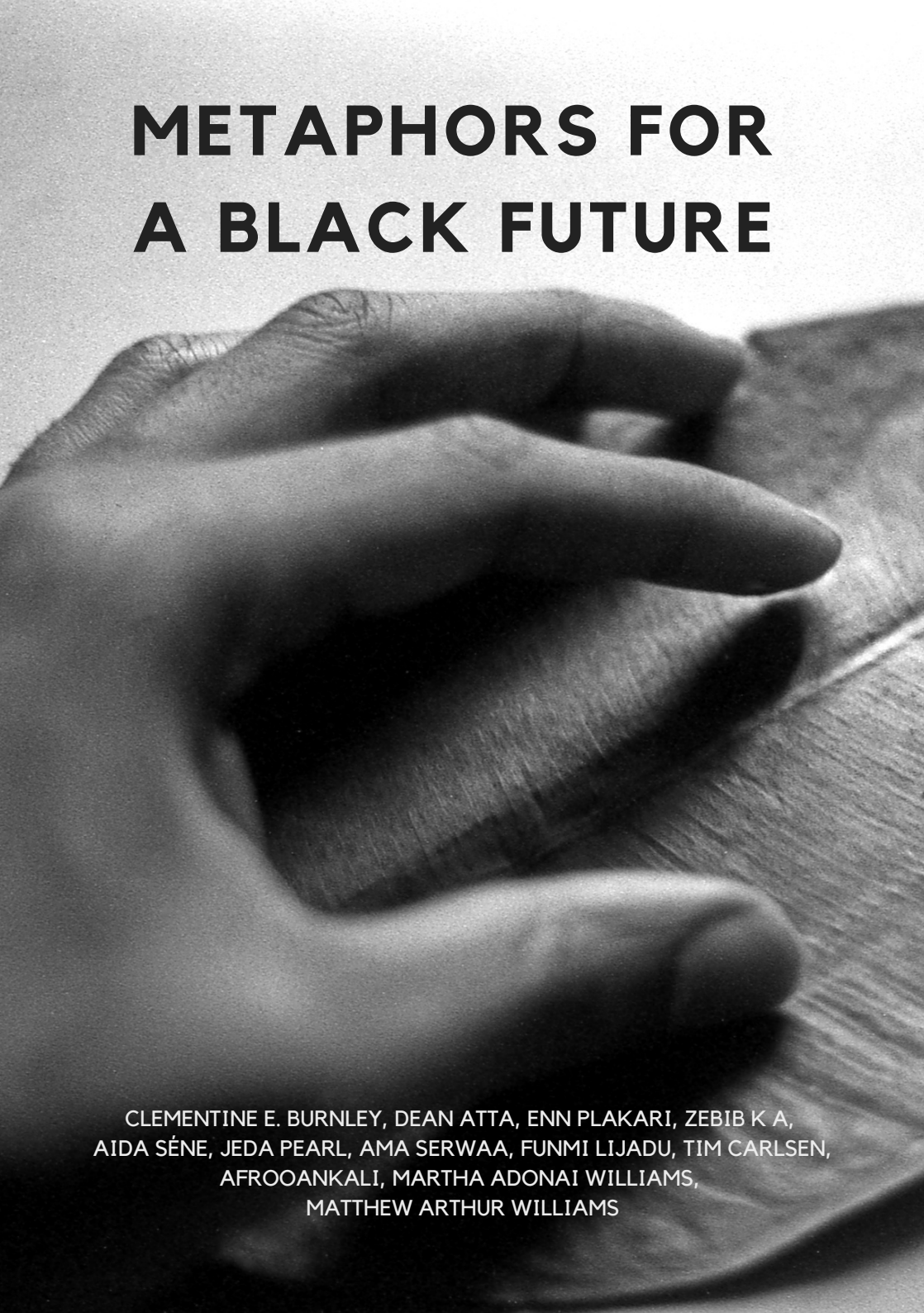
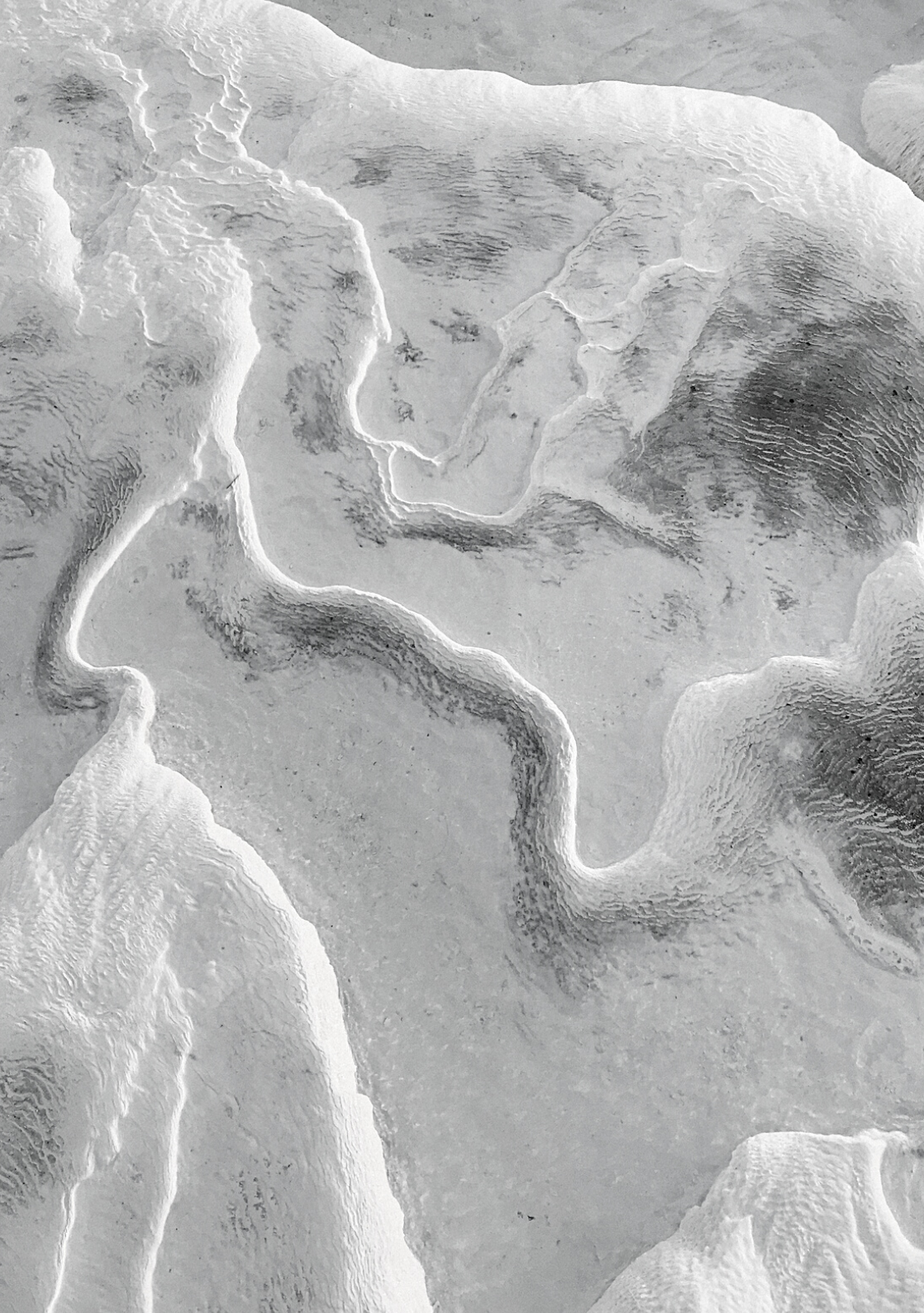


