

GRAPHICA

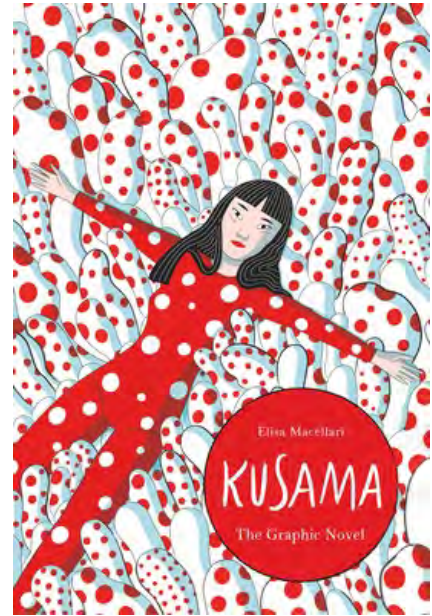
Kusama

Elisa Macellari & translated by Edward Fortes, 128 pgs, Laurence King Publishing, laurenceking.com, \$15

Vibrant illustrations by Thai-Italian artist Elisa Macellari drive this historical snapshot of now legendary installation artist Yayoi Kusama. We meet a young Kusama during her childhood in Japan during World War II. But Kusama's battles are in the home, where she is trapped with a deeply abusive mother and a womanizing father, constantly at odds. Art quickly emerges as a life-saving obsession, but her mother won't have it, tearing up her daughter's artwork in a rage. But Kusama is relentless. Kusama's mental health is widely understood to be critical to understanding her work (senior artist continues to live in a group home supporting people with lifelong mental health challenges), so a rare window into its earliest iterations illuminates beyond the books' pages. Macellari depicts the artistic fever of Kusama's early experiences with mental illness, hallucinations, and psychosis with pain and grace. Paintings start to pour Kusama's secret canvases, filling whole walls, whole rooms, whole galleries. Kusama's inner world is rolling and infinite. And what many of us have come

to see as eye candy for Instagram is Kusama's language, a means to translate a disordered inner reality otherwise unintelligible to the rest of us. The self-medication is not without its side effects. As a young artist, Kusama paints round the clock to the point of collapse.

Macellari curates snapshots from the maverick's eventful life. In one exhibit in 1965, an infinity mirror room is covered in soft sculptures: stuffed phallus-shaped protrusions. "Sex disgusts me," Kusama says. "The phallus literally horrifies me. This is how I try to overcome my phobias. It's a form of self-medication. I'd call it psychosomatic art." Her contempt for sexuality is likely a result of her adulterous father. Ironically, Kusama, a couple years later, is staging orgies in the streets of New York. These episodes from adulthood and early prominence are extra juicy: Kusama the guerilla artist, the high priestess of free love and pacifism, the underground activist, the innovator whose creations earn her the awe of her contemporaries (including her one-time bestie Salvador Dali).



We're living now in Kusama's golden age, when after some years away from the limelight, we've remembered an artistic force walks among us. Don't miss this opportunity to become (re) acquainted with the visionary.

A Song from Faraway

Deni Ellis Béchard, 240 pgs, Goose Lane Editions, gooselane.com, \$23

Fathers haunt this patchy tapestry of intergenerational fables. British Columbia-born journalist, memoirist and novelist Béchard bears witness to the way generations render stories into abstractions, tellings, repurcussions and loss. In one story, a pair of half-brothers, raised apart in different social strata, now struggle to understand their only true intersection, a distant, dissolute father. In another slice, an art historian uses an unexpected opportunity to conduct an ultimately ill-advised search for his own father. Béchard's investigative skills power these stories. Together, they grapple with the fraught mythologies of colonialism storytelling and the dark matter of the unknown hardening into unexpected truth in this accomplished, provocative book..

