

Marías at Sampaguitas

An illustration featuring a woman in the foreground wearing a dark blue, long-sleeved dress with a white sampaguita flower pinned to her chest. She is holding a sampaguita flower in her right hand. The background shows a crowd of people in blue and white, with several more sampaguita flowers scattered around the scene. The overall style is a mix of watercolor and graphic illustration.

Marías at Sampaguitas

Issue 3, December 2021

Binyag/Baptism

Cover Art: “Binyag”

Sam Bernardo (he/they) is a Filipino-American university student and freelance illustrator who mostly works in character illustration and sequential art. They find the most joy in using bold color palettes and romantic symbolism.

Pagsulat sa mga bulaklak Writing on flowers

MARIAS AT SAMPAGUITAS is an online literary magazine whose aim is to highlight voices of the under-resourced & underrepresented, such as the Black, Indigenous, POC, LGBTQIA+ communities, all marginalized genders, and everyone in between.

We honor our **Filipina/x roots**. Our name is Tagalog for “girls and flowers.” Flowers are gentle and fragile, yet convey certain emotions and messages, depending on its species. These same flowers can grow where other flora are unable.

We strive to be an **intersectionally feminist and womanist, inclusive** publication. We accept work from everyone from all backgrounds, and we prioritize Black, Indigenous, and POC artists of all genders. We do our best to consciously discourage hegemonic narratives; hierarchical structures; and supremacist, assimilationist, and normative messaging.

We aim to be a **safe literary and linguistic space**. We welcome submissions in non-English languages (although to uphold accessibility, we ask for English translations provided for all non-English work). In particular, we encourage non-Tagalog Philippine languages including but not limited to: Ilokano, Bikol, Pangasinense, Waray, Cebuano, etc.

We acknowledge the **ethnolinguistic diversity** of the Philippines. We believe that all identifier terms for Filipino/a/x people are valid, including but not limited to: Filipino, Pinoy, Pinay, Pin@y, Pilipino, Pilipinx, Fil-Am, Fil-Aus, Fil-Can, Philo, Filipinx, ethnolinguistic groups, such as Bikolano/a/x, Ilokano/a/x, Cebuano/a/x, etc.

We **support Indigenous rights** and representation. We encourage both non-Filipino/a/x and Filipino/a/x readers to learn more about the Indigenous Peoples of the Philippines.



Founder & Editor-in-Chief

Keana Aguila Labra (they/them/she/her) is a Cebuana Tagalog Filipinx poet & writer in diaspora residing on stolen Ohlone Tamyen land. She works to provide a safe literary space for underserved & underrepresented communities as the Editor-in-Chief of literary magazine, *Marías at Sampaguitas* and the co-Founder of the BIPOC/LGBTQIA+ focused publishing press, *Sampaguita Press*. Outside of MAS & SamPress, she is the Interview Lead for the Walang Hiya Project, an arts collective centering Filipinxaos of marginalized genders & LGBTQ+ folks. She is also a fellow of the Kearny Street Interdisciplinary Writer's Lab cohort of summer '21 & currently a Barangay Tanod intern with the Bayanihan Center in San Francisco. In her free time, she is a book reviewer with City Book Review. She is the author of the chapbooks, *No Saints* (Lazy Adventurer Publishing) & *Mohilak* (Fahmidan Co. & Publishing). Her third chapbook, *Kanunay*, is forthcoming early 2022. She served as one of the Honorary Santa Clara County Poets Laureate of Oct. '21 alongside Lorenz Mazon Dumuk. Her biggest secret is that Tagalogs can't tell she's Cebuano when she speaks Tagalog. Unfortunately, all Bisayans can tell she's Tagalog when she speaks Cebuano.

General Editor

Maria Bolaños (she/her/they) is a Filipina American poet, book reviewer, and co-Founder of *Sampaguita Press*. She is committed to building spaces to nurture and showcase Filipinxao literature as well as Black, Indigenous, and POC literature. She is a 2021 Best of the Net nominee, and her writing has been featured in US publications such as *Touchstone*, *Cut Fruit Collective*, and the *International Examiner*; and international publications such as *Antigone* and *Yuzu Press*, among others. Her debut chapbook, *SANA*, is set for release Spring 2022. See more of their work on Instagram and Twitter [@mariabeewrites](#).

Poetry & Issue Editor

Dina Klarisse (she/her) is a writer, poet, editor, and serial procrastinator based in the Bay Area. Poetry is her way of making sense of her experience as a queer Filipina American immigrant and recovering Catholic, as well as her interest in the intersections of history, language, culture, and identity. Her work has been published in ASU's *Canyon Voices*, *The Daily Drunk Mag*, *Chopsticks Alley*, *Kalopsia Literary Journal*, among others. More of her writing can be found on her Instagram [@hella_going](#) and blog [www.hellagoing.com](#).

Prose Editor

Asela Lee Kemper (she/her/hers) is a poet and editor. She holds many positions including Poetry Editor at *Variety Pack*, Prose Editor at *Marías at Sampaguitas*, and Editorial Director of the BuliLit Series at *Sampaguita Press*. She also has published works in *SOU Student Press*, *Flawless Mag: The Border Issue*, *Silk Club: QUIET*, *Reclamation Mag*, and the anthology *No Tender Fences*. Asela uses her passion for creative writing to open conversations on diversity and identity in literature. She currently resides in Oregon, USA with her family. You can find Asela on Twitter [@AselaLeeK](#) and Instagram [@thesakuraink](#).

Social Media Editor

Kelly Ritter (she/they) is a reader, writer, & crafter currently living life in Muncie, Indiana. She recently graduated from Ball State University with a Bachelor of Arts in English & a minor in Creative Writing. She is one of the Social Media Editors at *Brave Voices Magazine*. When she's not reading or tweeting, she's outside practicing yoga or cuddling her kitties.

Our Thanks to the following Contributors, Readers, and Interns

Christian Aldana • Czaerra Galicinao Ucol
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Binyag (Baptism)



Letter from the Editors & Content Warning

To our dear readers,
Sa aming minamahal na bumabasa,

In Filipino Catholic culture, baptisms hold a myriad of meaning. They are simultaneously moments of celebration and contemplation, a gathering of new and old life, a chance to reconnect with loved ones, and an excuse for the titas to show off their newest LV bags. The welcoming of an infant to the family's faith comes from a place of love and protection, but it's also a reminder of our country's colonized past.

The word baptism comes from the Greek baptizo, or baptisma, which means "to wash, bathe, or immerse." To many cultures, this ritual is the initiation of someone into sacred traditions that transcend countries, generations, and centuries. It is referred to in the Bible as the "newness of life," a promise to the newly baptized that the holy water is a forever bond to their God and the eternal life he has promised. The Tagalog word, binyag, is believed to come from a Bahasa Malaysian word meaning "to pour water from above." Water as purification and cleansing is universal and can be observed in other religions such as Islam and Sikhism, where worshippers wash their faces and feet before prayer or entering temples, or Hinduism, where pilgrims bathe in the river Ganges and return to the water as ashes after death.

As we turn another page and celebrate *Marías at Sampaguitas* on her third birthday, as well as the birth of Sampaguita Press, we asked our community to create work surrounding rebirth, new

life, and cleansing. This BINYAG issue is our hands dipped into still waters and the ripples and waves we make with each line break and metaphor.

The richness of our cultures has blessed us with stories and meaningful traditions, all while passing on generational traumas and scars that we heal through poetry, art, and community work. The process of healing often requires inspecting and cleaning out old wounds—as such, please note:

Some of the works in this publication exhibit explicit language and imagery that include sexual violence, blood/gore, and emotional and physical trauma. We kindly ask that you read with care and caution for your mental well-being.

Thank you for the love you have given us and continue to give in your readership.

To our contributors, thank you for allowing us the privilege of witnessing your art and your work. We are forever grateful for the opportunity to read and publish these poems, essays, and stories.

Lubos na nagpapasalamat,

Dina, Keana, Maria, Asela, and Kelly
The Editors





Editors' Works



A Sonnet for Mary

Dina Klarisse

Hail Mary, full of grace, blessed virgin pure,
at fourteen you mothered God's child
and kept all man's innocence secure,
holding woman hostage, undefiled.

I can't help but wonder who you really were,
you who lost childhood to a child fated to die.
And if you truly believed that our savior
was your baby boy—or a cruel man's lie.

You could not know, and you take no blame
for the white veil upon our heads.
That Mary's purity reflects Eve's shame
is God's will spoken from man's breath.

