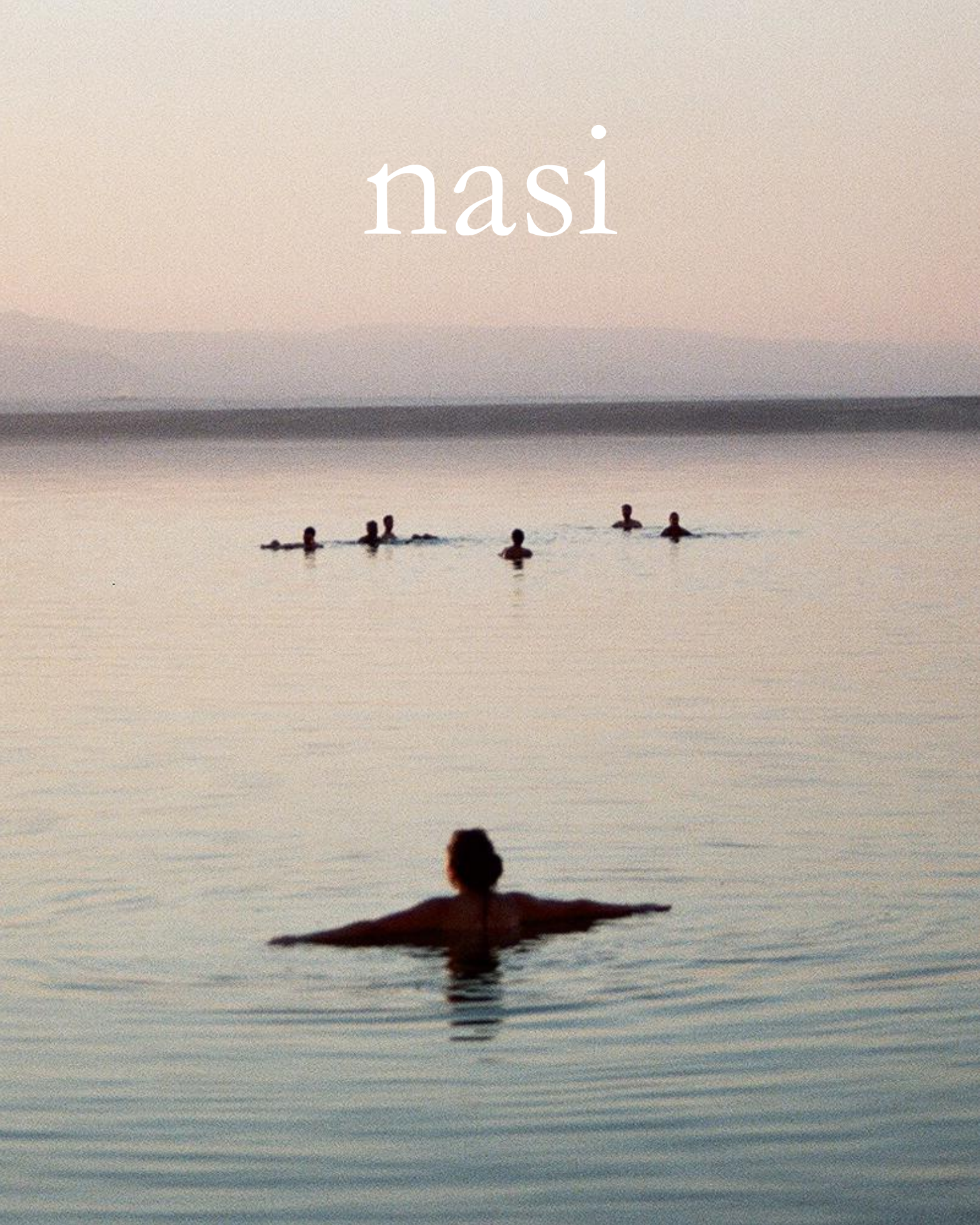


nasi





Where do you come from?

For some of us, we respond with our heritage, our ethnicity, our skin — inextricable pieces of our roots and past that shape who we are every single day. For others, where we come from is best represented by the people who carry our history: our family and friends. The people we've seen come, stay, and go through every season of our lives.

Taking the question at face value, it might also appear that the answer is more simple than we thought. Where we come from could just be the place we last were — a point of transition to represent our present journey on the way to the next place we are going. It's an in-between, a temporary home we create on our search to define our own pasts.

In a physical sense, of course, home can also be represented by a place.

Perhaps for you, home comes alive in the smell of magnolia leaves, a soft reminder of the tree in your front yard that used to shed its leaves every fall in its quest to graze the sky.

Maybe it's the street corner you used to turn on to see your high school ex-lover, a rooftop lot where you used to park to watch the sunrise, the driveway of the house where you first learned how to fall off a bike. Maybe, for you, it's a hilltop where you used to sit until four in the morning, chain smoking and laughing with friends about all the ways life hasn't been so good to you.

Or, on nights the moon is full and the sky is clear, all the ways it has.

Each and every one of us come from a million places — places we're proud of and, sometimes, places of trauma that we might still not know how to carry. Yet, what matters most, as we've tried to show through this issue, is that we are the ones ultimately who choose our stories and how we share them with others.

For this issue of *nasi*, we asked some of the most incredible women and creative partners we know to tell us — in their own words — where they come from and where they hope to go.

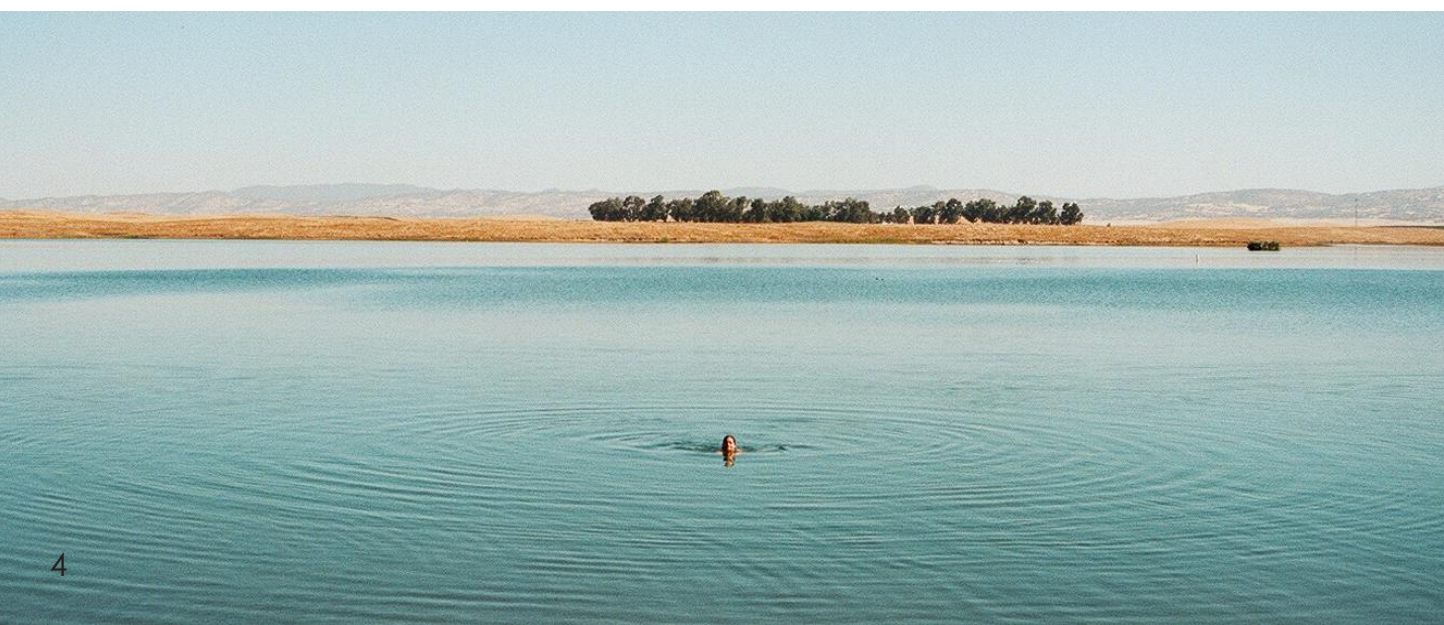
We would like to say thank you to Janel Kajisa for the photography found in “Nastia + Sarah” and “Kohinoorgasm,” to Tamara Kalo for the photography found on our front and back cover, and to all of the stunning artists found in this issue for their contributions to our question. A particularly special thank you to Taylor Marie for her work in nasi’s first issue, design, and conception.

