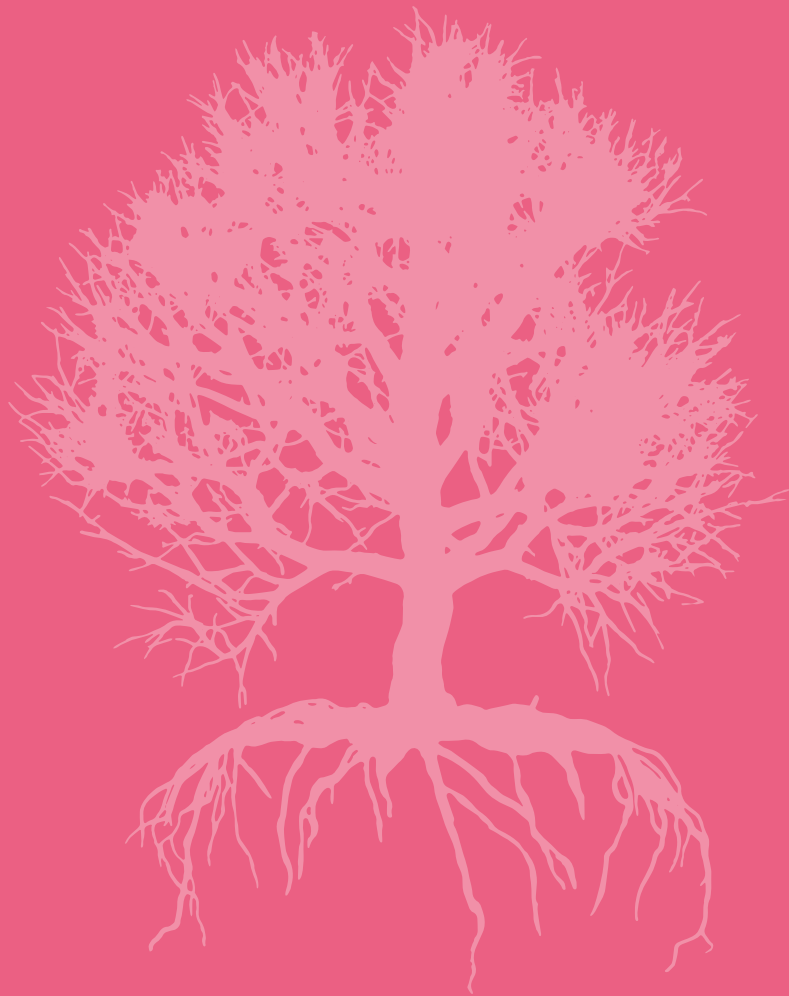




Trees, Blood & Circulatory Systems

Poetry in conversation
with *Old Tree*

September 2023



Foreword

Inspired by Pamela Rosenkranz's Plinth commission, *Old Tree*, the High Line presents *Trees, Blood, and Circulatory Systems*, a poetry reading on the High Line on Saturday, September 30, 2023, as part of a neighborhood-wide celebration, West Side Fest. The poetry reading brings together eight celebrated New York-based poets, whose writing practices touch on themes also reflected in *Old Tree*—the human body, circulatory systems, trees, and the connection between humans and nature, among others. This accompanying chapbook contains a selection of their work; poems that explore themes both present in, and in direct conversation with *Old Tree*.

The poetry event and this chapbook are divided into two themes. The first, *The Body and Its Connections*, features poems that explore the harmonious relationship between the human body and the natural environment, revealing the symbiotic bonds we share with other species and our surroundings. The second, *Nature, Trees, and Their Spiritual History*, features poems that touch on the symbolism, cultural significance, and spiritual connection humans have with nature and trees, a perspective deeply rooted in our shared human experience.

The High Line presents *Trees, Blood, and Circulatory Systems* as a public program for audiences to engage further with the concepts and themes behind the public artwork on the park. We hope that this event and chapbook will help audiences enter a contemplative space to ponder the intersections of art, nature, and the human spirit.

About *Old Tree* by Pamela Rosenkranz

May 2023 – Fall 2024
**On the High Line at the Spur,
at 30th St. and 10th Ave.**

For the third High Line Plinth commission, Rosenkranz presents *Old Tree*, a bright red-and-pink sculpture that animates myriad historical archetypes wherein the tree of life connects heaven and earth. The tree's sanguine color resembles the branching systems of human organs, blood vessels, and tissue, inviting viewers to consider the indivisible connection between human and plant life. *Old Tree* evokes metaphors for the ancient wisdom of human evolution as well as a future in which the synthetic has become nature. On the High Line—a contemporary urban park built on a relic of industry—*Old Tree* raises questions about what is truly “artificial” or “natural” in our world. Composed of man-made materials and standing at a height of 25 feet atop the Plinth, it provides a social space, creating shade while casting an ever-changing, luminous aura amid New York's changing seasons.

