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

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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
Momchedjikova, Blagovesta “Poetic Takes on Verticality”.

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

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)
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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