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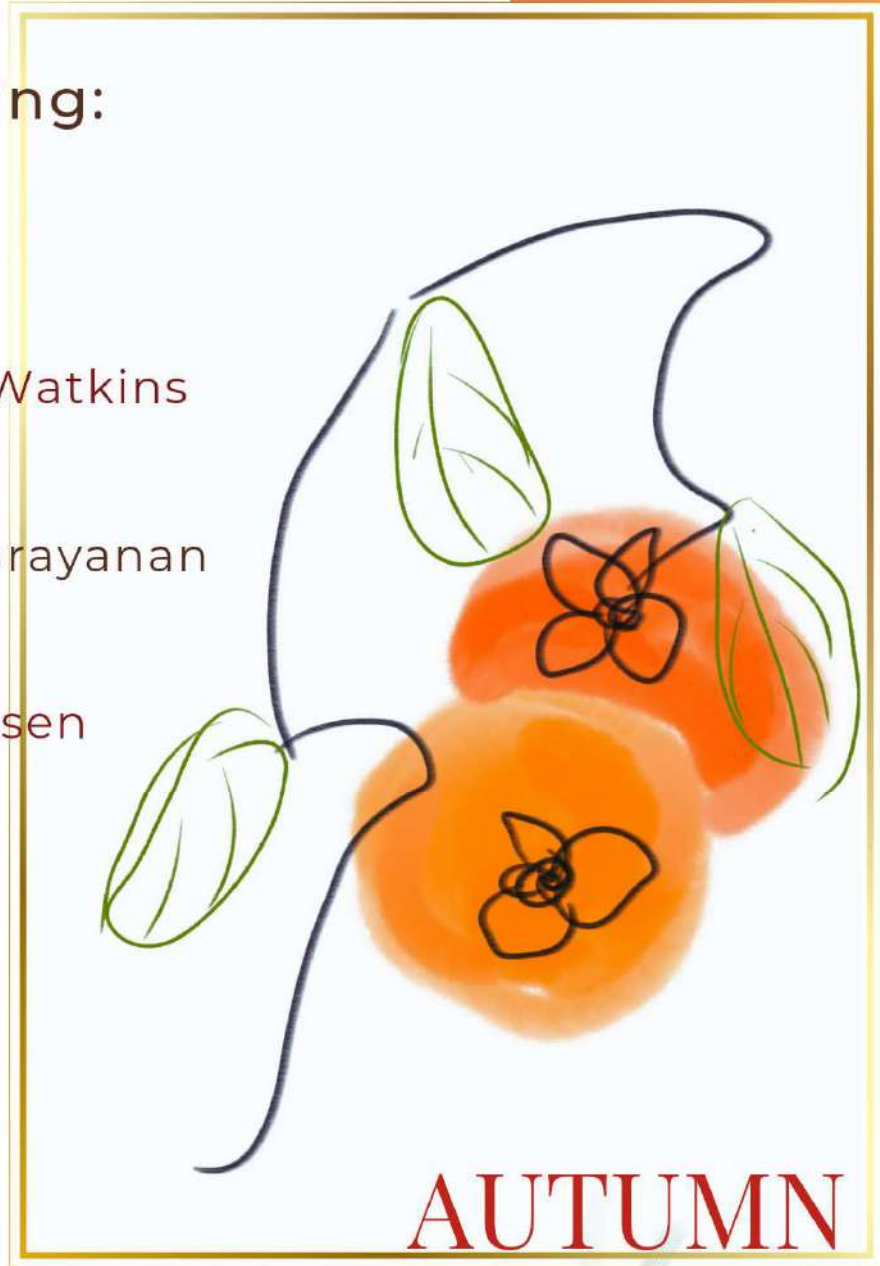
a journal of food writing and art

featuring:

Rebecca Watkins

Priya Narayanan

Lau A. Larsen



AUTUMN

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Description

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

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EDITOR'S LETTER

Autumn 2023 [Volume 2, Issue 2]

Dear readers,

Welcome to the Autumn Issue of **Amaranth Journal of Food Writing and Art!**

Autumn signals a season of bewildering ambivalence — a time of abundance and loss; of taking stock and letting go; of rest and restlessness.

The bittersweet ambivalence of the season tiptoes its way straight into the pages of this issue. The taste of heartbreak intermingles with delicate epiphanies and serendipitous encounters. Memories of mirth restore the oft-faltering faith in life and searing agonies mellow into quiet understanding.

Kindness wins. The simplest pleasures return as gifts of life-affirming wisdom.

And the mundane surprises with its hidden magic.

From this rich and intriguing assemblage, we have chosen three compositions (one from each section: Prose, Poetry, and Art) for their delightful, sensitive, and thought-provoking portrayal of our everyday transactions with food and eating.

Rebecca Watkins' creative nonfiction essay "Chiles as Cure for Heartbreak" is an ingenious and lyrical exploration of food that, with boundless empathy, feeds the soul.

In Priya Narayanan's poems "Secret" and "Where She Lives Her Life," food and eating take on darker overtones. The sensuous clear-sightedness of the poems makes food the conduit for powerful emotions.

Lau A. Larsen's photoessay "Unseen" leads us into the enchanted territory that lies beyond the ho-hum facade of the ordinary.

This issue has been put together with a lot of love and care. We hope that it delights and enthralls in equal measure.

Thank you for being here.

Bon Appétit!

Satarupa Sinha Roy

Founder & Managing Editor

Amaranth Journal of Food Writing and Art

Prose



Chiles as Cure for Heartbreak

Rebecca Watkins

I.

“This one,” Ana says, “we eat for sadness,” and she bites into the body of a reddish brown chile.

She hands it to me, and I nibble along the edge. Dark and earthy. A slow burn begins in the back of my mouth, then radiates forward. Is this the taste of heartbreak? Deep, searing, and unpredictable in its delivery of pain?

My first morning at the hostel, I awaken to singing. On the street below, an old man with a hunched back and a straw hat leads a donkey, his cart brimming with mangoes. When he sings, a lifetime of grief leaves his body with each note.

II.

“We eat these when we want to be happy,” Ana says gesturing to the soufflé cup of green diced chiles. She squints with a smile as she chews. I dip my spoon in and slide it between my lips. It is immediate. A flame igniting – fast and combustible – along my tongue. I gasp and laugh. For a moment, I forget why I ran to this city of flowers nestled in the mountains of Mexico. I forget the man I left in New York...forget how he said he didn’t feel free anymore, not with me.

Every day, I walk to the cathedral in the city center. Inside the cool interior, women bend over rosaries. Their prayers whisper and tumble like ocean waves. Novena candles flicker across the serene faces of saints. Sitting in a wooden pew, I cradle the parts of me that ache. I wait until the tightness in my chest unravels into ribbons of loss that I can name.

Had I tried too hard or not enough?

III.

“Here,” Ana says, tapping her slender finger on the cup of yellow chiles. “When we need to wake up, we eat this.”

We put the chiles in our mouths at the same time. The taste is sharper, an intense lick of heat. Electric. I lose myself. I am only the flame on my tongue. Sweat trickles down my temples.

I’ve been there for three weeks when a handsome man, younger than me, with eyes the color of the molé negro¹ I bought in Oaxaca, says if I’d like to see more of his city, he’d show me. We amble along cobblestone streets hugged by Spanish architecture. When the afternoon monsoon pours down, we sprint through puddles to crowd under an awning with other bodies smelling of cigars and jasmine. A Mariachi band in full regalia begins to play. Women holding children on their hips and men folding damp newspapers listen while streams fill the street. The young man whose name sounds like music, whispers in my ear. He runs his lips down my neck, tattooing *bella, hermosa*. I close my eyes. Mist moves in the mountains. I am burning. Rain pounds like drumbeats above us.



Rebecca Watkins holds an MFA in poetry and an MSEd from the City University of New York. She is the author of the chapbook *Field Guide to Forgiveness* (Finishing Line Press 2023) and the poetry collection *Sometimes, in These Places* (Unsolicited Press 2017). Her creative nonfiction has been shortlisted for *The Malabat Review*’s Open Season Awards. Rebecca has been published in *Sin Fronteras*, *New Feather’s Anthology*, *The Roanoke Review*, *Anderbo*, and *The Red Mesa Review* among other literary journals. She is

currently based in the Hudson Valley of New York. More of her work can be found at www.rebeccawatkinswriter.com.

¹ Pronounced MOH-lay, molé is a Mexican sauce, which depending on the individual recipe, can be made with a mixture of dried chiles, tomatoes, fruits, spices, nuts, and sometimes chocolate.

Eine Postkarte aus Verdun

William Berg

Verdun, 16. Oktober 1916

Meine liebste Marie,

Es ist wieder eine Oktobernacht und ich bin weit weg von dir. Weit entfernt von allem, was ich kannte und liebte. Heute Nacht ist die Erde vom Mondlicht durchflutet. Die Waffen sind verstummt. Keinen Ton. Nur der Wind in den Bäumen. Der Wind streicht stolpernd über die Wiesen, schwer vom Duft von Frühlingsblumen und toten Männern.

