

# ***The Striped World*** **by Emma Jones**



Born in Sydney and educated at the universities of Sydney and Cambridge, Emma Jones is one of a number of poets on the Next Generation list who have benefited from rights-of-poetic-passage residences at the Wordsworth Trust. It would be too simple to say that her poems replay the new world / old world tensions that arise from having a foot in both hemispheres, but her work is thoughtfully concerned with encounters and exchanges between systems. 'The bars were the lashes of the stripes / the stripes were the lashes of the bars' as she puts it in 'Tiger in the Menagerie'.

## **Waking**

Here it is again, light hoisting its terrible bells.  
As though a world might wake up with it –

the moon shuts its eye. Down in the street  
the same trolley is playing the pavestones.

For twenty-five years I've been waking  
this way. There was one morning

when my mother woke and felt a twitch  
inside, like the shifting of curtains.

She woke and so did I. I was like a bird  
beating. She had no time for anaesthetic.

We just rolled from each other like indecent genies.  
Even the nurses were startled.

Now she says the world and I were eager  
from the start. But I was only waking.

## **Tiger in the Menagerie**

No one could say how the tiger got into the menagerie.  
It was too flash, too blue,  
too much like the painting of a tiger.

At night the bars of the cage and the stripes of the tiger  
looked into each other so long  
that when it was time for those eyes to rock shut

the bars were the lashes of the stripes  
the stripes were the lashes of the bars

and they walked together in their dreams so long  
through the long colonnade  
that shed its fretwork to the Indian main

that when the sun rose they'd gone and the tiger was  
one clear orange eye that walked into the menagerie.

No one could say how the tiger got out in the menagerie.  
It was too bright, too bare.  
If the menagerie could, it would say 'tiger'.

If the aviary could, it would lock its door.  
Its heart began to beat in rows of rising birds  
when the tiger came inside to wait.

## **Exhibit**

On August 7, 1974,  
Philippe Petit, high-wire artist,  
who wishes to live very old,  
took a bow and arrow and fishing line  
and bridged the two towers  
of the World Trade Center in New York.

He called it an artistic crime.  
And onlookers said there was no wind  
when he crossed the line, back and forth,  
eight times or more. He just exhibited  
the courage of those extraordinary steel workers,  
who feel below them, swinging, vacant space.

## **Discussion Ideas**

- 'Waking' is the first poem in Emma Jones' debut collection, a slot traditionally reserved for the poem which introduces a writer's poetic manifesto to the reading world. What might this poem prepare you for, what would you be looking for in a book which began like this? Reading the other two Emma Jones poems we've selected, or reading the whole book – do you find it?
- What wish might an 'indecent genie' be asked for, or grant? Are there any wishes in this poem? Who is asking them? Are they granted?

- If you are the menagerie, what is the tiger? If you are the tiger, what is the menagerie?
- Here's more information about Philippe Petit, as mentioned in 'Exhibit' - [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philippe\\_Petit](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philippe_Petit). Is 'he *just* exhibited the courage ...' a fair commentary on Petit's activity?
- Emma Jones' book was published in 2009, the World Trade Centre attacks took place in 2001. Do you think 'Exhibit' was written before or after the attacks?

Emma Jones was born in Sydney, Australia and studied at the universities of Sydney and Cambridge. Her first book, *The Striped World*, was published in 2009 and won the Forward Prize for Best First Collection, the Queensland Premier's Literary Award for Best Collection and was shortlisted for the John Llewellyn Rhys Prize. In 2009-10 she was poet in residence at the Wordsworth Trust.

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