

# Red Wheelbarrow

LITERARY MAGAZINE

National Edition, 2024



HOLLY LANE: *Companions, The Three Graces*  
acrylic and carved wood, 16.25" x 24" x 4.875", 2021



BUSHRA GILL: **Connector** laser cut wood with acrylic, image transfer,  
14" x 28" x .5", 2023

# Red Wheelbarrow

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LITERARY MAGAZINE

EIGHTH ANNUAL POETRY PRIZE



ART: ELLERY AKERS, TAMERA AVERY,  
CHERYL COON, EDWIN CARUNGAY,  
RICA SMITH DE LA LUZ, BUSHRA GILL,  
JESSICA DIANA GARZA,  
HOLLY LANE, CARLOS RODRIGUEZ



POETRY OF INCARCERATED WRITERS:  
ROOSEVELT COLEMAN, JAMES HUMDY,  
DAVID MASSETTE, KORAY RICÉ,  
UBALDO TEQUE, JR., G. ANTHONY TOPETE



CREATIVE NON-FICTION: JESUS QUINTERO

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 spring student edition is open to De Anza students. We welcome submissions of all kinds, and seek to publish diverse styles and voices. Submission deadline for 2025 national edition: September 15th, 2025.

#### Submission Guidelines

Poetry: submit up to five poems to [weisnerken@fhda.edu](mailto:weisnerken@fhda.edu)

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

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

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

Photographs and Drawings: submit up to five digital files (.jpg, .tiff, or .psd format)

Comics: submit one b/w strip

#### The Red Wheelbarrow Poetry Prize

Deadline, July 31st, 2025

Guidelines and Submissions:

<https://redwheelbarrow.submittable.com/submit>

All *Red Wheelbarrow* poetry prize submissions are judged anonymously.

*Red Wheelbarrow*

De Anza College

21250 Stevens Creek Boulevard

Cupertino, CA 95014-5702

National edition single copy price: \$20; back issues: \$15.

Editor, national edition: Ken Weisner ([WeisnerKen@fhda.edu](mailto:WeisnerKen@fhda.edu))

<https://www.deanza.edu/english/creative-writing/red-wheelbarrow.html>

Faculty advisor, student edition: Jen Penkethman

<https://www.deanza.edu/english/creative-writing/red-wheelbarrow-student.html>

Art Design: Kathleen Roberts Design

Front cover: Tamera Avery, Crown of Tulle, oil on canvas, 22" x 24", 2021

Back cover: Edwin Carungay, Presence, photograph, 45" x 30", 2023

Frontispiece, page 1: Holly Lane, Companions, The Three Graces,  
acrylic and carved wood, 16.25" x 24 x "4.875, 2021

Frontispiece, page 2: Bushra Gill, Connector  
laser cut wood with acrylic, image transfer, 14" x 28" x .5", 2023

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ISSN 1543-1983

Printed by: Bookmobile

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*A Door into the Wild: Poetry and Art* | Ellery Akers  
Blue Light Press, San Rafael CA, 2024

The poet Ellery Akers has published a new book, *A Door into the Wild: Poetry and Art*, a collection of prose poems and original drawings, and the winner of the 2024 Blue Light Book Award. Akers, an accomplished artist and poet, has never combined her art and her poetry in the same book until now. In an introduction to a recent art feature in the online magazine *Terrain* (terrain.org), where she was also a finalist for their annual poetry competition, Akers wrote about her art process:

I love to sit outside in a camp chair and try to become what I'm looking at. I don't think of a tree or a river as a "subject" to draw or write about. I don't want to impose my will on what's in front of me—I'm going to capture the angle of that branch perfectly; I'm going to get that shadow down just right. What I want to do instead is listen. When I sit in front of a willow, I try to throw my consciousness inside the tree and draw or write about it from the inside out. I ask: What's it like to be you? How does it feel to have your roots so close to the stream? How does it feel to have a flycatcher land on a branch? Sometimes I'll sit for hours before I make a mark on the page. I haven't picked up a conventional brush in years.... I use a twig, a stick, a length of copper wire, a clump of doll's hair, a small broom. These odd tools help me gain access to a wild freshness in my work. I love making art by way of subtraction, and many of my drawings are created by dipping a stick in ink and then repeatedly wiping away the ink to create layering and texture.

The two images reproduced here, *Cottonwoods: Carson River* and *Arroyo, Point Reyes*, offer examples of the visual pleasure and craft of *A Door into the Wild*. But the poems shine with equal originality. Here's one example:

After Twenty Years

One night when I was depressed, I asked for a sign. I stood on a cliff and watched two deer step onto the beach below. Their hooves clinked when they crossed the shale, and when they walked up the beach, their hoof prints filled with seawater. Each pool held a moon. I tried to understand what it meant as kelp washed back and forth and the sea breathed below me. It's all gone now—who I longed for, what I felt. All I remember are those thirty or forty moons, shining.

Whether the poems in *A Door into the Wild* are ecstatic with the blaze of love, or elegiac, for a sister passed—the door opens, the wild appears: a lizard, a moth, a hailstorm, a mayfly, a sparrow—alongside the ironies and trials of everyday life. This is not just a pretty book. When the world is painful, awful, Akers sees and grieves. All the wild emotions are present. But through stillness and openness—art, wilderness, and connection offer extraordinary comfort. —kw



ELLERY AKERS: **Cottonwods, Carson River** ink on Yupo paper, 20" x 26", 2014 —From *A Door into the Wild: Poetry and Art* (Blue Light Press) 2024



ELLERY AKERS: **Arroyo, Point Reyes** ink on Yupo paper, 20" x 26", 2012  
From *A Door into the Wild: Poetry and Art* (Blue Light Press) 2024

## Aivazovsky's Brush | Taylor Gorman

Find a hole in you that you are afraid of, something you plan to fill with concrete. Climb into it. Become a painter of shipwrecks, conduct a history of ambient music to your observations of bees. Take the sheet off a ghost, grow into what's left. There's a complicated emptiness to hotel rooms, same as the sugar you taste on someone else's tongue. The translation goes: if you wish me to weep, you must first weep yourself. Tear out the first page of every book in the library, then bind them and wonder why there's no longer a future to walk into. Think of each song you know by heart, each place. Think Pennsylvania, your uncle's house, the first time you saw fireflies. Imagine the kind of light that is going to come out of your body. Think memory, frozen architecture. There's a word for when you jostle the kindling to keep warm at night. Think of Hong Wen, who met his wife after she smuggled herself out of China in a used refrigerator. Think of your therapist who had a stroke and no longer dreams. Dream that you are pregnant with a thundercloud. Cut yourself into smaller and smaller pieces: one hand on the needle, another on the fabric, thinking: yes, return.



## Splendid Things | Taylor Gorman

When my cat disappeared,  
it was through the bedroom window.  
In the empty year that has followed,  
my other cat began waiting for him there,  
her single eye blinking itself to sleep on the sill.  
I wonder if she has the same dream  
where he is waiting in the darkness  
on a corner where he shouldn't be.  
There are no words in her vocabulary  
to tell her what I do not know myself—  
how it became winter so quickly,  
why we are colder.  
But she could hear the months of rain  
that pulled the ink from the flyers  
and bled them into pulp—  
how could I explain that at some point  
I could no longer spend each night  
stapling them to the telephone poles  
that I had memorized throughout the city,  
calling his name until my voice could no longer carry it.  
How could I explain there was nothing left.  
Now, when she is by the window,  
I read her poems from a dignitary in China,  
a thousand years separating us from his dynasty.  
I explain the word for “prayer tent”  
and the phrase he uses to say he is broken,  
how *sè* is color, yet here it means form.  
I show her Qizhou on a map of what is now Henan  
and draw the characters of *sheng shi* on her fur  
as she falls asleep, saying it means “affairs of the past,”  
and yet, here, “splendid things.”  
I tell her the poet is saying goodbye to Zu Long,  
a person he once shared robes with  
and who has visited him in his exile in the mountains.

I tell her they are both old, and the poet knows  
they will never be in the same tent again to pray,  
but he is quiet as he undoes the ropes  
of the sampan boat, gripping them in his hands  
as if to tie himself to the Yangtze river.  
And when he looks up, Zu Long is far down the bend  
that curves into the winter fog between the mountains.  
I tell her that he stands there for a long time, looking.

## Tea & Horses | Taylor Gorman

We hiked to the garden of stones, placing small notes and poems into the cairns. Next to a koi pond, people leave prayers and letters to strangers and the dead. Little shrines all over, tokens and ghost money. There is a rock painted as a yellow luchador sitting next to a twenty dollar bill and an NA chip. We sat in that silence for a long time, listening to the leaves and writing poems. I think David wrote a letter to his son. At some point, a woman came in from the trail, white hair, sunglasses, and tired. She asked us about the piles of stones, looking lost. I said something rude, that I didn't want to talk to her. I was ending my letter to you and pretending not to cry. Nothing was coming out that way I meant it. In the Tang dynasty, they said "I wish you had shared a lot of tea with me and taken my horse for your return." David talked to the woman while I wrote my initials in a blur of aimless longing at the end of the page. I knew you weren't going to write back because I would never give it to you. You didn't deserve it. I folded it up and balanced the rocks on top of it. My mind was a dust storm, and I hoped the stones would hold the small things I was trying to forget. A sewing needle, an ashtray, a trade paperback in an empty hammock. I heard David's voice and watched as he handed her a pen and a torn piece of notebook paper. Do you want to write something. She looks at me and then back to David and the little graves behind him. She takes the paper, and she says yes.



## Saying It Aloud until It Comes True | Taylor Gorman

Whole days, eaten raw, I have waited for you. And here I am, a stone asleep in your garden. Do you still remember me? Lately, I've been dreaming of you. I gave you wildflowers, and you untangled them, fashioned them into a crown. I've been saying aloud the story I had written you, the one where you are a house that's on fire. The one where I walk inside of you and burn to death, the bones in my hand left holding the staircase. I told it to the grove of redwoods when only they could hear it. I told it to myself kneeling on the floor of the shower at night. I told it to a stranger at the bus station, and they said they could see the ashes in my grey hand. And there is another story, too, one I haven't mentioned to the trees. After the loss of his brother, Wang Wei, Wang Jin would carve his poems into woodblocks at sharp angles, pressing them into the skin of his thighs until he bled onto the wood. He would brush ink over it, then press it over mulberry paper. He said it was the only way he could know them by heart.

## Radical Acceptance | Claudia Meléndez Salinas

Let me take you to the doctor when you're sick  
I'll pick you up from home and drive you to the hospital's entrance

On the way there you can rattle on about how much it hurts  
to have your tonsils out, your appendix removed  
be kicked to a pulp by your partner  
the tiny deaths you've silently endured

Let me serve you in the most impossible way  
holding my heart with one hand  
and clasping my mouth with the other.

## Barely There | Claudia Meléndez Salinas

The poets and artists go around the circle  
sharing their struggles, ruminations,  
doubts about whether the creation process is worth it  
whether there are enough logs to keep the fire going.

The fire crackles a bit.

Rent. Sucky bosses. Family feuds. A decrepit government.  
The war industrial complex. Thousands of children  
starving to death in their mothers' arms.  
After consuming it all, is there any energy left to fan the flames?

There has to be, the fire whispers.

## Nucleation | Claudia Meléndez Salinas

*for Lucy*

The turtle carries in its back home, security, sorrow.  
It moves slowly gravity pulling its weight  
to the center of the earth reminding it of its nature.  
You can't escape your shell, little turtle.

On the horizon the turtle sees a shining promise  
flowing moving whispering  
a bale of turtles climbing one on top of another  
making their way to the water's edge

Ready to leap into a gentler reality  
in the water the turtle glides and flips and  
summersaults floats floats floats floats  
her sisters rushing to the rescue

If a current turns her belly up  
in the water the shell becomes boat  
sling, promise, armor that needs no escaping.

Stubby | Charles O. Atkinson

*for George and Rich*

A great blue heron—emblem of stillness  
even in flight—crosses the expanse  
of the marsh—slow, rhythmic strokes.

Brother reaches down, finger probing mud,  
eases out a spotted turtle, adult/female?  
Stillness has been key to its survival  
for an unimaginable span—200 million years?  
Her turtle-blinks, even the blinking of them,  
slow and patient . . . could it be Stubby?!

How will we know? How many turtle-lives lie  
buried in this thirty-foot pond year after year?  
How many are missing a left rear paw?  
Not mangled, and not a slow-down stump,  
and this: she seems unafraid in our hands.

*Atkinson Brother, circa 1955*

## Cut-Paper Collage: Nick's Portrait of Peggy | Patrice Vecchione

Here she is before Nick backed Peggy into a corner with the torrent of his voice, before he had to hold her upright on the subway ride home after a few too many martinis. Or maybe after a little corner-backing and a few-too-many drinks in such dainty, long-stemmed glasses, but long before the years piled up like dirty laundry. Peggy, a woman bent on tidiness as a sign of approaching nearness to God—God being her only certainty—married a man who'd clean up nothing.

The best thing about before is its undetermined possibility, and though it never lasts, for Peggy and Nick, it lasted long enough for him, in his adoration of her, to make this portrait from cut shapes of ordinary paper—construction, cardboard, one water-colored, blue piece cut into a small circle.

He arranged her pieces like a solved puzzle: bobbed hair just just below the chin, one blue eye, though she insisted her eyes were gray, the easy slope of her nose, wide lips, Max Factor red, a long, white neck. She floats, almost haloed, upon a pale gray background.

Here she is as he saw her when they were almost young and free as two people encumbered by childhood but determined to break away could be.

They took the subway up and down the city to clubs where they danced close and to the theatre, staying out as late as they wanted to. This is the portrait, the only thing from him that she didn't destroy, after leaving—finally. His love letters torn up, trashed. But solved? Neither solved nor resolved. Not then, not ever. And floating? In real life, that was her privilege only after the few-too-many.

It's the look in her eye that catches a viewer's attention first  
pensive, downcast. On the blue of her eye,  
to indicate a glint, Nick pasted a tiny triangle  
of white below the heavy lid shielding her pupil.  
For so long, she had that inclination,  
to find the uplift, to do a little jig, Irish girl that she was,  
a little glint in the rupture.

Here's the mother I came to know only a few years later.  
And though she'd deny it, like my father, I saw some blue  
in her eyes, like a sky that makes a promise it may not keep.  
Her lips, wide and stained, are mine. And some of what  
came from behind them, comes now from behind mine.

She's looking past him; I see that now.  
If only, I think, decades later, she could have done so  
with greater conviction, with less overriding sense  
of obligation and desire for acceptability, the high-heels  
and wiggling her skinny frame into the tight skirt. If only  
earlier she'd employed a harder certitude and packed a suitcase  
sooner. But then, of course, my chance at this endeavor  
might have been packed up too.

Instead, though gone from waking life, she resides,  
never-resting, leaning back against my bedroom shelf.  
And with that always-open eye, she watches  
for what she never got and over my sleep each night  
she watches, as when I was a fitful, colicky baby. And lately,  
while I'm too many years without her,  
mostly, I sleep well.

## ARTIST'S STATEMENT: BUSHRA GILL

Inspired by Islamic geometric patterns, I tessellate images from everyday life to create rich and complex surface structures in/with paint, print, and wood collage. In the process, dimensions of my subjects are simultaneously revealed and concealed, enabling me to explore ideas of that which is present, but veiled—much like my hair, which I cover with a scarf in public. Using repeated geometric shapes that fit closely together creates a sense of order through which I understand the natural world and my personal experience. Rather than constraining my freedom, this approach provides a scaffold for experimenting with color, texture, and spatial possibilities. In this way, through art, I find order within the chaos of everyday life.



Originally from Karachi, Pakistan, I emigrated to Houston, Texas with my family as a small child. I was drawn to art from a young age and graduated from Pratt Institute in 1994 with a BFA in sculpture.

I spent many years working as a museum educator at various galleries and museums including The Museum of Modern Art, The Drawing Center and The Rotunda Gallery, while also working as a studio assistant to various artists including Maya Lin, Ursula von Rydingsvard, and Maria Elena Gonzalez. I currently live and work in northern California and serve on the board of Oakland Art Murmur and curate exhibitions.





BUSHRA GILL: **Pre Dawn** acrylic, image transfer on canvas, 16" x 20", 2022

*Pre-dawn is waiting, pregnant with possibility and a time of transition.*



BUSHRA GILL: **Dawn** acrylic, image transfer, texture on canvas, 16" x 20", 2022

*Dawn is newness, beginnings and aflutter with possibilities.*





BUSHRA GILL: **Pink Hour** acrylic, image transfer on canvas, 24" x 30", 2022

*The pink hour in late afternoon is a basking display of confidence and joy.*



BUSHRA GILL: **Grapevine Chaos, Ordered** watercolor on drypoint print,  
13.5" x 9.75", 2019

*The grapevine clammers all along the fence, abaze with color in the early fall,*



BUSHRA GILL: **Pool Chaos, Ordered** watercolor on paper, 13.5" x 9.75", 2018

*Islamic patterns explore everyday images to create order and meaning.*



BUSHRA GILL: *Cousin Chaos I, Ordered* watercolor on drypoint print, 13" x 9.5", 2019

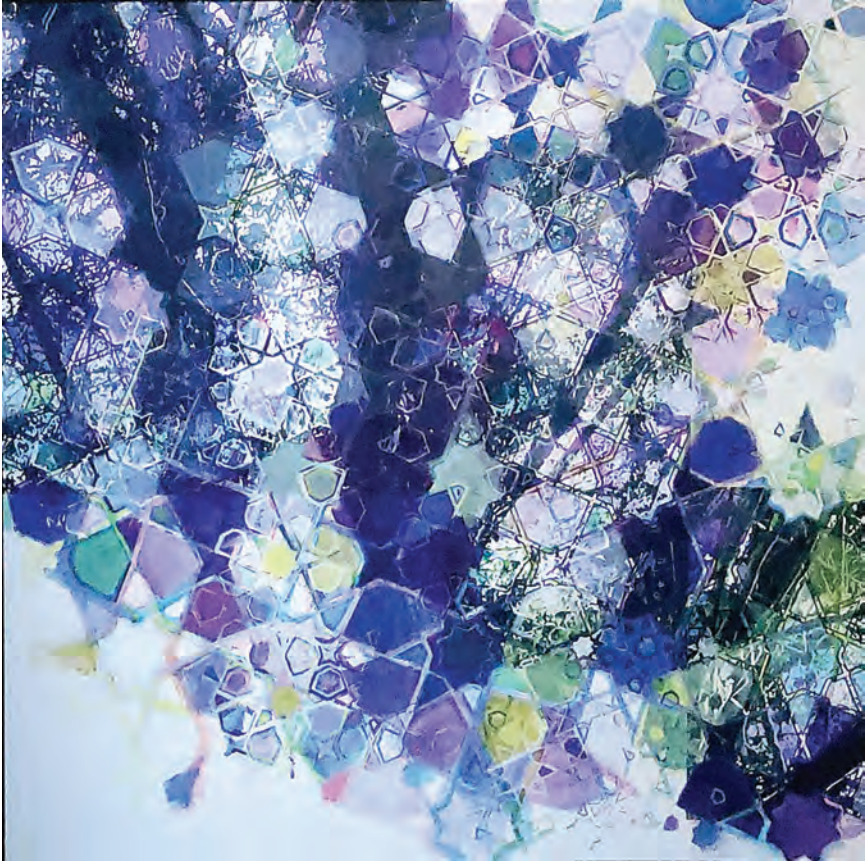
*The pattern speaks of the close relationship of the boys,  
in sync with one another's ideas.*





BUSHRA GILL: **Feel Seen** acrylic on lasercut wood collage, 24" x 26", 2023

*The image mirrors the movement from other to acquaintance.*



**BUSHRA GILL: Purpling** acrylic, texture paste, collage, 36" x 36", 2023

*When sunlight filters through trees, they purple in our vision, as motes and rays penetrate the leaves. This is especially noticeable at dusk, as everything takes on a violet shade, called the Purkinje effect.*



a circle of constant longitude passing | Kathryn Hopping

enter now the cathedral  
of breath and bone

of name body  
from dust to

dusk woven earth pull  
and cling of leaf

to weighted branch  
and season turned seed

shimmer light  
rains refracted

sun above well  
of moon shrouds

such radiant face  
rare blazing

ringed dark disc  
of us luminous

threshold  
of wind

enter now

## Callous | Tim Fitzmaurice

*Written in prison*

*“for in Latin to have callouses means to understand something completely”*  
(S. Kierkegaard, “Stages on Life’s Way”)

The poet is also a murderer.

So poets scramble lizardlike  
on the rocks of unwelcome  
and take what has not been offered.  
It has been kidnapped.

It seems like  
the unrelenting sun in deserts will  
suck life from anything  
that has the temerity to struggle  
in the wash.

Who walks in these fields of sham  
without paying attention?

Everyone but him.

I tell him, so we pay attention.  
It is what poets do!

I look into prison like  
I am looking into a funhouse mirror  
that we have built. And  
what do you think is staring back?

But back to the poet/murderer who  
brought me the word callous.  
He pronounced it Cowl You Us.

Cowl You Us?  
Oh you mean Callous? I said.

Yes Cowl You Us, he said.  
It was what the prosecutor kept saying at my trial,  
Cowl You Us.

