

Between

by Livia Blum (BA '23) and Laura Zhang (BA '23)

Oyster Island/ Livia Blum

november and something crawls bird bruises around my skin. little girl in the church garden can't find her mother. I dream soot. the earth can't find the places where she used to put her hands. I am on my back in a bee place in a heavy century. I am wrapped up blue on oyster island.

the sky lullabies around my eyes. louise says there is actually no such thing as a shoreline. I wonder if this means that once I was meant to be born in water. sometimes I listen so hard to the river and I get so sorrow. I write until I know I have destroyed something. I follow broken

mollusk shells home. I wonder if I already know the end of the story. out too late on broadway and a man shouts that i look like a boy. I take my feet to oyster island in a long long dress and braid my hair into the wild grass and spend some time missing my mother. I think I can promise

that everything has a language. I am not so good at speaking but if I were I would say that to really be in a place the place must also be in you. on the island there is a low humming in the water and a light that lingers just above the ground and I have an urge to eat everything.

the island takes my blood and I itch, bruise blue. I story myself into the coastline, turn into water and chris says to see a ghost you must first believe it is there and so I take pain in my hands and carry it to the island and we exchange our wounds and I wish my skin were water enough

to heal everything. I press my hands against the earth and leave them there, keep the island safe with otter songs and rain. it is still there tomorrow and so i fill my mouth with carbon and hold my breath: *don't die*. I sing myself wild on oyster island, pull ghosts from the water. it's almost enough.

Aubade: I'm Leaving Blue/ Laura Zhang

what if it was forever this quiet,
hummingbirds forgetting how to speak
and you and i are at the coastline
under a black and white passing
of the eastern waves, i think there's no more
river roar. i asked you if it was true,
that you would really keep this frozen night of us
even if you could never have the wisps
of your hometown wind tickle your ears again
the color blue for all your painting, not your sea heroes
nor their shadows, if we were
just two bodies,
i'm not sure i'd like this kind of love.

Unmake/ Livia Blum

I was waiting for something to happen I was counting disappearing stars I was reaching for the earthquake. I made up other names for myself and pressed my hands against the blue and pulled out plastic and tree roots. This is not how things make themselves, but I have only ever known how to unmake, how to crush open winter, how to apologize. I have been waiting for something ever coming, I have been sinking into an earth unbinding. If I could, I would be a maker of myths. If I could, I would swallow words, birth whales. But I am just the unraveling of bark and autumn, I am the thing that forgets to start breathing. I have never held anything in my hands. I dreamed you gave me other words, silver shards of meaninglessness, sensations not yet realized, and I could not take them. I dreamed the redwoods regrew themselves, and their skin was rising, gold and gasping, and the elephant seals threw back their heads, and fish rose from their graves and there was such a thing as water, and the earthquake never came. I woke up and could not find my eyes, and everything was breathing.

the sky cracked fell gold
from the moon all of it was
wild and promised

King Tide/ Laura Zhang

moon and sun
were dressed in white

bleeding their outer skins
into the water

for a dancing party. sun
took oregon's bristle leaves

made an amber green crown and
moon was brushed with sand speckle-

hand in hand they rippled. they became
unbodied, just splashes

sweeping across the ocean floor
tiptoeing home to each other

after midnight and they don't know
i'm watching their parting

from the overhang's last scar
in the big rock where they last met

its green stains my feet cold while
my city's sleep is buzzing

but a jazz song they dance to
is numbing, i'm humming and

the last thing
i remember is

the music
the music flooding

back to me.

