

Red Wheelbarrow

LITERARY MAGAZINE

National Edition, 2022





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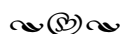
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Red Wheelbarrow

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SIXTH ANNUAL POETRY PRIZE



ART BY HASSAN ALNAWAR, JANET FINE,
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BOOK REVIEWS:
CHARLES ATKINSON, PAOLA BRUNI & JORY POST,
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POETRY: SALINAS VALLEY STATE PRISON
FIRST ANNUAL CALIFORNIA PRISON POETRY CONTEST

From 1976 to 1999 this magazine was known as *Bottomfish*, a name that referred to neglected, overlooked writing that had (metaphorically) fallen to the bottom of the sea. We hope that *Red Wheelbarrow* also signifies unpretentiousness and the casting of a wide net in search of new, exciting young writers as well as an ongoing commitment to originality, courage, and craft.

Red Wheelbarrow publishes twice a year. The National Edition publishes literary and artistic works from all over the country and the world. The Student Edition is open to De Anza students. We welcome submissions of all kinds, and we seek to publish a diverse range of styles and voices. Submission Deadline for 2023 National Edition: September 1st.

Poetry: submit up to five poems

Fiction: submit one short story (up to 5,000 words) or up to three flash fiction pieces

Drama: submit one play or screenplay (up to 5,000 words)

Creative Nonfiction: submit one personal essay (up to 5,000 words)

Photographs and Drawings: submit up to five b/w prints or digital files (.jpg, .tiff, or .psd format); please do not send originals

Comics: submit one b/w strip

Other: submit one!

Preferably please submit text files in MS Word (.doc or .docx) format.

Keep your name and contact information separate from the actual submission.

All *Red Wheelbarrow* submissions are judged anonymously.

Judges for all contests make their decisions independently.

Red Wheelbarrow

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Front cover, frontispiece, p.1: *Love and Courage*, Yolanda Guerra

Back cover: *Familia and Sacrifices Made*, Yolanda Guerra

Frontispiece, p. 2: *A Mother's Hope of Returning Children*, Yolanda Guerra

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The body of a boy lies on the pavement exactly
like the body of a boy.

*

It is a peaceful country.

This is a time of peace.

I do not hear gunshots,
but watch birds splash over the backyards of
the suburbs. How bright is the sky
as the avenue spins on its axis.
How bright is the sky (forgive me) how bright.

lines from: "In a Time of Peace," Ilya Kaminsky,
Deaf Republic, 2019, Graywolf Press

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Love and Justice | Yolanda Guerra



Woodblock Print

Laundry Line | Robert S. Pesich

The air wears my white shirt today
better than my body

Stains that were once plainly visible
now change shape within my dirty interiors

Some dark corners still hunger for my voice
never mind my daily correspondence

I say hello when my first mentor returns
the dark junco perches on the neckline

Sings I too can continue
as a horizon, this moment

He wipes his beak then takes a thread
takes flight

Contact Tracing | Robert S. Pesich

Her fevers never good enough
to get her admitted and social had been cut

She left for the Crossroads Shelter
on International and 76th

Had chills and sweats all night here
where she scratched herself open

Left behind blood-stained linen
looking like a map of some country

We took it all out
burned it in the ditch

Port-of-Entry | Robert S. Pesich

How many children did you process today?
Their fingers a little thicker than cigarettes?

What promises did you make on our behalf
to separate them from their family?

What did you say to the grandmother
who triggered alarms, US-made shrapnel
lodged in her neck for decades?

How many decades will the steel cages live
and grow in our children?

While they wait, who holds them and
who sedates them with:

Divalproex
Clonazepam
Lurasidone
Ziprasidone
Olanzapine
Benztropine
Duloxetine
Guanfacine

without consent

Didn't you say "Don't worry" to the Senators
on their fact-finding mission?
"Children are quick learners."

In the bright 24/7 light they start with Yes, No, Stop and
No Climbing, No Yelling, No Singing, No Hugging.

What bedtime stories are you reading
to your children? And with your last draw on your cig
what do you study? The wind? Your ash?

Beginning of the Boat Trip | Andrew Gent

In the beginning
we were all happy enough.
The guide told us
to keep our hands inside the boat.
The man in the green coat and white hat
was not paying attention.
Or refused
to accept instruction
from the likes
of a farmhand dressed
as a bank guard. Bad to worse.
The woman sitting next to him
might be his wife, or a complete stranger
for all she cared. They did not speak
the entire time or show any recognition
of the natural wonders they were about
to be exposed to. The trip, when appropriate
rules are observed, is entirely safe
and lasts, we are informed,
approximately 45 minutes.
Several members of the party
are considering
what else they might have done
with the time.

Bottomless Pit | Andrew Gent

Everything has a name
including the nothing
next to the roadway
you can look into
and see

nothing
but darkness. Of course
there is *something*
down there
but what

is in doubt.
We assume
years

of rocks and pennies
thrown by curious
grade schoolers
and delinquent parents
showing off.

Poised,
hand to ear,
awaiting the inevitable

clatter
that proves them both
right and wrong.

reasons for living | Erik B. Brown

after Reginald Shepherd

it's the summer before becoming ourselves
final fire turning sand to glass no one
photographed every pacific sunset is one
and yet all of them—photos are a scam like people
who offer up a moment like a tenderness
a eucalyptus frail and flammable—
old growth clearcut no clean rain nobody
just a stone swallowed in us forever thing
evades us every day except for *that* day
we live like a white pine does for
no one dark and quiet—one grew through my belly
paralyzed and not myself was I a tree? was that
the reason? a tree might be a reason
its silhouette even.

American Femme Fatale | David Denny

Like Barbara Stanwyck in *Double Indemnity*,
she spots our naiveté beneath the fakery
of our porkpie hat and blue woolen suit,
our salesman's grin and impish demeanor.

She smells our desperation when we lean in
to inhale her perfume. She cracks wise
and turns an aloof shoulder, then winks.
Or so we think. Was that a wink?

She plays us like a trout lured into the shallows—
just for kicks at first, but later she fries us
in a pan with lemon and butter, dash of salt,
dash of pepper, splash of whiskey. Down

her long, elegant gullet we go, sweet Jesus,
like the lump of a rat down the cool length
of a shiny garden snake, who slithers
on back to the shade of the gnarled old tree

whose strange fruit droops into the shadows,
whose fruit hangs low, real low down,
whose misshapen bittersweet fruit resembles
the jackboot, the cudgel, the noose.

Was You Ever Bit by a Dead Bee? | David Denny

Bogie is sitting in a smoky bar in a colonial Caribbean outpost filled with Warner Brothers' tropical props—all the usual palm fronds and political menace.

Hoagie Carmichael is noodling at the piano.
Lauren Bacall is hustling a rich American out of his wallet. Of course there are Nazis afoot.

People from the underground resistance keep asking Bogie to help. He's got a boat. He knows the waters. He's sympathetic. But he sticks his neck out for nobody.

Nazis? Yeah, what else is new? The world is full of assholes. He's exhausted by the prospect of spending his life fighting them—for once you join the fight, you can't

unjoin. You can't run their guns in the fog once and expect to get your slacker life back. And then there's his old pal Walter Brennan, a sometimes deck hand and all times

loveable drunken coot. Who'd watch out for him?
Hoagie sings about grace under pressure. His moody ballads tend towards jazzy trills designed to lull listeners

into buying more watered-down drinks. When Bacall sings Hoagie's world-weary lyrics, the place lights up. Bogie too. He gains another decade of life just by standing

next to her. Even so, he sparks one unfiltered cigarette after another. Ten years later, unable to shuffle more than a few steps without collapsing, he will allow Bacall

to stuff him into the household dumbwaiter in order to lower himself down to the parlor for cocktails with Huston. Sometimes no one sees the climax coming.

Serenade Concoction | Doren Robbins

Yet “the lightning is a yellow fork from tables in the sky” Emily Dickinson reminded her enough to collate the material into a file of interpretations overcrowding the other file on the infallibilism inherent in metaphors, and she remembered he first dog-eared the page for her where the Dickinson image appears two lines from the bottom (in his copy), and she never considered this declaration from Dickinson before, how the utensil, the eating, the yellow, the fork, the lightening connected tables, the face and the bottom of the body and eating to a place the lightening dropped from—it allowed her to see a Pleiades of his hands, she saw the Wine Star, she couldn’t describe the arrangement, she’d get it all wrong she wasn’t suffering from a type of information asymmetry, she simply lacked the heave of words the tone relies on, so he would have to trust her.

from *Sympathetic Manifesto, Selected Poems 1975–2015*

Book Review—Puppetmaster: Doren Robbins’

Sympathetic Manifesto (Spuyten Duyvil, 2021) | John Olson

Doren Robbins is a master of the human comedy. The title—*Sympathetic Manifesto*—reflects the tenor of the work. It has the rancor of a rant, the charged inventiveness and zeal of a manifesto but the warmth of an arm around your shoulder. That oft-used phrase “tell it like it is” is apt here.

There’s an edgy rawness to the work redolent of Dorn and Celine and Fielding Dawson. It states its case with confidence, and argues a seasoned voice. It has an honest grain and an amiable density, the horsepower of poetry in an engine of prose. “I never wanted a watered-down story,” reads the first line of “Two Puppets In One,” and dangles a commentary on the human condition in the 21st century line by line, as if the lines were strings holding and manipulating its characters, its metonyms and metaphors, and making them dance to the tune of an inner *Danse Macabre*.

“Two Puppets In One,” page 117, caught my interest because I’m fascinated by puppets, be they the Indonesian puppets of Wayang or a Punch and Judy show or a creepy, wise-cracking dummy on the knee of a world-weary ventriloquist. It’s a figural theatre that underscores the starkness of our situation, the impotence, the inability to fulfill the narratives we’ve crafted for ourselves. Life does feel pre-determined much of the time, my actions the result of forces and strings to which I’m attached without being fully cognizant of them.

The next several lines read, “Every denial leads to lobotomy / everything watered-down is a pack of lies.” Amen to that, brother. Denial is lethal. It makes people stupid and apathetic. See all those people walking down the sidewalk as if in a trance, enthralled with a handheld device in their hands? Puppets. Operated by technocratic strings, a digitalized world in which reality has been rendered virtual and Sisyphean, a burlesque of billionaires and deluded mortals, vaxed, masked, and lobotomized.

This is the rancorous part of the title, the manifesto, the aggressive stance, the move toward something better, the black robe—*kurogo*—of a Japanese Banraku master, visible but invisible, theatrical but actual. The sympathetic part is its focused solicitude: poetry may not be the antidote, but it is a subversive energy. It won’t create a utopia if—like a paper flower—

you immerse it in water and watch it expand. But it will open your eyes. Reattach that prefrontal to your brain and give you a pair of scissors to cut the strings.

The word *puppet* is used repetitively in the first part of the poem as it elucidates our situation as workers in an age of pharaonic income inequality, inflated prices and unchecked exploitation:

The worst lie is the way they've set up and advertised
the scarcity of work—so every puppet in the audience
is grateful to have any available job in the system:
paint-scraping puppets, pipe-fitter puppets, part-time
toxic clean-up crew puppets, factories of women puppets
packed and bunched at counters because they can fit more
of their smaller bodies into the factory space puppet
majority fits right in.

The next section of the poem unfolds the author's own puppetry, the slavish pattern of shit jobs all too familiar to many of us, poets especially. These jobs include delivery driver for a restaurant called Soul Charm BarBQ, dishwashing, and a stint as a line cook after the night cook "flipped out on *black beauties* / and stabbed himself in the thigh."

And then there are bosses. I've had good bosses. They exist. But the bad ones can drive you mad. The ones who know they've got the strings and can make you dance and move however they want, and take a sadistic pleasure in it. And here Robbins pops up with a marvelous phrase, "the velour of hating bosses," which evokes those occasions in me when the first two beers after work kicked in and hatred for a boss can begin to feel dangerously voluptuous, sybaritic in ways I don't quite understand. But it's huge, and complicated, and Rabelaisian, "which must explain why in the powerless / logic of being a puppet hating bosses during the years / 1971–1983 I lived in an apartment with bathroom so small / you had to shit sideways."

Not all the poems in this collection are this acerbic. The book as a whole is a compendium of some 40 years of writing. Tones and undercurrents vary depending on the context, the circumstances, the mood and disposition. Each poem presents an aggregate of phenomena that coheres around the kind of perspective—multiple perspectives—that will fuel and

drive a stream of consciousness immersed in the amphetamine of poetry. Some poems, such as “The Red Fan,” have a more quietly meditative and inventive manner, somewhat akin to the metaphysical poets, though from the perspective of someone working a broad gamut of jobs in the contemporary United States. “I hold up what’s left of a red fan,” the poem begins, “that burned apart inside of me.” This is a conceit redolent of Donne. The poem is about doing demolition work, “and how I used to take my tools / off to the side away from the crew, thinking I was / clearing away something within myself, and justified / the work.” The irony at the core of the poem’s reflections is the act of destruction—tearing out walls and floors and carting away stucco and lath—all within the context of a poem, which is a making, the bloom of language smelted into the metal of metaphor. Jobs may demolish our dreams, our reveries, while also providing means to resist. Friction makes sparks. For art, thought, contemplative practices are what keep us from being annihilated, and drive the engines of transformation. This is the energy I find running throughout Robbins’ work, that William Carlos Williams focus on the bustle of the everyday, but tweaked into a mode of defiant tolerability. It’s all about preserving one’s ontological autonomy, of doing what is necessary while employing a language “out of whack / with the example of goodness, because we shouldn’t need / of all things a virgin for comfort, but a different life.”

—John Olson

River Storm | Doren Robbins

He saw the pet cicada, he saw the orphan, that's what they called each other—she buried the doll with poor eyes, she buried her in a coat—"Which coat?" he asked. "A good coat? An outgrown coat? A coat doesn't just grow out of one of your flower boxes."—"Enough that I buried the doll," she said. Saw her looking down the rope-knot entangled bridge chopped-up floor escalator path narrow runway ramp, no way holding more than one, at least not more than one of them. Saw the face of the woman that came in and out of his dreams over twenty-five years, recognized her, couldn't get over who she was, lost her smell, lost the connection—"not a problem," he said to himself. He didn't know how much saying that would cost him, and he said it a lot, "not a problem." The rail was a kite string, the river water carried whole trees, sections of composition tiled roofs—saw the fuselage of an airplane, saw horses treading wildly for the water to hold them up, to run them toward a meadow—saw a moaning bull carried off in the current—saw her look away from the water rushing down the surge and close her eyes, pressing his face deeper where he had already kneeled down between her knees, the heaviest startling current he ever whispered his mouth up to—up-rooted oak roots pressed under the bridge, oak trunks arched from the river flood re-submerged, tilting back up the root legs, horses panting alongside of them—saw the stringy part of the roots, saw his legs and hers dance wrapped in them—saw the cicada, saw the orphan.

The Bleeding Rule to a Body's Consonance | Nnadi Samuel

I lay lenient to Golgotha. moonlight, pasturing my rib the way
a herd stomps over a grassland.

I rag my name to a cross,
 & assimilation rewards me in black consonant—where
gloom / collapse into a boy.

I brand my life a melody, fashioning trumpet from the hurt.
 what weariness bruise harm into harmony?

what vowel fine-tunes a boy into loss?

what letter upturned, ushers grief as a sibilant tearing the mouth?

 I sought the raw formula to havoc: the way a bullet sinks
a pronoun.

 the way arithmetic rats me out, & brothers of like terms
take dagger to my dream.

 the way a whole number lay in defence, & science wields
me in my surd state.

 the way I'm blood-sharpened till my grief rounds up to a whole
number.

 yet, I'm blunted by the world's problem. my body against the dying
heat—unspeaks life to a blooming plant, & brother kept ulcering out of
the family tree.

beloved brother,

 It'll amaze you what chews your lineage. grief, a cankerworm,
a canto threading the lining your ribcage.

I am learning to mold my edges like the cloud—running into vanishing:
the way white sprints the Milky Way & collapse into blue.

2022 RED WHEELBARROW POETRY PRIZE

Poetry Center San José and *Red Wheelbarrow* are excited to publish here the winners (along with finalists and selected semifinalists) of our sixth annual poetry prize. The poet Juan Felipe Herrera was this year's judge.

*

2022 Winners

- 1st Prize: "Transitioning" Claudia Meléndez Salinas, Salinas, CA
2nd Prize: "Mountain," Regina O'Melveny, Rancho Palos Verdes, CA
3rd Prize: "Ichiban," Patricia Aya Williams, San Diego, CA

These poets will receive awards of \$1,000, \$500, and \$250 respectively, and Gary Young of Greenhouse Review Press (Bonny Doon, California) will produce an original broadside of Claudia Meléndez Salinas's winning poem, "Transitioning."

*

2022 Finalists

- "Miyeokguk," Yesol Kim, Flushing, NY
"Aerodynamics of the American Negro," Reggie Edmonds, Oakland, CA
"30th Street to Union Station," Nadiya Greaser, Pittsburgh, PA
"Forced Fruit," Heidi Seaborn, Seattle, WA
"Heritage," Lisa Krueger, Pasadena, CA

*

Selected Semifinalists

- "reasons for living," Erik Brown (p. 16)
"Blood That Became a Seed," Renny Golden

Transitioning | Claudia Meléndez Salinas

Your body knows
It's not just cells it nourishes
It's dreams it's presence
It's the strength to hold
your abuelita's hand
as she travels to the ever after

Your body asks
for the right foods
at the right time
if you sit down and listen
with your eyes closed
your mind open
heart with no judgment

Your body knows hers
ancestral chord
corazón huichol
wixarika beat
unlimited folds of wisdom
is ready for the last breath
her transition into memory
her return to el Gran Nayar
her reunion with Tatuutsí Maxa Kwaxí
ready to take her place among the stars

So hold on tight
'ukári, warutsima, ma'íma
to that hand the seed
the ancestral connection to your land
to your Gran Nayar
to Tatuutsí Maxa Kwaxí

Tomorrow there'll be time for grading
for syllabi for faculty meetings
and other earthly crap

Today you hold on tight
to Takutsima
rock, wind and sail

Today you tighten the knot
to the eternal chord
and then, like a papalotol, just let her go

Isn't it amazing
all the wisdom your body holds?

Mountain | Regina O'Melveny

*And no hurt or harm be done
Anywhere along the holy mountain.*

—John O'Donohue, from *Benedictus*

Here in my garden, small mountain of fresh earth kicked up
in holy dig by gophers who sink my artichokes,
whole plants shaken, toppled, vanished, unintended offerings.

Here the anthill, fine crater mount, entry to the underworld
immaculate community each one working for all
all for one queen at center who oviposits life after life.

Here the far mountain in dream after a friend's estrangement,
a twisted road, difficult journey. I want to bless, release, pray
but the road writhes, steepens, stops.

Here the mountain where I live scabbled by spring wind
that tosses branches, moans all the way from pungent desert
and bears in its wake not calm but a blue edge or uneasy bellwether.

Still I lose words, trust, and must come back to the rugged range
that offers no pass until I see the holy mountain reach
is the whole of things that must be circled, walked, ascended,

descended over and over, received in silence, venerated, smelt, tasted,
seen every day. I hold it, mountain in hand and pray,
let no harm come to gopher, ant, or friend.

Ichiban | Patricia Aya Williams

Is there a girl from East San José, any other like me, a Ching-Chong-Sing-a-Song
All-American-Girl, growing up in Good Times & Happy Days—
whose mother worked at the school across the street
& was Japanese-or-Chinese-same-thing—
who can still see Tommy Gonzales walking on his hands
outside the school cafeteria
on Sloppy Joe or Pizza or Spaghetti Day—
who was awed by Serena, Lavinia, Oweeda, Black girls tougher than all the boys
put together but always sweet to her mother—*yes Mrs. Driscoll, thank you*
 Mrs. Driscoll—
who climbed trees, climbed fences, especially that one down by the creek
& ripped her new corduroy pants right down the buttcrack
while running away from One-Eyed Rosie,
Big Ruby,
& Scary Tiny—
who was a Tetherball Queen because she was tall, like her daddy
& *coordinated*, as he said, or *big-boned*, as her mother said—
who punched that yellow globe six ways to Sunday until it spun
its way to the top, like the midday sun—
who called rules: no backswings, no bubbles, no poles, no ropes, no lines,
 no stops—
okay, call stops if you want,
you still won't win—
whose mother walked to Lucky supermarket because Dad had the car for
 work and anyway
Mom didn't want to learn how to drive—
who lived a banana-bike-seat-ride away
from the barrio, popping wheelies on a sky-blue Schwinn—
who in Mrs. Harris's class always tried
to sit next to blue-eyed Billy Mueller & his Bazooka bubble gum—
whose nickname was MoneyBags
because she knocked on classroom doors,
collecting jingly drawstring bags full of lunch money,
carrying them

to Mrs. Salvatore in the office, who looked up from her desk
and smiled—
who was sweet on Silvester Mendoza, standing next to him and his red
Elton John t-shirt for the class picture—
whose parents believed in the Good Book
& the Good Belt & who cramped
like a kicked dog when her mother said
just wait till your dad gets home—
is there a girl from East San José—hey, no other like me—
a Ching-Chong-Bang-a-Gong-Number-One-Ichiban-Girl, who remembers
Walter Roa
wiggling ALL his fingers at her, saying
we're gonna have this many babies?

