



Ejiro Edward, j.lewis, Kayode Afolabi, Mary McCarthy,
OsyMizpah Unuevho, Shannon Hopkins, Shelly
Blankman, Victor Ugwu, Victoria Naa Takia Nunoo

with cover art from John Madu



Copyright © Individual Authors and Contributors, 2017

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, retained or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the author.

Published by *Praxis Magazine*

Website: www.praxismagonline.com

Address: Plot D49 Nsukka Street, Garki, Abuja 970001 Nigeria

Cover Painting: © John Madu, 2016

Book Design/Layout: Laura M Kaminski



ATF 5: Responses to THERE ARE NO WOMEN IN OUR HOUSE

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Ascension – OsyMizpah Unuevho.....	2
Cast Out – Mary McCarthy.....	3
Dyslexia – Shannon Hopkins.....	4
erasing mistakes – j.lewis	5
Flit – Victor Ugwu	7
Ghost stories – Ejiro Edward	9
Inside Out – Mary McCarthy	10
men born men – Victoria Naa Takia Nunoo.....	11
The morning dew never seems to settle around here – Victor Ugwu	12
Mother – Kayode Afolabi	13
My Mother Doesn’t Live Here Anymore – Shelly Blankman	15
“My nerves are bad tonight. Yes, bad...” – OsyMizpah Unuevho	17
red stains and romance – j.lewis	18
six fifteen am – Victoria Naa Takia Nunoo.....	19
tar – Victoria Naa Takia Nunoo	20
There are no men in our house – Kayode Afolabi	21
(untitled) – Ejiro Edward	22
The Waiting Space – Shannon Hopkins.....	23
Yellow carnations and an Owl – Kayode Afolabi.....	24
CONTRIBUTORS	26
ABOUT THE COVER ART	27

Introduction

In this 5th offering in *Praxis Magazine Online's* 'Around This Fire' chapbook series, nine poets offer their responses to poems in Iskandar Haggarty's digital chapbook *THERE ARE NO WOMEN IN OUR HOUSE*. Iskandar's poems are sensory experiences – richly vivid, surrealistic, unforgettable. The response poems included here reflect the intensity of color, experience, and emotion depicted in Iskandar's poems, as if in mirrors tilted at many different, unexpected angles.

We're also honoured to have permission to use a painting from the brilliant surrealist artist John Madu as the basis for the ATF5 cover. You can read more about John Madu's at the end of this chapbook in the "ABOUT THE COVER ART" section, and I do encourage you to check out more of his work on Instagram here: https://www.instagram.com/johnmadu_art/ and also an article about his work which appeared at Praxis in 2016 <http://www.praxismagonline.com/the-art-of-john-madu-beauty-morphogenesis-and-metaphors/>

Best wishes for a 2018 filled with inspiration!

*Laura M Kaminski
(Halima Ayuba)*

Ascension – OsyMizpah Unuevho

*"I saw myself reflected in the spaces
glowing dark, phosphorescent
my body made up of things which
had never been said..."*

– from "The Spaces In Between" by Iskandar Haggarty

not that speaking out was sin. No sir,
I was of imprisoned light,
longing for sunset air outside a congealed baptism of old earth.

a boy once sitting in his moon,
dulled by milk infinities of flat worlds
in the darkness;

still, expected to be full of soul,
in exile,
& walk on walls & in between small rooms
learning how to leap

from keystone to windowsill to star,
& dance
& speak
in interpretations
from the lower language of sunflowers & lemon beetles,

the references of self-discovery, also of ascension
between huddled torsos renewing light slowly
in the expanse of forever.

by night,
through the coming Jerusalem of dreams.
I was born

through immersion
in the cornerstone of
that faith

I found my body to be,
the transition of metals in water.

Cast Out – Mary McCarthy

*rain fell like / ashes from the / weeping stars and / all the birds
disappeared* (Iskandar Haggarty: "Powerful Magnetic Fields at the
Hearts of Giant Stars")

On a bare morning
we woke in the ruins
of a world thin and brittle
as a dry leaf
All the houses flat
as paper imitations
of the ones we knew
held together
with string and glue
leaving us homeless
voiceless as ghosts
drifting through the fog
waiting for me to strike
a spark
and burn it all down
begging the wind to scour
every ash
from the bone fields
that won't remember mercy
or offer promises of shelter
we might have once
believed in

Dyslexia – Shannon Hopkins

*The walls
are the color of
disappointment,
the window panes are
rusted over with sadness.*

- from "Dear Oleander" by Iskandar Haggarty

He doesn't like words
so, he talks to me in dreams –
our life in pictures.
He paints me pictures with his tongue
he never writes them down in words,
hating the confines of the tiny lines.
Lying quiet beside him
in the evening dark,
I close my eyes
letting his watercolours
flow over me.

