



THIS IS NOT A SAFETY BARRIER

(AN ANTHOLOGY OF POETRY & PHOTOGRAPHY)

EDITED BY MARC NAIR AND YEN PHANG

The city has never been ours; it is fleeting, a collection of habits and faint peals of laughter from glass towers. The old rivers are covered up, disinfected, bricked. Still we flood, still we rumble our dissent; insufficient to overtake taste buds, just enough to tempt.

We are labels, numbers, we are queues. We are yes-men of yesterday's news, multi-racial at convenient moments, diverse on GRC posters, silent when it counts.

The photograph questions our intent, the gaze an outstretched palm holding a question that need not be answered. The poem, when set against the tarmac of public sentiment, becomes a cracked window letting in shards of concrete light, a certain discomfiture.

Our borders are porous; the search for identity, more so.

This Is Not A Safety Barrier is an anthology of poems and photographs from 69 contributors.

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Foreword

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Lightweight plastic barriers that do not meet safety performance criteria must have "THIS IS NOT A SAFETY BARRIER" in 40mm uppercase lettering. Their purpose is to contain and redirect vehicles away from the works area.

The seed of this anthology came, as things do, by standing too close. A jackhammer sounds a chest-thumping monologue. Buildings implode, collapsing inwards. Armies of workers wait by roadsides to be trafficked to out-of-sight dormitories. Inured to these daily scenes, we are often just one step away from a construction site; so we learn to distance ourselves, and raise our own barriers.

In a city of constant growth, whatever is under construction is often scaffolded behind temporary hoardings of ubiquitous red and white plastic barriers that proclaim their lack of protection even as they deign to keep us out. After all, aren't we supposed to benefit and become better through this? But what is barely

dilapidated or abandoned quickly turns into fodder for developers, and land itself is more prized than the growth of lasting communities. We are inexorably becoming a mercenary people, erasing our (already short) histories in order to erect new facades.

If it's new, it'll surely make us better.

This set us thinking about other kinds of barriers; ideological or not, they often involve sacrosanct issues such as race, culture, religion and social stratification. Clumped together, they form a perimeter, warning us against overstepping our boundaries; nothing is light enough to be lifted by an individual, but collectively, these barriers will not save us from ourselves.

Against all that is bright and shiny, it's easy not to feel the danger; to not want to know something darker exists. Because all of us live within a safety buffer, we wear the myth of an invincible hard hat.

The poems and photographs in this anthology are imagistic snapshots of life in the city. They reveal moments that challenge, reaffirm or simply point out what is between, against, and without. Questioning and exploring, here is a social commentary of what's defined and undefined on a journey of how the self reacts in response to monolithic national barriers.

The book does not set out to represent the landscape, but to ask new questions and map a terrain of fracture and fallibility. An interplay exists between the poems and photos as space intersects with silence and conversations ensue.

The different sections, segmented according to broad themes, moves the reader through different emotional states. Hidden space vies for a voice against legislation, as the specter of our maligned foreign labour hovers like a

rough mirror, reflecting what is both triumphant and horrific in us.

Perhaps this quote from one of our contributors best sums up what we are trying to achieve, or unachieve, here:

Our hands are always busy building
something to fill
the void if not undoing what
has already been built

– RODRIGO DELA PEÑA, JR.,
"To those for whom the gods would destroy"

MARC NAIR AND YEN PHANG
Editors, *This Is Not A Safety Barrier*

Ceci n'est pas une...
MARCEL HEIJNEN



Under Construction

GRACE CHIA

He uses his beak to dig into her crust, ten feet deep;

always erect, mechanical, he burrows himself in,
long neck bulldozing even when she doesn't give way.

She has been soiled before –
years of bedrock spread-eagled for pillars and poles;

steel in her uterus, hole punched in the ground,
this is her foundation,

the base where storeys begin and apartment blocks
breed like toadstools invading this turf.

She is fifty now.
The grass is on the other side.

Once green, she's weathered change of hands;
her surface cracks, stoned by rocks, desiccated as desert.

On her dry days, she hoards dunes,
blows clouds of brown sandpapering the blue sky.

Fifty years since flags of red and white have flown
on the tip of a crane:

five squares red, four white,
marking her construction.

She is still being reinvented, fitted, neutered,
no longer fertile, origin erased;

memories muddied by rain that washes off her past,
emptying her grassland to blank squares of dust.