Miyeokguk | Yesol Kim

Insomniac, she brings a pot to boil.
Another year older. Grandmother'sunjotted
recipe: kelp broth teeming with anchovies.
Postpartum soup. Legend has it, *we learned
this craft watching whales eat seaweed
after birth*, a story she wishes
Mother had told. She cooks in a vaporous
wake. Iodine of long nights, sublimed.
Seaweed unspools like film. Lies splice
the memories she tells herself. What grows
on truth's underside, algae of latent image—
If her soul could be imaged
she imagines this: a whale's jawbone
in the desert where oceans go to sleep.

Another year rings forth from her
like water. Dreamless lucidity. She stews
a microcosmic sea. Soy sauce. Garlic shoal
pre-minced, the kind Halmeoni never bought.
Miyeok reels to black: hair of the drowned
reanimate. Birthday guk. *Make this
to honor what Umma ate, recovering
from the wound of you—*
Soul food, she thinks, if soul is a mouth
that hungers for womb, time
immemorial: she eats
to taste the salt. Not enough fat.
An oil spill of sesame, gold
buoys in the blackest brine of deep.

Aerodynamics of the American Negro | Reggie Edmonds

we did not // fly // but we did // escape // the south // a home // a
country // a genocide // some say my grandmother broke // her wings
// when she landed north // of the violence // and still did not find //
freedom // but she still knew // how to read the wind // well enough
// to predict rain // some say my mother defeathered // her tail // to
build a home // out of sticks and mud // but she knew how // to keep
us warm // when the frost came to // ice us // out of inheritance // my
family is // two flaps short // of finding safety // and still a gust away //
from whatever tries // to kill us // do birds // question // the breeze //
when it threatens // to push // them out // of the sky // did I question //
this country // when it threatened // to cheat // me out // of my home
// no // there is no god // that can command me // to abandon my
roost // when the sky falls // you will find me // in the storm // that
brought // it down // regrowing plumage over finger // -bones // un-
broken // remarrowed// wings spread // ready // to take flight again.

30th Street to Union Station | Nadiya Greaser

I am on a train into the city, so that I might
take a train out of the city again

this time in a different direction
it's midnightlate and the love
sitting next to me is asleep head
lulling on my shoulder
tuck into my neck feel love scratch at my softskin with its redbear
the conductor calls
Oreland
Colmar
Penllyn with the frontheavy overrenunciation of a postwar umpire
and calls
Jefferson Station
Jenkintown
Fern Rock dissociated-substitute-teacher style

love, I am so tired
one of us has to stay awake,
so that we might not miss our station stop
and end up farther from home
than we mean to

I am on the second train
out of my birthcity and in again to you

love is not saying anything when we spend
two more hours than we have left behind
a coal car that's detached and trapped on the tracks

staring at the flint corn fields until
the dusky sand red and grey is covered by quilted quiet blue
and grey and then there's nothing left to stare at and we're still not moving

love is carrying our shared bag
over his shoulder potato-sack-style through another station
if I get too tired carry me potato-sack-style

Forced Fruit | Heidi Seaborn

A Zuihitsu after Picasso's Les Desmoiselles d'Avignon, 1907

The new state laws ban abortions after six weeks of pregnancy, before most women even know they are pregnant. Sometimes what we don't know can hurt us. The fix is in.

Fixed into someone's version of a still life. Gaze at the fruit at Les Desmoiselles' feet—grapes and a peach perhaps. Maybe it's a Pence, so sweet. A 17 on the sugar scale.

At 17, we are fizzy, furred—. God we are glorious, the temperature purring as we pose our geometric equation of breasts and thighs on beach towels. Tanned bodies queueing in the loo, fixing hair, unaware the line of our mouths will be painted shut.

Picasso claimed *for me, there are only two kinds of women, goddesses, and doormats*. I imagine his boots, muddied with marl, the limestone so productive for the vines.

Because it failed to rain this summer, the wine harvest promises to be especially good. Even as I write this, the crush of grapes is taking place. Fruit at its most potent, plump state, reduced, casked and left to ferment.

In the renovated MOMA in New York, room after room of Picassos. We are masked, his women, and me. Our eyes sutured into the past. I have the habit of looking over my shoulder for the future.

I was not yet 17 when Roe v. Wade became law. Had just begun to find the contours of my body. A body already lost to rape.

The laws make no exception for rape or incest. When he was sixty-one, Picasso declared *women are machines for suffering* to Françoise Gilot, his twenty-one-year-old mistress.

The women's suffrage movement had won the right to vote when Gilot was just an infant. A baby water-colored by her mother, an artist, hoping to hold still a life that she knew would escape the frame.

I think of how a peach softens under the knife. How Catherine wrote of driving all the way to Yakima in search of the Pence peach in her poem “Idée Fixe.” For me that poem is about freedom.

Last week, I took a photo of the bowl of fruit in my kitchen, the cutting board with a sliced peach, dahlias from my garden in a French milk pitcher. Then posted it on Instagram with the caption, *Still Life at the End of Summer*

Heritage | Lisa Krueger

I invent Gabrielino women the way
I invent grandmothers I never knew—

my hands digging into land
that other hands have excavated.

Tongva. Hahamogna. Who forged
willow domes. Carved bowls from stone.

The women before me knew
which flowers were delicious,

which could heal. Some were shaman
who shape-shifted, drank toloache.

I tend stolen soil, claimed by Spain,
sold by Mexico, repurposed and renamed

by Anglos with titles like Eaton. My home
is called Pasadena, Crown of the Valley,

souvenir word from a Chippewa tribe
that never lived here.

In my mythology of comfort, my map
for the dark days, the women

are telling stories, arguing, singing
with percussion rocks and too much wine;

mothers of mothers of mothers
writing poems no one will see,

lacing flowers in their hair. Flame-keepers.
Women eager to speak

despite what comes after, daring history
in each small act,

foraging for what will heal.
Burying their love in the earth.

Blood That Became a Seed | Renny Golden

Your voice in Usultán, where ceiba trees open
green umbrellas above the cross-staked graves;
in Chalatenango, lush with mango trees and bones;
in Morazán, where graveyards have a voice—yours:

*If I am killed, let my blood be a seed
of freedom for this suffering people.*

Blood and seed to break rock: tattooed prisoners
with hearts so far from grace—
their muscled backs, a bloom of black crosses

and daggers, their spirits lost and hungry.
Your blood, Oscar, for fleeing mothers
lugging children through bush and river muck,
vigilant for the coiled and savaged.

Your blood for *campesinos* who walk
into a desert furnace. Your blood for girls
cut down, wildflowers left in fields.

Now people light candles and still sing as if
las maras, la policía, el presidente
might hear the words, might turn blood
into seed, wine, a garden

Norgate Shell, November 1957 | Susan Alexander

He always said to pay attention to breaks in the rain,
watch for the moment the torrent stalled.
He knew wet weather for a fact, running out to gas pumps
or driving some rich guy's Cadillac around the neighbourhood,
past the Tomahawk, the modest Hullah houses.
Tires cruised through underwater intersections while he tuned
engine music between the wiper blades' metronome.
Paid in cash or IOUs, sometimes with salmon.
This poem is a photo never taken. The rain stops.
Dad lights up an Export A, even though he's quitting.
He leans into the doorway at his station.
Service cap cocked back. Hands etched. His false teeth gleam.
One ray of leaked sun warms him and he stretches like a cat.
A cat with a fish.

from Slow Down Installation, Mojave Desert | Michele Guieu



Small rocks gathered on site, 2022

from Slow Down Installation, Mojave Desert | Michele Guieu



Rocks gathered on site, 2022

from Fragile Structures, Breil France | Michele Guieu



Driftwood collected on nearby Mediterranean sea shore, 2021

from Fragile Structures, Breil France | Michele Guieu



Driftwood collected on nearby Mediterranean sea shore, 2021

Cross-Fertilization: *Roots* | Andie Thrams



Watercolor, gouache, ink, and acrylic on paper over wood panel
© 2011 Andie Thrams

In Forests No. 2: *Beneath the Trees* | Andie Thrams



Acrylic and ink on canvas over wood panel, © 2004 Andie Thrams

Breaking into the Current | Sarah Rabkin

from: *The Quiet Activist: Healing the World by Doing What You Love*

*If you hear a voice within you say, "You cannot paint,"
then by all means paint and that voice will be silenced.*

—Vincent Van Gogh

When a body of moving water runs into a partial obstruction—a jutting elbow of riverbank, a boulder or fallen log—some of the current will sneak around and continue onward. But not all. A ribbon of flow turns back, filling the pocket of space left in the barrier's lee. The impediment thus creates a stretch of recirculating current, called an eddy, where a boater may find refuge from the downstream rush. River runners make deliberate use of such backwaters to rest or scout rapids by "eddyding out"—temporarily exiting the flow. To re-enter the mainstream, they "peel out" of an eddy and let gravity pull them downriver again.

But getting into or out of an eddy can be tricky. The turbulent seam where downstream current meets backflow—called an eddy line or eddy fence—may put up a force field of roiling water, in extreme cases even piling into an actual liquid wall that rises up to several feet high. Sometimes it takes great skill to row or paddle across these boundaries without flipping your boat.

Creative flow, too, has its slack periods between runs of inspiration and productivity. Whether your efforts as a creative activist amount to a full-time commitment or an occasional foray, you may at some point find yourself becalmed, either by choice or against your will. Attempting to embark, you might have trouble peeling out. Underway, you might deliberately take refuge from the journey to rest and regroup. Or you might become stuck in a backwater, struggling for momentum.

Doubt, resentment, fear; exhaustion, numbness, grief—all manner of conditions can keep your craft eddied out, your momentum thwarted. For any change maker in such a predicament, it helps to have a set of insights to make the best of the slack period and, when the time is right, re-enter the flow.

Honoring the Obstacles

When I was teaching university writing classes, I had a student who was

returning to college after a long hiatus. This young woman—I'll call her Meg—had suffered traumatic emotional abuse as a child. In her thirties when I met her, she was articulate and capable, but had floundered in school because of a debilitating block. Faced with a writing task, she would become mentally paralyzed, unable to put ideas into words. When she got to college these difficulties mounted, ultimately becoming so intractable that she had to drop out, spending years in the working world before returning to finish her degree.

By the time Meg enrolled in my class, she had worked concertedly to understand her struggles as a writer; the fine academic papers she produced reflected her hard-won insights. One day she made a memorable presentation to her fellow students about what she had learned. She hadn't been able to write, she told the group, because her psyche was busy holding back what it didn't want to face. As long as she resisted the nagging memories of what had happened to her as an abused child, other thoughts also proved difficult to access.

"It turns out you can't be selective about mental repression," she explained. "If your psyche is working hard to hold back painful material that it doesn't want to bring to the surface, then the barriers it puts up can prevent everything else from flowing freely." Meg's mind had been so intent on shielding her from ugly parts of her past that it was also crimping her capacity to brainstorm, analyze, or wonder.

With the help of an art therapist, Meg tried breaking the logjam by portraying her inner landscape in paint. As colors and shapes flowed onto the pages of her sketchpad, she began to make contact with feelings and thoughts associated with her childhood trauma. Gaining expressive power through the making of images, she also found herself regaining fluency with language. Slowly, she began writing journal entries, then letters, and eventually articles and essays. After graduating from college with honors, she went on to pursue her long-cherished dream of becoming an anthropologist.

For Meg, learning to write with power meant giving herself permission to acknowledge a difficult reality she'd long evaded. The songwriter Paul Simon described his own version of this phenomenon: "I think that when I get blocked," he told an interviewer, "it's that I have

something to say but I don't want to say it. So my mind says, 'I have nothing to say.' Closer to the truth is that I have a thought I really would prefer not to have."

For writers and artists, the thoughts we're inclined to avoid because they frighten or trouble us may turn out to be the very ones that propel us where we need to go. Arthur Miller: "The writer must be in it; he can't be to one side of it, ever. He has to be endangered by it. His own attitudes have to be tested in it. The best work that anybody ever writes is on the verge of embarrassing him, always."

Anyone trying to be of use can benefit from such advice. There will be times when you're stymied and stuck, daunted or overwhelmed. At those moments, rather than forcing yourself onward, it may help to do the opposite: stop struggling; relax into the place where you're bogged down; take a look around. Notice the details of this juncture on the path; explore the circumstances that mired you. Attend closely to those conditions, and know they may contain the means of your release.

Making Friends with Yourself

An unblocked psyche is more lucid than a repressed one, and more conducive to courageous action, as Buddhist teacher Kate Johnson can attest.

On the summer day in 2014 when unarmed Black teenager Michael Brown, Jr., was shot dead by white police officer Darren Wilson in a suburb of St. Louis, Missouri, Johnson was participating in a two-month Buddhist meditation retreat in Massachusetts. As is customary during such extended practice periods, Johnson had temporarily given up reading, conversing, and tuning in to the media, so she didn't learn of the Ferguson shooting until a taxi driver mentioned it on her trip home.

As she sat in the retreat center meditating, she thus had no conscious knowledge of the events unfolding in Missouri: Brown's body left bleeding in the street; an aggrieved community, long terrorized by a white-supremacist police department, reaching an emotional breaking point; the spontaneous uprising in Ferguson, met by a vicious response from officers in riot gear wielding tear gas and rubber bullets. Even so, her meditation sessions were oddly fraught with a feeling of intense trepidation more powerful than anything she had ever experienced.

As Johnson later wrote in her book *Radical Friendship*, she figured at the time that these waves of terror must be arising from “all the unmetabolized fear I’ve felt in my life, and the fears of all the generations before me that feed into this one.” After learning about Ferguson, she came to wonder whether she had been tapping in to a reality larger than her personal experience or her own family heritage.

Kate Johnson is the daughter of a Black Honduran father and a white American mother. Growing up in segregated Chicago, she learned early about racism—when, for example, white children’s parents wouldn’t let them play with her. Later, she discovered that her light-brown skin induced envy in some Black peers, mistrust and resentment in others. Eventually, her parents’ “interracial, cross-cultural, cross-class relationship” fell apart. All of this left her wary of rejection, confused about her identity, obliged to prove her own worth, and alienated from herself.

In her early twenties Johnson was drawn to the practice of meditation, in part as a way of healing from the stresses of living as a person of color in a racist society. “I was looking for a way to stay present and engaged without burning out,” she writes on her website. She sought the teachings of a Western-friendly branch of Buddhism, pursuing mindfulness training at various centers around the country. As her practice deepened, it became a source of healing and a path to personal transformation. Eventually she became a respected teacher of Buddhist meditation.

Yet for all that Johnson loved about her newfound meditation community, she also found it persistently unsettling. The teachings emphasized “personal practices of peacefulness contributing to the liberation of all beings everywhere,” and yet the actual practices—so inward-focused as to be socially isolating—struck her as terminally inadequate to that task. Despite the best of intentions, the Buddhist gatherings she attended tacitly perpetuated the racist status quo of the society at large. To her dismay if not her surprise, at a conference about “the emerging face of Buddhism in the West,” held well into the twenty-first century, the featured speakers were almost entirely white men. “For all our talk of mindfulness, compassion, and liberation for all beings,” she writes, “the supremacy that pervaded these communities remained somewhat unspeakable and largely unaddressed.”

A few months after the murder of Michael Brown, as part of a concerted attempt on the part of Buddhist leaders to include more women and people of color among presenters, Johnson was invited to give a conference talk. She wanted to use this opportunity to speak to her peers about the changes she believed her meditation community needed; she believed that their practices would cease to be relevant unless they actively began to address white dominance and other forms of inequality. She yearned to see Western Buddhist teachings evolve to meet these challenges. But, she wrote, “I was terrified to say these things to the still mostly white, mostly male audience there. I knew the mere mention of racism made some white folks uncomfortable, and that discomfort could lead to unsavory reactions. . . . I could be dismissed—not because I was wrong, but because they didn’t like what I had to say.”

Johnson struggled for a way to reach a largely white audience without arousing intractable defensiveness. What ultimately came to her were the Buddha’s teachings about a concept that is translated from ancient Pali texts as “spiritual friendship” or “admirable camaraderie”—a practice the Buddha is said to have equated with “the whole of the holy life.”

Most of the sage’s recorded early teachings center not on meditation instructions, it turns out, but on how to relate to others with insight and compassion. Learning to cultivate friendship in this spirit, Johnson saw, could help heal the rifts that keep people isolated from each other. It could serve as a basis for learning to support the freedom of every person—“spiritually, yes, but also socially and politically. Even in an unjust world. Even across difference. Even after generations and generations of harm.”

Johnson approached her listeners not as an expert but as a caring community member. She noted that mindfulness practice could serve as a powerful tool for learning to recognize one’s own implicit bias—“the kind of snap judgment that could lead a police officer to murder an unarmed child.” She asserted that learning to understand how oppression works can be a powerful spiritual practice, and that the training they shared as Buddhist practitioners “could uniquely position us to uproot racial bias and other forms of delusion—if we’re willing to apply our practice to those particular forms of suffering.”

Johnson's talk touched a nerve, in the best possible way. To her surprise and delight, the conference-goers responded eagerly to what she had to say. Dozens of them formed a spontaneous breakout session to continue the conversation. When they later turned to her, wondering what next steps to take, she urged them to sit with the heartbreak that comes of opening to others' suffering. "I wanted them to stop and feel," she wrote, "not to rush into action before truly absorbing the scope of the current reality."

"Our lives begin to end," said Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., "the day we become silent about things that matter." In Kate Johnson's refusal to remain silent, she found a way forward. Without denying her understandable fears, she chose to honor the voice within her that insisted all was not right with the community she loved. She mustered the courage to face an uncomfortable truth that was rising within her and the integrity to speak it with fierce compassion to a potentially hostile audience.

Johnson emerged from the conference with her audience's questions ringing in her ears: questions about how to awaken to dynamics of privilege and oppression, how to make authentic connections across the painful social divides into which we were born. These challenges continue to drive her work. In her life and her teaching, she uses a meditative technique she calls "making friends with yourself" to help practitioners cultivate acceptance within themselves and extend that equanimity to others.

Allowing Grief

Breaking into the current can also mean summoning the courage to accept and honor our sorrows. Visual artist Andie Thrums grew up in the 1950s and '60s in the Oakland Hills of the San Francisco Bay Area, rambling unsupervised with her brother around the slopes and thickets surrounding her neighborhood. Inspired by her parents' love of gardening and the antic diversity of the local vegetation—a jumble of indigenous and introduced species where palm trees mingle with redwoods, eucalyptus with coast live oaks—she developed a love of plants that has suffused the subsequent decades of her life.

Plants became the focus of Thrums's vocation as a professional artist. She worked initially as a botanical illustrator and graphic designer,

featuring graceful portraits of poppies, lupines, and other native flora on elegant notecards, calendars, and posters. Later, when producing images for commercial publication became too constraining, she turned to painting and making handmade books. Taking the financial leap into a fully committed artist's life, she began to work primarily outdoors, carrying art supplies on foot or by kayak into remote areas many days' travel from trailheads and roads.

Her greatest love was for wild forests, where she would settle in for days—absorbing loamy fragrances, woody presences, and intricate mosaics of ground-level vegetation. In some of her paintings, the massive bases of ancient Sitka spruce and giant sequoia trunks rise backlit against illuminated undergrowth; ferns, berries, and yellow violets glow in beams of filtered sunlight. Besides ink and watercolor, she now began to incorporate mixed media—integrating bits of the forest itself into her paintings, sketching with twigs and making paint with natural pigments she collected in the woods. Images mingled at times with musings in handwritten text.

Then came heat, drought, and choking smoke. Great green swaths of Western woods turned tinder-brown as temperatures rose, streams dried up, and hordes of tree-boring insects were suddenly liberated from the cyclical die-offs formerly imposed by winter chill. Where fuels had mounted during centuries of fire suppression, desiccated forests succumbed to massive, super-hot blazes—some ignited by lightning, others by faulty electrical equipment or arson or human carelessness. The woods began burning year-round, rendering obsolete the once-reliable expectation of an annual “fire season.” Researchers estimate that between 2010 and 2019, the ravages of development, pollution, and climate change killed 147 million trees in California alone; between 2012 and 2021, fires burned one of every eight acres in the state.