## New Poems & Art—Salinas Valley State Prison and Beyond

*Red Wheelbarrow* is committed to publishing the voices of incarcerated writers alongside the work of non-incarcerated writers. Salinas Valley State Prison is five miles north of the city of Soledad, in Monterey County, California. It houses close to 3,700 men. Prison psychologist Dr. Benjamin Bloch and the poet Ellen Bass began a workshop there in 2015, and offshoots of that original workshop exist to this day staffed by dedicated and talented volunteer teachers and mentors like Rose Black and Tim Fitzmaurice, who work with the writers published here. Dr. Bloch once wrote that “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 able to continue to feature voices of incarcerated writers in great part thanks to the support of Right to Write Press, The East Bay Community Foundation, and The William James Foundation.

\*

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## When I Was Five | David Massette

I remember the North Beach chess clubs; the Reagan era; Star Wars; the Russian Department at San Francisco State University; Professor Borkin (the munis talked to us back then; Jonestown; chess clubs; Pepperidge Farm Chessmen Butter Cookies, as a didactic mnemonic; the Savoy. . .ah!!!

\*

The most painful disaster I ever felt—(before my cicerone stoico cool-ness, you see)—I cried like I'd lost a sister:

We squirt-gunned an old lady outside of Portofino Cafe and my dad stomped the love of my life to death, right there on the spot, leaving the green shards of plastic military chauvanism broken like Picasso's sword, and a hole in my soul that was worse than Guernica. — — how *could* he?

A different time, a different expectation, a different estimate, and hope. Yes, we had hope back then.

## When I Was Fifteen | David Massette

Seriously, now, ladies and gentlemen. Kid gloves starting to come off. Rodney King taught us the real New Deal. We could no longer “Just Believe” they were there to protect us and serve us. Instead, we had a faith in our own truth.

Streets of the Mission District, absolutely no joke, yet still beautiful. Palm fronds (*gracias* Father Serra) all the way to 16th Street. Who does that? A kindergarten?—yeah, 1000%, Valencia Gardens. Us kids grew up fast in those gardens.

I saw it cause I lived it. Not a “lost generation,” but a “wasted generation”—not a “great depression,” but a “great despair”—something was dead inside of us then, and insulation was wearing off: World Trade Center I), drug vendors as role models, squalor, junior convicts playing pool at Victory Outreach. Follow in Father’s footsteps straight into the bear trap. (and I hate writing ugly, guys, but reality matters more here) masks broken. The CDCs crime lobby ruled back then with an iron fist. Obvious warfare. Smash mouth. Watcha gonna do about it? Law-fare.

Street Fighter II: The World Warrior (1991), the logical progression on Street Fighter I (1987). I was literally studying Ninjitsu as a career path—

Ninja Ryu Hyabusa my ideal, Brendan Lai’s Martial Arts Supply Co, 17th & Mission—

“My dojo is better than yours.” The campaign for top gun. “Ubermacht.”

A mind is a terrible thing to waste???? Our scholarships. Yeah, A knight is a terrible thing to waste.

### **Terrible**

But where would you find a seventeen-year-old kid with his own micro-apartment, \$1700 legal and \$1500 illegal for monthly income? I didn’t waste my mind. It was their minds wasted, never mind, never my mind.

It wasn’t my mind that was wasted. *The Cranberries* sang of the troubles. — You see, it’s not me, it’s not my family. “Zombies like NYC rats on treadmills. . .” Energy isn’t free. The downforce lifted all boats, but sank them to the Titanic floor.

# A Story Can Change Your Life | Ubaldo Teque, Jr.

*after Peter Everwine*

Twenty-sixth year of incarceration,  
Loss of wages way over one million.

No house, no car, no retirement plan.  
A hot pot, fifteen-inch flatscreen TV, CD player,  
Ten CDs, and a Norelco hair trimmer = assets.

LWOP\* strains the back.  
From a distance, McDonald's job  
Does not sound bad.

New laws attract petitions & writs into court.  
"Denied without prejudice!" yells the judge.

A seventy-four year old white lifer with a thick white mustache  
Mops the hallway, looks up & says, "Don't lose hope,"  
And continues with the ritual.

Every night brings comfort & relief.

Tomorrow the story plays again.  
"Burden or gift?" I ask,  
As I look into the cell's waxed floor.

*\* Life Without Parole*

Pick-A-Part | Ubaldo Teque, Jr.

*for mamita*

An octopus greets them at the entrance.

The red metal toolbox tilts the 8-year-old boy to the right.

Mountains and rows of metal, decorated with rust  
sizzle under the mid-day heat.

Dreamers dig for treasure, for car parts,  
hoping to find the ones that fit.

\*

Saturdays belonged to his family's mechanics,  
but their pursuit at Pick-A-Part ended  
a long time ago.

The red snap-on toolboxes, one metal, the other hard plastic,  
rest inside of a closet in a two-story house in West L.A.

An old lady guards them,  
because her two loves are no longer there.

The husband has died  
The son is in prison-  
LWOP has taken him away.

Sky-Blue Metal | Ubaldo Teque, Jr.

*for papito, r.i.p.*

There it stands in our driveway, muffler spewing steam, getting ready for the day's tasks.

Fully loaded, galloping into the street, its rubber hoofs burn toward St. Cecilia's Elementary, where it unloads its riders.

Headed toward his job site, the street and freeway admire its long-legged handsomeness. It is beautiful, dented, sky-blue, and automatic.

Tamed, ears at full attention, it parks at Anderson Desk, in between Monte Carlos, Toyota Trucks, Volkswagen bugs, and forklifts, where it stays til 6 p.m.

Our '65 Mustang didn't ask for much. Once a week a few gallons of regular gas, and, an occasional bath.



Kukul | Ubaldo Teque, Jr.



Deep inside of green he resides, and glides  
From tree to tree, harmony his habitat.

Dense fog embraces & caresses his plumage.  
Sky-covered puffy clouds watch over him.

The Mayan forest has not been populated  
For centuries. Pyramids adorn his turf.

Gold & jade have disappeared.

Waiting patiently for rain, the forest brings beauty  
With its green, his favorite color.

Far in the distance, in a California cell, a poet  
Prays and blows out smoke, hoping that soon

He that dies if isolated answers his prayer.

Bright red chest, the blood of kings of old  
His story continues to be told.

The Beetle | Jessica Diana Garza



Originally published by Prison Journalism Project, 2023  
<https://prisonjournalismproject.org/2023/09/13/artwork-beetle-visiting-prison-cell/>

Angels & Cherubim | Jessica Diana Garza





## In Memoriam, Jessica Diana Garza | Rose Black

It is with great sadness we tell you that Jessica Diana Garza, poet and artist extraordinaire, died on June 30, 2024, at the age of 67. Ms. Garza had been a steady presence from the early days of the poetry workshop at Salinas Valley State Prison, continuing on with us through her transfer and last months at CSP Sacramento. She was a frequent contributor to the *Red Wheelbarrow*, consistently gifting its readers with masterful illustrations and “golden nuggets” of poetry beside them.

\*

Ms. Garza’s main artistic focus was prison life: “I began painting and documenting the insides of prisons that the prison inmates had grown to hate—and I drew and painted the inmates as well.” Determined to depict her own prison experience, she incorporated dreams, self-portraits, the food and drink that gave her comfort, and the many animals, real and imagined, who eased her loneliness.

Jessica Garza recently won first place in the Inaugural Stillwater Award/ Best Illustration for Work Published by Prison Journalism Project (see image p. 42)

Ms. Garza’s talent and commitment to her art were extraordinary. “Ever since I was a child I’ve had a deeply personal love of poetry and art. . . in fact, I live, breathe, eat, and sleep art and poetry—my main loves that I live for and will always dedicate my life to.”

“Discovering poetry as a form of self expression granted me the wings and fresh air that had been stifled by imprisonment, releasing like a cool breeze on a hot day what I found difficult conveying. I spend hour upon hour on line-work, composition, and perspective. Good artwork seeks a place of honor that breathes life, a breath of fresh air, into the soul of the artist that created it.”

\*

Jessica Diana Garza, your work has breathed fresh air into our souls as well. You brilliantly capture the soul of what you are drawing, so that we, the viewers, are moved and forever transformed.

Self Portrait | Jessica Diana Garza





*Drawing dedicated to 'Lil Sis Patty*

ARTIST'S NOTE: My late wife “Adelita” was a soldier in the Mexican Revolution, a strong Mexican woman. So later on, during the Chicano movement, the term Adelita was given to our female leaders in the Brown Berets. It was a rank, like a Captain in the army. My wife was a leader of the Lady Brown Berets of the AV Chapter #3. So today we refer to her as our “Adelita in the Sky,” which is the old Aztec form of *disfratismo*, or play on words based on the old Nahuatl, the language spoken by our ancestors, the Aztecas.

The term for “heaven,” as it commonly appears in doctrinal Nahuatl texts, is *Ilhuicatl*, a relational word meaning ‘in the sky’—a semantic calque from Spanish *cielo*. In the *vocabulario*, it only attested through derived terms, e.g. *Ilhuicatl chaneque intlanex* ‘splendor of a glorious body,’ lit. ‘radiance of dwellers of the sky/heaven.’ Therefore, ‘in the sky’ is the *disfratismo*: meaning she is in Heaven. —G.A.T.

To Have a Taste of Your Crimson Lips | G. Anthony Topete

*to Xochi, My Adelita in the Sky*

In my heart. . .

My love for you, Xochi, is truly as strong as Death.  
How could I ever hide it? Last night, after separating from you,  
A thousands thoughts and sorrows let me see my unhappiness,  
And my entire heart was with you and no one else.

I can yield my heart to you, Mi Dulce Amor,  
But I cannot yield my body. . .not yet, Mi Dulce Amor.

I wish you to understand,

Mi Querida Adelita

In the sky

TE AMO Y TE ADORO

\*

Te Extraño

I miss you

*G. Anthony Topete, a widower*

## Unsettling Sense of Anxiety | G. Anthony Topete

*When it comes to sentences, state courts are bound by the Eighth Amendment to the United States Constitution, which famously prohibits “cruel and unusual punishment.”*

On July 3, 2024, I attended my first Parole Board Hearing. It started at 8am and ended around 11:30am. I could tell right away that this was going to be very unsettling by the sense of anxiety that filled the hearing room. Prior to the hearing I met via video with my attorney, and she informed me that we would meet at least once in person beforehand to prepare. As the date approached I became concerned, as she had not come. I tried to call her several times, but she never answered my calls. Having expressed my concerns to my family they also tried to call her, all the way up to the hearing date. . .without any answer. I never heard from her until the date of the hearing. She was already in the room and stated all would be fine: the commissioner was a former CDCR physic and friend of hers

The commissioners made many untrue statements that were put into the record and they became visibly upset when I politely corrected them. For instance, they said I was sentenced 19 years to life for murder, when in fact I was sentenced 7 years to life. They were further upset because they continued to state that I had no insight or remorse for having shot and killed the victim. But I was and still am deeply sorry. I regret that I assaulted the victim, and I expressed this several times over the course of the hearing, yet they accused me of lack of insight and empathy for the life of the victim that I took. Again, I clarified for the record to the Board that no one had been shot, much less killed in my case. At this they really became hostile, which gave me the distinct impression that the Board had already made their decision before I ever entered the room, and that my ability to address their misinformation into the record was the true source of their frustrations.

I say that because the Deputy Commissioner kept saying, “Mr. Topete, you’re a very educated man, with a 12.9 TABE score,” “I see you have a college education,” “Mr. Topete, we see here you’re PTK.” As if my work bettering myself and obtaining a college degree in attempts to make amends for my wrongs was yet another slap in their faces. Or is it that showing oneself to be an enlightened and educated Mexican-American is



yet another crime? This would indicate to me an ideology of white supremacy. My attorney and both commissioners, as well as the D.A. (who so happened was the prosecuting attorney in my trial), were NOT ignorant rubes, but white middle-class women, who perhaps see themselves as respectable citizens among the state's white, native born Protestants and perhaps exercise racial differences—THEREBY justifying the inhumane treatment of American Citizens as morally acceptable.

Based on the fact that all Mexicans must be gang members? Again, I made them aware of the fact that the gang allegations were dropped by the court as being unfounded within such proceedings. I base this on their repeated statements that the Brown Berets were an active street gang. They especially disliked the correction I offered that we were in fact an organization, NOT a gang. Then they said that the Brown Berets were a Revolutionary Group, which I stated is true. However, our definition of revolutionary was to bring about drastic and immediate change for the better of our people throughout the barrios of Aztlan, and not the overthrow of the US Government. This never even crossed our minds; we would never consider kicking in the doors of the White House. Furthermore, as a Veteran, I would never condone such action, ally myself to any group with those types of aspirations, or support such a cause. It's hard to believe, but the reality is that what they are saying does not show the full picture required or a shared understanding of reality. Who holds them, the Parole Board, accountable for misconduct and excessive use of force? No one, even if that makes for devastating consequences for the opportunities of Blacks and Latinos. At its heart, the rationale is "results-driven" and obscures the mechanisms of racial oppression.

The truth is that today there are many inmates who lay around all day watching TV, not working or going to school to better themselves (as a way to make amends), not attending self-help groups or any type of positive programs, but instead getting into mischief, getting 115s (RVRs-Rules Violation Reports), and getting high. The difference is that they are the ones found suitable for parole and receiving parole dates—not the student, worker, community member, etc.

In other words, it's as though those of us who are programming and doing what we're told is expected for our rehabilitation are being penalized for it. What we are seeing is inequality, institutional discrimination, and the exploitation of labor. I have to ask myself, is this their political agenda that is shining through? It should already be a cliché that observations and theoretical explanations of gang members would look different if the very same population were viewed through different labels, or with different concerns. There is often a misconception about who encounters the criminal justice system. As a society, we have been socialized by stigmatizing terms, including but not limited to "felon," "offender," and "deviant." This language has painted a harmful picture, and consequently has negatively impacted our ability to accurately understand the social, emotional, and psychological needs of individuals who encounter the criminal justice system.

For justice-involved veterans such as myself, this becomes an even more complex process. The term justice-involved veteran is used to describe former service members who have been detained by or are under the supervision of the criminal justice system. The Bureau of Justice Statistics estimates there are approximately 181,000 veterans incarcerated in prisons and jails in the United States of which I am only one and members are part of the mix of populations.

Also, as a 59 year old male I would like to point out that there has been a "graying" of the prison population during the last several decades. Little research has been done on the psychological distress symptoms and treatment access of the growing older population. (Data includes state respondents from the Survey of Prison Inmates, 2016.) Not to mention that this Great Nation of ours incarcerates more of its citizens than Russia, China, and North Korea combined. I can see no evidence of any public spirit adequate to resist the abuses which surround us. Rather that society accepts this, and consumes it.

End the epidemic of Mass Incarceration!

## Winter Rain and Snow | James Humdy

As winter approaches  
rain falls with splendor,  
ice freezes over a small pond.

Smoking chimneys, hot cider, warm milk.  
Soft music lightens the mood  
with food and drink.

All accordingly goes smooth,  
the dog in his sweater,  
cute as can be.

Small hills of snow  
upon the ground.  
Children make castles

until dark. Little kids  
play in the street  
as winter begins.

## From Lost to Smarter | Koray Ricé

Momma, why do the police kill black men like they do?

- 1) *I don't know, baby, I'm just as lost as you.*  
*It seems this the only thing you see on TV.*
- 2) *Be glad it wasn't you, be glad it wasn't me.*  
My friend told me to never trust a cop.
- 3) *Oh, is that so?*  
Yep, because they're never there when you need them.
- 4) *Correct, and when you don't want them around, they always show.*  
Do you remember the LA riots?
- 5) *Of course, very clear.*  
What happened, Momma?
- 6) *I'll tell you when you're older and can better understand, dear.*  
Well, I know how we could fix things
- 7) *Oh, what are you fixing and how?*  
Cops killing black men, we should riot now.
- 8) *So, harming those who've harmed us will fix every. . . ? wow.*  
I didn't mean it like that.
- 9) *Well, what do you mean?*  
I'm sorry. Now I'm lost.
- 10) *It's OK, Baby. Don't be sorry, be smarter,*  
*and you'll be a boss.*

## Letter to My Son | Koray Ricé

*his name is Wait and See*

Son, don't let this world use you, wait and see,  
If you do it'll confuse you, abuse you, and misuse you, wait and see.  
Sit down and listen to me, Imma school you,  
Tell you how to, how not to, who's who, what you should, what you  
shouldn't do.

What you could, what you couldn't do.

All the things people in my neighborhood wouldn't do.  
There's no limit, my boy, to the things you could do  
Use your brain, don't be a lame, that's what the good do.  
Don't join a gang, commit crimes, that's what misfits in the hood do,  
Get a job, EARN a living, is what you should do.

Better yet, (B) your own boss is what you could do,  
Learn the need, create, fill the need is what I would do.

No worries, long as you "stay true" to yoself,  
Son, it ain't nothing wrong with askin' for help.

Please talk to yo kids, don't use ya hand or a belt,  
I know first hand experience how that felt.

Speaking of which, I recall the switch that made me yelp,  
The pains no longer present, but looking at my leg you'll see a welt.

So I swore I'd never do the same to you, my son,  
Why take frustrations out on you, when I can take you out 2 have some fun?  
The majority of all the things you're going 2 go thru I've been thru,  
You'll feel I don't understand, I'm unreasonable, you'll hate me, but I'll still  
love (U).

All of this probably makes zero sense, because you're oh so young,  
It'll hit you when you have your own daughter(s) or son(s).

I'll savor the moment, it's something I can't wait to see,  
When I'm the grandfather, you'll have to Be the parent 2(U) I had to b!

**Wait and See!!**

## Letter to the Academy | Roosevelt Coleman

Each morning is accustomed to a drag that screens no near light in the future. I am boxed in clinging to the pleasure of my anguish, dizzied by the spell of the nurse's smile. Thinking in circles and chuckling at the same image dolled up four months ago. Funny. There's once in a lifetime thought for this incarcerated redeemed, .... "What if I had a scholar, a collegiate me, a college grad .... A serene visited my intellect. Is there a hidden academic respect living in my chest? a comfort soothes my collegiate thoughts and activation of my collegiate quest scrams into pursuit. Asking for information as to gain admission into UCSC, rubbed me an appreciation. These thought patterns have carried my fancies past the hills that wedge us and visions of an executive such in such fill my desire. I am the chaser of a new world, mounter of the highest mountains. My dream bares existence because reorientation of my mind woke up one prison morning and told me I was smarter than the door that traps me.

## Hunger | Roosevelt Coleman

The dribbling pain in my gut ached its way down to my ankles. The a.m. almost jostles a punishment of a memory .....

Breakfast may be around the corner for somebody, but it doesn't live on this living room floor. Let me keep towards the exit of the door, cause the same music keep kicking me a fantasy. I want to eat, but my youngest priority is all about making it to the bus stop.

School intellects my confusion and it's blessing curbs the physicality of my hunger pains. Excuse me Mrs. Louie ....? Just that fast my question lost itself. My eyes come off as lazy, so Amber would call me Sleepy and slide me a granola bar I'd hide from my dude Jimmy. No sharing this bar, engulfed in two whoofs, Amber's smile so politely excited. I'm clueless how she ritually packs me bars Monday-Friday, but this is the best part of school.

I'm ready to entertain Mrs. Louie with the bulb of my mind and be the first to raise my hand for ten questions. Festively, I'm rising... Oooh, oooh, oooh, hand rose with the alert of a challenged rooster. These next two hours Im good.

Now I'm back to thinking of the house again. My head is full of hunger again. But God has blessed me with the World's greatest girl-friend. There goes Amber's hand again. That's my girl.

## ARTIST'S STATEMENT: EDWIN CARUNGAY

*For me, everything comes, first and foremost, from the street—Alex Webb*



Based in the San Francisco Bay area, I am a graphic design and multimedia producer—with a profound passion for photography. My journey began in Southern California's skateboarding

subculture, where I often snapped shots of friends skating on streets, ditches, and backyard ramps. This love for skateboarding and documenting its adventures sparked my initial interest in photography.

My formal training started in my high school darkroom and graphic arts courses, then continuing into university alongside my studies as a graphic design major. Photography remained a constant sideline companion in my life. It was my wife, Lesha, also a photographer, who introduced me to Alex Webb's work through the book, *The Suffering of Light*. This was an epiphany—marking my introduction to the fine art world of street and documentary photography, igniting a passion that transformed my hobby into a dedicated pursuit.

As a street and documentary photographer, my devotion has led to local and international exhibitions and awards from long-admired institutions. My formative years while in the skateboarding scene are evident in the unscripted and often sentimental images I make. When not working as a creative marketing and communications professional, I spend time exploring avenues and streets, capturing colorful, candid moments of people navigating their lives, both in my hometown and abroad.