Tomorrow she is to be prepared, groomed,
a host for homes made for minted millions –

her past harvested for organs, lungs pumping life,
turning the keys forward and backwards

for the future.

Underpass

IZYANTI ASA'ARI

58
—

A grey beret weaves through the crowd,
His are clipped steps, do-properly steps,
And he has a face my mother would like.
What a nice boy, my mother would say,
Very nice boy, my aunties would also say,
Smiling at me, in their tudung quiet and keen.

His steps are swift
And his steps are clean
And his steps catch up
To another brother.

And he also has a face,
And it accompanies inked arms,
Emerging from the sleeves
Of a black muscle tee,
Grim, heavy.
He walks slow,
And if I may, I will say,
He walks heavy and slow,
With a weighted gait
Not unlike a bull dog.

A shoulder is tapped and
Very politely, he says,
The grey beret says,
“Sorry *abang*, boleh check ID?”

Behind them other grey berets
They keep to the circumference of their patrol.
Mothers and aunties, look away.
It's easier like this,
Sending kin to deal with kin.

Privacy

VERENA TAY

66

so rude

just take

never ask can or not

of course i don't like

i work all my life for only a few cents

i rest for one second

and you steal from me

as if you know me

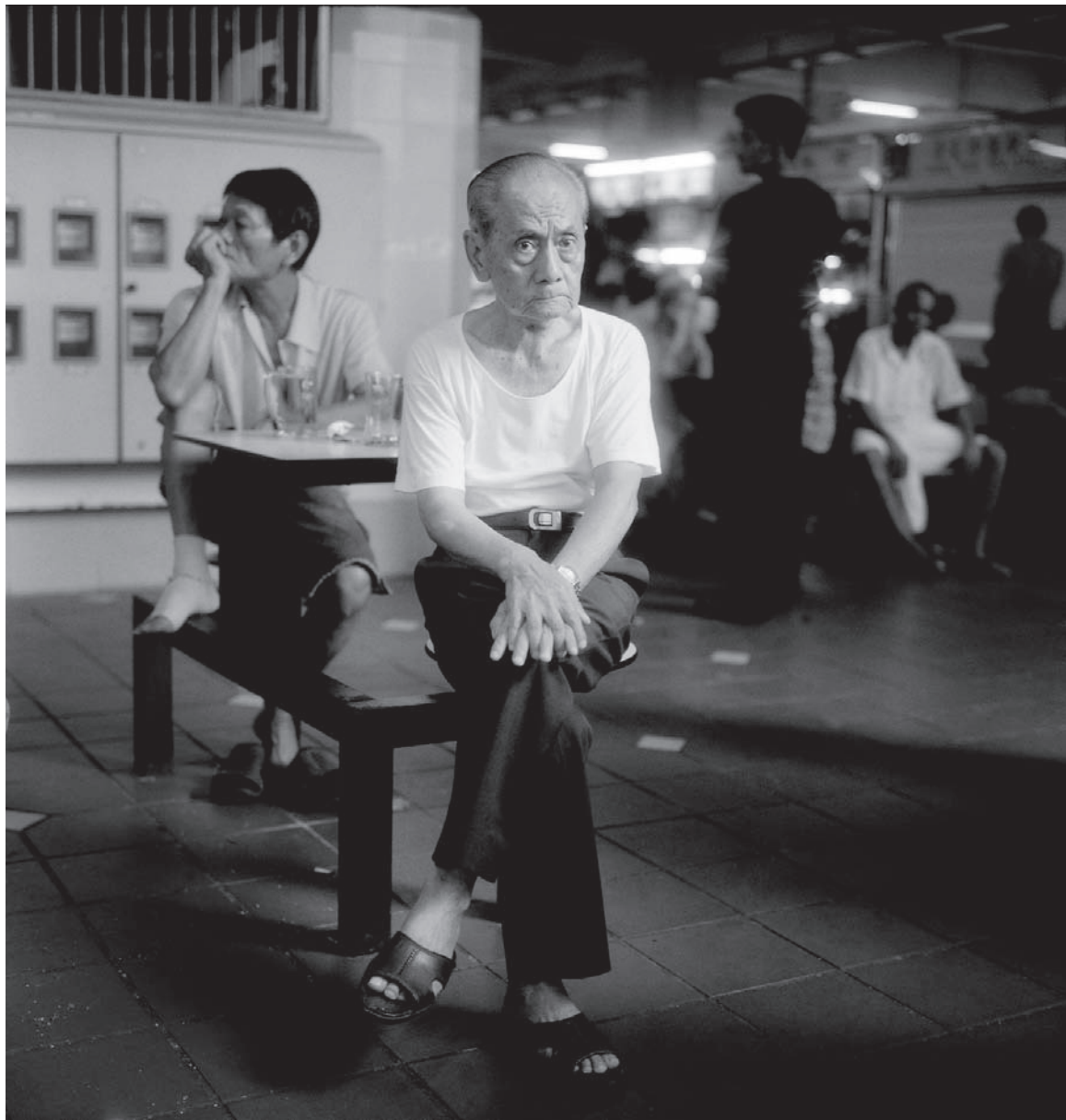
freezing what you see now

so you can show off later

how clever your eye is

you got nothing better to do is it

then pay me what you earn



Old Man

Tekka Centre, Singapore

JON GRESHAM

this is not a singapore poem

ROHAN NAIDU

MBS is not where noah parked it in '65

the meritocratic condom is not the national symbol
despite its advanced graduate-sensing abilities.

this is not an autocratic state
because this poet's annual defamation indiegogo
has not been set up yet

vowels are not banished to pulau hantu
because they will wash back on west coast
and mock those who cannot call the sea by her real name

all races are not equal:
the F1 race is more equal than the others.

the fire engine and police jeeps in Little India
are not for Saturday night's rain-dance party with siren lights.

the merlion does not guzzle its own praise in public after 10pm
because it might turn around and spit on the city it stands for.

there are no men at work, this is not a safety barrier,
it is the curtain of a hospital ward:
this country needs transfusions to survive.



Filial Piety
STEPHCHOY



Grateful
FLORENCE LAI

A Theory of Property

RUTH TANG YEE NING

Opened ground: is it property or a grave? In some accounts
I mix myself with the earth and it is mine. In others I do
the same but it gets to keep me. I combine myself with

