

Poetry Portfolio

Kwanlada (Kwan) Srijomkwan

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Urban Sketching

The shrimp gumbo from Reading Market,
Philadelphia, burnt
sienna broth, the scallion sap greens,
like the first knife lesson with my mother,
like the most transient of visits.

Wolfboro in summer, the landing
of loneliness, like the plane on the lake,
alizarin crimson, here to lick sour sorbet
off the Bananagrams table at sunset
when everyone else, in their bright bikinis,
races off towards the pier.

Lovelady, the Queen Anne home,
a study in shadows and isolation, straight
lines and bended emotions, now weeping,
next whomping like willows,
like lying about leaving,
like the therapy lamp in the corner
casting a shadow deeper than winter.

Emerging from the Tube, the momentary confusion,
facing Lime scooters in London, like a mental globe,
rotating with the meerkat's gaze, its zebra suit,
its perch on the purse, peculiar.
The sense of displacement,
like the nuclear plant that wasn't on the map,
like a suspension bridge of thin trust, falling.

If You Saw Me at Rumney, NH

If you saw me hike, dwarfed by a borrowed backpack,
you would know the cliffs secretly daunt me;

and if you saw me snatch a third handhold
you would know I had been dreaming all night long.

If I slipped in the glacier mud
you would admire the mica shards in the stones,

if I trusted my foothold and stood
you would pack for me a chewy chocolate bar.

Oh if I shot into the air when you fall
your heart would fly out to the frozen lakes

you would welp in joy, you would embrace
the chalk-stained granite, you would give me a high-five as I let you down.

If you saw me shake my limp arms
you would know the anchor will be in my hands;

And if you saw me looking down
you would know I'm plotting towards the sky;

and if you saw me coiling the ropes
you would know I was still hoping for tomorrow.

If I put bug spray on my harness –
if I rushed yet missed the bus – if I tore my pulley tendons –

you would know once upon a time
I believed I could climb beyond the past.



Portrait of the Artist as Taphanhin, Thailand

I am the man-eating crocodile,
the cursed shale bridge, the rotted wood
of train platforms, and the rice-laden boats
headed downriver.

I am noisy sparrows on electric poles, 6AM barefooted
monks on their food offering rounds, and comfy blankets.
I am passersby fire-hosed with river water
at the height of summer.

I am temple dogs, deep fried bananas, the motorcycles
that sixth-graders ride to school. I am the German
“English teacher,” his world map,
and the hour it takes to reach a bookshop.

I am the elephant at dusk, its hand-fed sugarcane,
its 7-11 plastic bag. I am car wheels half-sunk in floodwaters,
two hundred baht before election, and afternoons spying
the rival IT store on the walk back from school.

I am Dragons, gold and emerald, the schools opposite the hospital,
next to the temple, next to the graveyard jungle,
and the funeral parlor, its storefront
glinting a fake silver.

The Idea of the Charles Commons Fire

Having your dorm catch on fire on move-in day
is sort of like getting your hair pulled
into the back of a blow-dryer, or trekking
to the VelociCoaster on a rainy Universal Studios day,
which is sort of like trying to visit a Christmas Village
on Thanksgiving night or assuming Florida winter
is like Bangkok weather or realizing you forgot
your computer at the lab when you get home,
right as a thunderstorm cracks.

Getting a hundred dollars for compensation
after the fire is a bit like free shrimp salads
during a false-positive quarantine or attempting *thank you*
in three languages before getting it right.

Like finding your professor's name is *Jesus*,
or your keyboard double-bb-ing all the time,
which is sort of like waiting four hours for a
pizza delivery, or wearing masks on flights, not for Covid,
but to catch your drool.

The Dog-Eared Book

This dog-eared,
well-read and dirty, disrespected
paperback, aggregated pages hefty

enough to break a dog's skull.
Its author
destined for greatness, circa 2007.

I've internalized a great amount of advice:
be the first, do everything, sacrifice
the life I may or may not have.