<https://reygun.com/photography>

<https://reygun.com/about-edwin-carungay>





EDWIN CARUNGAY: Fanning, Lucha Libre, Oaxaca, Mexico  
photograph, 30" x 20", 2023



EDWIN CARUNGAY: Big Smile, Lucha Libre, Oaxaca, Mexico  
photograph, 30" x 20", 2023



EDWIN CARUNGAY: Greetings, Lucha Libre, Oaxaca, Mexico  
photograph, 30" x 20", 2023



EDWIN CARUNGAY: Reflections, Athens, Greece photograph, 30" x 20", 2023



EDWIN CARUNGAY: Now and Then, Athens, Greece photograph, 30" x 20", 2023



EDWIN CARUNGAY: Baptism, Athens, Greece photograph, 30" x 20", 2023





EDWIN CARUNGAY: Library Cloud, Athens, Greece photograph,  
30" x 20", 2023



EDWIN CARUNGAY: Sophia, Watsonville, California photograph,  
45" x 30", 2024





EDWIN CARUNGAY: Curas Blancos, Santo Tomás Jalieza, Oaxaca, Mexico photograph, 30" x 20", 2023



EDWIN CARUNGAY: Zancudos, Zaachila, Oaxaca, Mexico photograph, 45" x 30", 2019



EDWIN CARUNGAY: **Presence**, Santo Tomás Jalieza, Oaxaca, Mexico  
photograph, 45" x 30", 2023



EDWIN CARUNGAY: Birds, Hungry Ghost Festival, San Francisco, California photograph, 30" x 20", 2024

It only takes a sneeze to cause an avalanche, and in the economic world of the undocumented, it can just as easily start with a cough, just one pang in the side, and then you're being buried alive in a torrent of hospital bills. To avoid this, anytime somebody became sick in our family and it no longer helped to cough into a pillow—denial was a form of cheap medicine—we avoided the city hospital; instead, we'd go to the local clinic. *No, not that one.* The one in that Latino strip mall, Olivehurst, circa 1985, sandwiched between a phone repair joint and a knock-off Dollar Tree store. Sickness and upward mobility both have their price.

And when money and *el tiempo* were too tight, we'd go to the *sobador*, the massage healer who lived in the projects, *el Campo de Gobierno*. My family avoided going there since my father was too proud, not quite being able to articulate the tacit pathology afflicting the west of the lower class, *los más de abajo, los mexicanos*—those as good as on welfare.

The only difference between them and my Oakie, white-trash friends was that we spoke in Spanglish, they spoke in Oakie—the both of us speaking in “not giving a fuck”: a reckless tongue that gives the universal poor that inimitable cadence, the accent of the undignified, no equator or border required.

We begged my father to move us there: with them—with us, no? When we would visit on occasion, we'd refuse to leave, feeling it was home. “Pa...please. We gotta be here. Can we stay?” My mother said nothing, just sighed. In private, my father would respond: listen...they are uneducated, uncivilized. *Esa gente del campo son mal educada*, which meant their circumstances didn't allow them to afford some etiquette or act with “dignity.”

These *maleducados*, this “uncivilized” species roared with life unlike our “upper-class” town filled with white welfare recipients. These were kids with eternal, grass-stained knees, who broke all the rules in soccer, baseball, *muchachitos y muchachitas* who bled with concrete abrasions on their elbows and didn't flinch. The few times I played there, we would hunt the smell of dead animals, discover a decomposing body, and poke it with sticks until its chest would cave in, revealing a riot of maggots. Unscripted lives, unsupervised, the threat of danger and pain, a rush of entertainment. Caution is a form of boredom, an affliction only tailored to the rich.

But we had to go to *el campo*, land of the *maleducados*, the undig-

nified, to visit the *sobador*. Apa was losing it, all of it. He was having bouts of insomnia—*los nervios*—and his nerves, *los pinches nervios*, made him delirious, panic stricken. Little by little, he was grappling with hallucinations, a madness where he was confusing us with the past. Since we weren't aware of psychologists nor could we have afforded one, we depended on what was available: *remedios*, *milagros*, *fé en dios*, *El Sobador*. Vick's VapoRub, 7-Up, and prayers.

We felt like we were on the brink, our house of *lotería* cards collapsing. In the house, bills were unopened. Debt collectors called and to stay on script, we'd respond, "Me no speak engleesh." And we'd hang up. When they called at a different time and asked to speak for a parent or guardian, we'd reply, "...Me no spic...?"

*El Campo de Gobierno*, or the government camp, was built to help migrant workers with housing. Rent was as cheap as the peoples' labor, the occupants of the joint. Since it was government owned, the housing projects appeared to be painted with leftover prison paint. Women and men cooked with the doors and windows open, the smell and sound of something frying never stopped. Pots and pans barked like hungry dogs. Mexican music spilled out of the boarded-up windows. Actresses from Mexican soap operas sobbed uncontrollably.

Old women knocked on doors, sold tamales in pots big enough to baptize babies in. Campesinos, men who had nothing inside their apartment besides naked mattresses, cooled off outside and asked me, "how do you say, 'Do you want to dance,' in English." Naked children jumped over water sprinkles. Chickens avoided cats. Cats avoided the dogs. Dogs avoided cars, blaring the bass of tubas.

At night, people turned off the music and didn't go outside. Drunks yelled at their loved ones. Cars rolled by with their headlights turned off. White cops, with funny Spanish accents, knocked on doors and demanded information of some kind.

"Pásate," said El Sobador, making the universal sign of "come in" with a sweeping gesture. "Pásale." *Frijoles machucados* bubbled. *Chile de arbol* roasted, stinging the eyes and piercing the lungs. The old man retrieved some oils from the bathroom (two regular sofas away) licking his gums along the way. His house slippers scratched across the linoleum floor, peel-

ing from the corners of the room. His legs and muscles stiff, groaning and in pain with each step, smelling of Ben Gay and rubbing alcohol. The old lady in the kitchen asked if we wanted anything to drink or eat, her eyes cast out of the window, paying close attention to the headlights cruising by. We had already been instructed to politely decline, to act *bien educados*.

The *sobador* asked for assistance with unfolding the sofa bed, which served as a massage table. From the living room, the man reached over to the kitchen table and grabbed a napkin, where Apa would rest, face down.

My father was scrawny, a wire of a man, needing cardboard and papier maché to give him girth, some gravitas to be considered visible: no weight, barely human, easily qualifying as an “other.” Five minutes into the treatment, the *sobador* asked questions, needing feedback, probing my father to take a pulse of his tailored therapeutics: “What do you have? Que tienes?” The masseur stopped and leaned in, checking to see if Apa was still breathing, but nothing. No response.

Apa said nothing.

The old man shook his head in disbelief, his glasses nearly falling off.

“What does he have,” the old man looked at me, adjusting his glasses. He shook his hands as if drying them off without a towel. He opened a bottle that looked like piss, pieces of bark submerged at the bottom. He rubbed some of the solution on his own hands, his swollen knuckles. “How has he been acting?”

Apa didn’t want anyone to know what was happening to him, his delirium. At night, he would perform deranged soliloquies, yelling at no one in particular. Back then, I didn’t know these runaway trains of thought were his desperate attempts to purge himself from his past—from memories of El Rancho—when, past midnight, they would always resurface. I thought it was nothing more than your unclassified form of cultural vertigo that all FOBS experience.

Ama loosely explained, using calculated sighs as ellipses, inching close to the truth without offending her Mexican husband. She tested the limits of what she could say by gauging how Apa reacted, observing any twitches. Ma mentioned that he was tired, by all measures, *cansadisimo*: Ama had already learned how to survive by simply beating around the bush, only giving clues to allow the listener to infer her meaning...some patriarchal version of the \$100,000 Pyramid.



“Ahhh...,” the *sobador* said, wringing his hands. “His spirit is cold....?” He pushed his glasses back to the bridge of his nose. I wasn’t familiar with folklore diagnosis, but I knew these kinds of undocumented interpretations were not in the textbooks: Biology, Chemistry, Anatomy. Sadly, La Bruja, the *curandera* from El Rancho, had yet to migrate to the U.S., so we couldn’t get a second opinion.

Being *educado*, a decent son, meant remaining silent, not once speaking out of turn. I wanted to be a deviant and air our dirty laundry: Apa was becoming really unpredictable, transforming into a different person entirely. Without warning, he started snapping at the world around him. He would yell at us for no reason. Yell at the T.V. The plant. The walls. To express his anger or relieve the tension boiling within, he started hitting stuff with varying tempos and degrees of loudness: the physical vernacular of pounds, this primal communication, a Morse code of the panic-stricken.

Mid-massage, a son or grandson walked in, smelling of car wax and lighter fluid. I continued watching the T.V. perched on top of the refrigerator. I wanted to play with the kids who threw rocks against the buildings. These kids who wouldn’t move when cars honked at them to get out of the street. They cursed in English and in Spanish, but nobody told them to watch their mouths.

The *sobador* began breathing hard, taking a break to use his asthma inhaler, rubbing his forehead dry with the back of his palm. The session ended with the old man putting pressure on Apa’s spine to remove “pockets of air,” as though applying the final step to a wallpaper application, attempting to make him whole.

“Es todo?” the *sobador* said, pulling out his asthma inhaler from his shirt pocket. He takes a hit, and the wheezing fills the room. “Mis pulmones...”

On cue, in the final steps of homeopathic remedy, the old lady walked towards her husband, rubbing his hands with the bottle of piss solution, ignoring the novela on T.V., still absently looking out of the window.

My father slowly got up. His eyes were vacant, attempting to orient themselves back to this reality—transitioning from a state of phan-



tasmagoria into one of conscious awareness. He was aloof and distant, unsure of his place.

“What’s wrong...” said the old lady, clapping her hands to awaken him, snap him out of it. “He has terror in his eyes. *Un terror*. He should see an eye reader.”

My father slowly turned her head towards her, to us, and he attempted to speak the complexities that ailed him, attempting to articulate the unknown.

“I...” he sighed. “yo...” and his lips trembled...

Silence.

The wheezing lungs from the old man.

There are vows of silence; there’s being silent as a form of protest...there are silent treatments...all powerful, intentional unspoken directives as rhetorical ploy. There’s the pregnant pause.

Then there’s my mother’s habit, which I eventually picked up, of never speaking to my father out of fear that she would talk to him the wrong way.

My ama rubbed his back.

My father, being a man of few words, *pocas palabras*, didn’t have the inventory, the arsenal to convey the residuals of his past, his suffering, nor the mysteries that were contained within his body.

“How much?” he said. He shook his button-up like a mator—his farmer tan, his chest, bright in darkness. My father had Spanish features but was the color of tree sap, becoming darker by the day until he was just about the same color as his shadow: there and not there, visible but not whole. *Un indio*, aquiline nose and all.

Ama complemented a vine that worked its way up a wall, the plant suspended from the ceiling, growing out of a Manteca bucket. “Ahhhh.” She clapped her hands in appreciation. “Que boniiiiita!”

The old man wheezed, hands on knees, chin on chest. His glasses fell to the floor, but he didn’t pick them up. He used his leg to draw them closer, within reach.

“Whatever,” he said to Apa, waving a hand, and slowly, delicately reaching for his vision.

“I’m serious,” my father said, now inching closer to the top buttons

of his shirt, his white chest now clothed. "Be honest..." He looked up at the couple. "Seriously."

The old lady was now focused on the novela while rubbing the shoulders of the *sobrador*.

"Please," my mother said, clutching her purse. "It doesn't matter. Just say the price."

"Look..." said the old lady, pointing towards the T.V., her finger shaking, "I don't like that actress." They all danced this delicate, economic dance that teetered at the edge of shame, disrespect, bartering. Perhaps we could give them peaches during peach season? Cherries? Two bags? Maybe plants could be used as a form of currency? Did declining food at the beginning affect the price? There were too many "I'm fines..." and "are you sures...?" It was a show-down, a third-world game of commerce-chicken.

"Whatever," said the old man, who had now picked up his glasses, and started wiping them off with the same napkin my father had used as a face guard. "Give what you can. No problem." He instructed us through gesticulation to put the cushions back on the sofa-bed, which we sat on like squatters.

In the end, my father paid as little as possible, embarrassed the hell out of my mother, and angered the old lady who pretended not to care, just held her husband's hand and monitored his shallow breathing. "Let us know what happens?" said the old lady, looking at the three bills before her like a magician figuring out how to do a complicated trick for the first time.

Even back then, I knew that being *educado* meant never telling anybody what happened, what was actually happening. We used lies as a stitching that wove our precarious life, the Quintero narrative, together. That night, we would be instructed to not say anything; everything was fine, O.K.? My father would insist that we went to *El Campo* to help people, the needy. Perhaps he really thought of it that way, given his deranged state. Either way, it would be our way of saving face, avoiding the truth; we were maintaining our honor by being dishonorable.

For poor people, talk is cheap unless the truth is discovered. In that case, silence is golden. *Los del Campo*, not unlike us, were one truth away from collapsing. But it takes a toll to hide one's history.

Obviously, my siblings and I weren't allowed to roam *el Campo*, but I savored the Spanish in the air. There were so many regions of Mexico intersecting, their cadence and fluctuation like birds chirping in the morning; there were the *corridos corriendo* from cracked windows, the bass of tubas crashing with African Bombata and Zapp beats. The sounds of sizzling lard, the clapping of hands making *tortillas hechas de mano*, the occasional curse word from that still-in-the-closet tia who hated her nephews and nieces, as they invaded her personal space, using her prickly calves to play a game of pull the onion. No, my siblings and I were not allowed to join in. And as we left, we were instructed to duck so we wouldn't be seen.

\*

In the 1940's, Apa grew up on a tiny ranch in Michoacán—San Jose de Vargas. At that time, concrete and electricity were luxuries that would arrive decades later..

My *abuelitos*, *mis tios*, my parents in their "primitive" surroundings, still were living off the land and nothing else, their backs hunched over and, on all fours, *sembrando*. There wasn't any currency at the time (the peso had yet to arrive), so *maíz*, the crop, was valuable; it was used to barter.

Like El Rancho, mi Apa was left to his own devices to survive. Out in the remote village hidden from the world and history, my father was not aware of what was happening underneath his bare feet. The industrial revolution, the sewer system, something or other called a world war, happened. All of it didn't matter, hadn't reached El Rancho.

To Apa, what could possibly have mattered more than *las vacas*? Look, *mira*, that marvelous technology: miracle of milk, the blessing of labor, the manna of cooked flesh. Have you seen anything like it? What else did the world need? Wasn't this enough? With the absence of currency and conspicuous consumption, the cows were a way to measure one's worth—the only brands that mattered were the ones on the haunches of cattle. These specimens were revered, were a reflection of how well a family was doing, a status symbol that announced that one had arrived.

But nobody understood that nothing was theirs, not even their lives; they lived on the residuals, and the outskirts, of a complicated era

in which the Cardenista land reforms of the previous decade, which had aimed to peacefully redistribute land owned by the Spanish elite to peasant collectives, were now being rolled back as opposing national political parties vied for power. It had been all Viva La Patria until it wasn't, and the story became muddled by the time it reached El Rancho, which was too remote. Land documents appeared too alien, or the messengers had, or seemed to have, ulterior motives, and men were disappearing in the confusion. Most ranchers did not want to change their ways, or form collectives, or most certainly give up their land.

By the time there was clarity and a semblance of consensus on changing laws, it was already too late. Death had also become a form of currency, a way to dignify and stand out in the absence of all else. How close these ranchers now were to the basics of nature: blood and how much needed to be spilled to turn anyone, even a peasant, into a king.

There were already swirls of people being found dead given the confusion of land distribution, the speculation of owning. Families began feuding to sort it out—the elites and their politics be damned. In the evenings, there would be the wailing of a mother, the cursing of an uncle, the sound of shovels digging dirt and hammers pounding nails to make crosses.

When my Apa was a boy, finding a dead person out in the terrain was no more alarming than finding a hare maimed by a coyote, bits of a mouse plucked away from its spine. My *abuelito* was worried that he could be next. (Mi ama recalls a bandit pointing a rifle at her father, hiding behind maíz stalks. She screamed and the bandit fled. My *abuelita* also saw her cousin freshly shot, his brains still steaming, and not a damn fly around).

*Abuelito* reasoned that the bandits wouldn't have a heart cold enough to kill a child, and children were a form of utility, tools needed in order to work this new land. One's progeny were nothing but seeds themselves...just another instance of nature and history's entropy, some version of turtle eggs being laid out and buried in the sand, hatching to see how many would make it through happenstance once nature took its course.

As the second oldest of the family out of, what, twelve? thirteen? Apa had no choice but to become "a man," which required being responsible for a family that kept getting bigger every ten months. He bore the greatest yoke at age six. During the day, he was learning how to leverage

the ox and plow. He would use all of his weight against the bars attempting to crack the earth's stubborn hardpan. The uneven terrain and the pull of the beasts created an inertia beyond Apa's will. "Hey!" my dad would scream, holding on for dear life, attempting to control the animals. But they paid more attention to the flies hovering around their eyes. Every time Apa got knocked off, the animals absently went on without him.

Apa had to wake up at three in the morning. Watch the cattle. Someone could steal them. Count them. Bring them back. He had to since bandits weren't as likely to kill a child. *Abuelito* had a hunch that he would be assassinated. Every night/morning my dad knew what he had to do like clockwork: reach for his kerosene lamp and venture out in pitch blackness.

There would be the sound of my father cleaning his nostril, attempting to remove the snot of mucus, black from the dirty kerosene fumes—*el tisne*—inhaled throughout the night. He'd walk out of that crippled house that also housed other specimens: scorpions, snakes, lizards, opossums. He'd step outside and protect the light by his side, the thunderous gale of moth wings threatening to snuff it out. Finally, he'd raise the lamp above his head, and there, for only the mountains and other nocturnal creatures to see, was a child with the eyes of a caged animal, nose dripping with black sludge like someone crying off mascara.

During one of his rounds, Apa almost got shot by the night watch, *La Ronda*, a group of men guarding the perimeter. Apa heard bullets whizzing by his ear, and he saw the flash of a muzzle from his periphery. The men with rifles heard someone, *something* getting too close. At the time, they would stay up at night until dawn, guarding for any intruders who were attempting to take over the land. Any person who was perceived as an intruder was shot, simply on grounds of trespassing—there were rumors that the Irish were arriving. The land was up for grabs and laws were made up on the fly.

When he heard the shot, my father went down headfirst into the mud, sobbing into the night.

The men ran towards my father, tripping and falling across the rocky hillside.

"Muchacho!" said the leader. "What are you doing out here?"

Here?! 4 in the morning!” He pointed the gun at my father, who was on his knees, hands on his sides. “What’s wrong with you?”

My father explained his job responsibilities, ignoring the warm muzzle close to his face, the smell of gunpowder still in the air. “...for my dad...” Apa pleaded. “My family...” He removed the thorns and mud from his elbows. “I have to work. Have to find them, my cows.”

The men laughed, found it fascinating how innocent this child was. As a warning, the leader shot his rifle in the air. “Leave...go back home; you’re too young to be out here.”



*La Ronda, with the author's abuelito, fourth from right*

On another occasion, after a long day’s work, Apa got down from his burro, unaware that there was some iron spike. He jumped off the burro y ZAZ!— he felt the same pain of a discounted Christ—only a cross, a couple of spikes, and a couple of Romans short of a crucifixion.

His young body in shock, he got back onto his burro. Sensing his panic, the animal headed home, wailing like an ambulance. My father held on for dear life, clutching the burro’s neck for control, his body nearly jolting off and then what? Land head first on the border? When he got home, *abuelita* was mad that he had lost one of his *chanclas*; the other stayed on since it was nailed on, coming through the sole to the other side.

There weren’t any tetanus shots.

There weren’t any hospitals en El Rancho.

There weren't any doctors, do you understand?

Infections were fatal, and it wasn't uncommon that people from the ranch had died from rust entering the veins.

As a way to encourage my father to hold on for his life, *mi abuelita* asked him, or maybe she knew it was a last wish. "What do you need, *mijo*?"

There was a luxurious elixir that some of the rich people drank, something he had only sipped once before.

"A Pepsi. Please."

"A Pepsi?"

I can almost hear my abuelita's pensive thoughts. *Donde?* But where? Where to go to get that ambrosia *de nuestro ranchito*. *A ver, donde?*

Apa was five years old then, that critical age of cognitive development—speech patterns and socialization. Who knows what his first words were since his was the language of the hunter, opting for physical commands, steady steps, bent knees, choreographed motions that speak for themselves. Whatever language he used, it wasn't documented, no recordings, no baby books, but I do know that he was already in the process of speaking the wind's silence, picking up the cattle's cues, the way they communicated with their ears, and how their tails looped back and forth like a professor's cursive prose.

Because there was no choice but to spend too much time alone in the mountains, the desolate landscape, he imprinted himself onto the cattle, only comfortable with the companionship they provided, but Apa was also eager himself to be domesticated. He slowly identified as one of them, becoming a feral-like child, but bovine, more cow than boy, a mother-fucking Tarzan of the Rancho, a hero if people cared about Mexicans—illiterate ones, dark ones—usually a story nobody would give a damn about.

At the time, Apa didn't see anything wrong with morphing into a domesticated beast: a cow had more tangible value than a man; as the poorest of the poor on the ranch, he yearned to be acknowledged, so he mimicked the animals to gain at least their semblance of dignity. Like all places in the world, net worth was correlated with self-worth, and in the absence of currency, he figured that would be the next best thing. What a *tartaro*! He was cow king, hero and protector of the vacas.



