

HAMISH HAMILTON PRESENTS

Five Dials

NUMBER 42

Days of Shame

Paul Maliszewski | *Fatherhood in the Age of Trump*

Javier Marías | *My Favourite Book*

Zadie Smith | *Interviews Eminem*

James Robertson | *Listens to Frogs*

Jack Underwood | *New Fiction*

Plus: Brazilians in London, debtors in jail, Roger Deakin's belongings, Martha Sprackland reads voraciously, Noam Chomsky reveals the extent of American power, and one lucky short fiction writer takes first place in our climate change competition

Contributors

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JAMES ROBERTSON is a poet, essayist, editor and writer of fiction. He was born in Kent but has lived in Scotland since the age of six, and in rural Angus for the last fourteen years. He has published six novels, including *The Testament of Gideon Mack*, *And the Land Lay Still*, *The Professor of Truth* and *To Be Continued* (all published by Hamish Hamilton), and four collections of short stories. In 2013 he wrote a 365-word story every day of the year. These were published daily on-line during 2014, and in book form as *365: Stories*. He is currently working on a book about the Dundee songwriter, performer and all-round genius Michael Marra (1952–2012).

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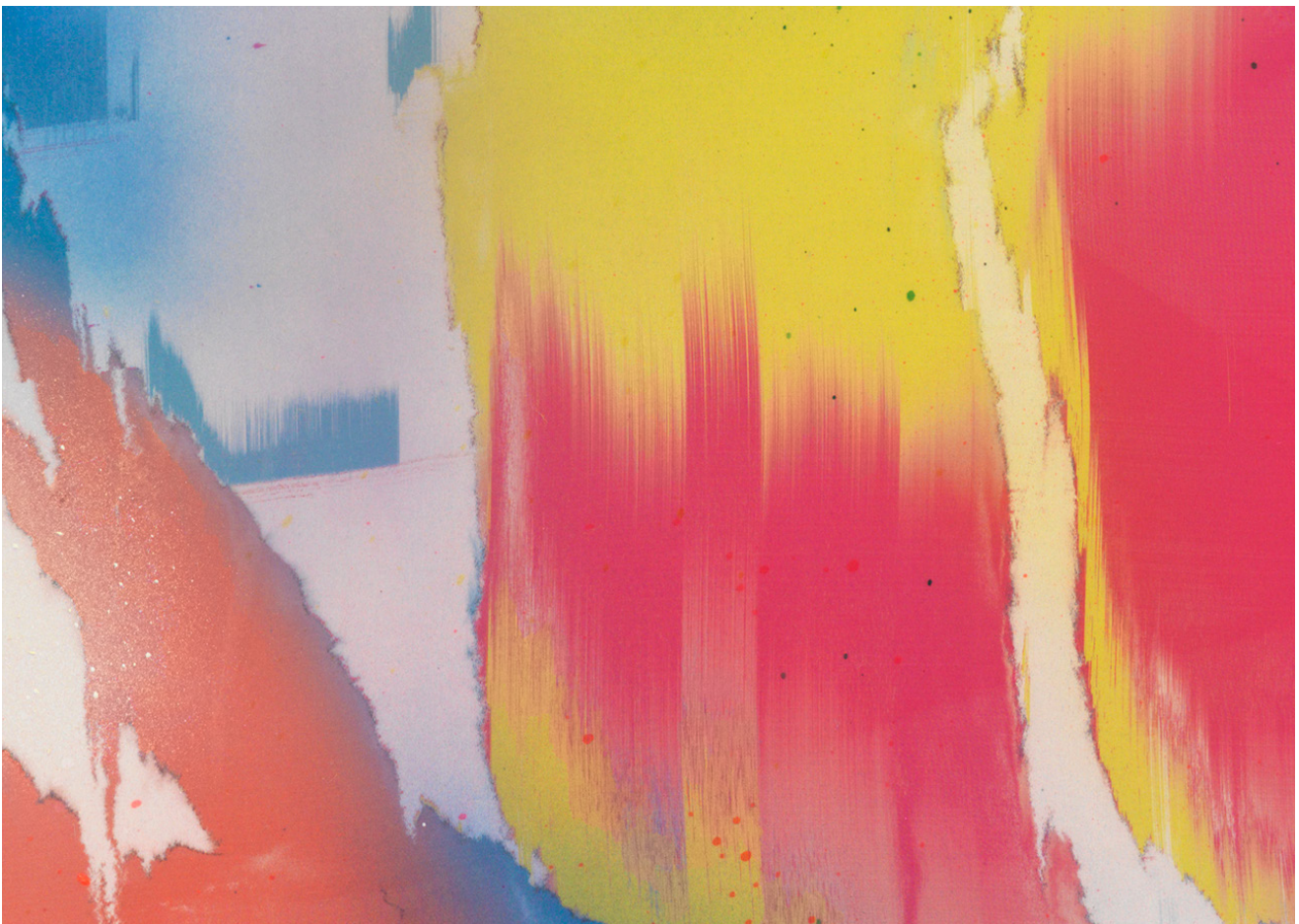


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Unable to Contribute

Some writers and journalists can't write for *Five Dials*

GULMIRE IMIN (Freelance, China) was one of several administrators of Uyghur-language Web forums arrested after the July 2009 riots in Urumqi — riots which began as protest over the death of Uyghur migrant workers in Guangdong province.

Imin held a local government post in Urumqi. She contributed poetry and short stories to the cultural website *Salkin*, and was invited to moderate the site in spring 2009.

Authorities accused Imin of being an organiser of the demonstrations on 5th July 2009, and of using the Uyghur-language website to distribute information about the event. Imin had been critical of the government in her online writing. The website was shut down after the riots: its contents were deleted.

In August 2010, Imin was sentenced to life imprisonment on charges of separatism and organising an illegal demonstration. Imin was also accused of leaking state secrets by phone to her husband who lives in Norway. Her husband told the Committee to Protect Journalists that he called her on 5th July 2009, but just to check whether she was safe.

Uyghurs make up less than 1% of China's overall population; CPJ found that 17 of 44 jailed journalists in China were Uyghur — nearly 40%.

Imin was being held in the Xinjiang women's prison in Urumqi. CPJ could not determine the status of her health in late 2016.

AHMED ABBA (Radio France Internationale, Cameroon) was a correspondent for RFI's Hausa service, was arrested as he left a press briefing at the office of a local governor in Maroua, capital of Cameroon's Far North region, on 30th July 2015. He was taken to Cameroon's capital, Yaoundé, and denied access to his lawyer until 19th October. Officials did not take a statement from Abba until 13th November — more than three months after his arrest, which is against the law.

The journalist's lawyer, Charles Tchoungang, said Abba was interrogated in relation to the activities of extremist sect Boko Haram — infamous for the kidnapping of

over 200 girls in northern Nigeria — which has been increasing its presence in northern Cameroon since 2014.

A military tribunal charged Abba with complicity in acts of terrorism and failure to denounce acts of terrorism under Cameroon's 2014 Anti-Terrorism Law. According to prosecutors, Abba failed to inform authorities he had been in contact with Boko Haram members. The maximum sentence for the charges is the death penalty.

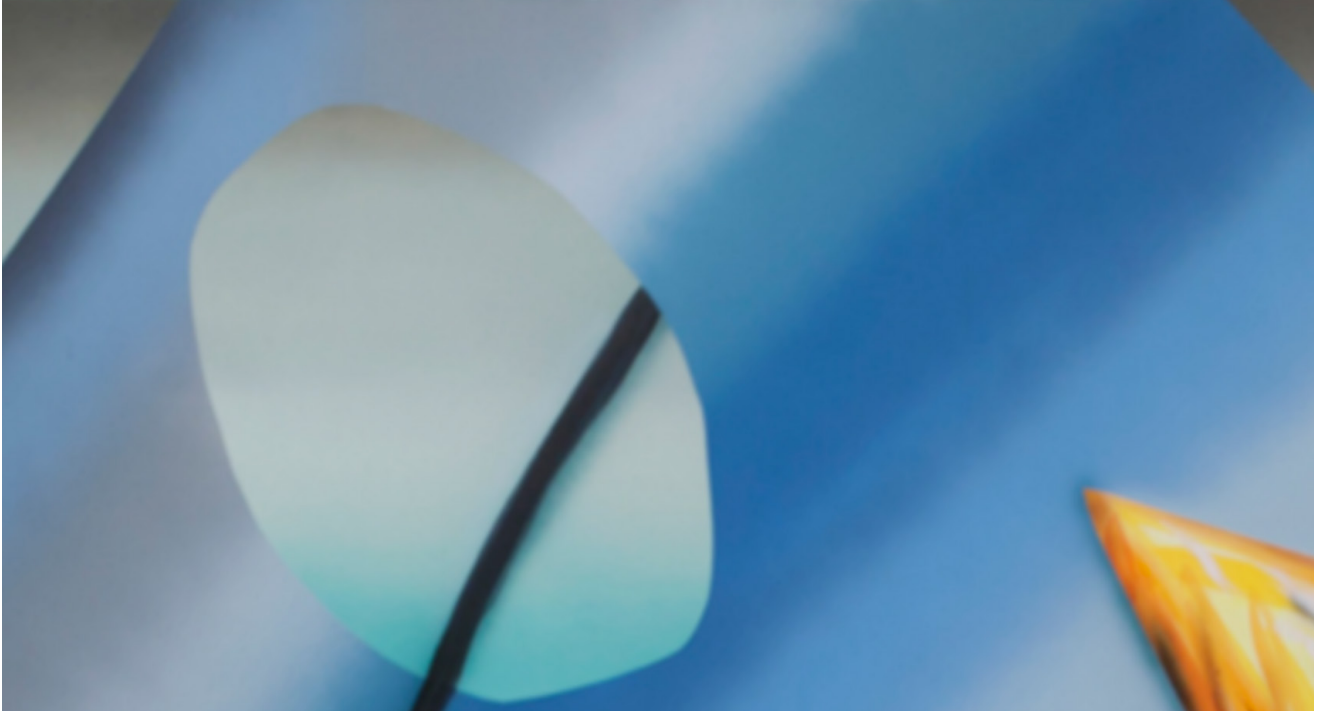
Abba pleaded not guilty at a hearing in August 2016. RFI reported that Abba mostly covered refugee issues in the region but had also covered attacks executed by Boko Haram. RFI issued a statement in June 2016 saying Abba's reporting had been professional and calling for his immediate release.

ZEHRA DOGAN (Jin News Agency, JINHA, Turkey). On 22nd July 2016, police detained Zehra Dogan — a reporter for the pro-Kurdish *Jin News Agency* (JINHA), which is staffed entirely by women — in Nusaybin, in Turkey's south eastern Mardin Province. The following day, the Nusaybin Court of Penal Peace ordered the journalist to be jailed pending trial on charges of 'being a member of a terrorist organisation'. Mardin's Second Court for Serious Crimes also indicted Dogan on the charge of 'making propaganda for a [terrorist] organisation'.

At the time of Dogan's arrest, Nusaybin was the site of urban warfare between Turkish security forces and ethnic-Kurdish fighters. The state's evidence in their indictment consists of testimonies from people saying that they saw Dogan talking with people in the street. Witnesses said that they could not hear the conversations but insisted that they were 'organisation meetings'. Witnesses also said they saw Dogan ask locals to pose with tools as though helping fighters dig trenches and construct barricades — showing the local population's support for the fight.

Dogan denied being a member of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), maintained that the conversations in question were part of her reporting, and denied the photographs being posed, the records show.

As of late 2016, Dogan was jailed in Mardin Prison, pending trial.



SUBMISSIONS FROM...

Our Glorious Readers

...on the subject of Rowena and climate change

A while ago we decided to start holding contests. It seemed like a way to connect with writers, as well as a chance to urge into being stories and poems we'd like to read.

With our own interests in mind, we announced the first in a series of incredibly specific commissions. Each of these commissions will consist of a set of harsh guidelines. This is necessary, as we are living in a time of harsh guidelines. The submissions will be rigorously vetted. We hesitate to use the phrase extreme vetting techniques, but some entries to our first contest were returned because, for instance, a writer forgot to name the lead character Rowena.

Here is what we asked for to kick off the series: a short story, 300-400 words in length, about a scientist who smuggles out crucial climate change facts under the iron fist of a censorial government. The scientist's name must be Rowena. The story must contain the line of dialogue: 'Some things you just don't see coming.'

The winner of this first contest will receive three pristine Hamish Hamilton hardcover books, one with an interesting fact about climate change written on the inside of the front cover.

Not long after we publicized the contest, submissions began appearing in our inbox, and so did Rowena, in her many incarnations. In Carla Manfredino's story,

for instance, she's a government scientist who writes a weekly climate-change column for an environmental magazine called ENVI-REVOLT. Paul Currion's Rowena also works for the government, as '...the youngest ever Government Chief Scientific Adviser, to a government punch drunk on the power of big data.' Hers is a world where roles are changing, where 'Q rather than Bond' could very well become the hero of the day.'

Here is what we asked for to kick off the series: a short story, 300-400 words in length, about a scientist who smuggles out crucial climate change facts under the iron fist of a censorial government. The scientist's name must be Rowena.

Emma Howell's submission points out that Rowena's name is derived from what witches consider the 'tree of healing'; she'll need otherworldly powers for the fight ahead. Laurence Reilly's Rowena has just made a terrifying discovery about rising sea levels.

In most of the stories, Rowena finds decent allies. Maeve Benz has her join forces with a group of dedicated resisters consisting of 'PhDs and convicts and convicts with PhDs, and PhDs soon to be convicts.' Our heroine is asked if she's ready. 'Rowena hasn't slept for three days and her eyes sting and the oceans are eating away at every coastline like a hungry beast and the orange-brown smog is lowering, swiftly and surely and no one will be ready for the drought when it comes or the storms when they tear the Midwest open, but there is no option other than to say, "I'm ready".'

In Nick Perry's story, the crucial delivery is made by Rowena's dog, creating a hero in Sal the Rhodesian Ridgeback.

In JY Saville's piece, Rowena hands her findings to a compatriot in the struggle, cunningly disguising the information as a recipe.

"Pea soup?"

"It's humidity data," she said.'

Even in 300-400 words, Rowena becomes again and again a woman of action as well as thought. She talks to herself, questions herself, urges herself on. In Sarah Manvel's submission, she ponders her choices while drinking tea, knowing that the climate will continue to change regardless of what she does. 'I'm meant to be a scientist, not a censor,' she says to herself as she cups her hands around the mug.

In her story, Lorna Caizley imagines a future made possible by the elevation of people like Scott Pruitt, the new head of the EPA, who believes that carbon dioxide has no connection to climate change. 'The drinking water for the whole state was in jeopardy,' Caizley writes, 'but the government clause in her contract had forbidden her to utter a single word.' Nevertheless, Rowena is 'headed to the local news station.' At least in Caizley's future, local news has survived in some form. What about the Mainstream Media?

Maya Charlton's Rowena is intent on spreading her findings to that coveted larger audience. Even in a rush, she listens to her driver, who tells her there's now a law banning taco trucks on corners. "I know, I know." Rowena leaned her head against the window. "Anyway, I got all my climate change research from my old office. The editor of the *New York Times* has agreed to publish it,

although who knows how many people still read it since it went underground."

Spreading the information is difficult, even at specified drop points. Pete Segall's tense drop-off scene takes place in a boisterous fast food joint. Ordering a salad and Coke, Rowena conceals an all-important envelope under her tray, relinquishing it only when a co-conspirator provides the predetermined verbal code.

As for Lyndsay Wheble's Rowena, she heads down to the docks to dispatch her report by boat, its pages ruffling 'like anemones.' Deb Tomkins sends her character through airport security. 'At the gate soldiers demanded Rowena's travel documents, rummaged through bags, ripped up nappies. Nothing was found, no stolen papers, no memory sticks, no scientific reading matter. Her camera, laptop and phone were confiscated.

'President's orders,' an officer said. 'So, why Scotland?'

'My husband's family.'

'You Muslim?'

'No.'

'No, *sir*.'

'No, *sir*.'

Although Rowena dies in some versions, and helps her dog to achieve success in others, mostly the cumulative portrait is of a scientist transformed into a fighter. We were impressed by the anger, the passion, the sense of consequence and the respect for scientific inquiry in the stories. In Kester Brewin's submission, Rowena gets angry as only a woman committed to the truth can. Shouldn't we all now adopt some version of her outrage?

'You can waterboard a scientist,' Rowena hissed, 'but you cannot break a fact.'

—

To read the winning story, please go to page 76.

FAQ

What does Dave Eggers think about the current situation?

HERE IS YOUR ANSWER

How about Alain de Botton?

HERE IS YOUR ANSWER

How about Nikita Lalwani?

HERE IS YOUR ANSWER

What's the best thing to do after sex?

HERE IS YOUR ANSWER

How does it feel to be instantly canonical?

HERE IS YOUR ANSWER

How does a ghost enter?

HERE IS YOUR ANSWER

Always? Never?

HERE IS YOUR ANSWER

What does Iran truly look like?

HERE IS YOUR ANSWER



OUR TOWN

NWII

Leaving Brazil and, eventually, loving London.

