



WORTHLESS OBJECTS

As writers' primary access to artworks throughout the twentieth century, museums and galleries, and their coffee table style publications, have operated as regulators for twentieth century ekphrasis – *the verbal representation of visual representation* – by limiting the available source materials and directing the ways in which they have been processed. The effect has been largely homogenising, with ekphrastic poetry dealing predominantly in the fine art of white, Western males, and exhibiting a poetic approach that mimics an art critical-historical one, asking readers to view the pieces in question as timeless repositories of human wisdom. Poets whose ekphrases moved beyond the realms of painting and sculpture to work with altogether new kinds of visual representations have been disregarded within the retrospectives of ekphrastic poetry, as have the majority of female-authored texts.

WHAT DO WOMEN SEE TODAY?

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with

ICA

THE POEMS INCLUDED IN THIS TENDER SPECIAL WERE COMMISSIONED FOR **WORTHLESS OBJECTS**, AN EVENT THAT TOOK PLACE AT THE INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY ARTS IN LONDON IN OCTOBER 2015.

AN EXCEPTION IS THE POEM ANIMU & MANGO FROM RACHAEL ALLEN'S 4CHAN POEMS SERIES. THE SERIES WAS THE SUBJECT OF **AN ESSAY** BY SOPHIE COLLINS ON EKPHRASIS AND FEMINISM, WHICH WAS IN TURN THE SEED FOR THE ICA EVENT.

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DAISY LAFARGE: *How-To*

as a six year old girl, become incredibly bored until you discover that everything in the small flat you share with your mum can be handled as exotic and arcane material. excavate her bedroom while she is out. beneath the rotting wood of the windowsill are stacks of glossy magazines; run your small finger along their straight white spines, stumbling on the French names you won't know how to pronounce for many years, until you learn to drag them out with your mouth like: V-ohhhhh-gue; EIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIII

pull them out one by one onto your lap. the spread is wider than the span of your knees and its gloss sticks to your skin in the slow, summer heat. flick through the pages with untrained eyes that don't yet know the difference between advert and feature; shoot and article, until the spine cracks independently and splays open to waxy pages, thick with unstuck treasure:

these are the sample pages, yielding a crop of liquid-filled sachets, square foil pouches of pastel creams and translucent gels; the immaterial adulthood of perfumed strips, sealed and chaste under lips of thick card. with eager fingers prise each one from its page, removing the adhesive from their backs that clings to the bronze bellied women; the residue faintly umbilical. you sever the women from their samples and set them aside to incubate for later.

keep turning. the thick pages snagging like kinks in a curl that slow the declivity of flicking. on the surface of a weighted card, a woman leans against a man leaning against a car. it is a dark night in a city, her dress defies the rain. you read:

please turn the page to experience/
to experience boss spirit open fold and rub gently onto pulse point

but fail to understand where your pulse point is: perhaps it is something you will get when you're older, like a bikini or responsibilities, deciding it is best to rub your entire body against the perfumed strip, just in case; but the magazine is too heavy to hold above your head so you flatten the page in front of you, peeling back the fragrant strip reverently like the fraying lace covering of a saintly relic;

or Charlie prising the last golden ticket from his bar of immaculate chocolate. the underside of the strip is long and dark, wet-look lustre like a road after rain. its aura is just that: the smell of rain at night, the coquettish cats-eyes gleaming, the intimacy of global weather systems that've pared themselves down for this out-of-time night in the aromatic rain, for the woman and the man by the car. they make an enviable trinity, the woman, the man, the car. the weather is non-denominational.

gymnastically smear your arms, legs, tummy, butt, lips and cheeks up and down the strip, dragging your body that is not yet piecemeal across the page that catches and creases, frictive with your skin. where, for example, does the outside thigh become a hip. the night road buckles, dissolving in lengths with each of your movements. there you are in the mirror: slightly fluffed and pink, your face round as an airbag that has absorbed the full force of something you are yet to understand. it is always hard to locate yourself there, especially now, halfway down the road to somewhere older that dangles like a bit of cold spaghetti. you twist around yourself, breath-heavy, trying to inhale the New You but failing to find a note of comparison, of how you smelled before, wondering if this is just one of those things, like the time you cried when you were four because you wanted to sit on your own lap and couldn't understand why 'you just can't'

