

# skirting around



Issue 4 / Feb 2025

# Skirting Around


## FOUR

**Feb 2025**

Editor in Chief: Carolyn Hashimoto  
Editorial Assistant: Alison Gray  
Guest Reader: Saskia McCracken

[www.skirtingaround.org](http://www.skirtingaround.org)  
Insta: @skirtingaroundmagazine  
Email: [skirting.around@yahoo.com](mailto:skirting.around@yahoo.com)

Cover page image by Rhona Millar  
Insta: @frasertextandtextiles



**SKIRTING  
AROUND  
ISSUE 4  
LAUNCH  
EVENT**

**One size does *not* fit all**

**Alicia Astronomo  
Divya Benezette  
Tessa Berring  
Trisha Broomfield  
Allison Burris  
Kim Crowder  
Beverly Frydman  
Gisela Haensel  
Fiona Larkin  
Joanne Macias  
Saskia McCracken  
Denise Zygodlo**

**Join us  
this Friday**

**ZOOM LAUNCH  
Feb 21st 7pm GMT**



## CONTENTS

- Tessa Berring** Lean Back A Little **5**  
**Divya Benezette** A Love Letter to My Dresses **6**  
**Fiona Larkin** Glamour as Armour, January 1979 **7**  
**Rachel Turney** Red Gloves **8**  
**Pam Benjamin** Unraveling **9**  
**Maria Duran** From *My Money is More Real Than Your Money* **10**  
**Kim Crowder** Wearing On **12**  
**Tessa Berring** What Is Soft Elastic? **13**  
**mk zariel** sparkling glitch **14**  
**Rose Ruane** Sisterly Bonds / Jeanetic Inheritance / My Beau, Baby **16**  
**Sarah Furuya** The Politics Of (period) Pants / Menostorm **19**  
**Helga Gruendler-Schierloh** Dazzled **24**  
**A.J. Parker** Hindsight Bias **25**  
**Rosalie Hendon** Indispensable **27**  
**Beverly Frydman** The dress in the window **29**  
**Matthew Travers** Translation as theft **30**  
**Gerd Laugesen** Excerpts from *Have you seen my dress?* **32**  
**Kristel Chua** Shoes **35**  
**Virna Teixeira** Conjoined **38**  
**Aleena Sharif** Jeans / No Longer Available **39**  
**Robin Rivers** Soft Pants **41**  
**Trisha Broomfield** Don't Expect Miracles **43**  
**Mary Fidler** all that and more **44**  
**Julia Ruth Smith** Moon. Segments. Out of Sorts. **45**  
**Tamsyn Challenger** Haberdashery **47**  
**Kathy Bruce** Tapada Limeña / Tapada Contemplating Her Skirt / Animal Magnetism **48**  
**Denise Zygadlo** Goody Two Shoes **51**  
**Mary Janicke** Fashion Forward **52**  
**Joanne Macias** Projection Reflection **53**  
**Robin Rivers** Monsters **54**  
**Gisela Haensel** What Are My True Colors? **55**  
**Olivia Baldacci** Crumbling **58**  
**Samantha Tunan** Junior Prep **59**  
**Alicia Astronomo** agape mouths and feeble ears **60**  
**Julia Biggs** less is more / the saving **62**  
**Allison Burris** Playing Dress Up **64**  
**Rachel Turney** Perfect Fit **65**  
**Kim Crowder** Skirting the Circle **66**  
**Contributors Bios** **67**



Tessa Berring

## **Lean Back A Little**

The difference between

a chair and a bikini  
is proximity

or is something out of reach

beautiful

(like the other side of swimming)

What I mean is  
when my heart bursts

I take off what I'm wearing  
and turn it into furniture

simple as that

Divya Benezette

## **A Love Letter to My Dresses**

You are the only one that holds me –  
You are the tears that I cry  
The flies that swarm my bed  
The morning walks to class,  
Papers ripping me open on the way back.

You are my childlike smile  
You are my laughter that sings like a bird  
You are my every hope, every joy, every dream.

I know wearing you means every eye will cling to my body  
But who am I if I cannot stomach the mirror for the rest of the world?

My sweet dresses,  
My silky pink with blue lace trim safety net,  
I love you and the risk I take every time I wear you.  
Should something ever happen,  
I rest assured you will still catch my fall  
Silky pink with blue lace trim covered in bloodstains and all.

Fiona Larkin

## **Glamour as Armour, January 1979**

My mother takes a plane to Dublin  
    and across the aisle is Edna O'Brien.  
Both cross their sling-backed ankles,  
    spray Elnett on their auburn waves.  
*The make-up on that woman!*

mutters my mother, more used to the boat,  
    who flies home to bury my granny.  
In borrowed furs against the snow  
    and sunglasses to hide her swollen eyes  
*they hardly knew me.*

Linda and Edna. Linda, my mother,  
    binds sex in a band of gold;  
Edna writes of love, but uncovers no  
    pleasure when the body's  
*"a sort of tabernacle of sin."*

Country girls, both, educated by nuns  
    – did you guess?  
Girls who sift their married bliss  
    through politics and priests.  
*She's on the Index – her books are banned!*

Linda flies back to Heathrow, facing  
    a headwind of suspicion  
of all passengers from the Republic.  
    Official fingers tug at her hair –  
*they thought it was a wig.*

She takes a plane because she must,  
    because her Estée Lauder lips  
hold fear and sorrow firmly horizontal.  
    Does she let a tear fall?  
*I wouldn't give them the satisfaction.*



Rachel Turney  
**Red Gloves**

She drove a big green Ford Galaxy and always wore red driving gloves, long thick skirts, and tight brown leather boots. I just watched her steer, peering up at her for hours.

Pam Benjamin  
**Unraveling**

A sweater is just holes sewn together—  
knitted loops to make a whole.  
Who is holding the needles?

A lone thread can only become a knot—  
on a balloon a tether to this earth,  
but when deflated, it's garbage.

A string attached to busted rubber  
shuffling into the gutter  
searching for needles to make it into value.

What hand makes it whole—  
sews it into something  
to alleviate the cold?

Maria Duran

*From My Money is More Real Than Your Money*







Kim Crowder  
**Wearing On**

Time to mix and match the polar fleece  
de-moth briar and bracken prickled tweeds ease on the ice-blue  
sweater's mosaic yoke diamonds snowflakes noughts and stars  
wrap dove-grey shawls early dusks' fine-spun swathes of mist  
shrug into rutting deer russets duns and drabs of cankered leaves  
hazy pearl of waning sun dab pulse-points wrist and throat  
with choking odour reeking palls heather smoulder  
lag beds in thermal layers re-buff scuffed chestnut brogues  
bottle ambered apple inky bramble shelve rowan's rubies  
glazed and jellied pick brittle umbels snap crisp stems  
cherish summer's fading relics kindle fires stride into winter  
criss-cross plaid patterned fields belts of plough tracks gouged  
by outsize tyres in stark green stripes of barley's aftermath.

Tessa Berring

## **What Is Soft Elastic?**

Even during

rape I thought

it's a good bra

a good bra

a good

bra a kind of

translucent stretch

gauze kind

of invisible

daisies / generic

flowers stitched

in the centre

or cute bouquet

of miniature

lilies



mk zariel

## **sparkling glitch**

a sportsball obsessive with a superiority

complex, stench of fast food

on his breath tells me unsolicitedly that

lesbians are ugly. *i'd be lucky*

*to be coveted by a tech bro who lost a bet*

cannot be bought or sold so

there is no reason for the flames of my

negation to resurrect him

part of me wants to tell him

we aren't ugly, just unknowable—

just contradictions in crop tops and patch jackets

just vintage drag-king cartoons, insurgence of

DIY worldmaking patched together—by light

of desire in her—sparkling glitch in the matrix of the possible

around cis men every moment is our opening night

we are our own burnt-out costume designers.

may never find our perfect lighting and

our only sound cues are slurs our crypto-bro ghosts

shout in our ears and DMs, yet we still dress

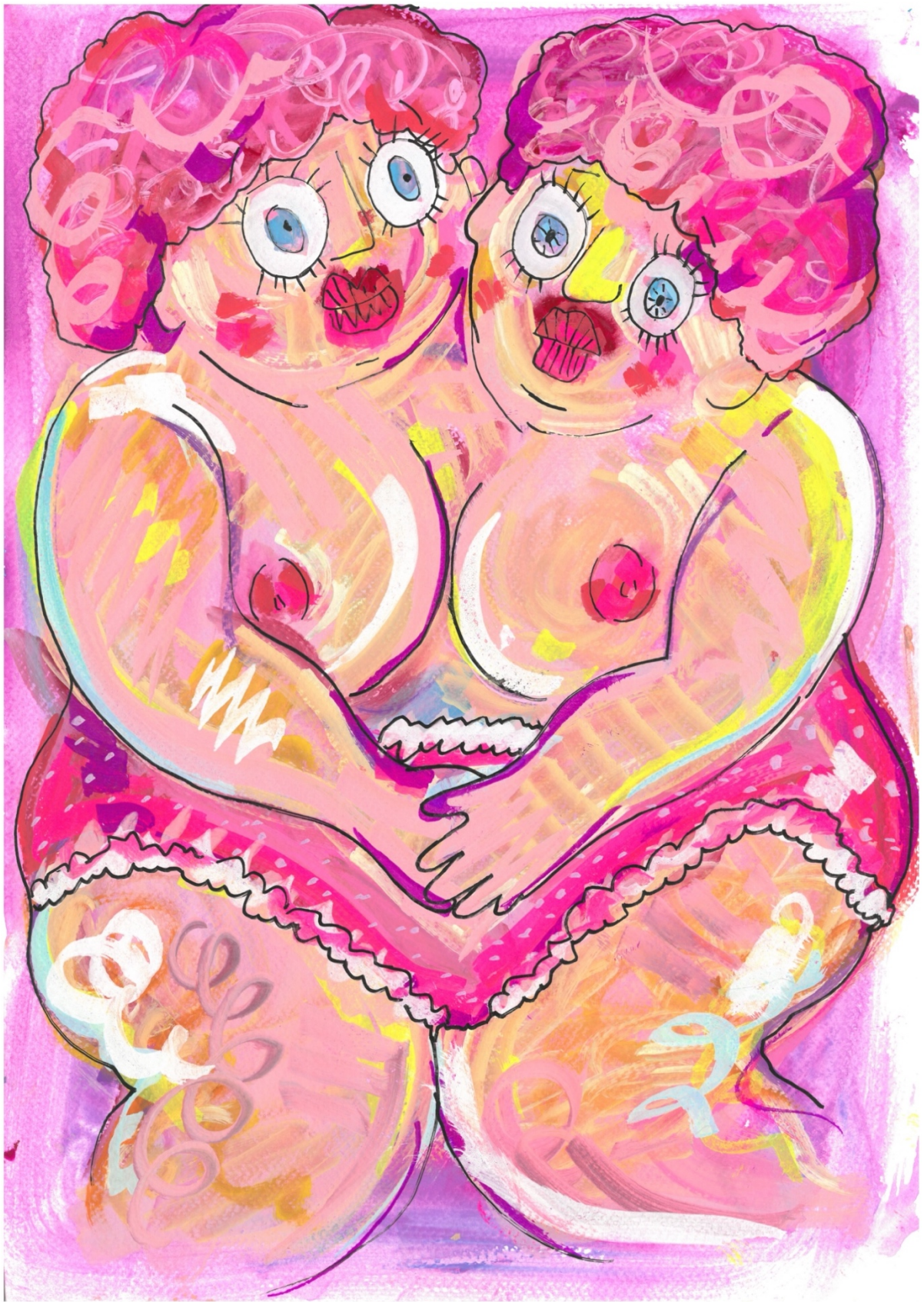
to provoke, stereotyped flannel

our jeans with one too many rips

men's shirts cast off by      our transfeminine sisters in arms  
somehow look like they care, like shattering, on us all

