

**Sophie Navarro** (“More Than Meets the Eye,” p. 8) grew up in the Excelsior District and discovered her independence wandering the neighborhoods of San Francisco and sampling local eateries. She continues to expand her palate and enjoys mining the NYT Cooking app for new recipes. She lives in the 94121 area.

**Brennan Woodruff** (“The Buena Vista,” p. 12) has lived in San Francisco for four years. Originally from Indiana, he’s come to love the enrapturing views waiting around every turn in SF. When not working on his start-up, he spends his time helping The Guardsmen raise money for at-risk youth in the Bay Area.

**Juhi Gupta** (“Dancing in the Street,” p. 16) is spending her twenties enthralled with the siren that is San Francisco. When she’s not designing materials for progressive political campaigns, she paints, DJs, and aspires to be the next brown Carrie Bradshaw. Born and raised in the 510, she holds degrees from the University of Chicago in public policy and visual art.

**Alli Cruz** (Poem, p. 18) is a queer writer of Filipinx and Cuban descent. They have been published in *The Margins*, *Blackbird*, *Hobart*, and other magazines. They work for *Pleiades* and Sony Pictures Television, and live in San Francisco’s Ingleside neighborhood.

**Susie Meserve** (Poem, p. 21) won a Blue Light Award from Blue Light Press for her 2018 debut poetry collection, *Little Prayers*. Originally from Boston, she lives with her family in Berkeley, where she was recently awarded a City of Berkeley Civic Arts Grant.

**Jared Stearns** (“The Girl on the Soap Box,” p. 22) is a San Francisco-based writer working on a biography of Mar-

ilyn Chambers. He’s lived in the same Tenderloin apartment for more than sixteen years. It’s rent controlled so he can never leave.

**Carrie Sisto** (“San Francisco’s Trail Blazers,” p. 29) is a freelance reporter who has been covering Bay Area news and events since 2016. She recently relocated to Los Osos, California, to work in San Luis Obispo County’s Planning and Building Department.

**Ingrid Roorda** (“San Francisco Almanac,” p. 33) traded cold Canadian winters for Mission District sun. She works as a mechanical engineer though still can’t quite figure out how to change the rear tire of a bicycle with regular success. She recently learned she still has four of her baby teeth.

**Christine No** (Poem, p. 34) is a Korean American daughter of immigrants, a poet, and a filmmaker. She’s a Sundance alum, VONA fellow, and three-time Pushcart Prize nominee. Her poetry collection, *Whatever Love Means*, is available via Barrelhouse Books. You can find her roaming the East Bay hills with her dog, Ruthie Wagmore.

**Guy Wilkinson** (“The Art of Low-riding,” p. 36) spent a decade working as a travel writer in Australia before realizing a career extolling the merits of spa weekends in the Daylesford countryside wasn’t his true calling. Originally from the UK, he traded London smog for San Francisco fog and focuses on portraying subcultures and street life in short films, documentaries, and photography.

**Jayne Martin** (“The Ferlinghetti of Flash,” p. 45) is a native San Franciscan. She is the author of *Tender Cuts*, a microfiction collection from Vine Leaves Press, and *The Daddy Chronicles:*

*Memoir of a Fatherless Daughter*, published by Whiskey Tit Books in spring 2022.

**Molly Giles** (Flash Fiction, p. 48) is the author of five award-winning short story collections and a novel. Her latest story collection, *Wife with Knife*, won the Leapfrog Global Fiction Prize.

**Alex Torres** (Flash Fiction, p. 48) is a San Francisco-based writer. He lives in the Mission, where he spends most of his free time reading at Dolores Park.

**Mathieu Cailler** (Flash Fiction, p. 49) has published work in many publications including the *Saturday Evening Post* and the *Los Angeles Times*. His novel *Heaven and Other Zip Codes* (Open Books) won the 2021 Los Angeles Book Festival Prize. His favorite thing is to walk across the Golden Gate Bridge and then have Irish coffee at the Buena Vista.

**Noah Sanders** (Reviews, p. 47 and p. 53), now a resident of the North North Bay, is still scared of how quiet the suburbs get and is pretty sure the houses on his street are just facades. Founding editor of *The Racket*, he lives with his fiancée and their zany dog sidekick, Arlo.

