Issue 2
Volume 5

Amaranth

a journal of food writing, art & design

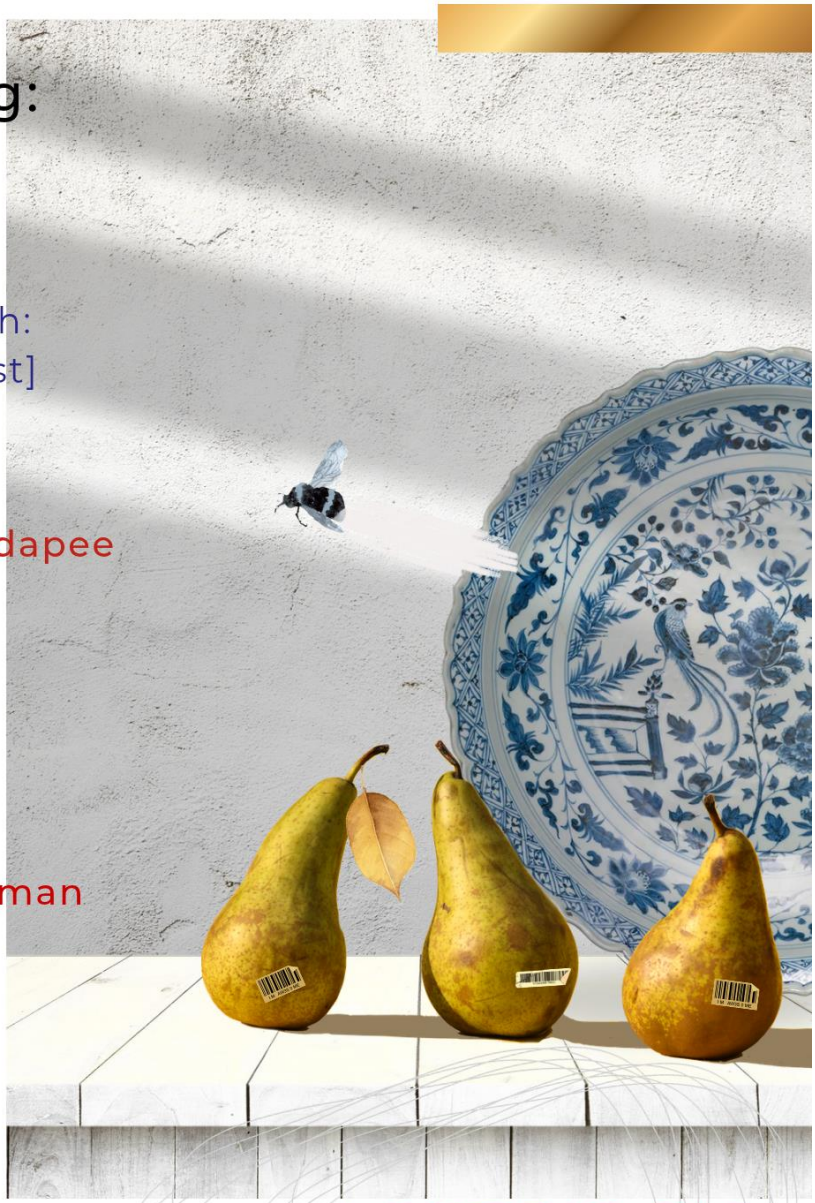
featuring:

In Conversation with:
Itamar Gilboa [Guest]

Carlene M. Gadapee

Stephen Connolly

Cynthia Yatchman



www.amaranthjournal.com

AUTUMN
2026

Description

Amaranth Journal of Food Writing, Art & 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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CONTENTS

Editor's Letter

Luster

Ruby Red 1

Rebecca Clifford

Übertritt 2

Schokozeit meiner Kindheit 3

Erdbeeren 3

Oliver Fahn

Soda Bread 5

Bread and Beer 6

Allison Burris

Les Gaufres de Liège 7

Ann Fisher-Wirth

When the Dead Come for Dinner 9

Christopher Woods

Something 11

Cathy Barber

Peach 1 13

Peach 2 14

Cynthia Yatchman

Tiger, Tiger 16

Stephen Connolly

Sapore/Sapere

Ne utrum 19
Philipp Ammon

Late September, 20
Long Before Eurylochus Killed the Cattle of Helios, 21
Carlene M. Gadapee

Gruel and Unusual 23
Tony Robles

Loving Cashews 28
Cynthia Pratt

Day-After Corn 30
Matt McGee

Secular Spirituality 31
Brian Cronwall

I Tasted a Peach and It was So Very Good 33
Pamela Scott

Ode to Robert G. Johnson and his Heirloom Tomatoes 35
Suellen Wedmore

Tomato in a Vase 37
Unwashed Skillet, Seal Beach, CA 38
Roger Camp

A Kitchen is a Sanctuary 40
Louis Faber

Firmness Index: A Behavioral Study 42
Tamara-Lee Brereton-Karabetsos

Weave

The Mennonite Squash 45
Picking Olives 46
Leonore Wilson

Ode to Leftover Pizza 48
Sali Andiamo Siyaya

The Appetite 50
Sarah Islam

Satay 55
Glutinous Rice 56
Kian Seh Low

the ferment 58
elle brown

oh, to be a caviar spoon 60
Lucinda Trew

Eggshell Preserves 61
Tess Lockhart

Breakfast Tacos 63
Joe Coy

The Soul of the Broth 64
Goutam Bhattacharyya

Spell 69
Sugar 70
V. Bray

Ode to Avgolemono Soup 71
Douglas Jones

Table Talk

Museum of Meals: In Conversation with Itamar Gilboa 72

EDITOR'S LETTER

Autumn 2026 [Volume 5, Issue 2]

Dear readers,

Welcome to the **Autumn 2026 Issue** of **Amaranth Journal of Food Writing, Art & Design**!

Autumn—a season of both abundance and letting go—asks us to gather: harvests, recipes, memories . . . It is also a time to gather around the table, not merely to dine but to listen to the countless stories that quietly shape the food on our plate.

In the pages of our autumn edition, meals metamorphose into maps of belonging; kitchens become archives and sites of care; and appetite opens onto questions of desire, memory, and ecology. The creative assemblages gathered here do not simply describe food—they listen to what food holds. From these diverse imaginings of food and its resonances, we have chosen the following compositions as the featured pieces for our **Autumn 2026 Issue**: **Steve Connolly**'s intriguing short story "**Tiger, Tiger**," for its seductive wit and deft interplay of humor and unease; **Carlene M. Gadapee**'s poems "**Late September,**" and "**Long Before Eurylochus Killed the Cattle of Helios,**" for their poignant explorations of deferred intimacy and forms of hunger that outlast a feast; and **Cynthia Yatchman**'s paintings, for their sensuous rendering of organic forms poised between abstraction and recognition.

We thank **Itamar Gilboa** for joining us in conversation. His artistic practice—probing the uneasy interplay of appetite, abundance, and wastage—invites us to look beyond the individual plate towards the systems of consumption and distribution in which we all participate.

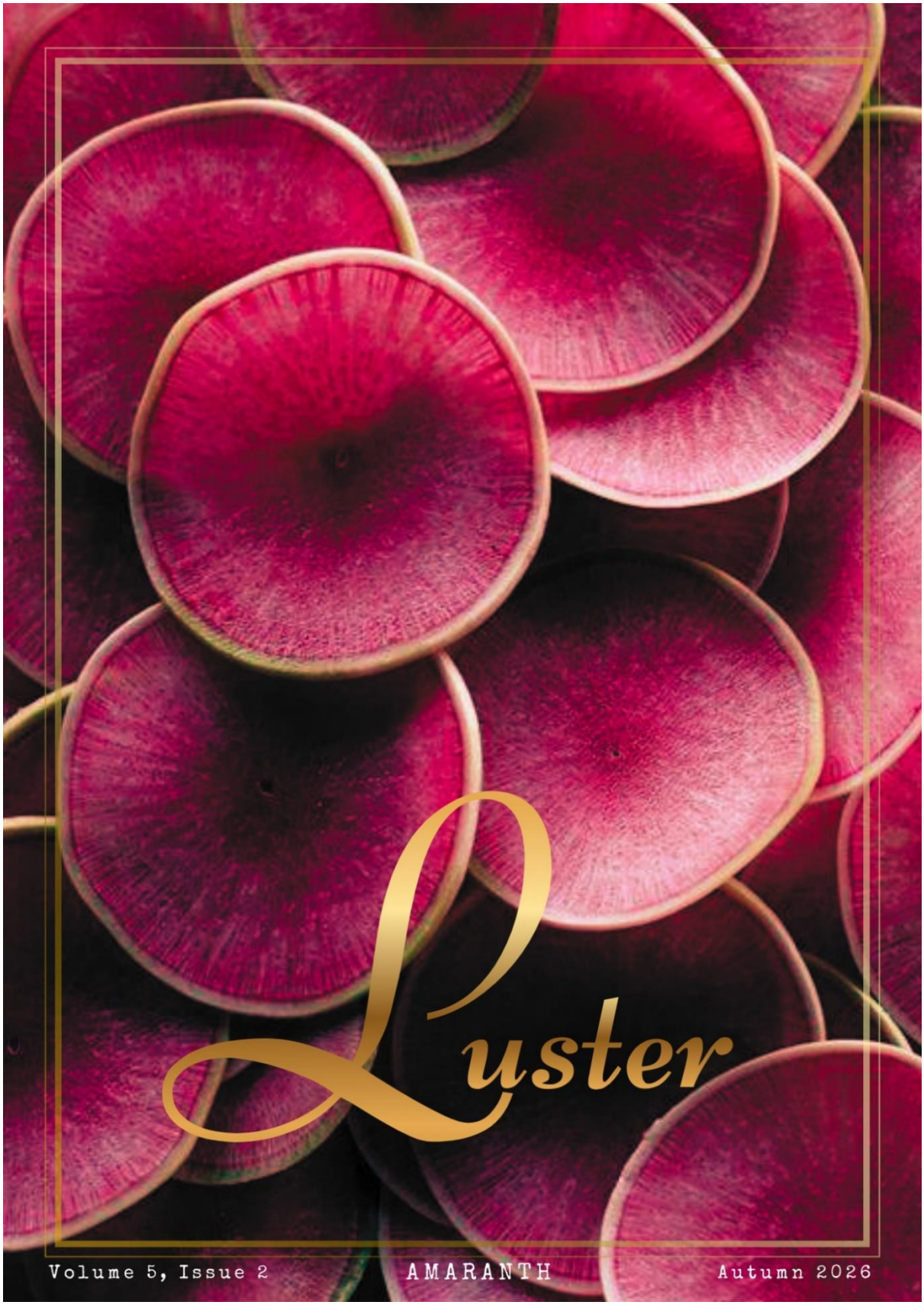
We are grateful to all our contributors for their trust, and to you, our readers, for the company you bring to this shared table. May you find in these pages much to savor, to reflect, and to return to.

Bon Appétit!

Satarupa Sinha Roy

Founder & Managing Editor

Amaranth Journal of Food Writing, Art & Design



Luster

Volume 5, Issue 2 AMARANTH Autumn 2026

Ruby Red

Rebecca Clifford

Two-pound bags of perfectly imperfect red and orange peppers glow
in produce bins, pulsing lanterns against the change of the clock
and the dying daylight this November.

Beets on sale–ten pounds for two dollars–a bargain I can't pass up.
Ditto, the carrots.

I peel, cut, carve, dice, chop, my hands stained with the claret lifeblood
of beetroot, the jaundiced aura of the carrots, my fingers slick with the
acid-crisp sweetness of the peppers.

Blanched, ice bathed, bagged for the freezer–I'm satisfied this frozen bounty
will outlast our Canadian winter. I remember to leave some for today.

I enjoy the sun filtering through the backyard, igniting the pinnae of the sumac,
and recreate this in the kitchen–the bloodletting beets, grated carrots, diced red and orange peppers tossed in
a lemon tarragon vinaigrette.

