

Red Wheelbarrow

LITERARY MAGAZINE

National Edition, 2020



HANK WILLIS THOMAS: *If the Leader Only Knew*, detail
bronze sculpture, 80", 2014

© Hank Willis Thomas. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

Red Wheelbarrow

LITERARY MAGAZINE

FOURTH ANNUAL POETRY PRIZE

POETRY: SALINAS VALLEY STATE PRISON

ART BY HANK WILLIS THOMAS, MARK HARRIS,
KEVIN COOLEY, DOROTHY ATKINS, AND
NOAH BERGER

INTERVIEW WITH ELLERY AKERS

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 and Foothill College students. We welcome submissions of all kinds, and we seek to publish a diverse range of styles and voices. The National Edition is published each fall.

We accept submissions each winter through February 15th to be considered by our *Red Wheelbarrow* student editorial staff. Poetry Prize deadline, however, is August 15th.

Poetry: submit up to five poems
Fiction: submit one short story (up to 5,000 words) or up to three short-shorts
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
(.tif or .psd format); please do not send originals
Comics: submit one b/w strip
Other: submit one!

Please submit text files for the National Edition in MS Word (.doc or .docx).
Red Wheelbarrow Poetry Prize submissions are screened and judged anonymously and independently. Deadline for the second annual poetry prize is August 15, 2021, through [Submittable.com](https://www.submittable.com).

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De Anza College
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Cupertino, CA 95014-5702
Faculty Advisor, Student & National Editions: Ken Weisner
Email contact: WeisnerKen@fhda.edu
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Back Cover Photograph: *Embers. Delta Fire, 2018* by Noah Berger

Frontispiece (p. 1): *If the Leader Only Knew* by Hank Willis Thomas

www.kevincooley.net, www.noahbergerphoto.com

www.hankwillisthomas.com

Layout and Design: Kathleen Roberts

Proofreading: Patricia Zylus

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CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Lita Kurth

EDITORIAL STAFF

Manveen Anand

Uri Benzion

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ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

Nathalia Moran

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HANK WILLIS THOMAS:
The Lives of Others
 5" x 57", sculpture, black urethane resin, 2014

© Hank Willis Thomas. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

DEDICATION

Adrienne Rich (1929–2012) *from* “Natural Resources”
The Dream of a Common Language

the passion to make and make again
where such unmaking reigns

...

My heart is moved by all I cannot save:
so much has been destroyed

I have to cast my lot with those
who age after age, perversely,

with no extraordinary power,
reconstitute the world.



HANK WILLIS THOMAS: **Raise Up** bronze sculpture, 112.2" x 9.84", 2014
© Hank Willis Thomas. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

Samuel's Angel | *Kim Hecko*

Samuel brings me gifts, wrapped in scrunched-up colored paper or sealed in plastic bags. Four walnuts in their shells. An old Magic 8 Ball. A rock he decorated with markers. And drawings. They are wild scribbles, swirls of color, each with a story. Tornados. Earthquakes. Rainbows. He is very patient with me when I ask him to repeat what he has said. Speech therapy is helping but, still, I have a very hard time understanding exactly what he is trying to tell me. The stories he tells me about his pictures spill out quickly and are too often lost to me in their speed and in the animation of his voice.

Samuel stopped speaking entirely when he was three. The kind of chemotherapy he was being given not only interrupts development in the language center of the brain, also it effects the muscles around the mouth and jaw to such an extent that making and pronouncing sounds becomes belabored and even impossible. He did not begin to speak again until he entered kindergarten, and then his words were halting, unintelligible, and few.

By first grade the words were flooding out of him. Stories, ideas, observations. In the midst of words slurred, truncated, poorly pronounced—pahaho for pájaro—a few big words, *terremoto* (*earthquake*), *tornado*, *leucemia*, which is Spanish for leukemia, come out with precision, as if he was sculpting them with his tongue before letting them out, like they were living things he had been holding in his mouth.

When I heard that there was a boy coming to first grade who had had leukemia, I didn't want him. I told myself it was because if I got sick again, it would be traumatizing for him, which, although true, wasn't the real reason. I didn't want him because I couldn't bear to look into the face of a six-year-old who had been in treatment since he was barely three, who had seen more of the inside of hospitals and clinics and doctors' offices than a park or the beach. A child who had been poked by needle after needle so often that it might have stopped hurting after a while because it became so normal to feel pain.

I couldn't bear having to look into the eyes of the mother who had to hear that her three-year-old had cancer, the eyes of a mother who had to sit with her child in endless waiting rooms, watch as his skin was pierced over and over, as poison was injected into his small

still-developing body week after week for three years.

I didn't realize at first that Samuel was the boy who had had cancer. In fact, there were three chubby Latino boys I had a hard time telling apart and I spent that first day of school calling Samuel Pablo, and Pablo José, and José Samuel.

José was the first to emerge clearly. He did indeed look a little like a gummy bear as his kindergarten teacher had written on his placement card. He was the one whose skin glistened after recess, the one whose cheeks turned ruddiest when he was hot. The one who I thought was smiling all through that first day but who I finally realized was not smiling at all but clamping his teeth together in a grimacing grin trying not to cry because he missed his mother. That was José.

And once I had seen José for José, I could see clearly that he and Pablo and Samuel looked nothing alike.

I noticed, then, that Samuel's cheeks looked familiar. They weren't chubby but swollen, the kind of inflated look you get when you take steroids, a lot of them, during chemotherapy. Oh. I went back to reread his placement card. "He's a survivor." Oh no, I thought. "See me about medical issues," his kindergarten teacher had written. Somehow in reviewing those cards I had either skipped over that information or read it and not absorbed it. Samuel. Samuel is the cancer kid. I got the cancer kid. He was mine now.

"Don't you just *love* him?" his kinder teacher asked me when I went to find out more about him. "He is such an amazing kid."

She told me that he had been diagnosed when he was about three, had been in treatment ever since and through most of kindergarten. Had been receiving speech therapy and twice-weekly help from the special education resource department.

"He likes to talk about it," she told me. "He wants to talk about it. When my mom came to visit once, they showed each other where their ports had been inserted. He liked that. He loved my mom."

So, during free play one day in the second week of school, I approached Samuel and told him that I knew he had had cancer and that I was so glad he was well now.

He pulled down the left side of the collar of his t-shirt and showed me a raised pink scaly scar, which I instantly recognized as

the place where his port had been inserted and then finally removed. I pulled the collar of my shirt to the side and pointed to my scar. He looked up at me, and I noticed that one of his eyes was just ever so slightly off kilter. Chemo? Did chemo do that too? I wondered.

He told me, “*Mi cáncer se llama leucemia.*” He drew out the word *leucemia* slowly, almost sound by sound, and then asked, “*¿Dónde estaba tu cáncer?*” He flinched slightly when I placed my hand on my abdomen.

“My grandma had cancer in her stomach,” he said, looking at me uneasily. “But she passed away.” He paused and thought for a moment. “She is in Mexico.”

I briefly wondered if Samuel might think that Mexico is where you go when you die. But looking back at his ravaged eyes, I knew that this child knew very well that you did not go to Mexico when you died. Just a mistake in verb tenses.

The following week, he pulled a gallon-sized zip lock bag out of his backpack and asked me if I wanted to see his angels. He laid playing card-sized cut outs of angels one by one on the desk. They were floating on clouds and had solemn adult faces; they were swathed in soft pastel colors, had halos and wings and light emanating from behind their haloed heads. All but the last one, a cut-out picture of Jesus with the usual blood dotting his palms and dripping down from where the thorns pierce along his forehead and into his hair. But this Jesus did not cast his eyes up towards heaven; they looked nowhere; they were vacant, like little piles of ash. And next to all the other gentle, beckoning angels laid out there, this picture of Jesus looked as lurid as a photograph of a car accident on the front of a Mexican tabloid.

I thanked him for sharing his special pictures with me and told him I was glad he was able to bring his angels to school with him.

Samuel is the kind of child whose look lingers on you just a few seconds after you have spoken. Like he is catching up or waiting to fully absorb what you have said. He slipped the angels back into the bag, asked me to seal it, and then put it back in his backpack.

The very next day Samuel told me that he had brought me a copy of one of his angels. A gift. One I could keep. Samuel held it out to me and said, “Here is an angel for you, Maestra Kim.”

He handed me a color copy of the garish picture of Jesus. I wondered why he had chosen this unsettling picture to have had copied for me instead of one of the others with wings and soft colors and no blood. But I thanked him and told him I would take it home and put it somewhere special.

I put it in my purse and forgot about it for a few days until I unwittingly pulled it out thinking it was my grocery list. This dead-eyed Jesus looked different to me when not surrounded by the angels and it began to make sense. For Samuel, this was not a macabre rendering. For Samuel, blood and being punctured are what saved him. Pain, needles, suffering—that was the backdrop to his toddlerhood. He had to make friends with all of that to stay alive.

When we have free time, Samuel draws. He fills the entire page with crayon scrawls, the unformed scribbles of a much younger child, the reds and blues and purples dark and waxy. Each picture contains an entire story that he is anxious to tell me. I repeat back to him what I heard, getting key points wrong, and he presses his lips together in quiet exasperation and tries again.

Over the next few weeks of school, I realize that he knows a lot about weather phenomena and snakes, especially big dangerous ones like the black mamba, and sea animals too.

I imagine Samuel during his hours and hours in the chemo chair, the IV planted into his port just above his heart, being read to or watching videos about tsunamis and earthquakes and animals.

Talking with Samuel's mom after school one day I told her that Samuel and I had talked a little about his cancer.

"I've had cancer too," I told her. "And I am so sorry your family had to go through this. He had to be so brave, so strong."

"Not at first," she said starting to cry. "But he got stronger. He got braver."

"I can see how brave he is," I told her.

He sits at recess like a spectator to what his young life should be, should have been, preferring the company of adults, sitting and talking to running and playing. When he walks, he seems to rock forward from heel to toe as if the soles of his feet are curved, each step as if he is catching himself just before he falls.

He smiles infrequently and almost never laughs. He wears his

wooden rosary around his neck, the clunky wooden crucifix dangling below his breastbone. He has other necklaces too, threads with cloth tags stamped with images of saints and biblical figures, and his backpack with his plastic bag of angels.

I listen to Samuel, try hard because I want to understand every single word he says. I want him to learn to pronounce everything else in his life with the same cutting precision as he pronounces those terrible words he has had to say far too often. I want him to recapture his own life, the one he should have had, the one without any cancer shadow.

The drawings, the gifts, the stories, they keep rolling out, unbreakable once they are shared, given, seen, and heard.

His kindergarten teacher was right. He is an amazing kid.

“Don’t you just love him?” she had asked me.

“Yeah,” I tell her. “It turns out, I really do.”

Betsy Minter | *Gary Young*

Betsy Minter woke one morning with a cough, and three days later she was dead. We met when we were children, but it was decades before I learned that from the time she was eleven, she and her mother played Hearts and drank beer every afternoon while they waited for her father to come home from work. Sixty years ago, her father taught me how to fish. This morning, I fished for hours. I took my hat off when I came in from the water, but for the rest of the day, I couldn't shake the sensation that it was still on my head.

2020 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 the fourth annual poetry prize. The poets Dorianne Laux and Joseph Millar were this year's final judges.

2020 WINNERS

1ST PRIZE: "Faustian Bargain"

by AE Hines of Portland, Oregon

2ND PRIZE: "requiem for a scream"

by Arien Reed of Fresno, California

3RD PRIZE: "Looking"

by Jim Daniels of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

2020 FINALISTS

"the visit/alzheimer's," Claire Acerno

"If I Had as Many Hands as Vishnu," Stephen Ackerman

"Postpartum Depression," Bridget Bell

"Planned Parenthood Abecedarian," Chelsea Bunn

"Mother," Morgan Corona

"Legacy," Susan Florence

"I Lose My Teeth Every New Moon," Russell Karrick

"Stirring the Ashes," Lynne Jensen Lampe

"Summer Crop," Heidi Richardson

"Memory's Fence," Jamie Ross

SELECTED 2020 SEMIFINALISTS

"Newsfeed," Dante Di Stefano

"Winter 2020: A Premonition," Ben Gunsberg

"Anaphora Is the Name We Give the Daughter We Do
Not Have," Julie Marie Wade

Faustian Bargain | *AE Hines*

for Larry Kramer, d. May 27, 2020

I wanted an open relationship with death,
an understanding we'd both see other people,
a promise that at the end of the night,
the last party over, we'd still go home
together.

This, one way of explaining how I survived
the eighties, the nineties. How I rolled from boy
to man, then rolled around with men
in that other time of plague. Walked over
flame-kissed stones without so much as a blister.

For years though I worry time's running out. Catch
glimpses of him stalking from corners of dark bars.
Too often, find we're in love with the same person.
Awkward triangles that never last, games of lust
he always wins. I stay. Watch so many go.

But I'm no immortal. One night, bartered time
expired, having done with it whatever I've managed
to do, he'll stroll up and tap my shoulder, tell me,
a deal's a deal.

Only then, enveloped in his black
and terrible wings, when he chokes me
with his kisses, will I understand the worth
of time and what I've paid.

My only hope, that he comes first for me, and not
my husband. *That* angel of man. I hope he's upstairs
asleep, or out running an errand. Maybe someplace
down the block, lost, searching for our car.

requiem for a scream | *Arien Reed*

i could have told you
a little girl hides inside and
i'm not sure where i began
maybe it was a song
my every breath is a requiem
a chord churning into fire
that cacophony of rhythm
fresh as flesh still tearing
where i loved my sounds

this is how it begins
a man stares out from my eyes
the girl still cringes in my skeleton
maybe i was always trans
my every thought is to disappear
snapping flashing vibrant
i never wanted to hear
my voice shreds my own ears
so i broke them like fingers

i could have shown you how
they hold hands delicately
i tell them to be quiet but
maybe i was never here
yet i want to be alive
and loud as birth
take me there but let me live
i don't recall a single moment
i wasn't ready to call my own

Looking | *Jim Daniels*

I had a thing for a woman in a hard hat—
maybe because I'd seen so few of them.
Not like in TV commercials or situation comedies—
an accessory like chewing gum and saying *ain't*—

but on real heads doing real work. One in particular
worked the cut-off switch on a cookie-cutter press
across from the one I worked on in the axle plant.
She sat on a stool—safety glasses and hard hat

and blue coveralls that pulled tight against her ass
in my direct sight line. She could not look away
from the press's steady thundering rise and fall:
if it came down crooked, mangled steel

jammed the machine. I stacked cutouts
of axle housings 50 high from pallets of baskets
then slid them on rollers into the press. I could
not look away from the stacking, each cutout-edge

sharp enough to shave with. But I could not
look away from her, despite the many stitches.
Served me right, I know. Guilty, guilty, guilty.
No one deserves to have a spotlight

on their ass, sweet or not, surrounded
by sharp steel or not. I never said a word
to her. Plenty of other guys with plenty
of words. Other women taught her

to loosen up the cut on those overalls
and chop her hair and wear eye
and ear protection for the no-nonsense
look. Scuff up that bright yellow hard hat.

Stacks of 50 high. I got down on all fours
on the rollers and shoved them into the press
with my steel-toed boots like the trained animal
I was. Stitch after stitch, and I never healed.

the visit/alzheimer's | *Claire Acerno*

the sky with its empty space
that is not the poem

not the bird at our feet
that hup hups on two stick legs
nor the tree's summer branches
with its last green leaves
ready to fall
that is not the poem

we watch rays of sunlight
dance on the Channel
rush to become one
with the Atlantic
that is not the poem

hours repeat the scene

mother sits beside me
her one-brake wheelchair
rolls yesterdays into today-tomorrow
not one decision left to make
her foot flicks in time to music
only she can hear
that is not the poem

the cloud white-blue circle of her eye
blinks *I'm gonna miss it here.*

What will you miss mom? I wonder

I'll miss you. her simple reply

I'll miss you too mom
that is the poem

If I Had as Many Hands as Vishnu | *Stephen Ackerman*

I would touch you tenderly
And then touch myself tenderly
As I wished to be touched by you.
I would open four books
And read four passages
With my four tongues
And these choristers would be
Scheherazade for the four Queens
Of you. If I had as many hands as Vishnu
I would draw silk with one hand from my sleeves,
Blindfold you with silk with another, lash you
With silk with another, remove the blindfold
With another. I would text you with a free hand and
Telephone you with an idle hand
To report that I had applied WD-40 to the valves
With one hand, removed the soufflé
From the oven with another, scattered
The seed for the songbirds across the surface
Of the earth with another,
Leashed the dogs with another
And was now in the field playing long toss
As I washed your hair with another.
There would always be one hand
Soothing you with the vowels
Of a sign language that I perfected
By listening to the sounds the signs
Made in you and I would release
The fingers of my leftmost hand
To do as they please while my rightmost hand
Conducted the string section and the brass and
The wind, the west wind, which traveled down
The life line of one of my many hands.
I could not foretell how long I would live,
For all my hands told a different story,
And I could not foretell how long we would love,
Though all my hands sought to please you.

Postpartum Depression | *Bridget Bell*

a strange fish in the ocean's midnight zone
unable to ever see light, a hot empty
attic, a loose button dropping unnoticed
off the cuff, slick stones at the bottom
of a river, a car-shattered deer dragging
its broken body, a window painted shut, a cornered mouse
frantic along the floor boards, wheels on black ice—
spinning, spinning, spinning—

Planned Parenthood Abecedarian | *Chelsea Bunn*

Almost Thanksgiving when I hold the plastic stick
blotted with a little plus sign in my hand, faint
calligraphy made by waste,
desire turned to matter. Minutes turn
elastic—I imagine you here, I imagine you not here.
From above, you'd see a woman, her man,
glimmer of what-if between them. Days later, I
haunt the waiting room, pale
infidel braced to be divested of an unnamed
jewel. The young technician asks do I want to
know if there is more than one and would I
like to see the image on the screen. After
my soft *no* I scan her face for information, find
none. What do I expect? A cheerful *it's smaller than an
olive?* And would I like her to insert the wand? It will be
painless. She studies the womb,
quarry from which you will be blasted and
raked clean through me. I am blank as a
slab of pure white stone. I
tie my shoes. And because it feels
unholy not to, left alone, I stand in
view of the monitor. I see a mouse. Or a duckling, floating
weightless through a gray galaxy. I see through myself. A plus tipped over is an
x—a value not yet known. On the edge of this new
year, bittersweet sacrament offers itself to me again and again:
zygote, sweet pea, primitive streak, bulge that holds the basic heart.

Mother | *Morgan Corona*

Mom sits on her couch ripping chicken apart with her bare hands, shoving the pieces into her mouth. Gnawing on the bones, she says, *This is a new couch, you know? It's much better than the old one.* Juice drips down her wrists, and onto the couch, staining the cushions with grease. She finishes her whole plate, and wipes her hands on her shirt. She stares at the wall for a few minutes then asks, *What if the best part of my life is over?*

Legacy | *Susan Florence*

In Memorium of Valentina Blackhorse, 28
Died of Coronavirus, April 23, 2020

For my daughter Poet:

I wash sleep from your eyes
with cloth woven of the Milky Way.
Gently, these starlit threads in sky's night
will open you to day.

I feed you words of our unwritten language
that voices of the elders will nurture you,
their stories sown in you, shared
and spread like wild morning glory on desert floor.

I clothe you in my jingle dress
to sparkle and dance at one
with rattle, flute, whistle, and drum
in prayer ceremony and song.

You will spring tall as fertile fields of corn
and the spirit of sister turtle will enable you
to walk a long life on sacred soil.
Plumes of brother eagle will crown your hair.

Your family of all living things
will guide you, and your homeland
of plains, mountains, forests, and lakes
will be your ground.

They say I left too soon
*"a beauty, someone who cared about our culture,
a woman with dreams of leading the Navajo Nation."*
But the dream I dreamed was you.

I Lose My Teeth Every New Moon | *Russell Karrick*

I lose my teeth every new moon
but I always find them, smaller than
I remember, inside of a guava.
I often forget to bother looking
until I've already found them semi-
enclosed in the fruit's pink flesh.
I've found them in the dark wooden
bellies of matryoshka dolls, below
an old guitarist's sombrero where
he may or may not have been hiding
his lunch. I once pulled a guava
from behind a polar bear's ear
& he thanked me with a bloody seal.
I watched a guava fall from my
grandmother's tutti frutti hat
as she crossed the street despite
her having been dead for years.
I can reach my hand into the open air
& catch a guava every time. If a finch
lands on a branch I taste a guava
on the pink walls of my gums & slosh
my tongue anxiously until I feel
the edge of each crooked tooth snug
in its cavern of foul morning breath.

Stirring the Ashes | *Lynne Jensen Lampe*

They kept her body till I got there, 18 hours, give or take. A good daughter knows the time to the minute and I wasn't that good most days. Losing Mama feels like ripping out a fingernail. Less because it hurts than because that nail's meant to be there, starting an orange peel and shielding raw flesh from a wayward blade.

She, beyond breath, is
not sorry. Blue nylon gown
slinks bone and table.

Thank god she was for the crematorium. No leftover makeup needed to rosy her cheeks and lips. They keep buckets of blush, foundation, even fingernail polish. Some people want the tinted formaldehyde and tissue fillers. I have no desire for Mama to look less dead unless she's not dead at all.

She, skin to skin, is
jupiter cold, gathers me
into her hollows.

Seventy-seven years, then a furnace, a shovel, a year in a small box. They said we could spread the ashes wherever. Last time we came here, Mama didn't get out of the car. Today it hurts to breathe whirlpools and February snow on short-leaf pine. I cradle the plastic bag in two hands, crouch on stone, spill her into dark water.

She, beyond bone, is
cloud food and ever rising,
no one's broken fire.

Summer Crop | *Heidi Richardson*

pardon me for w/black cook shame
grocery shelf stared down,
these hundreds-bagged earthy eyes,
Black Eyed Peas, what's left
all's left
me, a soulish food virgin except for
collards—mine somehow like the mythic
mammy's, never bitter
God
knows why this insane guilt
masked, over these hundreds winking
eyes, a dish I'm going to have to
look up but feel
I somehow should have known—
from in my genes and six steps back
a pig's foot please
from a butcher with his own viral
pause-widened eyes,
both of us, huffing shared canned air
neither of us, sure what to do
with Southern legumes or my shame
or the innocent limbs
all's left
stone trippin' his case,
me, w/black cook net-tenning
pot collab in my head, mouthing
shbbb, chill babe, topped up shelves

Memory's Fence | *Jamie Ross*

I can handle the keys on this machine tonight
like any latch worker in this Butte Montana plant

It's an old Ford place
but there aren't any plates

And there ain't no elocutions on graveyard
from the foreman, just a cold salami sandwich
my wife made in her sleep.

I wish there were mustard, or a house in Rawlins,
my bronze quarter Memo
with her withers rested, riding out the salt
to the Appaloosa Well—I loved her
in the heat and the autumn fire;

If I had a thought

it would be for the ranch, fix Memory's fence—
It's a bad day to work on a door on the line

the best of the steel goes nowadays to China

and a piece of shit to want a Ford these days

But I want one for Jenny
and I'll work until we're ready,

my daughter's got her lamb crated for Sioux City;
Randy's found another ghost-face in his milk.

The kid's got a bucket and I've got a trough
the slough's just a ditch with a sour bit of rain.

You shouldn't listen late to the country out of Dallas—

It's a bad piece of metal you can't bend or torch

or undo like the locks
in a scarred woman's hair.

Newsfeed | *Dante Di Stefano*

after Wanda Coleman after Elizabeth Bishop

flashlight app

As you might not doubt, forest fires rage over the continents. Even Antarctica burns. Our hands have become lanterns. Our most omnipresent source of illumination, the glowing space inside an ampersand.

instagram post

Meanwhile, last week in Galveston, the mounted police led a handcuffed man down the street; he'd been tied with rope to an officer's saddle. Scroll down to see the image. Click yes to tint sepia.

earbuds

It's Friday morning, and my daughter and I listen to Sun Ra and His Astro Infinity Arkestra. She dances even after the music stops. I want to teach her that her brother is the wind, and that this is the whole, true and only everlasting meaning of America.

