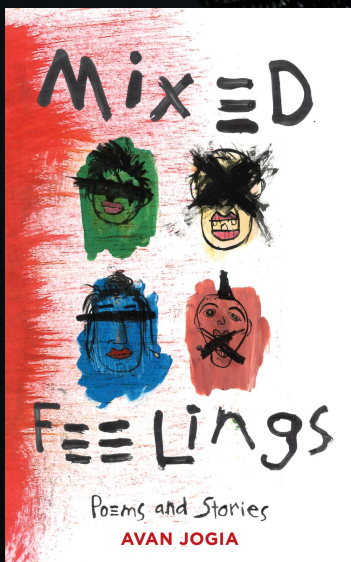


little infinite
Poetry for Life™
Voices

INTERVIEW WITH AVAN JOGIA OF MIXED
FEELINGS



Voices, Amplified



One of the first things I pitched when I came to little infinite was a column dedicated to poets who are putting in the hours and baring their souls. I wanted to use this site as a platform of amplification for writers and artists who are tackling human topics in raw, emotional, honest ways.

It's easy to see something happen in the world around you, or in your own life, make tentative eye contact with it, and then look away. The little infinite poetry audience doesn't do that. Our poets are fearless. They stare down some of the most difficult facets of humanity that people can encounter. In the months that we've interviewed artists about their craft, again and again Voices has been our favorite editorial element each week. The stories are so real. The poets are so human, and so lovely, and so wonderful.

And-- we'll just say it-- so damn savvy. What we did not expect when we launched Voices was how generous of spirit and knowledge our poets would be. Week after week, we've seen this community come together, bolster one another, and pull every reserve from their well only to turn around and give it all-- their insight, talent, professional advice, and prowess-- to their fellow poets.

It is as unselfish as it is unflinching, and it inspires us to remember, always, that this is as much a form of art as it is a professional path we can choose.

It's in that spirit that we're giving Voices a much-deserved glow-up. Each week via our newsletter, you'll be able to find an extensive interview with a poet (some professionally published, some self-published, some making serious digital waves, some telling stories in new and innovative ways). The interviews will later appear on the site, too, of course. But newsletter subscribers will get them first.

We hope you love this new Voices format as much as we do, and look forward to watching more pieces of this passion project evolve as our poetry community continues to grow.

**MALLORY VISCARDI
EDITOR IN CHIEF**

Mixed Feelings

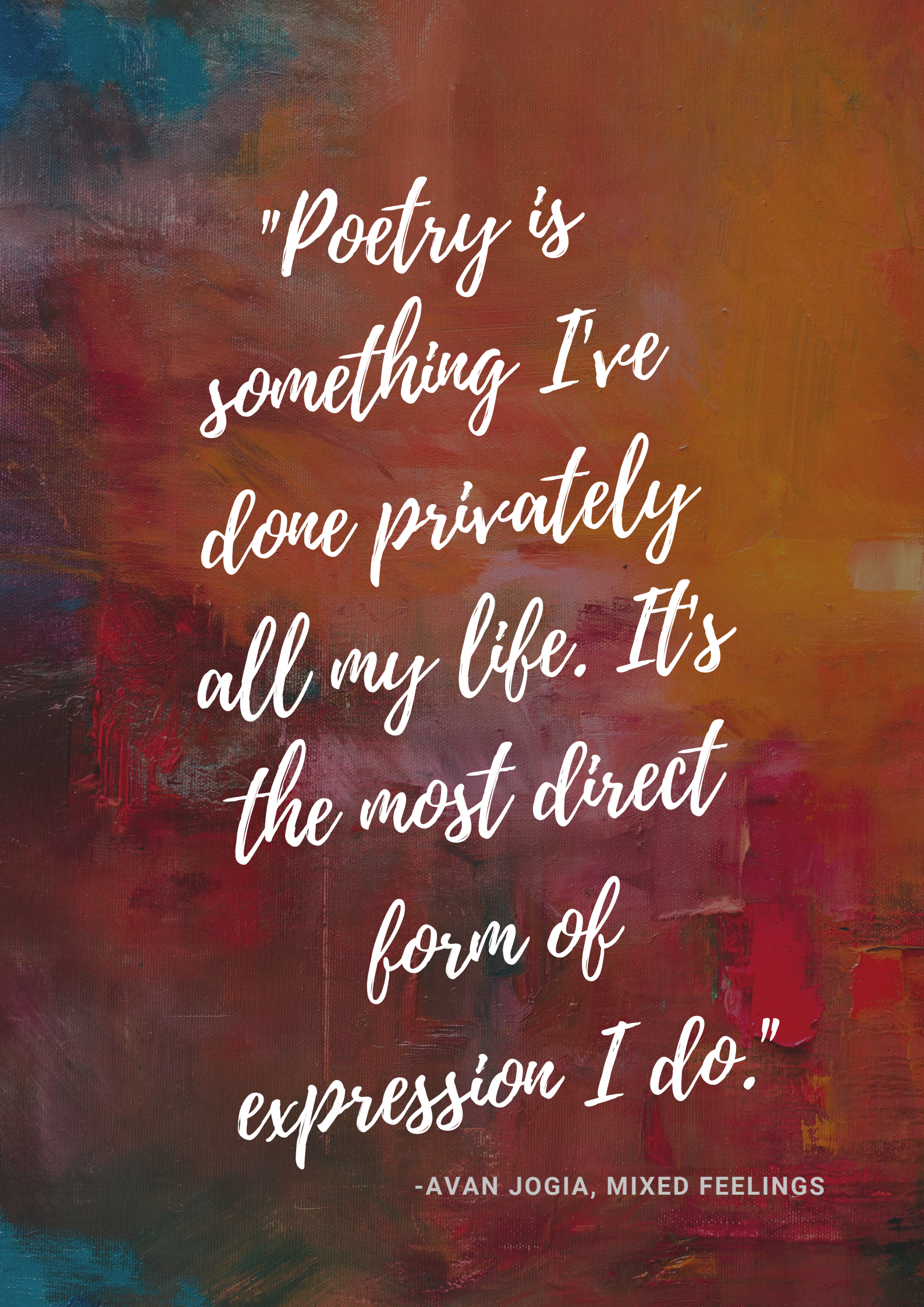
The first thing that blew us away about Avan Jogia's **Mixed Feelings** was the jarring beauty of the book. But it took almost no time at all for us to fall heart-first in love with Jogia's language, honesty, and introspective approach to his themes.