Pamela Rosenkranz creates sculptures, paintings, videos, and installations that reflect on the human need to anthropomorphize our surroundings in order to understand them. In doing so, she investigates the codes through which people give meaning to the natural world. Her projects center synthetic materials created in the image of nature: a swimming pool filled with viscous fluid, collections of mineral water bottles filled with silicone, or a kitchen faucet streaming water colored with E131 “sky blue” synthetic dye. Color is paramount for Rosenkranz, who employs fabricated colors intended to reflect unblemished and idealized nature. She elaborates on the condition of the body as a malleable system. Questioning the worldview that centers human

beings, Rosenkranz addresses our relentless attempts to domesticate and tame the other living beings around us, as well as our own bodies.

ARTIST BIO

Pamela Rosenkranz (b. 1979, Uri, Switzerland) lives and works in Zürich, Switzerland. She has held solo exhibitions at institutions including Kunsthaus Bregenz, Bregenz, Austria (2021); Fondazione Prada, Milan, Italy (2017); Kunsthalle Basel, Basel, Switzerland (2012); and Centre d'Art Contemporain, Geneva, Switzerland (2010). Her work was featured in recent group exhibitions at the Schinkel Pavillon, Berlin, Germany (2021); Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, California (2021); Sharjah Art Foundation, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates (2020); Garage Museum of Contemporary Art, Moscow, Russia (2019); Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France (2019); and Museo Espacio, Aguascalientes, Mexico (2016). She has participated in major international group exhibitions including the Okayama Art Summit, Japan (2019) and the 15th Biennale de Lyon, France (2019). In 2015, she presented the Swiss Pavilion at the 56th Venice Biennale. Her work is featured in the collections of major institutions around the world, including K11 Art Foundation, Hong Kong; Kunsthaus Zürich, Zürich, Switzerland; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, Illinois; Museum of Modern Art, New York, New York; and Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt, Germany.

ABOUT HIGH LINE PLINTH

In 2019, we launched a new program of rotating, monumental public commissions called High Line Plinth. High Line Plinth is located on the Spur, a special section of the High Line that opens onto expansive views of 10th Avenue and 30th Street. The program features new, large-scale contemporary art commissions that rotate every 18 months. High Line Plinth is a landmark for the city of New York that enriches the urban fabric of the city and the experiences of the over 8 million visitors that come to the park every year. High Line Plinth is the only site on the High Line solely dedicated to the presentation of art.

The remarkable works we commission, produce, and exhibit on the Plinth encourage discussions and conversations among artistic communities and the public alike. We debuted the program with a magnificent bronze sculpture by Simone Leigh, followed by a thought-provoking work by Sam Durant. Pamela Rosenkranz is the third recipient of the commission, and will be on view through October 2024. The fourth commission is set to open in fall 2024.

Featured Poets

Marissa Davis is a writer and translator from Paducah, Kentucky. Her poetry has appeared in *Poetry*, *Poem-A-Day*, *Gulf Coast*, *Narrative*, and *Best New Poets*, among other journals. Her translations have appeared in *The Common*, *American Chordata*, and *The Offing*, among others. Her chapbook, *My Name & Other Languages I Am Learning How to Speak* (Jai-Alai Books, 2020) was selected by Danez Smith for Cave Canem's 2019 Toi Derricotte and Cornelius Eady Prize. Davis holds an MFA from New York University.

Megan Fernandes is a writer living in New York City. Fernandes has published in *The New Yorker*, *POETRY*, *The Kenyon Review*, *The American Poetry Review*, *Ploughshares*, among others. Her third book of poetry, *I Do Everything I'm Told*, was published by Tin House in June 2023. Fernandes is an Associate Professor of English and the Writer-in-Residence at Lafayette College where she teaches courses on poetry, environmental writing, and critical theory. She has received scholarships and fellowships from the Sewanee Writer's Conference, the Yaddo Foundation, the Hawthornden Foundation, etc. She holds a PhD in English from the University of California, and an MFA in poetry from Boston University.