WiFi

The candidates ready themselves. The schoolyear begins. The president eats another bucket of Kentucky Fried Chicken aboard Air Force One as he flies over Birmingham, Montgomery, & Selma. The governor admits to wearing blackface and does not resign. The new version of iOS is now available to download and install.



In a poem, someone innocent has been shot again. Even the enjambments have purchased firearms with high-capacity magazines. Someone sings: "I'm dying, I can't breathe." This is no kind of music. This is real. When Leroi Jones said: "nobody sings anymore," he was talking about certain illimitable constellations of breath. All these devices sync at chokehold. Rate this poem out of five ☆☆☆☆☆.

August 2019–October 2019

Winter 2020: A Premonition | *Ben Gunsberg*

Months ago, I mourned the death
of my guitar—glitter washed off
the treble, bass emptied of dark rum.

Dry heat split the spruce, a luthier said.
Happens this time of year.
She snapped, we think, or, *he's cracked*.

How many hard-strummed hours?
Had I loosened strings—
what difference does it make?

Without tension, nothing rings. Waves
ceased. Cords went slack.
My mind unraveled and then the fog

filled with sirens—the wish to drift
near rocks. I saw myself
die slowly in a small, wooden box,

where rhythms coughed and scales
panicked. Before the top recessed,
before the breach, I played for hours,

slid between high and low E—
notes strolling downhill, notes rising
like herons. I sang until my lungs

ached, until the scalloped brace
jerked. A shudder passed between
the sound hole and my chest. My ear

searched for some constant other
than sirens. They swell now—
one shrill note.

Anaphora Is the Name We Give the Daughter
We Do Not Have | *Julie Marie Wade*

When will you rest?

When will you weary of dressing these words in their turtleneck sweaters?

When will you take up their hems, long-syllabled sleeves loosed to thread?

When will you unravel?

When will your mouth soften, forsaking again the tenuous flex of its smile?

When will your hands cease their chattering?

When will your fingers repose?

When will your hips sway to their own sulky music?

When will your kneecaps crackle, applaud?

When will your eyes close like the lush pink mouth of a flower?

When will your pulse spill from your veins, singing *Alouette*?

When will you lie with me in the blue fields of cotton?

When will you leave the buzzing moon to its hive?

When will your arms turn to wheat, your shoulders slacken like warm loam?

When will you rise—a thick-breaded silence?

When will you sleep—smooth golden sheaf in my arms?

PHOTOGRAPHY: KEVIN COOLEY

The year 2020 has been a watershed for the West in terms of confronting the explosive reality of climate change and the need for enhanced readiness for incredibly vicious, catastrophic, and prolonged fire seasons. Our featured (cover and folio) artist, Kevin Cooley, writes of his *Still Burning* series as centering “on work created before, during, and after the recent La Tuna Canyon Fire that nearly destroyed my house, my studio, and my entire photographic archive. As both personal catharsis and as continuation of an ongoing exploration of the physical and symbolic properties of fire, motivated by the 2016 election, this work is both my most personal, and political, to date.” Cooley is philosophical as well: “Fire is a powerful natural force that we harness for greater good, and it is the only basic element that we can create on demand, yet when out of control it has the potential for grave destruction.”

We also feature work here from Kevin’s series *Controlled Burns*, of which he writes: “Swirling and imposing clouds of smoke contend with one another in a physical battle between diametrically opposing explosions of black and white. From a structuralist point of view, this imagery serves as metaphor for binary opposition, e.g., good vs. evil or day vs. night, yet this is not the sole line of inquiry. Inspired by the smoke signals of the recent Papal conclave, which uses smoke as form of basic communication, this series is a part of a larger artistic practice focusing on human relationships to nature.” Cooley also calls *Controlled Burns* “a visual representation of an inherent duality in how we interact with nature, symbolizing our desire to conquer and control nature, reminding us that sometimes we must fight fire with fire.” Cooley makes intense beauty out of fire as well.

On his website (www.kevincooley.net), Cooley writes that in his multidisciplinary art practice, he works with “elemental forces of nature to question systems of knowledge as they relate to our perceptions and experience of everyday life. Using photography, video, and installation, he creates frameworks through which to observe experimental and performative gestures to decipher our complex, evolving relationships to nature, to technology, and ultimately to each other.”

Since 2014, Cooley has held solo exhibitions at the Catharine Clark Gallery, Disjecta Contemporary Art Center, Kopeikin Gallery, the Museum of Photographic Arts, the Nevada Museum of Art, Pierogi, Ryan/Lee Gallery, the Savannah College of Art and Design, and Yerba Buena Center for the Arts. His work appears in prominent public collections including the Guggenheim Museum, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Museum of Fine Arts Houston, 21c Museum, the Nelson-Atkins Museum, and the Museum of Photographic Arts. Cooley lives and works in Los Angeles, California, and Brooklyn, New York. We are grateful for the privilege of sharing a glimpse of Kevin’s work with our readers in the 2020 *Red Wheelbarrow*.



KEVIN COOLEY: **Controlled Burn IV** photograph, 60" x 40", 2013

Courtesy of the artist



KEVIN COOLEY: Lone Pine Fire, Lone Pine, CA photograph, 30" x 38.5", 2018

Courtesy of the artist



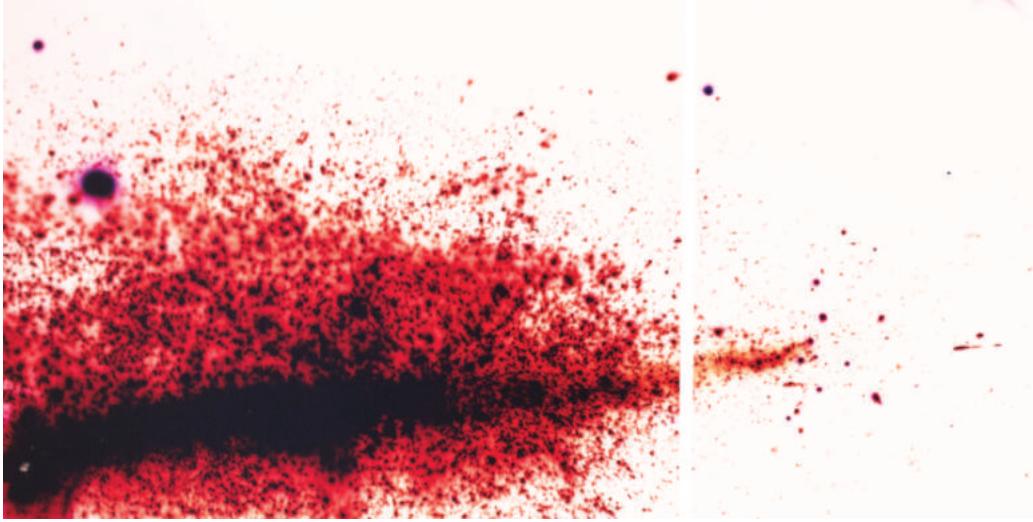
KEVIN COOLEY: La Tuna Canyon Fire, Tujunga, CA photograph,
30" x 38.5", 2017

Courtesy of the artist



KEVIN COOLEY: Woolsey Fire, West Hills, CA photograph, 30" x 45", 2018
Courtesy of the artist





KEVIN COOLEY: **Starlight Explosion** photograph, 60" x 16" triptych, 2014

Courtesy of the artist





KEVIN COOLEY: **Controlled Burn II** photograph, 60" x 40" 2013

Courtesy of the artist



KEVIN COOLEY: **Controlled Burn III** photograph, 60" x 40" 2013

Courtesy of the artist



KEVIN COOLEY: **Controlled Burn V** photograph, 60" x 40" 2013
Courtesy of the artist

Anxiety of Influence | *Stephen Kuusisto*

There are many poems now—
Think of carousel horses
Carved with love, hand painted,
The child inside us thrills.
Yesterday my wife said:
See how they have their mouths open?
Those horses are in pain.

A Poem Is Some Remembering | *Stephen Kuusisto*

Fish scales and barter
I grew up wild, barefoot
Mournful, split, talkative,
Always talking.
Did I mention letters?
I wrote them
Almost daily.

I think children
Shouldn't write letters
Or have to—
But blindness
Hospitals
Escapes
The trees
One starts early
Writing to no one.

Souvenir | *Stephen Kuusisto*

I went down to the Piraeus where yachts bobbed against one another. Blind, I stepped on a silver spoon which I shoved in my pocket. Forty years have gone and I still have it, a demitasse spoon thin as a dental probe. A sighted friend tells me there are three tiny birds on its stem.

Beautiful Statues | *Andrew Gent*

The horse caught in the act
of being factotum to whoever
is cast in bronze, iron, marble, or stone
above him. The beautiful
emblem of honor,
faith, duty, etc. Whatever
story the winning side
wants to tell themselves.
Eyes bulging, teeth bared, bit
pulling the mouth back
in a stereotypical pose
of terror. No one asks
which side the horse was on.
Just as no one asks
the rope at a lynching
whose neck it would prefer
to pull apart. Ah! But
those beautiful statues
must be preserved
so someone can claim
they knew
right from wrong.

Truth Is a River | *Andrew Gent*

Truth is a river,
a stream you can see through.
Objects in the stream
do not look the way they do
in real life. Distorted and magnified
by the rush of water
passing over them: rock, fish,
your own hand
shimmers and dances
like a 1950s movie
about the guests in a hotel
trapped by a hurricane
projected on a curtain
of rain from a hurricane
inundating the hotel where you sit
watching the movie. Yes,
it's like that. But much, much worse.

Cocoon | *Robert Fanning*

I am cocoon around a threaded flaw	of a grey-flaked gauze long staked and strewn	I've spun my unbound laws
whose frayed seams are sure to tear	of their inward wear my web it seems	whose hems composed of fear
my flaring there is need aflame	of some sheer hymns a seething glare	heft my unwinding air for my spider whom
I've unsewn the cause is sure to open soon	of this gnawing known to many eyes	by loom and lies I am cocoon

Down the Rivers of the Windfall Light | *Robert Fanning*

Houdini leaps from Weighlock Bridge, Rochester, NY, May 1907

How to refute our vision's knowledge?
Take these 10,000 grainy faces frozen in an image
watching the spectacle at Weighlock Bridge:

Look, Houdini's mid-fall, suspended in bondage,
chained angel a blink from the Erie Canal. Past the persiflage
of men in fishing boats, paid watchers only here to dredge

him up, past a sea of eyes locked on his passage.
The moment's inescapable. Should he emerge—
he frees them from fear's currents. Should he drown, they're hostages

sinking blind. Somewhere inside, his message
lies unbound. His green chains sunk in the sedge.

The Straight Jacket | *Robert Fanning*

Houdini studies a patient wearing a straitjacket—
Halifax, Nova Scotia, 1896

[Stranger, so you see through me]
[a way of escape. As if being bound]
[to all I want is choice. Lunacy,]
[I know. Why not leave. Find]

*though I'm free already, I see
you know: Binding me outward
in your skintight coat, I'll hang. Crazy—
my cape of wings: the cage. Smothered*

[a way. Escape. As if. Being bound,]
[maybe I'll be. There's no way out]
[I know. Why not leave. Confound]
[who confines me. Don't doubt.]

*you've taught me through death's garment
we break back into life. Wanting the flight,
the flailing secret. A curious experiment,
the will to free the will to fight.*

[Maybe I'll be. There's no way. Out]
[of selves. Wrap yourself like me. Wear]
[what confines you. I don't doubt—]
[in this crush of arms, you'll tear]

*Of this prison the body, this mad trickery,
the double bound lie: I'll reveal
we bear our dying through. A quickening,
a flutter of wings. The lifting of a veil:*

[off selves. Unwrap yourself. Like me. Where]
[trapped bats hear the sky. Open the latches]
[in this crush of arms. You'll tear]
[through what's held me. Whose hatch is

*they all will soon see—we make
of shadows a home
then break
a womb wide enough to roam*

[trapped. Bats hear the sky open the latches]
[to all I want. Is choice lunacy?]
[Through what's held me? Whose hatches,
[Stranger. So you see through me.]

*Thrown wide—
the swaddling clasp—the way
We're born to lift, to glide
our naked escape
the only ever lovely disarray*

Ropes | *Robert Fanning*

Houdini escapes the ropes and chair, 1909

One loop of rope a threat of wrath.
Another a drunken lullabye.

One loop, a black horse eye
lowering its lid. The devil's blink. Shame

one loops alone later, the tight rhymes
of self-hatred learned by rote.

One loop your deep want's moat.
One a clasped throat fear makes of air.

One loop a muted prayer. Nightmare
of sea mouth, wrecked cities, wandering lost.

One loop your yes made no, the twisted
tongue. Death, a scratched frame, a shadow

one loop shows in the reel. Rows
of winding hours, your molting flesh.

One loop a memory of a wish
to be heard from beyond. Your going

one loop hopes to stop. A growing wing.
A bone that slips inside, the shudder beneath.

Washing | *Ellery Akers*

We are washing our hands. In front of a stone spigot. A faucet. A tin basin. A bucket. A sink. With soap. With a washcloth. With a rag. We are opening up the lattices of our fingers, we are washing our knuckles, our wrists, we are turning our hands over so we can see our palms—the creases, the line that a palmist would say is the fate line, the health line, the heart line, the life line that curls under the ball of the thumb, the marriage line a crinkle to one side, lines formed when were in our mother’s belly—we are lathering, we are swabbing, we are wiping, we are hoping we are scrubbing away that tiny sphere with its spicules, we are singing *Happy Birthday* or *God Save the Queen*, we are looking for bubbles, we are looking for foam, we are looking under our fingernails, we are drawing the sack of loneliness over our heads, trying to breathe inside its coarse hood, and our hands look wrinkled and drained from being washed so often, we are rubbing our palms together the way villains rub their hands together in a movie to signify they’re going to get more money.

—from the forthcoming anthology *Pandemic Puzzle Poems*,
Blue Light Press, 2021

At Any Moment, There Could Be a Swerve in a
Different Direction | *Ellery Akers*

There was a moment
when shooting egrets for feathers became wrong.
There was a moment
when the Wilderness Act
changed the lives of billions of blades of grass.

I remember the moment when a river that used to catch fire turned
from flammable to swimmable.

A swerve smells astringent, like the wind off the sea;
it tastes red, the way Red Hot cinnamon mints
burn in your mouth;
it's heavy, the way the weight of letters is heavy,
arriving in sacks at the Senate;
it sounds like the click of needles
as hundreds of thousands of women knit pink hats;
it looks like a coyote, crossing the freeway to go home.

INTERVIEW WITH ELLERY AKERS

Celebrating her new book,

Swerve: Environmentalism, Feminism, and Resistance

RED WHEELBARROW: *Ellery, thank you so much for being here. We're excited about your new book, Swerve: Environmentalism, Feminism, and Resistance (2020, Blue Light Press). The book's political argument is clear and moving. I know this is not exactly a new thing in poetry—to bring together political urgency, emotional courage, intimate connection to the physical world, and meticulous attention to craft. In Swerve, you call for witness, engagement, and resistance around headlong climate change. How do you describe your culture work? What specific issues drove you into it? And how do you talk about the relationship between your so-often delicately observed poetry and the sharp appeal to resist that underlies it?*

ELLERY AKERS: Thanks, Ken. I began writing this book because I felt disheartened after the 2017 inauguration. I felt even more discouraged when the Stream Protection rule was cancelled in one of the first acts of the administration. And it went on from there, as we know—one environmental protection after another struck down. I felt compelled: I had to write my way towards hope. I think all poetry is political, because it tells the truth. And the truth is this is a dark time for the earth. But there is hope. Coal is on the decline. It's been found that if 3 1/2 percent of the people in a country become activists, change happens. We're close to that on climate issues right now. Ethiopia planted 350 million trees in one day. The Green New Deal is being discussed. Earth Justice has done a great job blocking the worst of the administration's anti-environmental projects.

RW: *Could you remind our readers of your background in botany and the biological sciences? Was your love of nature, art, and poetry always there alongside that?*

EA: I started writing poetry as a kid; my grandmother would often recite Shakespeare, so poetry seemed to be in the air. I love being outdoors. I love nature. I often take a notebook and a sketchbook and a camp chair and sit on a wilderness trail and write and draw. At one point, I considered being a biologist, and I took a lot of courses in botany and entomology and astronomy, but I realized I didn't have the skill set for science, though I love knowing the stars and plants and birds; it makes me feel like I belong. I volunteered for Point Reyes Bird Observatory for quite a few years, and worked out on their Farallon Island station. I also spent twenty years camping in the wilderness, living in a tent for six months a year. I wrote several of my books out there. You can't help being an environmentalist if you spend a lot of time in nature. Nature is my muse and my teacher, and I want to protect it.

RW: *Your book is generous—not angry so much as pointed. And in its ingenuous questions, minute observation, and expansive episodes of praise, Swerve often feels like it almost might be written for children awakening to the endangered earth, as well as for the most hardened activist. Did you think about reaching a wide audience in this way when you were putting this book together?*

EA: I'm delighted you think *Swerve* might be written for children. That's a great compliment! But I never think about readers when I'm writing: it would be like looking over my shoulder. But when I finished the book, I hoped it would encourage people to take action and inspire environmentalists.

RW: *You often turn to homage—the book is dedicated to Rachel Carson—as a way to salute your forebears and inspire your reader. In one poem (“Women and Nature”) you pay homage to geneticist Barbara McClintock, forest ecologist Suzanne Simard, primatologist Jane Goodall, and environmental activist Wangari Maathai—all of them intensely and devotedly resisting the scientific norms of their era. Just as the grass, the toads, the trees, are presented here with respect and tenderness, so are the voices of others. This feels so central to the book’s feminist ecology: ecosystems are also communities of voices, others, forebears, mentors.*

EA: Yes, Rachel Carson gives me hope. I needed to remember that we've been through dark times before and come out victorious. It didn't seem possible in the sixties that she would win: the corporations and polluters were so strong. But she got DDT banned. And because of her we have the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, the Wilderness Act, the Environmental Protection Agency, and even the concept of ecology. I'm also inspired by Christiana Figueres—her idea of “relentless optimism” and her vision of a reforested planet—Greta Thunberg, Jane Goodall, Wangari Maathai, all women who have spoken truth to power. By drawing on the strength of these women I felt empowered to write the last section. They made me feel despair is a luxury we can't afford. We have solutions.

RW: *Good poetry not only defines key value terms (defines the living language) but also “subverts the code”—the code as in the prevailing norms and definitions within a dominant culture. Dickinson did this—she turned on its head, in her writing, the meaning of the natural world in relation to the dominant religious ideology (and gender assumptions) of her time. She healed/liberated herself—found truth and beauty and real creative ecstasy—by determining to overturn in poetry the code of her culture and era—the prevailing values. In your work, in “#MeToo: Women in Touch with Their Anger”, for example,—the venomous toads “comfort her, they*

sing, they are alive.” Using the fairy tale from the Brothers Grimm, you explore our cultural relationship with gender (femininity and beauty), money (gold), toads (nature); what is “clean,” and what is “dirty”—money, or toads? “Overturning the code” means allowing poems to upend our sense of what is culturally true, beautiful, good, powerful. Are toads “good”? What is a “good” woman? Do you feel that such questions about language and culture are also at the core of Swerve? Which “value terms” are you most interested in (re)defining—and why?! Do certain poems come to mind? We could print one here :-)

EA: Thanks for such a thoughtful question. In terms of values, what comes to mind is “The Buddhist Practice of Bowing.” This poem tries to understand longing, and questions the value of making more and more money. In America, this is regarded as a virtue. It seems as if the CEOs and oil barons believe that making a trillion dollars rather than a billion dollars will make them happier. But it’s not true. A Princeton study shows that after earning \$75,000 a year, you don’t become happier, even if you make more money. So I feel as if I’m witnessing a tragic mistake: the earth being burnt down because of a misunderstanding—that more and more money brings happiness.

The Buddhist Practice of Bowing

“I bow with all beings to attain liberation”—Katagiri Roshi

I bow to iron bracelets as they clank on the arms of prisoners,
to shackles, handcuffs,
to the charm bracelets that jangled on my mother’s arms,
to the daisy chains I made as a child—
the broken green stems smelled juicy,
the way the grass smells after a rain.

I bow to the woman who bought a thousand dollar Coach bag,
and also to the woman who bought a gallon of milk at the
Dollar Store.

It’s almost impossible to bow to the Koch Brothers,
so instead I bow to the electrons of longing
zinging around inside them.

I bow to the young men
who love cars,
who love speed, chrome, gasoline,
who batter themselves against the mistake
as the mistake batters them.

Even our money
is steeped in longing:
it's longing for the forest it came from.

RW: *What a wonderful poem and example of redefining a value term—confronting prevailing notions of wealth, happiness. Swerve is a call to resistance, and writing is one dimension of your resistance. As you write in your poem for Rachel Carson, words for her were a kind of activism. “She called the facts to her. / They turned into ink. Into words.” Then you go on to comfort Carson, and perhaps yourself and your reader as well: “Be patient./ You would not have been given this assignment. If you were not strong enough to hold it in your bones” (22). Your poem “Taking Action” is another example of how in your poems you ache to inspire your reader to act, not only in writing, but in other ways too:*

Taking Action

“We live in capitalism. Its power seems inescapable. So did the divine right of kings. Any human power can be resisted and changed by human beings.” —Ursula le Guin

It's good to act. To lean into the body of the world.
To know lawyers sit at airports with signs
saying, *We Can Help* written in Farsi.

It's good to stop machines—giant needles that drill into the earth—
because what they are stitching is *The End*.

To see soldiers who wear camouflage—
shirts and pants that look like leaves and bark—
kneel in front of the Sioux
and say they're sorry for what's been taken,
even the language for *leaves* and *bark*.

It's good to signal to the others who are shocked,
to know we're not alone in shock,
that when we drive past a house
we know someone is sitting in a chair in front of a TV, shocked.

But the men who want to make us afraid
are afraid.

And my time on earth
is a huge breath:

I can blow that breath into the world.

RW: There's so much to appreciate about that little poem, from the le Guin epigraph to the list of "activisms," to the quiet power and compassion of the last lines. What about other modes of action, beyond writing? How do you suggest to readers pathways to take action within their already busy lives?

EA: We can write letters to senators and representatives. We can get out the vote. We can vote for candidates endorsed by LCV—the League of Conservation Voters. We can also find one thing that calls to us, something we enjoy. One of my friends has been working on the election. Another is working for Stop the Money Pipeline.org, which is involved with divestment. Some people enjoy planting trees. Joanna Macy says it's important to pick one thing; otherwise, it can be overwhelming. And she also says this: don't do this alone. It can be helpful to join a group like 350.org, or the Sunrise Movement, or the Sierra Club, and do one small, steadfast thing on a regular basis, like writing a letter every week.

***RW:** We live in a time of anger, and division. You explicitly embrace in Swerve a path of direct witness as well as tenderness for loss and human frailty. It's hard to gaze at what is so sad. Maybe we'd prefer to write ecstatic poems rather than laments. Does the life of truth-telling and activism ever become too depressing, too emotionally intense? What gives you resilience to continue this life of honest witness?*

EA: Like everybody, I get depressed about what's happening, and sometimes the grief can feel overwhelming. I think it's important to feel the grief. But I've also found it helpful to take action, which is my antidote for

despair. I've found several things that make a difference: Joanna Macy's books and the teachings of *The Work that Reconnects*—I sometimes watch *Active Hope* videos on the internet; I listen to Christiana Figueres; I meditate, and keep a gratitude practice. And I spend time in nature.

RW: *I know you are a talented visual artist too—your website (<https://elleryakers.com/>) shows us your wonderful talent. How does that other way of seeing complement or perhaps enrich your writing life?*

EA: I feel lucky to have two art forms, because one can get stale and repeat oneself. When that happens to me in poetry, I can say, oops, I need to do some drawing. In both art forms, I have a high failure rate: only one out of thirty poems or drawings has some energy. This is a pretty normal failure rate, I believe; as William Stafford said, *lower your standards*.