this is thirsty work. go get an ice pole from the freezer. tear it open with milk teeth and be overwhelmed by the smells as your re-enter the room which is no longer your mum's bedroom but some exotic harem or glasshouse; a sensorium flooded with the overripe pages that expose themselves shamelessly, spread-legged on the carpet. you crawl back to them on all fours. fat drops of blue ice pole fall onto the faces of women that turn grey and shrivelled as elephant ears. when you try to rub the page dry, the faces flake off and become a dull pulp that lodges itself beneath your fingernails. the samples are forming a small pile next to you, shining like objects in a magpie's nest. you are a sweaty and solo magpie.

an afternoon can be spent like this: hording the samples secreted by the glossy women, dousing yourself in their smells, entering the tribe. like any good anthropologist you collect samples; stacking the unopened sachets in the dark space under the bed where no one will look. there always seem to be more to add to the collection, as if the women re-fertilise the pages each night, when their spines are closed, and a fresh crop are ready by morning to be offered up by their long limbs, neat and brown as croissants. they are usually smiling, the women, but the samples seem anxiously otherwise, always anti- or -proof things you didn't know were bad; like water, age, or the sun.

but you look forward to it, the long hours spent in their company. you compare nails; hair; smile with them and tell them about your friends. and then one day, the spell breaks. maybe a teacher takes you aside at school; asking who gave you that perfume to wear or maybe it's one of the men who appear in your flat, beer-breathily declaring that someone smells like a tart, is it you, Jo? but your mum says no it's not her; and you know the perfume wasn't apple or cherry so your brain ticks slowly over what he means by the word tart, and you can tell by the two glass bottomed-bottles of his eyes and their post-pub leer that it is not a good thing.

the next time you sit down with the magazines, it seems like the shiny women are mocking you too. their pages bare and stripped of samples, their bounty retracted. for the first time, you fear what they've been saying between the pages at night. you feel like an overstuffed walrus, washed up on the beach of some Lilliputian island. the room seems quiet without them; the air suddenly stale and unfriendly; the afternoon reeling long and unwelcoming as an alleyway in the nearing-on twilight. the mirror is ignoring you too; you scratch absently with your fingernail at some dried food on the carpet. the word tart is still half-flipping over in your mind, stuck like the inevitable dud of the first pancake. it is then that you remember the unopened samples.

you haul the stash out from under the bed and tip them onto the carpet. you begin clawing at their edges, squeezing out creams and gels, moisturiser and shampoo over your body with abandon. your clothes've come off too: you're naked and frantic now, scrabbling to tear open each sachet, ravenous for the teeth-like sounds of the rip and the self-inflicted smacks of application - until you too, finally, are gleaming and glistening: wet-look and matte and glossy all at once. you beam. the liquids seep into each other, making thick, viscous rivers that merge slowly as the flow of toxic waste into unpolluted bodies of water. the synthetic aromas are a silent warfare, you can no longer tell one smell from the next.

if you turn back to the mirror, you might recognise yourself now; you are the woman with cucumber vision in the how-to guide for a wheatgrass face-masque, except instead of cucumbers there are circles of exposed skin round your eyes, and the masque has spread to subsume your entire body. there is a thick creamy layer between you and the world now: you wriggle and watch in the mirror as your lubricated limbs slide past each other, squelching like mud. you imagine

yourself growing up like this, inside this ectoplasm that is somehow safe, never fully touching anything, leaving some rich, regenerative discharge wherever you go. maybe it will harden, this second skin, and mummify around you. maybe one day you'll stop moving altogether, and much later someone will exhume you like a valuable artefact and discover you sleeping inside it: 'wow,' they'll murmur appreciatively 'wow, it looks like we've found something after all.'

