



ROOTS

welcome

The fourth issue of the *Art of Life Magazine*, introducing *Roots*. Thank you to all the writers and artists who supported this magazine all along the way!

This issue is a smaller one because of the summer time submissions; I am sure it has been a relaxing time for the majority of writers and artists, so it was definitely harder this time around to gather more writers and artists for this one! But, its still just as full of content and I hope that the contributors give themselves a round of applause for the creativity and time they put into their work to bring this issue to life.

Once again, the Art of Life Zine is not a mere magazine, it is a global community which aims to unite many talented poets, artists and even story tellers, to come together and advocate for the reality of the world we live in today. It is rather scary, how fast time slips by like sand in through fingers. *Roots* is a collection that seeks to inspire the writers' or artists' muse to connect them back to their core cultural values and the roots of their identity. The purpose of this issue is to realize that all of our identities remain rooted in our culture, heritage and ancestral legacies. **Lastly, this might be a heavy Issue to read which is why it comes with a Trigger Warning.**

I thank each and very one of you for your hardwork and creativity, which made this issue even more heart touching and magical. There are many pieces in this issue, so if you can't finish it in one seating, don't worry, simply read each one whenever you want to. If you love what you are reading or seeing, you know the drill! Follow and support those artists and writers, find them all in the *Authors + Artists Index*.



Much love,

Heta Patel/ founder & lead editor

featuring...

(corresponding pages in italics)

Poetry/Prose:

Alexandra Maurer
Alexandra Maurer
Elizabeth Butler
Guadalupe Miranda
Hamzah Taleb
Haven Alexa Langley
Hayden Robinson
Irina Vérène
Leah Collins
Mahailey Oliver
Nellikong Pslams
Preesha Menghwar
Quazi Afia Anjum Jyoti
Selina M. Maldonado
Shiwani Lohano
Srinjoyee Adhikary
Tilly Aistrop

Visual Art

Marie Magnetic
Marie V. Recalde
Samridhi Gupta

Poetry/Prose

Holy Supper

Alexandra Maurer

For want of it, we learnt of holiness – the unimaginable
was to be sung to, plead to, kneed to.

All the *clean white statues*
and murals, lords and a lady,
and *all communion a sacred tale.*

As tradition dictates, we sinned and then confessed and asked for mercy
for all the things that were just to be done.

We left it behind, but then –
we still eat praised lamb under the cross in the corner

White cloth on our laps, catching finest red
78 Euro a bottle.

We are still dressed in Sunday's best, lipsticked and gelled,
silver cutlery raised to plunge,
like an eagle raining benediction down.

We are still both animal and centurion,
feasting on hallow meat down to the bone,

and
still
pray
to be
saved.



Home is Here

Guadalupe Miranda

The roots of the monarch stretch into the soil of my skin.

It bleeds its silent cry,
a simple flap of its wings,
screeching like the eagle on the flag biting its victory into the snake.

My people have crossed the river,
the desert for a promise,
a dream of willful springs to bloom,
cultivating the land,
from farm to hand to hand to mouth—

The mouth sings the journey but never begs.

The roots of the monarch stretch to the ends of the highways,

There's dignity in the beauty of nature,
but this paper world is cruel,
empires built around the lie of a better tomorrow,
for you—
there is only sunset,

A warning: the sun will set for you.

The roots of the monarch stretch fluttering in tune with the radios
of the elotero,
in tune with the jingle of the bells
of the paletero,
with his daughter in the parks, in the neighbourhood streets,
in the eyes that see childhood—
in the eyes that call them criminals.

Home is Here

Guadalupe Miranda

The roots of the monarch stretch,
while the watermelon shaped wrappers in the cookie tin box at my grandma's
house,
the plastic of the dining table,
clinging to sweat covered skin,
cumbias vibrating into the air at carne asadas,
where we sit in a circle and talk.

No, my people do not beg.

We listen.
we sing the story of the land we used to call home
and the land that is now—
here in our hands.

We look to the sky, the sunlight raining
through the flesh of the leaves.

The monarch flies, its roots stretching.

They migrate.

Wherever they go, it is home.



Starchild by Marie V. Recalde

Tolerance

Elizabeth Butler

I will not be silenced,
Because I am allowed.

I stand up high and mighty,
Screaming "Change for the now."

***I am not a martyr,
Or an angel that does no wrong.***

I am a human person,
Watching people suffer daily.
To those, the ignorant souls,
Whose heart is broken glass.