Holy Mary, Mother of God, your secret's safe with me,
that gorgeous lie that trapped us all, so that man could be free.

Dina Klarisse (she/her) is the Poetry & Issue Editor of *Marías at Sampaguitas*.

How People Were Created

Maria Bolaños

The first time, they tell you who you are.
They want you to be cornmeal
and scales, half wild eyes,
ears and nose on a meaningless face.
Your limbs are useless, your hands
don't grasp anything at all.

Now, we try again. We give the body
shape. We move like fire
against wind. We have ears: listen
we have eyes: watch
our hands hold, our arms link—this
is the first history.

But we keep the scales on the tips of our fingers,
every touch a reminder,
a small threat.

Maria Bolaños (she/her/they) is the General Editor of *Marías at Sampaguitas*.

The moment I knew I needed to heal for myself

Keana Aguila Labra

Because sometimes we grow around our 15 year old selves. Because she'll scream through the decades. No one can really ever ignore a teenage girl. Because abandonment can transform into familiarity submerged until it's transformed into family. Those who hold your head longer underwater promising it'll make you stronger. Longing is a poison and the antidote is no better because teenage girls are in it for the long haul. They were born with nails to fight. The shell of the teenage girl eventually becomes a woman. She prays her children will be redemption, flesh as salve. But their hands never stitch the teenage girl because that's not how it works. The teenage girl's woman shell gives birth to a healer, fighter, and a boy. None of whom can save her. We cannot defeat what we refuse to face and children are more than their mother.

The first Thanksgiving without Lolo

Keana Aguila Labra

Wherein last year he told us he wanted to die. To unburden. Wherein my siblings and I rotated sleeping at a house that is no longer ours. Wherein I pleaded with Valek not to show up at the foot of my lola's bed while also bargaining with the wif. "If you let Eric stay on the phone with me I won't complain the next time Lolo wakes me to pee." The next day Lolo does the unspeakable and I change my clothes in silence. I mourn it as the day I became in their eyes a Man. Wherein things that are done to us are our coming of age. I took the bread thinking it was forever. Our eyes closed. Wherein we moved so often with our eyes closed. Wherein no one, not my cousin, uncle, auntie, or parents volunteered to sleep over or help. Wherein everyday was a reminder the youth did not deserve respite. I teetered towards insanity everyday I sacrificed my youth. They still don't see what we have done. The eras dismantled and packed away. The memory combed and resurfaced. Wherein a year does nothing to pain. Wherein the warmth of the sun a letter of white. Wherein each butterfly a mercy.

Keana Aguila Labra (they/them/she/her) is the Founder and Editor-in-Chief of *Marías at Sampaguitas*.

Contributor Works



binyag/baptism

Pilar Estrella Huerta

The story goes that
I was a baby carried into the dawn
by my mama and abuelita (my papa's mother)
to their Catholic Church where I was
splashed in the name of the cross
with Holy Water.
Papa couldn't know because
he was a Born-Again Christian,
re-birthing from his sins,
only to repeat them again later,
like when he cheated on my mama
with someone from their Born-Again Christian Bible study group.

If not for my mama and Tata's covert operations
and faith,
I wouldn't have been able
to partake in the Second Communion and
feel holy again though
looking a little like a child bride (in the pictures, I can barely form my closed lips into a smile.)

Now I will get into heaven—I will, won't I?
Nah, probably not
since I haven't taken
communion since I
was a Catholic in the 4th grade,
when my mama stole herself
into the night to fly
to the United States.

I missed Confirmation with the rest of my 6th grade classmates because
I was busy being a Born-Again Christian who avoided
praying to idols like the Baby Jesus statue
in my 6th grade classroom altar.

I am what they/Americans call a "lapsed Catholic" though
I have to admit
the rituals are in my blood,
and these are what I miss the most—
the practice of being holy & the suspended belief that I am not.

a happy poem

Pilar Estrella Huerta

My alarm clock has changed from a man
yelling racial slurs at his computer
in the room next to mine,
to my body waking up
to the soft breathing of my beloved partner
and soulmate, hearing the sharp yet muffled murmurs
of leftist media conglomerates on my clock radio. I get up with a longing
I can reach rather than a dread
that pulls me down, sinking.

Reaching this longing is a world
I feel i don't deserve but
feel so comfortable in, it seems sometimes
that this could last forever until i
suddenly remember how "everything is so fragile" and my anxiety
confirms it in sweaty palms and a resting, racing heartbeat,
so I take substances I am privileged enough
to have legal access to, just so i can forget for a while
that my fear & desire are
distractions from being alive.

What does that mean, "fear & desire"?
The fear to do what I desire.
The desire to do what I fear.
The last time that happened
i ended up running away from my then lover who i thought
was trying to kill me
by suffocating me with a pillow
he was hiding behind his back
at the other side of the living room
when i decided to run away
from him screaming for help
from our neighbors I'd never
introduced myself to in the 2 years i had been living there.
They called the police and I was 5150'd.

So I try to stay quiet and avoid
being myself who desired
Black Supremacy and a gender that I wasn't born with,
so I stay quiet
because I like waking up to the soft murmurs
of media conglomerates who
aren't in fact
reading my thoughts or
watching me in my room.

My lover has changed from someone I wasn't attracted to
but wanted to be attracted to
because of what they Symbolized,
to someone I still have a crush on and don't mythologize
because I feel like I know who he really is, and not just what I've seen him to be.
Slowly i am remembering what i desire
doesn't have to be what i fear.
This expulsion of happiness is step one.

Pilar Estrella Huerta (nickname Peluchi) was born and raised in Metro Manila, Philippines until the age of 14, when they immigrated to Northern California. They received their bachelor's degree in Rhetoric from UC Berkeley, with a minor in City & Regional Planning. Currently, Pilar works as a housing & homelessness program analyst for the State of California, and lives in stolen Me-Wuk land, legally known as Sacramento, with their fiancé A, their dog Miley and three cats, Beemo, Billie and Cass. If you like their work, they write book reviews/ reflections on IG: find them [@pilartyping](#)

kumain

Akira Ritos

to belong to your body, you must destroy it. with your
tears splashed over *pancit* with a douse of calamansi,
naive tender skin,
blood mixed with chilis and vinegar and maggi seasoning for *isaw*,
kiddie panties slaughtered and bleeding
innocence in the oils of pig brain soup,
you're nothing but owned.

grabbed by the nape of the neck,
the starved wolf loomed over a toddler.
unhinging his jaw, his greed-soaked saliva
coated collarbones, trickled down my throat,
and i became a helpless stray split down the back, my fur torn clean off. i'm
tender, fresh. men's raw meat.

the butcher wraps a shit-stained apron round his body,
he called me pretty
at a party, so now i lay on his maple cutting board
brown body butchered bloody
he slaps his flat knife against my ass
licking cherry blood clean.
you could have said no, you shouldn't have come home,
fool, to avoid this
means slow thawing and rapid searing, your damned cooking
never ceased the violent consumption.

the eyes are designed as orca teeth, serrated and unforgiving.
i can always feel them chewing,
tight nibbles at the base of my ankles, visceral shredding behind my knees
molar prints pressing my breasts,
spit-roasted *lechon*, no sweet apple in my mouth. spinned over coals, men
break their teeth to tear.

at night in my dim apartment, i place my palm in my cavern mouth and
i bite.
my hand wriggles like a snake in a jar, wild
muscle moving.
my throat hitched with a noise, rabbit-teeth
clenching harder.
the pain ricochets up my arm, but i do not let go. ownership,
ownership, ownership. i must not let go.
ritually, i gnawed my palm to remind myself why bleeding pigs shriek—
to survive.

when my mother cooks me *bulalo*, beef shanks and bone marrow soup,
i let the oil soak my lips, the fat swish in my cheeks, swallow savory dissatisfaction.
tomorrow, i will cook *dinuguan* in a stone bowl, chop chilis till my rice is tainted,
and scoop the pigs blood and flesh with a shaking hand.
i will own the body and consume every bit, every grain, until my tears mix with leftover soy
sauce, dripping and dripping.

Philippine Dishes Mentioned

Isaw: A street food of the Philippines, barbequed chicken/pork intestines.

Bulalo: A Philippine beef bone broth.

Pancit: A Philippine rice-noodle stir fry.

Lechon: A whole spit roasted pig, mostly served at get-togethers or special events.