# METAPHORS FOR A BLACK FUTURE



CLEMENTINE E. BURNLEY, DEAN ATTA, ENN PLAKARI, ZEBIB K A,  
AIDA SÉNE, JEDA PEARL, AMA SERWAA, FUNMI LIJADU, TIM CARLSEN,  
AFROANKALI, MARTHA ADONAI WILLIAMS,  
MATTHEW ARTHUR WILLIAMS



# WELCOME

Welcome to the Metaphors for a Black Future zine. This zine has grown out of a programme of the same name that brought together Black writers to build community while experimenting with new work, forms and processes.

Hosted by Scottish BAME Writers Network, the programme began as Black History Month ended in October 2020 and ran until December 2020. Over this time we came together as a group of Black, African and mixed-heritage writers to write, talk and remember. As we connected with the cartography our ancestors laid out for us, we cast our minds to the future and found words to welcome it. We were led to curiosity and imagination by the rich insight and tender offerings of workshop facilitators Clementine E. Burnley, Natasha Ruwona, Dean Atta, GG Renee Hill and Ama Josephine Budge.

We wrote from our bodies, giving attention to gesture and sensation. We honoured our dreams as sources of knowledge and power. We claimed identity and belonging through the metaphor of a flag. We attempted high speed speculative micro-fiction that told stories of pleasure as future-building. We were reminded to write with no audience in mind. We explored counter memory, ancestral memory and hauntology. We archived ourselves.

Artists Matthew Arthur Williams and AfroOankali were invited to create interdisciplinary responses to the programme, which are included here.

While the programme invited participants to take risks with their work with no pressure of any result, let alone a “good” one, this zine documents the work that the programme inspired; sensitive, honest and bold.

I am proud to have curated this programme and to have witnessed nourishing connections form as a result; between people and between people and their work. I hope you enjoy reading this zine as much as I have enjoyed the journey to making it.