By Luiza Sauma

My parents, both psychoanalysts, thought Hampstead looked nice. It's the kind of genteel London neighbourhood one dreams of when living in South America under a military dictatorship, and Freud had lived there, after all. But we couldn't afford it, so we went one tube stop along and settled in Temple Fortune, NWII, a dowdy suburb near Golders Green, mostly inhabited by Orthodox Jews. It was 1986, the year after the dictatorship ended in Brazil. My mother was a lapsed Jew, my father a lapsed Catholic, and they had three children aged four to nine. I was the youngest. Our flat in Rio de Janeiro — three blocks from Ipanema beach, with a view of Christ the Redeemer — was rented out. At my new school in London, I sat in a corner with the other immigrants; all of us mute, unable to communicate. When my teacher spoke to me, I could only understand my name.

Trauma affects people in different ways. For my older brother, coming to the UK — where we had no family, connections or language — erased all his childhood memories. I was the opposite: the move crystallized my memories of Rio. Walking up the hill to school, surrounded by thick greenery, afraid that we would see a snake; living in our twelfth-floor flat, with my grandparents on the eleventh; running into a wall, face-first, at my parents' social club in Leblon; chanting in

the car, with my brother and sister, the four words we knew in English, 'Cat, dog, yes, no'; our maid mopping the floor of our kitchen. It felt normal for her to be living there, taking care of us.

We were supposed to stay in London for two or three years; just enough time for my parents to develop their careers, for us to learn English and let that European glamour wash over us, before we returned to Ipanema, to our club, to discuss the merits of socialism at dinner parties, as maids cleared our plates. (To be fair, my parents and their friends were ardent activists, and no more hypocritical than some of the socialists I know in London. Latin America is just a very different milieu.)

But by the late eighties, the situation in Brazil had worsened: hyperinflation, escalating debt, widespread violence in the cities. When we visited, friends and family would casually recount stories of murder, robbery and kidnapping. The country sprinted through several short-lived currencies; prices went up every week and money lost its worth as soon it was in your pocket. My grandmother told my mother, over the phone, 'You should stay in London.' Her advice wasn't given lightly. At the age of twenty-three she fled Poland alone, betrothed to a man in Rio she had never met — my grandfather. They had a difficult marriage, but it saved

her life. Everyone else ended up in Auschwitz. My grandmother never visited Poland again, but she called it 'minha terra' — my homeland — until she died, aged 101. The last time I saw her she told me that the year we left Brazil was one of the most devastating of her life.

'Living in Europe was like dying and going to heaven,' says André Cabral, the protagonist of my novel, *Flesh and Bone and Water*, of his adolescent fantasies about leaving Brazil. My parents, in their late thirties, weren't quite as misty-eyed, but they couldn't have imagined how tough it would be, especially for their children. It's often assumed that migration is easier for young people, because they are more malleable. On the contrary, I believe that it's more challenging, because children don't have a concrete sense of self — they have more to lose. You don't step off the plane and slide into a new identity, like a foot into a shoe. It's a painstaking process, a learned performance. I spent years making small, conscious modifications to my character, to be more British when I was in London, more Brazilian in Rio.

I was Brazilian in the summer of 1986, when we arrived, and I was still Brazilian by the end of that year. I realized that I was ceasing to be Brazilian — and becoming, not British, but something indefinable — when we went to Rio in 1987 for the Christmas holidays. My friend Tatiana gasped when I said the word *paletó* — blazer. I had been explaining British school uniforms to her.

'It's not *paletó*; it's *paletó*,' she said, but I couldn't hear the difference. 'You can't speak Portuguese any more!' She laughed hysterically as my face burned with shame.

It was incredible to imagine that, if I hadn't gone to London, I too would be waited on like a princess. It seemed terrifying to be so useless, so dependent on others and so blind to the inequality of that relationship.

Seven years after we left, my parents sent for their furniture, records and paintings, and sold the flat in Ipanema. They recreated the flat in our new house — an Edwardian terrace near Golders Green station — minus the view of the ocean and Jesus, and the maid. We didn't

yet have indefinite leave to remain in the UK, but this wasn't something I was aware of, as a child — the touch-and-go nature of our existence here.

—

We went to Rio almost every year. I swam in the salty, rough Atlantic off Ipanema beach and in the cool, calm pool in Leblon. I ran away from cockroaches at Tatiana's flat and ate dinner served by her maid, Dada, who we loved so dearly. My sister and I watched MTV Brasil at my grandmother's flat until our eyes were sore. It was there that I first watched the video to Nirvana's 'Smells Like Teen Spirit', which both thrilled and terrified me.

In London, my limbs grew long and cumbersome, and my skin fluorescent white, from lack of sun. In Rio, relatives routinely mocked my whiteness and my accent. The Carioca humour, like the ocean, is often salty and rough. In the middle of Passover in Leblon, I locked myself in a bathroom and wept. I developed a phobia of speaking in public — in any language.

In the eighties and nineties, almost every flat I visited in Rio's wealthy Zona Sul was home to at least one hard-working, low-paid, black *empregada*, a maid who did everything for her white employers. (These days, thanks to new labour laws — maximum working hours and a minimum wage — it's less common for domestic workers to live in-house.) Our family and friends weren't aristocrats, but doctors, architects, engineers and civil servants. A princely life for the professional classes, while outside the spiked walls of their apartment buildings children lived and died in the streets. Many of the *empregadas* had family back home, in the favelas or further away, who they saw infrequently. But their sacrifice was often not recognized, and it was common to hear employers say, behind their backs, 'Poor thing. She's such an idiot. Such a bad cook.' The parallels with slavery, which Brazil abolished after every other western country, were stark. It was incredible to imagine that, if I hadn't gone to London, I too would be waited on like a princess. It seemed terrifying to be so useless, so dependent on others and so blind to the inequality of that relationship.

I cut my hair short and dyed it blue, and pierced my nose, tongue and belly button. On holiday in Rio, the sun bleached my hair till it was pale green. I couldn't have looked more foreign. Not in the anodyne European style admired by Cariocas, but like a freak. Rio still felt like home, but it didn't want me. It rejected me like a body rejecting a useless organ.

London didn't want me either. It was difficult to see beyond the grey skies, my mediocrity at school — both academic and social — and my blistering, chronic anxiety. I didn't have a single friend who shared my cultural

background, and I envied the Asian girls, posh girls and 'real' Jewish girls (who went to *shul* and believed in God) for having the close-knit community I craved, the comfort of sameness.

I was still Brazilian when a drunk man at Leeds train station screamed at me to get out of the country, 'you fucking immigrant', though by then I was also British, passport and all.

I was still Brazilian when a classmate berated me for supporting Brazil in the 1998 World Cup. 'You're in *England* now; you should support *England*.' I was still Brazilian later that year, when my cousin introduced me, in Rio, as '*minha prima inglesa*' — my English cousin. I was still Brazilian when I went to Leeds to study literature and became friends with lots of white English people, when previously most of my friends had been first- or second-generation immigrants. I was still Brazilian when one of my new friends jokingly, and erroneously, called me a 'spic' (Brazil is Lusophone, not Hispanic). I forgave him easily, just as I hope I've been forgiven for my own youthful insensitivities.

I was still Brazilian when a drunk man at Leeds train station screamed at me to get out of the country, 'you fucking immigrant', though by then I was also British, passport and all.

We thought we hated London, my siblings and I, but really we hated the feeling of not belonging. Not here, not in Rio, nowhere. My brother and sister reacted to this by chasing Brazilianness as though it were a pot of gold. They improved their Portuguese, made Brazilian friends, my brother moved to Lisbon and returned with a Brazilian wife; my sister moved back to Rio and returned with a Brazilian partner. Junot Díaz expressed a similar impulse in a 2008 interview: 'I became a fanatic of the Dominican Republic based on the fact that it was taken away from me.'

I became better at being Brazilian too. I grew my hair long, took out my piercings and learned the words to Brazilian songs, but I never wanted to move back. I planned to go somewhere entirely new — like my parents,

my Polish grandparents, my Lebanese great-grandfather and all the other immigrants I'm descended from. I looked at photos of California and felt my insides ache. Yes, this was the answer. As Mr Lies tells Harper in *Angels in America*: 'It's the price of rootlessness. Motion sickness. The only cure: to keep moving.'

It was love, in the end, that anchored me. I met Tim when we were at different universities, but we were both from London, so that's where we spent our weekends. I began to appreciate the wild beauty of Hampstead Heath, the city's unrivalled diversity, the comfort of a London accent. I graduated and moved away from NW11, to neighbourhoods I barely knew. With my English boyfriend, I began to explore my adopted country, beyond the capital, for the first time. My parents had rarely taken me outside the M25. They didn't feel comfortable in all-white English villages: their accents and my father's Lebanese–Amerindian face still give them away as outsiders, even after thirty years in this country.

At twenty-three I swam in the North Sea and then shivered on the beach, something I had previously seen as the preserve of mad, hardy English people. When I told my parents, they said, 'You're really English now!' But it's always a relief to return to London, to be among people whose origins are also distant and multifarious, to hear dozens of languages spoken in the street.

It's an accident, all of it. Growing up in NW11, becoming a British novelist, living a life that balances between two continents, even when I'm just walking from Golders Green station to my parents' house, our own little Ipanema; even as I write this essay in the British Library. When I leave I will put my headphones on and walk to King's Cross, listening to Gilberto Gil or Caetano Veloso — music from my parents' youth, as comforting and familiar as Nirvana — and I will merge with the crowd. Another immigrant in this city of immigrants.



OUR TOWN

WC2

Londoners have always had a problem with debt.

By Jerry White

I enter in this little book the names of the streets I can't go down while the shops are open. This dinner today closes Long Acre. I bought a pair of boots in Great Queen Street last week, and made that no thoroughfare too. There's only one avenue to the Strand left open now, and I shall have to stop that up to-night with a pair of gloves. The roads are closing so fast in every direction, that in about a month's time, unless my aunt sends me a remittance, I shall have to go three or four miles out of town to get over the way.

So Dick Swiveller, one of Charles Dickens's more amiable debtors, made shift to exist on an empty pocket in his single room dwelling, somewhere 'in the neighbourhood of Drury Lane' around 1840. As a debtor he was in good company. Everyone was a debtor in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century London, as had been the case for long before. Almost everyone remains a debtor two centuries on too, though with one big difference.

In Dick Swiveller's day and before there was no generally applicable credit mechanism available from a bank or building society or credit provider that enabled a debtor to spend freely in many places to an agreed limit. Debt then was personal, between a purchaser needing credit for one or a few items and a seller prepared to provide it. It

was a face-to-face arrangement between individuals who would know each other again. So debt, because personal, had spatial consequences, curtailing movement to avoid embarrassing local encounters, as for Dick. It could also involve restrictions of a more drastic kind, as we shall see.

If everyone was a debtor for a time it was not necessarily through inability or unwillingness to pay, for deferred payment on credit was the way business was generally organized. Great merchants or bankers traded not in ready money but by means of bills of exchange, a promise to pay at some point in the future, allowing time for goods to be sold or other debts gathered in. If disaster struck and merchants proved unable to honour outstanding bills they could take advantage of the bankruptcy laws and sell up in gentlemanly sessions with the Commissioners in Bankruptcy, without any of the humiliations of arrest or imprisonment that less wealthy people suffered.

For ordinary folk too, debts were an unavoidable part of everyday life. During much of the eighteenth century, specie — ready coin of the realm — was in such short supply, especially in small denominations, that it suited buyer and seller to allow an account to accumulate till it could be paid in silver or gold or, more rarely, by a banknote or draft. Paying with ready money was reserved generally for transactions between strangers — travellers

at an inn, say, or buyers from a street seller or pedlar. An account or tally would be run up with the grocer, baker, butcher or milkman, all on the credit of an address given, confirmed by the tradesman's delivery. Something ought to and might be occasionally paid on account, but otherwise the bill was rendered after a time thought reasonable by both sides: on the four quarter days, for instance, or even, for smart tailors or upholders (furnishers and interior designers) serving the quality, once a year at Christmas, when interest would be openly added to the bill. Indeed, delays in presenting a bill were considered polite. Delivering a bill or account too early was thought greedy or impertinent and could lose a customer for life. Tradesmen built into their pricing an element for bad debts, because it was anticipated that not all money owed could be gathered in.

The poor needed credit too, perhaps none more so, when the absence of ready money might mean a family going hungry. For them special mechanisms had been constructed, like pawnbrokers who would lend money on possessions at high interest, or informal pawning arrangements at public houses or with their grocers. By the beginning of the eighteenth century a new facility had come into fashion: tallymen or 'Manchester' or 'scotch' drapers selling 'Cloaths and such things' on credit, but requiring weekly repayments from poor customers at high interest. All these transactions could go wrong and tallymen were seen as 'a sort of Usurers', according to a pamphlet of 1716, 'where some of these oppressors are said to have above a hundred of these poor Wretches in the several Jayls in and near London at a time'.

Although the tallymen may have been notoriously quick off the mark, the truth is that when people got into debt they usually owed money everywhere. When John Rummells, 'Marriner' of Greenwich, totted up his creditors while in the Marshalsea in 1725 he listed six different 'victuallers', probably publicans, a City tallyman and a 'salesman', a butcher, baker, candle seller (tallow chandler), 'fisherman' and 'fisherwoman', a carpenter, an 'officer' (probably a Marshalsea bailiff), two 'Marriners', 'Elizabeth Baker, alias Read' (no occupation given) and three doctors (a 'surgion' and two 'Barbers'), twenty-one in all and scattered around the four naval towns of Greenwich, Deptford — or Debtford, as he once appropriately rendered it — Gosport and Portsmouth. It was the butcher who got his claim in first and made the arrest that put Rummells in the Marshalsea for £30. Many tradesmen devised mechanisms to avoid the losses consequent on untrustworthy credit and an unpaid bill. Landlords, those unofficial and unwilling bankers to the poor, frequently demanded prior references and a week's or month's rent in advance. Many shopkeepers had their own rules for refusing credit: 'Upon my word, sir, you must excuse me. It is a thing we never do to a stranger,' a sword-maker in the Strand told James Boswell, who had asked to

take away a silver-hilted weapon on a promise to pay later, though he relented under his customer's haughty gaze.

Others sought security by requiring a debtor to obtain a counter-signature or 'acceptance' to an IOU or promissory note, ideally a known householder or one from a good address; anyone signing, often family members or close friends, could find themselves liable for the whole sum if the debtor defaulted, and this gave creditors a further opportunity to get their money back.

Tradesmen who gave long credit were also, of course, debtors themselves. Tailors would owe drapers, cabinet-makers would owe gilders or timber merchants, shopkeepers would notoriously owe suppliers, employers would owe their journeymen wages, journeymen would owe publicans, publicans would owe brewers and so on and so forth. And any or all might owe the moneylenders if no other resource was open to them, none more experienced in the fine arts of recovering a debt through adroit manipulation of the law.

So debt, because personal, had spatial consequences, curtailing movement to avoid embarrassing local encounters.

True it was, then, that all sorts and conditions of men and women were in debt. When the *Morning Post* analyzed the occupations of 941 debtors going through the insolvency court in August 1801, it listed 252 distinct walks of life, from labourers (nineteen) to Doctors of Divinity (one). Retailers of one kind or another were prominent among them, with thirty-one 'shopkeepers', many others specifically described, and seventy-five 'victuallers', victims of countless real-life Dick Swivellers. In general, contemporary authorities agreed that debtors ending up in gaol were 'about two-thirds Manufacturers and Labourers — the remainder seamen, Dealers and Chapmen [or pedlars] and various Professions'. Those who had most difficulties were additionally burdened beyond the daily vicissitudes of industrial life, tending to be 'married; and many of them have very large families; some five, others six, and others ten Children'. Added to these, with children or without, was a small but significant proportion of women debtors, including many widows and women abandoned by men.

When a creditor's patience was exhausted the law provided the means to bully or frighten a debtor into paying up at last. The weapons at a creditor's disposal meant that, for countless numbers of debtors, debt could become a galling blight on their lives, never shaken off. Many of those cultured and sophisticated men and women who made the eighteenth century a particular age of genius did so with the shadow of the debtors' prison wall dark upon them. Artists like Gawen Hamilton, George Morland and Thomas Bonner, writers like Daniel Defoe, Sir Richard Steele, Henry Fielding, Laetitia Pilkington, Samuel Johnson, Oliver Goldsmith and John Cleland, actresses like Mary Robinson and Charlotte Charke, all saw the inside of a bailiff's lock-up or spunging (or sponging) house, if not worse. In England, it was said in 1716, there 'are more unhappy People to be found, suffering under extream Misery, by the severity of their Creditors, than in any other nation in *Europe*'.

The weapons at a creditor's disposal meant that, for countless numbers of debtors, debt could become a galling blight on their lives, never shaken off.

Not all of them were innocent victims. Debtors might have subterfuge, dishonesty, even fraud among the weapons with which they waged war on the innocent creditor. Hiding might be the first instinct, as it was for Dick Swiveller, perhaps 'in an obscure lodging, somewhere in the neighbourhood of Kilburn, in order to avoid the *traps*', or bailiffs, it was said in 1821. Because arrests couldn't be made at night or on Sundays, such a discreet debtor was called 'a *once-a-week man*, or, in other words, a *Sunday promenader*...' Obscure and ancient jurisdictions gave certain places in London immunity from arrest for debt, the longest-lived of these being the 'verge of the court', land belonging to the royal household around the King's Mews north of Charing Cross and extending to the royal parks. Sought-after lodgings could be rented in the verge: 'I knew an artful fellow once', recalled the reverend John Trusler in 1786, 'that eluded all his creditors, by residing there; if he wanted to go out of it, he took water at Whitehall-stairs, which place is privileged, and as no writ can be served on the water, without a water-bailiff's warrant, which cannot be immediately procured, he would land safely in the city, or on the Surry side', where some Middlesex or City writs had no force.