too many things. Sometimes they are people.
Ownership doesn't work as easily as theory says, with those.
Mouths are graves. In time you become accustomed

to living with shovels, holes in relief. We hang them
on the walls. Every day someone kills a family
of feral rats, digging holes. You're not meant to live

where they bury the dead, but we're running
out of room. I share my bed with four
side-sleepers and a snorer. I don't mind.

I'm not allowed to mind. The room lets you
breathe. Our hands are always covered in dirt
and animals. I combine myself
with myself and nothing remains.

About The Editors

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PHOTO BY JOYEE KOO

MARC NAIR is a poet and photographer from Singapore. He has published six volumes of poetry and has also been featured in a number of anthologies both print and online. A seasoned performance poet, Marc has represented Singapore competitively at international slam competitions and has performed spoken word for over ten years in more than ten countries. Marc was the 2015 Writer-In-Residence at Gardens by the Bay, Singapore and is the 2016-17 NTU-NAC Writer in Residence (National).

He also writes songs and poems with his band Neon and Wonder, collaborates with musicians, painters and visual artists and is the co-founder of *Mackerel*, an online culture magazine.

Marc's list of authored publications include *Spomenik* (2016), *The Poet of Unlove* (2015), *Animal City* (2014), *Postal Code* (2013), *Chai: Travel Poems* (2010), *Along The Yellow Line* (2007). His published short stories include 'Soon' in *Passages: Stories of Unspoken Journeys* (2013) and 'Under the Bridge' in *Balik Kampung 2B* (2013). He also edited and contributed poems to *The Making Of National Gallery Singapore* (2015).

www.marcnair.com | www.mackerel.life



PHOTO BY NICKY LOH

YEN PHANG is an artist who currently straddles the cities of Singapore and Montreal, in search of novel logics within hidden neuroses. Primarily a painter, his work spans a range of mediums including drawing, performance, and installation.

Since his first solo, *Catalysts & Collisions* (2012) at Evil Empire, other notable shows include *Continuum (Automatic Itineraries)* (2014) at Post-Museum Pop-up at the Centre of Contemporary Arts (Singapore), *Invisible Frequencies* (2015) at OCBC Art Space (Singapore), and *Lullaby for a Gardener Lost in the Woods* (2015) at the Montreal Art Centre (Montreal). He has also initiated projects such as *Displacements: 13 Wilkie Terrace* (2013), *Interstitium* (2015), and *Repurposing Nostalgia* (2016) under the Displacements banner.

