2021 Mixtape: Writers of Colour Audio Anthology

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Contents

3 Amanda Ajomale ... Art on a Canvas
5 Andrea Cabrera Luna ... I Can Break At Any Time/Yo Me Puedo Partir En Cualquier Momento
9 Andrés N. Ordorica ... Today
10 Clementine E. Burnley ... Searching the Archives
12 David Creighton-Offord ... In This Short Life That Only Lasts an Hour
14 Hannah Lavery ... Leaves Fall Gold
16 Jeda Pearl ... When all that’s left is
17 Jess Brough ... Long Disatnce
19 Kamala Santos ... Willow Pattern
21 Karl Sibanda ... THE FREE NATION’S CPN: A Captive o’ People Neutered
23 Leela Soma ... Writing Life
24 Lisa Williams ... Listen
26 Loraine Masiya Mponela ... Ode to Loraine
28 Lyly Lepinay ... Tongue Tied
30 Myla Corvidae ... The Three Parts of Me
32 Nasim Rebecca Asl ... we are nine and playing princesses
34 Niall Moorjani ... Bahut Swadhist Hai: Or, I love you Dadima
37 Nichelle Santagata ... Mirror Movements
39 Nikki Kilburn ... Blood
41 Raman Mundair ... Untitled
42 Roshni Gallagher ... I’ve been hiding
43 Sanjna Yechareddy ... An Ode to my Hair
45 Sean Wai Keung ... Autumn
47 Shasta Hanif Ali ... Sipping on spice infused chai
49 Sophie Lau ... ode to a lost seoul
51 Acknowledgements

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Amanda Ajomale

Art on a Canvas

Your lines and dots mark stories across my skin
From beginning to end
An ongoing expression of my soul's darkest secrets
A message in a bottle
In an undulating river
Shooting stars across the night's sky
Leaving hidden gems above the heads of each passer-by.
I was led, once, to believe you were the marks of a criminal
An outcast of society.
But each time your needle breaks the surface,
I feel another part of me set free.
I think it's the pain I love the most,
The pain that makes you permanent
In your ink I tell my stories
It's where I hold my venom and
Out from my head, my heart, my mind
I draw my greatest wishes and desires to place on my
Body as a forever reminder
That I felt something once.
Something magical, a miracle
That I am still alive
Satiracle, a pinnacle
Of what I have inside.
So here you are, matched with my piercings
To show the world what I cannot say
I'm an addict, I must admit, and very soon I may
Cover my whole body in black lines and dots
For what I cannot put into words.
I thank you for providing art on a canvas
And allowing wounds to be transferred
From the very depths of my soul.
I still don't feel whole
So I must thank the empty spaces, too
For allowing room for you to grow.
And what stories will you tell the world when my soul is no longer here?
“Here lies the canvas of a woman whose art told her to persevere.”
I Can Break At Any Time/Yo Me Puedo Partir En Cualquier Momento

I CAN BREAK AT ANY TIME

I'm a thin round wafer
Without much taste

I live life as a ghost
Without laughing
without crying
without talking to anyone

I have no children
Wafer women have no children

That's how wafer women are

I can break at any time
But I don’t

Drops dampen me
I'm not a rose

I don't have the scent of their heart
I don't have their colour
I lack any grace
I lack any disgrace

I'm a wafer with no desire to be tasty

I don't like having to explain why

I'm a wafer with well-defined margins
   My territory is limited,
   And my life circular

I navigate without words of space
   Nor linear temporal concepts

   Vice versa is a word
   I am passionate about
   Because I don't understand it

   Mine is a small house
   With no reflections in the windows
   And no windows in the reflections
YO ME PUEDO PARTIR EN CUALQUIER MOMENTO

Soy una oblea redonda y delgada
    Sin mucho gusto

Vivo la vida como fantasma
    Sin reír sin llorar sin hablar con nadie

No tengo hijos
Las mujeres oblea no tenemos hijos

Las mujeres oblea somos así

Yo me puedo quebrar en cualquier momento
    Pero no lo hago

Porque quiero que la lluvia me ame
    Y me entiendan las rosas

Yo no tengo el aroma de su corazón
    No tengo su color
Carezco de cualquier gracia
Carezco de cualquier desgracia