Late autumn light awakens a difference in my taste buds and my pocketbook.
Lettuce, now unseasonable, unreasonably dear, I fill the bowl with earthier joys.

Rebecca Clifford's poetry and prose appear in national and international journals and e-zines. She lives rurally, near a watershed, gardens with a backhoe, and plants as many sunflowers as the ground will hold. She is supported by her long-suffering husband and a disdainful cat of questionable parentage.

Übertritt

Oliver Fahn

Im Meer des Topfes
brodelt Gischt,
steigt an den Ufern jäh empor,
nicht zu deckeln,
strandgerichtet
bald auf der Platte
unlösbar.

Eingebrannt die Freiheit,
drückt mich Schmerz der Beschränkung,
verwandelt sich in Ausbruchskraft,
die in mich hineinkriecht,
mich vereinnahmt
für den kurzen Moment
angebrannten Dufts.

Wann folgt der Augenblick,
in dem auch aus mir
Kraft herausbricht?

Schokozeit meiner Kindheit

Dunkle Linien formieren sich zum Gitter,
nehmen meinen Strudel in Gefangenschaft.
Von einer weißen Decke berieselter Teigmantel,
im Fokus meiner Perspektive.

Ich inhaliere die Bestäubung,
unterdrücke ein Niesen,
spekuliere unaufhörlich,
seit wann jene Linien,
Schokolade meiner Kinderzeit,
zu Balsamico geworden sind.

Erdbeeren

Den in Eimern gepflückten Früchten
sehe ich das Kompott voraus.

Wie viel mögen sie wohl wiegen
jenseits der Waage
in den Mündern meiner Kleinen?

Oliver Fahn, geboren 1980 in Pfaffenhofen an der Ilm, ist Heilerziehungspfleger. Für sein Gedicht „Schlacht und Un-Schuld“ erhielt er den Lyrischen Lorbeer 2025. Mit der Kurzgeschichte „Freiheit fing in Berlin an“ belegte er den dritten Platz beim Schreibwettbewerb „Freiheit, die ich meine“ des Vereins 3. Oktober–Deutschland singt und klingt e. V. Für „Über wahre Blindheit und den Verlust der Sehkraft“ wurde er im Rahmen des Jubiläumsprojekts „200 Jahre Braille–Gemeinsam mehr sehen“ als einer von zehn Siegern ausgezeichnet. Im März 2024 kürte ihn der Kroggl Verlag zum Autor des Monats. Seine Geschichte „Lebewohl! Der Auszug“ erreichte die Longlist des 28. Deutschen Kurzgeschichtenwettbewerbs.

Soda Bread

Allison Burris

1.

You score the top of the loaf.
X-marks-the-four-leaf clover.
Think of the ancestors you never knew.
At some point, your mother's mother
came to America in the flow of labor
perhaps, during the death of potatoes
all the begetting/leavening.
Your stories are DNA fairy tales ground
into bare bone dust.

2.

Of course, it's heavy,
That's the whole point.

3.

At the Irish pub you order Irish coffees, a slab
of warm soda bread, which you slather
in Irish butter and knock into your stomach.
Bread as foundation, something concrete.
In the dark bar, Wilde stares down while
you play a game of giggling words
off each other's foreheads. Joyce mutters,
disapproving as always.

4.

In 1836 bicarbonate of soda was invented/discovered.
Early recipes instruct its rise in conjunction
with hydrochloric acid. Soon buttermilk is substituted
as a safer alternative.

But baking is never a safe act.

5.

My one-eighth heritage narrows into
stereotype in my own mind
a cabbage cuisine in an accent I can't pull off.
I know there's a density I'm missing—
must replace with one bite after the next.
I scatter crumbs of myself everywhere.

Bread and Beer

We put the record on and let it spin its crackling novelty. We eat cheese paid for by engineering wages on little toasts crisped like a tribute. What is synonymous with prosperity if not a grazing board? The Egyptians wished each other bread and beer. Were paid in bread and beer. When we clink our glasses, we're searching for unity in the sound, a moment of alignment. No wonder they call it a toast. I made this bread—watching the loaf spill open under the blade to let the steam out. The hardest part is all this waiting for sustenance—getting the timing right.

Allison Burris grew up in the misty Pacific Northwest and writes whimsical and subversive poems from Oakland, CA. She earned her Master's degree in Library science, so you can often find her at the library if she's not currently drawing or baking. Recent publications include *The Orange & Bee*, *New World Writing*, and *RockPaperPoem*. Her website is: https://linktr.ee/allisonburris

Les Gaufres de Liège

Ann Fisher-Wirth

Not just "Belgian waffles" but *les gaufres*
de Liège—chewy, yeasty, sometimes
still warm, with lumps of sugar baked in,
which, if they had touched the hot iron,

caramelized and streaked the surface with
a glaze of sweetness—rarely available,
and then, only in the basement of the Bon
Marché, no other store, no other city,

no other but those in the ex-pat years.
Not just "Belgian waffles," but treasure
tied in a square of paper, and I
swung the package by its string loop

as I walked home on winter twilights
after school, and ate square by careful
square, sitting bundled in two blankets
with my legs on the windowsill above

the only radiator, watching snow drift
over the grounds of the Musée des Beaux-Arts
across the Meuse, watching coal barges
ply the black water, heaped, nearly foundering.

Ann Fisher-Wirth is Mississippi Poet Laureate for 2025-2029. Her ninth book, *For What Is, Praise*, is forthcoming in the Silver Concho Series of Press 53. With Laura-Gray Street, she co-edited *The Ecopoetry Anthology* and *Attached to the Living World: A New Ecopoetry Anthology*, both published by Trinity University Press. A senior fellow of the Black Earth Institute, Ann received the 2023 Governor's Award for Excellence in Poetry from the Mississippi Arts Commission. She has had Fulbrights to Switzerland and Sweden, and residencies at Djerassi, Hedgebrook, Storyknife, and elsewhere. She is retired from the University of Mississippi, where she taught in the MFA program and directed the Environmental Studies minor. She also taught yoga at Southern Star in Oxford, Mississippi, for many years.

When the Dead Come for Dinner

Christopher Woods

I was in the kitchen, shoving a Hungry Man dinner in the microwave when I heard her voice. "Jimmy, we're back!"

I turned around to see my dear Aunt Ella in a starched sundress. And, behind her, Uncle Lowman standing there, smiling in his usual khakis. And Aunt Ella asked, "Are we too late?"

I have to tell you, I was absolutely shocked. Aunt Ella and Uncle Lowman have been dead for decades. I told them how surprised I was to see them. I couldn't believe it, and it made me so very happy.

Uncle Lowman explained that they had a weekend pass from heaven and decided to visit me. Wasn't I pleased to see them after all this time? I am, I said. It's super exciting, I told them.

I told them to have a seat and offered them iced tea. I remembered that they never drank liquor. Once we were all sitting down, I decided I would not tell them about my divorce, my arrests, the DUI or rehab. But you know what? They never asked. They still knew me as the sweet boy who spent summers with them in the country. They knew nothing else and, thankfully, didn't ask for an update.

Always the good host, I popped two more Hungry Man dinners in the microwave. Dinner soon, I told them. That's when Aunt Ella started staring at the microwave. "What is that darned thing?" she asked. Sure, I wished I had cleaned it in the last month or two, or three, but that wasn't the point. I tried to explain how the microwave worked, but I didn't really know. I guess I'm just another clueless consumer who takes miracles in stride.

"But what about your oven?" she asked. "Is it broken?" I had no ready answer.

"Where is your Corning Ware?" she asked. How to explain all the changes that have happened since they died? I decided to change the subject.

Tell me about heaven, I said, and our conversation livened, like the micro waves dancing

in that odd box in the corner. "Oh, we're more than happy there," Uncle Lowman said.

"Couldn't be nicer," Aunt Ella added. It sounded great, I had to agree.

I lit a candle and turned off the lights. In the semi-darkness, we ate our dinners

and laughed about old times, my aunt and uncle smiling just as I remembered.

Christopher Woods is a writer and photographer who lives in Texas. He has published a novel, *The Dream Patch*, a prose collection, *Under a Riverbed Sky*, and a poetry collection, *Maybe Birds Would Carry It Away*. His novella, *Hearts in the Dark*, was published in an anthology by Running Wild Press in Los Angeles. He has received residencies from The Ucross Foundation and the Edward Albee Foundation, and a grant from the Mary Roberts Rinehart Foundation. His plays include *Moonbirds*, an absurdist play about census-takers in a country where there are no people left to count; *Fire*, a drama about a woman who loses her family in a house fire she may have set; *Interim*, about souls in Purgatory; and *Heart Speak*, an evening of monologues for men and women.

Christopher Woods' Gallery: https://christopherwoods.zenfolio.com/f861509283

Something

Cathy Barber

Noreen texts:
Just left something
for you. I get off
the couch
I didn't think
I could get off of,
still wearing last
night's clothes, and
pad to the door.

A pink plastic bag
hangs on the knob.
A light rain, cold wind.
It doesn't matter
if I can eat
the brownies. My friend
has made them and driven
crosstown,
to offer something to me.

Cathy Barber's poetry has been published across four continents, including in *Stone Poetry Quarterly*, *Belt Magazine*, *The San Francisco Bay Guardian*, *SLAB*, *The Hopper,* and many other journals and has been anthologized many times, including in *Rewilding: Poems for the Environment* and the *Octopus and Other Cephalopods* and *Light Enters the Grove*, a Cuyahoga Valley National Park and Wick Poetry Center anthology. She is a graduate of the Vermont College of Fine Arts MFA program and makes her home in Cleveland Heights, Ohio, where she served on the board

of Literary Cleveland for many years. She lived for twenty years in California where she served on the board and taught with California Poets in the Schools. Her first full-length book is *Once: A Golden Shovel Collection* (Kelsay Books).

Peach 1

Cynthia Yatchman

Peach 2

Cynthia Yatchman is a Seattle-based artist. A former ceramicist, she studied with J.T. Abernathy in Ann Arbor, MI though after receiving her B.F.A. in painting from the University of Washington she switched from 3D art to 2D and has stayed there since, working primarily on paintings, prints and collages. Her art is housed in numerous public and private collections. She has exhibited extensively in the Northwest, including shows at Seattle University, Seattle Pacific University, Shoreline Community College, the Tacoma and Seattle Convention Centers, and the Pacific Science Center. She is a member of Women Painters of Washington, Seattle Print Art Association, COCA (Center of Contemporary Art), and the Puget Sound Group Northwest Artists.

Tiger, Tiger

Stephen Connolly

Come. Sit down. I won't bite, I promise. You've done well to get this far, to track us down. I salute you.

Now take a look around. Be honest, I can tell it's not what you were expecting. Instead of a tablecloth, butcher's paper from a roll. Faded menus in scratched plastic sleeves, ketchup in enormous plastic tomatoes, the reek of cheap cooking oil. An ordinary truck stop, no different from a hundred others across the City.

Relax! The food is safe enough, although not very inspired. Omelettes, steak, pasta. The usual suspects. Local versions of dishes from across the globe. Served with chips.

Why are we here? Because tonight could be special. Tonight, the Tiger may call. Perhaps he's already here, it's so tempting to barge into the kitchen and investigate. That door, there, see? Where that girl just went in. But first we eat. The proof of the pudding, as it were. You are of course free to leave at any time. But I hope you won't.

Still here? Good. Now lean close, for my words are not for the uninitiated.

We've been tracking him for years, this Tiger. Day by day, month by month, collating the sightings, puzzling out his schedule. Weeks go by without a trace and then POW! Last Tuesday, that Brasserie behind the station, you know the one? Wednesday, the Pizzeria across from the museum, the one that stays open late. Friday, a Noodle bar in the theatre district, that one with the pink neon signage. Run-of-the-mill places, with no reputation for quality. But for one night only, for a few precious hours, the food superb. Every meal cooked to an absolute perfection. And all because the Tiger deigned to visit.

Such skepticism on your face. But also . . . excitement?