Experienced debtors would know their way around such rabbit warrens: that proceedings in the Marshalsea or Palace court could not be brought if a debt was incurred in the City or more than twelve miles from Whitehall, nor arrests made in the City on a Marshalsea warrant alone, for instance, despite that court offering creditors the cheapest and quickest grip on those owing debts above the smallest. Even prison could be an effective hiding place, some debtors intriguing with family or friends — a man could be arrested at his wife's suit — to work up sham actions and so stop other creditors battenning on them:

The idea, that imprisonment can be a punishment to a man under these circumstances, must instantly vanish: he prepares for his catastrophe with the vizard of distress, and by that craft sets every danger at defiance; his property is conveyed by previous assignments, apparent gifts, spurious loans, and with the semblance of poverty, he possesses a genial fortune, fabricated on the ruin of the credulous, honest, and unsuspecting dealer... to the *collusive* Debtor therefore imprisonment can be no punishment, — for he feels it not as such.

QUESTIONNAIRE

Reading the Classics

My favorite classic is

Madame Bovary

Pride and Prejudice

White Lines

Classic. Just classic.

Which classic is most pertinent at the moment?

1984

It Could Happen Here

It's Happening Right Here, Right at This Moment

It's Literally Happening. Did You See What They Just Did?

It Just Happened Here

How does a book become a classic?

Good cover art

It stands the test of time

It gets made into a film

Plato writes it

Which classic titles end with a question mark?

Who Would Have Thought It? by María Amparo Ruíz de Burton

Can You Forgive Her? by Anthony Trollope

Who Moved My Cheese? by Spencer Johnson

What Is Art? by Leo Tolstoy

How does the classic *The Wolfman and Other Cases* by Sigmund Freud end?

The mother is found guilty

The Wolfman (Benicio del Toro) pursues Gwen (Emily Blunt) and traps her above a gorge. As he hesitates, the hunters approach...

Some seriously, seriously infantile, sexual and aggressive urges

Catharsis!

H.G. Wells loved books with 'war' in the title. Which two of his 'war' books are considered classics?

The War of the Worlds

The War in the Air

War: What Is It Good For?

The Art of War (with Sun Tzu)

How many classics have the word 'Chuzzlewit' in the title?

One

Depends on your definition of chuzzlewit

What's the crucial difference between Edmund Gosse's *Father and Son* and Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons*?

One is a memoir

One has more fathers

One has more sons











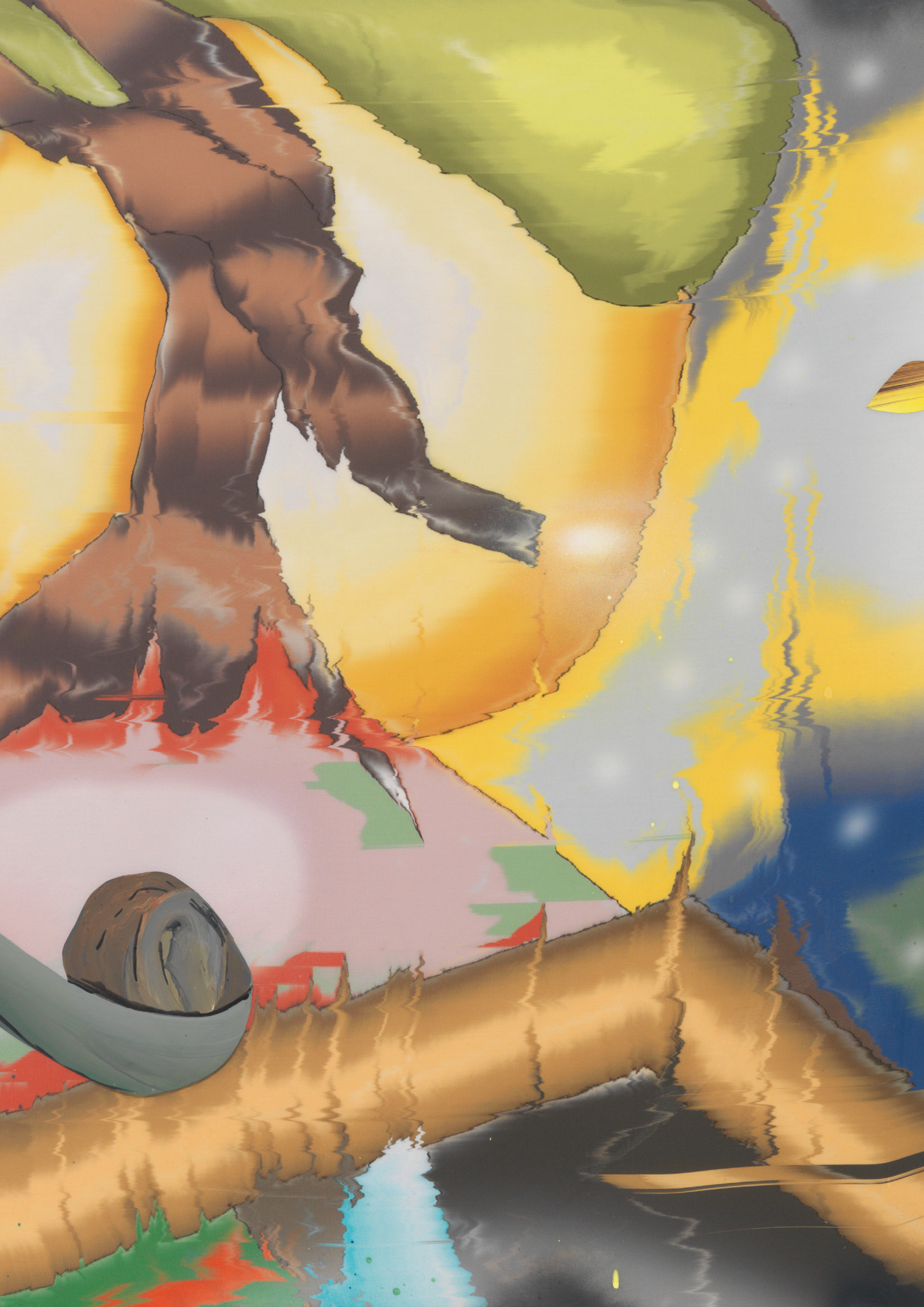


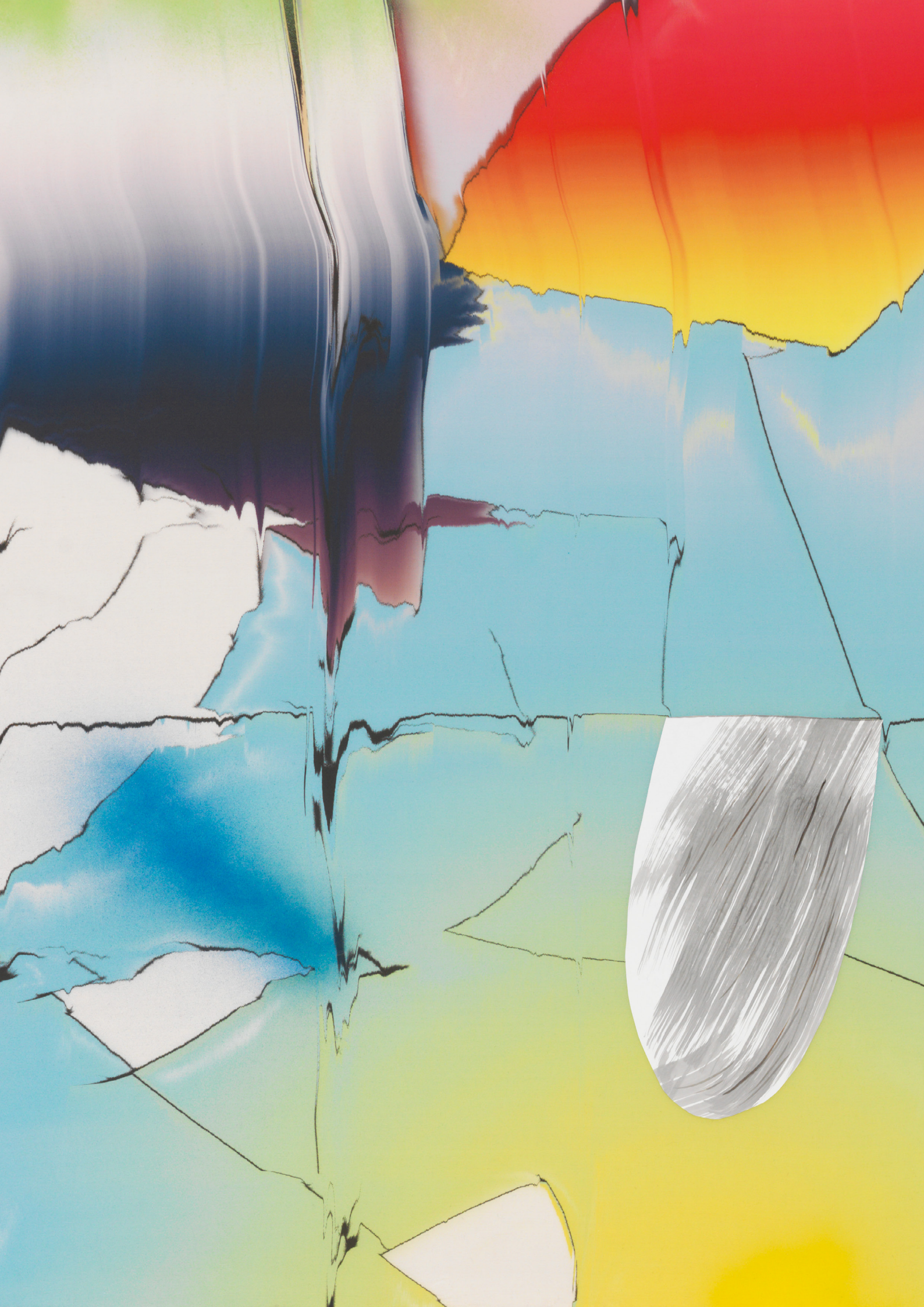










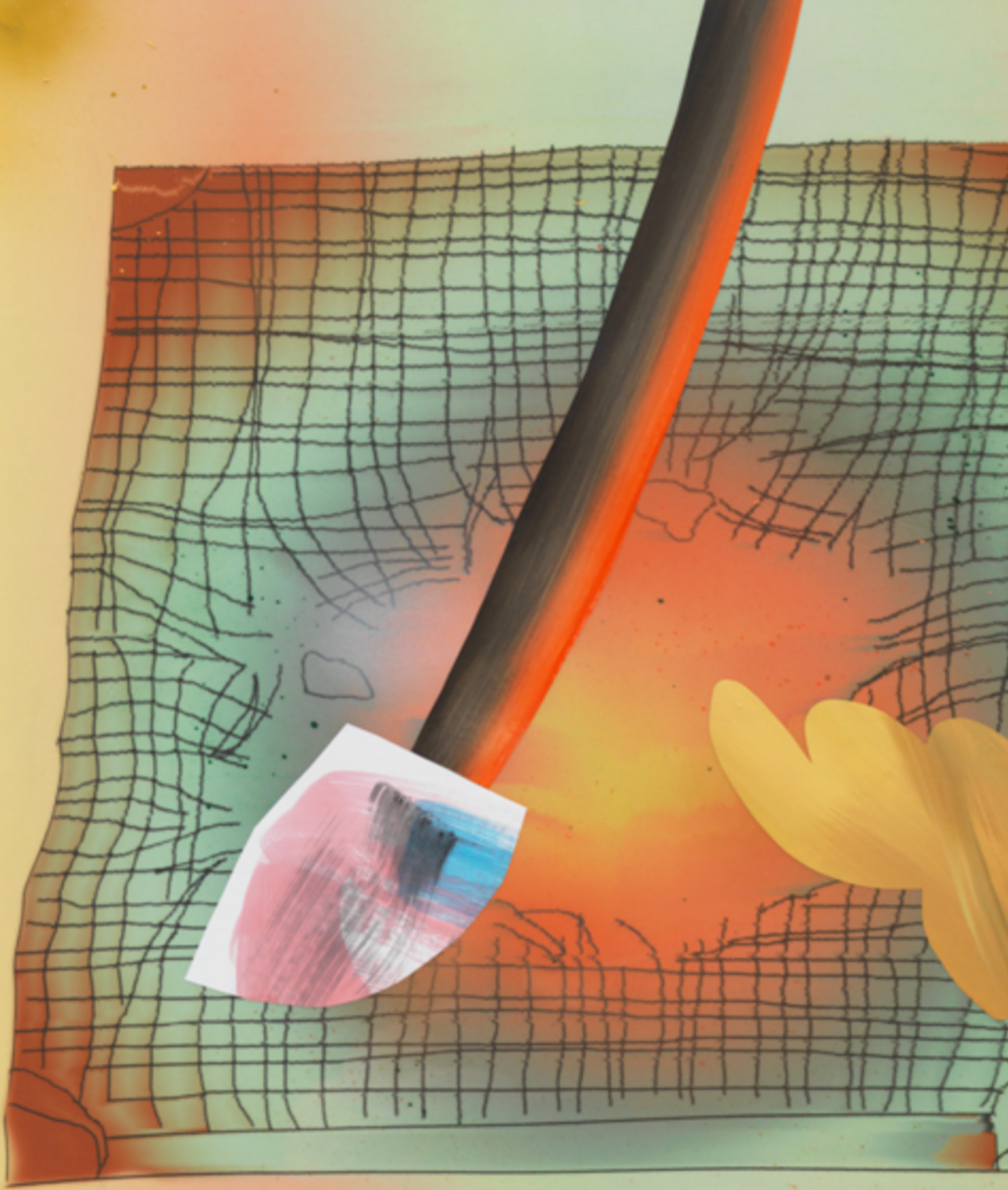



















Above paintings by Lauren Silva

FICTION

Hooper

By Jack Underwood

Hooper had been instructed to walk from one corner of gallery room four to the other, at intervals of her own choosing. The gallery manager had been clear on this: it was up to her. During her traversal crossing of gallery room four, Hooper was to ring the small, blue bell that the gallery manager had given her on behalf of the artist. It would also be up to Hooper to decide at which point during her traversal she would ring the bell; she could ring it the moment she began walking, or as she reached the other end of gallery room four; the art was 'literally in her hands', the gallery manager had said. The gallery manager had then paused briefly before relinquishing the bell to Hooper. It was as if she had communicated too much eagerness to hold the bell while the gallery manager had been talking, had been drawn to it before fully understanding the terms of its use or had intimated a certain impatience towards the specifics of his instruction, and this had made him suspicious about Hooper's readiness to follow the instructions, even though the instructions were simple; was she ready to hold the art *literally in her hands*? Hell, yes, she was!

Hooper was to repeat the sequence of traversing gallery room four and ringing the bell at intervals of her choosing for the duration of her one-hour shift, after which time she would be relieved by Benson, Haroun, Whooten, Afridi, Harris, Wallace, Badami or Collinghurst, depending on whose shift was next and to which room they were assigned. It occurred to Hooper that she could

choose not to traverse gallery room four and choose not to ring the bell at any point during the hour and so she put this idea to the gallery manager. The gallery manager agreed that, yes, she could choose not to ring the bell or traverse gallery room four, but this agreement in principle was accompanied with a wry smile suggesting that this was relatively undesirable as far as the piece of art was concerned, or else unsophisticated as far as her participation in the art was concerned, or perhaps just uninteresting as far as a member of the public might be concerned. Still, it remained a valid option and Hooper felt reassured by it. It took some of the pressure off, knowing that doing nothing was a certain way of doing something, or rather, her relative non-participation was, under the scrutiny of an observer, a very specific form of participation, albeit of an unsophisticated kind, yes, Hooper agreed, accustomizing herself to the weight of the bell, in her right hand, while taking care not to ring it with her left.

In gallery rooms two and five the other performers would each be traversing their rooms and ringing their own bells at intervals of their own choosing, though Hooper would not be able to see them. Hooper would hear the other bells, of course, and this, the artist had explained to the gallery manager via email, would inevitably create a tension between the performers; their independent agency would in some way be compromised; for instance, the first performer to ring their bell might be felt by

the other performers to have *got ahead*. Or it might be that one performer was perceived by the others to be withholding their bell, or only ringing their bell when their gallery room was empty; even if Hooper focussed on her own bell-ringing and crossing the room, the loud peel of another performer's bell would no doubt awaken such internal considerations of external influences. Indeed, as the artist had speculated in the email to the gallery manager: 'Not thinking about the sound of another performer's bell was', under the scrutiny of an observer, including the performer's self-scrutiny, 'a form of thinking about the bell', an assertion that had caused the gallery manager to smile wryly again, as he read the artist's email out loud from a copy he had printed especially *to get the wording right*, though Hooper also suspected that the gallery manager had printed the email out in part to intimate the correspondence that he had evidently had directly with the artist, the artist being relatively famous, and famously pedantic and perhaps even crotchety, the correspondence in and of itself therefore intimating not only that the gallery manager had been entrusted with relaying the specifics of the art piece, but that by this trust some intimacy had been imparted via the correspondence, and the gallery manager was intimating, yes, thought Hooper, that he had achieved some form of intimacy with this famously crotchety artist, that he was perhaps relatively unique in this intimacy that famously, one might presume, was not granted to just anybody.

