

Red Wheelbarrow

LITERARY MAGAZINE

National Edition, 2025/2026



CYNTHIA BRANNVALL: Frances Ellen Watkins Harper

19th century blouse, beeswax, damar, resin
approximately 17" x 20" x 14", 2020–2021

Red Wheelbarrow

LITERARY MAGAZINE

NINTH ANNUAL POETRY PRIZE



INTERVIEW: GARY YOUNG



ART: CYNTHIA BRANNVALL,
TONY MAY, GEORGE RIVERA,
FLO OY WONG, BING ZHANG



PRISON POETRY & ART:
CALIFORNIA AND OAXACA

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 2026 national edition: September 15th, 2026.

Submission Guidelines

Poetry: submit up to five poems to 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, 2026

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)

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

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

Art Design: Kathleen Roberts Design

Front cover: *Indigenusness*, Cynthia Brannvall, 2019, Historical, contemporary, and satellite maps printed on rice paper and beeswax on wood panel, 20" x 16"

Back cover: *Boy on a Train*, Bing Zhang, 20" x 28", Oil on Canvas, 2019

Frontispiece, pg. 1: *Frances Ellen Watkins Harper*, Cynthia Brannvall, 19th Century blouse, beeswax, damar, resin, approximately 17" x 20" x 14" 2020-2021

Frontispiece, pg. 10: *Portrait of a Young Man*, Bing Zhang, 2024, 20" x 16", Graphite, charcoal pencil and white chalk on toned paper

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ISSN 1543-1983

Printed by: Bookmobile

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Charles O. Atkinson, 1944-2025

*I heel, close-hauled, beat to windward.
Headwind thrums the stays, scours the mind...*

from "Dreamer at the Helm"

*Tell me we can live, eyes open, and know
this touch is the last. Let me be a membrane
to caress what comes, and let it pass through.*

from "Passing Bell for Kobun Chino, Sensei"



Bob Dickerson, 1948-2025

*The bugles send smoke to the skies
while the cannons shake with anger.
The teepees drag their feet along the river—
we pray our children will find new lives.*

from "Crazy Horse Speaks"



Joan Zimmerman, 1945-2026

*One word was my first;
one shall be my last.
Meanwhile the years break
into gold-flecked water.*

*Two red wings pivot
past the ball of light.
Trees breathe. Everything
moves with me toward home.*

from "Between 'No' and 'Forgive'"



BING ZHANG: **Portrait of a Young Man** graphite, charcoal pencil and white chalk on toned paper, 16"x 20", 2024

Words for My Sister | Bruce Weigl

I remember how she cared for me,
our working parents leaving us
alone sometimes. Not even two
years older, she watched over me
as best she could and brought things to
my crib, the cage that I felt safe
inside. She brought me bottles of milk
just warm enough but not too hot,
I don't know how she knew those things.
She told me not to be afraid
when thunder from a storm in off
the lake had rattled our windows and made
the lights flicker like stars. Even
as a child I came to see
that lonely nights are not fulfilled
unless there's someone there for you,
to pull you from the path of speeding
cars in the neighborhood,
someone to save you from yourself
before you learn your way around.
And now we are both so old
we even know the differences
between what's real and what's made up,
the myth of family a curtain you
may step behind as if to live
a dream, but this is not a dream.
I remember how she cared for me
and how without her care I wouldn't be.

Some Speculation on the Grief of Cats | Bruce Weigl

Still grieving for his brother he
lost weeks ago, my cat named Steve
searches all around the house,
and in the neighborhood as if
he'll find him there and bring him home.
He won't give up his vigilance.
At night in bed I hear him sometimes
howl a deep cry into
the empty dark in case his brother
was there to hear, and call him back.
But in the end he gives way
to the unanswerable night until
the morning when he rises from where
he'd slept at our feet, to do
it all again, to show us how.

Killing God | Bruce Weigl

Eighth grade, my girlfriend's name
was Rosa, from my neighborhood
in South Lorain, ruled by Puerto
Ricans so stylish to me I wanted
to be like them, and Rosa made
that possible, my introduction
to a culture I could not claim
as my own, but I did. Rosa
was a different kind of girl,
she stole rum from her father's stash
and we drank it in the dark alley
behind her house where dogs that no one
owned, roamed, and in the night
that summer gave to us, she put
her mouth against my mouth and used
her tongue to part my lips. She asked
me if I wanted "to be bad,"
but I didn't understand.
She asked if I'd say, "fuck god,"
out loud. She said she'd let me touch her
if I did. Even in
the face of god, my weaknesses
won out, and I said it more
than once. She laughed at me and said
it was the same as killing god.

How Words Mean | Bruce Weigl

for my friend, V., in memory

It is the time you have wasted
in your life that makes your life
so important, and no one ever
seems to have enough, as if
time could be spent, laid
on the table like cash to buy
just what you need along the way
of your journey to the hell
of your choice, the knowing of things
you can't turn away from. It's all
written down in ancient books held
together with an animal's disappearing
skin; the story already written
before words were even known.
Don't tell me your heart is full, show me
the blood across the broken pieces.
I wanted to invent a forgiveness
for your cruelties, imagined
and real, but once you drown in longing,
it's hard to find your way back
to good sense, or even to breathing
freely again. I brought it on
myself, I know, I fell in love with words.

First Snow Ohio, A Memory | Bruce Weigl

i

I know this passage well from many
years of winter here, in early
December it comes somehow at night,
so we wake to a world blanketed,
fallen branches sticking up
through the snow, like someone holding
out their arms to be saved,
or at least held close again, for one
last time. Winter and the new
year, the way things die so they
may be born again. We know
the plan, because it never stops
until it does. It's only the
beginning: first snow and freezing
air. Look at the trees and you
may see their stern resistance to
the planet turning away from
the sun. How they endure the way
we wish we could. They bend themselves
to let what blows in the night
pass through them, their bodies holding firm.

ii

I have travelled in tunnels of snow
more than was good for me, before
I knew a stranger's way among
us was wrong. We thought we'd dug
a hiding place in the mounds
of snow the plow turned over in
the dark, but he'd found us there
one night and no one else around.

First big snow of the year,
he sat among us in the cave

of snow we'd dug to hide from angry
parents, and no one did a thing.
He never said a word. We didn't
know what to do, or why
he'd come among us down inside
our frozen cave until I watched
him touch himself, his glasses slipping
down his nose, a happiness
descending all around him. That's not
the end. There's consequences for
even those who survive,
the snow piling up like worry, the snow
burying everything in its way.

Guardian | Ellery Akers

I am the one who knows you and accepts you,
stuck as you are, all over, with mistakes.
Who breathes more slowly than you do
when you slam the kitchen door;
who stands beside you
when you move too fast, break a glass,
sweep the floor.
You keep throwing your thoughts ahead of you,
trying to catch up,
and leave behind the lumbering animal
who belongs to you.
But I love that lumbering animal.
That animal and I have long talks in the dark in your bones.
That animal is often starved, confused.
But I keep on pouring the moonlight in.

Every Week I Drew Grasses in My Sketchbook | Ellery Akers

1.

This was the year
the doctors
cut into your back and took an inch.
Took another inch.

You don't stiffen when I touch you there,
but there are always two hollows,
reminders
melanoma returns,
but I still have time to love you.

2.

I broke my wrist.
The dog died.
We had to move.

But every week I noticed
how beautiful the grasses were
with their little thimbles of wind:

Needlegrass. Oat grass.
Deer grass. Brome.

The Ninety-Second Window Before We React | Ellery Akers

When a person has a reaction to something in their environment, there's a 90 second chemical process that happens in the body; after that, any remaining emotional response is just the person choosing to stay in that emotional loop.—Dr. Jill Bolte Taylor

There are tiny instructions written on every object
and across every living being
in the world.

On can openers. Blades of grass.
On the whiskers of porcupines. The whiskers of old men.
On each child. Each rifle. Each bedsheet.
The instructions are so small that no one
can read them.

Don't fire this gun.

Don't hit this child.

*He will grow up to be afraid of hands
and will always be alone
even though he longs to be touched.*

Don't cut down this oak.

*It carries secrets,
and if those secrets keep coursing through the xylem and phloem,
the forest will be saved,
and no one will die of thirst for a hundred years.*

But we can't read those instructions.

All we can do

is think of them as seconds:
the second before we speak.

The second before we slam the door.

The second before we put the key in the ignition of the car.

The Day That Unlocked the Others | Chopsy Gutowski

It is still the day she put a mint leaf on my tongue,
watching the world dawn on me.