Mein Bunker (von wo aus ich Ihnen diesen Brief schreibe) ist von einem Büschel Wildblumen gekrönt. Marie, ich sage dir, es ist sehr schön! Mein Freund Otto liebte die Blumen so sehr – sie erinnerten ihn an sein Dorf und die lila Meilen, die sich darum erstreckten, so weit die Augen reichten. Er bekam eine Kugel in den Kopf, der arme Otto, weil er die Gefahr ignorierte, die draußen im Freien lauerte. Er wollte die Blumen im Mondlicht sehen. War er dumm? Oh, das war er auf jeden Fall. Wir sind alle dumm und eitel, mit unseren erbärmlichen Waffen, die oft mit Gliedmaßen verwechselt werden, und versuchen verzweifelt, aus dieser Hölle herauszukriechen.

Ich kann nicht anders, als an mein Zuhause zu denken – Oma, Mama, Papa, Vera, Norburt, der alte blinde Hund...wie sehr ich mich nach einem ganz gewöhnlichen Tag mit der Familie sehne, die ich liebe. Nur einen einzigen Tag, den ich mit meinem Vater auf den Feldern oder beim Erledigen von Besorgungen für meine Mutter verbracht habe; oder Vera und Norburt beim Spielen im Garten zusehen, während der Geruch von Kartoffelsuppe aus der Küche weht. Ah, die Kartoffelsuppe – der Duft von Wärme, von Liebe!

Oma nannte es Pälzer Grumbeersupp. Sie kombinierte es oft mit gedämpften Knödeln, und als Vera sich schon nach einem Löffel weigerte, von ihrer Suppe zu essen, erzählte sie ihr die Geschichte vom Suppen-Kaspar. *Du willst nicht so enden wie Kaspar, oder?* Und Vera würde ohne weitere Verzögerung ihre Suppe essen.

Ach so, ich wäre nicht schlauer als Otto – allein für diese Kartoffelsuppe. Ich würde glücklich vergessen, vorsichtig zu sein – wer würde das nicht tun? Während ich in meinem Bunker liege, von zu Hause träume und mich nach einer Schüssel dampfender Kartoffelsuppe sehne, stelle ich mir vor, wie ich in meinem Bett einschlafe, während das Holz im Kamin knistert. Ich träume vom Ruhm, von den Belohnungen dafür, dass ich so mutig mein kleines Leben für unser glorreiches Heimatland riskiert habe. Ich träume von einem glücklichen Leben mit dir und unseren Kindern. Ich träume davon, am Feuer zu sitzen (unsere Kinder liegen bereits im Bett), deine Hand in meiner und über die glorreichen Tage zu reden.

Aber nichts davon fühlt sich für mich in diesen Momenten so real an wie der flüchtige Geschmack von Kartoffelsuppe in meinem Mund. Es reizt mich mit dem einfachen Trost, der natürlich unerreichbar bleiben muss. Keine Tapferkeit, kein Ruhm kann die gleiche Befriedigung bieten wie eine Schüssel Kartoffelsuppe.

Manchmal ist nur ein mondbeschienenes Stück Wildblumen oder eine Schüssel heiße Kartoffelsuppe alles, wofür Sie zu leben und zu sterben bereit sind.

Alles Liebe,
dein W



William „Willie“ Berg ist ein pensionierter Schullehrer und Hobbykoch. Er schreibt, liest, und kocht gerne für und mit seinen Millennial-Enkeln. Willies Großvater war ein Kriegsveteran. Sein Kriegstagebuch hatte er seinem einzigen Enkel vermacht. „Eine Postkarte aus Verdun“ ist von Kriegereignissen inspiriert, die in diesem Tagebuch beschrieben werden.

Andalusian Alchemy

Katharine Weinmann

I gazed into the predawn sky and saw Venus burning bright. My jet-lagged eyes took in the hazy outline of the Andalusian hills. My travel-weary body felt the warmth of a late summer breeze flutter my white gauze gown.

A writing retreat – the pretence to come to Spain.

A week in the pink-stuccoed villa – designed as the family home and cooking school – nestled in the forested hills northwest of Sevilla. Its owners, long time British expats with their hearts firmly planted in Spanish soil. Consummate hosts with their elegant hodgepodge of inherited English antiques, acquired Moorish textiles, and Spanish furnishings and ceramics.

A labyrinth of terraces and balconies, salons and reading rooms, bedrooms and bathrooms – splendidly composed of colour and texture, radiated beguiling stories of myth and history.

Six women gathered from around the world – we'd write in little red jot books impressions gleaned from the sights and the sounds, the aromas and the flavours as we sauntered every morning into local Andalusian villages. Breakfasting on freshly squeezed orange juice and steaming *café con leche*, or sipping *coppas* of chilled, pale golden *manzanilla* sherry, a refreshing pairing with the myriad tastes of *tapas*, we'd make gustatory notes embellished with vivid images and enticing fragrances. Red radishes as big as fat thumbs in a bowl of golden green olive oil and emerald *padron* chiles fried whole, sparkling with flakes of sea salt. Toast smeared with seasoned tomato sauce, Spain's take on Italy's *bruschetta*. Smokey olives. Pungent, aged *Manchego* cheese. Lightly battered fried sardines, the best ones small and crisp, eaten whole. Peeled, pink-shelled shrimps with heads intact, releasing their briny sweet juice when chewed.

Late lunches under the wisteria-covered pergola, where majolica platters of artfully arranged vegetables and salads – vibrant and glistening with ubiquitous olive oil and chopped herbs – waited for our forks. Grilled smoky-sweet ribs and savory sausages rendered from Iberian pigs that gift the world with its famous *jamón*. Baskets of crusty bread still warm from the stone oven sopped up oil and juices. Chilled wines from the cellar complimented the meal and made for a languid transition to siesta.

On afternoons, sitting together against the patio's cool stone walls, or in the studio overlooking the infinity pool, we'd write in our big black journals images from prompts. Memories of our mothers' cooking – what it meant and how to be a writer – what a line of proffered poetry evoked. Lazing on chaises we'd share our efforts. Floating on the pool's crystalline azure surface, silent thoughts dipped and dived like the swallows swooping within the chestnut groves that fed the Iberian pigs.

With a waxing moon and the Milky Way adding to the lantern-lit ambiance, the late night dinners combined the best local ingredients into multicultural, multicourse extravaganzas, expertly concocted and exquisitely plated. Again, the wine perfectly matched, leisurely corked and generously poured.

Both vivid and nuanced, these impressions travelled home with me, and like Jerez sherry aged for months in wooden casks, needed time within to mature. Trusting creativity's alchemical magic, whether in food prepared or story written, produced an energy to nourish and sustain long after the table was cleared, bags and books packed, goodbyes given.

Now, years later, when I gaze into the predawn sky and see Venus burning bright, I readily recall that Andalusian alchemy – then conjured on my plate, now inscribed upon this page.



Katharine Weinmann is a seeker whose reading of poets and philosophers shapes the container from which her words and images emerge, revealing beauty in her imperfect, sometimes broken, mostly well-lived and much loved life. An intrepid traveler who enjoys sharing good food and fine wine with family and friends, Katharine loves to concoct one-off “silk purse” meals from kitchen leftovers, leaving behind her signature messy stovetop, much to her husband's chagrin. A published poet and award-winning photographer, she blogs at [A Wabi Sabi Life](#) and is co-editor of the online quarterly, [Sage-ing: The Journal of Creative Aging](#). Katharine lives with her husband on the Canadian prairies, but her heart is also home on the shores of the mighty Niagara River, and in Italy. *Che bello!*

The Saké Man

Herbert Herrero

I arrived on a Thursday afternoon. Habit prodded me to begin my usual conduct of a recon. The urge to walk around and explore was far stronger than the urge to catch up on lost sleep. My feet brought me to a network of alleys – tidy, and free of the acidic odor of the ones we have back home. It felt like I was strolling in a maze, where every turn looked the same – indistinguishable to a first timer. Rows of small establishments were packed side by side, built to property lines, and almost to the curb, an indication of the value of space on this side of the city. Quiet but busy, the business hour was just about to start.

The transformation took place at dusk. The surroundings came alive in vibrant color, in anticipation of the approaching night. Once the lights were turned on, objects appeared to glow: banners, lanterns, signboards, standees, parked bicycles, parasols – a welcome gesture to visitors. Though none of the storefront markings were discernable, I knew I was where I wanted to be. The muted atmosphere was gradually replaced by muffled voices of locals who trickled in from nearby offices into *izakayas* of their choice. Having no particular preference, I allowed myself to be drawn to a few – looking through gaps in *shoji*s, to get a glimpse of the ambiance inside. It did not take long for some of the *izakayas* to be completely filled, not only with patrons but also with cigarette smoke.

I peeked into one which did not stand out – more discreet than the rest, and less noisy. It was narrow and deep, and could hardly fit in a group of twelve, laid out in such a way that the bar and stools converged on one side to allow movement on the other. The interior was simple and traditional – mostly, of varnished wood. Frames were hung on the wall, including a poster which resembled a calendar. There were just two men inside. One was standing behind the bar, while the

other, presumably, a customer, a decent-looking gentleman in a blazer, was enjoying his evening meal, a beer, and a cigarette. I stepped in, and immediately inquired if they served *saké*. I had interrupted their conversation. My sudden appearance was as unexpected as my order of the drink.

I exchanged short introductions in English with the seated fellow – where I was from, where I was staying, what has brought me here to Shimbashi. The other man spoke just the vernacular and could therefore only listen.

