

A Lens to Threads: 2025 Issue of Open Mic: A Creative Writing Journal

American singer, songwriter and civil rights activist, Nina Simone, in her reflection of the role of the artist, famously stated that:

“An artist's duty, as far as I am concerned, is to reflect the times. I think that is true of painters, sculptors, poets, and musicians. As far as I'm concerned, it's their choice, but I **choose** to reflect the times and situations in which I find myself. That, to me, is my duty. And at this crucial time in our lives, when everything is so desperate, when every day is a matter of survival, I don't think you can help but be involved.” (Simone cited in Nevins, 2021).

Almost seventy years since Simone's clarion call, it still reverberates with many an artist, lying at the nucleus of who we are. In our unique set of desperation where the world has seemingly gone mad and community, connection and empathy has systematically been severed, this year's Udubs Open Mic events, a joint project between the University of the Western Cape's (UWC) Writing Centre and Library have offered a platform for students on campus to process their challenging lived experiences and through this expression allow them to foster a sense of community on campus (Dison cited in Mtyala, 2025). Beyond the event, students are offered the opportunity to submit their work to the *Open Mic: A Creative Writing Journal*. This journal was established in 2024 to provide students with a platform to express themselves creatively. It aims to help them garner the necessary expertise to expand their reach through publication. For students like the authors of this editorial, it serves as a chance to become skilled in the labyrinth that is the world of publishing. They can take on roles as journal managers, reviewers, and editors. This issue is a result of two Open Mic events and hundreds of hours of work from students and administrators from the various organisations throughout the university community, coming together as they understand that creativity, in any form, acts as a connection to ourselves, to others and what matters most, awakening, transforming, and reminding us that we are not just surviving (Permall cited in Mtyala, 2025).

In this second edition, aptly titled *Threads*, artists reflect upon our divided world, reckoning with how we got here, who we are as a result and what possibilities are there for us to fuse these severed lines of connection to illicit change. This is represented in six overarching themes of troubled masculinities, navigating race, identity, grief, intergenerational conversations and peace.

Nsuku Mdau's "Men Say No Too," and Khongelani Njomane's "Speak Out" offer the opening gambit to the concept of troubled masculinity, asking critical questions about what it means to be a man in today's world. Lee-Ann Williams, in their piece "Beef", emerges as a response, reflecting on the female body upon which this troubled masculinity is exercised violently.

Ibongwe Mguni's "I Refuse to be Called a Black Woman" and Wendall Ockert's "The Social Politics of the Coloured Identity" bring to the forefront issues of navigating racial identity as a person of colour, thirty-one years into the project of the "Rainbow Nation."

Lwandiso Sijemlana's poems, "Out Run My Shadow" and "The Un-Objective Human," highlight the struggle with understanding one's own identity and one's sense of being in a world that demands conformity.

Amohelang Mopeli's "After The Thunder" and "Taught by Her Silence" offer colourful examinations of the impact of grief and sadness on one's psyche and the journey of healing that one undertakes.

Ntsako Lyn's "Kasi Tours", Lesego Kgatla's "Reflection of an African Household" and Omphemetse Matlou's "Miseducation of a Gen Z" represent a new generation in conversation with history and those who were an integral part in its creation, questioning the families, communities and societies that they have inherited.

Miriam Tandiwanashe Mukonza's "Senzani Na?" And Oluwaseyi Agboola's "Culture of Peace" reflects upon the state of this world, offering a call to action for peace. These emerged from a joint Open Mic and dialogue event between International Student Affairs, Writing Centre, UWC Library and this journal under the theme "Act Now for a Peaceful World." This event, commemorating the International Day of Peace, observed by the United Nations on the 21st of September, is expanded by Oluwaseyi Agboola's reflective piece.

Visually, this issue is interpolated with artwork from independent artists, Prince the Great and Mische Muller. This, alongside three artists, Siphosethu Dyan, Khwinana Mathapelo and Lutah Griffiths from the Art and Identity workshop held by the Deputy Vice Chancellor's office of Student Development and Support, serves to visually tie in the threads represented within this issue.

We, as the journal editors, hereby invite you, the reader, to join us on the journey as we travel through these powerful themes in our *Open Mic: A Creative Writing Journal* 2025 Edition. May the realities of our desperate times be reflected to you, and may you find the underlying thread to be not despair but hope.

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Student Editors: Open Mic: A Creative Writing Journal.

Reference List

Mtyala, Q. (2025). *UWC's Open Mic leaves audiences spellbound as students come out to perform*. [online] Uwc.ac.za. Available at: <https://www.uwc.ac.za/news-and-announcements/news/uwcs-open-mic-leaves-audiences-spellbound-as-students-come-out-to-perform> [Accessed 9 Dec. 2025].

Nevins, D.L. (2021). *Artists reflect the times they live in - The Fulcrum*. [online] thefulcrum.us. Available at: <https://thefulcrum.us/nina-simone>.