



NOTTINGHAM C.A.N PRESENTS

*I Come From
A Body That*

#communityartistsforcommunityaction



I Come From

Project Overview

Funded by the National Lottery Community Fund, the 'I Come From' project is the debut project from community arts organisation, Nottingham C.A.N (Community Arts Network). Inspired by the poem 'Where I Come From' by Elizabeth Brewster, the project worked in partnership with Rising Issue magazine and illustrator Raphicdesign, producing a trilogy of printed anthologies that explored identity, people and place through poetry, with a diverse range of participants.

The project began with a series of online workshops facilitated by poetry specialists exploring the themes of 'Race & Immigration', 'Gender & Sexuality' and 'Mental Health'. Supporting individuals to reach their creative potential, we shared stories, held discussions around specific questions within our themes and set a range of creative writing challenges that encouraged poets of all ages and abilities to express themselves and develop their creative writing skills.

The final session saw participants working with an illustrator; producing live, visualisations of the poetry as it was performed, this process helped our participants to build confidence in their performance skills and gave the poets an idea of how their work would be interpreted by wider audiences.

In terms of project legacy, the anthologies, containing our participants' work will act as a stimulus to provide community groups and educational institutes with a toolkit that attempts to break down barriers and misconceptions of the issues raised and encourages further conversations within the wider community.

As well as being taken on a series of roadshow events around Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire, the work has also been showcased at a celebration and launch event, and a selection of poems have been filmed so they can be accessed by community groups. To view these, please visit our youtube playlist via a [QR](#) code at the back of this anthology.

We would like to thank everyone involved in this, our debut project. It has allowed us to connect with so many people and to develop a learning resource that we feel will be so beneficial to our partnering community groups. We feel strongly that in order to tackle the issues that we have explored it is important to open up dialogue and communication. We feel that these anthologies and our video toolkit is a great way to facilitate these conversations. We welcome anybody to get in touch with us to discuss the project further.

Our inbox is always open.

Contributors

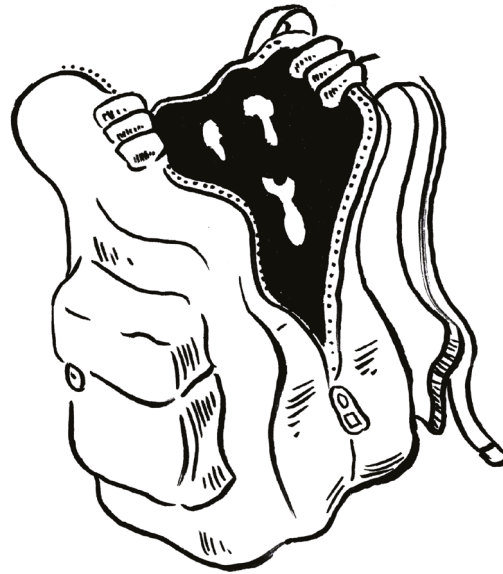
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Content Warning

This anthology explores the topic of gender and sexuality, there may be themes and language that some readers might find triggering or offensive. Discretion is advised.

Contents

<i>Poem</i>	<i>Page</i>	<i>Author</i>
Backpack	1	Troy Cabida
Bones	29	Lily Luty
British Museum	18	Teo Eve
Coming Out	2	Natasya Lund
Dare	4	Natasya Lund
Ghazal for Hot They:Them Summer	3	Joe Andrews
Hypochondria	5	Betty Doyle
I am not female	7	Ria Davies
I Come From A Body That	9	Sheetal Martine Joseph
I Crumble at the Sight of a Man	11	Sheetal Martine Joseph
Reflection in side a Jar	13	Sheetal Martine Joseph
Run	10	James McDermott
Scared of Swimming	16	James McDermott
Shame (That Catholic Thing)	14	Teo Eve
The Branches of Love	17	Becky Dillingham
The Ghosts that have not Left us Yet	6	Leanne Moden
The Moody Nature of Atoms	21	Joe Andrews
The Universe on Gender	31	Lily Luty
There's Dead Dad in the Grass	23	Rebecca Summerscales
These are Not the Parts We'll Remember	25	Jake Weaver
Time of the month	15	Lorna Gill
Unhappily Hirsute	27	Lorna Gill
When This is All Over	19	Jake Weaver



Backpack

by Troy Cabida

Of course, my bag is a violent scream,
 which I've learnt to like most days: anxiety
 to keep my mind awake on train rides home.
 There is a collection of receipts
 tight to one another thanks to a safety pin.
 Somewhere inside is a neon pink wristband
 from a show he once performed at,
 whose organisers he used to be friends with,
 how easy it is to forget things, how easier
 to never process anything if we chose to.
 Inside a small velvet pouch
 with strings tied twice for security,
 a marble bear hasn't woken in months,
 meaning hasn't seen the sun in months.
 Sometimes he lets himself believe
 that in his little world, it is still hibernation period.

