Volume 4 Issue 2

Amaranth

a journal of food writing, art & design

featuring:

Yuko Kurihara [Guest]

David Philip Ireland

Oliver Fahn

Jesse Curran

Cumhur Okay Özgür

www.amaranthjournal.com

AUTUMN
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Description

Amaranth Journal of Food Writing, Art, and Design is a digital journal that aims to connect a global community of food writers, artists, design thinkers, and culinary storytellers through sensitive storytelling. It publishes a wide range of creative endeavors and assemblages on food such as food stories, memoirs, vignettes, poems, photo essays, drawings, and other illustrative arts.

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SOBREMESA

EDITOR'S LETTER

Autumn, 2025 [Volume 4, Issue 2]

"There's something in the world that forces us to think ... It may be grasped in a range of affective tones: wonder, love, hatred, suffering."

— Gilles Deleuze

Dear readers,

If this Autumn Issue of **Amaranth Journal of Food Writing, Art, and Design** were to be a recipe, it would be equal parts love and faith. Love—as manifested in the conscientious practice of one's craft, and faith—as the unwavering belief in the restorative power of literature and art to nourish the human spirit.

From lighthearted musings on food to cogitations of intense emotional force, this Amaranth issue is as much a paean to food and nourishment as it is a reminder of our shared moral obligations and the (often unbearable) weight of being human.

The awareness that more than seven hundred million people go hungry every day worldwide is unsettling, to say the least. As of this writing, reports testify to civilians surviving on animal fodder (or worse) in conflict zones. The temptation to look away from the troubling statistics will not save us from falling apart. But empathy, most certainly, will. We are grateful to those that, through the sensitive and responsible practice of their craft, make the darkness visible while continuing to guide us gently toward light. May their tribe flourish!

From an ingenious and evocative assemblage of writing and art on the expansive theme of food, we have chosen the following compositions as featured pieces for our Autumn [2025] edition:

David Philip Ireland's "The Elegance of a Nasturtium Salad" and "Long Blue Goodbye," for their intensely lyrical rendition of food and all that

nourishes; **Oliver Fahn**'s „Der letzte Schluck," for the deliciously effortless elegance of its prose; **Jesse Curran**'s multi-tiered ekphrastic musings in "Alligator Pears," "Apple Family 3," and "Corn, No. 2," for giving us fresh access to art and to life; and **Cumhur Okay Özgür**'s deeply humanitarian digital illustration "Fishborne," for its quiet yet powerful eloquence. This issue also includes a new interview segment featuring the Japanese visual artist, **Yuko Kurihara**, whose delicate portrayal of edibles promises a wealth of delicious adventures.

We hope the stories that unfold over the following pages spark reflections that stay with you long after your journey through this edition is complete. And if they do—even to a humble measure—we will have achieved all that we set out to do.

Thank you for being part of our journey.

Bon Appétit!

Satarupa Sinha Roy

Founder & Managing Editor
Amaranth Journal of Food Writing, Art, and Design

Amaranth

Base Notes

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The Elegance of a Nasturtium Salad

David Philip Ireland

We lay them gently on the plate
petals like silken flames
radial and radiant
as if summer had composed them by hand.

Pepper bites softly beneath their beauty
a surprise tucked in colour,
where the eye expected perfume
but the tongue receives fire.

A tumble of leaves: rocket, chard, sorrel
not tossed but placed,
like brushstrokes on canvas
or thoughts in a careful letter.

No dressing to drown it
just lemon, oil, restraint
and a knowing glance of salt
as if the garden herself whispered
enough.

We eat it slowly, almost reverently
our hands full of green light
and everything that does not need explaining.

Long Blue Goodbye

The courgettes blister gently,
still slick with oil and lemon,
not seared, not scorched,
but coaxed into softness,
like the last day of a good summer
when the sun lingers a little longer
on your skin than you expect.
They hiss in the pan,
not in anger,
but in surrender.
The sigh of something becoming beautiful.

Olive oil in amber rivulets
across the grain of the old board.
You press your thumb into the wood,
not to measure doneness,
but truth.

Basil curls in the Murano bowl
like a lazy green ribbon.
Drunk on light,
drunk on olive brine,
drunk on the sweet oblivion of ripeness.
Tomatoes split their skins,
soft red confessions
spilling into silence,
as if love were
too much to hold.
Aubergine collapses into garlic.
Bitterness, softened.
Onions hush to gold.
In that hush,

a promise forms
on the tip of your tongue.

The meal builds itself.
No fanfare.
Only the quiet labour of sun
and time,
and hands that remember.
No ceremony,
just the scent of crushed herbs
on the wind,
and the shimmer of oil
turning language into flavour.

We eat with our hands sometimes,
mouths full of vowels,
open, round, generous.
The language of Venezia
rises with the steam,
a liturgy of heat and salt
and rosemary.
We need no translation.
Only this shared table,
and the slow rhythm
of breaking bread.

A wasp circles the rim of my glass.
I offer it thyme,
or mercy.
It takes neither.
Perhaps that's the wisdom
of late summer.

Behind us, the beech tree turns,
shrugs into russet.
The air grows brave enough for jumpers.
But here, under the trellis,
oregano shakes its tiny fists in the breeze.
Summer still clings
to the curve of the plate,
to the warm stem of the glass,
to the corner of your smile.

We do not speak much.
There is rosemary to admire,
tiny blue blossoms
like stars caught in green.
There is warm bread to tear,
wine to tilt,
and the sky,
slowly
beginning
its long
blue
goodbye.

David Philip Ireland is a British poet, novelist, and songwriter whose creative career spans more than sixty years. His poetry is known for its lyrical precision, emotional honesty, and ability to weave vivid imagery with universal themes of love, loss, and human resilience. Collections such as *Rattlesnake Jar* and *Splinters and Sparks* showcase his distinctive voice—at once intimate and expansive—earning him a reputation as a writer who captures the extraordinary in the everyday.

While poetry remains at the core of his work, David also writes fiction and composes music, each discipline enriching the others. His latest novel, *Unquiet Vengeance*, combines his gift for language with a taut, atmospheric narrative, while his songs draw on the same deep well of storytelling and lived experience. Based in Gloucestershire, UK, he continues to write, record, and perform, bringing words and music to audiences near and far.

After: Grandad Makes Breakfast, 1981

Marceline White

When you were wealthy, you dined in Paris.
Of all the things to love in that city of lights,
it was eggs that enchanted.

Each morning, you sat in the hotel's red velvet chairs,
ordered scrambled eggs, waited with delight.
The plate would appear, a simple crown of pure gold

floating in the white fog of the Ritz's lapis-rimmed
china. With persistence, you charmed the chef,
learned the secret of the scramble, a pinch of [ ],

one per egg, brings a rise, a lightness, as if the eggs
were whipped at a higher altitude, each curd a saffron pillow,
a luminous cadmium yellow, as if a star

had fallen onto your plate from Van Gogh's brush.
Years later, scrambling for jobs, eking out an income,
death by a thousand sales calls,

you'd serve eggs, scrambled, with bacon for dinner.
Your hands whisked the whites and yolks in the bowl, just as sure
as you'd once whirled partners around the dance floor

when you were young and full of medals and golden confidence.
Into the bowl, the other ingredients fall: whole milk, salt, flour,
and finally, with a wink, you add a secret dash of baking powder

to make eggs so light, they could take flight,
become clouds that looked onto a field of buttercups,
faces turned to the sun.

Marceline White is a Baltimore-based writer and activist whose work has appeared in *The Ekphrastic Review*, *trampset*, *Yolk*, *Prime Number, The Orchard Review*, *The Indianapolis Review*, and *Atticus Review,* among others. Twice nominated for the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net, when not writing, Marceline can be found serving her two cats and telling her son to text her when he arrives at the EDM show. Read more at www.marcelinewhitewrites.com.

Der Apfel im Magen

Oliver Fahn

Wenn mein Psychologe behauptet,
vom Baum der Erkenntnis zu naschen
sei nur bedingt empfehlenswert,
verneine ich seine Ratschläge,
verfalle dem Gegenteil
und wundere mich verlässlich
über das nachfolgende irdische Inferno.

Wiederholt geschah es:
Ich streckte meinen Arm zu weit entgegen,
wenn man mir darbot, was für alle Zeit,
unberührbar hätte bleiben müssen.

Im Vorfeld meiner Taten
hegte ich ins geheim die Hoffnung,
ich käme ungeschoren davon,
jedes Mal aufs Neue.

Allein die Unumkehrbarkeit meiner Unbelehrbarkeit
erleichtere mich, so dachte ich,
um die Spannung des Was-wäre-wenn.

In der Gewissheit meiner Verdammnis,
das Geschehen wäre unabwendbar,
der Betrug endgültig,
ein Fakt ohne Spekulation,
sänke ich sanft zu Boden,
fiele in ein weiches Kissen.

Allmählich, wo eine Myriade Feuer ausgebrochen sind,
in ihrem Flächenbrand unlöschbar,

wird mir bewusst:
ein reales Inferno übersteigt die Potenz
eines imaginierten ums Abertausendfache.

Isoliertin einer separaten Wohnung,
durch handfeste Fehltritte meiner seits,
zwanzig Ehejahrezerbrochen wie Porzellan:
Eine Misere nach Schablone,
das bin ich.

Die Beichte vor den Kindern,
wie es um ihren Vater steht,
wird sein wie vor Gericht.

Mein Wunsch,
man hätte mir in früheren Zeiten,
sobald ich nur erwog,
mit meinem Arm in fremden Gewässern zu fischen,
ihn betäubt bis in die Unbeweglichkeit,
bleibt reine Utopie.

Aus dem Paradies meiner Familie
bin ich vertrieben für ein Menschenleben lang.
Jedes mögliche Opfer scheint zu schwach
für ein Vergehen, das sich eingebrannt hat,
wie ein Apfel einmal im Magen,
für immer aufgegessen ist …
unwiderruflich.

Oliver Fahn, geboren am 21. März 1980 in Pfaffenhofen an der Ilm, gewann 2025 mit seinem Text „Freiheit fing in Berlin an“ den 3. Platz beim Schreibwettbewerb „Freiheit, die ich meine“ des Vereins 3. Oktober—Deutschland singt und klingt e.V. Im März 2024 wurde er vom Kroggl Verlag zum „Autor des Monats“ gewählt. Weitere Texte wurden u. a. veröffentlicht von: Ingo Cesaro, Literaturpreis Harz, Verband Katholischer Schriftsteller Österreichs, Mosaik, DUM, Die Brache, LiteraturRaumDortmundRuhr e.V., VHS Köln, Radieschen, eXperimenta, etcetera, Stadt St. Pölten, Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung.