The gallery manager's presumed intimacy with the artist was further intimidated by the fact that having relayed the exact contents of the email, the gallery manager nevertheless took it upon himself to paraphrase the exact wording of the artist's email afterwards, as if he had become party, as a result of his intimated correspondence, to a deeper understanding of the piece than the instructions the artist himself had emailed to be relayed to the performers. The idea was, the gallery manager told Hooper, that the bell being rung was a marker of time, and each room was its own reference frame within which each performer was experiencing a different sense of duration, and although this was the case, and he quoted the artist's email directly again at this point, 'The bells would resound across reference frames influencing each performer, interrupting the stability of their own reference frame, and altering their perception of time, and their movement through it. All the while members of the public will move between reference frames', the gallery manager continued, 'experiencing how time is configured singly by each performer, but also as a part of a wider relativity.'

When the gallery manager had finished reading he raised his eyebrows and grinned, saying 'Got it?' in a way that seemed half-sarcastic, as if Hooper had probably *not* got it, as if the email that he had just read from was verging on the ungettable, especially for someone who had not enjoyed a more intimate relationship with the artist

himself via email. Hooper felt, however, that she definitely had *got it*. And anyway, what did it matter? All she had to do was walk across the room when she felt like it, and ring the bell when she felt like it and if she didn't *get it* now, maybe she'd *get it* later, and who even gives a crap if she doesn't *get it* when she lives nearby and can use the free gallery WIFI and her little turn in gallery room four will be earning her £10 an hour, twice a day, for two weeks and that was *her* reference frame, motherfuckers. Hooper smiled.

Was she ready to hold the art literally in her hands? Hell, yes, she was!

Hooper was now contemplating her seventh traversal of gallery room four during her second session of the day. Seven was pretty good going at this point. Or it felt like it was, because there were no clocks on the walls and the performers were not allowed to wear watches so *this point* was more of a feeling than a moment in time exactly. Yesterday, on her second turn, she had only managed four rings during the hour. In three days' time, on her last day, she had already decided she would ring the bell constantly, walking ceaselessly back and forth, ringing and ringing. That would really be something. Ha! That would totally fuck with Haroun in gallery room five. Maybe he would start ringing constantly too, and what the fuck would Collinghurst do about that? Would the gallery manager be displeased? Intervene? Fuck it, last shift, who cares? Maybe if there were no member of the public in gallery room four, or maybe just for the last fifteen minutes of the session, or what felt like it was about to be the last fifteen minutes anyway.

One thing that annoyed Hooper about the piece, from a performer's perspective, was that it was very unclear what you were supposed to look at during your hour shift. Perhaps the artist had deliberately left this up to the performer, a further aspect of their agency to play with. Perhaps he had thought long and hard about it, perhaps he hadn't. Either way the first thing you notice when you're all set up with that bell in your hand, is that you're looking straight ahead at a white wall. This is fine until someone comes into gallery room four and you don't know whether to look at them. You desperately want to

look at them, but you know they're looking at you so instead you look at the floor. Hooper had made these her two main options: floor, wall opposite. Occasionally she would look at someone in the room, as she had a moment ago, when a man in green, straight, high-waisted denim trousers and a yellow shirt, with shoes that looked more like moccasin slippers, had walked into gallery room four and paused with his hip at an angle in such a way as to give him a cleft in the crotch, and who after a couple of seconds moved his left hand over his mouth, feeling his stubble. Hooper knew he wanted her to traverse and ring the bell, for her to do something. His hand was still planted over his mouth and Hooper could without looking, and this intimated to her that he was thinking deeply: thinking perhaps about reference frames and duration, or maybe pretending to think about the nature of time but really just looking at her body, taking it all in. His other hand moved onto the hip he'd already stuck out. Hooper could see this at the edge of her vision, which was focussed on the wall opposite. It was a small but clear gesture of impatience, Hooper thought, but she wasn't going to let this dickhead dictate to her when to traverse or not to traverse. Haroun had said that 'if you've been standing in silence for forty minutes holding a stupid green bell' [because Haroun was always in gallery room five where the bell was always green] 'every member of the public that comes in and stands there waiting for you to do something is a dickhead. It could be an old lady, a kid, an eccentric guy with a waxy moustache, I don't care, leave me alone to my traversing, you're a dickhead, back off out of my reference frame and get your own bell.'

It was true, thought Hooper, when you're performing in silence in front of the public you are *you* and they are *them*, there's a distance, and you can't wait for the hour to finish so you can go and bitch about *them* afterwards to all the other *yous*, even though these innocent members of the public have only come to the gallery to look at some art and what was the harm in that? No harm, but it doesn't matter. All are dickheads. Hooper now felt the need to check if the cleft in the man's crotch was still there, and, of course, it was. It was still there when she looked second time, a moment later, and still there, yes, now. Not that it matters. She isn't going to traverse and ring her bell just because the cleft is still there, no sirree. 'The only time the person looking at you isn't a dickhead is if they're superhot Haroun had said, then you're like, drink me in baby, I'm here for a whole hour.'

Hooper smiles lightly at the memory. There had been a few of *them* Hooper had fancied, but anyway, the dynamic was weird and they looked so pretentious watching her, as if they were trying to gather a tension in the room, or make a connection of some kind, as if they were trying to show somehow that they understood what it was like standing there in the corner of gallery room four having your reference frame messed up by these bells

going off while someone passably cute, or at least passably cute in the context of the boredom of the situation, is standing there trying to empathize with you. *They* didn't understand what *that* was like. And they didn't understand what it was like to feel suddenly very self-conscious and trapped, being looked at, and having to feign something like a defiant obliviousness to the whole thing.

It occurs to Hooper that the man in green, straight, high-waisted denim trousers and a yellow shirt might have seen her looking at the cleft in his crotch. She begins traversing gallery room four. The man does not move either of his hands as she nears him. She can see out of the corner of her eye that one hand is still at the mouth, the other hand is still on the hip. She has about ten feet to go before the opposite wall. The man is perhaps twelve feet away from Hooper and four feet to the left of her, though she keeps her eyes fixed straight ahead. Suddenly Collinghurst rings his bell in gallery room two. Hooper looks down and to the left at the cleft in the man's crotch. Still there. Hooper rings the bell.



A LIST

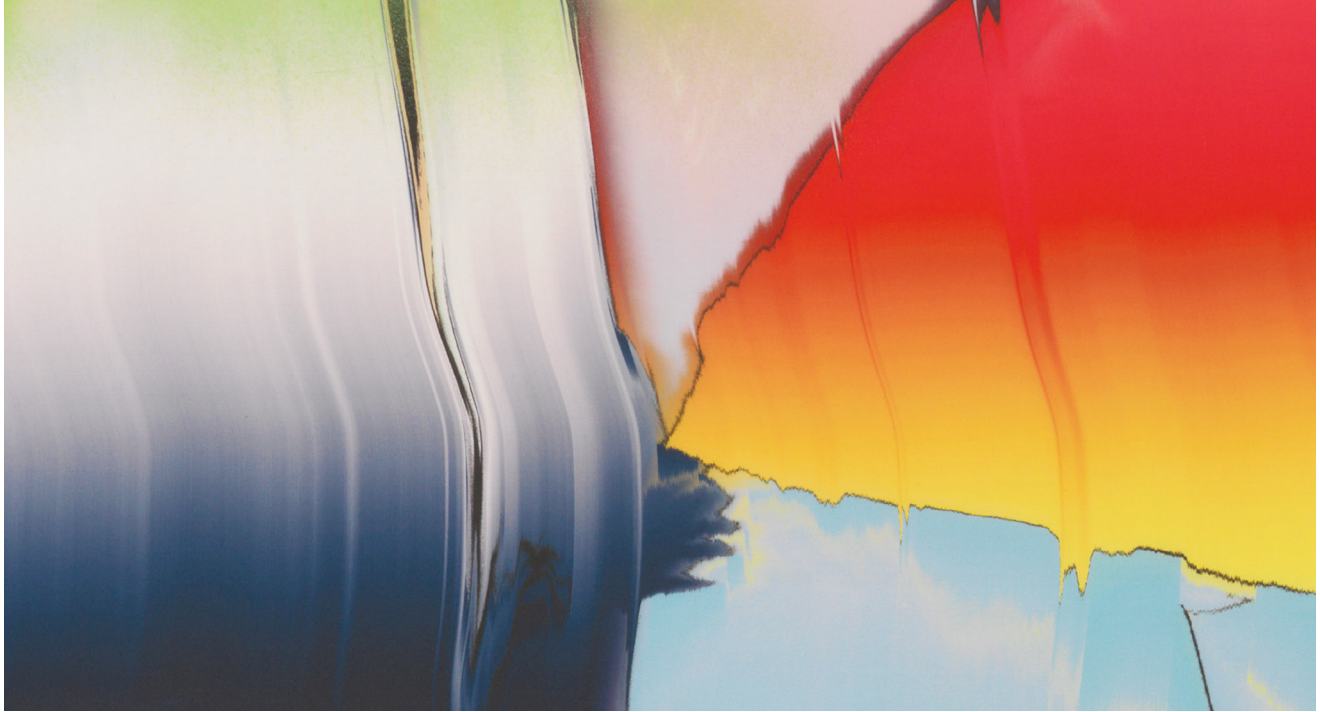
Remembering Roger Deakin

Compiled by Simon Prosser

The Roger Deakin archive at the University of East Anglia is a treasure trove of materials and memorabilia from the rich life of one of the greatest nature writers of the last century. The complete archive extends for 23 linear metres, but here are a just a few of our favourite items from the catalogue:

1. London International Festival of Whistling — proposal, 1996
2. Typescript and notes of RD's interview with Ronald Blythe on allotments; notes mentioning bluebells
3. Notes on penguins and notes of an interview with the Keeper of the Penguin Pool at London Zoo, 1998
4. Print-outs of mascots designed by Rene Lalique for classic Citroen cars (for which RD had a passion), 2001
5. Poem: 'For the Love of Cornish Apples', 2001
6. Drafts and final copies of a brochure written by RD for the Solid Fuel Advisory Service, 'Living With a Real Fire', 1987
7. Draft for a New Yorker article on well-worn garments, 'A Whiff of Peat', 2001

8. 'Hermes in a White Van' — a letter to the village postman of Mellis, Frank Gooderham, on his retirement, 2003
9. Assorted copies of community newspaper the Waveney Clarion, which RD helped write, plan and distribute, 1973–80
10. A hand-printed copy of *Tree Ghosts* by Alice Oswald, 2005
11. The 2002 book proposal for *Touching Wood*, which became *Wildwood*
12. A proposal for a series of books on trees, 1990
13. Sketches of lampshade designs (made from wood), undated
14. Swimwear, 1996: RD's black Speedo swimming costume
15. A summons issued by plaintiff RD on the defendant William A. Battell concerning the obstruction of Cowpasture Lane, 1981
16. Photographic negative of RD with crow, guinea pigs, etc — undated
17. A letter of welcome to RD from the Commonwealth Bank of Australia ('We hope your plans for migration to Australia are progressing well...'), 2000
18. A ring-binder containing an email on Cyprus oranges
19. A research file with cuttings on Apple Day, anti-road protests, Abergavenny carving, Wendell Berry, Bristol trees, fruit-fly flight, feltmakers, Barry Lopez, parakeets and silkworms
20. A press cutting showing RD with the goat given to him as a leaving present by the pupils he taught at Diss Grammar School, 1978



FROM THE ARCHIVE — 2002

The Zen of Eminem

When Zadie met Shady.

By Zadie Smith

As Chris Rock had it, something sure has changed in America when the best golfer is black and the best rapper white. Rock's choice of words is remarkable: not *richest*, not *most famous*, but *best*. Because there can be no doubt about it any more, and it's getting sort of churlish to deny it. You may dislike the language, the philosophy (and it *is* philosophy) or the hair dye. You may say Eminem can't last and, unusual for a rapper, he'll agree with you. 'I'm gonna do the music as long as I feel it, but if I'm sitting in the studio all tapped out, I just won't do it,' he says. 'The truth is that I can't rap for ever.'

'The truth of the matter.' This is his favourite phrase when he speaks. During an interview (in which he's oddly stilted and lost for words, the opposite of his persona on records), he says it nine times in an hour.

But let's settle on the bald facts: Eminem has secured his place in the rap pantheon. Tupac, Biggie and Pun are gone, and right now there isn't anyone else but Eminem who can rhyme fourteen syllables a line, enrage the US Senate, play the dozens, spin a tale, write a speech, push his voice into every register, toy with rhythm, subvert a whole goddamn genre, get metaphorical, allegorical, political, comical and deeply, deeply, personal — all in one groove of a vinyl.

Eminem is a word technician. He makes words work for him, and he's never lazy. Most rappers can be branded: we play Snoop for that down-and-dirty feeling; when you want to nod your head and pop your collar there's Dr Dre; Nelly will give you the songs of home; Mos Def makes you want to start a revolution; and Busta Rhymes is purely for freaking to. But Eminem, like Tupac before him, does a little of all these things. Like 'Pac, he does them with the integrity of an artist. This doesn't mean he's above the vulgar business of entertainment. It's just that elements of these two rappers are, in the sacred terminology of hip hop, *kept real*.

Tupac sold himself only so far. As unlikely as it seemed when we first met Eminem on *The Slim Shady LP*, he has demonstrated a similar attitude. Words matter to him.

'The truth of the matter.' This is his favourite phrase when he speaks. During an interview (in which he's oddly stilted and lost for words, the opposite of his persona on records), he says it nine times in an hour. His music shares Tupac's obsession with truthfully representing a group of disenfranchised people. 'I love that Tupac cared about *his* people, from *his* background, *his* generation,' Eminem says. 'He cared what *they* thought, and anybody else who didn't understand him could go to hell.'

That role, being the truth-telling prophet to a generation, is troublesome. Some truths are hard and self-destructive. Some are conflicting to the point of schizophrenia. Tupac wrote the feminist elegy 'Brenda's Got a Baby' and the abusive 'Wonda Why They Call U Bitch'; Eminem wrote the desperate 'Rock Bottom' and the mischievous 'Just Don't Give a Fuck'. These boys are both 'mad at cha' and not mad. They 'Just Don't Give a Fuck' and they *do*. And they're not in the business of committing crimes. They're rappers.

'The fact that a man picks up a microphone... that's *it*, you see?' says Eminem. 'That's what *makes* him a rapper. It's *not* a gun. It's a microphone.' This is something the anti-rap contingent of the Senate has never understood. Eminem's show on the Anger Management Tour (he's on the same bill as Ludacris and Papa Roach) opens with a video montage of real American politicians condemning the dangerous social phenomenon that is Eminem. Reality check: the FBI reports that there were 90,186 rapes and 15,517 murders reported in the US in 2000. Eminem committed none of them.

In the face of this kind of misplaced hysteria, good rappers don't back down. They defend the right to use words in the same way any novelist or filmmaker is free to do. They tell their personal truths. Sometimes they connect with millions of American teenagers. Then the question becomes one of incitement, of what happens when the music stops? The question of whose words make which people do what things:

How many retards'll listen to me? / And run up in the school shooting when they're pissed at a teach / er, her, him, is it you, is it them? / Wasn't me — Slim Shady said to do it again! / Damn! How much damage can you do with a pen?

Oh, plenty, but primarily to himself. Keeping it real is a dangerous game. How real is real? Real in the lyrics, real in an interview? Real on the streets, real in the 'hood? The rap survivors — Dr Dre and Master P — have determinedly drawn a line between the 'realness' of their past lives and their right to live like any other music mogul: money and a big house on the hill far from the ghetto. For Tupac, keeping it real was more perilous;

it dogged his life and contributed to his death. With Eminem, the question came to a head two years ago as he became increasingly embroiled in the justice system. But meeting him now, it's clear that he will not be going the tragic *Behind the Music* route. He's still talking it — 'Don't think I won't go there / Go to Beirut and do a show there!' — but, it seems, no longer living it.

'I had a wake-up call with my almost going to jail and shit, like, *slow down*,' he says. 'It wasn't me trying to portray a certain image or live up to anything. That was me letting my anger get the best of me, which I've done many times. No more.'

Eminem doesn't even look like himself on TV. Nathan, his half-brother, looks more like how you'd imagine Eminem would — tall, cartoon-bright.

This is the Anger Management Tour, after all, and Eminem in dress rehearsal is slick and professional. There's no wilding out. Even D12 is all business. My impression watching him rehearse: *serious*. There's no Slim about him. If something's wrong onstage, he wants it fixed. And the seedy-sounding girl on 'Superman' and 'Drug Ballad' isn't a ho — she's a charming woman called Dina Rae who's hoping, she says, to be 'a sort of white Ashanti, maybe'. She has been on all three albums but has never performed the songs live ('They call me Track13 Girl'). Rae's in awe of this opportunity and the man who gave it to her. I ask for a description. 'Sweet. Lovely. Shy.' Like he's a puppy.

