

Writing the Future

Wild Way

It was a radiantly clear morning on the Chemin and the waters of the Vallee as the first travellers emerged through the portal at Marsal into the guard hamlet of Fabas. The hamlet was quiet, apart from a flotilla of ducks, as yet unstrangled. On the other bank of the river, a peloton of Frogs (representatives of Vieux France) whizzed past on racing bikes dressed in the traditional colours of the Airbus/EDF League. They were allowed through as long as they kept moving; not difficult in their muscular group trance.

Xavier rowed over to accept the baguettes and the post. Bonjour, he said politely in old French to the postman with the characteristic beret and moustache worn by all males of voting age in La Vieux France. Foreigners coming, up the river, said the postman, sniffing disapprovingly. Lots of them. Better get the wine out, then, Xavier said. All welcome here. He could see in the distance Rodrigo pounding out of the tunnel entrance in his Caleche, drawn by a pony and a mule, his solar-powered headtorch blazing. Rodrigo, his accordion slung round his shoulder, shouted, panting and excited. Morning Froggy, he said to the postman before shouting Rugriders! Coming this way! On Carpets! Fast! Xavier frowned. Religious fundamentalists were not welcome in the Chemin, though all peaceful types were admitted.

It was going to be another interesting day for the Occitizens in the Chemin, where code was traded for fabbed goods, wine, fish and dead ducks, free of the anti-technology strictures of Vieux France and Little England. The Chemin, once a railway line that was never completed due to the metal for the rails needed for the first World War, but with all the tunnels, permanent way and station buildings completed, had become an Way or Path of imagination, with neocortical net circuits powered by pylons and antennae along a 60 kilometer stretch, which travellers had to pass, using the now expanded waterway and the former railway. As in times past the inhabitants lived on trading, a certain amount of barter-based taxation (or highway robbery as some travellers believed) and a very laissez-faire attitude to innovative tech, of a type now outlawed in Vieux France and Little England, in revolt against the domination of the invasive, censorious, preachy and maddeningly bland WorldCloud, which controlled all music, feelies, dating and gambling economies of the world now fragmented by terminal anthropogenic climate change.

Xaxier's sister, Nem, drew up in her skiff, wiping sweat from her home-fabbed T-shirt. "I've heard the rugriders are coders, trained in Meknes, actually." All the young denizens were coders, providing economic power for the community. Even the village mayors were an average age of 21, and all the key decision-makers were in their late teens. The adults over 35 had mainly retreated to their meditation towers, or left to join the LARP communities of Vieux France or Little England, in mourning for the planet, which had been given 50 years of storms and rising water levels before the humans and animals, at least, would be extinct.

"How about this Islamic girl gang? What are we going to do with them?" They would soon find out. Already a skin-crawling sensation began to overwhelm them as distant sounds of frenetic female ululation started echoing from the tunnel mouth.

They were a fearsome sight. Ululating, kohled eyes flashing behind veils and niquabs of varying lengths, some standing, some crouching on their flying carpets, they made an impressively screeching horde of invaders. One, skidded to a halt and levitating above the water in front of Xavier and Nem's house. "Bonjour Monsieur et Mademoiselle Grenouille. Salaam Aleikum. Qu'est-ce que ce passe quoi? Rachida ici. Vous avez du Gaillac? We're here to trade code for wine! Which we hear you have plenty of. And we like to dance, too." Gesturing to Rodrigo's accordion. "Come on! The world's going to end soon! Where's the party?!"

Rob La Frenais, 2019

Writing the Future

Skimming Stones

The one thing I remember most about my brother is skimming stones.

It was our thing.

It was all we did.

Every day;

Skim.

Skip.

Skim.

Skip.

I remember being captivated by the way the rock bounces along the water, with the impact of a small meteor and the ripples that spread wide and beautifully untroubled like the rings around planets.

When it was winter and the water became ice, the stone would bounce to the high frequency yelps of what we thought sounded like blaster guns.

The day I actually heard the sound leave a blaster barrel, I only saw *him*, fall to the ground. A gaping burning hole in his chest; the stones falling from his pockets.

Then black;

The sound and feel of nooses tightening.

'Take this one to the next site, and then the one after that. He'll make it. Kill him if he doesn't' is all I hear.