Out there, Apa became darker each passing day until his color eclipsed his existence. He had an overwhelming feeling that his human life didn't matter anymore. Nobody would acknowledge him, not even his parents. His siblings were true "Quinteros": his oldest sister, Chela, was a pearlescent white, *mi abuelito* was a moving awning to protect her from the dangers of the rancho—unwanted cat calls, bullets, the sun. His younger brother, Javier, came out white, broad shouldered, a stud of a man, back when dignity was gauged through the primal metric of girth, evaluated by nothing more than genes, progeny judged like a steed.

*Abuelito* would inspect my dad like a counterfeit dollar, holding him up to the light, a thorough investigation of his authenticity, but the outcome was always the same. He didn't measure up as a pure-bred Quintero. He was too skinny. This constant scrutiny always left him incomplete, feeling like the runt of the litter.

Years passed, and his development was further arrested; Apa became a pariah. He was just too socially awkward to participate in the rites of rancho adolescent passage. Because of his inability to engage and feel comfortable around people, he was teased, made to further feel inferior.

*Look at him. A real cowboy; just more cow than boy!*

He was uncomfortable around those bipedal animals that made him feel embarrassed, feel the pang of shame. Those animals with their tiny tongues, unlike a cow's, could inflict so much damage.

The livestock never judged him.

Apa's shame further isolated him. In the end, it was just him, the mountains, the cows, the horizon: his miniscule presence in the vast expanse.

But the cows made him feel alive.

They gave him experience seeing firsthand the laws of nature, the ways the animals conducted themselves: especially their need to go unnoticed on the fringes, to be patient, driven primarily by hunger.

## The Columbia at Wanapum | Tim Fitzmaurice

*from a scribbled poem on a worn out scrap of paper  
from an early printer with those holes in the margin  
for scrolling the paper. Circa 1980*

Though a river of kindness flows quietly  
through here among rocks  
and the careful scratches of Indians on stone,  
the dancing man and woman are haloed.

Though a river of happiness flows  
quietly through here  
among the cheerful birds  
who flutter in the empty air,  
trilling.

Though the river quietly flows, and  
the fish rise briefly to kiss the air  
full of light and the seagulls scream  
without conversation  
across the flat glass of water.

Though the river flows through here quietly,  
Nothing is green.  
Nothing is taken by the desert.  
It goes as silently as it comes.  
The spider scabbles across the sand  
without leaving a single footprint.

## Ghazal for Bisan | Arlene Biala

Each morning I hold my breath until I see you alive  
Exhale when I hear “It’s Bisan from Ghaza. I’m still alive!”

Yesterday was proclaimed World Children’s Day 2023  
Today a mother cradles her daughter, no longer alive

We try so desperately to save you, our brilliant north star  
They keep trying to destroy you, our fierce wizard alive

We want to hurl your pain and suffering into the sea  
Watch you float on gentle waves, your spirit alive

Can you feel our fires burning on the riverbanks for you?  
To conjure your safety, your land back. Our Bisan alive

—*for Bisan Owda*

## Next Year in Jerusalem | Wilma Marcus Chandler

*The final words of the Passover Seder—a hope for freedom and peace*

we thought that was where we were  
open roads, warm kitchens  
neighbors coming in and going out  
Passover in the spring  
the Elijah Cup  
the empty chair as comfortable as an old uncle

we thought that after final prayers  
we'd hear the music  
of a wider world

we believed that we did not need  
to journey to that ancient *yerushalayim*  
for it was always with us  
a glowing stone city shining in grace

but the plagues have come again  
not locusts or boils  
but the endless pandemonium  
of breaking glass and fire  
of torment and despair

so it seems the journey  
will always be about  
breathing hope  
through dense smoke  
through the cannonade of strife

next year let our Jerusalem  
surprise us with harvests  
and have our children find  
playmates  
in the most sorrowful of streets

## SocialLies | Joseph Jason Santiago LaCour

*for survivors of yesterday*

My name is Joseph Jason Santiago LaCour  
And I am losing my shit.  
I'm sure everyone in earshot can tell.  
Somewhere between ever since  
And never before, I have forgotten how to exist.  
Watch closely as I walk through the door,  
Acknowledge everyone in the room using a seemingly  
Well-balanced blend of Southern courtesy and Ghetto outside voice.  
I will smile and laugh. (often) Unnecessarily.  
Attaching to every punchline nervous guffaws.  
Making and maintaining eye contact intentionally.  
I'll use non-verbal cues and body language  
To easily align: communication skills sharpened by years of customer  
service and matriarchal conditioning.  
The streets have taught me to speak first.  
Break the ice and waterwalk over the shards.  
Avoiding triggers with precision.  
I feel I seldom befriend the shiny ones  
For fear of setting false expectations on either end.  
My friends are aware by now that I rarely go out.  
I'll say I'm down. No doubt.  
While, in earnest, I prefer distance  
Enough to touch without crushing.  
I'd rather douse myself in gasoline  
And roll a joint alone longing for lightning to strike.  
Watching Star Trek. We the Next Generation.  
Almost too balanced, I straddle the fence  
Between being honest and being liked.  
I'm likely to die over my overanalysis of our  
Interactions retroactively. Attention to detail almost on the spectrum in  
A shoulda coulda woulda kinda way  
I say "Man" way more than I'd want you to.  
Truth is I been perverted by abuse of us both.  
To the point of finding peace in being broke and broken.

Believe me, at times, breathing becomes voluntary.  
There is where I worry that if I stop dancing,  
I will stop laughing and uplifting will become a thing I “used to” do.  
My words will grow into hollows holding only contempt for requests  
to be heard and feeling will be stripped down to extremes.  
Only a Sith deals in absolutes.  
I salute you who struggle.  
The stress is unbearable even for the strong.  
But falling prey to this beast is not speaking up.  
Sinking into the dark and not reaching up.  
Crucified to an anchor of anguish what we feel means as much as the  
very air we in this room.  
Fear keeps us alive. Love lets us live;  
Lets us let go.  
This buoyant soul is worth its weight in salt.  
It’s not your fault you can float.  
Find your fight and fuck it.  
Despite our programmed attraction to destruction,  
We are born to be.  
To be a single leaf in an ancient forest of  
To be...the Lone wolf howling cursed spells at her moon cry.  
To be...free.  
To be...(sigh).

## EVOJVE | Joseph Jason Santiago LaCour

*commissioned by Green Foothills for Nature's Inspiration*

This poem begins 4.5 billion years ago.

Today.

The moment after a big bang flung  
everything outward at light speed  
speaking into existence  
the infinite in an asymmetrical instant.  
Hydrogen, helium, oxygen, elementary.  
We are just *star stuff*,  
Supernatural shrapnel that gravity  
gradually lassos into spiraling  
masses of gas and dust;

unshaped matter thrown on a potter's wheel  
rotating at a thousand miles per hour.

Hard-hearted, our newborn  
nuclear-powered marble,  
magma caramel convection oven  
swirling swelling crystallizing into  
spirit-deep layers of rock  
and mineral gradients.  
Electromagnetic radiance  
fuels an environmental  
unfolding along the surface  
Where terra firma takes her first steps.  
One ice age. Then, another,  
all the while holding atmosphere's hand.

With each cataclysmic giggle,  
Tectonic puzzle pieces sprawl,  
stretch and bow,  
compounding crust into  
canvas.

Prehistoric, this tabula rasa.  
Our page is ready.



Writhing out of her galactic chrysalis,  
Carbon catalyzes.  
Pen click.  
Life happens.  
3.8 billion years ago. Today.  
Single-celled organisms do-si-do. Slowly though.  
Prokaryotes proliferate and factory sun into sustenance.  
Mitochondria conjure  
all type of kingdom and phylum  
thus all the flora and fauna  
got all the same thing inside 'em.  
Jellyfish to trilobites  
To bony fish to spider bites  
To creeping thing to bzzzing things.  
Reptile kings extinct ... in a blink.  
The brink of destruction's a rebirth for survivors.

Paleo, Meso and Ceno-zoic.  
The blessed mess of a plain ol' poet.

As birds rise, mammals arrive.  
Time-travelers of all sizes call to arms,  
the harmonics of *Trochilidae*  
and distant song of *Balaenopteridae*  
Preparing the way for Us:  
Smart primates who migrated and ate 'shrooms. Maybe.  
Whose brains grew into strange new kinds of crazy.

This stanza stands upright.  
A bipedal, tool-making, rule-breaking,  
risk-taking, fist-shaking sort of poetry  
Who blossoms into the civilized, communicator,  
creative thinkers we now hope to be.  
Hunter/gatherers to growers, w'evolved  
From killers to village people.

From nomadic to static.  
From cromag to mechanic  
whose motto is “don’t panic.”  
Yo, you got this. This. All of this.  
If Earth’s entire timeline started at your elbow,  
human existence would be the free edge of your furthest fingernail.  
Happy thoughts tiny as tinkerbell.  
It’s natural that we navigate.  
It’s natural to read the signs.  
Naturally, redesign.  
It’s divine to breathe...to be...inspired.



RICA SMITH DE LA LUZ: **Medicina** acrylic and paint pens on cardboard, 20" x 28", 2018



RICA SMITH DE LA LUZ: *Madre de Maíz* acrylic and paint pens on cardboard, 20" x 28", 2017

## Madre de Maíz | Joseph Jason Santiago LaCour

Her lines tell stories.  
Starvation and plenty balance  
Beauty beneath the bone.  
Radiant Reyna who has renounced  
fashion trends and crash diets.  
Who has accepted the  
Responsibility of timelessness.  
Having held children  
And worked rightly  
since the beginning  
and even rebounding  
After a life-long  
relationship with death,  
Respect is expected.  
With the breath of life  
in her breast  
And the light of acceptance  
in her heart,  
All she sows grows,  
la madre de maíz.  
Nuestro verdad, Muchas gracias por su cariño.  
Your crying, your dying and  
Resurrection of the sun some  
sixty summers ago.  
The way you stare  
is a stairway to heaven.  
Having walked across celestial  
jungles, oceans and deserts,  
You have shed more myths  
And made more magic  
Than we can possibly ever comprehend.  
Master of disguise. Keeper of lies.  
Pain and anguish that  
you would never show.  
To behold such beauty  
is to bear fruit.  
And said fruit shall feed roots  
As these roots keep us connected.  
Laughter almost undetected.  
Subtle signs  
of love.

## Strawberries Speak | Gabriella Gutiérrez y Muhs

We are American, In Michoacán and Beijing  
We are lovely paired with cream  
We are seeds  
We are the color of her lips  
We are the flesh of tasty dreams  
We are not your champagne  
love-making  
pesticides in ice cream.  
The hands of Un forgetful paths,  
the delicious puzzles of your dreams  
Of millions of lives, we are.  
Strawberry upside down cake, we are.  
We are the scintillating, palpitating mouthfuls  
Of children's happiness  
We are the shape of chicken hearts  
and ruby pendants  
Huichol earrings made of pins, we are  
Our seeds deep in ancestral memories and lands,  
We are the history of the Americas  
The preferential offering of Jews throughout  
The happy, open mouthed world wind  
Palestinian love, today, close to God.

## Hours | Gabriella Gutiérrez y Muhs

These morning  
hours  
don't  
belong to you—  
destiny—

I will write poems that are mine.

In a continent of vanilla,  
strawberries and xocolatl

In a continent  
that births chiles,  
xitomatl, jicama, copal, tamal,  
maize,  
avocatl,  
There must be joy.



On the Death of Cesar Chavez 4/23/1993 | Tim Fitzmaurice

**Cesar Chavez/** so and how does this mean that  
there is an end or that anything is different? We still  
have a promise to keep. We still have work  
to do. our father who art finally away from disaster,  
out of the grip of that hand that wants to shape  
everything, to twist everything, that hand that  
crushes the flowers into a lingering  
fragrance, and that thinks to make  
men into mud again, I  
would like to tell you  
that the  
children will live. I would like to tell you  
that the children will be happy and in love  
with life again and in love with themselves.

It is the last promise  
I will make.  
They will live  
on my blood.

And no hand  
will cover their mouths again,  
and the air will be clean, and  
and their eyes will be open.

And their mouths  
will be unstuck,  
and the ears  
unstopped.

I think I can make this promise.  
What life would be worth living  
unless  
we can make this promise?

You can sleep now.  
You can dream now  
But dreaming, you still have work to do:  
Will you dream us?

And we will leave the door open  
on those hot evenings in the valley,  
and while we sleep, you can always walk  
in again.



## ARTIST'S STATEMENT: CARLOS RODRIGUEZ



My father moved our family from Mexico to the United States in the 80's in order to find the needed medical care my sister needed to save her life. My sister is alive today because of the treatment she received. As a young boy in Mexico, before immigrating to the United States, I was being raised in a town whose public spaces were filled with murals that seemed to provide the "glue" that helped connect the community and to give voice to its peoples' shared struggles, hopes and dreams. By being exposed to these murals,

and since then, the works created by great Mexican muralists like Rivera, Siqueiros and Orozco, I have come to understand and appreciate just how powerful a role murals can play in empowering and giving voice to a community's people, in promoting deeper cultural awareness and appreciation, and in visually reflecting its collective hopes, dreams, and aspirations. While I now realize the seeds of my artistic journey had been sown in Mexico, they took root and began to grow after arriving in America and finding my first artistic outlet in graffiti. Graffiti and street art gave me the freedom and the support structure I needed to learn how to visually express myself in public places and to develop my artistic talents. For the past 20+ years, I have continued to grow through collaborations across a network of professional Bay Area muralists, public art/mural organizations (e.g., Precita Eyes Muralists, Mission District, San Francisco), and through my arts business that has focused on commissioned street art pieces, murals, and fine art. Over the years, I have completed dozens of murals throughout San Jose (and beyond). These creative works have engaged the hearts and minds of thousands of people by giving voice to their unique stories, histories, cultures, dreams, aspirations, and values. As the *tlacuilo* (artist) in my *calpulli* (chosen family/group/clan), I believe it is my responsibility to create art that informs, educates, empowers, and inspires the diverse communities within which I work and live.



CARLOS RODRIGUEZ: **Our Journey is Sacred** acrylic paint, 50' x 15', 2023



CARLOS RODRIGUEZ: *Our Journey is Sacred* acrylic paint, 50' x 15', 2023





CARLOS RODRIGUEZ: Our Journey is Sacred acrylic paint, 50' x 15', 2023



CARLOS RODRIGUEZ: *Our Journey is Sacred* acrylic paint, 50' x 15', 2023





CARLOS RODRIGUEZ: from *Our Journey is Sacred* acrylic paint, 50' x 15', 2023



CARLOS RODRIGUEZ: **Pacha Mama** acrylic paint, XX' x XX', 2016



CARLOS RODRIGUEZ: **A Beating Heart** acrylic paint, 21' x 11', 2024



CARLOS RODRIGUEZ: A Beating Heart acrylic paint, 21' x 11', 2024

## Falcon | Venus Jones

*for Black skateboarders on a mission*

When you're the new Black misfit living in the boonies  
covered in tribal tattoos,

everyone on the court calls you out  
for not being in line. *You pretentious punk,*

they tease. Once, your middle finger flipped up.  
Now you catch it. Words can cause you to drop-kick

that surfboard on white wheels beneath your feet. When they shoot you  
an orange basketball after you refused to wrestle with pigskin,

why not humor them? You spin it on your index finger like a Globe Trotter.  
You're not in Harlem, but you pay homage to show-biz,

letting the ball glide over your shoulder, and it tumbles down your back.  
When it reaches the ground, you pick it up with your palm,  
dribble, and dodge.

It's an air ball, nowhere near the net. You don't score like Bill Russell.  
Each disappointed bystander is now bellowing one word, *Booooo!*

The point guard glares at the wings tatted on your back  
and the curly frohawk on your head, and yells, *Focus!*

Still, you shrug it off because you're an unexpected side show.  
You flash a peace sign at prejudice.

You perform the grand *Impossible* near the banister and keep rolling.  
You just circle the next four corners like a falcon.

## Heckler | Partridge Boswell

*for Anaïs Nin and Leonard Cohen*

And naturally I had no choice but to holler: Hey, you in the back! Then the whole audience woke & cringed. So I focused: No not you, the one beside you who thinks he's not cracked like the rest of us. Today is your lucky day! I hate to break it to you, especially since you came here to dissipate in the crowd. Don't take it too hard, but when surfaces craze, chances are their truth aches to amaze us. The last cracks I saw like that, hands chalked them to lower the risk of slipping. No doubt you assumed you were safe back there to chill with the shy kids and slackers—you'd just phone-surf and remain semi-conscious without getting called on or out, hanging tight with the silence. But hey, now's your shot to have your say in public and tweet it too—cast off and sing in your sinking—a chance to join the leaky boats of our stories full of holes! Listen bud don't expect your neighbor next to you to save you. This rift was no one's fault line but your own, a mirror won't tell you any more than a blackmailed sycophant. Only you know where it got painful as it shroomed into every dark room of you more predictably than a Marvel script, awaiting the day you'd crack wide open and let the light shine in undimmed. What's that? You've heard that old asterisk lyric before—some crackpot troubadour in a black fedora? It must be true then. Forget the stitches and glue, that stuff dentists took hours shellacking your teeth with: it's a war you can't win or lose. To reiterate, here's a hammer—you know what to do (& btdubs, that blossom of light inside you? It needs a way to get out too).



Taste *Shaptul* on Your Tongue | David Allen Sullivan

To eat a peach, gnarl it free  
with a twist & a pull-back jerk,  
bough pulling up & away. Dig  
teeth in right there, at the backend  
of a Vermont summer, towels around  
waists, post-skinny-dipped, relishing  
the aureole sunburst of breasts,  
defiantly proud of sixteen-year-old  
bodies, the heft of them astonishing.  
Every lick of dripped juice an invite.

\*

Before you eat peaches, thin-slice crescents of them on a cutting  
board—a plucked pit swelling one cheek—layer them in a circle atop  
custard so their sunset skins twirl like an overhead crane shot of an  
Ethel Merman dance routine.

\*

To drink peach juice,  
use a press to squeeze  
syrupy nectar into a tall glass,  
lace with a shot of vodka,  
spritz in soda water, & lean in  
to hear its fizzy fomenting  
of what the night portends.

\*

Before you eat a peach read genetics about how they & nectarines  
are actually one species, with only the existence of skin fuzz (or lack  
thereof) to set them apart.

\*

To contemplate a pretend peach, hike to a remote nunnery above  
Dali, in China's Yunnan province, which is being refurbished. Help  
tie off rebar for the new drainage channel being poured to direct rain  
run-off to the peach orchard where bottomless plastic buckets have



been shoved in the ground, each surrounding a stalk with waxy leaves like hands unfolding from prayer. Visit the shrine to Guanyin. See how she's made of crude plaster, garishly painted. One of her thirty hands extends far beyond the others in a superhuman stretch, fingers tickle a paper mache sphere of fruit wired to a rafter.

\*

To understand the cultivation of peaches, enter Xi'an's historical museum & peer into the glass cabinet of fossilized peach stones found beneath layers of soil along the Yangzi, carbon dated to around 6000 BCE. The regularity of their placement suggests they'd been planted, but some event interrupted fruition.

\*

Go out to the backyard  
where the peach tree's stilted  
with stakes to keep  
the weight of the fruit crop  
from taking down  
what's sending up nutrients  
into burgeoning hard nobs  
to be shared with wasps,  
birds, worms, & us.

\*

Before you eat a peach let the sugar  
& fruit mixture steep under muslin sheets.  
Tomorrow, cook it so the golden flesh turns  
burnt-orange, but keep the fruit whole,  
prodding only with a wooden spoon.  
Ladle into glass jars. Cellar until  
you're under winter's flag.

\*

Follow our family's camp-improvised recipe:  
core the fruit, insert a sliver of butter, finger

of brown sugar, teaspoon of cinnamon,  
wrap in tin foil, insert in the coal bed  
& wait until warm scents call.

\*

Learn to taste  
the miracle  
coveting your hand.  
Close your eyes,  
bite into the peach,  
taste again.

\*

Before you eat a peach, scoop up dark  
loamy Ningxia soil from the field where  
your graduate student took you to steal  
Han-nurtured globes of sweetness & laugh  
as they bloom in your mouths, teeth etched white,  
peach pits hurled into the stream before you lie  
back in the grass.

Remind yourself he's Uyghur,  
that you can't be in contact once you leave China,  
or he & his family will be in danger. Let his name be  
Ilham. After praying in the empty great mosque  
the next day, you roll over on your back &  
he points up at the geometric vines lacing  
the dome: *See how their ends swell?*  
*They suggest peaches, no?*

\*

Before you eat another backyard peach  
sound out the Uyghur he taught you: *shaptul*  
شاپتول spell it, his hand on yours.

## Chickpea Love | Ignatius Valentine Aloysius

There's no shortage of miracles & pleasure  
that protein brings to bones sprung up on legumes.  
Chickpeas see me through good & lean times  
at a nice price,

when meat isn't an option anymore.

On the streets in Mumbai, I recall vendors,  
their spoke-wheeled carts delighting the eyes with  
high pyramid-shaped stacks of cooked chickpeas,  
white & dark.

