

*Poetic Fibres: Gaude & Garance.*

Throughout the winter of 2021, I met with the founders and operators of Gaude & Garance to talk about their business—a small-scale textiles company which produces wool yarn and woven goods. Both trained as conceptual artists, Armen and Alexandrine have developed a project so philosophically rigorous in its commitment to sustainability and its rejection of modernity, that it blends slow fashion and immersive art installation.

I've been interested in the poem as a way of recording what is true—as a document, or a documentary. The following collection is created using a methodology developed at the Re:Locating artist's residency, hosted by the Khyber Arts Society in Kjiptuk (Halifax, Nova Scotia) and facilitated by Leelee Oluwatoyosi Eko Davis, in October of 2020. I was exploring writing as procedure—curious about which steps, if any, it was possible to take in order, and reliably end up with a poem every time. Shut in by the COVID-19 Pandemic for several months, already, and accessing the residency by way of videoconference, I was also interested in the possibility for collaboration in poetry—a notoriously lonely medium, which is something I always liked about it, until I didn't.

During the residency, I had the opportunity to test out my current strategy: conduct recorded interviews with a subject, in which I allow them to discuss their work or interest freely. From this recording, I create a transcription and study their voice. I listen to the recording over and over—as many times as I need to to create a transcription complete with their pauses, mumbles, stumbled words, and all.

From this transcription, I pull verbatim quotations and arrange them into found poetry—every word in the poems labelled *i* to *xi* were said by my interview partners. Some words are removed, and the order of phrases are intentionally arranged and re-arranged, spelling is swapped out for homophones, spaces are forced to stretch meaning—this conveys an echo of the original intent of the words, while also adding another layer of intent. I impose my own voice while I disclose the voice of my collaborators. This, of course, is how all nonfiction works—from autobiography to the strictest of journalism, nothing escapes the standpoint of the author. I've also included three poems in my own voice, inspired by the interviews with Armen and Alexandrine (*aubade from a sheep farm*, *new world blue*, and *rubia tictorum*).

Armen and Alexandrine told me, near the end of our interviews, that they had turned to textiles because they were tired of the false dichotomy between what is beautiful and what is necessary. Armen and Alexandrine are the best kind of artists—artists using art to be the best kind of person, which is a person throwing away binaries of *beautiful* and *required* and working through ways to make every crucial thing beautiful, make what is beautiful indispensable.

Tara McGowan-Ross  
Montreal  
April, 2021

*aubade from a sheep farm.*

before the sun gets up, you know—  
it feels like I can get it all done

feels like I can turn it  
around.

it's been harder, since she left—  
the volunteers, they keep

the worst of it  
at bay.

but before the dawn cracks  
that old horizon, you know—

and it's all possible, still.  
no sheep gone unfed, no

babies found froze to the ground  
in the night, no dogs

bloodied, having  
mutinied their chicken charges.

maybe I'll even answer a  
friggin' email.

*i. one of the better sweatshops  
february 1st, 2021*

sewing manufacturing place,  
all industrial. synthetic dyes  
on synthetic fabrics. plastic  
and dust. used to print

on natural fibres, but  
they phased it out. wanted  
to get rid of the union. labour  
issues, environmental

issues. sourcing problems. it's  
going to last max a year, then  
people throw it out. going to  
last a long time as garbage.

loses shape. hide under umbrella  
terms—and this is one of the better  
sweatshops. one of the better  
sweatshops in Montreal.

ii.                   *interdependence study*  
                          *february 1st, 2021*

maybe it was a little idealistic, I will admit, but  
whatever is worth buying is worth repairing.

don't pour the bath water in the sink.  
the plant gave us this process—

pour it out by the train tracks  
where there are weeds growing.

it's going to nourish them.     it's  
                                  filtered by the plants.

it's better to put it into the earth.

iii.

most plants, two  
three years before  
you can use them

for dying

*we did talk  
about dyeing*

we talked  
about dying

what makes dyeing in a [     ] different?

*—you have the right environment  
dying in roving?  
the colour ends up in the water*

iv.

*grandmother red*

*In the context of our interview, Armen and Alexandrine were discussing the Cochineal family of beetle—a natural source of red dye, found on several continents, all of which are related to the same common evolutionary ancestor. I was taken with the phrase “an ancestor who was the source of all red,” and selected phrases to suggest an ancestor who birthed the concept of “red” itself.*

at some point, before the continents  
separated, there was an ancestor  
who was the source of all red

let's say you want red. you are limited,  
by the size. I want one kilo of red.  
it can be a wine red, it can be

any shade of pink or peach. red,  
it's an awesome red, like—like,  
more angry. there is one in Europe,

[I want one kilo of red], one in  
Asia who is not the same.  
they're all related. how else could they

all give red? an ancestor. the source.

v.      *the great equalizers*

the city—where things just  
grow. golden rod. black  
walnut. sumac. queen  
anne's lace. weld—

from europe, actually. a really beautiful  
yellow. in nature, there's so much yellow  
and brown. everywhere in the world,

there is yellow and brown.

vi.