This poetry collection looks inward at how we as people identify ourselves through the lenses of mixed heritages, cultures, races, and faiths. It challenges readers to consider how those labels are externally applied, and how to reconcile the differences between how we see and define ourselves and how others see and define us.

It digs deep into the layers of meaning that encompass life as part of a mixed family, and brings together in a lovely and melodious harmony a symphony of perspectives and voices. In the hands of anyone else, the risk here would be that the voices struck discordant notes when assembled-- the topics here were not chosen with the comfort of the reader in mind, after all. But what Jogia accomplishes in **Mixed Feelings** is a brave and candid and tender and strong compilation of stories that tease out and shine light on a shared experience, however fractured it might seem to outsiders.

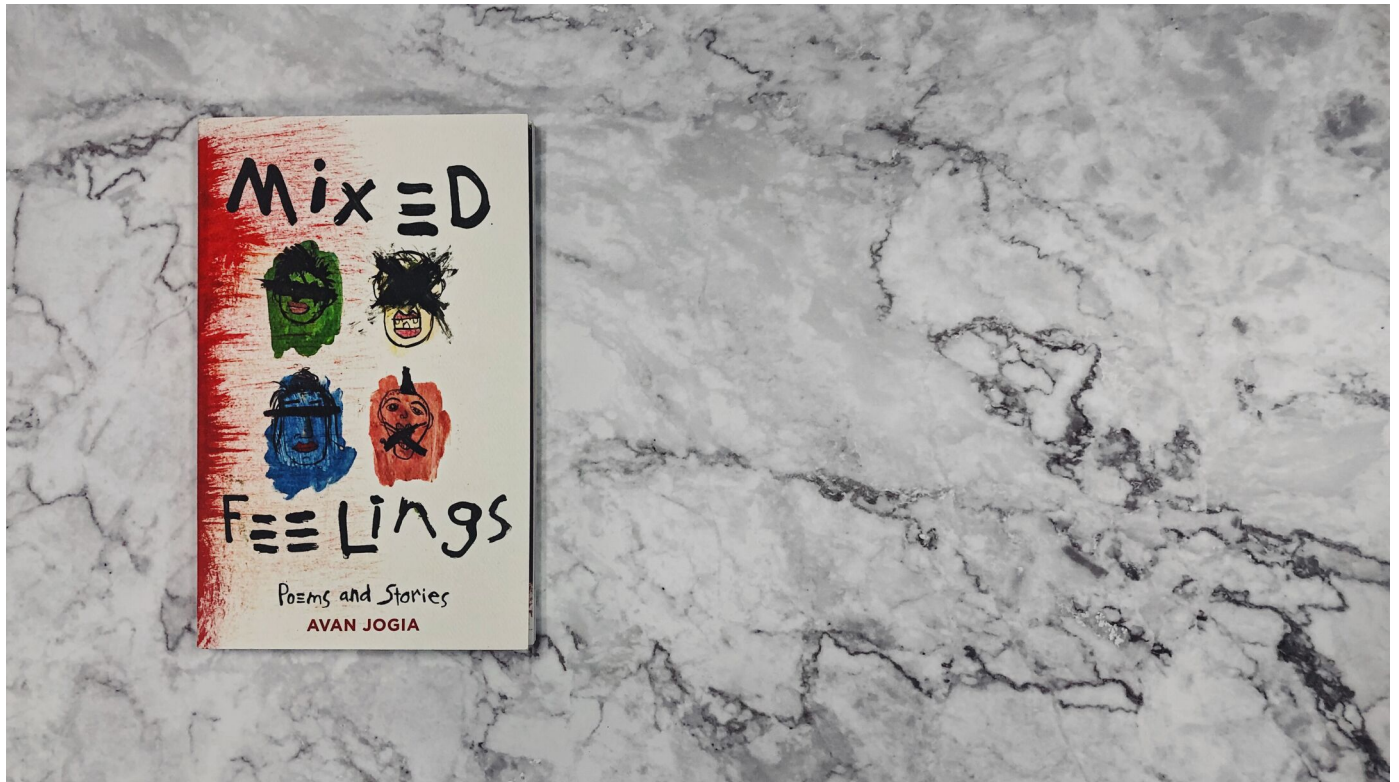
He gently calls you in and tells you his truth. He shares the truth of others. He challenges you to look at reality from his experiences, and to not look away. To step forward as part of a larger global community of thinkers and artists who seek connection and understanding, instead of blissful ignorance and a comfortable, unchallenged perspective. **Put simply, it's the poetry collection we've all been waiting for.**





"Poetry is
something I've
done privately
all my life. It's
the most direct
form of
expression I do."

-AVAN JOGIA, MIXED FEELINGS



Interview by

MALLORY VISCARDI

little infinite: Let's get right to it: This is a poetry collection centering around race and discrimination in a time when race is a very charged topic in the media. What led you to take on such an intense topic?

Avan Jogia: It was less of a desire to take on an intense topic and more of a desire to explore something that I take on every day, which is my identity.

All of us do this to a certain extent, but in a world increasingly polarized by race, being mixed adds another layer to determining your identity and where you fit in the world... and if these things truly hold any value at all in the first place.