Coming Out

by Natasya Lund

You guessed it right.
 But your face hoped otherwise.
 I hadn't seen such a sight,
 Since all my teenage lies.
 'This is me'.
 You wish I never said.
 The look of disappointment, I dreaded to see.
 And there you went, just saying 4 words...
 'I'm going to bed'.

Ghazal for Hot They: Them Summer

by Joe Andrews

I wanna be baby. That pink bubblegum cute.
That damn, look at those heels walk cute

down the street. You ever heard a stiletto knocking
on concrete? Wake up and praise me: Cute!

Gorgeous! Stunning! A whole lot of snack,
with 10% extra height. My CV just says cute

in size 72 font with a winky face. Because there's work
and working on yourself. That's your true cute

self baby. Oh Joe. I miss your shaved legs in the hot
they/them summer.

Dare

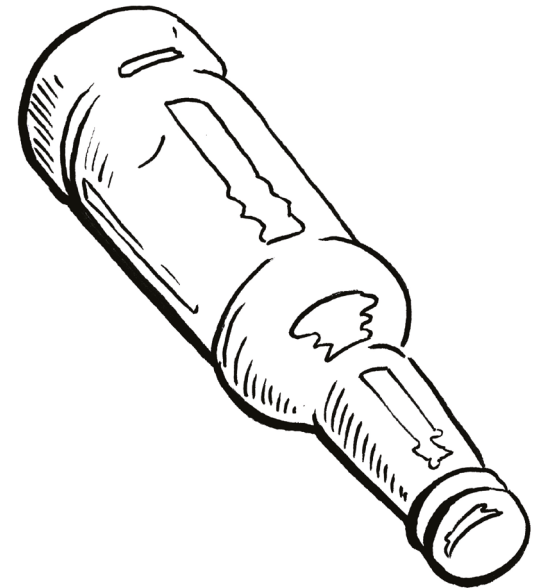
by Natasya Lund

House parties
Leads to
Truth and dare.

My turn came
Dare.
To kiss my friend.
A girl.

The boys excited.
Again.
They shouted.
We kissed

The second time.
I stopped it.
I had to.
I did not want to.



Hypochondria

by Betty Doyle

The quiet lump
of yellowing fat
in my left breast
turns black.

The knot
blocking off
the nerve's electric
in my thoracic
paralyses.

The dryness,
cinders itching
in my water line
dims vision,
assigns me blind.

The bloat
of my abdomen
is a hernia,
a tumour,
an undescended testicle,
a baby.

The mute face
of the blank pad
staring dumbly up at me
month after month
never becomes anything
at all.



The Ghosts that have not Left us Yet

by Leanne Moden

on the days when I cannot hold a pen
I feel myself disappearing

brittle talons unmoving
knuckles swelled to the size of regret

the blue-red throb of seizure
nameless pain borne silently

hands suspended in misshapen
half-fist ambivalence

flexion extension abduction
adduction circumduction

sometimes death comes all at once
sometimes by increments

hair once tamed is tangled
shoelaces go untied

these days I am
a professional mourner

unable to close the coffin lid
aching to write my own story

waiting for the next part of me
to disappear

I am not female

by Ria Davies

I come from a body that
Is full of holes, with faces
Appearing in every window
One holds an eye, yellowed and old
Another a tooth, illness and warmth

the god in the steampunk graveyard
I feel you there with me
With your hands on my hair
And my hair plaited with yours
And with you I am a giant, with no end in sight
With the head of a deer
And the spirit of my mother

with a knife and fork
And my food full of bones
I am a bone, you have bones, we will return to bones
Of the sea, of the tins, of the plastic
That twists into your skin

