

**POEMS BY FIVE POETS FROM 12 IN RESPONSE TO  
ACTS FOR PLACING WOOLLEN AND LINEN BY HELEN MIRRA  
CAMPLE LINE (AUGUST-SEPTEMBER 2020)**

**Peculiar Fibres Of My Being**

What are we looking at?  
What are we ever looking at?  
Do you want poetry? Or someone alive?  
Poppy seeds in the warm loaf  
A little drink in the side room  
It aches, wait, hey I don't know  
Let me stretch (let me love!) to an edge.

(Tessa Berring)

a little drink in the side room  
sex can bring things down to earth  
she died there eaten by foxes  
said love all possible bodies  
there's no savings and no mirror  
am just mobilising now we  
didn't stay with the exhibition

(Jane Goldman)

What are we ever looking at?  
Desire lines    Silent songs  
Blizzards      Grass rivers  
Ghosts tracks                      Bleached fields  
Plough marks                      Bright bones  
White sea                              Tangle nets  
What are we?                      What are we looking at?

(Lynn Davidson)

## **Harakeke *flax***

As kids we went down the gully climbing through and over harakeke, like beetles.  
Our backs in the rain-mist shining, like beetles.  
Our legs and arms in and out of the harakeke's long green leaves, like beetles.  
To each leaf, a keel. The hard ridge underneath. Fibres run parallel to the keel  
like the sea. The growing point is a stiff fan, like an outstretched hand.  
Tūi drink honey from its red flowers and then sing a two-voice-boxes song.  
The flowers are flags on tall, black stalks which we held ahead of us, like mandibles.

(Lynn Davidson)

## **Our Backs**

in the rain mist shining like beetles, shining  
like beetles in the rain mist at our backs in the rain  
mist shining like beetles, shining like beetles  
in the rain mist at our backs in the rain mist  
shining like beetles, shining like beetles in the rain  
mist at our backs in the rain mist shining like beetles  
shining like beetles in the rain mist at our backs

(Tessa Berring)

it's only a little ways to the end of the line  
when I took out the jacket from last summer it said, 'the best is yet to come'  
I wondered, kissing him, who'd finally taught him how to kiss  
it didn't take long for this moon to delineate  
she died there eaten by foxes  
many do, it's the done thing now  
I lie in bed naked feeling the universe expand

(JL Williams)

said love all possible bodies  
said all bodies are possible  
said walk said  
the pull of the sea or  
the push of the land said  
this means a lot to me said  
movement, geography, beauty, ambiguity

(Lynn Davidson)

What I'm trying to say is I want to wrap you around me  
The words for this are different but all over the world the action is the same  
I lie down on you I fold you over me I fold you over me  
Babies, brides, corpses - we all know this feeling  
The sun is a kind of torn open burning breast  
There I saw your lips opening just like mine  
No one coughed no one even said a word

(JL Williams)

there's nothing to say of the photograph now  
how quickly a landing page disappears what  
is it exactly to openly reference real life people  
when the reality of our rage is this grim failure  
to expend our labour on its own material as cities  
burn world events hang loosely suspended it is  
there i-i saw your lips opening just like mine

(Jane Goldman)

### **No-one Coughed**

no-one even said a word  
Am I doing this right?  
(Uneasy sometimes, beautiful sometimes)  
*I am not like this*  
*I am not like this*  
Let's write this over and over and over  
History is a deep well, bubbling.

She died there eaten by foxes  
(how bloody)  
Should this be a love story?  
I'm a bit lost - (in a wood perhaps?)  
If we pull the curtains  
this room will disappear  
leaving us nothing but suspended

I saw your lips opening just like mine  
the same incomparable 'ah'  
(The city is left to rot)  
Sometimes I'm disgusted  
by how pale happiness is  
Wouldn't you just love a magic flying carpet  
the exact same size as your body?