Next day, everything's back to normal. And even if you'd read a review or heard someone raving or you just happened to choose the Brasserie or the Pizzeria or the Noodle Bar it would be too late. Before you'd picked up a menu, before you'd even sat down, the magic would have already vanished, the Tiger gone.

For this Tiger is a nomad. Just another anonymous chef who walked in off the street and asked for a shift during the evening rush. Vanishing without a word at the end of the night. Not even waiting for his share of the tips.

Imagine it! Circling the City, night after night, restaurant to restaurant. Never the same place two nights running. And never the quality establishments, either. Always the small, the mediocre, even the chains! Nameless and faceless this Tiger, forgotten almost as soon as he's left the premises. But possessing such genius with meat and vegetables, such delicacy with herbs and spices. An artist of

oven and saucepan. Night after night feeding the undeserving, the proles. While those of us—I hope I may count you among our number—with the palate to truly appreciate his skills must go without.

Now do you understand our frustration, our eagerness to find him?

Some fools still insist this Tiger is a myth, all these wonderful meals mere coincidence. Run-of-the-mill chefs having a good night. But we know better.

For we're a motley crew, we who hunt the Tiger. Look behind you. Recognise him? Food critic for the Citizen. Over there, he was with the Times. And those two in the corner used to be on Television. Our ranks include scientists, statisticians and gamblers. Volunteers, all ready at a moment's notice, to rush to the scene of a sighting and bear witness.

But you know all this, surely? Your enquiries have not gone unnoticed. Or did you think our meeting here tonight mere coincidence? You wish to join our ranks—please, no protestations of innocence! But I must warn you it's not a decision to be taken lightly.

Not for nothing is our Tiger named for the fiercest of predators. Our Tiger is cursed. Every time he calls, he leaves a victim: every visit exacts its price. The woman who ate at the Brasserie then fell downstairs to her death. The man who ate at the Pizzeria only to be killed by a drunk driver on his way home. The woman who tripped as she left the Noodle bar and broke her neck on the pavement.

A culinary Flying Dutchman, condemned to wander the City, preparing extraordinary meals but leaving death in his wake. Coincidence, you say? The statistics don't lie. We have contacts everywhere. The police, the hospitals. Even the insurance companies.

So, there you have it. There is nothing more to tell, only the questions we are desperate to ask him. Where did he come from? Where did he train? How did he become so good? Above all, what did he do to draw death so close behind him? Are the two linked in some Faustian pact? What could his story be?

Sometimes I wonder if it's we who are cursed. I mean, look at us. Risking our very lives as we wander the City in pursuit of a phantom. Neglecting our families to chase rumours of soufflés and sauces. I can almost see him in your eyes, an image of the Tiger as clear and as real as I am. Do you really want to join us?

How close have I ever come? A good question. Just once, I think. Chasing a hunch to that Bistro by the Old Bridge, out of business now, sadly. Snatching a dirty plate from a waiter's hand. A smear of sauce, a fragment of fish and even cold, the taste . . . extraordinary. I'm sure it was him. Who else could it have been?

One day we will find him, I know it in my heart. Perhaps you will be the one to tip the balance, your palate enough to trigger a meeting? One day one of us will be in the right place at the right time. To meet him face to face, help him break the curse and cease his wandering. To settle down somewhere and open a restaurant. A cozy Trattoria perhaps, its whereabouts known only to our brotherhood. Or some grand Michelin-starred affair where selected guests may hope to be entertained.

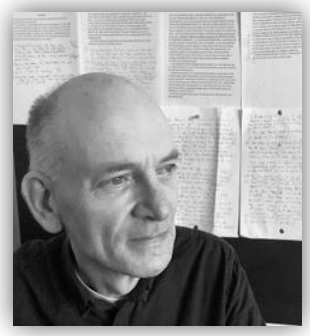
The proles have had their chance. It's our turn now.

But until that day we must continue the hunt, in hope. Our sacred Quest: to dine with the Tiger, though we risk our lives in the process. Though the faces of our loved ones grow ever fainter, our lives lose ever more scraps of meaning.

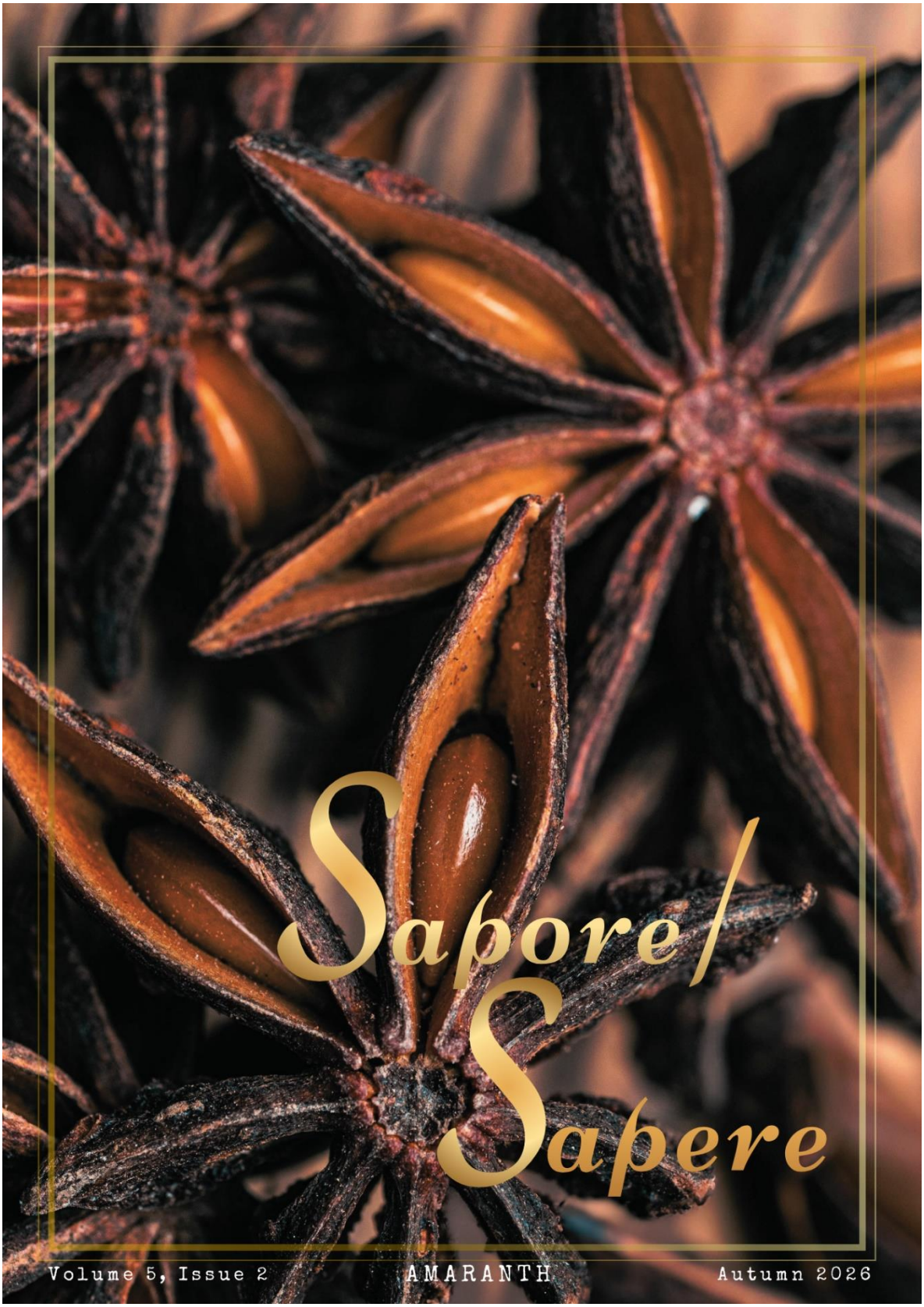
But one must be philosophical about these things, don't you agree? In order to enjoy the best, it seems only right that you should be prepared to risk everything. Why else are you here? I see the hunger in your face, don't attempt to hide it. One addict can always recognise another.

So. What do you think? Will you join us and prove yourself up to the challenge? Will tonight be the night, this humble truck stop the place where history is made? Do you need a moment before deciding? Behold, the waiter approaches. Please try to ignore the state of his fingernails.

It's time to make your decision. You've heard my tale and you know what's at stake. You've studied the menu. What looks tempting? What would you like for supper?



Stephen Connolly was born in Canada, grew up in Scotland and South Africa but now lives in the Cotswolds, where he does all the cooking. Primarily a playwright, he graduated with an MA in Scriptwriting from Bath Spa University. His radio play *Sky Pilots* won a BBC competition while his stage play *Parzival* was workshopped by Bristol Old Vic. His short stories have appeared in *Far Off Places*, *Fictive Dream*, *Leaf Books*, *Stroud Short Stories*, *Retreat West*, *DoubleSpeak,* and *Flash Flood*. Current works in progress include a novel about magic and a stage play about Scott of the Antarctic, set in 2012 instead of 1912.



Sapore/ Sapere

Volume 5, Issue 2 AMARANTH Autumn 2026

Ne utrum

Philipp Ammon

Was ist schlimmer:
Fraßfood schlingen
Oder mit
Trimalchio zechen?

Philipp Ammon ist Historiker und Slawist. Bei Klostermann erschien 2020 *Georgien zwischen Eigenstaatlichkeit und russischer Okkupation*. Seine Veröffentlichungen erschienen unter anderem in der *Neuen Zürcher Zeitung* (Schweiz), der *Frankfurter Allgemeinen Zeitung*, *Lettre International, Akzente—Zeitschrift für Literatur*, *metamorphosen*, *Matrix*, *Bawülon, tabula rasa, eXperimenta, Knochen für Bismarck, Drecksack, Rhein!, Sprachspielereien, Cicero, Berliner Zeitung, The European, Kosmopolis, Jüdische Rundschau, Neues Deutschland, karenina, Ossietzky,* und *Grenzenloses Erzählen. Eine deutschgriechische Anthologie* (Deutschland), *Zwischenwelt, Die Presse, David, erostepost, perspektive, mosaik und Fluch't'raum* (Österreich), in der *Anthologie des meilleurs poèmes du prix International Arthur Rimbaud 2023* (Frankreich), in *Quadrant* (Australien), *Književne novine* (Serbien) und *Turning Points—Faces & Names with Essays from The New York Times*, ferner in *ავრა* und *სჯანი* (Georgien), *Grine Medine* (Niederlande), ”דישלאנד (Schweden) und *Зеркало* (Israel).

Seine Texte wurden ins Ukrainische (Petro Rychlo) und Niederländische (Hilde Pach) übersetzt. 2020 erhielt er den Literaturpreis der Literaturzeitschrift *Nuove Lettere*. 2025 erschien im Moloko Print Verlag *Get your kicks*. 2026 erscheinen *Tuschetiens Wolken, Karthlis Untergang* sowie *Die schöne Zeit* mit einem Vorwort von György Dalos.

Late September,

Carlene M. Gadapee

and another summer's gone by without us

sitting on the deck in the gloaming, surrounded

by late robin-calls, the fairy lights in the trees,

and the welcoming embrace of darkness.

The chiminea remains shrouded, five summers

now, waiting for us to live the life it's purposed

for. We have set the stage diligently, the chairs

and glider, the gas grill, all under cover, all

waiting. I'm still waiting. I could sit alone,

swatting at rogue mosquitos, slow-drinking

a solitary glass of cold white wine. I could

watch the condensation ease down over

the curve of the glass, collect in a minor

torrent, make a slow cascade down the stem,

pool up at the base, mark a temporary

ring on the tabletop in the vestiges of dust

and pollen. But I don't. I look at shapes of trees

as they become indistinct, a blurred version

of what was planned, what came to be, what

bore fruit or not. I watch the tiny lights blink,

blue and white, blue and white, while birds

go home to their nests. They understand that

summer is just a season.

