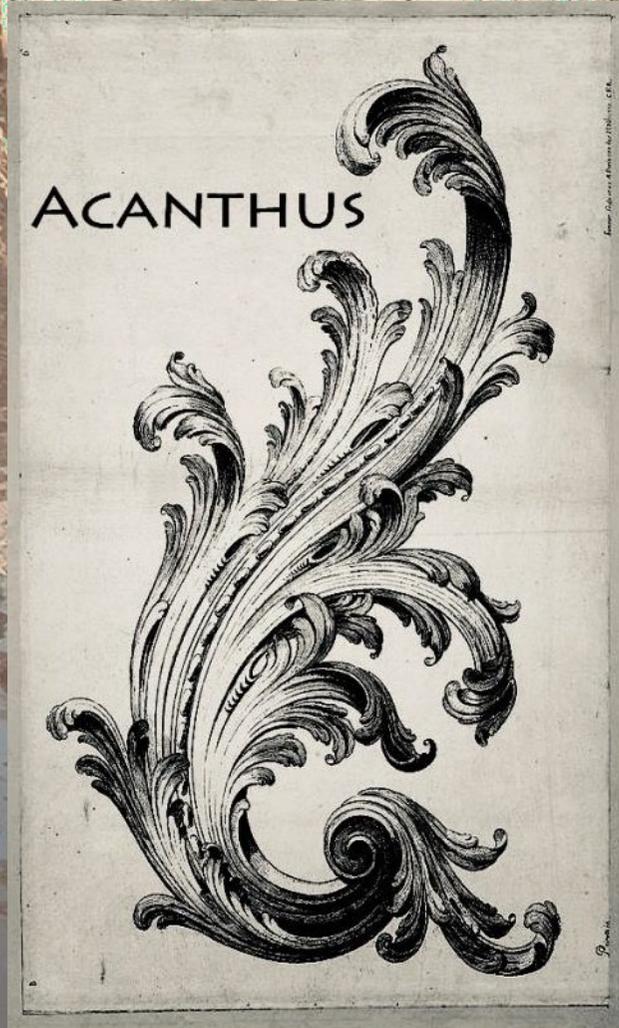


# Acanthus

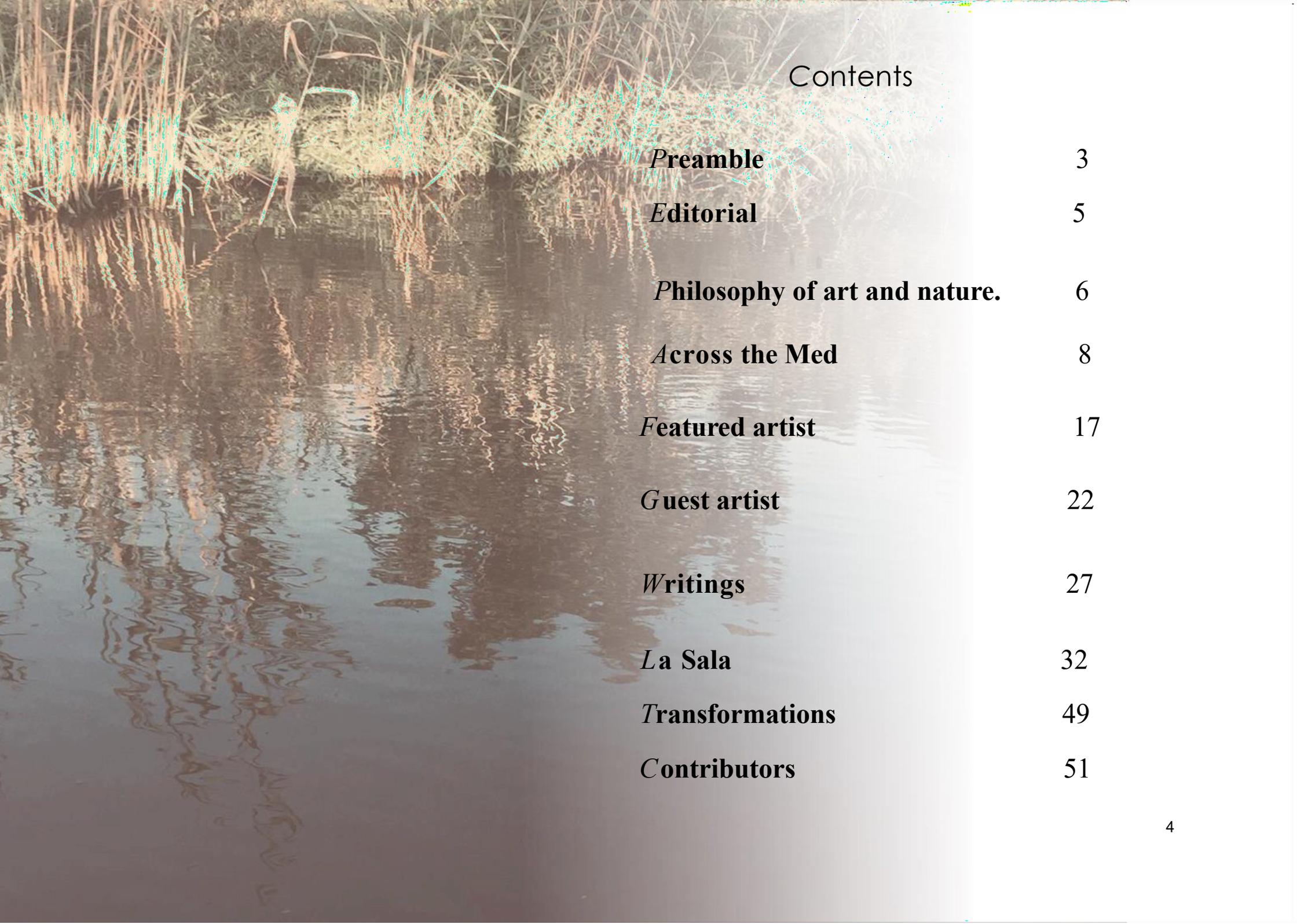
*earth/air/water*

Bloom, Valencia



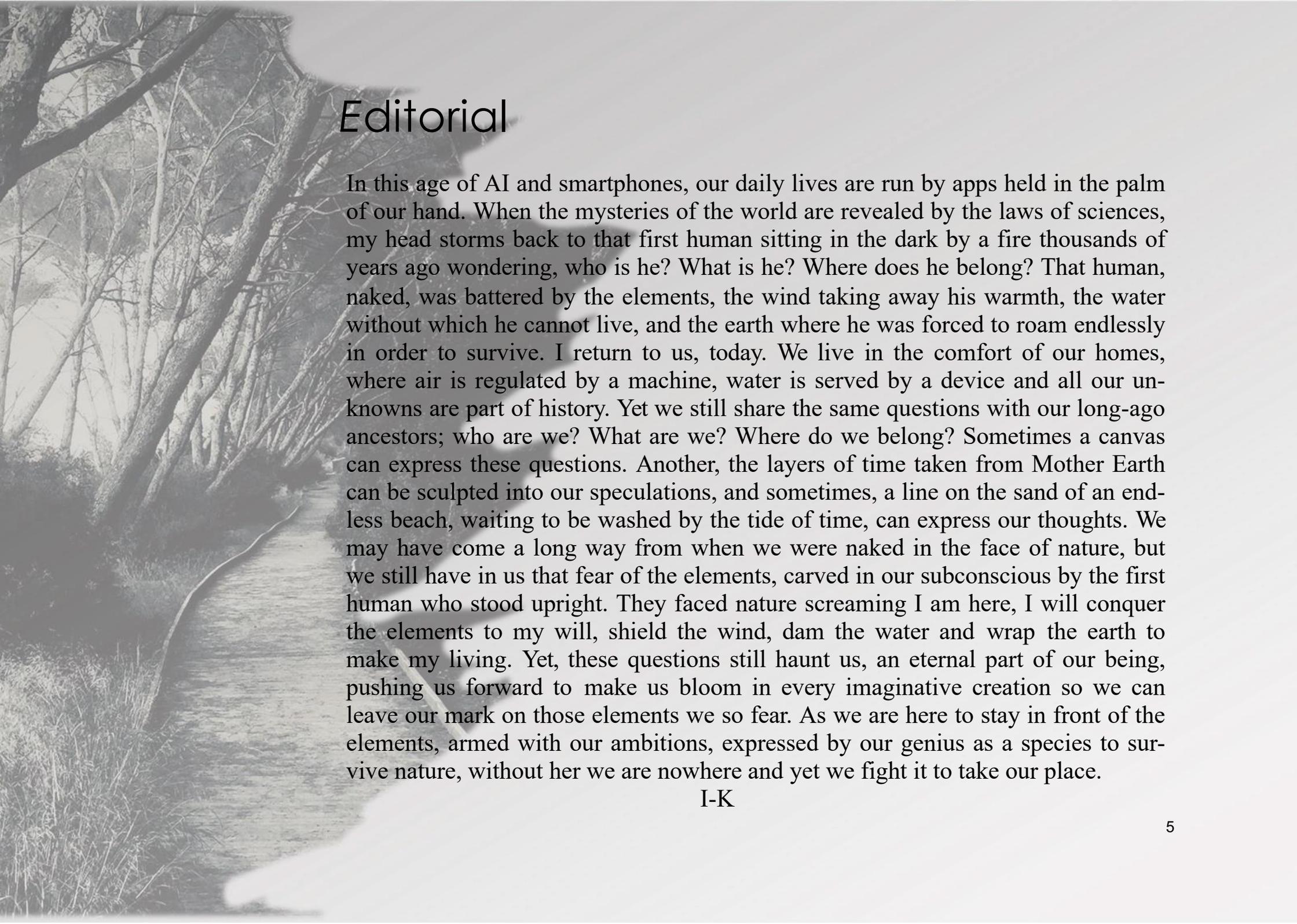
Acanthus takes its name from the acanthus plant, seen carved into the capitals of Corinthian columns. The plant takes its name from the myth of Acantha, a nymph loved by the god Apollo. As is often the case in mythology, Acantha rebuffed Apollo's advances, and scratched his face. In a fit of god-like anger, Apollo transformed her into the Acanthus, a plant that was beautiful to gaze upon, but whose spiky thorns pricked any who dared to approach it. Its name reflects our belief that art should attract our gaze, but also can tear at the soul.

Acanthus is published quarterly by Bloom Gallery, in November, February, May, and August. It invites artists, writers, and researchers to explore art, creative thought, and the research process, while crossing borders both disciplinary and physical.



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# Editorial

In this age of AI and smartphones, our daily lives are run by apps held in the palm of our hand. When the mysteries of the world are revealed by the laws of sciences, my head storms back to that first human sitting in the dark by a fire thousands of years ago wondering, who is he? What is he? Where does he belong? That human, naked, was battered by the elements, the wind taking away his warmth, the water without which he cannot live, and the earth where he was forced to roam endlessly in order to survive. I return to us, today. We live in the comfort of our homes, where air is regulated by a machine, water is served by a device and all our unknowns are part of history. Yet we still share the same questions with our long-ago ancestors; who are we? What are we? Where do we belong? Sometimes a canvas can express these questions. Another, the layers of time taken from Mother Earth can be sculpted into our speculations, and sometimes, a line on the sand of an endless beach, waiting to be washed by the tide of time, can express our thoughts. We may have come a long way from when we were naked in the face of nature, but we still have in us that fear of the elements, carved in our subconscious by the first human who stood upright. They faced nature screaming I am here, I will conquer the elements to my will, shield the wind, dam the water and wrap the earth to make my living. Yet, these questions still haunt us, an eternal part of our being, pushing us forward to make us bloom in every imaginative creation so we can leave our mark on those elements we so fear. As we are here to stay in front of the elements, armed with our ambitions, expressed by our genius as a species to survive nature, without her we are nowhere and yet we fight it to take our place.