Dinuguan: A Philippine savory blood stew, consisting of pig's blood, garlic, chilis, and vinegar.

here comes june

Akira Ritos

dipping a finger in the stone fountain at old country buffet, i skim the water of the oval koi pond
and the largest koi fish runs its body under my chubby knuckles

mesmerized, i lean over the marble ledge to watch it swim lazily, unperturbed.

its scales smooth and bright, the koi's tiger-striped body glimmers under the water

and i waddle away from the koi fish who swims in circles, unbeknownst to me that in the

tiny fountain, the koi fish is sentenced to an inevitable grief—

a ritual, passing. my *nanay* reminds me that all things come and go and i too, will swim in laps
over and over till i am satiated. a cycle, suffering.

at old country buffet, there were two girls that i befriended

frilly dresses, wide eyes, pink-pucker lips, they wanted me to play with them

“to see the koi fish,” one girl admitted, pointing a hand towards the stone fountain

the other girl, shy and small, pulled my arm in her direction with brutish strength

i stumble as she demands me to go with her, to stand at the pacman game in the corner

my palms sweat, deer-heart racing, as the two push and pull at my limbs—

waves, an ocean. my *nanay* brings me back to the table, to finish the empty heads of crawfish that
i left on my plate and distantly, silently, i rub my wrists. imprints, skin flushed.

new years eve, i am sixteen and red-faced, my lover laying beside me

two am moon-shine saliva and molasses skin, she has kissed me over and over

i am a dying bonfire beneath her touch, pink and feverish but
we inevitably drift. thin blade cutting thick rope, and i'm unravelling while spring marches in
with lions mane, and my mother comments with her pollen-tongue about how beautiful the tulips
look—

violets, i kiss them softly. *nanay* glares at me, her brown hair whipping furiously in the breeze, i
am battered, weary, as she notes the disappearance of my "friend". aching, i snip their stems.

what do i say to you, *nanay*, as you sit at the kitchen table drinking bitter

coffee, picking off store-bought *otap* flakes on your floral blouse and cream cardigan,

how can i tell you that a rose has sunken a thorn into my delicate skin and tore my flesh

how do i tell you that a woman kissed the knuckles of my hand and opened my gold core,

that she sipped my soul with venom-dipped lips and i was rendered empty, shakily alone,

i can only stare at you, sitting in a chipped wooden chair, legs and softened ribs bending in
tandem—

raggedly, i breathe. my pink-pale heart beats faster when you turn to me, fire forming in your
corneas and i wonder when the heat will completely engulf you. hate, impassioned burning.

god was real to me when i was two, all baby-blue and periwinkle in the fluorescent lights. over
and over, you'd clasp your hands till i breathed,

inhale, exhale, a new-born fawn squinting towards the sun. eighteen year sobs would rack my
body as i thought of you praying to someone who'd never reach

me. longing for soft flesh and voice, i'd wait for him to tend to my baby-bird heart, chirps of
sorrow awaiting a mother who's never landed in a battered nest—

wisps, of freedom and loss. i sob to a cold zoom call, wiping milk mascara and watery eyeliner
from my cheeks and my advisor murmurs *i'm sorry*. apologies, you shall never utter.

nanay, you will be angry once more. i grew flowers in the empty spaces where you once resided,
i found gold in my letters, sweet apple skin cut in the early morning, a lake with my reflection
in it and i didn't tremble at what i saw—

i am coming home in june with a koi fish tattoo and i will be abandoning your wardrobe

to hang my pride on the summer laundry line and learn to step outside on sweat-sticky asphalt,
accepting the wobbling of a lifetime buried.

the breeze will be soft, sandalwood perfume coating my neck,

and the koi fish at old country buffet

will be taken back to their home ponds, to swim untouched in wide blue water—

i breathe in. out. and i hope that when i ask you,

"nanay, mayabang ka ba sa akin, sapat na ba ako?"

you'll say, *"anak, you are already here. that is everything."*

*Translation Note: nanay, mayabang ka ba sa akin, sapat na ba ako? - mom, are you proud of
me, am i enough?
anak - child*

sentience

Akira Ritos

the moment
the breath
the bending

the soft wailing
the calloused gripping
the childish rubbing

the walk
the step
the stumble

the slow descending
the shattering ribs
the crystalline stars

the opening
the end
the touch

the turning novel
the cutting page
the biting ink

the flowers
the salt
the cinnamon

the sweet laughter
the blooming lilies
the dying tulips

the lights
the eyes
the swallow

the heated body
the bleeding soup
the pressing organs
the take
the beat
the dissonance

the pitiful weeping
the silencing
the _____

the apologizing
the holding
the trying

the knifing pains
the stabbing dreams
the acidic pouring

the grin
the nails
the belief

the graceful stumbling
the confident shaking
the trembling love

the baby
the child
the human

your salivating faith
your unwavering existence
your pink living

getting up
getting up
getting up

i am sorry
i am here
i am alive

the try again
the end is
the start is

to go
to run
to breathe

the inhale
the exhale
the move

forward
forward
forward.

Akira Ritos, also known as akira soh, is a 20-year old queer Filipino, a junior studying English and Creative Writing at the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign. Previously published in *poetically* magazine and forthcoming in *WrongDoing Magazine*, they write about trauma and queer experience through a Filipino-American lens. You can find them tweeting out nonsense at [@akirasohspice](#), or see their face on Instagram [@akirasoh](#)

a survivor's contemplation

Maria Lorena Llagas-Marbella

after Book 3, Episode 8 of Avatar: The Last Airbender

you run your whale tooth comb
through your grizzled locks
for the first time in 50 years

it offers you comfort
and imbues you with strength—
just as tonight's full moon does

you behold yourself in the looking glass,
your withered dignity
sharpened and bleached
in the stark moonlight

you smirk at your monstrous appearance
for you know
what *real* monsters are:
clad in armor
the color of dried gore,
spitting tongues of ebullient flame
as they raze your villages to ashes,
hunting your loved ones down
like animals

your eyes come alive
in a radiant inferno,
all-consuming, unquenchable

not even the coldest waters
from the southernmost tip of the world
could extinguish
what rages within you

for the fury to survive
thirsts only
for blood.

spark

Maria Lorena Llagas-Marbella

the act of creation
is arduous by design

you shape crumbling clay
between your palms
and offer it
the spark of life

with a gentle touch
the broken child
within you
deserves

you carefully assemble the pieces
of that broken boy,
hold him

together
with your blood and sweat,
and mold a warrior-queen—

ferocious
untouchable
bold

offer what you have lost
in the fury of your survival

& breathe life
into the goddess
you have become.

Maria Lorena Llagas-Marbella (she/they) is a trans Filipina/x storyteller and community organizer based in New York City. A poet, a writer, and a mistress of Jollibee-based innuendo, she has featured at venues such as Luya Poetry in Chicago, the Bowery Poetry Club, and the 2019 Asian American Literature Festival in Washington, DC. In 2018, their poem “Death Becomes the Artist as a Young Man” was nominated for the Pushcart Prize.

Twitter/Instagram: [@mmarbella12](#), Facebook Page: [Maria Lorena Llagas-Marbella](#)

Rozlind

Rozlind Silva

I rest my body in porcelain
its empty belly full
of Visayan salt & rose tea
a ceremony of steam
calling warmth into hallowed bones

my name
is a vessel on water
made of rose petals wandering home

to my great-grandmother,
her red roses
she loved even when she forgot
singing at dawn of straight stems and blossom

perhaps this is magic

perhaps power is simply
my skin of rose petals,
remembering to love at sunrise,

& my name—
the way the morning calls it
in my lola’s voice.

ode to my body

Rozlind Silva

to my legs,
I never doubt you when I wake
Your loving marriage
to ground and soil
firm roots in foundation

to my breath,
my busy mind craves your peace—
you're steadfast love to my body

to my faithful fingernails
always growing
against the blade
against the guillotine always
tough enough to hold blood and bone

to the white hair on my right temple
wise
ever-present
a gift from my mother and mothers before me

my blood,
you tireless messenger
you worker bee making honey of dinner
and sharing to each extremity
a river of life

and dear skin,
sometimes
you are the only thing that holds me
in all my rawness.
I praise you, my skin.
You are the easiest home to fix
when it is broken.

body, worship

Rozlind Silva

my body is
a world
of this world
part and whole
both, all, and neither
Total and every,
enough

a solar return,
the lunar cycle
stardust, soil
cosmic, calcium
& water
holy.