**When you see these beings,
Do you stop to think?**

A person should be valid,
And comfortable in their skin.

**Does it really matter,
What they do behind closed doors?**

If love is in their hearts,
No trouble they will cause.

Why in this day and age,
Does this involve you too?

Let the people be,
To get on with their lives.
'Cos all that really matters is,
We're all united, one.



When The Desert Meets the Sea

Hamzah Taleb

The folktales of my homeland remind me of days I have not lived,
The days of free olive trees, open borders, and the calming sea,
Days that were stolen from me before I could even enjoy their sweetness.

Cut my body into pieces and plant them in the soil of my homeland,
Let my honeyed blood bring prosperity,
Let your sinking boots drown in our sorrows.

We must not give up, we must adapt,
If you are hit by the same hand everyday you do not turn the other cheek so it hurts less,
You learn to move your head.

Generations ago we sat in our beautiful Eden,
I see the tears of my ancestors in the shrilling cries of children,
I hear the whispers of children in the timeless laughter of my ancestors.

We have loved and we have lost,
With each wave the desert sinks,
Revealing the bones of our elders.

Lay on the sand and listen to its hum,
Drown in the grief of those before you,
Relish in the joys of those after you.

Where the desert meets the sea,
My love was born; a love so forbidden as my homeland itself.

As the love of my land made me realize I had the ability to love at all.
When the desert meets the sea.
Our bodies return; when the desert meets the sea,
I am home.



The Idle Infatuation of Idiosyncrasy by Marie Magnetic

Summer Night in South Carolina

Haven Alexa Langley

“you know how when you close your eyes
you see *the colours and shapes*
zigzag diagonals?”

yes.

“when I get lost in them, I can almost still
see summer as a kid.”

what was it like then?

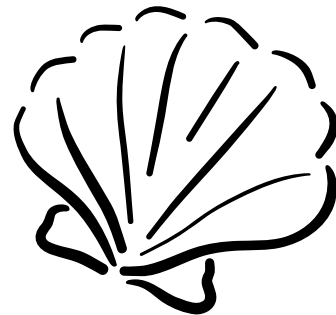
“*frogs and crickets would sing me to sleep;*
I could feel the sticky air suffocate
me

and the swing pinched my legs; I
remember the absolute agony when the
chlorine water
would shoot up my nose
and the smell of my sweat-drenched
clothes. The grass isn't the same here and
now as it was then and there; I can hear
my dad yelling at my brothers to reel
faster when Mossy Jaws got hooked on
their lines.”

it sounds like heaven.

“*it doesn't stop—the longing to be there*
again... a vast cavern exists within my
soul in the shape of seven-year-old me;
a hollowness hums, reverberating the
critter-song, and

i wish only to be young
on a summer night in south
carolina.”



****a legendary catfish of extraordinary strength; always managed to escape a hook; lived in the Langley Acres pond from 1999 — 2015****

Ink Worlds

Hayden Robinson

I feel like I belong
when I fall into stories.
***When the ink soaks me up,
the words take hold.***

*I hear sounds surround,
and music described.
From chirping birds
to metal music blasted.
I taste unknown foods
illustrated in colour.*

The every flavoured beans,
and the apple crumbles.
*I smell specks floating,
sweet and repugnant.*

A dirty man's beard,
a chocolate factory's river.
*I see multiverses build
inside my mind.*
Every white morning sun,
every raindrop fallen.

And **in these ink worlds I stay,**
And **in these ink worlds I create,**

I write

sight

smell

taste

sound

touch.

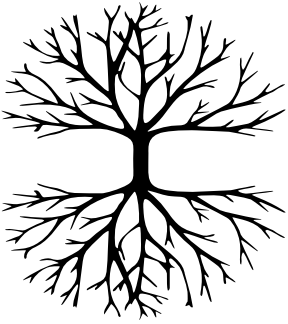
These senses so sensitive
build these stories of mine.

***These seeds take root
and grow into the flowers of words.***

I feel like I belong
when I fall into stories.