Long Before Eurylochus Killed the Cattle of Helios,

I invented a song to Io, heifer-princess, unwilling bedmate

of Zeus. Tired men join in, voices weak from weeping

and hungry for a hero. I've seen Odysseus at his best, more

often at his worst, and he always invents a glossy tale to lure

this herd back into the fold. He promises greener pastures,

ample grain, and future safety. Around feeble campfires, we

warm our stiff fingers and scan the smoky horizon for a sign.

Any sign. Men's voices are as low as prayer. Like confused cows,

they huddle together for warmth and simple companionship,

a depleted herd, poor brainless beasts. They keen and mourn

as if seeking their barn, their crafty cowherd.

Framed by sunset-rays of blood and gold, Odysseus appears,

Circe and swine finally abandoned. He has remembered

loyal men, the ones who stayed behind. Their hero brings

bushel-baskets of boasts and excuses, woven out of dreams

and desires—his. So much sweet fodder to share, to fill empty

bellies. We capture a bull, one of our own, a perfect sacrifice

to his barnyard stories—shallow valor. We gild horns and slit

a ropy throat, hoping to win someone's favor, maybe his,

maybe the gods'. Is there a difference? Roasting thigh meat

reminds me of other hungers not so easily fed. Libations

are poured and wine flows like blood, like hearts, like pain.

The men low and moan again. Tears and fat stain their tunics.

Poet and English teacher **Carlene M. Gadapee** lives in northern New Hampshire with her husband, several fruit trees, a pom-doxie dog, and two beehives. She is the author of two chapbooks of poetry, *Relearning the Body* (Finishing Line Press, 2026) and *What to Keep* (Finishing Line Press, 2025). Other poems and reviews can be found in many journals including *Allium, Smoky Quartz, Touchstone, MockingOwlRoost, Vox Populi,* and *MicroLit Almanac*.

Gruel and Unusual

Tony Robles

I was at the supermarket in search of something to cook for dinner. I perused the aisles and approached the breakfast cereal section. I walked to a shelf of boxes containing hot cereal. A box of cream of wheat magically leapt into a somersault and into my hands. I immediately thought of a phone call I'd received from my best friend 15 years ago. It was evening, after an unsatisfying day of phone work at a life insurance brokerage. My best friend was a debt collector and we'd both spent more than our fair share of time on the phone—fielding incoming and making outgoing calls while asking ourselves if we'd made the right career choices and whether there was something less banal to which we could devote our time—something that might yield more tangible results, such as building a table or unclogging a toilet.

James is my best friend because he, like me, is an oddball. "Shall we go out for a *libation?"* he might ask rather than, "Wanna go out for a drink?" When inquiring about a friend's son he asked, "*How's your progeny*?" He once referred to me as parsimonious. I looked the word up in the dictionary. Not very flattering, I thought. But James assured me it was a good-natured ribbing. From that moment onward, I carried a pocket dictionary just in case such words bubbled to the surface during our phone and in-person meetings.

Working the phones wasn't actually a choice as much as it was something we "fell into." We bounced from various jobs. James had a brief stint as a door-to-door meat salesman, driving a truck with a freezer in which the parts of deceased cows lay awaiting nature's thaw, if not A1 steak sauce. He lasted a week before being snatched up by tool company as a salesman. I landed at the insurance brokerage

as a temp worker. I took the obligatory typing test at the temp agency and other sundry aptitude measurements that assured them that I was familiar with the English alphabet, which was a sure track, in my mind, to the prestigious position of file clerk. Our jobs were in offices with ample fluorescent light, which flickered at times and droned at others. But the work was in an office setting that, somehow, suggested a degree of importance. The attire was tie, jacket, and slacks, which made me one of hundreds—perhaps thousands—wearing similar, if not identical outfits. The shirt and tie gave me a sense of esteem that, no doubt, came from my father, who had worked as a janitor. He'd come home from work and shed his work uniform, that affixed itself to his amply muscled frame as he mopped and buffed swathes of marble floors in the egalitarian halls of San Francisco's Opera House. You better study hard in school or you'll end up like me, he'd chide. You wanna clean toilets like me all your life? His words fell in that expansive realm separating hope and regret—question and lament. You want a job where you can sit down, like in an office, he'd finally say before retiring in front of his black-and-white TV and dispatching me to the store to pick him up an Eskimo Pie or some other treat, always adding, *"And bring me back all my change."*

I took a typing class in high school, thinking it might help me in my office work aspirations. I was in a class exclusively of girls and, between the crushes I held on them, the crushing drone of typewriter keys hitting paper, and my undiagnosed A.D.D., I was a disaster. I typed, at best, a dismal 5 words a minute. The instructor, a woman with a high perm and triangular glasses, peppered my papers with slash marks that cut my insides—internal paper cuts—before moving past my desk, abandoning a lost cause. I felt like a failure and envisioned others in the class heading towards a citadel of offices, flourishing in the financial district with desks under the fertile glare of fluorescent lights.

James called one evening. He spoke of the day, the phone calls, and the people he dealt with—deadbeats, liars, those with sob stories, and those truly down on their luck. It wears him down, but he's not one to complain. I, too, have my share of at-work experiences and complaints as well. For instance, it annoys me when, at the urinal, someone initiates a conversation. James had an in-bathroom experience when a coworker in the next urinal peed on his feet—the lightest of sprinkles that he initially doubted had transpired. Unfortunately for James, he'd had a foot injury that facilitated his wearing Birkenstock-like sandals. He made it a point, thereafter, to use the stall instead of the urinal. There's a lull in our conversation filled with television static. He then speaks.

"I was hungry but I was too lazy to go to the market."

"So, what'd you eat?"

"Cream of wheat."

"For dinner?"

"Yeah, that and sardines."

"Cream of wheat and sardines?"

"Yep."

The combination didn't sound appetizing; actually, it sounded somewhat gruesome. I asked how he'd prepared it. Did he cook the Cream of Wheat before dropping the sardines into the pot to slither and swim like eels in the viscous slop? Are you crazy, James replied, "I had the sardines on the side and the cream of wheat was *al dente*." He described his unusual meal; that it was—despite the unusual combination—not bad. I tried to imagine what cream of wheat and sardines might taste like when James added he was taking up a hobby. What kind of hobby, I asked. Woodworking, he replied, adding

that he'd enrolled in a class at the local community college. He wants to build a table, he explained. We ended our call knowing that there would be many more calls the following morning, as well as trips to the bathroom and, if we're lucky, free bagels, courtesy of the boss.

I hold the box of cream of wheat as I make my way to the supermarket checkout line. Many years have passed since that phone call with James. Our phone jobs are in the past. James has since married and I have married and divorced. James' wife does most, if not all, the cooking which does not include cream of wheat and sardines. He ditched the phones and worked as a meter reader for the water department and has recently retired. I bounced from various jobs—thrift store cashier, warehouse worker, non-profit housing advocate, to name a few. James and I continue to catch up on the phone, although I have moved 2000 plus miles away to another state.

He called and, I told him that I had bought a box of cream of wheat, minus sardines. He asks if I am joking. No, I say. I hadn't eaten cream of wheat in decades, but for some reason, I reached for the box, and it refused to leave my hands. Years prior as a young boy, I was forced to endure cream of wheat by my grandmother, a woman with a melodious voice and face gleaming with moisturizer. She called it "mush"—a word that made it unappetizing and led to my condition of *creamofwheataphobia*. What could be more appetizing than a steaming hot bowl of mush? She would douse the gruel with condensed milk, which I hated. Eat your mush, kid, it's good for you, she'd preach. The more she urged me, the more resistant I became, expressing my dislike with numerous facial contortions. I ate it under duress—namely that of my father's belt. He ate across from me a succulent plate of bacon, eggs and rice—having endured mush in the ensuing years.

A box of cream of wheat rests in my hands. I shake the box and hear the granules stir inside. I cook a pot of it and hear my grandma's voice: eat your mush, kid . . . *it's good for you.* I finish the bowl. I feel the warmth as it permeates my insides. I call James. I tell him of my culinary expedition into the past which is now the present. I assume you skipped the sardines, he says. No sardines, I say. It's actually good, I say, not bad at all.

James is still building things from wood; his latest, a bench that sits in his backyard. We still talk on the phone, the two of us, many years removed from our phone jobs; bachelor days and mishaps at the men's room urinal etc. James has recently retired and I am approaching social security age. We'll have to see each other soon. I'll have to remember to bring my pocket dictionary when that happens. Perhaps he will have built a table upon which we could dine on a steaming hot bowl of cream of wheat—with a side of sardines.

Tony Robles is a poet living in Hendersonville, North Carolina. He is the author of *Soup For the Storm: Poems of Hurricane Helene* among others. He was shortlisted for Poet Laureate of San Francisco in 2017, and in 2020 he was named the Carl Sandburg Writer in Residence by the Carl Sandburg Historic Home in Flat Rock, North Carolina. He earned his MFA in creative writing from Vermont College of Fine Arts in 2023 and is an adjunct professor in Creative Writing at Lenoir Rhyne University.

Loving Cashews

Cynthia Pratt

I skip nuts to appease my body,
knowing I will seize up, a twisted
band-aid unable to straighten out,
doubled like a stepped-on soft-
drink can. She caws in sorrow,
I mean *me*, of course, but it's easier
to try to put me someplace else,
a sad, no-cash, hewed-in-half person, waving
the intestine out into space unattached,
who wants so much to gorge
on their mushy salted crunch.
Those nuts I love do not love me
back. And here is what I will
tell you. I do not forgive you
for eating them in front of me.

Cynthia Pratt's poems have appeared in *Crab Creek Review, Raven Chronicles, Feminist Theology* Poetry, *The RavensPerch, The Writing Disorder, The Last Stanza Poetry Journal, Kestrel Journal, Third Wednesday* and other publications, and in numerous anthologies, including *Birdbrains, A Literal Guide to Birds in Washington*. She has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize by *Willows Wept Review* for her poem, "Body Parts." Her manuscript, *Celestial Drift*, was published in 2016. Her most recent book, *That Wild Knocking*, was published by Finishing Line Press in August, 2026. A former

Lacey Council member and Deputy Mayor of the City of Lacey for the last 12 years, her term ended in December 2021. She was the inaugural Poet Laureate of Lacey from January 1, 2022 to April 30, 2026. She spends a lot of time talking to her backyard birds and reading murder mysteries or Sci-fi. Her website is: Cynthia-pratt-poet.net

Day-After Corn

Matt McGee

Brenda says she loves popcorn.
"Fresh is fine but I really like it stale,
you know, once it's sat overnight
and has that day-after chewiness?
Mmm, that's the good stuff."

When I get home and undress,
on my way to bed I look in the mirror
at parts gone soft and think
Brenda and I are gonna
get along just fine.

Matt McGee writes in the Los Angeles area. His new one-act *Girls on Film* opened at Hollywood's Hobgoblin Theatre on February 20. In 2025, his work appeared in *Zyzzx*, *Four Feathers*, and the *Non-Binary Review*. When not typing, he drives around in rented cars and plays goalie in local hockey leagues.

Secular Spirituality

Brian Cronwall

Without butter, the cinnamon scone
is merely a breakfast pastry to eat
with tea or coffee, eggs or yogurt.

But with butter, it takes me
beyond a snack into the rite
of absorption, transformed like stars

in the sweet night sky,
glittering the tongue, making me
close my eyes, a kind of prayer

before the mysteries that accept
it all, a near-ecstasy. I repeat:
until the scone, once merely

flour, water, shortening,
sugar, cinnamon, and heart,
becomes a part of me, as the sun

replaces the moon, and the skies
are blue or gray or filled
with rain that the roof protects

me from unless I want to be

immersed, soaked. With soft

butter, the scone is now me,

I am the scone, and what a joy

to celebrate and to worship

this life, with or without a god.