Thrams had always known that human activity threatened the forests she loved. Now, faced with the scorching and withering of habitats that had nourished her spirit, she found herself painting in eerie orange light, under darkened skies carrying the acrid scents of countless tons of vaporized landscape—wafting sometimes from hundreds of miles away, sometimes from the next drainage over.

Sadness began to overwhelm her. “Sometimes I just set my brushes down and cry and cry,” she told me, “or feel such grief it all seems pointless to enjoy anything, to go anywhere, to care.” Her early years of working among wild trees had engendered a joyful connection to a living world greater than herself—“the biophilia experience,” as she calls it, invoking a term first used by psychoanalyst Erich Fromm in the early 1970s and later popularized by biologist E. O. Wilson. Now, her forest sojourns were overshadowed by solastalgia: Australian environmental scientist Glenn Albrecht’s neologism combining words for “comfort” and “pain,” invoking the homesickness one feels for beloved environments as they’re altered and degraded.

The only way forward, Thrums finds, leads directly through desolation and loss. “Instead of trying to ‘pull myself together’ and keep working,” she said, “I just lie down and cry, or stare into the forest and let the sadness wash into and over me. I walk about, or sit with eyes closed so I can better see and hear what is unseen and unspoken. I invite the sadness in and ask for help to interact with those emotions—both my own and whatever the experience of habitat destruction may be to forest inhabitants, to trees, flowers, insects, birds and animals, to soil and sky, water and air.”

Rather than an impediment to her creative work, her grief has become an impetus in its own right. “I allow myself into the darkest places of despair,” she said in describing one of her recent projects. “I use black ink, found wildfire charcoal, and tree sap to make images that are somber in both color and experience.” During the pandemic summer and fall of 2020, as wildfires raged across much of the western US, she began creating a series of one-by-three-foot “Forest Prayer Flags” on durable Japanese kozo paper made from the inner bark of mulberry trees. Carrying rolls of this paper into the forest along with a lightweight folding easel that she designed for the purpose, she worked at this large scale while seated or standing on the forest floor.

“I hike as many miles away from roads as time and energy allow,” she said, “seeking out less-frequented places, often returning to the same place for many days. I usually work alone.” Her finished black-and-white banners present images of forest life and death, complemented by text supplying ecological insights gleaned from scientific collaborators.

Field Work: *Alder Creek Grove, after the 2020 Castle Fire,*
Sequoia National Forest | Andie Thrams



Ink and wildfire charcoal on Kozo paper, © 2021 Andie Thrams

Forest Prayer Flags | Andie Thrams



Installation: Giant Forest, Sequoia National Park, ©2020 Andie Thrams

Artist's Statement: The FOREST PRAYER FLAGS project investigates grief, beauty, and interconnection; shares images and science; invokes the sacred; bears witness; and invites action. The project began in early 2020, during pandemic isolation, when I felt moved to respond to the overwhelming uncertainty and sadness of our times. While my art practice typically embraced biophilic forest experiences, I turned my gaze towards solastalgia—personal heartache resulting from environmental degradation I was witnessing in western forests.

A lightweight easel and other tools all fit into a pack, enabling me to paint in a tall scroll-like format in remote places. I use an intentionally somber palette of black and white ink and paint, found wildfire ash and charcoal, and tree sap on Japanese kozo paper. To weave contemporary science into the process, I interview forest scientists. As I work, I express gratitude to the trees, I envision my energies and those of the forest entwining, and I invoke hope that what I do is towards the protection of all forest beings. I embrace sadness and revel in delight, as I witness what is happening within our deteriorating, yet still beautiful, forests. I pause to take in the beauty, the horror, and the mystery. I often cry. Paradoxically, the more I allow grief and despair into my being, the more I experience hope and find energy to take action. Best of all, sharing this project seems to empower others, too.

Forest Prayer Flags: *For Mariposa Grove Giant Sequoias
during the Washburn Fire* | Andie Thrams



Ink, wildfire charcoal, gouache, tree resin,
and mica on Kozo paper mounted on canvas

© 2022 Andie Thrams

Forest Prayer Flags, Field Work:

Giant Forest, Sequoia National Park | Andie Thrams



Ink and wildfire charcoal on Kozo paper, © 2021 Andie Thrams

Forest Prayer Flags: *For the Resilience of Forests* | Andie Thrams



Ink, wildfire charcoal, gouache, tree resin, acrylic,
and mica on Kozo paper mounted on canvas

© 2021 Andie Thrams

Field Work: Forest Prayer Flags | Andie Thrams



Back Country, Kings Canyon National Park

“I am immersed in the beauty and the habitat degradation that I find everywhere I go,” she said. “I really don’t know how I would be able to endure the vast grief of our era without having an art practice. It is all about weaving myself into the forest world, and in order to do that I have to look directly at the sadness there—not only my own, but the struggle that is unfolding for the life-forms trying to cope and survive. So my art practice has evolved into a night-and-day, ebb-and-flow type of process.”

“If I can allow myself to be fully in my grief,” she says, “eventually the tidal wave of sadness subsides. The world will sparkle again and ignite a desire to paint, to watch, to love this beautiful world as deeply and fully as I can.”

Thrams shares her approach in field courses and online workshops. She sees teaching as a way of bearing witness in community to the precarious state of beloved natural systems, exploring the experiences of biophilia and solastalgia in the company of others. “It really sometimes feels like grief counseling,” she says, “and it is. My experience with hospice in my parents’ last months of life has carried over into my way of exploring the sadness many of us feel about our planet’s weakening health.”

Participants in her classes respond hungrily to Thrams’s invitation to embrace their own grief and fear. Their interest reinforces her confidence in the power of letting go emotionally “in order to reassemble into a more whole and empowered place of being, where one is more able to take action and feel less crushed by the weight of the times.” The paradox, she told me, is “how much happier one can feel again by delving into sadness.”

Bearing Witness: Activism as “Being-ism.”

Gwen Heistand lives and works in western Marin County, in Northern California, as the resident biologist and manager for a thousand-acre nature preserve that lies along the eastern watershed of Bolinas Lagoon—a misnamed estuary formed more than 7,000 years ago by the shifting of Earth’s tectonic plates. The preserve encompasses annual grasslands, mixed evergreen forests, canyon-bottom redwoods, freshwater ponds, salt marsh, lush riparian corridors, disappearing coastal prairie, and a few oak

woodlands riddled with the rapidly spreading fungal disease called sudden oak death. This piece of land, Gwen points out, embodies a microcosm of numerous ecological challenges facing California today, sitting as it does on the San Andreas Fault, at the edge of rising seas, its precipitous terrain incised by four steep stream-carved canyons where the last wildfire swept through in 1945.

All of this freights Gwen's job as an environmental steward and educator with pressing questions about the best ways to care for the land she loves and the communities who share it. More than most people, she witnesses both the astounding complexity of a vibrant more-than-human place and its vulnerability to the impacts of human activity.

Gwen can easily identify with conservationist Aldo Leopold's observation that people with ecological knowledge live all too consciously in a "world of wounds"—and yet she manages to inhabit this tattered world with lighthearted grace and generosity of spirit. When I asked her how she thinks about the worth of her efforts in light of sometimes overwhelming harm, she responded in language so lyrical it was less argument than hymn.

"When I've had occasion to sum up my work in a sentence," she told me, "it has been that I help people remember how to listen to what they may have forgotten in this more-than-human world. I have been told that what and how I teach has opened people's eyes and hearts. I listen as hard as I can to the land, knowing that bearing witness is an active conversation and requires both parties to witness and be witnessed. I hope that in my listening, I become a more proficient translator for all that doesn't speak human. I include those voices in all my conversations, whether they are about stewardship, land management, education, diversity, power and privilege, the arts, or human relationships.

"I don't really think about activism," she said. "I think about *being-ism*. I think, often, of Wendell Berry's assertion in his essay 'The Body and The Earth': 'Any severance produces two wounds that are, among other things, the record of how the severed parts once fitted together.' I see my work as looking for that record in our relationship to the world around us."

She enjoys watching this process unfold one interaction at a time: "One person holding a snake after a lifetime of fear," she said.

“One person awakening to teeming life contained within the ground they walk upon. One person thrilling to terms like ‘poikilohydric,’ ‘apricity,’ ‘petrichor.’ One person peering at microscopic pond life overwhelmed by its beauty. One person standing in amazement while viewing female hazelnut flowers through a hand lens. One person, butt up, examining tidepool intricacies. One person in near disbelief watching dog-vomit slime mold sporulate.”

“Despair and hope don’t hold much sway in my lexicon,” she told me. “I look for what transforms despair to grief, which is often curiosity, love, and a semblance of grace. When grief cracks me open, wonder fills me up. Grief and wonder contain a ferocity, a strength, a deep curiosity, a sense of responsibility, and no small amount of joy. I find none of these traits present in despair or hope. In this age when so much I love is disappearing, an interesting almost-koan I frequently contemplate is this: In apprenticing ourselves to loss, we need to lose loss as well.”

Echoing Andie Thrams’s hospice analogy, Gwen told me that witnessing the progression of her father’s dementia had taught her a great deal about how to deal with loss on a planetary scale. “If I was present with him in the moment, not the person I remembered and not the person he forgot, as his words and his memory slowly eroded,” she said, “I was able to sit within his humor and his pain and his confusion and his anger and his love. I sometimes think that we do the earth a great disservice trying to turn her into what we remember, into what we think she should be, rather than bearing witness, being present, listening in this moment.”

She recognizes that some wounds can’t be made whole. Even as she works diligently for the healing of land and people, she witnesses ongoing destruction. Rather than becoming resigned or bitter, she allows grief to flow as it must while she carries on, with a full heart, doing what she can. As habitats and species disappear, fire ravages landscapes, and pandemics sweep through communities, she asks, “How can I sit with them, hold their hand, and be present to the grace and wisdom they offer? How can I love without expectation?”

Gwen Heistand’s “being-ism,” like Andie Thrams’s dance with biophilia and solastalgia, suggests a radical paradigm for service in an

inexorably changing world. Her long view of our tiny-yet-profound human role reminds me of something the poet Gary Snyder once said in a letter to author Elizabeth Lesser. Responding to Lesser's desperate solastalgic guilt and despair, he wrote, "About the threats to the world and nature, I comfort myself with remembering that Gaia has multi-millions of years to work things out in, and we can neither really destroy nor save her. So, we get energized to work for the earth for ourselves. For character, and for style."

"For character, and for style," we dip our oars into the stream. We aim our craft into the flowing channel and seek a tongue of current to carry us around the next bend. And if we snag and spin and find ourselves cast back into the slough, we take stock; we take a long breath; we read the water and try again.

Righting the Boat: From Failure & Fear into Loving Action

On September 15th, 1971, a dozen people set sail from Vancouver, British Columbia, on an aging halibut-fishing boat. The activists, journalists, and photographer aboard were heading for Amchitka Island, ancestral home of the Aleut people for thousands of years and now politically a part of the United States—a foggy, windswept sliver of land in the Aleutian chain, so far removed from mainland Alaska that it lies in the Eastern Hemisphere, less than 900 miles east of Russia and far to the west of Hawaii.

The craft's green sail sported a peace sign along with the symbol widely recognized in the 1970s as representing "ecology": an amalgamation of the letters "e" for "environment" and "o" for "organism," together resembling the Greek letter Theta—representing *thanatos*, the wave of death with which human activity was threatening the earth. The crew's intention was to stop the underground testing of a nuclear bomb.

By then, Amchitka had already seen two experimental nuclear blasts, and a third was imminent. President William Taft had set aside the Aleutian chain in 1913 as a sort of wildlife reserve, with the proviso that military activities would still be allowed there. Having wrested Amchitka back from a brief Japanese occupation in 1942, the US military built an airbase on the island from which to launch assaults against Japanese forces. At the peak of activity during World War II, 15,000 troops occupied

the island. After US forces abandoned Amchitka at the end of 1950, the Atomic Energy Commission and the Department of Defense eventually repurposed it as a nuclear testing site.

The first detonation at Amchitka went off less than a year after the Great Alaska Earthquake of 1964, more than 2,000 feet beneath the ground. The public learned only years later that radioactive substances had found their way to the surface. A second test, performed in 1969, generated a shockwave measuring 6.9 on the Richter scale, forcing muddy geysers to erupt 50 feet into the air from local streams and lakes and leaving a crater in the earth.

A few days after that second bomb test, a small group of pacifists, scientists, and writers met in Vancouver. Formed in 1969, their organization called itself the Don't Make a Wave Committee. Among its members were Jim Bohlen, a US Navy veteran who had served during the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki; Irving and Dorothy Stowe, a Quaker couple who championed the peaceful form of passive resistance called bearing witness, and journalist Robert Hunter. Aware that the US government was planning a third underground nuclear test on Amchitka, the band of activists feared that this and any further explosions on the island might generate dangerous earthquakes and tsunamis as well as radioactive fallout. They were also concerned about threats to the vulnerable Aleutian ecosystem, where upwelling of nutrient-rich waters supported millions of birds, fish, and marine mammals.

Frustrated by a lack of anti-nuclear-testing action on the part of the relatively powerful Sierra Club, the committee members decided to take matters into their own hands. Bohlen's wife, Marie, inspired by the anti-nuclear voyages undertaken by former US Navy Commander Albert Bigelow a decade earlier, suggested that they try to disrupt the test by getting in the way: "Why not sail a boat up there and confront the bomb?"

The idea took hold, and the group raised funds by staging a sold-out concert featuring singer-songwriters Joni Mitchell, James Taylor, and Phil Ochs, along with the rock band Chilliwack. The performers volunteered their services; sixteen thousand paying audience members attended, and after the concert the money kept rolling in. The Don't Make a Wave Committee could now afford to charter a vessel. They hired an 80-foot trawler, the *Phyllis Cormack*, and the journey to Amchitka was on.

But the voyage proved to be something of a fiasco. Shortly after their boat left the dock, the crew members fell to bickering, their pacifist principles cast aside. Locked in power struggles over their course and strategy, they fought over every detail. “Here we were,” wrote Bob Hunter years later, “supposedly saving the world through our moral example, emulating the Quakers no less, when in reality we spent most of our time at each other’s throats, egos clashing, the group fatally divided from start to finish.”

Halfway through their journey, President Richard Nixon announced a delay of the nuclear bomb test; the boat, intercepted by the US Coast Guard, never made it to Amchitka. The detonation was carried out a few weeks later. The largest underground nuclear test in US history, with explosive power almost 400 times that of the bomb dropped on Hiroshima, it generated a seismic shock measuring 7.0 on the Richter scale. The explosion caused the ground to rise 20 feet, set off 35,000 square feet of rockfalls and landslides, and created a lake several hundred meters wide.

The foiled activists were heartsick and demoralized. “The best chance ever to actually interfere with nuclear testing,” Hunter reminisces, “and we had blown it through sheer stupidity—and a failure of nerve, to put it kindly.” As the boat made its way back to the Vancouver harbor, the deflated crewmembers slumped listlessly in the galley; Jim Bohlen declared that he would shut down the Don’t Make A Wave Committee for good. After all, the group had tried to carry out its mission, and it had failed.

In retrospect, though, the committee’s story looks like anything but a failure. For a reader not familiar with the ultimate outcome of their efforts, a giveaway detail lies in the hand-lettered banner superimposed on the *Phyllis Cormack’s* permanent insignia during the thwarted Amchitka adventure. In block capitals, this sign bore the temporary name her crew had chosen after an exchange at a Don’t Make a Wave committee meeting. One member had flashed a peace sign; another spontaneously replied, “Let’s make that a *green* peace!”—and thus was christened the vessel *GREENPEACE*.

“As it turned out,” Hunter writes in his memoir *The Greenpeace to Amchitka*, “my angst was unnecessary. Time has proven my post-trip despair to be utterly mistaken. The trip was a success beyond anybody’s

wildest dreams. That bomb went off, but the bombs planned for after that did not. The nuclear test program at Amchitka was cancelled five months after our missions, and some scholars argue that this was the beginning of the end of the Cold War.”

To the benefit of all who desire a planet free from nuclear explosions, Jim Bohlen did not follow through on his intention to fold the committee. Instead, at Hunter’s urging, the group opted to preserve the “hard-earned media capital” it had generated while raising support for the Amchitka voyage, and the Greenpeace Foundation was born. The publicity skills that had taken root during the Amchitka campaign blossomed into a brilliant strategy of peacefully disruptive actions that Hunter called “mind bombs,” garnering attention to ecological threats posed by the activities of powerful businesses and governments.

Over the past half-century, the independently funded Greenpeace Foundation has evolved into a worldwide activist network with thousands of volunteers, millions of supporters, and offices in more than forty countries. It works to end not only nuclear testing but also, as the group’s website pronounces, “devastating impacts of climate change; an extractivist, racist, and inequitable economy; destruction of ancient forests; and the deterioration of our oceans.”

In keeping with their Quaker origins, Greenpeace activists bear peaceful witness to environmental destruction, using nonviolent confrontation “to raise the level and quality of public debate.” As the organization continues its brave work, even some of its most disastrous setbacks—like the French secret service’s 1985 bombing of its ship *Rainbow Warrior*, which killed a crew member and sent the vessel to the bottom of New Zealand’s Auckland Harbour—have drawn greater worldwide support for the urgent causes it champions.

The Greenpeace origin story offers a fortifying reminder to all activists, noisy and quiet alike, for times when the world looks especially dim or our efforts seem futile. Success and failure are not matters we can judge accurately from within the midst of an attempt. Any setback, no matter how discouraging, may turn out to be temporary.

I have a helpful little prompt from writer Samuel Beckett tacked to my study wall: “Try again,” he admonishes. “Fail again. Fail better.”

Each time I embark on a writing project, acutely aware of all the ways it might crash and burn, an old familiar part of me nags, “You are going to screw this up; somewhere there’s a good way to do it, but it’s beyond you; you’re just not up to the task.” And so I channel Beckett, and a second internal voice talks back: “Yes, I hear you, and maybe you’re right—but for now, please just be quiet and let me work.”

When the work we do is on behalf of peace, social justice, or planetary health, the forces arrayed against our endeavors can be formidable, our contributions a drop in a very large bucket. We do still, of course, have the potential to make a difference; as some activists like to say, if you think you are too small to be effective, you have never been in bed in a room with a mosquito. But even if we never see the impact of our efforts, we can’t assume we have failed.

To renew my faith in this conviction, I sometimes turn to an oddly stirring koan: “Almost everything you do will seem insignificant, but it is very important that you do it.” Such a seemingly contradictory claim might carry less weight but for its source, a man who knew a thing or two about forging on when the chips are down: Mahatma Gandhi. Of course, Gandhi—like the peaceful warriors of Greenpeace—knew too well that going up against powerful entities can be dangerous. If the work you do threatens the interests of people who have the desire and the means to harm you, then you may find yourself reckoning not only with a fear of failure, but also with fear for your own wellbeing.

At such times, the camaraderie of allies can be crucial—and providing such support is often the focus of quiet activists. The Rosenberg Fund for Children exemplifies this kind of work. The organization was founded in 1990 by Robert Meeropol, the younger son of union organizer Ethel Rosenberg and her engineer husband Julius Rosenberg, who were convicted as spies and executed by the US government at the height of the anti-communist McCarthy era. Just six years old at the time, the orphaned Meeropol was forced to live in a shelter for a while because family members were too terrified of government persecution to risk taking him in. Eventually, he and his older brother were adopted by a family who loved and cared for them.

“As my father grew older,” writes Robert’s daughter Jennifer

Meeropol, who has overseen the organization since his retirement, “he came to realize the debt he owed to so many generous individuals whom he never met, but who rallied to his support.” In recognition of all who had helped him, Robert established the Rosenberg Fund to offer financial support to the children of parents whose social justice work has cost them their freedom, their livelihoods, even their lives. The fund’s grants provide children with educational and recreational opportunities, as well as emotional and psychological support, that would otherwise be out of reach for their families.

To read the roster of the RFC’s grantees is to be horrified by the harassment and persecution that people in this country are all too often made to suffer for their work as journalists, educators, and citizen activists in service of a more just and nurturing society. But it’s also a heartening reminder of the essential networks of succor that can form around those who are brave enough to do this work, and a model for the quiet transformation of fear into loving action.

When You’re Stuck: Sing Anyway

A colleague of mine has an ingenious tactic for sneaking up on his writing tasks: he calls it “Not Writing.” Finding himself unable to simply sit down and tackle an article or book chapter with a looming deadline, he instead putters around the house doing domestic chores while thoughts about the project flit through the back of his mind. Passing by his desk en route from washing machine to clothesline, he might casually set the laundry basket down just long enough to turn on the computer and rattle off a few thoughts.

I’m not writing, he tells himself; *I’m just making notes to remind myself of some things I’ll want to say when I do write this thing*. Eventually, all of that “not writing” adds up to substantial draft material, so that when he finally sits down to compose in earnest, he doesn’t have to face a blank page.