Rozlind Silva is a queer, Filipina cultural worker based in the San Gabriel Valley. Her spoken word has been featured on platforms like OneDownMedia and Beats n Poems radio, and published in works such as *Maganda Magazine*, *Overachiever Magazine*, and *Laban Magazine*. Rozlind now spends her time studying for her M.S. in Counseling, and serving as a Community Advisor to local community-based organization, Bayanihan Kollektive.
Instagram: [@r.zzylind](https://www.instagram.com/r.zzylind), Facebook: <https://m.facebook.com/rozzylind>

naked

Janel Schroth

she stands naked at the edge of herself
peeking over the curve of her spine
and how it meets the peak
after a delicious fall

the way her body dips
crevices filled to the brim
with holy water and sweat
and the secrets live there too

these incessant things
knocking down the door at night
begging to be tried on and worn out
like a new dress

she's hungry for quiet
the hours when she comes home to herself
a slight turn of the heel to see
all of the human body's glory

Janel Schroth (they/she) is a writer, zine maker, and community organizer based in Jersey City, NJ. A recent graduate from NYU with a B.F.A. in Recorded Music and Asian/Pacific/American Studies, they are currently a research intern at the Bulosan Center for Filipino Studies at UC Davis. Most days, she is writing in her journal, daydreaming on trains and taking care of her plants. You can find her at [@holy.veins](#) on Instagram and [@HOLYVEINS](#) on Twitter.

afterlife

Czaerra Galicinao Ucol

i have finally met an end where i don't want to go with it,

where my instinct to big bang and
unspeak the universe when we loved to the webs between our fingers
fights knowing that
holding delicate beauty only impresses our life lines into its petals,
crushing it

when i loved hard and fast and unruly, i found comfort in this theseus' ship of a body,
even speeding up the process:

a lob chop, an inked needle, an ignoring of the sense that i was running from something,
no longer hitting pavement for the sake of running itself

i know the new me is coming,
with exfoliation i sugar scrub away the me that snored in your ear and pulled off your blanket in
the night, that heard the "i love you" before you noticed it slip past your lips.

i will miss this body.

finally
a warm quiet,
not threatening to pin break for i'm already wading in it, hugging me;
i want to stay so bad in the leftover ripples and i shake into realization:
i don't have to leave if i don't want to,
don't have to violently rip myself away
because i settled into comfort like i'd always wanted,
finally a nesting doll of me left uncracked.

what a joy, to realize i have no more tension left to let go,
to see the event horizon of us and feel remembering is enough.

Czaerra Galicinao Ucol is a queer Filipino writer from Chicago. They graduated from New York University in 2020 with a degree in Asian/Pacific/American Studies and are the Program and Communications Director of Luya, a grassroots poetry organization centering people of color in Chicago. They are a 2021 Best New Poets and Best of the Net nominee, and in their free time, they like listening to Lake Michigan's waves crashing, practicing martial arts, and trying new fiber arts. Their social media handle is [@czaerra](#)

Nuestra Señora de EDSA

Cristina Legarda

Marchando llevando ametralladoras
o sentados en tanques retumbando por la avenida
los soldados del 23 de febrero de 1986
tenían sus ordenes.

No sabemos si verdaderamente
vieron por encima de la multitud
una mujer vestida de azul
que, convirtiéndolos de nuevo
en hombres ordinarios (pero también
extraordinarios), se dirigió a ellos como
mahal kong mga sundalo —
queridos soldados —

pero en aquel mogollón de gente
sin armas, llevando solo
rosarios y imagenes de la Virgen,
velas y flores, *siopao* y *ensaimadas*
para que pudieran merendar juntos
con los jovenes manejando los tanques

la vieron, claramente; claramente oyeron
la voz suave (¿pero de donde?)
Huwag ninyong sasaktan ang aking mga anak —
No lastimen a mis hijos y hijas —
sus palabras también transformando
la multitud extraordinaria.

Los soldados depusieron sus armas al ver
una verdadera aparición de Santa Maria
en los ojos, las caras, los abrazos
de sus hermanos y hermanas,
comunion de santos, cuerpo de Cristo,
una revolución del corazón
sin derramamiento de sangre.

Our Lady of EDSA

Cristina Legarda

Marching with machine guns
or seated in tanks rumbling down the avenue
the soldiers of February 23, 1986
had their orders.

We don't know if they truly saw above the crowd
a woman dressed in blue who, turning them back
into ordinary men (but also extraordinary),
addressed them as *mahal kong mga sundalo* —
beloved soldiers —

but in that multitude of unarmed people,
carrying only rosaries and images of the Virgin,
candles and flowers, *siopao* and *ensaimadas*
so that they could have an afternoon snack
with the young guys manning the tanks,

they saw her, clearly; clearly they heard
the gentle voice (but from where?)
Huwag ninyong sasaktan ang aking mga anak —
Don't hurt my children — her words transforming,
too, the extraordinary crowd.

The soldiers laid down their arms upon seeing
a true apparition of Holy Mary
in the eyes, faces, embraces
of their brothers and sisters,
communion of saints, body of Christ,
a revolution of the heart
without spillage of blood.

Cristina Legarda was born in the Philippines and spent her early childhood there before moving to Bethesda, Maryland. She is now a practicing physician in Boston. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *America* magazine, *The Dewdrop*, *Plainsongs*, *FOLIO*, *HeartWood*, and others. Instagram handle: [@poetintheOR](https://www.instagram.com/poetintheOR)

The Baptism of Humamay

Maria Prieto

The ink on Humamay's arms looked darker as she walked up the platform. Her rings and bracelets glinted against the sun. Their priest entered with a procession behind him, offering Humamay a picture of a pale woman dressed in blue and white robes, a cross, and a wooden child wearing a crown. Humamay, captivated by the wooden child, relaxed looking at its eyes. She scooped the wooden child from its sides, pulling it in for an embrace, a thunderous applause interrupting Humamay's reverie.

The waves roared ferociously, crashing against the trees. Higher and stronger than usual, our village feared our huts would not be able to withstand the storms expected to come.

"Oh, Hara Humamay," I said, teasing Humamay in a singsong voice. As if expecting me, Humamay quickly walked out, looping my arm into hers.

"Aman Sinaya, stop it. You're the one named after a diwata. Do I start calling you goddess?"

"You're wedded to Humabon. You *are* the queen. Stop being so humble, Hara... Anyway, I come to pray with you. Humabon said you're close and the moon is full and round tonight. We can ask the diwata for her blessing together."

"I suppose that would soothe my nerves... The storms aren't helping at all. Aman Sinaya, what if I'm not ready? What if I can't do it?"

"Now, now, I understand you're nervous. Nobody is ever really prepared for these situations. I'll be with you, making sure the spirits guide your baby to our world safely."

Humamay looked up at the glowing moon, her free hand caressing the growing baby in her belly.

The night the full moon waxed into its quarter, Humamay gave birth to a baby boy she named Uwan. A night raging with thunderstorms, Uwan's cries were only soothed when he rested on Humamay's chest. Humamay wrapped Uwan on her body during the day, telling him stories of our people and the land. Uwan learned the ways of the diwata and how to navigate this world looking at the stars and the moon. When he started walking, Humamay discovered Uwan drawn to the shore. Uwan meddled with sand crabs, using toy swords Humabon made for him. Humamay looked at Uwan full of love and wonder.

One foggy night, Humamay called out to Uwan to pray. When Uwan didn't answer, Humamay rushed to his bedroom, finding the window propped open, small footsteps leading to the ocean. Humamay followed Uwan's last footsteps swallowed by crashing waves. Humamay's eyes darted frantically across the horizon.

"Uwan! UWAN!!"

There were no boats docked on shore, the air too foggy to see past a short distance.

"Diwata of the sea, Diwata Aman Sinaya! Give me Uwan back! He is only a child! Give him back! —UWAN!!!"

Humamay dropped to her knees, fists buried in the wet sand.

"UWAN!!!" She howled once more.

But the waves only beat against Humamay's scraped fists.

Humamay's eyes were unrecognizable as she barged through the door.

"Aman Sinaya! —Uwan has gone out to the ocean. Help me, Aman Sinaya. You are babaylan. Summon Diwata Aman Sinaya! I pleaded for her in the ocean. She didn't answer. I'm begging you, please get through to her. Bring Uwan back."

I nodded, wanting to believe I could do it, wanting to believe I could save Uwan.

Three days of worship, offerings, ritual, even begging, yet the diwata remained silent. I consulted our elders, yet they only gave me their blessings, reassuring me that the diwata will answer when they are ready. After the third night, a cold air entered my room, extinguishing my candle for Uwan.

Uwan was really gone, his body lost to the sea.