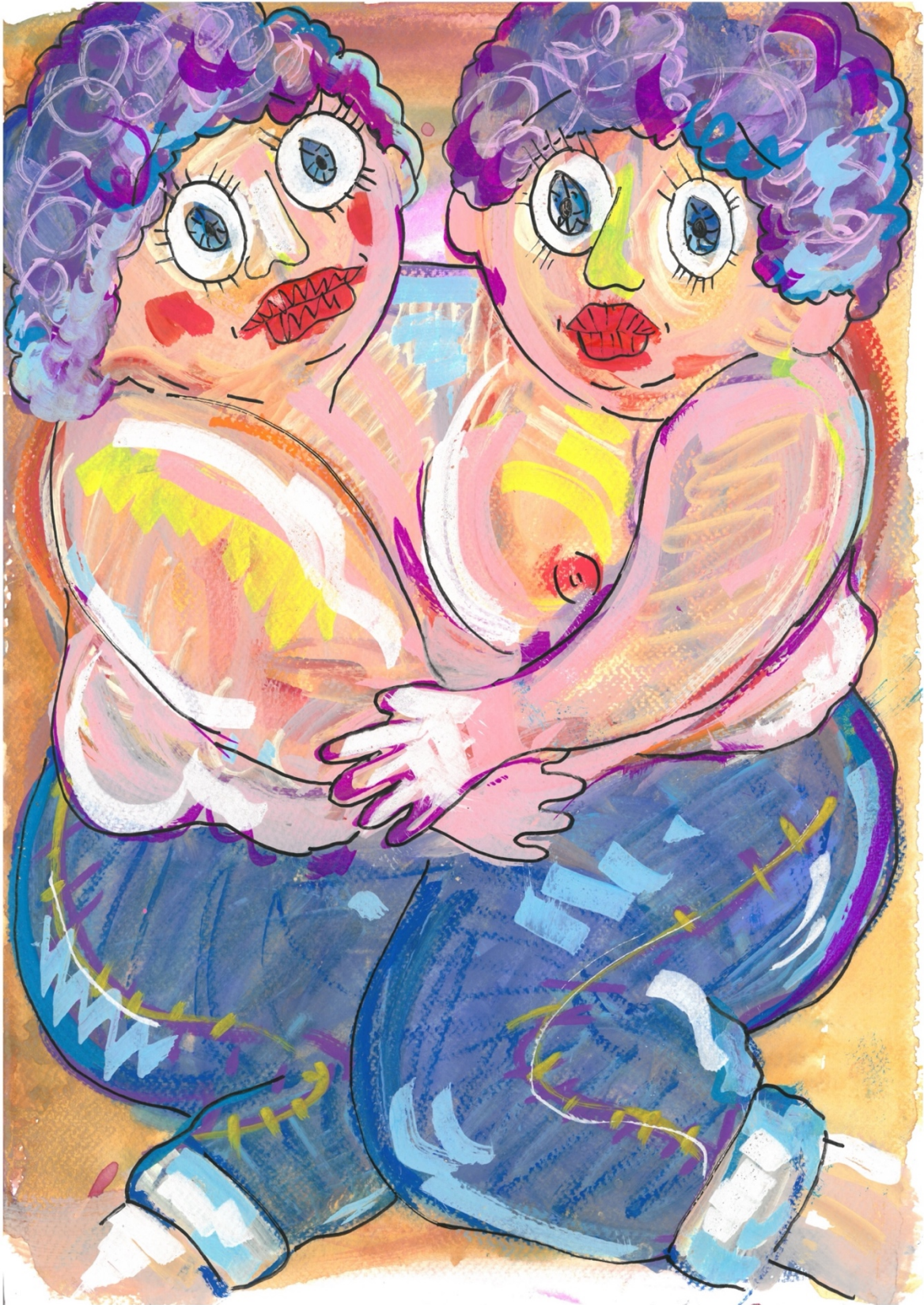
knowing men who yell, and other nuisances,  
will be intentionally clueless, in *he-i-mean-she-i-mean-they-actually-it*  
performance. *use every pronoun*  
*under the sun*, sometimes all  
at once. in new worlds we thrifted  
settle on he/they for  
an infinity or a second, yet still

none suit us quite so well  
as the sound of genders breaking—



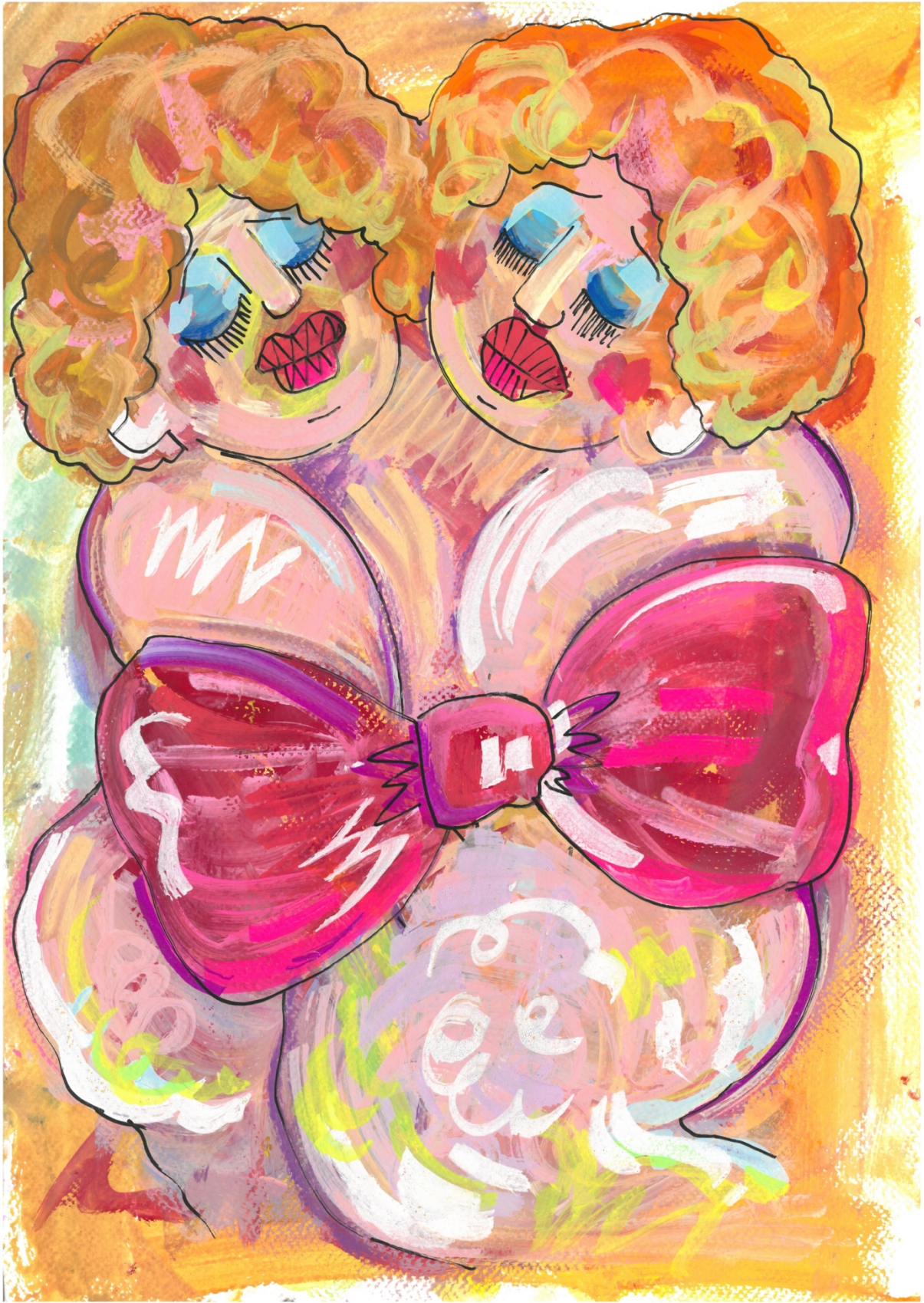
Rose Ruane **Sisterly Bonds**





Rose Ruane **Jeanetic Inheritance**





Rose Ruane **My Beau, Baby**

Sarah Furuya

## **The Politics of (period) Pants**

### **Menostorm**

What should I do with my period knickers?

Those M&S specials I invested in during the pandemic.

Before I was haemorrhaging so wildly that we all decided it was best to carefully remove the source of said haemorrhages.

I have no womb now.

The only thing I ever gave birth to: my own womb (and one ovary and a large myoma. Mamamamama my myoma).

The best week of my life, spent in hospital – restful, quiet, clear – with Kathy Burke and Lisa O’Neil for company.

I mean there were the downsides: the humiliation of every bodily evacuation happening at once, adult diapers, enemas, needles here and there, having my shave checked, knowing that during that lost three hours, a team of strangers had been ‘up in me’.

My comfy cotton (M&S) belly-warmers were carefully folded up, Mari Kondo fashion, and returned to me post-op in a gesture I found somehow tender.

One of the last things I remember, as I slipped into general anaesthetic, was having them rather swiftly yet gently and respectfully whisked from my person.

All very odd to recall from the mind-altering haze of general anaesthetic.

My wonderful surgeon Hashimoto Sensei asked my husband if he wanted to see the spoils of the surgery during their post-op debrief.

He thought they would show him a photo on an iPhone screen.

They did not.

Out came a metal tray with my uterus and one ovary in it.

I like to imagine it lightly steaming.

He said it looked like sashimi. (He’s Japanese.)

They invited him to take a photo.

He felt odd, and after confirming it was quite usual, he photographed it, showed it to me the following day, as Hashimoto Sensei had done immediately after.



I don't remember what it looks like now.

I have a vague image of a curling pink slice of lady-offal.

Interestingly I couldn't face looking at it after that first day.

I'm ready now – nine months out – for another sneak peek.

Maybe.

Actually, no.

I digress. Back to the matter at hand:

Redundant Period Knickers

(Now you have context for my conundrum.)

Back when I was still an ageing fertile being, I mentioned to an acquaintance that I was debating whether it was worth getting on board with this period-pants trend.

Clearly in my perimenopause, bleeding buckets of meat for days at a time and completely insane, I needed extra protection. I wanted to join in this particular knicker-movement, enticed by endless Facebook and Instagram ads – smiling ladies of varying sizes and body and skin types in nice pants! I say varying. Varying in the acceptable range of 'body positive'. You know. A bit chubby. A bit skinny. All limbs. Short but not too small. Tall but not *too* tall. Some skin tones. A palatable amount of stretch marks.

I fit this demographic.

Palatable imperfect.

Unattractive enough to get a round of applause emoji in a bikini but attractive enough you won't gag.