Some are beautiful.
There are terra cotta villas festooned with
bright bougainvillea vines,
great black horses with
long, curly manes.

Some turn my stomach.
Steely, cold, meaningless factories
where humanity
is a currency not accepted,
ugly men with big egos and loud voices.
beggars hating him
but asking him for money anyway.

My mind runs back
and forth
trying to escape these last,
wanting only the villas in the sky,
though the factories, rude men and beggars
are more real
and are his
more relevant
work.

erasing mistakes – j.lewis

*I scrubbed the black / stains of my father //
off of the floorboards – / it took hours.
– from Iskandar Haggarty's "Bluebells and Bowerbirds"*

for a crime scene cleaner
a message in crayon is nothing when you have
all the right solutions, it even comes out
of cracking wallpaper that
some cheap couple in a dirty trailer
used to blanket their pain
dress up their aching life together

the bathroom mirror was easiest
"bitch" went away in one simple wipe
hardly wrinkled the paper towel
and just like that
a woman she would never meet
was forgiven, sins wiped
sparkling clean

"who is he?" made her stop to wonder
if "he" had been the mayor
or the husband of someone well known
everyone knew the nasty rumors

a quick rub and then "he" too
was out of the story
erased from collective memory
onto a sponge tossed in the trash

she had to leave "i'll cut his throat"
as a wave of unexpected nausea hit her
culmination of the blood, the smell,
the frustration and despair that had
soaked into this tiny space

too many uneasy nights
unsettled fights

recovering, that threat was gone with a firm swipe
every man in the county breathing relief

fresh rags, brushes, water, soap
a spray of freshener in the kitchen

where she answered the question over the sink
"if i hung myself, would you cut me down"
by sawing through the waxy letters
with a rough cloth until the thought snapped
leaving frayed, bloody ends

job nearly done, the pressure of the place
weighing on her shoulders like her father's corpse
she frantically scrubbed the final, futile cry
from over the headboard
"i am really leaving"

Flit – Victor Ugwu

after "Flutter" by Islander Haggarty

I

(y)our father had
a Kalahari
empty of sun on his head

and he breaks it
with a tumbler
every night his hair falls inside

(y)our mother
will always carry his god
on her lips

the day a word
breaks
the day he dies

II

You wear (y)our
father's head
now

she smells
goatskin
and lemon

And silence
inside
while you press

ghost between green
glass and
forehead

III

I came out
from
inside

walls blank
in mother's vocal
cords (she grew

new ones
every
day)

breaking you
and him
from her salted ash

Ghost stories – Ejiro Edward

*She would / stare from / behind intricate stained- / glass windows,
gritting her / shark teeth to tiny / nubs against the sill.
– from "Keepsake" by Iskandar Haggarty*

Let us talk about those little boys in
Goosebump books
The kind that are stupidly brave
Walking through haunted houses alone,
Let us call out their names
Watch them fall like baseballs from our lips.

Inside Out – Mary McCarthy

I don't want you to see me / in this house of / broken bones
(Iskandar Haggarty: "Rain Poem 3")

Our house is gone
its roof and windows taken down
its address erased
written over–reassigned
and still I find myself
inside those rooms
caught in the corners
like the trash a flooding river
leaves behind
Salt in my wounds
and the weight of sorrow
heavy in my arms
keeping me there
in the rooms I carry with me
like an invisible prison
of unacknowledged grief

men born men – Victoria Naa Takia Nunoo

inspired by Iskandar Haggarty's 'There Are No Women in This House'

they say a woman is a dark dark pit
you pour into
yet only gets deeper

they say a woman is a weaver
of complications on the spine
until a man is broken into small parts
she can fit into her mouth

they even liken a woman to that silence so loud
it penetrates the skull
and leaves a ringing in the left ear

they say a woman is

too much of day
too full of night

she's a
burying desert
a swallowing body of water

where i come from men born men
with the same cowardice that runs in the veins
and so they give all sorts of appellations
to that which they do not understand