“Yes, we can taste it!”

My eyes scanned the multiplicity of green,
the tender thin stem of lavender,
its braided coiled elegance.

She said,
“have it,
smell it,
you can put it in your letters.”

We imbibed, together we dallied,
in the middle of the world there was starlight
where cars still screeched, and this lavender
fixed itself into all embroidery.

When I was nine she woke me,
“Karen, you're not going to school today.”
But I'm not sick!
“I know,” she said, “we're going on an adventure.”

She drove us in her red Chevrolet
through leaf-spangled lanes into denser shade,
turned into a nursery with rose geranium,
lemon balm, mints, and flowers.

Balm of lemon, balm of mint
removing strictures,
Monday to Friday,
stay in your seats,
now, read the sentence on the chalkboard
now, line up for recess.

Something about it made my stomach hurt.
The nurse, she'd take my temperature, find nothing wrong.
She'd lay me down by a window on a cot.
I'd watch the trees, secrets in their leaves, wind blowing.

But on this day Mom drove me to the *Pound Ridge Nursery*.
I imagined all the kids in the playground
while in our yard, there was a silent unfolding—

I mean all it was,
our hands in the dirt, pulling rocks out,
taking plants, tapping them out of their nursery pots,
just digging holes to make home for some flowers.

But that absence, those quiet few hours,
signed by my mother,
gave the rest of my life
a long secret power.

A Few Stray Raindrops | Chopsy Gutowski

Today while chatting with neighbors
about memory issues and cats
I felt a few stray raindrops, then

the rain picked up its pace, wafting the smell
of ozone over the pavement, revealing
truths about the cold and wet.

I was transported to another time,
the day my sister pulled me from the piano
when I was practicing Chopin and Bach.

*I want to hear **your** song*, she said as
she pulled me out, to ride our bikes into town.
My sister, who read Abbie Hoffman.

At 13, in the back of the car
she told us *the thing about McDonald's shakes is,*
there's no milk in them.

On the way home we were hit with a deluge.
She sheltered us in the garage of an eccentric artist, who
like her, knew to get out of the mundane world.

His painting—
loud swirls of juniper, aegean, tuscan sun—
showcased on the side of the street in a wooden frame.

He called my father who came for us,
folding our bike wheels together
in the back of the station wagon.

This afternoon, those framed paintings—
long subsumed, my father's ashes
mix with the smell of the wet earth.

My sister, still with me under that rainy roof
like a lifetime of yearning
to be an adequate sister.

I still look for her
in piano songs and bike rides,
still practicing what she taught me:
no one else can live like you can.

Goodbye Stone Yard, My Home | Rose Black

I

inside the stone
is a stone yard

where my lover carves
black granite mountains

I carve the low tide
and new moon

in the mud we find milk
and green pennies

in the tar of the roof
wild radish, white stars

in the garden gray lizards
dark shadows

inside the stone yard
inside the stone

II

goodbye, home of north, south, east, and west
Portuguese mountain dogs, Pedro and Champ.

goodbye, back fence, damaged by fire
and the corner rimmed with black bamboo.

goodbye, what we planted, what we made:
five redwoods, Moorpark apricot
a field of red poppies
lemon tree, leaves dark green in morning sun.

goodbye, jasmine gate, flowering almond
with roots coming up through the street.

goodbye, cottage, stone shop, pot bellied stove
shipping container, blue steel.

goodbye, railroad tracks, pallets of stone:
Carrara Bianco, Rosa Aurora,
Silver Cloud, Tiger Eye, Purple Bee.

goodbye, Senri from Japan, sculptor of fountains
giant spheres and eggs the size of horses.

goodbye, sculptor Zulema, from Argentina
and *Daughters of the Nile*—
five faces, stolen daughters, river journey.

goodbye, Shiffi, from the Marxist kibbutz
carving cosmic swirls
behind a blue curtain of stars.

goodbye, purple fence of passion vine
beside our four neighbors:

Mario, with his rooster, his flock of white chickens
Wanda, singing Soul Thursday nights at Sweet Jimmy's
Big Bob, the friendly Hells Angel
Geno, whose Rottweiler dug a tunnel right into our yard.

goodbye, stone yard and stones
sent by stars billions of years ago
lifted from hearts of mountains
from the beds of ancient oceans.

goodbye, stone yard
my home.

Still Life | Ralph James Savarese

In middle school, my son,
who is autistic,
answered the question
“What is a pyramid?”
by typing on his computer,
“A sand triangle.”
The teacher was astonished,

but I knew his eye
was painterly. Every object
in the universe can be reduced
to a geometric shape:
in this case,
both sand and pyramid
are trigonal.

(A trillion tiny Tuts lie
hidden in the ground.)
Just last week, a philosopher
asked him, “What is love?”
and he typed, “Peach.”
I thought he was being clever.
Round, succulent, promising...

But then he explained,
“For the longest time,
I couldn’t get myself to reach
for the man
who wanted to adopt me.
The peach, too, just sits there
when I look at it.

ARTIST'S STATEMENT: BING ZHANG

I tend to paint people in moments of introspection or concentration when they show their real character and mood which are normally behind the mask they put on in public. My painting is also about storytelling. I try to tell stories that show the hidden truth that I sense exists deep within their own experience of the world, and reflects their living condition, their mental state, their interests, and other aspects of their disposition of being. My goal is to search out the humanity within these situations.



BING ZHANG: **Distance of Intimacy** charcoal, pastel and Conte pencils on toned paper, 42"x 34", 2024



BING ZHANG: **Father and Son** oil on canvas, 48"x 36", 2022



BING ZHANG: **Anna** graphite, charcoal pencil and white chalk on toned paper, 14"x 11", 2023



BING ZHANG: **Subway-4** oil on canvas, 48"x 48", 2019



BING ZHANG: **Subway-1** oil on canvas, 48"x 38", 2015



BING ZHANG: **Beach** oil on three canvases, 120"x 60", 2020





BING ZHANG: **Hand Wash** oil on four canvases, 88"x 28", 2010





BING ZHANG: **Boy on a Train** oil on canvas, 28"x 20", 2019



BING ZHANG: **Subway-2** oil on canvas, 36"x 48", 2015



BING ZHANG: **Voyage** oil on canvas, 66"x 46", 2021

breyting // change | Robert Fanning

There is no such thing as a country—you are one
to know. And you'll surely not find one here. Yet
you're drawn to shore. Needing to feel yourself break.
All about you—mistspeak, rivertalk, driftword—you
don't hear. Wanting to become: ice. Or better, stone.
Turning your ear from slow prayers of wind and rain,
of river. *Heima, heimur*, your words will never be
home for this. To be longing is the only belonging.

Above the steaming hotpot, sleet. September's ghostbreath drags the sky. Stranger, lostfish, listening as you swim past splashing children, dreaming their mouthglitter as common tongue. It all melts through. Warm water through icy fingers. You want even your loneliness translatable. *Myrkur*, darkness. Shadowsky, the weight of nightfall day. Stop trying to live in one place. All your summerholds are evervain. Here is longing's double stitch: the pull of being between seasons. Deep in summer, *vetur*—winter—here. Both at once. Valleys flush with sun and bloom, and yet—a snowboat docking with its freight of ice.

Gullkistan // The Gold Chest | Robert Fanning

You've seen me in every weather, coffin-shaped butte
on the mountain outside your window. Draped in low grey
clouds, rainveiled. Or painted by late day sun, as I am now.
You stare as if I'll open. What treasure do you long for, so far
beyond yourself. In what country will you believe your eyes.
Here's an evening slope stained with glow. Here's an amber,
rising moon. Goldchest, angelhaven, hiveheart. Honey, let it
all in. If you want to be enthralled. To be full in every cell.

Icing Response | Ralph James Savarese

It was almost like “The Princess and the Pea”; there were so many sheets and blankets and covers and eiderdowns that it was hard to find her, because sometimes that bedroom was very, very cold, especially in October in Aberdeenshire.

—Paul Burrell, royal butler, remembering Queen Elizabeth’s annual stay at Balmoral Castle in Scotland

It was just as cold in December in Gainesville, FL.
Our bungalow wasn’t built to warm anyone.
We could see the ground through cracks in the floor.
It was like the foster parents, caseworkers and judges
we met—the whole system a deep, fruit-killing freeze.
Even the alligators, in their Danny Rolling Club,
practiced the icing response...[1]

The first night of your emergency placement,
I gathered every blanket in the house and piled it
on top of you. What did I know about caring
for children, let alone terribly injured ones?
Just back from the hospital, you were inconsolable,
your tiny chest a tray of pansies. (To this day,
I startle at purple and yellow in my garden.)

