

South Parade

Carole Ebtinger & Esther Gatón | *phosphorescence of my local lore*
23 November 2023 - 13 January 2024

Night of readings
7 December 2023

To celebrate Carole Ebtinger and Esther Gatón's show, South Parade is hosting a night of readings, from artist Esther Gatón and writers Nasim Luczaj, Eva Gerretsen and Lucy Rose Cunningham, who wrote the show's accompanying text. Throughout Esther Gatón's and Carole Ebtinger's practices, notions of movement and encounter are explored; a sense of attention, time, and intimacy with materials, people and places. Each reading will be informed and shaped by the show, moving with/embodying the material.

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Writers' Bios

Esther Gatón (she/her), was born in Valladolid and is now based in London. Esther works across sculpture, writing and video. She studied Fine Art at Saint-Luc Liège Belgium, the University of Barcelona, and Goldsmiths London, and holds a PhD from the Complutense University of Madrid. In 2022, Esther completed the WIELS Residency in Brussels, and in early 2023 opened a solo show CA2M Museum in Madrid, curated by Cory John Scozzari. Her work has been exhibited in institutions such as Capc (Bordeaux), Matadero (Madrid), La Casa Encendida (Madrid), Patio Herreriano Museum (Valladolid), Navarra University Museum, Fabra i Coats (Barcelona), TEA (Tenerife) and MUSAC (León), C3A Córdoba. Her writing has been published in NERO Magazine and Urbanomic.

Nasim Luczaj (she/her) is a poet and translator based between London and Glasgow. Her pamphlet *HIND MOUTH* was published in the Earthbound Poetry Series. Her work has appeared widely online and in print, among others in the anthologies *PROTOTYPE 5* (Prototype), *the weird folds: everyday poems from the anthropocene* (Dostoyevsky Wannabe), and *Virtual Oasis: An Anthology of Human-AI Responses* (Trickhouse Press).

Eva Gerretsen (she/her/they/them) is a writer based in London. Currently, she is a staff writer for The Lemming, a DIY magazine based in Manchester (who by some miracle lets her write whatever she wants). For The Lemming she has written about guerilla gardening, rewilding, funerary trends and Foucault, and has just finished a piece soon to be published about the art of the 1926 Empire Marketing Board. She also writes poetry; her recent pamphlet 'Coward' explores cowardice, grief and plagiarism. Her other poems have been published by bath magg and The Interpreter's House. Her most recent poem 'Unforgettings' which she will read tonight, was nominated as 'highly commended' for the Manchester Cathedral poetry competition and plays on the theme of truth, translation and extremophiles. She likes folk horror and Stuart Hall.

Lucy (Lu) Rose Cunningham (she/her/they/them) is a curator and writer. Before a recent move to London, she studied on the MLitt Curatorial Practice programme at Glasgow School of Art, curating shows at Kiosk Gallery, The Pipe Factory and French Street. Beyond curation, Cunningham has written for and exhibited performances at Leeds Art Gallery, The Hepworth, South London Gallery, and HuMBase, Stuttgart. She is the author of poetry pamphlets *For Mary; Marie, Maria* and *Interval: House, Lover, Slippages*, both published by Broken Sleep Books, the latter featured in PN Review 2023. She has also written for Glasgow's Pala Press and MAP Magazine.

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Esther Gatón
surface ornament frivolity (2019)

A world wholly alive has a hellish power - Clarice Lispector

We only have the surface. Our language knows it, because *this* word has no opposite. There is no such thing as *in-surface* or *a-superficial*; and concepts like “bottom” or “depth” are not exact antonyms either, as we often access them through the upper layers, sliding away different surfaces. If we cannot possibly touch anything but the facade of what is being shown, what do we gain by turning language on its head, by looking for the “non-superficial”? Rotating words, twisting them to tease out other possibilities, can lead to the discovery. Not so much of something secret—more valuable than anything we have seen—but of another equally fabricated, interpreted—maybe malignant—part.

Take the word *action* for example: what is the opposite of an “act”? It can’t be “to stop” because one can decide to do that, which implies some action. Neither do things like “de-act” (if that actually existed), or “in-action” work, because they somewhat describe processes. The opposite of action is probably passion. We don’t act when in the throes of our passions because passion is something that happens to us, that we give ourselves up to (passively). It sounds suspicious, for example, to say that someone “acts on love”.