So Blue Again/ Livia Blum

Dead bird winter and I get mad
chew up matchsticks and spit
smoke at the sky there are men
in the world and I think
it should be on fire no I'm just
kidding they're redrawing
the wetlands and I'm trying
to safety pin the water but
I just drown my hands so blue
again lily says carry more
than you need and so I fill
my mouth with Joshua tree
seeds and learn every way
to say sorry I hide my love
in the oyster beds I'm sorry
I say sorry winter and I bleed
my face with moon stand
thirsty at the shoreline
didn't I already become
the volcano by being born?
I can't bury anything anyway
keep the city between my teeth
give away tomorrow like its
nothing so nothing

My Mothers Touch Was/ Laura Zhang

northern winds pulling ropes of my hair into a school day braid
slick like Arizona heat, strands frayed in sundown.

soft buffalo fur and i'm never hungry, she lets me spend afternoons
in the waterhole where i learn to find Elderberry, bring it back to make paint.

yellow leaves on my sick tongue, sap of tree bark down the back
of my throat from her scavenging.

black like the Cola we buy from the new grocery store, it looks like
hard fired acorn shell, tastes like smoke rising on celebration day and it's

something you will never know. i've been living in her ashes
your brushfire, my only memories.

[Image: [Tessa Grundon's](#) art installation at Governor's Island, Artist in Residence at NYU
Wetlab]

Hungry/ Livia Blum

little girl opens dead
oyster and finds lost
Ocean hiding. little shrimp
and echo lullabies and
forests and slow. it stays
on her hands like pen
stains a new creature
under her nose, a tide
rising, a salt something
she dreams whale
dreams, wails for water,
is so thirsty. she drinks
and her mouth prays
the water clean again.
her soul is quiver
in the back of her head
it is night and then day falling
the sun stumbles
over too much air and
still the oysters are
dying and the water is
hungry is trying to escape
the dawn and she drinks
the sea through her baby teeth
and it is not enough
but the blue spreads under
her fingernails and up
her eyes and she is
something else she is
a thousand lost years
she is deep and dead and
eyes open eyes and
rising with the sea

Your Mother Works the Eastern Shores' Night Shift/ Laura Zhang

her name starts and ends with water. waterfall the horizons she sees fading. waterway the last track home waterproof her transparent soul for motherhood. backwater storm. watercolor a song she sings to you. underwater she wonders about you dreams like dryness water and you're wearing a riptide blanket drawn by her last slashing you're bathing in aftermath warm.

your name is unknown she calls you blue. she calls home sometimes you hear salt in her voice and the footsteps of men. you ask about the fish. she says they're beautiful like your sister and you wild wearing pink ribbons so much sea sparkle. you see her wrinkles pruny hear slapping guttural and soon the boat bell she says blue i have to go i'll see you in a washing of the shore count the shells i brought back for you as the nights. you say ok but you whisper they're dead undo these boatlines! you wish she wasn't the ocean and back that maybe she was bathing water gentle for you you hope she's mastered drowning and she's lost at shore crumbed and salty crawling back blue.

[Image: [Tessa Grundon's](#) art at Governor's Island, Artist in Residence at NYU Wetlab]

Untitled/ Livia Blum

*“What is it that brings me here to stand like a rock in this river of sound?
- Robin Wall Kimmerer*

opening my hands I am
making myself a painted shell I am
blue and wounding I am
never who I think I am I am
hands open hands I am
open mouth of volcano I am
sitting outside closed doors I am
promising myself to coastlines I am
opening my hands I am
shaking in a subway car I am
oyster breathing water I am
speaking the wrong english I am
finding seaglass in autumn I am
already in love I am
rising eyes of rivers I am
island in the snow i am
little wound of earth i am
what was left behind i am always
who I think I am
beginning
every world I am
folklore I am
sin I am
all
color learning to survive itself I am
lost too I am light

Growing Up/ Laura Zhang

*“The value of beauty is dependent on the cost of living”
-Ocean Vuong*

i can tell you, when you have seashell eyes and the storm comes you'll feel it early. that salt sting in your body runs red and deep like dusty amber leaves. and i know seashore is your hiding spot, your secret knowing when the first grains of sand begin to tremble. yes, it's only you who sees the trees dance a little softer, cries for the cerulean city under high tide. young one, this is growing up. when you can't tell the water from your tears anymore. but no one ever said you couldn't build salt castles, sing the storm a song, make new endings.

