

Magma Poetry Competition 2018/19

Magma holds two competitions, the Judge's Prize for poems of 11 to 50 lines, which was judged this year by Andrew McMillan, and the Editors' Prize for poems of up to 10 lines, which was judged by a panel of Magma editors. The prizes were awarded and winners read their poems at a celebratory event at Exmouth Market Centre, London on 21 March 2019.

Judge's First Prize:

Fuck/Boys by Inua Ellams

It starts early / A man compliments the tight nut of his
grandson's fist / Hit Me he says holding open his palms / The boy
strikes and winces / Shake It Off We Are Men We Feel Nothing
the man says / The boy tucks the tiny fracture into the sleeve of
himself and strikes again / The fracture burrows deeper / Over
the years others join / This when older boys squash butterflies /
This when the teacher ridicules his painting / This when the
fairy's light dims in the film / They swarm inward / A shoal of
needles through meat / shredding the vicissitudes of himself /
At twenty they are a nest of thorns around his heart / They
flatten to a hard shell / They close and crush him in / At thirty he
is imprisoned for a fight he can't justify / His heart is a gnarled
knuckle now / but holds a spot of light / thin as spiritskin / in
which the boy he was and the man he could have been / whisper
/ in hushed starlight / in dimmed symphonies of other ways of
being

Judge's Second Prize:
Stillborn by Rowena Warwick

This baby is so perfect
I want to lick it.

I want to slide my wet tongue
over its glazed eyes,

taste the translucent skin
on folded limbs, hands, feet.

Let its tuft of duckling hair
rise under my breath.

I want to dust my cheek
against the silence

the *almost*

Judge's Third Prize:
Hangover by Ben Strak

Head filleted by two pillows
and lightly pounding
I am trying to ignore day
- that hard white blind-edge.

I can tell you are trying too.
I risk fingertips
along your back - the gesture fills,
flexes as it ends.

Enough to turn your weight over,
to refill my hand,
part sleep-tacky lips, lift open
our similar legs.

Our prelude is taste. Ground water,
damp, mildewed flowers.
Flushed, you test my resistance,
overcome it frankly.

Joined now - close, uncomfortable,
you feel my depth, me
your length. Bodies kiss,
compose deliberate music.

You are up there, moving into me
like there is no choice.
Now I am up there.
Eyes shut. Devastated. Pious.

You shower first. Maybe I do.
Check over the sheets.
Press soft wet hair into wet hair.
Think about coffee.

Editors' First Prize:

A Strange Boulder by Derek Hughes

I passed you off as an erratic.
Now as I study you, I see orang-utan,
the kindly face, unkempt hair,
Prehensile limbs hugging yourself against the cold.
Cast aloft, as a volcano blew its top in Sumatra,
the memory of your body set in tephra...
touching down on a tightly mown Leicestershire lawn
ready to be curious.

Editors' Second Prize:

Entertaining Sammy Davis Jnr in St Ives,
1962 by Kathy Pimlott

On a Sunday, the amusement arcade in the harbour
is closed but I say to the fisherman/machine-minder,
'Look, just this once, while the Sally Army's in full toot
on the slipway, open up the back and let us in. It's Sammy,
he's getting nervous. He needs a casino milieu'. And Matty,
though fearful of reprisals from the Methodists and God,
lets us in. Now Sammy leans against the Penny Falls
and sighs, semi-content and nearly soothed, his clicking finger
softly brushing the pad of his thumb, his blind eye bright.

Editors' Third Prize:

Lanterns by Katie Hale

The dark was close enough to touch
when we took the jam jars from the shelf
to trap the lightning bugs

and hung them from the tree - a festoon
blinking in the blue evening.

I don't remember any thought
of setting them free. How pale

our hands were then, how small. They fluttered
in the glitter-light like moths.
We sat all night beneath the swaying glass.

Magma Poetry Competition 2018/19 Commended Poems

Judge's Commended poems (in no particular order)

On our night out by Milena Williamson

He gets the steak and I get the chicken.
The waiter lights a candle.

We discuss our dreams:
in mine, moles invade my old house

and they nibble my neck.
His dream has teeth in all the wrong places

and he won't even hold my hand in public.
We chew the tough meat.