I-K

# Philosophy of art and nature

The American writer and philosopher, Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803 – 1882) distinguished art and nature as similar things. In his dissertation, *Nature* (1836), he stated that, “the universe is composed of Nature and the Soul. Strictly speaking, therefore, all that is separate from us, all which philosophy distinguishes as the NOT ME, that is, both nature and art, all other men, and my own body, must be ranked under this name, NATURE.” However, there are significant differences between the two. Art requires us to say, “this is art”, to be comprehended, whereas nature needs an absence of thought; once it is ‘seen’ it ceases to be natural. Although so often comprehended through their similitude – both distinct from the body, both incapable of being fully defined - they are perhaps better understood as antonyms. Creation, imagination, vision...all are tied to the human ability to rationalize nature. Art views nature with the eye of our emotions, with a human eye, nor can it – or the human – exist without nature. Nature does not view art. It does not need art or humans to exist. It is independent yet also is part of a complex relational chain; art is a facet of the human, and the human is facet of nature. Air, invisible, intangible, yet it touches our senses. It can make us feel warm or make us shiver. Water, colorless, yet we see it in countless hues, surrounding us, the very substance we need for life. We travel on it, across it, under it. It forms borders, and barriers. It fascinates yet repels. The depths of the ocean more mysterious than outer space. And earth, the surface on which we exist. Corporeal, we can touch, taste, smell, see, even hear it. These are us. We are them. Yet we are also antithetical. It is this paradox that has long fascinated and continues to fascinate thinkers, artists and writers.

This triune of elements – earth, water, air – correspond with the states of matter – solid, liquid, gas. Why does air appear in the center of the title not, if we were following this logic, at the end? If seen through a lens of verticality, air is above, earth and water below. Picture the water cycle – evaporation, precipitation – and the three in a triangulated existence. Fire, the fourth element is transformative. It does not usually appear in landscapes, which is why it was omitted.