In love and power,  
Martha Adonai Williams

# CONTRIBUTORS

- Page 6 ***Enn Plakari*** : Upgraded to a hologram.
- Page 10 ***Jeda Pearl*** is a Scottish-Jamaican writer and poet. In 2019, she was awarded Cove Park's Scottish Emerging Writer Residency and shortlisted for the Bridge Awards. She's performed at StAnza, Event Horizon, Inky Fingers, Hidden Door. Her poems and short stories are published by Black Lives Matter Mural Trail, New Writing Scotland, Not Going Back to Normal – a Disabled Artists Manifesto, TSS Publishing, Tapsalteerie and Shoreline of Infinity. @jedapearl or jedapearl.com.
- Page 11 ***aida séne***
- Page 12 **AfroOankali** serves ritual bass: a hypnotic blend of low end frequencies and polyrhythms which celebrates the Afro-Caribbean influence in electronic music, underground club culture and the healing potential of bass music. AfroOankali is London born, living in Berlin.

Page 13 ***Ama Serwaa*** has recently rediscovered creative writing in retirement after working for more than 30 years in the NHS.

Page 16 ***Clementine E. Burnley*** : Mother, poet, facilitator, community organiser.

Page 18 ***Dean Atta's*** debut poetry collection, *I Am Nobody's Nigger*, was shortlisted for the Polari First Book Prize and his debut novel, *The Black Flamingo*, won the Stonewall Book Award. He was named as one of the most influential LGBT people in the UK by the Independent on Sunday.

Dean's work often deals with themes of gender, identity, race and growing up – and has appeared on BBC One, BBC Radio 4, BBC World Service, and Channel 4. Dean regularly performs across the UK, and internationally. He is a member of Malika's Poetry Kitchen.

Dean is based in Glasgow, and is Co-director of the Scottish BAME Writers Network and a patron of LGBT+ History Month.

Page 20 **Matthew Arthur Williams** (b. 1989 London) (pronouns: he/they) is a Black visual & sound artist, freelance photographer and DJ. Lives and works in Glasgow.

Their work sits to continuously encourage a different narrative and is primarily interested in the documentation of black existence and resistance, specifically in the UK.

As a DJ they have coordinated multiple nightspaces in the Glasgow nightscene and is a regular host on Clydebuilt Radio.

Page 26 **Zebib K. A.** (she/her) is a writer and psychiatrist. She moved from NYC to Scotland to do a Masters in Creative Writing at University of Edinburgh. She has been published in The Rumpus, The Selkie, Counterclock Journal, Nightingale and Sparrow, and more.

She is black, queer, and comes from an immigrant background, and explores these identities in her writing.

Page 28 **Funmi Lijadu** is a writer and multi-media artist highlighting the stories that are less told. She is invested in humanity, the histories that led to our present, and imagining better futures.

You can follow her work on instagram  
[@artbyfunmi](https://www.instagram.com/artbyfunmi)

Page 32 **Tim Carlsen** is from Oslo, Norway but has lived in Edinburgh for over 5 years. He has written Spoken Work Poetry for a couple of years now and writes about pretty much everything from relevant happenings, deep thoughts to basic everyday observations. Check out his other work: [linktr.ee/WokeFish](https://linktr.ee/WokeFish)

Page 36 **Martha Adonai Williams** is a writer, producer, community organiser and trainee therapist. Her practice departs to and returns from black feminist world-making, always, with regular layovers in front of trash tv or at the allotment. She curates the Metaphors for a Black Future programme.

# ENN PLAKARI

## *Fever Dreams*

She begins here, with a tempered memory

Painstakingly gilded by time.

In the enamel bathtub, her makeshift rocket ship

She dreams about bears instead of clouds

Memories filtered and peripheral sensations

Steady humming, the smell of benzene, rattling pipes

She sleeps.

[To remain in

One god's fever dream –

Sky shredding, fire, plague, hideous creations

Until the god unfurls from the dark, and we disappear.]

The mind elucidates form and shape, a woman

Cradled in enamel and chrome

Exquisite layers of blood and brittle bone



# ENN PLAKARI

She sleeps.

Muffled sounds pulling her

Towards spilled ouzo and the taste of burnt almond flour

Glued to the roof of her mouth.

One memory yields another.

Black hair, red fingernails, searched for excitement in the dead of  
winter

Tongues extended for coffee liqueur, prickled skin, steady humming

She welcomed those long legs to straddle her waist

Needed those hands to evanesce her ghosts, and

Those pauses

To make her feel

Something close to yearning.

They found another cadence for falling.

She dreams of bears in the sky - dreaming of

Frankincense and moss covered stones - feet slipping.

A word settles in her ear

Pulls her awake, so gently, and

Fingernails along her cheek

Disappear from view as she turns her head to look

# ENN PLAKARI

For the bears, no longer there, disappeared.

She is pulled out of sleep

Words coating her mouth

Sugar and butter, sweet grit on her tongue.