Longing for a traditional ceremony, I intently observed the presentation as the chopsticks, along with their holder, and a damp cold towel were placed on the wooden counter. The appetizer was pickled and, most certainly, was from the sea. I was not too picky as to what went with the drink; it was *the drink* that was of paramount importance. The *saké* was served with both hands, with utmost care, in a glass cup and a *masu* – filled to the brim, almost overflowing. I held it with both my hands to show my appreciation for the service, and took a measured sip. The aroma and taste were distinctly sweet – not too fruity – and smooth to swallow.

Just as I was savoring my drink, the other customer left, leaving me – my cup still half-filled – with the man at the bar. A drink is only as good as the company it is shared with. There was silence as we both realized that we didn't share a common language and that there was but little room for conversation. No sooner than another sip though, the solution flashed simultaneously in our minds: technology it was, that could bail us out of this impasse. The translations were not precise, of course, but good enough. We talked about our kids, the length of my stay, and of the years he has owned and operated the bar. He reached for a different bottle, which I gathered to be of a more premium grade, gauging by the way he held it. He served me another cupful, and then poured some for himself, too. I have taken it to mean that I was no longer a mere customer, a

visitor, a stranger, or a random traveler. I motioned to raise our glasses, as the gesture is universal, in recognition of the moment. A drink, like laughter, is a unifying language.

He handed me a cardboard fan as a giveaway, a modest souvenir. I was overwhelmed when he handed me my bill. I noticed that it was only for the price of a cup, a single serving. I looked at him, gave a simple nod, as if to bow, and acknowledged his hospitality. I drew out my camera, and without any hesitation, he acceded to the request. A man in his 70's and lightly built, as I figured, he wore a blue shirt and a jumper. He rested both arms, hands clenched, on the counter in a pose, with piles of bowls, saucers, spoons, cups, condiments, and trays lying around; behind him, a cupboard, a shelf, a fridge, a toaster, a chiller, and a white board hung on the wall. Wrinkled face, white hair and all, he did not bother to remove the handkerchief on his forehead. His confident bearing showed in his full cheeks and round chin. When he smiled, his eyes almost disappeared in the wrinkled folds of his skin. But he was unable to conceal his fondness for our acquaintance when we shook hands.

It was only eight o'clock when I stepped out of the *izakaya*. Despite the effects of the drink, I could feel the cool breeze on my skin and, in a leisurely saunter, found my way back to the hotel. The night did not disappoint. Borders were levelled, curiosities satisfied, palates made glad. I never got to ask the man's name, nor did I get back to visit again. I kept his photo though, and took fond sips of saké whenever I could.



about his hometown.

Herbert Herrero lives in Cebu City, Philippines. He was a fellow for Creative Non-Fiction in the 2019 National Writers Workshop at the University of Santo Tomas. His works have been included in the 39th issue of the *Anak Sastra Literary Journal*, the 16th issue of the *Likhaan Literary Journal* of the University of the Philippines, and recently in the 9th issue of the *Heart of Flesh Literary Journal*.

He is fond of literary sketches; rarely says no to a good drink, coffee, or conversation, and aspires to publish a book

Creme Earl Grey

Rebecca D. Martin

It isn't so much the taste as the smell of the Earl Grey tea – hot and sharp, wafting from the top of the blue-branched mug I bought from my friend's sister in Asheville. Fierce, that scent, and colored with grief because I can never get past leaving places and people behind. At any given pouring, the lemon-tinged taste of bergamot might take me anywhere: to Athens, Georgia, or to the angst of twenty-something days with a friend who's still my closest one, who I haven't seen in more than eight years; or to Oxford, England, because what other kind of tea are you ever going to order from the Alice in Wonderland shop that used to sit on Cornmarket Street? I was back last summer after a twenty-year absence; the shop is gone.

Or else the class I taught just this past autumn, taught and left, always carrying into my modular classroom a paper cup of Earl Grey from the modular drive-thru five minutes away. I can't order the same drink from that place anymore; that particular blend brings to mind the student I couldn't understand, couldn't reach, couldn't help but feel hurt by. He was expelled the day after I stopped teaching. His failure and mine loom too large in the scent of the strong, flat Harney & Sons bouquet.

No, this blend, today, the one with lavender, and I am in Blacksburg, Virginia, and you are the friend I wish I had given myself to – always serving tea, always the cut lavender in a milk glass vase on your kitchen table, or some other blossoms you had grown in your back garden. Always a baby napping in the room next door that you'd painted purple, but that was supposed to be gray. Always the art on your walls, your doctor husband with an eye for painting and an inclination for handcraft and the shelves he built and the books we could talk and talk about – you and I over the Creme Earl Grey.

Always one of my safe places in the world, your home, but I had not yet learned myself, which is to say I was still masking without knowing what an autistic mask was or that autism could look like this, but I knew even then the urgency of not letting the real self show through, even though the quiet smile on your face, your hands pushing forward a steaming cup on a green-petaled saucer, and in a soft paper package in the mail last week, a white tin of tea. From you.

Before I opened it, I knew what the flavor would be. There you were, in the scented steam rising from my mug.

It's been years without being myself – my whole life – but it isn't too late. I put the kettle on again. Maybe I call you. Maybe I invite another friend over for tea, one who lives in town, and the face behind my hands pushing a teacup across the table toward her is my real one – rainbow-lit against the glistening steam, a spectrum of possibilities.



Rebecca D. Martin is an autistic writer living in Virginia with her husband and two daughters. Her work has been published in the *Curator*, the *Brevity* blog, *Proximity*, and *Isele*, among others.

She can be found at <https://rebeccadmartin.substack.com/>, where she talks about some of her favorite things, including poetry, houses, and neurodiversity.

On Thursdays, she feeds bearded dragons at her local nature center.

Excuses

Andrea Isiminger

Two broken arms landed Kathy in a nursing home and me back in the Midwest so I could prepare her condo for sale. Although I lived far away, I was the only family member left. The painters had been kind and brought in the boxes she'd stored in the garage. On my final day, I quickly opened the last box while waiting for my ride to the airport. I was surprised to find items my cousin had saved for me after my parents died 17 years ago. I pocketed several pairs of Dad's cufflinks, ripped out the first page of my baby book (the only one Mom had completed – *Ha! We had something in common*) and crammed a couple photo albums into a beach bag that had somehow escaped the donation pile. Out of time and options, I pressed my purse into the overstuffed bag, convincing myself it would pass inspection as a single carry-on. The neighbor helping me admired a lovely vintage ring Mom had purchased during a family vacation in Europe (Budapest, Salzburg...*I couldn't remember*), so I gave it to her. But the only things that made me pause were the cookbooks.

We probably hadn't tried more than a dozen recipes from the lot, but I have fond memories of countless lazy hours spent browsing. I'd unpack the books from the bottom drawers of Mom's China cabinet and spread them out on the dining room floor as my friends might with their collections of fashion magazines. The afternoon sun streaming in through the sliding glass door often heated the small room like an oven on Thanksgiving Day. Although my mother preferred baking over cooking, neither was a task she loved. Unlike Mom, I once entertained thoughts of a career in the culinary arts. Because my parents hadn't attended college, they didn't see the value of the local program and pushed me towards a four-year institution. "An education is the one thing no one can ever take away from you," my father, the first-generation American, used to say.

These old books held dreams of a path not taken. Perhaps that beach bag had room for just one. I closed my eyes and dipped a hand deep into the box. My reverie was broken by the sound of the airport limo pulling up, and the cookbook slipped from my grasp. As it slid across the floor, our long-lost potica recipe shot out. I swear I heard a voice whisper, "Now what's your excuse?"

*

Always before Christmas and sometimes at Easter, the women in my mother's family would gather to make potica (po-*teet*-sah), a traditional Slovenian nut roll with a honey-walnut filling. My grandmother, who headed the operation, chose to make one huge potica – coiled like a fat, pale snake in the baking pan. This seemed like an unnecessary all-or-nothing gamble to me, but I suspected it began as a way to keep her cache of walnuts from depleting too rapidly. Walnuts were expensive, and her youngest child (my mother) would sneak handfuls of nuts on her way up to bed. Years later, Mom became our official taste-tester, checking the quality of each bag of walnut halves and eliminating any stray bits of shell. I worked alongside her by hand cranking the old cast iron nut grinder that Grandma had clamped onto the kitchen counter. Aunt Marge and Cousin Kathy handled the bulk of the work, rolling and pulling the dough until it hung over the edges of the table like a fine, translucent linen. To avoid any tearing, they spread the melted butter and then the filling with great care. There seemed to be a million steps to this process, so I never really considered that one could single-handedly create such a delicacy but, of course, people do. Despite my son Aaron's pleas, I know I will never bake him a potica. All those hands and hearts. All gone except for me. The feeling of sisterhood I lost still paralyzes me. "Excuse" is such a flimsy word.

*

Rheumatoid arthritis robbed Kathy of many things, one was her ability to bake, but there always was potica waiting for me each time I visited. She purchased them year-round from Carolyn, a talented baker who enabled us to recapture the past – one sweet, sticky bite at a time. Carolyn was an incredible find. Although she fashioned her potica into a much smaller form (similar to a strudel), it tasted just like my grandmother's. There are many types of potica: some resemble a cake rather than a pastry; others have a thicker, bread-like dough dominating the filling. Ours was rich and dense. I imagine this was a particular point of pride for the baker since plates of potica were given away to friends and family at Christmastime, and such a generous filling was an extravagance.