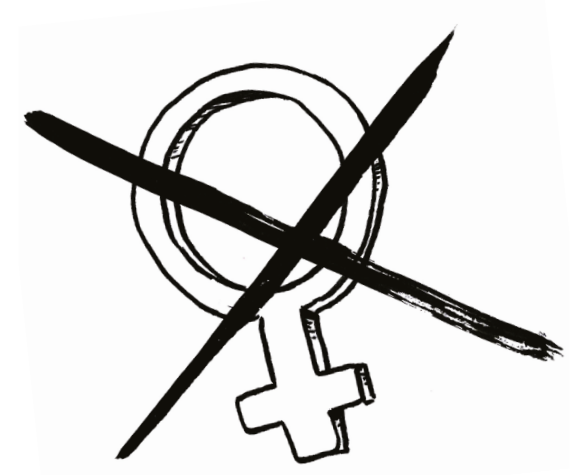
With a knife and scalpel
I am food full of bones
A body, on a metal plate,
Female they will write
To categorize me, how to dress me, where to put me

I am not there, it is not me.

Plastic twists into my skin
And like a bug I tick
Things are not simply
Dead or not

If you call me female
You are calling a ghost
Who never quite succeeded
To possess me

I come from a body that,
Is full of holes with faces
And tiny dolls with twisted limbs
There's a secret I can't tell you
And ghosts that I can't see.



I Come From A Body That

by Sheetal Martine Joseph

I come from a body that
Membranes and glands, I don't want

Maybe I align when the Clock ticks west
And the north and a year later, the south

Sports bras make up unintended binders
Green juices splash out

And the man's feet crumbles
Safe is like a lark's cry

The softness that runs and glides on my thumbs
And weird texture as I swallow the mess

Lighting up cities or maybe just the streets that I crafted
With the blood that caramelised from my wrists

Now it's all baked, the streets, I mean
They have got new pavements and the light

The light, his light is what made them
It said I'll be happy

And I cringed and snorted out a "Blah!"
And now, we are into 2020

Shut in a single bedroom and pyjamas for work
But aligned and content indeed.

Run

by James McDermott

sixteen I can't stop running
can't stop trying to run away from my secret self
can't stop trying to get myself out of my head
can't stop trying to make myself get in to my body
can't stop trying to make myself feel hot pain pleasure
can't stop trying to stop myself feeling as ugly as bullies
can't stop trying to sweat out the faggot
can't stop trying to sweat out the gay shame
can't stop trying
can't stop running
can't stop trying
can't stand still running
still running
still running

I Crumble at the Sight of a Man

by Sheetal Martine Joseph

Not
the coarse
touch of his thumb
against the nape
of my neck

I travel to it
voice cracks
against the lump of
my/his throat

trading his spit
a scalpel
hovering against
the orb of the bust

the curls
of his hair
that walk from
his erect nipples
to beneath his legs

hands tangle
along
the strings of
the corset

strapping
a dick
against
the girth
tongue
against mine

faced
the
with
ringing
the
dial
on
the
table
the
call
as
I
oscillate
mom?
pulling
up
the girdle
unwrapping
I return
below
descending
in
union
with
her
body

Reflection in side a Jar

by Sheetal Martine Joseph

I plucked a berry
and crushed and smeared it
as I tore off my garments
and dressed like them.
I poured in the sugar
which powdered the carnage,
as water rose in the jar
marked by my alterations
I placed the jar in the chest
As I pierced a hole in my ears
And carved letters onto my skin
fading the banks of
Neverland and Everland
Aged into splinters and
wine smoking the jar
I come in magenta heels
and my underarms in its growth
I glance down the bed
And watch it preserved
from the decade wiped out
and how
you can look
so intoxicated
after pulling out the chest
from underneath
all those realms
when pain is a mirror
looking you back
in your own image.



Shame (That Catholic Thing)

by Teo Eve

you're by my bed, knees tucked beneath the frame
like a priest at prayer, palms at the altar
as our love's lamb bleats, scarlet blood
running down the wooden gaps of my floor.

I'm by the window, blocking light,
shadow-posing Christ the Redeemer, turning
eyes skyward away from favelas toward
a greater love, personified by the sun.

Your silhouette ties yourself in a close
hug, heaves you to your feet like a priest
unsure his forgiveness, assured, was heard
beyond the confessional's metal grate.

A victim praying for the villain's forgiveness.
I close the curtains, close my eyes.

Time of the month

by Lorna Gill

Am I just hungover or is it the time of the month again?
Because everyday is a different time of the month.