Thunder pounding in her chest, echoing, until

The enamel cools her head, the sounds fade

Stirring the gods. Hands pour memories past her lips.

She sleeps.

Muffled sounds form and shape

Songs she belted out

Hands clenched to metal, trailing sweat and rum

One night, before the swollen waves and battering wind.

This memory makes her ache.

They pour sweetness past her lips, and she sleeps

Shallow breaths, she falls towards the bears.

Swung her legs over the sides of a beast.

The jaws open slowly

Tongue loll towards her palm, leaving a foam of stars.

Hair matted, prickled skin, steady humming,

Words stuck to the roof of her mouth.

# ENN PLAKARI

She sleeps –

A woman's face distorts in chrome taps, disconsolate.

[One god's fever dream.

In pursuit of deciphering the dream, they crash, fatigued

Into our cries, a chorus.

They wake from the vision of weeping clay.

# JEDA PEARL

## *Treewalking*

Uprooted, it crawls towards its own shrine  
Mirrorglass loch reflects the other side of time  
Forest of bells sing out in the distance  
Here is a calling to step through into the mists  
No gate here, merely a veil of a threshold  
Tip in, tiptoe, pour rings into a new mold  
Swim, drink, row branches down to the depths  
Hurricane a coming.  
Eye open, convex  
Ocean discordant, bells flutter and blink  
Tide determined, sip indelible ink

# AIDA SÉNE

## *untitled (etta)*

in the space between  
where darkness beautiful blackness  
rests holds creates explodes forms and lines  
is comfort and nurture  
a dandelion, a massive galaxy  
whispered away wishes into stars  
here oneness, we could call her etta, said:  
remember we are here to rejoice!  
not to quarrel over how this dandelion could grow in such darkness  
-trust-  
there was enabling life before there was light

# AFROANKALI



This mini mix was commissioned as a response to Metaphors for a Black Future.

Track list:

purge ft Asphodele - BAE BAE

Jimi & Faye Pt. 1 - Romare

Love Rain - Jill Scott

Shy Wind (ft Masego) - Maxwell Hunter

Collide - J-One

Smoky Quartz - KeiyaA x Blvck Spvde

Jewelry - Blood Orange

if remix ft AKUA - BAE BAE

Listen on Soundcloud:

[soundcloud.com/afroankali/a-love-note-towards-pleasure-based-black-futures](https://soundcloud.com/afroankali/a-love-note-towards-pleasure-based-black-futures)

# AMA SERWAA

## *When will I be ascending not hanging?*

I think of the future

One without the scab of trauma that's constantly unpicked

Unpicked by the adverts of crying children with razor blades for  
eyelashes

Where broken donkeys are empathised with more than their broken  
owners

Without the rasping pleads for breath, suffocating and drowning

Without the blank stares, the cold eyes, the stone ears

Where the entreaties for humanity are no longer needed

The absence of horror?

When will I be ascending, not hanging?

# AMA SERWAA

## *What if we had met?*

What if we had met when we were 4?

Would you have gawped open-mouthed ignoring your mother's  
"don't stare?"

Would your curiosity have overcome the fear that you still felt as a  
grown man?

Would you have brushed my arm then looked at your hand or could  
you not even have done that?

Would you have joined the "big boy's" boycott or would you have  
pulled me to your side, the game continuing with a shrug?

Would we have talked and laughed until our waists ached?

Would we have looked out for each other again & again?

Would I still be with you now?



# AMA SERWAA

## *Not waiving or swimming*

I wave my ability to speak for myself, even if others do not hear.

I wave my entitlement to decide who enters my home and who does not.

I wave my right to know who I am even if others do not.

The nationalism of the Scottish Ashanti.

I wave the black star on a white cross, the greens of the rainforests and moors; the gold of the sun now only on my ears.

I wave my right to not allow your fear to paralyse me

I wave my pride until the fear of the crimson wave overtakes me and I slump.

## CLEMENTINE E. BURNLEY

### *Dream in which I leave a vapour trail to break up behind me*

I go to a beach at dusk with a teenage girl. She shrinks down to the size of a terrier and begins to run in circles faster than my eye can follow. Her path takes her round and round me, into the ocean, out and onto the land and then she disappears like Storm in the X-Men. Her motion has propelled her into another dimension. I feel free but also jealous of this young girl, who lives in the opposite direction to me and at increasing velocity. I want to get younger, to be so quick and whoosh like that fury, leaving now and going towards other things, no fear of what I meet as long as I am not left behind, being fast and sure and “whoosh.”



Martha (she/her)

Dean Atta (he/him)

Clementine s/her

Matthe

on Otter.ai Live Notes ▾



DEAN ATTA

## *Mundane Magic*

This is our new normal / we go into the garden  
fortnightly to cut my hair

the extension cable fed / through our bedroom window  
clippers plugged in

I sit shirtless on the / fold out metal chair  
as the clippers buzz

we begin to float / you me and the chair  
eight legs in the air

the extension cable / anchors us to our home  
as the haircut continues

tiny particles of me / are carried off in the wind  
this mundane magic

all I have to do is sit here / we've been doing this  
for the best part of a year.