To me, poetry and art are related: they both rely on the senses. If I'm drawing a forest, I can smell the leaves, feel the wind on the leaves, the texture of the leaves, and all that goes into the drawing, and the viewer can experience all those sensations in their body. It's the same in poetry—if I'm present in my body—and of course, like everybody, I'm usually not present, just banging around in my head, worrying—but if I'm really smelling and listening and looking, the viewer and the reader get to see and hear and smell also.

My goal as an artist is to make a true mark—a mark that is felt and present and not “fake.” The same thing applies to poetry: I want to tell the truth, be present, to really see. All this isn't so easy.

RW: *It takes so much patience and courage to tell the truth, to really see. In terms of *Swerve* as a whole, at what point was it clear to you that Part II of this book, focusing more on feminism and personal healing, needed to be at the core of your political book on environmental witness and resistance? How do you talk about the book's structure? Was that an “aha” moment as you were putting it together, or more of a preconceived framework? The courage of Part II contributes to a very prescriptive work never feeling didactic or preachy. *Swerve* is an authentic, brave and loving book.*

EA: Thanks so much, Ken, that's great to hear. I wanted to explore the connection between women and nature. Women understand interdependence. We know we're in the web together; we're not separate. We all rely on rivers and rain and grass and the water cycle. I felt ecofeminism had to be

included in the book, as we live in a rape culture: in the U.S., a woman is raped about every two minutes. According to the World Health Organization, one woman in three experiences physical or sexual assault world wide. And this same kind of violence and appropriation happens to the land.

RW: *There are so many fierce healing poems in Swerve: "The Sibyl Speaks of the Fire," "Dandelion Woman" (36)—"she knows nothing is divided." "She's not defined by the stares of men, / she's defined by the gaze of stars" (36). Nature is a balm and teacher. In "What Nature Teaches Us," nature soothes the "mind's locomotives." How is nature your healer, and how important is that theme to the larger project of Swerve?*

EA: I feel nature is a form of ancient medicine. It's the original meditation teacher. It always restores my sense of wonder and curiosity, allows me to slow down and feel grounded, and helps me live in the present. Nature is always authentic and real, and that's a relief—it's an antidote to meaningless chatter and worries. And I've had many encounters with animals that are comforting; once, after a loss, I was crying in the middle of a field, and a chickadee landed on my shoulder; I felt better immediately.

Nature's healing powers aren't just woo-woo; science bears this out. Kids with ADHD who play outdoors have milder symptoms. Patients recovering from surgery heal more quickly if they can see trees. Contact with trees and greenery can even encourage a longer lifespan. And in Japan, the medical practice of forest bathing has been found to fight off infections.

RW: *How do you talk about the relationship between nature (the healer)—and the fragile, luminous human psyche? What do we lose in terms of the health of the psyche every time we lose a species, a language, a forest? Do you have a spiritual practice that helps you focus and energize your gaze, awareness, patience, and intention as an artist?*

EA: One of my practices as a writer and artist is what I call *becoming*. Poets and artists have been practicing this for centuries—it's throwing one's consciousness inside another form of life, a fox, a river, a tree, and trying to feel one's way into this life from the inside.

Once I was trying to draw a blackberry thorn, and it was going badly. So I put down my sketchbook and tried to listen, to feel my way inside the thorn, and the thorn seemed to be saying, *I'm proud to be protecting the blackberry*. Was that true? I don't know. But listening in that way made me a better artist that day.

I love the visible world, but I don't want to simply describe it from the outside, I want to become it, I want to be it, I want to speak for it, I want to pull the invisible out of the visible. This requires a kind of deep listening, trying to get out of my own way.

RW: *Thank you, Ellery Akers, for this wonderful new book of poems, your lifetime of creating luminous art and poetry about nature, and for speaking with us today. Let's close with one last poem from Swerve.*

We Have the Power to Pull Back from the Brink

— “The most common way people give up their power is by thinking they don't have any.” —Alice Walker

And so I stand here and call power.
I stand here and call water.

I call creeks. Lakes.
Pools. Sinkholes.
Tide pools with turban snails
and starfish—the ones
that have come back to the West Coast,
climbing over rocks on white tube feet,
resilient, as nature can be resilient.

I call shinbones of water skinnying down into sluice boxes.
Brackish water, sulfur-smelling water, sludge.
Rain in rain barrels,
clear water spilling over dams
and clear water that has never been dammed.

I confront the brink
even though I'm part of the brink.

I call snow geese sifting onto the rice fields, honking.
White-fronted geese. Brant.

I call the shapes of leaves: spatulate, cordate, pinnate, lanceolate.

I call the hole in the ozone.
Pollen. Luciferin. Chitin.

I call rare plants and animals coming back because of the fire:
fishers, black-backed woodpeckers, globe mallows, morels.

I call fire.

And fire answers with its flaming mouth and strange whining
pronunciation
as it clears the underbrush

and the hole in the ozone answers that it is closing

and the leaves answer *a twelve year old boy planted a million
trees*

And luciferin blinks on and off
and illuminates what has been buried so long under tons of dark
water

and pollen blows into the faces of climbers
who hung all night in slings from the St. John's Bridge
to stop Shell drilling the Arctic

and water answers
*Belize banned offshore oil
and protected the second largest barrier reef in the ocean*

and my power answers
*I've always known my hand could have been a leaf.
Hemoglobin and chlorophyll almost the same.
Only one atom different.*

Pity the Farmer | *Li Shen*

悯农
(唐) 李绅

春种一粒粟，
秋收万颗子。
四海无闲田，
农夫犹饿死。

You plant one seed in the spring,
And harvest a thousand seeds in autumn.
No farmland is left untilled,
But farmers still starve to death.

Translated by Gary Young and Yanwen Xu

Turning the Soil | *Li Shen*

锄禾
(唐) 李绅

锄禾日当午，
汗滴禾下土。
谁知盘中餐，
粒粒皆辛苦。

The soil is turned in the heat of the day,
And sweat drips into the ground.
Every grain of rice in your bowl
Is born out of suffering.

Translated by Gary Young and Yanwen Xu

June 27, I Write a Poem While Drunk in Wanghu
Tower | *Su Shi*

六月二十七日望湖楼醉书
(宋) 苏轼

黑云翻墨未遮山，
白雨跳珠乱入船。
卷地风来忽吹散，
望湖楼下水如天。

Ink-dark clouds cover everything below the mountains.
Raindrops like white pearls bounce onto the boats below.
Suddenly a strong wind blows everything away,
And the water beneath the tower is as clear as the sky.

Translated by Gary Young and Yanwen Xu

Go | *Rose Black*

*You must be willing to lose
the first fifty games, you say.*

You are *Jo zu*, the higher hand,
rank of seventh degree,
yet you choose me. My handicap:
nine black stones. I place them,
symmetrically, on the pale ash board,
on the *hoshi*, the star-points.

That day, we hunted for Go stones
on the hot, sand shore. Small, round,
white or black. Perfect. You found
the first stone, and touched my lips.

It is a game played to the death, you explain.

You bow. Then, cross legged
in your samurai *bakama*, you suspend
between two fingers stones of smooth
white, loud-click them on the board,
thwack, force battle, thwart.

I am ready. I mirror your posture.
My shiny jet-black warriors click,
rally, fight. Fortify themselves
in impregnable positions.

We do not speak, except,
Atari, the warning, softly,
before each capture.

Our eyes are always on the board.
One by one, we lay our stones down.
Broken sword, flying snow.

Vietnam | *Rose Black*

On the Fourth of July, you cover my eyes with your hand.
What's this? you ask, as you slide a piece of wet green pepper

into my mouth. I begin to nibble. *Stop!* you are screaming
down the stairs, into the courtyard. Now you are a speck

on the other side of an ocean. Between us, showers of shooting
sparks, flaming tails, red and orange fire. *Stop! Stop!*

But the people in the courtyard don't see or hear you. I run
down, try to grab the shell of you without you.

The rockets boom. People laugh. Their children laugh.
Later, they will join the parade, the big celebration.

Later, in your bedroom, you yank curtains closed. I put you
to bed, pull the covers up, watch you curl toward the wall.

The room is gray ice. I wish I could say I kept trying to touch
you, reach you, that I kept trying. Because, *Go away*, you said,

it was the last time I ever saw you. Every Fourth of July
I don't, no, can't, go back to where you went. But I go back

to *you*, and us. Salad of endive, tomato, green pepper; you
so close, then gone; small white box on the table, a surprise.

Stop! Please stop! who left, what happened.

The next day | *Imani Cezanne*

I called my brother today.
because I could.
because he's still alive.

this was my protest.

Yesterday I marched in the street. The passersby were
inconvenienced by the
acknowledgment of the dead

Yesterday I held my fist in the air while the internet asked
Why break the windows?
but not
Why kill the Black kid?

I called my brother today.
because I could.
because I'm still alive.

where is he is he okay is he missing would we find him would there be a rope
around his neck if we did would the flames leave nothing behind but bones that
could belong to anyone would they speak of what he looked like with his hands up
of how his name rolls off the tongue like a hashtag would they know his police
record but not his favorite juice or his roscoe's order or his favorite episode of the
office

Yesterday I was an activist

Yesterday I was a radical

Yesterday I set this city on fire auction
block by
auction
block

but today this dialing of this number is the most noise I can make there is no more call or response left in me today the streets gag on the flesh of the slaughtered they do not chew with their mouths closed today there is nothing well mannered about a buffet of black bodies today there is no hero behind a gun fired to keep the safe more safe and all I know for sure is they might kill my brother today.

just because he's black.
because he's still alive.
this is my most reasonable
fear.

ART: HANK WILLIS THOMAS

PROFILE PHOTO BY ANDREA BLANCH



HANK WILLIS THOMAS (b. 1976, Plainfield, NJ) lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. He is a conceptual artist working primarily with themes related to perspective, identity, commodity, media, and popular culture. Hank Willis Thomas's work, including *If the Leader Only Knew* (p. 78 in this volume), is currently featured in a local collaborative exhibition, *Barring Freedom*, now at the San José Museum of Art (October 30, 2020–April 25, 2021), co-organized with UC Santa Cruz Institute of Arts and Sciences and guest-curated by Rachel Nelson and Alexandra Moore. The

exhibition features works by twenty U.S.-based artists and “challenges how individuals see and understand our nation’s prison industrial complex—a nexus of policing, surveillance, detention, and imprisonment.” Thomas has demonstrated an acute interest in the prison industrial complex and other themes related to race, gender, and cultural identity—as well as commodification of identity through popular media, sports, and advertising—in his sculpture, photography, mixed media, installations, and video art. We are grateful to offer *Red Wheelbarrow* readers a glimpse of Thomas’s sculpture, photography, and mixed media work here. Please be encouraged to see his work currently exhibited at the San José Museum of Art and to explore the full range of his art, including the remarkable video projects (such as *Question Bridge*) at www.hankwillisthomas.com. A new book surveying his career, *All Things Being Equal*, is also available on the website.

Red Wheelbarrow has a long-term commitment to featuring the writing of inmate poets at Salinas Valley State Prison in each issue alongside the work of non-incarcerated writers. For this reason we asked Mr. Thomas if we might publish a range of thematically resonant images of his work adjacent to this year’s work by inmates. Notice in particular here his mixed-media textile series (80–83), quilts made out of decommissioned prison uniforms. Nelson and Moore write that “with more than two million incarcerated individuals, a majority Black or brown and virtually all from poor communities, the prison industrial complex reveals a troubled nation. *Barring Freedom* considers the strategies artists use to reveal this racist worldview and the social problems that it effectively creates and obscures.”



HANK WILLIS THOMAS: **And One** 96" x 48", digital c-print, 2011
© Hank Willis Thomas. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.



HANK WILLIS THOMAS: **Raise Up** bronze sculpture, 112.2" x 9.84", 2014



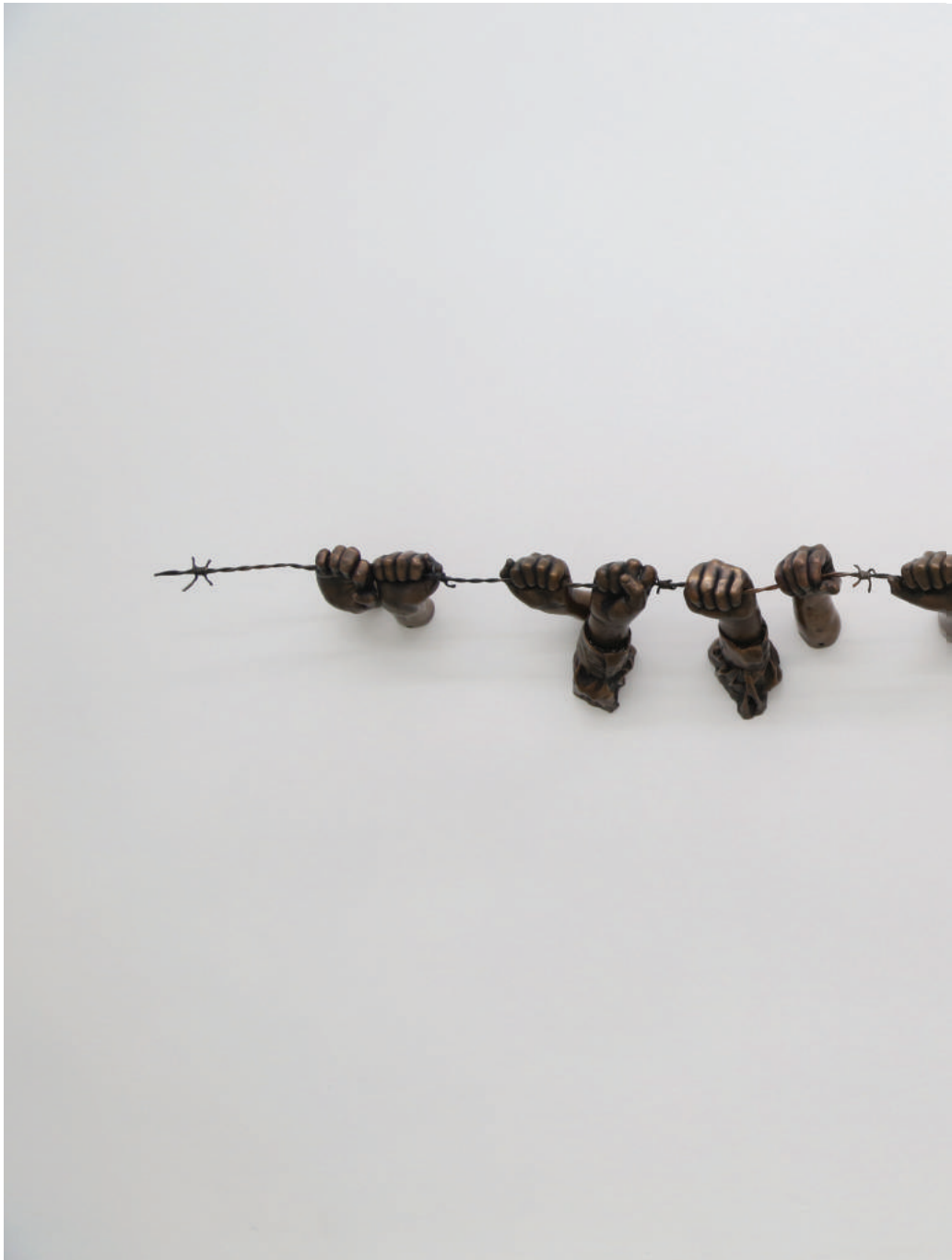
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HANK WILLIS THOMAS: *Football and Chain* 96" x 35.5", digital c-print, 2011

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HANK WILLIS THOMAS: *If the Leader Only Knew* bronze sculpture, 80", 2014

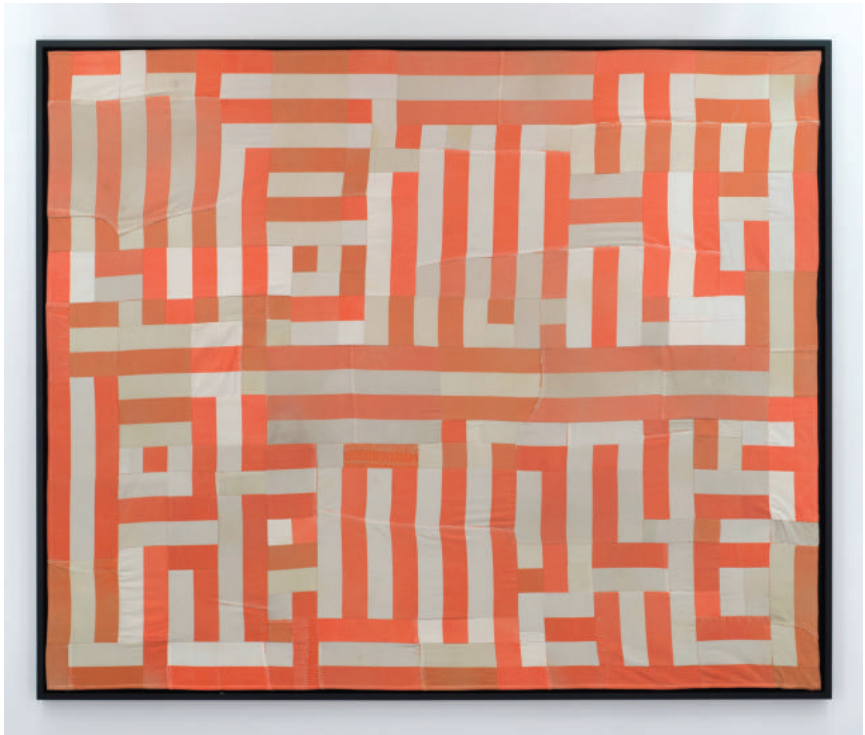


© Hank Willis Thomas. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.



HANK WILLIS THOMAS: **Angola Bound** quilt made out of decommissioned prison uniforms, 94" x 65", 2014

© Hank Willis Thomas. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.



HANK WILLIS THOMAS: **We the People** quilt made out of decommissioned prison uniforms, 73.25" x 88.25", 2015

© Hank Willis Thomas. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.



HANK WILLIS THOMAS: **Meschers** quilt made out of decommissioned prison uniforms, 75 1/4" x 57 5/8" x 1 1/2", 2017

© Hank Willis Thomas. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.



HANK WILLIS THOMAS: **Life** quilt made out of decommissioned prison uniforms, 60 5/16" x 35 1/8" x 1 1/4", 2017
© Hank Willis Thomas. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.



HANK WILLIS THOMAS: **Absolut No Return** lightjet print, 29.5" x 51", 2008
© Hank Willis Thomas. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

NEW POEMS FROM SALINAS VALLEY STATE PRISON

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. 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 prison inmates alongside the work of “free” men and women, both students and professionals. This year we are privileged to publish the work of four inmates.

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Current workshop instructors are Rose Black, Lisa Charnock, Julie Murphy, and Ken Weisner, all of whom also helped initiate Right to Write Press, a newly formed Northern California nonprofit that promotes the growth of emerging writers who are incarcerated in California state prisons, and which can be explored at <https://righttowritepress.org/publications>. Due to Covid-19, all volunteer-led programs at Salinas Valley have been temporarily suspended, so poems and prompts are being sent in weekly to distribute to inmate participants.

I looked outside my window, | *Jessica Diana Garza*

the view sparse and the land desolate.

I wondered, am I all alone in the world?

And I noticed a prison guard walking his rounds
atop the prison walls.

And walls there are plenty of,
the prison is surrounded by long, tall concrete walls.

Then I noticed the birds flying around the prison grounds
and landing on the long silver coils of barbed wire.

And I said, what's wrong with those birds?

Don't they know they're free and they don't have to be in prison?

So why do they insist on hanging around inside the prison walls?

If I were a bird I would fly far away and be free.

Why can't I be a bird?

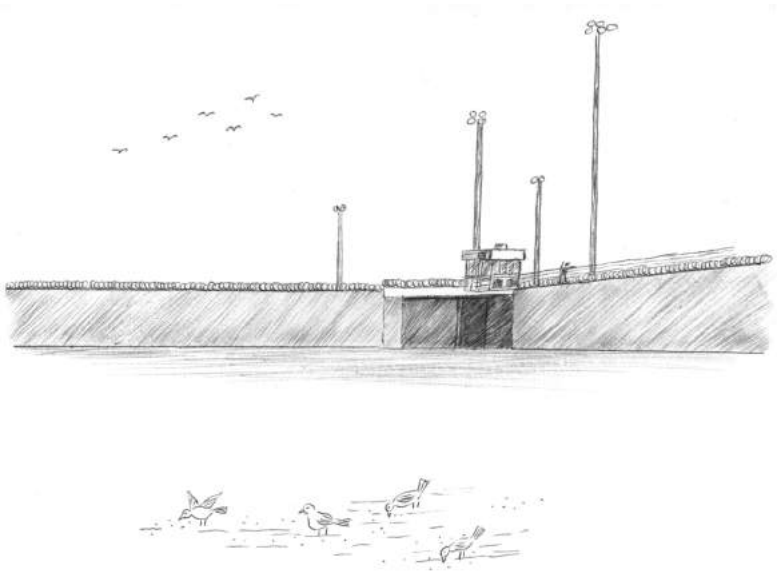
There's a spark of life that beats in my chest and it has wings.

Sometimes there are butterflies in my stomach.

Sometimes when I'm anxious there are bees in my chest.

This proves I have wings.

So let me fly away and be free. I'm sorry.



POETRY FEATURE: UBALDO TEQUE, JR.

As we crossed the river, I was piggyback on a stranger's back. I was five years old.

This is how Ubaldo Teque, Jr., came to Southern California from his native Guatemala. Years later, at Salinas Valley State Prison, Ubaldo would write poems about this journey, and about his life before and after. *Where would I be right now, Ubaldo says, if I hadn't been introduced to poetry?*

In October, 2020, Ubaldo's first collection of poems, *Niño Inmigrante*, was published by Right to Write Press, a nonprofit formed to promote the growth of writers incarcerated in California state prisons.

I cleanse my hands with black ink, Ubaldo writes. And indeed, with that ink, Ubaldo Teque, Jr., looks inside and transports himself from a dark prison cell to a place of purpose and clarity. As explorer, traveler, maker of poems, Ubaldo journeys back to the ancient Mayan landscape in which he is rooted, then, standing firm, he reaches toward sky.

Ubaldo writes in both Spanish and English. He is currently working on a book-length collection of essays and a second book of poetry. *I've always had poetry in my veins*, Ubaldo says.

The Innocence Project out of San Diego has officially been working on Ubaldo Teque, Jr.'s case since the fall of 2017. If all turns out well, Mr. Teque will be proven innocent and released in the near future.

—Rose Black

Some Advice to Those Who Will Serve Time in
Prison | *Ubaldo Teque, Jr.*

As that big metal door shuts behind you,
Don't! show your fear. Breathe normal,
and don't you dare sweat.

Shut your mouth! Observe all your
surroundings. This is now home.
YOUR EYES WON'T DECEIVE YOU.

Who do you run with? they will ask.
Think, really think what your response
will be, because they will use you.

Sleep with one eye open, and don't
become a creature of habit.
These two will save your life.

Don't accept gifts from anyone.
There are no free rides inside
of this bitch.

On days that you won't feel human,
take a cold shower—you will come back
to life. The wife, the girlfriend, they will leave,

but believe me, in due time another white
dove will bring you love. Always mind your
business, always keep yourself busy—

work, draw, pray, exercise, attend
self-help groups, enroll in school or college.
Try something new, life goes on.

If one day you want to die, because the inside
world has beat you, reach out for the pencil,
write what you feel on those cell walls.

Every word will take away a little bit
of the pain and bring you moral strength
inside of the beast.

after Nazim Hikmet

January February Prayer | *Ubaldo Teque, Jr.*

I find it so hard to write about January and February.

A chilly feeling emerges from my sleeves,
having to reminisce about the two decades
of strong winds that blew my children away,
like fallen leaves.