When I met with Humamay to deliver the diwata's message, she covered her mouth, shaking her head, sounding like she was gasping for air. The stillness in her posture and the silence of the room pleaded for different news. Humabon placed his hand on her shoulder. His quiet tears fell into Humamay's hair. Humamay squeezed his hand, weeping, reaching for his embrace.

"I'm so sorry, Humamay..." I tried to say, feeling like an intruder witnessing them grieve together. Tears blurred my vision. "I'll give you both some space." I walked away with my head bowed down, questioning my own faith and ability as babaylan.

Humamay refused to leave her room. She lit candles from sunrise until the moon glowed again. Humamay revered Uwan's toy swords, worshipping them like his soul rested in their hollow blades. I sometimes called out to her, offering her food and company, but she blatantly refused. Humabon insisted she needed more time.

"How much longer, Humabon? It's dangerous for her to be cooped up for this long. She doesn't eat, doesn't sleep—"

Three days of worship, offerings, ritual, even begging, yet the diwata remained silent.

“Aman Sinaya, I’m worried too. She insists on maintaining her solitude. Right now, there are more serious concerns that threaten our village—”

“What are you talking about, Humabon?”

“Kilat saw tall boats approaching the island. They do not look like they’re here for trade.”

The day the newcomers arrived, Humabon and his men approached their looming boats with caution and a facade of hospitality. Humabon commanded his men to conceal their weapons, but to be ready for battle. When the newcomers stepped down, our eyes widened at their ghostly faces and excessive clothing. They rode tall horses, looking at us with such curiosity. They laid out gifts in the sand, extending their arms to us. Humabon drew out large knives and shiny medals from the small mound. They whispered among each other, deciding Humabon was the ruler. Humabon then signaled food to be offered, to settle a debt of gratitude for their gifts.

Two of them dressed in white robes with tall white hats, two lines that crossed each other right above their foreheads. This symbol, two crossing lines, were all over their boats, their clothing, their jewelry... They seemed incredibly pleased when the village grew more curious about this cross. They put their palms together, whispering to it in their own tongue.

Humabon opened his home to them, where they met Humamay continuing her devotion for Uwan’s lost body. Startling Humamay, their priest approached her offering gifts. Humamay, exhausted from lack of sleep, didn’t seem to have the will to refuse the unwelcome guests. She shot Humabon a look, but registering the fear she saw in them, softened and played along. The newcomers dropped to their knees, offering a necklace with, again—a cross. Humamay tucked it in her hand, cupping it close to her heart. Pleased by Humamay’s tenderness, their leader offered Humabon and his men tobacco and wine.

Kilat saw tall boats approaching the island. They do not look like they’re here for trade.

Humabon and the newcomers gathered in merriment for a few more nights. The newcomers slept close to their boats. During the day, they surveyed the land with Humabon and a guide that spoke our language with a rigid tongue. We sometimes wondered if Humabon was still putting up a welcoming facade though most nights he looked more enchanted by their wine. One night, their festivities took a more

serious turn. Kilat reported Humabon and their leader agreed to a blood compact. Humabon was seen creeping back home with a cross on his chest. We knew then the newcomers were not leaving any time soon.

The next morning, a platform stood in the village square. Humabon, in the middle,

summoned the village to gather around it. The newcomers sat on decorated seats placed on the stage. The crowd quickly gathered, anxious to find out what the spectacle was about. I looked for Humabon for answers, but instead found Humamay dressed in black and white flowing robes, preparing to walk to the platform. My eyes pleaded for Humamay to catch my gaze. She walked up the platform, and was given a picture of a woman, and a cross. Their priest dipped his thumb in water and gestured their cross on her forehead. What kind of ritual was this? What was going on? I prayed for the diwata to save Humamay from this mysterious enchantment.

But then, they offered her a sculpture, a wooden child. Humamay smiled softly at the sculpture, a tear running across her cheek.

“Humamay! HUMAMAY!!—”

Humabon’s hand clasped over my mouth.

“Be quiet,” he said in a hushed tone, guiding me away from the crowd.

“No, Humabon. You do not get to sacrifice Humamay to your new friends. You think I don’t know you’re making deals with them? I see the gash in your arm. How could you betray your people? How could you pray to their god?”

“Aman Sinaya, I need you to understand. —Yes, I agreed to a sanduguan. The newcomers—they’re suspicious of me. I had to do something! I needed to buy time. They have weapons that can destroy our whole village. I need more warriors... I asked Kilat to visit Mactan. Datu Lapulapu has agreed to come.”

As Humamay stepped down, cradling the wooden child in her arms, thunder roared over the applause.

“Get ready,” it said, “get ready to fight.”

Maria Prieto was born and raised in Manila, Philippines. Her family including herself moved to Southern California when she was 12. She graduated with a BS in Psychology from University of California, San Diego and has a Master’s of Education. She spends most of her time reading, writing, and spending time with her child. Her book reflections and recommendations can be found on Instagram [@mpjustreading](https://www.instagram.com/mpjustreading)



Ophelia

Guide





Nathalie De Los Santos is digital designer and videographer based in Vancouver BC. She is the founder of PilipinxPages, a bookstagram of Filipino book recommendations. Her work appears in *Chopsticks Alley Pinoy*, *Marias at Sampaguitas*, *Ricepaper Magazine*, *Gastrofork*, and *The Vancouver Observer*. She recently appeared on CBC for Filipino-Canadian Heritage month and TFC to talk about Filipino-anime TRESE. She has read as an author at the LiterAsian Festival 2020, BIPOC Writing Community Reading Party, Freedom (W)rites: 8 Filipino Authors, and Sampaguita Perspectives: A Celebration of Filipino-Canadian Writers. She writes SFF and has completed three novels.

@pilipinxpages (all platforms)

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You can purchase these prints on my website: **www.nathaliedls.com**

Bloom

Interview: Wearing Maia, “Mother’s Advice”

Maia Lillford

Girl in the Summer Dress Self Reflects. Chicago Bean.



Artist’s Statement:

About This Fashion Line

Aiming to celebrate bodies in all their glory, Wearing Maia envisioned the versatile and inclusive “Mothers Advice” collection. This playful collection captures all the looks you weren’t allowed to leave the house in. Lace up backs, low fronts and skirt splits, are used to inspire confidence with a sense of cheek and rebellion.

This collection proves that colour is not limited to gender and emphasizes that silhouettes are to accentuate the human form. This collection is about celebrating your inner child and having the freedom to wear whatever your heart desires with confidence.

Coming in custom sizing and prints, for all body sizes and shapes this collection is genderless and celebrates people from all walks of life.

This collection prioritises aesthetics as well as sustainability, so you can ensure the clothes are as good for the environment, as they look on your behind. All scraps are upcycled into matching scrunchies, masks or even nails with any further fabric being repurposed into blankets and teddy bears for abused children.

The past year has proven that life is too short for insecurities. “Mothers Advice” encourages people to ignore snide remarks and step out and be the centre of attention, with no limit of age, weight, race or gender and allows people to feel seen and worthy.

William C. Crawford is a prolific itinerant photographer based in Winston Salem, NC. He seeks to bring the mundane into sharper focus. Instagram: [@bcraw44](https://www.instagram.com/bcraw44)

Q: Your brand is called “Wearing Maia.” How do you balance your personal taste in style while considering a wider audience?

A: I have learnt not to compromise with my style to please others. Everything I make I love and would be proud to wear. I then diversify them to be unisex, or with customisable colours, silhouettes and details to suit any wearer. I focus on loud prints and flattering silhouettes to make the wearer feel confident and comfortable.

Q: What inspired you to create this collection?

A: I grew up in a hippy town in countryside New South Wales and loved to wear outlandish outfits. My mother was always trying to protect me (or herself) from embarrassment. Even on my last trip home she apologised to local shop staff because I was wearing a mesh shirt. “Mothers advice” is a personal joke about remaining childish and colourful, regardless of expectations.

Q: Your collection’s goal is to “evoke confidence and celebrate bodies of all shapes and sizes.” How did you execute this goal?

A: In bright bold colours there is nowhere to hide. You are a giant beacon and can spread light with a smile. Being bold often starts a conversation with strangers and gives the wearer a reason to shine.

Q: Your collection alternates between two bold patterns: black-and-white cow print, and 90’s-esque squiggles on bubble gum pink. The juxtaposition is very striking. What connects these two outfits?

