

PREFACE

This is the first full issue I've edited since the passing of *Corresponding Voices* founder and editor Pedro Cuperman. All honor to his name. I try to proceed in the spirit in which he would do things, but if you knew Pedro, you know how impossible that would be. Pedro was a magician of the human spirit, a conjurer-trickster-guru who opened up space for unexpected vibrational resonance between poets, artists, musicians, students, colleagues, and friends in a way that will not be duplicated. Nevertheless, I think this issue would have delighted him. This year, we present five visionary poets who spark the magic of correspondence in the way Pedro always intended — a polyphonic, synaptic leap across pages that results in unexpected but vital communication between disparate people, places, eras, ontologies.

In these pages, ancient stories converge with a new myth-making, something Jessica Scicchitano takes up as a “spiritual ovulation” where “bombings married constellations and kitchens,” in the imagined physics of the inner life. Safia Elhillo and Rohan Chhetri write of the oceans and rivers of their respective childhoods — of bodies mapped by water crossings and waters mapped by body crossings, death stalking our literal and metaphorical borders, liminal zones where humans emerge and dissolve, immersions where Elhillo envisions “the age of dark bodies offering themselves to the water” and Chhetri senses “our pain deities drowning out of us.”

Our dead are with us, even translated through us, these poets seem to say. “There is a reckless translation in me always” writes Noel Quiñones, as he follows his “strange obsession with tongues” and the “raucous nature” of ancestry to “its epicenter.” Contributing Editor Kathryn Everly points out that José Sanjinés’ work — here in both Spanish and English — is very much about the idea of translation as both linguistic and experiential. Everly writes: “Sanjinés reminds us that poetry is always a form of translation, the world rendered in words. He reminds us that at its best, a poem converts everyday distractions into opportunities for the essential optimism.”

Each of these poets twists us through a unique phenomenology of the self, explored through its ecologies and microbiomes — a mango picked at the apex of its life, meatbone of love and long hair, vats of moonshine and milk,

masticated raspberries that fill a bronze tub, the ungreased French fry — these poems are bursting with sustenance and succulence. More urgently, the poems here grapple with the ways that experience is often indigestible, with how, even in its richness, life often offers us emptiness, gaps and fissures, moments beyond language, resistant, finally, to articulation. It is the poem’s job to rush into such spaces, to let language perform a kind of spiritual CPR via the spectacle of simulacrum, what Scicchitano calls “the mined diamond moment of our being here.” The poem puts pressure on image and idea; of our inclination to build stable meanings, the poem shows us how language threatens to scatter at any moment. Sanjinés explores this through characters brought to the brink, the “undecipherable life” blessed “with a kiss,” or lovers who “loved each other feverishly” but cannot make love — the ultimate failure of articulation — for fear of bringing “another creature to this world.” Quiñones senses these absences as a matter of lineage — “as I speak my grandmother is reminiscing in a place that does not exist anymore” — his own utterances a paradoxical function of what cannot be revived. Chhetri writes of a “misery language without speech” and also a “found narrative, white root translucence drinking every animal trajectory of me.” Similarly, Elhillo takes this up from the subject position of a speaker between nations, where “neither land has a word for the haunting inside me.”

Pedro conceived of *Corresponding Voices* as a project that would foster the kind of unscripted dialogues and intersections that depart, startle, delight, disrupt, and rearrange thinking. His aim was always a diverse assembly of voices, although he was skeptical of the word “diversity,” which he felt fostered a kind of “tourism” of others’ psyches. Rather, he aimed to “discover... the value of cross-fertilization.” The delight I think he might have taken in this issue is the same delight I hope you will take, in the sheer power and vibrancy of these five distinctive voices. There’s also a delight in taking them together, as a collection that says, among many other things: look how strange we are to each other and to ourselves, and in that, how alive, how akin.

— Jules Gibbs