Brian Cronwall is a retired English professor from Kaua`i Community College in Hawai`i. His poetry has been awarded the Oscar Wilde Poetry Prize, been nominated for a Pushcart Prize, and appeared in numerous journals and anthologies internationally, including *The Ekphrastic Review*, *California Quarterly*, *Hanging Loose*, *Bamboo Ridge*, *Hawai`i Pacific Review*, *Santa Fe Literary Review*, *Carolina Quarterly*, *Poetry Ireland Review*, *Evening Street Review*, *Tears in the Fence*, and others.

I Tasted a Peach and It was So Very Good

Pamela Scott

Can you get the same satisfaction from
Breathing air

As I scrub the sink clean
And put the dishes in their place?

From the wind rushing coolness into your face
as you shower with nature touching the room?

From sleep that tingles as you relax
And holds you in a hovering cloud as you awake?

From the smell of a man in the room
Or an apple pie ripening in the oven?

From a cold cup of water after hiking up a hill
Or babies making little grunting sounds?

From the sun-ripened peach in August
Or the feel of a finger tracing your hands?

How come when I write a poem
The ordinary holds my hand
And boundaries between pleasures dissolve?

The breath fills the lungs and the world moves through me.

Pamela Scott is an accountant by day and a nature lover and observer during her free time. She loves putting thoughts into words. She is new to the prospects of publishing, and has been published at *Raven's Perch*.

Ode to Robert G. Johnson and his Heirloom Tomatoes

Suellen Wedmore

Yesterday's poison, now prince
of palate and plate, banquet's queen:

Beefsteak *Cherokee* *Yellow Pear*

no mushy, paper-scented, hybrids—give us instead,
you, the lopsided, lumpy, creased, folded and dimpled,

Gardener's Delight *Black Cherry* *Tumbling Tom*

resonant of grassland, with overtones
of flute and cello and ukulele's pizzicato,

Mortgage Lifter *Arkansas Traveler* *Chocolate Stripe*

and a toast to you, Robert G. Johnson, daring
first to eat a tomato on the courthouse steps
of Salem, New Jersey—greeted, they say,
by 2,000 non-believers. Thank you from

the BLT addicted, marinara pasta sauce fanciers,

Black Krim *Grand Rio Gordo* *Bonnie Best*

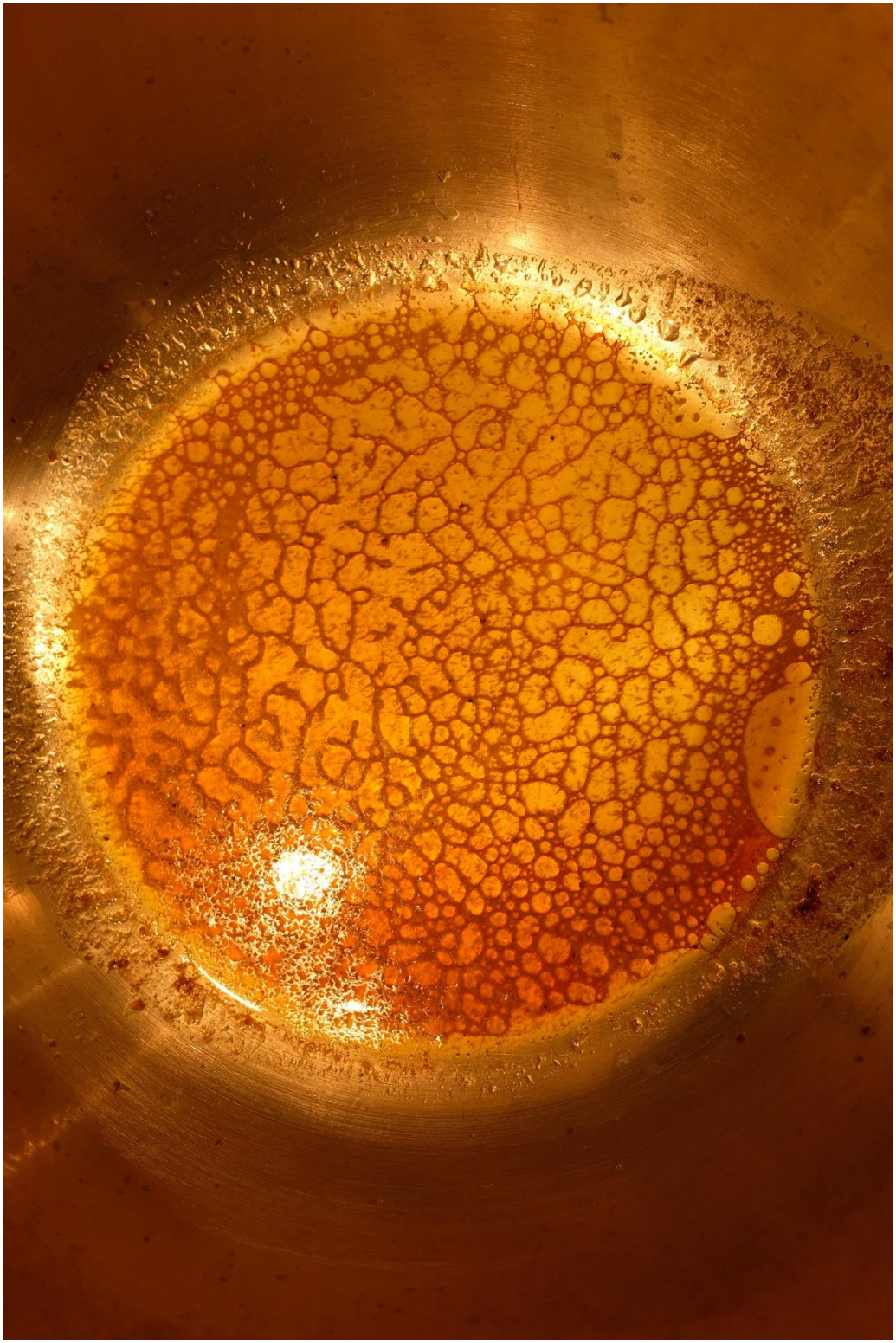
praise you, for life's gotta be richer
when you're not afraid to bite into it….

Poet Laureate emerita for the small seaside town of Rockport, Massachusetts, **Suellen Wedmore** has been awarded first place in Writer's Digest's Rhyming Poem and Non-Rhyming Poem Contests. Her chapbook *Deployed* won the Grayson Press annual contest, and another chapbook *Mind the Light* won first place in Quill's Edge Press's "Women on the Edge" contest. Four of her poems have been nominated for a Pushcart Prize, and recently Down East Books published her full-length book of poems: *A fixed White Light: Poems of Women Lighthouse Keepers*.

Tomato in a Vase

Roger Camp

Unwashed Skillet, Seal Beach, CA



Roger Camp is the author of three photography books including the award-winning *Butterflies in Flight*, Thames & Hudson, 2002. His documentary photography has been awarded Europe's prestigious Leica Medal of Excellence and published in numerous journals including *The New England Review*, *New York Quarterly*, *North American Review*, and *Orion Magazine*. He was a Fulbright Fellow in photography in Brazil. His archives are held by the University of California, Santa Barbara, Library, Special Research Collections.

A Kitchen is a Sanctuary

Louis Faber

In the midst of making Zaalouk
there is no pause for news,
the mashing of browned eggplant
requires the intensity of the scientist
insuring the stripes of peel
are evenly distributed,
the flesh of the tomato
pureed under the heel
of the masher, pressed against
the stainless bowl.
Had Lennon died
in the midst of preparing Djej
or a Tagine, I would have mourned,
but Zaalouk is unforgiving
and I have no time to give peace
or anything else a chance.
The remaining oil bubbles
in the pan, waiting impatiently
for the slurry to return, steam rising,
my fingers smell of garlic
and the stove is painted
in spatters of tomato-stained oil.

Louis Faber is a poet and writer. His work has appeared in numerous anthologies, *The MacGuffin*, *Steam Ticket*, *Havik*, *Cantos*, *Alchemy Spoon* (UK), *Meniscus* and *Arena Magazine* (Australia) *New Feathers Anthology*, *Dreich* (Scotland), *Prosetrics*, *Erothanatos* (Greece), *Defenestration*, *Atlanta Review*, *Glimpse*, *Rattle*, *Cold Mountain Review*, *Eureka Literary Magazine*, *Borderlands: Texas Poetry Review*, *Midnight Mind*, *Pearl*, *Midstream*, *European Judaism*, *The South Carolina Review,* and *Worcester Review*, among many others. Louis has been twice nominated for a Pushcart Prize and twice for a Best of the Web. His new book of poetry, *Free of the Shadow*, was recently published by Plain View Press.

Firmness Index: A Behavioral Study

Tamara-Lee Brereton-Karabetsos

Abstract

Firmness is defined as resistance under pressure. Current measurement methods remain inconclusive.

Materials

- Shared kitchen; overhead light flicker (2 Hz).
- Water at rolling boil (audible, un-timed).
- Salt (added until a subject indicated cessation).
- Subjects: **A** (keys in left pocket), **B** (burn mark on wrist), **C** (ambulatory; does not sit).
- Timer (activated post-impact).

Method

Heat applied through proximity and repeated questioning. Indirect pressure applied ("*What do you mean by that?*" / *"Are you sure?"*). Silence used as a control, then withdrawn.

Observations

- **Subject A:** Initial structure intact. Answers in full units. At 03:— (timer skipped), introduces a joke unrelated to the prompt. Laughter not shared. Edges begin to give. Slips into words she hasn't said before; when corrected, she nods. When ignored, she nods anyway.
- **Subject B:** Surface agreement. Hesitation ripples underneath after acceptance. Revises small facts (Tuesday → Monday; blue → darker blue). Refuses one sentence entirely: "*I didn't*—" stops. Repeats earlier claim with altered emphasis. Something in the center refuses to come loose.
- **Subject C:** Refuses to remain seated. Under direct pressure, disperses into an anecdote involving a train that does not arrive. Under silence, condenses. At 05:—, reaches for the window. It will not budge. Keeps talking.

Control: Silence

Increases force without visible input. All subjects destabilize. One tries to fill the void, fails. One retreats. One misnames objects (sink called basin, then called nothing).

Results

No fixed index found. Firmness presents briefly, then alters.

Al dente—phosphorus simmering at the edges, just out of reach.

Pull back too soon, the shape holds. Inside, no one can tell.

Discussion

Endurance mistaken for strength. Nods taken for compliance. Measurement disturbs what it tries to capture. The moment before change appears briefly, then disappears.

Limitations

- Timer unreliable.
- Prior conditions (pre-boil) not disclosed.
- Observer implicated (Note in margin: "*leave it*").

Conclusion

Prolonged exposure results in softening or fracture. Early removal preserves shape. Interior remains uncertain.

Addendum

At 06:—, all subjects report they are "fine."

Data not retained.

Based in Glyfada on the Athenian Riviera, **Tamara-Lee** is a writer and science communicator specializing in the intersection of data and the human experience. Drawing from a 15-year career in medical science, she bridges the gap between scientific fluency and creative storytelling, translating complex research into relatable narratives. Her diverse portfolio of published work spans health promotion, action health science, and the fast-paced world of business. By examining the moments where 'cold measurement' meets the strike of a pen, she explores the invisible influences that shape our world.

Her latest musings and weekly deep dives can be found at: @tamaraleewrites

Weave

Volume 5, Issue 2 AMARANTH Autumn 2026

The Mennonite Squash

Leonore Wilson

The woman at the museum
showed us the Mennonite squash
she caressed it in her arms,
and the big white baby curled
as if swaddled.

We took her photo
before she cut it open,
and the yellow of school buses,
of yield signs, of cat eyes
burst forth, the sun—
the mother of suns.

And the earth—
seeds fell like new pilgrims,
seeds reaped in autumn,
the fullness of autumn,
and we fried the squash in rings—
rings like Saturn.

Squash tasting of soft lustful
things, of moisture and soil,
of kindness, of what the museum
held, meaning the history
of travelers, of wildflowers, honey,
and fennel, of barley and wheat,
ships and sailors, of the water
on the land and the land itself
of all that was good,
fruitful and multiplied.

Picking Olives

Mother let the olives
fall, the black pearls

with their nutlet seeds.