***Come and soak up my ink, you'll be
in my worlds.***





Fury is Fertilizer

Irina Vèreène

*I once was a seedling never
meant to grow.*

*I sprouted where i didn't
belong,
a drain on the resources,
they said;
**too strange for their
copy-and-paste
gardens.***

***an invasive species** in
the twisted microcosm
they call perfection,
they feared i'd take out
their entire ecosystem.*

***they tried relentlessly
to extirpate my roots.***
*the constant pulling tore my
fibers,
the shovels splintered parts
of me
I didn't want to give up.*

*They and I alike thought i'd
wilt one day.*

*but seeds like mine?
we're planted in defiance.
we're watered to prove them
wrong.*

*resistance is our core—
their fury is but fertilizer
to those who dare
to take up space
no one granted them.*

*lips like cherries,
cheeks like peaches
ripened on the tree,
I will not fall, but rise—
sweet, plump, and nourished
enough,
to sustain others along with me
despite this soil poisoned
with hate, wrath and greed.*



Bloom Where it Hurts by Samridhi Gupta

Twyll (“Fraud”)

Leah Collins



“Are you Welsh?” “Yes, Pontypridd” for the countless time I exclaim,
“Why do you sound like that?”, for that, I know not where to point or blame.
It is not any fault of my family, even if we are not Welsh by name,
But again, yes, I am Welsh, by birth, cradle, and claim,
And fiercely I will claim it in the face of shame,
When we converse, why don’t I sound the same?

*Not even when I speak the tongue of our neighbours can any note of our melody
be heard aflame.*

Since I could first speak and listen, such questions have gnawed on my mind,
When sneered at by other children, do they even mean to be so unkind?
Outcast by my own voice, too different I am defined,
Even in adulthood I would echo the doubt these voices maligned,
A loose fist is raised, “yma o hyd” is meekly cried to drown out insecurity that’s
drowning me from the inside,*
Why am I made to feel so artificial when I claw a grasp at some pride,
just because I hesitate when I am asked
“Wyt ti’n siarad Cymraeg?”**

*Ydw, ond mae’n ddrwg gen i, dw e ddim yn ddigon,
Dydw i ddim yn rhugl, ni allaf yr sgwrs mi gario,
Fel dw i’n dwyll yw sut y gwneir i mi deimlo,
Dieithryn mewn dillad defaid, sut y mi gallu byth fod yn groeso?****

Twyll (“Fraud”)

Leah Collins



I was forged by city folk, on concrete paths crossed these souls,
Their steel and smoke from buildings and tobacco, not from shafts or coal,
Amongst the decay of a bygone foundation I was raised and called home,
As kids we played amongst tombed collieries, history crumbling as we grow.

How am I supposed to yearn for something I feel I was born too late to know,
I cannot ever properly feel a part of something that supposedly defines me from
eons ago,
An identity that feels iron branded despite to its shape I have failed to fold,
Who am I if not of the hills and greenery that were supposed to cultivate my
straying soul?

I am a descendant of stories, of memories, and of change,
of steeled resilience through eras that brimmed with pride and with rage
Do not denigrate me for failing to fulfil your impression of this age
We are varied and vast, yet we all bleed ink onto the same page.

It is my duty to dignify the voices of my kin,
Their warbled song and poetry are sewn into every cell in my skin,
To seem so different to their archetype surely cannot be sin,
Y ddraig goch's**** roar is in there somewhere, no matter how quietly it rattles
from within.

**Translation:

**"We are here" (title of the unofficial Welsh anthem)

**"Do you speak Welsh?"

***Yes, but I'm sorry, it is not enough

I am not fluent, I cannot carry conversation

Like a fraud is how I am made to feel

A stranger in sheep's clothing, how can I ever be welcome?

****The red dragon

Peeltown, Texas

Mahailey Oliver

***I am from acres of countryside,
buttercups and Indian Paintbrushes,
scraped knees and climbing trees.***



Inner Flight by Marie V. Recalde

I am from sultry summer afternoons
sipping sweet tea from a mason jar,
honey from the suckle,
crickets chirping at midnight
while my brother and I stargaze
from the bed of a '96 Chevy S10.

I am from plucking ripe blackberries from the vine,
the shady grove of my Papa's backyard
where we collected fallen pecans for him to crack.

I am from flashlights under the blankets reading past my bedtime,
I am from conservative school dances held in cafeterias,
my mother's Japanese cherry blossom lotion,
my father's Sunday morning scent of shaving cream.

I am from Sega Genesis on Saturday afternoons,
Pokémon-themed Monopoly and The Game of Life
I had to beg my family to play because it always ended in squabbles.