In “The Princess and the Pea,” the heroine proved
her pedigree after sleeping in a bed with a single
pisum sativum, under scores of blankets, bruised her.
You proved yours after being thrown against a wall
and punched repeatedly in your first foster home
didn’t kill you. Six months prior, you’d been taken
from your mother (and her johns) when a gas station

attendant found you in a dumpster looking for food.
You had used a box to climb in but couldn’t get out.
The attendant thought you might be an animal.
In time, we passed the royal test together—family
court can be fickle—and you became our prince.

Yet, how to live in the near-away Kingdom of Hope,
from which you'd long been exiled? After that night,

you insisted on a mountain of covers going forward.
Perhaps you were acting out the scene of rescue.
I'd catch you stealing some from my bed, smelling
them over and over, as though my scent might ward
off your assailant. Your fabric fortress had so many
lines of defense! Later, you explained that you needed
to feel my presence in the dark, where eyes become

superfluous and the past has a thousand arms.
The weight of the blankets like some watery father
whispering, "I'm here. I'm here." At Balmoral Castle,
Queen Elizabeth, who felt caged, threw open the windows.
You, who had been locked in a closet, threw open
your heart. "I can move forward," you were trying
to say, "but you must find me every morning."

[1] Danny Rolling was a serial killer in Gainesville, Florida. To survive freezing conditions, alligators remain submerged in the water with their snouts exposed to the air.

Names | Ralph James Savarese

My father insisted that I, his first-born son,
be named after him. My mother hated the name
Ralph (almost as much as she would come
to hate him) and used my middle name, James,
the name that she preferred, to register her dissent.

She so loved this name that she gave it to my brother.
People would always ask if his middle name
was Ralph—it's Edward. Ralph comes from Old Norse,
meaning "counsel" and "wolf," which is perfect
for my litigator father. After reading a book

I'd published, a judge for the Federal Trade
Commission wrote to say that he was the meanest
man he'd ever met but also the smartest. In slang,
Ralph means "dick" and "vomit." Once, when I was
in the eighth grade, my English teacher wrote

the following sentence on the blackboard:
"Ralph ralphed all over his ralph." He thought
he was being funny. Middle school is like riding
in a balloon that always crashes. Perhaps my mother
knew that in Hebrew James meant "replacer"

or "supplanter." It also means "may God protect."
Perhaps my father was jealous of me and by naming
me Ralph thought he could command her attention.
If people called the house and asked for Ralph,
my mother would say, "Big or little?" My father

stands six-foot four; I'd make it to five-foot ten.
As in boxing, the difference mattered. When my wife
and I began the process of adopting our son, I asked
the caseworker what the J in DJ stood for. "James,"
she replied, and I grinned, but she was mistaken—

it was John. Can I be forgiven for requesting
a change at the final hearing? It was an act of vanity,
yes, but also a vow: I would keep the boy safe
and do everything in my power—he's a writer
now—to have him supplant me.

Umpteen Syllables | Harryette Mullen

1. Akiko's Bed Head

after Yosano's "Midaregami"

I wake up looking
wild. My brush with boar's bristles
should lay it all down.
Oh, tangled, roughed-up hair, what
did we do last night?

These morning-after
frizzles—coarse, rebellious, black,
knotted, kinked, uncombed,
disorderly. Messy, like
unsorted feelings.

A thousand and one
threads of midnight—my undone
hair, unruly thoughts,
a thicket of untamed dreams,
entangled with you.

2. Shikishi's Perfume

Splashing cool fingers—
her hand in running water
scented with flower,
fruit, and leaf of the orange
tree standing upstream.

3. Takuboku's Complaint

Who can recall the
name of that immortal dead
poet? Each line of
verse only brings us closer
to the final word.

4. Issa Asks the Acrobat

Where will you land if
you fall from the net, spider
bouncing on your web?

5. Basho's Frog

Returns to that old
pond where only months ago
it was a tadpole.

To the Tune of Poluomen Song | Liu Yong

Last night I slept in my clothes.
Tonight I sleep in these clothes again.
After a bit of drink, returning
At the sound of the first gong past nightfall,
Drunk and lightheaded.
After midnight, what stirs me awake?
The chill of frost, a light wind taps
At my window, swaying the flickering lamp's flame.

In an empty bed I toss and turn
After another memory,
Dreams of being mingled with you
Like rain and clouds,
But leaning into the pillow, I cannot follow.
My inch-sized heart spans ten thousand thoughts,
A few feet might as well be a thousand miles.
Great days, beautiful sights, you, me—
These feelings we have are pointless.
We don't have the will to be together.

Translated by Grace Li

婆罗门令·昨宵里恁和衣睡

昨宵里恁和衣睡，今宵里又恁和衣睡。

小饮归来，初更过，醺醺醉。

中夜后、何事还惊起？

霜天冷，风细细，触疏窗、闪闪灯摇曳。

空床展转重追想，云雨梦、任敲枕难继。

寸心万绪，咫尺千里。

好景良天，彼此，空有相怜意，未有相怜计。

Second Draft | Grace Li

The door preparing to close.
The loud sky.
None of this matters but still struggles
To fail in the right way.

How the light decides to withdraw.
It still lingers in the trees.
A room with no windows, and outside
It could be anywhere.
Isn't that what falling in love was?

You exist.
I exist somewhere else.
What is a letter but a begging
For no response?

The mountains, the streetlights,
A beam of light and the hand closing it.
Closing, as if to return the next day.
As if there was a question
waiting to be answered.

landrek // continental drift | Robert Fanning

You too begin as one. Bodyspirit, one
Pangea of being. But no-one remains whole who wants
to live. Soon hole, rift, chasm, crevice, tongue.

Wide canyons
 of want.

 The heartbreak
 of being
 alive.

 Drawn by—
 the desire
 to be. Drawn by—

 the memory of
 being one. So begins: the urge
 to speak—

 to follow your maps

 of longing
 and language.

Until you remember
 who you are

becoming.

Mourning Warbler | James McCorkle

for Christian Cooper

“They are skulkers they stay close to the ground hidden in the shrubs

typically

one of the last warblers to come through in the migration”

yellow-underside, gray hood, olive top-side, males with a black bib

late May’s arrival in rambléd thickets berry copses

scrambles on pink legs

(the morning sky is bare & blue, not a single cloud)

winters across the once & now

colonies from Belize to Puerto Rico listed as “least concern”

but what is that &

how determined

when a third are gone

ground-nesting, sweet-braids, bark and grass, no wonder they love

the ramble, to loiter & sing, loaf

no vagrant though its habits may be

(*vagari* [L.] :: *to wander* [lonely as a cloud] *valka* [O.N.] :: *wander/walk*

—*invite my soul*)

linger on the grass, echoing green

radars in May nights caught the clouds, waves of migrants

riding thermal flows north, across borders

of habitat change

the morning blazings, when

this began we hardly noticed, the summer is sooner

or there're always anomalies

days like this when someone complains

and then to say it's a mis-
understanding, a mis-
take, to take by accident or training what is not—

a dog charges into a thicket
how long can you go
without breathing—

the sky is like a pool overhead, blazing in its cloud-
lessness, how far can you go

without breathing, how many life-times

Belize and back, a ramble before mourning
little warbler, singing in the bush
(a bird in hand /) the sky ablaze



Western citizen, starring Javier Bardem

Under the worlds' leadership there's a lot of shopping carts,

ants licking dead snakes dry, the cancer of obedience, a septic pit for
the unrequited unemployed,

under the world's leadership there's a lot of Haitians eating cookies
held together with dirt, an unbearable victims' aura to multiple races,
unmovable bowel crust and toxic meat syndrome, Asshat media pun-
dits surplus, hoppity rapidly following hippity, workers constructing
Dracula's athletic shoes...

there's a lot of armament producing thugs under the world's leader-
ship, landlord dickheads, derangements that don't finally compute,
cunnilingucide, *toilet injustice*, drugs to endure consciousness, cantors
of mishegas, expulsifiers in general, no one taking you up on your
offer under the world's leadership, nowhere left to buy sour dough

Note: The poem plays out of Allen Ginsberg's poem, "Under the World There's a Lot of Ass" (Mind Breaths, City Lights Books, 1978).