Nancy Huang grew up in Shanghai and near Detroit. Her poetry, plays, and prose are published by *The Offing*, poets.org, Asian American Writer's Workshop's *The Margins*, film distribution company A24, and others. They are a Voices/VONA, Watering Hole, Tin House, and Pink Door fellow. She has a poetry MFA from NYU. She works at a cemetery in Brooklyn.

Christopher Kondrich is the author of *Valuing* (University of Georgia Press, 2019), a winner of the National Poetry Series and a Library Journal best book of the year, and *Contrapuntal* (Free Verse Editions, 2013). His recent poetry appears or is forthcoming in *AGNI*, *Los Angeles Review of Books*, *New England Review*, *The Paris Review*, *Ploughshares*, *The New York Review of Books*, *TriQuarterly*, and *The Yale Review*. He has received fellowships from the MacDowell Colony, the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, the I-Park Foundation, the University of Denver, and Columbia University. Co-editor of *Creature Conserve: Writers Respond to the Science of Animal Conservation* (University of Minnesota Press, forthcoming) and an associate editor for *32 Poems*, he teaches poetry for Eastern Oregon University's low-residency MFA program.

Deborah Landau is the author of five books of poetry: *Skeletons*; *Soft Targets*, winner of The Believer Book Award; *The Uses of the Body*; *The Last Usable Hour*; and *Orchidelirium*. Her poems have appeared in *The New Yorker*, *The Paris Review*, *Poetry*, *APR*, *The Atlantic*, *The Nation*, *The New York Review of Books*, *The New York Times*, and *The Best American Poetry*, and she was a 2016 Guggenheim Fellow. She is a Professor and Director of the Creative Writing Program at New York University.

Francisco Márquez is a poet from Maracaibo, Venezuela, born in Miami, Florida. His work has been featured in the *Brooklyn Rail*, *The Yale Review*, the *Slowdown* podcast, and the *Best American Poetry* anthology. He has received fellowships from The Poetry Project and the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, where he was a 2019–2020 Poetry Fellow. He lives in Brooklyn, New York.

R. A. Villanueva is the author of *Reliquaria*, winner of the Prairie Schooner Book Prize. New work has been featured by the Academy of American Poets, *Ploughshares*, *Poetry*, and on National Public Radio—and his writing appears widely in international publications such as *Poetry London* and *The Poetry Review*. His honors include commendations from the Forward Prizes and fellowships from the Sewanee Writers' Conference, the Constance Saltonstall Foundation for the Arts, and Kundiman. He lives in Brooklyn.

Sally Wen Mao is the author of the poetry collection *The Kingdom of Surfaces* (Graywolf Press, 2023), and the forthcoming fiction collection *Ninetails* (Penguin Books). She is also the author of two previous poetry collections, *Oculus* (Graywolf Press, 2019), a finalist for the Los Angeles Times Book Prize, and *Mad Honey Symposium* (Alice James Books, 2014). The recipient of two Pushcart Prizes and a National Endowment for the Arts fellowship, she was recently a Cullman Fellow at the New York Public Library and a Shearing Fellow at the Black Mountain Institute.

Trees, Blood, and Circulatory Systems is organized by Constanza Valenzuela, Curatorial Assistant of High Line Art

Wild Grasses

Marissa Davis

as a girl, bare legs ablaze
with pollen, tamed beasts would pull you
into the wild grasses—

across the torch of midday,
august's illegible twist & cut. roar
of those tall unnamable flowers;

& pond frogs, field mice,
wasps & yellow jackets, hornets,
& whatever force teased them upward, outward.

fear was not knowing a face
until it struck.

no warning, though sometimes
the dog would balk, its leash yank

in your sun-damp hands, before something split
the wave grass,

some angular primordial face,

if not toad
then snake,
if not black
then corn,
then one

of those awful kinds
with death wetting their mouths—

their lips a fulcrum
between equinox
& annihilation, a known world
left swaying at the skin's edge.

& you'd grow strange, then—consequence
of such a miniscule mouth,
filament of fang,
half-dew-drip of venom—
made birth-slick, hound-

eared, deer-gazed, girl
resharpening the wan dulled animal.

& you'd feel, unsealing, a different possible.
first, an impact

dense as conviction, blunt force
like an arrow running

neat through bone. then, a poison's
eloquence: you, unwinding,

unyours. toppled.
down & down,
back into the land's
carnival of root,

where the long red worms, the patient
hyphae, would derange
your architecture: reuse, repattern you.
& you'd belong again.

now, here, tall-grown, you roam
the famed gardens
of a bare-boned city.
the sky is muzzled
with concrete.
your woman-feet
pad the sand-paths,
carelessly skirting
all this flora
combed & pearled
into *allée* after *allée* after *allée*—
& your eyes are searching—

still, still—

among clean lanes
of indexed flowers,

for what those wild grasses hid—

summer's legion of oblivion jaws;
creatures beyond the rim of utterance,
beyond negotiation—

& roamed too close, you would know
whose dominion. you would know your place.