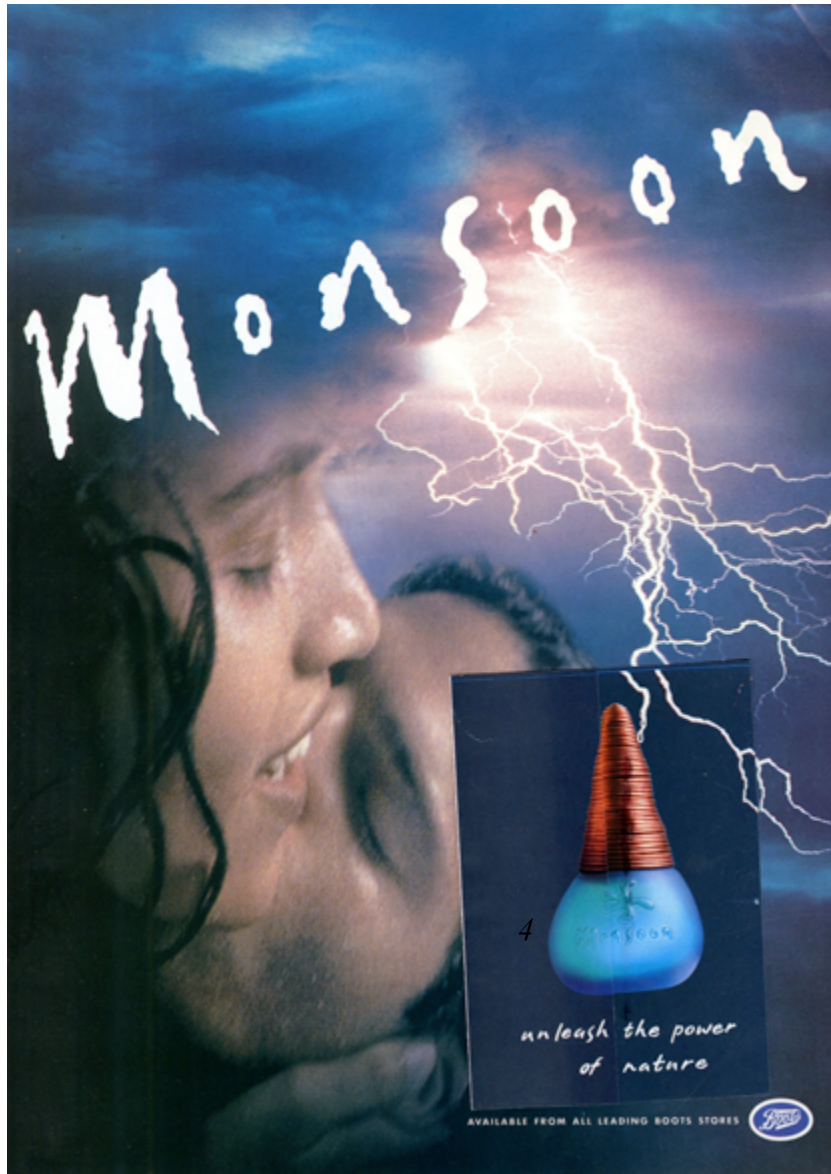
unleash the power of nature

Lightning dribbles from the sky; there go the dregs of your cereal's milk across the sink, careering towards the plughole like upended cutlery. The rain chivvies it on, mauve over blue, like the way scum on tarmacked roads is ushered into the bevelled gutters, before disappearing underground. You look up from the page briefly, remembering what someone told you, about burgers of fat growing in the sewers beneath London...

Above surface level, there is a monsoon. The bodiless faces of a man and a woman are set into cloud, floating like enormous weather systems. At first their profiles are pastel and formless, like the unstable shapes of rocks in a cave. But as an eye drinks darkness, so their features emerge; soft pink stalagmites that stiffen to meet the latitude and longitude of expanding air.

She's on top, closing her eyes and opening her mouth to look at him with three white teeth. Their skin forms one glistening mass; it appears they only have one eye each, so maybe the kiss he planted on her chin was the initial segue into their fusion, like a misfired attempt at sexual cannibalisation ending in stasis instead of death. It could have happened millennia ago; this backfire. When they first became melded together, fixed in the atmosphere.

Time and space collapse; it is hard to point to cause and effect. Was it the lightning that caused him to reach up and kiss her in fear or desire; or was the lightning a form of post-romantic shrapnel when he did? Either way, some fallout of the event offers itself in scented form; a small blue orb crowned with a tall bronze coil that seems to reprimand its seriousness, like a traffic cone drunkenly placed on some devout and memorial head. The coil conducts the soggy milk; the burgers of fat grow like troglodytes.