Skim.

Skip.

Skim.

Skip.

And then, aboard an unknown shuttle, weeks later I hunch to the small window. I watch helplessly as my planet, a sight I so longed to see with my brother next to me, everything we ever dreamed of, begins to twist away into a slow shrinking spinning blue globe.

Back home by the lake is his body, unburied, eyes not closed.

A stone clutched in his hand, not a weapon, just waiting to be skimmed.

Just waiting to be skipped.

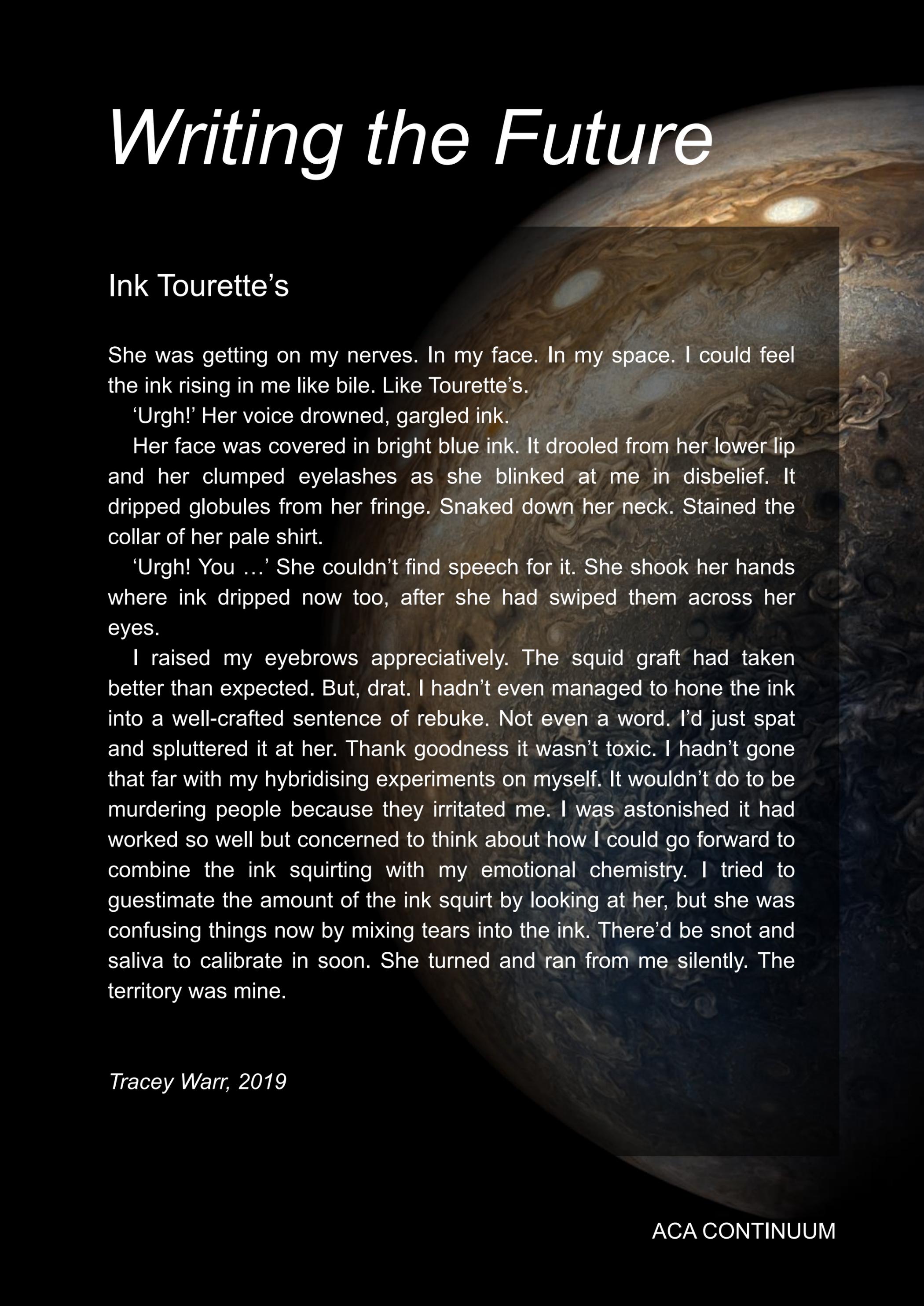
Skim.