Describing another backdoor approach, poet Naomi Shihab Nye invokes the working method of ceramic artist Rudolf Staffel, known for luminous translucent porcelain bowls, vases, and other vessels he called “Light Gatherers.” When Staffel was having a hard time embarking on a project, rather than diving right in, he started creating a series of “test

pots”—trying out shapes, textures, and colors in preparation for making the real thing. These trial efforts carried none of the pressure associated with producing finished works. As it turned out, though, the results proved surprisingly gratifying. “Procrastination is the most creative act there is,” said the ceramist, quoted in a poem by Nye. “Those little test pots are the way I get started. They’re the best things I do. Everything I do is test pots so now there are no test pots.” Re-framing your efforts as experiments rather than finished products can loosen the fetters of perfectionism.

Sometimes it’s not a lack of confidence that keeps us from acting, but sheer overload. We’re tired, demoralized, frustrated by the horror and destruction surrounding us—the ignorance, cruelty, and greed we see in so many of our fellow humans, and sometimes in ourselves; the ways in which the rich and powerful further enrich and empower themselves at the expense of everyone and everything else. We can’t take one more devastating news report, one more sign that the forces of destruction have the upper hand. We’re fed up and tapped out and tempted just to put the oars in the raft, curl up, and have a long nap.

When the challenge before you looms large, the trick is to make it less threatening by cutting it down to size. “If you get stuck,” the poet William Stafford told students, “lower your standards and keep going.” Don’t allow the perfect to be the enemy of the good; don’t let the magnitude of the problems prevent you from taking one small, manageable action; don’t let a feared yet uncertain future become the enemy of the here and now. When my friend Craig learned that his father had Alzheimer’s disease, he was initially catapulted into a state of grief-stricken panic. He began picturing all that might lie ahead: his father’s mental and physical decline; the help his dad would require; the emotional and financial toll this might take on the family. Finally, Craig reminded himself that he would not be required to live this experience all at once, as his inflamed imagination was trying to do; he only had to move through it day by day, one moment at a time—and that is indeed how he ended up surviving it in good spirit.

In the wake of the 2020 police murder of George Floyd, my psychologist friend Carol longed to register her outrage over the killing

and all it represented. She wanted to accomplish some act that could make at least a small difference. “I needed to do something to help,” she later told me, “because I noticed myself getting bitter. I believe bitterness is a psychological consequence we pay for our inertness.”

She thought about a conversation she’d had with a much-loved maintenance man who worked in her condominium complex. “I saw Harvey going about his tasks one Dr. King holiday,” she said, “and asked why he was at work that day; he replied that MLK Day was not a holiday at the condo complex. I asked how that was for him. Harvey replied that it was hard—his wife was home, his kids were home and he couldn’t share the day with them. He was not complaining; he just answered my question.”

She penned a letter urging the complex’s board of directors to make MLK Day a paid holiday. “Dr. King died for goodness, peace and an active struggle against racism,” she wrote. “I believe we should all honor his life and his example with a full-fledged holiday. To honor him in this way also honors Harvey, his identity both as a good man and as a Black man—a way of expressing gratitude and respect for how life matters and how he has made our lives happier and easier over the years. . . . My husband and I would certainly be willing to pay additional monthly dues to make it so, as I believe would many others.”

Carol followed up by speaking to the board of directors and the head of the company running the complex. They accepted her suggestion, and the paid MLK holiday became policy. She later learned that the man in charge of maintenance had read her letter to Harvey, who had been moved to tears. The employer himself was inspired to spend the holiday reading the speeches of King, who became one of his heroes.

Carol had long struggled against her own political passivity, even when events alarmed and enraged her; taking that single action shifted her into motion. If you venture forward one stumbling step at a time, like a night-hiker shining a flashlight, the trail ahead will be gradually revealed. That’s all you need to do, wrote Starhawk in her novel *City of Refuge*: “Not to sing with the voice of an angel, but—however cracked and broken your instrument—sing anyway.” You can theorize your way into inactivity, but not into acts of imagination and invention; these only take on meaning in the doing, in the tentative notes of a song that makes

itself up, day after day. Begin, and the work will beget more work; each small step will energize your doing.

We tend to think of the days we spend feeling thwarted and blocked as beside the point—a waste of our time and a hindrance to our endeavors. But forward momentum rarely proceeds uninterrupted. It's only by occasionally eddying out that we regain the vision and the courage to carry on. As Wendell Berry observed in his poem "The Real Work," we may truly be on our way only once we've run into a certain amount of confusion and struggle. "The mind that is not baffled is not employed," he wrote; "The impeded stream is the one that sings."

The Secret Activism Manifesto | Michalina W. Klasik

I believe in Earth

I believe in compassion

I believe in the possibility of creating new, good stories about the world

Stories that will teach us to inhabit the Earth “gently and tracelessly,” mindfully living in the world. Visual language has a great communicative potential, which facilitates building clear meanings, available and transcending divisions. I keep wondering: How can I do it wisely, do it right?

I believe in the (secret) activism

My direct and strongest inspiration comes from activists—“ordinary/extraordinary” people, who have been rising to rebel, protest, often putting their health and lives on the line. The area of my “statement,” however, is not that direct. I must admit I cannot muster enough courage to get involved in face-to-face confrontation. Also, my attitude follows from my intuition that peaceful, subtle but consistent action is also effective and necessary. Expressed this way, the message may have a chance to reach groups other than people open to protests, and therefore expand the effect of communication.

Some time ago, looking through comments to Mikołaj Smoczyński’s works, I happened upon his text about the cycle “The Secret Performance,” where he wrote, “I have never been a performer. . . . I have never mustered enough courage or this specific impudence, which are necessary to perform in public. . . . My actions have always been for photography’s sake only. The experience of one.” What Smoczyński defined as a “secret performance” meant documenting only the traces of his actions, his presence. Being an activist requires character traits similar to being a performer, as he says, and I relate to his inability to find them internally. At the same time, I do feel a strong need of joining the voices contesting the anthropocentric vision of the world – and I participate, but in a more gentle, slightly poetic manner, where you can find only traces of my protest. “The Secret Activism” is an area of my research.

At the moment, I am working on two complementary cycles. The first one —“Polish Landscape”—refers to the situation of Polish forests, where the state forest industry is trying to turn the ancient, naturally precious wildlife

into cultivated monocultures, grown solely for wood. This activity, harmful to us all, is unacceptable in the face of the pending climate catastrophe and during the sixth mass species extinction. Such a situation refers to many countries, Poland included. Within this project, I spend much time in the forest—wandering, taking photos, protesting—while the collected material serves as the basis for new paintings and objects.

At the same time, I browse the internet and find photographs of people hugging trees. They embrace them gently, with care. I save these photos and process them to blur out facial features, details of clothing, to bleach colors. The figures start to emanate their internal light, becoming alike—as if they belonged to one mysterious tribe—enormous, global, good. The term *tree-huggers* is used not only to describe people who like hugging trees and absorbing their energy, but mainly for ecologists and those who stand up for nature. Several years ago, Polish activists chained themselves to trees, in defense of the Białowieża Forest, the oldest one in Europe. It has been a few months since a group of activists started camping out in the Carpathian Forest, trying to prevent its logging.

It is said that the first “tree-huggers” were 294 men and 69 women of the Indian Bishnois tribe, who died in 1730, trying to protect the forest in their village against being cut for wood and used for palace construction. Dying, they were hugging the trees till the end. Their/our fight goes on. Here, now, still. . .

I believe that you are a secret activist too

I use the term “The Secret Activism” to define my own attitude in art and life, but I think it could accurately describe activities of many people, also beyond the field of visual arts. It complements and extends activism. In a subtle way, it appeals to people and shapes their attitudes. Secret activism encourages the co-authoring of new, good narratives about the world, to help us empathize and collaborate to build a better future.

I believe in cooperation—also above species

I believe (despite all) in humankind

from Tree-huggers | Michalina W. Klasik



UV print on synthetic glass, 18x18x1cm

from Tree-huggers | Michalina W. Klasik



UV print on synthetic glass, 18x18x1cm

Polish Landscape | Michalina W. Klasik



Digital print on recycled cotton paper fragments. 162 modules, each measuring 25x14.3cm. Entire work, 150x380cm.



bark, tree marking spray, approx. 28x13cm.

from Quarantine Journal | Michalina W. Klasik

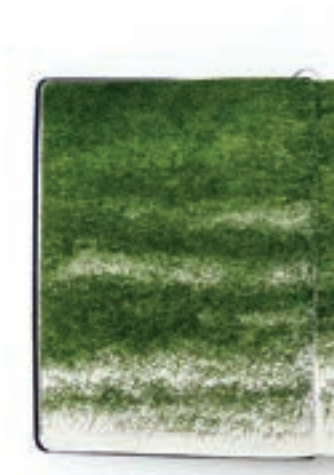
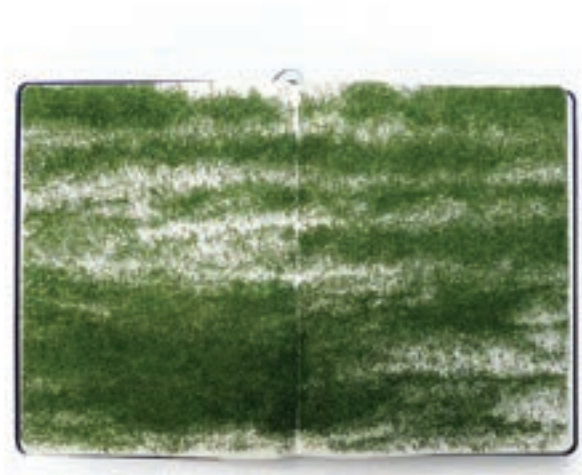


Drawing on paper, green ink, 25x39cm

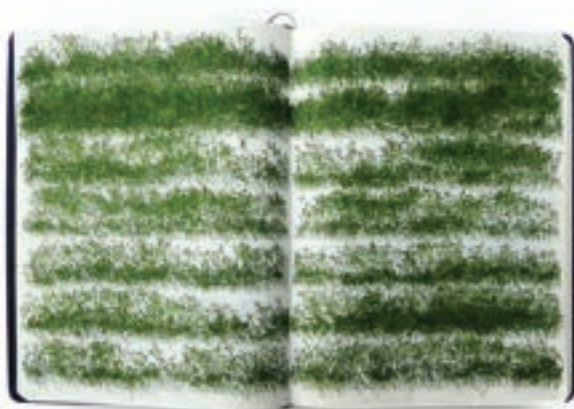
from Tree-huggers | Michalina W. Klasik



Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s_2lwh7ixms



Drawings on paper, green ink, 25x39cm





Oil on canvas, 36 x 48 inches

Resilience | David Allen Sullivan

based on Hassan Alnawar's painting

Between two worlds

flies a white stripe of a bird

one wing drags the Tigres
pulls up inter- puzzled fish

each a womb or tomb
self-contained in a semi-
permeable cell while

the other cuts open the sky
to reveal villages whole
undamaged unpeopled

white- cheeked

tern flies towards
a future just beyond the frame

pulls past the past

and the artist dips a fingertip
in a pool of oily black paint

to daub in its cap step back

Mosul Birthday | David Allen Sullivan

based on a photograph an Iraqi friend sent me

Come to these rooms
festooned with light.
See how they've removed
the roofs and most of the walls?

Birthday streamers are draped
high enough to avoid entanglement,
and balloons bounce in winds—
the blast popped only a few.

Pull one down, see how long you
and your documentary crew
can keep it aloft. The floor's
cracked plates could cut your feet.

Even their number's well hidden,
except from those who knew
their names, accepted Amal's
birthday invitation.

Where's the boy
who was born on this day?
He's that mark on the far wall,
beneath the black balloon.

Never knew what hit him.
Elegant to have those who
would've mourned hardest
die with him.

Brancusi's *Bird in Space* | David Allen Sullivan

L'Oiseau dans l'espace

a

fluid
figure
of flight's
ordination
formed in nar-
rowing bronze
rises & twists into
a wind-tunnel-tested
sliver of a propeller
torqued blade turned
& shaped on a smith's
anvil-thinned furnace-
burnished lightning rod
bird's wind-blasted bone
with underwing still
shape note singing
of how we yearn
to be this true
to be smoothly
perfected so
light slices
through us &
cracks air like
a whip's dance
like this strand
of hair I pull from
your mouth after
our last kiss un-
does us and we find ourselves on
foreign soil sucking new air into
new lungs & again register the
miracle of our bodies & come to
believe they are capable of flight



Unpredictable | Stephen Kuusisto

Blind, I imagine the butterflies—
Mornings so clear,
As if Buddha
Has washed my windows

Or course I want to telephone my dead mother
Tell her about tiny transparent flying specks of sun
Instead I draw circles on a birch with my finger
The marks say, land here my friends

Thinking of Louis Simpson | Stephen Kuusisto

I was too blind for the army
So I stayed home with a radio.

Remember those pressure hoses
In gas stations
They set off chimes
When tires rolled over?

America, boy scouts, flags
And me, sightless.

I tried telling you
How I loved your poems.
What a veteran presence you had.

I was the boy
Who leaned close—
The Zenith hot.

Yes I'm coming to the point.

Untitled | Gary Young

Gene kept painting after Elizabeth died, but said, I've lost my audience. At least I haven't lost interest in a conversation with the work, he said, but there's no reason for doing it, and who's doing it is unknown to me.

Untitled | Gary Young

Gene was talking to a man on the street, and later said, I recognized his face as he spoke, but I'd forgotten his name. Thankfully, he started telling me stories about himself, and they reminded me who he was.

Enough Said | Charles Atkinson

Eleanor in Hospice

Twenty years she's been warehoused—
no family, one lawyer, few visits.
Now she's in her final weeks.
“Minimally verbal,” says the chart.
Barely strength to turn in bed.
Orderlies fluff her pillows, move on.
Feral by now, she feels their distaste.
“Not nice,” she hisses at their backs . . .

Week five I'm clapping down the hall
and hear her vomit. Call the staff:
they clean, change her briskly, leave.
She reaches over the sheet, both hands,
grips two fingers, fierce claim
in those pale eyes . . . “Pray for me.”
What should I pray? “For peace. For me!”

It's easy to wish her serene passage;
she wants to recruit a higher power
I'm a stranger to, and interrupts
my silent fumble—“I ruv you”—
her phrase for closure, enough talk.
I love you, too . . . I'll come next week?
“—A rong time . . . your code hands.”

Today she's all business. “Pray
some more—hep me get rid of the scrubbers.”
Tell me about these scrubbers—scruples?
“Rike crowdads—y' know, foibers, surgents,
they eat me inside. Make 'em go.”
I ask her god to take her scrubbers.
Blue gaze steadies, tremor calms.
“Don' pray rike a priest. Jess sit here.”

*

Across town, I knew when it happened:
Duty nurse nodded—"Less than an hour."
Chamber music from her room—
Haydn? Someone's idea of decorum.
She would've shut it down in scorn.
Already they've shut her eyes and mouth.

It's hard to sit with the newly dead.
I'm every bit the petulant child.
Just days ago I stroked these hands,
brushed this hair. I crave a quiver—
forehead, eyebrows, jutting chin—
the spark I prayed with last week.

Bundle | Charles Atkinson

every night their year-old wakes
to scream at what she can't explain
for hours they pace the chilly floors
a little bundle of heat on one
tight shoulder then the other back
and forth they pass her giving up
one meager comfort for another
stroking rocking whisper song
hectic with fatigue and failure
husks that rattle on midnight's wind
bending toward surrender finally
her small head pressed against his throat
two rhythms now his own deep jolts
her downy flutter at the fontanel

What Shape Is a Kiss | Charles Atkinson

Eloise, age four, from her polka-dot car seat

I think, Momma, a kiss is a little bit
tinier than a bacteria.

If we look at a kiss
under a fourteen-thousand,
one-hundred-eighty-strong-of-a-microscope
I wonder if we'll see
a little ball or something—
a fuzzy ball, or a spiky ball.

... I wanna be
a scientist when I grow up—
or now!

I wanna be a scientist now.

When I'm four
I wanna be
a half-way taught one,
and a medium-taught one
when I'm five
and when I'm six years old,
full-taught.

Can you help me
learn some stuff
NOW, actually?

Everyday Affair | Charles Atkinson

will you marry me right now

one of us will ask the other

the answer hasn't changed for years

but when breath's held between yearning

and yes a rift can yawn look at us

how much time do we have left

just when grief can gather and break

a sleeper wave that wants to draw me

down beneath desire and dreaming

the frisson makes me laugh out loud

the fool I'd be to snub this offer

a silver chime rings in my palm

wake to this breathless moment

arms wreathed around *I do*

Brush | Charles Atkinson

Spring morning a New York sidewalk
early love our fingers spliced
we step off the curb a dark suit
behind us flings wide the cafe door
brushes by coffee in one hand
paper and something sweet in the other
strides from between two parked cars
another step out a speeder slams and
bounces him from grill to asphalt
dark fluid leaks from an ear
croissant beneath the idling car

*

I may forget the pastry smells
the woman who keened *oh call the morgue*
over and over I may forget how
heated we'd been to slip back to bed
may even forget my lover's name but
could I have held that stranger back
no chance but how can I forget
a ruby throb that wouldn't stop

Book Review—*Poems: New and Selected* | Charles Atkinson
Hummingbird Press, 2022

To many of us who love Charles Atkinson's poetry, his are some of the signal poems of our place, our time, and our most deeply held and shared values. We love the work for its detail, imagination, music, and craft—always accomplished, often dazzling; and we love the work for its emotional intelligence, its ways of seeing, and its savvy psychological insights—its wisdom. One should, in reading Atkinson's work, also feel permitted to enjoy the poetry as inward memoir of the man behind the poems—the creative nonfiction of the reflective mind. Atkinson's is both a philosophical and an ecstatic Pacific Rim aesthetic, and Zen meditation practice has always been at the heart of it. Here's how Atkinson talks about it, from a recent artist's statement for *Leaping Clear*. He writes:

"Meditation and writing arose together for me forty-some years ago and have seemed, ever since, to be interwoven forms of mindfulness practice. Both coax the mind to inhabit the present—which then takes on a richer, deeper hue. Most of my poetry, in fact, tracks a more or less distracted mind in search of momentary clarity, or at least some equanimity. Sometimes the mind/poem finds its way to an insight—Ah, this is how things are. Sometimes it records just the groping. The 'object' can be anything—plant, animal, lover, loss. After this many years, I can't imagine unraveling the two practices: it's all for mindfulness."

(<https://www.leapingclear.org/charlesatkinson?rq=Atkinson>)

There is a life of attention that takes place before the poem. Poetry rewards and articulates, and meditation facilitates, a loving, precise language as a tool to tell the stories that need to be told to explore the possibility of living a considered, brave, and ethical life. A more mindful life. And sometimes, as Atkinson states, that means just "groping" for the insight—this is not a poetry of false sentiment.

In the earliest work, there is so often physical labor at the heart of the poems. The mindfulness aesthetic is seen both in labor (splitting wood in "To Split a Round of Oak" and in pleasure (eating a Mariposa in "Plum") (referencing Snyder and Williams, respectively). Later, in "Calligraphy," the labor becomes the poetry. Fathering is a vital early theme as well ("Buddhist Practice in America"), and later in several of his well-known poems about breaking cycles of coolness and anger in his inherited fathering style. Another "real work" begins: Atkinson's

introspective self-critique—poetry to engage and heal the speaker as a wounded son, and most urgently, a not-always-mindful father.

As Joe Stroud writes, “Atkinson’s focus is always up-close, with a marvelous eye for detail.” Louis Zukofsky once wrote, “The emotional quality of good poetry is founded on exact observation.” Atkinson is no objectivist, but in all his poems about the natural world, and also his poems about personal matters—e.g., “Anger” and “Water Fight,” and many others—he knocks us out with emotional precision alongside his “eye for detail.” In “Anger,” which first appeared in *The Best of Us on Fire* (1992), Atkinson writes, “And a hand—white heat in the brain— / moves too quickly and draws back too late. / Your child will cry and you’ll find me again / as I found my father, and he found his.” The poetry—and the practice that nourishes the speaker—are “the best of me” and “the only cure I know.”

Poems of family tension in all the early books up through *Fossil Honey* (2006) allow readers to feel the process and meaning of what is lost (through a divorce), and compassion for all, especially the young. The poems explore the suffering and the dignity of each family member. As with the hospice poems from *Skeleton, Skin and Joy*, Atkinson manages to avoid “confessional poetry” pitfalls of emphasis on sentiment or melodrama—by focusing on dignity and respect. The facts of suffering are part of a powerful and necessary psychological journey. These are journeys we all undertake. What requires nuance and fearlessness is to not turn away, and to face complicity squarely, and Atkinson does.