When I ovulate I commiserate
At my single lonely state.
Oh I'll never find a man that's kind
Who'll put me in my place.

And it's not worthwhile to be fertile
When I'm out here all alone.
Oh I do despair, yes I really care,
That I've got no one to bone.

Yet the week preceding all that bleeding
I am lady muck.
Yeah I'm confident with all the men;
I am down to fuck.

And when I'm bleeding I'm still needing
A cock that's hard and strong.
I need to find a man that don't mind
Who doesn't think it's wrong.

And can i blame my mental state
When my hormones take a dip?
'Cause I'm still learning about my yearning
Upon this rocking ship.

But then again, I drank a lot last night.

I could just be hungover.



Scared of Swimming

by James McDermott

as a boy I recall being
scared of swimming

scared of the body
of water

scared of its desire
to drag me under

scared of the other
schoolboys in the showers

scared of changing
rooms another class I can't pass

but as a man I finally
learn to embrace to love its power

I learn to swim
to the surface of my body



The Branches of Love

by Becky Dillingham

It was but just a phase, or so they told me,
When in my spring years multiple branches of love grew
From the stem of my heart like boughs of a tree.



What should have been allowed to bloom organically,
Unhindered, as if I were the searching roots who knew
That branching out in several ways would mean I would succeed,

Was buried beneath my fear of how I'd be perceived
And so from my own nature I did eschew,
Severing connection to it like a bough cut from a tree.

The bloom that had begun to blossom withered from neglect at speed
But, like the tree felled, still it grew,
For it did not die, nor rot, nor completely recede.

No, as suckers sprout from the stump and will not concede
So, still, survived my truth
And I come to realise now that, indeed,

I can blossom into the fullness of my nature, in which I am freed,
Discarding the suffocating burden of a single way to love as I renew,
As the tree in autumn releasing leaves.

It is time now that I nurture my nature and from it I do not retreat
So that I may flourish like the flower in the summer sun on mornings new
And unearth what love and all its branches means to me.

British Museum

by Teo Eve

when we have reached the wastelands at the end
of time, will art-ifice suffice? she elaborated
on the French of sans in the group noun 'artisans'.

do not lay your hand on the glass where the broken
vase rests, roosting its trophied past, becoming itself
again. three inches and time cast dizzying przymys of

light, blurring words. the sign by the tank the signifier:
time, place, how it was 'found'. "Museums the globe
over display blank walls like pornography." What? Objects

are not the only things objectified --
you turn to me.

When This is *All* Over

by Jake Weaver

We will be together

I will finally release the tension from my brow
and place my left hand below my belly button
to meet yours [the one whose skin
bears darker hairs and flatter fingernails]
which rests there without questioning
if it should

I will lean my head to the side,
exposing my neck to your mouth
[the inside of which I could draw a map]
whose words ulcerated my gut
I will try not to flinch
when I feel teeth

Or we won't

I will stand alone
and regret passing those words [the ones
which pricked the underside of my tongue
like bitter flesh-stripped olive pits]
from my mouth to yours

I will try to convince myself
that the next time I hear
that song [the one we played on repeat,
under the covers in our old apartment]
I will not cry