# DEAN ATTA

## *Future Self*

I speak Greek / I speak to my yia yia / at least once a week /  
sometimes more

My nieces / call me / to tell me / their news / what they learned / at  
school / to show me / a drawing / to read me / their writing / to tell me  
/ what a friend / did or said

I make people / feel good / I check in / I remember / special occasions  
/ I send cards / flowers and gifts / to those / for whom it is / their love  
language

Everyone / I work with / enjoys working / with me / I am friendly /  
polite / and show gratitude / I have / a positive attitude

My partner / is excited / to come home / to me / he loves / spending  
time with me / whatever the activity

I am kind / to loved ones / and strangers

I am responsive / on social media / to my readers / in a way that feels  
/ genuine / professional / and heartfelt

I smile / because / I am happy

I give / because / I have plenty

My life is / abundant / and I inspire / others to be / generous / to take  
care / to show up / to listen / to check in / with those / around them /  
and most / importantly / with / themselves.





*Dreams, visions,  
searching,  
scratching,  
hunting,  
pausing.*

*Thinking about  
how language  
considers time,  
or doesn't  
consider time.*

MATTHEW ARTHUR WILLIAMS





MATTHEW ARTHUR WILLIAMS



MATTHEW ARTHUR WILLIAMS



MATTHEW ARTHUR WILLIAMS



ZEBIB K. A.

## *A Coffee Ceremony*

Twenty years later, the girl would be driving through a city a thousand miles away, her parents would call everyday to say they loved her and she was making many mistakes, and this house would be sold and forgotten, the cherry trees dead outside, the smell of coffee long gone from the walls. But now, here, the girl bounced between home, this revival of Eritrean customs, and a dreamscape she disappeared to. She had moments of feeling philosophical, surreal, as aunties asked her when she'd get married to a nice Eritrean boy. Nodding, smiling awkwardly, she'd get irritated, feeling hot, then spin off into her own thoughts. What differences there were between her and them. Here and there. Dissociated for a brief moment, she looked down at her hands, her body. Where was her body, then? Here, there, floating in between? Who did she have to thank her body for?

## ZEBIB K. A.

Her parents would say them, yell it across the room when she talked back. What shimmering membranes separated their experiences? Why was her body? Thanks to her parents. Thanks to a civil war. Thanks to pure chance and missed bullets, from enemy troops, from shootouts at a gas station downtown. Why was her body? Thanks to death, thanks to all the deaths that came before her. She drifted off too far. Out of the house, through the window, into the night sky. To higher ground. A rocket formed around her and she flew slowly higher. The girl remembered things impossible to remember, memories that weren't hers. She floated all the way to the moon. It took a long time for her to stop bouncing on the surface and float back down. She landed in the middle of a warm, salty sea. The rocket, the suit, had all stripped away, dissolved in the water. Swimming to shore, she walked the miles home. Arrived back at the house, the guests wondered why she was wet, her parents were horrified.

## FUNMI LIJADU

# *Failing Forwards in an Ableist World*

Failing has never been my cup of tea. I don't think it suits me. For me, failure was something to be avoided at all costs. Kneeling on my bedroom floor, seven year-old me would pray to God, begging Him to help me pass my tests at school. Failure must be prayed away, because it is a moral event, a stain on an immaculately polished identity.

The F word has had massive consequences for my wellbeing. If I let my failures rule my thoughts, my mind becomes a hostile place. On an unconscious level, I'd learnt that failure meant being unworthy.

My family taught me to strive for excellence in everything I do. I recall sitting on a stool in front of my grandma, chatting with her as she plaited my hair, looking down at me. My grandma gave me a sense of pride in my hair and skin, reminding me of my beauty. decay.

# FUNMI LIJADU

She would also tell me about poems she learnt as a young girl at school in Jamaica. One of these stood out to me:

Labour for learning before you grow old,  
Learning is better than silver and gold,  
Silver and gold will melt away,  
But a good education will never

This rhyme resonated because I recognised the value of education as a pathway to opportunities. My family was a testament to the power of education. My Windrush generation grandma's training to be a nurse opened up doors for her life and my parent's careers were also propelled by academic discipline. But how do you know the line that separates your abilities from your visions of success?

Sadly, I conflated visions of academic success with moral worth. I saw failure to excel as my fault, something to be ashamed of. But this is not surprising. In a world driven by one-dimensional success stories, it's easy to ignore the reality of varying human abilities. Not all of us are able to put our minds to things and see instant, shiny results. This is because not all minds are created equal, people have different strengths and weaknesses.

# FUNMI LIJADU

This is the irony of a society insistent on enforcing specific ways of solving problems, limited ways to show your intelligence, offering boxes through which creativity must be filtered.