Skip.

Skim.

Jake Tinsley, 2019

Writing the Future



Ink Tourette's

She was getting on my nerves. In my face. In my space. I could feel the ink rising in me like bile. Like Tourette's.

'Urgh!' Her voice drowned, gargled ink.

Her face was covered in bright blue ink. It drooled from her lower lip and her clumped eyelashes as she blinked at me in disbelief. It dripped globules from her fringe. Snaked down her neck. Stained the collar of her pale shirt.

'Urgh! You ...' She couldn't find speech for it. She shook her hands where ink dripped now too, after she had swiped them across her eyes.

I raised my eyebrows appreciatively. The squid graft had taken better than expected. But, drat. I hadn't even managed to hone the ink into a well-crafted sentence of rebuke. Not even a word. I'd just spat and spluttered it at her. Thank goodness it wasn't toxic. I hadn't gone that far with my hybridising experiments on myself. It wouldn't do to be murdering people because they irritated me. I was astonished it had worked so well but concerned to think about how I could go forward to combine the ink squirting with my emotional chemistry. I tried to guesstimate the amount of the ink squirt by looking at her, but she was confusing things now by mixing tears into the ink. There'd be snot and saliva to calibrate in soon. She turned and ran from me silently. The territory was mine.

Tracey Warr, 2019

Writing the Future

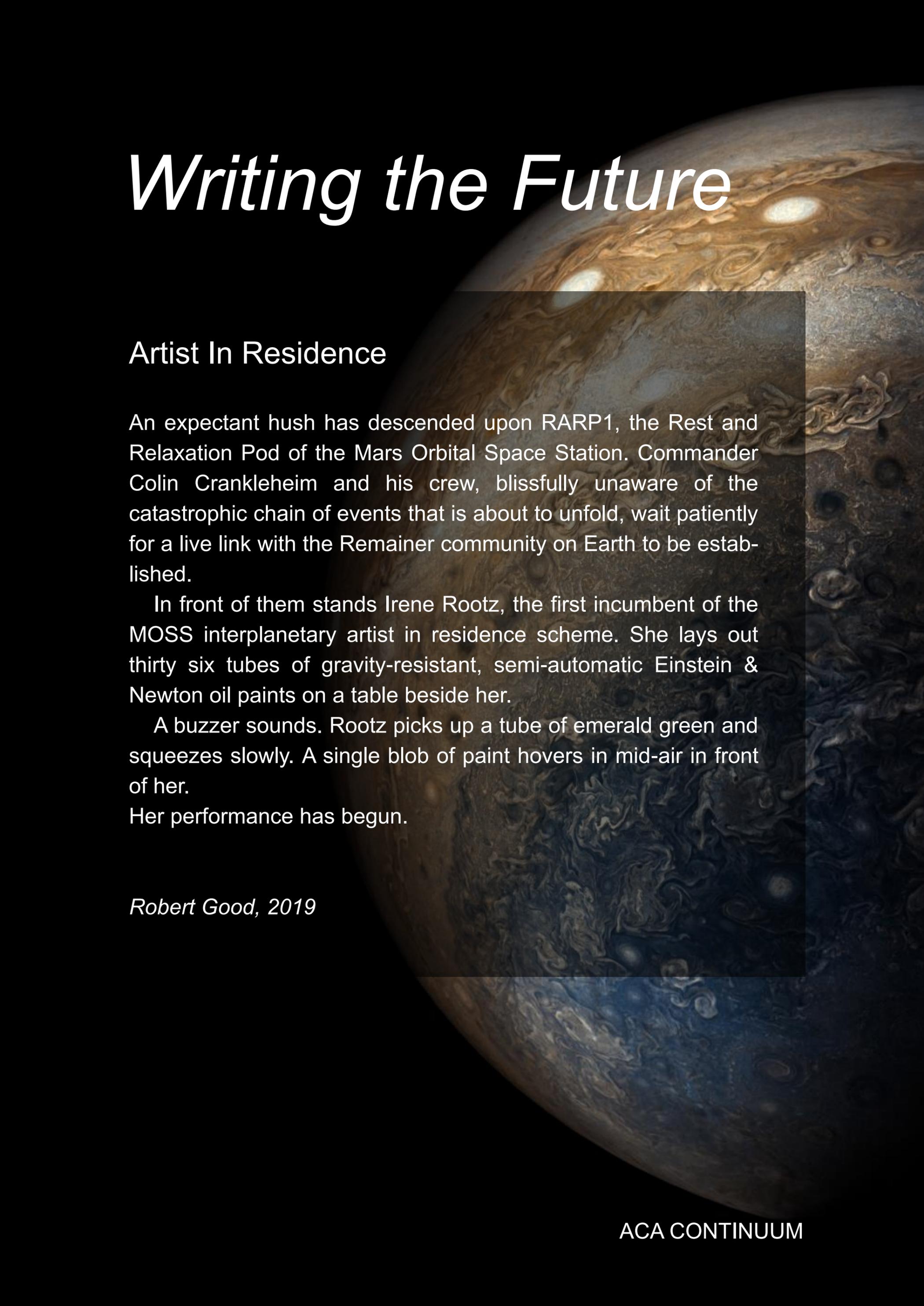
Planetary Approach Log

