Manuel Tzoc Bucup’s Queer Poetry

© Photography by Fabrizio Quemé

Introduction by Rita Palacios
Poems translated from Spanish by Paul Worley

Manuel Tzoc Bucup is a poet, visual, and performance artist from Iximulew (Guatemala). His work is intersectional, using poetic language and visual art to explore social realities, focusing on gender, identity, the body, origins, memory, language, image, object, sexual dissidence, and all possible combinations of these. He is self-taught, having learned through workshops, certificate programs, and readings of contemporary art and literature. In addition to self-published poetic objects, he has published a number of books in alternative presses, and his texts have appeared in literary magazines and anthologies throughout Abya Yala. Further, he has presented his visual art in galleries and contemporary art shows locally and internationally.

Fresa y fracaso © Manuel Tzoc Bucup ~ “Strawberries and Failure” Translation by Paul Worley
Siwar Mayu, Octubre 2020
He is one of the founders of Maleta Ilegal, a cartonera editorial, that is a small, independent and handmade publishing outfit that carries out limited print runs. He is well-known for his queer, erotic poetry and his poetic book objects, and recently he spearheaded the publication of one of the first queer poetry collections in Central America, *Antología LGBTIQ+ Guatemala* (e/X 2018). Tzoc’s overall approach to the edition and publication of his verses is informed by both the practical need to forego censorship and to ensure that his work is also experienced in a sensory manner. This also means that he shortens the distance between creator and public, lending his verses a physicality that they would otherwise lack as mere printed words. For the poet, the feel of the paper, the impact of the images, and the experience of handling the poetic object are all a part of the experience, and the reader is prompted to reflect on the fetishization of the book, and, ultimately, the word.

*Cuerpo de niño triste* © Manuel Tzoc Bucup, 2015

*Fresa y fracaso* © Manuel Tzoc Bucup ~ “Strawberries and Failure” Translation by Paul Worley

Siwar Mayu, Octubre 2020
His latest collection, *Wuj* (December 2019), recreates an epistolary experience of sorts. The poet-maker crafts a mere fifty copies of a loose-leaf poetic object, made out of richly textured paper, with font resembling typewritten text, all enclosed in an envelope that has been sealed. To obtain a copy, one must contact Tzoc directly, and its delivery is done by an international courier (Guatemala has no national postal system) or in-person (it should be noted that getting hold of a copy of *Wuj* has been impacted by the current global pandemic). The verses therein reflect on our relationship to social media (“Adiós Facebook! Cierro mi cuenta contigo ☹” Goodbye Facebook! I’m closing my account with you ☹) and the internet (“San Google cómo se encuentra tu espíritu cyborg en este momento?” Saint Google how is your cyborg spirit at this moment?); to writing and being read (“Ejercicios de escritura” Writing exercises, “A los lectores” To the readers, and “Wuj”); to Maya dress (“Kat Waj” I love you); and to urban life (“Memoriales urbanos” Urban memorials), to name a few. For this edition of *Siwar Mayu*, Tzoc presents us with unpublished verses that reflect on the current global pandemic: what it means to be alone, to face fear, illness, and death.

*Polen* © Manuel Tzoc Bucup, 2014

*Fresa y fracaso* © Manuel Tzoc Bucup ~ “Strawberries and Failure” Translation by Paul Worley
Siwar Mayu, Octubre 2020
BULLSHIT OF OBLIVION

Looking at the things in my bathroom
I ask myself about the little bullshit in them
those cynical bodies of the future
washing themselves with unscented gel soap

Exactly boy
we are bodies with no future
THAT'S US
washing and dirtying our hearts, wanting
to write from the depths of the abyss

Rebuilding the crime of day-to-day life
hugging our favorite book
watering a red poppy
looking out at the oil infested water
hugging a dead body, still warm
caressing stray dogs
finally and at last
this is the bullshit of our happy years

The day's crime section
full of domestic and work incidents
are we alone or do we feel alone?
the truth is always singular
I can't speak for you, girl
I'm sorry
even if you hate me
I'll disappear any minute
to rebuild the cursed history of our lives
STAR OF LONELINESS

Right now
you are the only thing that exists
Star of Loneliness
you'll keep us company
these nights filled with guns fired into the air
nights of collective isolation
of bodies pursued and forgotten
of radiant and free flamingos
swimming in urban rivers

Nights of solitary mirrors
OF ME AGAINST MYSELF

Note: this was written on the first day of the stay at home order in Guatemala, the 22 of March 2020
CORN DOUGH

Chew on the memory
devour
the ear of corn toasted by the fire
living ash
WOUNDED GIRL

The world and its mundane dangers
is outside, hypochondriac girl
(it's even inside)
waiting for you
calling you
you can't keep traveling through the universe
on that treadmill
germs smile back at you from everything
you are terrified of opening the door to go out
of touching your friends' skin
of penetrating your lovers' flesh

The sharp corners of things threaten you
you've made a cave in your wounded heart
you fear the spores floating in front of your crazed eyes
breathe and feel the pure, infected air
breathe and feel and ask to be calmer

Walk and breathe deeply my hypochondriac friend
and everything will be fine!
Or maybe not
SALT WATER

Everyone in this story will get hurt
with a dead body in tow
with a lover in the middle of the pandemic
healed
wounded
the same
private
sick
rejuvenated
bored to death
more alone than ever
more connected than ever
overworking ourselves virtually
or eternally waiting, resume in hand, for a reply

This story
this path
destiny
chance
bad or good luck
our daily walks on sidewalks of blood and green grass
films of memories and things we've forgotten
and salt water
always SALT WATER
anxiously awaiting
our defeated bodies