Soy una oblea sin la energía para ser sabrosa

No me gusta tener que explicarles a todos por qué

Soy una oblea con márgenes definidos
Mi territorio es limitado y mi vida circular

Navega sin palabras de espacio
Ni conceptos temporales lineales

Viceversa es una palabra que me apasiona
Porque no la entiendo

La mía es una casa pequeña
sin reflejos en las ventanas
sin ventanas en los reflejos
I have come here today
to channel a brewing unease inside me

I have come here today
to sprawl under sun in grass like a snail

I have come here today
to dance in the warm rain, unafraid of wet

I have come here today
to be both mountain and gorse

Here with you, I feel peace washing over me
like amber ochre leaves crunching underfoot
or raindrops emitting spectral rays of light
or a crisp apple bite reminding me, I am alive

I have come here today to be with you
and this is what you’ve gifted me
On the map, daughter countries share
a native tongue, a mother's gift
Time is a hungry gun
Language a broken promise
History, a looted house
where the gate hangs loose
And apples rot underneath crowded trees
Gift in German,
means contagion

I meet Mbuya Nehanda’s severed head,
Nehanda says she
is not the last of her line
She has been Mbuya Nehanda for over five hundred years

You have to take your hat off to Elizabeth
Mbuya Nehanda says
In which tribe does the same blood sit 22 generations on the same throne?
William’blood-strong
My voice shades high
I shake my head to tea
Look at this fucking photo again
I search the archive
I don’t recognise this past

There-there, croon the Queens
They’re bones
I search the archive
Fünfundzwanzig is twenty five lashes
We too, beat our children

The rod is made of hippopotamus skin
I speak a world language
Kolonie and Heimat
I search the archive
For those spared the Prügelstrafe
3600 seconds.

Every second a hundred fragmented thoughts.
A flickering barrage of images.
A snowstorm of sparks
Each fighting for dominance

60 minutes.

Every minute carved into a complex, a conceit, a concept.
A raging internal debate.
A screaming discourse on the absolute.
A bitter dispute with cruel fate.

An hour.
Is nothing until it is a lifetime
Is a million battling iterations
Of a spark that became a thought
That became a concept
That was a picture
That shifts... like sand
Details falling away and changing
To become a memory
That is forgotten
In less than a second
In this short life that only lasts an hour
There is something divine in endings when God comes to sit with you

leaves fall, gold on the ground.

The day the call came, She is gone
I lay on my bedroom floor

like a felled tree staring up
at the irreplaceable.

Should we cry it out to the sky?
Where should we take it- this pain?

I stared
at the empty sky

where did she go?

until it dropped low enough
to meet me, in the December sun.

And as this year closed
a bullfinch came
to sit, beautiful orange
in the bare winter branch.

I lit another candle
to light up flat memory

but the sun cut

in, leaving my ritual
redundant. There is nothing

more sacred, than the new day.
It’s how I move forward

now that she has become
Everything.

The sky is so beautiful
today, I hear her laughter

in it. I hear it all the time.
I hear her in every line.
What is left, when the world is stripped bare, 
innards scooped out, siphoned, bled dry? 
What is left, when they are torn from you, 
by acidic hate, or gulfs of salted water, 
cratered cities, abandoned shafts of fear. 
When all that's left is a silent howl 
to reunite with your departed, 
call up the impossible dream.

Find a way to love 
this earth and her bodies like our own flesh 
tend and soothe, caress them, scrape back to wild – 
have a place to land our own selves 
relearn to traverse this shifting ground. 
Massage it into life 
because all that's left is love, 
though I stand here – alive – asking 
what has it cost the earth and her bodies?
Sit with me
So that I can smell
The dust from where you’ve been.
No one has to tell me
That a journey is in the scent of a place,
And I am happy
That you now know these changing flavours.
I just wish I could have been there
To know them too.

You have returned
in different clothes,
And I have unravelled –
weeks of laundry and old socks
won’t drown us on your return.
They have been put away to make room
for hours of closeness.