Thank you to every single person who’s made this journey a reality.

We are so grateful for all the support you’ve shown along the way.

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HERE

Tamara Kalo

there was no Here before There

my Place was not an uncertain matter
until it was no longer

(m I n e)

flying further
brought me closer

distance made It smaller
yet clearer

making a 180-degree turn;
I left 0 in order to return

fogging the view
crystalized the feeling
normalized the space
the in-between place
within
there is both a Here and a There

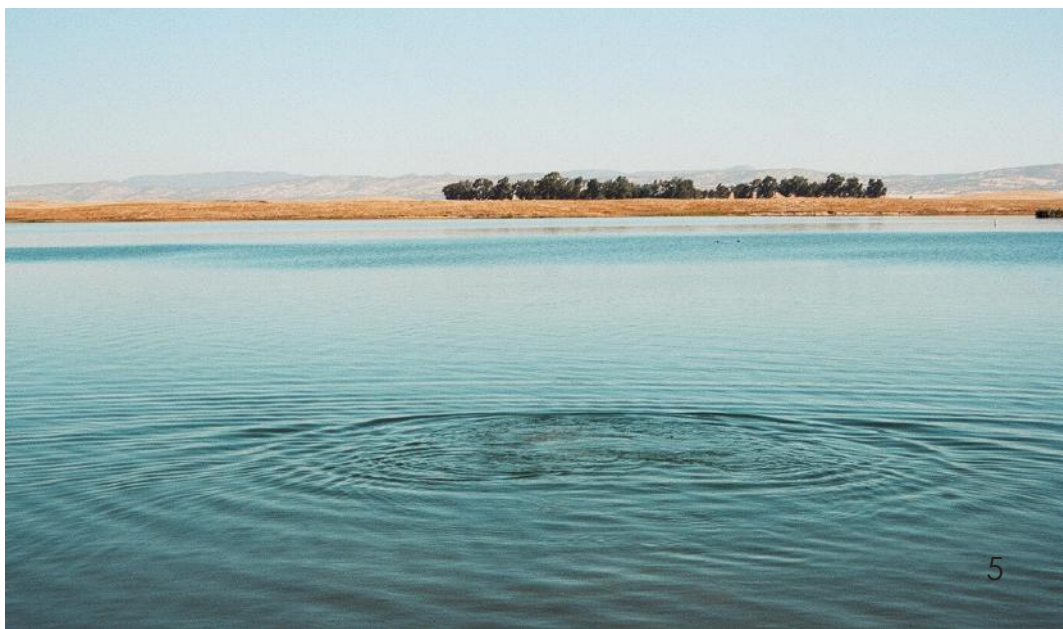
s e e s a w I n g

between the water and the sand
scouting:
a state to land
or fate to crash
from the sky onto the shore
through the gaping eyes of waves
hungry for solid ground

only to be consolidated
by the flow

letting the breeze grow
the grass blow

whether the tide is high or low
I learned to greet the ripples
as they come and go



HOW WE FIND HOME (AGAIN)

eda yu

let the finding begin with this:
the loss of my hands, the third bone beneath my ribcage.
i swear, i don't know if there's a part of me you left un-
touched. the eighth vertebrae on my lower back — things
i struggle to remember when the weather's bad. i am still
looking for a place i can call
home
that isn't housed or ruined by a body. and i
ache
to scratch the touch of last night's boy out of me the same
way i am scratching blood like this black ink and i always
said i would never be one of those girls but, my god, how i
want a cigarette. please,
tell my father i am
so,
so sorry. tell my mother i am still trying to forget how to
learn again.

let the finding begin with this:
there have been record storms in the region since you left.
the rain is pounding and unending and turns the ground
we christened home to brown-black mulch but a poet once
told me that the water is
meant to bring sadness.
and that the sadness is cleansing.
*i have written that i want to know what it means to wash
every ounce of my flesh clean in a hailstorm, and before you
left, you left me with a handful of rose quartz, so i washed
the sheets and rubbed it on*
everything.
i don't think i really understand yet, but they tell me that it's
only after it all ends that you cease clutching so desperately
onto your capacity to forget.
there is beauty in the remembering. i think that i am still
learning. please,
tell my mother i am trying; tell my father i am
so,
so sorry about all this forgetting

again.

these days, the rain has let up and the dew feels a bit better,
even if my bed still blooms with blood
like roses
in the center.

let the finding begin with this:

i am relearning how to use my hands. these nights, they
often run the broad, supple back of another. they search for
someone else's five fingers atop this cloud of white cover.
in this mess of kissing and leaving and silver sky, i found
a boy that,
somehow,
still looks at me like i am light.
my forehead is clearing up; it's taking longer than i antici-
pated, but i'm turning over new skin and — it aches — but
i'm replacing drugs with words to subsist, and
the boy i think i love has a hurt knee.
he has a sky in his eyes.
a poet once told me that, in them, i might find peace.

let the finding begin with this:

this storm, this wave, this cliché of a tornado, a list of ger-
unds, in succession: this
feeling; this wanting. this ending.
look at how the sun makes the sky
crinkle
with its blinding light.
if you squint, it looks like it's smiling.
it's forgetting. it's remembering.
it knows — like i do — how i loved you.
how you loved me.
how beautifully we are
finding.



HERE ARE SOME HOMIES WHO HAVE KEPT ME SANE OVER THE YEARS...



PLEASE MAKE SURE YOU DONT TAKE UR HOMIES 4 GRANTED...

BESAME

NASTIA + SARAH

*Nastia Voynovskaya and Sarah Burke
in conversation with each other, and
photographed by Janel Kajisa*

Having made waves in the Bay Area culture scene with their editorial prowess and strong dedication to the Oakland community, Nastia Voynovskaya and Sarah Burke are journalists, music and art critics, and old friends who met each other during their time at U.C. Berkeley. For this issue of *nasi*, both women asked one another about their heritage, their current work, and where they come from.

N: Hi Sarah, I'm so excited to be interviewing you! Please introduce yourself and describe where you come from.

S: Hey Nastia, it's cool to be interviewing an old friend. I'm a journalist, art critic, and aspiring curator. I live in West Oakland with my best friend and two cats right now. I'm originally from O'ahu, Hawaii. I grew up in a tiny town called Waimanalo just outside of Honolulu, then moved to California when I was seventeen to go to UC Berkeley — where I met you!

I've been thinking a lot lately about the ways that growing up in Hawaii has shaped my conception of race and how that plays into my work.

But before I get into that, let's talk about you. What do you do? I know you were born in Saint Petersburg, Russia but moved to the U.S. as a kid and grew up both in the Bay and Florida. How did those moves shape your concept of race and who you are?

N: I'm a journalist with a focus on music and culture also living in Oakland — North Oakland to be exact.

I came to the Bay Area from St. Petersburg at the end of first grade (almost exactly twenty years ago!) with zero English language skills. The first town we lived in was Foster City, south of San Francisco on the Peninsula. My first school had a lot of other first-gen kids from Chinese and Mexican families so it was actually a great place to land as an immigrant kid in retrospect.





In third grade, though, we moved to Danville, which is the much whiter East Bay town I lived in til I was 14. I feel like a big part of my experience living there was struggling to awkwardly assimilate into white America and constantly dealing with my status as a cultural outsider. It's the kind of town that has that liberal Bay Area of mom-and-pop shops and farmers' markets, but there's hardly any diversity and plenty of racist attitudes because of that. All throughout this time, though, my family was pretty active in the Russian community in Berkeley and San Francisco so I spent a lot of time in those cities, too.