Atkinson’s political and personal ethos always seeks to break cycles of personal and cultural anger, violence, dehumanization. As you read the *New and Selected*, do not miss “Buddhist Practice in America II,” in which Atkinson explores what he “learns” living next door to a set of proto MAGA “deplorables.” “Because We Are Men,” “World News, Local Weather,” “Quaker Witness,” “Hearing Beethoven’s 7th Symphony, Movement 2” powerfully address the costs of war; “Paradise on Earth” brings readers into solidarity with the exiled peoples of Tibet; “Eye for an Eye” contemplates and decries the death penalty.

Atkinson is a wonderful writer of elegy: “A Patch for the AIDS Quilt,” “Gas ’n’ Go,” “Dreamer at the Helm.” “Let Go” and “Grown Up”

take on the complexity and tension of a difficult loss, tinged with the unsaid but also moments of insight and redemption. Here the self-critique is universal: did I not see all this beauty until I felt this loss? So elegy becomes universal truth. And poetry is that seeing, also that spiritual awakening. All poetry is elegy in this sense.

It's a bit unusual for a *New and Selected* to start out with the new poems. Here, Atkinson has wisely put his remarkable unpublished chapbook of recent work, *Psalms for Hail and Ash*, at the beginning. And only in subsequent pages do we flash back and explore the construction of that sensibility, the journeys of love and loss that came before. All the poems published here in the 2022 edition of *Red Wheelbarrow* are from this new work.

In *Psalms for Hail and Ash*, we face loss and mortality with a speaker who is always riding the narrative edge of the lyric, always telling us a story, even as the stories veer inward. Yet this is a book of short poems, arrival points, essences. These poems walk a finely honed margin between earned gratitude and unflinching witness.

The natural world can always pull this speaker up from "the pit of a charcoal mood." In "Flux," the speaker observes as "flaunting for a mate," a hoverfly's compound eyes "scan the clearing, / his forest in flux." "wings that blur, three hundred beats / a second, forward or back, defying / the laws of physics, going nowhere. / And a stump that reaches down. And up." It's amazing what we miss by not looking.

Atkinson fashions a kind of gratitude after the CZU lightning fires: "thanks for sparing these / children who hadn't yet heard / the rattle of god // thanks for the quiet / in still-warm ashes the breaths / that lift their soft hair." In the title poem of *Psalms for Hail and Ash*, a hail storm out of season is "a dream with aching palms." "What we've unleashed has found us," the speaker acknowledges. In the personal realm, "Brittle hands have gripped my own, / even as they let me go. Now / I don't own these words..." ("Is this how"). The fact that Atkinson faces a diagnosis of Lewy Body Dementia is addressed in these poems as well, giving the collection added pathos and power.

Psalms is its own singular late-life trek of the spirit in a *New and Selected Poems* filled with many travels: here you will enjoy a tanka series following Basho's road ("Trundling After Basho"); gritty, compelling

snapshots of a month-long sesshin (“Words for Silence”); a pilgrimage to Lhasa, Tibet (“Paradise on Earth”); not to mention epic journeys of marriage, love, divorce, fathering—and into a constant companion, the Sierra Nevada high country.

In *Skeleton, Skin and Joy* (2017), Atkinson humanizes some of the most dehumanized among us—the dying, especially those dying alone. Forbes Ellis, director of volunteer services at Hospice of Santa Cruz County, who knows Atkinson well, values the way this collection helps us “to really feel what it’s like to be with the dying—a taboo subject in our culture. . . . Atkinson’s work is a gift to us, shining a light—sometimes gently, sometimes starkly . . . [on] the heart of what it means to be human.” After his retirement from teaching, Atkinson spent the better part of ten years as a hospice volunteer in Santa Cruz County.

Skeleton, Skin, and Joy explores and witnesses that hospice work. But it is a book about patience, love, humanizing the dehumanized. In the elegy for his teacher, “Passing Bell for Kobun Chino, Sensei,” Atkinson writes, “Tell me we can live, eyes open, and know / this touch is the last.” And when we are “Nothing but skeleton, skin and joy . . . / Singular crux of blood and hope, / time and bone,” let us be “reduced to love.” At the heart of *Skeleton, Skin and Joy* is “Dreamer at the Helm,” the long elegy for sailing friend Doug. Here is a masterpiece, containing all the truth and tenderness we long for in poems. It is another poem about end-of-life care—this time for a friend—but at core, as with *Psalms for Hail and Ash*, the poem sings out love of this life, this earth.

The last two poems in *Poems: New and Selected*, poems that never made it into any of the books, emphasize the theme of the ever-deepening gaze, and offer a revealing postscript to a meditative poet’s life-long pilgrimage. “Let Us Now Praise,” after Walker Evans, explores the art of seeing: “Tell me // how stare might soften into gaze. I would / die knowing something inward of the iris— / how to let it open without so much need.” The final poem in the volume, a poem that appeared in *Poetry*, “The Patience of Dry Plants,” inhabits a gaze that is patient, softened, tactile, observing with delicate detail the interaction between lichen and moss on the bleached rail of an old pine fence—a gaze that understands “something inward of the iris.” In this lovely closing poem, the gaze is held in union with body and breath.

Charles Atkinson's *Poems: New and Selected* leads us through a life of paying attention. Poetry, like life, lives in the moment as well as in its worlds of retrospect; this rare volume weds those impulses into such moving fabrics of reflection, elegy, introspection, and delight—and in so doing, marries lyric and narrative. The book, though somber in many places, offers the reader genuine hope. We create the way we see and affect the world. Poetry is the practice field and life is the curriculum. Now we hold this deeply caring book in our hands toward the end of a master poet's life, and it gives us ways to love the lost and the troubled, ways to celebrate the new and the innocent—and most remarkably of all, ways to love the self. Let this book be your friend, and you will be warmed and better for it.

—Ken Weisner

Is this how | Charles Atkinson

it comes, by way of slow subtraction?
I'm filing taxes, simple math,
reading a line of instructions—then it's
a page of numbers that make no sense,

computation whose point I've lost.
Early sun creeps over the table,
gilds the scratch pads, lights up worksheets.
Out there, traffic, yard birds gleaning
seeds flung in patterns that might be runes.
This chain of numbers must lead somewhere . . .

I loathe the self that can't see clearly.
I've been capable, too—and know
I'm at the mercy of something large—
absence itself, its chunks of memory
calving off the polar shelf.

Brittle hands have gripped my own,
even as they let me go. Now
I don't own these words, these numbers;
they snap into meaning when they choose.
Between them, vacancy stretches out.

Toward Diagnosis | Charles Atkinson

You ready? New Brighton Beach again.
We chant the names of shorebirds flocking—
willet, whimbrel, godwit, snipe.

These scavengers sidle out of reach,
certain every wave returns,
as they do, from over open water.

They scour sand scalloped by waves that
stagger up the beach, collapse, retreat,
and draw the birds back out.

Their ragged cries are torn, alarmed.
they rise in a fluster dense enough
to rap my shoulder. *Almost time.*

Lewy Body Positive | Charles Atkinson

A noun's a bridge—here to there.
I'll start across and already stutter:
a sentence without its head is lost—
what I'd hoped to tether me.

The modest adjectives, adverbs here and
there, dissolving, too. Their waywardness
makes me stupid. How to say it?
Open-mouthed, abashed, ashamed.

I urge the verbs to get me started.
Tussocks *mark* the thoughts I've lost.
I *hunker* in the stubborn silence.
Intention *braids* the shallow delta.

The current shifts: your steady voice,
the face I know, your palm in mine—
long enough to slow my breath.

What was blank, beyond recall,
returns, a moment of words that says
what I mean—a child again, eager
to join the raveled conversation.

Midsummer, Above Boomer Creek | Julie Murphy

It's late for mating season but still
they dive and rise as in early spring.
Kee-ah. Kee-ah—sears the hillsides
before the red-shouldered hawks arrive.
Drowns out even the crows. I'm obsessed
with the spectacle and abandon any task
for their screams. I watch through binoculars
nearly blinded as they cross the sun.
Five, six, seven times a day, they return
from the far side of the ridge. I want
what they have even though I can
give it no name. Don't say freedom.
Don't say longing. Don't tell me
it's some kind of sign. Can't the shiver,
trembly as a new born, that comes
with my breath, be enough?

Five Years After | Julie Murphy

It's been cold again, a crust
of frost swept across the deck
and the skin splitting at the sides
of my fingernails, like my mother's
and grandmother's did. Small red
slashes like splinters no amount
of lotion can prevent. I live in solitary
as does my mother, almost ninety-seven,
as did her mother before. Our husbands
having taken their leave well ahead
of us. The name we're given—widow—
like the black spider, like poison, like panic,
like the throttle wide open. Over the edge
we go. The life we knew a dream of the past.
And still the earth spins. Gravity holds
all the skyscrapers upright. The dog patrols
the fenceless yard's edges. The vessel
of the day begins empty then fills
with light. Memories huddle together.
Chores push the hands around
the clock. I drop sterile saline
into each eye. Blink. Ask
is it another dream? Casteneda
said look at your hands. I don't
need to look— my fingertips throb.
Lean into it, like the wind, what you feel
and can't touch. What is a dream anyway?
A time between? Something before?
Something after?

Certainty | Gabriella Gutiérrez y Muhs

My dog fears the pungent smell
of abandonment
yet people die alone—forgotten
betrayed and despised
or simply
ignored, daily.

Some killed by indifference
seen as the products of forgetfulness
of minimalist waste
of relationships gone badly,
not having found the mine of love
we all search for,
the El Dorado of relationships,
the eternal salts of rebirth
all relationships require.

In my mind I drive across mountains to nowhere
simply to look for the somewhere of certainty dogs already possess.

Una mosca en leche | Gabriella Gutiérrez y Muhs

A fly in milk—

A fly has conquered a glass of milk
spelled out, as a negative condition,
an irregular and accidental tragedy
Is the fly happy in milk?
Does the fly know it doesn't know how to swim?
Is this the equivalent of a fly suicide? Or fly vengeance?

Has the fly chosen to die in its triumph, swim in its drug,
drown in its glory?

Estados Unidos y los norteamericanos (América) |
Gabriella Gutiérrez y Muhs

Una chicana representa a Esta dos Unidos en la India,
mis rebozos doblados
tres metros, no siete,
el sari en espera.

Volveré doblada:
mis siete yardas de piel, incluyendo mi blusa
organizadas en pensamientos indios~
Una— soy India
Dos— no lo soy
Tres— soy una mestiza
Cuatro— soy la posibilidad de medidas
para la colonización,
no en diciséisavos o treintaidosavos,
como a nuestros nativos norteamericanos se les mide.
Sus narices—nuestras narices,
todas alcanzan la curva mayor,
requerida de un indio.

Cinco— el té habla mas fuerte que las palabras.
Seis yardas son dieciocho pies, o el equivalente de tres hombres,
o una mujer y un sari.

Todos indios, está claro—somos físicamente letrados.

from ¿How Many Indians Can We Be? (¿Cuántos indios podemos ser?)

America and Americans | Gabriella Gutiérrez y Muhs

A Chicana represents America in India,
my rebozos folded
three meters, not seven,
the sari awaits.
I will come back folded
all my seven yards of skin, including the blouse
organized in Indian thoughts~
One— I am India
Two— I am not
Three— I am a mestiza
Four— I am the possibility of measurement
for colonization,
not in 16ths or 32nds,
like our very own Indians in America.
Their noses—our noses,
all reach the major curve,
requested of an Indian.

Five— tea speaks louder than words
Six yards are eighteen feet or the equivalent of three men,
or one woman, one sari.

All Indians, it is clear—we are physically literate.

from *¿How Many Indians Can We Be? (¿Cuántos indios podemos ser?)*

Exchange | Gabriella Gutiérrez y Muhs

When you wear my huipil
as if you were wearing a sari,
it is not that we are trading identities
or cultures,
simply respect.

*

Intercambio | Gabriella Gutiérrez y Muhs

Cuando luces mi huipil
como si llevaras puesto un sari,
no es que estemos intercambiando identidades
o culturas,
simplemente respeto.

from ¿How Many Indians Can We Be? (¿Cuántos indios podemos ser?)

Book Review—Gabriella Gutiérrez y Muhs, *¿How Many Indians Can We Be? (¿Cuántos indios podemos ser?)* FlowerSong Press, 2022

Only five years after publishing *The Runaway Poems*, Gabriella Gutiérrez y Muhs has completed an essential new collection, *¿How Many Indians Can We Be? (¿Cuántos indios podemos ser?)*, a multilingual feast of lyric and comic virtuosity that also explores in Gutiérrez y Muhs' words, "indigeneity, colonization, social class, immigration." The book falls in love with travel, new perspectives on poetry & identity, and cross-cultural challenges and awakenings, and thereby emerges as an end-of-pandemic dream book, continually crossing borders and falling back in love with the world again, including the world of martyrs and sorrows.

The journey begins with Gutiérrez y Muhs' first-ever trip to soul-sister India. Invited to a poetry conference, she imagines herself Columbus arriving in India after all, via Lufthansa, where Gutiérrez y Muhs will be sharing her poems, both colonizer and colonized, and also "dress up / in everyday saris / my soul / of huipiles / for you, India." Gutiérrez y Muhs emerges with a soaring tri-cultural voice and vision. In the spirit of Francisco X. Alarcon, there is multilingual weaving (including here French, Nahuatl, Hindi), but more than that, a magnificent mid-life heteroglossia, a human celebration.

"Colonization minimizes entire cultures, two of which are Mexican and Indian," but Gutiérrez y Muhs has written a healing collection rooted far down in rich layers of otherness. Like Lucille Clifton, Gutiérrez y Muhs sings joy with precision; she is an ecstatic survivor. For every dehumanization, every loss, including being abandoned by a father (losing a language, a culture), there is a song, a newly found solidarity, a connection to emergent global women's consciousness, and an intimate connection with her readers. Gutiérrez y Muhs will "invent the melody of you the world can hear and be joyous." Yes, she writes, we are "tamed / by the language we work in / One billion Indians / and fifty million Latinos / with a dilemma." But echoing Adrienne Rich, Gutiérrez y Muhs dives into the wreck, seeking power and freedom: "an explorer/ and my instrument/ a book/ my tool a pen."

If the Goddesses Xochiquetzal and Huehucóyotl, and even Nezahualcóyotl, Tlatoani of Texcoco, had gotten together to improvise their own *Eat, Pray, Love*, while also drumming home "the many paper cuts of colonization," you'd have an idea of the unique effect of this book. Can the world please survive so that rhizomes like these poems might thrive branching across oceans and through skies?

—Ken Weisner

India | Gabriella Gutiérrez y Muhs

I will dress up
in everyday saris
my soul
of huipiles
for you, India.

I will hail
The problematic soul
of Octavio Paz
and adore the loving face
of Francisco Alarcón
because they
extended their arm
to you and yours
long before it was in vogue

In this case, I will take off my shoes.
It makes perfect sense
that one would be asked
to take a bath
before visiting the temple, Tirupati Timmapa,
petrified for his wish to emancipate humanity.

One should shed
the dirt of the soul
through a cleansed body
where one could
see one's dirt
disappear

Their saint that only comes
to hills, Lord Balaji, with goddess Lakshmi and princess Padmavathi,
the daughter of the king of the Seven Hills, petrified in their sanctity,
all three,

will be able to touch our cleanliness.
I will altar my life
with images
of roads, houses, three-legged dogs, cows, rice fields.
THE IMAGINARY OF MY SOUL
will again open doors.

from *¿How Many Indians Can We Be? (¿Cuántos indios podemos ser?)*

La India | Gabriella Gutiérrez y Muhs

Vestiré
a mi alma de huipiles,
en saris cotidianos
por ti, India.

Saludaré
el alma problemática
de Octavio Paz
y adoraré la cara amorosa
de Francisco Alarcón
porque ellos
extendieron su brazo
hacia ti y los tuyos
mucho antes de que estuviera en boga.

En este caso, me quitaré los zapatos.
Tiene perfecto sentido
que le pidieran a uno
bañarse
antes de visitar el templo, Tirupati Timmapa,
petrificado por su deseo de emancipar a la humanidad.

Uno debe desprenderse
de la mugre del alma
por medio de un cuerpo depurado,
en el cual se pudiera ver nuestra mugre
desaparecer.

Su santo, con otro nombre, que solo viene
a las colinas, el Señor Balaji, con la diosa Lakshmi y la princesa Padmavathi,
la hija del rey de las Siete Colinas, petrificados en su santidad, los tres,
podrán tocar nuestra limpieza.

Haré un altar de mi vida
con imágenes
de caminos, casas, perros con tres patas, vacas, campos de arroz.
El imaginario de mi alma
abrirá las puertas de nuevo.

from *¿How Many Indians Can We Be? (¿Cuántos indios podemos ser?)*

New Poems—Salinas Valley State Prison

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Salinas Valley State Prison is five miles north of the city of Soledad, in Monterey County, California. It houses close to 3,700 men. The D-Yard writing workshop was started in 2012 by prison psychologist Dr. Benjamin Bloch and the poet Ellen Bass. The poetry program has now switched to A-Yard where there is more inmate and staff leadership. Since instructors are not yet teaching again in person, they currently supply workshop prompts to a recreational therapist who is devoted to the program, and to inmate facilitators. Program teacher Rose Black in particular has continued to correspond with program writers, often even after they are transferred to other prisons.

As Dr. Bloch wrote in 2015: “In a world where volition is systematically crushed—and not only by the people in uniform—the workshop’s purpose is to offer participants the opportunity to embrace creativity as a way to actively transform their experience, to become makers and creators.” *Red Wheelbarrow* is committed to publishing the voices of California inmates alongside the work of non-incarcerated writers. This year we are privileged to publish the work of five inmates, including both art and poetry from Jessica Diana Garza. Current workshop instructors Rose Black, Lisa Charnock, Julie Murphy, and Ken Weisner helped initiate Right to Write Press (<https://righttowritepress.org>), a Northern California nonprofit that promotes the growth of emerging writers incarcerated in California state prisons.

Nightfall | Abel Nungaray

Nightfall.

Running Falling Slipping.

Wind blowing.

Rain Falling.

Friends.

Can't get back home.

Darkness all over.

Dawn Slowly Peals the Umbra, | Ubaldo Teque, Jr.

the darkest shadow. Opportunity
a blank tablet sewing words
into stanzas, traveling to the farthest

regions of memory. Hazel eyes,
pale skin, curvy, a woman's touch,
kiss, distant as Mars.

Venus and the sun will protect
the indigena from disappointments
that puncture hope.
The chest thumps, slicing
through the day,
distant glitter on barbed wire.

If It Weren't for Summer | Ubaldo Teque, Jr.

The sunshine bounces off the rotating
spokes, creating rays. Our BMX & Huff
bikes swerve into the street

& sidewalk, following the scent of sunscreen.
Two stunning white chicks in bathing suits
giggle & wave.

I grip the handle bars & bunny hop back onto
the avenue, showing off because it's summer.
Destination, the Santa Monica pier.

What a view—if only we were seagulls.
Slowly the ocean swallows the orange sun.
It's getting late. Parents wait—fate—physical pain.

Flat front tire, starving & tired,
At a distance I hear mamita, then papito.
I flip a U-turn & walk back into the nightfall.

Hell and Heaven | Ubaldo Teque, Jr.

Metal weapon-stock rips the concrete floor, as
its flatness is sharpened into a hot pointed tip.

Blood-splatter thick like cold oatmeal, lifeless odor
inside a dark icy cell in the hole.

The sun's beams enter through the top window of that
isolated cage, giving me duration of the day.
Bad behavior's penalty.

Burger and bun, no lettuce, tomato, onion, mustard,
mayo, cheese—no coke. Hating Thursday's prison menu.

Keys dangling, the heart beat accelerates, the cell door
opens, Mail Call! letters, pictures, stamps, and poetry.
Xmas early.

Every day this inferno, always there under my feet.

The Uncertainty of a Singer | Lester Virgil

I am a singer
I am very fond of tomatoes

I am a tomato
I am very fond of a singer

I am a singer of tomatoes
I am very fond

A fond singer I am I am
Very tomatoes

I am fond of am I tomatoes
Am I a singer

Tomatoes of a singer
Am I a very good singer

Poet tomatoes I am
Am I fond of a very singer

I am very close to tomatoes.
Am I a singer too.

Al Alba (At Day Break) | David Massette

A lonely dark night—
 So long and cold . . .
So many years—
 No one to hold . . .
Climb up the stairs—
 All that I know . . .
Hey, What's that?—
 It's starting to glow . . .
Like a huge block of ice—
 Beginning to thaw . . .
Something is stirring—
 I like what I saw . . .
A light gets to shining—
 And it turns me on . . .
A new day is breaking—
 Her name is Dawn!

La Poniente | David Massette

High hopes—They soared!

“The afterlife of Icarus”—I adored!

Hard effort—Agony—Thought I had scored. . .

I did!—Score board?

I trucked! Autogol—por Torpe. Slippin.