Let us look more closely at the nature, human, art trinity as they correlate with these three elemental forces. Nature, like earth, can exist independently. Without air or water, earth still exists, a planet hanging in the vast vacuum of space (although one could argue that space can be equated to air, as the anti-earth, diametrically opposed to the earth, but we shall dismiss this train of thought for the moment for the sake of simplicity). Yet, water and air are dependent on earth. Air cannot exist simply as air, nor can water without something to contain it. As humans we are air, the element we breathe, the thing we cannot comprehend yet know of its existence. Water, malleable, changeable, is art. We can manipulate it. Freeze it, evaporate it.

These three elements, whether consciously or not, are present in every artwork, even in the most technological concepts and media. For the material, no matter how unnatural it seems, is born of the natural. All art is of us, and we are of nature.

An aerial photograph of the Mediterranean Sea, showing a vast expanse of dark blue water with small, choppy waves. The text "Across the Med" is centered in the middle of the image in a white, sans-serif font.

# Across the Med

The man-made framing the natural. The complex interrelationships of art-human-nature.





Jane Khoury,  
Ramlet el Bayda, Beirut,  
2021

Juliana Khalaf, Anfeh, 2020



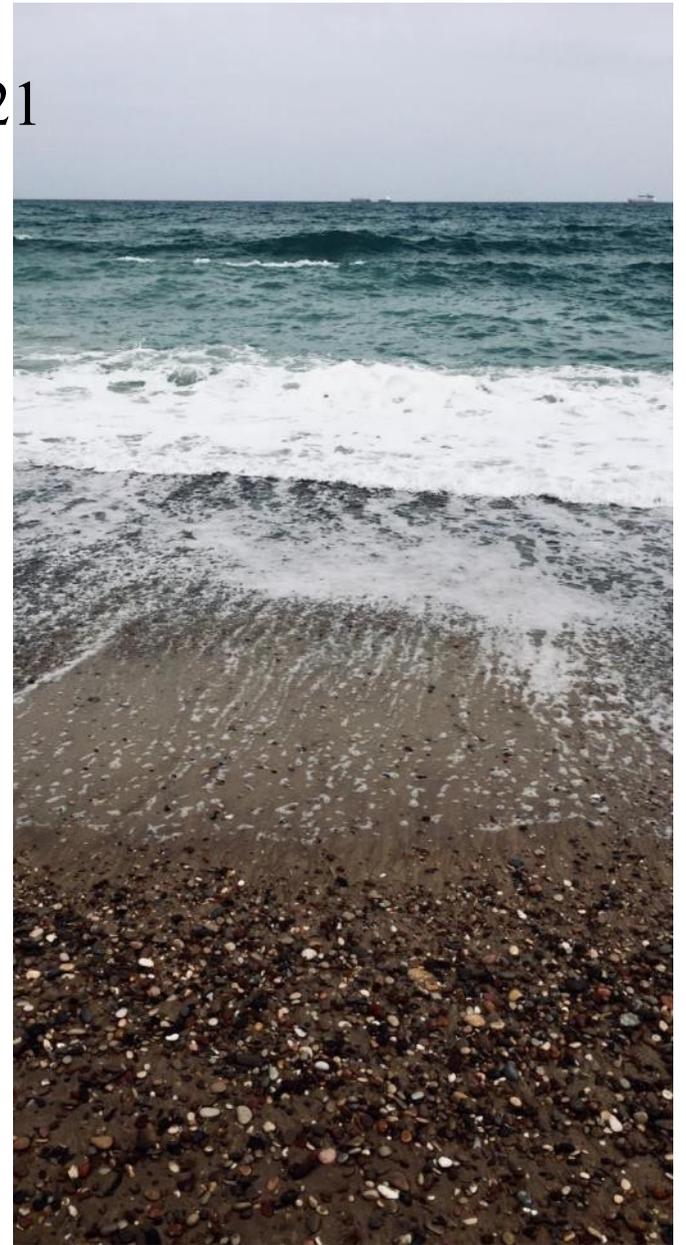
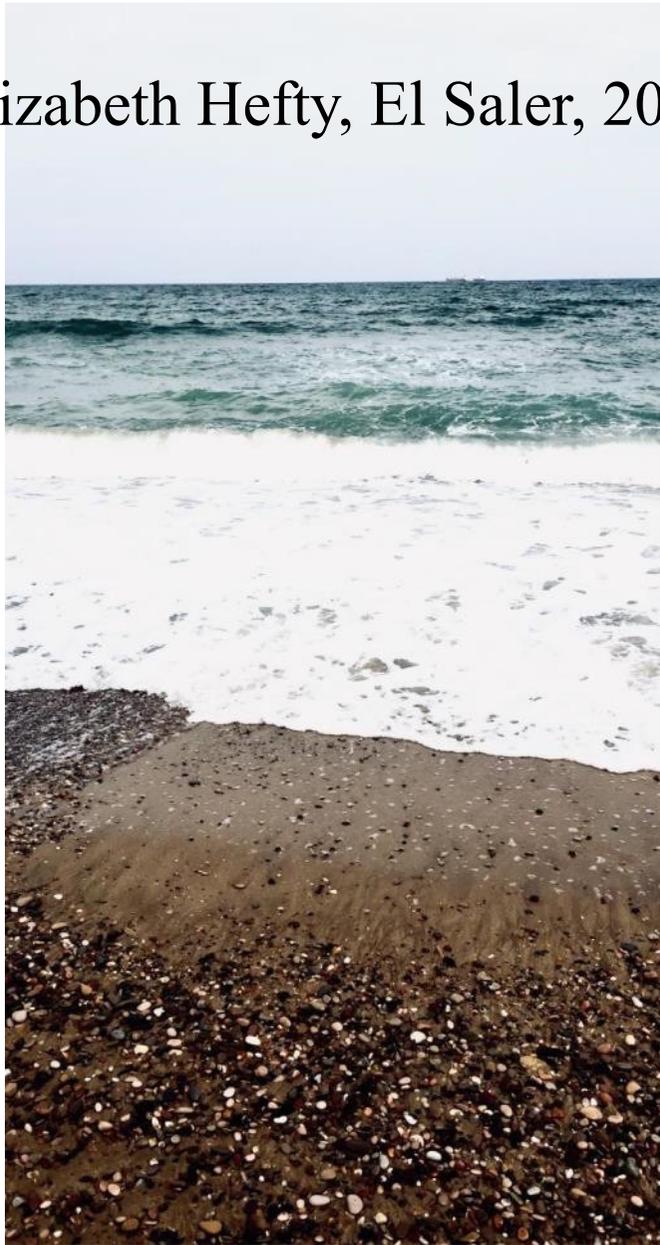
Juliana Khalaf,  
Roumieh, 2018