But let the record show
that I tried, but I was not perfect.
O let the dog-eared book

stand! For the American teacher
with his Harley Davidson and inspirational quotes;
For Paris in his lab;

for the fruit seller aunty,
expert in carving up mangoes; and Stephen Hawking,
crippled, brilliant, impossible. For Kim and Toey,

dancing to BTS, and the boys on Wednesday mornings
scrubbing their military boots, the dorm mother on duty
handing out yellow freedom cards,

for their unerring timeliness
and the air of approval when I pass.
Let the shelf be pristine

but let the books be dog-eared
and stand against the virtuous,
correct, and completely perfect

distended with expectations.
Let me have in any future
Some dog-eared thing to crave,

here Nakorn Pathom, Thailand, Mahidol Wittayanusorn.



Clumsy and Brave

He has always been clumsy and brave,
especially here weaving through Bangkok's streets

shuttling tourists to the Emerald Buddha. Clumsy was
the scrape of a back wheel against the sidewalk,

raining red-painted concrete pebbles. Brave was red, white, and blue
painted over the traditional green. Clumsy are the streaks

covering half the speed meter, a patriotic,
national-colored mistake. Brave is the promised ETA

for an extra hundred baht, for a couple of beers
before the next customer. Clumsy are the tickets,

six this month, still needing to be paid. Brave his smile
and light-hearted jest with traffic officers. Forty

miles per hour in a residential area, his driving
was clumsy. Brave then was the reassuring head pat

for his daughter after the latest near-accident. Trip
after trip he was clumsy and more

clumsy, for months he drove to pay off the charges,
the overdue tuitions. The brave

fighters their fear with recklessness, he traded it
for resolve. She hated a clumsy father. He was brave

so he promised he would change: no more drinking, no more breaking
the law. Brave, the robbers stood in wait for tourists.

Because he is clumsy, standing between clients and thieves,
he thinks, *Be steady with your hands*. What is brave

is what he says. Shots puncture the Tuk Tuk's seat,
rubber foam and sirens pluming into the air. Clumsy, brave,

clumsy and brave, his daughter, with still-bleeding hands,
places on his casket a messy garland.



Shipwrecked

Chanting prayers, dreaming of ships just beyond the horizon,
Another day, another hour, just another minute he wishes to live.
No other choice but one, no other food, no other flesh but his own.
No other way to feed his unfortunate child.
In the middle of nowhere, on this desolate rock, he cut his upper arm.
Blood, not a drop allowed to waste, meat, sickening yet juicy sweet
All of his hope and life, given to the tiny human.
Loyal love, from him, unloved by the world.

Uniting fire

An inch of distance.
That's all it needs to separate some things, someone.
An inch of distance,
cast in bronze
unmovable,
untouchable til the world burns
and the metal expands,
ever so slowly,
basking in every degree
of destructive heat.
Basking in the vengeance
of a punishment well-earned.
Memories
can be cold or warm,
sad or happy,
but never boiling
roiling
raging hot,
and never sufficient
Til the world burns
for punishments unearned

African Memorial, NH
Prompt from NH #WriteAcrossAmerica writing marathon 24/7/20

Haikus Collection

Haiku's
Jumping to drum beats
Hundreds of voices, raised as one
The joker moon smiled

— MWIT TISF 2019 disco night

The engine's soft hum,
Out of the dawn-lit window,
Snowy jagged peaks

— Descending to Geneva, early morning local time

Reverberation;
Endless stairs spiraling up
Tomb of ancient stone

— Saint Piere Church Geneva, South Tower

Cloudless dark blue veins,
Ripped through bronze and marbled sky;
Midnight adventure

— Midnight airport pickup, 1:06am 28/12/2019

Morning construction
sounds of relentless thumping
and the neighbor's groans

— College dorm experience

On a cold Christmas night
the subway platform was warm
and the church wasn't

— Chicago, 2021

Leaping droplets; fall
Wearing— never weary— down
On bright ropes, man climbs

— Outdoors rock climbing

Waking up to

The death of a dream.
Smoothing out its brain-fold
like wrinkles in the sheets.
Combing away tangled hopes
so it lies shining black.
Exercising a caution— a serenity
Reckless nights lacked
Running not away from its dregs
But along with decisiveness.
Letting its warmth touch cool skin
And away into the drains.
Writing it down, down, down,
Out of reach, out of expectation.
Waking up to
The death of a dream.
Waking up from
The doggedness of a purpose.
Waking up to
Find my way lost— again.
Waking up to
Live, again.