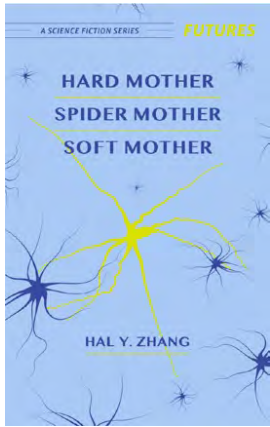
"This was the moment to tell the truth, Francis knew, to be escorted out and sent home. He would never speak to Amir and Rana again, but it hardly mattered. He barely knew them. And yet, if he told the soldier the truth, all of this would be over for him but not for them, who had done nothing wrong."

NOVEL

Hard Mother, Spider Mother, Soft Mother

Hal F. Zhang, Radix Media, radixmedia.org, \$10

Zhang conjures a frighteningly plausible near future, in which the government keeps a panoptical eye on all of its citizens. When Valerie Lang disappears, her daughter Ellery must find her, a quest that proves difficult as Valerie has managed to live a mysterious, private life. This book is a hair-raising tale with elements of body horror, but Zhang gently explores weighty themes such as the fallibility of memory, mental illness, and the complexity of mother-daughter relationships — though this particular relationship is fraught and tragic, stuck under the frightening lights of a future totalitarian China, Zhang’s assured voice renders it universal. Carving a remarkable niche within a towering genre — call it poetic speculative sci-fi at its finest — we look forward to more from Zhang. *Fans of this book may enjoy Story of Your Life by Ted Chiang, Oryx and Crake by Margaret Atwood, and The Left Hand of Darkness by Ursula K. Le Guin.*



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NON-FICTION

Fat Girls in Black Bodies

Joy Arlene Renee Cox, 192 pgs, North Atlantic Books, northatlanticbooks.com, \$12

This book is an eloquent, heartbreaking love letter to women living in bodies targeted by intersecting modes of marginality: what is it like to be fat, female, and Black today? As Cox writes, “with each additional marker of difference, the struggle intensifies.” Interrogating belonging and not-belonging in media, fashion, family, and more, Cox explores legacies of pain, familial bonds, trans lives, and modes of survival both within and outside of Black culture. In a lyrical voice that ranges from deeply personal — drawing vibrantly on the author’s past — to rigorously academic, this book carves out a safe space and a unique politics of activism, highlighting and celebrating identities that have long been kept from the mainstream. *Suggested for fans of Hunger by Roxane Gay, Shrilf by Lindy West, and Nasty Women: Feminism, Resistance, and Revolution in Trump’s America by Kate Harding.*



CAM & BEAU

\$19.95 | 9781989689073

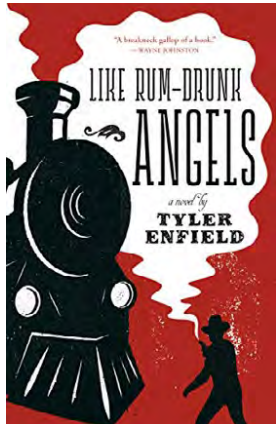
"CICHOSZ'S NOVEL, ABOUT YOUNG PEOPLE JUST TRYING TO EKE OUT AN EXISTENCE IN TORONTO AMID ONGOING PERSONAL AND EXTERNAL CRISES, HAS A PUNCHY, COMPLEX, YOUTHFUL TONE... IT'S REFRESHING TO READ A FAST-PACED, HIGHLY DRAMATIC NOVEL ABOUT QUEERISH CHARACTERS."

- QUILL & QUIRE

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NONPUBLISHING.COM

Our Best Reviewed Books From Last Year

We took a look back on this year in indie books and put together our top picks.



NOVEL

Like Rum-Drunk Angels

by Tyler Enfield, 440 pgs, Goose Lane Editions, gooselane.com, \$23

Boy meets girl. Boy seeks to impress girl. Boy sets off to earn his fortune. If the plot is familiar, nothing else is. This is a luminescent Western that relies on the pathos of its character for propulsion. There are gunslingers, bank robberies, and saloons, but more importantly there are devastating, peyote tinged insights into the best and worst of the human condition. Our hero Francis Blackstone is a touched everyman, the hero of an epic badlands fairytale complete with a happily ever after — well, something like it. An awesome take on the Wild West awaits the lucky readers of this gem.

