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Plastic Goes Concrete: "Plasticnic" and "Plasticpoems", Two Animated Poetry Videos about Plastic Pollution

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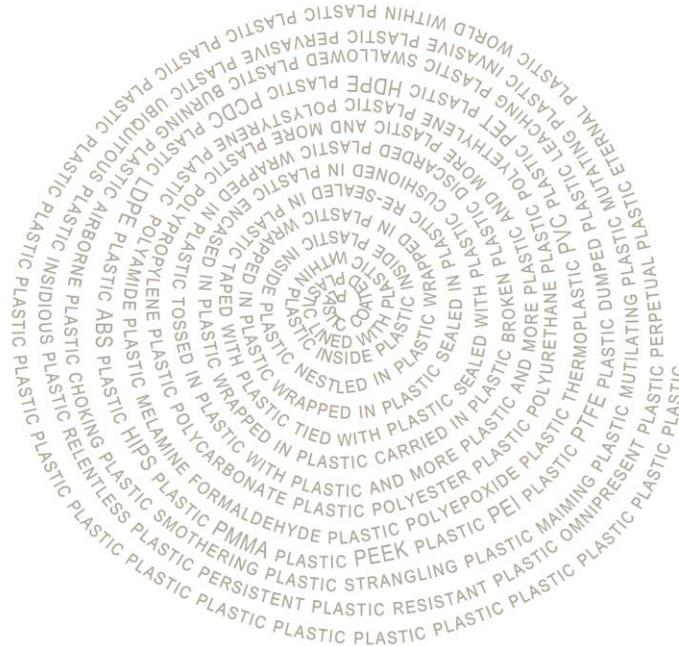
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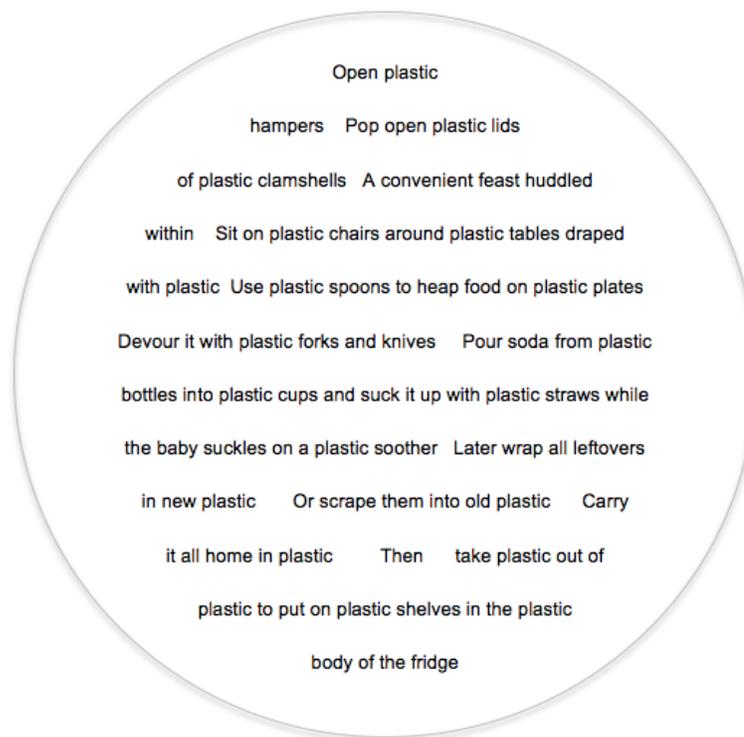
to conjure an image resembling plastic wrap used on food and consumer items, as well as the gyres of plastic in the ocean.



Although some poems could be shaped on the page simply by centering and arranging words without any special software or program (such as those published in [The Goose](#) in 2018), I learned how to use WordArt to move words in different sizes and fonts on the page to create a number of shaped and visual poems. It was a revelation! I obsessively experimented for hours with font, size, shape, and placement, making various adjustments. Many of the early draft poems were very close to their final shape within a few days. For the poem "Ocean," I positioned fragments of the word "plastic" on the page to make the words appear to be disintegrating and dissolving in the same way plastic eventually becomes microplastic and nanoplastic in our environment.

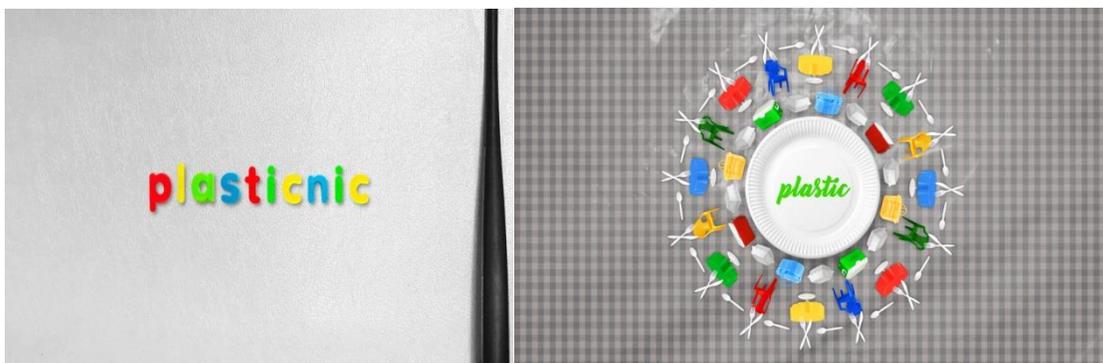
visual and auditory. To accompany the closing credits, I used photographs taken by UBC marine biologist, Dr. Elaine Su, who heads [Sea Smart](#), a local nonprofit organization which delivers educational programs and workshops on marine pollution to students.