Similarly, the ornament is more alive than life. It operates in several of our senses and can be defined as the change on the surface that attempts to bring us to a halt. It is a characteristic of the space that influences our time, and in fact the more effective the ornamentation, the more we stop to try and distinguish it. Although an ornament is never identified. An ornament can be overlooked completely or it can just be plain. It is always mixed up (submerged, almost) with the rest of its setting. Again, the ornament is what makes us stop: a sign, an announcement, a light, a sting, a kneepad.

For example, a tumble, a collision, would be an ornament viewed with disfavour (in other words, a reproachable but frequently efficient ornament). James Graham Ballard’s novel *Crash* operates like a torrent for this kind of ornamentation. In a 1970 interview for *Penthouse*, the author summed it up as follows: “A car crash harnesses elements of eroticism, aggression, desire, speed, drama, kinesthetic factors, the styling of motion, consumer goods, status—all these in one event. I myself see the car crash as a tremendous sexual event really: a liberation of human and machine libido (if there is such a thing).”

The most successful ornament is the one that exerts the most power of seduction, because ornament and sensuality go hand in hand. When we speak of “sensual forms”, we often refers to those fine curved lines coiled one on top of the other, but sensuality can be flat and unchanging. Smooth, cold, reflective, bitter, arid, rough. An ornamented surface may be austere. Ornamentation can not only occur without adornment, but can actually be more effective that way: when there are no witnesses. In other words, ornamentation is the act of seduction without realisation. When we are asleep, ornamentation thrives in our snores. To breathe during sleep with a rough hoarse noise due to the vibration of the soft palate; snoring is the epitome of ornamentation.

Death could also be acknowledged with a little mirth, with a little more frivolity. The word *frivolus*, which evolved into *frivolous*, was used to refer to cheap, useless clay vessels of little value. To any old clay. This material is modest enough to begin with, but when it is used to make a trivial object, that insignificant status is multiplied exponentially. Suddenly we find that the frivolus object is weighted down by an exaggerated humbleness: it becomes ridiculously banal.

So *frivolus*, once used to describe a worthless object, has evolved into *frivolous*, referring to someone who has no thought for anything serious or important and who instead chooses to focus on the lightweight things in life. In fact, *lightweight*, something that weighs very little, harks back to the origins of *frivolus*.

Faced with a heavy subject such as death, we would do well to lighten the burden. This matter of our dying (immense, unfathomable, voracious, tragic, valuable, true) gives rise to the construction of temples, which are the complete opposite of the *frivolus* pot, the second-rate clay vessel. And yet there is something

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much more moribund in the second element. It's as if the value of the *frivolus* were so inconsequential that death seems to be constantly stalking it.

Death is part and parcel of it, because no one would mind too much if it were to break. The fact is that we frequently put the *frivolus* in any old place, leave it out in the rain or store it without proper protection. We are careless with the *frivolus*, so it is only natural that it succumbs, or is on the verge of succumbing. It is a moribund object from day one. In all likelihood, this *frivolus* thing gets on much better with death than any other thing. Which is why nowadays adopting a frivolous attitude towards death is said to signify a convenient relationship with it. Numerous deaths occur every day.

I am reminded of the *Dialogue between Fashion and Death* that Giacomo Leopardi wrote in the eighteenth century. Fashion says to her sister, Death, "I say then that our common nature and custom is to incessantly renew the world. You attack the life of man, and overthrow all people and nations from beginning to end; whereas I content myself for the most part with influencing beards, head-dresses, costumes, furniture, houses, and the like. It is true, I do some things comparable to your supreme action. I pierce ears, lips, and noses, and cause them to be torn by the ornaments I suspend from them. I impress men's skin with hot iron stamps, under the pretence of adornment. I compress the heads of children with tight bandages and other contrivances; and make it customary for all men of a country to have heads of the same shape. I torture and cripple people with small shoes. I stifle women so they stay so tight that their eyes start from their heads; and I play a thousand similar pranks."

To say that death operates like fashion is frivolous, and can make us laugh. Laughter is how we react to something we can't understand. If mirth describes anything, it is the interference of life in our systems of reasoning. That *gag*, *lol* or *hahaha* is simply the interruption of the mechanics that we have built for ourselves. We fill what we don't understand with laughter. The straight line that moves forward, clear, uniform, eventually becomes life.