Yen was a recipient of the Winston Oh Travel Research Award (2016), and was awarded the Cliftons Art Prize (2015) and the UNSW Julius Stone Prize (2006). Yen is currently pursuing his Masters in Arts (Fine Arts) at LASALLE College of The Arts.

www.yenphang.com

About The Designer

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PHOTO BY TAN WEN HAO

LIM QI XUAN is a designer-artist hybrid based in Singapore. She works primarily in design but sculpts occasionally under her moniker *Qimmyshimmy*. She believes that design, though led by function, should also seek to express emotions and convey deeper narratives.

Qi Xuan started designing commercially at the age of eighteen, and through the years, moved her work from print to the digital realm. Seeking inspiration and guidance beyond her home country, Qi Xuan has fulfilled internships in cities such as Stockholm and Venice. Her body of work includes mainly publishing, branding, information graphics and exhibition design, having worked for clients such as Dulux, Esplanade, Blackberry and Uniqlo. Her works have been featured in *The New Paper*, *The Straits Times*, *Nylon Singapore*, *CATALOG*, and have exhibited in 8Q, Singapore Art Museum, as well as the ArtScience Museum.

Qi Xuan received her Bachelor of Fine Arts in Visual Communications from the School of Art, Design and Media, Nanyang Technological University in 2014 and will be starting a Masters course in Information Design in Design Academy Eindhoven in September 2016.

www.qimmyshimmy.com

About The Contributors

ANG MING WEI writes and photographs as a hobby. His work has been published in *SingPoWriMo 2015: The Anthology* and the online literary journal *We Are A Website*.

DANIELA BELTRANI is a performance artist based in Singapore. She holds a M.A. in Contemporary Asian Art Histories from LASALLE College of the Arts. She is currently researching yoga through ancient texts and training, to enrich her artistic practice and uncover her life's purpose. She enjoys reading and travelling. <http://danielabeltrani.weebly.com>

CHRISTOPHER CHAN enjoys taking photographs. It is his way of understanding himself and the world.

BENEDICT CHEN is an Economics graduate whose first job was in tunnel construction. Studied still photography with American and Italian Artists and Critics. Singaporean.

GRACE CHIA is the author of *Every Moving Thing That Lives Shall Be Food*, *The Cuckoo Conundrum*, *womango* and *Cordelia*, which was shortlisted for the Singapore Literature Prize for poetry in 2014. Her prose and poetry has been anthologised in textbooks and literary journals in the US, Australia, Germany, France, Serbia and Singapore. She was the NTU-NAC Writer-in-Residence from 2011–2012.

ALFONSE CHIU recently graduated from Raffles Institution, and is a freelance writer with publication credits in numerous literary anthologies and the film journal, *KINEMA*.

LEON CHOO picked up video gaming and poetry writing while in university. He currently works as a teacher to fund these bad habits.

STEPHCHOY is a visual artist and art-educator in Singapore. She enjoys collecting and appropriating items to juxtapose against the photographic gaze, and has a particular affinity to anything vaguely sexual. When not pottering around the studio she can be found in far flung places from the city. www.stephchoy.com

Civil servant by day who watches too much TV by night, **IAN CHUNG** graduated from the Warwick Writing Programme. His writing has appeared in *Asiatic*, *Axon: Creative Explorations*, *Cha*, *QLRS*, *The Cadaverine*, *Unthology No. 3*, and various Math Paper Press anthologies, among others. He is the editor of *Eunoia Review*.

PATRICK VAN DAM is a Dutch art director turned photographer, now based in Singapore. He spent most of his working years in editorial (re)design and creative direction for international magazines. As a documentary photographer he has a keen eye for aesthetics and composition. He is interested in capturing the beauty of everyday things.

DIANA RAHIM shoots under the name Verkur. Her photography has been featured in Lomography's *LoFi* magazine, *AFTERGLOBE*, *Canvas* by Grolsch, amongst others, and exhibited at Noise Singapore Showcase 2015. She can be found at Verkur.com

DEBORAH EMMANUEL is a writer, performer and four-time TEDx speaker. She is a founder of *SPEAK*, a monthly poetry night. She has published two books, *When I Giggle In My Sleep* and *Rebel Rites*. She also holds workshops, makes music with her band Wobology and performs on stage and screen.