The morning dew never seems to settle around here – Victor Ugwu

title derived from Iskander Haggarty's "Rain Poem 1"

I don't suppose it ever
will

It always never does/ it came around with pixels / and dust to wag/ and
collect our bodies/ into a wet book/ when it tried to stay/ someone lost a
house and a dog/ and we couldn't agree on better memories but/ a knife and
a hanging god/ to carry our dreams/ on horse neck/ it doesn't know/ how to
stay/ and not be colours/ God I hate colours/ I only like the effacement/
of my blandness/ nothing but to draw my thoughts/ on the window mirror/
it's last stay was two minutes/ I pressed my knuckles/ cut my hand/ and
emptied waltz/ on my grandmother's/ hollandaise until red/ black and white/
blurred into an empty/ collection of infinity

Ever since
it never came

Mother – Kayode Afolabi

inspired by Haggarty's "Flutter"

I

My mother is
the fairest flower
on this earthly garden.

Pure honey pumps
out of her heart
into diamond heads.

My mother is
the envy of all
on this earthly garden.

She is charm personified,
luring dad
from his iron work

to white sweetly scented myrtles.

II

My mother is made
of cones and rods.
Colours and black-and-white.

In prying eyes
she's red pepper
and black dagger

on trespassing hands.
If territorial peacocks
frighten you not,

ask around about Io.

III

My mother holds
a lamp in her head
and brains in her hands.

At night she weaves
the fabric she wears

to the boardroom.
A bard at needlework and paperwork.

IV
She is Venus when she smiles;
but she's Juno when she walks,
and Minerva when she talks.

She's Jupiter's sister, wife and daughter.

My Mother Doesn't Live Here Anymore – Shelly Blankman

Her brain is scavenged now
by the the scarab beetles

of Alzheimer's, leaving mom drifting
into a starless night, her sky blue eyes

clouded, her words soft and scrambled,
an anagram on a page that can't be turned.

I lean closer to understand her garble,
knowing that won't make a difference

in her darkness; words and thoughts
are clear only to her. Her memories gnawed away

but still dear to me. Fresh potatoes mashed
with onions and eggs. She never could

get out all the lumps... frustrating for her,
comfort food to me. Tuna on toast and

steaming tomato soup on snowy afternoons.
Grape jelly piled thick on white toast with hot tea

and honey when I was sick, served in her bed
with warm starched sheets that smelled like her.

Long drives for fresh air, laughing and listening
to Sinatra swing or Como croon, or talking about

old movie stars and the time she met Dick Powell.
I wonder if those moments are locked somewhere

in the prison of her mind. I'll never know. Her land
is strange, her language foreign. She is a child now,

wanting a cookie she cannot name or reach. Her home
is a crib she cannot escape no matter how hard she

tries or screams. I know these are the demons
of the disease with my mother's mask, her body

but a shell with a heart that ticks away the time
she has left. As evening swallows the sun, I kiss

her goodbye, tell her I love her and watch her eyelids
drape over her eyes. Her midnight is unending. I leave

trying to recall all those hot summer days spent on her
porch, those old torn blue-and-white patio chairs,

stinging my legs as we sat sucking juicy peach pits,
making people out of cloud formations, and chuckling

at our nosy neighbor hiding behind her half-closed door
clinging to every word. I wonder now if scents and sounds,

likes and dislikes, are still tucked somewhere in the crevices
of her brain, but as tides of sentences ebb into disjointed

words, my hopes drown in sorrow, I know
my mother doesn't live here anymore.

“My nerves are bad tonight. Yes, bad...” – OsyMizpah Unuevho

title is from a line of verse in 'A Game of Chess' in 'The Waste Country' by T.S. Eliot; after Iskandar Haggarty's Rain Poems 1, 2, 3, & 4, with lines from "Rain Poem 2"

dear O.,
probing drawers where
it is hard not to fall softly on wood
& postcards
growing like wild ivy
over bridges and zoos
cut into Prozac pills
by ash is how I live. My nerves are bad tonight. Yes, bad.
Stay with me, my palms are small patches of soil
never mixing well
with the dew,
with the small flowers sprouting
under the happiness of denial,
their secrets
turning my body into a look-away-love
picture for the hallway. It is how I struggle to live.
Maybe I'll pull you close
say, you are a shade of mascara
and *press my face against yours—*

say, this near empty bottle is the trigger of a gun,
and my mouth is the thumb and barrel

the lips touching—

this time,

say, my pills are fresh bibs,
and each pocket carries a press of Emilie Autumn,

kissing me under dusty pistols in the hallway of my dreams—

shoving me into the waterfall,
showing me how to ignore the rocks. enjoy galaxy's coldness.