Then the summer before 9th grade my family and I moved to Tampa, Florida, which was like the polar opposite. On one hand, Tampa is a really boring city where the only scenery is strip malls, regular malls, and Wal-Marts with huge parking lots. On the other hand, I went to a huge, extremely diverse urban high school, which is perhaps why I didn't grow up to be a total valley girl. Then I moved back to the Bay to go to Cal in 2008 and started hanging out in Oakland while I was a student. Oakland is where I really had my coming-of-age experience, and I feel like getting older here and being exposed to things like the history of the Black Panthers and the current, POC-led activist movements have helped me put in perspective my simultaneous white privilege and immigrant experience. I've always been the kind of person who cares about equal rights and is interested in people's cultures, so I've kind of learned to sit back and be a student of the game in terms of activism, and also to use the platforms I have as a writer to amplify people's voices from marginalized communities.

How did growing up in Hawaii and then moving to the Bay Area inform your knowledge of race and class and shape the person you are today?

S: That's so interesting. Learning to reconcile your privilege and experiences of oppression is such an important ongoing process for everyone, I feel.

I've been obsessed with Jeff Chang's essay "The In-Betweens: On Asian Americanness" ever since We 'Gon Be Alright came out. He writes about the process of learning to "become Asian-American" after he moved from Honolulu to Berkeley. I totally had the same experience. Race is dealt with so differently in Hawaii than it is in the continental U.S. It feels like the majority of people you meet are mixed-race. So, growing up, I had no concept of what a "person of color" was. It would have seemed like an unnecessary distinction to teenage me because being mixed race was the invisible-ized expectation in the same way that whiteness is here. Meanwhile, White people are called "haoles" — a pejorative that literally means "no spirit" in Native Hawaiian and has become completely accepted into daily conversation. It's only now that I'm started to reflect on the effect that growing up in a place like that had on me. There was definitely a point at which, around the age of 18, I had to learn to become Asian-American and learn what that identity category meant on the Mainland. It's bizarre to come into an imposed identity that late in life. It felt jarring, but at the same time very gradual. In fact, I'm still figuring it out.

In "My President Was Black", the essay that Ta Nehisi Coates wrote late last year for The Atlantic, there's a section about how growing up in Hawaii predisposed Obama to be less threatening to White people because he had less of an internalized resentment for Whites. (I'm crudely paraphrasing.) Meanwhile, Obama was able to adopt Black culture later in life without having had experienced much of the typical trauma of growing up Black in America. That, too, has been something I've been continually considering since I read it. There's a way in which — beyond all of the obvious benefits of living in "paradise" — growing up in Hawaii can be a huge privilege for people of color.

My mother is an immigrant from the Philippines, but when I was growing up I didn't feel a need to tap into that heritage much. Its importance didn't feel contested or threatened, if that make sense. So, although I ate adobo regularly, it didn't feel totally necessary to memorize the recipe. Now, I'm more interested in going back and learning about Filipino traditions, the history of colonization there, and so on. But there's a way in which it feels kind of phony at times — I don't feel like it really belongs to me.

Have you ever had feelings like that? I know you've been connecting with more Russian immigrants lately through activism, and thinking critically about the ways that Russians are viewed in America. What has that been like?

N: Yeah, I totally understand your feelings of trying to connect with an ancestral culture that doesn't quite feel yours. Since I moved to the US as a little girl, there are a lot of things about Russian culture that I had to re-discover or learn for the first time as an adult. I feel like I spent a lot of my adolescence trying to

become American that I forgot a lot of things about being Russian — but it wasn't only that, it was also living on the other side of the globe from where I come from. I feel like I did always have a strong sense of Russian traditions like food, holidays, old movies, literary classics and religion. But I didn't and still don't really have my finger on the pulse of what people my age there are doing, what media they're consuming, and what they're thinking. I've always only had one or two Russian American friends growing up and only one cousin I'm close with in Russia.

Recently I've been doing a lot of activism with fellow immigrants from the former Soviet Union, which has been awesome. I'm part of a Facebook group called Anti-Trump Soviet Immigrants and I've become friends with some of the members who live in the area irl. It's been really empowering discovering a whole world of like-minded Soviet immigrants on the internet because our community tends to be really conservative. It's been powerful for all of us to find each other. Of course, not everyone agrees on everything and there have been bumps in the road. I started an anti-racism subgroup as sort of an educational resource for people in the main group recently because racism in Russian culture is really widespread and ingrained. It's part of the reason why a large portion of the Russian American community voted for Trump even though we're immigrants, and many of us are refugees. I think it's really important for us to do work in our own communities to address racism — which is something I've read time and time again from the different Black scholars and intellectuals I follow on Twitter, like Feminista Jones and Mia McKenzie of Black Girl Dangerous. I'm trying to put that advice to practice in the former Soviet community because we really need it.

Working with former Soviet immigrants has also taught me about my own privilege as a Russian person. Russia colonized the other former Soviet republics and imposed our language and culture onto them, and as someone from St. Petersburg, I never questioned the narratives of the dominant culture too deeply until recently. It seems like a no-brainer now, but as a Russian American person in the US, you grow up with elders who tell you horror stories of the oppressive conditions of life in the Soviet Union. There's this notion that everyone was equally oppressed that stops you from interrogating the layers of ethnic, religious, and racial privilege that exist within that.

What about you? How has your activism evolved during the Trump era?

S: The layers! That's so fascinating and real. I'm glad you're digging into that — and also organizing with fellow former Soviet immigrants. It's inspiring. I've wanted to connect with Filipinos in the Bay, possibly doing anti-Duterte work, but I haven't found an avenue and I don't even know what that kind of work would look like.

Trump's first 100 Days have been a whirlwind for me — partially because they've intersected with a lot of personal life changes. Since I decided to go freelance, I'm much more aware of my own intentions because there are so many possibilities for how I could be spending my time. I was feeling really listless and disempow-

ered for a while, so I decided to throw myself into a ridiculously ambitious project and start a temporary free resource center for creative resistance projects in downtown Oakland, Anti Lab at Gallery 2301, with my best friend Holly. The whole process has been so ridiculously exhausting, because I'm spending 80% of my time doing work that isn't making money. It feels like doing a durational performance piece or endurance test or something. But it's totally shifted my attitude and my overall worldview. I feel so much more hopeful and grounded because I'm in the space all day helping people make things, and having long conversations with new friends, and learning from long-time activists and artists who come through (rather than obsessing over the news alone on my laptop). It's been thrilling.



What have you found hope in recently?

N: That's incredible, Sarah! Seriously, I applaud you for bringing this crazy idea into fruition and giving people such a vital space to have important conversations across cultural and community lines. I've been finding hope in the little things. It's hard not to feel down because of all the horrible things happening in the world right now. Organizing with my community has been a major source of empowerment, but beyond that I'm just trying to stay happy through practicing self-care and having fun with my friends.

SALIH AH



Salihah is a photographer and visual artist based in “the one and only Oaktown,” Oakland, California. Now a second-year student at the Academy of Art University in San Francisco, her love for photography began almost a decade ago, in a seventh grade journalism class. “My teacher saw something in my ability to capture people [through photographs] that I had not yet seen in myself.” She’s since dedicated herself to making a career of that gift, now focusing on bringing out the truth and spirit of her models through her commercial and editorial fashion photography, concert photography, and portrait work.

“My photography is not only an outlet for myself, but also a place for my models to express themselves in a real, genuine, or natural way. I want my audience to be able to feel like they have a sense of who this person is when they look at my work.”

• • •

“For me, this photo represents exactly what it says... “We gone be alright”... It represents black boy joy, black boys growing up in America, me, you, the minority community.

When I look at the innocence and beauty of the upcoming generations, I’m reassured, [and] every time this photo is displayed, I can tell it has an emotional impact on my audience.