Apology in Blue/ Livia Blum

if I had found another way I
would have lived wordless,
filled my eyes with river currents and blue
bird and battled backwards to summers
of wild grass and siren song, pressed
my hands against the engine roar of thieves.
but I am words and filthy
words and I am listening to wail
of water, breathing earth into
emergency and nothing
burns the way my hands do, holding
all this world. I stay bleeding
at the shoreline, filling my chest
with sickened salt and seal skin.
I understand that nothing has a name.
I understand that nothing has a name
but once there were sleeping giants, cave
kingdoms for creatures of the Blue Planet.
Once my body rose and fell with the tide,
built sorrow up with ice and forgave
everything with water. this is a horizon
smoldering in my arms, but I remember
when the channel was full and beating,
a storied shoreline of blue.
if I could find another way
i would be undrownable, filled
to my eyes with ocean, wrapped in
shellskin, mouth brave
of river nothing ever
red or heavy anymore.

I Saw Phoenix Burning/ Laura Zhang

and it was my body-
my orange breath coaxing
out a different sun as a
juicy persimmon
ripe like living when i didn't know
being heavy from my thighs
meant loving strangers was
blue.

i saw Phoenix burning
and i felt it in my body-
heat against my neck and my
skin starts to breathe free, it tingles
a guitar sound.
red writhing my skin
like pulling taffy
i feel it getting thinner like a veil
coming off myself. skinny, bony, a disheveled yellow
wriggling in the breeze.

i saw Phoenix burning
and it was so hot i thought i was returning
to the sunrise of my birthday.
i lost control of my thoughts, only saw my glossy eyes
screaming like a bloody baby
 i'm happy that it's all easy.

i saw Phoenix burning
and she was a body and a spirit-
a cottonwood tree killed and grown again.
i saw Phoenix burning and it was
Binding, Beautiful.

Errantry In Lost Place/ Livia Blum

I am not what I promised. I am
pulling up blue from the water and
it stays wonder and oil
on my hands it is sea storm
and oyster and sky and
things undying and
it's breathing right it's breathing
do I keep pulling up alive or
is everything ending just like I
thought it would? I want to say more
alive more alive and in some sunlights all
bodies look like wind and are rescued
in the corners of my eyes something is
becoming, up and falling blue and (blue and)
echoing, almost tattered roar of
coastline roar of river runaway
journey of earthquake and lobster something
is holding me I swear surrender. there is a light
that rises before the sun, a color
uncaptured and wild, it slips lost
through my fingers and it is water
I think it is water

After This It Pours/ Laura Zhang

Old Hillside was dusk potted
in waves and every woman's visiting spot
where glass animals ran smooth
under eyes closed under
everyday sun singing quiet
but it's been shattered and

at her grave
it pours so i see no
body just her last breath.

it's open casket her
purple skin sinking and i'm seeing
there is no mother no
wind spirit just forest burning
the air's empty like cemetery

i wonder if she took it in slow, full
like raging fire and spit it on
Aftermath's shoelaces
handed Disaster her body and
said the spirit always blows backwards

it's dead and she can't say sometimes
you're just girls with nothing left
to give / girls with mouths
who will rot in this same stillness / Lips like
girls and mother nature has no daughters

it pours and it's hurting and
she says if it was so numb
i'd choose lightning but the storm is still
breathing you're still living
take to the graveyard yes this
Afterlife from water is a life
i'd like to know for this life
is bruising but it still pours
me deep.

Gas/ Livia Blum

The following poem is an erasure of Exxon Mobile's [statements on plastic and climate change](#).

I.

It

touches every history a century

of kerosene and chemical

trade

the world

for oil and gas

II.

We are all places we will obey respect

dedicate

aspire

require and

employ

nature

We will

seek to

develop

III.

the weight of

People

makes its way into the environment.

We are plastic

a full lifecycle of

loss

Letter Found in Fall/ Laura Zhang

chances are this isn't what you've been looking for- i
can't seem to find anything either lately
 (coyote spirit in the rock mail written to my address
 the color green that paper plane instruction manual
 neighborhood rats a body under these clothes
 the period at the end of my sentences
 my nametag for work something to eat
 the part of my brain where i could find the past
 that cloud of tangled hair earthworms, soggy
 a reason to do much a reason to care about not doing much)

maybe everything is around the corner...
 what comes after october weather?
 it's windy, shadowy grey but are we all not
 hanging on like burning candle wax? god! Would you rather
Life without a body or a mind i mean

Imagine! imagine if we were all volcanic,
headless, clothed in ripped up wedding dresses
unafraid of dancing under everything blue.
more like our mothers, felt noise electric,
had a best friend called Now called This
called Here called Mine called Yes.
 (maybe then we'd stop saying sorry
 for things
 we aren't sorry for)
 anyways - sorry

i don't know you
well enough to write
this letter but at least we
have the pen.