Yes, I have unravelled slightly
across this long distance,
so maybe I am different too,
and maybe I have put away things
that you will now not see.
But appearances are not us.
Experiences are not us.
The memories,
though I keep them close,
are not us.
Nor the friends that we know
(though they are loved)
or the miles between our feet.
We are the scent between us,
the force that joins our shadows
and our shadowed silences,
and all the colours between our skin.
I take the tray from your bedside table, 
the pills are gone, the sandwich still on it. 
I stare at the cracks in the plate you repaired, 
and think about how it could happen at any time now, 

according to the average life expected, 
according to friends’ parents already departed, 
according to the dreaded, the unsaid, the broken-hearted. 

It’s turned my world on its head, to see him 
lying, frail and sick in my child’s small bed, and I know 
you’re meant to tell them you love them, before it’s 
too late. But what if that was never the language 
used? What if they never said it to you? 

And now I stand in the hallway accused 
by that terrible day, after you’ve gone, 
of all the things I should have said and done, 
that I should say and do now, but I don’t. 

Oh, sweet, soul-saving grace, let me hear you 
whisper the refrain, that love means to create, 
that deep in my heart of hearts I know, the 
spoken language of love, is only love in parts.
It was your acts of kindness that cried out at every turn, and they were never, ever, expected in return,

It was always this: 
the spicy scent of tiger balm
rubbed into aching shoulders, or, collecting me from town at 4am, when bus and taxi had deserted the streets, or, on the same night, a hot water bottle, found tucked beneath the sheets by freezing feet.

And when I finally had a place of my own, you’d come bearing gold: an alphonso mango, sliced and served on a broken blue plate, and the same plate returned within a week healed, restored, complete, super-glued fractures that whisper to me now love means to create; and recreate.
THE FREE NATION’S CPN: A Captive o’ People Neutered.

Kronos and chromo-slaughter

Robin’s and Benjamin’s worth...

what could these Alexander’s fathom of a dream of Tweed from the Hebrides?

Due to the effects the farmers dream mixed in with mayhem, those rocking through

Queens in sophisticated attire: be biting off this land more than they can eat.
There's a boat that's supposed to be special, something that might save a sea from destruction but the deal between strange concoction;

acids versus alkalinity, the vivid beauty of our social desire

Said a gods simulation.
Leela Soma

Writing Life

Pen poised
Moleskin black, a colourful pen, pretty stationery
the idyllic spot. Nature speaks to me, write
Loch Lomond on a steel grey sky day
misted mountains, the loch a thunderous dark.

Pen poised
words to etch on virgin white, blank now
a dream to write. Walk at the edge of the loch
swishing boats, paddling ducks, nature a balm,
a broken heart, words misunderstood, broken ties.
Listen
To your own blood rise to the occasion
Charge forth to ring the alarm
Disturb the clean line of your smile
You didn’t even clock was false

Listen
To the petit marronage amongst us
A warning in the pitch or tremble
A deliberate slowing down
A pregnant pause

Listen
To the old echoes on the wind
The precious violin with which
Douglass turned tragedy to triumph
In this city of pompous stone

Listen
To the crackle of effigies burning
Over whimpers of hunger
Men hurling carcasses of cats
On the King’s birthday
Listen
To the sons and daughters of Afric
Run under midnight’s cover
Broken collars crash to the floors
Hungry babies wake to cry

Listen
The essence of our hushed languages
Gather in the hum of ancestors
Shielding us from demons
As we walk through graveyards

Listen
To Our Long Rage Acoustic Device
The conch, the drum, the song
Boukman’s words still vibrate in the air
Who is the God who has ears to hear?
Ode to Loraine

despite your difficult circumstances
and everything going on
in this world today
you breathe courage

you inspire, encourage and even lift
those whose shoulders have fallen
make a way where none existed
you are a trailblazer

tackling big issues
you are not afraid
of losing friends either
for having uncomfortable conversations

giving hope and life
to those that feel faint
you touch hearts and minds
with your affectionate smile and love
you are blessed with a heart
bigger than Mount Kilimanjaro
you have made us all believe
that as long as the human spirit lives
life can be turned around
thank you for touching our Souls
this way.
Phone calls cut short.
Short of words, much less patience,
Can't think of the word, so I repeat
‘How do you say?’ in Cantonese
The only phrase I pronounce perfectly.

I don’t question how I can say that term
That rolls off my tongue
So easily in my adopted one
Just not in the one my mother gave me.