on a stick, no one to distinguish and enforce ethical reasoning shaping acts of two kinds, ones that enhance the well-being of others—that warrant our praise—and those that harm or diminish the well-being of others—and thus warrant our criticism,

under the world's leadership
there's a twelve-foot reality bronze sculpture village man-village-village-boy hands held walking a Cretan village square monument commemoration complete rounding-up males aged ten to sixty World War Two grave dump village 800, 713 on the list, in the permanence of that which happens...

under the worlds' leadership
labor emperors determine the lunch break, cigarette break, overtime schedule, non-increase of wages, expendable holidays, the entire Ass-hole Brigade,

there's a lot of Blackwater Felugia My Lai Bailout broth with the bones inside of it, with the purse inside of it, with the child's nose inside of it
under the world's leadership

there's an archeology of whip handles, explosives inside toilet tanks, reinstate the draft enthusiasts, international military gang rapists, political Emoticon designers making their Emoti-cackling behind our backs, mass murder at music and garlic festivals,

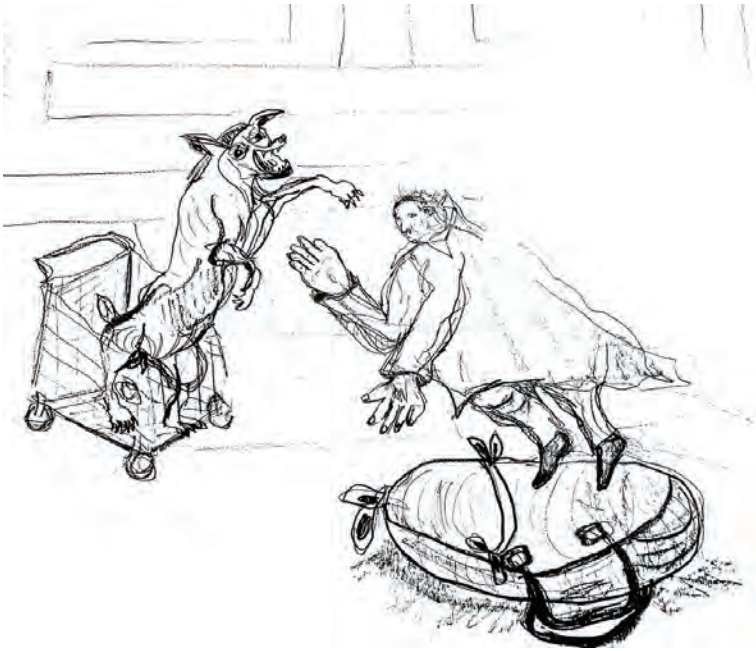
there's a lot of self-dug graves, sagittal sores, uncockered and still declitoral spaniels, one last metric ton of Mountain Dew dispersed in the enigmatic collective fertility dream,

there's a lot of disappearing egg receptacles, spermatozoa sparkulation defects, emotionoscopies, tech-dreckology, waste pipes leaking under suicide-bombed abortion clinics, the dirty feathers tradition, the sing and mate till you dry up tradition

under the worlds' leadership
there's a multiplying assassination battalion academy industry, oligarchs' multiple compounds, five-hundred thousand to one million plant and

animals' species facing the extinction catalogue,
there's a lot of unripe uranium, ocean plastic pollution set to grow four-
fold by 2050,
sleep harassment, invisible bowties, lost hair implants, sexy bags of books,
discreditors of sentient thinking, disappeared labor organizers, disap-
peared protesters against the worlds' leadership
under the world's leadership,

there's a lot of war criminals, extinction criminals, dyslexias, analexias,
melancholectomies, DOA identities, the oblivionated, the depresstapated,
and exasperized, not always with someone to rub your own foot, your
symbiotic pressure points, your direct hope and negative feeling for the
situation to end under the world's leadership
extinguishing my Retsina dream meditation marriage sleep refuge peace,
of a limited entanglement here.



Back of McDonalds puppet loses shopping cart to stray dog

Detention at the Border of Language | Harryette Mullen

después de Enrique Chagoya, otra vez

DIRECTION TO IMMEDIATELY REPEL, REPATRIATE, AND REMOVE PRECARIOUS IMMIGRANTS ENGAGED IN SURVIVAL:

Through the exercise of his authoritarianism, the Unprecedented is directing his autocracy to take any and all action to immediately repel, repatriate, and remove precarious immigrants across the southern border of the United States.

Through the exercise of his supremely granted authority, the Unprecedented has further restricted access to the provisions of the laws that would enable any precarious immigrants engaged in survival to enter across the southern border of the United States, to remain in the United States, or to submit themselves at the border for asylum, bedlam, or mayhem.

PROMISES KEPT: In 2024, the Unprecedented promised to “seal the border on Day 1.”

As the Unprecedented was informed in 2018: Precarious immigrants affect the lives of all Americans. Precarious immigrants are fellow workers who pay US taxes. They have a right to public safety. They participate in local schools, hospitals, and communities, contributing precious resources and providing essential services to the poor and prosperous Americans who need them most. Precarious immigrants create opportunities and augment the workforce of an aging population, sustaining the US economy...**which I will therefore take every action at my disposal to destroy. And that's what we're doing.**

(Unmasking) | Joseph Jason Santiago LaCour

It's an episode of twilight zone I'll never forget.
Where the old man blesses his bewildered children with a challenge of becoming
caricature witnesses against themselves.
It's emerging from our shadows.
A kind of unshaming, it's painful,
Like Dunbar done right:
Roll up and light at least one for every non-slave dialect poem spat over
the graves of gross neglect.
(Racism is not the panhandler we can ignore.)
It's a 13-inch thick pane of ballistic glass like man's attempt to capture an
ocean. It's open.
It's water is god's foolproof attempt to capture imaginations—
Infinite—deep like bad dreams.
Tea sachets of bad seeds steeping in unsweetened trauma.
It's trans like truth.
It's late like the period that becomes an ellipses.
It's the free-thinking slacker who slid past the bowery boy bullies to just be.
Left alone.
You, fuck.
It's Us.
It's Me. Asian. He. Creole.
We. Blazin. Key. Keyhole.
She...holds this gospel to be accepted like Terms and Conditions of the heart.
It's guarded by broken, ethnic men in gold rope nooses
and a tight grouping of gunshot wounds,
Revealing our selfish motivations to a nation of also dead outcasts.
Wasted privilege.
Doubt douses us in gas and laughs with a match in its hand.
You shouldn't stand until you understand.
And when you do stand, do not stutter.
Strike.
Be the light with sharp edges, educated in the ways of both blade and banter.

The answer's easy.
Believe me, excuses are too.

To outgrow them, grind 'em down finer.
You won't find a shortcut.
At times, it'll sorta suck
Your soul out when it's cold out and every ounce of you
Wants to announce that you quit!
Shi(f)t!
As long as you live,
you can love.

I'm still sleeping with my clothes on—lately, I wake up throwing a left hook at nothing. I've been starving myself and feeding on moonlight. I've felt like a broken scissor, a flaming arrow falling into the ocean. My thoughts every morning only dismantle: I keep thinking that my organs will be dredged up in fishing nets and sewn back into me, piecemeal. There is a man in a coat in the shadows of my bedroom with a gun pointed to my chest. His hands are boney turnips in the sleeves of his coat. I see him in the window of the laundromat when I fold myself in half; he is in the neon signs burning on my walk home. I make things up about him: how he prefers broken jade to intact tile, that he smells of salted fish, that he rinses his mouth with oil. In the middle of most nights, I take a long walk with gloves on. He is breathing underwater beneath the bridge, his little turnips on the trigger. I tell him he is half a bucket of water. I tell him I have eaten more salt than he has rice. I tell him I have nothing to surrender. Go ahead and shoot.

Arts & Crafts Session, Good Samaritan Hospital, 2009
| Robert Pesich

All of us with a diagnosis or waiting for one at the big table.

Hospital gowns are meant to fit us and our shadows.

Please feel free to assemble something
from these small pieces of wood.

Plenty of glitter, glue, and useless words.

No sharps but the sharpies smell fresh today.
So too the brushes, paint, all these nothings.

Pick a blank wood block. Let it be your totem.

What did they say, we can't repaint our voice?

Remember, every choice on this planet will soon be recorded.

But who assesses our fitness value and for whom?

The sunlight is so good right here.
But I'm told to sit over there now.

I want to ask a few questions and not crack this mask.

These colors are not allowed.

Create what you need. I like green.
Mix midnight with sunlight
all under the table.

What do you mean we need to learn a new language
if we desire touch?

I'm painting my poison dart frog orange
with green stripes. Its little mouth will hold
notes-to-selves

What exactly are you saying?

We're figuring that out maybe.