I lost their tiny voices in the long stretch
in between highways, hills, and deserts.
Time moved on without me—
my essence vanished from their sides.

Stranded on lockdown, I fought off stress
by reaching out to photos and old memories,
so that I could hold my composure inside
this cold, dark world.

Never sure if there was food, clothes,
shoes, toys, or roof over their small heads,
or who was putting them to bed.
Especially in January and February.

Every day I dread as I tie my shoestrings at dawn.
Prison is a dangerous place.

False reports and spoken lies by the L.A.P.D.
have ended their life span.

Oh, creator, protect my girls, son, and grandchildren,
as we hold hands walking towards the truth.
I'm an innocent man.

for my children and grandchildren

Dead but Alive | *Ubaldo Teque, Jr.*

I want to always sleep like a falcon.
I want to never own nightmares.
I want to learn how to eat patience.
I want to outlive the trees in the forest.
I want a mouthful of truth, and a side order of justice.
If the sunflower and the daisy can shine
 through turbulent times,
I want to walk out of prison wearing nothing but a smile.
I want to welcome you,
I want to wait for you to wake up in the mornings.
I want to fight off boredom, nonsense, and deceit
 from your lane.
I want to rest like a poem, and to be resuscitated,
 once I'm being read out loud.
I am the creator of poems in isolation.
I am thoughts that exercise my right hand.
I do not want to become that old history book
 covered in dust on the bookshelf.
I want my name pronounced daily, like Robert Frost,
 Pablo Neruda, Jimmy Santiago Baca,
 and Federico Garcia Lorca.

after Lorca and Terrance Hayes

for my daughters, son, and grandchildren

Rollercoaster Odyssey | *Ubaldo Teque, Jr.*

Injustice took my girls and son.
What the fuck did I do wrong?
LWOP numbed my soul,
alcohol is killing my pops.
Pruno calls me and promises tipsy.

Clean chrome memories, Dayton
Wire Wheels relaxing on Whitewall,
tires stepping on dangerous streets,
overflowing with enemies.

Missing my dyed-blond, long-haired girl,
with freckles scattered between
her big brown eyes; she understood—
Cindy, 100% hood.

Twenty-one years of twists, turns,
ups and downs inside of the beast.
Walking next to bad motherfuckers
that feast on the weak.
My flesh feels the dark madness.

Buried alive, the poet within me
pinned against my soul,
writes poetry with a blazing light.

White Lightning | *Ubaldo Teque, Jr.*

After the apples, oranges,
and fruit cocktails have spoiled,
they will eat up the jellies,
the same way the minutes have
eaten up my youth inside of this beast.
The big plastic bag will stop
blowing up; that's the sign that
it has stopped cooking and the pruno is done.

A pillow case will assist me in
straining the batch, separating the kicker from the juice.
Separating my family. Injustice separates against one's will.

The batch sits in the corner of my cell
as I tape up a stinger. An old electric outlet
and a piece of metal will help me burn
this batch tonight.

An all-night task stares back at me as I tape
a new plastic bag to the opening of the pruno batch.
A white bucket assists me in holding the stinger in place,
then the alcohol evaporates and starts sweating
into the new bag.

My hands tremble as the white liquid
starts to fill the new bag.

I hear the CO's keys as he approaches my cell.
It's counting time: 3:30 AM. I lie as if I'm asleep
but under my bunk my creation is coming to life.
I'm done. I flush all the old pruno batch
and I marvel at the white liquid. I dip a spoon
to taste my creation, it's 100% pure.

I know I'm an alcoholic. I will escape for a few days.
I will travel back in time to when I didn't know pain.
I will forget that I'm in this cell for a crime I did not commit.

This white lightning will bring her back.
My two-door Cutlass Brougham sitting on Daytona
whitewall tires will take me back to '94, '95.
Under the influence I feel alive.

after Jarvis Masters

I Carry the Leña | *Ubaldo Teque, Jr.*

I caress the warm earth with my bare feet.
I feel energized with every step
 as I carry the leña on my back.
Up ahead I see dark clouds surround the mountains
 and the Agua Volcán.
I seek asylum under a tree,
 away from the heavy rain that just started.
An unexpected lukewarm temperature rises
 as the raindrops nose-dive into the ground.
It gives off the scent of poverty and joy.
I wait for better weather. I wonder if papito will return home soon.
I enjoy his letters—they always bring all sorts of stickers,
 but I miss his voice and strong presence.
I don't like EL NORTE. He is there and I am here, in Guate.
 I am four years old.
I don't like being called the man of the house,
 because of all the chores now.
Here I AM, babysitting the leña so it doesn't get wet.
If papito were here I'd be next to a wood fire lying on my back,
 eating a homemade corn tortilla, a piece at a time.
Suddenly the rain comes to a halt, but now the warm earth
 has turned into slippery-wet mud.
I'm getting angry, so I look toward the mountains,
 because in that direction is EL NORTE.
 I yell at the top of my lungs in hopes that the wind
 carries my plea to papito
COME HOME PAPITO PLEASE
My echo vanishes into the dark gray clouds as I trek home,
 with the dry leña on my back.
I avoid slipping and falling on the wet Guate earth.

“Principium Individuationis” | *David Masette*

Many people think only of themselves
A vortex swirling backward unto “me”
A blindness that prevents the mind to see
Each living in private, personal hells.

 This ignorance shows, it tells!

An island in the sea:
“Without myself nothing else can be”
A bunch of snails in their shells.

 The opposite of this is “the other”

Seeing beyond the mirror
Caring like a bridge

 The opposite of this is “the brother”

Dying for the “our”
Means living on the edge.

The Tale of Two Cities | *David Massette*

Millionaires and homeless, that's San Francisco.

Like Gavin Newsom said, but not did:

"We, in the richest state, in the richest country in the world, have to do a better job of taking care of our homeless."—

It's so complex!

It's so much bigger than any one person. And it is like looking at the downtown skyline at night, watching it sparkle: you realize that to address the issue requires coalition...teamwork, not a Rambo paradigm.

The mental health component, the drugs, the virus, the lack of employment, the abundance of available real estate...

I say we need to build our way out of this crisis. Provide physical structures...But what do *you* say?—For some, it is the best of times, for others the worst of times...Is competition inevitable? Must we begin our logic with the premise that in order for some to be rich others must not be? Economic democracy?—The top 400 people own more cash stocks and real estate than the bottom 150 million combined. ...And they're still talking after that?

Political theater is what I see on T.V. ...actors, talkers, "law makers," panderers. I hate it! They say they "fight"...(never fought). I can't stand to be talked to that way. The conniving, the rhetorical prostitution, the "bread and circuses," the Scarne hocus-pocus. I don't have time for that...

We need an alternative party...a Poor People's Party. Imagine the look on their faces if they saw that challenging them? Let's work for that day...

POETRY FEATURE: LARRY D. JONES

Larry Jones's poetry is drawn from a deep well. It is urgent, roiled water. It is still water. It is a water with a flavor all its own. Deeply religious, political from a life-full of experience, rooted in cotton fields and family, Jones's poems ring out, sing out, and leave the reader wondering "how the hell did he do that?" His relationship to punctuation is unique, and at some point the inner editor just has to let go. When you do, when you enter the cadence of his oratory, you realize that this really is spoken word: this is oral poetry at its most rich and voiced. Read these poems out loud and imagine the poet's voice—a little gravelly, higher than you might have expected until certain words come along—reading them in a concrete room, a room that has suddenly gone silent, and that has become a different place, an open landscape, an oasis of freedom.

—Lisa Charnock

Last Ride John Lewis | *Larry D. Jones*

John Lewis, February 20, 1940–July 17, 2020

Good Trouble in Alabama 2020

It's undercurrent churning, for the days that have gone by.
Way back to the day of March 7th 1965, No more, it's 2020 now.
The life of John Lewis rest in the treetops that watch
over that Alabama river. That holds to this earth. as John's
soul went to meet his maker. John Lewis and the marchers
tried to breach the stronghold of the KKK, that day.
On the Edmund Pettus Bridge. March 7th left them
bloody and bruised. Resulted in the given name,
Bloody Sunday. The troopers set the
stage of action. For the future. And the Bridge,
the stainless-steel teeth that showed through
the view on the T.V. screen. They set like a hat,
snapshots of the racist past and present.
Looking back at him through the teeth
of that bridge. Calling John Lewis's name as the river moves
on to its destination. Every so often the clopping hooves, of the horse-
driven wagon would stop over the still water of the Alabama
River's face. Flat as a spatula on top. That was the
starting line. John Lewis helped so many people
get out of the starting blocks of life.
His blunt force trauma to the head and body couldn't
stop John Lewis's soul. His time was for all time, meet
you on higher ground. He was in people's
eyes and bodies even on Bloody Sunday.
Go have some more, Good Trouble.

Solid Stone Fluent
As moving water, never
Stopped, John Lewis Love

Digging Out | *Larry D. Jones*

I remember a time when hate consumed the fire in me. For good or for bad, it didn't matter. Because that's the way it was.

All I was saying in my heart was, Say it loud. I'm black and proud!

You got me down, but the polarity of my heart won't let you hurt my soul. You can't put two magnets together the wrong way. Something's got to change. We all live in these United States of America. We live together, like it or not.

Time after time you took my life, from that day to this day. You left me no way to fight back, but through my maker, who gave me a reprieve, without me knowing it at the time.

How many more of us haven't seen our day in court? You went as far as not letting a man attend his own trial. You left me no way to fight back, but through my maker. Again.

It took my half-white son being born for me to see what love can do. It would never have really stopped hurting if love didn't make a way for me to tolerate hate. We all have to be encased together with love.

I write this haiku = for you

Love surprised me
Took revenge fight, and sins
For everlasting change

The smell of fatback would wake me up early in the morning,
grab me by the throat,
and burn my nostrils.
It was, "Get up right now or die."
It was a smell that I hated.
It scared me so bad,
I had to hold my breath from my bed to the back door
before I could breathe the fresh air. But then,
I always ended up eating some of the fatback once it was cooked.
It was so good.
You could chew on the rind for a long time.
The grease would be recycled,
like an old time religion.

The sun wasn't up yet.
Did I have time to move?
Who would the revolution take today?
This is something not read in a book
or a one-sided newspaper report.
From the East to the West,
I think we all died a little bit that day.
I was at school getting a drink of water.
I was ten years old.
That's the day I got mad enough to fight.
Who would help my people now?
They had killed the President,
John Fitzgerald Kennedy.

To all that came later,
I was blind with anger about their deaths;
Martin Luther King, and a lot more.
The quiet deaths in a war of a different kind,
way before you were ready.
Watching decades of little black boys gathered,
like the hot grease in a skillet.
Kiss your mama, 'cause you might not make it home.

“My Country, 'Tis of Thee,” why you trying to kill me?
“Run, Charlie, run,
run, Charlie, run.”
“Time is up on you.
Time is up on you.”

We were the first line of defense.
From the old to the new,
I see it happening again.
They have tricked my people out of their blackness,
closed their eyes and manicured their minds.
You could eat the meat and chew on the fatback for a long time,
or kiss a girl that was so ugly, she was pretty.
My best friend, ironic enough that it is called Old Factory,
I'm still trying to learn the smell of life. I have not seen you,
Messiah, and cannot wait to the day that I talk to you.
Isaiah, if you ever read these words,
how are you going to know God's sense of humor,
if you never talk to him?

The cliché, “Be careful of what you wish for”
didn't fit in my black man's world.
The wave of mistaken identity
because when you start so low,
that everything is a stepping-stone.
“Lead by example.” Fuck that.
I still have to be me. The words still fill my head,
“You were born with everything you need.”
Did it really take this much hate
to search for the existence of this life and love?
The smell of fatback was an alarm clock.
As I step back into the arena of life, remember,
“You were born with everything you need.”
Yeah, right. Fuck that.

Provocation | *Larry D. Jones*

The realization
gave to us freely life is
all of life air out.

we just let it hurt
you'll never have it always
when you can get it air out.

The beatings took
all the tears away, no
more at all air out.

How to stop the pain
Christmas was on that day, grace
was unknown air out.

The air turned fire
when he was told, that he was
forgotten air out.

No present that day
speak if you can, talk into
existence air out.

lifetime of flashes
gave his life on the cross, all
to come in air out.

This day, this day never
forgotten when I found the
pain and let air out.

Jones of Jones | *Larry D. Jones*

song in haiku form

Close to you again
when the night, is running out
the sun runs in.

I see portals
that reveal, a hung down head
silently knocking.

Sleep-glued eyes
gather, protect a song I
didn't know I sang.

Too high to move, I'm
waking up dead, see stones.
counting my days.

Walking talons of time
authentic, pentagon line
catch before complete.

Turn over, wind, and slap
the air, pebbles much closer
to being all there.

The core of distance
repetition, protection
my gravitation.

Jones of Jones
cornerstone, not for distance
just special kinship.

I could talk to you
all day, but that would put my
heart, back in the way.

Boundaries were made
when, the night is running out
the sun runs in.

8-4-20

Juneteenth is Black Lives Matter

One of the eclipses of time, that will never be matched holds my today = **scars**
That left a black man, and woman underfoot. Who would of known, to know = **cotton**
Was a curse, with a blessing, of life being learnt, likening to the prickly pear = **fields**
Of life. Early or late, as you want to say, transported to California's = **institutions**
From the deep south to its last stronghold. The goldrush was on black men = **lives**
Back and soul, from Mississippi to Oklahoma, the dust bowl to California, that's all I knew = **lost**
Timing is that force, that's so uninhabited to black people. When will we = **hold**
The magic, stop being gone like fireflies cleaning the teeth of a northeaster = **no**
When will that one drop of life, run to the pool, here on this earth, where = **one**
Comes and leaves the same way. I must have heard, this a thousand times are = **is**
It's that one time, I understood it. Stand till you can't stand no more, then stand, none = **better**
You know it's out the bible. I don't have to read about it, just close my eyes. Are = **than**
Vividly seeing symptomatic slavery at work. We are people too, of this earth = **you**
Forget white people that we picked up arms with you, not against you = **and**
With the last air in my black race, we won't stop in this life, of fields = **you're**
Systematic oppression left impressions, of seeing life in a bad, hindsight = **no**
More every job there is, is not for black people. How you think you're so much = **better**
Even when we are licensed, for the trade you won't let us work other = **than**
Making us live and breathe in your cesspool of racism and hate = **anyone**
Can see from then to now, 2020 that the spirit of hate, cannot run = **the**
Race of a parallel reality. It must be met with the things spirits do = **dream**
The spirits that close the physical wounds, on my black people's backs, never forgetting = **that's**
Us. Our bodies sunk to the bottom, of the oceans, last breaths returned the spirits, that = **kept**
A race hardwired to the post of time. Juneteenth a shooting star, from we to us. Before = **me**
Life stinks sometime it can take your mother father and five brothers, only to see in spirit = **alive**
I hope to see their graves, as I enjoy the thought, of talking to them, who knows = **life**
Most people I know just want some letting alone. It don't make no difference how = **yesterday**
They killed us, remember because there is a new way today. But are they ready for = **love**
It has to be of a different kind, because your love only, answers to your love = **war**
Has to stop. Pay attention, live and let live, you can act a damn fool anytime = **hate**
Will only do for a course, that you will have to make a conclusion about = **why**
We as a people are growing learning how to see ourselves, experiencing the = **black**
Consciousness, who knows how many souls it takes to reach the threshold = **lives**
A tapestry that tumbles on the wind, come home to take hold, because black lives do = **matter**

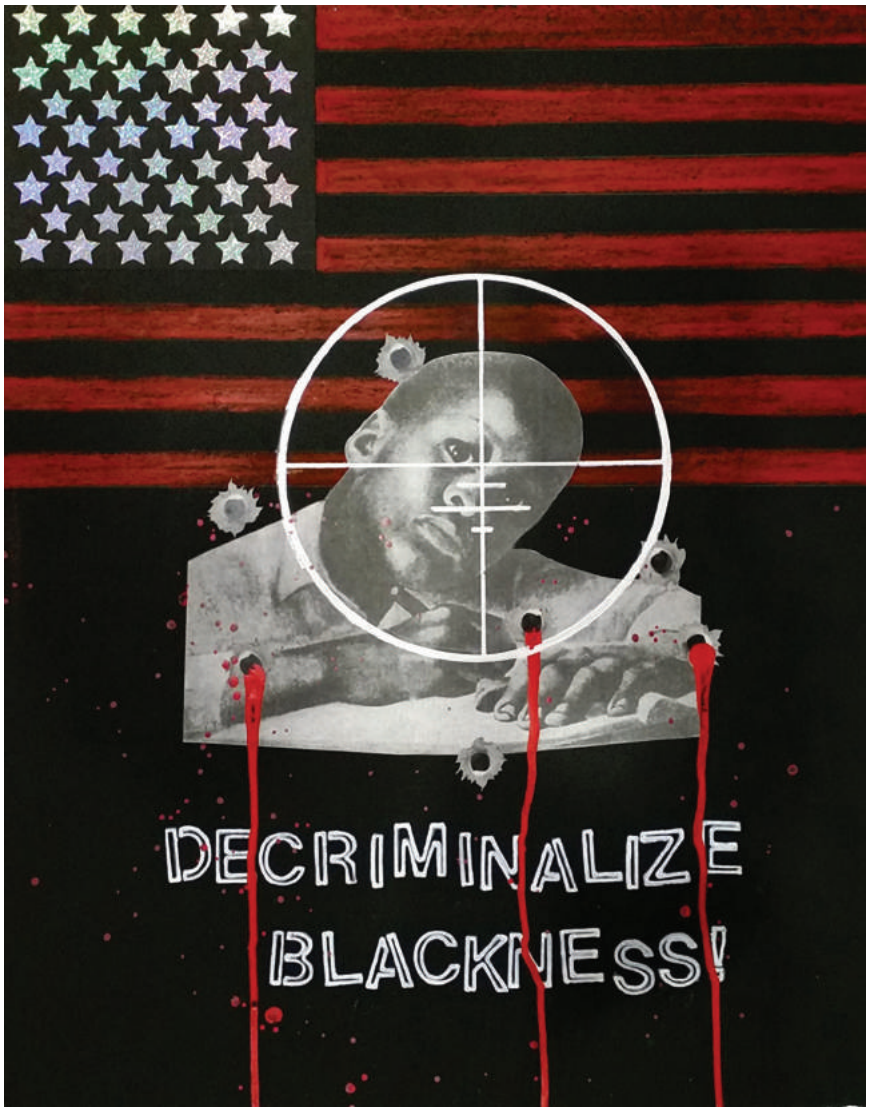
PAINTING, COLLAGE, AND MIXED MEDIA:
MARK HARRIS



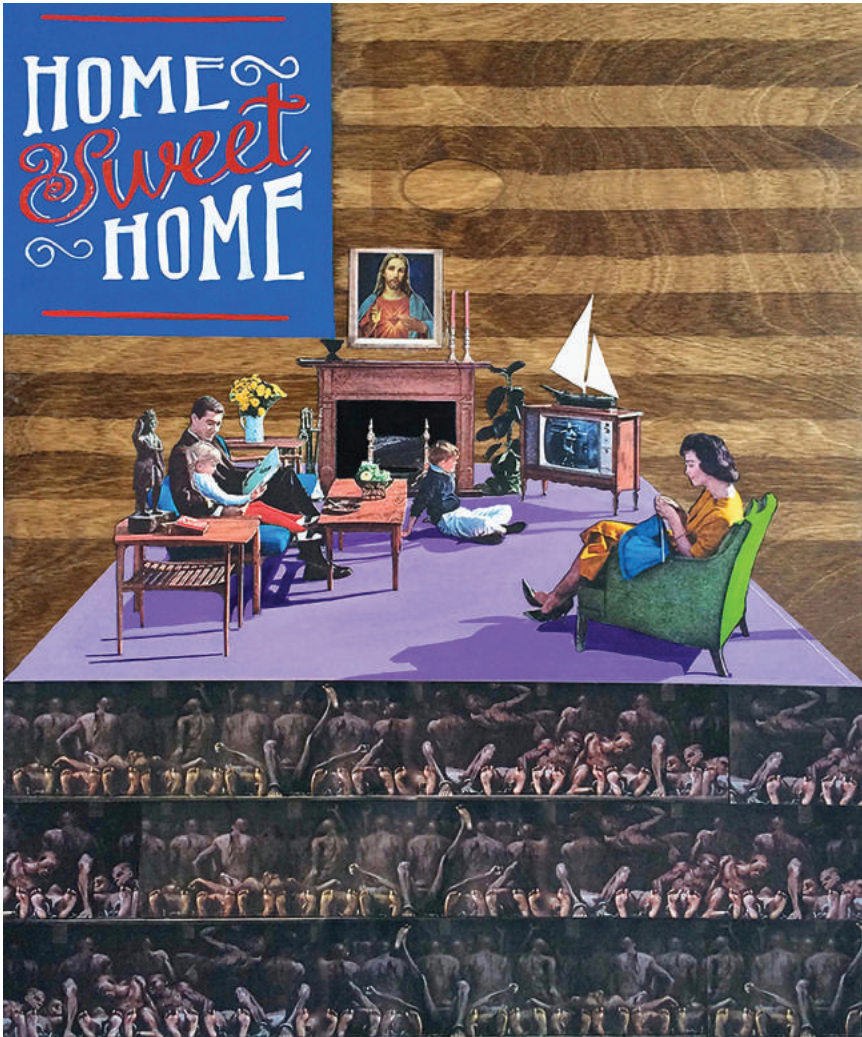
MARK HARRIS: Original Gangsters mixed media on paper



MARK HARRIS: Enquiring Minds Want to Know mixed media collage on panel



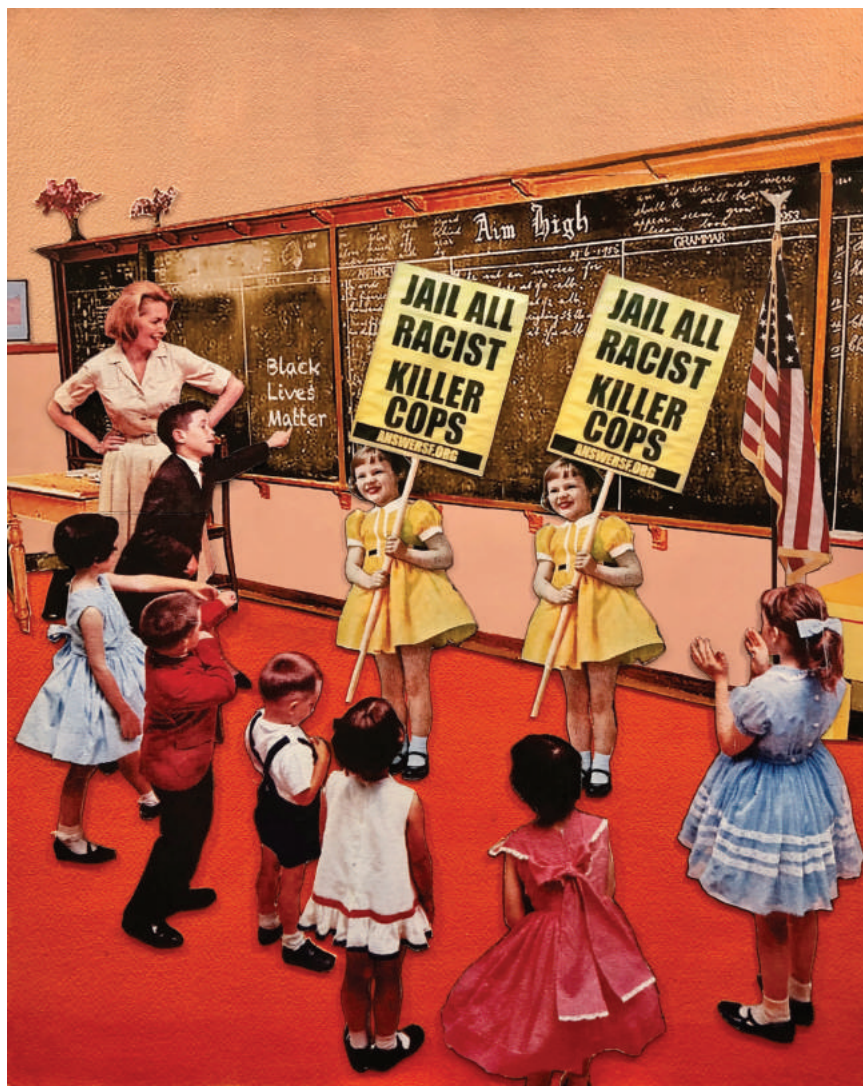
MARK HARRIS: To Serve and Protect mixed media collage on paper



MARK HARRIS: Den of Iniquity mixed media collage on panel



MARK HARRIS: Proverbs 22:6 mixed media collage on panel



MARK HARRIS: *Show and Tell* mixed media collage on paper mounted on panel

Making Shit Up | *Andrew Gent*

The president is making shit up.
Not coloring with the wrong shade
of crayon or leaving things out.
The president is talking trash
and the trash is talking crazy.