The algorithm has stopped delivering this now, replaced by a barrage of assertions that the middle of my body is disgusting and needs adjusting just like all the menopausal women need adjusting. All women need adjusting. 'Stubborn belly fat'.

How the fuck can a lipid be stubborn?

I'm starting to wonder if so many women have this extra belly fat, it's just a normal body state and shape for us crones in the making.

I fantasise about ditching my stomach-control-panel swimsuits.

Also from M&S.

Natch.

Still.

Capitalism.

So, period pants – my algorithm of yore.

Would I get my cost-per-wear from these bulky-undercarriaged items?

The acquaintance I consulted is ten years younger than me; she only has vague concepts of these menopause matters.

She espouses confident concepts that she sold vehemently to my vulnerable peri-menopausal self.

I suppose I ought to have gone ten years my senior for counsel.

To an elder.

‘You can use them until you stop bleeding, then use them when you start leaking urine,’ she suggested.

But I haven’t leaked urine since the uterine evacuation.

And by leak urine I mean pissed myself.

It stopped when my fibroid-occupied womb stopped thickening and pushing on my bladder so at certain times of the month I was playing Russian roulette each time I stood up.

Not now.

Now.

I have a glut of period knickers occupying IKEA Malm real estate.

Further conundrums.

Now, dear reader, I run a clothing exchange in Tokyo.

And period knickers *are* useful items for many women.

Mine have been soaked over and over again in a bowl in the shower room; rinsed, disinfected, and washed thoroughly. Then stored carefully.

(May I divulge a confidence? I would use that post-soak menses-infused water to water the plants at the back of my house, especially in the run up to surgery where I felt bereft – not at the impending loss of the seat of all life, but by the idea that I would no longer be able to surreptitiously urban-witch-water the plants with my womb-blood-water. It felt so dark, dirty and furtive. Perhaps a little spellbinding. Perhaps naughty. I wanted the tree to have my DNA hanging out at its roots. It’s not hanging out anywhere else.)

But I cannot pass them on, can I?

The idea of one (hetero) woman’s vulva coming into contact with the place where another’s vulva has sat; it’s too much, isn’t it?

Strange.

I need my second-hand underwear with tags attached.

I could save them, perhaps pack them for if we are in an emergency situation (which is likely).

An earthquake, tsunami, or particularly devastating typhoon – all of which are ever present, ever close here on the meeting place of four tectonic plates by the sea.

I can either use them myself, in our imagined – but likely – emergency. Or offer them to a fertile or incontinent person. In an emergency I think this would be appropriate. I don't know. I have no idea where the line of appropriate is drawn.

Perhaps if I become so poor that I can't purchase new underwear, they will be welcome backups. Yes. That's settled then.

### **I shall keep them!**

They have sacred work to do.

They already did sacred work in the clandestine nourishment of the tree at the rear of my home.

They already had sacred capture work in the death throes of my (useless) fertility.

They have sacred potential sitting at the back of my self-assembly drawers.

All plump of gusset.

And redundant.

For now.



Sarah Furuya **Menostorm**

Helga Gruendler-Schierloh

## **Dazzled**

We like clothes that are beautiful,  
nobody desires a shredded gown.  
Ain't it a shame that many times  
we can't afford a brand-new gown,  
and no matter how much we jest,  
we have to settle for second-best.

We like loves true and passionate,  
nobody fancies a dimming flame.  
Ain't it a pity that lots of players  
are trying to play a double game.  
And yet, used males are as a rule  
not called second-best but cool.

We like lives that are meaningful,  
nobody wants only the wrappings.  
Ain't it a riot that so many of us  
fail to peek beyond the trappings,  
and with all that glitter in our eye,  
we may let the real thing walk by.

A.J. Parker

## Hindsight Bias

I put on my platform loafers, the same kind she commented on  
when my co-worker wore them, like long legs and a ribbony blouse are a crime,  
and yet she sat me on trial sitting next to her every day,  
twin stick figures hunched over dual monitors  
except my water bottle was reusable and hers wasn't  
as she said *well I would have done it this way*  
and I bleed coffee instead of saying *well I did it this way*.  
I drive across the bridge every day and think about dying while I sit in traffic  
ever since I saw a Camry put a dent in a semi-truck on I-395,  
and I sit in glass fish tanks every day and flatten my cleavage  
so it's notebook paper when the boss walks by.  
she talks about her trichotillomania, and I think she might be human  
but then she bites my head off in the breakroom.  
*eat or be eaten*, the headlines say, though they don't let me write them.  
it's force-fed stoicism, all of it, and I grow my hair long  
so she can yank it when I misbehave, and by misbehave,  
I mean stay out five minutes past my lunch break and voice half an opinion,  
and I wonder if I'll be like her one day,  
taking the bus to work to be eco-conscious while trashing my neighbors,  
stepping up instead of stepping out of line, and by out of line,  
I mean wearing makeup and nail polish,  
because then *what kind of respectable workplace woman would I be?*  
and I thought she was five foot eight when I met her on our first call,  
but she's barely taller than me at five foot three,  
and I tell my therapist she reminds of my dad, and by that, I mean  
*I remind me of my dad, I mean we remind me of my dad,*  
and sometimes when I'm driving home,  
I think death might be the only way to escape her and by death, I mean  
wiping my computer and breaking my NDA and calling up her partner  
to see if he whispers government secrets into her ear at night to get her off.  
the worst part is, I worry I might be her clone, and by that, I mean  
there's safety in being *small* and *perfect* and *conservative*,  
though she *looooves* Beyoncé.  
she drinks more than me, that's a fact,  
but when she does it, it's *pretty* and *chic* and *trendy*  
and when I do it, it's *dark* and *ugly* and *heavy*.  
I envy her green pantsuit and kitten heels  
the one time she dresses up to present without telling me,  
and I cringe in the bathroom as I cover my acne  
with makeup and hairspray my flyaways



even though she wants me on camera, *like, now*,  
and I hope I look loud enough that everyone will notice me,  
and by notice me, I mean *leave me alone forever and ever*.  
she sends me to the work conference because  
she's *just so busy* and *I guess you'll do*, and I stare  
at the Philadelphia skyline from the 46th floor and wonder  
what I'm doing there when I used to run in hallways like these,  
make trouble in hotel stairwells like these,  
chitter with boys afterhours in rooms like these,  
but I can't tell her I like girls even though she *looooves* Eurovision,  
because then *what kind of promiscuous girl's girl would I be*,  
bringing up sex and wearing chunky loafers to the office?  
when I cut my hair months later because I'm starting chemotherapy,  
I think of her because now we have the same length,  
and I think about what would've happened if I had dyed it,  
because then I would've had tattoos *and* hair dye  
and *what kind of sanitized self-help girl does that make me?*  
so I get in my car and try not to think about dying on my drive back home,  
avoiding my reflection in the rear-view mirror in case she's staring back at me.

Rosalie Hendon

## Indispensable

*Before handbags, women used to wear interior, separate pockets. Once gowns became slimmer, it was scandalous to have 'pocket lines'. The precursor to the modern handbag was a reticule or 'indispensable'.*

*'Early American feminists, in particular, fought the loss of pockets for women. They believed handbags would never be as practical as pockets and advocated for functional pockets built into women's garments like pockets were for men. For these women, pockets for men and handbags for women became symbolic of the inequality between the sexes.'*

- The History of the Handbag, Women's Museum of California

You know that brick hanging from your shoulder?

Recipient of small comforts and necessities.

It always seems too small.

There's always something else to carry.

Tissues, hand sanitizer, eye drops—  
things other people ask for.

Advil, business cards, a spare hair tie.

Cram it all in with the essentials:

wallet, phone, work badge,

water bottle, sunglasses.

There might even be Band-Aids.

I learned the art of purse survival from my mother,

always ready to dispense a breath mint or spare sunglasses.

We leave the house equipped.

Never know what might happen out there.

When you carry a purse,  
family members notice.

They ask you to carry things for them—  
books, glasses, anything too heavy,  
too big for pockets.

An anchor, an anvil.

It drags you down, the weight  
of those unasked-for responsibilities.

The lightness without a purse is unparalleled.

Spread your hands—empty, sorry.

*I've streamlined, tell them.  
Can only take care of myself.  
Just have the essentials:  
ID, credit card, wits.*

Beverly Frydman

## **The dress in the window**

calls me in to the shop why not I need something new it's my style loose  
and flowy but yellow does nothing for me the dress gathers herself at the  
breast obviously she's pissed *I am not just yellow call me misted try me  
on if you're at all serious* how on earth could I say no she's moved into the  
dressing room now wafts a fluted sleeve *let's go* there's a wall of yellow  
here custard coloured wallpaper I may be in fashion danger I wonder if  
yellow is a shade of madness the dress shouts *misted yellow is pure happiness  
try me on I must insist* I slip on yellow silkiness check my look in the mirror  
misted yellow starts to shimmer wraps me up in yards of gold the dress  
victorious whispers *sold*

Matthew Travers

## Translation as theft

Of Gerd Laugesen's *Have you seen my dress?*



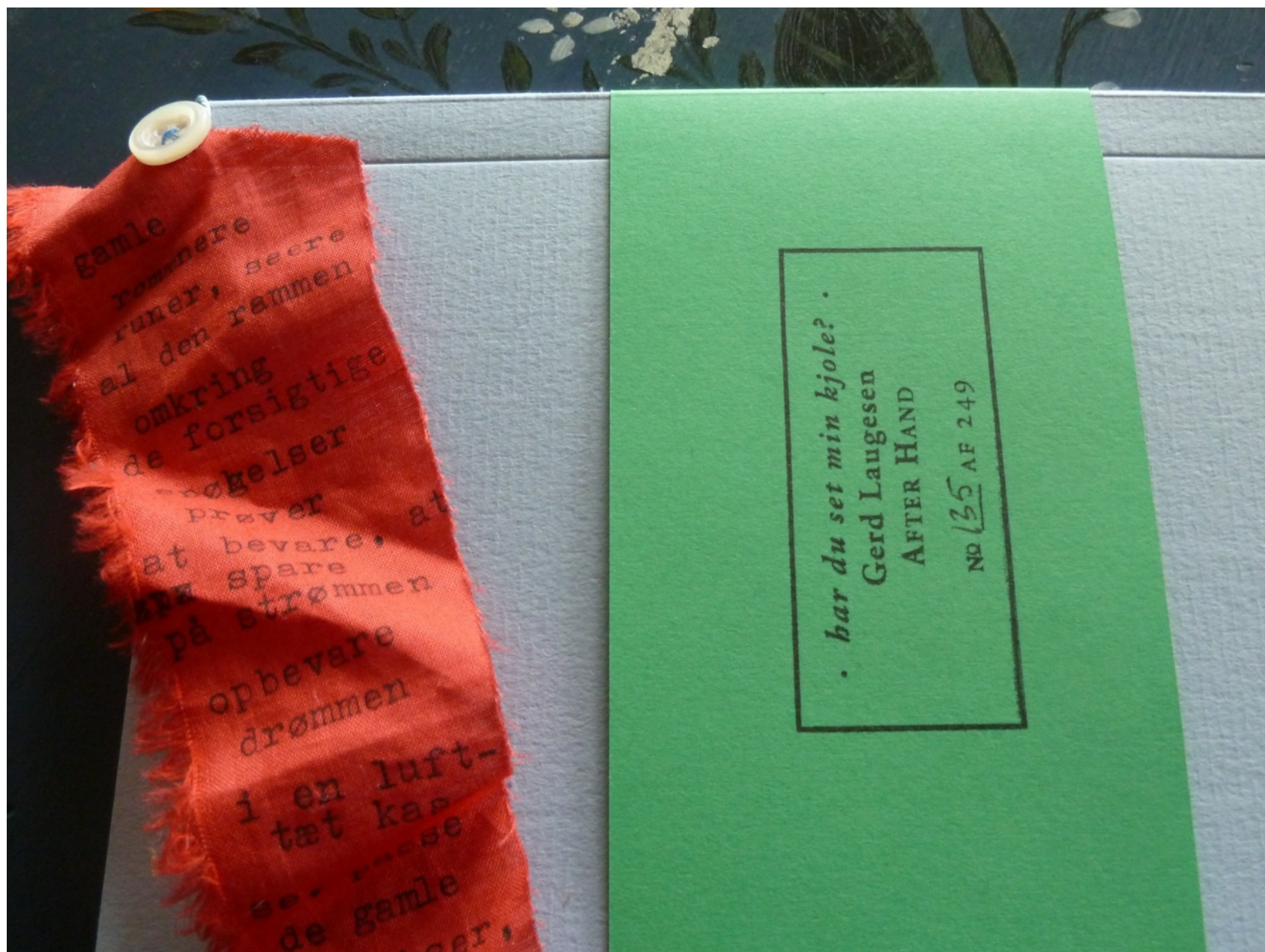
According to popular science, magpies have a knack for plucking out small shiny objects – like buttons, broaches, or sequins – for reasons best known to themselves or those they aim to attract, and there is something of the magpie in this bespoke section of articles from Gerd Laugesen's *Have you seen my dress?* (Original Danish title, *Har du set min kjole?* After Hand Press, 2011)

