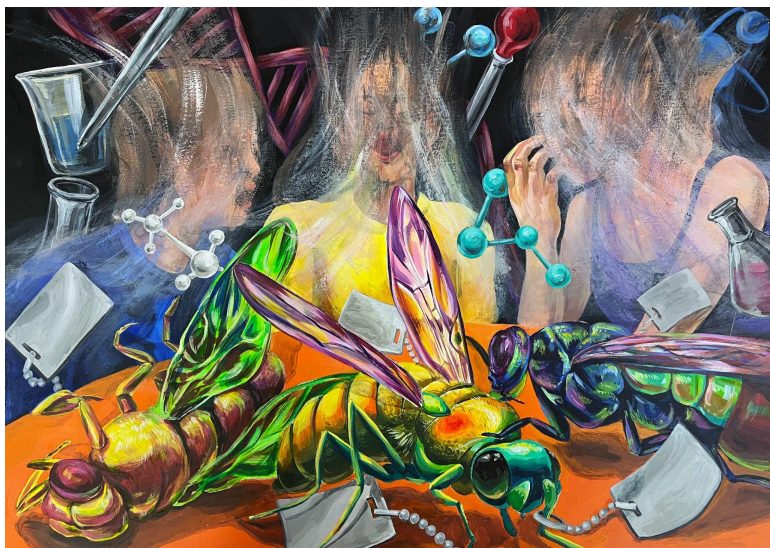
Then a green light flashed near one of the tables. His handbook had covered this. He should now approach the designated table for final processing.

"Number?"

"722-55."

The executrix's hands rattled around her keyboard as she confirmed the information, stopping occasionally so that she could look at her latest client to confirm his physical details and identity. Then, bored, she said:

“When this, your final interview, is complete, you will strip, re-clothe yourself in a mycelium gown, and ascend the mesh deck. At that point you will give final confirmation, and be told where to stand. Once you are in position, a mask will be affixed over your nose and mouth and you will be instructed to breathe deeply. It is my duty to warn you at this time that five to seven percent of volunteers will go into cardiac arrest. Shall I continue?”



722–55 just nodded. The executrix typed something into the keyboard.

“Should you live, within approximately five seconds, your body mass will decrease 99.9999 ...”

The echo was almost hypnotic and he felt a bit light-headed.

“... 999 ...”

He was going to faint.

“... percent. You will be the size of a small insect. You will immediately fall through the mesh beneath you and into your new home. It may feel like you are falling forever and that death is inevitable, but it is not. The decrease in your body mass will make the fall survivable to 97% of all volunteers. Do you consent?”

He was beginning to recover now, and nodded. She went back to the keyboard for more tapping.

“Once this group is complete, the entire system will be transported to a greenhouse roughly three acres square.”

There was a long pause as 722-55 waited for her to continue. She didn’t.

“And then?” he asked.

She looked at him quizzically. “You’re on your own.”

“But ...”

“It seems you would like to begin the question-answer section of your onboard.”

“Well, yes.”

She typed something into the keyboard, then shifted her weight and crossed her legs. “Proceed.”

“What do we do then?”

“That’s not our concern. You are being guaranteed a lifetime of food, water, and shelter in return for removing yourself as a consumer of the resources that the rest of us need. What you do with your freedom is entirely up to you. You will be biologically identical to how you present now, just smaller. Able to live on one apple for an entire year.”

“We have to eat apples?”

“That was an example. You will be fed regularly. And provided water with tubes that will appear as great waterfalls to you. Doesn’t that sound pleasant? Waterfalls?”

He ignored her patronizing question. “But what will we *do*?”

“You will live a life devoid of worry. Our scientists expect new civilizations to develop in Terraria. And you will be a part of that, at first.”

“At first.”

“Surely you’ve read the handbook, and are aware of the predicted decline in life expectancy.”

“Remind me.”

“No. It’s all in the handbook.” She stopped and looked at him. “Will there be anything else?”

“I suppose not.”

More rattling and tapping.

“Just remember the rules: no fire, and no complex machines—but otherwise you will be given plenty of matter with which to ... *evolve*. We will give you tiny huts, but can’t build tiny cars.”

She laughed here, and 722-55 had the impression that some of his peers had laughed along with her when it was their turn to listen.

“I have one more question.”

“You may ask it.”

“We’re going to be as small as bugs. What’s to prevent you from deciding not to feed us or give us water? Or maybe to just step on us one day?”

Her face suddenly turned very serious.

“Nothing. You’ll just have to trust us.”

He nodded and stood, signaling that he was finished. She nodded in return and directed him to a bench where he would sit for a few moments, before making a final decision. This was known as the Contemplation Pro Forma.

He sat and looked out at the enormous crowd still waiting in their line, pivoting at each switchback, eager to be gobbled by the inevitable serpent. He opened his book again.

“The first few bargained and begged. The next group schemed and cajoled. Then finally they all just sat, arm-and-arm, waiting for the tide to change.”

Later, he felt like he was falling forever.