Why we let him
get away with this

kind of (don't even say it)
is beyond me. Immune
to the laws of science
and logical thought

he lies

over and over again.
And the senators line up
behind him to smile
and wink at the camera.

And the immigrants line up
to have their children
taken away and put in camps
they may never return from.

Does this sound familiar?
The president is making
shit out of our country
and blaming us for it.

Enemy of the People | *Andrew Gent*

I want to be
the enemy of the people.
The one the president calls out
in his State of the Union speech
as most likely to succeed
in burning down illegal walls
and putting an end to the persecution
of blacks, women, and Hispanics
and all the other bullshit
he is selling. Enemy of the people
who go along, cheer him on
and pretend he isn't a liar
when he says what they want
to hear and close their eyes
when he says things they don't.
Yes, I believe in the violent overthrow
of bad ideas sold as patriotism
and patriotism sold as an excuse
to hurt others. I believe
in the Declaration of Independence
and the individual's right
to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness
not as an excuse to kill black people
and brown people and red people
but as a responsibility
to protect those rights
for each and every one of us
and especially those
who cannot protect themselves.
I am the enemy of the people
who think there isn't enough America
to go around. That they must
keep the rights to themselves
or else someone will take them away.
The purists, the privileged, the white
slave traders waiting for their ship to come in.

They are the enemy ready to gun us down,
even white boys like me, because
they swear the pen in my hand
looked just like a weapon
in the darkness
they claim is descending
on our country
as I speak.

The President at 3 A.M. | *Andrew Gent*

Watching television.

Talking to himself.

Or to the TV.

Or both.

Eating popcorn.

Drinking coke

& scotch.

Tweeting.

While the staff

kneels outside

the keyhole.

Police State | *Andrew Gent*

The police state
that the perpetrator
refused to obey
verbal instructions.

He reached for his pocket.
He attempted to flee the scene.
He resisted arrest
and was shot in the back.

The police state
his rear tail light was out
in clear violation
of state law.
They do not know why
the bodycam was turned off
at a critical point
in the proceedings.

The police state
it was unfortunate
but he interfered
with the carrying out
of their officially sanctioned duties.

An investigation is underway.
All pertinent documents
will be examined
for proof of wrongdoing.

They were just doing their job.
It was dark.
How were they to know

he was a father
of two children?
Personal details

should never cloud
an officer's decision making.

They felt threatened.
They acted appropriately.
The police state

the case is closed.

Its Water Is in Our Blood | *Amal Al-Jubouri*

Tonight we dragged the Euphrates here
and you realized Baghdad can morph
into a traveling city of departures,
that the diaspora can settle into
train stations stolen from our fates,
that prisoners
are flowers
that carry the aroma of empty spirits.

I made you jump back 2600 years to our homeland of exiles,
our homeland that became our haven, suspended
between thieves and dictators.

Razqi flowers are white-robed orphans
that celebrate water and dance dew to the roof
on mornings when we sleep there.

We descend at dawn before the sun kisses us,
descend to beds of desire
and continue in sleepiness, in the smell of wet dust
that flows from the taps of our homes.

There, in the Jewish district of Bataween,
or in orchards of Karrada,
near Violette's brick palace of a house,
or behind the home of Ellen and David Khalaaschi,
behind Uncle Daniel's,
we sleep on, seemingly forever.

We want to collect all the flowers,
all the sighs of the gardeners, all the male lovers' sighs
as they surreptitiously nibble on their women's lips,
safe from religion
and norms
and laws.

Razqi petals escape silently
to the banks of the Tigris,
they listen to the shy scuff of our footsteps,
to the sighs
escaping from Iraqi prisons that sail with us.

When we're there, we cry for the Euphrates
to carry us here,

and when we're here, we cry for the imprisoned Euphrates,
drained by injustice and sadness,
domesticated by the prisons of turbaned extremists,
to carry us there.

We cry for the river, but we can't cry on its shores.
We cry because its water is in our blood—
flows from here to there, from there to here.
We cry because captivity is pillowed with soft tears
in our auctioned homeland.

So why, when we talk of love,
do we return to the destruction of the temple,
to this betrayal?

I told you, this is Baghdad.

I wish I could wrap myself in her,
embrace her,
so the rain could tap into me
God's messages in semaphore.

When I touch the Thames I touch the Tigris,
but my fears for Iraq push my head underwater.

It's not just you...
it's not just the Euphrates...
it's not just the razqi,

not just the security,
not just the wishes,
but everything—
every single thing—
all of it
sinks
into silence.

Co-translated by the author and David Allen Sullivan

N O T E :

Elen Dangoor is the granddaughter of the Grand Rabbi of the Jewish community at the time, and the wife of David Khalaaschi, the son of Ezra Khalaaschi one of the wealthiest Baghdadi families. Dawod Khalaaschi never visited Israel. When asked why he said: Because I dream of returning home, to Iraq.

I Found Everything Except For... | *Amal Al-Jubouri*

The land was our land. The homeland was our homeland.
It was unfamiliar with borders.
Our identities were worn like our faces. They knew us.

She slept in our wombs:
Mine and Sara's and Miriam's.

Abraham,
if you're listening to what I say,
or reading what I write, God has opened an account
at the post office of the new life.

I don't give a fig if you read my commandments and teachings
for God owns all our skies and all postal accounts,
but if you listen or read
you'll know
that I found your children.

Some have forgotten heaven lies beneath our feet,
that everything is a breath from the Lord
which spirits over them.

I found them afraid,
hiding fear in a hand-held mirror,
monitoring themselves on cameras,
using cell phones to summarize their lives,
which they then downloaded to computers . . .
so much for our fates.

Their fear made me afraid,
but I was patient as Job,
because I thought of you waiting for me,
just as Hagar waited for you all her life.

I found Omar bin Al Khatab
and asked him about Ali.
I found Zainab in Nouriyas' face,

Fatima in Farhas' face
Hassan in Samis' face.

I found . . .
and I found . . .
and found . . .
everything . . .
saw everything.

I visited the prophet at the Aqsa mosque
and grew tired of the guard's questions because he forgot,
O Lord,
that you sent his prophet to call the tribes to one direction,
my qibla,
there in the peninsula's prison.

I had to repeat, like a parrot, *Allab is Allab
and Mohammed is his prophet.*

What is this, Abraham, you didn't teach them the art of welcoming guests?
I went to complain in the hope he would end the heresy of borders
and issue a decree:
Homelands are for people, religions are for God.

We are but members of your family.
Our home is here,
but our people are here and there, there and here.
Who? Why?
How did this happen?

I hid my anger at you and your God
so I wouldn't be called ungrateful.

At the edge of the Aqsa we sat
facing the wailing wall
where we directed our hopes.

With the hymns of the Church of the nativity and resurrection
we sang.

I remembered Babylon,
whose name they wanted to rape
as they raped our history.
And I heard a voice say to us:
Pray,
sing,
stay. This is your land!

How do we stay in a land
that has been made foreign?
It's under siege,
a siege of ignorance,
a siege of desertification,
a crisis of the besieged mind.

And you and the lowest of your people, the fools,
surround me
at all times . . .
except here.

I cornered you with questions, asked:
Why did you command
the way you did, Abraham?
And is it true
that the Torah is your book?
What of your last book?

Darkness does not malign truth. Darkness can't.
I found many things in your books,
I found everything
me,
her,
them,
but no truth called *Him*.

I found an illusory man who sold his heart,
found shrapnel in the ashes of his fires,
found in a creation fable all his women,
found his son,

but did not find one letter,
one pulse-beat,
of a human called Father of Prophets,
which my heart calls my man,
which other women call their man,
which Ismail calls his father.

I didn't find him, O Allah
for we are the ones who created him
in the auction house of religions,
inherited from all our wars,
and because I wanted it to end I started...

because of You, Allah,
and because You are who you are,
and because we all know
and twist the words
and practice hypocrisy in the markets
where we're sold as slaves
in the course of miracles,
in the telling of fables,
in the name of religion,

they invented You,
claimed ownership over You,
fought over Your pedigree,
doubted
and inherited hatred and stories,
so in the ruins of religions and their protective projected scripts,
in the talismans of storytellers, in the keepers of the paranormal
they sold You before you existed . . .

so who but You will show them the way?

Your strength is that You were a nation
that fragmented into pieces.

You were not actually born, nor was I.

The searcher in a stormy resurrection says:

*Take off the veil of veils,
I will bring to end
every cosmic argument about a lost door
or a magical legend,
every illusion
called You...*

*For I have found in the altar of my heart—
my altered heart—my altered mind—
the altar of my mind—everything except for You—*

everything

except

You

Co-translated by the author and David Allen Sullivan

NOTE :

Nouruiya's father and brother were killed during the farhud events. After 60 years of enforced migration from Baghdad, she still dreams of returning to Iraq. Farha is one of the Jews of Iraq who was forced to leave to Israel after imprisonment. She still dreams of returning to Baghdad even though she's over 90. Religious bodies in Iraq tried to change the name of Babylon to Imam Al Hassan in 2016. The civil society campaign succeeded in stopping the movement under the hashtag #MynameisBabylon.

The lost door refers to salvation through the Messiah.

You Call It Drips | *Carol Park*

"I hear the Blossom Festival is on." Carl held a cell phone to his ear and spread his big-boned frame on his office chair, nearly filling his superintendent's cubbyhole in the aging apartment complex.

"Hey, let's ride our bikes to Fresno tomorrow," proposed Rob.

"Yeah! I love their food trucks!" Carl felt his stomach rumble at the thought.

"And more good times at that bar. Let's get out before the traffic gets horrendous."

Carl nodded. "Early is good. I can work away. People call my cell anyways."

"Meet me at the Page Mill Parc 'N Ride at 2:00."

"You got it." Carl clicked off and checked emails. Someone explained why he was late on rent. Carl wrote, "12% late penalty." He walked the grounds and checked the gardeners' work. Shrubs needed trimming and a dead squirrel lay under one. He'd call them.

Akiko noticed a drop from the ceiling as she scrambled eggs for breakfast.

"Mommy, *mite!*" Her son Kotaro called.

"Look! Say, look!" She wouldn't admire what he fitted together until he repeated the English words.

"That's good!" She hoped bits of English would help in preschool. For his sake she accepted living here. How she missed understanding everything, or favorite foods like shabu-shabu. If someone spoke simply and clearly and repeated, she might understand.

She put Kotaro in his highchair, and wiped the drip, no, two drips. They came from the joint between the ceiling and wall. When her husband Shingo came down, she pointed out two more droplets rolling down.

"Ung. I'll call the super tonight. Too early now."

Akiko left it to him to interact with Safeway clerks and the super. People's impatience with her was humiliating.

Shingo rushed out for his Stanford research job.

Akiko kept revisiting the watery wall in between scrubbing the skillet, sweeping and answering Kotaro's demands. She timed the drops. Every fifteen minutes, ten drops. Now every ten minutes. Then a new place leaked. She wanted to go on a walk but did not dare.

Nor did she dare disturbing Shingo at work. *It isn't very bad*, she told herself.

She positioned cookie sheets where drips fell and went walking. On returning, a half inch of water stood in the pans. Would Shingo return early?

He arrived at 7 PM. "So bad. I'll call." He got voicemail. "This is Shingo Nakata in Apartment 139. Water drips come down wall. Please help."

Akiko thought, *ob, that's what you call them—drips*. She was glad for her husband's clear words.

When Carl came in Friday morning he had much to handle. Jerry in Apartment 255 stopped by at 8:45 quite angry with noisy neighbors and he calmed Jerry down. The gardeners came. He pointed out unsightly shrubs and the dead squirrel. The voicemail from the Japanese guy he could barely make out. Something about drips.

Drips of water, he thought. *Only drips. I've got a lot to do before 1:30. This is a job for someone else*. He called Clear Water Plumbing and the soonest they could get there was Monday. He looked up the names and phone of the occupants of the apartment over 139 and left a message with them: *Could anything be leaking downwards?* He thought of visiting the Nakatas, but remembered how scared Mrs. Nakata looked whenever he saw her. Besides someone was coming to see the apartment up for rent and he had to give them the look-around and sales talk. Before he knew it, 1:30 arrived. Time to meet Rob near 280.

Shingo arrived home exhausted at 8 PM Friday night. Akiko didn't greet him, she was so angry. Shingo was shocked to see nothing had been done about the water. A three-foot spread of ceiling-wall seam had water coming through. "Didn't the super come by?"

"No."

Shingo rang the super's number again and got voice mail. "More water is coming. Please come soon." He complained to his wife. "This wouldn't happen at home."

"It's terrible and foolish to wait so long. The super is *baka*."

On the way home Sunday Carl brooded over the Nakatas' second message. Shingo hadn't sounded desperate. Just puzzled with a hint of urgency. If it was an Italian or Pole and a few drops fell, the person would be all over him. But then people said that Japanese were polite. He thought about going by Sunday night, but he was too tired from partying.

Monday morning at 9 AM, Carl knocked on the Nakatas' door and the missus let him in. He stepped around four cardboard boxes in the living room filled with toys and kitchen stuff before going into the kitchen. He swore when he saw the flood coming down from a five-foot stretch of kitchen wall. It was drenched.

"How long has it been this bad?"

"Excuse me?"

"How long?"

"Uhh, drips on Thursday. Friday more. Saturday more and more. Sunday too."

Kotaro came near to see what they looked at. He stuck out a finger and it went through the wall.

"Shit!" said Carl. The drywall would have to be replaced. How did this happen? The owner was going to be so mad if he realized Carl hadn't even come by Friday morning.

"Excuse me?" asked Akiko.

"I was swearing. Excuse my language." He didn't want to get in trouble for that also.

"I want to learn word for when mad. I say *shit*—is that right?"

Carl nodded, "but more like shit, not sheet, like on a bed." Understand?" He couldn't believe he was having this conversation.

"Yes, I understand. Shit, I say shit too."

"Shit," said Kotaro and looked to his mother for a smile.

Carl chuckled. He'd call that to mind when calling the construction company to redo the drywall and explaining the expenses to his boss.

It is six o'clock when you leave the diet club with next week's meals, all three for every day of next week, in a little bag with a handle like a purse. A whole week, hanging from one hand. It costs way too much, but you don't know what else to do. Even now, you feel anxiety rising. The check you wrote for this stuff may not even clear. Your bank account's getting thinner while you thicken up like a Sequoia. A new ring for every season. The wide rings represent a rainy season. This has been a really rainy season for you.

As you pull away from the parking lot, the car in front of you stops suddenly. You slam the breaks and see with relief that there is no one on your bumper.

Then you notice your week of meals fell out of the bag. All those shiny packages, most of them about the size of your fist. That's what they say; a meal should be about the size of your clenched fist. Your fist is clenched on the steering wheel.

Relax. Calm yourself. You miss your old cat who died last week, and though your company downsized you into the unemployment line, the job market will pick up soon. The market. Hmm.

Food. You are kind of hungry. *What's that on the floor?* A packet with cookies in it! Ah how good that would be right now. Just a cookie. A tiny little treat.

As you continue home from the fat club meeting, you recall that moment on the scale. Why do they have to use a digital scale out 4 places? You'd be OK as hell knowing your weight within a few pounds.

Meanwhile you recall that tiny cookie across the car—on the passenger's side floor. How good that cookie would taste right now.

You lean and stretch, but you can't quite reach it and the impatient creep behind you honked the instant the light changed. The light changed the instant you stretched across the console and almost snagged the cookies.

You glare through the rear-view mirror as you pull away from the light. Hah! you run the next damn light and make a hard left at the intersection, hoping the cookies will slide your way. They do!

You don't know what street you're on, but you can reach the cookies.

And now, in your hand you see they are so *small*. Just two black

quarters wrapped in childproof plastic. No amount of pulling and tearing breaks the seal. Tears well up as you give them one last yank. BLAM, the plastic bursts open and they fly out—one in your lap and the other on the dash.

You just want a cookie. You've worked hard your whole life and you just want a goddamn cookie.

Now you've worked yourself into a state. Tears streaking the makeup you struggled with earlier for an interview. Maybe the interview went well. Who knows, but right now you've got that first cookie in your mouth. It is sooooo good.

A little child-like voice in your head whispers that it would be even better with vanilla ice cream. You know they didn't put anything like *that* in your bag. But hey, there's the Safeway, right over there.

Again, you swerve, just a *little* erratically, into the parking lot. This causes the other cookie to slide your way. Then, as you pull into a handicap spot right in front, a bwoop and flashing red startles you. WHAT?!

You imagine that the fat police will drag you out of your car and Breathalyze you. At which time you will fill the tube with cookie crumbs. And they will slap you in handcuffs, right in front of all those normal looking people gathered on the curb.

You think all this, and more, as the officer approaches your car, cautiously because, by now, you may look a bit wildeyed. However, what the officer sees when she asks you to roll down the window is a pitiful, makeup-streaked woman, offering the officer a cookie instead of her driver's license.

Sea Plaque | *Helene Simkin Jara*

Marcella had heard the story all her life. While Marcella's mother was in labor with her, she had felt the need to brush her teeth every hour. This story had been imprinted on Marcella's memory for the eighteen years before she entered Dental Hygiene School and graduated top in her class.

Marcella admired her mother and she too brushed her teeth after and even before every meal. She was never without her toothbrush. It calmed her down. She was an anxious child, but this habit kept her from becoming overly anxious.

All the girls in her class were jealous when Marcella got hired by the dentist most admired in the community. They called Dr. McClure "Dentist of the Stars." Word got out that not only was he handsome, but he gave lavish gifts to his employees every month.

On her first day, there were balloons and flowers for her and a raffle, which she entered and won. To her consternation, it was a ticket to a cage-diving expedition. She had never spent much time in the ocean, let alone diving. She was taught to be gracious, however, and thanked them all for this generous gift.

As she nervously checked in with the instructor on the day of the expedition, she was appalled at his demeanor: patronizing, self-congratulatory and paunch-bellied.

"Well, little lady," he began, grinning with a toothpick between his upper right bicuspid. Marcella was quietly disturbed by the discoloration of his teeth. She clutched her toothbrush, which was in her purse, as he droned on about the rules. "Don't get near the bars. Always wear your mask." Blah, blah, blah.

After changing into her wetsuit, she snuck her toothbrush into the sleeve.

To her great dismay, the other two participants did not show up. Being alone with this tool was going to be as bad as having to be

surrounded by sharks underwater. *Why me?* crossed her mind more than once.

As they were lowered into the ocean just off the coast, she watched the annoying gestures of the insufferable human, pointing to his whiteboard and grease pencil. He continued to point at her regulator and the bars, as she rubbed her left wrist with the aforementioned toothbrush underneath assuring herself of her escape from insanity.

And then, there they were: a school of hammerheads bumping into the bars of the cage.

Oh, my God. How crusty, filthy. Do they ever brush their teeth? With coral?

Marcella felt her breath quicken as she turned away from the buffoon next to her, too close to her. Crouching down, and turning with her back to him, she pulled down her regulator, held her breath, and whipped out her toothbrush, frantically brushing up, down and sideways. She felt a tap on her shoulder. As she straightened up and turned towards the man, he was agitatedly waving his arms, pointing to her regulator. She ignored him, continuing to brush her teeth. He then resorted to pulling out his whiteboard and writing with his grease pencil,

“PUT YOUR REGULATOR BACK ON NOW!”

Marcella inched as far away as she could from him, bumping into the bars. This sent the hammerheads into a frenzy and the instructor scribbling yet again on the whiteboard.

“STOP BUMPING INTO THE BARS! DANGEROUS!”

Marcella felt the cage being hoisted up to the surface, the wetsuited oaf ignoring her. She placed her regulator calmly back on her face, grateful to be able to breathe again, and reinserted her toothbrush into the sleeve of her wetsuit. As the instructor held out his hand to help

her get out of the boat, he refused to look at her. He had taken off the head of his wetsuit, his lips set in a tight line.

“You, young lady, have broken serious rules. You endangered not only yourself, but me as well. I am going to recommend that you never be allowed on an expedition like this ever again.”

Marcella inspected his teeth as he pontificated. She considered giving him her new employer’s card, but thought better of it and only nodded. She tried unsuccessfully not to smile at the thought of not being allowed to ever come back.

After peeling off her wetsuit and changing into her street clothes, Marcella breathed a sigh, whipped out her toothbrush, vigorously trying to erase the last hour of her life off her teeth.

When she came into work the following Monday, the employees all gushed at her.

“How was it? Was it thrilling?”

Blinking, Marcella nodded quickly with her best smile.

“Oh yes. Quite thrilling. Shocking how dirty hammerheads’ teeth are.”

The employees made sideways glances at each other. They had never considered this and were in admiration of Marcella’s astute observance.

In No Time | *Charles Atkinson*

Grown-up kids return with kids,
lives that hurtle by. This body
bends to sit with a grandchild,
calloused hands grown shiny.



Eloise, it's on a flower!

—*It's a moan-ark.*

What's it doing there?

—*Eating neck-tar.*

Why does it do that?

—*Make it stwong. I saw it Toosday.*

She pages back a lifetime
to a day last week called "Toosday,"
eager to master grown-up codes.
Adore the tiny adult.



And hope: may you wander,
chase an unnamed butterfly,
cajole it, hold a finger out.
When it will not land, let it
stagger, clear the fence, be gone.

Body Language | *Charles Atkinson*

Eloise

18 months

Anxious parents wave from the curb,
off to work. Eloise stands
inside the gate, head down,
shuffles beneath her plastic slide—
her thinking place. Slumps to
the lawn, wet cheek, wet grass.

I squat beside: “You sad?”
Nods. Her frown says, *Stupid*.
“Let’s sit in a chair.”
She looks away; I gather her
into my lap, she squirms to escape,
leans in to snuggle. Won’t surrender
to tears; still, she’s pressed her cheek
against my leg, familiar post.

20 months

Day two she’s quiet at the gate
while Mom backs out, then settles
in my lap with Bobcat and ’Gator.
Third day she’s chuffing her train,
barely looks up when Mom says ’bye.

Evening, Mom’s turn to shower,
a kiss and pat for Eloise,
who follows and breaks into sobs
at the shower door, begs, pounds
to get in, fully dressed.

2 years

She's learned to spin till the world is liquid,
legs like kelp fronds waver beneath her,
slow surrender to a sterner gravity.
Can't avoid the chair's armrest and
knocks head-first on its hardwood fist,
wobbles to the floor betrayed by delight.
I reach to stroke, she brushes the hand away.

Slip bobcat on my finger,
green-glass eyes curious.
He creeps toward her shoulder,
sniffs around her buried face.
She snatches, pulls bob to her belly
like a brood hen, still no tears.
My bob mood away no nap.