*Have you seen my dress?* was a one-off artisanal poetry sequence, hand-bound, and printed on fine gauze architect's paper so that the faint glimmer of the next poem could be seen through the one you were currently reading. And, for one season only, each limited-edition copy came with its own unique hand-sewn, designer dress, including a button and a flap near the base so that the hem could be drawn up into a pair of loose shorts, and fitted with a book-sized pocket 'so that you could wander about with it on the street.'

Perhaps gently propelled by one of Mallarmé's fans, Laugesen's garb brought together an embodied expression of style with an interior fashion statement of late avant garde poetics, and, as a translator, this struck a chord with me, as the act of translation can sometimes feel like entering an upmarket boutique and selecting the most expensive gear, and then hoping that it'll fit so well that no-one will notice you've left without paying. Having neither shaped or sewn the materials nor having earned the elegance the clothes confer; this sense of illicit danger is heightened when the outfit picked is nominally ascribed the opposite sex.

Her Danish publishers describe Laugesen's work as an attempt to 'get poetry out into the world' so that her poems might serve 'as a call to do something about life where it happens, namely, in ordinary everyday life.' In that spirit, I hope these four ready-to-wear translations for the Anglophone market look good to you and raise interest in a great poet of Danish design.







Gerd Laugesen

**Excerpts from *Have you seen my dress?***

Dansk	Engelsk
<p>Jeg tillader mig at gå på strømpe­sokker, når det regner. Jeg ved, det er dumt. Strømperne bliver gennem­blødte, for ikke at sige beskidte, og jeg bliver syg. Men det er bare et af de her oprør mod skosystemet. Jeg kan ikke gøre for det. Det har noget med autoritet at gøre.</p>	<p>I allow myself to go about in socks when it rains. I know it's stupid. The socks get soaked, not to say Filthy, and I get ill. But it's just one of these revolts against the shoe system. I can't help it. It has something to do with authority.</p>
<p>...der var engang i en lille by...der boede ikke andet end små mænd...de måtte ikke være over 1 meter og 60...ikke fordi der ikke var højt nok til loftet...fordi der ikke var tøj nok... stoffer kunne ikke blive længere end én kvadratmeter...hvis man prøvede at sy tøj­et længere... så gik det i stykker...ingen ved hvorfor...</p>	<p>...once upon a time in a small town...where there lived nothing other than small men...they couldn't be more than 5 foot 3...not because there wasn't enough height in the ceilings...but because the clothes weren't enough... fabrics couldn't stretch longer than a single square metre...if you tried to sew together a longer garment... then it fell to bits...no one knows why...</p>

<p>Kritiserer du mig for min tøjglæde  så får du igen af samme skuffe  du skal ikke fortælle mig at det er forkert  at have mit tøj liggende over det hele når jeg  holder så meget af det lige så vel som du  holder af bøger men du læser jo ikke  nødvendigvis dem alle sammen  du kan bare godt lide at have dem liggende</p>	<p>Are you criticising me for my love of clothes?  then you'll get more of that from the same drawer  you shan't tell me that it's wrong  to have my clothes draped over everything when I'm  so hung up on them just as much as you  are hung up on books but of course you don't necessarily  read all of them at once  you just like to have them lying about</p>
<p>Jeg har spist søm fra morgen til aften, jeg har  fingeret med motiver fra døde dyr. Jeg har sat  sættekasser ind i sildekasser ind i æggebægre,  ind i flængerne på murene på alting. Jeg har set  alting kaste sig ud fra tagene og blinkende løbende  hunde, der vinker med tungen og logrer med næbbet,  og halen er bare snoren for enden af diamantbælter  og flænsede dynebetræk. Det er vist det eneste,  jeg har oplevet for nylig.</p>	<p>I've been eating nails* from morning to night, I have  fiddled with the motifs from dead animals. I have set  seed boxes into herring crates into egg cups,  into the slits in the walls on everything. I have seen  everything throw itself off roofs and blinking, running  dogs that wave with their tongues and wag with their snout,  and the tail is just the dog-lead at the end of diamond-belts  and frayed duvet covers. That seems to be all  I've experienced recently.</p>

\*'eating nails' [Danish: *du må have spist søm*] is an old-fashioned Danish idiom for saying or doing something wildly improbable.



References to the publisher's blurb and photographs of Gerd Laugesen's *Har du set min kjole?* and accompanying dresses taken from *After Hand* website page: <http://afterhand.blogspot.com/2011/07/gerd-laugesen-har-du-set-min-kjole.html>

Kristel Chua

## Shoes

*On one foot:*

‘I was always criticized for being excessive. But it is the nature of mothering.’ Her eyes appeared to be pleading. The lavish portraits framing her blinked twice – help, we’re trapped. Imelda Marcos continued to discuss her uniquely matriarchal role, describing her overwhelming maternal love for her country (and for infrastructure), recalling fondly her lavish lifestyle, deftly dodging the elephant in the room even as it threatened to topple her.

I paused the documentary, *Kingmaker*, and took a deep diaphragmic breath. ‘Imelda and her shoes’ overly friendly white male strangers liked to say when the subject of Filipino politics somehow traipsed into an unwanted conversation. (How do I find myself in this position, again and again and again?) I’d nod. Admittedly, it is a recognizable, conversational, and egregious example of corrupt bureaucratic plundering of a suffering country’s wealth. Shoes, pretty little heels, each a variation on a nicety – wedge or stiletto? Pointed or round toe? Meanwhile, somewhere in shantytown Manila, my father trained brown orb-weaving spiders into warriors and showered in the rain. Yes, it is a generic example, but one everyone can understand.

*On the other:*

‘She has too many of them. I can’t wait to get rid of them.’ Last spring, my father and I ate at a cafe in New Jersey, getting along the only way we knew how – by kicking at dead-horse conversations until we hit bone and cracked marrow. We were talking about my mom’s shoes. Our basement is full of them, a veritable condominium of shoe boxes – no vacancies, but more infrastructure and guests are welcome. Racks of shoes frame the dimly lit room, black boots calf-high, black boots knee-high, running shoes, slippers for running errands, slippers for shopping, slippers for the sake of slippers. Variations of a phrase.

I paused, digging at my pancake as if it would yield a suitable response. ‘Mom and her shoes,’ we said for years and years as they accumulated at an alarming yet mysterious rate. She funneled the money she earned checking balances for the church into her favorite thing – perfect coordination, perfect posture, perfect calves for dancing in those perfect heels. She punctuated her long weeks with clandestine, cathartic shopping sprees, wielding her well-worn Macy’s membership. When finally her credit score groaned under the weight of her

excess, my father, the breadwinner (and the penny-pincher – he regularly sports my youth group T-shirt from over a decade ago: ‘Jesus is My Life Spark!’), had to reign her in. ‘She’s not allowed to buy any shoes for a while.’

‘It makes her happy,’ I finally responded, both unable to defend her reckless spending and unwilling to fully condemn her. I did not know how to communicate to my rationally minded and emotionally stunted father that my mother had endured unbearably mind-numbing afternoons of immigrant motherhood: days of kids at school, husband at work both physically and mentally, surrounded by unfriendly pale faces – one of them a brusque driving instructor cursing her to tears. Of course she found relief in the dazzling lights of the department store shoe section, Macy’s and Nordstrom at their apex. She wanted to show off to her family back home: the United States has all the designer shoes – here, have some, I am so happy and lucky to be here! She just wanted to feel beautiful.

On New York City’s Fifth Avenue, there walked Imelda Marcos, cheeks rouged red by the greeting kisses of Richard Nixon and Fidel Castro and Mao Zedong and Saddam Hussein. She punctuated her impressive international diplomacy with shopping sprees funded by bloated bank accounts under an account name that was not hers. Fashion aside, she had an inexplicable fixation on real estate and infrastructure. All around her, buildings were bought and built, decked out in American trends. Everyone and everything around her glittered, and as the matron of the Philippines, her country’s wealth was her wealth, and by God, she had a right to spend it all.

Across the corners of the US, my mother, sister, and I walk in size six shoes. When we lived under the same roof, we shared in the excess. Before morning mass, we’d run down to the basement for a quick ‘shopping’ trip, sorting through our options for the best garnish to pair with our outfits. From middle school dances to baccalaureate graduation ceremonies, my mother dressed us and our feet. Her daughters, her ultimate treasures, the very girls she sacrificed for, were beautiful and they deserve to feel beautiful and wear beautiful things. When my mother passes, my little feet will inherit fineries my cramped apartment cannot even fathom to contain. At least in regard to shoes, I will never be wanting.

On one foot, I am at breakfast with my father. I bite my tongue, squirm in my seat, sciatic pain flaring from a sedentary morning. On the other, I am in my apartment spending a solo afternoon watching documentaries for research, toes tingly- numb from sitting cross-legged (transfixed) during an entire film. Paused here, this frame, I hesitated. I didn’t want to draw

parallels or subscribe to simple formulaic math with simple and neat shapes. It would be easy to trace the runway, bob to the rhythmic clack of heels on an ironic, yet clean, predetermined path. Yes, it would be easy, yet lazy – but it would not go anywhere, would not result in anything other than a dismissive chuckle and ‘mom and her shoes’. I didn’t want to think like my father who, after a youth of struggle and scarcity, sought stability in the form of dollar signs.