Slippin through my hands.

The castles I’d build? Built by sands!

I might have been the joker

I might have been playing poker

But, that was no joke.

La Poniente, The Setting Sun.

Goldfish Bowl | Jessica Diana Garza

From a garage sale; I washed and shined it
Shopping pet stores to fill it—a fish so gold and pretty,
while larcenous thoughts went unwashed, not shined out.
Little did I know, I would be the one in a fish bowl, imprisoned.

*

New prison inmate arrivals
Thinking of prison fish
A lonely lost soul
Inside a fish bowl

Goldfish Bowl | Jessica Diana Garza



Pen & Ink, May, 2022

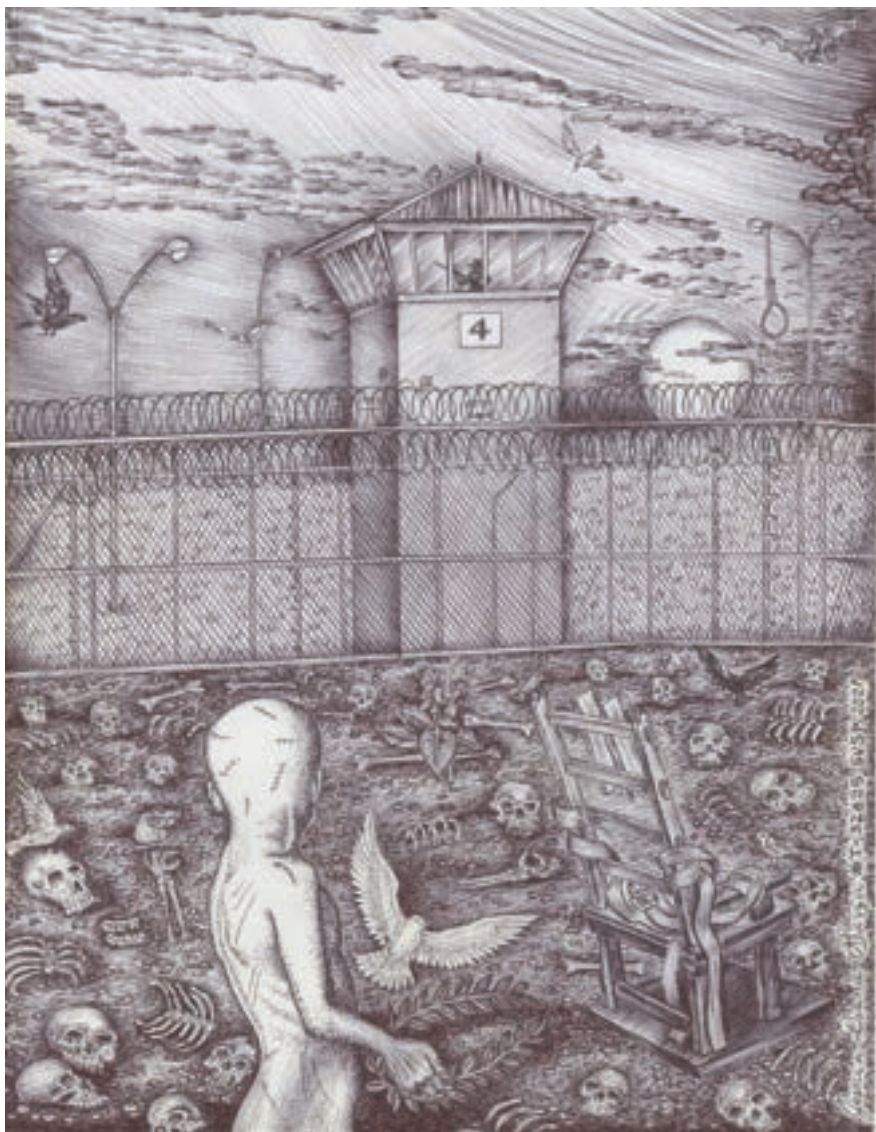
A Bad Idea? | Jessica Diana Garza

Owning a gun, for me, was most certainly a bad idea: The only kind of future I could see looked very bleak, with prison or death as a result. Even my dreams warned me as much: I saw *me*, that abused, troubled child that I was, standing in a prison yard. The gun tower stood over me. The rows and rows of electrified double-chain-link fence all around, smothering the small child in me.

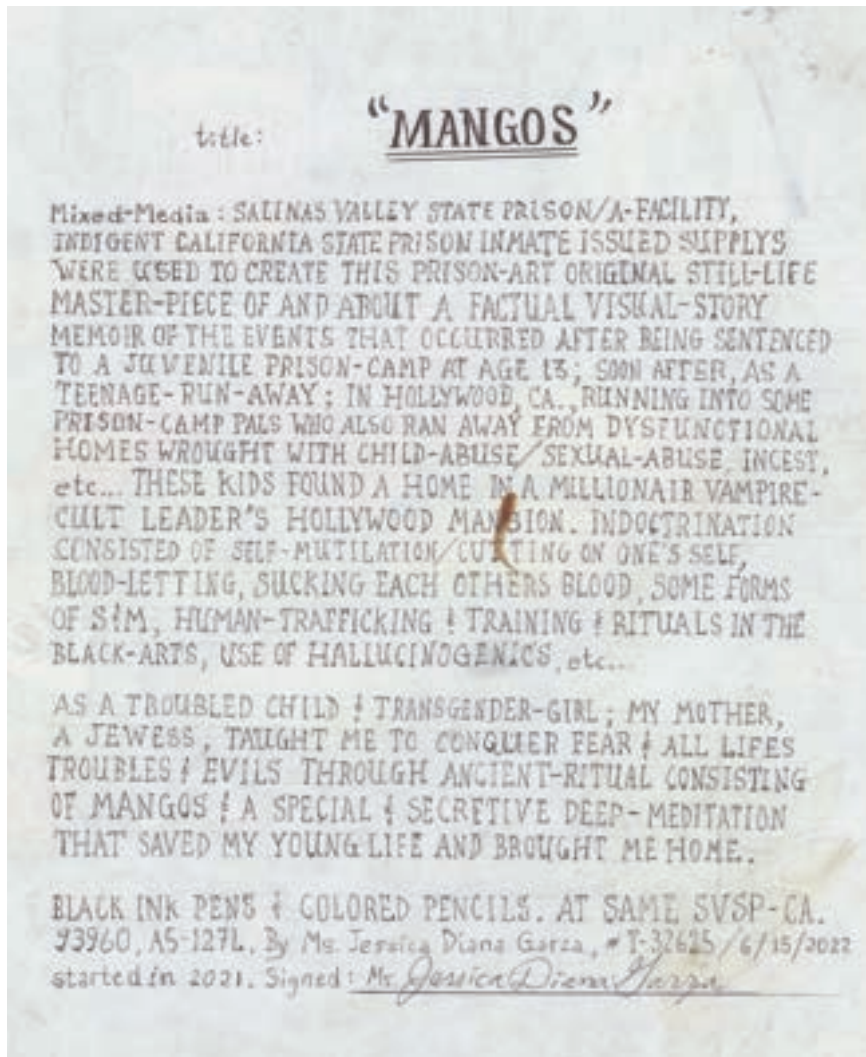
I believe in my dreams. Eventually, as fate would have it, I ended up imprisoned for most of my life, all because of a bad-idea-gun. And indeed, finally in my ripe old age, I was sentenced to a parole date that threatens to out-live me. A bad idea?

With razor-blade scars and whip scars, the abused child in the picture came to the conclusion that whenever a parolee thinks or dreams of buying a gun, the question remains after all: Isn't buying a gun a bad idea?

A Bad Idea? | Jessica Diana Garza



Pen & Ink, December, 2021



Mangos | Jessica Diana Garza



Black ink & colored pencil, June, 2022



Linoleum block, rust, pencil, ink, rubber stamps, 8 x 8 inches, 2019

Kredelle Petway, Freedom Rider | Melissa West



Three-color linoleum block print, 12 x 9 inches, 2021



Three-color linoleum block print, 12 x 9 inches, 2021

John Lewis, Freedom Rider | Melissa West



Three-color linoleum block print, 12 x 9 inches, 2021



Three-color linoleum block print, 12 x 9 inches, 2021



Linoleum block, rust, pencil, ink, rubber stamps, 8 x 8 inches, 2019



Oil on wood

Troy Davis, Executed September 21, 2011, Speaks on
September 22, 2011 | James McCorkle

I said I was
Said I was
I was
innocent, not by reason
or doubt, but innocent

no defense, I had none

until too late, when mockingbirds sang
too late, recantations of what
was signed under

threat, too late, the letters

letters after all the saying
made my claim

and you who are writing this
thinking you could be
me

I was not
by order of the state not
not worthy
of saving, and you
writing this, believing
you are free to do
so, or reading this

what are you thinking
that you could chew the leather
of my shoes and know
where I walked

no, how I ran, before the shots were
fired from a weapon
never found

instead they found me, no, no
I found myself
for them, gave them my life
to hold and protect

for all that I was
but they saw I was nothing, a meager
bit of skin

to slice into endless halves
to reach nothing

left, where I started from
in their eyes
that never looked to god in supplication
or weariness.

And I am, am I
not, a man waiting
his execution, and that now done,
I am a man, waiting
at the right hand of my god, my god
who abandoned me
to gather me up, and you, what
will be the forgiveness

extended, in the valleys you
walk through to reach
here, the sun stranded
in orchard
trees, crows
rocking on the branches
the shadows long across
the valleys.

The California Prison Poetry Contest

The California Prison Poetry Contest was started by Jordan Mattox in June 2021. Mattox, an educator from Madera, CA, was inspired to create the prize by his partner's work as a psychologist in the prison system and by the Insider Prize in Texas published by *American Short Fiction*. Mattox's contest is open to all incarcerated individuals in California and supported by CDCR, which published publicity fliers. The contest received over 1,000 poem submissions from almost every facility in California. Following an initial screening by three reviewers, the finalists were reviewed by poet Anthony Cody, who selected top winners (the five poems printed here) and five runners up. The winners are published and receive a cash prize. The contest will continue this year, open through June, 2023. *Red Wheelbarrow* will publish annually poems of the five prize winners:

1st Prize: Fragments Ubaldo Teque, Jr.	138
2nd Prize: Mother: Her Back Bao Vu Nguyen	139
3rd Prize: What Community Means to Me Amando Sanders	140
4th Prize: The Rest Beast Catrina 'Gata' Cameron	141
5th Prize: Numbers to Names Christopher Gabriel Rincon	142

*

Screeners: Bradley Samore, Emily Jo Scarz, Shelby Pinkham

Final Judge: Anthony Cody is from Fresno, CA with lineage in both the Bracero Program and the Dust Bowl. His debut, *Borderland Apocrypha* (Omnidawn, 2020) won the 2018 Omnidawn Open Book Prize, a 2021 American Book Award, a 2020 Southwest Book Award, and a 2022 Whiting Award, along with being recognized as a finalist for the National Book Award and the PEN America / Jean Stein Award, among others. Anthony co-edited and co-translated Juan Felipe Herrera's *Akrilica* (Noemi Press, 2022), co-edited *How Do I Begin?: A Hmong American Literary Anthology* (Heyday, 2011). His forthcoming collection, *The Rendering* (Omnidawn), will be published in Spring 2023. He is co-publisher of Noemi Press, collaborates with Juan Felipe Herrera and the Laureate Lab Visual Wordist Studio, and is visiting faculty in poetry at Randolph College's Low Residency MFA Program.

Fragments | Ubaldo Teque, Jr.

Chipped gray & white stones lay on the path in front of my hogar back in Guate,
sharp and close to my bare feet as I walked or jogged.

Dark gray stones, heavy like a rim's lug, were the ammunition for my slingshot.
I helped stones relocate by shooting them at hungry foxes and dogs.

To my ancestors, stones were earth's jewelry,
hot & shiny on blistering days, icy & delicate at night.

Here in my cell I have a small dirt-clothed rock, keeping me company.
A gift from the creator, it spoke to me while I was strolling the track.

I caress & talk to this stone on depressing days. I let it know my desire
for freedom, because we're both hard-boiled & contained to one place
for long periods of time.

Mother: Her Back | Bao Vu Nguyen

Her back bends as she crouches beside the river
This boulder of flesh is weathered and endured
 Strong and solid against the harsh punishment of the years
 The wind howls slashing furiously
 The sun pounds bashing mercilessly
 They found her unfazed and unafraid

Her back bows as she hovers over the hearth
This pillow of flesh is warm and cozy
 A nest where her child perches in dreamland
 This vast utopia is immersed in verdant aspirations
 Her child revels at the sparks of life
 Enkindled in the throes of her care

Her back is a pillar of love
She proudly stands like a marbled column
 Supporting the weight of hardship
 Carrying grief and pain and joy and happiness
 There's a place of refuge
 A sanctuary from harm and strife
 A shelter from cold wintry nights
Her back throbs mirthfully in her child's delight

What Community Means to Me | Amando Sanders

TO BE KEPT WITHIN LIMITS COMPLETELY/A FACADE
THE SOIL IS LIGHTLY PARTED/ AND A SEED IS PLANTED
THE EARTH IS HOME/AS I LOOK AROUND/I SEE THINGS THAT
REMINDE ME OF OUR
UNIFIED BODY/A BODY UNIFIED IN DEED/DEVELOPING
SURROUNDED AND BOUND BY MUTUAL
CIRCUMSTANCES CONDITIONS AND VARIOUS
OBJECTS/THE SPLENDOR OF IT ALL OVERWHELMS ME
AT TIMES/THE SOIL SO SOFT NOTHING SO NATURAL AND
IDENTIFIABLE/A MEDIUM IN WHICH LIFE TAKES HOLD AND
PROMOTES GROWTH GRADUALLY AS NEEDED/WITH
WATER FALLING IN DROPS FROM THE SKY
THE RAIN AND ITS COLDNESS IS WARMING/THERE!
AN ORGANIC SUBSTANCE
ESSENTIAL FOR NUTRITION
SOIL WITH ITS COMPOSITION/A FLOWER'S BASE ROOTED
AND AT ITS CENTER THE
OVARIES/HERBS/FRUITS/AND VEGETABLES MEDICINAL,
SAVORY, AROMATIC QUALITIES
COMMUNITY AND MY PART
LIKE A GARDEN, IN HARMONIC AND LASTING PEACE
EVER SO EMBRACING.

The Rest Beast | Catrina 'Gata' Cameron

Open your mind when I show what's inside
Won't wear a mask, my feelings I can't hide
Take time to know me then you might understand
The Burdens I carry reflect who I am
Once I was pure, not corrupted at all
Then a visit from Satan began my downfall
There was no time for tears, my little heart froze
I had to become a woman, that's how life goes
Only five years old, acting so grown
Would I be different if someone had known
A few years later I found my true love
Finding comfort in my favorite drug
Blood stained my hands before I could drive
Enjoying the Feeling of watching them die
Wouldn't make it fast, it was better slow
Inflicted my pain then relieved I'd go
Hard as a glacier no sun could melt
Not giving a fuck how nobody felt
Life was cruel and I became worse
Losing my mind was a part of my curse
Broken bones, bruises and blood
Silently praying to the heavens above
Please take me from my lonely place
Can't take no more of the demons I face
One hit too many and my life starts to fade
Finally taking all my pain away
Not my time, so I forced to come back
Had to face reality and pick up the slack
My fate has been written, I'm meant to be great
But first I must get rid of this anger and hate
The best within must be laid to rest
In order to conquer and overcome life's tests
It's been a journey and the end is still far
But I won't stop striving until I reach the stars

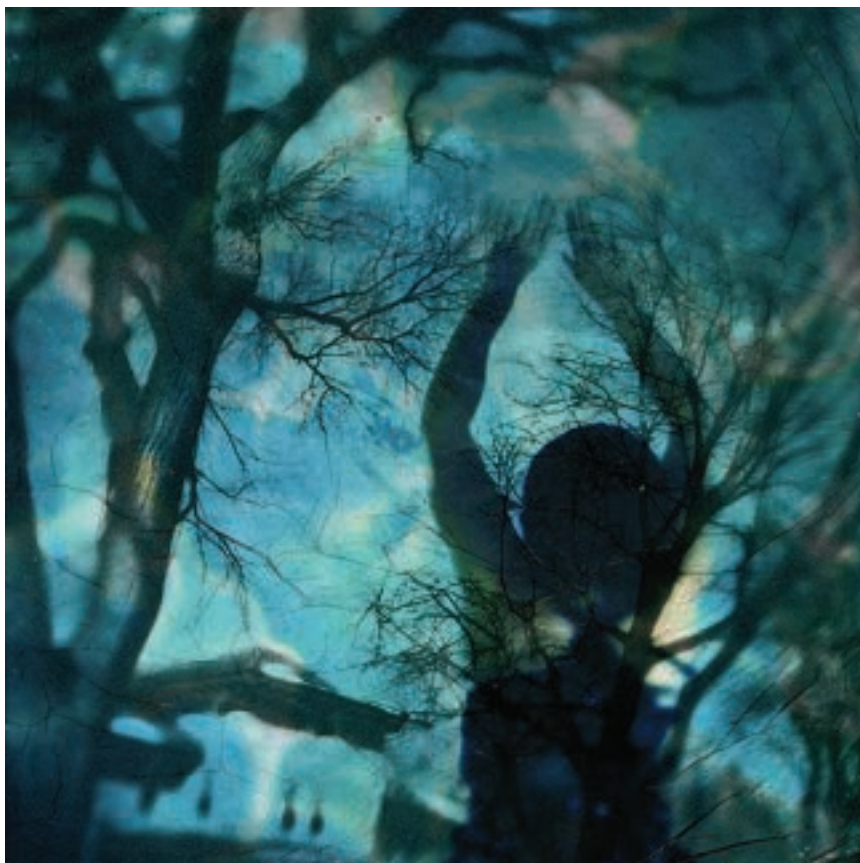
Numbers to Names | Christopher Gabriel Rincon

The state opts to define an individual with a number
When all individuality is refined by one's encumber.
So why is it society elects itself, giving warrant
to decide who's productive as opposed to those that torment
In all actuality perception defines tormentor
And once we see past the regal and spendor,
we become open to a truth that's been hidden so long.
The truth is that society itself is what's wrong.
Casting away those like I to the pits.
Instead of properly diagnosing the sick.
My name is Chris!!! And I shout it out loud!
No longer will I settle for being a number in a crowd!
Easily lost in this corrupted system
Dwelling on the mere thought of happy moments having missed them
No!! Today I take a stand, planting solidly my feet
impressing on the minds and hearts of society unique
individualism, and beauty to behold.
While warming the hearts that have turned so cold.
AP-8566 is the title
the state wishes to label me as, but idle
I will not stand, watching disaster take place.
Take heed to what I say and remember my face.
Hand in hand we must stand having been tempered by life's fire
chanting "We're worth saving." It's all we desire.
Never look down unless helping someone up
is what the world needs to do, sure it'll be tough
but still we must change one thing, which is how we behave,
a complete 180 from what's led us astray.
The perception of one as lesser than I
is the very reason I write this and cry.
For no one is lesser, we're equal, can't you see?
Each having a name and the potential to be.
So become we must while relying on self.
Let's become the helper, reaching out to those in need of help.
Shed the numbers we bear in the infinite game,
infringe society's perception as we
replace "Numbers to Names."