I am from squabbles, from sticks and stones that broke my bones
and words that hurt me all the same.

I am from endurance.

I am from love.

I am from forgiveness.

Losing my voice!

Preesha Menghwar



Fading like dust blowing away at gush of air,
I see it dying, my mother tongue I speak,
Learnt from day I was born, made alienated to me,

I am forced to speak in languages I never own,
I remember my grandma talks in it more,
She sings lullabies in that language,
Rich, pure, sweet and soft.

But shimmers of foreign tongues doomed its magic.
It slipped through rollercoaster of time
Huge empire's languages overshadowed it
Like rhythm lost in melodious noise of world
Like rotten pages of old books, easy to tear apart

After my grandma died, silence engulfed me,
My native language is no longer spoken,
Yet walls of my sweet home whispers it,
Growing old, watching people shifting to other dialects,
Fear of losing my language haunts me deeply.
No one wonders how in blink of eye,
everything changes so drastically.

Yet,
In prayers I ask in my own tongue.
Still my soul echoes in my mother tongue,
With language that's quiet, I barely breath,
But my grandma's voice always whispers in my ears, I know It exists in me,
Like roots of a nurturing tree under the soil.

Sindhi Heritage

Shiwani Lohano

Conversing about roots stick me to my soul and hence I sense;

When they twist their tongue to expose themselves heart, it creates a beautiful melody within;

When they hug, it connects not mere two bodies rather two souls of lovelyhood: In turn, they share peaceful rhythm hidden beneath the chest.

When they welcome, thy don't just bestow love, not just host, not just share happiness, *it makes them superficial to create garden of fantastic, aesthetic, scented, beautiful and the most merciful flowers.*

Disrespect serves poison to kill kinship owing to it's losing one's identity as dignity;
Hereby friendship serves supreme level crossing mountainous horizon even.

Fence, it can costs one's lives.

It's so Expensive,
It's so Expensive,
It's so Expensive.



Calling

Quazi Afia Anjum Jyoti



*To the city where I learned to walk,
To the city that gave me warmth in the coldest winter,
that became my umbrella in pouring rain.*

*To the city that held me as my heart was breaking,
That sheltered me as I shattered into pieces ,
And kept me safe as I rose from the ashes.*

*To the city that made me the person I'm today,
That helped me find my voice,
That witnessed every chapter of my life unfolding,
From the one where I laughed so hard that my stomach hurt to the ones where I
cried my heart out,
You are my home.*

*I felt what belonging feels like in the banks of the Padma,
in the dazzling city lights,
in the quiet benches under the big old trees,
in the ancient streets.*

*I may now travel miles to chase the dreams I dreamt in the city,
But **the height of my rise always comes from the depth of my roots,**
In every victory I miss the city lights shining for me,
In every loss I long for the Padma to comfort me.*

*No matter where my calling gets me,
the calling of
my roots
will always bring me back to you.*

Divinity in Pomegranetes

Srinjoyee Adhikary

*The gods are sick of lazy loving and
bored mouths sighing names,
so they were not displeased when I said,
"what's heaven to your lover's
homecoming?"*

Adam trusted Eve and I trust you the
same

Some poet said said the pomegranate is
the true bearing of Eden; the fruit of the
womb,
"for there's no sweeter innocence than
our gentle sin"

*Divinity will swallow me whole and spit
me out anyways,*

so I chase it through you my sweetheart
hands encased with greed all over my
darling's face, *"for there's no sweeter
innocence than our gentle sin".*

So you take me apart,
like the fruit of the womb,
and I drink dry the stain,
leaving a poem on the roof of your
tongue.



Love drips down your chin,
I had been so lovelorn before this,
There's so much sweetness beyond the
blood on your teeth.

Sheffield Moores

Tilly Aistrop

Moss attaches to rock- like a sheaf,
Protecting it from harsh rains,
And harsher river streams.

*Tree trunks sprawl out- like spider legs,
Each firm root echoing a name of a loved one,
Long lost and nearly forgotten.*

Muck under foot being one long thin veil,
Between the living and dead.