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Eva Gerretsen

Phosphorescence of my local lore: response and reading (2023)

'Local lore' to me reads as origin story. The worlds we craft for ourselves. How we deploy memory, articulate our belonging, our finger pointing ahead. When I thought about what I could read for this evening, I thought along the lines of myth; themes of cycles, passages, phases and arcs; life, death.

The following poems are either directly inspired by the works you see around you, Lu's accompanying text, or else related to this theme of origins to form a kind of cosmology – winks of relatedness, fine cords to connect.

*

1.

I came here 6 days ago
for the first time and stood
to recollect
to pull taught
to excavate the exquisite wanting of footholds
to reach my oldest and tentatively named ancestor
slow radius
sure fragments
word for "root"

What persisted
was muddy and fleshed
an image of gunk chorus
meadowhazing

From this room
I devised my local lore in three parts:

First,
this bit here
working backwards
from the grave of her
gravel pit
soaked November
I imagine her seeing
all the woodlice again as if through waterways

Second,
working backwards
her permanent choice
I am private about this part
I don't dare say the proper word for it
so, I have devised another: Deathchoosing
culturally untranslatable

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gets people strange

Third,
working backwards
I watch her on a DVD
lovesick and grasping
my lore
my enmeshment
you see this is where I have come from

*

2.

Deathchoosing

Charting her final days
as grainsmack
breathcleansing finishedness
here
in the hour of supreme need
a thumbfeel will do
she crosses over the dune -
this side better hill to die on
she thinks
humsifting
vision diminishing
though broken anew
defiant transit
calm passing
suitable harmonies I affirm
Deathchoosing
is
half seeing the folds of the other side
& then the desert
is fucking blue
bel canto
hive
deep rustic
and tensile
no splutter here just dark and star-studded
can you even hear me anymore
quickly I press my love
through my thumb
into your slowbecoming pulse
Deathseeing
Deathsmelling
tricks of my eye
who knew that colour (blue) could exist as it does as it did
holding the note of this room
reweld me to myself
all this enough to spook the global markets
& still it is so (blue)
death is a hate crime

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against real love
women are excellent
no one here understands
get up you lazy thing
meanwhile
she stays on the right side of the dune
which is
dependent on its vantage point on living
a cutthroat persuasive level of terror
not apparent in her batting eyes
I can't end this poem
I can't
I can't
I can't
Don't make me take it away before I

*

3.

It was my birthday & I saw my grandmother at 23 - the film is a comfort hum. Ribbon working. I was shocked into an upwelling. I added more to her mythology. My perfect friend. In the film she gets married, briefly disowned for her choice of Protestant, and has 3 children consecutively. She is shy but silly for the camera. A huge hawkish nose. Gap-toothed. 23 is younger than I am now. On her honeymoon she pats horses. A road-sign. A shot of a caterpillar labouring along a leaf. She skips and grins.

I have come home for my birthday. October this year. You see what I mean. In terms of terror. Can you feel full & empty at the same time? I miss the dog - who is dead. I tripped over the memory of her basket in the corner next to the kitchen table. My grandmother in glorious black sunglasses. I have a pair of sunglasses in my online shopping basket. I feel guilty and cull the tab. The film is black and white so it's hard to tell what the weather is like, but it looks typical wind and rain. She poses sideways on a rock. My grandfather (somewhat estranged after the supposed affair and then divorce) runs over to her to kiss her before darting back behind the camera. Didn't know him like that. Their wedding lunch: a table covered in little plates. Ham etc. Crushed flowers.

I change my attitude on the sofa and sit smaller. I hide behind hair and am a little stuck around my personal suffering. I crouch. It has been 6 years. I don't care if anyone is heartbroken except me. I envy the woodlouse. The cradle of dirt is homecoming and world-building. Less brutal. The caterpillar on screen again, nearby, teeth are tired and beaming.

*

Lore needs language. Mythology needs peculiar utterance. I wrote *Unforgettings* as part of a longer poem called 'M'. The poem shifts between the solitude of the Jordanian desert and 20th century Europe, retelling the Life of St Mary of Egypt as it collides with the life of 'M', an enigmatic version of my grandmother. Framed by the spiritual crisis of the monk Zosimus and his need for enlightenment, the poem explores themes of language and heritage set against landscapes of extremity.

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Unforgettings

The Wisdom of the Desert Fathers was originally an oral tradition, but at some point in the 5th century these sayings get written down. We cannot know what slipped into them during the process of transcription. The pen draws up its own truth.