red stains and romance – j.lewis

*I only remember the / slight red stain / on the corner of
grandma's lip (Iskandar Haggarty: "Powerful Magnetic Fields
at the Hearts of Giant Stars")*

she never wore lipstick
never explained the absence
of foundation or cover

when her lips were red
her rain-soaked eyes shone blue
her cheeks blossomed

in the most vivid purples
greens, and finally yellows
i thought she was a flower garden

blooming around grandfather
who stood oak-like above her
gnarled branches swinging in the wind

i was young then
knew nothing of the cost
of misplaced affection

six fifteen am – Victoria Naa Takia Nunoo

inspired by Iskandar Haggarty's 'Rain Poem 2'

i think about you when i wake up
when the alarm clock wakes half of the things in my room up
i look at the time and wonder why you're up so early in my thoughts
why you have come with such heavy buzzing
maybe you are here
loud as my clock
to wake the things that have been sleeping inside me up

tar – Victoria Naa Takia Nunoo

inspired by Iskandar Haggarty's 'Flutter'

I

your mother held you in her arms
on that dark dark night
with ruffled black hair
and dried blood stains under her feet
your eyes were little blinking lights
that told her something good
and beautiful
and true
could come out of pain

II

she spent years grooming you
to not become like your father
she told you soft was brave and powerful
and let you cry openly without shame or guilt

III

your mother knew your father's blood was tar
so she spent her days and nights
creating a solvent to thin yours

There are no men in our house – Kayode Afolabi

inspired by Iskandar Haggarty's "There are no women in our house"

There are no men in this house
Grandma had mum going on eighteen
Grandma's granny played dad and mum.
"Men are scum", says mum.
"They come
as homeless cyclone sufferers
pitch temporary tents
in the borealis
flanking your clitoris;
men are nomads"

There are no men in this house
Our ears are mother-in-law's tongues
to the slimy tongues of men.
All men speak ice-cream
with a core of gall;
they'll flatter you
then they'll shatter you.
The potsherds won't stop knocking.

There are no men in this house
There are half-bred children
There are trite teddy bears
There are dildos

There are
no men
in our house

(untitled) – Ejiro Edward

*My father's ghost / keeps telling me to be a man, /
but I am not a man.
- from "Dear Oleander" by Iskandar Haggarty*

Tell me the name of a city that is burning

Lagos

And that city is not really a city

But a body

Me

A mosaic of queer bodies burning

And nobody can see it.

The Waiting Space – Shannon Hopkins

in response to "The Spaces in Between" by Iskandar Haggarty

Trying to find
a shelf of relativity -
something that anchored me
to something.

A dalliance
in the dark
of the mental recesses,
a somnambulist into the
fluid, unseeable world
where all
the things
within us
are waiting
to come
to the light.

Yellow carnations and an Owl – Kayode Afolabi

inspired by Iskandar Haggarty's "Bluebells and Bowerbirds"

I.

Last week I was invited
to our funeral.

The one-eyed owl called,
I whistled but the owl didn't

stay back long enough
to douse the dread in my mouth.

Vultures in black Miu Miu gowns
perch on leafless trees,

waiting on the living carcass –
the only one I ever lived for.

The one-eyed postman slid a talon
toward his breast pocket;

one-eyed Pat had dropped
all my mails in the mailbox

but this funeral invitation –
this summon –
is for my own hands

II.

I woke up
this morning

with loads of lead on my lids
my eyes have cried – cry die.

I had grown pussy willows
from an insomnia-long night;

This summon –
the antidote to sleeping pills.

My bed, a garden of carnations
yellowed from nasal salt water.

I opened my mouth
to ask myself –

are these differences
really irreconcilable?

but my throat was shut
and Aunty Ronnie shut
the door behind her

III.

I thought of the casket –
the gavel made of ebony

as I pressed my black robe
on the funeral day.

It wouldn't smoothen;
nothing would.

Aunty Ronnie felt sorry
for my needless worry.