Instead, I mapped their lives – pinpointing the similar intersections before and highlighting the irreconcilable divergences after. First, I traced the karaoke-dotted timeline as it wound from beauty pageants to courtship and marriage, to children, to marital insecurity, to diplomatic and faithful isolation. Then, quiet in the buzz of consumerism, I lingered in their glimmering shopping mall respites: perfume, lipstick smiles, please-do-not-forget-to-take-a-full-body-photo-because-I-have-a-cute-outfit-on-today. And finally, with an exhale, I footnoted the journey with a much-needed class analysis, because though Imelda and Febe may have worn matching Louis Vuitton stilettos and marveled at the same runway fashions, they never shared the same path, never joined arms like giggling batchmate schoolgirls.

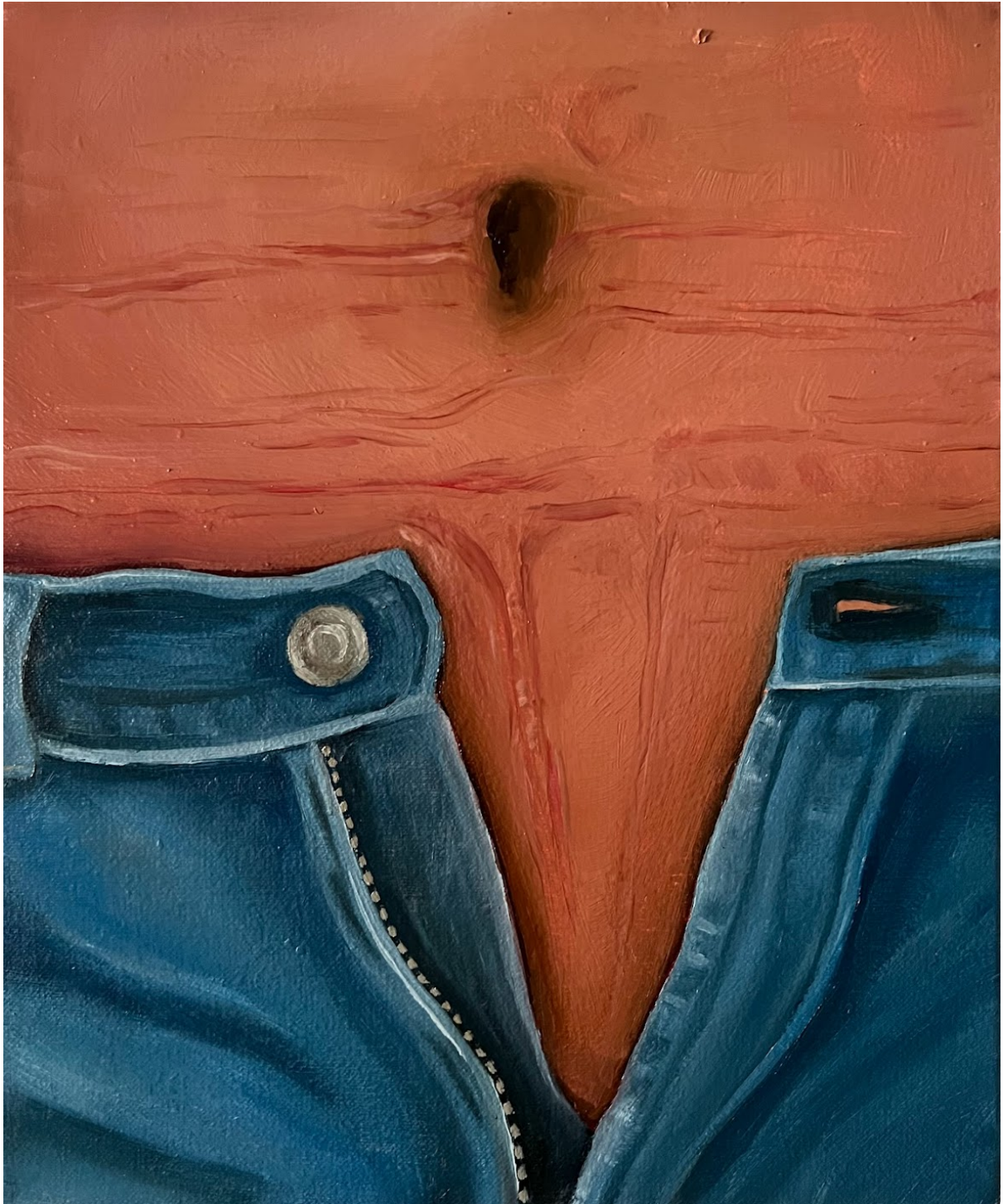
My mother’s hands, though pretty and lotioned and manicured, are not stained with blood. But Imelda’s hands and entire closet, under closer inspection, are spattered with blood and projected images: ribbed torsos of malnourished children, the cracked hands of peasants, Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) in an endless line at foreign consulates. At once a symptom and a cause, the greedy Marcoses pushed their imperialist-guided hands, liberalizing the Philippine economy, forcing our displacement. Their excess limited our agency to the sparse available options: sacrifice to survive. Imelda’s maternal devotion made her a long-lasting scourge on the Philippines. Meanwhile, my mother’s devotion materialized in the exhausting routine of keeping our bellies full, our illnesses tended to, our escape plans routed, our stressors minimal. Many Filipinos cannot hate their mothers; many Filipinos absolutely despise Imelda.

The aforementioned map continues, its new routes freshly inked by my wandering footprints. I know little of my family tree beyond my immediate family, and yet the trunk weighs heavily on me as I walk. Though the feet are the same, the prints change often, oscillating from high-heeled platform stompers to worn combat boots to smooth Mary Janes. The legacy – the habit – continues: as it so happens, I also have an unfortunate preoccupation with shoes.



Virna Teixeira  
**Conjoined**

It starts with a vision. Twins tied at the arms and the curvy torso wearing the same red dress. One head looks down, passively in resignation. The other head gazes at me with a defiant look. They are burning in silence. The dress and the body become one, as if they are melting. Their faces are turning golden, and the dress is turning orange by delicate ropes of fire. The soil is dark. There is a figure watching the scene, sat on a stone. Through the open metal visor of the helmet, I partially see my face. I also recognise that dress.



Aleena Sharif **Jeans**



Aleena Sharif **No Longer Available**

Robin Rivers  
**Soft Pants**

Who's the bony bastard

who made pants

With seams,

And buttons,

And skin-pinching snaps

to dig in every

curve I've earned?

Who's the demon

who made wool

with zippers,

Or pleather,

Or scratchy denim

That inevitably

makes me burn?

No, my darling soft pants,

I have no

words like that for you.

You're lusty,

Lingering on every inch of me

Like lovers do

(No sticky hands from pasting  
those others on like glue)

I shimmy out of my jeans,  
what a pinching bind.

Not dress pants,  
so tight I might go blind.

Just you  
a fluffy stretch, a cozy ease.  
The others break me down,  
you just please.

No mocking me,  
Leaving indents on my belly.  
No making me feel  
like my rear is made of jelly.  
Just a comforting touch.  
Just an easy way.  
Soft pants,  
I'm burning everything else  
today.



Trisha Broomfield

## **Don't Expect Miracles**

Silk stockings slither  
suspenders pop  
buttons tick-clip into metal loops  
dangling from flesh pink corsets

laces and bones squeeze flesh  
reducing breathing space  
that waist is a must  
bosoms heave, it's pleasing

wired bras grip soundlessly  
a hiss of freedom on unfastening  
the aching itch of emotions released  
red lines belying a pain-free ride

black lace whispers treachery  
pleasure promised, irritation delivered,  
pop socks ruck beneath heels  
no conscience or apology

things tempting from tiny hangers  
all sized to catch the unwary  
too small once exposed in the daylight  
of a dusty bedroom

no-cling slips speak out determinedly,  
'Don't expect miracles  
we never said we would rid you of all static.'  
When clearly, they did in the shop.

Mary Fidler

## **all that and more**

if i am magnificent

(and i am)

can one size fit all? most? some? of me

all the fabric that legions project

all the yardage that regions protect

how does this oneness feel its loneliness within its holiness

if i am all that & more

where do i fit? in what way? & why?

a road that keeps unfolding

seen only after distance spanned

the surrender to keep on going

if i am about love

can i hold on to this enormity?

this spacious, cozy cover

that is all that, and more

pick it up, put it on, wear it inside & out

forget

take it off

put it down

the wallowing fraught

YES YES YES to all of it

if i am, then so are you – 2 for 1

and if I know that you ARE

(and i do)

then i can don that one size too

Hey! Pockets!!



Julia Ruth Smith

## **Moon. Segments. Out of Sorts.**

The time she forgot the full moon, nothing happened. She woke up rested, with a regular heartbeat, and breathed into a cold room. Looking down at her nails, she noticed small speckles of white and felt maybe she was a little bit sad.

She'd forgotten to buy coffee and as she half-filled the moka, she anticipated a feeling of disappointment. She pushed the white pill through its flimsy foil. The end of another month. It reminded her to call her children, but she worried that it was too early.

In a city, so far away it felt like another planet, her oldest picked up and sighed. She could hear him sliding from his bed, away from his sleeping girlfriend then the sound of rain.

'Mum, it's early. Are you ok?'

She felt like a burden, out of sorts, dull.

'Yes, I just wanted to hear your voice, is all.'

'I'll call you later, ok?'

She longed suddenly for the click of an old-fashioned phone to tell her the conversation was over.

She walked to the market where she was offered clementines without pips and aubergines without seeds. It galled her but she bought them anyway. The noise of the sellers jostled her. There was always so much noise.

Back home she realised she hadn't picked up the coffee and it made her cry, then laugh at how foolish she'd become. She put on some Motown and danced around the living room alone until she felt better.

At lunchtime, a friend called and invited her to a birthday party. She remembered a red dress stuffed to the back of the wardrobe, and when she went to retrieve it, it was so startling she gasped as if happier times had been stitched into the lining. When she put it on, she noticed her eyes had changed from the sleepy grey of the morning to a deep green. She kept the dress on, hoping her wrinkles would fall out as she broke eggs into a bowl and fixed a salad. She considered pouring a glass of wine from the opened bottle but decided against it and was

stupidly proud of herself. A drip of yolk fell onto her dress. She cursed and dabbed it with warm water.

She'd just finished lunch when her son called her back, his voice slightly troubled.

'Mum, I need your advice.'

She gave it, feigning positivity until she realised her words had helped to solve his problem and he was grateful, then she crawled into bed and slept through the afternoon.

The moon was beginning to wane, and she was okay with that. She took comfort. Not everything lasts for ever. She peeled open a clementine, gathered the silvery pith in a small pile in front of her and spread out the segments like lunar phases. The first bite was tart and shocking, the second revealed a pip. She got up from the table, looking for the perfect pair of shoes for the party, gracious yet durable.

Tamsyn Challenger  
**Haberdashery**

Open the brocade a peep  
Inspect my curtains;  
do they match the drapes?  
Beams flash into covered dusty places  
Skittering across wooden floors  
Finger gauge the fabric  
Ruche away to the corners  
Do my curtains match my drapes?  
These days you can 'upgrade  
your space with a variety of stylish curtains'  
Ultra blush charcoal thin thermal  
Blackout recycle velvet pencil  
Warm cosy mid-century add personality  
Still pinching my simple dark seventies  
Material between your fingers  
But looking out the window anyhow  
Only to see a twitch of cotton  
from the other side of the street



Kathy Bruce **Tapada Limeña**





Kathy Bruce **Tapada Contemplating Her Skirt**





Kathy Bruce **Animal Magnetism**

Denise Zygadlo

## **Goody Two Shoes**

I do not choose  
to wear new shoes  
to go out visiting

they sit outside their sturdy box,  
crisp tissue nest  
and shine at me –  
smooth, ripe  
so cherry red and polished  
so ready to pick

I do not choose

And deep inside  
I yearn  
to fasten the stiff little straps  
and silver buckles,  
feel the smooth virgin soles  
slippy on Marley tiles

but this occasion is preserved  
the christening must be deserved  
the sweet delight is sacrificed  
the glorious moment stored

my throat is tight and fighty  
buckling on school sandals  
scuffed and sloppy  
dull tan and glamour free  
I do not choose

And have I won more days in heaven?