*grandfather blue*

while you were gone, I was just talking about  
blue. we don't have a natural source of blue  
in north america.

blue is only indigo. nothing about the plant  
looks blue. a very particular fermentation  
urine, feces, blood:

different cultures discovered it individually  
all over the world they must have left  
a bucket of old leaves

long enough, dropped a cloth and then  
blue. you have to keep feeding it  
how is it doing?

how is my baby doing? indigo experts,  
all they do is indigo. generational indigo.  
inoculate, carry

the colony on and on. you can spend  
your whole life trying to gain mastery  
over just one colour.

## New World Blue

*All natural blue dye originates from indigofera (or indigo) plants and their relatives, a tropical plant which is not indigenous to north America. Indigo became a cash crop in the New World as a result of the European invasion of North America and its subsequent slavery economy. As a result of the labour and innovation of enslaved people, new indigo cultivars were developed in the Southern United States in the 18th century. I dedicate this poem to the life's work of those men and women.*

the invasions brought a lot of things.  
 the great dying, the soaring crow  
 of the end to 56 million. never was  
 a death like that, measured relative  
 to the world as it is. not before, or since.  
 in some approximated Eden,

at Jamestown, after clearing  
 the Powhatan, invaders lay the roots  
 for blue—the long branches  
 with their small leaves, reaching, warning  
 of what was to come. projects like this  
 take time, you know.

in Charleston, they achieved it—  
 when they stopped shipping out  
 Kiawah slaves, Eliza Lucas,  
 in the South Carolina Business Hall of Fame,  
 but where are the men

and women she bought? where are  
 the testaments to the architects of  
 that new world blue? the labourers  
 drawing the sky from the trees—  
 their hands all stained with  
 the saddest colour.

vii. *conversations with plants*

a lot of patience required,  
patience, and respect.  
they have a whole personality. you're talking  
to the plant. negotiating. *why can't you do this?*  
*what can I change?*

if and when I grow my own,  
I'll have a more intimate relationship.  
I buy them ready made,  
ready made and dried and powdered.

I don't have favourites.  
I love them all.

viii.            *drop spindle*

the best way to explain my thoughts  
during spinning are when you're  
dreaming and you wake up

and you don't remember your dream.  
like a spider. incredibly thin. only as  
long as as your arms can stretch

physical, to spin like that. your shoulders  
hurt but you're very mobile. *I think*  
*people notice you.* on the bus, on

the metro. people actually don't  
notice it that much. it's easier to learn  
the principle because you're in control

of everything. you have to do everything  
yourself. you're adept enough to adjust  
to whatever imperfection. feeding it

to the twist. and that's how you make  
yarn. or cord. or rope. or anything. or,  
whatever. people learn in whatever way.

*ix. spinning wheel*

it was a technology. to save you  
from whatever work that the drop

implies. the pedal or pedals, that  
makes the wheel turn, and the wheel is

connected—that's where the yarn  
is being fed. it's the size of the wheel

and the speed of the pedalling  
that determines how fast it turns,

how much you twist and it's—at first,  
sometimes it feels like it can go out of

control.

x.

*unreliable machine*

it was the kind of thing I thought I would enjoy—taking  
all these disparate parts and making them one thing.

the word *machine* is

unreliable. structures, behaviours, and material. grand  
gestures, going from bits of fine  
hairs. they look like just a cloud, fall apart

in your hands. to something that is very solid.  
protective.

it's a piece of art but you can turn it into something

else.

*that's important.*

rubia tinctorum.

rose madder, common madder. dyer's madder.  
from family bedstraw, coffee. madder, like  
more angry.

ever green, turkey red. loamy preferences, sand  
or clay. food, to some infants: small, wriggling larvae.  
hummingbird hawk moth.

it's two years before it can soak something red. madder  
can't help the hierarchy: you have to cut in deep to get  
what is refined—

the outer layers are common. bubble alum with its  
crystals to the mordant-fixing. mash with clay,  
alum, ammonia—

and Vermeer panted his Mary's blouse a madder  
lake. the French, *garance*—a red so pretty  
it became a name.

a war god's herb. great opener—sending women  
to convulsions, their small ones coming early, twisted,  
knowing things.

*xi. your body inside the installation*

we gravitated towards each other, wanted  
to make things that are anti-modernity.  
useful.

there's never an end, there is always something  
that could come after it. the potential for something  
else— I thought I was avoiding conceptual art

what's the use of  
all these gorgeous things packed away in boxes  
with nobody looking at them.

that stuff sticks to you. I thought I had rejected it.  
sitting in those lectures, I was like, "this is stupid,"  
and like here I am still, like,

repeating all of it.