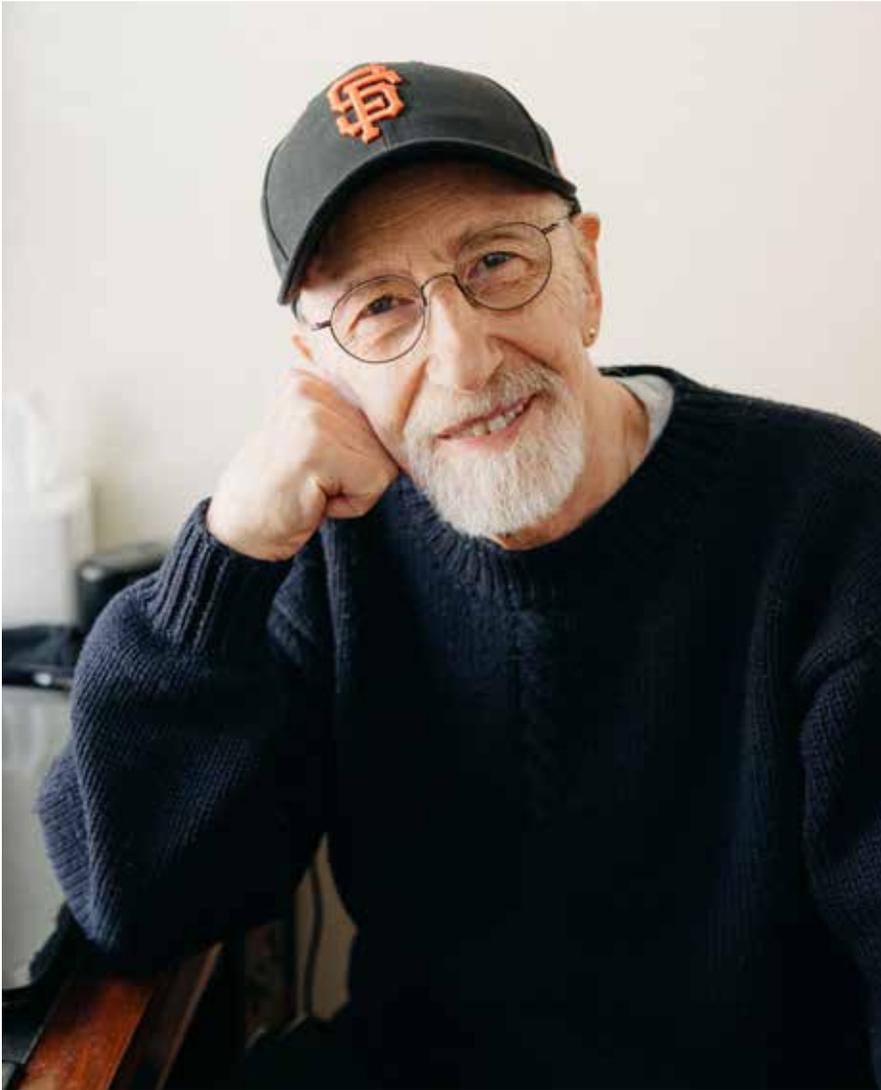
**Martin Reid Sanchez** (Fiction, p. 50) was born in the Bay Area and has lived in San Francisco for nine years. Previously, he was the author of the weekly short fiction project *Unseen San Francisco*. He’s never actually received a strange, anonymous love letter, but he hasn’t given up hope yet.

**Andrea Carla Michaels** (Crossword, p. 57) arrived in San Francisco in 1984 as a stand-up comic and a hippie who was about fifteen years too late. A writer and professional namer, she morphs daily into the Pizza Lady of Polk Street. Her puzzles appear in the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, and others.

# The SanFranciscan

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# The Ferlinghetti of Flash

*Explorations of form with author Robert Scotellaro.*

by Jayne Martin

*Like a high-wire act with no net, Scotellaro continues to push the limits of what's possible in flash fiction, thrilling his audience with his storytelling*

It was a busy Friday night in the Inner Sunset. Author Robert “Scotty” Scotellaro, his lovely wife, Diana, and I had met for dinner at Pacific Catch on Ninth Avenue. Across the street, the lights from Green Apple Books beckoned readers inside and I was reminded of the night we all first met.

It was 2018. A crowd of writers had gathered for the book launch of *Nothing Short of 100*, the anthology from *100 Word Story* in which Scotty and I had stories included. Scotellaro is the author of five collections of flash and micro fiction, including the 2020 publication *What Are the Chances?*, which Jane Ciabattari, a columnist for *Lit Hub*, called “lightning-quick glimpses into the human soul.” He is regarded as a master of the flash form.