I always knew that my brain worked differently to others. In primary school, I'd often have to stay in a little longer during break to complete work. When rapid fire mental maths questions were thrown my way, I'd panic, struggling to produce answers on the spot. I remember being well-behaved and enthusiastic in class but always the one that forgot to do the homework.

My patterns of hesitation and forgetting stopped me from reaching my full good-girl potential. And I hated it. Bringing home failed test results to Nigerian parents isn't cute. From primary school to secondary school, not succeeding created crippling shame. Substandard test results became symbolic of my inadequacy and my parents and I struggled with no clue as to what caused my failures. With no diagnosis, failure symbolised my inadequacy and my parents and I struggled with no clue as to what caused my failures.

Talking about disability has never been easy. The state of not being like others marks people as outsiders to be pitied or feared.



# FUNMI LIJADU

I've struggled loving myself because growing up gave me a sense of my wrongness as a person living with dyspraxia.

I only found out I was living with dyslexia's unpopular cousin at university, where I found out the neurological science behind my story of being great with words and awful with numbers. It turned out that my brain processes verbal information much quicker than numerical information. And the issues I had in my early years with organisation and coordinating my body through space was just a part of what it meant to have a brain like mine. Failure wasn't my fault anymore.

Now that I'm supported through challenges and failures at university, I feel content in a way I never have before. Separating disappointing events from my value, I can fail forward, towards a vision of innate self-worth. And now I live with aspiration, not fear.

# TIM CARLSEN

## *A Letter to Society*

Dear Society,

What does human rights mean?

It's the right to be human

The right to live your life free of the fear of being captured, sold and have all the days in this life dictated by another person.

It's the right to be free.

Regards of who you are

Regards of gender, pigment, eye colour, hair colour, height, tone of voice or nationality

We all have the right to be free.

When you hear the sound of my voice

Who do you envision?

What face do you think is behind the voice?

Am I white, black, Asian, or does it sound like I originate from Southern America?

Do you envision a person with a pale completion?

Or one of a darker skin?

Do I sound educated, articulate or an intellectual being?

Or Do I sound stupid, uneducated, or completely illiterate?

# TIM CARLSEN

Do I sound like someone who contributes to society, a typical hard worker and a person with a good set of values?

Or a troublemaker, criminal, a person who aims to consciously disrupt societal rules and norms?

Who do you see?

What do you envision?

We learn that first impressions are everything

That first impressions are key

But we really don't know a person until meeting them a few more times, changing our minds

Yet we tend forget that, and ditch the art of being kind

Hearing my voice, can you guess the number of languages I speak?

Am I mono-lingual, bi-lingual, multi-lingual or poly-lingual?

Do you hear an accent or a dialect when I talk?

Forstår du meg dersom jeg velger å snakke på et annet språk?

¿O hablar en español?

When you look at me, what do you see?

A person? My face? Maybe gender?

Most see pigment, colour, skin tone

Reacting either negatively, positively or not at all.

Am I friend or foe? Threat or safe?

# TIM CARLSEN

In the simplest explanation I am a young male with melanin  
A son, a brother, a friend  
I was a student, now an employee, a hard worker.  
I am creative, caring, extrovert, sometimes dancefloor twerker  
Despite these facts, including more.  
We need a need a cure for ignorance.  
An **'ignorance cure'**.

I am a young melanin man in today's society constantly choosing  
how I navigate between who I am & people's perceptions of who I  
am.  
I have fears & regrets, hopes & ambitions  
But navigating this world can be a difficult mission  
I'm just another human being like any other  
So, why is the book judged by its cover?

One of over 7 billion people on the planet we call home  
With probably a range of 46 chromosomes  
More than 93% of the world's population has another pigment other  
than what we perceive as the majority  
It's funny.  
In reality, we are all coloured  
We all have pigment  
We all have organs

# TIM CARLSEN

Brains that help us think

Lungs that helps us breathe and beating hearts that keep us alive.

We all have a consciousness.

We are from the genus - Homo

We are all the same species - Sapiens

The only species of homo that isn't extinct

We're Human.

A variety of genetical traits, societal constructs, and being brought up in different environments formed who we are as individuals

Race? That is another discussion.

Ideologies are learned

We are not born with them.

As Socrates once said "We are born with tabula rasa"

Blank slate.

So question - what does human rights mean?

It's the right to be human

The right to be free

So, when you look at me, what do you see?

Many Thanks

Tim

# MARTHA ADONAI WILLIAMS

## *Fragments of future time, a new city*

1

He walks at night, slow strides under a blue midnight moon. Silhouettes have merged into the blackness of the sky and all the lights in the houses are off. He is soft and likes to be alone. He remembers another night, from before, when the thoughts had laid heavy and he had gone out to be in the dark. He was the twisted man then, with memories greater than the sum of his parts, memory that was more him than he was.