Tired of Love Poems

Megan Fernandes

But we never tire of them, do we?
 We wish to worship more than just each other.
 We put a god first, sometimes a tree,
 write a sonnet to a bird in the black
 of night or offer a light to a stranger
 and not call it love. But it is. To pull
 out a chair is more than manners.
 What we tire of is that we never tire of it.
 How it guts us. How it fails, then reappears.
 Because what is the bird compared to you?
 The bird is replaced each morning.
 You approach on a red bike in summer
 and the poem takes shape. I entitle it
 anything but Love, anything but what it is.

Ecstasies

Deborah Landau

Catch me alive? I am today—swept through the air in a flesh,
 thinky-feeling, lugging itself up the subway stairs
 & now back on Spring Street again in the dazing light

pumping the marrow a breeze of breath a blood
 & still the minutes accelerate & we wake backweighted
 with days will we waste them all & then when we get there

we will think I wasted them all, stony before I was laid
 in stone, mourning before I was mourned
 & what was this velvet for? Spring didn't know—

flags of the grave? well also a jubilation not just a bawling
 & off again toward whatever, drinking exalted or coughing
 but still can swallow & here all your parts are warm & mostly work

& look it's luck, while not yet a word from the underworld,
 the necklace of days bracelets of hours the flush of blood
 present swelling the yes please of sex the abject of—

is it precarious yes exquisite *alive*, staging its trance
 the hand in hand, my mouth sloshed with coffee, sugared & warm,
 your silent reading this now.

You've Got to Start Somewhere

Deborah Landau

I had the idea of sitting still
while others rushed by.
I had the thought of a shop
that still sells records.
A letter in the mailbox.
The way that book felt in my hands.
I was always elsewhere.
How is it to have a body today,
to walk in this city, to run?
I wanted to eat an apple so precisely
the tree would make another
exactly like it, then lie
down uninterrupted
in the gadgetless grass.
I kept texting the precipice,
which kept not answering,
my phone auto-making
everything incorrect.
I had the idea. Put down the phone.
Earth, leaves, storm, water, vine.
The gorgeous art of breathing.
I had the idea — the hope
of friending you without electricity.
Of what could be made among the lampposts
with only our voices and hands.

Loquats

Sally Wen Mao

In the spring they ripen and swarm the trees,
the waxy little fruits that resemble bald heads.

I collect their remains: piebald, sweet
and sour. A syrup made of loquats

is said to cure cough. Their woolly twigs
splinter in pear blight. I am bereft

when I eat them all. My throat and heart
always sore. Whenever I got sick, my mother

used to skin yellow loquats, but they tasted
better with the skin on. This season, my cough

grows and grows. There is a tree or a fungus
in my chest. I once kissed a man in the hollow,

a tattoo of a tree stump on his chest. I counted
the rings to a hundred. His memory broke

against my cracked phone screen like waves
against the Sutro Baths. In different years

of my life, 2012 and 2017, two men
with the same name fucked me. Futility

was their name. Their bald heads, their kisses,
the spittle of spite, crawl into me, refusing to exit.

At the herbal medicine store, the most expensive
item is cordyceps or wormgrass, dead caterpillars

whose brains become host to a fungus that rots
them from the inside out. Good for the lungs,
a panacea for all pain, the saleswoman pitches.
I am wormgrass, expensive but brain-dead.

Comatose in my love, my refuse, futility fuels
my every waking hour. The tree inside me isn't loquat

but strangler fig. A tree so pretty and snakelike
it renders you breathless, then worthless, all at once.

formula for outside

Nancy Huang

i go outside for the first time in 10 days
wake up to dry light - go to bed with cake in my mouth

find there are more things around me than in me -
kumquat trees honeying poison ants

corals bloodstruck by a flounder
fog so thick i could break my teeth on it

understand this is only because i have been staying in my bathtub
but i've noticed lately my body separating familiar and not

my skin some flimsy foam blocking scenes from touching me
daub of sky on land

clouds doing a topstitch in mountains
some welt pitted from bruise with a blood rush

how do i go home from that - my favorite word is a weapon
my favorite scene a tragedy

my favorite place in the world somewhere
no one ever came with me

Empty Spaces

Christopher Kondrich

There are empty spaces we make
and empty spaces we grow

accustomed to, as though they were always
there—a gold mine you can descend an hour into

by elevator before reaching its network
of tunnels—or always will be,

as in the photosynthetic capacity of trees
to absorb carbon dioxide into their diameter, their height.