For me, it is more than satisfying for people to find comfort and hope from my photographs— it means knowing I can help people in a time of such craziness, simply by capturing beautiful moments like this one.”



ALL EYES ON KOHINOORGASM

*Josephine Shetty
in conversation with Athena Scott, and
photographed by Janel Kajisa*

Backlit by the cool grey of a dusky sky, smoke rises from the pot Josephine Shetty's just put on the stove. "I hope you don't mind," the singer smiles, getting up to stir her lentils periodically throughout our conversation. She makes tea, giving us our pick from her extensive collection, and we sit down around her dinner table in her Berkeley home to talk through her first year as the fully-fledged pop star "Kohinoorgasm."

"I love dancing," her smile is wide and sweet, her voice dreamy. "That's what I love about pop. You can dance super hard to so many different kinds of stories or situations and feelings. I love how you can get the same rhythms from so many different stories."

Kohinoorgasm, Josephine's alter ego for her experimental pop music project, was born a few years ago, rooted in Josephine's desire for a solo project.

Entirely written, sung, and produced by herself in her bedroom ("I love having control over my projects") her debut album, *Titalee*, was released by the artist last May (2016) on Soundcloud. Over the eleven songs on the EP, a twinkling beat loops under the singer's haunting voice, rich as a whisper.

That summer, Kohinoorgasm began playing shows. It was at one of these early shows, outside Empress Vintage in Oakland, that I first saw her perform. The show, set up as a small block party, had the singer standing on the sidewalk lit by the warm light of the store's window. The performance was striking; she seemed almost absorbed in her own world, but more like she was absorbing herself into your world, pulling everyone together into the buoyant beat for a dance party. "I just —" she describes her intimate approach to live performance. "Well, imagine you're in a big room, and

suddenly everyone looks at you and decide you, you must have something great to show us. That's pretty nuts!"

Josephine is quick to take the conversation in a million different directions, always. Here, she moves immediately from the physical stage to our phone screens. "Like, even on Instagram— imagine if you were in a crowd of thousands of people, and everyone just turned their eyes on [you] for 15 seconds, what would [you] do? And if you have that time in a moment in history, why would you waste it?"

It seems every little thing Kohinoorgasm does has an intentionality weighted by this sense of story and historical place. The name itself is a combination of two deeply storied words: Kohinoor and orgasm.

A massive diamond, stolen from South Asia during British Colonization, the

Kohinoor is now drastically whittled down to sit in the crown of the Queen of England. “It’s a pretty big fuck you to every colonized country... which is like every country,” Josephine tells the story. Recently, there’s been conversations about repatriating it, which are complicated by borders in that region, which have been drawn and redrawn over and over again. “It’s hard to repatriate an object whose homeland doesn’t really exist.”

“And the orgasm part was just kind of tacked on there for a while,” she laughs, before launching into a thoughtful take on the journey of an orgasm. “There’s so much pressure around them— to orgasm, to orgasm a certain way, to make someone orgasm, to want to orgasm, and by the time you’ve figured out what your feelings are about that, you’ve probably endured a pretty confusing and painful and weird, awkward journey.”

Josephine, who has spent the past year transforming into a full-blown pop star who now gets flown out to play shows all over the country (this summer (2017), she performed at SXSW in Texas and Nochella in L.A.), gets up to let her cat outside, stir her lentils, and turn the lights on as the early-summer sunset quickens. She settles back into her chair, and we get to talking about where she comes from, what it means to know yourself, and her place in the middle of a colorful, creative, vast historical matrix.

“That’s what I love about pop... I love how you can get the same rhythms from so many different stories.”

Where do you come from?

It depends on the time of day; I might be coming from a certain emotion, I could be drawing on a certain part of my history. I’d say ultimately I’m trying to come from myself, like a place of honesty. [It’s] like knowing what feels good to me, and what feeling good looks like. Like, does this feel good because it’s serving a part of me that’s hungry in a ferocious way, like jealousy, or is it feeding a part of me that wanted to learn more information or wanted to make a new friend, or wanted to feel love?

I just feel really singular— like I am the center of my world, ultimately, but it’s me with an ever-growing understanding of what’s around me and what I get to live in.

Do you feel like that plays into your art?

One thing I think about is that it is so wild that I don’t have to do anything but be my identity to get to wear this beautiful kurta that my ancestors invented. Like they had style, they were innovators. Because I get to wear these things, I want to do my ancestors justice and continue their work. What can I do to evolve that culture? I see all this work that’s been done behind me and this future that I envision, and I’m in the middle of a matrix of things that make up who I am and I’m just there like ping-pong off it.

In a more literal way, some of my songs are in Hindi, [so] they’re in a language that has a history, but they’re also serving a really immediate emotional need. Mera Shareer is about owning your body, but that’s a really storied issue redefined within our current experience. How we experience owning our body, it’s so different [from] the way our womyn ancestors did, but they would maybe still enjoy hearing a song about owning their body [laughs].

Would that question would be answered any differently as Kohinoorgasm?

Well, I think Kohinoorgasm is definitely her own person. Sometimes I wonder if she were a different person, if we’d even get along! I’d say she’s a little more mysterious, and ethereal. She’s definitely more serious. But I don’t think she’d answer it any differently than me. I don’t want people to read me and Kohinoorgasm too differently, like it’s not super serious.

I like having a little character though. Like one of my goals, and this is kind of an indulgent goal, but I love how Erykah Badu has different [characters], like [how] Low Down Loretta Brown is the DJ Erykah. I’d love to have that, because I do a lot of different things — like I DJ with the Chulita Vinyl Club. When I DJ I go by Kohinoorgasm, because I feel like if I did that now... it’d be a little extra right now. But I’d love to have different personas, because I do have a lot of fantasies

about making punk music, or indie pop, but that doesn’t feel like Kohinoorgasm.

“I just feel really singular— like I am the center of my world, but it’s me with an ever-growing understanding of what’s around me and what I get to live in.”

What’s it like when you put together an album?

When I’m writing I’ll usually make a beat, or the bass of a beat, and then I’ll just jam over it with my microphone for forever until I find a melody and a topic that is sounding good to me, and then I’ll really write the lyrics.

I feel really accomplished having put out one album, that’s all I ever really wanted to do. So much came out in it. I’ve been writing more songs, and I’m hoping to put out another album later this year. But so many things came up [in *Titalee*] and I just worked so much out. I was jamming the other day and I was like, wow I can’t believe how much I just sang about that one thing! It really took over my creative process for a second but now I’m over it. But now, I’m excited for the new traumas in the next album! What will come out? What have I not realized has been bothering me for so long?

What place do you see your art having in the world?

When people are immigrants or are taken from their cultural roots, you have to make a new culture for yourself. Making [that] new culture is definitely a dialogue I want to be involved in.

Like, for me, how does a queer, mixed South Asian celebrate herself in the West, with a very particular culture and a very particular art making and celebratory ritual practice? We have had to make these things for ourselves as children of immigrants. And I think a huge part of that is advocating for yourself, advocating for your art. Advocating for queer people, advocating for trans people, advocating for black folx, and imagining a world where everyone’s cultural needs are met.







S H A M I

In conversation with and photographed by Eileen Syrop

Standing by the door of her bedroom in her family's Hayward home, the walls lined with fabric-filled shelves and every imaginable color of thread, her white sewing machine reflected the afternoon sun that peeked in through her window. Shami has not only lived in this home her whole life, she was born within its walls. But when asked "What is home to you?" she expressed that she felt as though she did not have one, and was in the process of creating one for herself.

"I don't really feel emotionally attached to anything," she said. "Detachment is my "home," freedom is as well."



Shami is a seventeen year old "designer of wearable art" from California's San Francisco Bay Area. She started sewing lessons at eight years old, and created the brand "Shami Oshun" two years ago when her dad returned from a trip to Africa with fabrics for her to use. After using the fabric to make a halter top, she decided to make other pieces to go with it, and created a website to sell them. She has continued to do this, expanding her business from her home to the world.