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Fourth Grade Feral

Tina Posner



My restless hands still miss the feel of metal spikes shaped like molecules, scooping them up like the queen of jacks. That was the year our teacher died.

We'd left a small world stacked on her gray slab desk. Lined pages full of shaky cursive facts and glossy magazine pictures rippled with Elmer's glue.

A heart attack in the tub, they said. We whispered words like nude and wondered if she pruned. The classroom buzzed and thrummed with sub after sub.

Freddy carefully lifted the pinching crayfish from the terrarium, and we raced them in a track we made from yardstick lanes, betting our milk money to win.

At recess, I'd weave myself in and out of the monkey bars. Dawn eyed my trick, but she wouldn't fit. Her curves had skipped a few grades ahead.

Her peach bottom shook as the workmen sawed through the metal grid to pull her free. My hands remember that too.
The sub distracted us

with a game called Circles. In the back of the room I beat the pants off Hubert. And when I lost, I unzipped my shirt to an uproar.

We rarely thought of our dead teacher anymore. She was buried with the unkind wish that wished her away under the muddy hubbub of spring.

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Notes on Gold

Zoe Dulay-Peña

cross came, crown came
and still
we were sunbitten
at the throat.

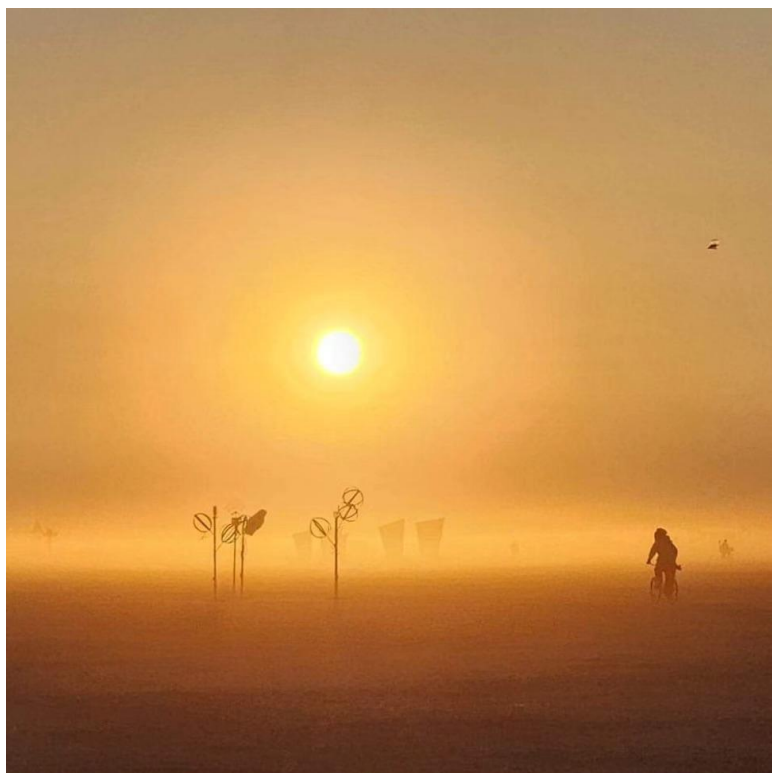
girlgold, godspit
deathproof little shine.

my mother kept bars
in the fear-drawer,
a bright thing
hunger might accept
instead of the body.

a woman learns
the exchange rate early,
how much metal
for supper.

saints watched
from their gilt rooms,
we kept the old blade.

call it beauty
if that helps.



Authors

Vin Berardi is a NYC-based writer specializing in dark, strange, and comic pieces—often at the same time. An acting teacher for 30 years, he hosts The Trilogy Podcast, has a wife named Amy, and a dog named Louise. His work, first submitted for publication in 2026, has appeared or is forthcoming in San Antonio Review, Emerge, AntipodeanSF, Rue Scribe, Punk Eek, Exclamation Mark Lit, Gnome & Bone, and elsewhere.

Jay Bond returned to Melbourne/Naarm, Australia, in 2020 after two decades teaching in Asia and the United States. She now focuses on writing. Jay had early poetry in Luna and Meanjin magazines. More recently, her poems have appeared in publications that include The Ekphrastic Review, Otherwise Engaged Literary & Arts Journal, Plants & Poetry Journal, Melbourne Poets Union Finding My Feet Anthology and Society of Women Writers Victoria anthologies. Jay is a lover of nature and all the arts.

Si Chen's work has appeared in 50-Word Stories and is forthcoming in Blink-Ink. He is an oceanographer at work on a collection of short stories.

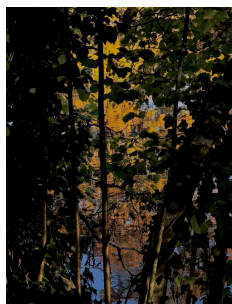
Zoe Dulay-Peña is a Filipino writer based in Hong Kong. Her work has appeared in Rolling Stone, Vogue and more, and she was most recently longlisted for the 2025 Short Story Hope Prize.