After my cousin's funeral, the neighbor, who also was a potica fan, passed along a slip of paper with Carolyn's phone number. I placed an order to bring back to my family, and as I was

writing down directions to her house, her surname caught my attention. It was slightly unusual and one I hadn't thought about since I'd paired it with my first name in a sea of hearts on the inside cover of my 4th grade notebook. A few days later when I went to pick up the poticas, I casually inquired if she was related to Matthew and learned that she was his wife. Did I imagine the icy edge to Carolyn's voice when she asked if I had known him in high school? We'd attended different secondary schools; besides, my puppy love had fizzled years earlier. Even so, I had to suppress the temptation to dash around her living room, flipping on light switches to view the photographs on display. My vocal cords vibrated with unasked questions. I stayed silent, not wanting to jeopardize my relationship with a woman who could give my child something I could not.

If I had allowed my capricious nature to overtake me, what would my excuse be then? I needed to see if he still had his beautiful dark hair or to know if he still collected stamps and would like me to send him some from Spain. My ties were no longer to him, but to his wife. She could provide that missing puzzle piece for my son. He would now be able to taste my childhood instead of just listen to my stories. If he moved to the U.S. after graduate school, potica could be part of his life anytime he pleased (Carolyn also provided a mail service).

Curbing my curiosity would preserve the potica connection. It's a small gesture, perhaps, when taken out of context. However, love, unlike recipe ingredients, shouldn't be measured. I've come to realize it's a delicate balancing act to manage our love for others while not forgetting to love ourselves. I don't obsess over my limits and won't allow my flaws to define me; that knowledge and strength are the things I hope to pass on to my children...along with the potica recipe, of course.



Andrea Isiminger, who is originally from the Chicagoland area, has lived near Madrid, Spain for more than 20 years. Although her family is resigned to appearing in her essays, the names of others have been changed. Andrea’s writing has appeared in print and online in a variety of publications — most recently at *Intrepid Times*, *NonBinary Review*, and *Brevity Blog*.

Making the Perfect Cheese Omelet

Kathleen Connolly Empsucha

First, let me say that I have never made a perfect omelet, cheese or otherwise. The whole idea makes me anxious, filled with fear of failure. But today I am going to try. I will follow your steps lovingly, but with great trepidation.

As I walk into the kitchen, I feel you beside me, judging each choice as I make it. I gather the necessary equipment: a nonstick skillet, a bowl, a silicone spatula, a cheese grater and a plate that can be warmed in the microwave. Is the bowl too small or the pan too big? I smile to myself as I let you into my moment.

I hear you chiding me as I work through the process. Next, I collect the ingredients: Two very fresh eggs, good butter and cheddar cheese, Maldon salt and chives. I grate about $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of cheese and chop the chives. Is this the right knife? I place the skillet on the stove to get hot. This usually takes about a minute or two. Now I crack the eggs into the bowl, removing any unwanted shell, and whisk them until well combined. You remind me that Michael Ruhlman says there should be no apparent white floating on top. Ugh! Add a pinch of salt and I am ready to cook.

I see you glancing over your newspaper, eyes twinkling, waiting to see if I check that my pan is hot. When it is, I drop in a pat of butter, about 1 tablespoon. *"It should melt and bubble but not turn brown,"* I hear you. This is very important to the overall look of the omelet. I pour in the eggs and stir them with the spatula, shaking the pan for 30 seconds then stop and let them set. Next, I add the cheese, sprinkling it somewhat evenly over the eggs. I let everything cook for about a minute and then remove the pan from the heat and allow the omelet to finish while my plate warms in the microwave. You are starting to believe I can do this. I am starting to feel it as well.

I tilt the pan and slide the omelet onto the plate. I try shaping it by folding it over or rolling it, then glaze it with melted butter, a wee bit of salt and a sprinkle of chives. Wow, it worked!

I let out a sigh and serve it up with a satisfied smile. I sit down to enjoy the fruits of my labor and realize that I have enjoyed having you with me in the kitchen this morning, even if it was only in my mind. Memories wash over me as I sit sipping my coffee.

The secret to the perfect omelet is love. Without love it is just scrambled eggs.



Kathleen Connolly Empsucha is a retired operating room nurse with a forty-five year career behind her. She is a graduate of Christ Hospital School of Nursing and the University of Maryland. She lived and worked as an RN in Washington DC from 1971 to 1987 when she married and relocated to Houston, TX. It was in Houston that she joined the staff at Texas Children's Hospital as the OR Nurse Coordinator for the Pediatric Urology Service. After losing her husband in 2018, she joined a memoir writing group.

Initially she used this group to write about her deep sense of loss. She wrote poems and short pieces that expressed her grief. Thanks to the support of this group and other writer friends, her interest in writing for personal enrichment grew. She still lives in Houston where she enjoys being a member of several writing groups and classes.

The Story of the Roux and the Chayote

Deon Dewar-Gray

Laurie Colwin once said, “No one who cooks, cooks alone. Even at her most solitary, a cook in the kitchen is surrounded by generations of cooks past, the advice and menus of cooks present, the wisdom of cookbook writers.”

I agree with Laurie, “No one who cooks, cooks alone,” especially when “surrounded by generations of cooks past,” or how I like to put it, *I cook with the blessings of my ancestors and throw until a voice says throw no more*. Now I know this is not the conventional way of cooking, but this is pretty much how I have cooked all my life, and how I used to see my mother and grandmother cook. Yes, on rare occasions you will find me using a recipe but, when I do, I usually substitute something or add a dash more of something. Has it always worked out for me? Sure, 95.99% of the time. If you ask me, I will say that is pretty darn good! So, what about the other 4.01% of the time you ask? Well, I just chalk that up to youthful exuberance or lessons learned.

Here’s a little secret between us. I spent the first sixteen years of my life watching my mom and grandma cook the way they did and practiced the same thing (I was cooking from before I was 10). I then went off to college to pursue a three-year diploma course (now it’s a degree) in Institutional and Catering Management thinking that I would become this great chef and work on ships or in 5-star restaurants and “*living la vida loca*” like Ricky Martin said. I learned the fundamentals of the science behind cooking and all that beautiful stuff, then left college and went back to cooking exactly how I used to. Life, I tell you! I spent about 4 years in the hotel industry and never once in a kitchen. I stuck to my kitchen or that of family and friends I like. Some days if you ask me how to make a roux I would probably say, “roux who?” or ask you, “what is that?” Just kidding, I know how to make an awesome roux and how to transform it into many tasty accompaniments for other dishes.

As I sit at my desk writing this piece one of my favorite recipes pops into my head – one that I call “*The Rouxfully Cheesy Christophene Au Gratin*.” It is filled with veggies and baked in my rouxfully cheesy sauce, or a cheesy béchamel sauce, if you will.

Let’s talk a little about the components of this tasty little treat.

But first, what is a roux and what are some recipes that use it?

A roux is a 1:1 ratio blend of butter (or other fats such as oil or drippings) and flour. It is used as a basis for sauces, soups, stews, and casseroles as a thickening agent. You can use a variety of butters/fats to manipulate the taste of your roux and ultimately the taste of whatever you use it in.

Some popular uses of roux:

1. Classic Béchamel Sauce – basic roux with milk added. You can season it with salt, pepper, and nutmeg (optional).
2. Cheesy Béchamel Sauce – classic béchamel sauce with your favorite cheeses added. Great for your au gratins and macaroni-and-cheese dishes.
3. Brown Gravy – basic roux with broth of your liking, plus Worcestershire or soy sauce added. Season with whatever tickles your fancy and serve with potatoes, rice, or meatloaf.
4. Velouté Sauce – basic roux with chicken, fish, or vegetable broth. Can be used as a base for other sauces or as a stand-alone.
5. Cajun Gumbo – if you live in Louisiana, you know that this is the foundation of any good gumbo. Cook the roux until it is dark and then add all the other gumbo stuff.

Like the roux, knowing the basics of cooking can make you transform any unexciting food item into something that tantalizes your taste buds and leaves you wanting more. And, speaking about wanting more, let us explore Chayote (chai·ow·tee). Sounds cute, doesn’t it? Well, it should. In Brazil, the word for chayote is “chuchu” which is how they affectionately describe someone who is “cute” or “pretty.” This leaves me wondering about this, though. Have you ever seen the skin of a chayote? It is often rough and spiky, although there are some with smooth skins with ridges. But, to each his own, as the saying goes. Notwithstanding that, let us dive into the smoothness that is on the inside and discover its versatility and flavor.

The Chayote Explored

Chayote (*Sechium edule*) otherwise known as vegetable pear, milton, or christophene in various parts of the world, and chocho in Jamaica, is technically a fruit and not a vegetable, though it is consumed mainly as a vegetable. Chocho, by its very name already sounds boring, unless you call it christophene which sounds a bit French-*ish*, and is, in my opinion, a very bland, unattractive – not the first thing I would get excited about – food item. However, like the roux, chocho can be a versatile thing, making it a nice addition to both sweet and savory dishes and the best part is that it is extremely low in calorie which makes it a winner in my books.