When she's not at school, she spends most of her time sewing — bringing her designs to life. Her main inspiration for her designs come from her aunt's dauntless wardrobe.

"I don't really follow the normal guidelines of clothing. I mix cottons with satins 'cause it just feels right," She described. "I don't make anything to please anybody else, but it does make me happy to know that there are people who will end up buying it and liking it."

Although she often questions whether or not her pursuits in fashion are what she actually wants to pursue — especially with all of the different sports, instruments, and hobbies she has tried, along with the constant inflow of design ideas she has — she can't think of anything else that makes her as happy.

"I do everything I do just because I love to do it. All the patterns and fabrics I pick are because I love them, they connect with me."





VAVI + AMINA

*Vanessa Vigil and Amina El Kabbany,
in conversation with Eda Yu and
photographed by each other*

Vanessa Vigil and Amina El Kabbany sat across each other, their faces outlined by shadows formed in the East Oakland studio's fading afternoon glow. The broad window of the workspace overlooked cranes that dotted the Oakland Marina. Sounds of car whirs and weekday traffic honks speckled the peaceful, almost-evening silence. As the last of the sun slid behind the mountains, the two women looked at each other, waiting to begin their interview.

Arguably perceived as an artistic power duo in the Bay Area, Vanessa and Amina have made powerful names for themselves through their work in the Oakland scene. A freelance photographer who hails from Sacramento, Amina takes photographs and creates stunning visual collages with ethereal, near-magical qualities. Her work can be seen in the stunning portraits she regularly posts on her Instagram, as well as the overlaid, superimposed collages that combine nature, people, and emotion.

Vanessa, an artist who first developed her creative inspiration through photography, has also made a name for herself as an organizer and curator in the East Bay arts scene. In August 2015, Vanessa launched "Not Ur Baby", an all-women art show dedicated to ending human trafficking that was received with overwhelmingly positive feedback. In March 2016, she then returned with "Not Ur Baby Pt. II" at Oakland Terminal, solidifying her presence as a curator dedicated to upholding women's rights in the Oakland arts community.

Through their time together in the Bay, Amina and Vavi have frequently collaborated. The Oakland "Unity In Color" shoot the duo embarked on in late March, for instance, was a gorgeous synthesis of the two creatives' work: A visual art project of women clad in beige, yellow, and brown-toned clothing, standing in solidarity with women's rights.

For this issue of *nasi*, the two artists asked each other where they each come from, how that belonging has influenced their work, and how their friendship and collaboration thrive off their vibrant, intoxicating femme energy — something that they'll carry with them wherever they may go.

Amina: Where do you come from? What are your roots? What do you claim as home?

Vanessa: My roots, as much as I deny [them] most of the time, are in the suburbs. I guess a lot of my artistry is rooted in being different from everyone around me, from being alone. Like, when you think about the suburbs, [you think of] a lot of loneliness. [Being] secluded. That's where a lot of my roots are, I guess. That suburb



life. And being an art kid in the suburbs, where everyone either played sports or, like, fucked your boyfriend in your car or stuff. laughs.

A: Suburb life, for sure. I kind of had the same kind of upbringing because I grew up in the suburbs of Sacramento. But I come from lots of diversity, lots of conflicting ideologies, and lots of conflict in general. Like, in my home, it was just conflict, one thing after another. There was always something going on. The first house my mom bought had mold in it and so she was trying to sue the landlord and put food on the table and my brother would always act out — and yeah, my art comes from trying to find peace within that.

V: **What about where you come from in a non-physical sense?**

A: My dreams. My dreams have been either memories of a past life, or things I've experienced that I'm still trying to reattach to. I know my soul is connected to a lot of different places.

We're living in an age where we're taught to suppress that and to suppress our backgrounds to assimilate into white culture and white society. It's erasure. So for me, it's important to make it a point in my work to show that we are all the product of so many different things and lifetimes. It shouldn't matter the color of

our skin or our gender — we're all just products of just a lot of lives. Energy exists and is reborn. I think about that all the time.

A: **What about you? Where do you come from in a non physical sense?**

V: I don't know if I've explored that deep. I guess a root I can directly identify with is a feminine energy. I don't necessarily have an answer for that yet.

V: **How'd you start picking up a camera?**

A: In elementary school, I would make my mom buy me, like, five disposable cameras to bring on field trips in school. I just developed the rolls recently [actually], and I was like, damn, I was really taking pictures of everything [back then]. I'd see beauty in everything and feel like I needed to capture it. That translated into middle school. And then high school. So I just always had a camera strapped to me for all my school events, taking pictures of my friends, and it hasn't stopped.

V: I'm the same way. I remember my first camera was a polaroid when I was, like, five years old. It had Barbie frames. When we'd go on trips — not that we went on a lot of trips, maybe like two — I always had my mom's little mom-camera. High school rolled around and I got

my first DSLR, and I had it every day at school. Everyone on that campus knew that I had a camera. And I haven't put it down since.

A: **Where do you seek inspiration for your work?**

V: My emotions, so how I fluctuate. Being sensitive to my emotions and my interactions with people and all the emotional layers that I'm constantly uncovering. But I am inspired by Frida Kahlo, her trials, and her outcome. She's an artist, and there was no choice for her. She just made art. If she didn't, she'd probably have exploded. She's definitely a strong inspiration for me. When I get down and out, I'll look to her as a kind of fairy godmother.

A: **Do you see yourself as a photographer?**

V: I just see myself as an artist. Although I remember having that polaroid and these things in my childhood, I didn't realize that shit until later — like [in] interviews, when I'd have to dig deep and be like, oh yeah, I did always have my camera. But I was always just an artist. Photography has always been what people out here know me for, and that's my strongest suit I guess, but I don't necessarily consider myself a photographer above everything else. I consider myself an artist.

A: It also took me a long time to kind of buckle down and be like, okay, I'm a photographer. [There was a point that] I was like, okay, I want to do this full-time, so I have to be a photographer if I take photos full-time. Photography for me has always been secondary, but now it's front and center.

V: What do you look for when you're shooting? When you bring out your camera?

A: I think it's really important to capture moments for the future, for both myself and other people — but mostly for me, I think. Every time I look at an old photo I can transport myself back to that time, so I look for a raw authentic moment from whatever it is that I'm experiencing. Sometimes, I feel weight to capture it. Like in our political climate, if I was at a rally or something. I look back on those photos, and I'm like, damn, that's history.

V: For the most part, [my work] almost always correlates with people. I always photograph portraits, so it usually has something to do with finding some rawness or truth in them. A lot of times, it's usually someone who's close to me, or someone who I want to be closer to. I'm creating this set to bring this vulnerable moment. I'm looking for this rawness or truth or possible conversation — or there's no conversation and a natural bond is made through that.

V: What impact do you want your art to have?

A: I want people to believe they have opportunities and they can create the reality that they want for themselves. That's what I'm trying to convey with my work. It's not like I think what I do is that uncommon or anything. I shoot people; I create vision boards with my digital collages. But I feel like I'm trying

to push people — like, look what I did. You don't have to live in the confines of what you've been told is going to make you successful or happy. You can just follow your own idea of what happiness or success is, and make that happen.

I want my brand to be my existence, so that I can be a beacon of hope for people like me — from a random school and broken home, whatever you want to call it, not that it's like a crazy sad story. It just builds character. But some people don't build character from it. They just become really sad and lost. I want to show you [that] hey, no matter what you've been through, no matter what your childhood looked like, no matter what high school was for you, you have now. And you can move forward.

A: How 'bout you?

V: My impact — I feel like when I first started making work that was geared for people to see, it started with this project about taking nudes of women in a non-sexual manner, a refreshing view of the nude female body. I feel like with my impact, I just want to be able to shit on society with whatever I do. Like, oh, that's where you've been at? Let me help you rethink that, dismantle it, or challenge you.