All images responded to by this author are as featured in ELLE UK June 1993/April 1995

a magical feeling

It is dawn, or another warlike hour. Gold confetti blisters the sky, rouged like a burst fuselage; exploding from an amber receptacle as large and vessel-like as the head of the woman that holds it up in one skinny hand. They lean in to each other across space. It must be light as a feather to be held up like that: its lid scalloped like a whorl of hotel butter, a silver shell launching its kamikaze contents. Whatever their motive, their nature remains ambiguous. They meet the warm air innocuous as petals.

The woman twists her head, her eyes turned upwards to meet the shell-shaped lid. No sign she was tasked to keep the bottle tight: she wastes its insides gleefully, bodies in the sky. The bottle traps words on its surface, flies in amber; their sticky black legs spelling out nothing.

Her arms hinge heavenwards – a Minoan snake goddess – and there is something hide-like in the way her red dress is slicked over her body; a remnant of a skin she hasn't yet shed, smooth and untearable as a snake's underbelly. There are no shadows, only the dark crop of hair that drips onto her shoulder; her red lips that are in fact a misplaced stitch of her dress.

She could be a goddess, even, spinning around in self-rapture, giddy with libations – or a dissident votary, drunk on the offerings left at the altar. Her gaze is immovable but powerless. Whatever ugly thing was living in the shell has turned to stone. The decapitated lid is the bad twin of her unseverable head, it does everything she can't: the boundless trajectory of its flaking skin, its emptying out to welcome the latent fuck of another form, another life. She is frozen out of the cycle, a fly stuck with entomological pins, looking at the pink tip of newly burst pupa: what she never was, what she'll never be.



GIVENCHY

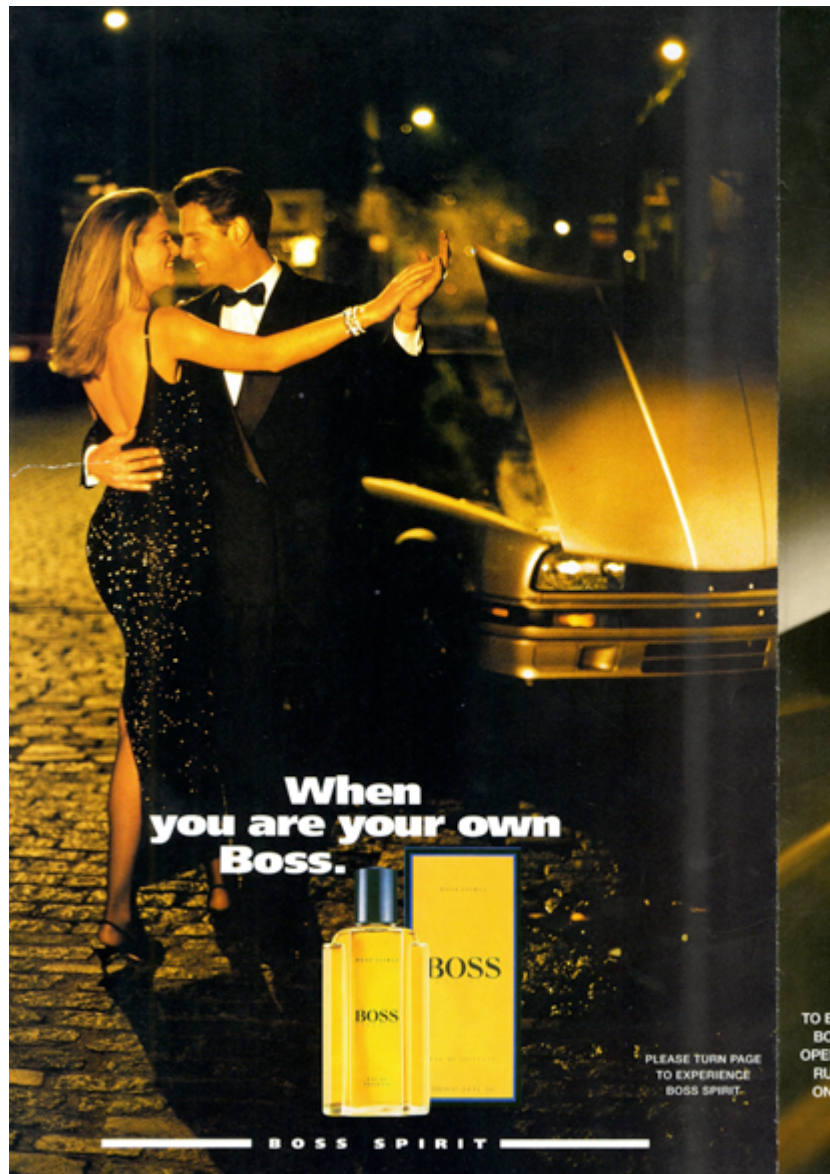
All images responded to by this author are as featured in ELLE UK June 1993/April 1995