A: Sometimes I draw sketches and create a collection from the designs, other times it works in reverse and fabric inspires a collection. This was one of those cases. I have a large collection of beautiful fabrics that I’m not quite sure how I will use, but were too beautiful to leave behind. From the outside they are not cohesive but for me they are both very nostalgic of my childhood and fond memories, that I would like to bring to the present. They are an extension of the Nostalgia collection which use a lot of colourful jumbo gingham and 90’s-esque prints.

Q: Do you have a target/ideal audience for this collection? As you were creating this line, who did you envision would be wearing your creations?

A: This collection is not for the faint-hearted. It was designed for men, women and everyone in between who love to be a bit cheeky with their outfit choices and even show off a bit of hairy leg. I hope people young and old of any body shape, colour and gender wear these clothes. Even though the concept behind this collection is personal, I think many people can relate. Growing up in a small country town, moving to the big city, international travel and chasing your dreams seems personal to me, but many people have the same experiences. I want the clothes to be individual to the wearer but also apply to a larger audience of people with a similar mindset.

Q: We love that your messaging includes “prioritise aesthetics as well as sustainability.” How does your collection achieve this goal?

A: Wearing Maia creates all small run hand-made pieces, this saves on fabric waste, as it is created on demand. All scraps are upcycled into scrunchies, headbands, masks or accessories and the leftovers are sent to be made into teddy bears and blankets for abused children. This ensures I’m not limited by dead stock, and can keep up to date with fabric trends and changing inspirations.

Q: How can we, as consumers, introduce more recycling and upcycling to our closets?

- Learning the basics of sewing a button, dyeing old clothes or minor adjustments can really prolong a garment lifecycle.
- Try a clothes swap with your friends or have a stall at a local market.
- Locally here in Tokyo, second hand shops will buy your used items for cash.
- Department stores are taking the initiative to recycle clothes with donation bins in-store.
- You could contact your local hobby/craft group or school to see if they have a use for it.
- If all else fails, contact a mechanic to see if they can use the scraps in the shed or dog shelters to use it for dog bed stuffing.

Q: Who would you say are your influences in the fashion and art spaces?

A: I am obsessed with Beate Karlsson’s enormous latex outfits and jumbo feet shoes. Eda Yorulmazoglu, makes insane alien bodysuits and equally fantastical colourful and intricate outfits for them to wear. Long-time lover of Australian artist Ken Done and his summer prints and bold pastel artworks.

Q: What’s one thing you wish more people knew about the fashion industry?

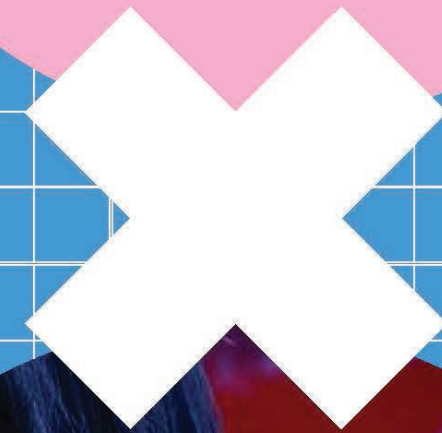
A: Greenwashing is prevalent and you should research big brands and products before purchasing from them.

Recycled polyester saves on raw materials, reduces greenhouse gasses, water and energy and diverts landfill however the fibre loses its strength and has to be mixed with virgin polyester anyway, also a lot of bleach is used in the production process and releases a large amount of microplastics into the ocean through the washing process.

The same can apply to leather and pleather. Leather is a far superior material, lasting up to decades being naturally biodegradable and durable. However, the treatment of the cows is often cruel with only 60% of the hide used due to poor diet, cattle prods, branding marks, insect bites and lesions. Also, the worlds tanning factories are located in China, Brazil, Russia and India and often have unsafe working conditions and result in toxic by-products into the environment. Pleather is lighter, cheaper and far less durable and made from polyurethane or PVC, it releases toxins which affect our air, water and food chain. We are luckily at a stage where cork and vegan leather are an option.



WEARING
MAIA











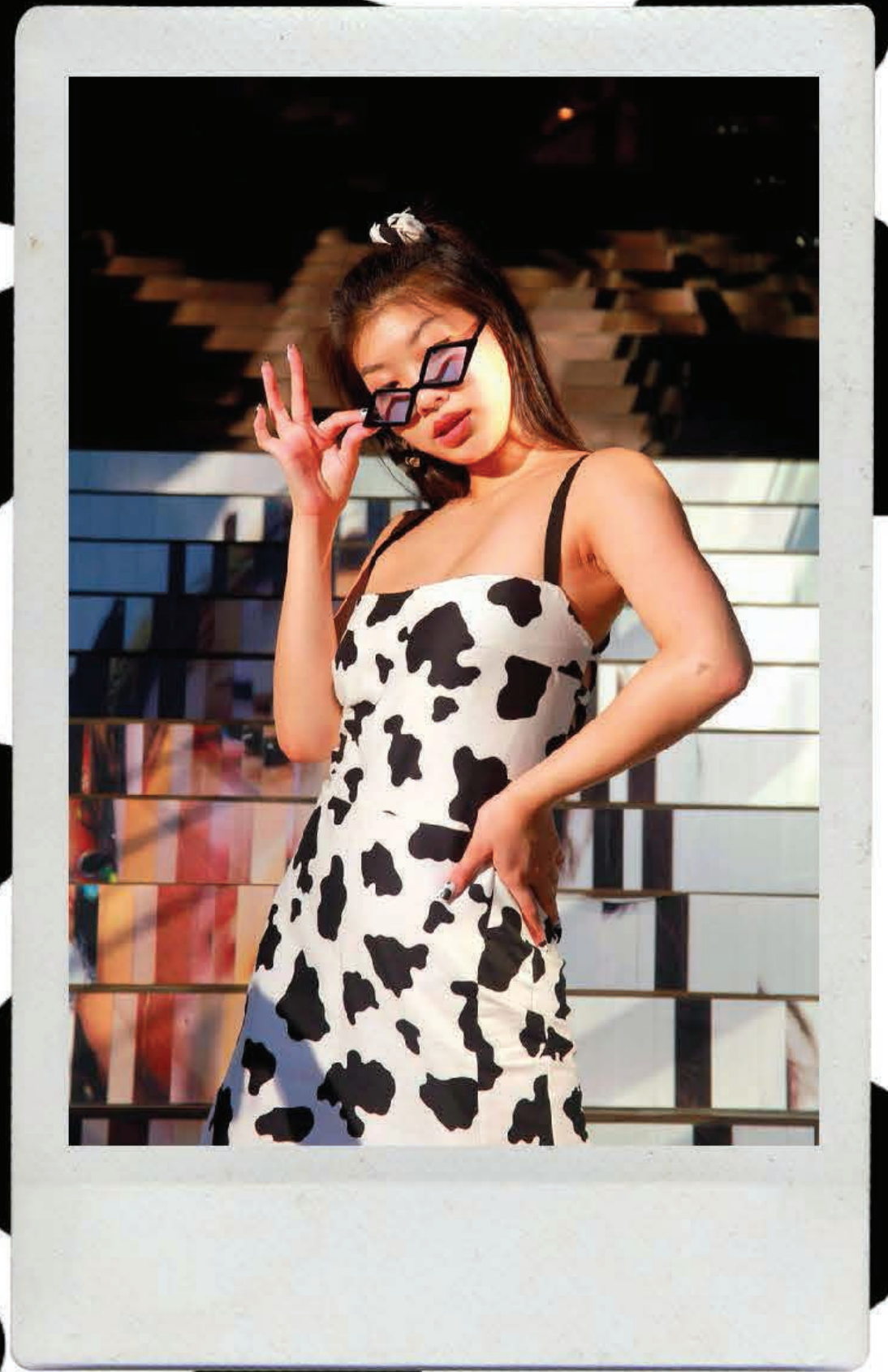
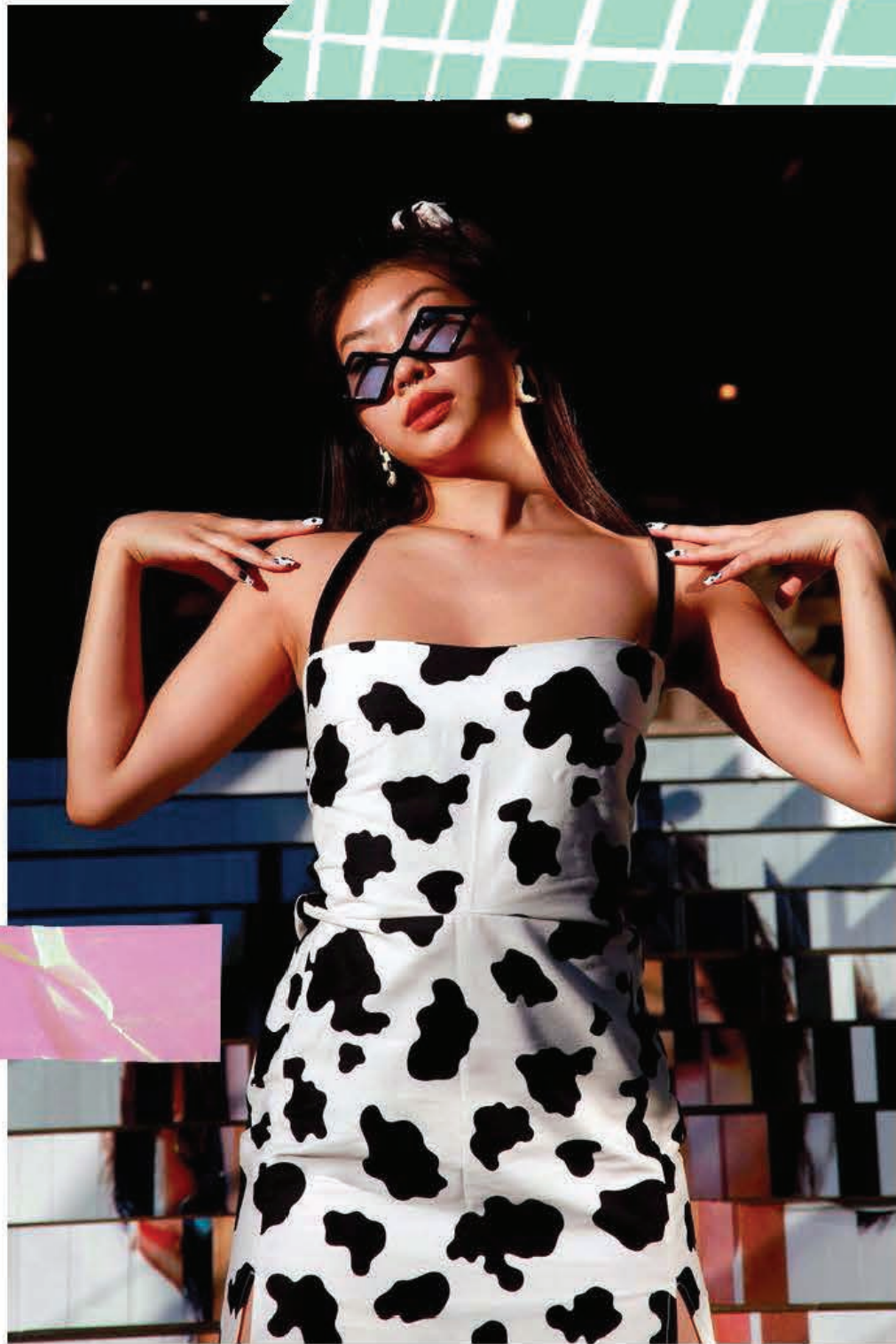


