Kwan Srijomkwan
— 2 Jun 2021

Ember

Within the depth of dying fire
the flame, intensely green, leapt high
and mingled in its heart with blues
so clear it rival summer skies.

The stars and micas on the ground...
Had I but look askew— and frown
It's hard to tell the flames that rise
from bright auroras reaching down.

A five dollars folk-craft made for fun
some phosphorus, sulfate, and it's done
Best of science (plus my dream) in a jar
— Magic— accompanied by our guitar.

Each time I go to sleep I smell
Bleach from the lab, I now could tell
Maybe some wind could it disperse
And let my old fire out in verse.



Thai Scholars Summer Camp — July 10th, 2021

To the moon

What do you do
when your love is on the moon?
So you resent the sun
and shun the lullabys
You sing out your heart at night
But wishes only fly so high
What medium should love take
to make it all the way?
Launched on fuel of passion
with yearning carefully rationed,
trapped in geostation,
a mere fraction— of despair
I breathe, and love is in the air
So I'm just here suffocating
Exploding in vacuum
Loveless
On my way to the moon.

Egg Rock

“บ้านนี้เลี้ยงลูกเหมือนไข่ในหิน พอออกไปสู่สังคมภายนอกก็ไม่สามารถดูแลช่วยเหลือตนเองได้”

This house raises their children like eggs in a rock— no wonder they can't support themselves in the outside world.

There is an egg inside a rock
A cage of granite, light and smooth.
—Unbreakable
Ten long years I bite my way through
My tooth¹ had fallen off
so long ago, I'd pretended
I could emerge whenever I want
And rather than gnash,
I nibble.

Today the stone case is broken
Hot sand under my squishy flippers
And no predators overhead
Yet the salt water, like words,
Stings
So I turned and paddle, paddle
All the way back
to all the love I had
my lifelong igneous shrine,
broken and unmendable
Left sitting here, beside my surrendered safety.

Never aware of my own shield
on my soft, round back.

¹ Turtles hatch using a temporary tooth called “carbuncle”

My Ugly Pajamas

Tomorrow it would be sunny out, and warm
as spring could be. The forecast says
seventy and in my
twenties I want to wear my Forever
21 mini-skirt but what if
a bike pass and what if the wind blew? I have
fourteen shirts, two dresses, and
five skirts (that's all I would count)— and none of them would do.
Oh how I miss my simple high school life.
My wardrobe had a hat and just three shoes,
A uniform for school and sports and sleep.
The only colors yellow, white, and blue.
Mornings we walked in pairs down swept, neat stairs
To breakfast as a group. A thousand girls,
beside the world, gossip the only thing to share.
We bed in numbered bunks, showered in chunks,
all together and I couldn't be happier — to *not* be free — if all my
free-
time is spent on a dozen people, and not a dozen
trifles. Every day now
I wake up at the unholy and outcasted
hour of five
in the morning. I always organize (some would say militarize)
my life and I realize
That my meticulously folded (Marie Kondo-style) wardrobe
would probably never be aired, nor could I share
my bath-in-7-minutes skill. But how
how could I bear
to excise the memories
in those cloned (somewhat ugly) and striped
pajamas, when the rule out here
is to be individualized
— and alone?

Birds trapped in the sky

Sometimes, I feel like
A bird, trapped in the sky.
Every hope, every chance, every sight
Upon me heaven smiles.
To live the dream, top the heights
—and never see the lie
So how can I stop and rest and perch,
When I have the privilege to fly?
We are feathers reflecting sunlight,
Flapping away feet after feet,
Gazing out miles after miles.
We search for the destination of our flight,
But north or east, west or south,
Only traps met our eyes.
Hope is waning, right along our might,
But to land is to give,
To settle is to cease to defy.
So we flew and flapped and never alight,
Casting ever higher, further, freer,
With never a perch or a touch or a sigh.