Τηε σπαχε–φυνκ τραπερσεδ ισ ιμμενσε ασ ωε αππροαχη τηε σε χονδ πλανετ σινχε ουρ ηομε ιν τηε ανδρομεδασ σψστεμ εμιπτινγ σινγσ οφ χιπιλισατιον. Συχη σινγσ λικε σατελλιτε ιμαγινγ ανδ δ ατα ουτπυτ; αν ατμοσπηερε συσταιναβλε φορ οργανιχ ματτερ ε. γ. 78:21:1 Νιτρογεν:Οξψγεν:Αργον αρε ωηατ ωε σχαν τηε γαλαξιε σ φορ. Ωε χηοσε αν αρβιτραρψ λανδμασσ ανδ λανδ ατ λοχατιον 54.97°N, 2.11°Ω σλιγητλψ οφφ χεντρε δυε το υνεξπεχτεδ ωεστερλ ψ ωινδσ ωιτη πρεχιπιτατιον. Λανδινγ λοχατιον δενοτεδ βψ ινηα βιταντσ □ μαρκινγσ ασ □HEXHAM□. Δυε το φολλοω αχχλιματισ ατιον προτοχολ πριορ το ουρ πρελιμιναρψ εξχυρσιον ιν 3, 2, 1.

The space-junk traversed is immense as we approach the second planet since our home in the andromedas system emitting signs of civilisation. Such signs like satellite imaging and data output; an atmosphere sustainable for organic matter e.g., 78:21:1 Nitrogen:Oxygen:Argon are what we scan the galaxies for. We chose an arbitrary landmass and land at location 54.97°N, 2.11°W slightly off centre due to unexpected westerly winds with precipitation. Landing location denoted by inhabitants' markings as 'HEXHAM'. Due to follow acclimatisation protocol prior to our preliminary excursion in 3, 2, 1.

Lisa Chatterjee, 2019

Writing the Future



Artist In Residence

An expectant hush has descended upon RARP1, the Rest and Relaxation Pod of the Mars Orbital Space Station. Commander Colin Crankleheim and his crew, blissfully unaware of the catastrophic chain of events that is about to unfold, wait patiently for a live link with the Remainer community on Earth to be established.