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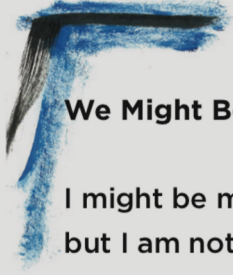
li: How did you select poetry as a medium for your contribution to the conversation?

AJ: Poetry is something I've done privately all my life, it's the most direct form of expression I do. I find it an easy way to get out my true feelings on a subject, or more elusively, multiple subjects that are mixed together and through that are nameless.

Also, words are fun to play around with.

Poetry Preview

avan jogia



We Might Be Mixed.

I might be mixed
but I am not half of anything.
I'm a full being.

I might be mixed
but I am not starved for anything.
I'm a full being.

Fruit from two trees nourishes me.
I might be different from you, although slightly.
But like me,
you perceive differently.

You see with different sight.
Please remember to add sound to your sight.
We need the shine from your light.
We need less bark and more bite.

You might be mixed
but you're not half of anything.
You're a full being.

The world deserves to
see your sight.
Your point of view makes
us full-seeing.

I AM
Not Half
of Anything
I AM a full
BEING

li: *"Mixed Feelings* serves as a dialogue starter for difficult topics that now, more than ever, need to be discussed." We wholeheartedly agree. What kinds of dialogue do you hope this collection sparks for (and by) the people who read your work? What kinds of conversations have you personally had in the wake of writing and publishing this book?

AJ: At first, it was sort of an insular conversation with myself. Trying to define what this subject was to me. That went rather badly, to be honest. It wasn't until I started interviewing people and trying to determine a collective narrative for the mixed experience that I was able to go back and look at my own life, and what being mixed has meant to me.

It is in this spirit that I hope conversations occur. Interior conversations about self-identity and exterior group conversations about collective identity, the latter being the most underrated I feel. Speaking to people all over the world about what mixed identity is has been the most incredible thing to come out of all this, and how similar all of our experiences are.