Our conversation began with reminiscences of Scotty’s early days in San Francisco, more than five decades ago. While it may have been the promise of sex, drugs, and rock and roll that first lured the young poet from his home in New York’s East Village to our City by the Bay in 1970, it was the literary scene that kept him here. Like the 1950s, which saw an explosion of work by the experimental generation of Beat poets, the early 1970s in San Francisco was an impactful time for artistic expression with its burgeoning counter-culture hippie movement. Writers found outlets for their work in the abundance of homegrown literary publications that were appearing on the scene. And in 1978 Armistead Maupin would publish the first of his *Tales of the City* books.

Scotellaro got to work, publishing poems in multiple issues of *Rolling Stone*, releasing several anthologies, and diving deep into the underground comix scene. He then took the plunge into publishing, creating a small poetry chapbook imprint called Lion’s Breath Press, which gave emerging Bay Area poets a platform for their work. But it would be his discovery of the 1989

*Sudden Fiction International* anthology, sixty short stories ranging from 500 to 1,500 words, that would set him on his current creative course.

“Good Lord! I knew I had found a literary form I could spend the rest of my career devoted to,” he recalled at dinner. “One that required endless strategies to expand its small-word-count borders through a variety of means: detail, implication, allusion, those spaces between the lines, a partnering with the reader at times to interpret and imagine after the last note is struck.”

Thus began a prolific career in flash fiction. By 2018, Scotellaro would come full circle when he coedited the W. W. Norton anthology *New Micro: Exceptionally Short Fiction*. In April 2020, he became a founding member of the Flash Fiction Collection at the Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas, where his books are featured alongside the works of many prominent flash fiction writers and editors.

It didn’t surprise me when he named Lawrence Ferlinghetti’s *A Coney Island of the Mind* as one of his favorite books. In this book, as in his others, Ferlinghetti’s poetry splashes onto the page like stones across a running creek, inviting the reader to leap from one poem to the next with the playful faith of a child. One could well describe Scotty’s mind in much the same way: playful.

Like Ferlinghetti, Scotellaro is known for pushing the boundaries of form. Our conversation turned to his latest book, *Ways to Read the World: Stories in Triptych*, a collection of forty-nine tales in which this master of micro once again captivates the reader with his originality.

The word *triptych* has its origins in the Greek *triptykhos*, meaning “three-layered.” Until recently, the term was mostly limited to the art world, describing a painting done over three separate-but-connected panels showing elements that are related and/or complement each other. In the literary world, it’s a story written in three short segments, often from various perspectives.

“Starting out as a poet, writing in segments is very natural to me,” said Scotellaro. “I’d been writing them for some time and enjoyed the challenge of seeing what I could create utilizing different approaches, characters, and themes.”

I needed to know how he did it. His process. Writers hate being asked

about their process. It’s akin to asking a magician to explain a sleight of hand. Nevertheless, as the waiter cleared our dishes, I ordered another glass of wine and opened the book to a story titled, “His Ink and Miss Atomic Bomb.”

“How the triptych is different from linear storytelling is that each piece

## His Ink and Miss Atomic Bomb

### *Tats*

All his stories, he said, were written in his ink. There was even a tattoo under his full head of hair she’d never seen, but glimpsed the shadow of. She fingered the ones on his chest and thought it peculiar and amusing how some curly black hairs poked through them in the oddest places.

### *Miss Atomic Bomb*

Her great aunt was Miss Atomic Bomb in the 1950s. She showed him a photo of her in a bathing suit, young and beautiful—a mushroom cloud crown on her head. A bunch of grinning soldiers gathered around. Said how she died at 90—left behind over a hundred Chia Pets. The withered plant life browning in their decorative planters her family dumped. Had no real pets. Imagined Miss Atomic Bomb as a tattoo added to his picture book body, had it been his aunt. Ever young—flourishing for as long as he did.

### *Thicket*

In the diner, she couldn’t help staring at the creature clawing out of his collar, cinched by a dark tie cutting into his neck. Wore it for a job interview he was back from. Wondered what its story was, and the prison ones too. The crude spook show tats, shiny when he got out of the shower. When he took her and she was among them. That thicket. Unlike her husband’s blank canvas. Across from her on one hand: LOVE. On the other: HATE. A letter for each knuckle. LOVE holding the fork. HATE cutting into his steak.

is written in three distinct yet related parts,” he said by way of explanation. “It’s not just cutting a story into thirds but writing one in thirds.”