Little Ghost/ Livia Blum

season of water angels and women
in long skirts, faces blue and bleeding
smoke ache and coyote. I woke up
with water and stone under my skin,
my hands stained sorry with a red sun.
what else is there but sea walls
and invasion, coat hanging
like a little ghost in the doorway,
willow trees breathing in old ironing rooms,
ghost of girl with redwood skin everything
blooming underneath this shrieking city.
I will never find the beginning of the world
but I have probably found the end.

a whale went dying to staten island on friday and
bleeker street is covered in little shells little
ghosts of some creature that no longer
has a name. there is elastic all over my teeth.
all day the wind presses her hands through my spine,
she is trying to lift me and I want to rise I want
to sleep and find in my bones the silence
of California. I make circles of tiger
moth and peppermint, every word
for *promise*. I keep finding drought
in everyone's face. I stand vanished
on the shoreline, making up
words. I want to imagine a world
but if I did it would look like this world only
everything gone would be back again.
I break my bones into the earth.

I am thinking about how so many things
are filled with light and its okay its fine
that we can't hold the light it's just not
meant to be found and I'm wondering
where my ghost is and why is everyone pretending
not to hear the water and do my hands still make blue
the way I thought they did and does anything ever
stop being over

Between/ Laura Zhang

the water and the shore i lost everything i knew.

my mothers and my strength to hold on tighter
to the treeline that gave me earth as a skin and
roots longer than the manhatta sky all because
some boats came and took me on what they said
was a fishing trip and even though i told them i
talk to the fish often, actually daily when the sun
touches the soft dirt of the shore's rocks, still
they plunged my hands into water's tongue. she
licked me cold and blue and i didn't have time
to tell her i was her friend, not an enemy, that it
was her who taught me how to swim. when i
was floating there blue pieces of the wind kept
biting me so i sunk my teeth into her grasp to
hold on but she's invisible, couldn't wrestle me
from sea with her ribbon body when she bent us
all backwards it was fast, we were drifting, i
looked at my island's curve, blue and green
were melting, soft tree root in water where once

i knew everything. i lost the water and the shore.

Dredge/ Livia Blum

river falls over me & I
am blue over everything,
feet deep in trout valleys.
river climbs over me & I
am & am not the river
again & I want to know
if I have seen anything die
without knowing it was dying.
I stand facing the city, dripping
its history and shame. ice
under my tongue, I face
the face of liberty. is anything
still blue, the way it once was
blue? I search my mouth
for water ghosts. the river
is too deep the fish are
getting lost. it is cold.
the river stands over me,
readies herself to crash & I want
the whole world back want
the city to love the water again
want to grow a new history.
cold keeps open my eyes.
I carry blue in my hands
the way I used to carry redwoods.
beginning & end of everything.
oysters are going gone but
we line the shore with oysters.
they keep digging up
the river but the river
comes back

On Shore We Drink Beastly/ Laura Zhang

aegean sea holds
bareback child light like flooding
 pulls heavy on mother swimming
with heavy hair she drags her bundle through.

crossed bodies cry heavier than aegean's
singing their tongues hold out drinking
themselves boat regurgitates
homeland and it's contaminated water

dinghy and foils do they carry
so far? floating is backwards is childhood
is before those walls stuck in deep
 those painted fumes
turned skin black boat bodies shedding wrought
foils in a night cover and she's
 cold like aegean

girls wrestle aegean
trying to lick her surface clean.
girls map her hands into boat
crevasses take aegean by the neck
 kick girls for three hours you see
she charges butterfly

girls land swimming feel aegean wrinkle
her peace she wonders what direction
aegean sweeps or losts

girls on shore drinks aegean smooth aegean cold
aegean her beast still running