when you are your own boss

A man and woman dance on brick-paving, everything swathed in a waspish palette of yellow and black. Behind them the opened bonnet of his car croaks up to the dark sky: it is broken, no one hears its complaint. Smoke rises to distend the night. Perhaps that's why they are dancing; forgetting why they are dressed in evening wear; where they were on their way to when they argued in the car about the juddering engine, and she said why didn't you take it to the fucking garage like you said you would.

But then the car stopped altogether and the smoke started in front of the windscreen; summoning them out, trance-like, onto the street, and they began gliding across the cobbles in each other's arms – and have been ever since – as if this cul-de-sac of fog was exactly where their evening – their whole lives, even – was headed.

It is unknown when the night will end. Each surface is illuminated by an unseen traffic light stuck on amber, and suspends itself accordingly: the couple's dance is a perpetual warm-up, they spend unmarked years get-setting for a party they will never arrive to. The mists hang low, patrolling the will of its prisoners like an element schooled in Tarkovskian weather. Lobotomised smiles paint their faces that glow like dud suns; happiness sprung up around their feet, photosynthesised by artificial warmth. The streets are sodden. The light holds the promise of a half-peeled orange on Christmas morning. At some point they may remember what else they learned as children; about amber being also a warning.



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Image author's own

KATHRYN MARIS: *Statement on 'Object'*

Borrowing from the tradition of the Anglo-Saxon riddle, this poem avoids naming its subject and contains quotations and allusions. The quotes are from Marianne Moore, Freud, and the Bible.

The object in question is a dress (pictured below) my friend Suki bought while backpacking in Mexico. Suki used to wear this dress at Ragdale, an artists' residency outside Chicago where we met one hot July. I admired the dress, so Suki gave it to me.

I wore the dress in my 20s around New York City; and then, when I moved to London, it became a maternity dress. When it began to show wear and tear, the dress became a nightgown or housedress.

When I last visited my parents in New York, the fire alarm went off in the middle of the night. As the fire department tore through the building, I stood outside next to my children, my parents, and their neighbours, feeling homely and exposed in the tattered dress I used to wear so publicly and unselfconsciously. The dress seemed to symbolize my aging, which, if I were a man, would probably not be considered aging but instead 'my prime'.

On the subject of gender and aging: I grew up with a tile in my kitchen (also pictured) that says 'The Woman is Like the World':

*at 20 years she is like Africa—semi-explored
at 30 years she is like India—warm, mature and mysterious
at 40 years she is like America—technically perfect
at 50 years she is like Europe—all in ruin
at 60 years she is like Siberia—everyone knows where it is, but no one wants to go.*

This tile must have lodged itself in my unconscious, as it makes a brief appearance in this poem, which I have dedicated to Suki.

Object

FOR SUKI

Your name shall be governed by your owner not your provenance. You shall be pregnant or empty of flesh. People may rise for you in public transport, or watch you hang in the Calle Giazzo. Of you someone will say *This delicate zephyr of a thing stirs us to the soul!* while another decrees *Let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart.* You will walk with an elastic step; you will be marred by no shadow of a spot. Under you will occur 12 optional sex acts and the first spasms of an exiting new-born girl who at age 20 will resemble Africa but at 60 will be likened to Siberia— and loved and abhorred accordingly. Though you shall have one maker, you will have at least two possessors. While one travels to a communist state with a serenaded leader, the other will have interludes of agoraphobia. Through them you will see bodegas and hedges and sheds; hares and wrens; basilicas and synagogues. You will know frost, rain, and hurricanes, along with corporate mammals who fake empathy. You will take the shape of your owners, as they of you— as they once took the shape of difficult fathers, and then took lovers who were happier 'free'. O worthless object, love them as they have loved you, the common skin of a female friendship. Love them even as they love or slay or are slain; love them even as Rome burns and the emperor does nothing but play his imperious instrument.