The chayote offers several health benefits including, as I mentioned before, low calorie content, rich source of dietary fiber, vitamins and minerals – including vitamin C, vitamin B6, folate, and potassium, and it contains antioxidants. Research also speaks to its use in reducing the growth of cancerous cells, lowering blood sugar levels, reducing ulcer formation, and reducing cholesterol deposits in the blood vessels. Not bad for an un-cute, not so tasty fruit that is actually a vegetable.

Predominantly used in savory dishes like stir-fry, raw and cooked veggie salads, soups, salsas, curries, stews, and my favorite – casseroles; chayote can also be used in desserts like my mom used to make. She had a knock-out chocho bread, which I unfortunately never learned to make and there's no recipe because Mama used to work with the ancestors by her side. I guess I will have to try my luck and do the same while praying that I hear the right portions. Wish me luck!

Now back to the beginning

Why did I make the comparison between roux and chayote? Because, in the kitchen you can turn any basic or bland item into something marvelous that packs a punch or two and is overflowing with flavors. Here's my fun way of marrying my roux to my chayote. Note, there will be no exact amounts of ingredients given here. Let your ancestors be your guide, except for the base roux formula – don't mess with that.

I call this “*The Rouxfully Cheesy Christophene Au Gratin*,” but you can call it anything you want. It’s like a potato au gratin but with veggies. Miss Chayote, of course, is the main character.

Recipe

- Thinly sliced **Chayote**/Christophene/ Chocho (and all other names by which it is called)
- Carrots, Broccoli, Cauliflower, Sweet peppers, Onions, Garlic
- Scotch bonnet hot pepper – because I’m from the Caribbean
- Salt, black pepper and any other seasoning of your choice – to taste
- The Cheesy Roux – which is your basic roux with milk and loads of cheese
- Lots of love and a smile

Things to Note

- I parboil the chayote if I use thick slices or wedges to cut down on baking time. I also parboil fresh broccoli and cauliflower – if using frozen ones, I just throw them into the mix. Please note that parboiled items should still be relatively hard, think of it like blanching except you won’t be adding the cold water /ice.
- I use a variety of cheeses to give it that nice palate tease.
- Replace regular milk with coconut milk (I think coconut milk makes everything taste better).
- You can opt to roast the sweet peppers and caramelize the onions before adding them to the mix.
- If you are worried about your hips widening, or your cholesterol shooting up, reduce the amount of butter, cheese, and milk you use – or use low-fat items – or reduce the amount you consume on a regular basis. Remember, chayote has approximately 19 calories in 100 grams so you are starting from a good number. Don’t overdo it!

That’s it!

Oh, well, no, you must put it into the oven next. Lightly grease your favorite baking dish and layer your ingredients, starting with a little sauce at the bottom of the pan, veggie mix, cheesy roux, veggie mix, cheesy roux, then top with shredded cheese and breadcrumbs. Bake until you see it bubbling and the top is nicely crusted. Remove from the oven, let cool, and then serve with love!

Like Joey Fatone says, “If you combine good flavors, food turns into an orchestra.” Oh, what a symphony!

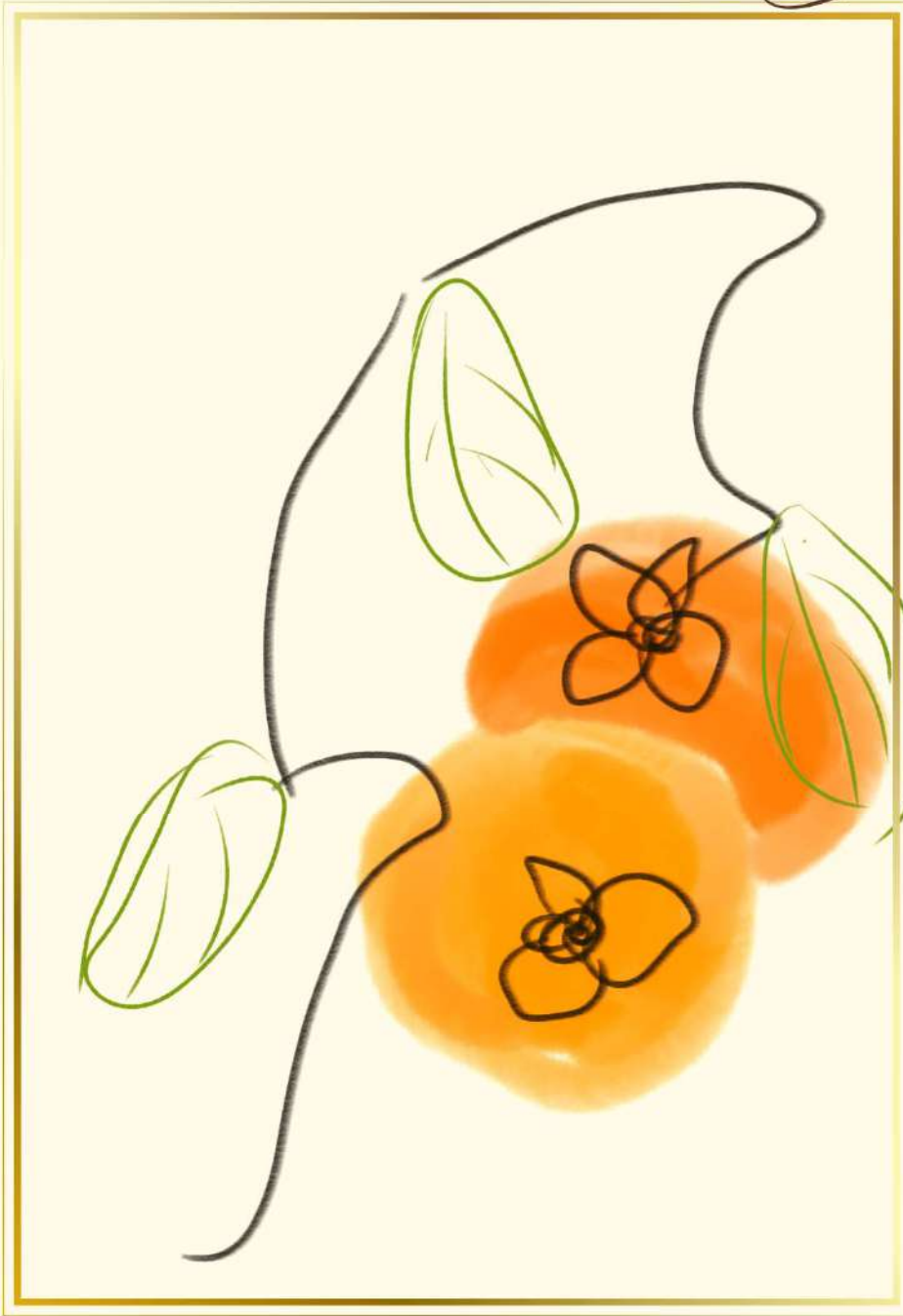


Deon is a General Management Consultant and the Founder and Chief Content Creator for her Website and Feel Good Magazine.

Born on the beautiful island of Jamaica, in the Caribbean, Deon is a self-proclaimed blogger, writer, and an aspiring author, who discovered her passion for crafting compelling narratives that resonate with others in late 2018 after a job loss. Deon skillfully weaves her life stories with universal themes, inviting readers into her world and connecting on a deep, emotional level. Her articles have gained recognition in other online magazines and podcasts, earning her interviews on Jamaica’s top morning time show – Smile Jamaica.

When she’s not busy being Miss Jill-of-all-Trades, you can find her in her garden, organizing or decluttering something, taking a drive to the countryside, grooving to music at home, catching up on her reading, or spending quality time with her family and friends.

Poetry



Secret

Priya Narayanan

Pour me a drink.

My stories are in the bubbles
that rush past. Fleeting, floating,
rapturous, rumbustious –
my stories are the ones
that kiss your lips
and tingle your senses
before common sense prevails
and strangles each story
lest you gulp them down
and become one with them.

Pour me a drink.

My stories are in the ice cubes
that float like fish
in the koi pond
where you come to feast your eyes
on the streaks of golden orange,
your passionate gaze
causing them to sink to the bottom
from where only a coin diver
can collect them again
if he has faith that they do indeed exist.

Pour me a drink.

My stories are in the numbness
of my tongue –
my otherwise wagging tongue
that is now paralyzed into silence.

Can you hear the stories
in my silence? Can you see
the stories in my eyes,
where the pupils
have been replaced
by the moon and her darker twin?

How long does it take for a story
to travel from the eyes and the ears
to the tongue?

Pour me a drink
and I might let you into my little secret.

Where She Lives Her Life

Watch her closely
as she goes to the market,
an orange (plastic) basket in hand.

She haggles with vendors
her bangles clinking in approval.
She bags her trophies –

potatoes, carrots, cabbage, shallots,
a bagful of shelled peas,
cauliflower – a large piece;

a triumphant smile on the way back – peace.

She empties the basket on the table,
pinches apart the cauliflower florets

and washes them under running water
with the tenderness of a mother
bathing her naked babies.

She tosses the chopped shallots,
tomatoes, peas, and florets
in a shallow pan, adds in the right spices

and cooks them to perfection.
Her mister is waiting at the table
purportedly reading a newspaper,

but from behind the political blitzkrieg in Iraq –
or is it Yemen? – and the quarter-page ad
for life insurance

his nose twitches just that extra bit
and a smile lurks
behind the wild moustache.