Eight Poems | *Jory Post*

ARTIST'S STATEMENT:

*I won't say I "lucked" into poetry. It took a bout of pancreatic cancer, excellent mentors in Gary Young and Danusba Lameris, and a group full of dedicated poets who gave me weekly input on my work. The luck came with finding words I needed to say the things that needed to be said. The first book of poetry, *The Extra Year*, poured out of me like red hot lava, a stream that only hardened when it reached the sea. The second book of poetry, *Of Two Minds*, was born of the same persistent flow, but not as hot, tempered by the winds, extruded through cooled pipes that knew I'd burn out if I kept up the pace. Book three is on its way, much slower, the completion of the trilogy almost upon me.*

*That I have been lucky enough to blend my writing with my art has been enough to drive me forward to finish lines I never thought I'd see, My first novel, *Pious Rebel*, was born from a two-month window where my keyboard lit up for me. At the same time, I began developing an art installation focusing on extinct birds. The novel I'm currently writing incorporates it all: the birds, the chemo, covid, cancer, the day-to-day inch-by-inch forge forward. It's a charmed life I've lived.*

Cobwebs

South fork of the Smith River. Dad visits. Tells me he wants to take me there. Says we'll camp just north of Gasquet, roast marshmallows, do guy things. Bring fishing gear. Dig for nightcrawlers. "Why guy things?" I ask. "Shelly would probably like to come, too." He nods, tells me I make a good point. "We'll do people things," he says. He tells me a story I've heard many times, the one about his friend who drowned in the Oakland Estuary the day they cut school. The details change. They always do. He's an artist with words. Makes his stories broad with invented colors. He hasn't talked to me like this since 2005. He brushes cobwebs off poles and tackle boxes. I remind him he's been dead for 14 years. "I know," he says. "It's okay. We'll fish and talk. Tell your sister."

Pot de Crème

I saw a face in the pot de crème tonight. It wasn't Jesus or the Virgin of Guadalupe. It looked a little like the checker at Nob Hill who surfs at Pleasure Point every morning before work. The whipped cream highlighting the rich chocolate just enough to show the blond waves in his hair. Well-known in the surfing community, but not so famous that I can charge admission to have folks stare into my ramekin to see what I see. I loosen my gaze to look at the TV screen above the bar, Dallas stomping Philadelphia, and when I return, the face has changed. I see the woman who gave me a manicure last week, the one who tried to fix my tortured nails, the one with streaks of dyed hair barely reaching the nape of her neck, her strong hands having their way with mine. Karen asks what I'm doing, why I'm not eating. I look into her eyes, tell her the truth, say, "Just savoring it." Which isn't really a lie. But short of full disclosure. This time when I return to the dessert, the face has morphed again. I still see the deep-set eyes, hidden beneath thick brows of brown, the strong chin, but the hair has changed, wild, erratic, wanting to be combed, touched, put in order. When the fourth image occurs fresh and demanding, I realize this could go on all night, and we need to get home, slip between sheets and sleep for ten hours, let dreams guide us through to morning. I lift my spoon, scrape the edges of the bowl, slide the final bites over my tongue, devour the eyes, the jutting chin, swallow the eyebrows whole, lick my lips clean of visions and shadows.

Smitten

I am so smitten with the French president right now, but that's a topic for another discussion.

—overheard while walking down Pacific Avenue

I can't help it. The words attract me. I make a U-turn and follow them. Close enough to see he wears no socks, bare ankles exposed just above his red-and-white checkered Vans. She has Doc Marten boots, black and scuffed. I can't make out full sentences, just an occasional word or phrase: "Clytemnestra" and "collateral damage." They take a booth at Santa Cruz Roasting Company and I follow, sit behind them. They order double espressos. I order a hot chocolate

with whipped cream. He talks about a professor of literature who drives him crazy. She reads two poems she's written for her advanced poetry workshop. He gives constructive critique, applies the kiss first, what he loves about them, before adding the kick, the parts he doesn't understand. I want to slide in next to her, point at the first line in the second stanza, ask her if "hardened arteries" is the right combination to carry the reader forward. It takes a second hot chocolate before I hear him return to the French president: "He was fifteen when he met his then thirty-nine-year-old wife. He plays piano. He skis, plays tennis, boxes, and has a black lab named Nemo." They stand to leave, hug at the doorway, he turns left, she right. I stay seated, lick the whipped cream from my lip, think about how long it's been since I've been smitten.

Repeat

Saturday mornings look like this: Write, flea market, breakfast, Grey Bears. Kathy. I've been told before that I'm no more than a creature. I don't disagree. This is a habit I would relish every day of the week. Wake with fingers on keyboard at 3:00. Check my lightbulbs for inspiration. Find two prose poems and work them out. Take a hot shower. Grab the backpack. Find three dollar bills for the entry fee. Walk the aisles. Hunt and gather. Cabinets. Boxes. Tables. Small metallic or porcelain items. Head to Silver Spur and sit at the community table. Order a large French toast with pure maple syrup and a medium bowl of steel cut oats. Add protein powder. Wait in line at Grey Bears for the gates to open at 10:00. Find new treasures. Take our bounty home. Meet Kathy back in the courtyard at 10:30. Attend to and expand the agenda. Go sideways. Birdwalk. Create segues. Interrupt each other as often as possible with new thoughts. Savor. Repeat.

Postage Stamps

A woman at the party talked of her trips to India. Said her daughter was unhappy she hadn't written. But she had written. Almost every day. She told a friend, who informed her the workers steal stamps at the post office. Rip them off the envelopes, toss the letters in the trash. I make up my own version of what happened. It's just at that one branch, not every postal office in every city in India. Just the one in Lucknow, Shop #128 in Sukh Plaza. And it's not all the workers. Just one. Her name is Aditi. She has a daughter, Neha. Neha has leukemia, needs expensive medication to survive. Aditi works three jobs. Borrows money from family members. Has considered selling her body. Instead she lifts stamps. Sells them to a friend who hawks them on the street. Neha gets her pills. They get by. Aditi feels badly about the letters. Brings them home. Doesn't toss them in the trash. Puts them on an altar. Prays to them. Thanks them. Vows to send them later, when Neha is healthy. When they're both healthy. The woman at the party smiles. "Yes. Of course. That makes more sense. I'll tell my daughter they're on the way."

Just in Case

When I hear on the car radio that a comet from another solar system is heading toward our sun, my thoughts blossom with gravity, astronomy, the collision of universes. Has this other solar system grown tired of hiding in the shadows? A violent act to thrust us into endless darkness? Or a playful gesture, an errant overhand toss of rocks from one planet to another that flew over the fence and into our yard? It has a name: C/2019 Q4. I learn a new word: perihelion, the closest point the comet will come to the sun, a distance of approximately 190 million miles, which will occur on December 8. Breathe a little easier. Three months to get my life in order. Not the things one would normally consider: the living trust, outstanding bills, cancelling subscriptions. Without a sun, none of that matters. No one would be around to know. To care that I have left all of my writing to my oldest granddaughter. My books and boxes to the youngest granddaughter. No. Ninety days left to check in with people. To tell the people I love. To go back into the bead store and apologize to

the owner for my part in our mutual tirade yesterday. To buy eight ounces of amethyst stones from him. To sit with Karen in our memory garden, remember every day of our time together. To ignore the tumor that has altered my molecular structure. To listen to friends read their poetry, their plays, their fiction. To do everything with them I would normally do, but with more passion, carrying with me the notion that on December 8, traveling at 93,000 miles per hour, what if C/2019 Q4 veered off course a bit, didn't follow its intended boomerang trajectory home, but instead plunged into our sun, ending it all? Just in case, I'll put lawn chairs on the roof, invite neighbors, friends, family. We'll roast corn, barbecue chicken and lamb and prawns. It'll be a block party. We'll close off the road. Snuggle up to our lovers under warm blankets, await the ultimate fireworks display. Just in case, I'll brush my teeth, trim my beard, call friends who live far away, say goodbye. Remember to tell them I love them. All of them. Even the owner of the bead store.

French Toast

My wife is not a fan of suicide, assisted or solo. She would have debated with Sylvia Plath about the nature of consciousness, would have secretly turned off the gas to her house. It would have been no use trying to talk Virginia Woolf out of her inevitable plight, but Karen would have carried a blade and sliced open the pockets that carried the heavy stones. With Robin Williams, she would have brought a book of jokes, read to him hour after hour until he laughed himself to sleep. Kurt Cobain would have been more difficult. She'd have to scour his house, find his stash of heroin and valium and flush it down the toilet. With me, she's made it clear. She will cook me egg sandwiches for breakfast, Texas French toast with maple syrup. She'll buy me lactose-free vanilla ice cream and make me homemade chocolate chip cookies. Even while I continue to lose weight she will try to fatten me up. She does not want to come in after her morning walk and find me dead. She does not want to get a phone call saying I was found in the Happy Valley School parking lot with a hose in my tailpipe. What she does want, is me, down to the last gurgle.

Impermanence

These two young girls in the full bloom of winter vacation, knees scraping concrete sidewalks, use colored chalk the size of bananas, to draw intricate designs on their cement canvas. They draw happy faces and cruise ships and castles with moats and golden horses mounted by men and women dressed in armor. They are too young to know Jimi Hendrix. May never learn of him unless in their twenties or thirties or even forties, become interested in the best guitar players in the world and happen to find the *Rolling Stone* article about the top 100 and see him at #1 atop the list. They may never run across his line: “castles made of sand slip into the sea eventually.” But it’s the line I remember every time I hear his name, every time I hear his fingers dance across guitar strings. When I see two girls drawing with chalk on a sidewalk. A line that has guided my thoughts, functioned as a religion. It’s what comes to mind when I see the one girl draw a bridge, the other add cars. It’s all I can think of when I look into the sky above them, see the gnarled grey clouds twisting into themselves, ready to wring out a wet towel. Will they cry or laugh when the thundercloud snaps and the downpour erases their masterpiece, washes it into the gutter, a steady flow, through rivulets and creeks and passageways that drop it into the sea, to merge with Jimi’s collapsed castles? I stand across the street, hair dripping, watching them inside their house, toweling off their heads, noses pressed to the window, watching the sky, a piece of chalk in each of their hands, waiting.

Half-In, Half-Out | *Paola Bruni*

One night at dinner, I told my parents
about the spirits I allowed to inhabit my body,
expecting disbelief, a shot of booze,
suggestion I see a *head doctor*.

Instead, my father didn't flinch. Claimed oracles
had been around forever. Egypt first. Then Greece.
Said Pythia was Apollo's woman. Emboldened,
I said I channeled a male entity named Samuel.

My father said, *I wanna meet the guy*,
as if we were dating. My mother fretted, offered
a bowl of pasta, a glass of Merlot to calm my ills,
a rosary. *Can you change the channel?* She asked

as though I was tuned in to the wrong station—
a dangerous frequency. Truth was, I was thirty-five,
divorced, an empty husk of a workaholic
who dressed in tailored suits, sold credit cards

to an unsuspecting public. Spirits sniffed me up.
Begged for a little astral empathy.
It was like being stalked by friendly felines
who rubbed bristled fur on my legs, took sharp,

insistent nips from my ankles, draped themselves
across my neck, their slender claws pressed
into my arteries. Most spirits are lonely.
Stuck in the putrefying middle, the less-desirable,

but still habitable half-place where you're not like a kite,
necessarily tethered. More like a fish on a hook,
halfway reeled in. It's been twenty years since I've spoken
to the disembodied or lent one my skin.

But at the mausoleum where my parents are buried,
I recognize the high-voltage sizzle,
detect sound like tissue paper crinkling,
notice the air go sweet or rancid. My scalp itches.

Not me, I say, waving the spirits off. They sense
I'm permeable again, waiting for my mother
or father to say something. Anything.
No, not anything. Something I want to hear.

That they've hit the eternal jackpot—
are enjoying a billion-dollar view of the galaxy.
Instead, they are mute. And in the silence,
I'm like a house with a broken screen.

Domino Lines

Post to Bruni

Domino artist and YouTuber Lily Hevesh set a world record for domino lines using 15,524 dominos that took five days to build and takes over five minutes to collapse. It's not unlike the placing of 2.3 million blocks of limestone and granite in the Great Pyramid of Cheops over a ten- to twenty-year period. It's not unlike a series of interconnected epistles between two poets attached at ventricles and cerebella. Neither are afraid to crack open an artery in the heart, let it spill, to take a scalpel and slice the length of a dendrite to view the crystalline mass. They are willing to suffer the consequences, have the patience to watch shattered bones heal, watch gouged flesh regenerate. They are equally as willing to have their eyes widened by riding the opiate trails of extinct birds willing to carry them into unknown pathways. We pretend to etch and engrave our ancient stories into the surface of large blocks, small dominos, as if they were our own stories, as if they haven't been circling our universe endlessly, an eternal recurrence, as if they are fresh and ours alone. Each cycle we learn to say goodbye, prepare ourselves for what returns, what is remade.

the fixed & the falling

Bruni to Post

Dominos trail the living room, march the length of tiled hallway,
strut to the counter. Charlie, my nephew who's four, relishes
assembly and destruction.

Slight as a sparrow,
flings himself from chairs, counter tops,
steep dives from sofa spine, heathen blur on jungle gym.
He terrifies me.

I've never been good at falling, bright shame of Merthiolate
swiped on skin, scabs of indiscretion saved,
a war of wounding at every tumble.

My body isn't a graceful thing. I'm double-jointed,
twisting patella, discs loose as juju beads. *Stand straight*,
I was told, as if being vertical, fixed in place might save the fall.

But I couldn't be contained, had to push against
every terror.

Did I tell you I once jumped from a plane at 14,000 feet?
Harnessed to an ex-paratrooper who earned
his metal in 'Nam, cradled
me as we somersaulted backwards from the hatch, falling away,
falling like I've never fallen, falling through the big empty,
then stretched out like starfish in the mist—an unbearable float.
I was glad for the weight of him
pressed against me. I think I might have died otherwise.
Cord pulled, we swayed like the point of a pendulum, wide arcs
over the small habitations of buildings and roads, parks and flowers.
The sky climbed inside me, blew me up balloon-like, and still, I fell.

Some of me scattered
before we touched down and my knees buckled.
It's adrenaline, he whispered into my ear. *Best drug in the world.*

He held me after,
after the harness no longer strung us together.

Do you sense the sky climbing inside you? Widening the spaces,
pumping your stories with helium, pushing
them out your eyes and ears.

I'll fill the air between us with words, stories
fixed and falling. I won't learn to say goodbye.

between worlds

Bruni to Post

What is it about dreams?

Time without end. The dead feigning a Lazarus,
returning in new, yet familiar skin.
Levitation. Catastrophes survived.

In my dreams, I frequently

drown in the blue, blue, nothing.
Get swallowed whole.
Then wake—a silvery thread, split-second
realization—*it was just a dream.*

On Saturday, a raucous thunder yanked

me from sleep around 2 a.m. It was a hot, angry bit of air
howling like an injured brown buck. It sunk its teeth
into my gut, had me pounding
my ears with my fists. Sometimes, reality
is too gritty, too gruesome. All that thunder wailing,
echoing a kind of mortal pain. Is it your pain?
Is it mine?

My neighbor works for the weather service, said the storm
dropped right on us. No hesitation between
illumination and grief.

Like birth. First light, then loss.

The sudden absence

of a hospitable womb in exchange for the fierce
interruption of life.

The storm took our sixty-foot redwood to task, stripped it down
to a slender winter coat. My husband and I swept
and swept, piling fronds.

I have no answers. And I'm weary of the effort to make sense of things.
I'd rather dream, day and night. Live in dusky possibilities.

A few weeks ago, you appeared in my dream as a palimpsest,
words and symbols trailing over your flesh, embossed
watermarks rising, then fading away.
Outside the window,
humpback whales surged. Porpoises frolicked
under a glassy pink sun.
I wanted to sleep forever, read the stories traveling
across the flat shimmer of your eyes.

more than two

Post to Bruni

So damn many worlds to discover and master. I find a new one every morning, riding a transparent wave in front of your collage-like dreams, fighting my way into a crack in the shell of a freshly-hatched egg. Once inside it's dark until I see the piercing light of your eyes illuminate our interior. This is one of those worlds. You hiding in the corner of this oval closet with your eyes wide open awaiting the next crack, the next catastrophe or miracle. You slip into a nearby stream of words inscribed on top of an ancient Tibetan etching, and I grab your ankle, join you, hands cupping water, this measured swim that empties us into a bay of your Capri as I roll onto my back and float to the shore of this place I've never been, a world whose mouths are full of romance and braggadocio. I sink into the moist sand, tiny crabs climbing over my chest treating me like Gulliver, cinching me down, tattooing me like a Rosetta Stone to be interpreted by a future culture, restraining my desire to move on to what's pink and pure and unknown.

*From Someone Falls Overboard: Talking Through
Poems | Stephen Kuusisto & Ralph James Savarese*

In the spirit of William Stafford and Marvin Bell's 1983 book *Segues: A Correspondence in Poetry*, we have written a book called *Someone Falls Overboard: Talking through Poems*. There were just two rules for the poetic exchange: 1) 16-line poems (an extra line is permissible) and 2) each poem must respond in some way to the one that precedes it. As Bell writes in *Segues*, "I pinch off/ a part of the story I know;/toss it to you." A third, unstated rule: be funny! — Stephen Kuusisto & Ralph James Savarese

In the Middle Distance... (SK)

Does anyone read Louis Simpson anymore? Is it time
For a smoke? How about Robert Hayden?
Where do the poets go—please
Say Valhalla, among the living they're not read
Though I can see them through a glass
And others—Ignatow, Rukeyser,
Thomas McGrath, my old teacher
Don Justice...the living now
Read clean menus and phones.
The poets born early last century
Had fatigued and ruined hearts
Which should not be forgotten
For some God truly looked down upon them.
I want to stare a little while
Blind though I am
As Hart Crane lifts his heavy arms.

Scoundrels (RJS)

They used to say of a father
who left: *He went out for a smoke
and never came back.*

Translation: *The bastard abandoned
us; he didn't leave a dime.*

It's the same with poets:
every reader is a child
and every poem, a betrayal.

The word moves on.

Truth is, we nagged
them to death.

Books are like milk bottles:
they wait to be opened
and spoil quickly.

We're all just scoundrels
of the moment.

Bee Leaf | *Farnaz Fatemi*

We bring Charades for your birthday.
Broad daylight, your house.
You two at your door,
the two of us quarantined
at your rose bush, a jar of vodka
& tonic on the sidewalk
so I can toast you.
I've heard in Sweden
that birthday guests receive the gifts,
instead of giving them, and that's what I remember
as I stand here gesticulating
to get you to guess
the name of a Danielle Steel novel. We are so bad
I am laughing tears. When it's your turn to act,
you mime a rake on your concrete porch
which now holds anything that comes to me—
dirt, rows, farmland, seeds, rain—
as they fall from your sweetheart's arms. I see it.
He shows us. I shout it out a dozen times:
he is a scarecrow and then he is
Rapunzel and then we are with a hundred people
figuring out how to live off the land. Isn't that it?
You are striking out and I will follow
because you are making me smile: you don't fret
about the neighbors
or about my inability to gesture more precisely,
and you love that I throw myself into
these games, and I love that you let me.
I see you for days, an afterimage of
abandon, you willing me to see
what you're raking as he gestures
over and over, making the curves
from which the thing is falling,
the thing we're all looking at together,
unwilling, or unable,
to say its name.

ONE LOVE:
DOROTHY ATKINS, PAINTINGS



DOROTHY ATKINS: *Becoming* 9" x 12", acrylic on canvas



DOROTHY ATKINS: **Leading Ladies** 8" x 10", acrylic on canvas



DOROTHY ATKINS: Goddess of Hope 9" x 12", acrylic on canvas



DOROTHY ATKINS: *Inspired* 8" x 10", acrylic on canvas



DOROTHY ATKINS: *Great Expectations* 8" x 10", acrylic on canvas



DOROTHY ATKINS: Visionary Surroundings 11" x 14", acrylic on canvas



DOROTHY ATKINS: **Blue Moon** 11" x 14", acrylic on canvas



DOROTHY ATKINS: **Mask** 21" x 25", acrylic on canvas

Autoethnography | *Imani Cezanne*

Two Black girls stand at a Northeast DC bus stop. Younger than I would ever be at a bus stop with a friend after dark but that's just what old people say. One rocks a lavender lipstick too bright for a schoolday. Her hair sits atop her head in two buns. The other has long braids sprinting down her back, a clean round face. They trade stories like they pay bills. Bun Girl tells about when some white girl asked her why Girl With Two Braids' hair was *so much longer this week than it was last week*. They laugh the way Black girls laugh after telling a story they don't have to finish. Bun Girl tells another story. She's the talker of the two. Girl With Two Braids doesn't mind. In this story, Bun Girl asked Granny to press 'n curl her hair so she would look like Edith. *Is Edith a white girl?* Granny asked. Yes. *Baby let me tell you somethin,' You ain't gon' look like Edith. All the pressing in the world ain't gon' do that.* They laugh some more. The way Black girls laugh when we speak of when we wanted to look like white girls. The way Black girls have to laugh sometimes. And not just to keep from crying. Just to keep on laughing.

Yellow Is for Chivas | *Kim Hecko*

The Guadalajara Chivas beat Team América in the Mexican Clásico that year. All around our town men young and old, children and even some women sported the yellow jerseys to show their support. The Chivas team was a perpetual underdog. Unlike their most feared rival they had little money and recruited from Guadalajara and small towns nearby. Locals. Mexicanos. Team América could afford to recruit from anywhere. Team América was the team of the rich; the Chivas, the team of the people. That year, they were tied at the half, when the Chivas came forward with an unexpected win, 3 to 1, and neighborhoods exploded in yellow pride.

Although Vicky's and Danny's family were firmly on the side of the Chivas, they never wore their yellow jerseys to school, Vicky preferring shirts with rainbows or horses or glitter hearts and Danny neatly pressed button-ups. They would arrive at school radiating the stinging, bright smell of laundry soap, their faces scrubbed so clean they looked polished, Danny's hair stiff and shiny with gel and Vicky's drawn back into a neat, tight ponytail.

Their family occupied three apartments in a small complex behind a Denny's in the shadow of a freeway off-ramp. They lived in the first with their parents, Federico and Zulema, and their little brother Benji. Their two aunts—*las tías*—both childless and unmarried, and both with the uncanny ability to look at times forty, at others fifty and even sixty, lived directly next door. Their two uncles, also childless and spouseless, lived in the third unit with their ancient grandfather. Their three narrow apartments in a row like books shoved together on a shelf.

I had been their teacher when each was in the first grade, first Vicky and two years later Danny. I would never be their brother Benji's teacher. Although he was four, everyone still referred to him as the baby. Benji had been born with a panoply of disabilities I never learned the names of and had spent much of his young life in and out of the Lucile Packard Children's Hospital at Stanford. Despite multiple surgeries he was still unable to speak or swallow, his only nourishment delivered directly into his stomach through a feeding tube. He suffered untold effects of a malformed heart and it was predicted that he would never walk. He was partially deaf and though not blind, no one could be sure what he could see. They adored him.

Federico, or one of the uncles, brought Danny and Vicky to school every day, although they lived only blocks away from the bus stop. In the mornings on the way to school, they passed the line of children standing on the filthy curb, dark hulks of homeless people sleeping in the park behind them.

When Danny was in my class, we gathered one spring day for our Monday morning circle to share news about the weekend. Students recounted stories about loose teeth, going to the park, the movies or church. Danny, when it was his turn, told us that he was very tired that morning because he had been woken in the night by flashing red lights. His father's heart had gotten sick, he said, and he had been taken away to the hospital in an ambulance.

This was not the first time that Danny and his Vicky had been woken by red lights flashing outside their curtained window, by the opening and closing of metal doors, by panicked voices below and the sound of wheels on the pavement driving away into the night. Not the first time that, after they were ushered back upstairs by one of the aunts, they tried to fall back to sleep surrounded by the terrible quiet as the flashing red lights receded and disappeared. But it had been their little brother Benji who was rushed to the hospital before, Benji his mother had climbed into the back of the ambulance with—not their father.

I found out some weeks later that in the process of determining that their father Federico hadn't had a heart attack after all, the doctors had found dark spots on his lungs. It was fortunate really, Federico said, if they hadn't given me all those tests in the hospital, they would not have found them. They were not using the word cancer yet, at least not to anyone outside of the family, and not to the children.