When I am finally ushered into the presence of the Most Evil Rapper Alive™, he's not like his cohorts on TV. I've just watched 48 hours of MTV waiting for him to arrive in Buffalo from Detroit, so I know. Rappers wear diamonds, endorse everything and talk a lot. Eminem doesn't even look like *himself* on TV. Nathan, his half-brother, looks more like how you'd imagine Eminem would — tall, cartoon-bright. Eminem is small, slender-faced and more innocuous than the picture in your mind. He talks quietly, rarely, and only makes eye contact when the questions are about other people or rappers he admires. He does not shill ('I couldn't do that, I *wouldn't*,' he says. 'I mean, I drink a whole lot of [a popular soda],

but I wouldn't *sponsor* it. That's not what I'm about.'). Nor does he spend lavishly. He has a car — a car. A leased Mercedes-Benz. He's dressed exactly like the millions of adolescents he represents: sweatpants, a white T-shirt and a baseball cap. No more, no less. No jewels of any kind. The other thing I learned from MTV: rappers always tell you they are the greatest. Most rappers.

—
ZADIE SMITH

So tell me something about this new album.

EMINEM

I learned how to ride a beat better, like, that's what I wanted to focus on doing. On the last album, I hadn't completely mastered it yet, to sink into the beat? That's what I don't like about that second album — I'd listen, and I'd be like, why am I so far behind that beat? [*voice rising*] The first album was TERRIBLE — like, I was playing catch-up with the beat constantly.

ZADIE SMITH

You talk a lot about ease in this record. Is it easy to write these raps?

EMINEM

Well, actually, I'd be lying if I said it was easy. The truth of the matter is it's not. Sometimes I'll spend hours on a single rhyme, or days, or I'll give up and come back to it later. Anyone who says they write a verse in less than twenty minutes is full of shit, I believe. Even if I have my ideas stacked, if I'm flooded with ideas, I'm always trying to figure out how to make it better, make it smoother — that's how it is. Unless you're just somebody who doesn't care.

A lot of people don't care. You can make a lot of money in rap these days without caring: 'Pissed off, 'cause Biggie and 'Pac just missed all this / Watching all these cheap imitations get rich off 'em.' For every Eminem or Mos Def, for every rapper trying to push the medium forward, twenty branded rappers are selling you their lifestyle: the poolside life, the gangsta life, the playa life. Image is everything (the *video* is everything); nobody cares about the words. We can assume that P. Diddy ('Don't worry if I write rhymes, I write cheques') simply doesn't care as much as the man who wrote, in 'Square Dance':

Nothing moves me more than a groove that soothes me, nothing soothes me more than a groove that boosts me, nothing boosts me more, or suits me more beautifully / There's nothing you can do to me, stab me, shoot me / Psychotic, hypnotic product, I got it, the antibiotic, ain't nobody hotter and so on / And yada yada, God — I talk a lotta hem de lay la la la, oochie walla walla um dab da dab da da but you gotta gotta / Keep movin', there's more music to make, keep makin' new shit, produce hits to break / The monotony, what's gotten into me? Drugs, rock and Hennessy, thug like I'm 'Pac on my enemies!

Eminem delivers the last line in knowing imitations of Tupac's unforgettable preacher's delivery. On the drive to the arena, I mention this lyric admiringly to his publicist, who smiles. 'You know, I told him, "*Man*, no one'll notice the fucking 'Pac thing." But Em said, "If they love 'Pac, they'll know it." I thought nobody noticed stuff like that.'

As thousands of inches of newsprint show, people are busy noticing a few other things. Every article ever published on Eminem can be paraphrased thus: Mother, Libel, Gun, Homosexuals, Drugs, Own Daughter, Wife, Rape, Trunk of Car, Youth of America, Tattoos, Prison, Gangsta, White Trash.

People want to know which bits are real and which bits are hip-hop exaggeration. Does he hate fags ('the answer's "yes!"' he says in his song 'Criminal', from the *Marshall Mathers LP*)? Or does he love gay men ('Right, Ken? Give me an Amen!')? I don't know. All I can say is that in person he doesn't speak like that, and he barely swears. The only reference to homosexuality all day long comes from me, bored in the front seat of a hot car waiting to meet Eminem, singing alternative gay lyrics to popular songs (Usher: 'You don't have to call, 'cause I'm a gay girl, and I got other things on tonight').

Ask Eminem about his writing, and he can't understand why you took him so seriously in the first place. He's like the Zen master who tells his disciple that enlightenment can be found in a pile of dog dung, and then shakes his head in dismay as the young man gets his hands dirty. 'I'm saying this to piss you off, *and you're getting mad?*' Em says of his lyrical provocations. 'That's childish shit!' But what does he expect? On the records, moralist Eminem commands people to say what you say and stand by it, but at the same time, he defends the right to his own peculiar double standard.

'It's like, I've grown up a lot the past two years, and I've learned that you *got* to be able to separate the truth from entertainment to an extent,' he says. 'Like, I'm always gonna be real with myself, and people should know the difference. Not *always*, when I'm joking and when I'm not — but for the most part, they should know what's

entertainment and what's not.' So it's *our* responsibility, *not* the artist's? You mean, wait — let me get this right: *We're* responsible for our *own* morality? Well, *goddamn!* This concept of personal responsibility, I imagine, might be a little too Zen-like for the fiercely Christian, anti-rap Senate contingent.

But Eminem isn't devoid of parental, protective instincts. In 'Stan' he satirized his own fears about wielding negative influence, but those fears are real. He knows how many people listen to him. 'Truthfully,' he says, sinking down in his seat, 'I really don't watch that much TV any more. I can't stand to see myself all the time like that.' His lyrics suggest he's bemused by how awful people think he is, but he's also capable of thinking that way about himself.

It's all political, if my music is literal / And I'm a criminal / How the fuck can I raise a little girl? / I couldn't, I wouldn't be fit to.

It is Em's daughter, Hailie, age six, who inspires both his most positive lyrics and his life choices. She makes him think differently. When asked The Women in Rap Lyrics Question™, and how he squares it with bringing up a daughter, Eminem is suddenly impassioned.

'See, that's where the separation is, right there,' he says. 'I'm not going to walk up to women saying, "Word up, bitch?" I wouldn't have got anywhere in this business if I was just a complete asshole like some of the music portrays. But the other truth of the matter is, whenever I do say something bad about women like that, it usually is an emotion that I'm going through at the time. And,' he adds softly, 'my experience with women has not been great, man. I have not had the greatest women in my life. So all I can do is be the best father that I can and try to instil in Hailie the best values, because I *do* care about what is said around her and done around her.'

But does she listen to the music? 'Sure she listens to it,' he says. 'And she did a song with me, "My Dad's Gone Crazy". But in the second verse, there's a part that's really pretty bad, so I made her a clean version and she listens to that. Because "fuck that shit bitch, eat a motherfucking cock" — that's a little too much.'

Eminem seems tired, as if he's in a 24-hour battle with the world, another Tupac-like trait. When I tell him that a customs official in Buffalo asked me, 'What the fuck you wanna interview *that* guy for?' he nods wearily. Nothing about America's love — hate relationship with him is a surprise anymore. And, dear reader, imagine for a moment having a relationship like that with *a whole country*. But he *is* evolving, despite the pressure. Work and parenthood make him calm. He talks enthusiastically

about one day moving over to producing and the new life that might engender: 'Getting gas for my car like a normal person, walking down the street!'

He speaks almost wistfully about his days as a 'really hungry underground MC', back when he really didn't give a fuck. He does now. About 9/11: 'That was, like, a dark day. It's a subject I couldn't really bring myself to make fun about — then I'd just have no fucking morals or scruples at all.' About the N-word: 'It's not my place to say it. There's some things that *I just don't do*'; and about fame, the subject he's most eloquent about: 'If I was the type of person who got in it for the money and fame, I would have quit after the first album.' Em fears the alienation his money has produced. On the album he worries that he has sold his soul, that he's trapped.

But again, there are contradictions: he says he wants to say goodbye to Hollywood — 'I just wanna leave this game with level head intact' — but he has also just made a movie with Kim Basinger, *8 Mile*, a semi-autobiographical effort that he's proud of. 'Acting was hard, though,' he muses, 'not second nature, like rapping. I might do another, but not one where I'm in every scene and the whole movie's riding on me.' If he stays in the game, he wants to be cast because of his acting skills, not his rap reputation.

Thing is, people love the way he raps. Even when they're agonizing over the content, they can't get enough of the form. To these people, I can confirm Dina Rae's judgement: *Sweet. Lovely. Shy*. But even if he wasn't, so what? Salvador Dalí was an asshole. So was John Milton. Eminem's life and opinions are not his art. His art is his art. Sometimes people with bad problems make good art. The interesting question is this: when the problems go, does the art go too? Oh, and if that word 'art' is still bothering you in the context of a white-trash rapper from Detroit, here's a quick, useful definition of an artist: someone with an expressive talent most of us do not have.

I quoted the lyric from 'Square Dance' at length for a reason. Look back there and read it again. Hey you, the kid reading this article, wanting to be a rapper — can *you* do that? Hey, journalist who believes rap is a social deviancy — can *you* do that? Lynne Cheney — can *you* do that?



AN INTERJECTION

Toad Time

In which a toad starts speaking to a human being, which might lighten up the state of the world, or at least the state of your world, at least for a while. This interjection is taken from the latest novel by James Robertson, *To Be Continued...*

Left hand clutching a glass, a bottle of red wine tucked under the corresponding oxtail, Douglas Findhorn Elder opened the back door of what was half his and half his father's house — the house in which he had grown up, which he had never really left and which, one day perhaps not too far off, would be wholly his — and stepped into the blue night. Stars and the sodium vapour of many street lamps contested the sky above him, but the garden was dark with October darkness.

His movement triggered a security light set on the wall of the house, and this illuminated the stone slabs of the patio or — as it had always been known in the family — the *sitootery*; or — as his father used to observe with dry wit on wet days — the *raindaffery*.

Douglas stood on a small bright stage in a sloe-black arena and breathed in a portion of the gentle breeze. Tens of thousands of his adoring fans could be out there but not one of them was visible to him.

A slight swell of Rioja rolled in his gullet and he belched softly.

To his surprise an answering rift, suggestive of imitation or even mockery, came from a spot close to his right foot.

Douglas looked down and smiled. He could not help smiling, for what he saw was pleasing to him. Squatting on one of the slabs was a large, jowly, brownish-backed, creamy-breasted toad, well covered with warts.

There is something appealing about a toad, especially one that strikes the attitude of a fat monk disturbed while at prayer.

*Douglas looked down and smiled.
He could not help smiling, for
what he saw was pleasing to him.
Squatting on one of the slabs was
a large, jowly, brownish-backed,
creamy-breasted toad, well covered
with warts.*

‘Good evening,’ Douglas said.

He did not anticipate that much would follow this opening remark. A few platitudes from him, a blank glance or two from the toad, and they would go their separate ways — he to his bed, and the toad to its, presumably after a night of foraging for snails, worms and other comestibles. Douglas felt that the toad had acquitted itself well merely by belching with such excellent timing. He expected nothing more from it.

He was therefore astonished when — in a low, dark, yet sonorous and somehow commanding voice — the toad spoke.

‘It is a good evening,’ it said. ‘And mild, for the time of year.’

Douglas bent down.

‘Did you just speak?’

‘Did *you* not?’

‘Aye, but...’

‘Aye, but what?’

‘But you are a toad.’ Even to Douglas, this sounded lame and inadequate.

For if a toad has spoken, not once but three times in succession, then its toadness is already one of its less interesting features.

The toad hunched its back. No creature, of any species, can match a toad when it comes to looking disdainful.

‘Your point being?’

Douglas swayed slightly, removed bottle from oxters in order to be able to raise glass to mouth, and took a drink. It occurred to him that he might have had more wine than he thought, and that the toad might not really be there. Or *he* might not be there. Conceivably, neither of them might be there. However, the Cartesian paradox suggested by this possibility was of such magnitude and complexity that he, for the moment, did not feel mentally adequate to address it.

A period of silence ensued. When Douglas checked again the toad was still present and still, apparently, waiting for an answer.

‘What?’ Douglas said.

‘What do you mean, what?’

‘You’re looking at me.’

‘*You’re* looking at *me*. And it is rude to stare.’

‘I wasn’t staring.’

‘You have changed tenses, from which I infer a sense of guilt. You may not be staring now, but you certainly were, and you know it.’

‘You were staring at *me*!’

‘I was not. I was dazzled when you put the light on, that’s all. I simply happened to be facing in your direction.’

‘The light comes on by itself.’

‘Well, you should have it repaired.’

‘That’s what it’s meant to do.’

‘Dazzle me? Charming!’

‘When anybody or anything above a certain size moves in this area, it comes on. It’s a security device. I’m sorry that it dazzled you.’

‘So am I. As a security device it is flawed, since it would appear to offer no protection against the smaller bandit or housebreaker. Still, I accept your apology.’

‘Fine. Acceptance accepted.’

They had reached, Douglas thought, either an impasse or an accommodation. Carefully, so as not to cause further offence, he stepped round the toad and set the wine bottle on the patio’s cast-iron table. He sat on one of the two matching chairs and raised his glass.

‘Your health,’ he said. The toad took a few lumbering steps towards the back door, examined a weed or two between slabs, then turned and lumbered back to its original position.

A thought occurred to Douglas as he watched.

‘Did we... ? That is, have we... met before?’

‘Where might that have been?’

‘Over there, in that flowerbed. Yesterday. I was digging out a clump of lilies —’

‘Why?’

‘Because it’s autumn, they’re long over, and there are too many of them. They’re taking over the whole garden.’

‘There can never be too many lilies,’ the toad said.

‘However, continue with your story.’

‘I was digging out the lilies, and something happened. My graip had a close encounter with you, if it was you.’

‘Your what?’

‘My graip. Garden fork. Or you had a close encounter with it. For a moment I thought I’d impaled you or amputated your leg. But you dived into the undergrowth before I had a chance to make sure.’

‘That you’d amputated my leg? Again, charming!’

‘No, that I hadn’t! Which, clearly, I haven’t.’

‘You seem very certain of that.’

‘Well, you have your legs. A complete set. So, unless it wasn’t you...’

‘It wasn’t.’

‘Oh.’

Although the toad’s expression hardly altered, a slyness seemed to invade its features.

‘You know something about it, though, don’t you?’ Douglas said.

‘News gets around. It was a cousin of mine.’

‘Is he all right?’

‘*She* is fine, no thanks to you. You missed her’ — holding up two digits almost closed together — ‘by that much. She is still in shock.’

‘I am so sorry.’

‘So you should be. It scares the daylight out of you, something like that. And when I say “daylights” I don’t mean “daylights”.’

‘It wasn’t intentional. I hope she makes a full recovery. Would you give her my apologies?’

‘No.’

‘Why not?’

‘We are not on speaking terms. But I’ll make sure she’s told.’

‘That’s kind of you.’

‘Humff!’ the toad said, and made a small, ungainly hop, landing a foot closer.

‘Two chairs, one bottle, one glass,’ it said. ‘Why are you drinking on your own?’

The security light went out. Douglas said, ‘Do you mind? Close your eyes,’ and waved his arm to bring the light back on again.

‘If you are patient your vision will adjust to the night,’ the toad said.

‘You will be able to see me perfectly well — if that’s what you wish to do. Of course you will also have to sit still. Whereas I...’

It stood on its back feet and stretched itself against one of the table legs, like an athlete warming up. Then, with the laborious care of an expert rock-climber, it began an ascent of the table.

‘Want a hoist?’ Douglas asked.

‘No. It’s good exercise.’ Left hand, right foot, right hand, left foot, the toad made steady progress and quite evidently needed no assistance. ‘You haven’t answered my question.’

‘Why shouldn’t I drink on my own?’

‘I’m not judging you. There used to be other people here, that’s all. An old woman and an old man. And you weren’t around so much. Then the old woman disappeared.’

‘She died. That was my mother.’

‘Then, recently, you’ve been here more. You used not to show up for long spells, but in the last few seasons...’

The toad left the sentence unfinished as it negotiated the overhang of the tabletop with impressive skill. It settled beside the wine bottle, breathing hard.

‘I used to come and go a bit. But now I’m back, you’re right. A permanent fixture, you could say.’

‘The old man was the permanent one. Your father?’

‘Aye.’

‘I quite liked him. Not that we ever met, or spoke... like this. He seemed content, self-contained. There was no sign of violence in *him*. But he’s been absent lately. What’s happened? Dead, too?’

‘No. He’s in a home.’

‘Is this not his home?’

‘It is. It was. But he couldn’t stay here. So he’s gone to a home. A *Home*.’

‘Either I am being obtuse or you are being obscure. Please explain.’

‘My father is ill. He is suffering from various afflictions. Memory loss, confusion, dizziness. He struggles to articulate his thoughts and feelings. He doesn’t always know who he is or where he is. He gets depressed. He falls over a lot. He no longer has full control of some bodily functions.’

‘Like my cousin when you attacked her with your... graip?’

‘I didn’t attack her. I didn’t see her till it was too late. She happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.’
‘She was in bed! It was mid-afternoon. She was in exactly the *right* place at exactly the *right* time.’

‘Toad time.’

‘It would be odd if we kept any other kind.’ The toad then said something that to Douglas, dredging up the Latin he had studied for a year or two at school, sounded remarkably like ‘*Suum cuique*’. He must have misheard.

‘To each his own,’ he said, just to check.

‘Precisely,’ the toad said.