He had caught his reflection in the window that morning as he sat at his desk to write. He saw the way he curled his hands into the shape of a foetus and rested his cheeks on its upturned belly.

# MARTHA ADONAI WILLIAMS

The same gesture his mother made most days when he was little and she sat across the table and watched him eat. He felt himself grow smaller at his desk, his feet begin to dangle above the ground.

At some point, around the time he told her, her eyes glazed, hardened into little pebbles. She became unreachable. Over time, he forgot what it felt like to be held - in her gaze, in her arms. Catching a flash of her in him this morning, he lost grip of himself too. He felt himself the loss she mourned, the empty space she perceived, as permanent as death.

The cool air moved through his thoughts. A quiet companion. He paused. Tensed the muscles in his arms, in his legs then released. Tried to push breath through the block in his chest. Exhale twice as long. He begins to panic that he can't relax, that he doesn't know how to, that he never will again so he says out loud to the air, "okay Mum, yes, I am out of control." He is still then, waits for the relief to come. He has confessed. But instead he is eight and his brother is counting quietly in the bunk below and he remembers how to time his breath to its rhythm.

# MARTHA ADONAI WILLIAMS

On days like this he always ends up back in that house where the windows were painted shut and his mother watched and his brother counted. He still wasn't sure what. Last time they had spoken, his brother had told him about the heath and the heathen, about being beyond judgement, beyond control.

Out in the shadows and the clear air of night, he thinks of the maps they would pour over together, imagining where they could go, wondering how to navigate away from there, how to read the contours, estimate the elevation, mark the miles and the minutes if only they had someone to teach them.

2

Enough has been relearned by now, by all of us, for the body to have forgotten the old fears; the thud of the heart in the dark doesn't sound like footsteps coming up behind you anymore, unless perhaps in play or if you've gone out looking for some loving and then, well...



