

# Amphibian

by Natalie Bühler



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

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.