Mary Janicke

## **Fashion Forward**

The little black dress hangs in the closet. Lonely, unworn, a relic. The lady of the house prefers sheen and shine, glitz and spangles. She once wore the little black dress when she was ever so proper. Now she wears purple.

\

Joanne Macias

## **Projection Reflection**

Wow, I look good today!

~~Don't be so stupid.~~

This dress makes me look so feminine

~~If it weren't for all these lumps.~~

I wonder how I would look with a new hairstyle –

~~FAT!~~

What if I tried to...

~~Why bother?~~

I don't know if it's the mirror.

I don't know if it's me.

Is there truth in the reflection,

Or truth from my mind?

The pressure to conform,

To meet never ending standards

Makes me wonder

If what I see in the mirror is enough.

Robin Rivers  
**Monsters**

Monster-faced girl  
with the fangs  
sunk deep  
in her throat

Can't even  
defend herself properly

Monster-faced girl  
with the claws  
shoved deep  
into her sides

Can't even  
control herself properly

Monster-faced girl  
with the howl  
buried deep  
within her chest

Can't even  
speak her mind properly

Monster-faced girl  
with the eyes  
hollowed out  
barren holes

Can't even  
disappear properly

Pretty-faced girl  
with the pearls  
sunk deep  
in her throat

See how she  
submits herself properly

Pretty-faced girl  
with the scalpel  
shoved deep  
into her sides

See how she  
maintains herself properly

Pretty-faced girl  
with the song  
buried deep  
within her chest

See how she  
keeps silent properly

Pretty-faced girl  
with the eyes  
baby blue  
barren holes

Now she can  
disappear properly



Gisela Haensel

## What Are My True Colors?

Unicorns didn't exist when I was a little girl, not even as prints on T-shirts. From what I remember, clothes were not sorted by colors for girls and colors for boys; they came in all basic colors, and I don't think that pink was one of them. Pink came later. My mom said she bought me a sweater in light blue because it went well with my blond hair. Moms decided what was best for us. And when to wear a jacket or a scarf or a beanie. Come spring, they always worried that we'd take off our jackets too early and catch a cold. Somehow, they couldn't trust us kids to feel the temperature ourselves, and my body got used to being bundled up.

One sunny spring day, I remember I was wearing a green jersey cardigan over a thin blue sweater, and I heard my mom say that combining those two colors was considered inappropriate when she was my age. This idea blew my mind. She even quoted a saying from back then, yet she didn't have me take off my cardigan. To this day, I am unclear if combining green and blue had been viewed as inherently ugly, meaning forever ugly, or just temporarily ugly because the fashion industry said so. Or was there a deeper meaning to it? The comment about the odd color combination was probably the only one my mom ever made about clothes. Although, come to think of it, there was a comment about girls in her day needing to wear skirts on the most important holiday of the protestant church, Reformation Day. Which tells me that even back in post-war northern West Germany, girls no longer wore skirts by default. But apparently, girls didn't combine green with blue. I'd love to know which colors they actually wore, but how can we tell from looking at old black-and-white photography? Can you somehow reverse engineer the original color from the shade of gray?

In any case, we did wear skirts when I went to elementary school in the 70s, at least on some days. I was part of a group of four girls that decades later would have been called the nerds or geeks, but back then there was no label for us. Our moms got along really well. One of them, who was this prolific knitter, started to knit a blue-and-white skirt for her daughter. My mom liked the idea, and being the wife of a mechanical engineer, took out the knitting machine and made a skirt for me that looked just like my friend's, except it didn't look hand-crafted. Then the moms got really into it and made skirts for our two other friends and added matching vests, all in white and blue. Or were the skirts just blue and only the vests two-toned? The more I think about it, the less I remember; isn't that funny? It's as if the memory fades in front of your eyes the more you look at it. I am not sure why these colors were chosen; moms back then probably thought that you cannot go wrong with blue, blue goes with everybody and everything, except green of course.

There we were, these geeky girls in skirts, at least on some days, which didn't prevent us from playing outside in the commons of our high-rise apartment complex where we would climb trees and venture out into the nearby forest to forage for unknown plants we could press and add to our herbarium. And then teach ourselves their names. I do remember my

own attempt to knit a sweater. It was an ambitious interpretation of a homework assignment in a subject that sounds old-fashioned today but was taught in a progressive way to all genders so that girls *and* boys learned how to sew, and cross-stitch, and crochet, and knit. I personally was drawn to the design phase rather than the execution which I found unexpectedly monotonous. In the end, it was my mom who finished the sweater. Its front showed block stripes in red, blue, and... green. One cuff was blue, the other one red, and the rest was an early version of pink, which was really more of a light tea rose.

A few years later, tea rose happened to be the exact shade of my junior high school crush's favorite sweater, though the bold print of the brand name on the back was what was most important to this boy. When the girl sitting next to me in class appeared with the same sweater in a different color, he greeted her warmly with a 'Welcome to the club!' Oh, the envy! My parents didn't spend a lot of money on clothes. And my dad had a deep aversion to his kids wanting to do things just because other kids did them. Back then I found this attitude incomprehensible and frustrating because who didn't want to be part of the club?! And then one day, I noticed that my mom owned a blouse of the same brand. I couldn't believe my eyes. Granted it was a plain white blouse with a regular-sized brand label inside the collar and no bold print on the back. But still, it was *the* brand! For a while, I daydreamed myself into a situation where I somehow had found an occasion to wear this blouse and a way to ask my mom to lend it to me, then getting a compliment for my blouse and savoring the moment when I reply nonchalantly: 'Oh, it's a Marc O'Polo.' And feel a sense of belonging rush over my entire body.

Anyhow, from what I remember, the next big thing was florescent colors. They came into being during the 80s. There was still no pink. Nor unicorns. But there were punks. And for Mardi Gras, I felt old and bold enough to leave the kid's costumes behind and dress up as one of them: black nails, black lips, black earrings, and a hand-crocheted florescent-yellow fishnet worn over a black sweater. So black was clearly making an appearance, and black started this trend of being more than just a color. Black was a statement and a state of mind. Black was cool. Black looked good on anybody independent of their hair color. A photo that I found in an old album shows me wearing pants with black-and-white stripes, and to the me of today, I don't look like a punk but rather like a clown dressed up as a punk. Why, you might ask, didn't I wear a miniskirt? Like my favorite singer Nena, who looked at me full of promise from the life-size puzzle poster on my bedroom door. The reason is lost to history. It could have been the German winter weather.

Speaking of winter, in high school, my best friend and I discovered the four-season color analysis and became obsessed with it as only teenagers can be. The potential! While fashion prescribes new colors each and every season, color theory considers your physical appearance and assigns a season for life. And you stay with it because of the promise that it will always look good on you. I'd call this an early move towards authenticity, away from belonging: are you with us or are you with yourself? In some ways, I was back to the goal of matching the color of my sweater with the color of my hair – just in a more sophisticated way. By then, I wasn't blond anymore, so light blue was no longer an option. My friend

believed that I had the look of Snow White with dark hair, fair skin, and red lips, which moved me backwards in season from the spring into the winter category. I clearly remember my favorite outfit as a high-school senior: a bright-red jersey pant skirt with a woolen black turtleneck, adorned by a necklace of red wooden balls on black leather laces. Or ‘your atomic model’ as my geeky friends called it, with a mix of delight and disdain in their voices. Now that I think of it, this set of clothes combined the best of both of my longings: the authentic red of winter, interwoven with black, the chameleon of colors, allowing you to stay authentic while belonging.

Yet in my later twenties, I noticed that certain brown and green tones made me shine. This discovery created a small panic. Had I been miscategorized all along? Or was this whole color analysis just a bunch of crap? It was the time of post-everything and deconstructing anything that you held dear. And the neat system of four seasons color analysis suffered the same fate as structuralism in the literary studies of my college years. The old truths didn’t hold anymore. Any color goes. And it’s complicated. What is true here isn’t necessarily true there, and it’s all constructed anyway.

I only really thought of all of this again when I moved to America half a decade later. There are unicorns everywhere here along with little girls running around in iridescent-colored princess dresses. And wherever I go, life around me appears to be color-coded. There are colors for Christmas and colors for Hanukkah. Colors for colleges and colors for causes. Colors for each side of the family during a wedding celebration. Colors for genders and for the fireworks at gender reveal parties. No color is neutral anymore. Every color has a meaning or can be assigned a meaning – if only temporarily. And there is pink, a lot of it, but never for men, at least not “real” men – I mean old-school straight men – because pink doesn’t fit with their version of masculinity (that we now finally call toxic). Instead of the rainbow, you're handed a minefield.

Looking back, when it comes to clothes, or at least the colors of clothes, my childhood appears more gender-neutral, more fluid, more open-minded – perhaps more carefree. Or is that just the effect of the rose-tinted glasses of my nostalgia? I, for my part, am back to wearing a baby-blue sweater. It goes really well with my hair, which by now has turned a natural platinum blond.



Olivia Baldacci **Crumbling**

Samantha Tunan  
**Junior Prep**

By Halloween, group projects were due for presentation  
it took me until then to wear myself down  
and dress up to talk about World War II.

My sister and I were built like reverse triangles, back then.  
Did I ever consider slogans or screenprint words before this?  
Where were clothes with buttons down the front or chiseled collars?

It was middle school, paper towel dispensers and fruit sliced  
with butter knives, orchestra paid for uniform gowns and teams  
shelled out for shorts in every permissible color, including white.

I floated around with notebooks carried at my navel so the thickly cut  
words *Junior Prep* on my sister's stolen tee were wide open, inviting  
peers to see my eternally flat but newly decorated chest and read it.

The newness of wanting to be read.

I still mixed my sister's castoffs and unnoticed thefts in with my own  
cotton and rayon-stuffed dresser drawers after that group presentation,  
but *Junior Prep* slept abandoned in the bottom.

Whenever I thought of dressing fancy in a tee, I saw the pretty girl  
who would talk with me about what I was reading in class coming  
to my locker, asking me not to wear preparatory paraphernalia.

I wasn't taking the private high school prep course like she and her neighbors  
were twice a week until end of next year, and I was trying too hard to be  
like her and her private school-to-be friends. She was just being nice.

That was all just fine. I'd wear wordless stripes or corduroy or solid  
thermals or checkered everything else, merrily sporting only shirts  
that shouted in wordless middle-American: Working Class Average!