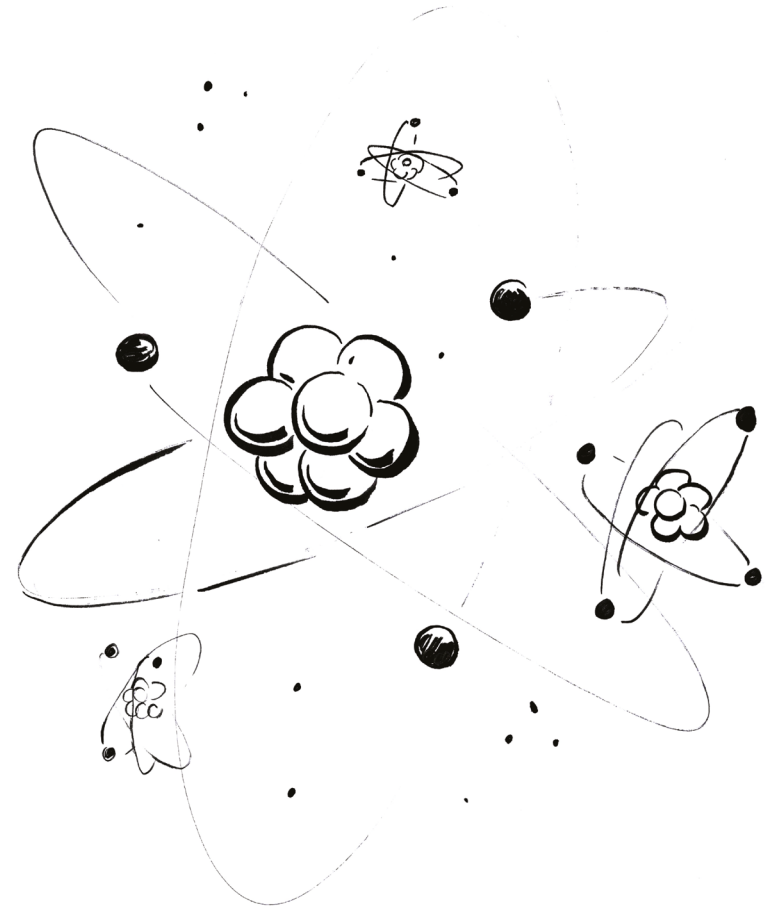
The Moody Nature of Atoms

by Joe Andrews

Physicists keep telling me about
the moody nature of atoms
Shrink yourself down enough
and everything is just
probabilistic Being alive is
just electrons battering the fuck
out of themselves inside you
like dice in a cup One of
those physicists invented the
multiverse two new dimensions
for every coin toss and that
There's exactly one multiverse
where I am a woman I wake
up to nothing but my breathe
Watch my hair dancing over my
shoulders and back like blades
of grass I throw on whatever
makes me feel cute and pop to
the shops just because I can
Smile at the cashier with an
apple slice grin and tell them
keep the change Do physicists
enjoy knowing about the
smallest little things laughing
at sad sad biologists and their
pretentiously large genomics

Stupid chromosomes they say
The universe is completely full
of small things larger things and
itself Last night I had a dream
in a field full of strangers and
my cousin wished me dead and
in that moment all the electrons
in her body just paused

[twenty trillion times the length of an electron]



There's Dead Dad in the Grass

by Rebecca Summerscales

There's dead dad in the grass up by the dam. I remember when we poured out the ashes how it
looked like cat litter And I bet there are some dead parts of people in cat litter sometimes, not on purpose
but it must get everywhere, it makes total sense The way it rolled outwards, covering our shoes,
- must get everywhere. You know when you think of all the things a body does before it's
charred up and poured out onto the ground somewhere, And I think about those days
when I spend five hours deciding what to eat for dinner and how it'll mean nothing
when it's my turn in the grass So it probably means nothing now Maybe I'll
have cereal for dinner - I bet there's some dead people parts in cereal
sometimes it makes total sense, must get everywhere. I wonder
how many steps I take that aren't on dead Or how many
times I've swallowed someone's Tibia And just
how much the dead pave the path for
getting your nails done. I know
my body will grow something
else one day, maybe a
herb garden, or a
worm. Maybe
I'll be the
dirt
for someone else,
or a book about women who write
words in weird ways and call it poetry. I know I am
already something great, I just hope the grass knows that. I want
it to know That the whole world is in my cereal. That I must get everywhere.

I hate the
snow

What
is
a dead thing
anyway?



These are Not the Parts We'll Remember

by Jake Weaver

What colour is the sky in your dreams about
me? Do your fingers trace the creases

in my palms or measure the circumference
of my neck? We prod the soft parts of

each other's bodies like kids finding out
which bits of a cat like to be stroked. I

wake to you sleep talking and I commit
to counting how many different ways

I can make you bare your teeth. The parts of
you that you carry at arm's length, as if

separate from the bone, are the hardest
for me to earn. The first time I visited

your body you pushed your proudest parts
through your zipper, a month later when I

focused on your knees I told you I loved
them. The word love parted my lips like the

head of a cock and you flinched as if I'd
just taken yours between my incisors

and you were thrilled about it. In my dreams
we meet again and again. Your hands run

around me like a magician as you
show me new parts of my own body and

I wake in a cold and sticky sweat. There
are no parts of me that you can't stomach,
just parts of you that cannot stomach me.