As a forest is torn down, as it dries out, dies off,
the trees that are left won't absorb as much carbon

as they used to. Studies show them storing less, fitting less
into themselves. The trees are *falling down*

on the job, as they say,
then we say. The shareholders saying

through us, from inside us. And we cannot
squeeze into tree cells to enlarge them by pushing outward

in all directions at once, like da Vinci's sketch
of the proportions of the human body

according to Vitruvius. A sketch of a man
over a sketch of the same man with arms and legs

at different angles, so as to cover as much of the circle
and square as possible. A sketch depicting the ideal form

that leaves little room for much else.

Summer of Fires

Francisco Márquez

Summer of fires and we fly northeast
 to southwest, Brooklyn to Los Angeles
 watching swarms of cities turn quiet,
 tilled fields lace their patchwork, white windmills
 dissipate mist into Topeka like a widening shade
 of sienna and the gold of braided wheat
 or early corn buried earless before resembling possibility,
 the way in Brooklyn we were hungry for more time
 and now we increase in Pacific light. The east
 behind us darkens crowned in slate and the hours
 recede like a river falls backwards into headwaters,
 the future west expanding in silence except
 for a thin row of crimson in the distance
 like a wound, as the pilot announces: to the left
 is a row of burning cedars. Like small torches
 amassed in a plunder, embers rise like lanterns
 combusting, their thin rice paper lit like matches
 as silence falls and fire spreads miles
 below our feet, a mouth consuming green
 in the inverse of the deepest spring
 as we glide further into darkness,
 the half-light that briefly hit our faces fading
 as it would with the last few flares of a sunset,
 or perhaps as with some faint tragedy
 long since behind us, except it was neither
 and it was still happening
 all around.

PAREIDOLIA

R.A. Villanueva

When the new year came with whole flocks of doves
 and jackdaws falling dead upon the fields,
 landfills and roofs blackened with wings; the lakes
 silvered with drumfish, their bellies bloated,
 eyes thickened to milk. The ministers sang
 of seals and omens, sang of prophecies
 above tambourines and horns. For starlings
 they cried, for spiders flooded into trees,
 for the quakes and fires. Last night the moon
 hovered like a scimitar over an East
 River bloodied by the air. We took planes
 for constellations, named strobes for comets;
 we watched a crowd kneel before a hollow,
 calling *Mary, Our Lady of Sorrows*.
 *
 They call *Beata Maria Virgo*
Perdolens pray for us, divining shapes
 from knots weathered open, bark crowned with sap.
 They bow *Salve, Regina* at the foot
 of this tree flanked by lilies and find—clothed
 in mantle of blue—the Virgin atop
 scars in the trunk. Hers is the form they hope
 we see first, an image we know we won't
 hold holy or miraculous. Picture
 this: what appears here is something of the
 body. Not Her eyes or mouth dressed with stars,
 not hands in coronal loops, but that part
 of his wife St. Joseph would never see,
 that place touched once by the Holy Spirit.

ABOUT HIGH LINE ART

Founded in 2009, High Line Art commissions and produces many artworks on the High Line, including site-specific commissions, exhibitions, performances, video programs, and a series of billboard interventions. Led by Cecilia Alemani, the Donald R. Mullen, Jr. Director & Chief Curator of High Line Art, and presented by the High Line, the art program invites artists to think of creative ways to engage with the unique architecture, history, and design of the park, and to foster a productive dialogue with the surrounding neighborhood and urban landscape.

For more information about High Line Art, please visit thehighline.org/art.

ABOUT THE HIGH LINE

The High Line is both a nonprofit organization and a public park on the West Side of Manhattan. Through our work with communities on and off the High Line, we're devoted to reimagining public spaces to create connected, healthy neighborhoods and cities. Built on a historic, elevated rail line, the High Line was always intended to be more than a park. You can walk through gardens, view art, experience a performance, enjoy food and beverage, or connect with friends and neighbors—all while enjoying a unique perspective of New York City. Nearly 100% of our annual budget comes through donations. The High Line is owned by the City of New York and we operate under a license agreement with NYC Parks.

For more information about the High Line, please visit thehighline.org.

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REFERENCES

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