

## TAKE UP SPACE

By Vanessa Kisuule

Take up space  
Don't wait for permission or approval  
Don't let ghostly question marks  
Haunt the ends of your sentences  
You don't always have to be the one  
Laughing at the jokes  
You can make them, too  
And not just about sex or diets or tampons  
You are not the wing tip tick on a quota list  
A fleeting footnote on the final page  
A decorative nod to 'equality' on the stage  
Push at the brackets choking your voice  
Your potential cannot be pressed  
Between thumb and forefinger anymore  
Take up space  
Wear pink skirts or black Doc Martens  
Know that souls can dance unchecked  
Beneath the fortress of a burka  
As well as baggy t-shirts and ripped jeans  
Shave your legs or don't  
Smile from ear to ear or don't  
Liberation has no dress code  
Ettiquette or secret dialect  
Give yourself the space to be fickle  
To fumble with your faith, to fail  
To fluff up your lines and make things up  
Your shabby, slipped stitch mistakes  
Make you miraculous  
A goddess of spit and sweat  
Stumbling in a pit of phoenix ashes  
Take up space  
Believe the compliments you are given  
Give yourself the benefit of the doubt  
Don't doubt the benefits  
Of being the brightest shade of you  
On the spectrum  
You  
You with the slouching shoulders prone to shrugs  
And the throat full of half formed whispers  
You are indispensable  
Celebrate the women you share life, love, liquor  
Or the occasional tube journey with



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POEMS

Exchange small smiles like a secret handshake  
 We are walking pillars of defiance  
 In every exhale of breath  
 And assured step of foot towards threshold  
 Run your tongue along the swords  
 Of the women who fought before us  
 Wear the legacy like a pair of box fresh trainers  
 Lean in close  
 Rest your head on each other's shoulders  
 The journey has been long  
 But now you can  
 Take up space  
 In any way you choose  
 Maybe you will knock patiently at the door  
 Or flex your knuckles  
 Before karate kicking it down  
 It does not matter  
 As long as you know that you  
 Don't belong outside  
 In the chill of indifference and fear  
 Don't wear your body  
 As if this sacred package of skin  
 And nerves and blood rush restlessness  
 Were an accident, a graceless misstep of fate or fortune  
 When you hold yourself with joy and purpose  
 No misguided man can ever  
 Make a wounded elegy of your flesh  
 Step into the room  
 When asked for your name  
 Pronounce it with all the music  
 You can squeeze from its syllables  
 Don't shrink yourself  
 Like a slither of self loathing soap  
 When you walk down the street  
 Don't cower in anticipation of cat calls and stares  
 It is they who should skulk  
 And slouch and shrivel in shame  
 Not you  
 You go ahead  
 And take up some more space  
 Laugh for longer and louder  
 Than what's deemed appropriate  
 Let your cackles rise up into the sky  
 Like a chorus of homesick angels  
 When your favourite song comes on  
 Don't be fearful of an empty dance floor

Unzip the stillness with your teeth  
Let rip the punk rock in your gut  
The hunger of your castanet hips  
Eat with relish  
Chase at every stray crumb with your fork  
Lick the icing off each prong  
With ironic porn star gusto  
The revolution starts small  
At your dining table  
The newsagents  
The Friday night club queue  
Your mirror reflection  
Take up space  
Love beyond the confines of your arm span  
Learn wider than the textbooks on your shelves  
So as the world oils the hinges of its doors for us  
We can take our rightful place  
Behind the steering wheel of the future  
And finally, rightfully, gloriously  
Take up space



POEMS