



**JAAM 29**  
Edited by Anne Kennedy  
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 by Anne Kennedy.  
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 Patricia Prime.**

The journal *JAAM* appoints a different editor each year for this anthology series and

it allows editors a certain amount of freedom with regard to the selection process. **Anne Kennedy's** editorial selections for *JAAM 29* are a glittering read. She has done a splendid job and includes poems from Christchurch writers about the devastating earthquakes, poems from Pacific writers, from showcase writers, visual artists, the composer John Psathas, short stories and non-fiction. The journal is beautifully produced and contains a delightful cover image by Jocelyn Carlin and a selection of Portraits by her and artwork by Ya-Wen Ho, which accompanies poems by Renee Liang.

Kennedy tells us in her Editorial to the collection that the writing in *JAAM 29* comes "from Aotearoa, Hawai'i, Australia and California, with connections to Samoa, Tonga and the Philippines. This mix is inherently eclectic in aesthetic, in ideas and in Englishes."

Fiona Farrell, a talented poet and author, opens the collection with her poem "Quake poem 5" which bears testament to the destruction and heartbreak of seeing one's home destroyed:

Our roof is broken.  
 Tiles cracked. The  
 chimney shattered.  
 The light gets in,  
 slivers of air slicing  
 to soft pink heart.

Kiri Pihana-Wong's excerpt from her masterly sequence "On Commerce St" rings a forceful note:

On another night we  
 had just gone to bed  
 when the fire alarm  
 went off. We lay  
 there listening until  
 it shuddered to a stop,  
 giving way to the  
 deep bass pulse  
 of the nightclub  
 downstairs, the whirr  
 of the fans, people  
 shouting in the car park.

Helen Rickerby's poem "Kusama" coming later in the journal is a total commitment to her subject. In Sam Sampson's "A Strange harvest . . . A" the seven sections of his poem make a unique observation of liminal experiences, as we see in the first few lines of his first section:

## SEISMIC SEA WAVE

a crescent phase: a compass rose  
 a trail of words in the heart of a plant  
 let's not mince words: pollen is a plant sperm  
 tiny algae making sea water appear the colour of wine

The lack of any desire to "tell" us anything more important than each observation, makes his sequence all the more refreshing.

What I appreciate about *JAAM* is being able to catch up with current work from so many writers. The impact is stupendous, gathered within the sparkling covers of one publication.

Many of the poets will be well-known to New Zealand readers: Janet Charman, Gregory O'Brien, Michele Leggott, Serie Barford and Vivienne Plumb to name a handful. Others may be less familiar, such as Blaine Tolentino, Lisa Ottiger and Leilani Burgoyne.

The short stories range from Wes Lee's "Space Dust" to Albert Wendt's "Friendship." It's not so hard been taken somewhere stranger than home reading through the stories, yet they resonate with something familiar and known. However, not everything familiar is comforting; Kenneth Quilantang's "Abe, da Cleaning Technician," is a gutsy piece about a youth's after school job:

Since I'm a junior and Boy is still in intermediate, I get to work right after school. I don't need any crap from my folks. Especially him. They've kind of left me alone since 'that time' which is cool with me. As long as I'm not alone with him. Fuckin perverted prick. In my mind I don't even call him "dad" anymore.

A story by Vivienne Plumb is always a delight and "In Their Own Tongue" has earned its place in this collection. Many of the stories come in bite-sized pieces and are very readable. Frances Mountier's "Hood St" is slight in length, but contains a sharp enough message: "There's one thing keeping that house together," Drew said. 'Borer holding hands.'"

While the detached yet slightly cynical approach of Susanna Gendall's "Broken Sleep" leaves no room for doubt:

“Of course it didn’t work. I wasn’t able to get on the plane. The rules were those of a semi-conscious mental state – you couldn’t just get out because you wanted to. The debilitating nausea associated with pregnancy prevented me from getting out of bed altogether.”

Many more poems and stories need mentioning, but space doesn’t allow. Kennedy has put together New Zealand poetry and prose which is inclusive and loaded. This is a great way to start reading or to re-read some of the best contemporary New Zealand writers, and to find gems along the way and plenty to think about.