They served up legumes with diced  
onions, tomatoes, hot green chilies, pinches of salt  
& red pepper, mango powder, cilantro, then a final  
squeeze of fresh lime, all of it tossed up with a  
spoon in a whipped-up waffle-cone made of cut-  
up newspapers.

It blows your mind, this act &  
slice of life, of sellers, telescoping on dusty streets.

Chickpeas are love, a fine democratic lot.

Nectar | Ignatius Valentine Aloysius

Once again,  
my vision stands naked before  
winter sailing through my wounds  
at the speed of wind gusts &  
spiny booms unfit for tidy orchards, unfit  
for banked roadside rigs.

In silence's tight fist I hear the air's  
white noise, the spiked leaves of  
the potted shell ginger pushing away  
from each other.

No one asks after the lost one at the party.  
Some people place their keen ears cold  
against blind walls.

I taste nectar in intolerant winds.

My footsteps haven't strayed  
too far from home.

Cante Jondo | David Allen Sullivan

*I could just as well be a poet of sewing needles or hydraulic landscapes.*

—Federico García Lorca

Olive trees slick sidewalks of Alfacar  
with their leavings. Dark stains pit pavement  
flattened under Nationalist boot heels. Bits

are scraped free & swept into leaf gutters  
with the fragments of my fragmented skull  
that bears witness to the punctuation marks

of two bullets that began a quotation  
never closed. From this rooftop I can see  
Juan Ramirez's house. Maria's out front

beating the hell out of a rug, & dust  
rises up like the heavy hand of goodbye.  
Eat nuts & dance for me, Juan Ramirez,

I'm not going to die on this or any day,  
it's only my body they sent on its way—  
olives under a book stack, brining.

—*for sam sax*

## Ignatius Valentine Aloysius | Souls

*For the victims of the mass shooting, Highland Park, Illinois, July 4th, 2022.*

Only when we lift up gracefully  
from the ground, do we see those we've  
left behind. Our lives are not myths or  
forgotten boundaries of talents. The light  
we'll help you keep, holds promises that will  
beat in your hearts beyond ruling fists of iron.  
So live for our sakes without prejudice or  
preconceptions. If broken wings struggle  
to fly, help them heal, forgive injustices,  
find independence. What you call freedoms  
are fresh flowers we place in your hands.

## Navigation | Rose Black

They are coming at me  
lots of cars can't stop  
can't rest sirens  
in the distance as I turn  
sharp corners narrow streets  
my wandering mind.

Rumi the mountain dog  
used to ride with me  
Rumi lives somewhere  
else now.

Peter appears smiling  
tells me he's let go  
of everything:  
books papers clothes.  
Everything except his walking  
stick going to take it with him  
into the mountains.

Peter of course  
is dead now he can rest  
he can do anything  
he wants.



## First Over Feet | Rose Black

once I was run over by a car  
flat on the street

perhaps I was three  
perhaps somewhat older

slowly big car drove  
first over feet

lots of pipes and wires  
gas and grease

and it roared  
close so close

took a long time to reach my head  
and then it disappeared

I never told a soul  
perhaps it didn't even happen

stuck in my head  
for no reason

like when Ronald Miglianico said  
the magic's gone

like when Great Uncle Joe  
refused to go to mother's funeral

because things weren't  
being done right

what really happens  
and who is good and who is bad

and who is punished  
once I was run over by a car

## ARTIST'S STATEMENT : CHERYL COON

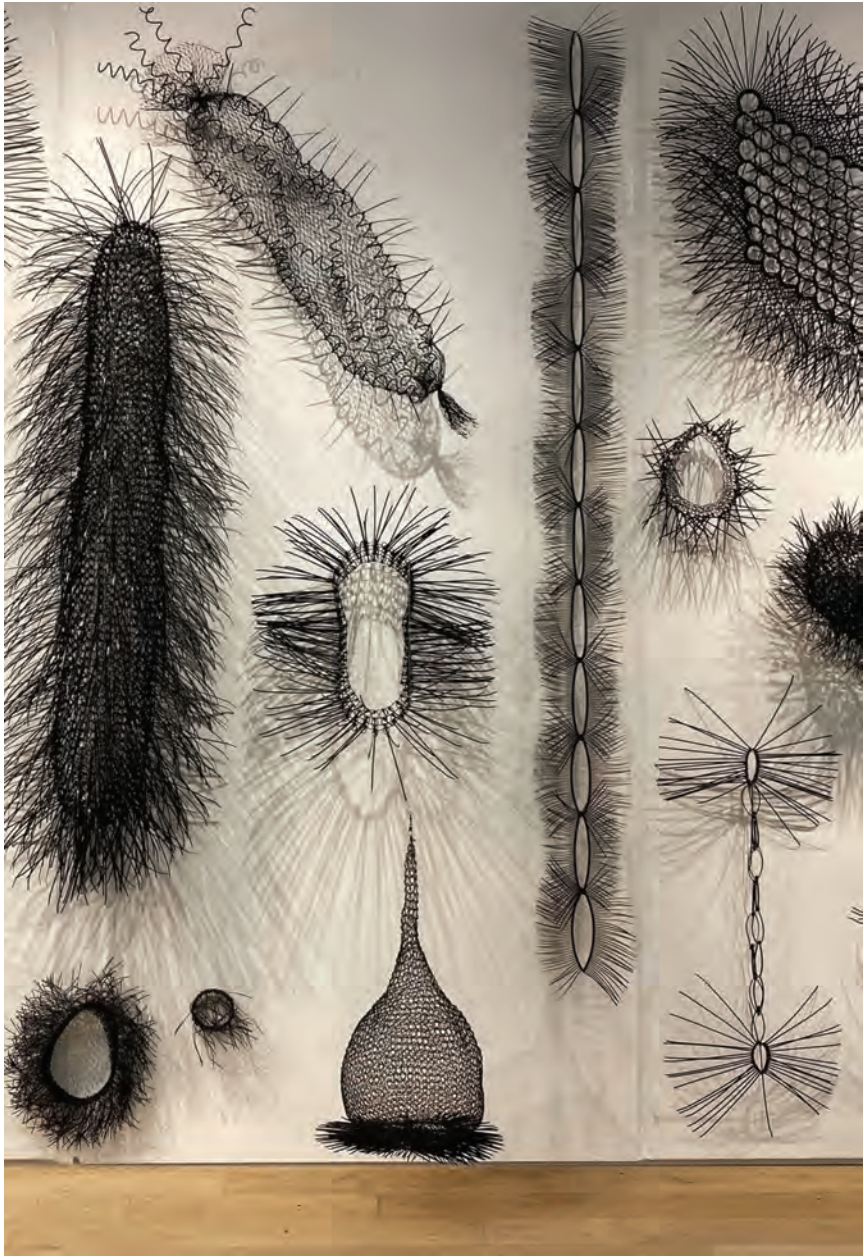
I am interested in microscopic organisms, such as cells, spores, pollen, and minute creatures that have the power to affect our physical well-being. My work is mainly influenced by spending time on the ocean observing life floating in the water, seen over many years of kayaking and fishing around California and the Sea of Cortez and Baja.

The most recent sculptures investigate the attraction/repulsion and the extreme beauty of natural organisms. I am fascinated by diatoms and plankton—including algae, protozoa and bacteria—that demonstrate infinite variations of natural geometry. As abstractions of biological forms, they are indicative of many recurring patterns in nature—such as shells, spikes, thorns or fish spines—which are used by organisms for protection, to repel intruders in a hostile environment.

The small black sculptures are made with barbed steel, tied or welded into clusters. Some are installed by throwing the objects at the wall. This chaotic method of installation reflects our inability to control natural phenomenon in spite of our scientific efforts to recreate and harness biological organisms.



CHERYL COON: **Symbiosis Sonoma** (detail) zip ties, steel, aluminum, nylon, fiber, 144" x 196" x 18", 2024



CHERYL COON: **Symbiosis** (detail) zip ties, steel, aluminum, fiber,  
144" x 196" x 24", 2020





CHERYL COON: **Virus** nails, thread, thrown at the wall, size varies, 2010



CHERYL COON: *Cyclotella* zip ties, 18" x 18" x 18", 2017



CHERYL COON: **Diatom** zip ties, 6" x 6" x 4", 2018





CHERYL COON: **Cyclotellas Estrellas** (detail) zip ties, steel. LED lights, 144" x 144" x 14", 2023

# THE RED WHEELBARROW POETRY PRIZE

Poetry Center San José and *Red Wheelbarrow* are excited to publish here:  
the winners (along with finalists and selected semifinalists)  
of our eighth annual poetry prize.  
Kim Addonizio was this year's judge.

\*

## 2024 Winners

1st Prize: "Pink Anemone," John Blair, San Marcos, TX

2nd Prize: "Driving the Prison Bus Is a Calling," G.R. Kramer, Alexandria, VA

3rd Prize: "My Mother's Rural Kansas Childhood, 1910s" Jane Bridges, Ann Arbor, MI

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

\*

## 2024 Finalists

"Do not mistake the waterfall for a harbor," Mirande Bissell, Ellicott City, MD

"In Which I Inhabit for a Moment a Whitesnake Video," Morrow Dowdle, Durham, NC

"Phantom Daughter," Sara Femenella Los Angeles, CA

"Arachnophobia," Elizabeth Joy Levinson Chicago, IL

"Everything is a Cool New Modern Wine Bar Now," Amy Meckler, Forest Hills, NY

"To the first poet I met here," Olga Mexina, Tallahassee, FL

"How Batteries Work," Lisa Allen Ortiz, Santa Cruz, CA

"spring comes to Juniata, Pennsylvania, 1945," Thomas Patterson, Westport, MA

"Cuban Sonnet," Alfonso "Sito" Sasieta, Hyattsville, MD

"The Other Grail," Kira Trainor, Pomfret Center, CT

\*

## *Selected Semifinalists*

"4:40 am next to my father," Steven Alvarez

"After the 527th Anti-LGBTQ Bill This Year, I Remind Myself," Emily Portillo

"With," Elizabeth Sochko Hussain

"Remember, This Was 1969," Avra Wing

"An Ode to Edward Hopper," Jane McBride

## Pink Anemone | John Blair

Also known as *windflower*. Tongue  
and uvula, vulva, open palm, random  
cup of concupiscence. Inner ear, tickling  
with vertigo. Synesthesia of sweet.  
Guardian of raw. The flavor of noise  
in the sleepless dark. Certain thoughts  
seen through the blood-curtains  
of eyelids. There's no wavelength  
of light that corresponds to pink.  
Our mind just makes it up as it goes,  
filling that spectral blank with half-ness  
and near-miss. Color of mild. Color  
of inside of whatever conspires  
to have an inside, mouths, colons,  
places to hide the terror, especially  
the risible kind, Alfred Hitchcock's  
storied fear of eggs, your elderly dog  
slinking away from the rumor of thunder  
when a small plane grinds its teeth  
against the clouds. Color of hiding  
in small spaces. Color of beneath  
and within and overwhelmed with pity,  
underwhelmed with joy. Aftermath,  
when decisions have been made,  
backs have been turned. Walking away  
from. What gets said in another room.  
Tinge. Touch. Trifle. Truth: you can doubt  
anything if you try hard enough. That's  
the way the future works, getting in  
between us and things we can't face.  
Fever in our bloodstreams that won't  
stop glowing. Apprehension proving us  
right in the pearl-pink hour before dawn  
when bombs get dropped. Apple-flush.  
The forbidden garden wet with resurrection,  
blooming just to prove us wrong.

## Driving the Prison Bus Is a Calling | G.R. Kramer

That Super Max  
in the far hills  
is a deep-sunk hole.  
Some days I pull  
the long haul there.

The fresh meat j-cats  
and grayfaced guards  
all pile in  
my steel mesh cube  
and I just drive.

Sometimes theres trouble in the back.  
Mostly its hungry silent.  
Like a sleepy child.  
Only road sounds and metallic rattle.  
Insects splat the screen.

I just drive past sights  
for the new fish and lifers  
to tuck in—  
burger joints  
boarded shacks  
bone yards  
corn stalks huddled half alive.  
Summer thunder spits  
needles of rain.  
Then Route 17 curves  
through fog for miles  
up and down the mountain.

Today is one of those days  
where I just drive  
and think  
to myself.  
Man this is fine work.

My Mother's Rural Kansas Childhood, 1910s | Jane Bridges

*based on her words in a small red notebook (undated)*

never just rain but raining pitchforks  
we'd ride our stick horses                      play pick up sticks

sticktights would cling to our baggy black stockings  
    using old black socks for Kotex

my little sister Ruth and I  
    finding a dead man in the creek

cat having kittens in Aunt Ora's lap  
    the calf eating arsenic                      hail killing the peas

J & H flour sacks used for our underpants  
    and to carry the big rooster

living with dread when Dad got down  
    from the wagon drunk  
        we hid in corners of the cellar among  
        rotting potatoes

after the last big fight  
    Mama wearing a black and white dress—new—  
        with sleeves torn out

people standing around waiting for something to happen  
    to fill themselves up

bare hard-packed yard  
    how we cherished even the weeds

## How Batteries Work | Lisa Allen Ortiz

Bewildering, the silent chemistry inside—  
electrons, ions, destabilized lithium.

When we got bad news yesterday at our house  
my daughter wailed  
and pummeled the belly of a pillow  
while the rest of us circled the couch and watched  
the yellow tassels flinch.

After that, we ate a silent lunch.  
Napkins folded, steaming bowl of vegetables and rice.  
Electrons dripped across the table cathode to anode.

There's a Sufi saying that a life is made of 10,000 joys  
and 10,000 sorrows.  
Tenderness and what's left after tenderness is gone.  
Across the terminus of our bodies we feel it:  
an attempt to even out.

After lunch we felt sad and sorry. We mended  
what we could, sending blue heart texts and tiny chicks  
in tiny broken eggs.  
We slept, wires running up the walls' dark insides.

By morning, the fog was charged thick against the window panes.  
Someone woke up early and sliced fruit, lining bowls  
along the counter top, one set out  
for each of us.

Cuban Sonnet | Alfonso "Sito" Sasieta

after "Que Viva La Vida" by Azucar Negra

I smiled when I first heard Haila Mompié  
wait a half-clave to sigh *ah!* & ease  
onto the downbeat. I steered into grace  
in an interstate slog, as traffic teased  
us with clever *bloques* & sudden brakes.  
Now, I believe in the pause— that we please

our partners once we have learned how to grind  
to a halt, mid-song, & own our own faults.

Each piano bridge makes one promise: soon  
we will accelerate. Soon, we will merge  
onto the freeway they call *montuno*.  
For now, a dancer is just on the verge  
of speed. This *guaguancó* clave is smooth cement,  
though its curved ramps end with a surge.



4:40 am next to my father | Steven Alvarez

I rest my left hand on my father's forehead  
as he sleeps I listen to him breathe  
struggle to breathe & I touch his right  
hand w. my right hand & surely  
somewhere there's a poem abt all this  
somewhere in this universe, a poem  
for my father, his voice thunders a whisper  
when he wakes, sez *two children spoke*  
*to me* in I think a dream, as he touches  
stars already my father sleeps then stirs then  
sleeps & somewhere in this universe, a poem  
for him for his visions his life  
& what a father means to children in this universe  
I can say only that there's a poem  
& it starts not w. him or ends w. me

but it's a poem & it goes on

*Safford, Arizona, 14 June 2021*

spring comes to Juniata, Pennsylvania, 1945 | Thomas Patterson

on the day of our baptism, we waited to be reborn  
with the iris the lilies the roses; the baptismal font was a deep dark lake  
where our father lowered us down beneath the water  
and lifted us back up three times  
first for father then for the son and then for the holy spirit;  
afterwards in the vestry, each of the three of us held a lily  
immaculate as our innocence once was,

our father went out that night to visit the sick  
or somewhere else – it wasn't our business;

behind the ballpark we dammed up  
the Little Juniata Creek where it narrowed into the shallows,  
we stopped it up with stones and mud  
as though we were trying to keep something at bay

and dusk surrendered to darkness  
as hope surrenders to despair,

the spire of the church our father pastored  
silhouetted across the melting snow  
whose question was why  
whose answer was because

the storm doors sheltered the war-frightened  
kittens  
warming themselves at the  
kerosene stoves,

the blood of our young men ran out at Iwo Jima running from column  
to column  
it ran down the street it ran outside our windows  
wending its way from door to door;

in our beds that night the April darkness closed around us  
like a mother's arms might do

in the kitchen the newspaper in our father's hands was let go and fell to  
the floor,

the moon rolled into its position  
the white stars steered into their places

and the green spring patiently waited

After the 527th Anti-LGBTQ Bill This Year, I Remind Myself  
| Emily Portillo

There are still hedgehog prickles, hummingbird charms, duckling fuzz and honey, still the loon's howl, still sinkholes, still glass bottom boats and accented goats, Mmmmbops and Mmmhops and orange cream soda, there are fireworks on foggy nights, little spoons, little cheesecakes, little elephants who suck their trunks like giant thumbs, there are still babies, there's Beyonce, there are people still with December bones like porch swings, chests like lidless Tupperware, there are still bees and keepers, still goosebumps, always there are goosebumps, it's safe here tonight the crickets hum and in Kentucky two lamp posts twirl  
Totally in Love and I'm still  
here for those who stop  
for the sky. Every day  
is another chance to  
hold your face in  
both my hands.  
It's rapture  
if we  
say  
so.

## With | Elizabeth Sochko Hussain

He started first with an invitation. Come with me. Warm concrete with water evaporating. Sun fell with blind instinct, acted with vigor. There, nettles stung with even the slightest brush. I walked barefoot with rocks at my heels. With a towel around my neck. The picture I'm trying to leave you with is a woman with freckles wearing a black swimsuit; her with him. The view of the water came with an understanding that we would get in it. Would emerge with purpose to lie with our backs kissing the ground. I lived in one world when I was with him, in his backyard. When he said *I like you with wet hair*. That sky dotted with swallows. With my eyes closed, I stepped up the ladder. Each slap of wind left me with gooseflesh. His head rested on the ledge with the patient look of someone who knows they will get whatever it is they want. I couldn't say anything in French, so he repeated each word back with pleasure. *Avec plaisir*. He whispered *What are you reading?* with the tenderness of a bruised rib. I was mad about something I couldn't come to terms with. All summer, he bit figs in half with his teeth.

## Everything is a Cool New Modern Wine Bar Now | Amy Meckler

*Headline on Punch Drunk, June 12, 2024*

The dive bar where I met N is  
a cool new modern wine bar now, and  
the tables don't rock when you put your glass down  
nor will your thigh collect splinters  
when crossing your legs. The corner where we exchanged  
bags of belongings, where he chased  
a homeless man off the stoop and threatened to call the NYPD,  
is a cool new modern wine bar now,  
and the policemen tap their batons like toasting with champagne  
every time they clear a vagrant from the stoop  
where the gentry live. The NYPD  
is a cool new modern wine bar now;  
the stools don't spin but the booths have benefits  
and a pension. Flatbush Avenue is lousy with couples  
walking side by side who never turn to look at the other's profile.  
One in each pair holds an umbrella over himself and his  
date's near side. Flatbush Avenue is a cool new modern  
wine bar now, and the couples are quiet  
and stare with purpose in parallel directions, one facing  
the bassist, one facing the rain. The rain is a cool new  
modern wine bar now, the talk of the city, the headline  
above the fold. It used to be you could duck into any doorway  
with your companion, your sides aligned  
like prayer hands to stay dry. When the rain became  
a cool new modern wine bar, the cabs lined up like last call  
and you could get home on your own, alone,  
contactless payment, exit under your awning, dry  
from stem to stein, home well  
before sunrise.

## Remember, This Was 1969 | Avra Wing

We were in college. There was a dance. We called them mixers, by which was meant different schools. Men and women. Merville was there—he went to Columbia, an NYC Ivy. I went to City. We knew each other from high school, not well, but, still, familiar. We hung out all evening. He took me home in a cab he paid for. Ever the gentleman, he wanted to walk me to my door, the door of my walk-up apartment in the Bronx, through the front door of the building, its lock always broken, into the tiny lobby, up the stairs. Maybe he wanted to kiss me. Or just a hug. We'd had a good time. I would have kissed him. He was tall. Behind the door was the kitchen, and, as it was night, the cockroaches streaming over the sink. Thirsty monsters. Insatiable. Endurable. Unendurable.

The building so old on one wall was a dumbwaiter, painted shut in layers of yellowing white paint, connected to the basement. The bugs crawled up, seeped through the cracks. I remember the super hauling cans of ash from the basement to the curb—what was left of the coal that had been burned, but my father said I was too young to have seen that. But he was wrong, my father. My father who still called the refrigerator the ice box because that's what he was used to, neither of us used to it being just us left, and certainly not to the roaches. I wouldn't have asked Merville in. He was at Columbia, and I was ashamed of the broken lock, the shabby lobby, despite its fading reproduction Sunflowers, the vermin. So I said, *no need, no need* to see me up—and this is where it occurs to you you see the world one way only, that you think what's happening in your head is what's happening. I didn't hear again from Merville, who became a doctor, of course. And it was years, yes, years, before I replayed that evening and realized maybe he thought I was embarrassed or ashamed or afraid to be seen with him, that a neighbor, or my father or, who knows, some guy passing by, anyone, would think *What is she doing with him? What is he doing with her?* And after so much time no way to explain, to tell him now I see that in this scenario, I was the cockroach.