Legend says all crosses came to burn and watch the grieving land. How it fled into harmless solace.

*

Everything here has been balanced by the ripe muscle of the wind. Noon ribs the long waves, licking them into a dazzling emptiness. These waves become grisly under the chalked sun and glaze of stars.

*

Here, tongues are bells, flesh the timid hand and all this to repeal a slipped faith.

*

Abolish polluted change. Look to wisdom, an alcohol of wonder. Their summer: hungry to know. End of.

*

Is music a remnant of the object. Give soft hallelujahs and ride by and die. Is music a keeper beyond seduction, as though borne by cameras, not nature. In the end, the head is still sandy.

*

Outside the firm mind, a blood-red native cup. Grim, weary.

*

What tongue can name god and a pinstripe knee. What tongue can ordain the sanded hillside and recognise the bright stone as friendship.

*

If the rock is lifeless, how is it that men stumble? Their recognition is of their missing joys. The door. Emerging when another closes.

*

What ear can hear the work of dew, the dawn lake. What ear can hear the holy whip of conversion, or exchange.

*

Sky-moan, or wind, or bird-path, or sandstorm, or take a long, hard breath now.

*

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What eye can bear the heavy East. The burnt land. Seeking to strengthen. What eye can resolve the granulated sentence.

*

When I was reading about the story of St Mary of Egypt, I consulted the Old English text. I noticed how quickly I corrupted it. How unfaithful I became. I wrote of events in orders invented. Conveyed only versions. I asked what was necessary to tell an inherited narrative. A perverted hagiography. I mean a biography which treats all its subjects with sainted reverence. You see, before she died my grandmother asked me to write down her life story. You see, the stakes are high.

I was interested in the monk Zosimus, because I recognised a familiar devotion to geriatric women. In fact, St Mary of Egypt comes to us through the monk Zosimus. In his wanderings of the Jordanian desert - in the manner of the Desert Fathers - he chances on St Mary, who at this point in the narrative, has been living in the desert alone for forty-seven years.

Zosimus dreams of desert trip

Zosimus dreams of The Law painted in blood on the wall

Zosimus dreams that the ornament of planets is finished in good order

Zosimus dreams of when he was a small girl

Zosimus dreams of carrying a coffin

Zosimus dreams of giving birth to country folk then swallowing them

Zosimus dreams of an idling Chevrolet

Zosimus dreams of dead ships

Zosimus dreams of rations

Zosimus dreams of scripture in bubble writing

Zosimus dreams of the sky-road and how birds pursue currents

Zosimus dreams of failure anxiety

Zosimus dreams of getting vaccinated

Zosimus dreams of the twigs snapping

Zosimus dreams of perverting the course of justice

Zosimus dreams of life support

Zosimus dreams of playing solitaire in the rain

Zosimus dreams of sucking bones

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Zosimus dreams of an angel with sunglasses on (inside!)

Zosimus dreams of the endless knot

Zosimus dreams in contrapposto

Zosimus dreams of campfire perfume

Zosimus dreams of toes

Zosimus dreams of writing everything down

Zosimus wakes up. He hears the low hum of matins. A Franklin peals. A dog breathes hotly outside. He sits with the abbot. You should join your brothers. The abbot gestures to the window, and beyond where a distant whistle erupts. It is too red, that vista. You should seek out other holy men, they will guide you. You will become a desert father. Zosimus, the abbot continues, you are missing something.

Zosimus thinks about it as he walks to prayer. He is wary of allure. As he sings with his brothers, he notices that same wind has brought in red sand. Like a path, it leads to the altar.

*

The central lesson of the Life of St Mary of Egypt and the appeal it would have had to its Medieval audience, is contained within the story she tells Zosimus of her childhood in Alexandria, followed by her pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

It could be argued that her unusual embodiment of female sanctity is made acceptable because of how it supports his spiritual journey.

*

MARY'S CALENDAR OF EROTIC LIFE

Monday

She is born into the shy gap of cleavage between two dunes. She is born, like the stones, with nestling practice.

Tuesday

Nothing runs as dry as her mother's milk. Outside, two sheep skulls balanced on top of each other, as atoms are wont to collapse.

Wednesday

Her mother has a habit of pacing.

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Thursday

Down bad. There is no crop. The groaning stars move into their constellations.