I want my overall impact to be to be a vessel for other women, especially Women of Color, especially LGBTQ women — those three groups are constantly suppressed — because I'll say my shit so you don't have to. Like, you don't have to put that shit on your back. I'll do it for you. I'm willing to give myself and be vulnerable and be open and be criticized, even though those are all the things I fear. I feel like it's my duty to do that. So with my art, that's the impact I want it to have: Let me take you on my back; let's all do that.

nasi: What's your favorite thing about each other?

V: My favorite thing about Amina, and really any close friend I have, is the bal-

ance they bring me. Although [Amina and I] get on very well, and we can seem very similar in humor, she helps create this balance of — I don't know if I've ever told you this, but I definitely tell other people this about you and our friendship. I'm more the quiet [one]; I have a harder time engaging with people, and I always look mean, very intimidating. And Amina — she'll just make friends with everyone. When she gives that energy, it helps me to find balance and to find that attitude, too.

I told her this analogy once — our analogy as people is that Amina is the type of dog that, if someone broke into your house, it'd be like, "hey, what's up". And I'm the type of dog where you've met the dog a zillion times, and you go over to your friends house, and they still don't fuck with you. You're like, what the fuck, we know each other, and I'm just like staring at you from in the hallway. That's me and Amina.

A: Trueeeee. I just like being around her energy. I love your energy, I love how introspective you are but also fun. Your versatility. When I'm with you, I'm just like ok, I can be whatever.

You just make me feel like I can be whatever I need to be in that moment, and I feel like it helps to be around someone who also has as crazy and wild of dreams as I do. It makes me feel like anything that we want to do is achievable.

I don't really click with people very easily, to the point of being down to do whatever with them. But we'll be here, we'll be wherever, and you're that friend I have where I feel completely comfortable. I trust you and I care for you and I feel like I don't have to put on a front or be anything that I'm not. You have such a loving, comforting, understanding persona. Your energy is very compassionate — and you can't trust these hoes these days, so I'm so glad I can trust you.

FREEDOM

zariya allen

My country tis of thee
Sweet land of liberty
For thee i sing

Land where the slaves all died
Hung on trees like christmas lights
On every mountain side
Let Freedom

ring
it's rope around my neck
let it ask me my name
only to forget-

just like all the other kids
living life in black flesh
Freedom is both the man of my dreams
and a man i've never met

i heard he's supposed to live around here
but i ain't seen him yet

i call Freedom drunk at 3am
but he does not call back

i've heard legends of black kids
that tried to trace Freedom's tracks
but bullets bust them in the head
and they never came back

Have you ever seen Freedom? Is he white or is he black?
i'm just waiting to meet him
so I can finally ask

if he's seen the bodies in the street
how he feels about that

because the only thing worse
than being born Woman
is being born Black

and i've never seen Freedom at a cookout--
Freedom dont rock a fade

I'm starting to think that Freedom might not be as great as they say.

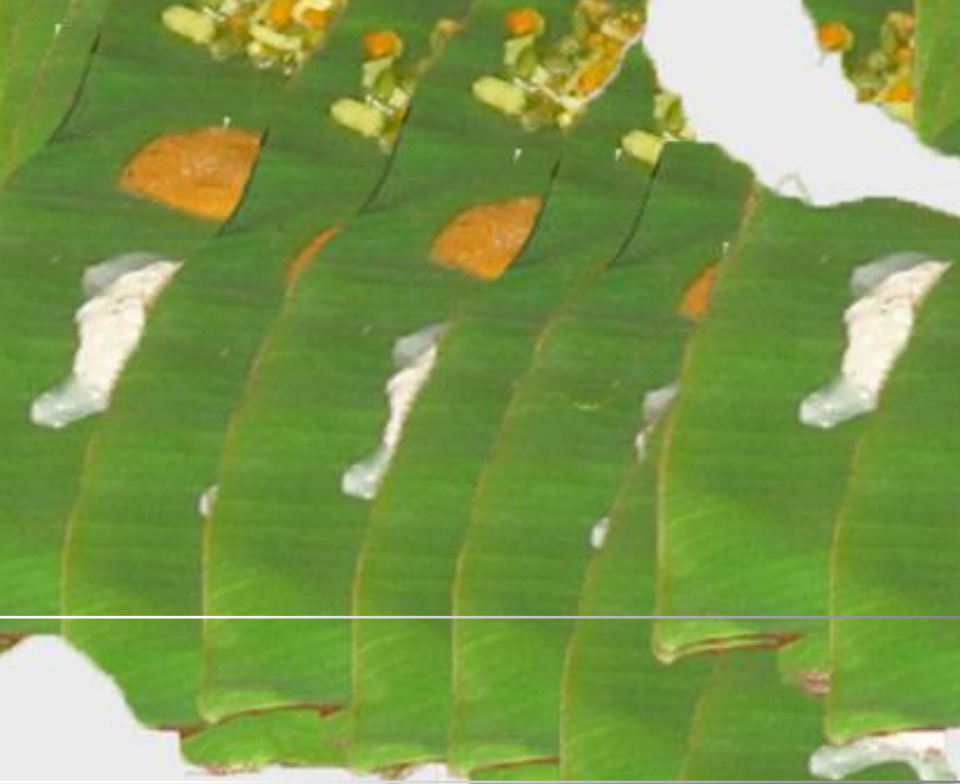
i wait.

but i still haven't seen freedom. i don't think he's showing up.
he's a buster. a coward. the rain above my head. and yet he'd rather pay for war than give me
or my brothers a warm bed. or schoolbooks with pages that don't rip at the end.

Freedom takes a piss in your mother's bathroom and leaves the toilet seat up.
Freedom will steal the food right out of your mouth
and then call you selfish when you stop inviting him over for dinner

and yet still expects me to listen
to smile in submission

i would shine his shoes a million times
just to get the chance to spit on them.



AISHWARYA

O wandering girl,
what is home to you?

How is this selfishness of yours
that you should not let your own feet take rest?



THE OBSERVER EFFECT

You want me to speak on my mother's bangles,
the aroma of incense, drawers of mustard seeds and ghee.

But what do You have to offer me
if I am to tell you of home?

Is home not a place
where these English words cannot enter?
Ee manelli naavu Kannada matte Havyaka mathadudhu.

Perhaps home knew
of the greedy eyes and fast mouths that would dare claim to understand,
and so it wove itself into a pattern so unique
foreign fingers could not trace even if they hyphenated all the stars.

I was not conceived on American soil,
an Indian woman's body was my first home.
I flow out from inside my mother's saffron-colored robes.
I live in the embrace of her four arms;
the wetness of Puttur,
the delicate white mist of Madikeri in Coorg,
the heat laden over muddy rice fields in Udupi,
the brisk early mornings of Mysore.

You want to know where I come from
but I do not trust You.
If I say too much,
You might show up.
White Americans on summer holiday
with Coca-Cola and feminism,
and in the name of progress,
You would ruin us.

You want to know what home is,
well I have no couplets for You.
No bangles.
No incense.
No mustard seeds or ghee.
And I would die before I mentioned brown skin.
Lest You make me
Make my own self foreign to me.

Stay out.
You are not welcome here.
And I do not trust You.





ONX

Summer Mason and Nicole Sievert
in conversation with Athena Scott, and
photographed by Lily Woo

Summer Mason and Nicole Sievert, co-editors of the magazine-turned-creative agency ONX, take a shot together. Whisky. We're tucked into a booth at Radio, a small bar in Downtown Oakland, Summer's dyed-blond curls (they've been talking of shaving their head, though) and Nicole's fluffy, gauzy, halo of a pink shirt framed by the crimson walls. Together, they're facing the question we've asked every person we've met this month—"Where do you come from?"

Nicole, with her dark eyes trained on the table in front of us, makes a little motion toward Summer— Could you go first? You instantly pick up on the sync between the two, as Summer picks up on the conversation, diving in.