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Jim Zola is a poet and photographer living in North Carolina.

“Daan Tungo Sa Sarili” (Self Discovery)

Ma Shiela B. Montemayor

There is this Chinese proverb that has been stuck in my head lately. It is a motivational proverb that expresses deep insight about determination and avoiding procrastination. A person must begin his or her journey to reach their goal or destination.

“A journey of a thousand miles, begins with a single step.”

But what if your journey has a reset button? You always start with a single step and will have to start all over again because it's either you don't know what you want or you don't know where to go. Have you ever felt that fear? Have you ever felt stuck in a place or situation where you were left few options to choose from? I remembered the many times I went to school back in college with only 20 pesos in my pocket. I didn't know where to get food during the long hours in University and the dreadful part of it is where would I get the money to go back home? I had to endure poverty, to persist in pursuing my dream of finishing my degree. I had no choice, this will be my ticket to success. And so I thought but I was wrong.

Poverty weakened my ability to follow through with that single step. The tremendous fear of surviving paved the way for insecurities and inferiority complexes, so much so that I failed to acknowledge my accomplishments. I became apprehensive about myself. Reluctant to the idea of growth, of thriving. That state of doubt and self-loathing, hesitancy and indecision. This fear crippled me to not achieve my full potential, it made me a hostage of my own self denial. It pushed me to a place where negativity fostered and this web tangled me in a dark place not knowing how to escape. The victories in life I have achieved were never really honored by me. I didn't even hug or pat myself on the back to appreciate the “me” that others celebrated. I have this never ending saga of “*take a leap*” or “*just stay*.” The worst part is I sabotage my own victory by procrastinating and leaving the opportunity to grow hanging in the air.

The pilgrimage of my self discovery is a work in progress, a continuous process of reflection that yields to self-love, humility and dignity. I can never be anyone but me. However, I can be inspired

by other people's journey and achievements. I can use their story to amplify my desire, to entice my aspirations, and to make my dreams come true, grounded to the reality of life being fulfilled.

Today, I will make it happen.

I will be brave.

I will take that step to move forward,

to take a leap and just let myself free of all the fears,
self doubt and insecurities.

You don't really have to know everything to start a journey anyways. The beauty of inexperience will make your voyage more interesting and colorful. Your passion to change your course will fuel you. Know yourself more and please do not apologize for your “*rough edges*.” It is part of development, a metamorphosis waiting to unfold, just like a butterfly.

Value the talents invested in you.

Spread your wings and know that you are worthy!

That you are significant no matter how people perceive you.

“One Day”

Ma Shiela B. Montemayor

For my dearest Samantha & Ethan on Mother’s Day and always...

I remember the first time I had a glimpse of your face, I was exhausted but the feeling of seeing you after nine months in my womb felt surreal. I cried and smiled at the same time in disbelief, how amazing a woman’s womb can be? To carry life!

I remembered they put you on my chest before I fell asleep, and woke up with chills, shivering under the twofold blankets. I was scared, I didn’t know what to do. Then I remember you, I said my prayers of gratitude to our creator, and fell asleep again.

From then on, I walked with you as I carried you in my arms with a promise in my heart to love you until my last breath.

Yes, I will continue to walk with you in life no matter how long it will take to reach your destination. I will hold your hand for as long as it takes for you to learn about your own journey. I will hug you as tight as I can, as many times as you need it, for as long as my arms can hold on. Until you feel strong to face the world.

There were a lot of lullabies I sang just to keep you sleeping. There were many hand tappings to caress you whenever you felt scared and uncomfortable. There were messes all over not only on your face and hands but in our tiny house as well. Sometimes it was funny seeing you with baby food but sometimes it gets overwhelming.

I had countless sleepless nights especially when you get sick. I cried in frustration of feeling not good enough, of feeling not equipped. There were miserable moments when I felt awful about myself for not knowing how motherhood works.

But I am here with you right now, still working and learning on how to be better at it.

One day I know you will learn how to walk in life on your own, without me.

One day I know you will explore life on your own, without me.

One day I know you will have to let go of my weary arms to face the world on your own, without me.

One day I might not be there in many milestones of your life. I want you to remember that I will keep my promise to love you until my feet can no longer walk, until my hands can no longer hold on, until my arms get weary. Until my last breath...

I love you, that will never change, not even one day.

Ma Shiela B. Montemayor is a woman who embodied resiliency through her life long experience of poverty and underserved opportunity.

She became a woman that she is now because of her loving family, dear friends and those who comes in her life in between crossroads.

She graduated from Pamantasan ng Lungsod ng Maynila (PLM) with a Bachelor’s Degree in Chemistry, far from her creative interests and passion but nevertheless mold her to be chemically entangled to the beauty of creative writing.

You can find her Instagram Account at [@batosayshiela34](#)

Care Givers

Eric Abalajon

The first thing you notice about
people who work with the
institutionalized
elderly, it that they have a
grim sense of
humor.

My aunt
once describe an average
night shift
in a home, to be
smooth, quiet, and simple
checking if the old timers
are still
breathing.

They have
learned to sing, dance, do
stand-up comedy, mostly
the
slapstick kind, so that
the patient could have a little
more reason to take
another meal, another dose of
medication.

None of them thought,
that sterile halls of aged
bodies could contain so much
laughter,
flirting,
and
racial slurs.

The story of the caregiver
who was so beloved by her patient
that she inherited a portion
of his wealth
has mythical status,
though they swear it really happened.

It's impossible to verify, since it's not exactly
material for newspapers.
I hope, my mother added, she got her money
right away, the thing with lived-in care is
you're out of work
when the elderly dies.