# MARTHA ADONAI WILLIAMS

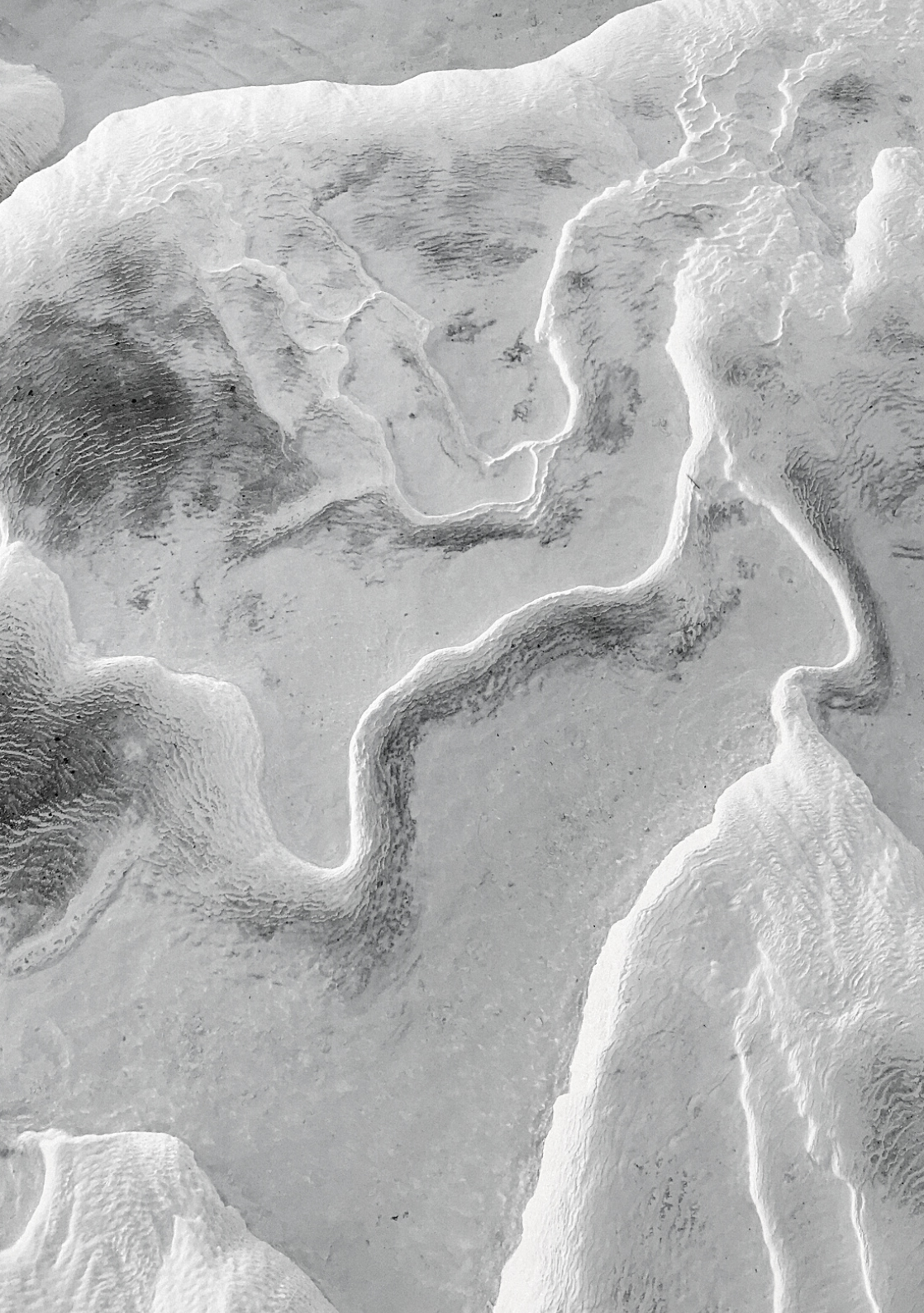
3

You would have thought then that these would be the stories that we would choose to remember, have re-runs of documentaries on TV, kids telling each other in history class, “yeah my Grandzaddy was one of the Night League,” but no. Sometimes on cultural days the Night League will be mentioned or photos of dykes and queers and trans folk with guns will be circulated by some small press somewhere but it’s not, you know, too much part of the collective sensibility. It’s no secret, nothing to be ashamed of, but I’m not sure it’s something to celebrate either. We always used to say that our stories must be told, we must find ways, but that was a strategy for before when we spent our pennies on oral history projects and people’s museums and lobbied national galleries to include us. Yes, that’s it. It’s not unspoken, not oppressed and repressed like we were then, but it is finished. We grew tired of overcoming. We couldn’t let that be our story or for your mind, your body, your breath to be conditioned to hold those possibilities. If you knew the questions to ask I would have told you already but I don’t want to start putting things in your head about who you are and where you come from. You come from now and it starts here.

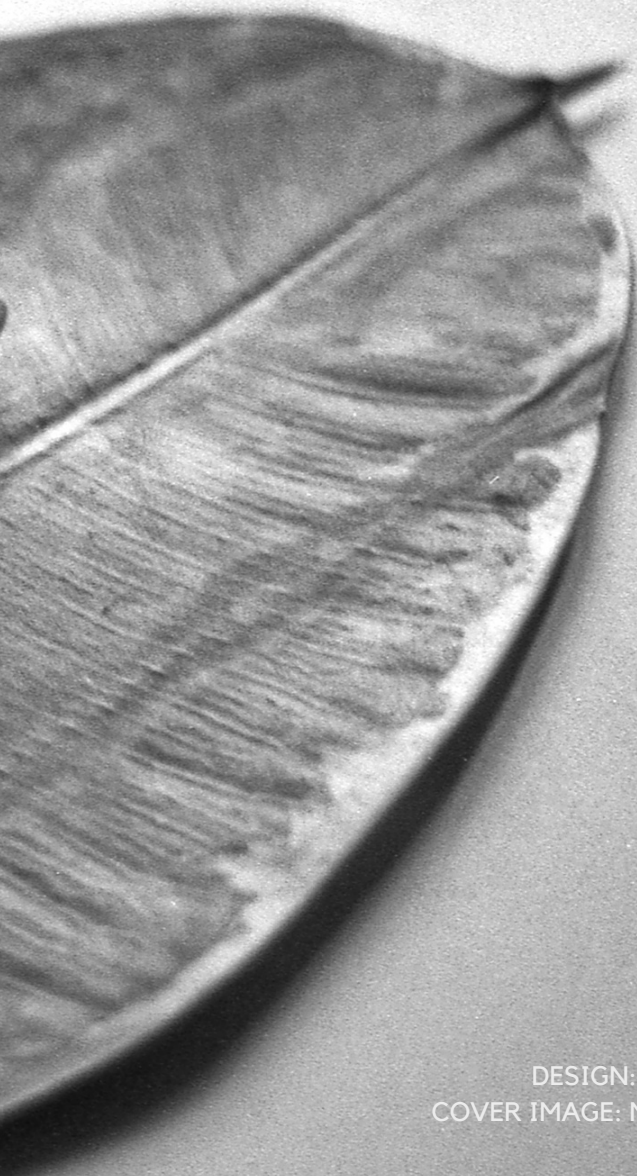
# MARTHA ADONAI WILLIAMS

4

She takes the long route home. She has the time. Lays out on lawns left to go wild. Finds a bed among the long grass. Looks up at the yellowing blades flirting with the temperament of the soft wind. The urgent dance of the crickets quiet her mind. She imagines them pounding the earth, shaking the dust up, over, around their vibrating bodies, letting it out, letting it all out. She misses her friends, her lovers, the insistent ululation of what it is to have a body. And then the rain begins. Fat warm droplets splashing on her skin. Small oceans.







DESIGN: MARTHA ADONAI WILLIAMS  
COVER IMAGE: MATTHEW ARTHUR WILLIAMS