Words of the Pearl River Delta once
flowed from my mouth
as a child
Now my brain plunges south
Thirstily
Into a desert
Void of vocabulary.
Seasons gone by,
Downpours of words evaporated.
Dehydrated, my lips gone dry,
Dessicated with dread as I trip over nine tones
As we talk o’er the phone.
My head says it right
My mouth never quite.
I choke.
Once promising seeds of Cantonese words, but
Now only wayward weeds of sounds are heard.

Can’t make my parents understand
Can’t understand why they can’t speak
Like the natives in this adopted land
They made home seasons ago.
You’d think by now their English would flow.

They dug up their roots and planted them here
Yet not once did they fear
That our origins would run out of oxygen.

I hang up.
Given up.
Like the chrysanthemum asphyxiated by the thistle.
We sit in the kitchen while the men wait for masala omelettes and chai. The rest of us gather the kids for school. My aunt shouts from her stove top, listing all the things needed for the backpacks and we are all tired.

I offer to make the chai but I don’t yet know how or have forgotten the recipe again. Grabbing halwa on toast with Scottish butter (my aunt says it’s the best kind) I rush the kids around the corner for school so we can both have five minutes peace from the chaos of an Asian family home.

I return with buttered fingers leaving trails of crumbs through my hair. My aunt looks at me and rolls her eyes. I am a mess, having never learnt the knack of perfection. She hands me a cup of chai as the men leave for work and says exasperated: “Who’s coat is that jacket?”

One of the kids had forgotten and I hadn’t noticed.

“Gymeraf I e?” (shall I take it?)

No sounds surprisingly similar across all the languages I am familiar with. I shrug and grab a paratha with masala omelette and escape to
the local park. I wonder if the ducks in this country like paratha too...

I had just travelled down from Scotland to visit family. Bringing irnbru for my grandfather, butter for my grandmother, butter for my aunt and tablet for the kids. I had a snack of haggis samosa on the train down, carried in a Cymru (Welsh) box and it seems the posh English woman in first class hated my food in all the cultures I am familiar with.

Turns out ducks don't like parathas. I asked them fit like anyway and buy some acceptable food from the local shop. When I return to distribute the goods I watch fat white bodies pedalling through brackish water. Brandishing even whiter ice cream they disrupt the birds.

A man saunters by, notices my Asian sandwich and gravely informs me that “Geese don't eat foreign food.”

I look at him, smile sweetly and say: “Wyt ti o ddifrif?” (are you serious?)

He marches off muttering loud enough to hear “I don't speak foreign either!”

We are in Wales. We are in Wales miri jan (my dear).
we are nine and playing princesses

arms spiralling like sycamore seeds
we careen from one end of the big yard to the next.
grey pleats fan from our empty hips like ballgowns.

scalloped socks sliding down our tiny ankles.
the plaits trailing behind our pigtailed heads are budding wings.
you decree so we spin and spin and spin and spin

until grass is sky and clouds are daisies then we tumble
flushed, limbs skidding on tarmac, knees grazed, breathless, laughing.
if we lay down in our shadows we'd be dwarfed.

on bruised elbows i cross my legs to look at you.
when the war cry breaks out our classmates scatter like dandelion seeds.
i make a wish, then we’re up and running

from the yard, across the field, down the hill
away, away from the power of the boys nipping at our small heels.
i am faster than you, a berry-brown waif
already used to fleeing the thunder of a man
so your fingers stretch for mine
and i pull you behind me
ignore my bursting heart
the mess of moths rising in the dust of my stomach
i can’t catch my breath but as i turn
to your buttercup hair my chin is glowing

you are the most beautiful thing my short life has seen.

and i don’t know what this means so i release your milk-bottle fingers
and let a boy with hair as gold as yours catch you instead.
i’m glad that he’s not old or bold enough to pucker up.
your lips stay apple red.

after school i open my snow white diary, write
i’m scared I might love girls
reread my unjoined letters, bury them
in felt tip, slam shut the book then hide it
in the shadows under my bed.
I fix a picture of her in my mind. Framed by the creams and browns of her kitchen. She is a tiny figure, hunched under a sky blue cardigan and snow white hair. Steam streams around her wonderfully wrinkled chestnut brown skin. A spoon is lifted to taste. Hard to tell if she is pleased.

