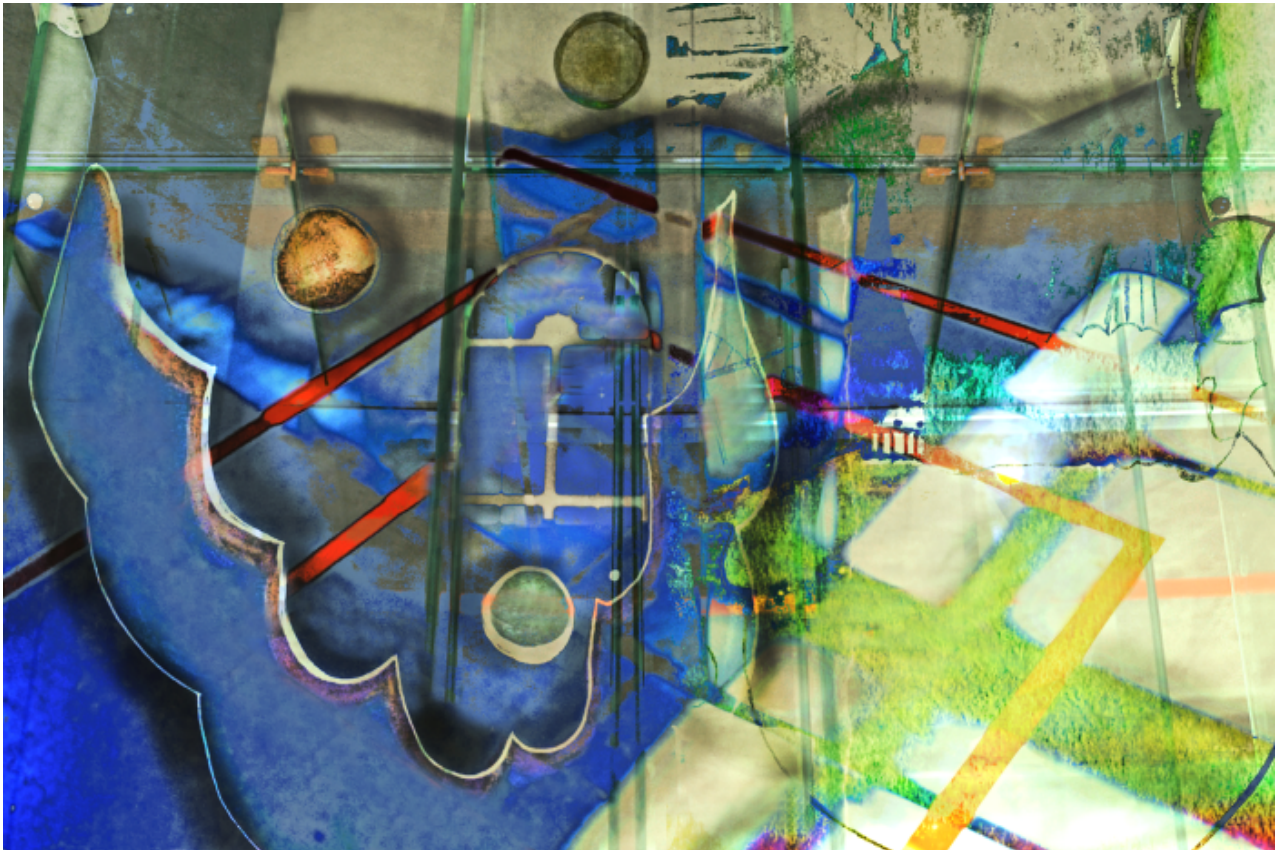


FLASH FICTION

Dazed

by Christian Lesmes



"Window that Dreams" by Anna Smetanenko

“What does this Eel eat?” I asked, watching it swim around a white bucket. “Bananas,” said the owner of the processing plant.

The long, shiny body turned its head towards me, opening a dark place in the room.

The heat was relentless; I found myself on a bus along the Caribbean coast, listening to a Vallenato song that made me think about the past.

Amarte más, no pude

To my left, I could see the plantations passing by: the vast lands filled with rows of banana plants, their bright blue sacks hanging from stems and leaves.

The bus stopped briefly to allow two men with a large crate of dark avocados to board. They wore faded sweatsuits, oversized green T-shirts, and a cap that matched their grey work boots. Their outfits were intense sun and jungle debris, like oil paintings with too much turpentine. Well-kept, hand-woven grey *Mochilas* hung from their shoulders — a place where a paper swan could perish, white and unblemished. Both men had long, thick hair and strong, work-shaped hands.

I saw them struggling to balance while walking towards the driver to pay. Their hair swayed side to side, and they could barely steady their feet — the yellow-green-blue of passing plantations reflected in their eyes. I wondered if the repeating landscape gave them vertigo. One tried to dig through the coins in his pocket, but the engraved numbers were water droplets on metal: trickling without falling, flirting in the sun.

“We get off at Gate Two,” one of them mumbled.

There was a shared sense of grief on the bus — a mutual understanding of how people here got ill while working in the plantations. Everyone else thanked God for their mixed heritage and 9-to-5 jobs, even though avocados were scarce and dry there.

The Eel continued to circle. “120 kph, 160, 180, close to the speed of light!” said the man. “Faster!” I watched the colours swirl together, a continuous green and brown ring with white plastic.

The ring shrank until it became untenably small.

Dazed, the Eel swallowed itself until the spark of life faded away, and the water was calm; our faces reflected in it.

“Unexpected,” said the man.

“But here, I have another one. Come with me; I’ll teach you how to use the electric shock.”

I told the driver I’d get off at the next stop.

I walked a muddy path along the river, to its mouth (the sea).