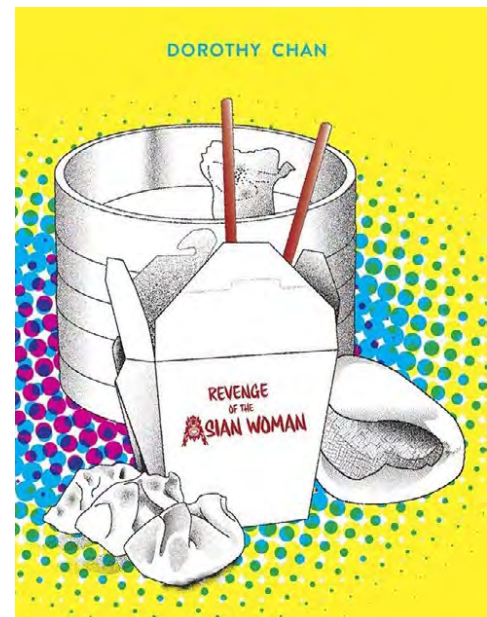
"Bob Temple finally accepts the day is a wash. The gang is divided, frothing like cretins or else wandering the desert, and there is no use trying to corral them toward anything useful till the cactus runs its course.

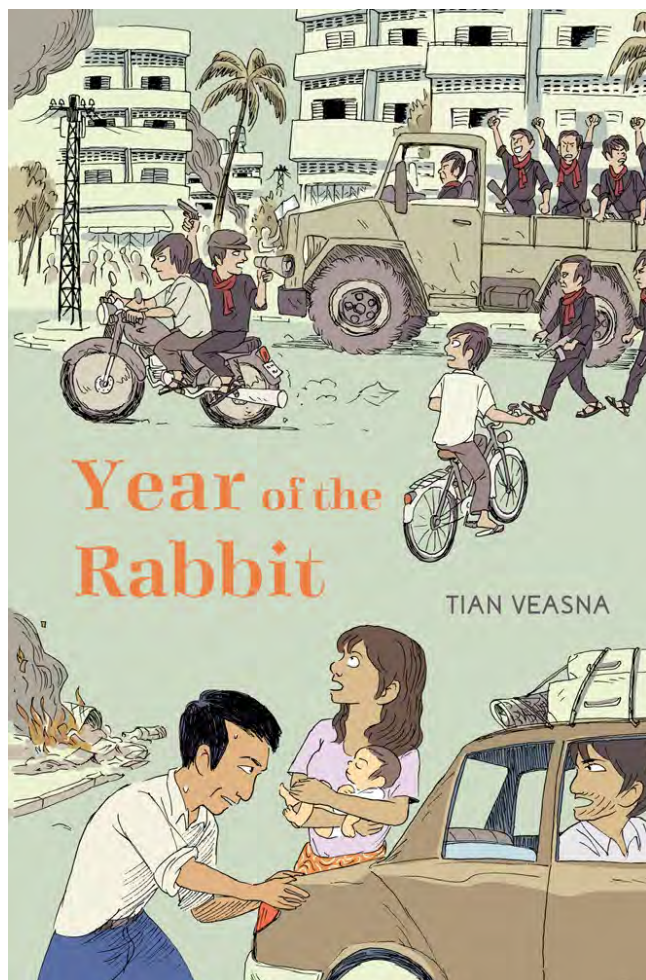
He takes his pistol and goes out a ways and stacks up stones. The sound of his pistol fire has an improbable quality, oddly muted against the hugeness of his surroundings. His hand is numb and ringing when he stops and stares at the stacks, spilled as they are. He stands in place, looking about. He is alone."

Revenge of the Asian Woman

Dorothy Chan, 104 pgs, Diode Editions, diodeeditions.com, \$18

This is less a book of poetry and more a sensual buffet, exploding with food, sex, politics, and extravagant wordplay. Wisconsin-based poetry boss Dorothy Chan eschews the evasive and ambiguous register of the genre, instead whisking you hard and fast into a chaotic world of beauty, seduction, and dining both fine and not-so-fine. Celebrating everything from glimmering dishes of caviar to late-night McDonalds bags that arrive just at the stroke of midnight, Chan's palette and politics are both expansive. She dives in with eyes open praising the "kinderwhore" fashion that lives in a world of twisted nostalgia, and summarily dismissing with boredom and disgust the white boys who think Asian food is just dumplings and potstickers (and aren't willing to learn to use chopsticks). *Revenge of the Asian Woman* is a bawdy, sexy, and deliciously sensual portrait of a lyrical straight shooter who owns real power and pleasure — and eats it, too.