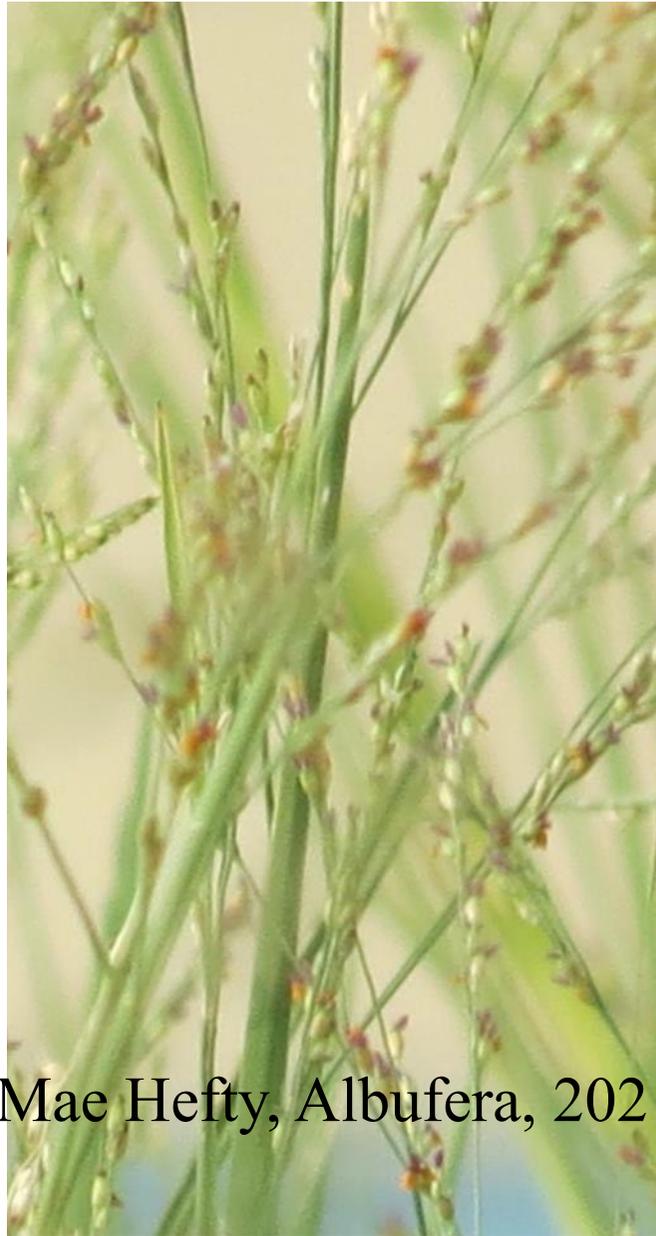
Elizabeth Hefty, Devesa, 2021

Elizabeth Hefty, El Saler, 2021

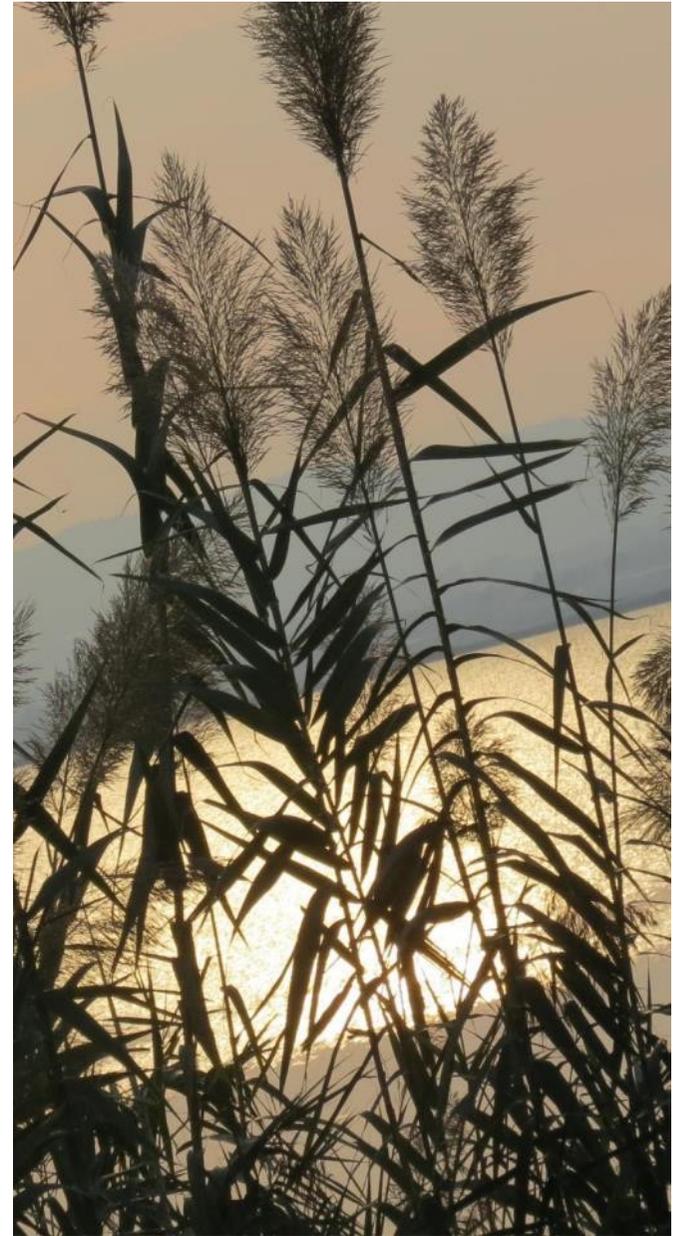




Mae Hefty, Devesa, 2021



Mae Hefty, Albufera, 2021



# Featured artist

## **Karen Eva Laing**

Karen does not write a text for her work. She believes in allowing the viewer to express their feelings on the image. She does not want to give any direction; she would rather have people let their own energy/sensibility flow.

In a short interview with Bloom, she talked a little about her work and her creative process:

***Bloom:*** What is it about a scene or an object that compels you to photograph it?

***Karen:*** It's an esthetic resonance (colors or patterns) or an emotional harmony which I feel within my inner self.

***Bloom:*** Do you have a favorite photograph that you've taken?

***Karen:*** No, I don't. My work is very much related to the way I feel and depending on the day some photos will appeal more to me than others. A photograph is just a point of view.