She heads the regional
branch of a multimillion firm,

has two daughters and a son
and appears happy

She has no husband.
Who needs a husband

when you have
lots of money
and a cryobank.

CONTRIBUTORS

Ejiro Edward is a writer, poet and lover of the arts. Loves reading, wanderlust and travel.

j.lewis is an internationally published poet who has learned to love the waters of California as much as the red sandstone of his native New Mexico, and the imagination of other poets as much as his own.

Kayode Afolabi is a chronic cakehaholic. He enjoys listening to, reading and writing poetry whenever he isn't providing medical care or chasing other forms of fun. His poems have appeared at *Bravearts Africa*, *Kalahari Review*, *Tuck Magazine*, *Vox Poetica*, *Praxis Magazine Online*, and *Ake Review*.

Mary McCarthy has always been a writer, but spent most of her working life as a Registered Nurse. She has had work published in many on line and print journals, including *Gnarled Oak*, *3 Elements Review*, and *Earth's Daughters*. *Praxis Magazine Online* recently offered her e-chapbook *Things I was Told Not to Think About*. Despite all we are up against in today's world, she sees great hope for justice and humanity in our future.

OsyMizpah Unuevho is a member of the Hilltop Creative Arts Foundation, and spends time roaming between the cities of Minna and Lagos in Nigeria, writing, studying and loving God; Geology; sensory paintings and music.

Shannon Hopkins is a writer and creative from the KwaZulu-Natal North Coast of South Africa. She has a BA degree in Fine Art and English, and is currently studying for her Honours in English literature at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. She writes as a means to explore issues and complexities of the times as well as those of personal experience.

Shelly Blankman's first love has always been poetry, although her career has generally followed the path of public relations/ journalism. Her poetry has been published by *Whispers*, *Silver Birch Press*, *Verse-Virtual*, *Praxis Magazine Online*, *Ekphrastic: writing and art on art and writing* and *Visual Verse*.

Victor Ugwu writes from Minna, Nigeria, where he's a member of the Hill-top Art Foundation. His works have appeared at *Praxis Magazine Online* and elsewhere.

Victoria Naa Takia Nunoo is a Ghanaian writer and poet. Her works of fiction have appeared in *The Kalahari Review*, *Brittle Paper* and *Afridiaspora*. She has recently been published in the anthology *The Different Shades of a Feminine Mind*, an AfriWowri Literary Project, and is currently a finalist in the 2017 RL Poetry Award.

ABOUT THE COVER ART

Praxis Magazine Online would like to thank artist John Madu for allowing us to use his painting as the basis for the cover of this chapbook.

John Madu is a multi-disciplinary artist whose paintings and art pieces overlap between art and design through personal iconographic symbols as metaphors, texture, indigenous patterns and colour. His paintings instigate the development of new modes of critical practice. His most recent subject matter dwells along the lines of the effect of globalisation on African identity, in which portraiture, figurative symbolism, mixed media, and collage come into play. His resource materials are eclectic because of influences from pop culture, African art history, music and lived experiences. John Madu was born in Lagos in 1983 and holds a B.sc in policy and strategic studies.

Exhibition history:

Morphogenesis 2015 (Didi museum).

A solo exhibition depicting man as an organism in a functional environment

ONLY THE BRAVE EXHIBITION

(Diesel flagship store)

Solo exhibition 2015. Diesel celebrating their 2 year anniversary in Nigeria.

YELLOW SUN EXHIBITION 2015

A group exhibition organised by Venessa Powers of Avenir Magazine, at the Moor House in Lagos, featuring artists: Lina Iris Viktor, Ewa Wiczyński, Tristan Pigott, Sang Woo Kim, Onyekachi Ironkwa, Abraham Oghobase

PLATFORM 2015

Art21 eko hotels

Group exhibition (where John Madu created his flashing lights series)

AN OBSCURE FASHION FOR AFFECTION 2016.

solo exhibition held in terra kulture.

IT'S NOT FURNITURE

(group exhibition)

Omenka gallery Lagos

27th of May 2017

His popular works are mostly mixed media on canvas with a concurrent use of burlap, paper collage and constructive media depending on how inspired he feels. Oils, acrylic, gouache are mostly used type of medium he creates with. John Madu has sold paintings in the international auction house called Arthouse contemporary based in Lagos, and the value of his work determined by sizes can be found in askart auction directory. His rendition of style flows along with how contemporary or relative a subject moves him to create his pieces of art.