There's another narrative
of the senior who turned his
care giver into his wife,
but is received with
disbelief
and laughter.

A job
requirement is suppressing
paradoxes
that haunt your sleep,
like how could children
neglect,
(or abandon, or any
harsher word, in dozens of
mother tongues)
their parents to
total strangers, but then again,
if they didn't,
caregivers wouldn't
be able to provide for their own
children, parents, relatives, friends,
neighbors, back home.

Things never reach philosophical
levels, like is a
longer life a better life?
or can one really
suffer from dementia?
You are not paid to
contemplate the
global flow of care
while waiting
for your next shift.

Now, who would like to hear stories of
nannies?

Stopovers

Eric Abalajon

I

We were on our last coffee break,
I was eating biscuits that are too sweet.
He asked me if I'm exhausted
a few more hours before our 12-hr shift ends.
I said a monotonous of course. After cursing
aloud in the lunchroom where no one understood,
he goes on, when I was in college
I used to lift cases of beer on the side
in a warehouse near our house for extra money.
You should just also eat more.
Small talk was never his thing.
I said if I did, now opening my phone,
I wouldn't have appetite when we get home.

II

He was cursing at the TV
a bit more than usual.
I'm the same age as Rico J. Puno
he said to no one in particular, misty-eyed.
Meanwhile, I knew the guy when he guested
in shows for his humor, not necessarily singing.
I think mixing English and Filipino
in ballads is now campy.
Died in a heart attack, he concluded.
Unable to finish his term as councilor too.
I should take care of my self more.
Instead of sulking, my mother beside him added.
It was an odd way to give homage, to find a will to live.

III

Surprisingly we were not alone
but this might also be the usual crowd

at the memorial park beyond
All Saints' Day. The mid-afternoon sun
is gone though the gloom actually
made the humidity worse.
Is this really take care of? he sneered.
The grass honestly looks decent
but two names painted gold
on the stone tablet could use a retouch.
I grew up visiting this place every year
but I never knew them. Pictures could
have been easy substitute for stories
by they were too poor for those back then.
Maybe being away for so long
eventually makes a cemetery
an ideal first stopover
from the airport. Traffic starts to build
up in the jeepney terminal across the street.
I just want to take a shower and sleep.

Eric Abalajon is currently a lecturer at the University of the Philippines Visayas, Iloilo. Some of his works have appeared in *Revolt Magazine*, *Loch Raven Review*, *Ani*, and *Katitikan*. Under the pen name Jacob Laneria, his zine of short fiction, *Mga Migranteng Sandali*, is distributed by Kasingkasing Press. He lives near Iloilo City. You can find him [@jacob_laneria](#) in Instagram and [@JLaneria](#) in Twitter.

pagbabalik

Aileen Cassinetta

My father returned twice to the river
now steeper than when he first knew it,
its wild waters meandering with the
widest bends. So much of who he was
was shaped by movement outside my line of
sight. So much struggle upriver before
reaching gravel and calmer waters. My
ancestors, the river dwellers, were known
in the history of Song to trade silk-
cotton for caldrons and betel nuts for
iron pots. But so much of how they lived
depended on mangroves and women
warriors who read Kawi and Sanskrit ciphers,
scripts on copper, the bluest star cluster.

Aileen Cassinetta is a Filipino American poet and publisher born and raised in Manila, Philippines. She was named an Academy of American Poets Laureate Fellow in 2021. Her work has appeared most recently in *Poetry Magazine* and *Marsh Hawk Press Review*. She currently serves as the Poet Laureate of San Mateo County, California. aileencassinetta.com

folding

Daisy Miller-Wells

the dull ache of missing your presence
grew to a crater in my chest overnight
the arms i swear i could feel around me
hugged me farewell and departed

it's a bittersweet type of alone
in that it's temporary
this is when we're meant to stand
at disparate ends of the supermarket

and pretend to do our grocery shopping
spam and root beer and L&P
and act as if everything is
absolutely, unbearably normal

and then once it truly begins to feel that way
i will be able to sit through hearing you laugh
without feeling so much warmth and
pain in my chest,

like touching the glowing burner on the stove
after your mother has warned you not to
and doing it again, and again,
when she promises that it will hurt more

(at least i'd feel you at all)

Daisy Miller-Wells (she/her) is a Filipina undergrad student from San Francisco studying English. She is based in Salina, Kansas. Her work has been recently featured in or is forthcoming from *the levatio* and *Yuzu Press*. She tweets [@daisyjademw](https://twitter.com/daisyjademw)

Yesterday, I watched videos on manifesting

Noreen Ocampo

I find a sunny place to survive.
Every morning, a new magnum opus greets me
& I am so awake
& my parents don't have to worry.

My friends are not far away
& if they are, I can drive to them. I can drive.
My friends never have to wonder whether I'll text back
this time.

I love someone who loves me & receive flowers every week
but not necessarily from them
& not necessarily flowers. Sometimes
I buy the not-flowers myself & my windowsill becomes an arrangement.

I cannot believe
how happy I am. I believe how happy I am.
I fall asleep so easily
& even in every dream I survive.

How to Paint Your Nails

Noreen Ocampo

1. Apply two coats of plum polish to each teacup-shaped nail of your left hand.
2. Halfway through the first coat on your thumbnail, jump to lock your bedroom door, just in case.
3. You're shaking. Stop shaking.
4. Focus.
5. Try to paint inside the lines, slowly.
6. When a little plum drop falls onto your desk, smear it away with the soft of your palm.
7. Leave your right hand unpainted and unassuming.
8. Weave your left hand through the air until your nails dry. It'll take longer than you think.
9. Don't mind the fingerprint smudge if you check too early.
10. At dinner, eat with your left hand behind your back, clenched into a beautiful, innocent fist.
11. When your father asks to see your hands, don't show him.
12. But he will ask another time.
13. Your father will tell you not to do it again. He will tell you not to do anything your mother doesn't do.
14. You will remember this comment for the next ten years, at least, so don't spend too much time thinking about it now.
15. Listen to him until I tell you not to.

Noreen Ocampo is a Filipina writer and poet based in Atlanta. She is the author of the forthcoming chapbook, *Not Flowers* (Variant Literature, 2022), a regular contributor for *Mariás at Sampaguitas*, and a blog co-editor and web editor for *COUNTERCLOCK*. She studies English, film, and media at Emory University. Say hi on Twitter [@maybenoreen](https://twitter.com/maybenoreen)

Blessing the rice god statue in the full moon

Christian Aldana

I've come to hate them, the swords:
they appear, forlorn figures
with blades in their backs,
the blindfolds don't help.

Always they are underneath,
behind, crossing
the card that Gericault says represents me.
In other words, my brain is a box of knives:

I have to draw them out somehow.
I forget what else was in the reading—maybe
the Empress, or the World,
—something about friendship, abundance,

something that calls to mind how it feels
to sit on a blanket in the park
under the full moon,
me and Samer and Gericault,

shivering, cos our gay asses didn't think
to bring coats, huddled around a red
pillar candle, red like the stripes in this blanket
I bought on a whim at Seafood City,

talking about loss, and what it's like to be queer
and how much we want to live, and live, and live and move beyond
all that we have been taught.

We dig our palms into the grass
through the blanket, damp with the essence
of what the day left for us to touch,
I touch the smooth forehead

of the rice god, the heat
of the oven still lingering within the clay
I ask my brain, *do you see this shit?*
the way Gericault flips

her hair over her shoulder when she speaks,
the way Samer looks when he smiles, beard lined up, the moon giving light to just enough
of our faces so I can fill the rest in from love.

Christian Aldana's poetry is a safe space for evil and sinister femmes who hate imperialism. When she's not writing poems you can find her in deep discussion about dystopian sci-fi. She is a community organizer currently based in Chicago.

Binyag (Baptism)

Maricris Maliglig

at hinagkan ng dalisay na tubig ang kanyang katawan
(and the crystal clear water caressed her skin)

dumaloy hanggang sa maruming kasuluk-sulukan
(crawled into crevices deep and unclean)

hanggang makaniig ang kaluluwang makasalanan
(melded with her soul stained with sin)

at sa pagmulat kinabukasan
(and when she opened her eyes the next morning)

nasa bisig muli ng kapayapaan
(she's back to the peaceful warmth she's been longing)



Maricris Maliglig (she/her) enjoys staying indoors reading whodunnits, sketching animes, or writing poems. Her works are posted on her Instagram, [@crisemaliglig](#)