If a culture is defined by their shared experiences then maybe there is such a thing as a mixed culture that runs globally.

"If a culture is defined by their shared experiences then maybe there is such a thing as a mixed culture that runs globally."

li: *Mixed Feelings* deals a lot with this concept of proximity to identity and culture. Why do you think there has been such a struggle to mentally, culturally, and emotionally orient oneself among all the facets and factors that make up who we are as humans?

AJ: Being human is hard. There are a thousand ways to do it, and if you are like me you believe it doesn't come with an instruction manual. Orienting your identities to fit into another person's single idea of what makes you up, I think, is a pitfall.

By definition, orientation is determined by your relation to other people. I think this is where the problem lies. You can't rely on other people's assessment of your identity. It's bullshit, and not nearly as important as your own assessment.

Making that switch takes a lot of confidence and I think that is what I am promoting here if anything: Confidence in your own assessment of your identity.

li: **What parts of your self-identity made others—either those within or those outside your culture or heritage—the most uncomfortable?**

AJ: This goes back to that confidence in your own assessment of your identity thing I was talking about. Rather than pulling apart yourself and determining what is most or least acceptable to other people.

Having the confidence to stand your ground about who you are and know that you are made up of many pieces. You are a good daughter and also a bad sister. You are a loyal friend and also selfish.

Humans are hypocrites. And the more you can lace that into your sense of self, the less painful your identity becomes.



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li: One of the through-themes in the collection is this external pressure to control your emotions. Repression of self and oppression from external forces both seem to contribute to it. (Oppression first, teaching repression as a mechanism for maintaining safety.) Why is poetry such a powerful tool to you, in dealing with the repression and frustration?

AJ: That's an interesting interpretation; I see it less as an external pressure to control your emotions and more of an internal choice to be the master of them.

We are all aware of the oppression that swirls around us externally, but we determine how we are affected by it internally. Frustrating as the emotional labour is. I think there is a through-line of repression in the book but I don't think I advocate that as a solution, in a poem like "dot or feather" for instance, it's less about internally dealing with the oppression than it is about externally confronting the oppressors.

Poetry is absolutely a way of working these things out. It helps you practice a strong inner life that defends you.

li: What other modes of self-expression help you to strike a healthy balance between raising your voice and maintaining safety?

AJ: This is sort of why I think its expression over repression. Art, in general, is about this pursuit of humanity for me. Art helps me see myself more clearly and through that other people.

I have a sort of odd approach to the raise-your-voice/maintained-safety thing. I have the time, you know? I have a deep well of patience for bullshit and I think don't let my emotions get the best of me. If someone is oppressive to me I want to know why, and I want them to find out why for themselves. I have the time and I'm aware other people don't or can't for various reasons.

But for myself, if I can turn an oppressor into an ally, I'm going to.

*"If I can turn
an oppressor
into an ally,
I'm going to."*

Poetry Preview (1/2)

mixed feelings

The Kids Aren't All White.

The kids aren't all white
as they reach out of the basement
tired by now of patience
rising up to meet the rising sun
the new-dawn-green-lawn-brown-picket-fence
sort of existence
born out of persistence
and resistance
pistons pump the engine on
consistent
as they dare to jump
to shine their light on
bare pawns
unable to see what's going on
swan song
to the days that seem long gone
bye to
the wrong of the gone era
death of the past
we're the pallbearers organised and angry young Che Guevara
as we crawl out of the basement
faced with what's really been going on
still the power is strong
gripped tight the fist
and the lights are on
fight night 'cause our rights are gone
fist smite 'cause our might is long
King Kong
top of the tower
late is the hour
bang the goddamn gong

Poetry Preview (2/2)

avan jogia



The Kids Aren't all White

the kids aren't all white
and that's all right

sing long the rising song

li: What advice do you have for the generation of people coming up who also want to express their frustrations, speak their truths, hold their oppressors accountable, fight for change, and tell their stories?

AJ: I think before I was able to add my voice to the storm, I had to strengthen and galvanize myself. [It's a] *broke can't fix broke* sort of deal.

I'd say working on your own inner life is the most important thing you can do to help prepare yourself for helping externally. And just f*cking doing it. At a certain point, it's about starting.

li: What tools do you recommend they acquire?

AJ: Again, build a strong inner life. You'll be lost without it.

li: How did you balance authenticity and vulnerability with preserving the meaning and message of your stories?