Soon the table is full of small steel dishes which perfume the room. Daal Makhani, rich and brown, Sindhi Aloo luminous yellow, pale papad, saffron sprinkled rice and clay red murgh masala. All ala Dadima.

“Ab kanah bahut swadisht hai,” I say in badly pronounced Hindi before I have taken a bite because I know that it will taste delicious.

Then I spot a deep pot full of vegetable oil. “You are making puri?!" She hasn't made puri in years. Seconds later there is a divine and yet everyday transformation, as the first dough disk inflates like a hot air balloon into a golden shell, what a smell...Puri.

Before I know it three are placed in front of me and I rapidly stuff one with everything else, fingers burnt for my impatient endeavours.
All worth it though.

The first mouthful.

Bliss.

She doesn’t eat with me, she never does. She instead keeps my food supply endlessly topped up. Years of practice have taught me to strategically announce I am stuffed when I’m only two thirds full.

Because, “You can eat more beta,” she dismisses.

I can, and do, gratefully. A fit to burst belly means much more to her than my thanks.

After, we move into the living room. Same colours as the kitchen.

She seems sad today, I wonder if she is lonely, missing Grampa, both, or neither. I ask her if she is ok? “Life goes on beta.” I think about our relationship, how I don’t really know her.

She excuses herself to pour chai.
She doesn’t really know me, she doesn’t know I’m non binary, I hide it like my tattoo of a selkie (seal and human and wholeheartedly themselves). She would disown me if she knew about either.

She never says, I love you, not aloud.

I want to tell her I love her and bring joy to her life. But words seldom reach her. Instead, all I can do is happily accept the chai given to me and although she doesn’t really know me and I don’t really know her, when she asks if it is good, I sip.

And say,

“Ab chai bahut swadisht hai Dadima.”

It tastes very delicious indeed, or, I love you too.
I've been dancing to
My own love songs
With Myself
In front of the
Mirror
Each day.

I dance as if
I am two lovers within Myself-
One lover in the past, and
One lover in the present.
Both of Me dance around
Each other, endlessly, trying
To make sense of My connections
And disconnections-
Meeting and leaving at
Different stages of
My life.
I see My entire journey
In the Mirror.
I see
The severs
And sealings
That are beyond
Skin deep.

I continue to
Embrace My new tempo
With whichever way I flow.

I stare at Myself
In the Mirror and
Remember to
Keep loving
Myself and
Keep Moving
Myself
Each day.
Memories swirl like tea leaves in yellow breasted finch coloured water,
I bleed floating beneath this heavy soil,
The creep of loneliness tapes my eyelids shut
An Alaskan owl chick eats three lemmings a day
A tree wrenched out by the storm
Survival a cold-blooded business.
Unravelling the hurt with every stitch I weave together the black mist of this reality.
A base mix of unlawful foundations, and opaque truth built an unsafe home
Generations lost rattling around endless grey walls,
Nature dictates cycle, the sacred roots of our stories maimed, women sacrificed,
A silent agony of muffled screams; each sorrow committed to marking the typography of its painful history.
Our wombs fill their cups with rivers of blood, washing away their sins keeping their secrets buried,
Freedom guarded; forced to pass down a legacy of physical protection and heeds from the cauldron of psychic wounds.
Her story of vulnerability and shame, a source of power, suspended between domination & resistance, we clamber for luminescence, A living carved from the heroine's journey of reclamation innately born into our blood. Patiently unravelling the knots, the language of emotion a rupturing storm, When I was buried deep where eyes can't pry matriarch you were there to hold my hand A mast to help me stand a force pushing one foot in front of the other Sisters in arms you fought the battle when I was bruised and defeated You spoke strength into my ears when I felt only loss and lived in scarcity Wrapped me in blankets when I was withered and torn by loneliness. A prison of surrender, release from death, reborn into the abundance of our sacrifice.
Dripping,
   like a ripe mango
you bring them to their knees
silk chakra, fur orchid slit
discerning, generous, embracing-
home to deepest desire

you ooze reviving nectar
for lucky tongues who feast
you deserve the
mouths that worship you
you deserve the
the deep, searching want
and butterfly fingertips

yoni, of mine
I covet you
I protect you
I gatekeep
   for you
I tend to you
I breathe deep for you.
Come, come, come
The ridge of the fish bone
mountain rises in air out of my dreams.