“This story is woven together so seamlessly,” I said. “Yet each could be a stand-alone piece.”

“A triptych is a sum greater than its parts, much like putting together a collection,” said Scotellaro. “Each section has its own focus while allowing for a corridor into the following one. The final section, just as in most flash stories, contains a kind of resonance a reader can build upon with their own imagination.”

To garner ideas for his writing, Scotellaro refers to a plethora of large notebooks he’s compiled over the years. They contain everything from random titles, first lines, telling details, and snippets of dialogue to themes, characters, traits, conflicts, and interesting facts.

“Sometimes just a word or two I find triggering. They are prompts I’ve created for myself. It’s a process I use when writing flash in general,” he said.

“The triptych form really has endless possibilities, doesn’t it,” I said.

“Oh, yes! I find the various strategies for creating them exhilarating. At this point in my career, I’m fascinated with the notion of investigating form, mining it for new possibilities of storytelling within the overarching ‘flash’ umbrella.”

His blue eyes sparkle at the thought of such fun, and there’s that sense of playfulness again.

“So what’s next in your sandbox of storytelling?” I asked.

He teased with a secretive smile. Like the rest of his fans, I would just have to wait.

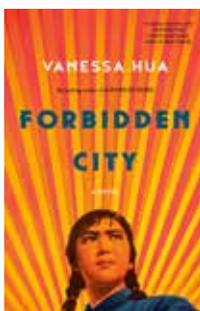
Ferlinghetti once said, “Constantly risking absurdity and death whenever he performs above the heads of his audience, the poet, like an acrobat, climbs on rhyme to a high wire of his own making.”

In *Ways to Read the World*, Robert Scotellaro has once again proven himself to be a master of that high wire. ♦

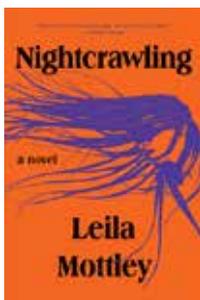
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## Books by the Bay

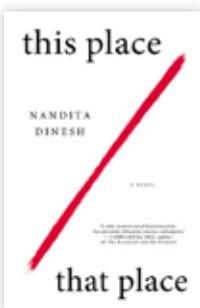
by Noah Sanders



**Forbidden City**, by *Vanessa Hua* (Ballantine Books). In her newest novel, Vanessa Hua tells the tale of the waning days of Mao Zedong’s communist China through the eyes of an impoverished villager turned dancer, actor, and, through sheer wit and political maneuvering, concubine to the Chairman himself. *Forbidden City* explores the roles people play to survive, and what happens when illusion overtakes reality. Hua draws the crumbling communist society beautifully, from the staid luxury of the Lake Palace to the rioting crowds of the Cultural Revolution. Her rendition of an aging Mao is wonderfully awful, portraying him as a strangely tender monster, bloated and poisoned by power, clutching at whatever he can to maintain his grip on a country slipping into chaos. *Forbidden City* does what only the best of historical fiction can: it uses the epic sweep of history as a canvas for a single character’s fascinating story. Hua lives in San Francisco.



**Nightcrawling**, by *Leila Mottley* (Knopf). Leila Mottley’s debut novel, *Nightcrawling*, is a harrowing look at what survival means in a community teetering on the edge of destitution. Kiara, a teen living well below the poverty line in East Oakland, struggles to make rent for her and her brother, and when circumstances lead her into prostitution, things quickly slide out of control. Mottley pulls no punches in her evocative descriptions of Kiara’s downward spiral and the harsh environments she traffics, immersing the reader in a world decidedly close by but rarely seen. In gripping, sometimes painfully realistic prose, Mottley reveals that in situations of extreme scarcity, there are no choices, merely survival. Mottley lives in Oakland.



**This Place That Place**, by *Nandita Dinesh* (Melville House). In *This Place That Place*, Nandita Dinesh presents a world stripped of identifying signifiers. We are given two nameless protagonists stuck under a curfew imposed by one country—That Place—whose military occupies another country—This Place. Dinesh’s bare rendering invites the reader to draw conclusions about the blossoming relationship between the two characters based solely on their conversation, their actions, and their evolving perspectives. While this is not light subject matter, Dinesh employs surprising humor and deftness as she critically examines individual experience and survival in the midst of a dehumanizing international conflict. Dinesh lives in San Francisco. ♦