Tomatoes

Mike Maggio

I planted them in early spring,
after the last frost had passed.
I tilled the earth
pulling weed, removing rot—

aged, decayed leaves,
not quite mulch.
Clumps of dried-up grass.
Sticks and stems,

stones and pebbles,
old newspapers and stray debris—
anything that would interfere
with the rearing of my precious crop.

At first, I seeded them in tiny pots
watered them loyally
morning and night
watched eagerly as they slowly sprouted.

Green sprigs of hope
peaking demurely through beads of soil,
white slip of a smile at the very top—
a foretaste of a sumptuous meal to come.

When the time was right, I transplanted them
troweled an intrepid hole
gently set my little seedlings,

roots riveted in the rich, brown loam.

Each day, I tended them—
watered them with my faithful hose,
watched and waited,
pulling a stray weed here,

a wildflower there,
guiding them along posts,
securing them in metal cages
set for them to climb and curl.

Devoted father fostering his child
Watchful parent protecting his nascent fold.

Soon, they appeared—
bright yellow blossoms,
then, shortly, gently swollen stems
at last, plush, plump green bulbs

strung like Christmas balls
suspended along graceful winding vines
buoyant in the summer sun
eager to attain their crimson destiny.

Then, one day,
the sun still settling in the Virginia sky,
they were gone
snatched away from their innocent perch.

A stray deer perhaps
or maybe an errant rabbit—

animals once dear to the heart
now swiftly sworn enemies.

How easily we pivot from love to hate!
How inscrutable the anger!

Once a tomato patch
now but bare bush.
Once wondrous creatures of God
now merely hateful foes.

And the clouds gather in the darkening sky
And the fearsome storm erupts
And the rain and thunder pummel the wailing earth
And the forest cowers in unfathomable fear.

Yet not one tomato in this forsaken world
can possibly equal even one precarious life.

Mike Maggio's publication credits include fiction, poetry, reviews, translations, and travel in *The Montserrat Review*, *Potomac Review*, *The L.A. Weekly*, *The Washington City Paper,* and many others. He has written 11 books of poetry and fiction, including *Let's Call It Paradise*, which won the International Book Award for Contemporary Poetry in 2023, and *Woman in the Abbey*, which was awarded the Literary Titan Gold Book Award in 2025.

His website is www.mikemaggio.net.

Strawberry Patch Senryū

Cortney Collins

Strawberry patch, sweet
memories of not knowing
it would become past.

Strawberry patch, young
girl oblivious to snakes
not seen in shadows.

Strawberry patch, pure
innocence in a basket
carried to the house.

Strawberry patch, dead
vines clinging to
halcyon-like fingers on a ledge.

Strawberry patch, gone
when they left the farm for good
to move into town.

Strawberry patch, wild
with desire to come home,
where nothing is lost.

Why I Don't Write Recipe Poems

I don't write recipe poems,
because I'm incapable of following a recipe.

I rebel against recipes, restless
with rules
instructions
repetition
of someone else's creation.

I read the list of ingredients carefully,
study the instructions meticulously,

and decide I have a better idea.

1 cup maple syrup. Can I use lemon juice instead?

I get impatient.

Simmer for 45 minutes?! Let's try 10.

I start with a recipe for coconut cream pie,
and wonder if I can turn it into chicken parmigiana.

(Just a few small tweaks.)

I should have been an alchemist,
instead of a rotten cook.

When I got sober,
I had a sponsor who said the 12 Steps
were like the most delicious cake

I'd ever tasted.

If I wanted to make that exact cake,
I'd follow the recipe with total precision and accuracy.

I had the same problem with the 12 Steps.

We weren't really talking about making a cake, were we?

We were talking about remaking a soul.

As far as I know, there aren't any precise measurements
or step-by-step infallible instructions
for the mending of a soul.

Souls are made on the horizon,
just beyond rules.

Souls are made through failure.
Through rejection letters.
Through that lover choosing someone else.
Through risk.
Loss.
Missing the mark.
Souls are made by measuring out too much or too little,
withholding what should have been added to the batter and tasting dull regret later,
or adding too much spice to the soup when restraint would have been better,
choking on pepper caught in your throat—
a reminder that once spoken,
it can never be unsaid.

Souls are baked to perfection
(or juicy raw imperfection)
by what we get wrong.

Souls are the burnt part of the crust that still tastes good,
the garlic you threw into the sauté pan with the lemon butter
not realizing the lemon would turn the garlic blue,
resulting in shrimp scampi that looks like it has tiny bits of blue construction paper.

Souls are blue shrimp scampi that manages to stick to the ribs.

If you're a lousy cook like me,
and find recipes tedious,

I'm tempted to say, *so what?*

But—
there is a price.

You'll end up with curdled cream,
a steak that's too well done,
loads of credit card debt,
a dead-end job,
a badly damaged heart.

And the truth is, *so what?*

Maybe recipes are play,
not duplication of a predictable result.

If you play hard, you'll find yourself with skinned knees.

Bruises.

Mistakes.

A charred heart.

Success.

This is why I don't write recipe poems.

Cortney Collins is a poet living on the Front Range of Colorado with her beloved feline companions, Pablo (after Neruda) and Lida Rose (after a barbershop quartet song from *The Music Man*). She is the founder of the pandemic-era virtual poetry community Zoem, otherwise affectionately known as "The Magpies." Zoem produced two anthologies of its poets' work, the first of which she is co-editor. Cortney has led poetry and spoken word workshops in the community, in schools, and in the corrections system.

Her work has been published in various online and print journals. She loves a lot of people, places, and things and does her best to pay attention.

Alchemy in the Kitchen

Sharon Berg

We grow up thinking our mothers
teach us the alchemy we need to survive
in a world pitted against female life, but
in my family it was Dad who schooled
my sister and me. We learned lemon
juice and vinegar clean hair with streaks
that look like we are sun-kissed.
Witch hazel is an astringent to clean
our pores, and castor oil moves dry lumps
in our bowels. Cardamom offers a lovely
flavour and aroma but too much
(the amount never disclosed) is
hallucinogenic—the same for nutmeg,
cinnamon, and allspice. We learned
from Dad the yeast for sour dough
starter can be found in any kitchen,
because we are surrounded by
possibilities. He was the one who
delighted us as children wanting pancakes
in shapes like bunny rabbits, teddy bears,
or chickens. From him we learned when Mom
burned a roast that charcoal is essential
to a healthy diet, and nothing we

imagined can ever go wrong

as long as there's love in our kitchen.

Sharon Berg's work has been published in Canada, USA, Mexico, England, Wales, The Netherlands, Romania, Germany, Siberia, India, Persia, Singapore, and Australia. Her poetry books include: *To a Young Horse, Borealis* (1979), *The Body Labyrinth, Coach House* (1984); and *Stars in the Junkyard, Cyberwit* (2020), which was an International Book Award Finalist. Her short fiction collection, *Naming the Shadows*, appeared with Porcupine's Quill (2019). Her nonfiction *The Name Unspoken: Wandering Spirit Survival School*, BPR Press (2019) won a 2020 IPPY Award for Regional Nonfiction. Sharon interviewed for Artisanal Writer for 19 issues (2022/2023) and is resident interviewer (2023-continuous) for *The tEmz Review*. Her book reviews appear in *ARC*, *Freefall*, *The Pacific Rim Review of Books*, *The Lambton Shield*, and on the League of Canadian Poets website, *Event,* and *Poetry Canada Review*.

Sharon lives in and operates Oceanview Writers Retreat at Clode Sound, Terra Nova National Park in Newfoundland, Canada.

Saltless

Cynthia Hilts

If there were a loving god,
did she purposely make all the food
saltless?
Plain and needing something more?
To burst in our yearning mouths
with the sparkle, the saliva-evoking
joy and deep spherical savor
of salt?
If the goddess plans fates and confluences
this must be on the celestial list.

If a Grudge Were Fruits-of-the-Forest Pie

If a grudge were fruits-of-the-forest pie
I would never hold onto it for so long.
But I would wish I could.
All the tasty interactions would be mystical and magical.
I could use old dried and withered things,
which nonetheless or therefore retain their condensed essence,
to enhance it.
The outer shell would be important
not just for looks, but for
delivering nuance with due ceremony and texture.
It would of course be improved by gobs of whipped cream.
I could serve it up to practically anyone
and it would be well received.

Cynthia Hilts is poet, musician, composer, performer and teacher. One of her primary values, as an artist of any genre, is that blood moves in the body of the art she produces. She is a lover of nature and tradition, and a thousand-petaled iconoclast. Cynthia creates worlds and microspheres with words, with jazz, with improvisation and song-writing.

She has been published in several journals and anthologies, performs in concerts and festivals around the world, teaches privately, has recorded for documentaries, and received many awards and grants as composer and lyricist.

Amaranth

Table Talk

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Café Damascus

Nicky Torode

"Just one? They're so tiny," the waitress smiles, confused. "We usually serve baklava in threes. But I check. I'm new here," she shrugs.

"From Syria?" I ask, guessing she isn't.

"No, Ukraine."

My eyebrows arch, my heart crumbles. Seems voyeuristic to strike up small talk. She must be fed up of explaining.

She approaches, pulling a small notepad from her apron. "I like work here in this Syrian café," she says, voice bright.

"And your family?" I say, sotto voce. Losing Hari, my partner, to cancer last month has shrunk my voice, my world.

"Papa had to stay, to fight." She bites her lip. "He's half Russian," her eyes look down, cheeks flush. "Mama, she's too old for a long journey."

I'm close to tears.

She turns and, in seconds, comes back, holding high a plate like she's doing silver service. As if, for now, the world is just this sunny autumn day in Café Damascus, West Norwood.

She sets the plate down. A trio of golden, plump, flaky rhomboids, like three kings of the Orient, huddle in the centre of the plate. Baklava. Baklava! I love mouthing the word. Three kings with crowns of crushed, lime-bright pistachio, paddle in the glistening, satin ribbon of honey. Powdered sugar dusts the plate like snow-capped earth. A tiny, three-pronged fork glints on the side, impatiently.

The manager, from Syria, comes over. I ask for two forks. When she returns, I invite them to eat the baklava with me.