My first cat died in that house -
I buried Catty out front under the cherry tree.

His milky eye was still open: a piece of fat
the moon spat back. *It was a rental.*

My second cat died of shock
when I told him I fell

in love with a married man. Nobody
recorded the time of death. Tenderly

I fold my napkin
like a burning house.

Break the fast with peaches
by Catherine Norris

Your palm – my palm
juices flash flood
our fate lines
pour extension to
our life lines
sate our dry
morning mouths

Put another punnet
on the shopping list
I can't resist another
sweet blubber
fleshy slobber
leaning into me
you bite – the indent
is heart shaped

Sheffield Fox by
Regina Weinert

He's a dark shadow of himself
against the grain of smoke-white paint.
He's young and on his own, ears wide,
untidy snout, hairs on his back a fuzz,
toes paused on plastic scraps,
missed dandelion leaves and grit.
His heavy-looking brush points
down the one-way lane. Cars filtering
towards another hardening artery
fix him with their flash. His eyes absorb
the glare, they're marble moons.
Or hollows, swirling with cloud
the longer your stare pins him to the wall.
A crack runs straight through him,
he waits in pricking late November mist,
daring you to break the spell.

Checklist by Inessa Rajah

I had checked all the boxes:
Fold laundry (check).
Buy groceries (check).
Study (check).
My post-its were clean.
Deeper than that, I had slept enough.
Dutifully called my family.
Spoken to my friends enough to appease my wriggling conscience.
If I'd had plants - they'd be watered.
If I'd had pets - they'd be fed.
I walked onto the balcony, feeling accomplished.
The brisk winter air tap-danced on my face, up my nose
It nudged my gaze toward the trees across the road,
The tall, lanky, looming ones that looked like sprites with wild curls.
Except, I discovered, their heads were bare;
They had shed their leaves in the night (or nights)
And in my busy-ness,
I had failed to notice.

It is always a work in progress,
This life.
There is always more to be done.

Still Life with Cigarette by Robyn Steely

If you want to light a cigarette, turn your back to the wind. Better yet, press your face to the wind and let your eyes well up in front of strangers. Run the shower cold. Get dressed in the dark. Then consider: God with a sidearm crossing a bridge, hard rain clocking windows, a plate of yellow onions. Arrange a long and careful dusk. Draw the foreground first: My heart in a jar on a stack of your records, my heart in a jar cherry red.

Violin by Ian Patterson

Guitars hung like a row of Spanish
hams, or stood zipped into body bags.

In its casket I cradled, the violin was a
ventriloquist's doll. It drew looks outside

the shop, and on the train. At home
I looked at its bow, like a wiper blade,

optometrist's chin-rest, and bridge. It
had two sad eyes. I scratched out cats'

music, before those first chords pulled
the whole world into line.

At Logan Botanic Garden by Barbara Hickson

These Koi Carp in the formal pond remind me
of the Timothy Hitsman shoes I wore on our wedding day.
Oyster pale, pearlescent, their texture could have been fish-skin.

They were slippery – smooth leather soles sliding on tarmac –
and skittish – slingback straps escaping the curve of my heel
so I nearly stepped out of them, left them

basking in the shade of azaleas,
afraid they might dart away
at any moment.

Infinite Jump Glitch by Ken Babstock

Still centre of an expressway overpass, the terrain vague
of this eastern borough;
the mood rich in overcast, mission creep, Camus's Plague
yellowing on loan.
There remains the glitch, like a jump glitch, of working subject
into the landscape -
itself an echt vollständig description of, not the subject,
the landscape.

The Text by Claire Gallivan

THE TEXT depends on numerous details: here is the sky lined with vespers
But without supplying any account of what proceeds the weight of the whole
Fades into the sea. Green functions sacramentally but blue is illumined and
Readers sometimes wonder whether there is any historical reference.
Scholarship is work but the sea has a mood it does not share, in fact,
The Incarnation is not clear that flowers open in spring, but, for example,
Nothing supports your chair and so you prepare for hours. Some have tried
To establish one answer, a window to a window, which probably means
The guest room to a house giving rise to a number of alternate versions
That on closer observation is fruit tumbling from an open palm.