POETRY

Amphibian

by Natalie Bühler



"Can me if you can" (mixed media on paper 2019) by Ipung Purnomo

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Slide in for a bilingual swim, brain suddenly porous,
Grammar shifts but lexicon remains, the sun casts
The same net on the pool floor,
Pebbles petrified in concrete
And that beating breath
Then, movement
Pushing with my frog legs
To run a zipper-line across the surface:

One, two — HAH
Eis, zwoi — HAH
Du bisch denn en wasserratte

I floated in unsalted pools then, watching the frogs
Migrate at dawn, goosebumped arms
Sticking out of wet swimmers
Turn — HAH
Push off the wall — HAH
Lingered until fingertips were shrivelling;
What a funny expression away from home, a water-rat

Eis, two, wait —
Which language do I count in
Swallow saline — HAH

Remember to swim on the left — remember the pool
In Winterthur, so welcoming on lonely afternoons
Don't think of distance, don't sink
800, *800*, just fifty left — HAH
Crawl back, *eis, zwoi* — HAH
Can't remember my mother's rash
After decades of working in chlorine;
Just that frogs' skin is so porous it'll poison them
So we'd fish out and walk them to their home in the pond

One, two, HAH
Bubbles drowning noise — pull up into air again
Mami, ich bin hüt ändlich wider go schwümme
And walk myself home as far as I can.

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