*Corpses that feed back to the earth,
Making the grass greener.
And hills taller.*



*Our birds seek refuge here,
Their singing carried to us by the generous
breeze,
We're fortunate enough to be welcome here,
If we don't leave too many,
Footprints, stones overturned, flowers plucked;
if we don't startle the songbirds.*

***Better we observe the land, than pillage
it.***

***Don't tear the humble soil
Or redirect the young stream.***

*If you butcher the lands beneath us
There will be no sustenance for life,
No bed to lie in, in death.*

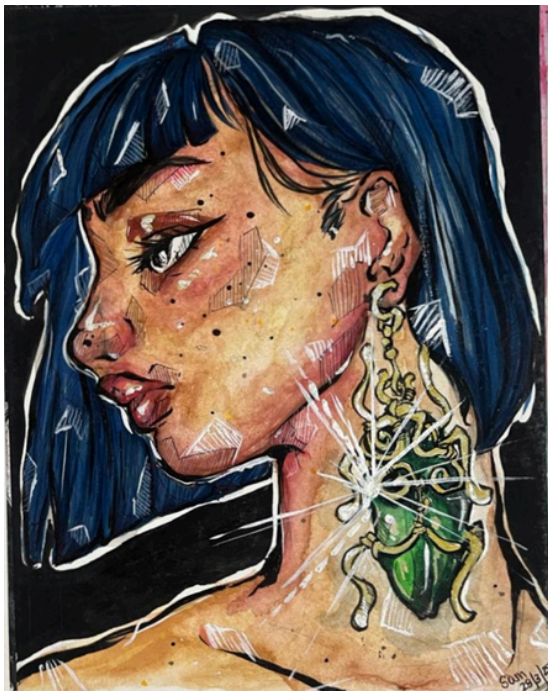
Rooted in Poetic Meadows

Nellikong Pslams

Sticks and stones break bones,
but words never hurt,
that was a lie because ***those roots have an anchor in the dirt,***
try to pull at them like weed take a lot of work,
maybe one day those negative words will dissolve into the soil and become
one with the earth,
but I decided to create a poetic garden that makes it worth it.

Watering these poetic flowers with liquid that flows through this pen,
the nutrients of creativity,,
will help germinate these seeds of ideas that I planted erupt from the ground and
end this cycle,
of what poetry is supposed to be.

I want this garden to transform into a meadow,
with the endless creative oasis that I let flow,
from the highs of a soprano to the depths of an alto,
there are
endless limits to where my pen
will go.



← The Earring is Heavier than her Silence by Samridhi Gupta

A Spring Blossom in Grisaille

Selina M. Maldonado

I was turned from the outside when he came into my view. Almost like seeing the outlines of a grave just buried. The curiosity in me sparked as if I could calculate the weight of his soul. And could I? What could I make of this omen of a man? Collar magnets pinned against a white button down, silver cufflinks as if the manufacturer were the moon herself, a calm statue amongst the chaos of a storm. Borges is what he mainly digested. Meanwhile I was reading Aurelius. To correct, he was Aurelius in Rome and I was Borges in Tlön. I could make no such reality of him unless he were in my mind. In my mind he remained as I let myself go with my madness. Through the fog of the city I watched him, gazing out into the shore of the creek as if he were some sort of vigilante. I could see the flare of light from his watch as he proceeded to take his left sleeve to check the time. On the bench where I was waiting for a bus to come take me to my apartment he decided to sit near me.

He could have chosen any bench on the street, but this one held the destination he had in mind. Profound silence. Impending conversation is sensed from the deception of anxiety. As usual, a person like him and the rest of us would pull out their phone in boredom. To do what exactly? Stare at the multicolored background that it comes with while the numbers shift from 7:35 to a minute ahead. What else was there to be done? Who else did we need to be? Nothing more than silent beings in physical matter.

The night grows colder and the streets grow brighter. The stars are muted and my heart bears a slight tinge of grief, and as the slight tinge grows it festers in my ribcage, and when I hear the hiss of the brakes I am awoken out of my sorrows. I watch him enter, and then I follow. He finds the nearest seat available on the empty bus. Do I dare sit next to him? I do.

He offers a flask to me before he gets off to his stop. It's full of sake. He brings up the topic of the Heian period of Japan. His voice runs deep like a river weathering away a hill. He told me with a calm but great passion that he saw a capital formed in 794. A history of a shifting and evolving power this man remembered as if a tree knew how many branches it had to take care of so they don't break. After multiple recounts of elegies from noblewomen awaiting or mourning their lovers in poetry, he then was silent for a long, long moment. I wanted to break it, but every time I attempted, he scolded me with his eyes, as if the silence between us was sacred.