Left | Janet Fine



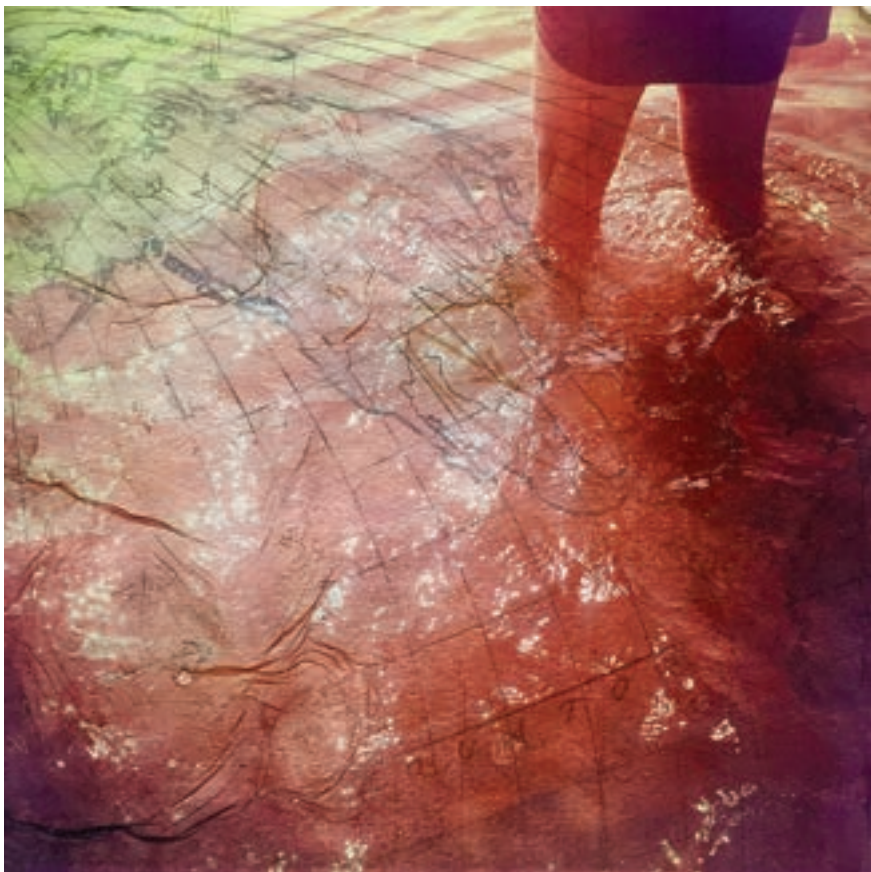
Alcohol transfer



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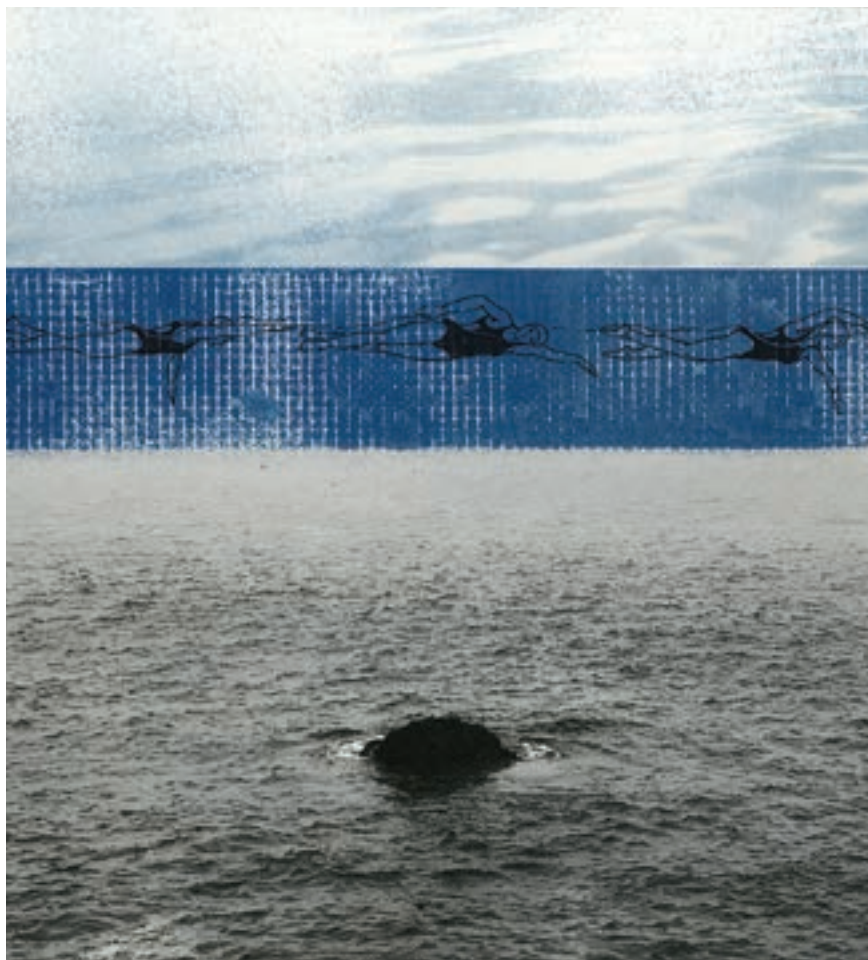


Alcohol transfer

Blind | Janet Fine



Cyanotype, pigment print on canvas, wood, thread



Cyanotype, image transfer, pigment print

Hospitum | Ralph James Savarese

Sorrow is a rabbit,
and happiness, a frog.
Come hell or high water...
Ribit, ribit.

Her body, a seed?
Her spirit, a dress?
How is she doing?
Sew sew.

Old age is a workout,
the bed its gym.
Less weight in the after..
Lift, lift.

Words are like crystal.
She's having a bawl.
Come frog and come rabbit.
Lo and be held.

Your prized antique: a secretary from 18th century Spain. The thing had so many little, intricate drawers, impossibly curved, as if to prove the maker's artistry. The chairs that faced it in the living room, themselves a French marvel, bowed like servants before their master, as you would bow, Mother, before your briefcase husband. (It's easier to appease a Sicilian than to contest him, you would say—our house lacked a judge.) You knew your furniture and loved to talk about the piece's provenance: a castle south of Cordoba . . . a monk with many children . . .

When you got divorced and had to have the piece appraised—assets like nuts or skulls must be cracked—you discovered it was fake, its innards strictly 20th-century. "How could I have been fooled?" you asked again and again. "Secretary"—from the Middle English for a person (and later an object) entrusted with secrets or private and confidential matters." "It's just like your father," you said one morning, "a forgery of the human." "No, Mom," I replied. "He's never concealed his depravity."

Men, I think all of these years later, should come with keys and handcuffs. Fathers should be Lilliputian. That way, a child or a small, slim woman might have a fighting chance.

Loaf | Ralph James Savarese

In the dream,
 I'm the one sliding her
into the crematorium.
 She's on a tray of sorts—
or maybe
 it's a dresser drawer.
The thing has sides,
 as if she might fall
out of death.
 Her mouth opens
like a trap door:
 "Really? You're going
to do this to your mother?"
 She's smirking as usual.
And then suddenly
 she's a mound of dough,
and it's time for CCD.
 The priest explains
how bread becomes body.
 "What a loaf of nonsense,"
she says. "He's got
 it backwards,
as any mother will tell you."
 We kids devoured her...
Eat, skinny man.
 No more art before the horse.
For memory to rise,
 it needs flames.

Pinsetter | Ralph James Savarese

Into the throat of a child you sent your slender fingers
to retrieve the devil's bowling ball,

a piece of hard candy. The child—me!—was blue
and in the gutter. When the ball emerged,

as if by magic, you went inside to pour yourself a drink:
Campari and Soda. "The damn thing

was bigger than your head! You're not an African rock
python for God's sake!" "Thanks, Mom,"

I replied, releasing another fireball into my mouth.
What is motherhood but a kind of rack

and hood return: the child gets a second chance.
Memory works like this—or tries to

with its invisible fingers, especially now that you are gone.
Of course, I'm an African rock python, Mom.

The heart will accommodate just about anything, even
a red-hot, cinnamon absence. Later,

darkness lodged in the sky, and the moon, that diligent
pinsetter, went about righting the pines.

America | Stephen Kuusisto

America with your history of eugenics.
With your hostility to the global charter on disability rights.
With your jails, stocked with psychiatric patients—worse than the Soviet
Union. We are
Gulag Los Angeles; Gulag Rikers Island; Gulag Five Points in Upstate New York.
America with your young Doctor Mengeles.
With your broken VA.
With your war on food stamps and infant nutrition.
With your terror of autism and lack of empathy for those who have it.
With your 80% unemployment rate for people with disabilities.
With your pity parties—inspiration porn—Billy was broken until we
gave him a puppy.
With your sanctimonious low drivel disguised as empathy.
With your terror of reasonable accommodations.
With your NPR essays about fake disability fraud, which is derision of the
poor and elderly.
With your disa-phobia—I wouldn't want one of them to sit next to me on a bus.
America, when will you admit you have a hernia?
When will you admit you're a lousy driver?
Admit you miss the days of those segregated schools, hospitals, residential
facilities—
just keep them out of sight.
When will you apologize for your ugly laws?
When will you make Ron Kovic's book irrelevant?
America, you threatened Allen Ginsberg with lobotomy.
America, you medicated a generation of teenagers for bi-polar depression
when all they
were feeling was old-fashioned fear.
When will you protect wheelchairs on airlines?
When will you admit you're terrified of luck?

Floof | Dion O'Reilly

Last night, my daughter
called to say she'd killed her cat.

She had to: asthma had taken his lungs.
By the time she reached the vet, Floof's tongue

was blue. That cat was huge
and afraid of me, but slowly,

when I visited, he learned
to love me, let me knead his skin

and pull his mane, which was how
he liked it. Rough.

With his mother, he was pathetic,
nuzzling her, though she hated him,

spit and thwacked his nose, jumped
off the soft window seat

he wanted to share. He was so slow
when he crept from under the couch

or dark closet, to let me roll him over,
grab his head, his motor purr, vibrating

the windows, humming into my feet.
I felt sick when she told me, skipped

dinner, but forgot by the time I woke, until,
picking chicharo peas in the rain, the snails,

big as flagships, their flaring labial bodies,

sucking the pods. Why were they so familiar?

Their bigness and elegance, slow determination,
delicate whiskers, and brindled shells.

I couldn't bear to crush them, threw them
into the cowfield instead, plucked handfuls

of bloated peas, ran home in a downpour.
Floofy, I love how hard this rain is falling.

The rain, the rain, pounding my straw hat,
the worms rising from dust.

Part of a painting | Vincent Mowrey

So painterly, the view up canyon.

Am I in the painting?
Have I some function
in a composition?

Do wild eyes see and wonder
what purpose he serves,
that man in his van?

Part of a painting
sounds fine! Just daub me in there,
in the corner ...

inconsequential brush-stroke
ink-slash
in a Chinese scroll.

Make me a boatman
crossing the River Tao ...
I'm here, I'm fine, I love you.

Stick figure standing on water
steering a raft
raising a stick hand to say hello.

Cuyama Valley, Santa Barbara County 19 Feb 2021

My friends the cows have given up on me | Vincent Mowrey

A plea in their brows says
c'mon, man. C'mon.

They stand at the fence.
But I got nothin'.

I pull my pockets inside out:
nothin'.

One by one they turn
to join the line.

The last follows the first
over the hill.

Not one takes one last look
or even pauses.

I stand at the fence.

I'm sorry,
friends.
Good bye.

Under an oak outside West Entrance, Pinnacles 31 Mar 2020

Transcend | Brent Ameneiro

Concrete bench, black coffee, sunrise—
I wish I could say I was transcending.

I want to swim, float,
be part of it all. Instead, I am

just this flesh. Focus on the buzzing
wings in the trees,

how they sound like the lights
in the retail store where I worked

so many years. The buzzing
from bright lights used to induce

a hallucinatory effect.
The lights put everyone

in a dreamlike state—sedated
by the constant brightness,

less willing to protest. They made it hard
to tell whether it was day or night.

Buzzing in my skin, rattling my teeth,
echoing in the space

between brain and skull, down through my ribs,
past my knees, plucking my cartilage like a harp.

Louder and louder by the second, the buzzing
mixes up my memories.

Transcend, finally, leave
this body, float off beyond the clouds,

off into the dark where the buzzing
manifests into a giant wingless fly

and I see my silhouette a thousand times
reflected in its thousand simple eyes.

To Consciousness | Lawrence Di Stefano

Leaving the warmth of the living
room, full of family chatter—the dim hum

of the TV cut by a shadow that begins
in the hallway. Entering as a thought

coming into fruition. The small body
moving like the inclination

toward speech—slow, and then pausing,
small hand to the hard plaster wall

for bearing, only a mumbling
in its mouth—the sensation

that there is more here, a flickering
of soft brain-gray just beyond that

dark, where the little footsteps become
more measured. In the hallway, alone

with the mind, hand grazing its walls
—its ceiling, imperceptible, and high

By the Sea | Dylan Pliskin

The language is not in a bush and breaks
like the start of the week. Being born. I think
I might have something for that.

I guess you discussed it with them. [It will
not] I think you started at north park [It will
not] pushed a cart into a canyon. Then every
canyon. Carts rolling down. emptyweight.
abandon. I will put the cover on the car. [It
will not] come together.

I am pushing my toward and then someone
and then man with bag and then priest and
the cat is underneath car on fifth and fifth is
filthy like this who goes keep looking at the
birdwatchers in Cardiff-by-the-Sea.

This is the number of stops on a bus line: not
here. Or the stops on top of your lung there a
hand hand of ranking officer. Oh. Sunset.
Floating of a great grey boat. Fence who
break beach. A man with his dog is looking
through. A man with his dog is wondering
through.

Sunset. Steak motif. Coronado.

I am in this leopard of a fish in two tones.
One. Exactly. Two. The sun. You will go to
the store just after the summer and you will
put a basket out. a basket out wondering. It
strikes me that so many things: a basket out
wondering.

I am turning up again. To the [gestures] you know. [Gestures]

[Gestures] Yes [gestures] it discreetly [gestures] or the thanks that [gestures] magnificent.

I only can touch the stone with soft mud. Not the reach. I press into diamonds. I press something into hair again. It leaves me. It comes and goes.

You are standing exactly there. Again. You're standing there and then and there's a pen in your hand. (Smoking like a word in the mouth or whatever.) Smoking like a cold open.

It is this: push it. He is moving. Yes. To put the head or strong and in the hand yes the dirt. Or to put the strong who weak bits of candle light, shore who weak bits of candlelight. Yes he is moving or not to look away.

Duende with Rain | Lawrence Di Stefano

You fill the umbrella with smoke—
the weather does not weather you,
somehow, taking rain and relocating it,
unlike sunshine, which turns rain
back into hope—if only, you knew,
were aware of what it is you do,
how you bend the stalks of trees,
which appear to be bowing now—
they bow to you or break, and cloud
this system of precipitous doubt,
its drops, heavier, thinking about
how one must compose themselves
before entering a house—shake off
the umbrella of its rain, clean
each foot, brush off the demon—
we do this differently, we have our own
ways of looking like men again.
I took it out on the dark, wet
earth, a heavy drop down
onto my knees, first
a fist into the damp dirt, kneeling
between two parked cars,
where no one could see me—
no one could see me, this ghost
making little depressions
like raindrops into water,
again and again, until the wind
died down

Withdrawal or Treading Water at Point Nemo | Lindsay Stewart

Landless, without edges, the only way
to go is down, drowning in cyan, azure,
cobalt, midnight, doubt where air should be,
no place to rest my weary mind, salt-dry,
sea-soaked, taking weather personally,
I survive on small sips of self inventory,
the body both the problem and the solution.
Mourning on land wanders, aimless, out here
it cuts like a seabird's urgent beak. The last
line of this poem is the first land I've seen
in weeks.

Point Nemo is the location in the ocean farthest from land

Cairns (III) | Phil Memmer

Sisyphus, the stone asks, *why*
do you love me?

Just how, I scoff, *could I ever*
love a stone?

But its weight feels strange.

I didn't ask if you knew how,
explains the stone.
I asked you why you do.

*

Even if I *could* hate the stone,
what could I do about that?
Strike it with my hands?
I need those

to haul its weight. Throw it
from the top of the mountain?
Already, every day,
the stone falls.

*

Sisyphus, the stone whispers,
are you awake?

I shouldn't be. I ache.
And tomorrow too

will be hard.
Sisyphus?

If stones could see, it would see me

not gazing up
at what isn't stars.

*

The holidays come. The charred trees
are choked with lights,
and for a little while

hell's deep bells are tuned
a few notes higher.

Soon

I'll start my climb like
I always do...
but drunk. The stone
festooned with bows.

*

How long, asks the stone,
can you keep this up?

I pause amid smoking thistles.
The climb, you mean?

No, says the stone. *I mean*
your silly claim

that if you could do something else
you wouldn't do this.

*

Are you as intimate with anything
as I am with
this rock? With whom
have you ever

walked as we have walked?
When you don't talk, who
hears you? Whose resounding silence
echoes your thoughts?

*

One day, we agreed—just for a change—
that I would climb the mountain

on my own,
and the stone would
“do some stone stuff” on the ground.

Then, without a thought,
I bent down just like always
to lift the stone.

*

There are things I would tell you,
I tell the stone,
if stones could listen.

Go ahead, replies the stone,
I hear you.

So I do. For years. I tell and tell.

With that new weight
what else could it do but fall?

Empire Waist | Lisa Allen Ortiz

1.

The poem knows she's naked.

She wakes up that way
uncovered from her pages
by a forefinger and thumb.

Exposed, the poem doesn't seem to care.

The poem understands
what nakedness is
and how her nakedness
is her own.

The poem likes to think
of her conception— that night-blind coupling of two
love-mad living things, how she was birthed
miniature but fully formed,
naked and alive— the way
she intends to stay.

2.

Such nakedness is by definition *nothing*
though such nakedness
makes an *impression*.

When the poem is put down
she remains.

3.

I licked my finger and pressed it against
the messy cheek of paper.

I write this way.

Something made of language
blurs around the sclera of my eye.

Sometimes I regret
what I write.

4.

Naked and slender-tall, the poem
steps through the gate.
She's the type who sees more than she's seen, so
she'll be alright.
There's a safety
in being naked the way she's naked, artless
and without guile. She could be
a list. She could be the pulled-off bottom of a receipt.
Standing on the curb, she looks like air.
Her nakedness is so complete
she's really nothing.
She's gone before she's here.

5.

The poem's absence allows her
to be more or less understood.
She's missing only when
she's missed.
Invisible, she's free to look around.
She has a naked eye with which
she glances up at: roofs, wires,
trees, a hawk.
The poem knows the names of things.

6.

I taught that poem names.
She knows all the planets.
I taught her certain birds and plants.
As she walks, she probably
lists the things she sees.
Those names
define the way she's seen.
Those names became
that poem's skin.

7.

The poem exists
in state of being verbs. She *was*
and *is*. Such stillness lets
her nakedness be seen, but, walking
she's invisible again. She speaks
with concealed lips. She discloses
soundlessly: mustard grass, coffeeberry,
Venus, Mars.

The poem thinks:

*the sky wears
a gown of crêpe de chine and
clouds are strewn around
like underthings.*

8.

When I go out, I wear my saddest sweater.
Men and women trudge along in puffer coats.
 I pull my hat down low.
 I double-knot the laces of my boots
 and look around for
 the nothing that
 the poem was.

Book Review—Jory Post and Paola Bruni |
how do you spell the sound of crickets

In the dialogic poetry sequence *how do you spell the sound of crickets*, Paola Bruni gives us a new twist on *Scheherazade*: “Write to me. Keep me alive,” Jory Post says. “Let’s write 50 poems before I’m gone.” Post has stage four pancreatic cancer. The ensuing exchange powerfully deepens their friendship. The synergy from page to page is like between jazz musicians—the poems inspire and inhabit one another like dreams, and sing layered over one another. This beautiful book is Ella Fitzgerald singing “I’ve got you, under my skin . . . deep in the heart of me.” It’s also the precarious music between Sonny and Creole in James Baldwin’s “Sonny’s Blues”; there is something at stake, something dark, and it’s show time. And so these poems bloom with hothouse intensity. They matter to us, and they make a new kind of poetry.

Why should we be surprised to find Kabir Das and Federico García Lorca alive and well in this moving new book. In “The Time before Death,” Kabir said, “So plunge into the truth, find out who the Teacher is, / Believe in the Great Sound! . . . // When the Guest is being searched for, / it is the intensity of the longing for the Guest / that does all the work. // Look at me, and you will see a slave of that intensity.” That is precisely the book Post and Bruni have created for our own time, intensely imagined, deftly edited, and absolutely a book of duende marvels and “the endless baptism of freshly created things” (Lorca). Here is a book of friendship and deep memory, and plunging into truth.

Paola Bruni’s images are startling and fully conceived, her forms and pacing are languid and impeccable, in full embrace of Jory Post’s urgency, overflowing play, and uncanny presence. As in his previous poetry collections, Post displays comfort and originality in the prose poem. For Post, poetry is consciousness—which he has great faith in. He follows his poems where they need to go. Bruni also dazzles with her spacious and disarming craft. What Bruni and Post give us is often soaring and unique. Sometimes, like a friendship, a book can be a treasure. To read this book is to cherish these voices, this intimacy and earnest dialogue. But it’s what they each do with poetry that will stay with you. They “make it new.” They invent it once more in one of its earliest forms: as a healing art.

How could a little book that began as a kind of game—"let's write 50 of these before I die"—have become such a lovely weaving of what is possible in poetry and human friendship? But as with Jane Kenyon, Jory Post has limited time. There is incredible charm in Jory's poems, but also such beautiful longing and sadness in his hunger for life. "It's what you haven't told me that terrifies me," Post writes Bruni toward the end. And Bruni must also face this silence. We have no answer for her when she breaks our hearts: "what is the word for an unanswered letter?"

—Ken Weisner

Contributors' Notes

Susan Alexander's most recent collection of poems is *The Dance Floor Tilts* (Thistledown Press). Her work has won multiple awards and appears in anthologies and literary magazines in Canada, U.S., U.K., and Australia. She lives on Nexwéléxm/Bowen Island, Canada, which is the traditional, unceded territory of the Squamish Nation.