Preparing cultured steak for the engagement dinner | Robert Pesich

Ix slowly lifts the mold from her newly cultured steak, butterfly-shaped, thick and pink, resting on a large white platter. The edge of the right wing is lacerated. Ix stares silently at the wound.

Her sister Em leans over the platter and gasps. “You can’t present him this! It’s bad luck. Do you have another, something smaller? Do you have a cheek steak, maybe?”

“No. And I love this one. It’s beautiful and puffy. Anyway, the others didn’t take very well. They’re too small.” Ix places the mold on the counter and slowly slides the butterfly steak under a lamp.

“Can you please open that suture kit?”

“And what has he prepared for you? Do you know?”

Em unzips a black vinyl case.

“No. I don’t. It’s supposed to be a surprise. Probably cheek. Hand me the needle and forceps.”

“Here. Is Grandma still harassing you about this?”

Ix takes the needle threaded with silk and the forceps. She is quiet, leaning over the platter. Em steps back to give her room to work.

Ix’s hands move rhythmically—small, precise gestures, never rushed. The needle driver rests between thumb and ring finger, her index guiding the work. She whispers to herself,

“Good. Good. One more pass. Good.”

“Em, I’m tying this off. Can you cut?”

Em quickly takes the scissors from the pouch, leans in, cuts the thread.

“Edges look excellent.” Ix lifts the platter, then looks up at Em.

“Yes, Grandma still calls me a cannibal. The nerve—
when she still eats animals. Even pigs!”

“Yup. Crazy. I know. How long do you think it will take to bind?”

“Four, maybe five days.” Ix walks toward a large incubator
studded with green and red LED lights.

“It’s not deep. We’ll need more media though, complete media, with
stem cells.”

“Okay. I’ll get that. Do you need anything else?”

“More cremini. What you brought are excellent, but they won’t stay
fresh. I’ll need to call him to postpone to Wednesday.”

“And what recipe did you choose?”

Ix chuckles as she closes the incubator door, then turns around.

“One of Grandma’s faves, *straccetti di manzo* with arugula.
But I’m adding *psilocybe* with your cremini.

I’m not preparing this as strips. I’m going to slowly feed it to Marko.
And I’m renaming this dish:
Teonanácatl.”

“Flesh of the Gods?!”

“Yeah. Pass me my mobile.”

ARTIST'S STATEMENT: GEORGE RIVERA

Since the late 1970s I have chosen to focus on the human figure as the key theme in all of my work. The subject, themes and ideas explore the human experience in life, past, present, and looking ahead. These themes are largely autobiographical and often utilize metaphor to depict my experiences, reflections and perspectives about life, often in solitary moments of pain, peace, indecision, fear, guilt, indifference, self-inflicted silence, expectations; other times exploring the realm of relationships and the vast experiences which affect them and those close to us. I've also paid attention to the global impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and its rippling effect on our global communities, from individuals to our societies at large, and to the effects of war and aggression.

No matter how dark, I believe in Hope. The light depicted in all of my works represent the presence of Hope.

The subjects depicted in my work are friends, relatives, and my own self-portraits. Even the models who work with me are colleagues and



friends. I find this connection and trust to be essential to my work since most of the themes are reflective of my own experiences, feelings, and observations. The people who work with me have a strong sense of what I am trying to share and accomplish. We discuss what my ideas and intent are about, and we share openly our own journeys and experience.

The people who model and work with me are very important to my work, they bring their own experiences, honesty, and understanding of what we are trying to share and express. "...in the private isolated moments, when we have to face our demons, whatever they may be, real or self-imposed, these are the conflicts and moments of indecision, pain, and confrontations of life which I share through my work."

As I have continued to explore the depths and complexities of relationships, I have become more aware of the quieter, more subtle shades in my work and in life. In this journey, through art, I have found more and more connection with others, both in the past and present, including the gray areas of human experience, the fleeting moments, not dark or light...just life.



GEORGE RIVERA: **Precipice** oil on canvas, center panel of a triptych, 8' x 6', 2020



GEORGE RIVERA: Fear, Pain, Faith and Trust...and Unconditional Love
oil on canvas, 7' x 5', 2020



GEORGE RIVERA: Vulnerability of Trust and Hope oil on canvas,
7' x 5', 2020



GEORGE RIVERA: Truth, Compassion, Forgiveness and Eternity
oil on canvas, 5' x 4', 2020



GEORGE RIVERA: *Lifting the Veil, Letting in the Light* oil on canvas, 6' x 4', 2015



GEORGE RIVERA: **Four Lemons** oil on canvas, 24" x 18", 2022



GEORGE RIVERA: *Amidst the Chaos, Hope* oil on canvas, 7' x 5', 2022



GEORGE RIVERA: For Gaza (Missile Strike) oil on canvas, 6' x 4', 2025

Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina | Rob Pesich

And go back to live
in what home?
A small field of stones? Stumps?
Our village was burned down.
Even the soil flew away.

Again, every stone in Stari Most is beautiful.
But Stari Most rebuilt is not the same bridge.
And my country is not the same country.
It's just too much or not enough.
Probably like yours.

I never considered jumping from the bridge.
But now many young people return to jump
for money into the fast moving
cold River Neretva.
For a while some make a good living.

Pavane | Wilma Marcus Chandler

These are the days of barest song,
thin melodies drifting into the air,
ice on the river, dark birds.

In a town where no one is innocent,
where when Mildred dies,
we glance at each other,
and when Michael dies,
we slam and lock the doors,
we all cry privately and buy guns.

Despite nearing Spring, the trees
are still bare, the parks closed.
We eat out of tin bowls,
scrape them clean with sand
breathe only cold air
through thin fractures in the doors.

An hour ago, there was all day,
now merely time for a breath.
Folded and weeping,
we long for the season when acacia
and plum will bloom.

But when the Great Offense arrives
we know we'll be ready, alone as we are,
righteous and armed.

Ocean-Thousand, Mountain-Thousand | Taylor Gorman

Still eating wet cement. Still sleeping until the sun is dead. Still a pay-phone with a broken jaw and money to talk. Still paying the price of the living. Still discovering strangers at bus stations are the equivalent to angels. Still singing with an ashtray mouth. Still forgiving the wind that talks me into smaller stones: half moon, quarter moon. Still burning my tree branch body—the choir of birds in me still cartoon ghosts on cartoon fire. Still no use for anger. Still surprised by the kindness of ice. Still levitating in front of statues. Still a fealty to dust. Still a cutting board to a religion of knives. Still dragging my teeth to till a garden. Still writing postcards from one dead tree to the next. Still throwing a vase the size of my body. Still a snake, a thousand years in the ocean; still waiting for a thousand years in the mountains. Still wearing a mask when I go to sleep for someone else to do my dreaming. Still pressing flowers with my tongue, however long it takes.

Wild Onion | Taylor Gorman

I had a dream you were a spider, and I let you into my garden. I thought maybe god is a spider, maybe all the gods are, and that's all we need to know. I come back to this, as if to pull off another skin, another blue flame from my chest. I love the ugliness of accordion, the bleed of a clarinet, and your warm voice of French horn: what sound is what color to you, and why have you come to me as a yellow garden spider? The first dream of the new year is supposed to mean something, so return my story and feed me bread. They always say: if you felt what I felt, you would do the same, and it's true. What about wild onion, what about spring garlic? What if I claw myself to the center of a mountain, or cut my hands off to be placed at your altar? What if I couldn't tell you from any other spider, with children in egg sacs that are dust in the air? For a long time, I would have a funeral for anything: a broken pencil, a dead leaf, honeycomb I cut off the hive. I just wanted to allow myself to feel it, I guess.

In Another Life We Are Forests on Fire | Taylor Gorman

In another life, we are forests on fire; in this one, cold rivers bending. I want you like brine from an oyster—we undress on the beach to let our skin hunger. My hands on your chainmail tattoos, the metal taste of your breasts. You know a magic trick where you turn slowly into smoke. I know a magic trick where I build you out of sand and eat your glass heart. We are both lighthouses we sail away from & into each other like shipwreck. In most ways, I don't forgive you: how you quarry stone, the lightness, your touch. The kindness of the tree to be the body of the axe.

American Analects | An Interview with Gary Young

Red Wheelbarrow: The two epigraphs for your latest collection of prose poems, *American Analects*, are from 1) Confucius: “Words are all you need to get your point across” (Book XV, No. 41), and 2) Gene Holtan, your dear artist friend: “When you get to the door, throw the instructions away....” I love the space those two epigraphs open right away, contradictory axioms, perhaps complementary ones—a koan—an unsettled physics, and the lives we are about to encounter, including yours.