GRAPHICA

Year of the Rabbit

Tian Veasna, translated by Helge Dascher, 380 pgs, Drawn & Quarterly, drawnandquarterly.com, \$34.95

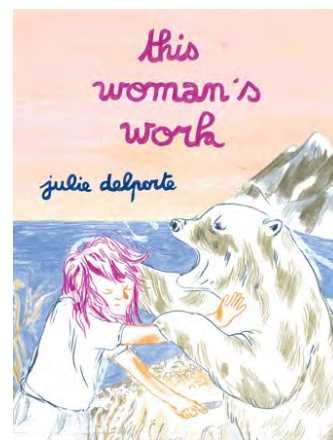
Anti-intellectual slogans are blasted from speakers at every turn as a doctor and his family are forced to join the hordes evacuating from Phnom Penh, the capital city of Cambodia. It is “Glorious, April 17” the beginning of the Cambodian genocide. In *The Year of the Rabbit*, Tian Veasna recounts a harrowing journey to Thai border while simultaneously telling the history of the brutal US-backed Khmer Rouge and its rise to power. The imagery is devastating — innocent people slain with pickaxes because the regime didn’t want to waste bullets, children digging graves, families callously separated. But there are also intimate, aching human moments of couples whispering in the dark and friends discovering one another along the long refugee roads. *Year of the Rabbit* is a necessary education in the brutal history of the Khmer Regime, but it is also an ode to the enduring humanity and resilience of one family facing unimaginable circumstances.

POETRY

ROMANS/SNOWMARE

Cam Scott, 104 pgs, ARP Books, arpbooks.org, \$17

Queer politics and poetics are steeped in the crises of early 21st-century capitalism in Cam Scott’s collection. *ROMANS/SNOWMARE* reads like an open file, an ongoing project of notebook observations and flighty connections. But Scott’s entertaining mellifluousness and observational tone do not overshadow the politics that clearly inform every word. Far from an aggressive argument, this is nevertheless a very engaged, conscientious work. Together the individual pieces come together to make bold, smart and readable poetry that manages to mean something.



GRAPHICA

This Woman’s Work

Julie Delporte, 256 pgs, Drawn & Quarterly, drawnandquarterly.com, \$29.95

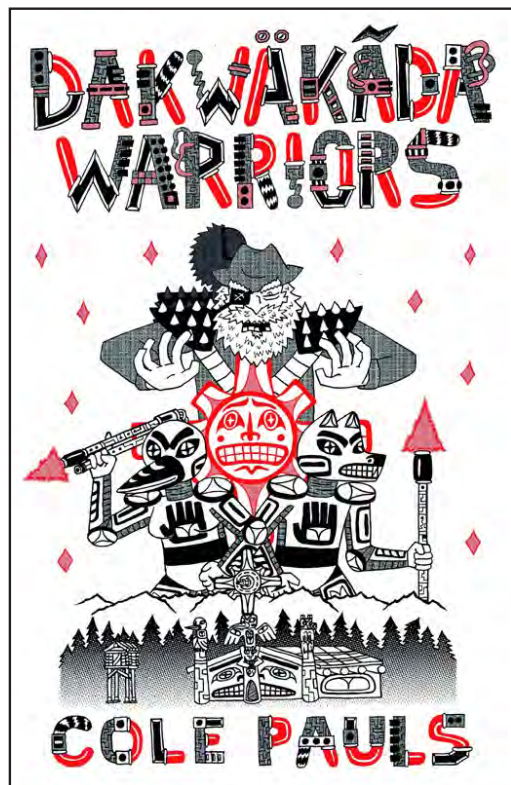
Julie Delporte’s work is quiet, but striking. Soft sketches lull and comfort both reader and speaker as painful realities slowly, then all at once, draw you in. In this beautiful graphic memoir, Delporte turns over and examines her relationship to womanhood, particularly as an artist. Making sense of her own gender is a painful excavation, as she unravels memories of trauma and sexual abuse, misogyny from within her family and without. It’s deeply personal, but offers readers a companion to explore their own relationship with womanhood. It’s a work bursting at the seams with vulnerability, whose tenderness is worth making room.