Sand dunes fall
in the grey stacked roof of the city.

The light shifts and catches
the bright belly of a gull. I've been hiding –

out in the hush and howl.
Deep in the splintering sea.
Sanjna Girish Yechareddy

An Ode to my Hair

This is an ode to my hair
my hair
I mean, my mother’s hair
once my mother's being
covered in amniotic fluid
My hair
is still
my mother’s.

I discover this
when I declare my will
to sever all strands
from my scalp
leave behind nothing
Her rage burns through histories on my head
preserved in fingerprints.

Once in an operating room
Mother faced her professors
as they dissected her short curls
instead of cubes of cancer
You cannot cure as a woman
if you don’t look like one.
Now illness is the air
that carves my mother's body
blossoms of exhaustion
planted in open incisions
we heal, if only for a brief moment
when her rusty needle fingers
string coconut oil crystals
on my long, black tendrils
they flower over my shoulders
because my mother wills them to
growing from roots to nostrils
from lungs to nails
slippery regeneration.
weaving together
our shell-skins.
To claim
that this body is my own
is to forget this.
Is there nothing left
to bind us now
than keratin?
these train stations are full of leaves
and so are the people
while above them small chattering birds fly through
floating thoughts of times spent with each other
of memories of kisses of warm communal meals

i remember
you told me that day it was true – that leaves are meant to fly
not be crushed underfoot

today i had to tell myself it was true – that at some time before all this
we sat together on the same seat-couplet on a train
heading for a beachy daytrip far away from here

if i was a leaf i wouldn’t want to be a train station leaf
to either get in peoples way or to be swept away
no if i was a leaf i would want to be the leaf you picked from the ground that day
the leaf that blew into us as we walked together beside the rickety promenade
after i scared away the dead-eyed seagull staring us down

you remember
that leaf you placed so carefully in your bag
telling me that you wanted to take it home with you
as an object to remember
our universal truth
about leaves
Sipping on spice infused chai

Seasons changed around him
undisturbed craggy hills above thirst quenched fields
dusty sunbaked plains cracking
under each bare footed step

One chilly bittersweet winter
reluctant and torn
the motherland frantically whispers
of families and kinship,
of dreamless nights beneath the stars
twinkling under the wisdom of ancestors

Of evenings sipping on spice infused chai
brewed over an open fire,
the infusion of aromas wafting over age old traditions
gently warming the chills of the elders tales

But lands afar summoned
with endless promises in an unfamiliar tongue
of bountiful opportunities,
prospect and securities
for the family yet to be
Here I sit decades later
at the end and beginning of a pathless journey
loosely fitting around the prism of cultures
lost in translation between a myriad of languages

Yet, I see no stars in the skies
but wisdom, your wisdom, finds me in other ways
deep in salah, when I fall into sujood
with open stretched palms,
in the silence of sabr

In fragments of memories
of forgotten tales and tribulations,
in the twinkling of young eyes
reflecting kindness over generations

As I sit sipping on spice infused chai
with a shortbread on the side,
it suddenly makes perfect sense
that although you’re neither here nor there,
You are in fact, everywhere
feel your pull
tu luz
too loose
for me to comprehend
close my eyes
take me back to when
persimmons and pomegranates stained your skyline

oh you are
a dream i swirled in my cup
sticky sweetness a testimony to times gone by
skeletal towers presenting a path to the sky
i sipped you to the very last drop
consumed you all but i couldn't stop
ta chaleur dans mes os
a memory i can't let go so
you linger on my tongue still
일출
homogenous people
leave your dreams at the door
know you can never wish for more
carried down cancerous capillaries
defined by dystopian reality
сейчас сижу у твоей реки
i see
everything we lost

서울
i miss your soul
how many spirits have you destroyed?
pageantry and puppetry we are but your toys
frameworks for existence pressing in
turn to debased desires
origin of sin
dévoyés
tous noyés
why wait when we know
our bodies will sink to the depths below
nourish otters we never knew existed
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