



Hong Kong International  
Literary Festival  
香港國際文學節

WRITING+

## Urban Love Poem – A Writing Prompt

### *A Generous Catalog of Particular Things*

Love, again, is attention, which can be translated into how intently we look at things we are attracted to. The city is beautiful not because we say it is; such beauty resides in the incessant grunts of bus engines, the pastel walls of aging buildings, the pigeons by a satellite dish, silent as gargoyles. Tautological as it may sound, the specific things that a cityscape allows to happen compose the city.

As writers, we don't work with brushes or colors; what we use, instead, is words and the meanings they carry. In order to communicate one's love for a city, one ought to deliver the images in their head to the readers, with as little loss as possible. A perennial trick which poets employ is to generate a catalog of concrete details. Think Marcus Jackson's "First Warm Morning, Amsterdam Avenue—"a spry deliveryman stacks boxes / of blueberries, carrots complete / with green mane..." Think Marilyn Chin's "Urban Love Poem"—"Gingko, vomit-eater of the metropolis, / city's oxygen, small men's shadows..."

Now write a list of things you've encountered in the city you love, things which have left a mark on you, from your own perspective. Stay away from abstractions and high-sounding diction at first. Look carefully and clinically at those moments/scenes/objects, and revisit them if you have to. If there is love, it will show itself in your descriptions.

After you have around twenty items on your list, read them aloud, shuffle them, and notice the pulse in the flow of those vivid descriptions. Whatever you want to say to/about the city, it's already there. Revise the poem around that center. Be carried away.