

Poetic Takes on Verticality: Ice-skating, Nightstands by the Curb, Hair A-Z, An Urban Riddle

Blagovesta Momchedjikova

Abstract

These poems explore our experiences of verticality in the city, as a daily practice. “Ice-skating” attempts to capture what it means to glide on the ice rink in the city and connect to things beyond the immediate present; “Nightstands by the Curb” records seeing two discarded nightstands by the side of the road and how in their loneliness they stand tall and significant despite the fact that their owner found them useless. In “Hair A-Z,” I list all possible variations of hair styles and accessories, as a way of seeing how hair makes us distinct, unique, tall in the city. “An Urban Riddle,” written in the voice of the elevated park, the High Line, in Manhattan, investigates what it may mean to have such an unusual green “presence” in the city. Each of these poems is paired with a photograph: some were taken on the occasion of the poem, like the ice-skating one, others, like the photographs by my friend Nikola Bradonjic—not, but we decided that they went well with the poems (the “Nightstands by the Curb” and “Hair A-Z” poems). The photograph accompanying “an Urban Riddle” is of a site-specific artwork, *Broken Bridge II*, by El Anatsui, which graced the High Line park from November 2012 until October 2013.

Ice- skating

The difference
between
ice and
sand
is that
you can't
bury your
feet
in the ice,
and feel
the hot
pulse of
the earth
tickle your
toes.
But you
can glide
on its
glistening
surface,
among
reflections
of clouds
and half-
frozen
leaves,
and hear
ancient
footsteps
in the
swooshing
sounds
of your
skates...
...and think
of preservation.



Fig. 1. LeFrak Center at Lakeside, Prospect Park, Brooklyn, New York. March 31st, 2019. Photo credit: Blagovesta Momchedjikova



Fig. 2. LeFrak Center at Lakeside, Prospect Park, Brooklyn, New York, March 29th, 2019. Photo credit: Blagovesta Momchedjikova

Night-stands by the Curb

Back-to-back
two night-stands
pressed against each other
standing almost tall
beside the curb
despite the dirt and noise
on Linden, their horizontal companion
—the bed—missing.
Forgotten and faded,
they only have each other
for a few more hours

before the junk truck
breaks them down,
one by one, and removes them
(and all the stories they hold)
for good.



Fig. 3. A Brooklyn Street. New York. December 2014.
Photo credit: Nikola Bradonjic.