Our forks plunge in, making that satisfying crackle, like trumpets marking the start of the ball.

Crunch.

All my cousins were sent to war.

Crunch.

In Syria brothers are killing brothers.

Crunch.

Dying young. Needless.

We chew in silence.

The radio's no longer playing Kiss FM. Instead, energetic violins, sitars and bells, try to coax us, like snake charmers, into the rhythms of life—a life saying: still there's joy.

The music gets louder as if shooing away the bad spirits. The smell of rose water and semolina perfume the air. I see twirling, sparkly tassels that jiggle, whip and swirl on three dancers' hips. A chorus of "olas" cry out to the beat. The melty filo, the silky honey and sharp nibs of nuts coat my tongue. We smile.

In this moment the baklava makes my world bigger. It feels like I'm scooped onto a magic carpet, a fabric of passion fruit reds, syrupy golds, and fig browns, flying, smiling. Sweet, warm, filling. Grateful now. Hari, he's freed from pain. At rest.

Forks down, we dab our lips with crisp white napkins. I lick my finger to pick up the last crumbs, surprised how my appetite has returned.

We nod, keep nodding, smiles curling. Joy, a tiny act of joy. I hear Kiss FM again.

I leave a generous tip, call out goodbye. My voice vibrates, warm and strong. I walk into the sunshine and smile as the 468 pulls up to take me home.

Nicky Torode is a writer of short, fiction and nonfiction, living in Hastings on the south coast of England. She loves writing about food, place and belonging. She grew up on Guernsey in the Channel Islands and spent over 10 years working overseas.

She is a coach and journaling facilitator.

Haleem

Homa Mojadidi

My aunt Soraiya likes to make haleem
exactly how my grandmother taught her.
First, she washes the whole wheat grains
soaks them overnight
boils them until they're soft
pushes small dollops of the grains through a metal sieve
with a large spoon
to separate milky sap from husk.

After twenty minutes
thin beads of sweat form on her upper lip
even though the AC in her apartment's set to 65 degrees.
Her arm strains from the effort
she pauses for a few deep intakes of breath
before carrying on—

Meanwhile, pieces of lamb boil and froth in another pot.
She gathers and discards the scum with a slotted spoon
purees soft chunks in the blender
to a creamy consistency
pours this into the wheat sap
followed by the stock
stirs the large pot
for another thirty minutes
to make sure the haleem doesn't stick to its bottom.

She's usually in a big hurry when she's cooking
often cuts or burns herself in her rush to get things done
but today she's happy to wait and stir
to let the mixture slowly simmer—

When it's cooked through
she places a dollop into each of two bowls
sprinkled with olive oil, cinnamon, and powdered sugar.

As we sit down to eat
that first bite with a piece of warm Afghan naan
transports her back in time
to when she was a young girl in Kabul

not yet dispersed by war
or forced to seek refuge in foreign lands
carrying only memories across borders—

I ask her, is all this effort worth it?
Isn't there an easier way to make haleem
using cracked wheat instead?

You can, she says
but that's not how we made it back home—
Besides, it won't taste quite as good.

Making Qabili Palaw with My Mom

I watch her place the thawed lamb shanks
into a large pot
sear them in hot oil
sprinkle salt and pepper
listen to the minced garlic sizzle
and turn a golden brown—

It's all about having the right ingredients, she says
as she throws in a handful of fried onions and her own
spice mixture of cloves, cinnamon, cumin, and cardamom
adds two tablespoons of tomato paste
mixes everything for another five minutes
covers the mixture with boiling water
simmers until the meat becomes tender.

She says, *but this meat doesn't taste the same.*
Back in Kabul, you got to pick your cut
from the freshly slaughtered calf or sheep
hanging from large hooks in the butcher's shop
its flesh still a pinkish mauve
not brown or frozen,
wrapped in trays of cardboard or plastic.

In winter, we made landi palaw from dried meat
the salted pieces hanging like clothes drying on the line

we used onions and tomatoes
sundried on our roof
sizzled the meat in freshly-churned ghee or butter
until the onions turned a deep brownish gold
the color of freshly turned earth—

Mulberries

The pattern was paisley, the texture embossed brocade,
the color of creamy white rose and jade.

There was a dining table of solid walnut or oak
offering cool shade underneath, after running around all afternoon.

The rest of the memory's fuzzy, I'm not sure how it still persists
my four-year-old self trying to resist my grandmother's attempts

to coax me to nap so she could get a couple of hours' respite
to focus on her daily chores, giving directions to the cook

making sure the bread was freshly baked
the vegetables purchased, burgundy beets and purple carrots

from the street vendor knocking on the door.
Onions, tomatoes, and eggplants, drying on the line on the roof.

But the last thing I wanted to do was sleep. I wanted to sneak
another handful of the ripe mulberries brought fresh

from Parwan, two hours distance by car from Kabul
resting on an intertwined pile of flat heart-shaped leaves

each shining in glossy tones of burgundy, pink, white, and amethyst.
My favorite were the pink ones with the perfect amount of ripeness

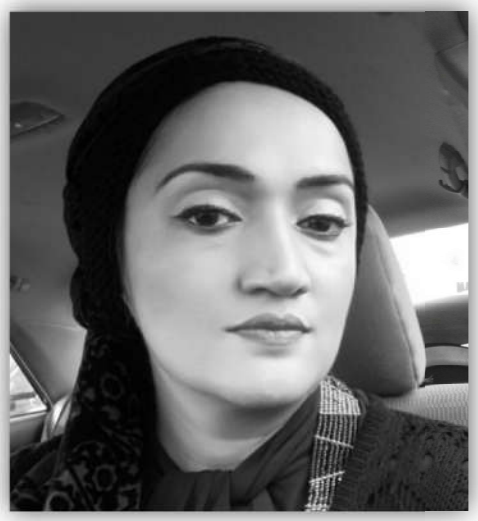
not too sweet or dripping with juice like the dark burgundy.
I just wanted a handful of those, handpicked from the rest

to feel the burst of their subtle sweetness on my tongue.

Why nap when fresh mulberries beckoned me

from the *tabang* placed on the white tablecloth
with its embroidered geometric pink designs?

A flavor and texture I still long for—



Homa Mojadidi is an Afghan American poet and translator. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Asymptote*, *Washington Square Review*, *Anomalous Press, One Art*, *Beyond Words Literary*, *Blue Mountain Review, Gulf Stream, Mudlark, Calyx, Arcana Poetry Anthology,* and *IHRAF Publishes*. Her work explores the themes of loss, exile, memory, and mysticism. Homa has an M.A. in English Literature from the University of North Florida and an M.F.A. in Creative Writing with a concentration in poetry from George Mason University.

The Octopus

Raynal Somiah

There lay a dish as foreign to me as that land.

My fork sensed the odd combination of textures before my mouth did.

Rubbery, chewy, then soft and yielding.

A sweet smokiness coated the tongue, but sulphuric traces lingered. The octopus had long been away from the sea.

My palate struggled to be accepting. Both a bad host, and a poor guest.

Then came the stomach churns.

I imagined tentacles swishing through my innards bringing with it waves of dread and fear of the unrecognisable.

Just like going places.

Novelty quickly replaced with visceral reality.

I had moved there to discover and reinvent.

The gnawing inside was saying something else, though.

It interrogated my fantasies of reinvention. Did I have the constitution to make it there?

I had long been a child of migration and lived in all the disquiet that came with it.

But never had I really questioned what it meant to digest places until that night.

My earlier transitions went with little notice.

When other aspects of belonging chewed away at me, home could always be found on a plate.

Eventually there were more plates.

The octopus, a siren, a shapeshifter.

Raynal Somiah is an educator and has lived in South Africa, the UK, Spain and China. She works at a design institute, has participated in exhibitions and has a degree in History while pursuing another in Linguistics.
She is currently writing poetry and creative non-fiction pieces that explore themes of place and culinary cultures.

Home

Gillian Barlow

Home is an onion.

There are layers to it—of having your own home, of returning home, of being home, of home. In ever decreasing circumferences, you peel off layer after layer until you arrive at the centre where nothing remains except for the tears in your eyes.

Home is a never-settled settling.

In my mother's family, the outer layer is Tiefenort, Germany, from where my great-great-grandfather, Georg Heidenreich left late in the nineteenth Century for Adelaide, South Australia, then to Bethaniel (now known as Bethany) on the edge of the Barossa Valley, South Australia, where he arrived in 1866 and then almost immediately set off for the middle of Central Australia, Ntaria or Hermannsburg, to establish a home for those whose home it already was—the Western Arranda people.

Mostly, the Heidenreichs lived around the Barossa Valley—in or close to Tanunda—a place of brandy, graves and picnics.

Aahhh, Tanunda.

I have never lived in Tanunda, not even came close to living there, but it is 'home' regardless. It is not my home, but it is my mother's home—or it is, at least, *one* of her homes. It is a place of certainty and knowing, my mother's homeland. My father must have felt overwhelmed by all my mother's family's home stuff. He enjoyed going to Tanunda, nonetheless. At least it could provide those things he felt a home should give—fine food and wine.

Year after year we would plan our trip to Tanunda, travelling the same route, seeing the same things, buying the same food and the same drinks from the same shops. Variations would be suggested and at times even included, but they were always disappointing, and although nothing would be said, they would not be included on future trips, and we would revert to our favourites.

We would drive there and then back from Adelaide. The number of cars and the composition of the party travelling in them would vary. The order of activities would also vary. But it was always much the same.

Early in the seventies, there we are—the grandchildren, my grandfather, my grandmother, and my father—all in the beige-and-tan Chevy. The Chevy has more legroom than the other car, so my father accompanies us, although he would prefer to drive with our uncle. He has slightly more in common with our uncle, them being both men and all. Besides, it's his holiday and he would prefer to be away from us. My grandfather's hat sits stolidly on the back shelf of the Chevy, warning those who can read such signs to stay clear, here is a 'hat driver!'

In the other vehicle is our mother, our aunt, our uncle and our cousins.