Friday

There is only the burn. A diagram is drawn in the sand. Here is the stomach, here the intestines. Her brothers are learning the way to hold a knife. They pick the dirt from her feet.

Saturday

Though she is small, she is ruinous. She perceives each grain as glories.

Sunday

She is concentrating with malicious intent. She is very young when she breaches.

Monday

Illicit fire

light licks the concave chest of a spoon.

She enters the pavilion of darkness in an uncompromising hour.

She is chilled from the rest.

Tuesday

She breaks ties.

If I can't dance here? She is beckoned to a door,

brightly, people spill out. She catches a few words – that is enough- says her navel.

Wednesday

Across the porous world of salt scales, fresh crab and starlight

she pulls herself onto them. If her mouth were the sea it would condemn the earth.

Thursday

How did the sea endure those wicked lusts? The fishy sailors offer her money. She laughs at their cocks.

What is money good for in the Kingdom of Heaven? Now, that is something she actually believes.

Friday

Is the heat of faith the same as the other kind? She gets seasick. She enters a new phase.

Saturday

Is arrival into Jerusalem. One date palm has not yet been devoured by the pilgrims. Within minutes she has coated her teeth in their skins. She is fuller, with sanded hair. Casting an eye above the swirling cloth she spies the Temple.

Sunday

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The church is sealed. She has violated a star. Eve's confusion. Making bliss. It's the sky. It's Santa Maria Chicago my son. Pay no mountain, walk no snakes. She is denied entry.

Monday

Doubt is no longer luxurious. The Temple stands quietly. The pilgrims have not yet risen. She paces outside, hungry for the hidden.

Tuesday

She looks again at the map of herself. Where does this road want to lead?

Wednesday

The sun has cracked the flags. There is laughter among smells. She breaks a leaf up by its veins.

Thursday

She tries again; this time she holds her breath. Still the same. The doors clatter against her. The bruise lasts for days.

Friday

She fortifies her eyes, her lips, her breasts and her feet. She exalts the threshold of the door. Still no whisper, the bar is down.

Saturday

Hung silence. God is silence. She is hit by it; the recognition. God is silence. She makes no sound.

Sunday

Oh, oh , oh, oh it is glorious! To be seen. To be let in.

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Nasim Luczaj

Phosphorescence of my local lore: response and reading (2023)

in open field

in open field the lightning chooses you you're on the way, are in its path to ground
become loud white passed through a passing through
run through fear, out of self, across mute blue safe as an insect falling you reach sound
in open field the lightning chooses you
wake in the eye of it as it blinks you an iris with a tension woven round
becomes loud white passed through a passing through
the eye you wake in blinks and sways you true bones set to sky veins, thunder keeps you bound in
open field where lightning chooses you
to have been born at all, to be anew
a surface, solace, thrust of being found
to be loud white passed through a passing through
what you can't see will stand struck into view there will be ways there are no ways around in open
field the lightning will choose you
pass its loud white past sound and pass you through

*

salt brush

of course i was frightened
the sea had looked right at me

and so the difference
was carved between us

it had stuck coast lights
for organs, thrown me
made my nails

and now your dreams
bite into them as salt does

by you i mean
whoever made me
so tired and real with one stroke

*

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from *I love you like this morning*

Note:

The painter Georgia O'Keeffe and the photographer Alfred Stieglitz exchanged letters for over forty years. They wrote to each other as acquaintances, passionate lovers, newlyweds, as well as throughout an increasingly distanced marriage. O'Keeffe outlived Stieglitz by another forty years, never had children and never remarried. In the poems that follow, excerpts from O'Keeffe's letters are in italics.

*

Canyon, Texas. February 16, 1917

Most of the day I have watched the wind—and wondered—
where are we? Are we still alike? Are we transparent
with each other, whistling through, truly?
How good is this tangle, honey, in your mouth?
How do you see it, the rickety drips that come off my fingers
like snippets of rain off a conifer? How about the liquid
that, stuck in the trunk, eats its own tail? Back in the day I would run
to my friend's house and back, my friend's house and back
like sap. I may be old and tall for what I am,
but shake me, bend branch. I know stillness as unfeasible.
Even breasts are fast to fall, or empires. At least
the goose-pimpled summits never lose touch
with the dough of their bases. They're onto something.