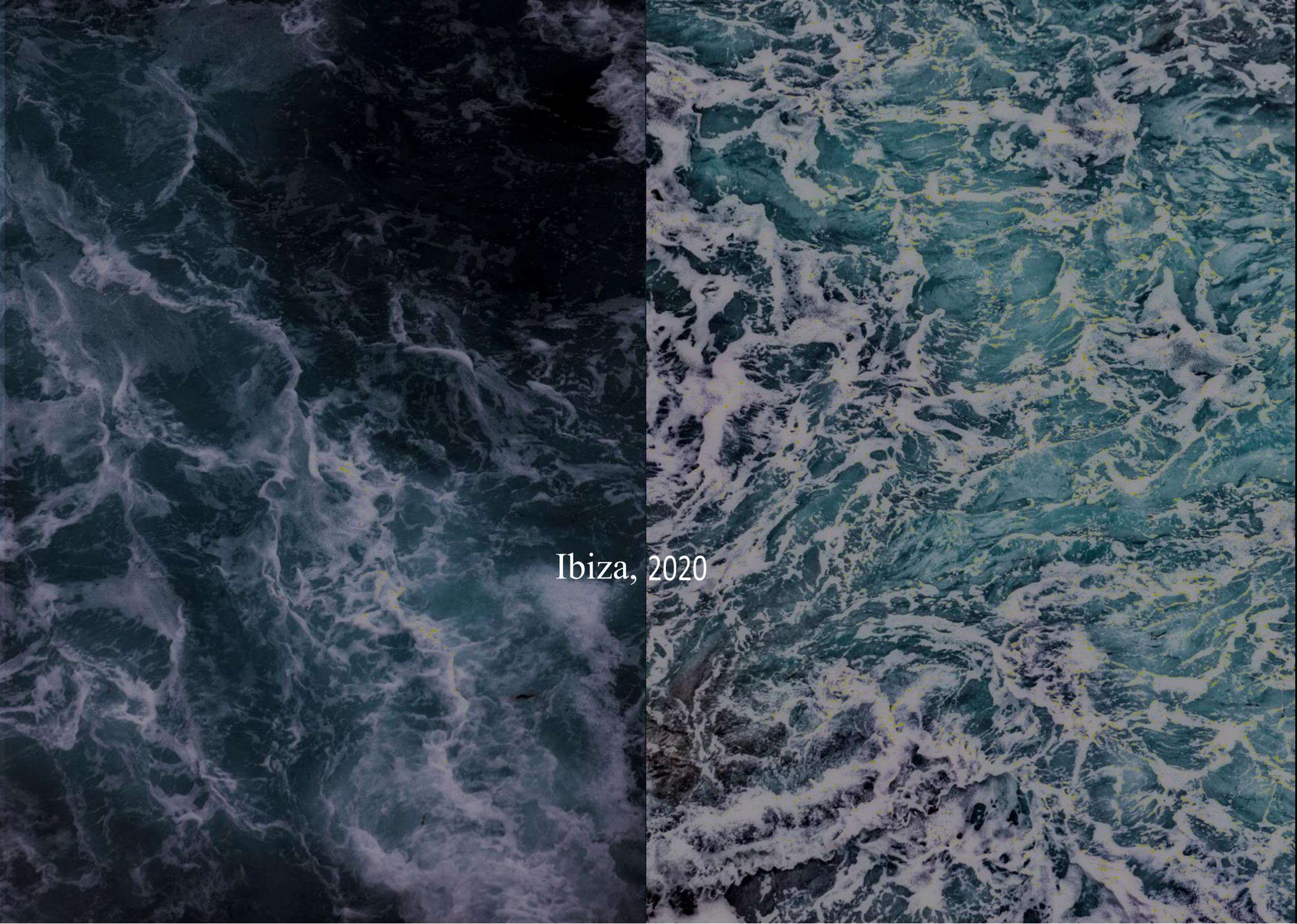
***Bloom:*** You've spent much of your life traveling and living in different countries. Does your work represent this nomadism? Or is it a way of creating roots, a sense of place?