The shaped poem, "[Plasticnic](#)," started out as a humorous depiction of a family having a picnic riddled with plastic implements and furniture. For the print version, I arranged the words within a circular boundary as if they were atop a plastic plate. I also wanted the circular shape to allude to how overconsumption and plastic pollution affect our entire planet and how we urgently need to develop a circular economy.



For the video poem, I started by making an audio-recording, then sketched out an approach for the visuals, specifying key elements and images. I asked local animator Tish Deb

Pillai, a recent graduate from the Emily Carr University of Art and Design, to structure the video poem around a colourful mandala created by a gradual accumulation of plastic cutlery, cups, straws, containers, tables and chairs circling around a central plate on a plastic checkered tablecloth. Tisha choreographed the circling movement of the plastic items in time with the narration and suggested other visual elements such as plastic wrap on the plate. Since the text of the poem wasn't visually appealing in itself, I decided to eliminate the appearance of the text of the poem, and instead focus on the repetition of the word "plastic" which would appear in different fonts and colours whenever it was uttered in order to underline our dependence on plastic. For the opening and closing credits, I suggested plastic fridge magnets on a fridge door—the kind of seemingly innocent childhood toys that end up in our landfills. For the closing images, I obtained permission from [Washed Ashore](#), a grassroots non-profit environmental organization in Oregon, to use photographs to depict the consequences of the accumulation of plastic in our environment. I asked Tinjun Niu, the sound designer, to insert specific sound effects to amplify the images and meaning.



Looking back, I would never have imagined that the simple desire to type out a spiral-shaped poem would lead to an exploration of concrete/visual poetry and to collaborations with animators and others to create poetry videos that would be screened at festivals all around the

world. One poem was a seed for other poems. Then some of those poems ended up being seeds that developed into poetry videos. Perhaps all poems are seeds—so much experience, movement, memory, intelligence and emotion are distilled and compressed within each one. With attention, at the right time and place, they can unfurl and bloom in seen and unseen ways.

Notes on the Text:

Print poem "Roll" originally published in *Oratorealis* magazine (May 2017) and reprinted in *Odes & Laments* (Caitlin Press, 2019).

Print poems "Ocean" and "Plasticnic" originally published in *RAUM* magazine (November 2017, Issue #4) and reprinted in *Odes & Laments* (Caitlin Press, 2019).

"Plasticnic" has been screened at the Athens 7th International Video Poetry Festival, REELpoetry Houston, the Wrong Biennale of Digital Art and Culture, the O'Beal 7th International Poetry Film Festival, the Lost Angeles Animation Festival 2019, the Lyra Festival 2020, Cadence Video Poetry Festival 2020, Zebra Poetry Film Festival 2020 (Berlin), Film & Video Poetry Symposium 2020 (LA), Berlin Interfilm Short Film Festival 2020.

"Plasticpoems" has been screened at the Cadence Video Poetry festival (Seattle, April 2019), the Art in Nature Festival (Seattle, June 2019) and at the Experimental Film and Music Video Festival (Toronto, October 2019). It won the Judges' Award for Best Poetry Award at Houston's REELpoetry festival in January 2020.

FIONA TINWEI LAM is the author of the poetry collection, [*Odes & Laments*](#), which celebrates the overlooked wonder in the everyday, while lamenting harm to our ecosystems. She has authored two previous poetry books, a children's book, and edited *The Bright Well: Contemporary Canadian Poems on Facing Cancer*. Lam won *The New Quarterly's* Nick Blatchford Prize and was a finalist for the City of Vancouver Book Award. Her work appears in more than thirty-five anthologies, including *The Best Canadian Poetry in English* (both 2010 and 2020) and *Forcefield: 77 Women Poets of BC*. Her poetry videos made in collaboration with Vancouver animators have screened at festivals locally and internationally, garnering awards in Houston and Minneapolis. She teaches at Simon Fraser University's Continuing Studies. Her website is at fionalam.net.

TISHA DEB PILLAI (animator of "Plasticnic") is an animation director and motion designer based in Vancouver, BC. She graduated with a Bachelor of Media Arts in Animation from the Emily Carr University of Art and Design. Her films have screened at TIFF, Cinanima, Anima Mundi, Ottawa International Animation Festival, NY International Children's Film Festival, Northwest Animation Festival, Animation Nights New York, and Vancouver International Women in Film Festival. Her film *If You Fall* has also been added to the permanent collection at the Education Department Resources at the Museum of Modern Art. Her website is <https://vimeo.com/tishadebpillai>.

NHAT TRUONG (animator of "Plasticpoems") is a graduate of the Art Institute of Vancouver with a 3D Animation major who majored in 3D animation and has honed her skills in various types of art including 2D animation, illustration and more. View more of Nhat's works at <https://aegiu.artstation.com/>.