## Phantom Daughter | Sara Femenella

The myth of the daughter is a myth part sea-creature, part biology. I gave you a name that somebody else had once, all those pretty somebodies with their yearns and prayers, but you're lest-to-light

as daughter-gained was also daughter lost. Your name shrieked like the spinning of a weathervane. One frees oneself by which way one has sailed. Your name surrendered to a wind-blown

plunder. My throat softened around the object of my suffering. My suffering takes many forms, a ship or a sandstorm, a mamba or a scimitar. I wanted a daughter like somebody else had once,

but I'm fixed, anchored, a green island alone on a blue sea. Your name shut like the closing of an atlas. Luminous daughter at the prow of your retelling. Of course, there's more than one

version. I can still feel you. Look! a handprint on the window. Someone else has been here. It must have been real, which way one has sailed. Love has no other end.

## An Ode to Edward Hopper | Jane McBride

Thank you that out of everything  
You could have painted tonight—

Like the husbands in tan trench coats and shiny shoes  
Or the wives in purple flannels over little black dresses  
Or a tiny dog in an old lady's purse

Like an ambulance lapping the block  
Or a gay man and a straight woman laughing too loud  
Or a half-chewed pot sticker falling out of a mouth  
Or a phone pressed to an ear

Like a waiter coming by to ask how everyone's doing tonight  
Or a Columbia freshman who greened out and thinks she's dying

Like a couple breaking up  
A couple eavesdropping  
A couple eating in silence

Like Sunday-funny lines wiggling off cold shoulders  
Or Saint Valentine and his many lovers

Like *I don't think we're in Kansas anymore*  
Or pork buns steaming—

You painted us  
Standing on the sidewalk  
In the glow of Happy Hot Hunan!  
On 108th and Amsterdam. Me:  
Laughing in my snazzy red dress. Her:  
Smoking in that jaunty hat.  
I'd paint us, too.  
I'd look at us forever if I could.

To the First Poet I Met Here | Olga Mexina

—for Tony Hoagland

Dearly disembodied,

I'm winning temporarily  
while you're dead, and I'm still alive—  
while manuscripts don't burn, the body  
is barely a Phoenix—

you know how you said I must stop  
imagining a poem is a warm, bloody thing  
out of the womb of Pushkin?  
I have news for you—I'm a bloody snippet  
of a book cut into 72 parts

of god—have you met Pushkin? *Salut, monsieur  
Pouchkine, comment ça va?* Tell him,  
he must stop imagining he gave birth  
to the Russian language—he's an ant  
propelled by the anthill

to follow Icarus into the sun. There are no languages,  
except for the sign language  
his unknown apostle is currently using  
to dance with the dead. There are no languages—  
I'm sure you know this

now when you are a thread  
god uses to bookmark the dust—  
here's a slice of flesh that isn't flesh—  
it lets the sun through like a downpour  
inside a crystal, that is to say—

I loved you—the way I realized, while looking up  
inside a poppy field—raindrops are bullets,  
and god is holding the machine gun.  
This world is full of comfortable graves,  
this space—like all the other prisons

and even brothels inside our heads—is just a street  
they keep renaming with every new  
dictator, although I distinctly hear  
the echo of a single thread—  
its one and only living name—  
it's in the sound of the sound—the whirlwind  
of the periodic table, where each element  
is just a name of self in afterdeath.

## Arachnophobia | Elizabeth Joy Levinson

Hummingbirds knit their nests together with spider silk,  
you can stop a bleed with a bit of webbing,  
hold a fish on an arachnid's line,  
in Madagascar, they've found a way  
to milk threads from orb weavers, like spun gold,  
they plait it into a bullet proof brocade,  
that seems to hold sunlight, and I'd like  
to show you how they wrap themselves  
in a hammock, felted from the sun or slivers of moon,  
and shed their skins again and again, and I wish  
I was that strong, enough to hold you up,  
enough to let you see yourself through.

## The Other Grail | Kira Trainor

Winter's unchewed gristle clings to his leavings,  
uncloaked by snow melt—a jaw here,  
a rib there, nestled in the bitten fescue.  
Down trail the deer scatter, blowing,  
their bones almost safe  
in their bodies.

The eyeless tunnel of darkness sees me,  
sees the stilled, silent animals  
hiding in brush and burrow  
while I trace the ancient braille  
of cranial sutures, recalling  
the grail of emptiness,  
the Tao's pot—useful  
where the clay is not. Still...

sometimes I dream they will know me.  
Sometimes I dream that the moon  
will lead them to my window, that  
they will stare at me curiously  
as I sleep—as if  
we are all friends here.

But even the vultures  
in their gentle circles drift off, and I leave  
the skull in the hushed meadow. It's time  
to go home, it's time to go home.

Do not mistake the waterfall for a harbor | Mirande Bissell

The house buckled as we lifted  
sandwiches to our mouths. Something  
rattled our teeth, the pickle jar,

the potato chips on the lemon-rimmed plates.  
I've lost our faces, my son's and mine.  
He is his hands. I am my feet, pressed that day

to the floorboards, springing and motherly.  
At the window, I thought of the end, looking  
south for a mushroom cloud, counting

the seconds as if this was thunder. It was blue  
as ever, the sky. Earthquake—  
over before the word came to me.

You cannot say what time will do to time.  
Events don't stay perched like canned corn  
on grocery shelves.

More than ever now, my mind thrums.  
Vibrations motor along fine nerve lines  
as if that cloud, guilt & bruised, had risen

after all, irradiating us, treetopping the hills  
in viridian flame, every moment  
candescing more as it leaves us,

its fuel unspendable.  
Some crescendo shimmies the past  
as it recedes. In place of Skateland,



where we kept time with Pat Benatar,  
a range of new mountains has shaken to life,  
anguish in the rock faces, new habitats

thrown like nets over highland swamps and glacial effluence—  
what all of this could have been, and is,  
made sad and whole.

In Which I Inhabit for a Moment a Whitesnake Video  
| Morrow Dowdle

The morning after we make out, Phil sends the message  
that he's never felt like this before. He writes, *It's time*

*to get out the big guns*, attaches a music video.

"Is This Love?" by Whitesnake plays. This from the friend

who'd made me mix tapes of Black Flag, Dead Kennedys.  
But when I watch it, it doesn't seem silly—it's the sweetest

four minute and thirty-two second love note anyone  
has ever sent me. It's simple: A man longs for a woman

who isn't sure she wants him. In the end, he convinces her—  
we think. On my apartment floor, Phil stroked my breast,

kissed my neck as my kenneled terrier watched. Innocent,  
almost. I imagine him in 1987, teenaged, watching MTV,

where he imagines he's the hero of this mist-machined scenario.  
Oh, it was so complicated—both of us cheating on our spouses,

who were both cheating on us. Was it a crime, then, to want,  
for a moment, promises made by a hair band hand-wringing

their way through a power ballad? To want salvation  
by grand gesture, a gorgeous blond-mulletered god to answer,

to know just what could be wrested from a reluctant lover  
when he bends her across the hood of a pure white car.

## Making Pancakes | Dion O'Reilly

He wants to get it right, whips  
whites to a froth, folds them in,  
while yolks, in their demitasse shells,  
wait for their moment in the batter. I can't help  
thinking his furrowed brow, the thin seam  
between his lips, resembles his attention  
as he tends my body, something  
he also takes quite seriously. Like most men,  
he's quiet when he does it, while I open  
to any music— my sighs and groans,  
a bit like cheerleading. The more I sound excited,  
the more we both are. I read women are more vocal  
to attract their next favorite, lurking  
behind a vine. After the big moment,  
when the first paramour succumbs to stupor  
as they invariably do, the next one jumps in  
and the multi-orgasmic woman carries on with her song.  
Oh, the old matriarchal days. Now that's service!  
I think, as Michael hands me a hot stack,  
steaming, fragrant, a butter filigree on the skins,  
smattering of berries on the side.  
But really, ladies, how many pancakes  
can one girl eat?

## ARTIST'S STATEMENT: TAMERA AVERY

### **Liminal Landscapes, Ambivalent Futures**

My work is a celebration of youth, where the young are the champions of change in flawed social, political, and environmental landscapes. Faced with ever-mounting global change, the young have the knowledge to understand what is at stake and—with their increasingly powerful voices—the ability to rearrange the balance of power. To shift this balance visually, my subjects wear masks and costumes that augment their agency and the space they take up. Originally prompted by folk carnivals celebrating the arrival of spring, I employ found images and objects along with homemade costumes to portray figures modest in composition but heroic in execution. Through a process starting with collage, isolated images function as vocabulary, deconstructing visual truths and reconstructing them into stories that call for action. Using imagery from the White House to Chernobyl, icebergs to abandoned ships, I work at the intersection of the current reality and the possibility of change to tell a story of hope in a landscape of despair—with armor-clad youth standing in the path of destruction.



TAMERA AVERY: **Self Portrait** oil on canvas, 24" x 28", 2019



TAMERA AVERY: My Little Valentine oil on canvas, 18" x 24", 2018



TAMERA AVERY: **Crown of Tulle** oil on canvas, 22" x 24", 2021





TAMERA AVERY: **Control Top** oil on canvas, 30" x 36", 2020



TAMERA AVERY: **Slipstream** oil on canvas, 76" x 84", 2020



TAMERA AVERY: **Sitting Duck** oil on canvas, 24" x 30", 2020



TAMERA AVERY: **Sunny** oil on canvas, 18" x 24", 2021



TAMERA AVERY: **Squeeze** oil on canvas, 76" x 84", 2019





TAMERA AVERY: **Evergreen** oil on canvas, 76" x 76", 2022



TAMERA AVERY: Olivia Standing Behind White Chair oil on canvas, 60" x 78", 2015





TAMERA AVERY: #114 Justice ? oil on canvas, 42" x 50", 2021



TAMERA AVERY: **Space Case** oil on canvas, 32" x 40", 2022

## The Book of Ruth | James McCorkle

Winds blow south on the Nevada desert floor, isotopes,  
dirty, eternal half-lives spread

across the air, crisp blue, no clouds but one,  
in this second series of detonations troops stationed

air on the first of November, 1951, six miles from ground zero,  
then moved to within nine-hundred meters of the crater, to test the effects,

psychological and radiological of the blast; later  
atmospheric tests were tourist attractions in Las Vegas and St. George

—*we're having a blast* a postcard says—

a photograph of troops milling about, waiting for deployment  
under the doubled sun, the stalk of the cloud wobbles, the frilled head,

a jellyfish or peony, fists the otherwise empty sky.

There is a list of cancers: thyroid, brain, gastro-intestinal, bone;

lymphomas and leukemia, melanoma and breast cancers  
contracted by troops, down-winders, tourists.

How far does the wind carry eternity?

I love the emptiness of afternoons.

Who were the fathers and mothers? Who watched? Yours?

How does the sky empty so quickly? How fast does fire travel in air?

Like a blade across the throat, a scythe across a field to be gleaned?

A buteo a black **W** against the blaze of light. Then into glide, a slash,  
then tilts and gone. To live with eternity,

to watch it emerge, continue past us, and we're left—

what happens next, do souls lift from bodies, or slip onto tongues of others  
as a song or fragments of words, howls at night,

patients slipping into interior fire-fields set on fire by glint

and scythed cells, burning out from the interior:  
on each street a neighbor points to houses marked by leukemia, melanoma,  
bone cancer, no survivors: here's another photograph, a test house,  
windows blown out, black, but no shadow bodies  
streak the walls as in cities six years earlier—  
or now a full life-time's passage, everything in air tilts  
from black to nothing in a blaze of burnt rain. Nothing  
in half-lives is coincidence, it is all memory, memorized, a film  
of sediment. Radiant.  
My mother's first dog was an Airedale, named Buster—  
across from MacDill we grew up with duck-and-cover exercises,  
bedrolls, and dog-tags we were told would help us find each other if lost,  
not for ID-ing remains, if something remained past  
shadow and fire-swept landscapes, how quickly  
would that front of burning-air cross the bay  
from the intended target, or six miles south of ground zero  
to where the 188th Airborne Infantry Regiment, 11th Airborne Division;  
3rd Medical Platoon, 188th Airborne Medical Company;  
Platoon Company A, 127th Engineer Battalion; and  
Battery C, 546th Field Artillery Battalion  
in an exercise called Buster-Jangle-Dog, for the agencies  
administering it like routine anesthesia, waited with orders to move  
from defensive positions to reconnoiter the destruction at mid-century:  
Abraham or Ruth, the first born at his hands on the mountaintop  
or in the fields of Boaz, she to glean the fields out of love:  
*where you go I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge;  
where you die, I will die, and there be buried, my love.*

## Orion | James McCorkle

When the dog pulled me out at night  
zig-zagging  
into bone-cracked cold, the stars lowered close, brittle, large—

no pity in this world, nothing the spin  
of zodiac or lay  
of cards could say, a sweep of a blade across  
the work of days—

how many bodies do I have in this one, and when  
done, to fall back into what  
quiet depth—

walking over compressed snow &  
below: crocus, trout-lily, grass's knitted glassine roots,  
mycorrhiza synapsing in  
the grind of chert and lime

the fine-line of plutonium 239 turns to lead  
our finger-print across  
sediments, half-lives into other bodies,  
fine ash carbon-black from smelters  
& crematoriums—

the wafer-pale moon  
a benediction, a lost word for was and will-be  
body-to-body

as fox-cirrus, deer-archipelagoes, kestrelling-stars

shoal-clouds, stirred ink, smudged but almost seen whole—

standing in the cherry-tree's lea, ice-wet wind rushes uphill  
the dog watches geese  
crease the sky with their calls

the days won't come back, Orion hunts across the sky,

geese wheel around night's pole, bare trees  
bristle, the ground's hoard's soon to split.

Infinity Room | Robert Fanning

*Dreamers, they never learn.* —Thom Yorke

Box with a door            so being curious

you enter  
not knowing eternity

waits to find you

here where  
it has always been

if we are able to wander            in between  
the pillars of light

are you the one  
my song comes through

the fire inside  
of winter

of what burns

*Beyond me, beyond you—*

where language slows  
near the mouth

of a cave of ice

what will we make  
of forever

in a field  
of stars

of endless selves  
we may still harvest

from the ever-  
swallowing dark

inside the mirror

if we believe

we are not captive  
in this world of rooms

in what  
holds us

ever open

if the box I stepped into  
was you

## Belonging | Andrew Fague

Strings of stars have feelings  
we act out, and in those dark days  
before any gift of sight, eyes closed,  
suckling milk, we reach for them,  
the feelings of stars.

The first voices spin down,  
vibrating our ear drums. Our lips  
tremble with unspoken promises  
as we learn the words for thirst,  
hunger. Our stomachs:

are they shy about feelings? We all  
come from neuropathic wombs,  
also fireplaces, veined leaves, black  
cherries, tide pools—can't they feel  
and be felt? Think of Eliot's

tubers in the deadened ground—  
the snowmelt and the rains  
must have felt like  
the grooves of an old record  
wiped clean.

The crows feel lucky  
as they stab at baby potatoes,  
the north wind in their feathers.  
The earth they've disturbed  
is the cry of the newborn.



## On the Naming of Things | Robert Fanning

*We must unlearn the constellations to see the stars.*

—Jack Gilbert

As we walk in autumn woods, a winged flame  
chitters and drips from branch to branch, some  
peripheral flash we try to catch but can't.  
It's flown, this beautiful luminous whatever  
it was—gone. Yet here we stand, scanning  
the sky as if it will return, like a word  
we can't quite remember. Which it doesn't.  
But which does have a name: *lethologica*—  
that tip-of-the-tongue phenomenon. Who knew?  
And don't ask me how I still know that  
pink-fringed hulk of mist drifting above us  
is called a *cirrocumulus*. Anyway, what  
difference now—*cardinal, tanager, flicker, finch*.  
We argue this from time to time: if the essence  
of a thing is lessened or lost, given a name.  
You say: never—that we see it better, once  
identified. I like to say I'm not so sure, even if  
I half believe myself. There, across the river,  
see that sequined dancer quaking in the field,  
that silver ghost outside the crowded pines?  
I loved that tree so much more before I learned  
its blinding name. Look at *us*, after all.  
Most of our lives I've walked beside you,  
a shadow flitting through my inner branches.  
When it finally appeared in a clearing, I gave it  
a name. Now I look out through its eyes—  
I'm all you see. And all you'll never see again.

## The Restaurant | Robert Fanning

*Inspired by* The Restaurant of Mistaken Orders, Tokyo, Japan

You remember the time the server placed it before you: that steaming heap of whatever the fuck—a dinner you didn't want, a plate bound for another diner? Then the hasty

apology, the eternal wait. Not to mention: all the other times—the trauma of no ketchup bottle, no silverware, hunk of bloody flesh instead of tofu, or, God forbid, needing to suffer

your momentary thirst, an empty glass glaring at you. You remember? The sting of injustice, the sense of being wronged, maybe even secretly hated by the smiling server, the chef,

the management, the universe. Now, imagine relinquishing orders. Just taking what you get. What kind of a world is that? In the dark corner booth, a man stares for hours at an empty

place setting. Another receives someone else's dessert. Near the door, a couple grapples with their marriage suddenly scratched from the menu. A young mother draws both

of her children close, handed a plate of stage four cancer, as another leaves, opening their bag to find a to-go order they didn't place: the dream job, mansion on the bluff, its glass façade a mouth

filling every evening with the spilled sherbet of a sunset. And here it comes—at last—your life, just as you imagined it, perfect and succulent, trailing a sweet flag of smoke, as it passes you by.

## Asthma | Andrew Gent

Your heart does its little slapstick  
clutch and stagger  
and the crowd roars  
its approval.

You've seen this movie  
a thousand times, but still  
it takes you by surprise.

You are, literally, out of breath.

What follows is 25 minutes  
on the ragged edge  
of being human,  
all your concentration gone

to not slipping  
out of a cheap suit  
of skin and bones.

And if you're lucky,  
you get the rest of the day  
to contemplate  
what just didn't happen.

The zeros adding up  
like smoke rings,  
smoke signals

from the next hill over  
telling you what you already  
suspect: next time

you might not make it.  
And if, two hours from now,

you realize that the about-to-fail  
any minute is gone,

you are grateful.  
Grateful, to be living  
with a loaded gun  
pointed at your chest.

Each evening,  
counting the empty chambers.  
Each morning,  
pulling the trigger.

## Modulations | Sally Ashton

*Speech, which as it is a sound resulting from the modulation of the Air, has most affinity to the spirit.*

—Government of the Tongue, 1674

The street guy plays “Moondance” on his flute, and someone else nearby clips their nails, the sound like a cricket. It’s still 80 degrees out, 9:30pm on a Thursday night. Groups of men cluster in front of Starbucks across from the flute player. No one speaks. No one is as they appear, toughed up for a night downtown. Most of it veneer. Cell phones hold gazes, public space controlled by the armor of private fixations. *All right, get some rest* one man says aloud to his Bluetooth. Yea, give that thing some rest. A bus arrives, departs, and at last the train’s bell, a squeal of wheel on tracks, and I’m on board with the going home crowd, so glad not to have to stand anymore. We ride. No one looks up. Maybe the lights are too bright, but mainly everyone bows over phones. Some talk to it. One woman, phrase to phrase a near whisper then an outburst of noise and TMI, must have no idea how loud she gets. Or doesn’t care. So what. I scroll through my Facebook feed. At the next stop a large woman with golden slippers rolls in on her motorized chair and parks in the aisle. Queen of the night, she cradles her phone, laughs, croons into it. Somewhere, if I could only see it, the Moon lifts over the rooftops. Somewhere. I have no one to talk to.

Timepiece | Kirk Glaser  
*after the fire*

Where lie the hands  
a gear a father's  
watch

the alligator skin band darkened  
by sweat from long dead  
wrist

the twenty-one minute jewels  
glinted fire now scattered in  
ash

held since a teen when  
I dragged my father from shallows'  
water

pushed against chest stars minutes  
failed to breathe back  
life

somewhere now in ruin under foot  
the two-inch square of stainless  
steel

the casing wedding date initials  
love inscribed in time  
lost

## ARTIST'S STATEMENT: HOLLY LANE

While an undergraduate in painting I began to think about frames. At that time, if a painting had a frame at all, it was a thin line, serving as protection for the art, and as conceptual dividing line. The frame was a demarcation that indicated that all that was within was art—the frame itself, and all that was outside the frame was not art. A good frame was to be inconspicuous.



While pondering the nature of frames, I found some illuminated manuscripts in the University library, and saw how the borders visually commented on the text, sometimes even spoofing the text. From this discovery I realized that a frame could be many things; it could be a commentary, an informing context, an environment, a fanfare, a shelter, it could extent movement, it could be a conceptual or formal elaboration, it could embody ancillary ideas, it could be like a body that houses and expresses the mind, and many other rich permutations. From that point I began to create pieces that fused frame and painting, with some pieces having doors that open and close over paintings to suggest contingency, potentiality, future, past, or cause and effect.

To experience the space of a painting we project our minds into the painting, consequently I see pictorial space as mind space. The spatial qualities of sculpture exist in our own physical space; we walk around it, proportion our bodies to it—in part it is apprehended or “seen” by the body. By fusing sculptural frames with pictorial images I hope to address both modes of aesthetic perception.