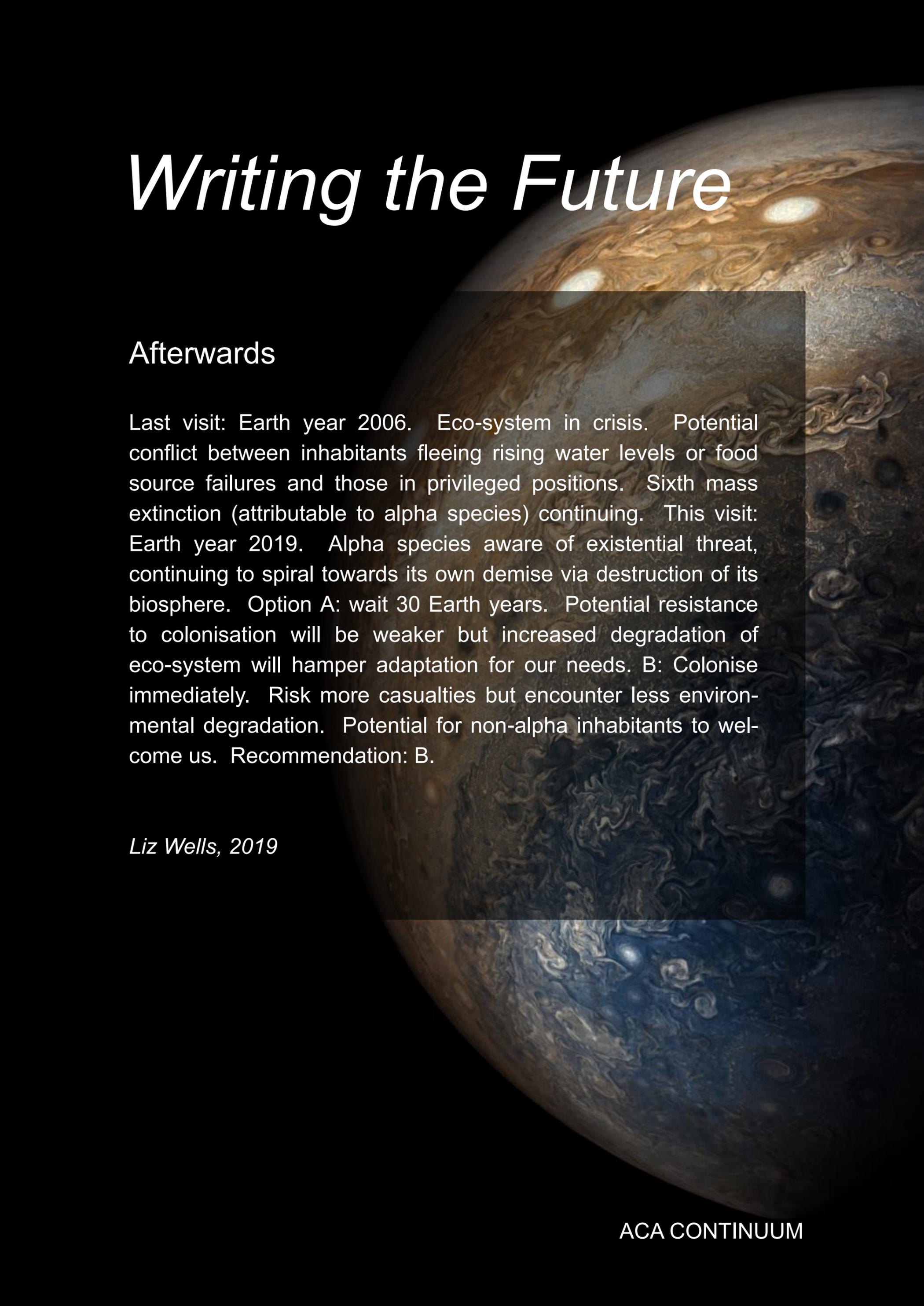
In front of them stands Irene Rootz, the first incumbent of the MOSS interplanetary artist in residence scheme. She lays out thirty six tubes of gravity-resistant, semi-automatic Einstein & Newton oil paints on a table beside her.

A buzzer sounds. Rootz picks up a tube of emerald green and squeezes slowly. A single blob of paint hovers in mid-air in front of her.

Her performance has begun.

