

# Still Life

Helen Acklam  
JoAnne McKay  
Tabi Mudaliar  
Mark Saunders



The Still Life project at CAMPLE LINE was inspired by the ordinary domestic objects and materials that surround us, which are perhaps more familiar this year as we have all spent a lot more time at home. Participants were asked to collect materials in advance of the first writing workshop, including flyers and circulars, newspapers and magazines, letters, and books, as well as packaging materials and shopping receipts. Together we explored techniques for transforming them into poetry, looking at examples by artists who work between art, poetry, and performance, including Dan Graham, Richard Serra, Vito Acconci, and Jackson Mac Low. After the initial workshop, Helen, Mark, JoAnne, and Tabi selected their final source materials and made these techniques and processes their own.

Helen created acrostics on the phrases ‘The Old Rock’ and ‘Hjaltland’ following a process inspired by Mac Low and a lune based on the example of Acconci’s word transfer in issue 5 of 0 to 9, the magazine he edited with Bernadette Meyer; both poems use the same source: Elizabeth Balneaves, *The Windswept Isles*, a particularly appropriate choice as she was on Shetland when she was writing. Mark was also inspired by Acconci’s word transfer. He created a list of words, the last on each page from a copy of *The Metro*, and then searched for these words in *The Other Man* by Edgar Wallace. Following the suggestion from the workshop, he replaced words he could not find in *The Other Man* with searches for either ‘still’ or ‘life,’ or words from his shopping receipt. In this way, he selected short lines and phrases from which to build his poem of four-line stanzas. For her first poem, JoAnne worked in a similar way, compiling a list of words from *Woman and Home*, forty-four, as a nod to quarantine, combined with ‘still’ and ‘life’ to create her forty-line poem from *Moby Dick*. Laura Spinney’s *The Pale Rider* is the source of her second poem, which she rewrote using the receipt from her regular Co-Op shop, keeping to the order on the receipt to make four groups of four-line stanzas, interspersed with groups of verbs, listed and reordered according to four different categories: active, doing, ruling class, and passive. These verbs were taken from pages 100-103 of *Cholera 1832* by RJ Morris. Tabi’s poem reflects on the relationship between mother and daughter, life and loss. She took words from a poignant issue of *The Guardian Weekend*, a card from a friend, ‘still’ and ‘life,’ and applied them to *The Secret Garden* by Frances Hodgson Burnett. She uses italics, underlining, bold, and the strike through features, to draw out and highlight parts of her poem, emphasising writing as a process and a graphic form.

Victoria Miguel

## THE OLD ROCK

Three thousand miles of tattered coast  
ice-**H**ewn  
s**E**a-torn

strung with **l**Ochs  
confused and tumb**L**ing bursting sea  
threade**D** with voes

somb**R**e miles of lonely dales  
twilight of the n**O**rthen light  
bog **C**otton flutters  
**K**nife-edged stacks

## HJALTLAND

**H**erring shoals, silver and blue  
a **J**ib and mainsail rigged fore and aft  
the f**A**r haaf  
smal**L** glow of a peat fire  
sal**T** winds  
twi**L**ight of the northern nights  
bird and se**A** things  
moon-draw**N** tides  
**D**rive the fishing

ISLAND

wind-blown islands  
stone shores and iridescent surface of sea  
silver herring below

Helen Acklam

## Still Life I

I know of only four published outlines,  
the meaning of that story of Narcissus:  
the pleasant, holiday weather,  
the ungraspable phantom of life.

I never saw such a sight in my life –  
who because he could not grasp  
that accessory and strange glory –  
gazes himself blind at the monumental white shroud.

He'll get up sooner or later,  
a tall straight jet of misty spray,  
could still be social with it.  
What do you see

in a wide, low, straggling entry?  
I'll give ye a glim in a jiffy.  
Still deeper the meaning,  
an exploding bomb upon a dazed and sleepy town.

Sea blacksmiths, and harpooners, and ship keepers,  
haughty dames in jewelled velvets,  
summoned to our meal in an adjoining room.  
Depend upon it, landlord

had provided the chapel.  
He can better answer than anyone else,  
sallied out upon this special errand,  
a still better seaward peep.

Was I disappointed upon learning  
he too lives like a Czar in an ice palace?  
His ears were two golden hoops:  
a positive torment to him.

Tribulations of every kind whatsoever  
get such an upper hand of me  
out of sight of land.  
Partners! I must have Partners!

Aye aye Sir, just through with this job.  
Then have a talk,  
the only clear space  
another night following before me.

I was again trying to force open the door  
of week days pent up in lath and plaster.  
Thou thyself, as I myself,  
we have hugely mistaken this matter of Life and Death.