***Karen:*** Yes, I think it's a reflection of my nomadic life, but it is also a conscious filing of the moment.



*fluidity*

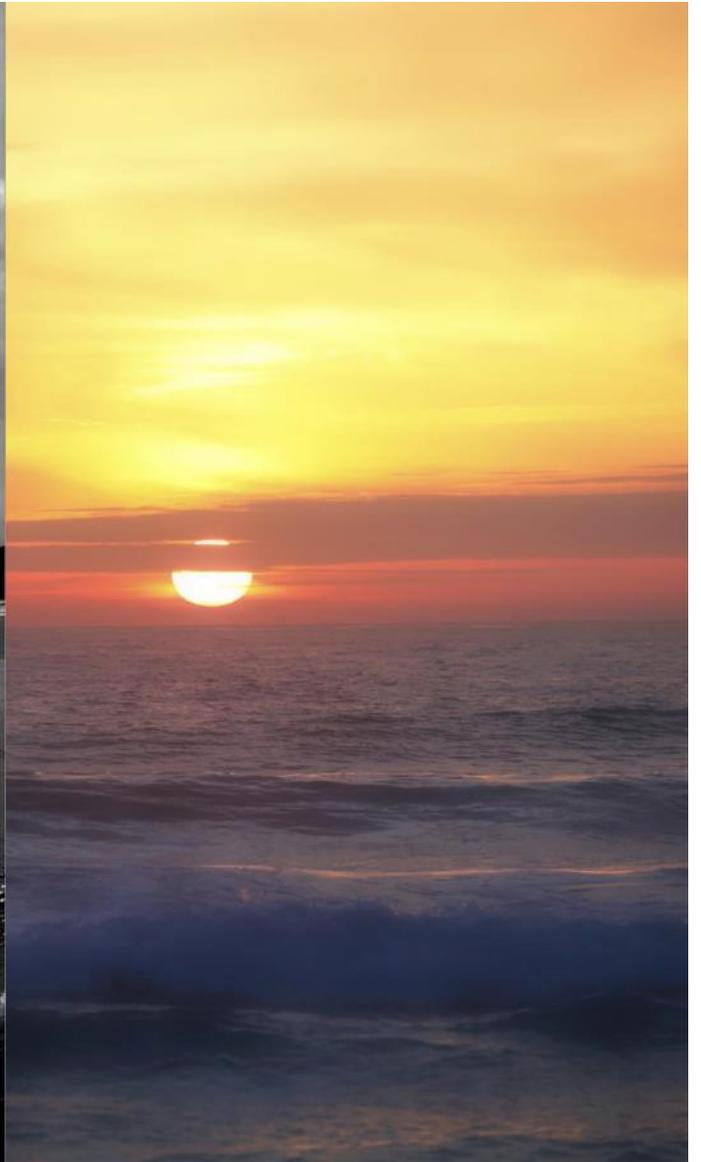
Karen Eva Laing



Ibiza, 2020

# El Saler, 2021





Guest artist

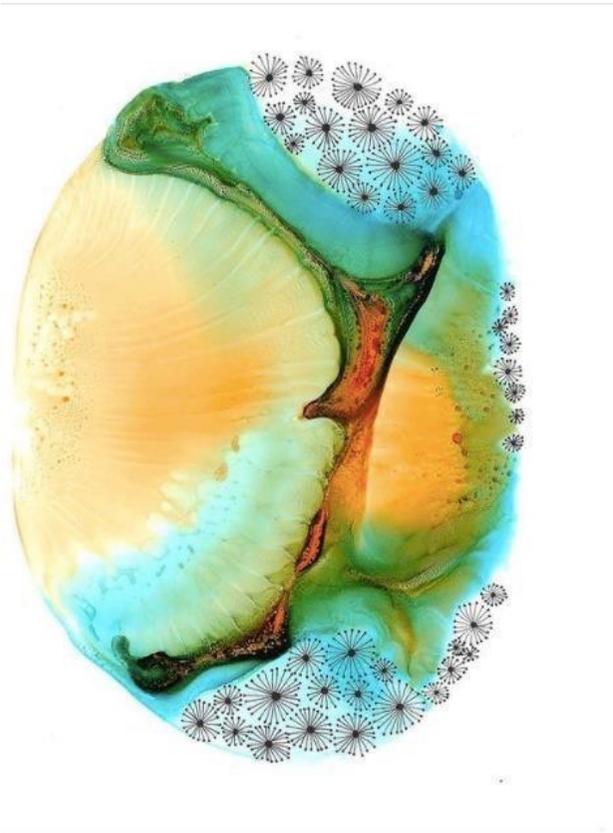
Let's dream...

Katherine Heald

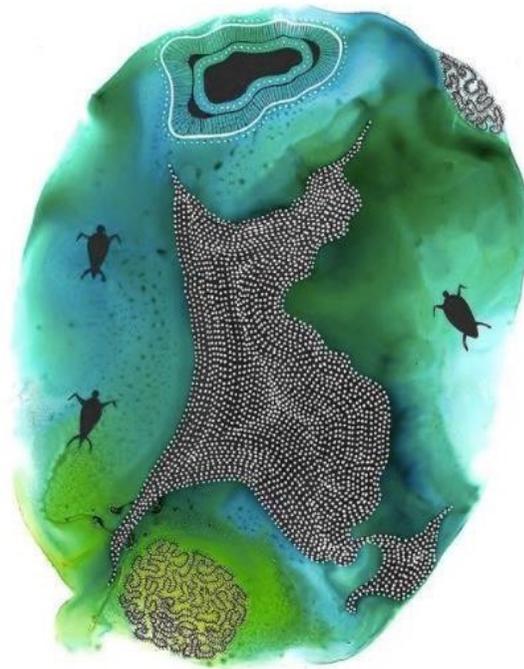


**Katherine Heald** presents abstract memories of our unspoiled natural world from above, with no humans or cars or buildings, as a stark reminder of what we once had in all its beautiful glory, and a reminder that we need to take steps to preserve it.

Our eyes need to see the beauty in our natural world daily to help rid them of the grind of everyday lives we get caught up in.



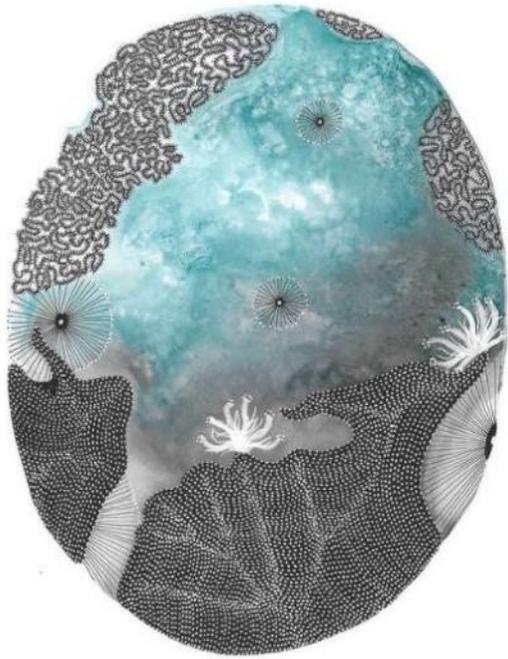
Tropical Island



Great Barrier



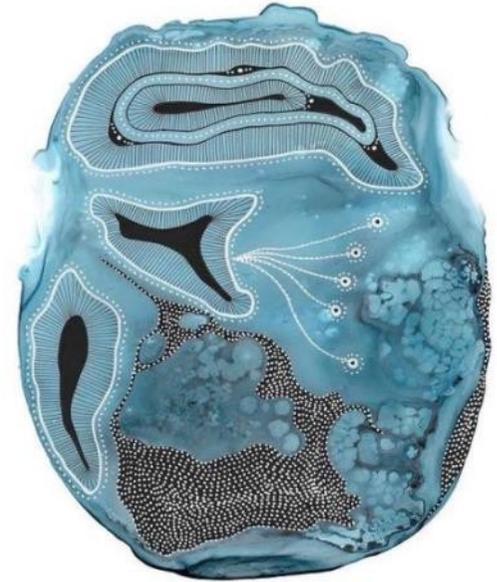
Chartreuse Theron



Great Barrier Reef



Ocean Cave



Underwater Life



Frog pond

Writings

# Dare I Breathe

Catherine Lowe

2014

Subway commute kit: liter of water, headphones, peppermint gum to poke my tongue around, lavender oil to huff off my wrist, a keychain of a garish frog in a bikini that my friend gave me.

Protocol: Look for someone in medical scrubs, who can help if the headphones (just headphones, no music), water, gum, lavender (is it going bad? I give the bottle a shake), or frog don't. Look for someone with their head in their hands or between their knees. Someone who's hungover or simply looks worse than I feel. The combination of able and miserable grounds me. Maybe I should stand up.

The trouble is I don't breathe enough in general. I produce, engage, react, but between my anxiety, the guy behind me playing a loud game on his phone, and the girl on the seat opposite doing her full face in a mirror, contouring now, there's no real occasion to breathe deeply *and* savor it.

My office has moved, this time to Times Square, 40<sup>th</sup> floor. Top of the world, again: I've worked in four other such buildings. Rather than contemplating the panoramas, my mind goes straight to air rights: *Whoever owns the soil, it is theirs up to Heaven and down to Hell*. New York City real estate developers took that 13<sup>th</sup> century maxim literally, applied it greedily. My slice of heaven is a desk with a vista of an ALDO billboard, a stock ticker, and Broadway's golden ticket, all digital, massive, and blinding. On occasion I've exited the building weak-eyed and clammy, Google Mapping the nearest urgent care center, where I babble to a doctor about the horror of to-die-for views, have a hot, wet cry, then head back to work.

My own apartment is on the fourth floor. It has a small room with a view of the Hudson River and the sailboats, Jet Skis, and Circle Lines that traverse it. My husband and I are in this room most of the time, windows cracked open even in winter. From the sofa we talk about the water, rarely taking our eyes<sup>28</sup>off it.