*

Canyon, Texas. March 11, 1917

It's a very wobbly little girl writing you tonight—

my own shudders approach me, begging for money.
I throw them moonrinds, don't look down,
hear the soil, how it's pounded by millions
of runs to our heat, to our young, to where it befalls
to die, hear the ice of namegiving,
crack and plonk, no more windows, no more
mirrors, no more boots, no more sense, you the word
I know least, dear sir, molasses, kind winter—

*

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Later that day

He had been telling me about a blue hyacinth he was going to bring me—
then I forgot he even was, and then I told you about him.
He won't be offended. He is dead, I am dead.
It happens. Fur puckered with blood. Shrewd wings
on the roadside. At least I can tell I am going off,
that tarmac has claimed me, that there are lorry drivers
who drag bulbs down the motorway for a living,
whose wheels are a massage the tar sighs under,
who wouldn't have minded my company, who would have laughed
with nothing not quick to give, blatant as brushstroke, sunset.

*

Later still

*I think—if there is
anything left of me
after I've trailed
off for that moonlight
breakfast I'll paint
tomorrow—
backwards
from this moment
the colours will take
themselves
to what I need
of them:
womb—
depth flickering
neat thuds,
a fraught always.*

*

Canyon, Texas. June 29, 1917

*I just came in from the night—very little
breeze—moonlight on the bigness—
and the baggy lack of you, too, glowed
on everything said. Full of holes.
Dragging the seas breakfast lunch
and dinner. Sadness: I tiptoe in soft
so as not to spoil the balloon of its quiet.
Where do you want to be touched,
not to mention how might I reach you,
my first bike, half-patina, forever turning right
in the garage?*

*

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San Antonio, Texas. March 14, 1918

*Your letters—why you know I like them
but it occurs to me that you need taking care of—
only how am I to do it? You think I'm any good
at staying put, here on my blink of earth, so slipshod?
I who let the sun's mute witchcraft conjure tumours
under my arms, moles over the wrist. I who pick veg
and let it fall apart all on its own. Whose bedtimes are erratic
as the spaces between blades of grass. And I'm not healthy
when your letters come, imported from so far away,
woven tight as lips securing heaven, as baskets
to keep wine in, miracles with handles. I can access them
like a tiger's sorrow—it seems there in the eye's design,
but what do I know? A tiger wouldn't see it that way.
What the hell does a tiger see, anyway, how many colours
of meat? A sheep distinguishes all kinds of green, sees the sugar.
Meanwhile I can't get through to what you mean to me,
break it down into view. I hold the page always as if it were
to blow away, its intentions clenched as seeds, and wonder
how come you mean all this, how come I take it
so to heart, everything you hand me, imprinted on the millings
of a tree? Recently there's all this talk of boundaries—
everyone starts to set them. They lie around us, rinks of jelly,
their collagen beckoned from dead hooves.
But you do need taking care of, my wobbly one,
your one and only colour being
whatever devotion is, or a coat slapped onto it.
You are slapdash too—don't climb me or throw sand.
Don't lie on top of what I see. Don't cover me.
Don't ask me to lower myself. My mattress lies
right on the floor so the eyes are left with what is high
—umber whines of select sky pulled over
the street—but not the street itself. No curtains—
I've peeled the room. I can see the outside's soot,
though not the flames themselves, wood licked apart,
not the water released from trunks, smoke bending
and scattering light. It takes all the blue, smoke does,
leaving a soiled sheet, always unsettling, sometimes sunset,
misplaced and everywhere. A sunset—thick columns of air, thicker
than blue, at the right time. And you?*

*

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Again

Such a soft half wind (there it goes again).
Enough for my face to seem
the rock bottom of somewhere or other
where starfish shrug off limb by limb
in service of their centres—
I meant to say something gentler
but here I am, where the wind takes me,
where the wind is taken
to your iris, stripe-wheeling marble cub, love.

*

And again

The yellowest thing I ever made—
a sigh that coursed the room like spring.
Your common marsh marigold
facing rubbery
out of the mud.
Not only did the breath
escape my mouth,
it ran straight back, schoolbag sinking off
one shoulder.

*

San Antonio, Texas. June 3, 1918, telegram, dream

Think I see straight yet see nothing. Meanwhile a dragonfly
might view this roundly. You know they have three-sixty vision,
see two hundred frames per second? Imagine the paintings.
But to fly is to be followed by drowning:
they do not walk. They live even years underwater,
come up to hunt, mate, and die. Just to see what it's like.
I confide in you almost for the same reasons. The gap between us reminds me
of someone who, thanks to that very gap, you shall never
be reminded of. I am freest this way, made up of how
everyone before me spoke, and how out of that has fumbled
my every jewel, its name beyond me, shape not
in my hands at all. Maybe, just maybe, in yours.