SHERLYN GOH is a storyteller and adrenaline junkie with a soft spot for spiders. The aspiring public relations practitioner has won awards in playwriting and directing at Word Forward Lit! Up Write Stuff Drama Competition and has performed her poetry and non-fiction at literary events including Singapore Writers Festival 2014.

JON GRESHAM's debut collection of short stories, *We Rose Up Slowly*, was published in 2015 by Math Paper Press. His stories have also appeared in *Quarterly Literary Review of Singapore*, *Eastern Heathens*, and *From the Belly of the Cat*. He blogs at www.igloomelts.com

TIFFANY GWEE enjoys the thought of getting lost in poems after 2.30am. She was a member of Burn After Reading (Singapore) and her poems have appeared in *SingPoWriMo* (Math Paper Press, 2014) and the *Bristol Poetry* anthology (2015). She is currently studying Sociology and Philosophy in Bristol.

MARCEL HEIJNEN is a photographer from The Netherlands who made Asia his home almost 25 years ago. Driven by a general curiosity of life and its meaning, urbanisation and impermanence are central themes in his work. The work featured here is part of his 'Picture in Picture' series.

ALVIN HO is a street and fine art photographer who explores social issues and human emotions in his works. He reads at the Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information.

CONSTANCE HO works in Human Resources and understands the pliability of contractual relationships. Written, tacit, or assumed - they aren't safety barriers either. Her other poetry has appeared in *Ceriph* (Math Paper Press) and *Microcosmos* (Kaleido Press); you can also find her on Instagram as @schnoc.

SHAWN HOO's poems have appeared in *[Slippage] Literary Magazine*, *Black Fox Literary Magazine*, and in *A Luxury We Cannot Afford*. He was awarded a Merit Prize at the Singapore National Poetry Competition (2015).

MD MUKUL HOSSINE was born in Patgram, Bangladesh. In 2008, he arrived in Singapore and has been working in its construction sector. Mukul writes poems, novels, and short stories. To date, he has published three books, including *Buker Simanaye Sukh (Happiness at Heart's Edge)*, *Apurna Vasana (Unfulfilled Desire)* and *Me Migrant*.

JOSHUA IP is an award-winning poet, editor and literary organizer. He has written 2.5 collections of poetry, edited 4 anthologies for Math Paper Press, and is working on a graphic novel. He runs Sing Lit Station, a literary nonprofit that runs community initiatives like poetry.sg, SingPoWriMo, and Manuscript Bootcamp. www.joshuaip.com

IZYANTI ASA'ARI's works burrow into everyday Singaporean life to explore its kinships, rituals, and deeply-rooted emotional habits. They quietly dissect family (in both the nuclear and broader sense) to unearth ties less visible in name and sight. They are perhaps more near-truths than stories, and are her way to make sense of her experience as a young Malay woman in Singapore.

RAJIB SHIL JIBON was born in Chittagong, Bangladesh. He is a noted writer in Bangladesh for both television and radio. His poetry has also been published back home.

NUZHAT KAZI has a Bachelor's in Architecture from India and a Masters in Urban Design from London. She lives in Singapore with her three active teenage children who keep her busy. She sketches, paints, sings Indian classical music and writes poetry. She is working on her memoir project and poetry collection. She recently sold two of her paintings in Singapore.

CLARILYN KHOO is composed largely of tea, esoteric literary references and too many ideas, which she mostly tends to convert into plays and occasionally poems. She has written things that people have enjoyed, much to her pleasant surprise.

FAITH CHRISTINE LAI is currently an undergraduate in Philosophy, Politics and Economics at Oxford University. In her spare time, she enjoys geeking out over art & design, Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu, and a good cup of coffee. She can be contacted via email at faithchristinelai@gmail.com.

FLORENCE LAI aka 花海女子 is a trained Illustrator and is also skilled in graphic design. Her blooming passion not only lies in communicating visuals through print design and illustration but also in other disciplines like photography, craft-making, anything visible and makable.

LAU QUANHAN is an educator who happens to have taken a personal interest in ekphrastic poetry.