‘Well, I must say, you have an impressive command of English,’ Douglas said. ‘And not just English.’

‘You have a very good command of Toad,’ the toad said.

‘I’m not speaking Toad.’

‘Yes you are. Never mind. Where were we? Your father. Not a well man, by the sound of things. All these ailments — did they arrive simultaneously?’

‘They crept up on him over a period of time, like saboteurs, setting off little explosions, disrupting lines of communication and generally causing fear and alarm.’

‘How dramatic.’

‘It isn’t really. It’s horribly tedious.’

‘Curable?’

‘Taken as a whole, no.’

‘But if he’s so ill, why isn’t he here and why are you not looking after him?’

There was a hard, cool edge to the cast-iron table. Douglas gripped it.

‘I can’t. I tried, believe me, but it became impossible. He’s better off where he is. He’s safer, apart from anything else. He became a danger to himself while he was here — and to others. Me, in particular. He set things on fire — mostly by accident. He fell over and couldn’t get up. He went out leaving the doors and windows wide open and was lost for hours at a time. I couldn’t go out without taking him with me, and that usually ended in disaster.’

‘Disaster? You exaggerate, surely. How many times can an excursion end in disaster if those involved are not seriously injured or killed? Has anybody been seriously injured or killed?’

‘No, but it’s been close.’

‘Had you sliced off my cousin’s leg or decapitated her, that would have been a disaster, for her at least. Has your father lost a limb, or his head? I can see you haven’t.’

‘Near-disaster, then. And it wasn’t just when we were out. Even here, in the house or garden, I couldn’t turn my back for five minutes without something going wrong.’

‘So now he is in *a* home, and you’re *at* home? Is that why you’re here drinking wine by yourself?’

‘No. Well, yes, in a way. Don’t look so critical.’

‘I already said, I don’t judge. You people do what you do, we do what we do. If a toad is ill, he stays at home until he gets better or dies. It’s logical.’

‘It used to be like that for us, but not any more.’

‘Why not?’

‘Because life is more complicated. And people are living longer.’

‘Toads aren’t. We live long enough already.’

‘Good for you.’

‘Good for us, yes. When you said, earlier, that you came and went, where did you go?’

‘I was in a relationship. I still am, I suppose, but it’s been a little rocky lately, so maybe I’m not. Anyway, I went to Sonya’s. That’s the name of the woman I was in a relationship with.’

‘Sonyas?’

‘No, Sonya. My partner. Erstwhile. Ex. I lived with her and her two children. They’re grown up now.’

‘I don’t recall ever seeing these people of whom you speak.’

‘You wouldn’t have. They didn’t live here. I lived there.’

‘Where?’

‘With them. In their home.’

‘Another home?’

‘Yes, Sonya’s. In another part of the city. As I said, life is complicated.’

‘Complicated, but interesting,’ the toad remarked.

‘Incidentally, the security light went out some time ago. That, too, I find interesting. Don’t make a sudden move.’

Douglas made a gentle, slow move and refilled his glass. ‘I hadn’t noticed,’ he said.

‘That’s what I find interesting,’ the toad said.

The nodules of its skin seemed somehow to catch the starlight, or the street-lamp light, and thus to glitter. When it turned its gaze on Douglas the eyes were revealed as amber discs slashed horizontally by black pupils.

There was something beautiful and intelligent about the toad. Despite its curt manner, Douglas felt that here was somebody he could confide in, a fellow creature he could really talk to.

‘And another reason for taking a drink tonight,’ he said, ‘is to celebrate. Today is my birthday.’

‘I take it you mean an anniversary of your birth. Which one?’ the toad asked.

‘The fiftieth.’

‘In years? Hmm. Not much to celebrate, that. Not much of a celebration either.’

‘Good enough for me. Do toads celebrate their birthdays?’

‘We don’t even notice them. Age is approximate with us. Years don’t matter, only seasons.’

‘That’s a healthy attitude. Humans could learn from it.’

‘It’s not an attitude, it’s reality. It wouldn’t work for humans.’

‘Why not?’

‘Different reality. How, if you were going to, would you *really* celebrate, as you put it, your birthday?’

‘Well, I could ask some friends to join me, and have a party.’

‘Do you have some friends?’

‘A few.’

‘And if you did, what would happen at this party?’

‘Well, there might be a cake, with candles on it representing the number of years. Sometimes people give you presents. Or they send you cards with messages in them.’

‘Messages?’

‘“Happy birthday”, “Many happy returns”, “Eat, drink and be merry”, that sort of thing. But presents and cards don’t matter to me. They’re more for children, really.’

‘Did you receive any presents? Or cards?’

‘I was bought some drinks. And I had one card. From Sonya.’

‘What was her message?’

‘She wished me a happy birthday. Well, no, she didn’t, because that was already printed on the card. She just signed her name. No other message. I suppose that *was* her message.’

‘And that was everything?’

‘That was it. Oh, I did get a birthday communication from the National Health Service, inviting me to take part in the Bowel Screening Programme.’

‘What is that, a film festival?’

‘Not exactly. The idea is to check for signs of bowel cancer every couple of years from the age of fifty until you’re seventy-four. The earlier it’s detected, the sooner it can be treated, and this increases your chance of survival.’

‘Why not start the checks when you’re a child, then?’

‘Because older people are much more at risk.’

‘But the checks stop when you’re seventy-four?’

'I know it sounds illogical. They must reckon you're as likely to die of something else by then.'

'And what happens in this programme?'

'You do three tests to see if you've any symptoms.'

'Tests?'

'You provide three samples. I haven't read all the instructions yet. I think it's going to be difficult.'

'Oh, the tests are difficult?'

'Not in that way. I mean, awkward. There's a kit due to arrive any day now. Don't worry about it.'

'I'm not worried. Well, let me add to the messages you've had from Sonya and the National Health Service. Happy birthday.'

'Thank you. I'd offer you some wine, but I don't suppose you do.'

'Do what?'

'Drink wine.'

'I don't drink at all,' the toad said. 'However, I am not averse to alcohol. I can't take too much, but then who can? Splash a bit on the table there.'

The deed was done. The toad crawled across and poised his rump over the pool.

'Many happy returns,' the toad said, and settled into the wine.

'Thank you,' Douglas said. 'To your liking?'

'Very absorbing,' said the toad.

'And now,' Douglas said, 'I have some questions for you.' The toad inclined its head.

'First of all, and don't take offence, am I right in believing that you are a *Mister Toad*?'

'As opposed to what? A Doctor Toad? A Rear-Admiral Toad? MacToad of that ilk?'

'Are you a *male* toad?'

The toad clapped a hand on top of its head and drew the fingers down over its nose. 'For heaven's sake. Do I look like a female toad?'

'I don't know.'

'No, I do *not* look like a female toad. Female toads are bigger and fatter than males, and there are other anatomical differences, beyond the obvious ones, with which I will not tax the limited capacity of your brain. Your next question?'

'If, as you say, toads live long enough, how long is that? I read somewhere that a common toad can live as long as forty years. You yourself, judging by your observations of my family, appear to have been around some considerable time.'

'A remarkable thing about humans,' the toad said, 'is their arrogance. If you knew anything at all, you would call us *uncommon* toads. That is the remarkable thing about *us*. We are all uncommon. Each of us is an individual. That's why we lead solitary lives, except in the spring. Ah, the spring!' There was a pause, during which he (for so he must now be designated) appeared to inspect his hands and feet and possibly to count his fingers and toes. 'Forty!' he said at last. 'I would be a *very* uncommon toad if *that* was the best I could hope for.'

'Then our estimates are inaccurate?'

'Wildly so! Look at the pace we go at, compared with you. Barring accidents or foul play, sir, there is little doubt that I shall outlive you.'

Douglas was tempted to dispute this assertion, but he had a third question for his amphibian acquaintance. 'If we are going to continue this relationship,' he said, '— which I should very much like to do — it would be easier if I could address you by name. Do you have such a thing as a name?'

The toad didn't exactly stamp one of his feet, but he shifted his weight with irritation. Douglas noticed that the pool of wine had diminished considerably.

'Do you ever stop being patronising? How would we function as a community — even a community of solitaires — if we didn't have names?'

'And yours is?'

'You couldn't pronounce it. Not a chance, even with your proficiency in Toad. Call me... let me see... call me Mungo.'

'Did you just pluck that out of the air?'

'I did. Like a gnat. It has a ring to it. Mung-oh. Mungo. Call me that.'

‘Very well. My name, which appears on my birth certificate, is Douglas Elder.’

‘Dugliselda?’

‘No, Douglas Elder. It’s two names.’

‘Douglas Fir would make more sense.’

‘You’re not the first to have cracked that joke.’

‘What joke?’

‘You should call me Douglas.’

‘Douglas. But you have two names. If you have two names, I’d better have two as well.’

‘So what will your second name be? Mungo what?’

‘No, I don’t like it. Mungo Mungo.’

‘You can’t just use the same name twice.’

‘Why not? Mungo is my first choice. I like it very much. I cannot imagine any name to match it, except another Mungo. Ergo, Mungo Mungo.’

‘Actually I have three names. Douglas Findhorn Elder.’

‘Three? I could go on adding Mungos, but Mungo Mungo Mungo is excessive. Even I can see that. What is the significance of your middle one?’

‘It’s the name of a river. It’s a tradition in the Elder family to have Scottish rivers in our names. My father is Thomas Ythan Elder. *His* father was Donald Garry Elder. And so on.’

‘Rivers are good, although sometimes perilous. I shall be — appropriating your family tradition — Mungo Forth Mungo. A local touch.’

‘That’s very good. You could go far with a name like that.’

‘Perhaps, but it’s October. I usually settle down for a long sleep about now. Mind you, I have always wanted to travel. Like my namesake, Mungo Park, although I wouldn’t wish to go as far as he did.’

Douglas was again surprised by the toad’s erudition. ‘How do you know about Mungo Park?’

‘In the same way that I know about David Douglas, after whom I believe the aforementioned fir is named.’

‘But what way is that?’

‘You forget what I said before, about our longevity. Knowledge acquisition and transference go on all the time. How else does one learn to survive?’

‘You didn’t seem to know much about birthdays.’

‘Not so important, nor so interesting.’

‘Aye, but — with respect — what possible use to you, a toad, or to your survival, is knowledge of long-dead Scottish explorers?’

“‘With respect’,” said Mungo, ‘is a phrase generally employed to preface remarks of a disrespectful nature. Your question is no exception to this rule. I might just as well demand of you whether your supposed knowledge of the so-called “common toad” is relevant to you or to *your* survival.’

‘Well —’ Douglas began, but Mungo interrupted.

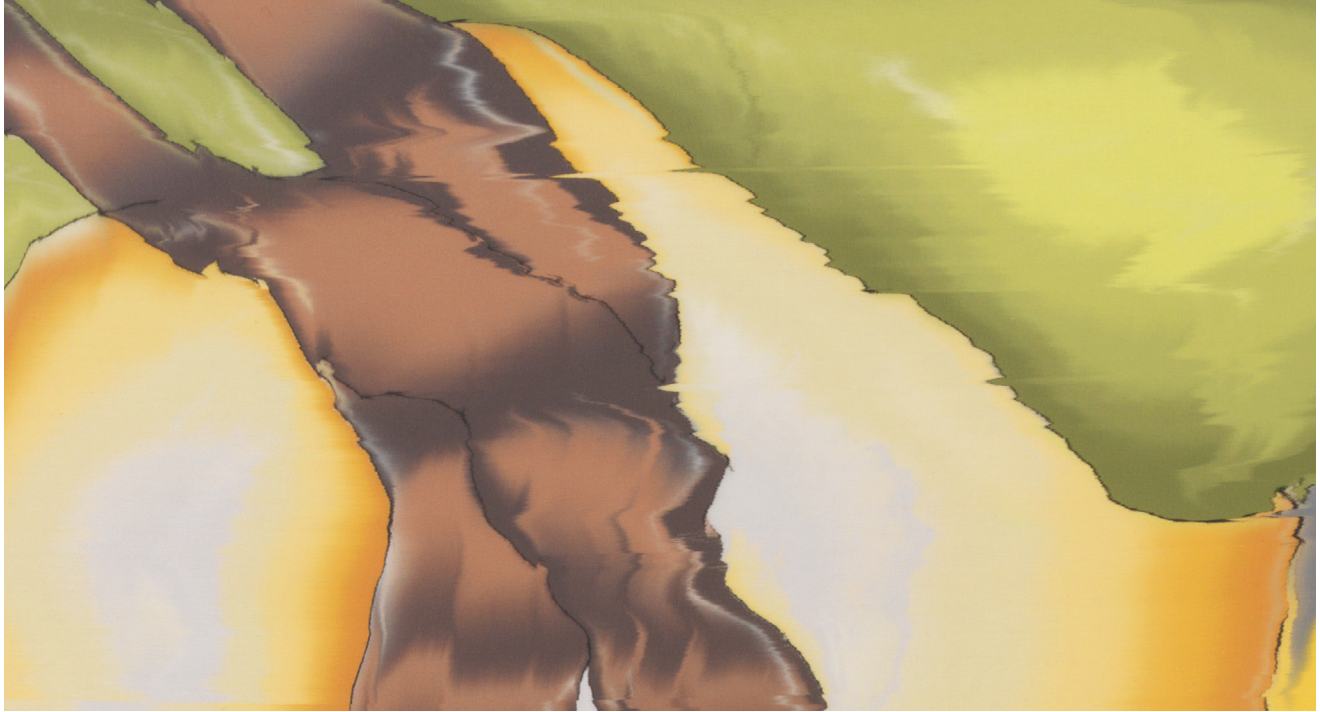
‘Do you or do you not subscribe to the view that all knowledge is potentially valuable, and that its value, potential or realised, cannot be determined by the superficial assessment of its perceived utility at any given moment?’

‘I’ll have to think about that,’ Douglas said. It seemed too grand and complex a proposition to be unscrambled so late in the garden of October darkness, especially after the best part of a bottle of red wine.

‘Do so,’ Mungo said. ‘I already have.’ And in one untoad-like leap he left the table and landed somewhere in the night. Douglas could not have sworn to it, but he was fairly sure he heard a groan following the faint impact of Mungo’s touchdown.

Douglas shivered: the air was a little chillier now. His glass was empty. So was the bottle, almost. He picked up both, and stood unsteadily. If a man cannot stand unsteadily at the end of his fiftieth birthday, he thought, when can he? The security light came on. He was on the bright stage again. Of Mungo there was no sign. It was possible, Douglas thought, that his senses had completely failed him and that he had imagined the entire evening. It was possible that every word of their conversation had taken place inside his own head.

It was possible. But he did not think it likely.



Q & A

Questions for Lauren Silva

Our featured artist describes the small, important resonances of great painting, and why she chooses to work on charmeuse silk.

FIVE DIALS

Your first solo exhibition was called 'I tried to catch the fog. I mist.' What is this 'fog'?

LAUREN SILVA

I wanted to evoke the sensation of grappling with the near future, even though it's impossible to understand or predict.

From a historical perspective, when we're in a particular period, it's difficult to fully comprehend our direction. We spend our time wandering through a chaotic system, much like fog.

The title was also a reference to growing up in the Bay Area, where fog is a part of the landscape. I spent a lot of time driving through it, trying not to crash.

FIVE DIALS

If you had to pick an art movement to identify with, which one would resonate the most?

LAUREN SILVA

Post-Impressionist landscapes. My work is more surreal and abstract in some ways, but there was a significant psychological tinge to the Post-Impressionist palette that I aspire to reach in my studio.

FIVE DIALS

You paint on charmeuse silk. Why?

LAUREN SILVA

Silk holds an emotional charge for me. As a little kid, I couldn't fall asleep without touching my mom's silk charmeuse nightgown. I took it and used it as a blanket. But the decision to use it for paintings occurred about two years ago when I was reading a book on the history of movies. I came across a passage explaining how old cinemas used large sheets of luminous silk for projection screens.

It's a bit romantic, but the suggestion of watching dramatic narratives unfold in flickering images across movie theatre silk triggered a series of thoughts in my head. If I were to paint on this material, how would I want it to look?

I settled on a newer process: digital painting and printing. From this sprang a body of work that allowed me to evoke something of a fleeting, flickering moment in my imagery while staying faithful to the stretchy and luminous qualities of the natural material.

FIVE DIALS

Charmeuse silk is expensive to play around with. Do you experiment beforehand?

LAUREN SILVA

I use sheets of printer paper. I look at a blank piece and think: How can I make it look interesting?

FIVE DIALS

What comes next?

LAUREN SILVA

Drawing, scanning, looking for the unexpected, the unrecognizable. Producing prolific large works costs a lot of money. Making sketches and carving out time to sit and think is an important part of the process and is more economical. It's still an expense in other ways.

FIVE DIALS

During this early process, are you in tune with what's happening in the world, or do you retreat towards a more interior place?

LAUREN SILVA

I wouldn't call it retreating, per se. My work isn't necessarily a reflection of what is interior to me. I am committed to a vision of my art that has its unique evolution and which follows a different timeline than the pace of the news.

FIVE DIALS

Looking back at your development as an artist, even from childhood, can you remember a moment that shifted your perspective in your art practice?

LAUREN SILVA

As a student, 'overwork' didn't even register as something one could do to an art piece. I worked all the time.

