



Reshma Ruia

NEW COMMISSION

Postcards from Oxford Road

Reshma Ruia is a poet, novelist and co-founder of The Whole Kahani, a collective of British South Asian Writers. Her first novel, *Something Black in the Lentil Soup*, was described in The Sunday Times as ‘a gem of straight-faced comedy’ and her second novel manuscript, *A Mouthful of Silence*, was shortlisted for the SI Leeds Literary Prize. Her debut collection of poetry, *A Dinner Party in the Home Counties*, won the 2019 Debut Word Masala Award and her debut collection of short stories, *Mrs Pinto Drives to Happiness*, is published this Autumn. Born in India and brought up in Italy, Reshma’s writing portrays the inherent preoccupations of those who possess a multiple sense of belonging.

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In summer 2021, Manchester Literature Festival and Manchester Poetry Library at Manchester Metropolitan University co-commissioned Reshma Ruia to write a new poem inspired by the rich tapestry of Oxford Road and her own connections with the corridor.

MLF and MPL also commissioned Modify Productions to produce a short film capturing Reshma performing her work on location at The Whitworth, University of Manchester and Oxford Road. The film was showcased at Manchester Poetry Library from 21-23 October 2021 for the inaugural Corridor of Light alongside new co-commissions by fellow poets Hafsah Aneela Bashir and Andrew McMillan.

You can watch the film of Postcards from Oxford Road on Manchester Literature Festival’s Vimeo channel: vimeo.com/mcrlitfest

www.manchesterliteraturefestival.co.uk

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Oxford
Road
Corridor

**CORRIDOR
OF LIGHT**

POSTCARDS FROM OXFORD ROAD

'Every road is a story'
Reshma Ruia

UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER

And the days they pass The nights they fall
Like wounded birds around her feet. But it doesn't have to be this way
She thinks Discarding her Marigold gloves

Her bucket Her broom

There is life in her Yet
She flies over Oxford Road borne on shoulders of the young
Their youth - a Duracell battery keeping her afloat
At the university she makes a list of things left behind
Screaming kids

Filthy dishes

Unmade beds scowl back at her

Voices bite

Set up home inside her ear

You are too old Too wife Too mother to be a student once more
But there she sits in the library

A teenager drunk on words

The quiet eyes of books watch over her Years tick by

She scribbles on and on

She looks up one day to find herself in Whitworth Hall

Proud Upright in a black scholar's gown

Her degree A crown on her salt-pepper head

A Doctor of Philosophy

She may not rescue a life but she has saved her soul

WHITWORTH GALLERY AND PARK

A quiet afternoon A summer's day
Scrubbed clean of virus, the road gleams
A cabbie driver, I turn the meter off and wait outside
the Whitworth Gallery and stare
At the ochre rust bricks. Dare I?

The door smiles wide open. I step inside

Paintings nod. Statues grin

Standardisation and Deviation

The headlines scream

On the walls, hang textiles from far off lands

Guns. Machines. Cartoons and craft

Binding the world in a tight embrace
Tears and blood Built this space
But now there is only the soft footfall of men like me
Looking to belong
In the cafeteria, over tea and cake
I spot curlicues of clouds floating high
The park crowded with trees presses its nose
to wide glass window panes
Sycamore, beech, plane and lime,
Their bowed heads full of flower and leaf
will shelter me from storm and grief
This museum. This park
Tell me I am home

THE REFUGE RESTAURANT AT KIMPTON CLOCKTOWER HOTEL

We would like to build a road back to us
Press an ear to each other's chest
Hear the heartbeat go wild before it stops
We would like a table for two
Are you celebrating something? The waiter asks
He leads us to an alcove table shy and dark.
A menu card crowded with wine
The shimmer and smoke of mirrors
Plays tricks with our eyes
We sit down to eat
Like a caterpillar you nibble at a lettuce leaf
I chew a bird's dead bone
The clink of glasses is a funeral bell
Afterwards we walk to the end of our road
The milky stars blink above
Our shadows duck and dive
Like dancers aiming blows

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