She sang to them
among the chickadees,

as the pipe-thin
boughs let down

their leaves

like skiffs touching scuds
and krill.

How she sang
in the morning canyon

over the history of clay

and to the stream that tippled
down as if

the earth
were a cradle.

She sang for creation,
as if she were Eve

making fire
with hands and feet circling.

And how the little galaxies
swelled

one, two, three…
into the pail's curvature,

unchronicled and ancient.

Leonore Wilson is a college English and creative writing teacher from Northern California. She is on the MFA Board at St Mary's College of California. Her poetry books are *Western Solstice* (Hireath Press) and *Tremendum, Augustum* (Kelsey Press). Leonore's work has been published in The *Iowa Review*, *UnrulyCatholic Women Writers*, *Trivia: Voices of Feminism*, *Third Coast*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Quarterly West*, *Upstreet, Madison Review*, *Laurel Review*, *Pif*, etc.

Her historic cattle ranch and family home in Napa Valley were recently destroyed in the LNU fire.

Ode to Leftover Pizza

Sali Andiamo Siyaya

O, faithful slice,
Waiting inside the fridge
under the yellow light.
So cold and quiet in your cardboard
box kingdom.

Last night, people laughed around you.
Greasy fingers reached for you.
Music blasted through the walls.
Now the apartment is silent.
Only you remain.

Your cheese has gone hard a little.
Pepperoni has curled at the edges, and
the crust bends in the middle.
But I don't care about that.

I eat you standing over the sink
at two in the morning,
wearing yesterday's clothes,
too tired to make anything else.

I turn on the microwave.
Your cheese starts melting slowly,
stretching in long strings
when I pull you apart.

You smell like tomato sauce,
and cold fridge air

Still, you are beautiful to me.
You ask for nothing, and you do
not judge bad days, or empty wallets.

You are there after parties,
after breakups, after long hours of work
and when the world feels too chaotic
With news of wars and the outbreaks of
diseases.

O, leftover pizza,
small survivor of the night.
A greasy saint of hungry people,
and you wait patiently for someone
to need you again.

Sali Andiamo Siyaya is a Malawian writer of genre fiction especially, crime and horror. She retired from engineering to focus mainly on writing, and she has so far published three novels; *Fashion and Crime, The Mafia Academy,* and *The Triumph of Single Ladies*. Sali's work has appeared in both short story and poetry anthologies including *Fearful Symmetries; An Anthology of Psychedelic Horror, Roots and Rivers: A Collection of Myth and Folklore*, *Exorcists of the Dead: Infestation*, and many more. Her poems have appeared in the poetry anthology, *The Poetess, Space and Time magazine Issue 151, Divyodaya Journal: A Journal of Poetry and Literature* (Vol. 1: Issue 1), to mention a few. Her work has also appeared in a few magazines including *Lit eZine* (Vol. 9), and *Libretto Magazine*. Her work has been recognized through longlist selections for the 2025 Quramo Writers' Prize and the 2026 ÀROKÒ Folklore Anthology.

The Appetite

Sarah Islam

Three days after she drank the words, Leila ate the corner of the death certificate.

She had taken the folder down from the top of the wardrobe because the solicitor wanted copies. For a while, she sat on the bedroom floor with the papers spread around her knees: passport, hospital letter, burial receipt, and the certificate. Leila looked at the paper for a long time before she put it in her mouth.

The paper gave way slowly. It tasted official. She chewed once, then again. A grey paste gathered against her molars. She swallowed the last bit with a glass of water.

Then she sat very still.

The words had come from Naima.

"You cannot go on like this," Naima had said, standing in Leila's kitchen with a plate of bread and eggs untouched between them.

"I'm not going on. I'm sitting here."

"Your mouth has closed."

Leila had almost smiled at that. Naima had a way of speaking about the body that usually made her impatient. That morning, it was difficult to argue with her.

Samir had been dead eleven days. In that time Leila had drunk tea, water, two cups of thin soup, and one mouthful of yoghurt that came back up before it reached her stomach. Food had become inappropriate. Bananas browned in the bowl. Bread hardened in its bag. Her neighbours kept bringing dishes wrapped in foil, all of them fragrant, all of them indecent.

Naima arrived with saffron folded in paper, a small bottle of rosewater, and the white saucer Leila used for olives. She did not ask permission. Older women rarely did when they had decided kindness was urgent.

Leila watched from the table while Naima crushed the saffron with the back of a spoon. She added a few drops of rosewater until the threads gave up their colour. Then, with a wooden toothpick, she wrote inside the saucer: a short verse, a row of letters, a little square of numbers. Her hand was plain and steady. Nothing dramatic entered the room. When the writing had settled, Naima poured water over it. The ink lifted and clouded the water. She bent her head, murmured over the saucer, and blew once across the surface.

"Drink."

Leila obeyed because refusing would have required more strength than she had. The water tasted faintly of flowers, bitter at the end. It moved through her without incident. She expected embarrassment. She expected nothing else.

Hunger woke her around two in the morning.

She stood in front of the open fridge and ate cold rice with her fingers. Then a boiled egg. Then bread rubbed with olive oil and salt, and a few figs. Her stomach cramped and accepted everything. She cried while chewing, but kept on chewing. By dawn she had eaten almost everything in the fridge.

When Naima came the next morning, she said only one word: "Good."

For two days, ordinary food seemed to be enough.

Leila told no one about the certificate. The missing corner was small, but the important lines remained intact.

By afternoon, she had eaten the appointment card from the oncology clinic.

This was harder to explain to herself. It had been tucked into her wallet since March, blue ink on the pale card, Samir's appointment written in the receptionist's round, cheerful hand. He had hated that card. He kept taking it out to check the time and then accusing the hospital of moving the hour when it had not moved.

Leila had been meaning to throw it away. Instead, she sat at the kitchen table and tore off the strip with his patient number. The card was thicker than the certificate. It stuck to her tongue. She drank water and swallowed it in two attempts. Afterward, a warmth moved through her, brief and shameful. By evening, she understood that ordinary food had only opened the door.

She wanted the discharge summary. The prescription with morphine crossed out and rewritten. The parking ticket from the hospital, printed at 18:42, the night Samir told her that he had dreamt of his mother. She wanted the chemist's receipt, the back of the envelope on which he had written aubergines, batteries, bring sweater and chewing gum.

She ate carefully. That was the worst part. She did not tear things. She trimmed them with nail scissors and chose sections that could vanish without being immediately missed. A corner. A date. Sometimes just one word.

The first word she ate was further.

It came from a letter that began, "We regret that no further treatment…" She cut the word out, placed it on her tongue, and let it soften. It had almost no taste. Still, something in her settled.

After that she ate unfortunately, decline, palliative, and beloved.

Leila ate many words.

By the end of the week, she had learned to use nail scissors without leaving obvious gaps.

She did not become thin. If anything, colour returned to her face. Naima said she looked better. The neighbours stopped pushing foil parcels into her hands and began saying sensible things about strength. Leila nodded. She bought fruit. She cooked lentils. She ate toast with butter in the mornings, soup in the evenings, and so on.

Then, late one night, her phone lit up with the notification she had refused to clear.

One saved voicemail. Samir had left it the day before his last admission. She knew the message without playing it.

“ Where are you? I can’t find the blue sweater. Also, don’t buy those awful pears again. I can’t stand them!”

She had not listened since he died. The idea of his voice waiting inside the machine had been both mercy and threat.

Now she found herself holding the phone with saliva gathering under her tongue.

She played the message.

His voice entered the kitchen casually, almost bored, alive in the ordinary, brutal way recordings are alive. Leila closed her eyes. Her mouth filled so suddenly she gripped the counter. When the message ended, she played it again. By the fourth time, she was pressing the phone against her teeth.

She stopped then. She walked to the sink and drank water straight from the tap. Her hands shook, but not violently. They seemed to be shaking somewhere below the surface.

In the morning she went to Naima.

The older woman was making coffee. She listened without interrupting while Leila told her about the papers, the words, the voicemail. Only once did her face change, and that was at beloved.

When Leila finished, Naima turned off the stove.

“I asked for appetite,” she said.

“You got it.”

Naima accepted this. “The mouth opened too far.”

“Can you close it?”

Naima looked towards the window. On the sill, basil leaned into the weak sun. A fly worried the glass.

“No,” she said. “But maybe we can teach it to savor, not just swallow.”

She placed bread on a plate. Then olives. Then a boiled egg, cut in half and salted. Ordinary things. Things with no handwriting on them.

Leila sat down and for a while she only looked.

Then she picked up the bread and chewed slowly, with the discipline of someone learning again after injury. It tasted of flour, salt, yeast, and nothing Samir had touched. It did not satisfy her but she forced herself to swallow it.

That afternoon, she took the folder from the wardrobe and brought it to the kitchen. One by one, she placed the papers in clear plastic sleeves: certificate, letter, receipt, card. The bitten edges showed. The eaten words left small clean absences in the lines.

At the back of the folder she placed a blank sheet of paper.

For three nights she did nothing. On the fourth, she took out the blank sheet, cut away one corner, and put it on her tongue.

It tasted of nothing.

She kept it there until it softened, then swallowed.

Sarah Islam is a writer interested in memory, ritual, food, and the uncanny material life of language. Her work often draws on Islamic cosmology, family history, and the intimate violence of grief. Her essay "The Taste of Forgiveness" appeared in *Porridge Magazine*.

Satay

Kian Seh Low

meat
skewers descended from
Indian kebab, twice derived
from saté originating from *catai*,
or flesh in Tamil, put on the grill
over glowing charcoal; I now
still
remember how my eldest uncle,
in sweat-soaked singlet browned
by ash, stood there fanning flames
with precise control till the fat in
the pork slices glistened in the oil,
and their edges curled into a gentle
char
at a corner of a coffee shop near
my childhood home, and I would visit
in the evening, when he would let me
help, guiding me as a maestro would;
how he stuffed a five-dollar note in
my pocket as reward, kindness in a
grin—I remember his warmth, while
his
cof-
fin
rolls
into
the
fire.

Glutinous Rice

I stood on a small stool that wobbled
like impatience, watching mother's
hands move with a knowing I could
not name. The rice, soaked overnight,
each grain glutinous, gradually swollen
with waiting. She drained it slowly,
as if afraid to spill time. Peanuts
crackled in the pan, skins loosening
like secrets. Next were shallots, scent
suffusing, thick enough to stick
to walls. I helped chop spring onions
into tiny tunnels and slice mushrooms
to thin boats. The old pot took in
everything. When it all came together,
the rice clung, refusing the idea
of separation even under heat. Mother
said *this is how family should be;*
I could not see her face through the
rising steam of the bowl we shared.

Kian Seh Low holds a chemical engineering degree but is an artist to a greater degree. He is a chemistry teacher by occupation but has poetry as preoccupation. His works have been published in various anthologies such as *A Luxury We Cannot Afford*, poetry magazines such as *Voice & Verse*, zines, and online publications such as *The Atelier of Healing*. He won the first prize in Singapore's National Poetry Competition 2019, but he is better known for his twin cinema poem, *Singaporean Son*, that went viral, twice.