Singapore native **RACHEL MINN LEE** questions if there is meaning in the everyday, capturing the places encountered on the way to work and back home, in an evocative monochrome essay using film.

In between taking sneaky photos of people in public and playing around as a film student in New York, **CARIN LEONG** enjoys writing, travelling, a good conversation and contemplating the incomprehensible largeness of life, the universe and everything.

LEONG SU ZHEN graduated from the National University of Singapore with a Bachelor's degree in Literature (Honours). She is a full-time educator.

EVA LIM is a graduate research student. Her poems have appeared in journals and anthologies such as *Kitaab* and *Body Boundaries: The EtiquetteSG Anthologies Volume 1*. She received an honourable mention at Singapore's Golden Point Award (2013) and the top 3 prize at the Singapore National Poetry Competition (2015).

GERLINE LIM is a Singaporean living in Germany, who sometimes misses her playground in the east side.

ADELINE LOH is an imaginative idealist in junior college who will be taking her 'A' levels in 2016. When she isn't studying, she can be found at her college's theatre studio. She looks forward to pursuing writing and academia in the future.

EDEN LOW is a girl, not quite yet a woman, whose laugh is heard before she's even seen. She never says no to supper, loves to sing in the shower, and relishes random encounters and conversations with strangers while travelling.

QUINN LUM is an undergraduate, studying at the School of Art, Design Media in Nanyang Technological University, and he enjoys exploring the human conditions of his homeland.

ROHAN NAIDU is a rising junior at Yale-NUS College. After eighteen monsoons in India, the liberal arts lured Rohan away to Singapore where he studies Relativity along with Relativism.

JOE NAIR imagines that he is a visual artist. He works as a freelance photographer doing editorial and corporate work.

LEONARD NG was born and lives in Singapore. He is the author of the poetry collections *Changes and Chances* and *This Mortal World* (shortlisted for the 2012 Singapore Literature Prize).

VANESSA NG's short story was adapted into an animation and screened in Montreal International Animation Film Festival, ANIMAZE Daze, in Cannes, France (2016) and the Singapore's Writers' Festival (2015). She is a recipient of the Singapore-Industry Scholarship. She has been published in anthologies in Singapore and San Francisco.

BENJAMIN ONG was born and bred in Kuala Lumpur. A child of the city, he is passionate about urban ecology and conservation. He enjoys long train journeys and wild, rugged landscapes.

CYAN ONG CHAO YAN is a photographer and graphic designer based in Singapore. With a keen eye for quiet drama, she aspires to lift life's ordinary moments into vignettes of poetry with her camera lenses, offering unusual angles of truth and capturing the disappearing remnants of this ever-changing world.

HOLLY PAINTER is the author of *Excerpts from a Natural History* (Titus Books, 2015). She lives in Singapore with her wife and son.

RODRIGO DELA PEÑA, JR. is the author of *Requiem*, a chapbook. His poems have been published in *QLRS*, *Rattle*, *Hayden's Ferry Review* and other journals and anthologies. He is a recipient of the Palanca Award for Poetry from the Philippines, as well as awards from British Council Singapore.

HENDRY POH's passion as a photographer has led him to document the little pockets of forgotten places – under-appreciated structures that are inevitably left behind as society progresses.

MELISSA POWERS is a Singaporean-American who grew up in China and now lives in New York. Please reach out if you want to help her put on Hamlet in an IKEA.

QAMAR FIRDAUS SAINI is in the Public Service, and is especially fond of salmon sashimi. He writes to remember the things he forgets. His works can be found in *Moving Words 2011: A Poetry Anthology*, and is forthcoming in *ASINGBOL: An Archaeology of the Singapore Poetic Form* and *SingPoWriMo 2016: The Anthology*.

MARGARET FENERTY SCHUMANN is a fourth-year undergraduate student at Yale-NUS College studying anthropology. Her work has previously been featured in *QLRS*.

SEE WERN HAO is pursuing Law and Liberal Arts at the National University of Singapore and Yale-NUS College. His works have been featured in *Toasted Cheese Literary Journal* and *We Are A Website*. He has also contributed to anthologies such as *Words: Lost and Found* and *Rollercoasters & Bedsheets*.

BERNICE SEOW is searching for an answer to a question that has no answer and is spiralling down an open manhole. This can be interpreted in many ways. She wants to know your interpretation of things.