2015

For vacation, we go to the end of the world. Ushuaia, Argentina, is an unfinished yet congested mess with a Hard Rock Café at its heart. Our taxi driver nicked a dog crossing the street and kept driving as he nervously complained about the now-limping animal. The town is surrounded by the Beagle Channel, whose cold, slurpy waters are the public restroom for hundreds of cormorants, budget penguins whose excrement reeks up the air. Ushuaia was built by exiled convicts in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and retains the gloomy restlessness that must have fueled its construction.

I'm only slightly disappointed that el fin del mundo is a kind of a dump; I banished myself here willingly, after all. Its only pleasure is its post office, sitting alone on a pier on the Beagle Channel. The wood and corrugated metal shed looks proud, active, and loved. I walk in and choose a postcard and stamp to send my mother, scrawling a trite "Greetings from the end of the world!", and dropping it in a red box. I'm thrilled when she receives it two months later, though she doesn't pay it much mind.

Humble in size but important and cherished in its function, the post office elicits good cheer. Suddenly there's someone you want to write to, whose address you never had to remember. Probably many mothers and fathers receive postcards from the end of the world.

2016

Japan is the last place I visit before having another urgent care meltdown in New York, this one followed by a few shaky beers with the friend who gave me the frog keychain, then two days in bed or on the sofa watching the Hudson River, shale-like in winter, and thinking it was time for a move.

On the remote island of Naoshima, Tadao Ando built a home specially for works by Claude Monet, Walter De Maria and James Turrell. Ando's Chichu Art Museum was built partially underground

to respect and preserve Naoshima's natural features. Navigating these almost anonymous spaces, their concrete walls a low, cool breath, I hold my own, bunkered in peace.

Walking amid De Maria's strange stage of pedestals and spheres is like finding myself in *Last Year at Marienbad*, albeit severely underdressed. Turrell's *Open Field* is infinity, temporarily. But it was moving to see Monet's "Water Lilies" in a space built just for them, providing them natural light, an almost real lily life, at another edge of the earth.

2018

Two weeks into living in Valencia, Spain, and I'm angry at the air. It's suffused with a gorgeous, sweet fragrance—orange, magnolia?—and I can't identify the source. Is someone wearing a lot, lot, *lot* of perfume? Is it scent branding, escaped from a hotel lobby? Did I neglect to pay an entrance fee somewhere? I stand still to case the block. It's September, the sky a thick cerulean lid. A warm breeze lifts my hair to breathe on my neck. It's almost indecent. I lift my face to a tree with flowers high atop its branches, inhale uninhibited joy, and am ravished for all the monk parakeets to see, even weeping afterward.

2020

I stop talking after Ahmaud Arbery, just out for a jog, is killed. Give up meditating after Breonna Taylor is killed in her sleep. George Floyd is killed while running an errand, and I want nothing more to do with the air. To share the molecules still carrying George Floyd's "Mama!"—I'd rather not talk, or breathe, at all.

Nothing takes the edge off living on Earth. Air rights are now personally defined, the heavens filling with Blacks while anger, anguish, pain and covid hang heavily in the air below. I don't thrive, no hobbies. A lit fuse unless sleeping.

2021

Walking-around kit in Valencia: liter of water, extra masks, notebook and pen, Luis Bunuel's memoir (incidentally titled *Mi Ultimo Suspiro*), and the frog in the bikini.

*Claim your space. Your body is your temple. YOLO.* These expressions make sense to me now. But *bucket list* remains a maudlin/morbid concept that begat a travel guide industry, produced a suspiciously cheery movie starring two handsome millionaires, and generally kept the pressure on.

After the chaos of the past two years, the bucket list seems antiquated. An appropriate reframe might be:

things we hope to do before Earth dies.

A few months ago I went back to New York and met friends for brunch at a restaurant near our old office. We passed 770 Broadway later as we searched for a bar. Nobody looked up at the 40<sup>th</sup> floor, we were oblivious to skyscrapers. The bar had a working jukebox and served cheap yet overpriced prosecco I felt practically honored to drink. We talked about bands we'd seen live, high fived a lot.

Our feet tapped, scaled, and slid between the rungs of the tall barstools. We ordered another glass and wondered why we never just ordered a bottle, then quickly grew disinterested in cost value or any math other than tangents. In Times Square, of all places, I took that deep breath, and lived to tell. No bucket list destination could compare.

La Sala



La Sala features our contributing artists working in a variety of different media, and with different approaches to the subject.

Zaid Almymoni

*Roles in Nature, 2018*

This work is symbolic of life and nature, where roles are mutable, and can change. Fish now in the sky, falcons taking their place in the water. Increasing air pollution causes the falcons to flee to the water; the fish driven to the sky due to the toxic aquatic environment. Water and air systems are essential to us, they are fragile. Animals give us early warnings about the changing environment, and the perilous state that we face due to their degradation.



## Maria Jesús Perez

The relationship between the human and nature, complex yet fragile, is often portrayed figuratively - the human's interaction and interrelationship with the natural world – a relationship less wrought in awe as that of our ancestors. A relationship where art, human, and nature seem to coexist as equals.

De mi boca espinas y  
rosas, 2019





Simbiosis con la naturaleza, 2019

Libre, 2020



# Davia Santiago

## *Venus de Milos*

The human is of nature and throughout time we have made deities of it, humanizing it, worshipping its power. Male and female deities personified the elements, celebrating our connection to the earth, the water, the air, things always understood – perhaps more in ancient times than now – as crucial to our survival. Representations of Venus – from Willendorf to de Milos – exquisitely sum up the complex and highly nuanced relationship between art, humans, and nature.

