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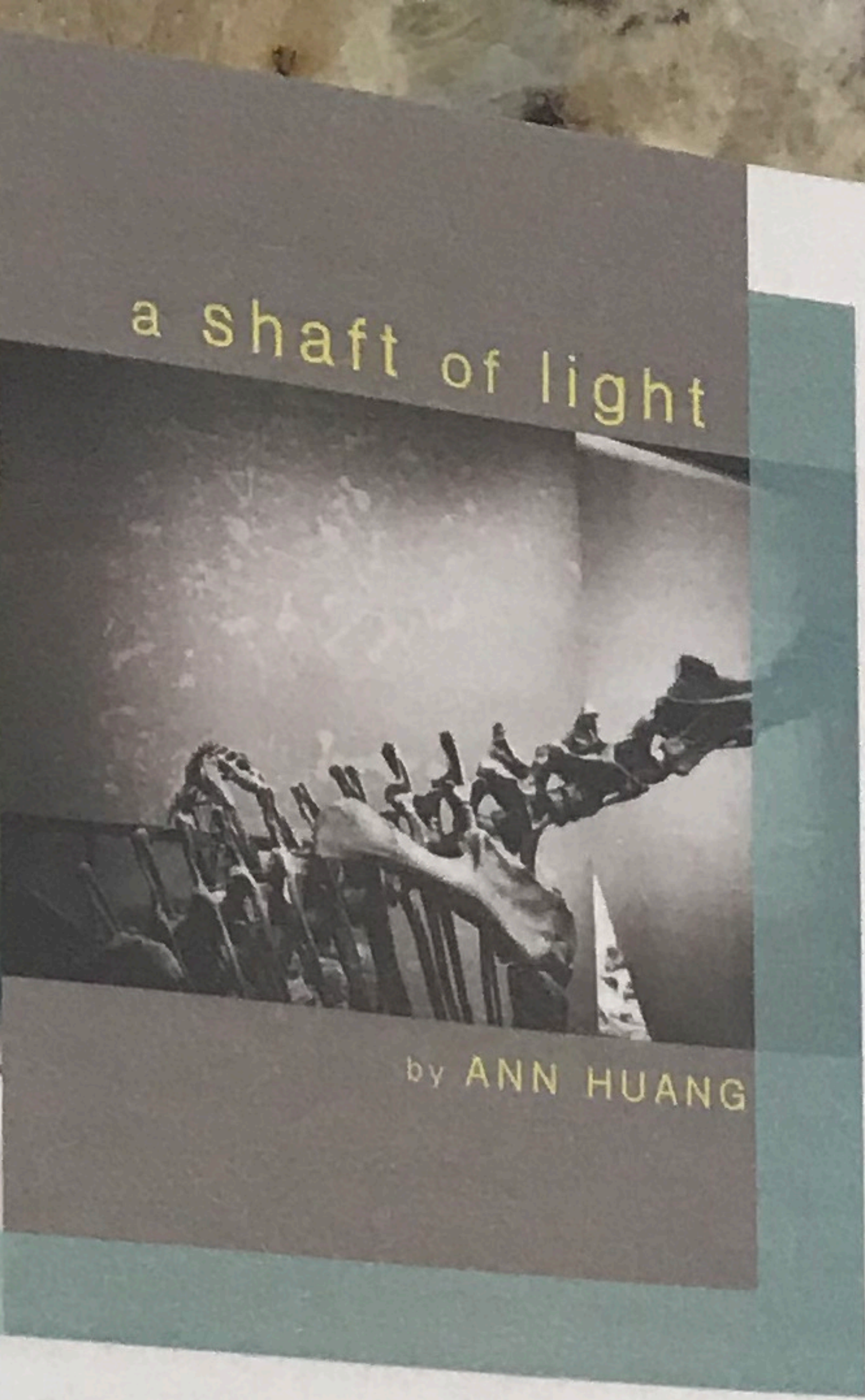
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Ann Huang ('14 W) Transforms her Multifaceted Dreams into Art

Guided by the surrealist artists of the twentieth century and her own deep subconscious, Ann Huang is turning her dreams into lyrical poems that provide a sharp commentary on the fragmented world we find ourselves in today.