My grandfather's car always leads the expedition. My grandfather points out the same things excitedly, slapping the steering wheel hard with his left arm. He leans across my grandmother, his head following the direction of his arm so his eyes no longer watch the road's dotted white line which runs under the centre of the car. He points with his right arm towards her passenger side window. 'There!' He glances into the rear-view mirror to make sure my father, my brothers and I, are looking where he is pointing. 'There,' he says again triumphantly, emphasising a point he has made (again) on this trip as part of his running commentary on 'going to Tanunda'. He will then start the discussion with my grandmother as to the order of things—should we go via Bethany and visit the cemetery where my great-great-grandfather, my grandfather's grandfather, lies and then head on to Schlinky's Gully for the picnic, or go straight into Tanunda via great-grandmother's house and get the *mett* first up? This is code for: do we have enough food for a picnic, or will we need *mettwurst* and bread and *sharm* cakes as well?

Whatever the order, at some stage of this trip, we will drive past great-grandmother's house.

'There,' someone will say.

The car slows down. The car has no air conditioning. It is summer and it is so hot the windows are wound right down, although it would be better if they were up because with them down, the hot dry air blows in and around the car, making it hotter and drier inside. With the windows down, the number of flies inside increase and they buzz ceaselessly around our faces.

Our heads turn as one to look at what is being pointed at.

'There', someone says again. The car slows. It almost stops. The dazzling heat flares up. We all look.

It is a house with a central solid timber door and a double-hung window on either side. There is a change of pitch in the roof to form a deep verandah at the front. There are few distinguishing features. Time slows momentarily then speeds up again and we are past.

Grandfather stamps his foot onto the accelerator, the car surges forward and our heads are thrown back with the thrust.

That is all we see of great-grandmother's house. But it is an intro to the stories of a childhood growing up in a German village away from Germany, of a life spent constantly roaming from one relative's house to the next—where dead bodies are always lying in the front room since there is nowhere else to put them and where food, or the lack of it, is a driving force for everything.

At some stage we will buy the *mettwurst* and the *fritz* for the picnic from the same deli where great-grandma bought it—it would be sacrilege to buy it from anywhere else even if it were better there. We have much the same conversation as if we had been coming in each day for the past thirty years. Hello there. Good to see you. How are the grand children? Mmmm. Have you seen what they have done to the old house? Oooh, is that right? You'll have the *mett* then. With or without the garlic? They're good and soft. You know there is always someone who wants the hard ones though. Would the kiddies like a slice of the *fritz*? Thick or thin? How many were you after? They never make enough *sharm* cakes, do they? Look at that! We're almost out already. Ooh, there could be enough though. Lucky you! Would you like them all? Shall I pack them in a box or are you eating them now? We'll have more next time you're in—they're making them now.

We drive to our picnic spot via the cemetery where we drop in to visit the 'family.' We walk through the headstones, pausing and reading each one off as though we have never seen them before, and question who they were and work out their role. Finally, we arrive at the picnic shed at Schlinky's Gully. This is the heart of the visit. We lay the food on the table and slump into place. The heat is awful. The heat is unbearable. It is so hot, eating seems like the last thing you'd want to do. We pretend for a bit we will get straight into the enormous spread set out before us, but we all know what is coming next.

'How about a fire?' my grandmother finally suggests enthusiastically.

We file out of the picnic shed, which has been holding the heat firmly down on our heads and walk slap bang into the horizontal heat of the sun. We begin the search for twigs and sticks. From these, my grandma will build an almighty fire. She'll watch whilst one or other of us has a go at doing it, tutting to herself, pointing at various sticks or bits of log that need to be moved slightly or taken out. Finally, she'll be forced to come and rescue it, and within minutes it will roar into life. She sits happily then for the rest of the afternoon poking a stick at it, moving logs or sticks ever so slightly, commanding someone to go and fetch a bit more fuel—a stick yay long by this thick (she holds up her rickety finger and measures one against the other to indicate how thick the stick ought to be)—commenting over and over what a good fire it is, and reminiscing about other fires she has had. My grandma, happy, sitting, stoking the fire until well after dark.

We sit there with her. All thoughts on the fire. All thoughts on family—on where we have been, on where we are going, on where we are—on everything around us.

At the centre.

At home.

Finally, we head back to prepare for the next trip.

Dr. Gillian Barlow lives in Sydney, Australia. Her background is German and Aboriginal (Kaurna/Barkindji). She is an architect and writer. Most of her architecture work has been in Aboriginal housing, disability housing and Aboriginal health buildings. She is currently teaching Masters Architecture students the First Nations concept of Country and ways of knowing, being, and doing. She has one published book, *The Hojoki Re-membered* (Saddle Road Press, 2023)—a ficto-critical account of her experiences as an architect, combined with concepts of 'home'. She has numerous short stories and poems published in journals. She is currently writing an account of her great-great-grandfather, Georg Heidenreich, who arrived in Australia from Tiefenorte, Germany and walked from Bethany, South Australia to establish the Hermannsburg Mission in Central Australia—an 18-month journey—and aligning it with an exploration of learning aikido, a Japanese martial art.

An Ode to Oranges

Olivia D'Zavala

Remembering my mother
is biting into sunshine
under a coconut tree while we take cover
from the summer cicada whines
and the slate-grey clouds tinged with ozone
promising hot metallic rain
but we don't care, we sit alone
together, our fingers sticky and stained,
my tiny hands unable to wield that global fluorescent
so she tears the thick skin to reveal
the citrine jeweled flesh inside, making half-moon crescents
and leaving sunburst scars on the peel.
How can I still taste that very orange in the rain and the sun?
I marvel that I can still taste orange at all and not become undone.

Olivia D'Zavala has spent over two decades shaping minds and nurturing voices as an adjunct college English instructor, specializing in composition, literature, and technical writing. With more than 23 years of teaching experience, she brings both academic rigor and creative insight to the classroom. Her written work has appeared in a variety of undergraduate and graduate literary journals, and her publication in *Amaranth Journal of Food Writing, Art, and Design* marks her debut on the international stage.

Beyond the lecture hall, Olivia finds joy in the simple pleasures of life—sipping Old Fashioneds on her patio, reading poetry and short story collections while surrounded by her three beloved doggos. Her writing often reflects the same qualities that define her personal world: dark, subverted, and quietly bold.

The Rotten Watermelon

Fergana Kocadoru Özgör

In my painting titled ***The Rotten Watermelon*** (Watercolor on Paper, 14.8 × 21 cm, 2025), I aimed to focus particularly on the food crisis in Gaza.

The watermelon, which is often regarded as a symbol of Palestine, is depicted as rotten and inedible due to the ongoing food and humanitarian crisis. While children—the most affected by wars—continue to die of hunger and are often forced to consume spoiled and moldy food, tons of edible food is wasted daily in different parts of the world. This unconscious culture of consumption affects us all, both ecologically and humanly. This painting may represent the only food a child in a warzone could consume.

With the hope that wars will end all around the world one day…

Fergana Kocadoru Özgör was born in 1990 in Eskişehir, Turkey. She completed her undergraduate studies in the Department of Painting at Anadolu University in 2012 and earned her master's degree in Painting at Kütahya Dumlupınar University, where her thesis *German Romance and the Solitude of Genius* was later published as a book. In 2013, she became a research assistant at Hacettepe University, Faculty of Fine Arts, and in 2019 she completed her doctoral dissertation titled, *Urban Melancholia*.

Since 2020, she has been teaching at Balıkesir University, Faculty of Fine Arts, where she currently serves as Associate Professor. Alongside her academic career, she continues to produce and exhibit her artistic work.

Coffee

Carlene M. Gadapee

I want to be somewhere else. At any coast,
watching gulls and waves and clouds. At a café,
sipping dark coffee with a tart twist of lemon
from a tiny white cup, perched on a red bistro
chair, peering over my sunglasses, pondering

books and love and life choices. In a snug little
cottage deep in the woods, drifted in by piles
of pine needles, a pottery mug of coffee,
rich with cinnamon and cream, nestled beside
my notebook lying flat, ignored for a moment
as I drift in and out of a lazy dream of words.

But I am home, listening to wood pellets drop
from the hopper, rattling down to the small fire
in the stove. Trucks and cars hum past the windows.
This morning's coffee cools in a squat black mug
beside me. Why do I wish to be where I'm not?

Do You Know Me?

A waxy half-pint carton
of expired chocolate milk
hides in the cavernous,
unlit wasteland of my aging
avocado fridge. The blurry

photo of a missing kid, his

freckled face is snugged up
against wilting lettuce leaves,
moldy and curling bread-ends
and the damp orange box
of clumpy baking soda. I swear

into the chill, echoing the tinny,
metallic clicks and wheezes
of the struggling compressor.
The boy's shy and gap-toothed
smile catches me searching
for something more than food.

Panis Domum

Sift and pile five or six loosely filled cups of all-purpose flour
in a yellow crockery bowl. Ringless hands, newly-washed,
create the well for water. Sprinkle salt, yeast, a little sugar. Pour
in unfed sourdough, ripe and gluey—nothing is wasted.
A yeasty ghost-memory fragrance rises: hints of toast and jam.
Past and future crumbs crust aging fingers.
                But not yet: the dough, sticky and shaggy, is needful
of kneading. Gather parts into a whole. Knobs and scraps form a ball,
smooth and soft as a baby's cheek. Push and gather, coax and shape.
A biddable round emerges, sagging squat on the floured counter.
It rests. One last satisfied pat, and I can rest, too.

Poet and English teacher **Carlene M. Gadapee** lives in northern New Hampshire with her husband, several fruit trees, and a beehive. Her chapbook, *What to Keep* (Finishing Line Press, 2025), joins her poems and reviews in many journals including *Allium*, *Smoky Quartz*, *Touchstone*, *GyroscopeReview*, *Vox Populi*, and *MicroLit Almanac*. Her next chapbook, *Relearning the Body*, will also be published by Finishing Line Press in the spring of 2026.

The Chicken Comes Home

George Yatchisin

Despite growing up in a suburban New Jersey house where my mother bought tomatoes bulk from the Sharkey's Farm (the only place beyond *Hee-Haw* I saw people wear overalls), so she could can them, which still seems the wrong word since the tomatoes went peeled into jars, the glass jammed with almost-medical specimens that sometimes rested in our cellar so long they seemed to be an experiment in wine aging, despite all that farm-to-sterilized-glass-to-eternity, I'm pretty sure young me thought green beans only came frozen! It's as if Birds Eye were an actual growing variety, right there with bush and pole, or the more exotically tinged Roma or *haricots verts*, the latter names that took your tongue around the world even before you ate them.