Gary Young: My immediate goal for juxtaposing an analect of Confucius with Gene Holtan’s final words was to explicitly draw the connection between those two men. Confucius was one of the great sages. Gene was my Confucius.

Red Wheelbarrow: I want to ask you about Gene Holtan in just a moment. But first, why a book of poems referencing Confucius now? Because the poems have the texture of analects? Or do you feel that our current “civil order” might benefit from certain of his teachings? Life was rugged for Confucius. Plenty of war, exile, and disappointments. Perhaps his later-life devotion against all odds to a coherent, lucid writing life—seeking to cut through the madness—also makes him your brother.

Gary Young: I’ve always considered my prose poems to be analects, each poem a piece of a greater poem, a confederacy of observation, lyricism, and inquiry. *The Analects* of Confucius were transcribed by Master Kung’s disciples, and I’ve incorporated my memories of Gene Holton’s pronouncements into many of the poems in this book.

That these are “American” analects is a reflection on my use of vernacular American English. I try to keep my poems as slender and as low-key as possible. I lean on a relatively unadorned demotic voice as a strategy to slip interesting or unorthodox ideas into unintimidating, easily apprehended texts. My poems are written in prose and have no titles; they couldn’t be less intimidating, and that’s by design.

Red Wheelbarrow: Gene was your cover artist for this book, and he and his wife Elizabeth Sanchez also appear in your 2018 book *That’s What I Thought*. What has it been about Gene and Elizabeth, and about Gene’s art and friendship in particular that has been so powerful and influential for you?

Gary Young: Gene and I met at a high school night class in printing. I had just completed my MFA in poetry and wanted to save money by printing the poetry journal that I'd started. Gene had spent years as a successful illustrator and commercial artist who moved to Santa Cruz where he and Elizabeth intended to live as artists. We met in that class and felt an immediate connection. I was 23; Gene was 43. We held so many of the same values as artists, the age difference seemed incidental. Gene loved to talk, and he was always eager to share his knowledge of printing, art history, and philosophy. As much as I admired Gene, he always insisted that I had taught him more than he could ever teach me. That wasn't true, of course, but he believed it. In me, he saw the young artist that he had hoped to be when he first started out. Having two children while still in his very early twenties required him to put those desires on hold. When we met, we were living the same ideal, but with a generation between us.

Red Wheelbarrow: What is the best way to learn about Gene Holtan's remarkable drawing and painting? Some of his work is archived at the Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History. I understand that Gene was originally from Saskatchewan, but that he lived in Santa Cruz in the seventies & eighties, did magazine work, turned to abstract painting late in his life. One of his joyous abstract landscapes is on your new book's front cover, and you stand side by side with Gene in front of another of his paintings on the back cover.

Gary Young: Gene had a long and very successful career as an illustrator, and much of that work is available online. The cards and posters that he and Elizabeth produced are also online and can be found in various private collections. Gene's paintings, too, have an online presence, but most are in private hands. Although he enjoyed selling his paintings, he did not spend a great deal of time managing or even encouraging his career. In that, we were always in sympathy.

As you say, the Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History have a large and very beautiful collection of drawings that Gene made of the Beach Hill area where he lived. The museum also has a copy of *The Geography of Home*, an artist's book that Gene, Elizebeth, and I produced.

Many of the magazine covers and children's books that Gene illustrated occasionally appear for sale, and his drawings, prints, and paintings frequently show up in art or fine print auctions.

Red Wheelbarrow: Gene struggles late in life with bereavement, dementia, and mortality. But Gene also comes across as a central friend in your life—not quite a Shams of Tabriz, not quite a Socrates or Lao Tzu—but extraordinary in that dialectical sense, and also in that he was so colorful. For one thing, he loved to talk, and you loved to listen—and perhaps you egged him on at times.

Gary Young: Gene needed no egging on; he spoke as he thought, which is to say that he was nearly always talking. That's not to say that our conversations were one-sided. Gene was always eager to hear what I was thinking, and we often dug deeply in one topic or another.

It's hard to think of such an intimate relationship in the grand terms that you suggest, but we knew that our friendship was something special. We weren't quite like Boswell and Dr. Johnson, because our friendship was much more balanced than theirs. If I had to pick an historical analogy, it would probably be Han Shan and Shi-te, two Chan (Zen) Buddhist monks from the Tang dynasty. Han Shan was a poet whose fame came centuries after he wrote his poems; Shi-te was his best friend and companion. Both of them were thought to be a little crazy.

Red Wheelbarrow: You write about how Gene and Elizabeth both helped you with “knowing that you were loved” (49), as you say in one of the poems. You dedicated the book to both of them. Your book touches on Elizabeth's death (she died first) as well as on Gene's sometimes hallucinatory, magical-realist bereavement. Long after her death, Gene worries “that someday her voice will be gone” (58). This is a book about friendship, but also about love and marriage (your own, as well)—marriage here as a quintessential form of friendship. Love and connection are foundational.

Gary Young: For many people who knew them, Gene and Elizabeth were like a single, conjoined unit: Gene-and-Elizabeth. They arrived in Santa Cruz determined to live as artists, and to live as closely together as possible.

Except when Gene was in his studio in the backyard of their home, and Elizabeth was in the house just a few feet away, they were always by each other's sides. Elizabeth was as taciturn as Gene was loquacious, but when she spoke, she was a revelation. Their partnership (they never married) was quite glorious, and it was certainly an inspiration to me as I married and had children. Gene had ideas about things; Elizabeth unequivocally knew things.

Red Wheelbarrow: Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism have such distinct emphases and practices though they are sometimes called “the three teachings” and are seen as complementary. How do you think about those teachings, or do you? Maybe good poetry, like wise living, is syncretic, weaves value systems, makes things new.

Gary Young: I first fell in love with poetry when I was in junior high school and bought a copy of *The Jade Mountain*, Witter Bynner's translations of Tang Dynasty poems. That book also introduced me to Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism, which I have studied, and followed, if poorly, most of my life.

By nature, I am more of a Taoist; by inclination, more of a Buddhist; but as I've aged, my love of Confucius has grown and offered solace. Right living, recognizing honor and embracing familial duty are perhaps an older person's consolations.

Red Wheelbarrow: Gary, do you see yourself as a Pacific Rim writer? I'm thinking of your longtime connection to Chinese and Japanese poetry and philosophy, also your attention in craft to concision, understatement, and letting images do the work. How else do you see that? I think I've heard you joke before that you'd love to be remembered as a Chinese poet.

Gary Young: I have never thought of myself as a Pacific Rim writer, although the description certainly fits if you consider that I have lived my whole life on the lip of the continent.

I was schooled in the great English poets, and some of my favorite poets (Gerard Manley Hopkins, for instance) are from that tradition. Rimbaud and Baudelaire certainly inspired my turn to the prose poem, and I've loved the Spanish poets—Federico García Lorca, Juan Ramón Jiménez,

Vicente Aleixandre, Luis Cernuda—from the moment I first encountered them. Of course, the great South American poets, Pablo Neruda, César Vallejo and all the rest have long been an influence. Still, my gaze is primarily toward Asia rather than Europe. My visual art, particularly my woodcuts, have been influenced by mediaeval Japanese prints as much as anything else, and my poetry hums with the concerns, philosophies, and strategies of the great Japanese and Chinese poets.

I've never harbored any thoughts that I might be remembered as a Chinese poet, but when I first had a notion to become a poet, I did dream of being a Chinese poet.

Red Wheelbarrow: How does place inhabit tone and texture in your poetry? Don't both California and Wyoming landscapes effect the prose and voice style you've found? I ask because I know you've thought about all that before—about the emotional and cultural landscapes of prose poetry, like in *The Geography of Home: California's Poetry of Place*, an anthology you edited with the poet Chris Buckley. To my ear, your little koan prose poems often carry an open prairie in them, sentences that might ride to any fence line or beyond. Last time we spoke you mentioned guitarist and singer Mary McCaslin in terms of how “landscape penetrates us and alters how we feel, think, and especially, how we speak and sing.” Her songs like “Prairie in the Sky” and her rendition of “Ghost Riders in the Sky,” have touched you, a self-described “Southern California boy who's spent most of his summers in Wyoming since he was six.”

Gary Young: Home is everything. It's our spot on the planet, how we locate ourselves on earth. Most of my visual art depicts landscapes, and I've made countless drawings, paintings, and engravings of the landscapes of Wyoming and of California. But I've also published an artist's book of poems and images of New York City, made while I was teaching there once for a semester. I've written poems and made images of Japan and various other places where I've been lucky to visit long enough to allow the local atmospherics to work on me. Home is lapidary. Most of us have more than one landscape or city that moves us.

