

Small Things in the World

That year we changed from drinking pitchers to teapots, took the train to shores that will be washed away in the years to come, the jagged coast already a part of history, of what once was. We capture it digitally, because it will last longer than the shore itself and there is a sadness in that.

Later, I sit parked on a double yellow in the night just off a main road too heavy to drive. Petrol leaves a long dark trail of unseen devastation behind me. Cigarette butts and chewing gums stuck to the pavement. N95 masks tumbling in the breeze. I watch a cat chase a moth under a lamp, chase an old man as he walks along the pavement, and the cat begins to walk alongside him, hopping over front gates, bobbing along to his fingers touching whiskers until the old man reaches the main road and the cat hesitates, pauses, stops. The old man carries on without it. Above us the clouds roll unseen into a new day.

A friend of mine told me about a photographer, Rinko Kawauchi, who describes her work as in sympathy with small things in the bigness of nature. As capturing the conversation of all the small things in the world.

I think of the way we try to determine the end of the days with small differences. The light is the same, but the starlings took longer to return this year than the last. In parts of the world it rained more, and in some parts there was more heat. The ozone layer expanded and contracted. We regurgitate information, reminding ourselves of the bigness of nature, so that the alarm bells don't turn into white noise.

I search for the best reef-safe SPF, buy recycled clothes, use less plastic. Meanwhile private jets arrive at climate change conferences. In a workshop, someone asks: What difference does it make if only some of us make a difference?

Inspired by creative conversations and creative writing workshop on nature.

Monsoon Rain

In my ancestors' hustling city on the Arabian Sea,
It rained nine inches of monsoon rain in one day
The palm trees swayed, at first gently, and then
Like alarm bells ringing under the tirade of lashing rain
Warning its 20 million residents of the calamity to come.

In the aftermath, children pick their way
across muddied water high upto their waist
with nowhere else to go, strewn branches
and remains of their city floating in their tracks
as they search for their families and shelter.

If not water, it is the heat in the North,
where temperatures continue to rise in the mountains
Melting glaciers and ice fields threatening
dam bursts and soil erosion.

In a village to the South, farmers toil in blistering heat,
Only to have a pink fog of locusts destroy the harvest,
Leaving behind famine and poverty in a country
Responsible for only a small percentage of
Greenhouse gas emissions.

I am a mouth gaping tourist to their tragedy,
apart from them, and yet a part of them,
I understand the literal language of their pain
But do not feel its magnitude,
Rattling death statistics and frowning at screens
Rattling despair, tragedy, change, change, change.

Teachings

Waste not vital resources,
Not even the water from a flowing river
Or the last bite of a filling meal
This is the dust that you are created from
And as dust you are human beings
Scattered into the world
And just like the water and the dust
Come together when you perform wudu,
As must you live in harmony and honour
the rights of all things, and not impose onto
the leaves, for they are not silent. Listen
to their murmur, and the communion of
leaves, twigs, soil, air, as you but take shade
under the tree of this world while passing through.

Inspired by focus group discussing Islam and Nature.