JoAnne McKay

## Still Life II

The banks and silk stores have been closed down  
Except for one intriguing item  
Statisticians were foxed by their own observation  
The whole of human history

To wreck  
To raid  
To sell  
To gain

Should be taken with a pinch of salt  
Western Europe was unreasonably hot that month  
Contact with carriers of infection  
A bag full of Marie biscuits

To produce  
To assert  
To supply  
To buy

An elderly couple spent all their savings on a bread roll  
That some say affected her balance and ability to fly  
If so then credit must go to  
The hubris of the medical community

To suffer  
To fear  
To follow  
To face

The causes of disease were physical  
So he went to visit the divine image of the Stop-Coughing  
Priest  
The merchants set about raising funds  
Living records of our evolutionary past

To co-operate  
To continue  
To run the risk  
To persist

JoAnne McKay

## Mother & Daughter, A Still Life

**create**  
**commemorate**  
**process**  
**understand**  
**close**

### Mother

'He gives me medicine and tells me to rest.'

**S**He used to scream even at the idea of fresh air.

For ten years **S**he had lived this lonely life ~~his~~ **her** heart  
full of sadness.

She was not looking forward to life.

Gone.

### **Daughter**

She was a writer all her life.

'I'm **can't go** going home to help Mother.'

It was the first time she had ever felt sorry for anyone.

Most of the time **S**he just looked.

Last.

### **Still Life**

She stood very still.

### **Still Life**

The secret garden was returning to life.

Tabi Mudaliar

## Still Life

Still tangled in her lashes  
TB had stated his errand -  
a man's life on a night like this! -  
the traffic roared in the open spaces

the assurance of years  
you Americans are going to fight  
all his life he would remember  
his feet as helpless as if...  
to earn the bread, butter and et ceteras of life  
all his life, he declared to himself

a friend of mine – name of Smith – in the government  
fingering the violets at her corsage  
stirring his coffee at one of the tables

believe me, it surprises me no more  
I retorted, still sore from my last Saturday  
blistering me in unprotected places

if the child had looked like him, I -  
we had arranged a little interview  
since the strange case of the man in lower ten  
NUMBERS SEVEN AND NINE

the most remarkable period of my life  
three entirely different people  
probably owing to Richey's suggestion  
(I would neither give it up nor live it again)

when the dinner had progressed from salmon to meat  
I carried my carrier-bag,  
we put out the light and opened the shutters

on the first page was a staring announcement:  
*if you care to run the risk -*

Mark Saunders

Helen Acklam is an artist living and working from southwest Scotland. In 2012 she graduated with a degree in drawing from the University of Cumbria. The Scottish Highlands and islands with their rich heritage both inform and provide the underlying narrative to her work, and research and reading into the stories and histories of the islands adds a personal narrative. Her work explores surface, form, texture and colour, using a variety of media to convey her interest in the natural and man-made landscapes.

JoAnne McKay was born in Essex and served as a police officer in the southwest of England before moving to Dumfriesshire two decades ago. She has published four poetry pamphlets and has appeared at Literary Festivals throughout the UK. Her work has been prize-winning, widely published and anthologised. She currently works at Dumfries Museum. JoAnne's latest work was a creative exploration of historical pandemics for the Atlas Pandemica project, which culminated in an exhibition at Dumfries Museum: 'Precedent and Pandemic: What Remains'.

Tabi Mudaliar is a Director of the South West Media Factory CIC and a freelance Creative Producer producing art films, promotional videos, digital media, cultural events, training, radio programmes, and podcasts. She is also a writer and radio broadcast journalist presenting and producing her own weekly magazine radio show on Alive 107.3fm. In her own creative writing, Tabi's work focusses on experimental flash fiction and creative non-fiction.

Mark Saunders is a performer, director, writer, walker and gardener, living on the Firth of Forth outside Edinburgh. from 1992-2009, he was Lecturer in Movement at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama, Glasgow, and then Head of the MA in Classical and Contemporary Text programme. Since retiring from that post, he has been exploring new avenues of creativity, including writing, painting and performance. He has recently published a poetry pamphlet, entitled *the sound of water/ that's all/ just water/ that's enough*, a series of 100 short, concise poems about walking and landscape.

Victoria Miguel is a writer. Her work has been published and presented by Triple Canopy, Summerhall, and Glasgow International. She worked for the John Cage Trust (2001-2007) and has been a specialist in Cage's work, creating unique performances, for more than a decade. Last year she began a PhD at the University of Glasgow exploring Cage's writing and created the writing project, *After John Cage: 'Writing Through' Carlyle and Emerson* for CAMPLE LINE

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