I recall the stories from the eternal man to this day, and sometimes my mind forgets, but my body remembers the wise soul he kept. I recall a certain detail when we conversed about poetry: Ryokan's calligraphy of Chinese poems. It was the Edo period,

A Spring Blossom in Grisaille

Selina M. Maldonado

and he mentioned how calligraphers often portrayed their state of mind through rough or round strokes of characters on the paper, more than the poem itself. I could remember him laughing at that. He found it interesting how the poets perceived their own mortality. A verse rings in my head like a prayer to this day.

*What karmic bond draws me to the brush and inkstone?
Once I have written, I write yet again.
I know not whom to ask about this matter,
the Buddha, the Great Mentor,
the Teacher of Gods and Men.*

I myself know not what brought me to my passions, or my self perceived passions. Once I listen to this man, I listen even further, so as to learn something important from him that I might not catch in later life. I may ask him about this matter, but then, he would know I am listening, trying to decipher and channel every word into something I can manage. I myself know not of eternity. This man, like a spring blossom in grisaille, might. It is a full moon. I take his hand, and I discover myself in constant rebirth.







Long Walk Home by Marie V. Recalde

Q&A WITH THE COVER ARTIST

First off, congratulations on having your piece, Long Walk Home, be the face of our fourth Issue. This is your second time becoming our cover artist, how do you feel about this achievement?

I think I said it the first time around, but again, what an honor. As an artist, you hope your expressions will resonate with someone out there and find a home in as beautiful a place as The Art of Life. Every issue is filled with heart and soul, and I couldn't be happier.

For your art piece, the design is well suited to the theme of one's roots and the title itself has in it the precious everlasting feeling of walking back home. What inspired you to make this piece? How did you come up with the layout, design and medium of your beautiful artwork?

The concept of Home has been top of mind in so many conversations I've had in the past few years. In this picture, it's my best friend Hilary's and my inner children finding each other as chosen family and taking Ram Dass's quote to heart as we're all just walking each other home. In the anthology of our lives, we have our families of origin and of creation, and the farther we wander, the more we redefine what home means to us. If we're lucky, our homes can be places, people, memory and the possibility of what's to come. The two figures and the field of sunflowers breaking out of the frame of life's storybook is Rumi's beyond the field of right and wrong, that no matter what we do, we are still worthy of being loved and that love is always accessible.

I'll always work and build with physical media. It's funny that analog collage has always been the medium I love working with the most, and when Hilary and I met almost 20 years ago, wouldn't you know she's been creating collage art in the same way since childhood. Her friendship makes walking the winding path of adulting in late-stage capitalism so much brighter.

As our issue is on theme of Roots, if you don't mind, we would love to know more about your story and the culture you come from?

I always think about how my parents met as my origin story and my blueprint as an eternal traveler. My mom was visiting Los Angeles and met my dad by fate or by chance while he was bartending at LAX. Her grandmother set off from Ireland in the 1920s to start a new life in New Jersey, and my dad moved to Manhattan at 16 from Ecuador. Their love was born in a liminal space and they set roots down in Southern California, which will always be home to me.

Growing up mixed was and still is an amazing experience because it feels like there never was a binary in identity. There's no absolute, rather a spectrum of what can be. It was never either/or, but both/and, so it bred an inclusive and expansive mindset from the get go. Growing up bilingual also helped me bridge cultural distance and find similarities in the different Asian and European countries I've lived in over the last 12 years. I'm so lucky my husband has always been an adventurer (and incredibly responsible), so we're getting to show our two daughters that their roots and home can be anywhere and everywhere.

We know we asked you a similar question before, but just to update this in our latest issue as well; what is one piece of advice you would like to give to a person in your line of work?

I'll always say to ignore the 'stay in your lane' advice—the world in which we inhabit and hold within us is infinite, and there's so much to explore with our one wild and precious life. Do everything, try everything. Be a jack of all trades and you'll end up a master of some. Hone your skills and invest in what you love. Let that lead you and know that what works for you will change throughout your life, and that's perfectly fine.

Lastly, we do have your bio given in the author and artist index, but just to sum it all up, where could people find the magnificent art that you do?

It's all on Instagram at @imaginarymarie! I'll always post what gets published and where my art is being exhibited, usually with some awfully niche or Millennial cringe caption. Life's too short not to have fun with it.