He was shortlisted for Sing Lit Station's Manuscript Bootcamp 2021, and has been hosting Catharsis, an event under the Poetry Festival Singapore, since 2022.

the ferment

elle brown

i ferment what i can, each jar its own universe
little terraria i await and who await me
right time, moment, or times past primes
we will meet like lovers across time
randomly
each at a place of ripeness and bruise
burdock and milk thistle now
bubble in wait
as i wait too, unsure when they want me
we glance across the room
looking for clues
like old married people
after a fight
is it time yet?

it's grass season now, but southern winter will come
early spring shoots
i shall wad them up
into alcoholized whey they go
connecting me for first time with
Siberian women i'll never know—
ancestors of someone else
as i learn their ways
while my culture never relents its own self-export
and i wonder why the ferment knits
the women all together.

elle brown (xe/they) lives in southern woods of the United States. A retired indigenous-focused anthropologist and former professional chef most interested in impacts of nourishment access, disability, and the queering of food discourse, xe writes across creative nonfiction genres with frequent veering into nature, illness, justice, and incompetent gardening. elle is a co-author of *Southern Dis-Comfort: Confessions of a Southern DEI Officer—How Jim Crow and Plantation Economics Run the 21st-Century Organization* and lives in the wrong part of the country/state/world to think that way. Xe also manages a sizable unpopulated chicken resort and high-oxalate sage flowers that only seem to grow in one yard, as well as counting hundreds of wild onions that bloom in conspiracy the morning the grass is to be cut.

oh, to be a caviar spoon

Lucinda Trew

a mother-of-pearl cradle afloat in shimmering
tides of abalone, sterling-banded stem engraved
and ordained for the bespoke task

of ferrying sturgeon roe from Caspian Sea
feather-stirred, lacquer-tinned, to rooms of sumptuosity
iced serving bowl, linens arctic-white,

warmed by wine and candle flush–to lips and longing
tongue—ah, the exalted calling of delivering delicacy!
briny buttery dewdrops

that leave mouths sea-glistening, eyes closed and aflutter,
gill-like in brackish ecstasy, sated by the slightest of servings—
an ocean's crossing in a caviar spoon.

Lucinda Trew is the author of *What Falls to Ground* (Charlotte Lit Press, 2025). Her work has been honored with four Pushcart nominations, a Best of the Net nomination, and *Boulevard*'s 2023 Poetry Contest Award for Emerging Poets. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Cagibi Literary Journal, Pinch, The North Carolina Literary Review, Burningword Literary Journal, Susurrus,* and elsewhere. She lives, writes, and rambles in the piney, red clay piedmont of North Carolina.

Eggshell Preserves

Tess Lockhart

Because her dog's liver enzymes were up
at his last vet's appointment,
she makes his food from fresh ingredients
free of oxymoronic preservatives
that damage both life and livers.

Freshly-wrung chicken necks
and all attendant animal's meat,
along with rice, cranberries, and vegetables
cut down in their prime fruition
go into the pot.

To give him the calcium he needs,
eggshells, designed to carry life
in all its fragility, are cracked open,
spilling their nourishing essence
into iron-skillet breakfasts.

Then, washed and baked,
the refuse of those infertile lives
crash into the mortar bowl
where, with persistent pestle,
mere mortal shells are crushed into dust

and are dumped into the mix.
So much destruction holds us up, unseen—
death-to-life recycling
that, in love, preserves.

Tess Lockhart is a retired theologian, Presbyterian pastor, licensed medical massage therapist, and internationally-published poet. Most of her publications have been academic theological works with her poetry being like the whispered rumors of medieval Popes' children. But now they're starting to talk and sell their stories to publications: *Ohio Bards Anthologies, The Soliloquist, TrashLight, Bards of the Storm Anthology, Sextet, The Pocket Poet, Flowers of the Field,* and *Monterey Poetry Review*. She won a 2025 Bermuda Triangle Poetry Prize which encouraged her to continue to watch for Spirit lurking in the muck of it all and seek to catch its ephemeral revelation in linguistic play.

More of her work can be found at www.tess-lockhart.com

Breakfast Tacos

Joe Coy

mornings like this are
rarer than they should be—
laughter and conversation and
love and joy and other clichés
wrapped like
sausage and egg and
cheese in warm tortillas—
delicious moments
nourishing and
filling to the soul
occasions to be savored.

Joe Coy (he/him) has always been fascinated by how a few words and a few lines can say so much. His poems have been accepted for publication in *Altar Literary*, *Epistemic Literary*, *Call Me [Brackets]*, *Anomaly Poetry*, *Haunted Words Press*, *Quill of the Goddess,* and *Gorgon's Gaze Press*. In addition to poetry, Joe loves being in nature, spending time with family, cooking, yoga, meditation, and platypuses.

The Soul of the Broth

Goutam Bhattacharyya

The mist in Tawang does not merely descend; it settles with the stubborn familiarity of an old relative, who has no intention of leaving before tea.

From the window of the faculty quarters near the Yid-Ga-Choi-Zen Monastery, the world was a study in monochromatic grandeur. The snow peaks of the Shangfu Hills loomed like silent, white-turbaned giants, while below, the valley was punctuated by the vibrant prayer flags of the town and the occasional brilliant explosion of crimson Rhododendron bushes.

Inside, however, the atmosphere was dictated by a far more terrestrial crisis. Rathin, currently navigating the treacherous and highly sensitive waters of the ninth grade, sat, staring down at a blank sheet of paper. His English teacher, a woman possessed of formidable standards and an unyielding faith in the literary prowess of fifteen-year-olds, had decreed that the winter vacation must yield a piece of non-fiction. And not just any essay, but one "befitting the center-page of a prestigious national daily."

"The weight of the nation's intellectual discourse rests on your shoulders, Rathin," his uncle, Dr. Siddharth Sen, remarked dryly. He adjusted his spectacles, turning a page of his lecture notes. Siddharth had spent five years teaching at the Dorji Khandu College, a tenure that had transformed him from a fastidious Durgapur academic into a man who could discuss Tibetan mysticism and the price of *churpi*—a Himalayan yak-milk cheese—in the same breath.

"It's no laughing matter, *Mama**," Rathin sighed, resting his chin on his hands. "I've thought about the border check-posts, the nomadic Monpa herders, the reincarnations of the monks here, even the c*hhaam* mask dances. But every time I try to write, I end up sounding like a melancholic clerk tasked with writing a geography textbook."

Siddharth chuckled, a warm sound that competed with the rhythmic clack-clack of a distant prayer wheel. "That is because you are seeing the hills with only your eyes, not your stomach. You have been here three weeks, Rathin. What is the most real thing you've discovered about Tawang?"

Rathin paused, his gaze drifting to the heater in the small room. "That I am perpetually hungry, and that the cold here requires an internal lining of grease."

"Precisely," Siddharth said, his eyes twinkling with the seasoned authority of a culinary anthropologist. "Forget the grand narratives. Write about the eating traditions. Food here is not sustenance; it is a diplomatic treaty with the climate."

The education of Rathin's palate had begun on a drizzling, gelid evening when Siddharth had dragged him to a place that defied the conventional definition of a restaurant. It was a massive, unfinished traditional wooden house belonging to Tshomo Aama. Behind the establishment loomed an enormous boulder, as if it had rolled down the mountain centuries ago and simply decided to stay. A formidable wooden-press perched atop this rock, used for squeezing out *puta*, the rustic buckwheat noodles of the region.

They had been accompanied by Mr. Gurung, Siddharth's loquacious colleague from Nepal, whose only defense against the cold was to keep talking.
"Drink, drink," Gurung had urged, pressing a large, steaming glass into Rathin's frozen hands. "You think it is *chaa*, but it is *sueja*. It will cure your city bones. Give you the coveted warmth."

Rathin took a sip and blinked. The tea was thick, salty, and distinctly oily—the time-honoured brew of Tibetan yak-butter and tea leaves, infused with mistletoe and myrtle. It was an acquired taste, certainly, more broth than beverage. But as it slid down his throat, a soothing warmth bloomed in his chest.

"You see?" Siddharth said, watching his nephew's expression with quiet amusement. "In Durgapur, butter is an indulgence. Here, it's armor."

It was at Tshomo Aama's that Rathin also discovered *thukpaa* and *thenthuk*. Every Sunday morning, the shop became a secular cathedral for displaced plains-folk and foreign project workers. They gathered for the buckwheat noodles, particularly the variety that brimmed with toothsome local

mushrooms, wild greens, and generous chunks of meat. The *thenthuk*, with its flat, hand-pulled dough pieces, was a rustic masterpiece—designed to be eaten while the wind howled outside the wooden walls.

As the days blurred into a happy-go-lucky rhythm of exploration, Rathin began to see the valley through his uncle's nuanced, slightly ironic eye. Siddharth loved the people, whom he described as a magnificent mix of humanity: eccentric, moody, sometimes woebegone, and occasionally overly fond of local spirits, yet pure of heart.

One afternoon, they stopped near Tshering Aapa's *tshongkhag*—a shop. In the triangular courtyard outside, villagers from remote hamlets had gathered for a quiet ritual of barter.

"Look at that," Siddharth whispered, pointing to the colorful spread laid out on jute sacks. Bright apples, plums, and raspberries lay side by side with Himalayan red rice, fern fronds, and orchids. "They bring the bounty of the forbidden hills to exchange for salt and kerosene. It's a unique commerce, much older than the currency notes in your pocket."

But the real test of Rathin's culinary bravery came a few nights later, when another colleague of Siddharth invited them for a formal Monpa dinner.

The table unfolded into an edible map of the terrain. There was *zan*, a thick, comforting porridge of millet flour stirred with vegetables and meat, followed by *gyapa khazi*', Monpa-style fried rice—fragrant with wood-smoke and native herbs. Then came the casualties.

"Try the *chura sabzi*," their host insisted, nudging a bowl of pale curry forward. "It's very traditional."

Rathin took a generous spoonful. The dish, made of *churpi* and large, innocent-looking green chilies, exploded on his tongue. It lacked the familiar flavour of traditional Indian spices, but its sharp, pungent heat cut through the sinuses and brought tears to his eyes almost instantly. Beside him, Siddharth was already dabbing his forehead with a handkerchief.

"A perspiring experience, isn't it?" Siddharth wheezed mildly, with his dignity intact. "It pairs excellently with the *lukter*."

The *lukter* was a fiery side dish of dry meat stir-fried with local chili flakes, its heat threatening to rewrite Rathin's DNA. To combat the fire, the elders sipped *aarak*, a limpid, potent homemade liquor that had been warmed with a raw chicken egg poured slowly into it, an auspicious winter luxury that Rathin was thankfully deemed too young to drink. He contented himself with a small sip of *chang*, the mildly sour, nutritious home-brewed millet beer that tasted faintly of yeast and Monpa hospitality.

The final, and perhaps the most ironic, culinary revelation arrived on the morning of their departure. Walking near the military check-post, the air thick with the smell of diesel fumes and alpine cold, Rathin's nose caught a bewilderingly familiar scent.

In a small, unassuming eatery run by Daaju Karna, an ex-army man, a crowd of school children had gathered at recess—eagerly lapping up plates of . . . puffy *bondas*.

Rathin stared in absolute disbelief at the golden, bouncy spheres. "*Mama*, is that a South Indian *bonda*? In Tawang?"

Siddharth laughed—a deep, satisfied sound. "Ah, it is the wonders of the Indian Army's logistics. Perhaps some fortune-seeking Keralite imported the recipe decades ago, or an infantry cook got nostalgic. Capitalism and craving know no altitude, my boy."

Now, back in the quiet sanctuary of his home in Durgapur, the memory of those golden *bondas*, the pungent bite of *churpi*, and the soothing, greasy warmth of *sueja* felt like fragments of a dream from another life.

Rathin looked down at the blank page. The daunting grandeur of a "center-page article" suddenly felt less intimidating. He realized he didn't need to write a political treatise on the northeast frontier or an esoteric essay on reincarnation. He just needed to write about the kitchen fires that kept the cold at bay.

He picked up his pen, a faint smile playing on his lips, and wrote the first line: 'In Tawang, the mist is heavy, but the broth is heavier.'

Writing a piece for the archive on the eating cultures of Tawang wasn't a bad idea, after all.

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* In Bengali (Bangla), 'Mama' refers to one's maternal uncle.

Dr. Goutam Bhattacharyya is a writer based in Ahmedabad, India, passionate about capturing the essence of Indian culture. He started his career as Resource-Teacher with the Ministry of Education, Royal Govt. of Bhutan in April 1990 and retired as the Principal of the Birla School, Porbandar in 2024. His creative writings have been published in different anthologies, and magazines, such as *Kitaab* a Singapore-based South Asian literary magazine, *Free Flash Fiction*, a UK based literary magazine, *Gramarye*, the Literary Magazine of Chichester University, UK, *TheWiseOwl*, and *The Muse India*. His novellas *Living in Obscurity, The Chisels of Farewell and Echoes over Kedarnath are currently available in Amazon, Kindle*. He has compiled an anthology of 21 short stories in English written by different authors living in various parts of the globe, to be published soon.