The title for our poetry-of-place anthology, *The Geography of Home*, was lifted from the earlier artist's book that I created with Gene and Elizabeth.

That original book is comprised of 40 relief prints and a poetic essay that I wrote about landscapes, both domestic and geographic. The text is printed in a single line on the backs of the prints and runs to almost 100 pages. It was the final impetus for me to devote myself to the prose poem, to write poems that begin and move horizontally across the page in the same way my landscape drawings do.

Red Wheelbarrow: I love that story and have to say I'd love to find a copy of that book. One of the pleasures of the prose poem is its essential plasticity—fluidity between lyric and narrative, image and idea. The voice is enough, no need to dress it up. And so, you can enter any poem with equal ease through the grand doors and vistas of voice and story, or the plentiful windows of image.

Gary Young: Images are the engines that drive every poem. Voice and narrative can grab a reader, caress them and settle them into a poem, but images are what crack open the heart.

In my prose poems, I often reduce narratives to their essential components and then utilize those stories in the same way that I utilize images. I suppose I try to think of a story as an object and employ it as such.

Red Wheelbarrow: In *American Analects*, a treasure hunter finds the remains of a dead dog in a tin box in the speaker's (your) back yard; the speaker determines to rebury it even though the treasure hunter wants the tin box. It's a simple story, polished, reduced ultimately to its most compelling image (the speaker reburying the dog-remains, intact in the box) (22). The poem is the speaker's moral arc—the choice, in the moment. Something is shown, not told, and we get it. Related to that, it's interesting how "analects" means a collection of short philosophical extracts, and in your books, there is an ethics that often undergirds the gaze, the voicings, the juxtapositions. Maybe it is the poetry of a Chinese philosopher, and maybe the prose poem is terribly well-suited for that.

Gary Young: If any work of art is ethical, it is because choices were made by the artist. This or that word; this or that mark. Whether those choices are good or not, pleasing or not, that work will always be more ethical than something made arbitrarily. The artist must be responsible for the work, and that requires choice.

Red Wheelbarrow: As different as you were from Gene, art has given each of you a way of seeing what is more whole, less fragmented or anxious. And perhaps along with that, somehow, a more lucid, loving life. Yet Gene's art is quite transparently radical, inchoate, only distantly narrative—a language of color, line, texture, shape. He says his art is “outside of purpose” (32). He calls his art “mark-making” (13) (are pure expression and balance of form outside of all purpose?). At some level, do you see your own work that way, his way? These are paradoxes you do invite us to consider.

Gary Young: When Gene says that art is outside of purpose, he means that it is of no use to the tribe, to the others; it's only real use is to the one who produces it. As someone who hopes their poems and prints bring pleasure to others, I have to say that's not why I write poems or make art. That's one of the paradoxes you mention. Art conceived for the tribe, whether it be for commercial purposes or to aggrandize its author, is lifeless. Think of the difference between Beethoven and Musak, between Shakespeare and sentimental verse, between “Ode to a Grecian Urn” and the mawkish message on a Hallmark card. We can recognize the real thing. Like pornography: we may not be able to define it, but we know it when we see it.

Red Wheelbarrow: I often find in your poems an antidote to anxiety—in voice, gaze and as honed artifacts. The poems won't turn away from troubled water, but they are also such tightly built little sailing craft.

American Analects is a collection of meditations, each a miniature sublime, and at times very funny as well. So, I wonder, are you also healed through your writing process? I imagine and hope you are, as you transmute constant change and loss into meaning, appreciation, homage, and remembrance.

Gary Young: Ken, I'm not sure that I have ever been “healed” by writing poetry. But I have been writing poetry almost all my life, and all I know is that the absence of poetry, those times when the poems don't come, or when life's demands prevent me from engaging with poems are darker times.

Red Wheelbarrow: Nation and planet are in turmoil, and on top of it, we are aging, friends are dying, and now we are thinking about mortality, struggle, and loss in more visceral, concrete ways. In *American Analects*, you turn our attention to the Paradise (“Camp”) and CZU Lightning

Complex fires (24), Buson's grave (25), your own father's death, Gene's and Elizabeth's declines, other friends' passings, and many central images related to fragility of life. Have loss and an incumbent gathering wisdom changed what you see and emphasize as an artist—how you write poems and tell stories? Confucius wrote his *Analects* late in life, after accruing the dismay and wisdom of a lifetime. Wasn't this also true of Buson, who took up poetry later in life? So, one's writing can improve as one ages? Say yes, Gary.

Gary Young: Happy to oblige, Ken. Yes—of course! You've just given examples of poets whose work either blossomed or continued unabated into old age, and there are many examples that come immediately to mind: Rexroth, Milosz, Bishop, Du Fu, Mallarmé. And let's not forget the visual artists whose work dazzled until their last days: Rembrandt, Picasso, Monet, Hokusai. These lists could go on for pages.

I wish that emphasizing death and the evanescence of life was the result of my advancing age, but the truth is that I have been writing about that my whole career. I've always been obsessed, not with death per se, but with the notion that everything and everyone that we love will be lost. That idea tormented me as child, and I fear that anxiety has never left me. Perhaps that's one reason I was so drawn to Buddhism, although I find little succor there, except for the clarity of Buddhist thought as regards death, loss, and impermanence.

Red Wheelbarrow: Facing Gene's dementia is one inescapable driver in this book's exploration of friendship and aging. Gene's bereavement, dementia, and coping (in one poem, he has labeled each kitchen drawer with its contents), and his overall diminishment in later years, in no way stifles your friendship. You are with Gene to—and on—his last day. What are we to make of Gene's journey and yours with him? As we read, we admire his pluck, wisdom, generosity, ways of resistance and acceptance. But what else are we meant to take from that story, from our witness to it and the compassion you allow us to feel? What did you yourself take from having accompanied Gene on that final journey? It is beautiful that your friendship remained intact through the very end.

Gary Young: I don't know that I ever considered what readers might take from my poems about Gene. My desire was simply to capture something of this complicated, marvelous man before I died and my memories of him died with me. Every life can be an inspiration. We are often inspired by heroic individuals, by great artists, soldiers, or inventors. But I've always held that the greatest heroes, the greatest artists, the most profound philosophers remain unknown to us. They live their lives with modest obscurity, known only to a few. In the Jewish tradition, there is the notion that there are 36 righteous people unknown to each other and unrecognized by those around them. These people, the Lamed Vav, prevent God from destroying the world. Perhaps Gene was one of them.

Red Wheelbarrow: There is a poem written a year after the CZU lightning fire that nearly burned you out; in it, redwood seedlings have sprung up everywhere, even in your flower beds, "thick as a lawn" and you have to "kneel and wipe away the little forest with my hand" (57). In another, on the oldest poets' gravestones higher up the mountain, "the names are barely legible." "The rain and the moss never tire" (59). We are complicit. Nature is resilient. Art and artists praise—and then are erased. It seems important to you to remind us, and yourself, of these truths, and that somehow impermanence is almost uplifting.

Gary Young: Death can be uplifting, I suppose, but I think that most people find it terrifying or unimaginable, an appalling mystery. Death is the end of us all, and even nature, as we conceive of it, though resilient, will also end once the planet is incinerated by our exploding sun. I think our job is to recognize that fact and to move on, to concentrate on what we have, what's around us, the gift of the world we've been given, even as we recognize its evanescence.

Red Wheelbarrow: I love those huge Buddha heads described in the book (the one at Kamakura, e.g.) that you can walk inside—that are somehow stiller than the world itself (45). These are grand images of nothingness as a kind of rapture. "The metal sings when you strike it with your hand, and the world falls away" (45). "When you exit at last, there's no telling where you might be" (45). Identity is malleable, and that is a good true thing. So, does the best poetry, art, meditation, all wish us this rapture? You seem close to this kind of idea or at least interested in it.

Gary Young: I'm not sure that poetry wishes us rapture or anything else, but rapture is certainly made available to us through music, dancing, art, and sometimes poetry. Nothingness is the field on which we walk, pretending to be someplace and someone. Those enlightened souls who can inhabit that psychic space for prolonged periods live with the knowledge of nothingness and non-existence, but most of us only manage glimpses. The world pulls us back. Kobayashi Issa, a devout Buddhist and famous haiku poet wrote perhaps the finest example of this in the poem written after the death of his young daughter:

The world of dew
is the world of dew,
and yet,
and yet. . .