(Tessa Berring)

I lie down on you I fold you over me I fold you over me

face in the burn I nose through water  
and coming out you fleece me  
I mean pelt me  
I mean you *cover* me

we use *burn* for river in scotland australia and new zealand  
the oil from your hands peppers me when I breathe in

(Lynn Davidson)

Hang my life on a wall, woman, and break it  
into seven parts. Give each stripe a hand to tell  
its story as a loveline, a lifeline across the palm –  
its never a perfect square, though the eye will want  
it so, correct it. Leave the edges ragged raw,  
a tide line of hours, the evidence of plumbing depth.  
Even the shadows show where the light won't go.

But a life doesn't move that way – a stripe or two  
and you're through – it's a shift of tide; we add line  
after line, changing patterns, tacking the new  
to the old, making way, tying it off only to start again,  
and all of it, each stitch, us. I study the line above to see  
where I'm from, before daylight brings me another.  
I study the line below to see what is to come.

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Look closely at the edges: this one is  
unfinished. Look through me at the wall  
and see how the light makes less  
of my frame than what's actually there,  
standing firm. It refuses to distinguish  
my limbs, condenses my body to a smaller  
form of myself.

--

My body will not fit within the lines of a loom,  
the pattern another has set out for me. Watch  
my skin sing of its own volition, open up a space  
for you to fit. Place a palm here, in the dip,  
the perfect width of your hand, and balance,  
hold steady without changing my shape,  
without asking too much.

--

I have left you your own space in the light.  
You need not carry me from here.

--

Maadar	Mother
Dokhtar	Daughter
Maadar	Mother
Dokhtar	Daughter
Maadar	Mother

(Marjorie Lotfi Gill)

### **To You**

you need not carry me from here  
means I am alone now  
means stillness  
something along the lines of  
I don't know you

but skin burns  
and a red rash

is always a mis-shape  
never a perfect square  
as if i need a perfect square  
a perfect pain  
a perfect body  
means not measuring  
the span of a hand

the length of a loveline  
the light behind an eye  
means something  
to do with darkness  
and indistinguishable  
reminds me  
of extinguishing

a fire  
of unfinished edges  
the parts you notice  
when it's hot in the house  
each eye  
squeezed tight  
for clarity

(Tessa Berring)

### **No Exhibitions**

I often think people

must be dead

if I don't hear from them

for a long time

It's been a terrible year

Look at your hands and face!

*(Here is what is to diminish*

*Here is what must disappear)*

Absence is hard

to talk about with others

I sat in a car  
and was driven into hills  
ate strawberries and nougat  
(hazelnuts and almonds)  
'Similar' is a nice word, isn't it?  
Walking on a cattle-grid  
I called to mind a different cattle-grid  
I thought a lot about love  
and the effort of making  
things matter

(Tessa Berring)

### **Acts**

I'm attracted to unattractive things  
I'd love to be attracted to attractive things  
(bamboo, kisses, cashew nuts)  
It's easy to get carried away  
by false but plausible things  
Imagine that you are a hole in a map  
with a pin stuck through on purpose!

(Tessa Berring)

### **ACTS FOR PLACING WOOLLEN AND LINEN**

writing is fingernails apart  
i-i didn't expect them to be so alive  
living wings wall basking all of a tremor  
keen material beauty in thrall  
to gravitational pull in need of tending  
awaiting the burial transformation  
to be laid out under stones

burial is a transition  
approximately squared  
of living decomposed  
into living care holds  
spaces of will and process  
the atlas of all our woollen futures  
scattered signs to be cultivated

a body takes time to diminish  
it becomes mesmerised  
wrapped in gravity a grave  
purpose in nourishment a body  
is a sea in surrender to soil  
breeding movement making work  
hardships build material it leaks

a landscape takes verbs  
scattered mesmerised with difference  
extensions of sea beauty pinned wings  
this domain map is linen placing itself  
spaces grow embodied by difference  
this is notational land consider us  
ground that is skylless in movement

money wrote the old laws of burial  
in pure national woollen or linen  
this was not about bioremediation  
it might well have been nylon had  
charles the second & james the seventh  
held shares in petrochemicals  
a graveyard is an atlas of toxins