Author + Artist Index

Alexandra Maurer

she/her:

Alex M. is a writer by profession and poet by passion. She grew up in a small Italian village and moved to Munich to study and work. Her themes focus mainly on home and hope and lessons learned. With her work, she wants to express life in a for her meaningful way and see if others relate to what she feels.

Elizabeth Butler

she/her:

Elizabeth Butler is a disabled writer using a wheelchair. She has a Masters Degree in Creative Writing and has featured in a poetry anthology and has a collection of children's stories published online. She has self-published several books of poetry and winner of Prose Contest at The Atkinson writing competition. She has gained recognition in her local area and has performed at local events.

Guadalupe Miranda

she/her:

Guadalupe Miranda is a Senior at CSUN studying Creative Writing. She has had publications in youth led magazines on Instagram such as The Flower Mouth Press. She has also been a staff writer for The Kintsugi Journal as well as Youth of Letters. Her hobbies include scrapbooking and discovering new second hand books. You can find her on Instagram at @g.honyy.

Hamzah Taleb

he/him:

Hamzah Taleb is a poet, editor, and emerging legal scholar based in Toronto. Published widely in journals across Canada, The United States of America, and the Middle East his work explores themes of love, memory, resistance, and the poetics of displacement. He is the founder and Editor in Chief of Muses of Justice, a scholarly journal at York University, where he is completing his Honours BA with a major in Law and Society and a minor in Creative Writing He has been profiled for his artistic and scholarly contributions by media outlets in Toronto

Haven Alexa Langley

she/her:

Haven Alexa Langley is an emerging poet from The Carolinas whose work explores identity, yearning, and emotional vulnerability. Haven is typically drawn to lyrical, rhythmically-driven work but also experiments with confessional forms, surreal imagery, and raw, conversational tone. Her poems often blur the line between intimacy and chaos, capturing the ache of queer desire, memory, and becoming. When not writing, Haven enjoys hanging out with her nephews, doing anything artsy, or crying to Taylor Swift lyrics. Haven can be found on Instagram @havenalexalangley or TikTok @havspoetrycorner.

Hayden Robinson

he/him:

Hayden Robinson (he/him) is an autistic British writer. He mainly writes horror stories and poetry. His themes often focus on overcoming trauma and neurodivergence. His work has appeared in various publications, including HorrorScope Volumes 3 and 4, Halloween Remains, Violent Advents: A Christmas Horror Anthology, Scribble 2025, and HNDL Magazine. His short story collection 'Inside Your Screams: Stories of Restless Terror' is set to be released in October 2025. His debut novel 'plaything' is set to be released in July 2026. He currently lives in Decatur, GA with his wife, their dog, and their two cats.

INSTAGRAM: @geekwriter92

TIKTOK: @typewritergeek27

TUMBLR: @hrstories1234

BLUESKY: @horrorwriter92.bsky.social

Irina Vérène

they/them:

Irina Vérène is a non-binary writer from Germany who loves to explore the rawness and complexity of human connection and emotion in both poetry and prose. Since 2025, they are a staff writer for Sepulchre Literary, Violet Desires, and Soft Love Literary. Their work has appeared in Gnashing Teeth Publishing, Moss Puppy Magazine, and Frenetic Magazine, among others. Find them on Instagram (@queen_of_gore) or Substack (@queenofgore).

Leah Collins

she/her

Leah is an "aspiring writer" from Cardiff, aspiring to grasp poetry and critical analysis. Her current writing fixates on the spectrums of grief and identity. When not working, she enjoys a little r&r; running & reading, rewatching & reviewing, or ruminating & regretting. @leahkcollins on instagram and @yourlivingend on letterbox.

Mahailey Oliver

she/her:

Mahailey Oliver holds an English MA from Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches, Texas. Her work has recently appeared in The Solitude Diaries, The Raven Review, and Blue Daisy Journal. To read more of her work, visit her website: <https://sites.google.com/view/mahaileyoliver/home>

Marie Magnetic

she/her:

Marie Magnetic (b. 1989, Jackson, Michigan) uses color, form, and surreal images to reflect on the mundane, the morose, and the magnificently mad. Pulling from her experiences, social issues, and current events, Marie's work considers the experiences of being othered. Her art aims to explore humanity and share her strange inner world with her audience. Besides a handful of art classes she has taken at community art centers, Marie is self-taught.