GRAPHICA

Dakwākāda Warriors

Cole Pauls, 112 pgs, Conundrum Press, conundrumpress.com, \$20

We were ecstatic when we heard Zine Awards winner Cole Pauls' decolonial space adventure was released as a full-fledged book. Together, the graphic trilogy reads



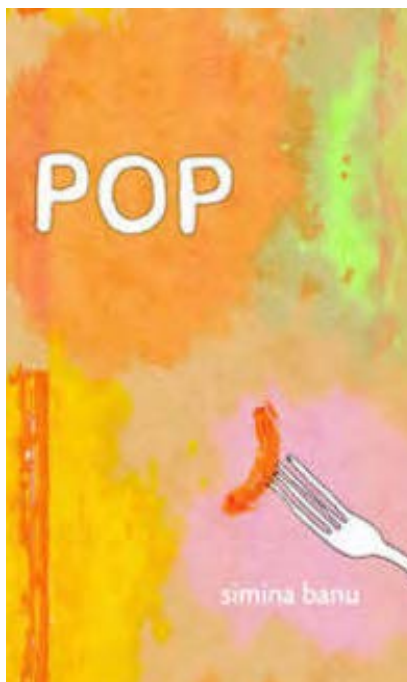
like a full-blown epic unlike any other. Pauls spins a tale of Indigenous resistance that serves as both an introduction to understanding colonialism and a rock-socking sci-fi western, all rendered in a style that boldly blends the best of contemporary punk comics with traditional motifs. Pauls famously worked with two language preservers from his hometown of (Dakwākāda) Haines Junction, Yukon, to make the book bilingual, partially written in the ancestral tongue of Southern Tutchone. This collected edition comes complete with a revised glossary, a behind-the-scenes look at Pauls' process and guest illustrations from a host of Indigenous cartoonists and artists. Miss this book, and you're missing history.

POETRY

POP

Simina Banu, 96 pgs, Coach House Book, chbooks.com, \$21.95

Pop culture references are all the rage in poetry right now, but no one uses them as masterfully as Simina Banu. In *POP*, modern love poems and junk food references become tools to lyricize the strange, suffocating experience of emotional abuse. Banu re-invents her tools of meaning-making, pushing pop images outside their natural habitats of social media slumming and crafted vulnerability. A shabby shield made of Fritos, Doritos, Cheetos attempts to protect the protagonist from her narcissistic partner and their cheap digs. Though there's a reluctance and pain throughout, Banu's methods are masterful, and her voice offers fullness and clarity.



MEMOIR

Savage Gods

Paul Kingsnorth, 142 pgs, Two Dollar Radio, twodollarradio.com, \$11

When English thinker Paul Kingsnorth writes a book, we at BP pay attention. Writer, environmental activist and philosopher, Kingsnorth is premiere independent writer working totally outside the mainstream. He is a founder of the Dark Mountain Project, which explores our collective grief over the collapse of nature, and in prose he is an introspective bard of the human condition. In this hybrid memoir and long personal essay, Kingsnorth centres his reflections on his family's move to Ireland. What follows is a rumination on restlessness, isolation and the increasingly solitary experience of being human. Kingsnorth turns over what it means to belong, eventually realizing that nobody belongs anymore. Thinking about the ramifications of this truth, he rages against the dying of the light, "Words are savage gods," he warns. "In the end, however, well you serve them, they will eat you alive." However, by the end of the book, Kingsnorth pulls back post-vent. There can still be beauty. Words too: "At midsummer in the west of Ireland, the sky is never really dark. Night doesn't fall until nearly midnight and dawn takes hours to spread across the wide sky. Whenever you wake, it is light."