Some re-occurring themes are: interspecies compassion, philosophical proofs of animal cognition (e.g. the correction of errors, pretense, and awareness of other minds), veiled symbolism, re-presenting women from a woman artist's perspective, exploring the hidden implications, or the backstory of myths, eco-psychology and nature mysticism.

<https://www.hollylaneart.com/carved-frame-paintings>





HOLLY LANE: **Cottonwood Moon** acrylic and carved wood, 11.25" x 27.5" x 6.25", 2023



HOLLY LANE: Light in the Forest acrylic and carved wood,  
17" x 14" x 5.75", 2020



HOLLY LANE: **Wading Through Amber** acrylic and carved wood,  
17.5" x 12.5" x 4.5", 2020



HOLLY LANE: **All Will Be Well** acrylic and carved wood, 17" x 15.5" x 4", 2016



HOLLY LANE: **Night Singing** acrylic and carved wood, 14.75" x 12" x 4.75", 2016





HOLLY LANE: *The Mooring Hour, When Sky is Nearer Than Skin*  
acrylic and carved wood, 23.5" x 25" x 7.75", 2009



HOLLY LANE: **After the Storm** acrylic and carved wood,  
39.5" x 33.75" x 9.5", 2012



HOLLY LANE: *The Lazarus Hour* acrylic and carved wood, 9.75" x 19" x 6", 2018





HOLLY LANE: *Refuge, Here Birds Rest* acrylic and carved wood, 9.25" x 32" x 5.75", 2023



HOLLY LANE: *Night Gathering* acrylic and carved wood,  
13" x 26.75" x 5.375", 2021

After you walk across the Trans-Himalayas twice, what's next  
| Julie Murphy

What can follow living like a nomad  
at the top of the world  
so high, so quiet  
but for wind and river  
but for the crows' constant clamor  
and the donkey's nicker  
as he waits for his feedbag.

You try to remember who you were  
but can't. You are so far  
from that person after  
crossing five, five-thousand-  
meter passes. After  
you give everything to the  
mountain. Kneeling in hot dirt

and giving praise. Every thought  
scoured clean. What could be  
next, after you prostrate  
in Milarepa's cave.  
You find joy for the loves  
you can only lose. Thank-you  
to the friend who won't speak

to you. Thank you for the  
troubles that keep us tethered  
to the world. Step after step.  
hours climbing, hours  
descending, or the rare days  
of smaller hills,  
up and down and up again,  
and down again.

## Epilogue | Frances Hatfield

And then, one day it is returned to you  
as if by chance, on your way to somewhere  
on a February morning, perfect waves of glass  
sliding into foam as far as you can see  
tell you to stop the car, take off your shoes  
and walk along the edge of your world,  
let cold sand, broken shells, charred  
bits of wood announce the end of winter  
to your feet, let the sun rinse your eyes  
of salt and tears and endless snow,  
and then you see it  
among the flotsam beached by the tide, strewn  
with gull-picked sea life heaved up from the abyss  
where it sank with the ship of your old life  
and you recognize it at once  
though now it resembles the world more than you,  
mottled green and brown, pitted and fractured,  
shot through with crystals and unseen beings  
countless as stars, and you know  
it will never belong entirely to you again  
and that it never did  
but still you pick it up  
and cup it in your hands,  
say thank you

## A Summer Blessing | David Denny

It's the ants who've got my attention now,  
coming up through cracks in the clay soil  
of the apricot orchard this suburban house  
was built on. First sighting was a straight line  
across the kitchen floor and up the slick  
aluminum garbage pail. When I lifted the lid,  
they were already mobbing gobs of sour  
yogurt, plum pits, and bits of burnt turkey.  
These are the small black ants, not the big  
red ones that sting and make war, like those  
in Thoreau's Walden woodpile— these rather,  
the wily buccaneer crews who with industrious  
delight leave pheromone trails for one  
another from nest to bounty and back again.  
Each yawning July day they surprise me  
with their selfless camaraderie. When death  
comes, they mourn their losses on the move,  
trudging pieces of the fallen back to the colony:  
their communal serenity a balm for what  
we must also reckon as individual torment.  
According to the goddess Lakshmi, small  
black ants in a house signal the end of  
troubled times and the promise of wealth.  
No word yet from the state lottery commission  
on the status of our impending riches;  
however, I can report that the brave young  
scouts among them freely tickle their way up  
my leg when I sit too long in the same spot.  
And by this morning, they had trekked all the way  
to the laundry, among scents of sweat and grime,  
Clorox and Tide—and then this evening, just now  
in fact, one clever and lonesome soul danced  
across your forearm, my darling, my love.

## Deep Summer Alleluia | David Denny

I pick a small flower  
of Dutch clover, inhale  
its cinnamon scent, twirl  
its kaleidoscope of  
white/pink/pale green, grow  
drowsy on the liquor  
of late summer madness;

my dog and I doze in  
the piney shade, gaze over  
the grassy field abuzz  
with bees in perpetual  
work since that day in May  
when our neighborhood awoke  
to Pan's sweet dancing pipes;

somewhere in the midst of  
our deepening green sea  
is a ball I may have tossed  
and my dog may have declined  
to fetch, surrendering instead  
we two to the heaviness  
of bodies embraced at last  
by the earth who loves us

as no other mother, who  
wraps us in her warm embrace,  
bids us suck on teats of  
August nectar until we lay  
lazy, drunk, and stupid  
among ten thousand bees  
who float from flower to  
flower with the easy  
and elephantine grace

of Sumo wrestlers as  
they move from steam bath to  
rice bowls and sake, all  
the while powdering their  
great bellies with pollen  
and chanting psalms of  
penitent and languid praise.



## Cost of Commitment | Tom McKoy

We were married for 64 years.  
Beginning with that ring he put on my finger  
I promised to love, honor and obey.

For 60 of those years Paul preached—  
Indiana, the Philippines, Montana,  
North Dakota, South Dakota,  
and finally North Carolina.  
So much prayer, always  
the gospel, so many blessings.  
He left this world confident  
of his entry into the Kingdom.

Months passed before I was able  
to write to Jane, our middle daughter,  
shunned, disowned for so many years,  
denied a place at our table.  
He said she had turned her back  
on Christ by laying with another woman.  
Paul would not speak her name.  
I kept her under my tongue.

He is gone and  
she is blood of my blood.  
Today the letter is marked return to sender,  
address unknown.

A River—An Alphabet of Sentences of Len Anderson  
| Joan Zimmerman

*Assembled in admiration*

Are we saved by our virtue, our faith, or by the limitless grace of mangoes?  
But, nestled inside each miracle is trouble.

Cows rest in the street.

Dying can be a lot like being born: we don't know the name of the one  
we cry out to.

Every atom in the universe is a quantum cloud of doubt.

For example, why can't seven billion people just get along?

God must really like I'm Not Sure's.

How can I uncover the god inside a stone?

I live for the day, yet the day and I were invented by the night.

Just who do you think you are, thinking you are who you say you are, when  
you are the pearl of ambiguity?

Len is forever in debt to the man, woman, or child who picked this very mango.  
My teacher—not me of course—moves with a catlike grace and precision I can  
only admire.

Newton was the first to see how all things are falling, I say, as a passenger jet,  
wheels down, slips behind tall buildings.

Now the bread and wine have been transformed into their body and blood.  
Outside, all our buckets filled up last night.

Persimmons ripen diligently.

Quantum physics tells us the world is unlike anything.

Rain has prevented as many wars as all our noble intentions.

Spring, and my wife is in the garden planting pole beans, pod peas,  
blackberries, basil, zucchini, and chard.

Sages tell us to prepare for death.

Today I am the summer grass on a hillside.

Water clings to the leaf tips of the redwood trees.

Where did I lay my wings when I came in the door?

You may have heard that the soul is not ours but is entrusted to us by a river.

## The Nature Lover | Jill Gingham

Moving slowly  
into the morning,  
I crunch through the debris  
of the children's room,  
draw back the curtains  
and find myself staring  
into the steadfast eyes  
of a large owl  
sitting on the lowest branch  
of the Joshua tree.

I run out and stand  
idolatrous before him  
in the rain,  
ridiculously unfeathered,  
my outsize housecoat  
flapping about me.  
At last a sign, a portent,  
the Gods have noticed my struggles.  
He gazes over my head  
oblivious as the film star  
looking to the limousine at the curb.

School time and the children  
smile shyly,  
slipping into the car  
beneath the owl.  
As we roll down the driveway  
he lifts his wings wide  
and, effortlessly,  
silent as snow falling,  
glides the curve of the earth  
to a neighbor's roof.  
I am relieved.  
He has blessed us and  
gone his way.

When I return  
he is back in the tree.  
A thrill of dread runs through me.  
What does he want?  
My children are gone,  
the hamster sleeps  
in his ball of shavings,  
the kittens beneath the bed.  
Does he know  
I can resist nothing that loves me?

I rush beneath him  
shrinking from the claws on my back,  
the beak in my clavicle.  
All afternoon I rage through my chores,  
a woman distorted,  
glaring from windows.  
Does he expect  
saucers of skinned mice  
outside the door every evening?  
He'll have to realize  
I can't take any more love.

Yet when  
early dusk  
the rain a fine drizzle  
the tree is empty,  
I feel a pang—  
the sense of blood organs.  
Gone his spotlight on the  
dark larder of the night,  
the wild air filling his wings.  
I am left in the crowded gloom  
palely turning within walls.

## Fig Tree Fills the Sky | Rosie King

There's no way to see  
the three weathered trunks

braided together  
twining upward

and not be  
struck

by the severed one

cut short  
down low

clasped tight  
between the two  
still rising

The three  
still touch

One root

Hard not to feel  
the cut

the mingle  
of limbs  
green leaves and fruit above

A breath away

on the stump's  
smooth bark

knobs of green

## Stretch | Frances Hatfield

*Humans are the lowest form of divine being.*

—Iamblichus

I return to the friction of skin on sheet  
when I wake to find  
my body where I left it last night  
to wander in my other life,  
then I do the first thing I learned how to do,  
before even breathing:

I stretch.

Like the goddess my cat,  
like Sophia Loren on a Riviera holiday,  
I tune my first and favorite instrument,  
play the inside music of muscles on bones,  
revel in the pleasure of expanding distances  
between heel and hipsocket, finger  
and finger, toe and toe, bathe my joints  
in synovial fluid, open the sluices from femur  
to occiput, sternum to sacrum, wrist  
to rib, let my serpent spine glide  
and curl, arch and reach.

This is my body, my native country  
of rivers and trees, architecture of delicate  
lightning, sown with the seeds  
of my death and hunger for infinite spaces,  
this is my brick and mortar, my *habeus corpus*,  
my creaky valentine, my garden of Eden  
with its half-eaten fruit.

While there is time, let me praise  
the only life my body knows  
before I am pixilated into another  
kind with a different alphabet for praise,

Let me remember for a future I can't see  
what it was like to wake and stretch,  
animal and human and holy,  
to rise up and walk in a garden called earth

## Contributors' Notes

**Ellery Akers** is the author of four poetry collections: the brand new prize-winning collection of poetry and her own art, from Blue Light Books, *A Door into the Wild*; and her three previous collections: *Swerve: Environmentalism, Feminism, and Resistance*; *Practicing the Truth* and *Knocking on the Earth*, as well as her children's novel, *Sarah's Waterfall*. Akers has won thirteen writing awards and has also exhibited her art in museums and galleries nationally. She is the recipient of the Watson Cross Jr Award from the National Watercolor Society.

**Ignatius Valentine Aloysius** earned his MFA in Creative Writing from Northwestern University, where he teaches. He is the author of the literary novel *Fishhead: Republic of Want* (Tortoise Books, 2020). Ignatius is the current host & curator of the long-running reading series Sunday Salon Chicago. He also serves as Co-Chair of the Curatorial Board at Ragdale Foundation, where he is on the Board of Trustees. A resident of Evanston, IL, Ignatius is currently shopping a second poetry collection, *Bone Dust Mother*, as well as a speculative novel and a novel in verse. He is excited to be publishing a collaborative poetry collection with David Allen Sullivan this fall, entitled *Salt Pruning*, from Hummingbird Press. Find out more about Ignatius at <https://linktr.ee/ignatius.valentine.aloysius>

**Steven Alvarez** is the son of Mexican immigrants. He grew up in southern Arizona, where he experienced how the inculcation of hate can deeply affect the Mexican American self and awareness of both roots and history. Steven has used poetry to confront and dislodge the hate he has experienced in himself and others. Steven's *ars poetica* reasons that "we translanguage poetics by demolishing linguistic borders. We do this because the socially constraining aspects of languages can never refuse our dignity as storytellers, poets, and innovators, enacting the power to name what is and what is not possible." He has performed his work at the Asian American Writers Workshop, the St. Marks Poetry Project, the Brooklyn Arts Museum, and in the middle of Times Square. His published work has appeared in *Acentos Review*, *Berkeley Poetry Review* (Pushcart Nomination in 2014), *Blue Mesa Review*, *Fence*, *New Delta Review*, *The Broome Street Review*, *Modern Poetry Quarterly Review*, *Newfound*, *RHINO*, and the blogs for PEN America and *Best American Poetry*. His work has been anthologized in the *BAX Best American Experimental Writing* in 2015 and 2016, and appeared in the second volume of *Bettering American Poetry*.

**Sally Ashton** is a writer, teacher, and editor of *DMQ Review*, an online journal featuring poetry and art. Author of five books including this year's *Listening to Mars*, she specializes in brief forms across genres. One of her poems is headed to the Moon, October 2025. [www.sallyashton.com](http://www.sallyashton.com)

**Charles Atkinson's** *Poems: New and Selected* was published in fall 2022 by Hummingbird Press. His collection *The Only Cure I Know* (San Diego Poets Press, 1991) 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, *Fossil Honey* and *This Deep In*, with Hummingbird Press, and two chapbooks—*World News*, *Local Weather* and *Skeleton*, *Skin and Joy*—with Finishing Line Press.

**Tamera Avery** is a painter living and working in San Francisco who has exhibited widely across California, including at the De Young Museum. After an early career at the in-



tersection of business and fashion, she turned to painting full-time, working with key artist-mentors at the San Francisco Art Institute and UC Berkeley Extension school. She is represented by Andra Norris Gallery in Burlingame, California.

**Arlene Biala** (she/her) is a Pinay poet and performance artist born in San Francisco, CA and raised in the South Bay. She has been participating in poetry performances and workshops in the Bay Area for over 30 years and was Poet Laureate of Santa Clara County for 2016 and 2017. She is the author of several collections of poetry: *bone*, *continental drift*, and *her beckoning hands*, which won the 2015 American Book Award. Her latest book, *one inch punch*, was published in 2019. She is a Lucas Artist Residency Fellow at Montalvo for 2023-25.

**Mirande Bissell** is a teacher and poet who lives in the Patapsco River Valley, west of Baltimore. Her first book of poems, *Stalin at the Opera*, was selected by Diane Seuss as winner of the Ghost Peach Press prize, and was published in 2021.

**Rose Black's** 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 is one of the founders of Right to Write Press, a non-profit that promotes the growth of emerging poets who are incarcerated in California state prisons.

**John M. Blair** is a prize-winning author of seven books, including the 2023 collection *The Shape of Things to Come*, poems about the dawn of the atomic age and the Trinity test of the first atomic bomb, from Gival Books. Blair's other books include *Playful Song Called Beautiful* (winner of the Iowa Poetry Prize); *American Standard* (fiction – winner of the Drue Heinz Literature Prize); two novels: *A Landscape of Darkness and Bright Angel*; and two other collections of poetry: *The Green Girls* and *The Occasions of Paradise*. Blair has published more than 250 poems & stories in magazines and journals such as *The Colorado Review*, *Poetry*, *The Sewanee Review*, *The Antioch Review*, *The Georgia Review* and *New Letters*. John is a Distinguished Professor at Texas State University, where he directs the undergraduate creative writing program.

**Partridge Boswell** is the author of the 2023 Fool for Poetry Prize-winning chapbook *Levis Corner House* and Grolier Poetry Prize-winning collection *Some Far Country*. Partridge is co-founder of Bookstock Literary Festival and teaches at Vallum Society for Education in Arts & Letters in Montreal. Recipient of the inaugural *Red Wheelbarrow Prize* (selected by Ellen Bass), he troubadours widely with the poetry/music group Los Lorcás and is currently planning the trio's 2025 tour of Ireland in concert with the release of their sophomore album. <https://loslorcas.com/>

**Jane Bridges'** poems have been published in *The MacGuffin* (18th National Poet Hunt Contest Honorable Mention), *Mudfish*, *Sow's Ear Poetry Review*, *Third Wednesday*, *Paterson Literary Review* (2014 Allen Ginsberg Poetry Awards Honorable Mention), and elsewhere. Since retiring from teaching full time (mostly science), she has taught poetry workshops to teens and retirees. She is grateful for having grandchildren to dote on and many opportunities to birdwatch in the tropics all over the world. Monarchs laying eggs

on milkweed in her garden as she writes this remind her to pay attention to things that won't be here very long, but will come again if she's lucky.

Based in the San Francisco Bay area, **Edwin Carungay** is a graphic design and multimedia producer—with a profound passion for photography. His journey began in Southern California's skateboarding subculture, where he often snapped shots of friends skating on the streets, ditches, and backyard ramps. This love for skateboarding and documenting its certain adventures sparked his initial interest in photography. Edwin's formal training started in his high school darkroom and graphic arts courses, then continuing into university alongside his studies as a graphic design major. Photography remained a constant sideline companion in his life. It was Edwin's wife, Lesha, also a photographer, who introduced Edwin to Alex Webb's work through the book, *The Suffering of Light*. This was an epiphany—marking his introduction to the fine art world of street and documentary photography, igniting a passion that transformed his hobby into a dedicated pursuit. As a street and documentary photographer, Edwin's devotion has led to local and international exhibitions, and awards from long-admired institutions. His formative years while in the skateboarding scene are evident in the unscripted and often sentimental images he makes. When not working as a creative marketing and communications professional, he spends his time exploring avenues and streets, capturing colorful, candid moments of people navigating their lives, both in his hometown and abroad.

**Wilma Marcus Chandler** is a poet, playwright and theatre arts director working in the Monterey Bay Area. Her theatre books are published by Smith& Kraus, Inc. and her first poetry collection, *The Night Bridge*, was published by Hummingbird Press. Her newest work is a co-edited anthology *When a Woman Tells the Truth: writings and art by women over 80*, published by Many Names Press.

**Roosevelt Coleman** has been incarcerated since the middle 1990's. He broke into poetry suddenly and without much coaching, making language his pet and training it to express the fullness of a life lived mostly in a prison cell but open to the unbounded depth of his experience. He has become prolific. His special power is joy. This is his first publication.

**Cheryl Coon** received her MFA from the San Francisco Art Institute, and BAs in both art and French from Humboldt State. She studied art history at the Université de Paris XIII, Panthéon-Sorbonne. Cheryl has had exhibitions at the de Saisset Museum, Triton Museum, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Santa Rosa, State University of New York, Morris Graves Museum, Euphrat Museum, and San Francisco State University Art Gallery, and internationally at the The Rooms Gallery in Canada; the Polymer Culture Factory, Katlamaja, Estonia; the Galerii Y, University of Tartu, Tartu, Estonia; and the Physics Room in Christchurch, New Zealand. Awards have included the Carl Djerassi Honorary Fellowship from the Djerassi Resident Artists Program, a full sculpture fellowship to the Vermont Studio Center, an artist residency at the Pouch Cove Foundation in Newfoundland, and an artist residency at Villa Montalvo.

**David Denny's** poems have recently appeared in *South Florida Poetry Review*, *Chiron Review*, and *I-70 Review*. His most recent books include the poetry collection *Angel of the*

*Waters* and the short story collection *Sometimes Only the Sad Songs Will Do*, both from Shanti Arts. He lives in California with his wife Jill and their Belgian Shepherd Ginny. More info: [daviddenny.net](http://daviddenny.net).

**Morrow Dowdle** (they/them) has poetry published in or forthcoming from *New York Quarterly*, *Ghost City Review*, *Fatal Flaw Literary Magazine*, *Pedestal Magazine*, and *The Baltimore Review*. They have been nominated for the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net. They edit poetry for *Sunspot Literary Journal* and curate a performance series in Hillsborough, NC featuring traditionally underrepresented voices. They live in Durham, NC.

**Andrew Fague's** poems have appeared in *Catamaran*, *Windfall*, *Salt*, *Chicago Quarterly Review*, *phren-Z*, *Porter Gulch Review*, and elsewhere. For over twenty years, he has taught writing, literature, mythology, and poetry workshops at various colleges on the West Coast, currently at Cabrillo College. He lives with his two children in Santa Cruz, California.