*

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York Beach, Maine, September 1923, February, Glasgow, February

*Everything was silver when I first looked out
and just as irritants work on a pearl I worked
on calling it love. I worked on the painting of the red barn.
I worked on spraying my feet to kill the fungus,
worked on ever waking up. I rolled
my head to hear all the little crunches,
tethered things making their way through,
bubbles of air, water-hit, salt-hit, hailing from the rockpool
where my feet had looked up, two werewolves at a moonsun.*

*

Taos, New Mexico. June 15, 1930

*I felt as if I had forgotten
what a moon was like when I saw it—
lazy eye I said hello to—
unendable, only partly
there. My morning kiss
feels very alive—an earthworm
challenging concrete. Baby tongue
wants out. You tell me
this is a mountain day. Okay. How
fitting. Even stillness
is molten. This
is how I'm tuned. I get up early,
I learn to drive.
My car drills the wind
and I want you.*

*

Alcalde, New Mexico. May 17, 1931

*Anyone with a desire to paint ought to be poisoned by the age of twenty—
The years we spent next to each other speak for themselves.
I sat beside you in a skyscraper and felt sad for the sky, its increasing
rate of scrapeage. How come not a skylicker? I don't know
but I saw the buildings softly, like tongues, the only muscles
you can survey each morning, the muscles that get to see daylight.
The rest is a mystery. The glass does not rest. You took me in.*

South Parade

Lucy Rose Cunningham
exhibition text for *phosphorescence of my local lore*

*An arrangement of shadows thrown by leaves against
a wall. Clods of wet earth, alive post-shower.
The colour of my local lore,
deep greens to murky blues.
A subtle glimmer.*

The word phosphoresce comes to mind, fireflies beneath rivers' thin membrane. Movements holding memories you wish to scoop up with your bare hands. The propensity to collect, to recollect, to gather, to abandon, across canvas / wall / open expanse / open windows into the room and out again, to the secluded green found on a lost city trapeze.

All the gardens, all the pathways. All the straying trellis sweet-peas, the straying brush strokes, the silken lines growing into stems. The first fronds. To smell these flowers, and wonder what she smells like when waking in the morning, when pining after a lover. After the after. What does loss smell like. What does reconnecting with the self smell like. Feel like. The skin as it opens up, receptive, blooming like lichen / lilies / lovesickness. Love, from thirst, to be quenched through saturation, the reapplication of dyes, of waters, such weight -

- of loving, of lusting, of living, collapsed into paper stretches, inks and heart beat. Body and spirit pulled asunder, pulled taught. Aches felt along the spine, along the framework to grasp onto, for fear of falling down / for / in towards another, caring too much or too little.

All the gardens, all the pathways. We take to the outside, determine the greenery that won't subject us to more aching, but will remind us perhaps of where we have been, of where we might go. Grasses chorusing for us to come back to the earth; to shed human touch, shed the rejection of closure or not-knowing.

But grass hairs lick much like tongue, fingers and fleshed junctures. Never quite moving beyond memories that remain, nothing ever quite perishing, flickering in and out of comprehension. Inky reds to blues, the bloodlust of thunder overhead, the rain-cycle outside a cyclical bout of tears. You insist there is nothing abject about you, as you greet the mo(u)ning's course ozone.

Outside, the locus of desire. Desire in the cellulose of man's limbs and flower's stem. Desire in speckled sweat pheromones, desire in a foliar day, when the air sips yellow to ochre to gold. Tasting limerence in sun-dewed firmament and soil, its gossamer mycelia swash; among root systems as they sing your ancestor's tongue, a long drawn out note traced through the till of this land. One cannot bear to hear it. Another listens and echoes back.

But grass licks like grasses all the same, gesturing for us to simply wait / pause / acknowledge. To be with the soft drone of a hive in pollen peppered meadowland. To move forward. To be, in the in-between space - between trailblazing and being carried, between alight and simmering.

She is looking for those who mean it. For tenderness, saturation, a bleeding into the fabric of another. Her garden - *here* - to enter, to pause, acknowledge, go forth. Her garden, for those seeking tenderness too.