Image author's own

SOPHIE COLLINS: *Our Mother of Perpetual Health*

The hyperphotosynthesised leaves hanging
from the top right
much like the thumb
in Jeff Koons' 1986 Bacardi advert
resemble a flaccid dick

How ironic then the flop
of dark green's leaning in
towards the wet tip of a Latin cross
hard as a pencil
there and everywhere
notable mainly
in this context
for the incongruity of the front-facing
rose window almost Pagan



Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Our_Lady_of_Perpetual_Help



Image author's own

DENISE SAUL: *The Passport She Travelled With (1958)*

The housewife reads her passport on the flight from British Guiana. She tells her husband that the first name is incorrect but the photo is flattering. 'There's a place in London that can sort this out,' she says. He looks at the black entry stamp although it is the second country that they have travelled to. At the airport, she asks about popular British names for children. 'Your brother mentioned that Patrick's still common.' She hands over her passport to the security desk. They talk about the two sons that they've left back home.

RACHAEL ALLEN:
MONSANTO 

Workers go out
groped one ovule
consider another
untold conditions.

Supposedly more
of you're covert
now, you'll go on
to school to know

oncology, you've
obviously got to
know enough for
you to work most

tumours off. Told
labourers to look
over your brown
stool for uncommon

colour or GMO pods
without copyright:
however gooey our
food comes out our

logo's embossed on
those chromosome
loops. Don't avoid

those obligatory job
lots or you'll cost
Monsanto loads of
dollars. Shopping's

out, senator on topic:
no show. Sorry too
for oranges, soya, none
honestly home-grown.

Animu & Mango

/a/

FROM 4CHAN POEMS

The main bit's where Naru and Keitaro kiss and, in character, Keitaro was Declan who lived in Pensilva and had a cast and wore school uniform even after school (poor) and I was Naru. In one scene I made Declan promise we'd go away to college together but I don't think he understood, we were far beyond the slap-pink and heavy breathing of a slow Chinese burn but would carry on doing them in silence or burn shag bands on hay bales that were shrink wrapped in the nearly-dark and as he burnt grass I dreamt heavily and cleanly about our future together it was in truth a sluggish start anyway he's in the navy now and probably knows how to make a promise



Screenshot from Japanese manga series Love Hina, source: <http://boards.4chan.org/a/>

DAISY LAFARGE is a writer and maker, born in Hastings and due to graduate from the University of Edinburgh in 2016. Her writing has been published by online platforms such as the *Quietus* and *Clinic*, and in print in *The Burning Sand*, *Poetry London* and *Best British Poetry 2015* (Salt).

KATHRYN MARIS's second collection, *God Loves You* (Seren), was published in 2013. Her poems have appeared in *Best British Poetry 2015* (Salt), *The Pushcart Prize Anthology*, *Granta*, *tender*, and many other print and online publications. Originally from New York, she now lives in London.

DENISE SAUL's *White Narcissi* (Flipped Eye Publishing), was Poetry Book Society Pamphlet Choice for Autumn 2007. Her *House of Blue* (Rack Press) was PBS Pamphlet Recommendation for Summer 2012. She is the winner of the 2011 Geoffrey Dearmer Prize. Denise is working towards a PhD in creative writing at the University of Roehampton. She is currently a PBS pamphlet reviewer.

RACHAEL ALLEN's first pamphlet of poems was published by Faber. Her poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *Poetry*, *Best British Poetry 2015* (Salt) and *Poetry London*. She is the poetry editor for *Granta* magazine and co-editor of anthology series *Clinic*. She studied English Literature at Goldsmiths College, and is now studying for a PhD at Hull University. She is co-founder and editor of *tender*.

SOPHIE COLLINS grew up in North Holland and now lives in Edinburgh. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Poetry*, *The White Review*, *Ploughshares*, *Poetic Series* (Sternberg Press), *Five Dials*, and elsewhere. She received an Eric Gregory Award in 2014. She is now editing *Currently & Emotion*, an anthology of translations to be published by Test Centre in spring 2016. Her first collection will be published by Penguin in 2017. She is co-founder and editor of *tender*.