Alicia Astronomo

## **agape mouths and feeble ears**

1 agape mouths and feeble ears  
2 waiting for the bus  
3 adjusting my shirt  
4  
5 i didn't put on socks this time  
6 protect free knobs from falling off  
7 cover up my scars a million tries  
8  
9 it's one of those days to get stared at  
10 by an old man  
11 beside his old wife  
12 while you're eating a blueberry muffin you found  
13  
14 positioned behind a power outlet for your computer  
15 beside someone conducting a therapy session remotely  
16  
17 i'm making crumbs,  
18 stains,  
19 eating my hair in between looks around the room  
20  
21 there's that man that always asks if i'm single  
22 in this building to the next  
23  
24 i haven't seen "can i suck your nipples, sweetheart"  
25 around the back in a while  
26

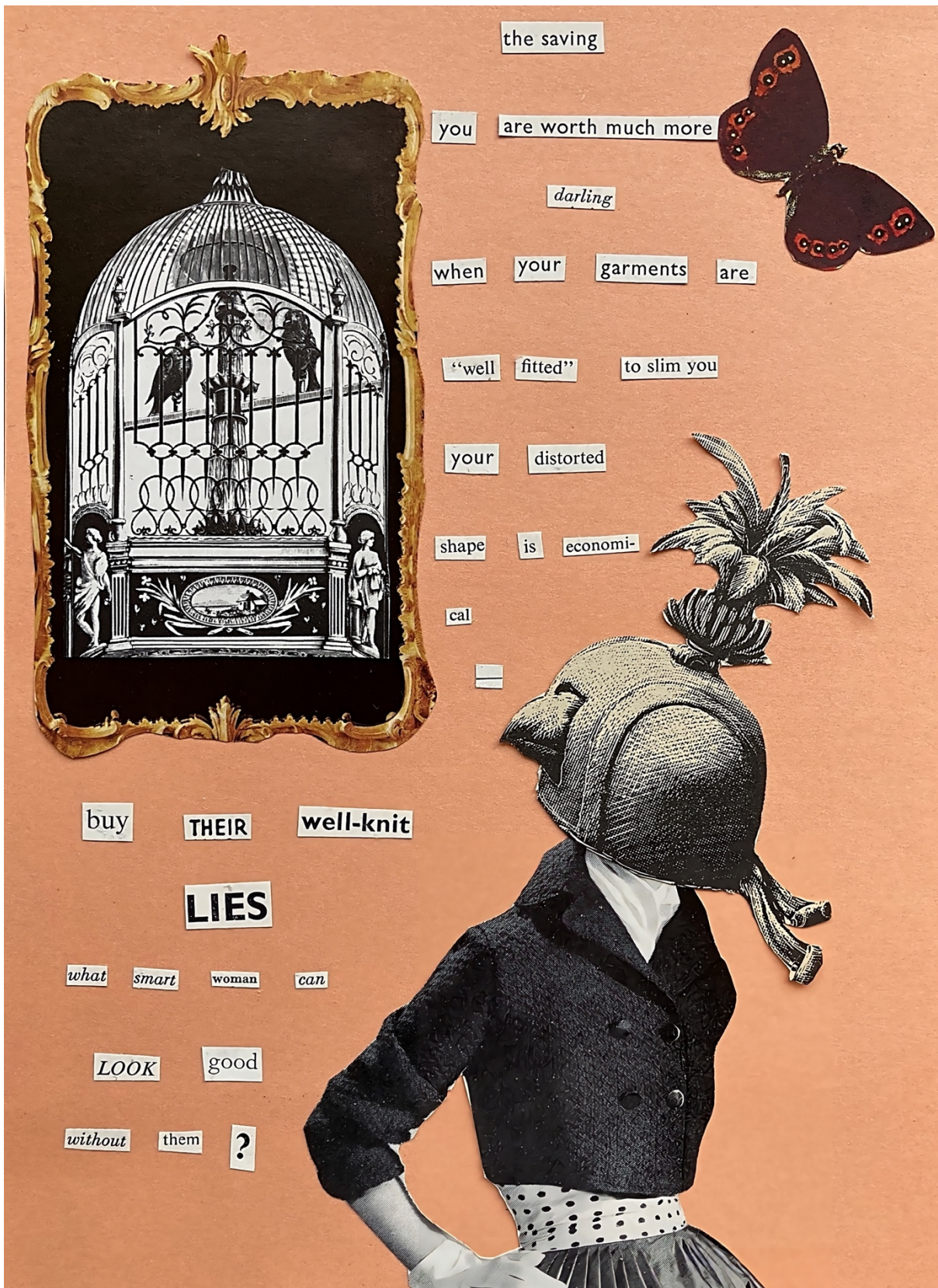
27 i'm not sure where my mental repositioning is landing  
28 i made camp in the grass  
29 i'm tending fire in a public space  
30 the therapist leaves  
31 the couple stays  
32  
33 i remember being invited to a threesome by the river  
34 by an old couple in dc  
35  
36 we've got enough smiles to go around  
37 sticky fingers  
38 broken mouths

Julia Biggs  
**less is more**





Julia Biggs  
the saving



the saving

you are worth much more

*darling*

when your garments are

“well fitted” to slim you

your distorted

shape is economi-

cal

buy THEIR well-knit

**LIES**

*what smart woman can*

**LOOK** good

*without them ?*

Allison Burris

## **Playing Dress Up**

I browse through past lives in thrift stores, flick through sartorial diaries while metal hangers imprint their gray grease on my fingers. Here's \$8.49 for a hot pink night out when everyone thought their lemonade was spiked and that meant something. Here's \$16.99 for a bridesmaid's pea-green emotional labor. Who cried the most at the wedding? Never me, instead paying \$6.35 for that tropical vacation where every keyhole is a sunburn stencil. I pull on a new self/sweater from screechy racks. I am not the girl who cat-eyed her liner and had too many cardigans or the girl who drenched her/self in charcoal hoodies. I am an in-between searching for a new personality/prairie skirt. I am looking for miracles/a pair of jeans that fit. I buy sapphire velour pants that zip up the back and pair them with lace necklines out of a Victorian catalog. Here's a green suede dress for all my nonexistent board meetings. The new me is heavy with jewel toned possibilities that I have to leave at the bottom of the jet bridge. I couldn't possibly lift them into an overhead compartment.



Rachel Turney  
**Perfect Fit**

Every Easter my mother bought me new shoes to go with my matching new dress. She would take me down to the shop and help me choose, patting my head while a man measured my feet. Then she would buckle the little Mary Janes for me and hold my shoed foot in her hand. She got down on her knees and was right there in front of me, so close, so near. She would look right at me while she made sure the shoes had the perfect fit. Every year I looked forward to Easter when she would take me for new shoes. It was the only time – in my entire life – that her eyes were exactly parallel with mine.

Kim Crowder

## Skirting the Circle

In the clinical interview, she asked,

*'Did you enjoy watching things spin?'* Oh yes, way-back-when. I remember that tin humming top. Pumping the handle, conjuring energy, hearing the hum grow and falter and fade – equilibrium ebbing – its eccentric wandering and wobbling before falling. Starting again, mesmerised, caught in the spell of the spin.

Digging deeper, *'Did you like to circle and twirl?'* Of course. Daily I'd turn tornado, dance the dance of the top, whirl on the spot, spindle-thin, right up on tiptoe in self-induced trance. Feeling the bliss of my bias-cut skirt flaring, flat as a pancake, flipped. Tottering to a dizzy-drunk stop. Repeating again and again until firmly forbidden.

*'And at school?'* Me – the maths class write-off, bemused by abstruse numbers, abstractions. But, in geometry, immersed in the ellipse's kiss, exploring the circle's boundless boundary, a line for keeping things out and holding things in. Girths of moon, sun and planets, or snowflake symmetries plotted with my compasses pirouetting *en pointe*.

Let me backtrack. I must say how I hated the plank of a box-pleat school skirt, the droop of a dirndl clamped to my calves like a clapped-out bell. Multi-tiered petticoats, frilled petals of full skirts outspread as flower corollas were what I craved. Better still, a ballet tutu strictly stiffened to hold the horizontal, hips haloed in flounces of trembling net and tulle. Born decades too late, I longed to Lindy Hop in a 360 skirt – cartwheeling, and whirling, doing the splits.

*'Did you outgrow this?'* Maybe. Not really. Often, I stare at wind turbines' sky-sweeping fins, or laundry on high-speed spin, vinyl discs turning at 33 rpm. Ammonite spirals, fern fronds uncurling, or seed-head helixes entice me – any shapes that follow Fibonacci, from galaxies down to the prints on my thumbs. And yes, I still yearn for a shapeshifter skirt whose flexi geometrics mutate in motion. A garment to whittle the waist from thorax to pelvis down to a thread-thin isthmus attaching my top to whatever a wasp wears under her dress.

*'Why the fascination with rotation?'* In repeat revolutions, I evolve my own element, reprieved from misspent medicines and pointless placebos. Full-skirted, in fact or in fantasy, I circle to focus, rebalance, make sense of sensation, manage my diversi-divergent dimension. Rotation reassures me – holds order and chaos in tension – keeps my world turning, not coming unspun.

## CONTRIBUTORS

**A.J. PARKER** grew up in Phoenix, Arizona, then spent some time on the East Coast trying to make up for all that water she lost. Her work has been published in over ten literary journals, including *Feminist Food Journal* and *Watershed Review*. She has a short story forthcoming in *After Dinner Conversation*.

<https://www.instagram.com/authorajparker/>

<https://x.com/authorajparker>

<https://updateswithaj.substack.com/>

**Aleena SHARIF** was born in Pakistan and went to school at the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York. She graduated with a BFA and a minor in Art History. Since graduating she has exhibited in New York, Los Angeles, London, Italy, and Pakistan, as well as many virtual galleries. She currently continues her practice between California and Pakistan where she holds open studies in hope of creating a safe space for nude paintings to be shown.

[https://www.instagram.com/aleenasharif\\_art/](https://www.instagram.com/aleenasharif_art/)

**Alicia ASTRONOMO** is an author, artist, and arts administrator born and based in Baltimore, MD, whose work focuses on documentation, archives, and education. She is the developer of <https://www.nakedartmuseum.com> – a virtual arts community platform, and <https://vomitmouth.medium.com> – a contemporary arts history blog and magazine.

<https://www.instagram.com/turntabletitis>

**Allison BURRIS** grew up in the Pacific Northwest and currently lives in Oakland, California. She received her MLIS from San Jose State University and her poetry appears, or is forthcoming, in various journals including *Instant Noodles*, *Heartline Spec*, *Muleskinner*, *After Happy Hour Review*, and *The Marbled Sigh*.

<https://linktr.ee/allisonburris>

**Beverly FRYDMAN** walks her dog every morning in West London and often brings home poems. She has published a pamphlet with Rochelle Robshaw called *Time Cracks* with Moormaid Press and is a proud member of the Popogrou Collective.

<https://www.instagram.com/beverlyfrydman/>

**Denise ZYGADLO** is a visual artist based in Auldgirth, Dumfries. Having always had an interest in clothing, her focus is cloth and the body, exploring this through drawing, printing and collage. And now writing has become an expression of the patterns she has found during her life.

[www.denisezygadlo.co.uk](http://www.denisezygadlo.co.uk)

<https://www.instagram.com/zygadlodenise/>

**Divya BENEZETTE** is a graduate student in professional writing. She recently completed her undergraduate degree in English literature at Towson University. She is an avid poet, academic, reader, and lover of animals and nature. You can find her work in *Bardics Anonymous*, *The Greyhound Journal*, and *Clover + Bee*.