HAIR A-Z

Accessorized, Afro, Airdried, Allovertheplace, Angled, Animal, Anime, Arabic, Arganoiled, Asian, Asymmetric, Auburn, Authentic, Baby, Bad, Bald, Bandana, Bangs, Bantuknots, Barbershop, Barrette, Beads, Beautiful, Big, Black, Bleached, Blond, Blowdried, Blunt, Bob, Bobbypin, Bohemian, Bouncy, Bow, Bowlcut, Boxbraids, Braids, Braided, Bridal, Brown, Brush, Bun, Buzzcut, Caeser-cut, Cascading, Centerparted, Chic, Chignon, Chop, Classic, Clip, Club, Coiffure, Coiled, Comb, Conditioned, Conditioner, Conk, Cornrows, Coronet, Corporate, Covering, Cowries, Crazy, Crewcut, CrissCross, Crochet, Crop, Crown, Curly, Curlwand, Cute, D.A., Damaged, Damp, Dandruff, Design, Detangled, Died, Dipdied, Dirty, Dirtyblond, Disheveled, Disorderly, Do, Doubledutch, Dreads, Dressy, Dry, Dryer, Ducktail, Durag, Dusty, Eccentric, Edgy, Elegant, Elastic, Exotic, Extensions, Fabulous, Fade, Fake, Fauxhawk, Fingerwaves, Fishtail, Flaky, Flatiron, Flattwist, Fluffy, Fly, Frenchbraid, Full, Funky, Fuzzy, Gaminepixie, Geisha, Gel, Ghetto, Ginger, Gloss, Goofy, Grease, Grey, Groomed, Hairdo, Hairloss, Hairstyle, Halfup, Hanging, Heat, Heatless, Heavy, Heavymetal, Herhair, Hippie, Hipster, Hishair, Hat, Headband, Heatconditioned, Highlights, Hijab, Hollywoodchic, Hotcomb, Hotoil, Hotrollers, Iconic, Indian, Instanthairdo, Invisibleextensions, Irresistible, Itchy, Ivory, Jaguarscissors, Jawclipped, Jerrycurled, Jumpy, Justright, Justabovetheshoulders, Justwashed, Kinky, Knotout, Knotted, Layered, Leaf, Lice, Lineup, Locs, Locksoflove, Long, Loose, Lousy, Low, Lye, Mane, Marine-cut, Matted, Messy, Milkmaid, Mischief, Modern, Mohawk, Motown, Myhair, Nappy, Natural, Naturallycurly, Neat, Net, New, NewYork, Nice, NoFuss, Oatmealforhair, Office, Oilslick, Oily, Oliveoil, Ombre, Onthego, Open, Orderly, Outrageous, Overnightmask, Overthear, Parted, Perfect, Perm, Pick, Pictureperfect, Pigtails, Pirate, Pixiecrop, Plait, Plaited, Political, Polished, Pompadour, Ponytail, Poof, Pretty, Print, Prom, Proud, Puffy, Pulledback, Punk, Queue, Quickfix, Quiff, Rattail, Rapunzel, Raw, Razorcut, Receding, Red, Regular, Relaxed, Relaxer, Retro, Ribbon, Ringlet, Rockstar, Romantic, Roots, Rubber-band, Safe, Salon, Sassy, Scalp, Scarf, Scrunchie, Sexy, Shaved, Short, Shoulderlength, Sideburns, Sidelocks, Sideparted, Sideswept, Sikha, Silky, Simple, Sleek, Slickedback, Smooth, Snood, Soft, Softener, Sophisticated, Spiky, Spiral, Splitends, Static, Stereotyped, Straight, Straightened, Stylish, Sunkissed, Sweaty, Swirls, Tangled, Tattoo, Texture, Thin, Tie, Tips, Toupee, Transplants, Treated, Trendy, Tress, Tuckedbehindtheears, Turban, Twirls, Twists, Twotoned, Uncut, Undercut, Understated, Undertheveil, Unisex, Unkempt, Unmanageable, Untreated, Untrimmed, Updo, Upintheair, Urban, Veil, Vintage, Vixen, Vogue, Volume, Voluminous, Wand, Wandcurled, Wandstraightened, Washed, Waistlong, Waterfall, Wave, Wavy, Weave, Weird, Wet, Whimsical, White, Wig, Wild, X-over, X-treme, YOUR YELLOW ZIGZAG ZOMBIE HAIR RIGHTINMYFACE AS YOU RUSH PAST ME TO SWITCH FROM THE 5 TO THE 6 TRAIN AT BROOKLYN BRIDGE/CITY HALL.



Fig. 4. Hairdo. Novi Sad, Serbia. May 2014. Photo credit: Nikola Bradonjic.



Fig. 5. Hair salon. New York, February 2015. Photo credit: Nikola Bradonjic.

An Urban Riddle

I stand tall and stretch long above streets, people, and doorways
but I'm not a bridge.

People flock to and away from my train tracks
but I'm not a train station.

Plants of various kinds grow on me
but I'm not a botanical garden.

My benches are made of wood
but I'm not a church.

I always see the sky above me
but I'm not a river.

Children play all over me
but I'm not a playground.

Artworks grace my sides
but I'm not a museum.

I run thin through buildings and commerce
but I'm not a highway.

I feel every breeze from the Hudson River
but I'm not a boat.

I hover above traffic lights
but I'm not a bird.

To get to me, you need to go up
but I'm not a mountain.

What am I?

(The Highline)



Fig. 6. El Anatsui, *Broken Bridge II*, 37 feet x157 feet. Recycled pressed tin and mirrors. The High Line, New York City (Nov. 2012-Oct. 2013). Photo credit: Ken Goebel.

About the author

Blagovesta Momchedjikova, PhD, is a lover and writer of cities. She teaches writing, art, and, the urban experience at New York University; and chairs the Urban Culture Area for the Mid-Atlantic Popular/American Culture Association (MAPACA) and the Conference Scientific Committee for the International Panorama Council (IPC). She has edited *Captured by the City: Perspectives in Urban Culture Studies* (2013) and *Urban Feel* (2010); co-edited *From Above: The Practice of Verticality* (2019), *Thoughts and Visions On and Around the Queens Museum's Panorama of the City of New York* (2018), and *Public Place: Between Spectacle and Resistance* (2016); and contributed to *The International Panorama Council Journal*, *The Everyday of Memory*, *Robert Moses and the Modern City*, *Streetnotes*, *Iso Magazine*, *The Journal of American Culture*, *Tourist Studies*, *Genre: Imagined Cities*, and *PIERS*.

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