**Robert Fanning** is the author of six full-length collections of poetry: *All We are Given We Cannot Hold*, (forthcoming, Dzanc Books, 2026), *Cage* (forthcoming, Salmon Poetry, 2025), *Severance*, *Our Sudden Museum*, *American Prophet*, and *The Seed Thieves*, as well as three chapbooks: *Prince of the Air*, *Sheet Music*, and *Old Bright Wheel*. His poems have appeared in *Poetry*, *Ploughshares*, *Shenandoah*, *Gulf Coast*, *The Atlanta Review*, *Waxwing*, *THRUSH*, *Diode*, *The Cortland Review*, *The Common*, and many other journals. He is a Professor of English at Central Michigan University, as well as the Founder/Facilitator of the Wellspring Literary Series in Mt. Pleasant, MI., and the Director of PEN/INSULA POETRY, a resource for Michigan poets. [www.robertfanning.wordpress.com](http://www.robertfanning.wordpress.com).

**Sara Femenella's** poems have been published or are forthcoming in *The North American Review*, *Palette Poetry*, *Pleiades*, *The Journal*, *The New Orleans Review*, *The Saint Ann's Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Salamander*, and *Seventh Wave*, among others. Her manuscript, *Elegies for One Small Future*, was a semi-finalist for the Autumn House Press Poetry Prize, a finalist for Write Bloody Publishing's Jack McCarthy Book Prize and a finalist for The Waywiser Press Anthony Hecht Poetry Prize. Sara lives in Los Angeles with her husband and son.

**Tim Fitzmaurice** is the author of the 2022 poetry collection: *The Things We Take With Us: New and Selected*. In addition to poodles and guitar, Tim has an avid interest in politics and maintaining healthy, vibrant communities—he once served as mayor of his beloved Santa Cruz. Tim is an emeritus lecturer in writing at UCSC's Merrill and Crown Colleges, and a devoted writing workshop leader at Salinas Valley State Prison.

The artist and writer **Jessica Diana Garza's** passed away unexpectedly at Salinas Valley State Prison this past summer. During her imprisonment, Ms. Garza was committed to creating unforgettable, original prison art, mostly ink drawings. Determined to depict her own experience, she incorporated dreams, self-portraits, sketches of the many animals with which she identified, and memories of food and drink from her pre-prison life: She once wrote: "Good artwork seeks a place of honor that breathes life into the soul of the artist that created it. I spend hour upon hour on line work, composition, and perspective." One of her last drawings, "The Beetle" is featured in this issue on p. 42, across from an *in memoriam* written by one of her writing teachers, Rose Black.

**Andrew Gent** lives in New Hampshire. His first book of poetry is *[explicit lyrics]* from the University of Arkansas Press. Current work can be found in recent issues of *North Dakota Review*, *Under Review*, *Thin Air*, and *Tipton Poetry Review*.

**Bushra Gill** finds order within the chaos of everyday life through art. She was born in Karachi, Pakistan, and as a small child, emigrated to Houston, Texas, with her family. Drawn to art from a young age, she graduated from Pratt Institute in 1994 with a BFA in sculpture. She has been awarded residencies at Pilchuck Glass School and Kala Art Institute. Gill spent many years of working as a museum educator at various galleries and museums including The Museum of Modern Art, The Drawing Center and The Rotunda Gallery, while also working as a studio assistant to various artists including Maya Lin, Ursula von Rydingsvard, and Maria Elena Gonzalez. Currently living and working in northern California, Gill also serves on the board of Oakland Art Murmur and curates exhibitions.

**Jill Ginghofer** is a poet living in Santa Cruz. Her poem “Determining My Lifespan at 85” recently appeared in the landmark anthology *When a Woman Tells the Truth: Writings and Creative Work by Women over 80*, edited by Wilma Marcus Chandler and Dena Taylor. In addition to attending to her vocation as a poet, Jill was for many years the executive director of the Alzheimers Association of Santa Cruz County.

**Kirk Glaser** is a poet and fiction writer whose work has been nominated twice for the Pushcart Prize and appeared in over fifty publications, including *The Threepenny Review*, *Nimrod*, *Chicago Quarterly Review*, *Catamaran*, and elsewhere. Awards for his work include an American Academy of Poets prize, C. H. Jones National Poetry Prize, University of California Poet Laureate Award, Gertrude Stein Fiction Award Finalist/The Doctor T.J. Eckleburg Review, New Millennium Writings Contest Finalist, and Richard Eberhart Poetry Award/Southeast Literary Review. His poetry collection, *The House That Fire Built*, will be published in 2025 by MadHat Press. A Teaching Professor at Santa Clara University, he serves as Director of the Creative Writing Program and Faculty Advisor to the *Santa Clara Review*. He is co-editor of the anthology, *New California Writing 2013*, Heyday.

**Taylor Gorman** has been published in *The New Orleans Review*, *The Cincinnati Review*, *Cutbank*, and *Passages North*. He lives in Santa Cruz with his cat.

**Dr. Gabriella Gutiérrez y Muhs** is a poet and professor in Modern Languages and Women and Gender Studies at Seattle University. She received her MA and PhD from Stanford University and is the author/editor of several poetry collections. Gabriella has also edited multiple anthologies and has been anthologized and published in many journals and anthologies including *Cascadian Zen*; *As/Us: A Space for Women of the World*; *Bilingual Review: Revista Bilingüe, 25th Anniversary Issue*; *Quarry West's "In Celebration of the Muse" Anthology*; *Cruzando Puentes: Antología de Literatura Latina*; *Yellow Medicine Review*; *Puentes*; *Ventana Abierta*; *Camino Real*; *Chicana/Latina Studies: The Journal of Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social*; and *Diálogo: An Interdisciplinary Journal*. She recently co-edited *In Xochitl, In Cuicatl*, a bilingual poetry anthology of Chicana/Latinx poetry, published in 2021 in Madrid, Spain (includes more than 60 poets), and another multigenre Latinx women's anthology *Indomitable/Indomables* from San Diego State

University Press. Her poetry collection *¿How Many Indians Can We Be? ¿Cuántos indios podíamos ser?* was published with Flowersong Press, 2022.

**Frances Hatfield** is the author of *Rudiments of Flight* (2013, Wings Press). Her work has appeared in *Parabola*, *Jung Journal: Culture and Psyche, Psychological Perspectives*, and more recently in the *New Mexico Poetry Anthology 2023*. She is a Jungian psychoanalyst in private practice, and Director of the Training Program at the Jung Institute in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

**Kathryn Hopping** lives in Alameda and is a retired ESL teacher, substitute teacher, alcohol and drug counselor, and online editor. She writes short fiction and poetry and her work has appeared most recently in *The Fourth River*. She loves cooking, reading, and playing with her 3-year-old grandson.

**Mr. James Humdy** was born in Lynwood, CA, and raised in Watts, Imperial Courts Projects. He says that *Hard Way*, the book he completed in 2020, published by Right to Write Press, was a step towards a change and helped him to say what he really felt without being judged.

**Elizabeth Sochko Hussain** is a writer living in Los Angeles. Her poems have been published in *Muzzle*, *Columbia Journal*, *Quarterly West*, and elsewhere. She also has a newsletter. @esocho

**Venus Jones** is a dynamic poet, producer, and educator with over twenty years of classroom and stage experience. Through her work in entertainment, academia, and media, she promotes inner peace and progress using powerful stories to spark vital conversations. Her animated poetic narrative, *Lil Red is Riding the Wrong Way in the Hood*, brings communities together for open discussions on safety and trust. Discover more about her impactful projects at [venusjones.com](http://venusjones.com), and join her in creating positive change. Venus writes: “It is an honor to be published in the Red Wheelbarrow. Thank you to all who made it possible. Through each line of “Falcon,” I use imagery and wordplay to capture the dreams, challenges, and resilience of a young misfit in America seeking adventure but also a sense of belonging. It is my hope that your support goes beyond reading my poetry—your support helps me build a pathway to a brighter future for historically marginalized children who want to soar without limits. Together, let’s turn these words into action, and increase equity and empathy through the arts.”

**Rosie King** was born in Saginaw, Michigan, hometown of Pulitzer winner Theodore Roethke, her first live poet, whose sister she had for 9th grade English. A graduate of Wellesley College, she came west in the 60’s, earned an M.A. while teaching at San Francisco State, and taught beginning poets at UC Santa Cruz while completing a doctorate on the late poetry of HD. Her poetry has appeared in various journals and seven of her poems were read by Garrison Keillor on NPR’s *Writer’s Almanac*. Her first book, *Sweetwater, Saltwater*, was published in 2007, and a second, *Time and Peonies*, in 2017, both by Hummingbird Press. Thanks to the kind encouragement and keen eyes and ears of poet friends, she has another in the works close to finished. When not traveling, she still lives in the house she landed in fifty-one years ago with a garden near the beach in Santa Cruz.

**G. R. Kramer** of Alexandria, Virginia, has published in numerous journals, including the *Atlanta Review*, *Palette Poetry*, the *New York Times*, *Mudfish*, *Sixfold*, *Young Ravens Literary Review*, and *Winter Anthology*. His first chapbook, *Locomotive of Mangled Parts*, was published by Finishing Line Press in 2023. You can read more about G,R, and see other poems of his at his new Substack site: <https://grkramerpoetry.substack.com/>

**Joseph Jason Santiago LaCour** is a Spoken Word and Hip-Hop Artist from the Midwest now living in Santa Cruz. Since 2017, he has been a resident of The Tannery Artist Lofts with his partner and fellow artist, Rica Smith De La Luz. Together they form Sacred Poets, sharing their practice through books, prints, and apparel. Filipino and French Creole, Joseph struggled as a young parent and worked countless jobs. Today, his daughters are grown, he has true love in his life, and he wants to share his art, his heart, with you. You can hear his spoken word through Bandcamp and Spotify. Instagram: @josephjasonsantiagolacour —Facebook: Joseph Jason Santiago LaCour

**Holly Lane** is a California fine artist who combines painting and sculptural hand carved frames that she carves herself. After earning a Masters of Fine Art from San Jose State University, Lane began to show nationwide with nine solo shows in New York City, seven solo museum shows and inclusion in over one hundred group exhibitions. Her current solo museum exhibition is at NUMU, New Museum of Los Gatos, “Not Enough Time to Love the World”—guest curated by Helaine Glick; the show will run from August 2, 2024-January 26, 2025 as a two-part exhibition, one room with about 22 works of art and another room “In the Artist’s Studio” that will show the many steps in creating a piece, with photos of the steps, explanatory text, preparatory drawings, tools, sketchbooks, studies and materials.

**Elizabeth Joy Levinson** is a biology teacher in Chicago. Her work has been published in *Whale Road Review*, *SWWIM*, *Anti-Heroine Chic*, *The Shore*, *One Art*, and others. She is the author of two chapbooks, *As Wild Animals* (Dancing Girl Press) and *Running Aground* (Finishing Line Press), and her full-length collection, *Uncomfortable Ecologies*, is available from Unsolicited Press.

**Rica Smith de la Luz** is a multimedia artist residing and working at the Tannery Arts Center in Santa Cruz. In her private studio Sacred Mud Henna & Tattoo she offers body art, and classes. She draws inspiration from nature and folk art, and her amazing creative community.

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

**Jane McBride** (she/her) is a novelist and poet. Originally from the heart of the Rockies in Colorado, she moved to New York City to study Creative Writing and Religion at Columbia University. Her poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in the *Rising Phoenix Review*, the *After Happy Hour Review*, the *Orchards Poetry Journal*, and elsewhere.



**James McCorkle** co-directs the Africana Studies program at Hobart and William Smith Colleges in upstate NY, where he lives. His work has recently appeared in *Conjunctions*, *Kenyon Review*, *Seneca Review* and past issues of *Red Wheelbarrow*. He is the author of three collections of poems, *Evidences*, *The Subtle Bodies*, and *In Time*.

**Tom McKoy** grew up in Haverford, PA. He has a BA in English from the University of Virginia and an MS in Procurement and Contract Management from St Mary's College in Moraga, CA. He was at all three days of Woodstock and actually remembers most of it. He has worked as a dishwasher, day laborer, ski binding adjuster, casino change carrier, radio announcer, print stripper, technical editor and contract negotiator. These days he catches the occasional gopher and lives in Santa Cruz, CA with his wife, Ellen McCarthy.

**Amy Meckler's** poems have appeared in *Atlanta Review*, *Rattapallax*, *Margie*, *Lyric*, *Alyss*, *The Maine Review*, *Ilanot Review*, and *Cider Press Review*, among other publications. Her first collection, *What All the Sleeping Is For*, won the 2002 Defined Providence Press Poetry Book Award. She received her MFA from Hunter College and lives in New York City.

**Olga Mexina** is a PhD student in Poetry at Florida State University and Interviews Editor for *Southeast Review*. Her work has been chosen for the Editors' Final Round Picks for the Plentitudes Poetry Prize. She was born in St. Petersburg, Russia and lives in Tallahassee, Florida.

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

**Dion O'Reilly** is the author of three poetry collections: *Sadness of the Apex Predator*, a finalist for the Steel Toe Book Prize and the Ex Ophidia Prize; *Ghost Dogs*, winner of the Pinnacle Book Achievement Award, The Independent Press Award for Poetry, and shortlisted for both the Eric Hoffer Poetry Award and The Catamaran Poetry Prize; and *Limerence*, a finalist for the John Pierce Chapbook Competition, and forthcoming from Floating Bridge Press. Dion's work appears in *The Sun*, *Rattle*, *Cincinnati Review*, *The Slowdown*, *Alaska Quarterly Review*, and elsewhere. She is a podcaster at The Hive Poetry Collective, leads poetry workshops, and is a reader for *Catamaran Literary Reader*. She splits her time between a ranch in the Santa Cruz Mountains and a residence in Bellingham, Washington.

**Lisa Allen Ortiz** is the author of *Stem*, winner of the 2021 Idaho Prize judged by Ilya Kaminsky. She lives in Santa Cruz.

**Thomas Patterson's** poetry has appeared in 60 journals, including, *The Antioch Review*, *Nimrod International Journal*, *CutBank*, *New Orleans Review*, *The South Carolina Review*, and *Confrontation*, among many others. He has had work nominated for the Pushcart

Prize, and his poetry chapbook, *Juniata County*, was nominated for a Massachusetts Book Award. Another chapbook, *Village of Doomed Women*, was published from Finishing Line Press in 2019. His Masters Degree in English is from Northeastern University; his MED in Counseling Psychology is from Rhode Island College. Thomas lives in Westport, MA.

**Emily Portillo** is a queer poet, mother, and avid over-thinker from the Boston area. She was a poetry finalist in the 2022 Poetry International Prize, the 2022-2023 SAS Poetry Contest, the 2023 Sublingua Prize for Poetry, the 2024 Sand Hills Poetry Contest, and the 2024 Muriel Craft Bailey Poetry Contest. She is the winner of the 2022 Ellen Conroy Kennedy Poetry Contest and her work has been published or is forthcoming in *Rattle*, *The Comstock Review*, and elsewhere.

**Jesus Quintero** read his first work of fiction at the age of twenty-one; it was Michael Chabon's *Wonder Boys* (only because the original cover appeared to have a jumping, candy-apple green sixty-four, and the title suggested it could be about gangs). His essay "Anatomy of a Botched Assimilation" appeared in *Your Impossible Voice* and the 2022 *Best American Essays* from Mariner Books. Jesus teaches English, including creative writing, at De Anza College in California's South Bay.

**Mr. Koray Ricé** was born and raised in Compton, CA. He is a talented writer of poetry, rap, R & B, & urban fiction. Koray Ricé's pen name is KR, which stands for Keep Reading. He has one daughter, 25 years old.

Leading South Bay muralist **Carlos Rodriguez** had humble beginnings. The journalist Jose Posadas wrote many years ago in the SV Latino about the then up-and-coming muralist: "The path toward being an artist can take many forms. For some it starts with nothing more than a number 2 pencil and plain sheet of paper. For others it may be a box of crayons, colored markers or a water color paint set. For 11-year-old Carlos Rodriguez, newly arrived to San Jose from Mexico in 1988, his path to being an artist was through creating graffiti on walls throughout San Jose in Latino neighborhoods that allowed spaces for public murals. Twenty-three years later Rodriguez opened a studio called The Tracks, located south of downtown San Jose in the Spartan-Keys Neighborhood; he and co-owner/founder Helene Ehrlich hoped to create a space where other aspiring artists could learn and grow." Today, Rodriguez still devotes his energies to creating "powerful and inspirational high-quality visual experiences through murals, canvas art, and range of visually stunning creations that touch the hearts and minds of audiences while enriching and activating the environments in which they are installed." Learn much more about at <https://www.carlosrodriguezart.com>

**Claudia Meléndez Salinas** is journalist, writer and poet of Indigenous Mexican ancestry. In 2017, she co-founded of Voices of Monterey Bay, a bilingual online news magazine for California's Central Coast. Her poetry has been published in *La Raíz Magazine*, *Journal X*, *Acentos Review*, and it will be included in the upcoming "Somos Xicanas" anthology, due out Dec. 14. Her poem "Transitioning" was the recipient of the 2022 Red Wheelbarrow Poetry Prize.



**Alfonso "Sito" Sasieta** is a Peruvian-American poet and dancer. He trains and performs with the internationally acclaimed Cuban dance company, DC Casineros. His poems have been published in *America Media*, *Cold Mountain Review*, *The Christian Century*, and elsewhere.

Former Santa Cruz county poet laureate **David Allen Sullivan's** books include *Strong-Armed Angels*, *Every Seed of the Pomegranate*, a book of co-translation with Abbas Kadhim from the Arabic of Iraqi Adnan Al-Sayegh, *Bombs Have Not Breakfasted Yet*, & *Black Ice*. He won the Mary Ballard Chapbook poetry prize for *Take Wing*. *Black Butterflies over Baghdad* was selected for the Hilary Tham Capital Collection by Tim Seibles, & published by Word Works, while *Seed Shell Ash*—a book of poems about his Fulbright year teaching in Xi'an, China—is forthcoming from Salmon Press. David teaches at Cabrillo College, where he edits the *Porter Gulch Review* with his students. <https://dasulliv1.wixsite.com/website-1>.

**Ubaldo Teque, Jr.** is a Guatemalan poet, essayist and memoirist from Southern California. His poetry and prose have appeared in *Red Wheelbarrow*, *Pilgrimage*, and other publications, and his work has been featured on the Central Coast Poetry Show on Community Television.

**Mr. G. Anthony Topete** was born in East Los Angeles. He served 9 years in the U.S. Army Infantry, and three years as a Red Cross Director of Disaster Services. He is proud to have commanded the finest chapter of Brown Berets in the Country. He writes: "as Chicanos, Xicanos, we are trilingual: English, Spanish, and Nahuatl, with our own linguistic community, a very different culture. In Nahuatl, the term 'heaven' as it commonly appears in doctrinal Nahuatl texts, is ILHUICAC, a relational word meaning 'in the sky'—a semantic calque from Spanish cielo." Mr. Topete has two sons and two daughters.

**Kira Trainor** is a New England writer and educator who enjoys rewinding language through poetry and other experiments. She has studied writing as a fellow at the Martha's Vineyard Institute of Creative Writing, among other places. Her work first appeared in *Nimrod International*, having received an honorary mention in the Francine Ringold contest. More recently, it was featured in *Sheila-Na-Gig*, and she was named as a finalist in Sewanee Review's 2023 poetry contest. Her current interests include writing from the body, imaginative healing, postactivism, and listening to the unheard.

Nonfiction writer, poet, and collage artist **Patrice Vecchione's** art show *Imagination Migration* is on view at Gabriella Café in Santa Cruz. She has new writing forthcoming in an anthology about *The Black Scholar Journal*, where she worked as college intern, and a feature article in *Edible Monterey Bay*. Patrice's books include *My Shouting*, *Shattered*, *Whispering Voice: A Guide to Writing Poetry & Speaking Your Truth* and *Ink Knows No Borders: Poems of the Immigrant and Refugee Experience*, both from Seven Stories Press. Patrice is the Poet-in-Schools for Monterey County High Schools through the Carl Cherry Center for the Arts Poetry Program. Her column *A Walk About Town* appears monthly in *The Monterey Herald*.

**Avra Wing's** poems appeared most recently in *Hole in the Head Review*, *I-70 Review*, and *Tipton Poetry Journal*, and are upcoming in *Grist*, *Healing Muse*, *Hanging Loose*, and *Pirene's Fountain*. She is the author of two novels: *Angie, I Says*, a *New York Times* "notable book" made into the film *Angie*, and *After Isaac*, for young adults. Avra leads a NY Writers Coalition workshop at the Center for Independence of the Disabled New York.

**Joan Zimmerman** earned her doctorate from the University of Oxford (UK) through her research on solid-state physics with applications to archaeology. Her post-doc work was on the moon rocks at Washington University (USA). She was featured in the 2013 *New Resonances* haiku anthology and was the first Poet in Residence for the Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music (2014). She came to haikai after three decades of being published as a lyric poet and being awarded the Mary Lonnberg Smith Poetry Prize. As well as reviewing books, she writes articles on Japanese poetry forms. Her archival website on poetry can be found at <http://www.baymoon.com/~ariadne/form/haibun.htm>



## On Politics and Poetry

In order for me to write poetry that isn't political,  
I must listen to the birds  
and in order to hear the birds  
the warplanes must be silent

لكي أكتب شعرا ليس سياسيًا يجب  
أن أصغي إلى العصافير،  
ولكي أسمع العصافير يجب  
أن تُخرس الطائرة

Marwan Makhoul // مروان مخول

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