She settles the dish on the table.
He thrusts the newspaper aside
and devours every morsel in a silence

that is interrupted
only by the sound of an eager tongue
smacking the fingers clean.

What are you waiting for? Come,
press your ears against his belly.
Do you hear a gentle ‘plunk’?

Shift your gaze to his plump face.
Do you see the gradual spread
of a smile – a ripple in a pond?

Between that ‘plunk’ and the ripple
is where she lives her life –
everyday.



Priya Narayanan is a designer, traveler, poet, and writer based in Ahmedabad, India. Writing, for her, is as much about finding the extraordinary in the ordinary as it is about confronting life head-on. With a keenness to experiment with different forms of self-expression, her writings – whether meant for adults or for children – cut across genres and forms. While she is an award-winning children’s author, her writings for an older audience have found homes in anthologies and literary magazines including *Indian Quarterly*, Sahitya Akademi’s *Indian Literature*, *Muse India*, *Narrow Road Literary Journal*, *The Bombay Literary Magazine*, *Modern Haiku*, *Haikukatha*, *Under the Basho*, *Failed Haiku*, *Ribbons* and *Akitsu Quarterly*. In a parallel universe, she is an interior architect straddling both the professional and academic worlds of design with equal passion. You can learn more about her at: www.priyanarayanan.in.

Backyard Feeder

Thom Brucie

'Away, away,' I heard from warbled throat,
and fly it did from limb to branch to roof;
its chatter dared to chase the squirrel away,
that I would soon its favorite seeds display.

While I indulged my humor for a time,
the squirrel in agitation scolded then and fled
from roof to branch and once again to tree,
and waited 'till I ceased my reverie.

Then scooped the seeds did I
and all the feeders fill;
and with the trays now full of seed,
I called to them, 'It's time to feed.'

The backyard's not a mountain high,
neither pond, nor forest glen;
It's just a place where creatures stand
And dare rely on human hand.

Summer Reunion

Enemy cousins arriving at the family reunion
aren't always welcome
for the entire weekend;
especially, if the fishing's been good,
and the sun's been hot
like the coals in the deep pit
of the barbeque,
and all the meat that's been gathered
from cows and sheep and pigs and
chickens and flavored flavorings
like mustard and catsup
are arranged carefully
and orderly
on the picnic table
so that placement of memories
and placement of feelings
are protected from emergence
in much the same way that younger children
protect themselves from the emergence of uncomfortable truths
by kicking round balls
across the crooked necks of July grass
which has adorned the field with
the shield of green –
another bedroom, really, if wishes fail,
and cousins insist on spending the night.



Thom Brucie has published two chapbooks of poems: *Moments Around The Campfire With A Vietnam Vet*, named “the best chapbook of 2010” by Irene Koronas of *Ibbetson Street Press*, and *Apprentice Lessons*, poems which explore the dignity of labor. Individual works have appeared in a variety of journals and publications, including *DEROS*, *San Joaquin Review*, *Cappers*, *The Southwestern Review*, *Editions Bibliotekos*, *Pacific Review*, *Dead Mule School of Southern Literature*, *Wilderness House Literary Review*, and others.

Sushi

Scott Ennis

The fish is raw; I know that turns some off –
It sits on sticky rice, with seaweed, too,
I like it, though I know some people scoff,
It's just a thing some folks will sometimes do.

But I'm a fan of sushi and I know,
It isn't quite as easy as it looks.
Itamae makes the sushi where I go,
Much more than just a chef who doesn't cook!

Wasabi mixed with soy sauce is my dip
For my nigiri or my sushi roll,
“Is sake wine or salmon?” I might quip,
My Japanese is pidgin, never whole!

But I enjoy my sushi unpronounced,
I've never from a sushi bar been bounced!

Foraging

When I was young our cupboards were all bare –
I guess you'd call us “poor,” but we survived.
I learned that some communities will share,
“Community” means no one is deprived.

I learned that nature gives abundantly,
It called this hungry boy to come and eat.
My nourishment was largely left to me,
But nature's always there, my needs to meet.

I've foraged clams and oysters off the beach,
I've foraged berries full of nature's hope,
I've learned there's more that nature has to teach,
I've learned that nature lives to help us cope.

I've coped with hunger pains in life's great field,
I've learned that nature shares a fruitful yield.



Scott Ennis is a sonneteer. His creative approach aligns the most with that of screenwriting and poetic cinema. Scott earned his B.A. in English Literature from Weber State University. He was a paratrooper in the U.S. Army and an endurance athlete, who has completed the Boston Marathon and the Ironman Triathlon. Scott survived a near-fatal accident in 2010 and lives with the effects of a TBI.

Sonnettics is an anagram of his name.

Gramma's Peaches

Rick Blum

In thrall of winter's gloom, Gramma would send me
down to the dank basement – a haven of canned pears
and peaches, testifying to fall's fulsome harvest.

Once, I returned with a jar featuring a spit
of hardened juice zigzagging down its side,
the color behind the glass decidedly off hue.

Ah, Gramma said scrunching her face,
wrinkles appearing like the furrowed rows trailing
Grandpa's tractor every spring, *this is a spoiled batch;*
must have been a crack in the sealing.

I peered at the offending squiggle clinging doggedly
to the smooth exterior, squinting my eyes hard like taking
a Rorschach Test in the presence of a court-appointed
psychiatrist, then blurted out wise-guyishly:
This ain't bad Gramma; you musta overfilled it.

Gramma paused briefly, eyed me sternly and said,
I don't overfill my jars, young man. Sometimes they
are just defective – like your manners. Now go down
and get another jar. This time make it a good one.

So I did as Gramma asked, and returned with an impeccably
clean jar of peaches, which she took with a cryptic smile,
then rewarded me with one of her giant chocolate chip
cookies, which was almost as tasty as the impeccably
sweet peaches we had for dessert that night.



Rick Blum has been chronicling life's vagaries for more than 30 years during his stints as a nightclub owner, high-tech manager, market research mogul, and, most recently, old geezer. His early works were published in several, now defunct, national magazines, whose fate he takes no credit for. He was a regular opinion columnist for eleven years for the newsweekly *The Mosquito*, which, surprisingly, is still in print. His writings have appeared in *Avalon Literary Review*, *Third Wednesday*, and *The Literary Hatchet*, among others. He is also a frequent contributor to the *Humor Times*, and has been published in numerous poetry anthologies.

Chef

Joseph A. Farina

Alone in the kitchen

I become a master chef:

Recipes fly before me

in over 40 books from

pastry, bread, steak and pasta.

I see myself versed in

French, Italian, and American cuisines –

they are before me in glorious colours

all to no avail.

From print to plate has faltered,

I'm told that I have wasted time and money

on my cookbook collection

but how can you put

a price tag on a dream?

Food Not Flowers

In the spring-thawed ground

My father always planted foods –
never daffodils or tulips.

The colours green, red, and black
were the constant theme:

Green beans, rabba, zucchini, peppers,
red tomatoes, San Marzano and heirloom
black Sicillian melanzani.

The colours of his Sicillian Zappaturi past:
red for the blood of his family,
black for the mourning of departures,
green for life to continue and grow.

Flowers were for songs
and the landed idle rich,
whose tables were never bare –
not for men with families to care.



Joseph A. Farina is a retired lawyer based in Sarnia, Ontario, Canada. Drawing from his profession and his Sicilian-Canadian background, he has published widely and is an internationally-acclaimed award-winning poet. Several of his poems have been published in *Quills Canadian Poetry Magazine*, *The Wild Word*, *The Chamber Magazine*, *Lothlorian Poetry Journal*, *Ascent*, *Subterranean Blue* and in *The Tower Poetry Magazine*, *Inscribed*, *The Windsor Review*, *Boxcar Poetry Revue*, and appears in many anthologies including *Sweet Lemons: Writings with a Sicilian Accent*, *Canadian Italians at Table*, *Witness from Serengeti Press* and *Tamaracks: Canadian Poetry for the 21st Century*. He has had poems published in the U.S. magazines *Mobius*, *Pyramid Arts*, *Arabesques*, *Fiele-Festa*, and *Philadelphia Poets*. He has had two books of poetry published — *The Cancer Chronicles* and *The Ghosts of Water Street* and an e-book, *Sunsets in Black and White*.

Potato Eaters

Marceline White

Because I never learned the names of potatoes

yet loved them: their mealy mouths, their eyes gone
to seed; I feed them to you as you sleep, fill you with
Agata, Ajanhuiri, Amandine, Burgundy red, Bloomer,
Belle de Fontenay...

blighted, benighted-peasant feeder,
famine breeder. Take in the rough skin, scrub it, peel
away layers to reach your soft white body, my little tater tot,
my pomme de terre, my mashed/smashed boxty,
my kugel, my mousseline. Let me feast on you, let
me drink you in, white flesh, heavy cream, au gratin.
Stick to my ribs, fill me up, intoxicate me. I swirl
you in my mouth, taste you on my tongue
murmuring poitín, poitín, poitín.