DAN TAN is a sleeping poet who spends his time dabbling in various hobbies. He likes exploring nature, the human condition, sometimes love and romance, but often whatever comes makes it onto paper. When not writing, he's dreaming about stars.

Fifteen, **KYLA TANG** is often moved by the stories of unsung heroes in society.

MARK TANG is a person who engages in art, music, design and writing. He enjoys listening to podcasts and long walks by the beach.

RUTH TANG writes poetry and plays. Her poetry has appeared in the *Quarterly Literary Review Singapore* and won a Merit at the 2015 Singapore National Poetry Competition. She co-edited *SingPoWriMo 2016: The Anthology* with Joshua Ip and Daryl Yam. Her other preoccupations include bargain basement books and non-musical theatre.

VERENA TAY (www.verenatay.com) has published a short story collection, *Spectre* (2012), and three play collections. She is also the editor of the popular *Balik Kampung* series by Math Paper Press.

BASIL EDWARD TEO is a multimedia editor and visual journalist at *The Straits Times*. When not on assignment, he pursues personal projects that often become work too.

JENNIFER TEO is a Singaporean cultural producer who works at the intersections of art, justice and love.

TEO XIAO TING is part of the Burn After Reading collective (Singapore). Her work has been anthologised in *Inheritance: An Anthology*, *SingPoWriMo (2015)*, and *Words: Lost and Found*. She is interested in writing as therapy, and is a psychology major in Yale-NUS College.

VANESSA TING is currently based in Kuala Lumpur where she works on urban biodiversity. She is heavily influenced by her convent school upbringing and her eclectic reading habits.

TING WEI TAI currently studies at Yale University. His poems have previously been featured in *Quarterly Literary Review Singapore*, *Poetry Kanto*, and *Cha*. He was awarded the Francis Bergen Memorial Prize at Yale in 2016 for his poetry.

TSE HAO GUANG's books are *hyperlinkage* (2013) and *Deeds of Light* (2015), the latter shortlisted for the 2016 Singapore Literature Prize. He co-edits *OF ZOOS* and *UnFree Verse*, and is the Essays Editor of *poetry.sg*. He is a 2016 Fellow of the International Writing Program at the University of Iowa.

ERIC TINSAY VALLES's poetry collections are *A World in Transit* and *After the Fall (diriges among ruins)*. He has been featured also in *& Words*, *Reflecting on the Merlion*, *Routledge's New Writing: The International Journal for the Practice and Theory of Creative Writing* and other journals. He won a Goh Sin Tub Creative Writing prize in 2013.

DAVID WONG HSIEN MING has appeared in publications like *QLRS* and *Mascara Literary Review*. His first collection, *For the End Comes Reaching*, is published by Math Paper Press. www.davidwonghsienming.wordpress.com

JERROLD YAM (b. 1991) is a lawyer and the author of three poetry collections: *Intruder* (2014), *Scattered Vertebrae* (2013) and *Chasing Curtained Suns* (2012). He has received poetry awards from the British Council, National University of Singapore and Poetry Book Society, and has been nominated for the Forward and Pushcart Prizes.

CHRISTIAN YEO is a Year 5 student from Anglo-Chinese School (Independent) and a former participant of the Creative Arts Programme. When he isn't writing, Christian can be found pursuing a host of other activities he isn't particularly good at, or watching Arsenal lose yet another game they should have won.

CLARA YEO ZHE XUAN is a law undergraduate at University College London. She writes, photographs, reads, ponders, organises and grows – among other things.

DENNIS YEO lectures at the National Institute of Education. He has taught in primary, secondary, JC and tertiary levels and was SH (Literature), HOD (PCCG) and VP at Pioneer JC before joining NIE. His PhD dissertation was on Gothic film. He believes everyone should write poems no matter how terrible they are at it.

JEMIMA YONG is a performance maker and photographer. She is East-Malaysian born, raised in Singapore and currently living in London. She is interested in art as catalyst for empathy and social change. Collaboration is central to her practice, as is experimentation and time.

ZAKIR HOSSAIN KHOKAN was born in Bangladesh. He works in the construction industry in Singapore as a QA/QC supervisor. He has published two books of poetry and a book of non-fiction prose. He was the first prize winner in the inaugural Migrant Worker Poetry Contest in Singapore on 2014 and 2015. He is also a freelance journalist and photographer.

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