embalmed corpses are poison inhumation is  
no greener than cremation unless a body's  
buried in a shroud of myco-remediation  
coffin as land function not fixed body location  
we each need to find the right mushroom suit  
to eat up the unpreserved dead's active toxins  
let the dead surrender like sea to the soil

fine descending linen shuttle-walked gravity  
hands of one hemp the silk growing blue  
nouns enable this scene of woollen  
incorporation we can only guess alpaca's  
activity this is a collective of wool  
making sea push this is walking yarn  
for the unrecording linen mill to diminish

wefts a width of singular arm movement  
warps seven singular hand spans this is land  
tweed to land shroud this is land jute into grass  
movement word mill into hot silence mulch placed  
almost square near horizontal this yarn is reed battened  
down into near vertical linen no abstract universal cloth geo-  
metrics no pure process unique hands span into angora stripes

how precisely a simple arm can  
scatter the glance this is microflora  
living as gravity intended fungal dis-  
appearance cat's cradle to cat's cradle  
biodegradable pieces of shed plaid energy  
sea futures these future-making woollens  
bison bamboo elm bark hemp mohair cotton

(can cotton for example ever be innocent it got here dissolving like sugar  
blood steeped a weaving is a structure in tension that holds itself up  
the warp threads can be of any sort and they may or may not be visible  
tradition insists warp threads are there to make the weft look like it holds  
itself up in weaving never cut a warp thread visible/invisible it holds the undyed  
weft yarn made from regional plant/animal fibre up yes these warp threads hold  
the whole thing in its weft worked localities feel the interlocked tension thickness)

protein gristle soil boards garments descend into carbon tissue  
connotations purely made by an arm or a hand that well we all  
know has no purely distinct morphology yes joy is in the abject  
feelings that act composed in the very warps of linens saying  
how beautiful is the pull that transforms us all each and every  
one of us into sailors for there is no harm in decay we are trans-  
formed sailors in earth earth falling into itself heavy like light fall

this beautiful gravity carrier is flexing  
like the kitchen wall is wearing a wing  
like four crows are flying at your face like  
three sleek skyscrapers it is tightly rippling  
with the force of that which is thrown across  
with the force of that which is woven to dense  
purpose in one body tensed against its own dispersal

(Jane Goldman)

### **Atlas of Our Woolen Futures**

Can't live on magic, can we love?

Eyes that peer round droops in the corners

*Moths and dust and moths and dust*

*Wing of a bison, leaf of a goat*

Sunlight bleaches the fields and they become the sea

Who cut the sky today?

Are we all going to drown in this hot grass?

(Tessa Berring)

This is the line I want to make: exactly the length of my two  
wise arms. Between my hands no friction, no fear, only the hillside  
of home and the swaddling of open sky. With every stripe  
the pendulum swings - one for each decade - the weave loosens  
and tightens, sun and rain, birth and death, the warp of dreams.  
I halt my hands at the new and tie off: no woman should guess  
at her future, no woman should whisper it into the lines of wool.

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She does not want to go on her own, wishes for the cloak  
of company, an umbilical cord to another. She does not want  
to choose the tree losing its leaves, is never sure whether birch or  
elm is best. She does not want to decide whether to wait out  
the rain before opening her satchel, unfolding the tissue, placing  
the wool upon roots. She does not want to turn away, to let  
these hands of her own go to make their own way, to become.

(Marjorie Lotfi Gill)

After the taut enclosure of their looms  
they are released into the white field.  
Day and night migrate across them,  
graze on caught herbs and grasses.

I go to the walls of the gallery

to see if the caught grass has buds  
or some kind of split open and  
to see if the clouds have broken

to see if the coats are still spread on the hill  
and if the bleaching fields are  
something real and you know  
to sit in the window. I go to the wall  
of the gallery to re-imagine common land  
to bite at threads to ache  
for what we make and make and  
make.

I go to the gallery walls to see things  
so radically soft and slack they might be me

might be us, running into each other  
what hand we come from.

(Lynn Davidson)