Poems read by the panelists
Imagination & the Anthropocene

Angela Trudell Vasquez:

Fragments in Time

Moonlight radiates down
children do not mourn
parents buy new shoes
  rabbits copulate in grass,
  leap over each other and dash.

Cracking open a woman a child births itself.

Bodies arch over steering wheel
fog condenses glass.
We find each other… *a voice in my head says he is the one.*

After the fall people see
  they are not who they thought.
Fortify hope in a wooden barrel
send her over water to live
in her grandparents’ stable.
Wait out the peril: dust storms,
trains tracks pounding down her back,
nails piercing flesh, hand rotting still attached.

Shoulder length hair, khaki crescendo,
camel jacket wind sails, ghost bodies,
hang around invisible ankles, graze cement.
  He follows me, shouts from corners *beware, beware.*

Grandson places hand in sandpaper fold,
parachutes to shoulders, peers down fields
where white herons alight, flocks migrate
nest at feet of skyscrapers, exhaust fumes, birch oasis.

Moon beams flood evening, babies born with wings
flee fire steeples, plant pine forest temples
along the shores of ancient rivers. Start over.

  *What was our first language?*
Poets resist death of a people
inghtips bless pen, paper.
Full moon halo crowns campus new humans born two hearts beats beating.

Sound.

This poem is featured in In Light, Always Light, and was first published in the Taos Journal of Poetry

My People Redux
Not yet published. The poem is in four parts, and is the title of her forthcoming collection from Finishing Line Press.

Kyce Bello:

The Thin Line

Stock trading halted by noon. Airplanes
grounded soon after. In an encampment in the forest,
a hunter knapping arrowheads
says, There is a hole where elders used to be.
The thin line of honking birds overhead could be geese,
but are Sandhill cranes. I now gauge
whom to trust by who can tell the difference.
My daughter hears it won’t be children
who die. She grows quiet, then asks
So, kids will be the doctors?
Kids will be the teachers? and in the pause
between her question and No, no, of course not,
that future lifts its head to gaze at me.
At their compound in the woods, the hunters
sleep under bark and pine boughs.
They don’t have guns or zippers. They say
that needing each other and being needed is better
even than a grocery store. They hold
hands and look at the stars and think
how once, each one was named,
and how now, or sometime soon enough,
when we’ve forgotten what to call them,
they can be named again.

This poem was published in the Santa Fe New Mexican
(https://www.santafenewmexican.com/pasatiempo/books/poetry-of-the-pandemic/article_3a89ffea-783d-11ea-9e93-a799e7a46d0b.html)

The Tree Coroners

In laboratories they count tree rings,
graph snowmelt and needle-fall. For decades,
they’ve watched two degrees determine
by which means a tree will choose to die—
hunger or thirst. The delicate doorway
of each pine needle’s mouth hanging open,
or snapped closed. I spend the last hours
of sleep looking over my shoulder, dream
resurrection ferns unfurling in south-eastern woods. Which boast to believe? My own,
or their malediction? Might as well ask
which forest will claim my ashes. The one
I coax into a chase, or the one I run alongside?
The one I walked in before you were born.

Refugia (4)

Overwintering theories abound
with lessons I will apply
to taming my petulance.

Still, I burn when crossed.

During the last glacial,
fireweed went in pursuit of soil—

long leaves ragged along the same crags
they have rambled over for epochs.

Paleo-pollen indicates shore-pines
walking away from ice

& though I fret over the fate
of fir & piñon,

a biologist with a baby at her breast
says these mountains

were not long ago
populated by different trees altogether.

She says grief
is losing what we know of home,

while the land drifts
into a thousand small harbors,

& leaves us
to our short lives, our quick tempers.
Refugia (5)

2.6 million years of alluvia collect into a new land.

Mountain avens & muskox cross-pollinate, reproduce & persist, until major disturbing events alter their ecological trajectory.

After fires one, two & three, the mountains cease to breathe.

The forest succeeds itself in waves we watch unfold:

pages of Quercus, then quaking aspen re-write the contoured book & the mountain turns to something other & unknown, growing beyond us.

These three poems are featured in Refugia (University of Nevada Press)

The Search for the Golden Spike

The hunt is now on for a "golden spike", as it is known - the marker that scientists can point to years hence - and say, "There! That's the start of the Anthropocene Epoch."

Not to be obscure, but take recent fallout recorded in stone.
Human generated deposits
    held in watery fields, in estuary & peat bog,

even biological hosts:
    coral & trees,

children—they wake
    every morning about this time.

Unprecedented accuracy, birdsong.

The best spike left by plutonium bomb tests in the 1950s,
    sampled in marine & lake sediment,
    ice layers, perhaps even speleotherms.

Scientists conclude they are nearing agreement.

    Set in motion up the valley—

Conifers, contour

    It doesn’t take long for morning to raise

a thin layer of mist from the grass it beds against.

    It doesn’t take long.

    Just now it happened

This poem was published in QWERTY Magazine.

Arianne True:

Encroachment: desert song
Not yet published
the aftermath of what

I

is it raining ash there?
it’s raining ash here.
bits of mountainside catch
in the window mesh
sap holds ash to oak leaves

all light red
shadows, red
red holes in shadows
ash so pale in all that ::

the whole street lit as if by ::

the volcanoes :: south
hold quiet
in the aftermath of what
exactly

II

who knew mountains could burn
a range ablaze
my lover sweats out
a fever in the living room

the wind coughs through window screens
soot collects the sill grey
the grass sleeps yellow
   overhued and oblivious

III

ash films spider webs
when you mourn
where does it go

This poem was published in Lit Hub (https://lithub.com/new-poetry-by-queer-indigenous-women/)
This poem was published in the Boston Review (http://bostonreview.net/poetry/arianne-true-nanta-kata)

Beatrice Szymkowiak:

8 poems from her project B/RDS:
/Cygnus Americanus/
Not yet published.
Note: the last line of this poem is “our vestigial wishbones” — I think might have clipped “wish” by accident while I read)

Around the Heavens
This poem was published in the online magazine terrain.org (https://www.terrain.org/2020/poetry/beatrice-szymkowiak/)

/Larus Zonorhynchus/
Not yet published

Gnawings
Not yet published

/Pelicanus Fuscus/
Not yet published

Viscera
Not yet published

/Melospiza Melodia/
Not yet published

Blades of Grass
Not yet published