Robert Good, 2019

Writing the Future

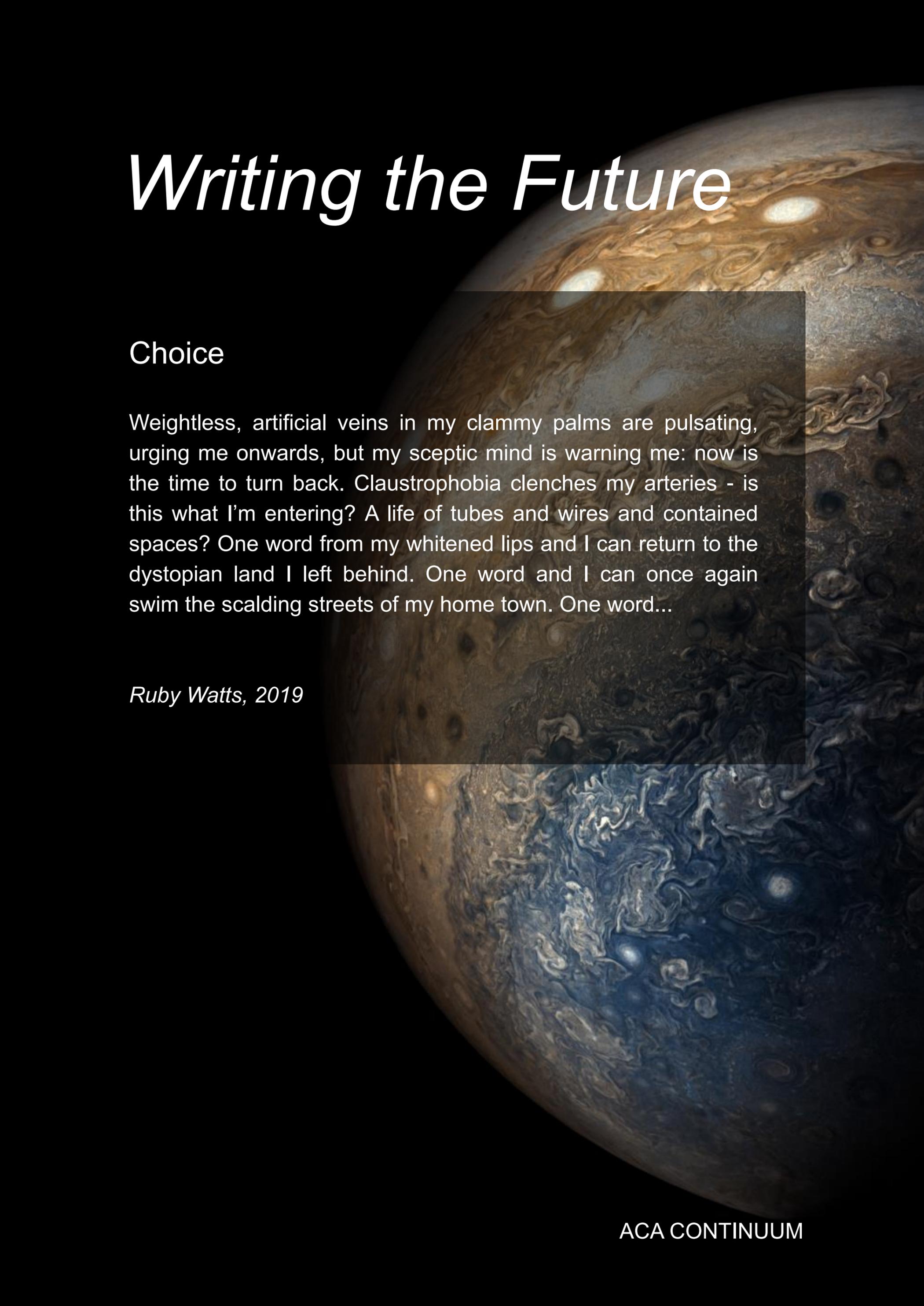


Afterwards

Last visit: Earth year 2006. Eco-system in crisis. Potential conflict between inhabitants fleeing rising water levels or food source failures and those in privileged positions. Sixth mass extinction (attributable to alpha species) continuing. This visit: Earth year 2019. Alpha species aware of existential threat, continuing to spiral towards its own demise via destruction of its biosphere. Option A: wait 30 Earth years. Potential resistance to colonisation will be weaker but increased degradation of eco-system will hamper adaptation for our needs. B: Colonise immediately. Risk more casualties but encounter less environmental degradation. Potential for non-alpha inhabitants to welcome us. Recommendation: B.

Liz Wells, 2019

Writing the Future



Choice

Weightless, artificial veins in my clammy palms are pulsating, urging me onwards, but my sceptic mind is warning me: now is the time to turn back. Claustrophobia clenches my arteries - is this what I'm entering? A life of tubes and wires and contained spaces? One word from my whitened lips and I can return to the dystopian land I left behind. One word and I can once again swim the scalding streets of my home town. One word...

Ruby Watts, 2019