But frozen French-style green beans, those made perfect '70s sense. Particularly in one of my mom's show-stopper dishes, a stuffed chicken breast that also featured cheese—American sliced, naturally—and diced pimentos years before I'd learn they belonged in my martini's olives. My earliest drinking, as it was with any good child, was beer. My first hard stuff crush was Black & White Scotch, not only because it was my dad's drink and therefore easier to sneak some out of his liquor cabinet under the sink, but also for its label, adorned with those cute terriers. Or perhaps, even more so because that one New Year's Eve, when drinking it, I first found that balance one might call *tight* and that I still ache to achieve each time I tipple.

Meanwhile, you can see the attraction to the dish, what with its protein-hiding vegetables in its precisely-pierced-with-toothpicks pocket. Whip up some potatoes, and it's a plate, perhaps with iceberg aside splashed with some bottled dressing, or if Mom cared to show off, some Good Seasons dressing shaken from that special, pre-measured cruet they'd offer once a year. I'm sure many a visiting priest got this dish post his busy Sunday morning work when he stopped in at our very Catholic house. And given the priest was so close to God, you needed to treat him well—it was sort of a bribe on a hope of heaven. Despite one of our most favored priest's wicked ways, it's possible I learned the f-word from Father Fortuna when he acidly quipped, "You don't fuck the

flock," in a way that we couldn't tell if he just hoped to be outré or was trying to make us feel safe from any advances. At the least, I learned my mother cut men of the cloth more slack than she'd cut her own son.

In addition to guilt, I also learned the recipe from her, no doubt having a poorly photocopied version of it to work from (I imagined I'd find it still jammed inside my paperback of the *Betty Crocker Cookbook* but I was wrong). I attended a college that didn't have dorms for its students once we moved on from our first year, which at the time seemed like brute optimism and not bald finance, although the two might be the same. Living on my own I *had* to cook for myself, if for no other reason than I liked eating. After all, an 18-year-old boy, particularly me, thought nothing of downing the 900 calories wrapped in deliciousness of a pint of strawberry Haagen-Dazs in one spoon-licking sitting. I had the anxious metabolism of a greyhound knowing he had to win at the track or get it in his long neck.

So I doggedly went to work in the kitchen, as I liked pleasing myself (see eighteen-year-old boy, above). This dish was particularly fitting as it seemed so removed from anything that ever actually lived—is there a stranger bit of flesh than a boneless, skinless chicken breast? It's all about convenience, for someone has subtracted the animal for you. What you gain in distance from Perdue's killing fields you lose in flavor, of course, but that wasn't really this recipe's goal. It was all about comfort, home, a Pyrex baking dish full of bubbly breasts that didn't look like breasts at all. I haven't had the meal in decades but can still sense in the roof of my mouth how over-cooked the breasts tended to end up, somehow dry even with the pool of melted cheese oozed out, the defrost runoff from the beans, all that liquid as their "sauce." Of course, some of their edges would crust brown, a particular sort of enjoyment that teaches you the joy of gnawing. I mean, I made this dish because I didn't know better not to like it.

Taste is always 20/20 hindsight, to mix a metaphor. We convince our taste buds as kids we were kidding. So perhaps we gain sophistication and lose ourselves.

Of course, that the dish is not hard to make is why it's easy (and that's not quite a tautology). In some ways getting all the pre-sliced cheese out of its packaging is one of the toughest steps, what with Kraft slices both in plastic and lined with a bit of waxy paper too, a pre-made precious cargo.

If you wanted to show off—and I'm pretty sure I even made this dish for a dinner when a writing TA came over one evening, if that wasn't one of my mom's other famous dishes, like the pork chops in the Lipton mushroom soup mix—you'd work on the breasts a bit, as they always came with a bit of that gelatinous pallid yellow fat that needed trimming. But this was even in the days before you seasoned every step, so you just laid out the breasts, lined that with the cheese, spread some of the semi-thawed French green beans, sprinkled that with a bit from the jar of pimentos. Rolled. Had a reason to have a box of toothpicks. Pierced, and the chicken tended to fight back, so you'd have a tiny pile of failed picks as kindling for a humblest fire until you accomplished your goal. The oven did the rest.

It always came out as you cooked the crap out of it; the thing I've come to learn to call, thanks to recent TV chef shows, *hammering* is fail-proof, if done is your goal. But now having had pimentos in paella and loving them reclaimed by their Spanishness, living in a town with farmers' markets where beans are delicious and snap-able and green, observing chickens with not just personality but also names roaming my own backyard (that crazy Julia charges the dogs!), providing us eggs with yolks more orange than slices of processed American cheese, I can't help but still wonder what I've lost refining my taste, losing a recipe, knowing so much more despite my mom gone over a decade.

George Yatchisin is Santa Barbara Poet Laureate, 2025-2027, and the author of the chapbook *Feast Days* (Flutter Press 2016) and the full length *The First Night We Thought the World Would End* (Brandenburg Press 2019). He is the co-editor of the anthologies *Big Enough for Words: Poems and vintage photographs from California's Central Coast* (Gunpowder Press 2021) and *Rare Feathers: Poems on Birds & Art* (Gunpowder Press 2015), and his poetry appears in several anthologies including *Reel Verse: Poems About the*

Movies (Everyman's Library 2019), and *Clash by Night*.

As a journalist he has worked for outlets like *KCET Food Blog*, *Sunset*, *Santa Barbara Independent*, and *Edible Santa Barbara*. His work also appears in the anthology *I'll Tell You Mine: Thirty Years of Nonfiction from the Iowa Nonfiction Writing Program* (University of Chicago Press 2015).

Der letzte Schluck

Oliver Fahn

Meine Hand hast du genommen, wie ein Werkzeug, das dich bediente. Deine Suppe, die du schlürftest, goss sie nach, Teller für Teller.

In deiner Löffelführung erkannte ich das Kind von einst und den Greis in mir, während deine Kraft versiegte und ich das Löffeln übernahm.

„Gib," sagtest du, wohlweislich, dass die eigentliche Gabe für mich darin lag, zurückzugeben.

Zurückgeben—ein unausgesprochenes Wort auf deiner schwachen Zunge.

Der Tisch trug deine Ellenbogen, die Gewissheit deiner Mattigkeit. Du Kind in Sohneshand!

Meine hoffnungsfrohe Miene musste dir doch Spiegel sein, in den du hineinsehen durftest, voll Zuversicht.

Ich führte diesen Löffel, zunehmend getaktet, mechanisch in seiner Frequenz. Ein Utensil des Theaters, das ich gestaltete.

Jeden Wunsch von deinen Augen abzulesen hielt ich für meine Pflicht.

„Guter Junge!" Worte von Gewalt. Im Verlust meines Gesichtes, das ich dennoch wahren musste. Lug und Trug, meine Bürde, für die du mich nicht mehr belangen können würdest.

Ich wusste, wie es um dich stand. Du nicht. Zerfließend vor mir, noch unbemerkt für dich.

Deine Magerkeit nur ein Indiz dieser Sache, die man dir bei der Visite verschwieg.

Der Löffel in meiner Hand klimperte am Tellerrand und läuteteihn ein—den letzten Schluck.

Oliver Fahn, geboren am 21. März 1980 in Pfaffenhofen an der Ilm, gewann 2025 mit seinem Text „Freiheit fing in Berlin an“ den 3. Platz beim Schreibwettbewerb „Freiheit, die ich meine“ des Vereins 3. Oktober—Deutschland singt und klingt e.V. Im März 2024 wurde er vom Kroggl Verlag zum „Autor des Monats“ gewählt. Weitere Texte wurden u. a. veröffentlicht von: Ingo Cesaro, Literaturpreis Harz, Verband Katholischer Schriftsteller Österreichs, Mosaik, DUM, Die Brache, LiteraturRaumDortmundRuhr e.V., VHS Köln, Radieschen, eXperimenta, etcetera, Stadt St. Pölten, Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung.

Amaranth

Pink Fruits, Green Plates by **Yuko Kurihara**

In Conversation with Yuko Kurihara

Yuko Kurihara is a visual artist from Japan. Her art, which is characterized by a unique perspective and an ingenious use of flamboyant colors, draws inspiration from Japanese Nihonga painting. **Amaranth Journal** caught up with the artist recently in an interview over email. In this interview, **Yuko Kurihara** talks about her love for natural forms, her journey as a visual artist, and how the brilliantly hued motifs of edible items—so compellingly real yet admittedly magical—have been foundational to the development of her distinctive visual idiom.

The artist was interviewed by **Amaranth**'s managing & art editor, Satarupa Sinha Roy.

AMARANTH: We are very curious about your beginning and the progress of your interest toward everyday edibles. What inspired you to focus on the subject of food/ edibles in your art?

YUKO KURIHARA: I have been drawing since I was so young that I can't remember. I think I owe my interest in art partly to my mother, who graduated from an art university.

I spent my elementary school years in Singapore due to my father's work, and I think that my interest in the motifs of edible items in my artwork today is the result of my natural exposure to a wide variety of plants, nationalities, languages, food, and cultures. I think I naturally became interested in such things, especially because of Singapore's climate that encouraged a great diversity of tropical fruits, vegetables, and greens and the fact that everything around me was so colorful and vibrant. Foodstuffs and plants, in particular, show diverse changes in color and pattern over time and are never boring to observe. I paint pictures as I observe.

And just as I mentioned before, I believe that my art has also been influenced by the fact that my mother, who died two years ago, was a quilter. I think seeing her work on a daily basis—not to mention being privy to her fabulous collection of fabrics—has had an indirect influence on me.

A: What is the most important element in your art and why?

YK: One of the main reasons for painting is to convey to the viewer through my work that there are so many interesting and beautiful things in the world—right beside you and me. So I place the greatest importance on how to bring out the charm of the motifs that feature in my artworks. Color plays a key role here—especially in creating and enhancing the overall visual impact of those motifs. For this reason, I consider the color scheme to be a very important factor in my art. I have to be the biggest fan of the motif I choose to paint.

A: Is there a place, real or imagined, that influences (or have influenced) your art?

YK: I can say that Singapore, which I mentioned earlier, is a significant one. But I also believe that nature is the best teacher, no matter what country or place. Libraries are also wonderful places to learn. In particular, I often learn a lot from collections of ethnic and folk art cultures, archaeological sites, and furniture pieces from around the world. Quite often, collections and exhibits of paintings themselves turn out to be highly impressionable.

A: Through the ages, food has featured as a common motif in art. What artist(s)/ artistic works have influenced the way you paint now?