Iraqi Hassan Alnawar is a painter and educator who now resides in Monterey, California. Alnawar's paintings and prints have been featured in several international events and exhibitions including: UNPD: The Future of the Climate and Al-Mutanabbi Street Starts Here. The painting included in this issue was displayed as part of the Santa Cruz poet laureate project Agents of Change.

Brent Ameneyro earned his MFA at San Diego State University, where he was awarded the 2021 SRS Research Award for Diversity, Inclusion and Social Justice. He is the 2022–2023 Letras Latinas Poetry Coalition Fellow at the University of Notre Dame. His poetry has been published or is forthcoming in *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *The Iowa Review*, *The Journal*, and elsewhere. He currently serves as the Book Review Editor at *Los Angeles Review*.

Charles Atkinson's *Poems: New and Selected*, was published in fall, 2022, by Hummingbird Press. Charles's collection *The Only Cure I Know* (San Diego Poets Press), received the American Book Series award for poetry; a chapbook, *The Best of Us on Fire*, won the Wayland Press competition. A third volume, *Because We Are Men*, was awarded the Sow's Ear Poetry Chapbook Prize. He has published two full-length collections with Hummingbird Press—*Fossil Honey* and *This Deep In*, and two chapbooks—*World News*, *Local Weather* and *Skeleton, Skin and Joy*, from Finishing Line Press. He lives in Santa Cruz County with his wife, writer and teacher Sarah Rabkin.

Erik B. Brown is a poet living in Houston, Texas, and is the former digital editor for *Gulf Coast: A Journal of Literature & Fine Arts*.

Catrina 'Gata' Cameron is a writer serving time at Central California Women's Facility.

David Denny's fiction has recently appeared in *Narrative*, *New Ohio Review*, and *Catamaran*. His books include *Sometimes Only the Sad Songs Will Do*, *The Gill Man in Purgatory*, and *Some Divine Commotion*. More information: www.daviddenny.net

Lawrence Di Stefano's poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *RHINO*, *Free State Review*, *STIRRING*, *The Shore*, and *Santa Clara Review*, among other journals. He holds an MFA in poetry from San Diego State University and is a Book Review Editor at *The Los Angeles Review*.

Reggie Edmonds (They/Them) is a poet, educator, and cultural curator based out of Oakland, CA. They are the co-founder of Rich Oak Events, which organizes the Oakland Poetry Slam, the Berkeley Poetry Slam, the Rich Oak Alchemy Slam, and the on-line platform Bay Poets Unite. They have been awarded various fellowships and awards

from organizations like Nomadic Press, the Afro Urban Society, Shuffle Collective, and others. Their work can be found in *Rigorous Magazine*, *Foglifter Journal*, *Stentorian Bitch*, and two self-published chapbooks, *I'm Too Black For this Shxt* (2017) and *SadBoi* (2019). ig and twitter: @Reggiepoetry

Janet Fine is a mixed-media artist who uses “anything she can get her hands on” from tea bag paper & paint swatches to shrinky-dinks & forbidden rice. She incorporates printmaking, silk-screen, painting, alternative photographic processes, digital media, found objects, installation, video, and interactive photographic constructions. She has a fondness for the surprises generated by juxtaposing and layering imagery, and by using semi-unpredictable media. Fine has 30 years’ experience overseeing a multitude of photographic techniques in the art photo labs of UCSC and Cabrillo College. She teaches cyanotype and image transfer workshops and her dream class, Combined Processes, at Cabrillo College. She has also curated and juried exhibitions for the Santa Cruz Art League, Open Show Santa Cruz, and the Pajaro Valley Arts. Her work has been published multiple times in the international publication, *The Hand* and in *Jill Enfield’s Guide to Photographic Alternative Processes*, 2nd edition. Janet was an artist in residence at the Santa Cruz Resource Recovery Facility in 2019, and an honored recipient of the Gail Rich Award in 2018.

During **Ms. Jessica Diana Garza’s** imprisonment, she has been committed to creating original prison art. Determined to depict her own prison experience, she incorporates dreams, self-portraits, sketches of the many animals with which she identifies, and memories of food and drink from her pre-prison life. She writes, “Good artwork seeks a place of honor that breathes life into the soul of the artist that created it. I spend hour upon hour on line work, composition, and perspective. I’m just glad to be able to share my artwork and writing with anyone who has the opportunity to see it. Why did a child eating mangos while meditating conquer her fear of bats? . . . While I savored the sweet, juicy, distinctive flavor of a ripe mango, the effect of sundown was a supernatural light on its multicolors. Multicolors of a ripening mango. It was awesome to look at.”

Andrew Gent lives in New Hampshire, where he works as a writer and information architect. His first book, [explicit lyrics], won the Miller Williams Poetry Prize and is available from the University of Arkansas Press.

Renny Golden’s *Blood Desert: Witnesses 1820–1880* (University of New Mexico Press) won the WILLA Literary Award for poetry, was named a Southwest Notable Book of the Year. *The Music of Her Rivers* (University of New Mexico Press) was a finalist for the New Mexico/Arizona Book Award 2020. *Benedicite* was a finalist for White Pine Press’s Poetry Prize. She is a Professor Emerita, Northeastern Illinois University. She was a Dominican sister. www.rennygolden.com

Nadiya Greaser is a queer Appalachian poet.

Yolanda Guerra was born and raised in San José, California, and received her art degree at San José State University. She maintains a studio practice in San José and in Oaxaca, Mexico. As a mixed-media artist with the emphasis on woodblock carving and textiles, she explores the power of being female and the injustices we face such as misogyny and societal expectations of being a single woman. As a Mexican American/Chicana, her work also highlights social injustices of Black and Brown communities. Lastly, her art reflects concerns of corn and non-GMO species. Yolanda strives to affirm voices that rise to be heard. Her process of carving into wood or linoleum and/or quilting stitches, is cathartic and meditative to what she intensely feels about her subject matter. The usage of subtle yet impactful strong bold lines alongside breathable negative spaces creates inviting visuals out of difficult subjects. She is striving to create an endurance of hope and give a voice to the voiceless through her work.

Michele Guieu is a French-American interdisciplinary eco-artist and teaching artist who lives and works in the Bay Area, California. Michele is collapse-aware. Her work, including site-specific large-scale installations in the outdoors, is made of found materials and almost entirely ephemeral. Michele created and curates *What's Next For Earth*, an ongoing international art project based on the Think Resilience online course by the Post Carbon Institute and supported by the Millennium Alliance for Humanity and the Biosphere (MAHB), a Stanford University Initiative. She is the art director at the MAHB.

Dr. Gabriella Gutiérrez y Muhs is a poet and professor in Modern Languages and Women and Gender Studies at Seattle University. Gabriella is the author/editor of several poetry collections. She received her MA and PhD from Stanford University. She has also edited multiple anthologies and has been anthologized and published in multiple journals and anthologies like *Cascadian Zen*; *As/Us: A Space for Women of the World*; *Bilingual Review: Revista Bilingüe*; *Quarry West's* anthology, *In Celebration of the Muse*; *Cruzando Puentes: Antología de Literatura Latina*; *Yellow Medicine Review*; *Puentes*; *Ventana Abierta*; *Camino Real*; *Chicana/Latina Studies: The Journal of Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social*; and *Diálogo: An Interdisciplinary Journal*. Last year she co-edited *In Xochitl, In Cuicatl*, a bilingual poetry anthology of Chicana/Latina poetry, published in 2021 in Madrid, Spain (it includes more than 60 poets) and another multigenre Latinx women's anthology, *Indomitable/Indomables*, forthcoming, with San Diego State University Press. Her latest collection *¿How Many Indians Can We Be? (¿Cuántos indios podemos ser?)* was published with FlowerSong Press, 2022.

Yesol Kim is a student of literature and an MFA candidate in poetry at NYU. She lives in New York.

Michalina W. Klasik is a Polish visual artist and secret activist. Works with image, object, text. Her artistic practice is guided by the idea of decolonizing nature. She is a graduate of the Academy of Fine Arts in Katowice, Poland. PhD in fine arts in 2017.

She cooperates with artists, activists from different parts of the world, dealing with the issues of deep ecology.

Lisa Krueger is a poet and psychologist in Los Angeles. Her poems have appeared in various journals and with Red Hen Press.

Stephen Kuusisto holds a University Professorship at Syracuse University and is the author of the memoirs *Have Dog, Will Travel: A Poet's Journey*; *Planet of the Blind* (a *New York Times* Notable Book of the Year); and *Eavesdropping: A Memoir of Blindness and Listening* and of the poetry collections *Only Bread, Only Light*; *Letters to Borges*; and *Old Horse, What is to Be Done?*

David Massette's poetry has appeared in *Red Wheelbarrow* and was read on Central Coast Poetry Shows on Santa Cruz Community TV. He is a creative polymath. Among his many passions are astronomy, classical music, philosophy, great speeches, and the city he loves, San Francisco.

James McCorkle's poetry collections include *Evidences*, *The Subtle Bodies*, and *In Time*. Recent work appears in *Bennington Review*, *Raritan*, and online at *Chants de la Sirene*. He co-directs the Africana Studies Program at Hobart and William Smith Colleges in Geneva, NY. He is an active critic of policing and carceral systems.

Claudia Meléndez Salinas of Salinas, CA, is an award-winning multi-media journalist, teacher, novelist, and co-founder of the not-for-profit bilingual news organization Voices of Monterey Bay— <https://voicesofmontereybay.org/about-us/> Her poems have appeared in *Xinachtli Journal* and *Voices of Monterey Bay* as well as *Latin@ Literatures* and *El Andar Magazine*.

Philip Memmer is the author of five books of poems, most recently *Pantheon* (Lost Horse Press 2019). His sixth, *Cairns*, is new from Lost Horse Press in fall 2022. His work has appeared in such journals as *Poetry*, *Poetry Northwest*, and *Poetry London*; on the Library of Congress's *Poetry 180* site; and in many anthologies. He lives in upstate New York, where he founded and directs the YMCA's Downtown Writers Center, serves as Publisher at Tiger Bark Press, and teaches creative writing at Hamilton College.

Vincent Mowrey's home base is Ventura, CA, but he travels in his van and writes poems from obscure campsites. Recent work has appeared in *The Sun*.

Julie Murphy's poems appear or are forthcoming in *Chicago Quarterly Review*, *Atlanta Review*, *Massachusetts Review*, *CALYX*, *Catamaran*, *SWWIM*, *Common Ground Review*, and *The Louisville Review*, among other journals. A licensed psychotherapist, Julie developed Embodied Writing™ and teaches poetry at Salinas Valley State Prison. As a member of the Hive Poetry Collective, she hosts poetry programs on KSQD. Julie is a member of the Right to Write Press and the Community of Writers. She lives in Santa Cruz County, California.

Bao Vu Nguyen is a writer serving time at Centinela State Prison.

Abel G. Nungaray was born in Southern California in the city of Tarzana. He grew up in San Fernando Valley till the age of 19. He is now serving a life sentence and is currently 40 years old.

Regina O'Melveny is a writer and artist whose award-winning poetry and prose have been anthologized and widely published in literary magazines such as *The Bellingham Review*, *The Sun*, *The LA Weekly*, *Solo*, and *Dark Matter: Women Witnessing*. Her long poem "Fireflies" won the Conflux Press Poetry Award and was published as an artist's book designed by Tania Baban. *Blue Wolves*, a collection of poems with reproductions of her assemblages, won the Bright Hill Press poetry book award. Her novel *The Book of Madness and Cures*, was published by Little, Brown and Company, and was listed under "Time Passages: The Year's Best Historical Fiction" at NPR.org. She has taught writing at Marymount College, the Palos Verdes Art Center, and South Coast Botanic Gardens, and lives with her husband in Rancho Palos Verdes.

Dion O'Reilly's debut collection, *Ghost Dogs*, was shortlisted for The Catamaran Prize and The Eric Hoffer Award. Her second book, *Sadness of the Apex Predator*, will be published by University of Wisconsin's Cornerstone Press in 2024. Her work appears in *The Sun*, *Rattle*, *Cincinnati Review*, *Narrative*, *The Slowdown*, and elsewhere. She facilitates private workshops and hosts a podcast at The Hive Poetry Collective. Most recently, her poem "The Value of Tears" was chosen by the poet Denise Duhamel as winner of the Glitter Bomb Award. (dionoreilly.wordpress.com)

John Olson is the author of numerous books of poetry and prose poetry, including *Weave of the Dream King*, *Dada Budapest*, *Larynx Galaxy*, and *Backscatter: New and Selected Poems*. He has also published five novels, including *Mingled Yarn In Advance of the Broken Justy*, *The Seeing Machine*, *The Nothing That Is*, and *Souls of Wind*, which was shortlisted for a Believer Book of the Year Award in 2008. A recently completed sixth novel, *You Know There's Something*, is forthcoming from Grand Iota Press in England.

Lisa Allen Ortiz's new book is *Stem*, winner of the 2021 Idaho Prize judged by Ilya Kaminsky.

Robert Pesich's work has appeared in *MiGoZine*, *7x7*, *The Bitter Oleander*, *Sand Hill Review*, *Santa Clara Review*, *Content Magazine* and other journals. Work also appears in the anthologies *Wondering the Alphabet* (Bitter Oleander Press, 2017) and *And We the Creatures* edited by C. J. Sage (Dream Horse Press, 2003). He is the author of *Model Organism* (Five Oaks Press, 2017) and *Burned Kilim* (Dragonfly Press, 2001). He has received support from SVCCreates and the Silicon Valley Community Foundation, and was thrice a Djerassi Resident Artist Fellow. He currently

works as president of Poetry Center San José, at Swan Scythe Press, and as a research associate at Palo Alto Veterans Institute for Research and Stanford University.

Dylan Pliskin is a poet and educator from San Diego. He has an MFA in creative writing from SDSU. His poems have been published in *Second Stutter*.

Sarah Rabkin is the author and illustrator of *What I Learned at Bug Camp: Essays on Finding a Home in the World* (Juniper Lake Press, 2011). After teaching writing and environmental studies at UC Santa Cruz for more than 30 years, she now works as a freelance editor and workshop leader. Sarah is seeking a publisher for *The Quiet Activist: Healing the World by Doing What You Love*, which is excerpted in this issue. She lives in Santa Cruz County with her husband, poet Charles Atkinson.

Christopher Gabriel Rincon is a writer serving time at RJ Donovan Correctional Facility.

Doren Robbins is a poet, mixed media artist, and educator from Santa Cruz, California. Robbins' art and written works have appeared in *The American Poetry Review*, *Another Chicago Magazine*, *Exquisite Corpse*, *5AM*, *The Iowa Review*, *Kayak*, *Lana Turner*, *Miramar*, *New Letters*, *Nimrod*, *Otoliths*, *Salt*, and *Sulfur*. His books were awarded the Blue Lynx Poetry Award 2001 and the 2008 PEN Oakland Josephine Miles Poetry Award. In 2021 Spuyten Duyvil Press published *Sympathetic Manifesto, Selected Poems 1975–2015*. He was Professor Emeritus at Foothill College until 2022.

Nnadi Samuel (he/him/his) holds a BA in English & literature from the University of Benin. His works have been previously published/forthcoming in *Suburban Review*, *Seventh Wave Magazine*, *NativeSkin lit Magazine*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *Quarterly West*, *Common Wealth Writers*, and elsewhere. He was the winner of the Canadian Open Drawer contest for 2020. He is the author of *Reopening of Wounds* and *Subject Lessons* (forthcoming). He tweets @Samuelsamba10.

Amando Sanders is a writer serving time at Valley State Prison.

Ralph James Savarese is the author of two books of prose and three books of poetry. He's also the author of a chapbook of ekphrastic poems, in response to the paintings of Tilly Woodward, called *Did We Make It?* He lives in Iowa.

Heidi Seaborn is author of *Marilyn: Essays & Poems* (PANK); the 2021 PANK Poetry Prize–winning volume *An Insomniac's Slumber Party with Marilyn Monroe*; her acclaimed debut volume *Give a Girl Chaos*; and her Comstock Chapbook Award–winning *Bite Marks*. Recent work appears in *Blackbird*, *Beloit*, *Brevity*, *Copper Nickel*, *Cortland Review*, *diode*, *Financial Times of London*, *The Offing*, *Penn Review*, *Radar*, *The Slowdown* and elsewhere. Heidi is Executive Editor of *The Adroit Journal* and holds an MFA from NYU. heidiseabornpoet.com

Lindsay Stewart is from Glen Ellen, California. Her work has been featured in *The Los Angeles Review*, *Tar River Poetry*, *The I-70 Review*, *Spillway*, and *The Shore*, and one of her poems was featured on an episode of the Poetry Foundation's VS podcast. Her chapbook *house(hold)* is forthcoming with Eggtooth Editions

Santa Cruz poet laureate **David Allen Sullivan's** books include *Strong-Armed Angels*, *Every Seed of the Pomegranate*, a book of co-translation with Abbas Kadhim from the Arabic of Iraqi Adnan Al-Sayegh, *Bombs Have Not Breakfasted Yet*, and *Black Ice*. Most recently, he won the Mary Ballard Chapbook poetry prize for *Take Wing*, and published *Black Butterflies Over Baghdad* with Word Works Books. He teaches at Cabrillo College, where he edits the *Porter Gulch Review* with his students. He lives in Santa Cruz with his family. <https://dasulliv1.wixsite.com/website-1>

Ubaldo Teque, Jr., is a Guatemalan poet, essayist and memoirist from Southern California. His poetry and prose have appeared in *Red Wheelbarrow*, *Pilgrimage* and other publications and was read on the program *Central Coast Poetry Shows* on Community Television. His first collection of poems and essays, *Nino Inmigrante*, was published in October 2020 by Right to Write Press.

Andie Thrans (b. 1952, Oakland, CA) is a Sierra Nevada-based visual artist who uses watercolors in wildland forests to create paintings and artist's books that explore mystery, reverence, and delight, while also grappling with the vanishing habitats of our era. Merging the lineages of illuminated manuscripts and natural history field journals with a contemporary art and science awareness, her paintings weave intricate detail into rich layers of shape, color, and hand-lettered text to evoke the interconnectedness in ecosystems of the Greater West. An interest in forests regularly takes her to remote places accessible only by foot or kayak for extended wilderness expeditions from Alaska to Baja California and Hawaii. Her work is held in many public and private collections, is regularly exhibited, and has been honored by institutions including Sitka Center for Art & Ecology and Yosemite Renaissance. She lives in a small river town in the Sierra Nevada foothills with her husband. They spend time in the wilds whenever they can.

Lester Virgil is a new addition to the A-Yard workshop. His writing shows great promise and he is eager to embark on new poetic creations.

Melissa West's work explores the fine line between comfort and menace in our most common stories and shared experiences. The place where they meet is sometimes fraught with tension, sometimes filled with magic. In her prints she often depicts the characters who populate myths, legends, and fairy tales, but transplants them into a modern or neutral setting. The tension thus created helps viewers see these familiar tales anew, and think about the ways they remain relevant to the modern world. Many of her prints take a topical slant, honoring the tradition of broadsheets and political tracts. West lives Watsonville, California, with her spouse and three cats.

Patricia Aya Williams lives in Southern California. Her poem “Abilene” earned Honorable Mention in The Steve Kowit Poetry Prize 2020–2021. Her work has appeared in *San Diego Poetry Annual*, *Writers Resist*, *Origami Poems Project*, and *The Closed Eye Open*.

Gary Young’s most recent books are *That’s What I Thought*, winner of the Lexi Rudnitsky Editor’s Choice Award from Persea Books, and *Precious Mirror*, translations from the Japanese. His books include *Even So: New and Selected Poems*; *Pleasure; No Other Life*, winner of the William Carlos Williams Award; *Braver Deeds*, winner of the Peregrine Smith Poetry Prize; *The Dream of a Moral Life*, which won the James D. Phelan Award; and *Hands*. A new book of translations, *Taken to Heart: 70 poems from the Chinese*, is forthcoming from White Pine Press. He has received grants from the NEH and NEA, and the Shelley Memorial Award from the Poetry Society of America, among others. He teaches creative writing and directs the Cowell Press at UC Santa Cruz.

Dedicated to Gerald Stern, 1925-2022



my father cupping
his left hand under his armpit, doing the dance
of old Ukraine, the sound of his skin half drum,
half fart, the world at last a meadow,
the three of us whirling and singing, the three of us
screaming and falling, as if we were dying,
as if we could never stop—in 1945—
in Pittsburgh, beautiful filthy Pittsburgh, home
of the evil Mellons, 5,000 miles away
from the other dancing—in Poland and Germany—
oh God of mercy, oh wild God.

Gerald Stern, from "The Dancing," from *This Time: New and Selected Poems*. Copyright © 1984 by Gerald Stern.