With some earlier undergrad works, I filled up each painting, trying to cram several big ideas into one frame. I needed to write an accompanying book to outline the intentions of everything going on in them. Eventually, I realized that I was having a more complex and exciting experience with my paintings when I stepped back at an uncomfortable finishing point, leaving them more open to myself and the viewer.

FIVE DIALS

When did that uncomfortable point become noticeable? How did you learn to trust it?

LAUREN SILVA

I spent a lot of time in undergrad just looking at art and discovering new artists. The images that burned an afterimage in my head had a more uncanny quality. They were curious and a little awkward, like a lived experience. I began to think of my art as less about making a big statement and more about offering a small resonance.

FIVE DIALS

One of your former professors said that when you first came to Columbia you were creating extremely wide paintings. However, as your new studio was cramped and narrow, you switched to making vertical pieces. Are you affected by the space around you?

LAUREN SILVA

One of the biggest assets Los Angeles had to offer me was space. I made 20-foot paintings there because it was easy to do so. After I moved to New York I noticed that double doors were a luxury. Space in New York was a completely different animal. My first studio was only about 7 feet wide, but the ceilings were high — at least 14 feet. I decided to make very narrow paintings I could work on in the middle of the room. I propped them up on saw horses. I built the stretcher bars as long trapezoids, creating a forced perspective illusion to make the paintings seem even taller than they were. After shuffling around spaces through the years, I've become comfortable adapting my scale.

FIVE DIALS

You said: 'I run these paintings through my mind every day but I haven't actually visualized them... They go wall to wall in the studio. It's almost like I haven't even really seen them for the first time yet.'

LAUREN SILVA

I work up to the last minute. I haven't visualized the paintings yet because up until the moment they are hanging on someone else's wall, I can still see an infinite possibility for change in them.

FIVE DIALS

You use a broad range of colour. In a society of muted tones, why go bold?

LAUREN SILVA

The question more often posed in my mind when I look around is: 'What in our society and culture has caused so many to fear colour?'

FIVE DIALS

Which artist do you most admire?

LAUREN SILVA

Lari Pittman. He was my professor at UCLA and offered me the first glimpse at the life of a professional artist. I assumed his paintings were just made by pure magic until I saw his studio in person and learned about his work ethic first hand.

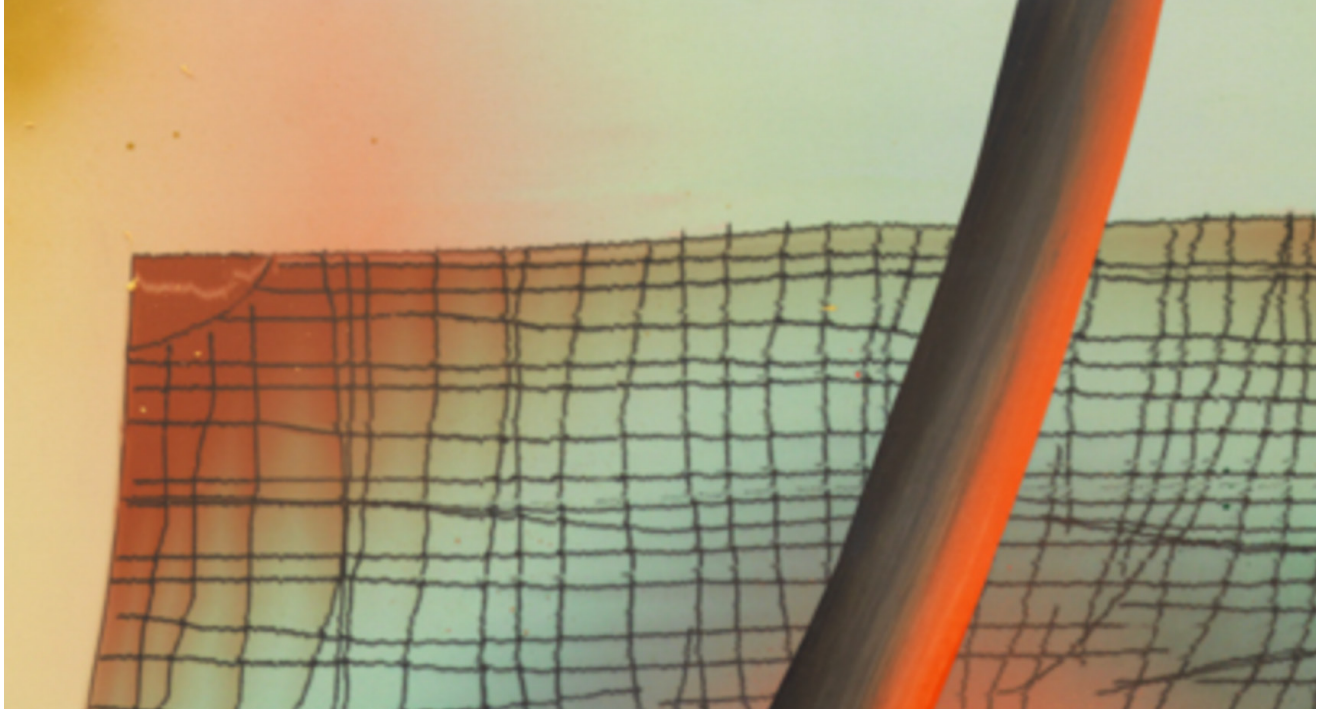
FIVE DIALS

What was the last book you read?

LAUREN SILVA

A friend recently gave me Haruki Murakami's memoir *What I Talk About When I Talk About Running*, as a gift after I ran the New York City Marathon. I read the book in one sitting on a snowy day, and interestingly it took about the same time to run the marathon as it did to read the book. Murakami relates his practice of long distance running and marathon training to the slowly increasing

physical and mental willpower required to write novels. I found myself toggling between the image of writing and painting in my mind as I read, as the stamina and focus described for the labor of writing felt familiar for the other.



A SINGLE BOOK

Tristram Shandy

To find your favourite book, you must translate.

By Javier Marías

Asking a writer to choose his favourite book is tempting him either to lie or to boast, since, if he's really honest (not that there's any reason why he should be, either then or on any other occasion), he would be sure to say that his favourite book is one that he himself has written. It isn't the case, as the late, boastful Juan Rulfo said about his novel *Pedro Páramo*, that all writers write the book they would like to read, because otherwise there would be nothing worth reading, but it is true that an author's own books are the ones he will have read most often and with most care, patience, interest, understanding and indulgence (sometimes as if his very life depended on it). They will also be the books — one presumes — that most satisfy him, and if they're not, then he should refrain from publishing them. Writing is, in short, the most perfect and passionate way of reading, which is doubtless why adolescents, who usually have more time on their hands, often take the trouble to write out a poem they really love: rewriting is not only a way of appropriating a text, of adopting and endorsing it, it's also the best, most exact, most alert, most certain way of reading it. The Borges character Pierre Menard set out to write *Don Quixote* and, before he died, managed to complete two whole chapters and a fragment by his own means (that is, not by copying or transcribing it or even trying to live the same life Cervantes lived in order to find out if it was those experiences that had led him to write

the book). His work, therefore, remained unfinished — a very painful and frustrating experience for any writer — even though, in his case, Menard could, had he so wished, have easily found out what the rest of his novel would have been like. Of course, being a writer rather than a mere reader, he did not.

I, however, am fortunate enough to be able to reply to the question without indulging in lies or even in excessive vainglory, because I translated Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (or *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* to give it its full title), and so, as well as reading it, I have also written it. It probably is and will be my best book, and I say 'probably' thinking of other translations I've done (*The Mirror of the Sea* by Conrad or the works of Sir Thomas Browne) or others I might one day consider undertaking (Eliot's 'Prufrock' or Faulkner's *The Wild Palms*). Now, when I say that *Tristram Shandy* is my favourite book, I realize that this is precisely because I did translate it, because each and every one of its sentences, every word (even the blank and, indeed, the black pages it contains) not only passed before my attentive gaze, but through my painstaking intellect, my vigilant ear, my own tongue (by which I mean Spanish, not the moist thing in my mouth), and were finally reordered and set down on paper by my weary, hard-working fingers. Had I not translated *Tristram Shandy*, my favourite book might be *Don Quixote* or *Madame*

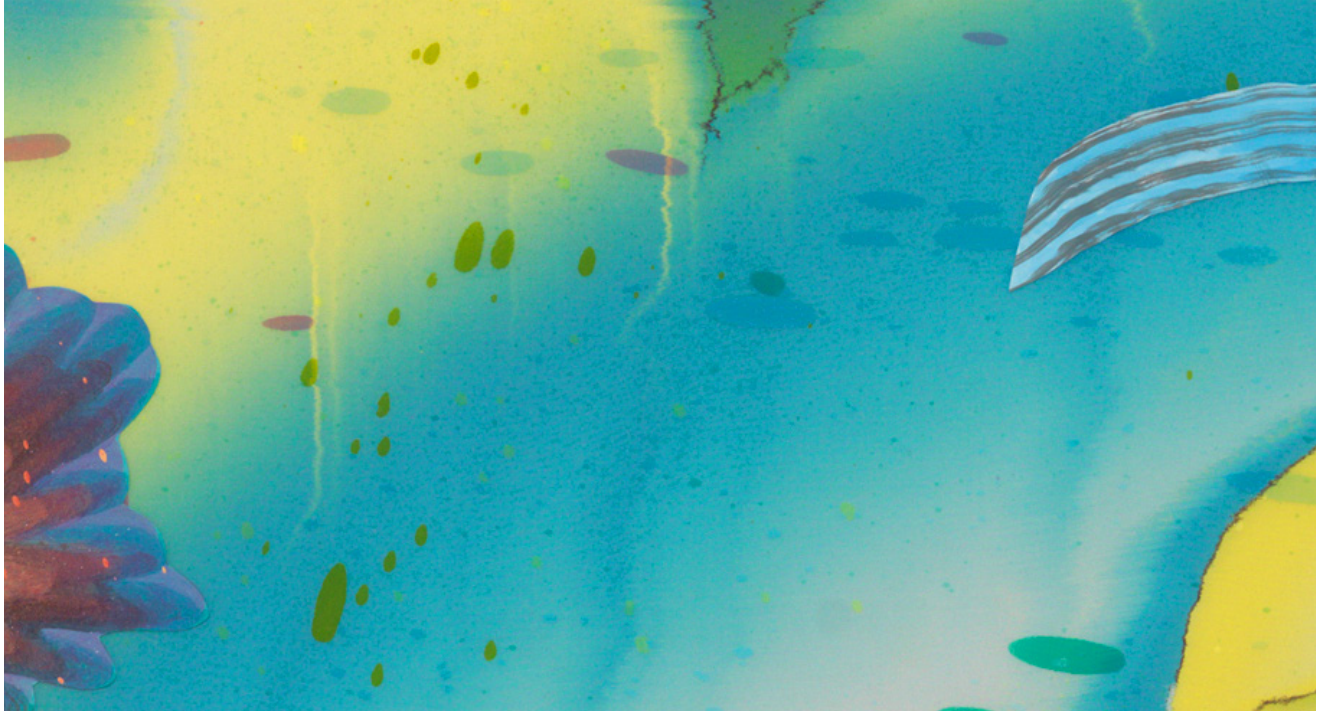
Bovary or *Heart of Darkness* or *Adolphe* or the poetry of Baudelaire. However, I didn't spend almost two years of my life with any of those books; nor did I submerge myself in them as I did in *Tristram Shandy*, however carefully I may have read them (and I did have to read *Don Quixote* in order to teach it, which is another of the most perfect ways of reading a book, but not the most exciting); none of them obliged me to write or edit or compose over a thousand sheets of paper, each one typed and retyped numerous times; none demanded that I find or invent more than a thousand notes; none of them, lastly, took over my prose, put me inside the author's — the other's — skin, so that I thought like him, spoke like him, said what he said in the way that he said it. Consequently, I can announce the title of my favourite book without resorting to lies. And yet, even though the truth does not impel me (as it would most writers) to choose one of my own novels, such absolute sincerity does not entirely exempt me from a charge of boastfulness.

Writing is, in short, the most perfect and passionate way of reading, which is doubtless why adolescents, who usually have more time on their hands, often take the trouble to write out a poem they really love.

For I should, in all honesty, say that my favourite book is my *Tristram Shandy*; that is, *Tristram Shandy* in or according to my version, which is necessarily different from Sterne's (although it's also necessarily the same, which is one of the insoluble paradoxes of translation, of all translation, good or bad), just as the two chapters of *Don Quixote* that Pierre Menard managed to write must have been different from those by Cervantes even though they were exactly the same, word for word, and written in the same language. This doesn't mean that I consider my version of Sterne's novel to be superior to Sterne's original — no, I mean something much simpler and less competitive: in my version, in Sterne-according-to-Mariás, I know the reasoning behind the choice of each line and each word, whereas I don't in Sterne-according-to-Sterne. And that is why I could still go on correcting my version, could keep working on it, improving it in accordance with my current criteria, aptitudes and understanding (the translation was, after all, published in 1978), something that I couldn't and

wouldn't want to do with the English text, which, unlike the Spanish, does not in any way belong to me.

There's another circumstance to be added to all of this, one that apparently contradicts what I've just said and yet which is crucial to me in making my choice. The further beyond my grasp a book is, the greater my admiration. There are books I wouldn't want to write and wouldn't like to have written and which I nonetheless admire, precisely because, quite apart from not wanting to have written them, I feel I would have been incapable of doing so. Of all the books I've written or translated, and which I know, therefore, that in one sense or another I was capable of writing or translating, *Tristram Shandy* is the only book I would consider myself incapable of writing or translating now, even though I know that I did translate it. I mean if, say, just for the pleasure of reading a page or two, I open it at random and start to read (to re-read my own version), I find myself confronted by a task that now seems to me utterly impossible. I cannot conceive of how anyone could translate or have translated each and every page of this book into Spanish in an acceptable manner, and I can't explain how the person I was did just that. I don't believe the person I am now would be capable of the task. My favourite book, then, contains all the necessary qualities to be my favourite: it is, at once, the classic novel closest to *Don Quixote* and to the novel of my own age; thinking about it and occasionally dipping into it always bring me pleasure; and, finally, I admire it immensely because I see it as something beyond my grasp, even though I know that, as well as reading it (which, fortunately, I will always be able to do), there was a time when I re-wrote it.



ON POETRY & OTHERS

Go Away and Then Come Back

Martha Sprackland reads voraciously

Works referenced:

the cream, Edwina Attlee
(clinic Publishing Ltd, 2016)

Sunshine, Melissa Lee-Houghton
(Penning in *the Margins*, 2016)

The Lesser Bohemians, Eimear McBride
(Faber & Faber, 2016)

Conversations with Friends, Sally Rooney
(Faber & Faber, 2017)

White Hills, Chloe Stopa-Hunt
(clinic Publishing Ltd, 2016)

Animals, Emma Jane Unsworth
(Canongate Books, 2014)

This book is gonna be a killer. It's gonna suck me dry.

These words, two-thirds of the way through the opening poem in Melissa Lee-Houghton's *Sunshine*, scorched me, flashed in my eyes, thumped me right in the solar plexus. It's a moment in which she looks up from the page, looks right out from the book, chin lifted like a boxer, and I adore it. The book *is* a killer, a brute — dirty, overflowing, valuable, seething, sweet, extravagant; I've been pressing it into people's hands since it was published in September, when it was greeted by a Forward Prize-shortlisting for poem 'i

am very precious', a *Guardian* Best Poetry Books of 2016 plaudit and widespread praise for its painful, Plathian yawp. I felt pretty confessional, uncomfortable, tender and angry myself throughout 2016, to be honest. The year's run of high-profile celebrity deaths and political Armageddon began, for me, with the death of Bowie and the end of my marriage, before I quit my job and pitched forward into a three-month season of festival hedonism and an escape to Spain for the autumn. Plenty of sunshine. It was tempting to indulge in 2016, wasn't it? We're all outraged, all shellshocked, all a little grossly fascinated by the rolling news. I'm going to promise myself this is the last I'll write about it. I've felt vague and vagrant, loosely held, without focus or destination. Which is fine, which is fine, which is *fine*; until it isn't fine and you want to be grabbed by the ankle and pulled back down to earth. Melissa's poem ends with a plea:

I fit inside love like the breath in a flute. I will escape at the slightest pause or hesitation. You need to *clasp* me. You need to tie me down. Please. I want to go *nowhere*.

— 'And All the Things That We Do I Could Face Today'

I read a proof of Sally Rooney's debut novel, *Conversations with Friends*, whilst I was in Madrid, and admired its tetchy, touching, co-dependent central friendship between two

cool, clever young women, putting me in mind of Emma Jane Unsworth's *Animals*, albeit somewhat more hipster, more laconic, less wild. I was feeling keenly the absence of my own favourite women, eight hundred miles away in London, and the milieu and *ménages* of Frances and Bobbi, Nick and Melissa — not a million, not even eight hundred miles away from my gang, my world — sparked recognition and empathy and admiration more than once. I read *Conversations with Friends* hot on the heels of Eimear McBride's spectacular *The Lesser Bohemians*, and between them they struck a chord of identification in their portrayal of impossible, life-altering relationships with older lovers. It seems a boring thing to admit — not very *improving*, somehow — but when your life has changed and you're feeling nihilistic it's sometimes the gut-wrenching misery of doomed longing you want. 'You say you love me; well break me. When you're awful I lie back breathless'; or the way catching the other's eye feels 'like always, a key turning hard inside me'. You want to wallow, indulge, to test the limits of hurt in order to better locate and understand your own. And then you come back into the light, I suppose. *Conversations with Friends* also ends with a demand:

I closed my eyes. Things and people moved around me, taking positions in obscure hierarchies, participating in systems I didn't know about and never would. A complex network of objects and concepts. You live through certain things before you understand them. You can't always take the analytical position.