YK: I was influenced by a Japanese painter named Heihachiro Fukuda. He lived in the Meiji era and was very gentle and sincere in his view of nature.
When I was in high school, I saw a collection of his work and began to seriously consider becoming an artist. His paintings—the final versions—are wonderfully good, but the very many sketches leading up to those paintings are also excellent.

Solo exhibition at Bunkamura Box Gallery in Tokyo (2023)

Live drawing at the exhibition

A: What is the most challenging piece (a single painting/series/project) you have ever created/worked on?

YK: There were many, but I would like to mention a particular project—one that involved a lot of other people: I worked for several years on the main visuals for the summer and winter gift season announcements for Mitsukoshi, a long-established department store in Japan. Normally, I work alone. But this project was a rare opportunity for me to communicate a lot with the graphic design company and the department store. Although there was a lot of pressure on me, the process of creating something together with someone else was very interesting and I learned a lot.

A: If you could work in any other art form what would it be?

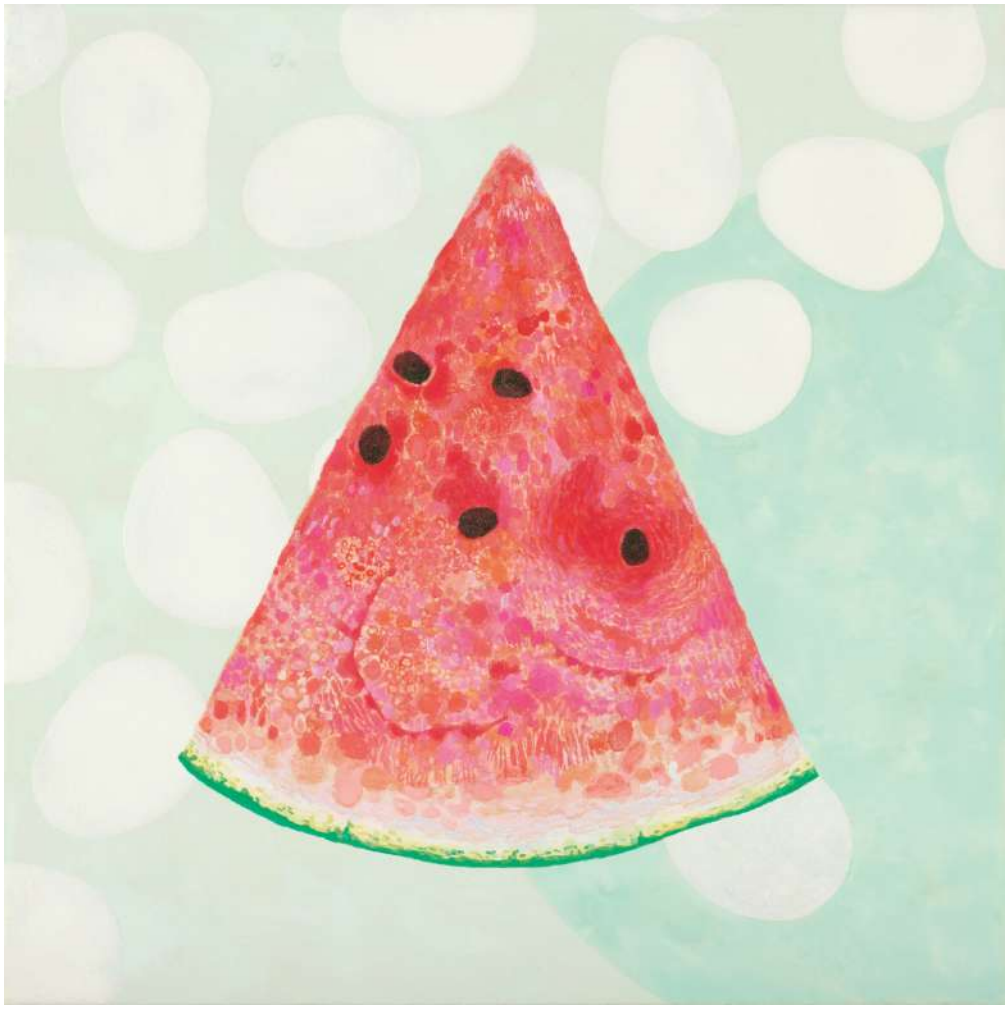
YK: This is a difficult question! But if I had to choose something other than painting, it would be ceramics or Japanese confectionery "Wagashi" design. I have a little longing for the world of confectionery, which expresses the Japanese cultural background and the seasons in a very simple, delicate, and beautiful way. I think it would be very nice if I could design the packaging as well. However, both require making the same thing in the same size and I am not very good at it because I am so clumsy!

A: What kind of legacy do you want to leave through your art?

YK: I have never exhibited overseas but I would like to create such an opportunity someday. Also, I will be 50 years old next year, and I would like to leave something behind for the younger generations. There are some difficulties in choosing a location and actually running the (art) business, but I dream of creating an open atelier where children can come and go as they please, draw pictures, read books, and make things that each of them wants to make while I am working. I love dogs, so if the dog (I hope to have one someday) is also comfortable and relaxed in my atelier, I will be very happy.

A: What words of wisdom would you like to share with Amaranth Journal?

YK: "The snow that falls silently accumulates."
These are the words that my professor taught me when I was a university student. It means that the most important thing is not to be influenced by the words of others, the latest fads, etc., but to continue steadily on the path you believe in, and the results will accumulate like the snow that quietly falls. Snow that falls noisily like sleet will soon melt away. However, snow that falls quietly may be light, but it will accumulate over time.
I think it is actually quite difficult to keep going without losing sight of *who* or *what* we are. But I believe that this will be an unchangeable strength, even if it takes time.



Mizu Mizu by **Yuko Kurihara**

Born in 1976, **Yuko Kurihara** spent her elementary school years in Singapore, junior high school years in Chiba, Japan, and high school years in Atlanta, Georgia and in Rye, New York in the United States. In the third year of high school, she decided to pursue a career in Japanese-style painting, Nihonga, being impressed and inspired by the works of Heihachiro Fukuda, a 20th-century Japanese Nihonga painter.

The collected artworks of Yuko Kurihara were published in 2025 in a volume titled *Nature—As it is*.

Alligator Pears

~Georgia O'Keeffe, 1920-21

Jesse Curran

Find them in a market in Manhattan. Lord knows
    you won't find them in the Adirondacks.
While you're there, you'll need some other items: a tomato,
    a garlic clove, a white onion, and a lemon for juice.
Consider how kids on Long Island, growing up in the 80s
    won't try them until college, until western New York
    when a red-haired hippy girl reveals one before philosophy,
    slices it open with a knife and eats it with a tablespoon
    she had wrapped in a paper towel and stowed
    in her knapsack.
Consider how she will spark curiosity.
Consider how they spark curiosity.
Forget this all; instead, focus on the fruit.
Leave the basket on a table, regard it.
Take a glance at the color wheel inscribed on your heart.
See green then see pink. See pink then see brown.
    See brown then see green.
Feel the fruit, know the moment it slides from firmness
    to tenderness.
Place them back in the basket, spend time with how the shine
    and ripples of the skin toggle the light.
Slice them when they're ripe, remove the pit; be mindful
    not to use the knife to jab it, lest it slips
    and stabs your palm.
Spoon into a bowl, then mash with the back of a fork.
Dice the onion finely and press the garlic so it, too, is fine.
Mix it all together. Add salt to taste.

Serve on small lettuce leaves to your photographer lover,
allowing the buttery softness to become
part of how he sees you, your hidden dimples
and your abstract longing, unlike anything
the art world had ever dreamed.
Somehow sense that in the future, such alligators
will find another name and become as common
as apples.
Somehow discern how your painting will teach others
how to see, how to sense, how to savor.

Apple Family 3

~Georgia O'Keeffe, 1921

Begin in late September.
Better yet, begin two years earlier, when you prune the hell
out of the old trees, wearing a long black frock,
handsaw in hand and prairie in heart.
Let go of landscape in favor of still life, but note,
while one might take the still life out of the landscape
one can never take the landscape out of the still life;
the trees from where you fetch the fruit and the many ways
they bask in sky and mountain, are forever part
of their sweetness, their tartness, their story.
In the orchard, by the lake, gather the apples in bushel baskets,
then take a nap, using the basket as a pillow; rest well;
let the apple fever fill your dreams, then, upon waking,
haul them back to your shanty shed.
Be sure they are crisp and juicy, which necessitates tasting a few.
Caress the orbs, close your eyes, feel line free of color.

Arrange them in light. Morning light, afternoon light, twilight.
Watch them in the light until they speak to one another.
Ruminate on family, the differences between people and apple;
    though we sit alongside one another, we are distinct,
    temperamentally.
Have your way with the color, be the colorist you're known to be
    wielding a palette of burnt sienna, gamboge, raw umber,
    carmine, green earth.
Breathe with pigment as long as you can.
Eventually, heave them from the shanty to the house.
Wash and quarter, toss it all in a kettle, then simmer
    and soften and cool.
Wrap the ones you don't use in brown paper, store
    in a cool dark closet for winter, for what's to come,
    for pies and crumbles and ciders and so forth.
Remember applesauce like something archetypal.
Recall my story, when I was two, how a freak accident
    sent a sharp piece of stone flying through the air
    slicing my top lip in two, so that only the softness
    of this sauce was suitable for the stitches, for the surgery,
    for consoling a toddler, hungry, scared, and in pain.
Find the old food mill, last used for summer tomatoes, siphon
    out the seeds and stems and peels.
Consider the suitability for dipping, using as a substitute
    for all other condiments: ketchup, mustard,
    duck sauce, and so forth.
Add sugar to taste. A dash of lemon. A pinch of cinnamon.
Can what you can for winter.
Bask in what you can in autumn.

Corn, No. 2

~Georgia O'Keeffe, 1924

Can you imagine thirty of them sitting around the big table eating corn on the cob?