A recent Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net nominee, **Marceline White**'s writing has appeared or is forthcoming in *Press 53*, *Feral: A Journal of Poetry & Art*, *Harpy Hybrid*, *Scrawl Place*, *The Orchard Review*, *The Indianapolis Review*, *Atticus Review*, *Snapdragon*, *Little Patuxent Review*, *Please See Me*, *Quaranzine*, *Gingerbread House*, *The Free State Review*, *The Loch Raven Review* and others. Her anthologies include *Ancient Party: Collaborations in Baltimore, 2000-2010* and *Life in Me*

Like Grass on Fire. An award-winning economic rights advocate, Marceline is the author

of chapters in two books on gender and globalization, numerous research reports and op-eds. When not writing or engaged in activism, she can be found learning how to better serve her two cats, posting too many pictures of her garden on social media, and reminding her son to text her when he arrives at the party. To know more about Marceline visit her website, www.marcelinewhitewrites.com.

A Meal of Love and Kindness

Katharine Weinmann

On the Portuguese Coastal Camino, on a quiet Monday night in May,
I found a café empty except for the local nursing his beer at the back table.
With gesture and a smile, I was welcomed to settle at a table by the window.
There, within that humble space, I ate a meal that in my heart has stayed.

A glass tumbler filled near to overflowing with red wine soothed my soul.

A grilled veal steak sliced, garnished with orange, glistened on a wooden platter.

Roasted potatoes. Seasoned rice. Sautéed turnip greens – redolent with spicy olive oil.

A silky chocolate mousse, home-made, hardly room, but not to be denied.

Stayed because it so simply satisfied my need for a good hot meal after that long hard day,
walking face first in the elements, with blistered feet and heat-rashed legs.
Stayed because it was prepared and served with kindness in the most fundamental ways,
by the women in the kitchen of that intimate cafe.

Even now, I'm moved to tears when I think back to that night –
what it gave and how it sustained me, held within its simple light.

We blew each other kisses as I prepared to take my leave.
Indelible memories etched in love tasted and believed.



Katharine Weinmann is a seeker whose reading of poets and philosophers shapes the container from which her words and images emerge, revealing beauty in her imperfect, sometimes broken, mostly well-lived and much loved life. An intrepid traveler who enjoys sharing good food and fine wine with family and friends, Katharine loves to concoct one-off “silk purse” meals from kitchen leftovers, leaving behind her signature messy stovetop, much to her husband’s chagrin. A

published poet and award-winning photographer, she blogs at [A Wabi Sabi Life](#) and is co-editor of the online quarterly, [Sage-ing: The Journal of Creative Aging](#). Katharine lives with her husband on the Canadian prairies, but her heart is also home on the shores of the mighty Niagara River, and in Italy. *Che bello!*

Lost Appetites

Rp Verlaine

You still hungry?
Come words
from high glossed,
almost polished
lips to make my
date appear younger,
a beauty however.

No, I just don't like –
I tell her –
food to be wasted.
There're too many hungry people
who'd eat it off the floor
even with people
watching.

She fixes me with
hard crystal eyes,
blue, without being sad.
I notice a hardness I'd missed,
the beauty now gone.

If they're hungry, it's
because they're lazy,
stupid, or both.

She'd told me
she was conservative,

but didn't add mindless.

Sometimes it's having too many
kids and buying them clothes,
or things for school or for doctors,
or getting a car fixed you need
for work or...

there're government programs,
don't freakin' mansplain to me!

The waiter came with her
barely-eaten sirloin and
barely-touched salad in
a white bag.
My Porterhouse, onions and
mushrooms with wild rice long gone. I held
my beers to 2 and the damage
was just over a hundred dollars.

A week before I'd sent less
than a quarter of that to
the Feed My Hungry Children charity,
and now felt guilty as I put away
the credit card.

Dead silence at our table.

Maybe I wasn't
going to sleep with her,
after all.

You aren't going to eat
that, are you? she asked with
an almost delicate shudder.

First thing tomorrow! I said,
smiling brightly. She stood up,
thanked me for the dinner, and
was gone.

I had a beer and left. Tossed
the white bag to the wino outside
the restaurant – invisible to her, I guess.
His besotted eyes
shining with inebriated glitter when
I told him it was steak.

Then I walked home
knowing that only
his smile was real.



Rp Verlaine lives in New York City. He has an MFA in creative writing from City College. He taught in New York Public schools for many years. His first volume of poetry, *Damaged by Dames & Drinking* was published in 2017, and another – *Femme Fatales Movie Starlets & Rockers* – in 2018. A set of three e-books titled, *Lies From The Autobiography* Vol. 1-3 were published from 2018 to 2020. His latest book, *Imagined Indecencies*, was published in February, 2022. He was nominated for a Pushcart prize in poetry in 2021 and 2022.

Sorry About the Love, I Wish It Wasn't Mine

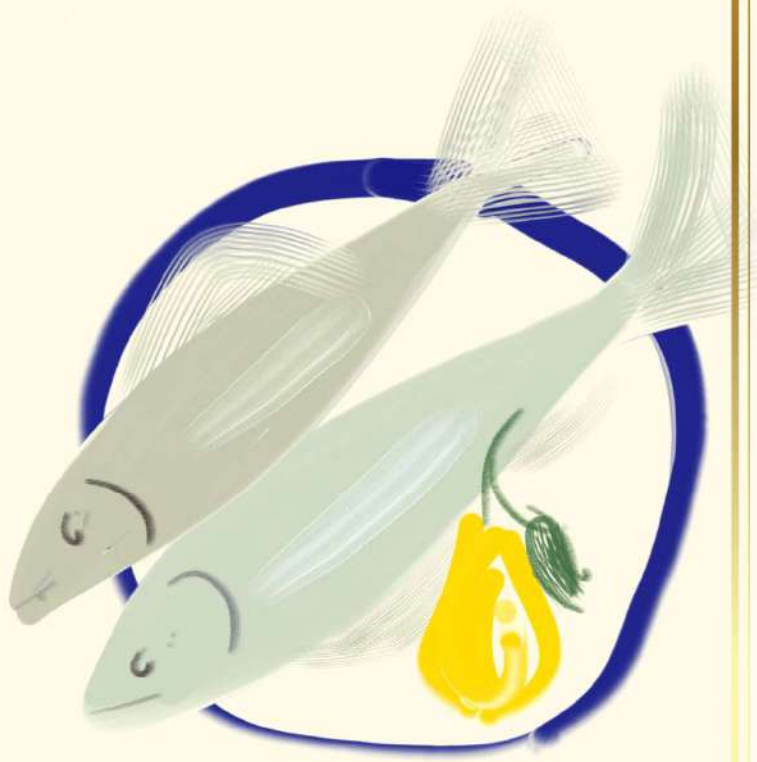
Sam Moe

End of days. Mountains turning forest-green to seashell-pink –
Then red, not like rubies – red like blood, the dried kind – scabs.
Wolves in pockets, your shoulder bumping into mine, are you
going to stick around after the dirt dries up from the storm or
is this another goodbye I haven't prepared for? Forgive me, sour
these days; the doctor said it's common, told me I'm turning into
a lime or a brand new kiwi – puckered tongue, opposite of soft
pastel sugar cookies you love so much. You've brought bundles
of sweet breads and various meats in your pack, you've eaten
the map; don't much care for stars these days, though I suppose
The scrub-brush bushes shed needles and glow into green shapes
regardless of whether or not I believe in them, and even though
I thought to myself last night, I don't think I'm going to make it:
Today I choked on pomegranate seeds and thought, please god,
let me keep my life.



Sam Moe is the recipient of a 2023 St. Joe Community Foundation Poetry Fellowship from *Longleaf Writers Conference*. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming from *Whale Road Review*, *The Indianapolis Review*, *Sundog Lit*, and others. Her poetry book *Heart Weeds* is out from Alien Buddha Press (Sept. 2022) and her chapbook *Grief Birds* is out from *Bullshit Lit* (Apr. 2023). Her full-length collection, *Cicatrizing the Daughters* is forthcoming from *FlowerSong Press*.