Unhappily Hirsute

by Lorna Gill

I'm a woman with hairs on my chinny chin chin
They also grow on my shinny shin shin
Under my arms in my pitty pit pits
And between my legs to protect my clit

But I've grown up believing that it's not feminine
For hair to grow out of my god-given skin
The boys all laughed when we got sexually active
And I started to feel shame about the body that I'm in

Throughout my life I've gone that way and this
On the topic of hair and my bushy pubis
I've shaved it off, waxed it off, just given it a trim
Some men have reacted like my hair is a sin



And some days I love it, some days I hate it
Some days I run my hands through and parade it
Because it's natural, phenomenal, a fate I can't escape it
But it's wiry, it's smelly and society can't abate it

And I wish I could find peace in the order of things
Stand back and appreciate my natural way of being
Scrape back the layers and the years conditioning
Just be hairy and be lovely but it's too ingrained within

So I guess I will remain unhappily hirsute
And sometimes I'll be really happily hirsute
And sometimes I'll be really happily bald
That's all I've got to say. Thank you.

Bones

by Lily Luty

I am porcelain stained calcium
Thick, with the potential to shatter
I watch X ray visions of my pelvis breaking
In my mother's documentaries

I have never broken a bone but I am
Woven haphazardly
Built to swoon and
Stumble over faulting ankles
I am half a skull rise
Less than my brother
His bones are praised as stronger
Even though I saw
The whites of him protrude clear out the half empty
Skinsack of his arm
At school that day

My mother always said he was my protector
Although I showed us how to belly crawl
Through the thick black smoke
Of an abandoned conversation
And my wooden sword chimed just as true in her honour

I watch my skull unearthed
Teeth removed, skin and hair
Peeled back white as a potato
In my mother's documentaries

When she tells me not to leave at night
She uses the same hushed tone
Reserved for stories of men dripping from tunnel roofs
Like tar. Silent, inescapable
Stories of being trapped between her uncle and a burning log
Stories that did not succeed in loosening the silence
Embedded in my lower jaw

I wish my bones were smoothed into an ivory shield
Like my brother's are said to be
I wish he didn't have to bear twice the impact
Defending me
As though his bones don't splinter in the same dimensions as mine

They say we hold strength in the soft flesh of
Our organs
As though our bones aren't built strong enough to house those organs safely
As though soft curves betray our ability

I watch my mother bury me
Episode after episode, the creases of her forehead
Fold into tombs
I watch her spine distort over every bone she finds

I stay silent,
A well rehearsed ghost

The Universe on Gender

by Lily Luty

We were the first generation. Shaking asteroids loose from our hair as we danced, spinning and leaping, scattering stars which seeded themselves deep in fertile indigo. Our laughter whipped hot and bright, casting droplets of fire which grew into suns. We folded into the softness of one another and watched the world become.

We moulded the earth for you. Dissolved into calcium, carbon, magnesium, dirt, breath. Veins growing delicate through rose leaves. Once you would have called us Gods, we would have laughed away your reverence. So young, eyes dancing like stars behind a spying glass.

As you grew, curiosity became regimented. Once you discovered names you wanted everything labeled. Stars, birds, trees, water pools, split and studied and sexed as you tried to order the world. Cataloguing one another according to difference. Writing lengthy dreams in notebooks explaining away goodness. Each division angered us. We filled the clouds with crystals that whipped against your barriers.

Wreathing barbed metal through fields and flowers, trees and cobwebs, you declared yourselves our authority. Decorated the stars with pieces of tin and curved glass until we had no choice but to be sad the way you had written us. Told children we were made of black ink tentacles and icing sugar dust.



Our bones crumbled together in soft earth. You dug us up in the night and separated us. Took our cheekbones smothered in stardust, our lips of coral, our paper thin kneecaps. Sorted them into glass cages, dissolved specks of us in acid, unstitched the tenderest parts of us hoping to find the universe.

When you burned what was written of us, the spirits of the pages fluttered upwards to be cradled by nebulas. Everytime it rains we wipe tears from our descendants' faces. Coat them in thin blessings, repeating the names they give themselves in sacred whispers. Sequins and pearls stretched over collarbones, jackets and dresses swish soft greetings in sea-crested waves. The universe resting in the mountain ridges of their shoulders.

Scan Me



To continue the legacy of the project and to provide a toolkit for community groups to explore the topics covered in this anthology, we have compiled a playlist of a selection of the poems to act as a stimulus to aid group conversations and learning.





COMMUNITY
FUND



rising
issue