Ann's newest book of poems, *A Shaft of Light*, was published this summer by Finishing Line Press. VCFA faculty Leslie Ullman says of Ann's book, "This lovely, unusual book is inhabited by a shapeshifting 'you,' who is sometimes the speaker, sometimes an intimate other, and sometimes, perhaps, figures mentioned along the way—Plath, Matisse, Obama, Jung, a grandparent, a parent. They mesh into one consciousness that is almost but not quite troubled—bemused, questing, dreaming its way into and through observed surfaces to offer partial insights that question and tease and resonate. As does the language, which is surreal and fresh at every turn."

Written specifically for socially minded women between the ages of 25–55, *A Shaft of Light* serves as a kind of collective memory for the group of people who grew up during recent significant political events, including the Clinton and Bush presidencies, 9/11, and the Iraq War. Ann says of her target audience, "This is a generation who developed a sincere interest in politics as a result of the changing world around them. They gained the right to vote and saw Barack Obama's presidency, and then were shocked to the core in November 2016."

It was the 2016 US elections which were a catalyst for many of the poems collected in *A Shaft of Light*. "It was a very low and disappointing time for me," Ann says. "It reminded me of the time we got out of China during the Tiananmen Square Protests in 1989. Horrendous memories resurfaced in my mind, and I was compelled to write about these turbulent years, where teen suicide rates and adult mental health issues had risen all at once." Everywhere she turned, the world seemed to be unraveling. Newly elected presidents around the world were tightening their control and putting on dangerous shows of power. Journalists were disappearing. Human extinction became an ever more serious threat.

Through her poetry, Ann attempts to bring people together by exploring our commonalities instead of differences. She is a melting pot of cultures herself. Ann was born in China, moved to Mexico as a teen, and later moved to the United States. Because of her multicultural and multilingual

upbringing, she says, she resists the limitations of space: "I have incessantly wished the countries that I have loved and lived in would share the same language and culture, with no borders or racial discriminations."

What better way to approach writing about the fragmentation of the political world than with the non-narrative and dreamlike gestures of surrealist language? A longtime lover of works by Man Ray, Maya Deren, and René Magritte, Ann was fascinated by the way her dreams seemed to have a logic of their own, yet possessed a "darkly rational truth." Throughout her time at VCFA, she explored the transformative philosophies of the surrealist artists she admired, as well as questioning the meanings of the dreams created in the core of her own unconscious.

In the MFA in Writing program, Ann worked closely with faculty Ralph Angel, Leslie Ullman, and Richard Jackson. Each mentor inspired and transformed Ann's work. Pairing Angel's "pure romanticism" with the exposure to contemporary painters and photographers she received from Ullman, Ann says that her writing has "defined itself as pure lyricism with a twist of contrast and 'pull' within each poem." Professionally, Jackson taught Ann about discipline and encouraged her to write one poem every night. "I am constantly in debt to them for all the good work we've put together," she says.

Collaboration and transformation are front and center in another aspect of Ann's work, as well: she is the founder of Saffron Splash Media, an experimental short film and production studio based in Newport Beach, California. Sharing a name with one of her previous book-length poetry collections, Saffron Splash Media works to manifest her dreams (and poems) into motion pictures. No longer restricted to paper, her poems burst with life and energy on the screen, just as they do in her own mind. To date, the small production crew of just five people has adapted Ann's published poems into four experimental films, including *PALPITATIONS OF DUST* (2017), which won the 2017 Prince of Prestige Academy Award for Best Experimental Film.

Before making *PALPITATIONS OF DUST*, Ann had never taken any film classes but had read film-related books and articles, particularly on the surrealist and Dadaist movements, during her final critical thesis semester at VCFA. However, to Ann, the processes of writing and filmmaking share very similar qualities. In both art forms, she carefully chooses words that visually and acoustically evoke mythologies, dreams, and the mysteries of the human psyche. Like a kind of alchemy, ink on a page transforms into palpable sentiments of loss, pain, and desire. These emotions bubbling under the surface are what drive Ann's creativity. "My poems and poetry films are intended to be consumed with introspection. When my audience navigates their memories with detailed attention to their feelings, they can explore the complex emotions of my films with fluidity."

Above all, Ann wants the power of her poetry to reside in its connectivity with her audience, in her work's ability to let readers create their own meaning and conclusions about the world. Ann says, "This allows [viewers] to be happier and better individuals in this increasingly disparate and volatile society"—a theme that runs throughout *A Shaft of Light*, too. Among the countless geopolitical and technological upheavals we are currently experiencing, Ann's poetry reminds us that we must search for joy where we can. She asks us to not merely consume life as it comes, but to live our lives actively and fully, and always, always dream.

life after the mfa