

BHAC 2019 Sussex Poetry Competition

Runner up – Lucy Cage

Swimming Off The Nudist Beach On The Hottest Day Of The Year

I like the contrast my bright new nails
make with the waves on every
paddle-handed stroke: Tango orange,
British Racing Green, the colours
of childhood summers. I like the way

my earthworm skin looks almost tan
when blessed by sea, clear water
and sunlight conspiring to cast nets
of gold across my arms. Further out
the occasional tease of pisswarm currents,

lines of Regency terraces multiplied
in every glassy roller, windows, doors, tiles:
a Kemptown gingham. To the east,
turf-skinned land swells then drops
in great chalk slabs. Bouquets of bladderwrack

smack at thighs, full fathom depth of cold
darkens under foot. The further out you swim
the less it matters if bodies on the beach
are wearing pants, some red as beef,
some chicken pink, leching and squealing

or sprawled prone in obeisance to sun.

Dionysus in Aviators reclines on pebbles,

belly a barrel of chuckles, his naked boys

ready with toasts to San Miguel.

They say:

We are all beautiful in here! We roll

like seals, we're glad as song,

put us in the good green sea and we dissolve.

Let's rearrange our clumsy bones as art and light:

in tangerine, teal, rose, and Brighton blue.