Venus de Milos



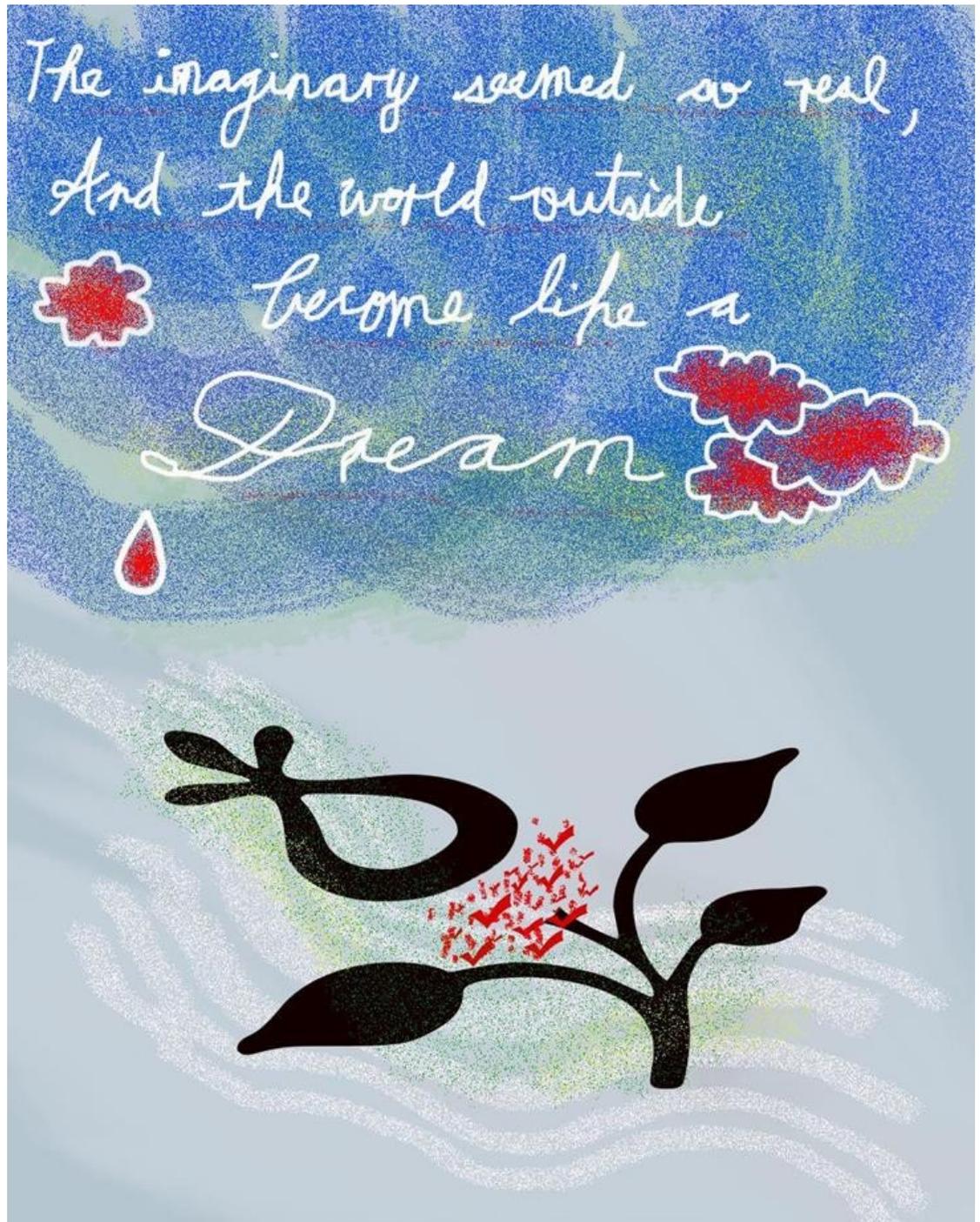
Matthew R. Burns,  
*Fountain and Frolic*, 2021

This work examines our isolation and reconnection with nature during the pandemic. Life and the seasons continue, despite our disconnection with self and place. Our forced separation from the natural made many crave it in a way they were unaware of before lockdown.



## Bobby Yu Shuk Pui

Bobby Yu Shuk Pui's practice is focused on the human – specifically body culture. In recent years she has been examining human genetic engineering, and how this technology shapes our cognition and understanding of the body. Far in time from our ancestors, the human now is manipulating and controlling nature.



Cut People Out, 2017



Sketch, 2017

# Vicky Barona

Nature is cyclical. From the human need to control nature, so we come back to nature as natural. The elements. Vicky's work examines the geosphere, where the elements come back together. And so the circle closes.



Cielo



Aurora

# Transformations – Farida Hussain

Earth. Wind. Water.

Flow like water.

Ground yourself like earth.

Change like the wind.

We hear these stories and concepts to be like the elements...and yet...at the moment, all that comes to mind when I think of each one...hmmm....water...my bladder does need to flow...I've been “grounded” on my sofa all morning...and I probably should change my clothing...I've been in them for too long. Fire wasn't mentioned (because I was told not to use that element) but I should probably burn the clothing as well. This is what happens to us when we work from home.

Covid took many tolls on many souls...even on trolls. I think the trolls were hit the worst. There are some things money can't buy...and a vaccine can't rectify.

And by trolls, I don't mean the online variety, I am referring to the large hairy ones that collect a toll for your safe passage. No one was allowed out and so they went bankrupt. Tragic.

But what did we become from this all?

I learned that water does flow, and it also does hold the shape of any vessel it is in...we change shape and adapt and sometimes we need to be held. But we didn't start out in the vessel. We came from something bigger...a larger body that created us...vessel-less yet contained. And so...we also flow and are in a state of constant movement, whether we see it or feel it...we are moving...inside...flowing to mysterious lands. We can look at the same spot on a river and have already had so much pass us by that we can't even fathom it...and yet we like to believe we have seen it all...and been in our depths...forgetting we are bottomless and limitless and eternal. That's deep shit!

I learned, that like the earth, we are not just actual earth, but a suspended entity held by invisible hands we call gravity and love. I've heard people say, "you aren't a tree...you aren't planted in the same place, you can move" (#BeLikeGroot!) but maybe we do need to plant ourselves for a certain period of time...it could be a second or a year or more...but change is inevitable and so are taxes...for some. And so we can generate our own seeds if we stay somewhere long enough to grow, flourish, blossom and fall...only to rise again...over and over.

I learned that like the wind, change is not only inevitable but it is a blessing and a privilege. And what do the great winds of old deliver to us? They carry our secrets and share them with the flowers and the stars and all the universe. They whisper to our hearts desires and push us to move in a direction we are more prone to resist because it is the unknown. The wind plants our seeds into the souls and into the earth that was nourished by our deep waters. It's a beautiful cycle we call nature...life.

Where is fire? The internal flame? The destruction of what was and the allowance to become anew? In Valencia, we have the Fallas where they create majestic art pieces and worship them and praise them for their beauty just before they are condemned like the witches burned hundreds of years ago, only to fly into the sky transformed into plumes of heavy black smoke, leaving behind the charred lungs of the onlookers and the ashes which the wind will carry off and spread over the earth...to keep the cycle going.

Earth. Wind. Water. Fire.

# Contributors

Vicky Barona is an artist based in Cali, Colombia

Matthew R. Burns is an artist and educator, he lives in San Francisco, USA

Katherine Heald is an artist, she lives in Queensland, Australia

Elizabeth Hefty is co-owner of Bloom Gallery, Valencia

Mae Hefty is a student, she lives in Valencia, Spain

Farida Hussain is an writer, she lives in Valencia, Spain

Juliana Khalaf is an art appraiser and photographer, in Beirut, Lebanon

Jane Khoury is a film student and lives in Beirut, Lebanon

Karen Laing is a photographer and lives in Spain

Catherine Lowe is a writer and editor and lives in Spain and the USA

Zaid Al Mymoni is an artist and educator, he lives in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Maria Jesus Perez is an artist, she lives in Valencia, Spain

Davia Santiago is an artist, she lives in New York, USA

Bobby Yu Shuk Pui is an artist and lives in Oslo, Norway