I pictured Federico's small, wiry frame, that wry expression I had seen more than once crossing his face, his neatly trimmed goatee, shiny and very black. Like his sisters, it was difficult to read his age in his face—he could be 32 or 35 or possibly 40—but no older. I remember him waiting outside my classroom once, mothers and fathers murmuring to one another about the downturn in the economy. He knew enough English to understand them and say wryly, “We were poor then, we are still poor. For us, it is the same.”

I saw Federico again in the early fall, around the time the Chivas made their astounding win. He stood toeing the blacktop, with his hands in his pockets, waiting just outside the door of Danny's classroom. I could see his bald scalp under his baseball cap and how his goatee had thinned to almost invisible.

"¿Cómo estás?" I lamely asked him, suspecting that this was probably the worst question to ask someone with cancer.

"Muy, muy bien." He told me, looking down and smiling ruefully. "Chivas va ganando. *Chivas is on winning streak.*"

I must have asked him something more because he told me that the treatment wasn't as bad as everyone said it was going to be and that he felt good, like he was getting better.

"The spots might get smaller. We'll see." He told me.

"You should see Benji now," he continued, changing the subject abruptly. "He is getting better too. Yes, he is a lot better now."

Conversations with Federico always found their way back to Benji. Every tiny improvement in Benji's condition was treated as a miracle, a result as much of some kind of divine intervention as of the expertise of doctors, as though Benji's ability to withstand surgery after surgery rendered him somehow that much more precious to them, more blessed than the average child, his suffering and innocence giving him a direct pipeline to God.

"*Gracias a Díos,*" his parents or aunts would intone, grateful for everyday he was still alive and wasn't that was proof of God's grace?

"*Just one more operation and then he might be able to drink and swallow. Es un milagro. A miracle.*"

As the year wore on, it was one or other of the uncles I would see waiting for Danny outside his classroom door.

I did not speak to Federico again and the spots on his lungs did not fade away. He died just before the end of that school year, Danny finishing second grade and Vicky fourth. The day after he died, we went, the principal and I, to offer our condolences to Federico's family and to see if there was anything we could do, any way we could help.

I had been to their apartment before because my daughter and Vicky were in the same grade and had been hand-holding friends in kindergarten. My daughter had been invited to play and to parties

and to the winter Posadas celebration there. Zulema and the aunts had fussed over my Ella's blonde hair, plied her with candies and sugary fruit water and had even let her hold Benji.

The apartment complex had one small yard, a fenced-off patch of dirt with snarled weeds facing the street, pressed up against the outside wall of their putty-colored stucco building. The times I had come before, the uncles, slim-hipped and wiry like Federico, with tall stiff cowboy hats and pointed boots, had been standing in that tiny yard smoking and talking softly to each other. This time there was no one in the yard and the front doors and windows lining the entrances to the family's row of apartments had a sealed, vacant look about them.

Zulema opened the door cautiously and led us in without a word. The brightly lit hallway gave way to the living room, the curtains above the sofa on the far wall tightly drawn. I could make out one of the aunts sitting on the couch, propping up Benji next to her. The place was clean and cramped, smelling of pine cleanser and cooked meat, every corner stuffed with boxes of disposable diapers, Benji's medical devices and toddler gadgets. I could see that the hospice bed with its plasticized mattress, now stripped of sheets, stood gaping and empty in the open portal between the living room and the kitchen. A faded, framed picture of Jesus hung on the wall above the hospice bed, a tall candle with the Virgin of Guadalupe flickered on the kitchen counter.

"We are so sorry." We said as we offered hugs to Zulema, who held her hands open gesturing for us to sit, and as if that gesture had taken the very last of her strength, she sank down slowly in front of the metal legs of the empty bed.

We joined her on the carpeted floor, and she said, "The hospice people, they told me we would have more time." She told us that the end came so suddenly and that just before Federico had taken his last breath, he had kissed her and told her that he loved her.

"Así se murió. Besándome. That is how he died. Kissing me."

"Where are Vicky and Danny?" I asked after a pause.

"Upstairs, in the bedroom, watching a movie I think." She answered.

"How are they?"

“Bien triste. They want their papá.”

I heard a sound coming from the sofa, a kind of grunting coo I recognized as Benji. Benji was always in someone’s arms and one or another of the aunts would swoop in from nowhere with a tissue or a plastic suction bulb, ready to clear the gurgling mucus from his throat or pooling below his nose. His aunt brought him over to where we were sitting on the floor and Zulema gathered him to her.

Benji looked over at the bed and then at me. He stared towards me with what I imagined to be a beseeching look, his eyes so dark they appeared to have no pupils. He began jabbing his forehead with his thumb, spreading his fingers and wagging them like the petals of a carnivorous flower.

“It means papá,” Zulema told us. “He’s been learning sign language with a nurse who comes here. Papá was the first one he learned. I think he is asking, *“where is my papa?”*”

I thought it a cruel thing, that of everything Benji could not do, eat, talk, walk, he could still feel this loss, this bewildering, unimaginable loss. That though he could not see or hear his father very well, he had been able to detect him in some other way; he had been able to distinguish him from everyone else, could register his presence and now, his absence.

The aunts would gather, fingers pressed to rosary beads, the shapes of crosses traced with thumbs and fingers onto foreheads, on chests over hearts, onto lips. Over and over. Zulema would light more candles and hug her children closer and tell them that their father had gone to live with Diosito—their beloved God. What would Benji understand?

Vicky and Danny wanted me to come to the funeral. I went, though I didn’t want to, arriving late.

As I walked across the lawn towards the small clump of mourners, I could see that the casket was only just being lowered into the grave; I had not missed the burial as I had hoped. I could hear Danny’s shrieks as I approached, *“Papi, papi, yo quiero a mi papi. I want my papi!”*

Vicky peeled off from the group and ran towards me, seizing me in a trembling hug. I took her hand and we walked back to where the grave was being covered in earth. Heads were bowed and hands

drawn together as the sod was laid on and yellow chrysanthemums placed there. Later, Zulema told me that one day they would buy a marker, but for now they would place flowers, yellow for the Chivas, his favorite team, marking the spot where he lay.

The family's prayers—isolated murmurs and words spoken in unison—were released up and up and up towards where heaven was believed to be.

And Benji in his mother's arms, his thumb pressed into his forehead his fingers spread and waving, his own wordless, pleading prayer sent up with all the others.

Papá.

Papá.

“Your mother’s a malcontent,” asserts my father when I give him the news that Mom just split from her third husband. My father was number two, on the heels of her brief, and to hear my mother tell it, foolish starter marriage. I know my father is secretly pleased that this one didn’t work out for her either. It means that he wasn’t the one who was defective.

“What was it this time?” he probes.

“I dunno, something about a homeless person sleeping in front of their house.”

They weren’t married very long, less than a year. But this one was supposed to be it, third time’s the charm and all. He was a friend of a friend, recently widowed, solvent, and housebroken. He didn’t drink, didn’t smoke, and appeared to adore my mother, showering her with jewelry and exotic trips. I was just glad that she was sufficiently occupied that she no longer needed to text me 20 times a day. I didn’t have strong feelings about Jeff one way or the other. Of all the guys named Jeff she’d dated he was probably the least objectionable, but it’s not like I was looking for a stepfather or a buddy, and I was onto the fact that any guy dating my mom who was friendly to me, pouring on the tickets to ballgames and the good Scotch, could turn on a dime once the courtship phase was over. The Jeff before this one sold me a vintage Mustang convertible for way below Kelly Bluebook, only to ask for it back when Mom called off their engagement. So I kept it light. I kept it loose.

As the story goes, Mom and the current Jeff got home late one night from a trip to Spain and Portugal, luggage and presents in hand, to see this homeless guy, or maybe it was a woman, that part isn’t completely clear, asleep on the bus stop bench in front of their house, swollen feet sticking out from the ratty blanket covering his or her face and body. “Oh my god,” says Mom, in her telling of the story. Followed by a “What the fuck?” from her beloved Jeff. Apparently, the homeless are supposed to be invisible in their upscale suburb. He/she was gone by the next morning, but her shoes, dirty pink Adidas without laces, were tucked below the bench along with her blanket and a pile of fast food wrappers, or so Jeff reported after

he scooped them all up and tossed them into the trash.

“No way!” Monica, my mom, protested. “Those shoes belong to somebody. And what’s she supposed to use for a blanket, now?”

“Maybe she should have thought that through before making our front yard her storage locker.” And then all hell broke loose if you believe Monica’s version of the story. Which I do and I don’t. She hasn’t always been the most reliable narrator.

“Where’s she supposed to sleep?” Monica wanted to know.

“Not my problem.”

You’d think two adults in their 50s who’d seen their share of relationships might have a way to navigate such differences. Nope. Even though they were jet-lagged and travel weary, neither of them thought to say, wait a minute, let’s sleep on this. Monica, who’s never been especially slow to anger, started by throwing all of Jeff’s shoes into the trash, so maybe he could grow a little empathy. Fat chance. Jeff tore all of Monica’s favorite blankets off the bed and went to sleep in his Airstream parked on the side of the house. If you ask me, they deserve each other. And yet, it appears Mom is alone again, an old sad song.

Sometimes I worry that she’ll try to move in with me. The two of us wouldn’t last a week in my studio apartment. I don’t know what will become of her. She talks about moving to Seattle or L.A. It’s enough to drive me back to Tinder, to Meet-up, to hiking with friends of friends. She’s got more shoes than anyone could ever need, but she’s not exactly at home in the world. I’d like to say, not my problem, but, of course, it’s not that simple.

Friends don’t let friends move to L.A. I told her. It’s not like I wanted her in Seattle—a little too close to my place in Bellingham—but L.A. seemed like a colossally bad idea. The elephant in the room, or to be more accurate, the elephant on the street, was my younger brother Scottie. In the wake of the break-up, I’d been summoned home to Santa Rosa for the weekend, Monica’s support team of one. I could have used a friendly sibling along for the ride; instead, I sat there alone on Monica’s ice-blue couch across the coffee table from her, watching as her whole face began to quiver. Oh shit. I never

knew what to do when she cried. I probably shouldn't have said what I did about L.A., Scottie's last known place of residence. He was living on the street last anyone knew. No, not drugs, he's just off, Monica insisted to anyone who asked, but mainly she didn't talk about him anymore, the blot on her resume as a mother, the blight in her immaculate house. She hadn't even mentioned his existence to Jeff. Weird, I know, but I sometimes had trouble talking about him too. For a few years, Monica drove to L.A. once or twice a year looking for Scottie. My dad said she couldn't help herself even though it was futile to look for someone who didn't want to be found. Yet, Monica persisted, finally found him in small homeless encampment downtown, offered to get him an apartment, get him plugged into social services, but Scottie turned her down. He had a tent. He had a small dog. He had his harmonica. He didn't want to go back to apartment living and all that goes with it—noisy neighbors, evil landlords. He didn't want Monica's help. She was heartbroken. Can you blame her? He'd initially moved to L.A. to join a band, which worked out for maybe a summer, followed by house painting, followed by work as a barista. And then something, no one can say just what, went askew. "It's not catching, honey," she'd told me when we first learned Scottie was homeless. As if that was my worry. As if that's all I cared about. She missed her blue-eyed boy; I missed my funny, smart, crazy-in-a-good-way brother. I only had one. I'd trade my only-son-status in a minute to get him back. It was no comfort to hear Monica go on about how I had always been the steady one, to remind me how Scottie went sailing off the back of the couch one day and lost a tooth before he even could talk. I, on the other hand, according to Monica, took measured steps before I could walk, cruising the edges of the couch, hands on the cushions, feet on the floor, an inch at a time, back in the day when the couch was orange and white stripes, the colors of a Creamsicle. Back when even my dad still lived here.

While I get it that Monica felt she had to go off on Jeff—everybody does need to sleep somewhere; how does he not get that?—I still think they could have tried to talk it through. Family is not that easy to come by.

Once when we were little, some time after my dad had moved out, Monica's boyfriend of the month took off with Scottie before anyone else was awake. Monica staggered out to the living room in her fluffy pink robe to find me watching cartoons alone.

"Where's your brother?"

"I dunno," I answered without taking my eyes off the set.

"What do you mean you don't know? Turn that thing off," she yelled, yanking me up by the back of my Star Trek pajamas.

"Don't you ever lose track of your brother. You hear me? Ever."

She looked around for her boyfriend, searching first the kitchen, then the yard, her face crumbling and rearranging itself in a way I'd never seen before as she came back in through the slider.

"I'm calling the police."

That's when I knew something scary was happening. To this day when things get dicey, I invariably say something stupid.

"If Scottie never comes back, can I have his room?"

She slapped me across the face so hard I bit the inside of my cheek.

And even though Josh, Monica's poor excuse of a boyfriend, finally walked in the front door with a big bag of sunflower seeds, Cokes for everyone, Scottie in tow, having just made a little run to 7-Eleven, I understood then, as I understand now, that I failed my mother, failed my brother. Scottie's still out there somewhere and I have lost track of him. When I think about that, my face still stings.

The Lost Hats | *Lisa Allen Ortiz*

We were someones when
we wore hats. You and me and our heads
with brims and ribbons and clasps.

Those were the days
we say to ourselves when we're out of the sun
down in the dark, having a drink.

Those were the days when we wore hats!
The dark is a hat and the drink is hat.
Used to flowers up there! We drink to that.

To all the flowers and flounces that were!
We rub our scalps, their carcinomas,
their bald spots and liver spots.

Now we know better but still!
At least we're together— at least we care
about that. At least we've let go of the past.

Those old hats have blown up or floated away
to that gyre of hats far out at sea—
fedoras and boaters and caps

floating over their own memory of heads
and inside the memory of heads the memory
of the very same hats.

It's dreamed up like that. *To the now!*
And we go out with unfastened hair
that blows from our uncovered heads

obscuring our sight and slicing
our smiles while we kiss
under what's left of the sky.

The Ocean Floor | *Lisa Allen Ortiz*

The world is known and traveled now
so even places that once seemed fathoms off
have all been mapped
and measured.

I have access to photographs
of bioluminescent fish
which suck up nutrients
from hydrothermal vents
though up on land
it's all
zoonotic pandemic.

I stay home
looking up facts with my thumb.
I search:
What happened?
How did it come to this?
Instagram photos of Iceland
for instance. Footprints
everywhere, the roots
of trees exposed from
so much stepping.

I'm alone
as I mentioned.

My chair. The lamp.
My own sitting.
The froth of my glance
out the window to
the gray wood fence
and
a leafless branch
that bends down
to discover me.

Monsieur Monod Cannot Sing | *Blanca Varela*

querido mío
te recuerdo como la mejor canción
esa apoteosis de gallos y estrellas que ya no eres
que ya no soy que ya no seremos
y sin embargo muy bien sabemos ambos
que hablo por la boca pintada del silencio
con agonía de mosca
al final del verano
y por todos las puertas mal cerradas
conjurando o llamando ese viento alevoso de la memoria
ese disco rayado antes de usarse
teñido según el humor del tiempo
y sus viejas enfermedades
o de rojo
o de negro
como un rey de desgracia frente al espejo
el día de la víspera
y mañana y pasado y siempre

noche que te precipitas
(así debe decir la canción)
cargada de presagios
perra insaciable (un peu fort)
madre espléndida (plus doux)
paridora y descalza siempre
para no ser oída por el necio que en ti cree
para mejor aplastar el corazón
del desvelado
que se atreve a oír el arrastrado paso
de la vida
a la muerte

my darling
I remember you like the best song
what divinity of roosters and stars you once were
the way I am no longer and we will no longer be
yet doubtless we both know
that I speak with a mouth painted over
in silence, with the wretchedness of a fly
at summer's end
and still there are doors left ajar
plotting or calling the shifty wind of memory
a record scratched before it was ever used
tinted with the humor of the times
and their old maladies
of red
of black
like a disgraced king standing before a mirror
at the moment of evensong
and tomorrow and in the past and forever

night that ruined you
(now here comes the song)
filled with augury
insatiable bitch (un peu fort)
splendid mother (plus doux)
ever fecund and shoeless
so as not to be heard by the fool who believes in you
so as to better crush the heart
of the sensitive one
who dares to hear the miserable step
of life
and of death

un cuesco de zancudo un torrente de plumas
una tempestad en un vaso de vino
un tango

el orden altera el producto
error del maquinista
podrida técnica seguir viviendo tu historia
al revés como en el cine
un sueño grueso
y misterioso que se adelgaza
the end is the beginning
una lucecita vacilante como las esperanza
como clara de huevo
con olor a pescado y mala leche
oscura boca de lobo que te lleva
de Cluny al Parque Salazar
tapiz rodante tan veloz y tan negro
que ya no sabes
si eres o te haces el vivo
o el muerto
y sí una flor de hierro
como un último bocado torcido y sucio y lento
para mejor devorarte

querido mío
adoro todo lo que no es mío
tú por ejemplo
con tu piel de asno sobre el alma
y esas alas de cera que te regalé
y que jamás te atreviste a usar
no sabes cómo me arrepiento de mis virtudes
ya no sé qué hacer con mi colección de ganzúas

pit in the thigh, storm of feathers
a gale in a glass of wine
a tango

the order alters the product
a machinist's error
poor technology that allows you to keep living your story
but backwards like in a movie
a dream thick
and mysterious, thinning
el final es la entrada
hope's timid little lamp
like the white of an egg
with a smell like fish or old milk
from Cluny and the Parque Salazar
a treadmill, so dark and speeding
that you never know
if you are or you are making a life
or a death
and yes an iron flower
like the last little bite to devour you
twisted and dirty and slow

my darling
I love everything that is not mine
you for example
with that jackass skin covering your soul
and those wax wings I gave you
that you never dared use
you don't know how I regret my virtues
I don't know what to do with my collection of keys

y mentiras
con mi indecencia de niño que debe terminar este cuento
ahora que ya es tarde
porque el recuerdo como las canciones
la peor la que quieras la única
no resiste otra página en blanco
y no tiene sentido que yo esté aquí
destruyendo
lo que no existe

querido mío
a pesar de eso
todo sigue igual
el cosquilleo filosófico después de la ducha
el café frío el cigarrillo amargo el Cieno Verde
en el Montecarlo
sigue apta para todos la vida perdurable
intacta la esupidez de las nubes
intacta la obscenidad de los geranios
intacta la vergüenza del ajo
los gorrioncitos cagándose divinamente en pleno cielo
de abril
Mandrake criando conejos en algún círculo
del infierno
y siempre la patita de cangrejo atrapada
en la trampa del ser
o del no ser
o de no quiero eso sino lo otro
tú sabes
esas cosas que nos suceden
y que deben olvidarse para que existan
verbigracia la mano con alas
y sin mano

and lies
with my child's obscenity and I must
finish a story that's already too late to tell
because memory is like a song
worse if you want the one and only
and can't resist another blank page
and it doesn't make sense that I am here
destroying
what does not exist

my darling
in spite of that
everything stays the same
the philosophical tickle after a shower
the cold coffee the bitter cigarette
Green Slime at the Montecarlo
all of it continues well-suited for life everlasting
intact: the idiocy of the clouds
intact: the obscenity of geraniums
intact: the garlic's shame
the little sparrows shitting divinely
in April's open sky
Mandrake raising rabbits in some
circle of hell
and always the crab leg snared
in the trap of being
or not being
or I don't want this or that
you know
these things that happen to us
and should be forgotten so they can exist
for instance a hand with wings
but without hands

la historia del canguro— aquella de la bolsa o la vida—
o la del capitán encerrado en la botella
para siempre vacía
y el vientre vacío pero con alas
y sin vientre
tú sabes
la pasión la obsesión
la poesía la prosa
el sexo el éxito
o viceversa
el vacío congénito
el huevecillo moteado
entre millones y millones de huevecillos moteados
tú y yo
you and me
toi et moi
tea for two en la inmensidad del silencio
en el mar intemporal
en el horizonte de la historia
porque ácido ribonucleico somos
pero ácido ribonucleico enamorado siempre

a kangaroo history— that of the sack or the life—
or of the captain trapped in a bottle
that's always empty
an empty belly with wings
and without a belly
you know
the passion the obsession
the poetry the prose
the sex the success
or vice versa
the congenital vacuum
the little speckled egg
among the millions and millions of speckled eggs
you and I
tú y yo
toi et moi
tea for two in the immensity of silence
in the timeless sea
on the horizon of history
because ribonucleic acid we are
but ribonucleic acid in love forever

Translated by Lisa Allen Ortiz

When I Was Pregnant | *Lisa Allen Ortiz*

I was tree then.
I shaded the bed
where you slept.

In the leaves of me
you whispered:
green, green tree.

I reached,
had fruit.
I fettered
and clung.
I was green
and you slept
under me.

A Crack in the Ground that Went to the Other Side of the Earth | *Vikram Ramakrishnan*

One time Appa said the planet broke in half, and I looked down at the jagged line in the dirt he was pointing at and agreed, yeah, that's a crack, but you think that goes all the way to the other side? He nodded in his sage way and poked at it with a stick before he got on his knees and stuck a coin in there, but it wouldn't go in. A month later, the coin did go in, on my birthday a pencil, and on New Year's, we wedged in a carrom striker before he shook his head real slow. Not good, he said. He would come to check on the fracture a few times every day, and I started thinking this was the only thing that made him happy since Amma disappeared. He made us look for knick-knacks and trinkets that we could edge into that crack, and when I asked him if we were making it bigger, he barked at me and said no, it's happening on its own. When it was wide enough to fit a Parle-G biscuit face down, we lit a few firecrackers and dropped them in and laughed when they popped and Appa didn't yell or anything, but instead, he packed up his bags, threw on a jacket he hadn't worn in years, tied his dhoti around his ankles and headed to the Big City to convince Important People that something was wrong.

When he came back, Appa said the Important People in the Big City didn't believe him and that we were on our own, so we sat around the school chalkboard and started formulating ways that we could stop the crack from widening. First things first, he said we had to stop throwing firecrackers down there because if someone on the other side got hurt, it'd be our fault. I asked if we can't stop it from growing, what if we put a bridge over it, but Appa said the bridge would break as the chasm got wider. Then I said what about a tunnel, like a tube in the ground and he said he liked the idea, but what if it collapsed? Then I said, what about like a cricket ball and Appa looked at me tilting his head like when he wanted to learn more, and I said like the stitching on a cricket ball that holds it together. I tossed him one, and Appa caught it mid-air, bouncing it in his hand. That's when he called me a genius, and that was the proudest I ever felt.

Appa knew a metalsmith who started making stakes for us, so we started driving them with hammers into the ground, strong ones that wouldn't move even during the monsoons. We scattered the stakes across from one another on each side of the baby chasm and then

tied them together with a metal twine that was usually used for fences. Appa said it was a good start, but none of us were strong enough to pull the two halves together, so we got a farmer who had an old tractor to tie the twine to the back of it. All of us were surprised, especially Appa, at how much noise the tractor's engine made when trying to pull the earth together. It stopped budging, and the farmer asked us if we were sure this would work, and Appa was adamant that it would, so he tried again.

Nothing happened, so I said we have to do this together, and Appa tilted his head again at me. His eyes were red, and his face flushed. He started nodding. Yes, together, he said. He started yelling at the top of his lungs. Together together together. So, we all wrapped our hands around the twine and pulled at the same time as the tractor. Then there was a little earthquake beneath our feet until we heard a click. The same spot that had fit the Parle-G biscuits and the firecrackers and everything else was tight against the other side. So then we went from town to town over the ocean and all the way to the other side of the planet, learning a hundred new languages as we stitched up the earth until we could finally sit down with our backs to the tractor, sweating and breathless after a long life's work.