- Georgia O'Keeffe on the Stieglitz Family summer meals at Lake George

Find a tall canvas, long and slender, akin to a cob.
Be sure you see within it a stem—straight and stiff
    and capable of bearing summer bounty.
Use the vertical inclination to suggest a horizontal expansion.
Shuck away the idea that the essence is in the kernel.
For a little, linger with the suggestion that the core
    reaches through roots, fibrous little tentacles
    of overgrown grass.
Keep the cob intact, peering down into it from above
    so it starts to spiral, forever unfolding.
Don't toss the leaves in the compost.
Use them to ruminate on green. Swirl into sap
    and emerald and viridian.
Then make the green brighter with cadmium yellow,
    with a blob of ultramarine.
Head to your shanty shed to spark the burner.
As the temperature elevates, lose the clothes and the banter
    and all the other nineteenth-century styles.
Boil away the idea that a peasant dish of three ingredients
    can't be a masterpiece, is not a subject for painting.
Remember corn was a goddess on this lake
    long before Europeans brought their oils

and canvases and colonial chaos.
Simmer five to eight minutes—or better yet—until
tenderness takes hold.
Consider butter, salt, pepper. Or nothing.
Consider how sweet this labor—this shaping
an equivalent
for sustenance.

Jesse Curran is a poet, essayist, scholar, and teacher who lives in Northport, NY. Her essays and poems have appeared in dozens of literary journals including *After the Art, Literary Mama, The Denver Quarterly, Blueline,* and *Ruminate*. She is the 2025 Long Island Poet of the Year and Assistant Professor in the Department of English at SUNY Old Westbury.
Her website is www.jesseleecurran.com.

Orange Honeysuckle and Sea Salt

Olivia D'Zavala

Summer 1984

When I was four years old, I played in my imaginary kitchen in the backyard many mornings and on into early afternoons, before the boiling Texas Panhandle heat set in and my mama would call me indoors. I made cool, sticky mud pies underneath the wooden picnic table, lining them up on the "windowsill" of my kitchen, and plucked the orange honeysuckle that grew around the perimeter of the entire backyard. My mom had taught me how to pluck the silky flowers in a way that wouldn't tear the stem. She showed me how to place it in my mouth and gently tease the nectar from the blossom. I felt like Willy Wonka when he tore the buttercup lemon daffodil from the ground, then separated the flower in half and drank the daffodil juice, holding the canary yellow bifurcated flower as if holding a fragile sea glass tempered teacup and saucer. He bit into the cup when he finished draining the nectar, and it cracked into sugar-spun shards of candy that he chewed as an apéritif. My cup-and-saucer blossom didn't break under the gnashing of my teeth, but it did tear, so I chewed the bittersweet petals dutifully.

The lilac bush bloomed in the corner next to the row of honeysuckles, and I could taste the soapy sachet of the lavender-hued blooms in the aftertaste of the honeysuckle nectar. I think back and wonder if the lilac terpenes were infused in the shared soil with the wild honeysuckle, showing themselves in the flavor bouquet of that honey nectar. Or perhaps, instead of the aromatic oils filtering up through the soil and the roots, perhaps the flavor molecules floated through the air like floral flotsam and jetsam and eventually settled upon the exterior of the honeysuckle.

After suckling the perfumed juices, I would take the silken blossom, careful not to tear it, and place it gently in the middle of a mud pie. I was envisioning Magnolia™ aesthetics before Joanna had gained. Then, while I went inside the house for the afternoon, my chocolate mud pies with authentic floral décor baked under that hateful Texas sun. In the evening, I would come back out and serve the posh pies to my plush animals. My mother would always come by my Picnic Table Kitchen Diner for a slice, and both she and the plushies always raved about the added touch of the blossoms. "Très chic," my mother would always say, and I would marvel at the lovely lilt of her Texas-French dialect.

Fall 2023

My mother was given a death sentence of stage IV cancer. It had ravaged through her body before they could catch it. She lasted through one round of chemo before her organs just shut down. I received nineteen phone calls during the hours of 10 p.m. and 7 a.m. from my brother. The phone calls ended when my mother's life ended. I awoke to those notifications and a single, final notification in the form of a text: Mom is gone.

During the weeks that my mother was dying, I had no idea. I myself was going through one of the most intense gastroparesis episodes of my life, including hospitalization. And during that time, she protected me. She didn't tell me she was counting down her death sentence. And while my mother was dying, and I was calling her daily, hourly, screaming into the phone for her to help me—*mama, please help me, please make the pain go away*—she would tell me stories of the two of us in a dream she once had, a dream she said she always had, a day dream, a wish, a longing; in this dream, she and I walked down those golden beaches, digging our toes into the white powdery sand, soft as confectioner's sugar. We would settle under a coconut tree and crack open the rope-covered husks to reveal the thick white flesh inside; she would drip the coconut water into my open mouth and then I would hold the broken husk and tear into the meat with my tiny child teeth (*because in this story I was always a child, wasn't I?*) while my mama peeled oranges next to me. She would divide the sections evenly but always gave me more from her pile. The jeweled segments burst warm sunshine into our mouths and citrine cantaloupe-hued juice dribbled out when we bit into the fleshy fruits. We crept up to the ocean's edge and rinsed our sticky hands in the sea salt makeshift sink, then fell asleep together under the coconut tree.

Spring 2025

Cocoa Beach was eventful and yet not. Jameson took me to the beach, and I ran out into the froth, into the sea-briny spray, and let the tides ebb and flow forcefully over my body, giving myself to the ocean, to the sea, to the unending horizon ahead. I marveled at the tiny holes scattered all across the sand like black spores, and when I crouched down to have a closer look at them, I could see they were not spores at all but, in fact, tiny holes that led to a labyrinthine network of tunnels under the sand, winding who knows where, except for the tiny sea creatures that use the holes as their own primitive floo and disapparate across the beach at will.

We continued to walk along the beach, marveling at how different the Atlantic Ocean was from the Pacific. The Pacific Beach neighborhood I lived in was like a *Saved by the Bell*, *Beverly Hills 90210*, *Melrose Place*, WeHo, Malibu, Orange County, Carmel-by-the-Sea mash up, a mélange of glitter and fan palms and Birds-of-Paradise-come-true. I lived about two blocks from Crown Point Bay, on Morrell and off Grand and Garnet, around the corner from the artists haunting La Jolla and the cosmetic surgeons bestowing Bird Rock with their presence at their poly-fusion-gastropubs, indulging in happy hours that began with Rossi vermouth, egg whites, and raspberry gin gimlets and ended with Wagyu beef burgers topped with brie, fig, and arugula; confit duck tacos with raclette fries; Carolina Reaper adobo with cheek meat, tucked inside blue corn tortilla blankets.

Golden light spilled across the ocean like gauze, sheer and shimmering, as sunburnt silhouettes carved their way along the California coast—rollerblading the boardwalks, surfing the crests, striding barefoot with swagger down Crown Point Bay. Bluetooth speakers blared from backpacks, earbuds tossed aside in favor of communal soundtracks. I spent my days tangled in that rhythm too, drifting between beach and boardwalk, Long afternoons and early evenings filled with consuming blueberry margaritas and fresh Pacific snapper tacos, shredded purple cabbage and cilantro and diced onion, squeezes of fresh limes into both the fish tacos and the margarita. I would use the rinds and margarita salt as a natural cuticle exfoliant, rubbing it around my naked toenail beds before tossing the rinds into the air, the twisty skins spinning like the baby spiders from *Charlotte's Web,*only to be caught by squawking seagulls and carried away.

Cocoa Beach tasted different. If Pacific Beach tasted like golden rays of sunlight and bubbling Prosecco during a Saturday sunset, Cocoa tasted like craft IPAs and ambergris salt flakes on a grey Tuesday evening. One was not worse than the other; they were simply different, beautifully dissonant experiences. We ended our beach foray with me digging feverishly into the wet grains, foraging enough silt and sand to make sand pie. I wasn't sure if it would hold together like a Texas mud pie, considering the consistency was like salt, not sugar, and there was no ball of fire to bake it to a crisp, but I tried. I patted the wet sand into a coaster shape, into the shape of an ashtray (*my mother's?*). I took a stick and drew an epigraph of a blossom. If I squinted hard enough, I could clearly see through my tears that it was a honeysuckle.

My tears tasted like those salt flakes, but whether it was from the briny sea in front of me or the ozone-tinged storm inside of me, I could not tell. I tried to bite into the gritty tart, but it disintegrated under my teeth and the grains of sand squeaked uncomfortably against the enamel of those toothy pearls. I remembered the honeysuckle mud pies tinged in lilac trichomes, remembered

how dense and dark they tasted in the cool summer evenings, cool earth and umami, sweet drippings and granny's bitter sachet petals.

I threw the sand pie down and kept walking. Up ahead, I could see bonfires and scorched marshmallows. Smoker pits and fresh snapper stuffed with lemon slices and fresh dill. Oscar Meyers bologna and Kraft American, platicky cheese on Rainbow white bread, gritty with sand and Dorito dustings.

I opened my mouth and let the salt crystals from the sea spray float inside and gently rest on my buds. I could taste my mother everywhere.

Olivia D'Zavala has spent over two decades shaping minds and nurturing voices as an adjunct college English instructor, specializing in composition, literature, and technical writing. With more than 23 years of teaching experience, she brings both academic rigor and creative insight to the classroom. Her written work has appeared in a variety of undergraduate and graduate literary journals, and her publication in *Amaranth Journal of Food Writing, Art, and Design* marks her debut on the international stage. Beyond the lecture hall, Olivia finds joy in the simple pleasures of life—sipping Old Fashioneds on her patio, reading poetry and short story collections while surrounded by her three beloved doggos. Her writing often reflects the same qualities that define her personal world: dark, subverted, and quietly bold.

Water, Water

Kaumudi Marathé

Like a connoisseur discerns the bouquets and back notes of fine wines, I'm attuned to the subtleties of a beverage people take for granted: water.

I'm fussy about the taste and thirst-quenching ability of my favorite drink. I drink still water, slightly below room temperature. Sparkling won't do. No lemon wedges or cucumber slices. Ice cubes are a no-no—they give me a headache and make water too cold to swallow easily.

I reminisce about the fragrant, sweet water of Pune, my birthplace. Stored in bulbous terracotta pots, we sipped it from metal tumblers. I also remember the water in London, Ontario where we lived in the '70s. Water was not a fashion accessory yet. No one walked around with a fancy bottle of H_2O, we drank it straight from the tap and it quenched our thirsts.

Before that, in India, we had seen our mother and grandmas collect fresh water in large pans at the kitchen faucet every morning. They boiled it to kill bacteria, cooled, and stored it. Still when I got married in Bombay in 1991, I didn't boil our water. Maybe I was too busy, too young, or simply uncomprehending of consequences. Then I developed abscesses that lingered for months, doubling me over with severe pain. They had to be drained of the pus that destroyed the flesh under the point of eruption. Our doctor admonished, "BOIL your water." Lesson learned.