AJ: The message is in the authenticity. This book is about our history. So not putting mine on display would be a cop out to the message.

li: Did you worry about keeping your message "palatable" for a wide audience? Or did you write your truth and choose not to be concerned with how it landed in the minds of others?

AJ: Making art for any other reason than [that] you have to is a mistake I think. That being said, I was aware of who would be reading, which made me want to speak more of my truth rather than edit it down.

I was making this book for a younger me, and I have enough respect for that version of myself not to talk down or redact truth.

li: What advice do you have for fellow poets, artists, and writers who want to tackle topics that cause discomfort—both for the artist in their exploration of themselves within the topic and for others reading the finished work?

AJ: I'd say if you the start from the place of, "Do I have to talk about this?" If the answer is yes, then the work won't be false. Because if you have to do it, then you will pursue the truth of the thing as it pertains to YOU. Rather than just trying to make art about a controversial subject that holds no meaning to you. You'll seem like a fraud and the work will suck.

*"Build a strong inner life.
You'll be lost without it."*

Poetry Preview

avan jogia

Flowerboys.

My brother and I were raised to be flowerboys
softly swaying in the wind,
taught that men practice kindness,
taught that showing love was the most powerful thing
we could do.

Our father was a flower too.
He grew us in his garden.

Maybe one day there will be fields and fields of
flowerboys
softly swaying in the wind.
I think the world will be kinder then.
You can be a flower too.

FLOWER
boys.



li: Did anyone in your family give you a hard time for including images / histories that they felt were too personal?

AJ: Ha. I guess we will find out. I paid respect and asked my family their opinion for sure. It's hard for artists with families that are so tight to explore that topic with full objectivity. The feelings of "Is this going to upset someone I love?" comes up a lot.

But you're not living for that person. Ultimately, you are living for you. And I think the book and me speaking my truth has brought us closer together rather than further apart.

li: What has the feedback been from family and readers on the finished product? Do you feel satisfied with the end representations of stories and personal elements of the book?

AJ: My Bapa (grandfather) was excited to see the old shop from England in the book. That has made me the happiest so far.

I think the response to the book has been overwhelmingly positive. Which is amazing, obviously, for something so personal. But as an artist, I'd advocate for disconnecting from the outcome of these sorts of things.

My job is done on this book. I've already completed this book's journey, the results mean nothing to me, and that's a practiced reaction, not natural. Because it's natural to attach to the result or how it will be received or whatever, but ultimately it doesn't serve you to care. It serves you to get started on the next thing.

li: How did poetry first strike you as an art that you'd like to create?

AJ: I was like writing absinthe-soaked lord Byron sex poetry at like 12. Didn't really fit my whole vibe you know? Being a 17th-century son of a lord with a frilly shirt. It's how I felt inside but I had no life experience to back it up.

That's how I got to the party. Poetry was escapism. Which is funny because my first book is so unrelentingly inhabiting reality, maybe [for] the next one I'll go back to the other thing.

*"Poetry was escapism.
Which is funny because
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li: How did you develop the visual elements of the collection, the painting and the photography and the letter art?

AJ: I hand-painted everything. If the poems were going to be really personal it had to look personal, too.

I am not much of a painter, but I sat down and painted 200 or so pages of images and then we assembled them. I'm actually quite proud of how it turned out and the handmade feel it gives the book.

Art Preview



li: The collection shines a lovely spotlight onto the voices of some other poets and artists, both through poetry and through essays. How did you find other writers to contribute to your book?

AJ: I reached out over the internet. A lot of bullshit on there, the internet I mean, but one of the things it does best is to help you find like-minded people.

I wanted people to tell their stories alongside mine because I wanted to show how similar we all are, despite not sharing the same mixes... that being mixed is a cultural experience unto itself.

li: What do you want to say to all the artists, poets, writers, and creative spirits out there who are struggling with their culture, their heritage, their faith, or their place in this world?


AJ: You can put down all those monikers and labels whenever you like. You don't need anyone to agree with you. In fact, you can't make people agree with you about how you see you.

But you can unburden yourself from these labels. If they serve you, great. Use them. if they hold you back, cut them out.

"You can unburden yourself from these labels. If they serve you, great. Use them. If they hold you back, cut them out."

li: What does the phrase *poetry for life* mean to you?

AJ: The whole thing is poetry... life, you know? It's ugly and long and short and beautiful and you have to do it.



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and beautiful and
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-AVAN JOGIA, MIXED FEELINGS

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TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 17

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copy today!*