"I come from a house of 7 boys, no parents, and us just raising each other." They talk with a boisterous fondness of their family. "Looking back, it's not sad. I love that that was my family. All I needed was my brothers. They raised me and I raised them and that's the beautiful part of it."

It takes longer for Nicole to answer. She tells her story of being uprooted from her home in the Philippines, moving to Los Angeles just three days before her eighth birthday. Her voice is soft, she pauses. "If I ever do have an opportunity to go back to that place, that won't be home. This will be home, and I'm scared of that." Her words unfold slowly; she's thoughtful and guarded telling us about taking care of herself at such a young age and facing political corruption. "I've always just been very angry, felt like I was robbed of something."

The two are conscious, vocal in fact, about holding space for each story in their friendship and partnership. Summer lays it out for us. "See, I don't hold Nicole's narrative at all, but I will be one of the biggest protectors of it. And I know that Nicole feels the same way toward mine."

This intention turns conversation toward their project together: the third

season of ONX. This season is notable both as the agency's first film project (prior to this, ONX had produced print art magazines) and because it's the first project that's had both women steering the head of it.

"There was this feeling this wasn't a side project. This is something we both want careers in and gotten rejected for and so we were like fuck you— let's do our own thing."

Summer, ONX's founder, recounts their first meeting. "I will never forget—the first conversation I had with Nicole, she asked me, 'Okay Summer, what do you want?'" Summer laughs. "I don't think anyone had ever asked me that question before."

Potent in that moment, and threaded throughout the conversation, and, in retrospect, through their own personal histories as well, is this hunger for self-determination. You can trace it back to the 3-year-old magazine's early photo spreads, which held titles like "Don't let me be misunderstood."

Don't let me be misunderstood— It's the grounding intention with which they work together, and was, ultimately, what sparked Summer to create ONX in the first place. "Growing up I never got to see great depictions of my brothers. We never got to see anything that captured us. My biggest thing was always to protect images of black people. And the best way to do that is to make them yourself."

Together, they reimagined ONX entirely, laying out lofty goals to bring ONX beyond the bounds of any single project. They dreamt of ONX acting as a creative agency for POC artists in the Bay Area, creating opportunities to hire POC and black photographers and videographers and stylists and make up artists. Their first project in this departure from print? The answer came easily to Summer.

"I just realized, like, I'm a filmmaker and why the fuck am I not making films through ONX?"

Their first film, *Copper*, recently released, focuses on a redefinition of black womxn's death.

But this film about death is anything but morbid. It floats on a soft, romantic palette, creating a surrealist dream-world where, as Summer describes it, "you're no longer bound to a body that faces so much negativity— you're free." Given the subject, there's more grit behind the film than your typical pastel palette, but never grime. Summer is adamant about that: "I didn't want to recreate death. You can already find so many videos, all these terrible images of black death that get so normalized. It's disgusting. I don't want to have to see blood."

Instead, the film, titled *Copper*, looks to its eponymous element as "this passive way of rebirthing blood." Truly, it exists as the perfect abstraction of the liquid, rusty and red. Even down to the taste of it; after all, blood is metallic.

"It was just so easy." Nicole's voice, previously slow and careful, speeds up when she's talking about the project. "It was so fundamentally easy because everyone was so supportive. I've never experienced [that] level of support for something that I've worked on, where it was just so easy to be like *yes* this is what's needed, and *yes* that should be a thing, and *yes* this project needs to be seen, these voices need to be heard!"

"The first conversation I had with Nicole, she asked me, 'Okay Summer, what do you want?' I don't think anyone had ever asked me that question before."

Summer feeds off this excitement, and the conversation takes on its own momentum. "There was this feeling this wasn't a side project. This wasn't some



thing we did on the weekend. This is something we both recognized that we wanted as careers, work we have applied for consistently and gotten rejected for and so we were like fuck you— let's do our own thing.”

Nicole laughs, “Yeah, I was just tired of getting rejected” — a lighthearted play on some deep (and super relatable, thank you) bitter frustration. True to form, *ONX*, in the midst of being told what they could or could not do, decided to take the matter into their own hands and just do it.

Though it doesn't seem like rejection will be a problem for either much longer.

With each new release, *ONX* has garnered more and more enthusiasm, and with their big dreams for expansion, the collective will be impossible to ignore.

Moving forward, *ONX* plans to find more opportunities for commercial work to pay for a growing portfolio of creative projects, which they see as spanning everything from experimental films to music videos to documentaries.

They just finished filming their first commercial film, released as a promotion for a multicultural concert featuring the singer Yuna, held by Superb Productions April 2017. Within the next few years, they want to get a studio in

Oakland to have as a base, or a hub, or really just a home for black and POC artists to come and work together.

Behind it all is this tremendous sense of love; that's what you come away with when you talk to Summer and Nicole. They ooze it— for each other, for the project, for everyone that touches it (and that seems to be a lot of people and growing).

“People don't want to see us being badass together,” Summer adds as we slide out of the booth, tipping the bartender on our way out. “I think the scariest thing to see is Womxn of Color and Black Womxn banding together.”



WAVY BABY
@therealwavybaby

I was born and raised in Oakland and moved to LA to attend UCLA about 3 years ago. I got into DJing through hosting a radio show, first at UCLA Radio and now at Dash Radio. I've loved music all my life, and I'm a really serious hip hop head. I love DJing and hosting my radio show firstly, because I really love hip hop and secondly, because — whenever I go out — I really just want to dance. When I DJ, I love being able to unite everyone through the music I'm playing. Being able to directly control the mood and energy of a party is hella cool, but it's also a huge responsibility. For my radio show, I'm always listening to so much new music and new artists who are hella talented. I love being able to have a platform for people to hear new music and to promote new artists. Honestly, everything I do, I do because it's so fun for me.

— wavybaby.co

FUN FACT:
“I have an affinity for gold and always wear hella gold jewelry.”

WAVY B BABY'S TOP 10

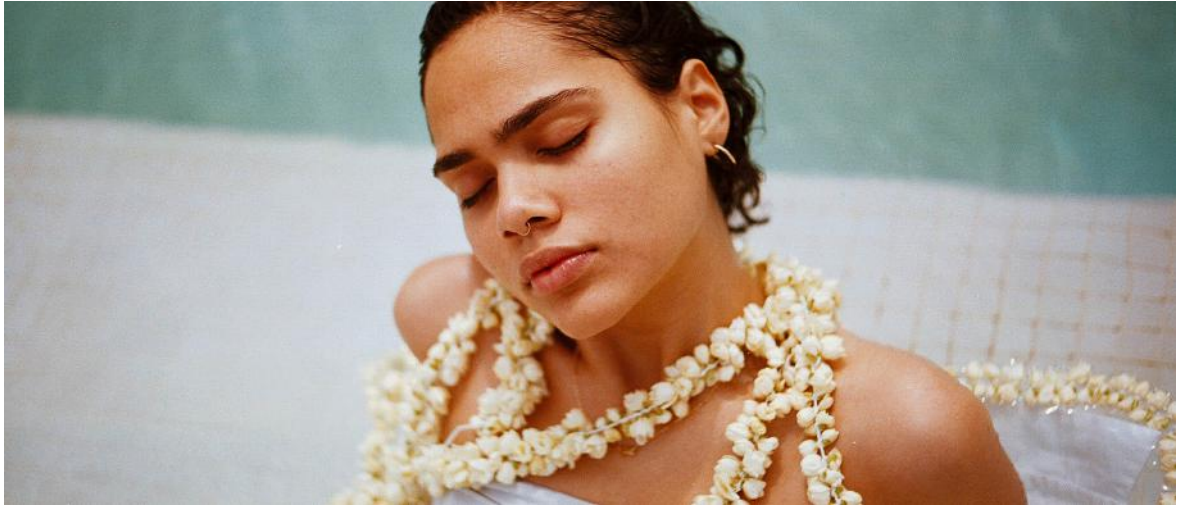
- MAC DRE - DOLLALALA ^{LDTSA} ^{PAYPA}
- LUMIDEE - NEVER LEAVE YOU
- N.E.R.D. - RUN TO THE SUN
- GOLDLINK - FALL IN LOVE
- TUPAC - I GET AROUND
- DLD - YOU PLAYED ME
- KAMAIVAH - FREAKY FREAKS
- M.I.A. - COME AROUND
- MIKE JONES - FLOSSIN'
- YASIN BEY - AUDITORIUM