Come and get me, I said.

A while ago one of my favourite literary platforms, clinic, branched out into pamphlets with Edwina Attlee's *the cream* and *White Hills* by Chloe Stopa-Hunt, published riso in attractive limited editions (250 copies) by the Hoxton-based Hato Press (whose name, incidentally — 'pigeon' in Japanese — is in homage to the Doves Press, whose famously beautiful Doves type was, in my favourite story in font history, cast into the Thames and lost on Good Friday, 1913, after a dispute over ownership). I came across Edwina's writing not so long ago (both of these poets were commended in the Faber New Poets scheme), but I've known Chloe's work for years, having published a poem of hers in a magazine I used to run seven or eight years back. I like her poems, which are jewelled and windswept as grey weather on the beach, with plenty of myth and madness.

It strikes me that much of what I've liked this year has been narratives of forgiveness ('*This cold snap is / No fault of mine*') or acknowledgement of physical and mental tribulations, misalignments and idiosyncrasies, having got to grips with my own. I'm reluctant to say 'illnesses' or

'troubles', though I include them in the category; Melissa's dispatches from the psychiatric ward, Chloe's from the frontlines of chronic illness, Sally's protagonist's diagnosis of endometriosis and what it signifies for her reproductive future and sense of womanhood (this, too, a theme in *Animals*, in the form of a pushily womb-controlling fiancé). A nod to Plath here, too, and a wink: 'Tulips, like the / Dreadful things they are.' It's woozy, louche stuff, simultaneously rich and etiolated, like a sounding string bent past its note on a violin. They're poems of brevity, almost haiku-like:

A rain begins,
Of red
Morning flowers
And fresh,
Sufficient light.

— 'Education'

I like these books. Melissa's 'sadness spun of pure sunshine'; Chloe's fresh, sufficient light in which 'We all decode our blows: *What light is, / What vessel, what heart is.*' None of this was meant to be self-help. Before I went to Spain, looking for balance, someone told me to 'go away, if you have to, go away and then come back'. That's probably enough, isn't it, to be asked — so I did. Come and get me, I said. I want to go *nowhere*.



THE BACKLISTER

Who Rules the World

An appreciation of Noam Chomsky's endless factcheck of American power

Who run the world?
Girls.

Who run this mother?

Girls.

But who *rules* the world? Well... not girls. Not boys. Who rules this mother, according to elderly-yet-vital Noam Chomsky? It's more like '...the top ranks of increasingly monopolized economies, the gargantuan and often predatory financial institutions, the multinationals protected by state power, and the political figures who largely represent their interests.' Yes. We're still waiting for that particular single to drop.

What's satisfying about diving into backlist Chomsky is that new titles keep appearing. He's 88 to Beyoncé's 35 but still prolific, offering in the past few years primers and conversations and pocket-sized explications on Anarchism, on Occupy, on Palestine. At this point most people seriously interested in politics, history, literature, poverty reduction, climate change or just generally in life itself on this planet have read Chomsky, or — and bless their hearts, we're all hardworking people — *feel* they've read Chomsky. A vague memory coheres around key terms such as 'power systems'. A far-off reading list materializes. Someone you admired, or someone you wanted to sleep with, or someone mansplaining loudly in a pub might

have produced a battered copy of Chomsky. Did you pick it up? Now more than ever it's important to read the words rather than luxuriate in a memory, especially since members of Trump's cabinet seem to have emerged, untouched, straight from these predatory financial institutions and rapacious multinationals. In vertiginous times, we face the danger of actually living *inside* a Chomsky paragraph come to life, jolted into existence by the dark energy of an orange politician. If you remember Chomsky is relevant, that his thinking might have shaped you in some dusty moment in the past, go back to the text.

In vertiginous times, we face the danger of actually living inside a Chomsky paragraph come to life, jolted into existence by the dark energy of an orange politician.

The Backlister was first introduced to *Manufacturing Consent* in the early nineties, so Chomsky will forever be associated with damp basement flats where Ani DiFranco seemed to play constantly on someone's stereo. It was around the time Jennifer Baichwal's film version of *Manufacturing Consent* appeared, Chomsky grew into a figurehead. Because he could eloquently draw a line from Howard Zinn back to David Hume, he was regularly denied airtime on shouty news channels. On the other side of the political spectrum, Chomsky suffered from deification. The lefty family at the heart of the recent film *Captain Fantastic* celebrates Chomsky Day instead of Christmas. 'You would prefer,' Viggo Mortensen's character asks his children, 'to celebrate a magical fictitious elf instead of a living humanitarian who's done so much to promote human rights and understanding?' This worship was not always helpful. To the left, Chomsky began to resemble something fictitious, if not an actual elf, then a legendary untouchable figure, as if his work was finished. His books still breathe, and now can act as a corrective to the unfolding American narrative. When people ask 'How did we get to this point?' it's worth reminding him the events of Trump's presidency are tethered to the past. Chomsky is there, crooking his finger: Go back. Follow the path.

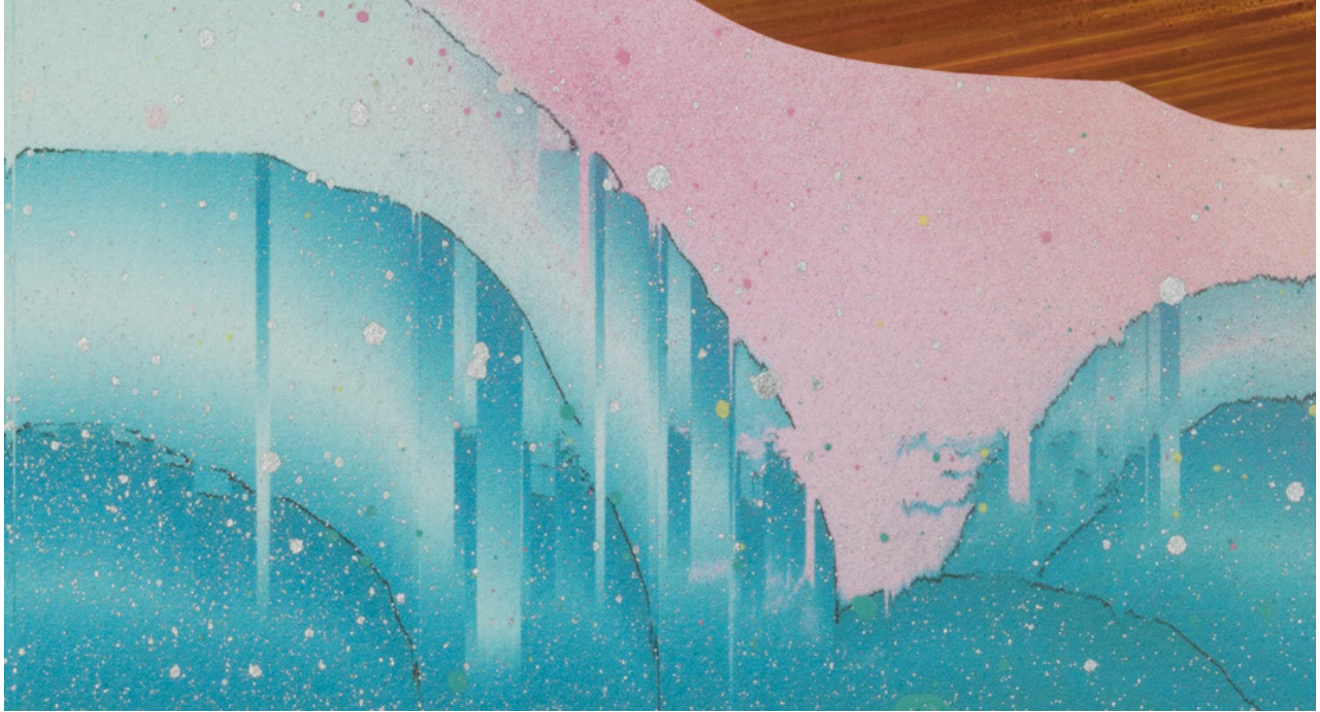
Reintroducing Chomsky into your life will rouse dormant emotions. His dry humour will elicit a few bitter laughs. He will make you angry, despondent, then angrier, and even more despondent. He will remind you of US involvement in Central and South America in the 80s in such a vital way you might even, like I did, begin to envision Oliver North, like a ghostly vision from the past, raising his hand to testify in the Iran-Contra affair. One of the notes I scrawled as I made my way through the book read 'look into what happened to those Salvadoran bishops'. I have; it's not good.

But just when things are getting bad, in a world of Trumpery and intellectuals working in service to the power establishment, Chomsky offers a droplet of hope. He quotes the wonderfully named Thorstein Veblen, who mentions that we regular people make up 'the underlying populations' and we may hope to overcome the power of business and nationalist doctrine to emerge, in Veblen's words, 'alive and fit to live.' The current president likes to brag of his love for the forgotten man and woman, but his policies show he'd like more of them to remain forgotten — or to absent themselves from the national conversation if not the entire geography of the United States. Recently a staffer for a congressman described the effect of constant phone calls from the members of the community recounting personal stories of immigration. En masse, they're unignorable, and who is making these phone calls if not 'the underlying population'? Of course, after quoting Veblen in his text, Chomsky returns to tone down our happiness with his next line: there is

not much time. There was not much time when the book was published. On the 26th of January, 2017, the Doomsday Clock, created in 1947 by the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* to warn us of the catastrophic nature of nuclear weapons, was set ahead 30 seconds, to two and a half minutes to midnight. That's the closest it's been to midnight since 1953.

In *Who Rules The World*, Chomsky allows for equal opportunity criticism. We all might feel early nostalgia for Obama — Don't go, smooth-talking Barack, and leave us with the current menace. But hold up, Chomsky reminds us. Resist the tendency to see individuals instead of power structures, the tendency to overlook convenient continuity. What Obama's 'ban on torture' eradicated was torture performed by Americans, not the bulk of it, which is still 'handled and outsourced to foreigners under US patronage.' Obama just, well, 'repositioned' torture and it's worth remembering that, even when we shudder at a president who shrugs and celebrates waterboarding.

Whatever you think of Chomsky's politics, in these later years of his life, it's evident he remains anti-pain, anti-murder but never gives in to sentimentality. Please look at the facts, the books announce. Here they are again. At the end of *Who Rules The World*, The Backlister felt a strange sort of vacillating feeling towards the US. There's the Age of Trump, of course, and the rise of demagoguery. But where else in the world could a man like this produce such a body of work?



VERY SPECIFIC COMMISSIONS

Rowena Fights For Truth

The winner of our climate change fiction contest.

A new story from Abi Andrews

Giles leans into the beaten up desk chair in his office at the Marine Research Centre. Behind his door hangs the old sign. ‘Conservation’ was to protect a vulnerable thing, no longer the work of government-funded organisations. The environment is now a robust and besides the point *inconsequential* landscape.

A noise from the door, a tall woman enters shutting it quietly behind her. They both look around the artefacts of his office in silence. Simultaneously they stop at the gold plaque on his desk.

‘Three years ago, can you imagine?’

‘How about you? First female marine biologist to win the Johnston Prize for Innovation.’

‘What a farce.’

‘Some things you just don’t see coming.’

She slides an envelope across the desk, takes his hand and squeezes. She walks to the door, closing it softly behind. Giles opens the envelope.

Shaking + 3am + can’t stop watching videos of that man on youtube. He talks in the same language as us + vilifies it.

Terrified this means nothing means anything any more. He is undoing the sanctity of words/facts/truth.

I dream about our reef Giles. It’s broken my heart. Ten years spent trying to stave off the worst changes. Another ten it could all be gone. I know its dying + staying might only witness its undoing. But I want so badly to try fighting, bring about a day when the polyps find shelter in our printed simulacra.

We can hope, at least, recolonisation. Our structure reborn as a reef for 4000 years even. With it the truth might live, outlive him + our civilisation maybe, no one left to understand but what could be more perfect than for the coral to once again live on the skeleton of our message void of any meaning?

If singular polyps find their way back after we are gone, repopulate structure until again reef bleeds with life the fish flicker between its fingers their shoals refracting sunlight in shapes like entire organisms, colour rushing back. I cry Giles, when I allow myself to think it.

The message:

CLIMATE CHANGE IS HAPPENING CARBON DIOXIDE ABSORBED BY OCEAN TURNS IT TO ACID, ACIDIFICATION BLEACHING CORALS HITTING ENTIRE MARINE FOOD CHAIN, OCEAN ABSORBING HEAT OF RISING TEMPERATURES, HEAT KILLING THE KRILL

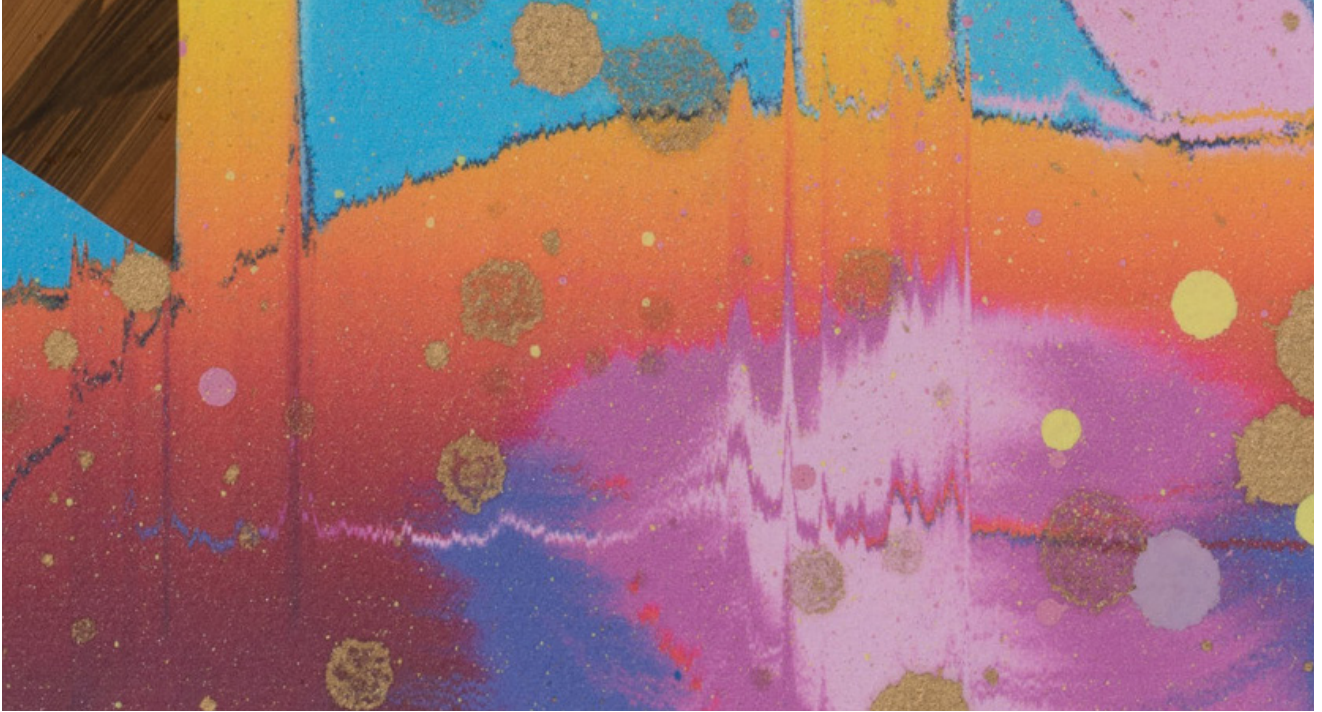
THAT BREED IN COLD WATERS, KRILL DEATHS
IMPLICATE ENTIRE FOOD CHAIN INCLUDING
PRIMARY PREDATORS, HUMANS. EARTH A
SYSTEM OCEAN PLAYS ITS PART KEEPING
BALANCE. GOVERNMENT WANT TO HIDE
SCIENCE SO IT DOES NOT DAMAGE THEIR
PROFIT/INDUSTRY SACRIFICED PLANET TO
MYOPIC GREED. OUR EPITAPH. SO LONG AND
THANKS FOR ALL THE FISH.

*Sandstone closest in texture/chemical makeup to coral; will attract
the polyps. Lay coordinates in sections for different bedding teams,
make each a map to follow that disguises the message, eventual
structure so big that they will be unaware of significance. Contacts
in Bahrain/ Monaco/ Australia are ready, know the plan, are
careful + know to wait until you and I are out to go public.*

*Mexico. Keep safe + get out as soon as you can. Hard to let go,
life, friends, family, this forsaken fucking sea we love. If it was
just the threat of being fired. Not with Emily, not after Bret was
killed, and Simon in prison. This is so big, Giles. Sometimes
I feel like I'm suffocating under it.*

Speak ASAP

Rowena



AND FINALLY

A Poem by Jay Barnett

Tourism

I went to a star
 Floated till I got there
A small rock drifted into sight
Spiraled ahead. I watched for about six hours
until it got too small
It was the only thing I saw
for a century

There were many centuries