Marie Magnetic is a Chicago-based visual artist. She is queer, neurodivergent, Blackfeet, Jewish, and Irish. Marie was awarded a Bachelor of Science in Psychology from Central Michigan University in 2017, working in social services and several library roles before returning to art during the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2023, Marie held her first solo exhibit at Little Broken Things in Chicago. Marie is a Foundation House, Haven Foundation, and New York Foundation for the Arts grant recipient. Her work has been published in Haus-a-Rest, HNDL Mag, and Flash Frog. You can find her work at mariemagnetic.com or Instagram @marie_magnetic_art.

Marie V. Recalde

she/her:

Marie V. Recalde is an artist, writer, translator and California native living abroad for the last twelve years. Her artwork has been most recently featured in Spectrum Literary Journal and the Shanghai Literary Review.

Nelli Kong Pslams

she/her:

Nelli Kong is a poet based out of the United States. She recently got back into her love writing over the last three years. She enjoys bringing words to life off the page and giving them new life and meaning. She hopes that her words jump from the page into the heart of the reader. She can be found on instagram and tiktok @nellikongpslams.

Preesha Menghwar

she/her:

Preesha, belongs to Pakistan, is an English teacher, chess player and emerging writer. Majoring in English Linguistics and literature, she is inspired by many authors and began her writing journey by publishing her first piece in university's magazine and other contests - that empowered her to write more. Beyond today's incorporated classrooms, she finds literature as bliss and books as rebellion. Since then, she participated in various creative writing contests and internship programs. Writing is not merely her hobby but a life long passion.

Quazi Afia Anjum Jyoti

she/her:

To follow her dreams she had to leave comfort of roots are and fly high. While she's a medical science student, her goal of healing expands. Not just through medical intervention but also through words, she dreams of finding the cure. The mind , body , soul alignment. To explore of of her journey and growth make sure to visit @quaziafiaanjumjyoti.

Samridhi Gupta

she/her:

Samridhi Gupta is a 14-year-old artist from India whose work doesn't follow rules — it follows emotion. Her art is raw, messy, and deeply human. It doesn't try to impress; it tries to speak. Through expressive, character-based illustrations, she explores identity, burnout, grief, girlhood, and the strange loneliness of growing up when everyone expects you to be okay. Her characters often look like they're about to cry or scream or vanish — and that's the point. She started creating not for likes or followers, but out of need. Drawing was survival. Her sketchbook became the one place where she didn't have to filter herself. Now, she's chasing a quiet dream: to have her art published or featured somewhere before she turns 15. This isn't about being the best. It's about being seen. It's about working through school stress, self-doubt, exhaustion, and still trying to create something real. Samridhi doesn't want to be an influencer. She doesn't want to be a brand. She just wants her work to leave a mark before she turns fifteen — a reminder that she was here, she felt deeply, and she made something true.

Selina M. Maldonado

she/her:

Selina M. Maldonado is the author of short stories and poems portraying culture, speculation, and history. She plans to publish more as time progresses along with her. @silentapotheosis

Shiwani Lohano

she/her:

Shiwani, being an earnest scholar, centrally belongs from a remote area of Pakistan. She recently graduated from Mehran University of Engineering and Technology in BSEnglish. Currently, she's working as an English Educator in "Army Public school and Hyderabad cantt". Shiwani, fervent about writing creatively in different styles, has done the "content writing internship" from "Pride of Muet". As her passion of doing research and reading, she's now focused towards getting her literary work known to the world. While writing, Shiwani always puts her soul and spirit reflective in her works.

Srinjoyee Adhikary

she/her:

Srinjoyee, a 16-year-old singer, songwriter, and poet, is a passionate dreamer with a voice that speaks the unspoken. Her songs and poems reflect her deep emotions, exploring themes of self-discovery, love, and life's fleeting beauty. With a heart full of untold stories, she's determined to turn her dreams into reality. A true artist, Srinjoyee's music is a journey of exploration and expression, and she's just getting started, with big aspirations and a world of unspoken words to share.

Tilly Aistrop

she/her:

Tilly Aistrop is an aspiring writer from the steel city, working in the toon. She writes poetry, articles, written pieces- that range on topics about her personal life, politics, feminism and queerness. You can find her portfolio here: bit.ly/Aistrop-portfolio You can follow her on substack @tillais and on Instagram @tilly.a_

“The height of my rise comes from the depth of my roots”

**—Quazi Afia Anjum Jyoti
(another yet talented writer from this issue)**