<https://www.instagram.com/whatsdivyareading/>

<https://www.chillsubs.com/user/divyabenezette>

**Fiona LARKIN's** debut collection, *Rope of Sand*, was published by Pindrop Press in 2023. The title poem was highly commended in the Forward Prizes. Her pamphlets are *Vital Capacity* (Broken Sleep Books, 2022) and *A Dovetail of Breath* (Rack Press, 2020), and she manages innovative projects with Corrupted Poetry.

<https://fionalarkinpoetry.wordpress.com/>

<https://www.instagram.com/fiona.larkin/>

[@fionalarkin.bsky.social](https://www.bsky.app/profile/fionalarkin.bsky.social)

**Gerd LAUGESSEN** is a widely published Danish poet, artist, and documentarist whose works travel the world in pursuit of the surreal dimensions of everyday life. In 2022, she received the Danish *Dan Turèll Medal* lifetime achievement award for her writing, and her forthcoming novel, *If Life Was a Film (Hvis Livet Var En Film)* Turbine, 2025, follows in the footsteps of 'Nili', who was, among other things, the real body double for Elizabeth Taylor in the blockbuster movie *Cleopatra*.

Link to publishers website for *If Life Was a Film* <https://turbine.dk/produkt/hvis-livet-var-en-film/>

**Gisela HAENSEL** is a localization expert, mindfulness instructor, and writer who's been blogging about her experience as an expat in Silicon Valley since 2005. She holds an MA in German/French from Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin and officially kicked off her English writing with a Stanford course 10+ years ago.

<https://kalifornienjournal.com>

[https://www.instagram.com/gisela\\_viktoria/](https://www.instagram.com/gisela_viktoria/)

**Helga GRUENDLER-SCHIERLOH** is a bilingual writer with a degree in journalism and graduate credits in linguistics. Her articles, essays, short stories, and poetry have appeared in the USA, the UK, Canada, and South Africa. Her debut novel, *Burying Leo*, a Me-Too story released in 2017, won second place in women's fiction during Pen Craft Awards' 2018 writing contest.

[www.facebook.com/Gruendler-Schierloh](https://www.facebook.com/Gruendler-Schierloh)

**Joanne MACIAS** is a multi-disciplinary creative, featured in *Living Stories*, *Best of Times*, *The Sour Collective*, *Two Wolves Digest*, *Short Stories Unlimited*, *Roi Fainéant* plus many more. She loves finding interesting ways to challenge reader perception through unique scenarios. She embarks on her first residency in Ireland in 2025.

[https://www.instagram.com/joanne\\_macias\\_writer/](https://www.instagram.com/joanne_macias_writer/)

**Julia BIGGS** is a poet, writer and freelance art historian. She lives in Cambridge, UK. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Osmosis Press*, *Ink Sweat & Tears*, *Streetcake Magazine*, *RIC Journal* and elsewhere. Find her on Twitter/X @Chiaroscuro1897, on Bluesky @chiaroscuro1897.bsky.social or via her website: <https://juliabiggs1.wixsite.com/juliabiggs>

**Julia Ruth SMITH** is a mother, teacher and writer. She lives by the sea in Brindisi and is happier barefoot. Her writing can be found in numerous online and print journals and she has been nominated for both Pushcart and Best of the Net. You can find her at

<https://bsky.app/profile/juliaruthsmith.bsky.social>

**Kathy BRUCE** is a visual artist based in Dunoon, Scotland. She received an M.F.A from Yale University and a certificate from The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. Her work

explores archetypal female forms within the context of poetry, literature and the natural environment. She has exhibited in the U.K., U.S. and internationally including Senegal, Taiwan, Denmark, Peru, France, and Canada.

<https://www.instagram.com/kat10bruce/>

**Kim CROWDER** lives in rural Angus. Her writings are widely published by poetry magazines and various projects focused on human-animal relations, climate change and medical humanities. In 2024, she was a participant in the Clydebuilt 16 poetry scheme. She holds a master's degree in Textile Culture (Norwich School of Art, 2004), and a visual Anthropology PhD awarded by Goldsmiths, 2012.

**Kristel CHUA** is a queer, Filipino, and working-class writer and zine-maker. She is an aktibista fighting for Filipino national liberation and anti-imperialism. Kristel lives with her husband and cats in Seattle and can be found in your local coffee shops, rallies, and mosh pits.

<https://www.instagram.com/kris.sword/>

<https://bsky.app/profile/krisblade.bsky.social>

**Maria DURAN** (she/her) is a writer and Art History PhD candidate. Her literary work has been published or is forthcoming with *Gilbert & Hall Press*, *Black Moon Magazine*, and *Masque&Spectacle*, among others. She was a finalist of the 2024 Lisbon Poetry Festival.

<https://www.instagram.com/m.mar.duran/>

<https://vimeo.com/952258016>

**Mary FIDLER** likes lots of things: drawing, stitching, making and of course, writing, to name a few. Originally from Washington state she has been a longtime resident of Japan and currently resides in Nagasaki.

<https://www.instagram.com/maryideart/>

**Mary JANICKE** is a gardener and writer living in Texas. Her work has appeared in *The New York Times*, *USA Today*, *Green Ink*, *Honeyguide*, *Blue Lake Review*, and elsewhere.

**Matthew TRAVERS** is a writer and translator whose work has featured in a number of media outlets and small presses, including *3:AM magazine*, *Tripwire Journal*, *Asymptote*, *Firmament Magazine*, *Mercury Firs*, *Minor Literature(s)*, and *Overground Underground*. Originally from Huddersfield, England, he is now based in Aarhus, Denmark.

Twitter: @traverse\_matt

**mk ZARIEL** {it/its} is a transmasculine lesbian poet, theatre artist, movement journalist, & insurrectionary anarchist. It is fuelled by folk-punk, Emma Goldman, and existential dread. It can be found online at <https://linktr.ee/mkzariel>, creating conflictually queer-anarchic spaces, and being mildly feral in the great lakes region. It is kinda gay ngl.

**Olivia BALDACCI** (she/they) is a mixed-media artist based in New York. She is interested in exploring how media helps form our cultural norms, specifically our conceptions of identity. Collage is her ideal format as it utilizes real-world imagery that is intended to reinforce norms.

<https://www.instagram.com/oliviabaldacci/>

<https://oliviabaldacci.squarespace.com>



**Pam BENJAMIN** is an international stand-up comedian currently living in Athens Greece. She found her way to comedy from a poetry background earning an MA in Fiction 2010 and MFA in Poetry in 2012 from SFSU. Her 2nd novel *VOICES* is still available on Amazon Kindle for a mere .99 cents. She is currently working on an anticapitalist detective novel involving the reincarnated souls of Greek and Roman philosophers in today's times and continues to write poems daily.

<https://www.instagram.com/pamsmutiny/>

<https://www.facebook.com/pam.benjamin.581>

[www.mutinyradio.fm](http://www.mutinyradio.fm)

**Rachel TURNEY** is an educator and artist located in Denver. Her poems, research articles, drawings, and photography can be found in a number of publications.

<https://turneytalks.wordpress.com>

<https://www.instagram.com/turneytalks/>

BlueSky: @rachelturney

**Rhona MILLAR** is an experimental women's fiction writer and graduate of Textile Design from Glasgow School of Art. Her written work has been published in journals such as *Gutter*, *Litro*, *Quotidian* and *From Glasgow to Saturn*. She holds a master's in creative writing with Distinction from the University of Glasgow.

<https://www.instagram.com/frasertextandtextiles/>

**Robin RIVERS** is a poet and novelist obsessed with myth, magic, and comfortable pants. She lives and works in Vancouver, Canada, on the unceded territory of the Coast Salish Peoples.

<https://www.thesibyllinechronicles.com>

<https://thesibyllinechronicles.substack.com/>

<https://www.instagram.com/robinmriversauthor/>

**Rosalie HENDON** (she/her) is an arborist living in Columbus, Ohio. Her work is published in *Ravens Perch*, *Quibble Lit*, *Sad Girls Diaries*, *Pollux*, *Blue Bottle*, and *Willawaw*, among others. Rosalie is inspired by ecology, relationships, and stories passed down through generations.

**Rose RUANE** is an artist and writer working and living in Glasgow with her ever-expanding collection of mid-20th Century kitsch. She is chair of The Adamson Collection: work created in the art therapy studio at Netherne Hospital, between 1946 & 1981

<https://www.instagram.com/regretteruane/>

<https://bsky.app/profile/regretteruane.bsky.social>

**Samantha TUNAN** is a wildlife biologist and writer from St. Louis, MO. Her poetry often features lived experiences from her career, and fanciful situations that examine shared humanity and a blending of immersive imagery. Sam lives in Duluth, MN, and enjoys jumps into Lake Superior with her shoes on.

<https://www.instagram.com/samtunan/>

**Sarah FURUYA** is a coach and writer from Liverpool, now living on sacred shores south of Tokyo. She is published in Moon Hotel Press's *Summer diary 2024* and *Winter Diary 2024* and *Skirting Around* magazine. Since 2023 she has been the coach at large of the Ordinary Magic Writers programme with poet Carolyn Hashimoto. Sarah has interviewed multiple

writers on her podcast, and has stewarded many an article, publication, essay, zine and book into the world.

<https://www.sarahfuruya.com>

[https://linktr.ee/sarah\\_furuya\\_coaching](https://linktr.ee/sarah_furuya_coaching)

<https://www.instagram.com/sarahfuruyacoaching>

**Tamsyn CHALLENGER** is a multi-disciplinary artist. Her film poem, *Fret*, was a Women in Word Lit Fest official selection, 2024. Her poems are published in *Anthropocene*, *Osmosis Press*, *The AI Literary Review and Ink*, *Sweat and Tears*. She's currently an Associate Artist at Beaconsfield Gallery, London working with Glasgow University on events around contours and dynamics between visual art and text.

[https://www.instagram.com/tamsyn\\_challenger/](https://www.instagram.com/tamsyn_challenger/)

<https://bsky.app/profile/tamsynchallenger.bsky.social>

<https://www.tamsynchallenger.com>

**Tessa BERRING's** most recent collection of poems is *Joke Book*, published by The Silent Academy, January 2025. She is also the author of *Bitten Hair* and *Folded Purse* (Blue Diode Press) *Putty* (If a Leaf Falls Press) and *Cut Glass and No Flowers* (Dancing Girl Press).

<https://www.instagram.com/tbberring/>

**Trisha BROOMFIELD** has had three pamphlets published by Dempsey and Windle and contributed to many anthologies. Her new collection, *My Acrostic Mother*, deftly illustrated by Heather Moulson, is available to order from bookstores and online. You can hear her poems in the podcast Poetry Worth Hearing and BBC Upload. She is also one third of the poetry trio @boominglovelies

<https://www.instagram.com/magentapink22/>

<https://www.facebook.com/p/Trisha-Broomfield-Poetry-100058910088988/>

**Virna TEIXEIRA** is a Brazilian published poet, short story writer, translator, and visual artist. Her poetry collections have been published in South America and Portugal. She runs an independent poetry project, Carnival Press where she has also self-published her work. In the UK, her poems have appeared in *datableed*, *Poetry Wales*, *Painted Spoken*, *Zarf*, *Pamenar* to name some. She works as a psychiatrist and is a Jungian analyst in training.

<http://www.virnateixeira.com>

<https://www.instagram.com/virna.visual.art/>

<https://www.instagram.com/carnavalpress/>