Spell

V. Bray

Kielbasa
sauerkraut mix
in savory harmony

infusing the house with an image
of you

  hunched over the sink
  peeling green apples in long winding strings

  your purple-flowered housedress
  a solo within this symphony
  of scent and sight

a garden a home

you made for us that I

can only conjure

in this dish.

Sugar

The weeping mulberry leaves sweep
into the muddy river.

You say we can make a pie,
like you used to as a girl, before the war.

We pick berries off the trees,
wash and boil with sugar,

bake in a lattice-work crust,
sprinkle more sugar,

sugar, you laugh, too much sugar,
sugar you never had in the labor camp.

But I think,
can there ever be enough sweetness?

V. Bray has been a writer since childhood and still has a box filled with her first "books," usually illustrated with markers and bound with yarn. She writes in many genres, from speculative and historical fiction to poetry. Her work has been published in literary journals including *Stonecoast Review*, *About Place Journal*, *Halfway Down the Stairs*, and *pacific REVIEW*. Her chapbook *Breast* was published by Plan B Press in 2026. Learn more about her work at authorvbray.com.

Ode to Avgolemono Soup

Douglas Jones

You make the other soups give up and weep;
why live with you around? Your taunting broth
of lemonshine, drunk garlic, celery,
fine carrots bears oregano applause.

And then you marry this quick citrus slap
to chicken, savory, light shredded, in
some pasta orzo, slick with olive fat,
which drives it through celestial hymns.

The broth was thickened slowly, steady care
in folding yolks, and now all parts conspire
to raise us from the dead, at least to swear
and break a dish against a wall, Greek style.

I met you first not far from Athens,
in a tiny kitchen frail, with love intense.

Douglas Jones, MFA poetry (Univ. of Idaho), MA philosophy (Univ. of Southern Cal) teaches high-school literature in San Diego. He has published poetry in *Antiphon, Dappled Things, California Quarterly, Merion West, Cordite Poetry Review, Novus Literary Arts Journal, Cathexis Northwest, Amethyst Review,* and more.

Table Talk

Volume 5, Issue 2 AMARANTH Autumn 2026

Museum of Meals:

In Conversation with Itamar Gilboa

Image credit: Itamar Gilboa

Itamar Gilboa (IL/NL, 1973) is an internationally acclaimed artist based in Amsterdam, whose work explores the connections between art, technology, science, and environment. By conducting thorough research and data collection, Gilboa creates thought-provoking immersive sculptural installations that are relevant in both poetic and academic spheres of thinking about identity. Very intimate details become statistics, which morph into compelling narratives that captivate the viewer's imagination.

Gilboa's art has garnered widespread acclaim and has been exhibited in museums and art institutions across Europe, North America, the Middle East, and Asia. His work is featured in both private and corporate collections, and is prominently exhibited in the permanent collection of the LAM Museum in the Netherlands.

Image credit: Hellmann's

Itamar Gilboa was interviewed by **Amaranth Journal**'s managing editor, **Satarupa Sinha Roy**.

AJ: We're curious about the internal archive of your motivations as an artist. What drew you toward art as the most effective language for your observations and thoughts?

IG: Art has always been part of my life. Since I was a child, I enjoyed observing the world around me and translating what I saw into visual forms of expression. Over the years, art became a progressively stronger way for me to express myself, until it eventually led me to move to Amsterdam in 2001 to study at the Gerrit Rietveld Academie.

For me, art became the language through which I could understand my own life and, at the same time, speak about larger social questions. My work often begins with something very personal: my memories, my body, my habits, my migration or even my consumption. But I am not merely interested in the personal as an autobiography. I use it as a starting point, almost as raw material, to ask questions that reach beyond myself.

Art allows me to take these invisible changes and make them visible. It gives me the freedom to combine research, data, science, emotion, and sculpture, in one space. A statistic can become an object. A private diary can become a public installation, as in the *Food Chain Project*. A brain scan can become a sculpture, as in *Body of Work*. This transformation is what interests me most: how something intimate can become a shared experience.

AJ: Your *Food Chain Project* transformed a year of personal consumption into a physical sculptural archive. When you strip a food item—say, a carton of milk or a specific beverage or a vegetable—of its point of origin or commercial branding and cast it in monochrome, what 'hidden' stories or material truths do you feel are finally allowed to emerge?

IG: When I remove the commercial identity of a food item, the object changes completely. It stops functioning as a product and begins functioning as evidence. It is no longer trying to seduce us, advertise itself, or belong to a company. It becomes quieter, almost like a memory or a fossil.

Mix: *Food Chain Project* | Image credit: Itamar Gilboa

In the *Food Chain Project*, I wanted to expose what we normally do not see when we consume. A carton of milk is not just a carton of milk. It carries labor, transport, packaging, agriculture, marketing, desire, routine, and waste. A hamburger is not merely a hamburger—it is part of a much larger chain of production and consumption.

By casting the objects in white, I created a kind of equality between them. A piece of fruit, a bottle of Diet Coke, a package of pasta, a croquette, a vegetable—all become part of the same archive. The brand disappears, but the form remains. What emerges is not the commercial story of the object, but its human and social story.

The monochrome surface also creates distance. It allows the viewer to look again at things that are usually consumed too quickly to be seen. From this vantage point, the objects simultaneously function as traces of a life and also traces of a system.

Lettuce Sculpture | Image credit: Itamar Gilboa

AJ: Much of your work relies on the precision of data and numbers. How do you balance this neat clinical quantification with the deeply personal, often messy human stories that food naturally carries?

IG: I do not see data as separate from human experience. For me, data is a way to hold experience, to give it structure, and to make it visible. But the source of the data is always personal and often messy.

In the *Food Chain Project*, the data was very precise: I wrote down every single thing I ate and drank for one year. I also made one important rule: I was not allowed to look at the list until the year was over. This was essential, because I did not want to correct myself or improve my behavior. I wanted to observe without interference.

When I finally opened the list, I was confronted by myself. The amount of certain things I consumed was shocking to me. At that moment the data was no longer abstract. It became emotional, even uncomfortable. It revealed habits I knew were there, but had never truly seen in their full scale.

This is where the balance happens in my work. The number gives the work clarity, but the sculpture gives it body. The data creates distance, but the material brings back intimacy. What begins as a list becomes a self-portrait, and eventually a mirror for the viewer.

AJ: In your opinion, does art have a responsibility to be didactic, or should the philosophical inquiry of the artist remain open-ended for the viewer/audience to navigate?

IG: I do not think art should become didactic in a simple way. I am not interested in telling people what to think. If the work becomes too explanatory, it can foreclose the experience. I prefer to create a space where the viewer can enter, reflect, and make connections.

At the same time, I do believe that art bears significant responsibility. When I work with subjects such as hunger, consumption, food waste, climate change, or migration, these are not neutral subjects; they are connected to and bound up with real lives and real systems. I cannot ignore that.

For me, the responsibility of art is not necessarily to give answers, but to ask questions in a way that cannot easily be dismissed. I want the work to open a space for awareness and ethical inquiry. I want the viewer to feel that something ordinary—eating, buying, discarding, remembering— are each connected to something much larger. Art should not only have urgency, but should also offer space. It should invite people to think, not force them into one conclusion.

AJ: You have often spoken about the environmental impact of the choices we make regarding our everyday consumption. In the context of Amaranth Journal's interest in food as a medium for social commentary, do you believe that making the 'invisible' volume of our waste 'visible' through art is more effective than traditional activism or journalism?

IG: I would not say that art is more effective than activism or journalism. Each have a different and distinct role. Journalism can inform us quickly and clearly. Activism can mobilize people and push for change. Art works in another way. It can create an experience that stays in the body and memory.

We all know, in some way, that we consume way too much and also waste way too much. But knowing something is not the same as feeling it. When waste is translated into scale, when it is physically present in front of you, it becomes much harder to ignore.

In the *Food Chain Project*, one object is almost nothing. But 8,000 objects together become a confrontation. The installation turns a private act of eating into a public monument of consumption. It shows how small daily choices accumulate into something enormous.

I think art can make invisible systems visible. It can translate statistics into human experience. It does not have to scream to make a point. Sometimes the quiet presence of many repeated objects can be more powerful than a direct message. It allows the viewer to arrive at awareness in their own way.

Installation: COP26 | Image Credit: Hellmann's

AJ: In projects such as the *Food Chain*, you have used meticulous records to reconstruct a specific period of your life. Do you see these installations as a form of autobiography, or is there a point where the data detaches from your personal memory and becomes an independent entity?

IG: I see the *Food Chain Project* very much as a form of autobiography, but not in the traditional sense. It is not an autobiography built from major events, but from small daily actions: eating, drinking, choosing, repeating. It is a portrait made through consumption.

At the beginning, the project was completely connected to me. Every item on the list passed through my body. Every sculpture represented something I had consumed. When I saw the full installation, I felt exposed. It was not just 8,000 objects. It was me.

But once the work entered the public space, it began to detach from my personal memory. The viewer does not need to know the exact day I ate a certain thing. They recognize the products, the habits, the excess. The work becomes less about me alone and more about a collective condition.

This transformation is central to my practice. I often begin with myself, but the goal is not to remain there. The personal becomes a method to reach the universal. The data starts as my diary, but eventually it becomes an independent archive of a culture and a time.

Nieuw Dakota Amsterdam | Image credit: Itamar Gilboa

LAM Museum | Image credit: Sophie Kugel

AJ: Your work often deals with the *now*—what we consume, often unthinkingly, at the moment in a globalized, hypermodern world. How do you think your method of meticulous tracking of the daily consumption of edible items might apply to documenting ancestral culinary stories or displaced food cultures? Can data help preserve the hearth that no longer exists?

IG: I think data can preserve traces, but it cannot capture the full experience. Food is never only ingredients or quantities. It is also smell, gesture, memory, family, language, place, and atmosphere.

Meticulous tracking can become a powerful tool, especially when cultures are displaced. When people migrate, food often becomes one of the strongest connections to the place they left behind. Recipes change, ingredients are replaced, and gestures are adapted, but something remains.

My own experience of migration made me aware of this. After moving to Amsterdam, my eating habits changed, and with them my relationship to comfort, community, and belonging. Food revealed something about displacement that I could not easily explain otherwise.

So yes, data can help preserve the hearth that no longer exists, but only if it is treated with care. The list itself is not enough; it needs to be transformed into story, image, object, sound, or ritual. Only then can the data become alive again.

AJ: How does your art address the relationship between climate change and food waste? What insights would you like to share with our readers in this context?

IG: From my perspective, food waste is one of the most tangible ways to confront the connection between everyday life and climate change, especially when we ask how our daily habits contribute to this global issue. We often think of climate change as something abstract or far away, but food brings it very close. It is right there in our kitchen, our supermarket, our plate, and our bin.

When food is wasted, it is not only the food that disappears. We also waste the land, water, labor, energy, packaging, and transport behind it. And when discarded food decomposes, it releases greenhouse gases, especially methane, which directly contributes to climate change. So, the object we throw away is only the final visible point in a much longer invisible chain.

This was the starting point, for example, when I created *The Food Waste Effect*, the work I presented during COP26 in Glasgow. I focused on the amount of food wasted by an average UK family and translated that invisible quantity into a physical installation. I wanted people to stand in front of the scale of waste and feel that it is not abstract—it is real, measurable, connected to all of us, and supported by live data on waste.

For me, the important message is that we still have power as individuals. The choices we make every day—what we buy, what we eat, what we throw away—can make a difference. Art cannot solve climate change by itself, but it can shift awareness. It can make invisible systems visible and hopefully encourage people to approach this crisis differently, with more responsibility, care, and imagination.

World of Plenty | Image Credit: Museo Internazionale delle Ceramiche (MIC)