In 1996, when my then-husband and I came to the USA so he could do his masters, we visited family in New Jersey. There we met the teasing taste of filtered water that promised to satisfy our thirst but, instead, just titillated it. And in restaurants, I experienced the disturbing lemon-tinged, brain freeze of late 20th century American water, served on so much ice that one struggled to sip it without getting hit in the eye.

Since then, we've lived in Glendale, California. City commercials tell us our tap water is safe to drink but it is unsatisfying so I buy bottled drinking water, one brand after having tested many. It troubles my conscience because I try to limit my use of plastic, but I console myself with the knowledge that it's my one splurge. And luckily for me, tap water works fine for hot drinks. When my daughter was ten, I tried a sip of water from her bottle one evening, knowing she'd filled it with filtered water at her friend's place. Maybe I'll like it and can stop buying water, I thought.

Alas, it tasted dreadful and didn't seep into my pores, leaving me thirsty while my stomach felt bloated. I continued sipping it, wanting to understand why it was so unsatisfying. What I learned was that the water I enjoyed slid easily down my gullet, spread across my tongue, the insides of my cheeks, my throat. It made its way into my body as speedily as the pores of a sponge soak up when they touch liquid. It vanquished my thirst but didn't weigh me down, as the filtered water did.

Yet the one water I will never forget is the one I liked the least, the strangely agitating well water of Gondavale. I was 15 when I tasted it and 41 years later, its minerally memory makes me shudder. It's what first made me realize how essential it was for one's thirst to be satisfied and also how different water could taste. Why were all waters not created equal?

On a burning May afternoon in the Indian summer of 1985, my cousins Niranjan, Sudarshan, Madhuri, Mukund, Ashwini, and Aditi; my brother Sameer; our grandfather, *Appa*; and I boarded a rickety, red Maharashtra State Transport bus for Gondavale. The journey was a tedious four hours for someone not used to rough travel. The bus heaved and rattled its way south from Pune over inadequate roads and tracts of barren, arid landscape, and stony outcrops. On that trip, I finished most of my cool Pune water and puzzled over a question that has fascinated me since. Why do people live in inhospitable places? El Paso? The Arctic? Middle Eastern deserts? Or this place where all I could see was granite tableland, dust rising up into the air, no water, no trees?

We were headed to the tiny temple town to take part in a community *munja*, a coming-of-age ritual for six to twelve-year-old Marathi Brahmin boys. I was excited as it had been about a decade since my last visit. On that occasion, my cousin Pramodan and I had travelled with my grandparents in my uncle's car, pausing briefly so *Appa* and *Aji* could rest under the shaded canopy of trees and we could run and play. We waded in a shallow stream, standing in the cool, gently flowing water, feeling the smooth pebbles underfoot, watching the shimmering heat.

My only other memory of that trip had to do with another potable liquid. I don't remember the water I drank then or perhaps I was not as discriminating at five as I became ten years later. But I fondly remember Gondavale buttermilk.

Temple meals are communal. Devotees cook food that's served free of charge. Places are laid in traditional fashion on the floor of the dining hall. Each diner gets a leaf plate, with individual servings of salt and lemon. When everyone is seated cross-legged, servers walk down the aisles, placing rice, a condiment, salad, and vegetables on each plate. Into one shallow leaf bowl go lentils; into another, thin, salted buttermilk.

Every meal I ate on that first visit was exquisite, but it was the refreshing coolness of the buttermilk that tingled tartly on my tongue every time I thought of Gondavale afterward. I looked forward to tasting it again. This time around, however, buttermilk would be more of a water substitute for me.

Gondavale was even more rustic than I'd remembered. Step out of the temple property, and all you could see were thatched huts, a farmer driving a bullock cart, and maybe, a goatherd walking his flock. We opened and cleaned *Appa*'s lodging, then used the communal bathrooms to shower before stepping barefoot into the temple to offer our respects and pray. I'd swigged down the last of my water and was still thirsty. So at some point, I took a sip of the local water and blenched, almost spitting out the hard, heavy unpleasantness.

"What's wrong with it?" I asked.

"It's well water," *Appa* explained. "You'll get used to it."

I didn't. After some hours during which I could concentrate on little but my thirst, I asked Madhuri who still had half a bottle of home water, if I could have it. She handed it over generously. She was used to Gondavale water and did not mind its flavor. Then I checked if the other cousins had water and replenished my supply, which kept me going though I was conscious each time I took a sip that my reserves were fast depleting!

Soon I was on empty again. I spent the next three days thinking of ingenious ways to quench my thirst. That's where the buttermilk came in. At mealtime, I'd swig it and wait impatiently for the servers to come back so I could ask for seconds. By the end of our stay, I'd taken to downing my buttermilk while they were still in my vicinity so I could quickly get a refill.

But no amount of buttermilk satisfied me. I didn't care about its fabulous flavor this time. It was just a means to hydration, an unsatisfactory one at that. I gave the well water another brave try. If it'd been chilled, it might have been easier to swallow, but there were no refrigerators at the temple. Then I had a brainwave.

Sugarcane juice! One of my favorite summer drinks, sugarcane juice is pressed with ginger and lemon and served on ice. It's hard to imagine anything more rejuvenating. I asked whether there was a sugarcane juice-*wallah* near the temple. There was one, so I gathered the troops—my horde of cousins—and we walked into the village for a treat! At the thatched-roof stall, as soon as the frothy drink was handed to us, I put my glass to my mouth and took a big sip, expecting salvation. In vain.

The juice was sweet, gingery … *and* hot. Hot from the press. In my experience, fresh sugarcane juice was always served with crushed ice, so I realized that what I was craving was just cold refreshment.

"Where's the ice?" I asked.

The vendor looked at me, puzzled. "Ice? We don't have ice."

Of course, he didn't. There was no ice anywhere in Gondavale because there was no freezing system in the village. I was crestfallen but couldn't stop laughing at myself and the failure of my brilliant plan.

Only when we reached Pune two days later was I finally able to satisfy my thirst.

And what I knew for certain was that I would never take water for granted again.

Kaumudi Marathé is a journalist by training and a chef by choice. She grew up in India, Wales, and Canada, so in her mother's kitchen she ate an astonishing array of international foods.

Food, family, and memory are intertwined in Kaumudi's head so she started researching Indian cuisines to connect with her roots. In 2007, she started Un-Curry, an organic catering company and cooking school in Los Angeles, hoping to put regional Indian food into the American consciousness.

Kaumudi's first cookbook, *Maharashtrian Cuisine: A Family Treasury* (Zaika, BPI, 1999) documents her family's food history. Her second, *The Essential Marathi Cookbook* (Penguin India, 2009) has been listed in the USA as one of the 10 best books on Indian cooking. Her memoir, *Shared Tables: Family Stories and Recipes from Poona to LA* was published in 2017. Today, Kaumudi contributes regularly to *Serious Eats* from California and is also writing a novel.

Aftertaste

Bill Zaget

I reach out…
An earthen appendage,
a jutting peninsular tongue
into the salty amniotic fluid of my waters.

I can almost feel my babies, still:
Benthos, Nekton, and Plankton.
Of them, a memory.

Rearward, ranging,
I take in
the ghostly taste of vegetation.
The earthiness of roots,
the tang, the savory
and the bitterness
of leaves and stems,
the astringent bark,
and sweetness of petals
clothing and comforting me.
Once.

Now, nearly naked,
I sigh.

I have kissed my mammalian whelps,
licked their feathers and fur
as they scurried about my body.
Tasted their rendered remains

after falling prey.

And my highly evolved
but unruly children;
how they used and abused me
to build their human cities
and inventions,
only to have crumbled.
I have re-absorbed
their noxious realms
and manufacture,
the rotted flesh and bones
of my offspring
in their graves.

But.
I still mourn their loss
and feel a lingering nostalgia
for all my brood, the good *and* the bad.

I am alone now.
A small sphere
in the great woof and warp
of the universe.
Torn and unraveled,
I am dying.

I miss being a mother…

Bill Zaget (he/him) is a performance-poet and writer of dark slipstream fiction, a playwright, and an actor (as Zag Dorison). Publications include his award-winning prose-poem, "Renfield or, Dining at the Bughouse," in the 2001 Ace Books anthology, *Dracula in London*; "Zombies on the Down-Low," 2009 by Ravenous Romance in the anthology, *Beach Boys*; "Symeon," in the award-winning 2012 anthology *Danse Macabre: Close Encounters with the Reaper* by Edge/Hades Publications; "The Samsa" in the 2015 anthology, *Gods, Memes, and Monsters*, Stone Skin Press, UK; "The Yearning Shape" in the Cloaked Press 2021 anthology *Nightmare Fuel*; and "Constellations" in the 2021 Summer/Fall issue of the journal *Prospectus*.

He currently lives with his partner in Montreal in a small apartment, chock-a-block with too many books, and an eclectic mish-mash of diablo masks, Egyptian and religious statuary, and gothic and Native-American objets d'art. All he's missing is a cat.

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Fishborne

Cumhur Okay Özgür

In the artwork titled ***Fishborne*** [Digital illustration, 14.8×21 cm.; 2025], the fishbone symbolizes hunger, while the other fruits and vegetables represent wastefulness. In today's world, while people are dying of hunger, tons of food is discarded merely because its expiration date has passed. The artist sought to express this contradiction through the use of monochrome tones instead of vibrant colors. The opposition between scarcity and abundance is reflected through the contrasts in geometric forms. Additionally, the fishbone symbolizes both life and death, while also reflecting the relentless passage of time. The spiral-shaped vegetables symbolize infinity and the cycle of life.

Cumhur Okay Özgür was born in 1981 in Altınoluk (on the border of the provinces of Çanakkale and Balıkesir). He graduated from the Department of Painting at the Faculty of Fine Arts, Kütahya Dumlupınar University in 2008. In 2012, he completed his Master's degree at Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University, Institute of Social Sciences, Department of Painting, with a thesis on "The Theme of Loneliness in 20th Century Painting." In 2017, he earned his PhD from Hacettepe University, Institute of Fine Arts, Department of Painting, with a dissertation titled, *Dark Romanticism, Nightmare Paintings and Imaginary Images*.

He currently serves as Associate Professor in the Department of Painting at the Faculty of Fine Arts, Balıkesir University, and is awaiting appointment to a Professorship. His academic research focuses on cinema, video games, and illustration.