Tina Posner lives in San Diego, CA, by way of Austin, TX, and her native New York City. Her work has appeared in River Heron Review, Oyster River Press, Mantis, Ocean State Review, and more, as well as in multiple anthologies. She works in educational publishing, where she has designed award-winning

instructional programs and written over a dozen poetry and nonfiction books for young adults. She holds an MFA in poetry from Pacific University.



Art and Artists



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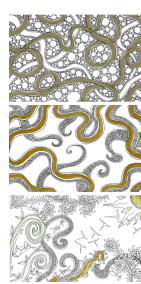
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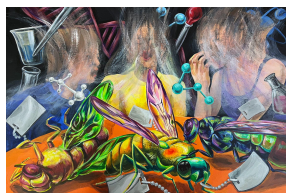
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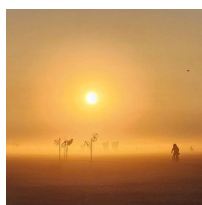
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14



15

1. “Dart Reflection” by Shaun Déríoz
2. “The Winding Road” by Luca Colluzi
3. “Bus Stop” by Matt Ricardo
4. “Big Heart, Old Shop” by Christine Yung
5. “Patis / Distroded” by bimpoman
6. “Toro” by Shaun Déríoz
7. “Somnia Aurea VII” by Lorraine Caputo
8. “Somnia Aurea X” by Lorraine Caputo
9. “Towards the Sun” by Lorraine Caputo
10. “The Lotus” by Jennie Park
11. “Observed Observers” by Jennie Park
12. “The Chase” by Zed
13. “Ultimatum” by Matt Ricardo
14. “One Night in Mexico City” by Zed
15. “Golden Whispers” by Tetiana Yatsechko-Blazhenko

bimpoman is a multidisciplinary lens-based artist from the Philippines working across photography, film, fine art, and mixed media. His practice explores emotion, time, identity, and the surreal through experimental image-making, analog processes, and color. Remaining largely anonymous, he allows the work to speak for itself—treating each image as a fragment of a larger, evolving visual world. More at bimpoman.com.

Lorraine Caputo’s artwork and photography are in private collections. They have also been exhibited in the US, Ecuador and Peru, and published internationally in over 50 journals. Her poems and travel narratives also appear internationally, in over 500 journals and 24 chapbooks – including *Orinoco Plains* (dancing girl press, 2025). She is a Best of the Net and Pushcart Prize nominee. Ms. Caputo continues journeying south of the equator. Find her on her [website](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), or [BlueSky](#).

Luca Colluzi is a photographer and documentary filmmaker from Savignano Irpino in Southern Italy. His photographs have

been published in many travel magazines. He lives with his partner and their 6-year-old Dachshund Ella.

Shaun Déríoz (cover artist) *is a keen photographer who has been snapping since his early teens. He photographs over a range of subjects, especially nature, street, portrait, landscape and reportage. His work has been published in national magazines, local press and other media outlets and he does occasional commercial work with photo and video. His other passions are kayak fishing and vintage watches.*

Jennie Park *is a high school student at an international school in Seoul, South Korea. She is inspired by the layered textures of city life and the quiet details of everyday moments. When she's not painting or sketching, she enjoys reading, writing, and discovering new artists.*

Matt Ricardo *is a variety performer from London who lives with his wife and cats by the seaside in Brighton, UK. His passion is writing and taking photographs while travelling to gigs worldwide.*

Ricky Sadiosa *has made Hong Kong his second home since the 1990s. Originally from the Philippines, he's travelled to more than 150 international cities and countries. He loves connecting with fellow photographers and admiring their work. A passionate human rights advocate, in 2017 Ricky was shortlisted for the Justice Centre Hong Kong's Human Rights Art Prize for his photo journalism. Ricky spent 5 years traveling the world in the footsteps of Philippine national hero, Dr. Jose Rizal. During his travels, he produced a feature-length documentary film and took photographs for his latest 500-page coffee table book.*

Tetiana Yatsechko-Blazhenko *is a Ukrainian writer, poet, and visual artist working across literary fiction, poetry, and visual forms. Her artistic practice explores fragmentation, memory,*

perception, and the relationship between image and text, often shaped by urban space, travel, and personal mythology. Her work has appeared in literary journals, magazines, and curated publications, including Midway Journal, Muse-Pie Press, Eleventh Hour Literary, Red Ogre Review, Qwerty Magazine, RipRap Journal, and others. Her visual and literary works have also been featured in Ukrainian and international anthologies and collections. Find more [here](#) or [here](#).

*After a long career in the corporate world, **Christine S. Yung** spent three years visiting shops across Hong Kong, chatting with the owners and taking photographs to preserve their stories and cultural heritage.*

***Zed** is an adventurer and award-winning documentary filmmaker. He has made over fifty films that have been watched by fifteen people. He lives in Brooklyn, New York, but rarely spends time there. He lost his heart in Havana and his mind in Sarajevo.*