BREAKING NEWS PHOTOGRAPHY:
NOAH BERGER



NOAH BERGER: *Wear a Mask*. LNU Lightning Complex Fire, 2020
photograph



NOAH BERGER: Embers. Delta Fire, 2018 photograph



NOAH BERGER: Cabin Engulfed in Flames. LNU Lightning Complex Fire, 2020 photograph



NOAH BERGER: Flames Consume Shasta Historic Schoolhouse. Carr Fire, 2018 photograph



NOAH BERGER: Flames Crest Hilltop above Cache Creek Casino.
County Fire, 2018 photograph



NOAH BERGER: Inmate Firefighter. River Fire, 2020 photograph



NOAH BERGER: Inmate Firefighters At Rest. River Fire, 2020 photograph



NOAH BERGER: Federal Officers Disperse Protesters. Portland, 2020
photograph



NOAH BERGER: Feds Go Home. Portland, 2020 photograph



NOAH BERGER: Wall of Moms. Portland, 2020 photograph

CONTRIBUTORS

Claire Acerno is a mother, grandmother, hausfrau, poet, and all around fun gal. She says: “your mind is your best friend, tell it what you want, make it happy, then pass it around.”

Stephen Ackerman worked as an attorney in the Legal Counsel Division of the New York City Law Department for over thirty years. He retired in 2019. His poems have appeared in many publications, including *Best New Poets 2010*, *Boulevard*, *Columbia Review*, *Mudfish*, *Partisan Review*, *Ploughshares*, *Salamander*, *Seneca Review*, and *upstreet*, as well as on *Poetry Daily*. “If I Had as Many Hands as Vishnu” is from his manuscript *Late Life*.

Ellery Akers is the author of three poetry books, most recently, *Sverve: Environmentalism, Feminism, and Resistance*, which won an award from Book Authority as “One of the Best Environmentalism Books of All Time.” She’s also won thirteen national writing awards, including an Independent Publisher Book Award and the Poetry International Prize. Her poetry has been featured on National Public Radio and *American Life in Poetry* and has appeared in the *New York Times Magazine*, *Poetry*, and the *American Poetry Review*. She’s also the author of a children’s novel, *Sarah’s Waterfall*. Among her honors are fellowships from the MacDowell Colony, Ucross Foundation, and Headlands Center for the Arts. Also an artist and naturalist, Akers lives in Marin County and teaches private poetry workshops.

Amal Al-Jubouri has written many books, including *Hagar Before the Occupation Hagar After the Occupation*, published by Alice James. These co-translations, undertaken with David Allen Sullivan when he visited her in London, are from the manuscript *Tattoo the Torab on My Eyelids*. She lives there with her son, and visits Iraq regularly to work with children overcoming trauma through creating poetry and art. www.amal-aljubouri.com

Dorothy Atkins is a self-taught artist and writer who has been painting since an early age. A mixed media artist, she also enjoys working with india ink. Look closely at her paintings and they whisper; some are shy, some loud, and some bold. Her paintings are in the homes of art collectors around the world. Gratitude to Luanna K. Leisure for photographing the “One Love” paintings reproduced here. Dorothy writes: “I am an emotional artist and I paint what I know. My inspiration comes from life’s lessons, surroundings, people, places and being socially aware. The *One Love* series was greatly influenced by the better angels who have been a presence throughout my life.” Dorothy’s book of art and poetry, *Heady Scent of Lilac*, is available through Lulu.com/Amazon.com. Find out more about her art at www.dorothyatkinsartist.com.

Charles Atkinson’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.

Bridget Bell is an English instructor at Durham Technical Community College and a proofreader for Four Way Books, which is an independent press based in Manhattan. She studied at Ohio University and Sarah Lawrence College, and her work is forthcoming in the *Los Angeles Review* online and *Tinderbox Poetry Journal*. It has been published in the *New Ohio Review*, *Folio*, *Gargoyle*, *Zone 3*, the *Pedestal Magazine*, the *Blood Orange Review*, *DIAGRAM*, and *Eleven Eleven*, among other literary journals. Bridget is currently working on a poetry collection about perinatal mood disorders.

Freelance photographer **Noah Berger**'s career spans 25 years shooting for editorial, corporate, and government clients. He works regularly for major news outlets including the Associated Press and *San Francisco Chronicle*. On the news side, Noah specializes in wildfires, riots, and other edgy situations. After covering the 2013 Rim Fire outside Yosemite, Noah began devoting summers and autumns to documenting California's major fires. He often lives out of his car for days at a time carrying everything needed for self-sufficiency. Mostly recently, he's covered the Portland Black Lives Matter movement for the Associated Press as demonstrators faced off against federal agents for explosive nights of tear gas and violence. Along with colleagues at the Associated Press, Noah was named 2019 Pulitzer Prize Finalist in Breaking News Photography for his images of California's deadliest fire season. A native of New York City, Berger lives in Alameda, California with his wife, ten-year-old son, and Lab puppy. Noah Berger Photography: www.noahbergerphoto.com

Rose Black lives and works at Renaissance Stone, a sculpting studio in East Oakland. Her poetry has been widely published and she is the author of three books: *Clearing*, *Winter Light*, and *Green Field*. Her first two books are included in Yale's Beinecke Library for the Yale Collection of American Literature. Rose teaches poetry at Salinas Valley State Prison and is one of the founders of Right to Write Press, a nonprofit that promotes the growth of emerging writers who are incarcerated in California state prisons.

Paola Bruni work has been published or is forthcoming in *Five Points Journal*, *Rattle*, *Massachusetts Review*, *Catamaran Literary Reader*, *Poet Lore*, *Red Wheelbarrow*, *Comstock Review*, *Mudfish*, *Italian Americana*, and *pbren-Z*, among others. She is the 2019 winner of the Morton Marcus Poetry Prize and 2017 winner of the Muriel Craft Bailey Poetry Prize.

Chelsea Bunn is the author of the chapbook *Forgiveness* (Finishing Line Press, 2019) and a recipient of the Rita Dove Award in Poetry. Her work appears in *Best New Poets*, *Maudlin House*, the *Ellis Review*, *Sooth Swarm Journal*, *Dunes Review*, and elsewhere. She earned her MFA in Poetry and her BA in English at Hunter College in New York, and currently lives and teaches in New Mexico.

Imani Cezanne is a highly acclaimed writer, performer, teaching artist, and poetry slam coach. Rooted in her experiences as a Black woman, Cezanne's work digs deep into the silenced themes of race, gender, class, sexuality, and privilege to become a catalyst for social justice and change. As a nationally touring spoken word poet, Cezanne has been invited to share her work at poetry venues, colleges, universities, conferences and festivals across the nation. Cezanne has won five Grand Slam Championships, placed in the top ten at seven World Poetry Slams and appeared on three major network television shows. Imani has work forthcoming in *Fugue*, *Nimrod*, *Crab Creek Review* and in 2016 released *Black Girl Fly*, a chapbook, with Belladonna Press. In March she became the 2020 Women of the World Poetry Slam Champion for the second time, one of only two people to ever do so.

For the past fifteen years, **Kevin Cooley**'s work has centered around a phenomenological, systems-based inquiry into humanity's contemporary relationship with the five classical elements—earth, air, fire, water, and aether. The resulting photographs, videos, and public installations look outward—examining the environment to observe experimental and performative gestures that seek to decipher our complex, evolving relationships to nature, technology, and each other. As his practice continues to evolve, he strives to challenge our assumptions and deepen our understanding of the environment and

materiality. His latest projects address the human perspective more directly, presenting a comprehensive view of our collective environmental concerns, questioning the long-term sustainability of present-day living, and revealing the struggles—both practically and psychologically—of inhabiting a planet we are slowly destroying. Since 2014, he's held solo exhibitions at the Catharine Clark Gallery, Disjecta Contemporary Art Center, Kopeikin Gallery, the Museum of Photographic Arts, the Nevada Museum of Art, Pierogi, Ryan/Lee Gallery, the Savannah College of Art and Design, and Yerba Buena Center for the Arts. His work is in prominent public collections including The Guggenheim Museum, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Museum of Fine Arts Houston, 21c Museum, the Nelson-Atkins Museum, and the Museum of Photographic Arts. Additionally, he has received numerous awards including a juried award at Art Prize, a Foundation for Contemporary Art grant, an Experimental Television Center Grant, an Aaron Siskand Foundation Grant, and a Rema Hort Mann Foundation Grant. Cooley lives and works in Los Angeles, California, and Brooklyn, New York. www.kevincooley.net

Morgan Corona is a poet, printer, and former farmer from Santa Cruz, California. Her work has appeared in *Catamaran Literary Reader*, *Miramar*, *Plain China*, and *Matchbox Magazine*. She is a current MFA candidate at Oregon State University and an incoming poetry coeditor for *45th Parallel Literary Magazine*.

Jim Daniels is the author of many books of poems, including, most recently, *Rowing Inland and Street Calligraphy*. His sixth book of fiction, *The Perp Walk*, was published by Michigan State University Press in 2019, along with the anthology he edited with M. L. Liebler, *RESPECT: The Poetry of Detroit Music*. He lives in Pittsburgh, where he has been teaching at Carnegie Mellon University since 1981.

Dante Di Stefano is the author of *Ill Angels* (Etruscan Press, 2019) and *Love Is a Stone Endlessly in Flight* (Brighthorse Books, 2016). His poetry, essays, and reviews have appeared in *American Life in Poetry*, *Best American Poetry 2018*, *Poem-a-Day*, *Prairie Schooner*, the *Sewanee Review*, the *Writer's Chronicle*, and elsewhere. Along with María Isabel Álvarez, he coedited the anthology *Misrepresented People: Poetic Responses to Trump's America* (NYQ Books, 2018). He holds a PhD in English Literature from Binghamton University and is the poetry editor for the *DIALOGIST*.

Robert Fanning is the author of four full-length collections: *Severance* (Salmon Poetry, 2019), *Our Sudden Museum* (Salmon Poetry, 2017), *American Prophet* (Marick Press, 2009), and *The Seed Thieves* (Marick Press, 2006) as well as two chapbooks, *Sheet Music* (Three Bee Press, 2015) and *Old Bright Wheel* (Ledge Press, 2003). His poems have appeared in *Poetry*, *Ploughshares*, *Shenandoah*, *Gulf Coast*, *Waxwing*, the *Cortland Review*, *Rattle*, *failbetter*, and many other journals. He is a professor at Central Michigan University, and the founder/facilitator of the Wellspring Literary Series in Mt. Pleasant, Michigan. For more, visit www.robertfanning.wordpress.com.

Farnaz Fatemi is an Iranian-American poet, editor, and writing teacher in Santa Cruz, California. She is a member and cofounder of The Hive Poetry Collective, which presents a weekly radio show and podcast in Santa Cruz County and hosts readings and poetry-related events. Her poetry and prose appears in *SWWIM Daily*, *Grist Journal*, *Catamaran Literary Reader*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Tahoma Literary Review*, *pbren-z.org*, *Tupelo Quarterly*, and several anthologies (including, most recently, *My Shadow Is My Skin: Voices of the Iranian Diaspora* and *The BreakBeat Poets Vol. 3: Halal If You Hear Me*). “Bee Leaf” is for Kathy Chetkovich.

Susan Florence's career has been writing and illustrating gift products and 30 gift books for many years. But it is the creative process of poetry that keeps her profoundly connected to herself—finding ground, especially during these uncertain and difficult times.

Jessica Diana Garza's poetry and artwork were extensively featured in the 2016 *Red Wheelbarrow Literary Magazine: The Writer's Life*. Her cover artwork for this issue was titled *Bird Bath*, and the magazine is available at the Right to Write Press web site: www.richtowritepress.org. Ms. Garza's subject material ranges from boxing to soup kitchens, from drugs to the transgender experience. She often looks outside her prison window to record the expressive sparrows and squirrels, the occasional flower.

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.

Ben Gunsberg is an associate professor of English at Utah State University. His poetry appears in *DIAGRAM*, *CutBank*, and *Mid-American Review*, among other magazines. He is the author of the poetry collection *Welcome, Dangerous Life* and the chapbook *Rhapsodies with Portraits*. He lives in Logan, Utah, at the foot of the Bear River Mountains.

Mark Harris is an award-winning artist, activist, and educator. He has combined his passions for art making and activism to create a unique visual vocabulary that he uses to engage his audience on critical issues facing society today. He has established a strong independent voice and is one of the San Francisco Bay Area's most controversial artists. The *Metro Silicon Valley News* called his work "brilliantly subversive." His evocative, elegant, and dynamic creations have caught the eye of international and domestic art collectors alike. A native of Durham, North Carolina, Harris grew up in Atlanta, Georgia, but he now lives in San Francisco, California.

Kim Hecko is a bilingual teacher, cancer survivor, fumbling surfer, and mom to a teen. She is an aspiring writer who uses writing to reflect on the struggles and wonder of her students and to explore the complexities of life, especially around the edges. She came to Santa Cruz 35 years ago to go to college, and as often happens, never left.

A retired Bay Area community college English instructor, Suzanne Helfman writes, reads, and walks on the California Central Coast. She looks forward to the brighter year ahead. Don't we all?

AE Hines is a poet living in Portland, Oregon. He is a recent Pushcart nominee and his work has appeared in numerous publications, including *Atlanta Review*, *California Quarterly*, the *Briar Cliff Review*, *Hawaii Pacific Review*, *I-70 Review*, the *Crosswinds Poetry Journal*, *SLAB*, and *Pinyon*. www.aehines.net

Helene Simkin Jara is an actor, director, author, and educator who lives and works in Santa Cruz, California. Her work has been published in the *Porter Gulch Review*, *La Revista*, *Mindprints*, *pbren-Z*, *Serving House Journal*, and *Nerve Cowboy*. In 2003, she received the "best prose" award from *Porter Gulch* for her short story "Josefina" and again in 2009 for her short play "FUBMC." In November of 2006, Helene's play *The Tongue* was part of a festival at the African American Shakespeare Company in San Francisco. In 2007, her poem "The Difference" was nominated for a Pushcart Prize. She has self-published the book *Because I Had To*, a collection of short stories, poems, plays and monologues. It was an Amazon Kindle bestseller in July, 2014. Her book

True Doll Stories We Remember was published by Ingram Sparks. She has also recently published a book of short stories called *Turn Left at the Gorilla and Go Down the Hall*. She is currently working on a memoir, *Life on the Stand*.

Larry D. Jones has been a writer in the Salinas Valley State Prison EOP Poetry Workshop for several years. His novel *Reality of a Spiritual Kind* was published by the Prisons Foundation and is available online at Prisonsfoundation.org. His poetry has appeared in *Red Wheelbarrow*, and was read on Central Coast Poetry Shows on Santa Cruz Community TV. Mr. Jones's recent writing addresses civil rights, issues highlighted by the Black Lives Matter movement, and Covid-19. He often reaches back into his past, weaving in rich images from work and childhood, his days of "Fatback" and "Green Cotton."

Russell Karrick is a poet/translator living between New York and Colombia. He has won translation awards from *World Literature Today* and *Lunch Ticket*. His poetry has appeared in *Magma Poetry*, *Blue Earth Review*, *Jet Fuel Review*, *300 Days of Sun*, and the *Lily Poetry Review*, among others.

Stephen Kuusisto's brand new collection of poetry from Tiger Bark Press is titled *Old Horse, What Is To Be Done*. He is also the author of the memoirs *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*, and *Letters to Borges*. His newest memoir, *Have Dog, Will Travel: A Poet's Journey*, is just out from Simon & Schuster. A graduate of the Iowa Writer's Workshop and a Fulbright Scholar, he has taught at the University of Iowa, Hobart & William Smith Colleges, and The Ohio State University. He currently teaches at Syracuse University where he holds a professorship in Disability Studies. Professor Kuusisto has served as an advisor to the Metropolitan Museum and the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the National Endowment for the Arts in Washington DC. He has appeared on numerous television and radio programs including the *Oprah Winfrey Show*, *Dateline*, *All Things Considered*, *Morning Edition*, *Talk of the Nation*, *A & E*, and *Animal Planet*. His essays have appeared in the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, *Harper's*, the *Reader's Digest*, and his daily blog *Planet of the Blind* is read globally by people interested in disability and contemporary culture. He is a frequent speaker in the U.S. and abroad. His website is www.stephenkuusisto.com.

Lynne Jensen Lampe has poems in or forthcoming from *Small Orange*, *Rock & Sling*, *LIT Magazine* *Corona Chronicle*, *San Pedro River Review*, and elsewhere. Her work has been nominated for Best of the Net. She lives in Columbia, Missouri, where she edits academic books and journals. You can find her on Twitter @LJensenLampe.

Linda Lappin taught English at San Jose State University after graduating with her MFA and publishing *Not Far From the Tree*, a collection of poems. Her poems have been published in numerous s-mall presses. This is her first flash fiction to be published. She currently volunteers and is on the board of Recovery Cafe San Jose and lives in Japan Town.

David Masette'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.

Lisa Allen Ortiz is the author of the 2016 Perugia Prize-winning *Guide to the Exhibit* and two chapbooks: *Self Portrait as a Clock* and *Turns Out*.

Carol Park loves exploring geographies, internal and external, far and near. Her homes have ranged from the San Francisco suburbs to mazes of Japan, from Hawaiian sands to wilderness of redwoods and pines. Her fiction has appeared in the *East Bay Review*, *Inigo*, the *Harpoon Review*, *Birdland Journal*, *Shark Reef*, *Red Wheelbarrow*, and the *Antarctica Journal*. Three anthologies, *Irrational Fear*, *Fault Zone: Strike Shift*, and *Barbies That Were and Never Were*, also include her stories. She earned her MFA from Seattle Pacific University.

Jory Post has been an educator and writer for 40 years as well as making handmade books and journals with his wife, Karen, as JoKa Press. He is the cofounder and editor of *pbren-Z*, an online literary magazine, since 2012. His fiction and poetry have been published in *Catamaran Literary Review*, *Chicago Quarterly Review*, *Porter Gulch Review*, *Red Wheelbarrow*, *82 Review*, the *Sun*, and others.

Vikram Ramakrishnan is a Tamil-American writer and computer programmer. He is an alumnus of the University of Pennsylvania, where he studied physics, mathematics, and computer science. He is a graduate of the Odyssey Writing Workshop, where he won the Walter & Kattie Metcalf Singing Spider Scholarship. He lives in New York.

Arien Reed, a Baha'i, differently abled, queer, trans man, holds an MFA from National University, lives with his husband, and works at Fresno City College, where he cofounded the LGBTQ Allied Staff and Faculty Association, on which he currently serves as president. His poetry and art have appeared, or are forthcoming, in *Oberon*, *Sonora Review*, *Hippocrates*, *Poet's Choice*, *High Shelf Press*, *La Piccioletta Barca*, and others.

Heidi Richardson earned her BA in Creative Writing/Poetry from Cal State, San Bernardino, in 2016...as a slightly later-in-life student. Her first book of poetry, *Praise of the Black Narcissus*, received Honorable Mention in the Cave Canem Book Prize for African American Writers in 2016. Her poem "The Waiting Room" received a Pushcart Prize nomination and touched on the experience of a black woman giving birth during segregation. Her work has been published in the *Ghost Town Lit Mag*, the *Pacific Review* and most recently in the *Glassworks 2020 Anthology*.

Jamie Ross writes, paints, hauls water, and chops wood on a mesa near Taos, New Mexico. He also lives in Mexico. His poetry has appeared in many journals, including *Cutthroat*, *Nimrod*, the *Northwest*, *Asheville*, *Texas*, and *Paris Reviews*, also in *Best New Poets 2007*. His 2010 collection, *Vinland*, received the Intro Poetry Prize from Four Way Books.

Ralph James Savarese is the author of two books of prose, *Reasonable People* and *See It Feelingly*, and two collections of poetry, *Republican Fathers* and *When This Is Over*. He lives in Iowa City, Iowa.

There is no record of **Li Shen's** birth, but we know that he passed the imperial examinations, was briefly a professor, and later served as secretary to the war lord Li Qi. Li Shen was made governor of Shedong in 833, and served as chancellor under Emperor Wuzong. His poems often bemoan the plight of poor farmers. Li Shen died in 846.

Su Shi, also referred to as Su Tung-po, (1037–1101) was a preeminent poet of the Song dynasty. In addition to his gifts as a poet, he was also a renowned calligrapher and painter. For most of his life, Su was a high-ranking government official, although he was twice exiled. After his final pardon, he retired from government work, began a period of Buddhist meditation, and produced many of his finest poems and paintings.

David Allen Sullivan is poet laureate of Santa Cruz County, California. His books include *Strong-Armed Angels*, *Every Seed of the Pomegranate*, *Bombs Have Not Breakfasted Yet* (a book of co-translation with Abbas Kadhim from the Arabic of Iraqi Adnan Al-Sayegh), and *Black Ice*. He won the Mary Ballard Chapbook poetry prize for *Take Wing*; his book of poems about the year he spent as a Fulbright lecturer in China, *Seed Shell Ash*, is forthcoming from Salmon Press; and *Black Butterflies Over Baghdad* will be published by The Word Works. “Nightjars”—a long narrative poem about the friendship between an Iraqi interpreter and a U.S. soldier—is searching for a home, as is *The Painted Word*, an anthology of poems about the paintings of Bosch and Bruegel he edited with his art historian mother, who died recently. He teaches at Cabrillo College, where he edits the *Porter Gulch Review* with his students, and lives in Santa Cruz with his family.

Ubaldo Teque, Jr., is originally from Guatemala via Southern California. His poetry and prose have appeared in *Red Wheelbarrow*, *Pilgrimage*, and *Erotic Review*, and were read on Central Coast Poetry Shows on Santa Cruz Community TV. His first collection of poems and essays, *Niño Inmigrante*, was published in October, 2020, by Right to Write Press. In addition to poetry, Ubaldo Teque, Jr., writes essays and memoir. He enjoys translation, and has translated many of his father’s poems from Spanish to English.

Hank Willis Thomas (b. 1976, Plainfield, New Jersey; lives and works in Brooklyn, New York) is a conceptual artist working primarily with themes related to perspective, identity, commodity, media, and popular culture. His work has been exhibited throughout the United States and abroad including the International Center of Photography, New York; Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, Spain; Musée du quai Branly, Paris; Hong Kong Arts Centre, Hong Kong; and the Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, Netherlands. Thomas’s work is included in numerous public collections including those in the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Brooklyn Museum, New York; High Museum of Art, Atlanta, Georgia; and the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. His collaborative projects include *Question Bridge: Black Males, In Search Of The Truth (The Truth Booth)*, *The Writing on the Wall*, and *For Freedoms*. In 2017, *For Freedoms* was awarded the ICP Infinity Award for New Media and Online Platform. Thomas is a recipient of the Gordon Parks Foundation Fellowship (2019), the Guggenheim Fellowship (2018), AIMIA | AGO Photography Prize (2017), Soros Equality Fellowship (2017), Aperture West Book Prize (2008), Renew Media Arts Fellowship from the Rockefeller Foundation (2007), and the New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowship Award (2006). He is also a member of the Public Design Commission for the City of New York. In 2019, Thomas unveiled his permanent work *Unity* in Brooklyn, New York. In 2017, *Love Over Rules* permanent neon was unveiled in San Francisco, California and *All Power to All People* in Opa Locka, Florida.

Blanca Varela (1926–2009) was born in Lima, Peru, and authored nine collections of poetry. She was the recipient of Gabriela Mistral Medal, the Octavio Paz Prize, and the Reina Sofía Prize for Ibero-American Poetry.

Julie Marie Wade teaches in the creative writing program at Florida International University in Miami. She has published twelve collections of poetry and prose, most recently the book-length lyric essay, *Just an Ordinary Woman Breathing* (The Ohio State University Press, 2020) and the hybrid-forms chapbook, *P*R*I*D*E* (VCFA/Hunger

Mountain, 2020). Wade reviews regularly for *Lambda Literary Review* and the *Rumpus* and makes her home in Dania Beach with her spouse Angie Griffin and their two cats.

Yanwen Xu was born in Xuzhou, China, but he now studies and writes in Santa Cruz.

Gary Young is the author of several collections of poetry. His 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*. He has received a Pushcart Prize and grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities, National Endowment for the Arts, the California Arts Council, and the Vogelstein Foundation among others. In 2009 he received the Shelley Memorial Award from the Poetry Society of America. He teaches creative writing and directs the Cowell Press at UC Santa Cruz.