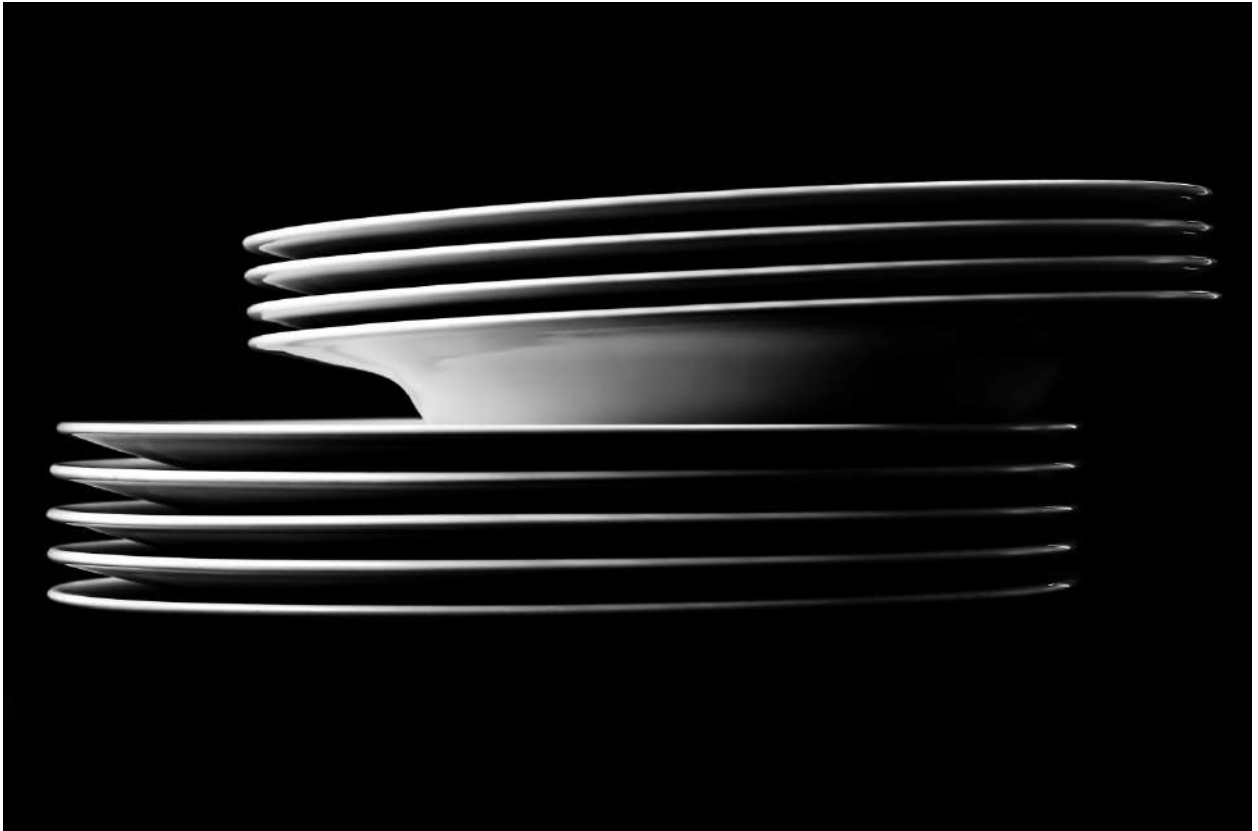
Art



Unseen

A Photoessay by

Lau A. Larsen



PlateMates



Stacked in Black



TenderNest



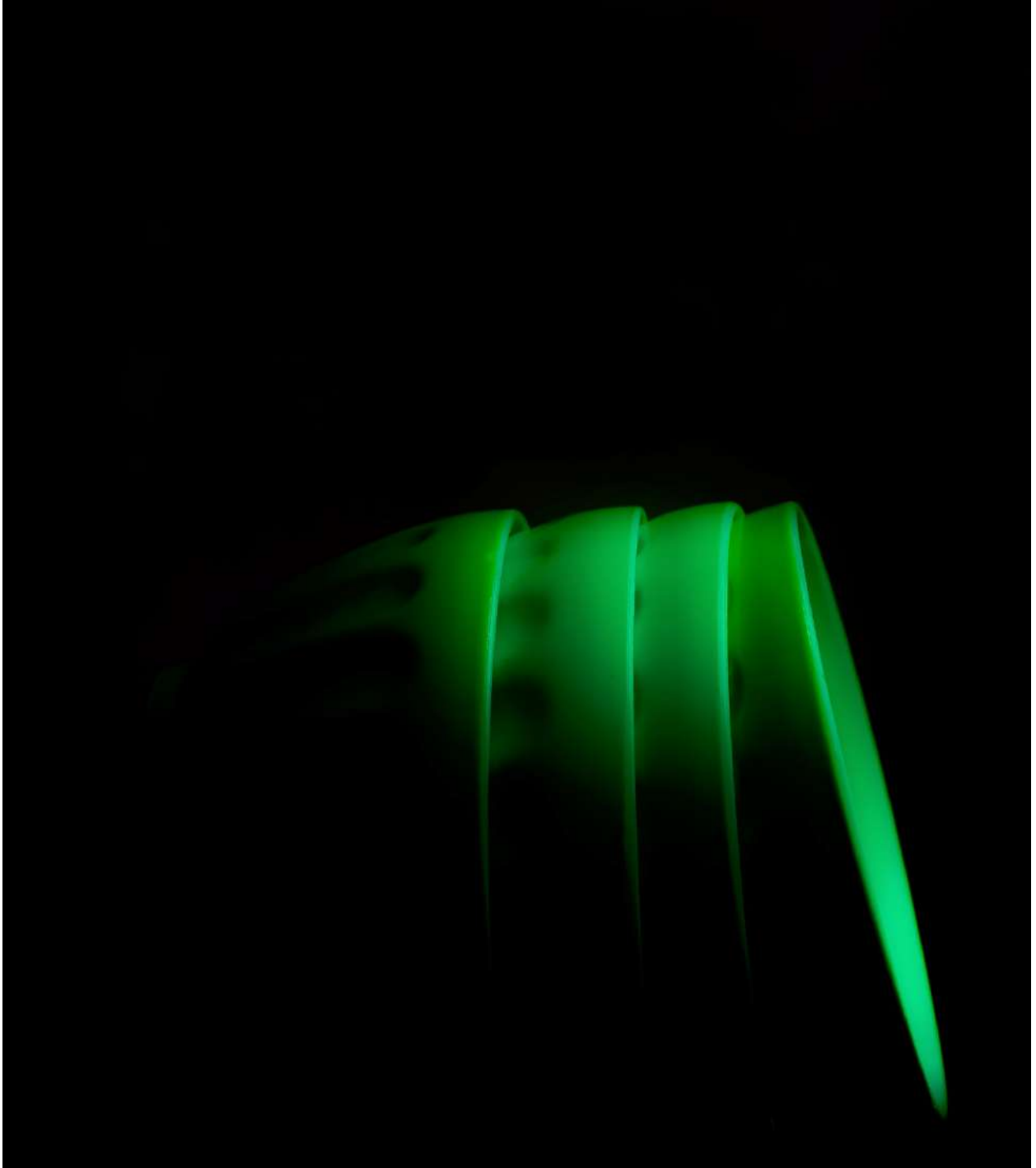
Forked



Cuples



MixMatch



Deep See



Lau A. Larsen is a Danish visual artist with a past in portrait photography. He attributes the sharp contrasts and often melancholic tone in his pictures to his Nordic background.

He is drawn into the image-making process as soon as he sees a motive that speaks to him. He immediately captures the motive and begins the postproduction to convey its story. From beginning to end it happens beyond words. It is an entirely intuitive process. Sometimes he gives the finished artwork a

twisted or poetic title, which offers the viewer an opportunity to attach more dimensions to the visual experience.

Lau A. is fascinated by the unseen. For him, his art succeeds when he guides the viewer to discover that there is always a hidden calmness in the human chaos and a surprising beauty in even our most ordinary artefacts and constructions.

To learn more about Lau A. visit:

facebook.com/lau.a.photo

@Lau.a.Larsen

lensculture.com/lau-larsen

My First Banana Eaten in July

A Pastel Drawing by

Irina Tall Novikova





Irina Tall (Novikova) is an artist, graphic artist, illustrator. She graduated from the State Academy of Slavic Cultures with a degree in art, and also has a bachelor's degree in design. The first personal exhibition “My soul is like a wild hawk” (2002) was held in the Museum of Maxim Bagdanovich. In her works, she raises themes of ecology; in 2005 she devoted a series of works to the Chernobyl disaster, drawing on anti-war topics. The first big series she drew was “The Red Book,” dedicated to rare and endangered species of animals and birds. Irina writes fairy tales and poems and illustrates short stories.

She draws various fantastic creatures: unicorns, animals with human faces; Sirens. In 2020, she took part in Poznań Art Week. Her work has been published in magazines: *Gupsophila*, *Harpy Hybrid Review*, *Little Literary Living Room* and others. In 2022, her short story was included in the collection “The 50 Best Short Stories” and her poem was published in the collection of poetry “The wonders of winter.”

Berries

A Watercolor Painting by

Vivienne Bretherick



Fish-n-Chips

A Watercolor Painting by

Vivienne Bretherick





Vivienne E. Bretherick is a visual artist originally from Devonshire, England. Her water colour paintings, created from freestyle sketches, are inspired by photographs, observations and experiences.

She lives in eastern Ontario, Canada.

Andalusian Lunch

A Photograph by

Katharine Weinmann





Katharine Weinmann is a seeker whose reading of poets and philosophers shapes the container from which her words and images emerge, revealing beauty in her imperfect, sometimes broken, mostly well-lived and much loved life. An intrepid traveler who enjoys sharing good food and fine wine with family and friends, Katharine loves to concoct one-off “silk purse” meals from kitchen leftovers, leaving behind her signature messy stovetop, much to her husband’s chagrin. A published poet and award-winning photographer, she blogs at [A Wabi Sabi Life](#) and is co-editor of the online quarterly, [Sage-ing: The Journal of Creative Aging](#). Katharine lives with her husband on the Canadian prairies, but her heart is also home on the shores of the mighty Niagara River, and in Italy. *Che bello!*

Entstehung

ein Foto von

Emma Martin





Emma Martin wurde in Berlin geboren. Sie hat in Europa und Asien gelebt und gearbeitet. Sie ist auf Lebensmitteldesign und Druckgrafik spezialisiert. Emmas Kunst versucht, die Aufmerksamkeit des Publikums auf die oft übersehenen Aspekte der Dinge des täglichen Lebens zu lenken. Sie glaubt, dass Kunst befreit, indem sie uns der wahren Natur der Dinge näher bringt.