I CARRY YOU IN DREAMS OF JASMIN



MASHAEL AL-SAIE

*Jasmin, the word alone draws me back
into my grandmother's kitchen where she would ornate every free surface with
freshly cut jasmin in little porcelain bowls.*





waking up to
morning sun
dancing off teal-blue prisms of
water,
wind,
and colliding chimes.



my room faced east in
the sun-soaked place i call home.

night brought
glitter
dancing off asphalt, skylines
the silent dazzle of a monster
exhaling city lights.
the smell of
summertime magnolia
weaving through heavy, heat-laced air.
at night, the world turned violet and,
sometimes,
you found moon in your hair.

home, as
a memory of east, as
inhaling city lights without
understanding identity, as
the feeling of searching for
history
in a concrete place or
god
in dusty, gold-flecked afternoon haze.

my eastward-facing room gave me
Angel wings fit for a City,
slow rumble and
thundering treble outlining bass,
cacophony
coalescing like cadence,
sound to which
my Asian body clings like a prayer
in deafening white silence.

FACING EAST

eda yu

and yet,
as the sound and light began to fade,
home, for me, became
something forgotten.
the last wisps of
blush-pink sunset
kissed my eastward-facing room goodbye, and
the darkness had me
hitting the ground running to find
where i come from in
white,
summer-drenched
air-conditioning sighs,
early morning train cries,
places of transit,
junctures in time.

in the silence, i
pressed my ear to
cassava-pushing e a r t h
to hear my grandfather's pounding footsteps
on brown Indonesian land. i searched for
lost thud of the
last falling stone of my grandmother's Nanking
in wrinkles tracing her hand.
i clung to a new sound,
an anthem of my ancestors' time,
to carry me through the waning light.

in the night, i began looking for home in
red,
blood red moon,
lunar calendars and
fistfuls of your roots;
my mother's mid-day laugh
scoring roar of my veins' relentless
Southeast Asian monsoon.



looking for myself, i
woke in other beds and remembered my
eastward-facing room.
missing myself, i
looked for my golden-brown skin in
sun elsewhere,
dancing off blue prisms
in the gasp between
the touch of other hands and my thigh.
missing my home, i looked for

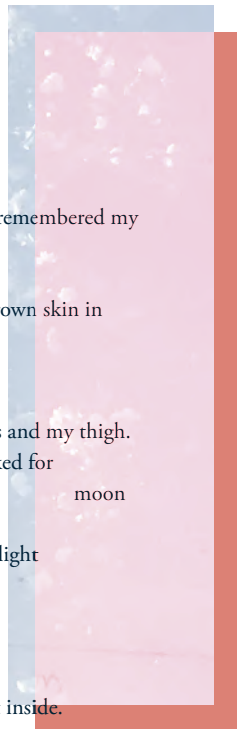
woven into hair
in his soft exhale of city light
and closed eyes.
in all our
white noise, i found we
often hold in quiet
the things we carry most inside.

sometimes, my mother's
gorgeously
unabashed laugh
still brings me to my knees.
i hear it most loudly these days
when
waking up in other rooms
looking for moon or
looking east.
"nasi,"
she tells five year old me.

"hold onto it.
share it.
be generous, sweetie."
you will make home again in
this messy,
beautiful wonder of
memory.

you will make home again in the sharing.

you will make home again in
morning sun



moon

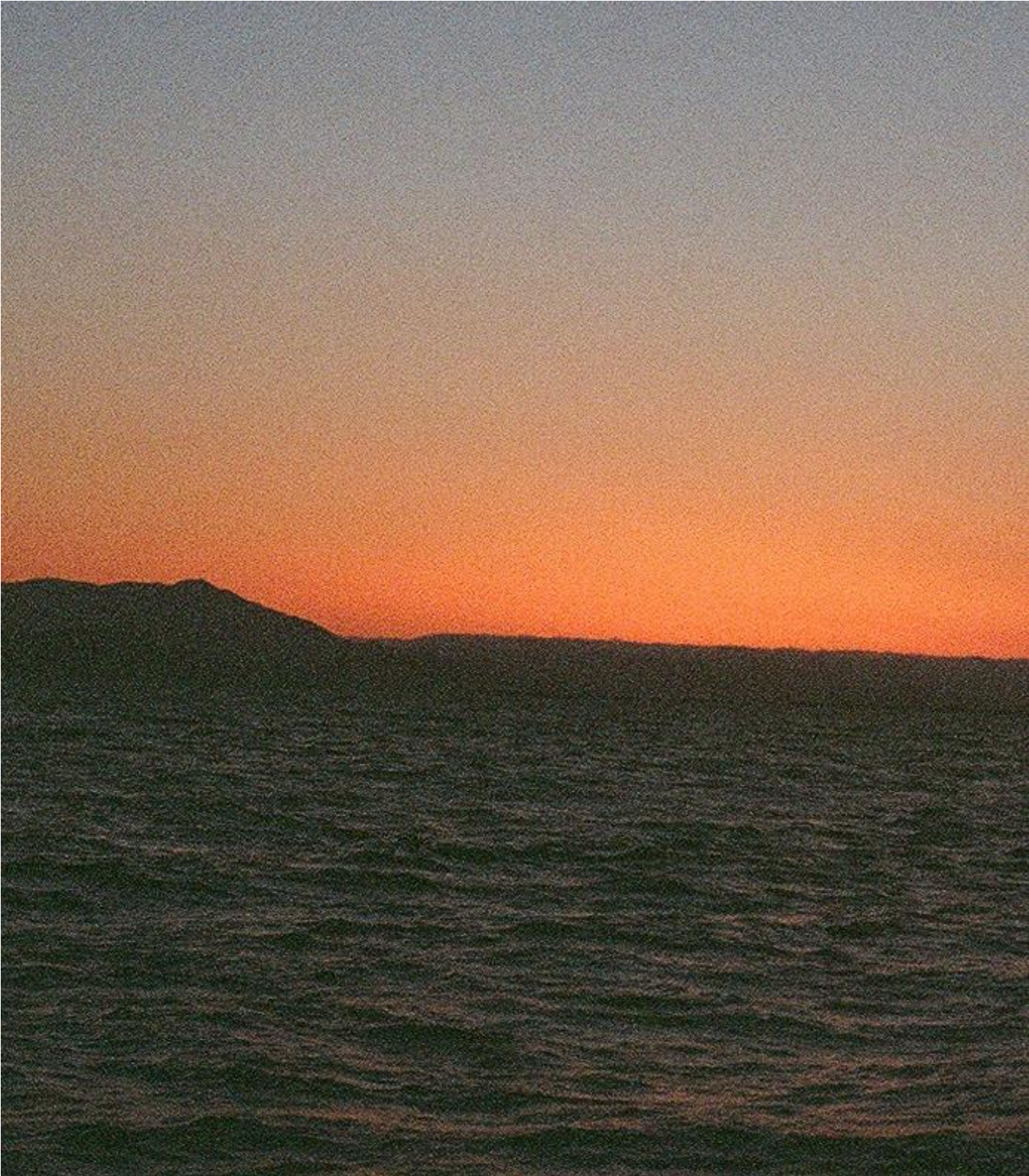


returning.

SWALLOWED SALT WATER, WE GREW UP
BELLY FULL OF THE PACIFIC

ATHENA SCOTT







I found a shell on the sand yesterday.

I brought it up to my ear to hear the rolling waves and found his faint whisper from that last day. I climbed slowly into it and laid down in the hollow hum. Made my home on the water.

Watching sunrise through the waves: the color of my grandfather's ashes pulled under.

nasimag.com