Red Wheelbarrow: You write a lot about nothingness in *American Analects*. You talk about “when consciousness confronts the true self, which has no voice...” (16). Are you referring to the idea of the soul there, when you say “true self”? I tend to connect self with language and consciousness. My understanding of self is that the honing and confronting and sharpening of language, as in poetry, gives us the knowing that simultaneously can express the limits of knowing. But perhaps meditation does something deeper.

Gary Young: Poetry is my discipline, the stone upon which I hone myself (or grind myself, as the case may be). The true self is the selfless self, the egoless self that has no need of language. Gene and I both agreed that mark-making is a way to approach a self that is free of encumbrances—of language, of ego. I do think that poets sometimes tap into that space, and I believe we recognize those poems when we read them; poems divested of ego, poems that seem to have appeared out of a void. The great haiku poets of Japan certainly write from that place. César Vallejo is another whose poems frequently feel like that to me, but of course, there are countless others.

Red Wheelbarrow: “There but for the grace of God go I.” The ethical argument in your work seems to be for humility throughout. The first poem in *American Analects* shares the speaker’s dream in which the word “snow” is all that the speaker finds on a piece of paper by the bedside in the middle of the night where he thought he had written out an entire spectacular

poem (hasn't something like that happened to most poets). The poem concludes: "The authentic self is inarticulate, and there is no end to the excitement of failure" (3). Comment?

Gary Young: "The authentic self," the true self that I just described, is not dependent upon language, is, in fact, non-verbal. As a visual artist, I can embrace that. As a poet, I'm locked out of that authentic space simply because I work in words. The excitement I describe in the poem is produced by confronting my inevitable failures, which are exciting if only because they produce shadows cast from that other mode of being. That may be as close as I'll ever get to it.

Red Wheelbarrow: The closing three poems of *American Analects* are a compelling sequence. I really like the ("joyful, reckless") house finch poem (61), how the last line brings the speaker of the volume emotionally so close to us: "That same fire burns in me," he concludes. That poem is followed by the poem about sitting with Gene at his deathbed, holding his hand, ending with "Outside, the sea was going up in flames" (62). The inner and outer fires in those poems are true to the passions of the book, so near to endings, also so full with the mystery of connection. The book's final poem, revisiting the CZU Lightning Complex fire's aftermath—is the third fiery poem in a row, this time both in a more literal and a more cosmic sense. The fire, ever-smoldering underground, has "blown up between burn scars" (63). "The world roils and churns beneath us" (63). Human and natural resilience in the face of loss: nature and the imagination keep on singing.

Gary Young: The world may someday end in ice, but like Robert Frost, I'll put my money on fire. Living in the woods for nearly half a century, I've endured three forest fires, and my childhood home burned as well when I was a boy. Fire is such a potent image (consider the fires of hell!). It can portend destruction, purification, and religious or sexual passion. Fire has always terrified me, but it's an interesting companion; like living with a vicious dog.

Red Wheelbarrow: I know you're a hard-boiled editor of your own work. Is there a poem, an example you can give us, where the cutaway was dramatic and where the final shape and ending really took you by surprise?

Gary Young: Unless I begin with the end of a poem and work backwards toward the beginning, which I occasionally do, the endings of most of my poems surprise me. Every poem is like getting on a train and not knowing where it's headed, and that's half the fun of writing.

There's a poem from *What on Earth*, the book I'm working on now. I thought I was writing about flowers, and how each season produces different colors at different times. Turns out I was writing about death. Go figure!

Late in the season, summer flowers take on the color of the sky:
mountain lilac on the peaks rising from the coast, a blush of forget-me-nots on the slope above the stream, spears of foxglove in the meadow. A blue bottle fly, its body glistening like a crystal, lands on the wall in front of me and doesn't move, and I ask it, what do you know that I don't?

Red Wheelbarrow: Do you think of poetry as a genre, or as a function of language, i.e., a dimension of language? For me, poetry is that function of language that tends to always be creating and confronting its own medium—its essence, terms, and assumptions—sometimes in new, even revelatory ways. Much “prose” does this very thing, and much “poetry” does not.

Gary Young: I agree that poetry is a function of language rather than a genre. I'm not smart enough to dig down into the foundational aspects of poetry, its biological and evolutionary basis (though my son Jake has published several essays on this). All speech, all language, contains the seeds of poetry, and perhaps every utterance, if listened to carefully, rises to the level of poetry (consider the occasional brilliance of so-called “found poetry”). But poetry is a made thing, as the Greek root of the word “poet” suggests. Poems are artifacts, and as such they can transcend their maker—the author—and be available to readers in other times, some who might even speak other languages, and touch them. It's a beautiful mystery.

Red Wheelbarrow: What comes first for you, the life, or the poem? Doesn't the poem begin and end with the life? What are the practices in your life that make room for the poetry?

Gary Young: Life always comes first. Art without life, without a devotion to the world, is useless. All good poems tell us something of what it means to be human, to be a part of the scrum here on earth.

I am not a particularly disciplined person. I don't write every day, or even every month, for that matter. But I'm always taking notes, always playing with words in my head. Sometimes I'm lucky enough to get them down on paper.

Red Wheelbarrow: Thank you, Gary, for this book, and this generous conversation. I learn so much and get so much pleasure from reading your work. What else do you feel like talking about?

Gary Young: Spring training. It can never come soon enough.

*

from What on Earth | Gary Young

Hiking a hill above Pigeon Point, we passed lupin, starry flax, and blue-eyed grass—then bindweed, monkey flowers, and wild iris as we climbed higher. The summit was covered with checkerbloom and puffs of white yarrow waving on their stalks. We looked down on the lighthouse at Whaler's Cove, and on the open sea that lay beyond, a dozen whales were spouting, their hot breath hanging in the air. The hillside was a spring bouquet, and the sea itself was blooming.

ARTIST'S STATEMENT: TONY MAY

My painting studies at UW-Madison took place during the early 60's, a time when expressive abstraction held sway to such an extent that it would not have been acceptable to produce realistic paintings. I struggled to find my own voice in the abstract idiom for quite a few years before essentially abandoning painting in favor of producing the three-dimensional constructions that comprised my MFA Graduate Show.

I started painting again only in the 1970's, influenced by the photo realist painters, as a way of documenting things I had built or done to my house in San Jose. The first of these *Home Improvements* paintings is one included in this selection: *A Kitchen Island*. It struck me as amusing, looking like an illustration from an old *Popular Mechanics* magazine with the caption becoming an integral part of the work. The format of white on black text was inspired by a Marcel Duchamp piece, the altered paint advertisement: *Apolinere Enameled*. I eventually produced more than 20 paintings on this theme.

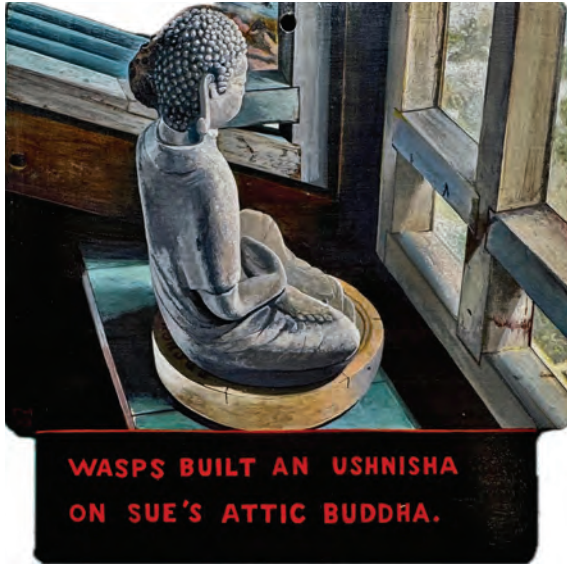
In 1983, inspired by a recent visit to Japan, I began construction of the building in my back yard which came to be called the T.House (not tea house). It was a project that occupied me for about a decade, a sort of hybrid of traditional Japanese buildings and midwestern barns that I had known from my youth in Wisconsin. In the early 90's I began another series of paintings entitled *Views of the T.House* showing various stages and details from that building's construction. The series started with 18 paintings but has grown subsequently.

In the spirit of those two groups of work I have continued to focus on things I have built more recently, two newer structures, and other art-like constructions. Books have played a role in a number of my pieces and been depicted; in some cases the paintings have referenced other art. Included here are works linked to Bruce Nauman (a one-time house-mate), Bill Wiley, Wayne Thiebaud and Marcel Duchamp.

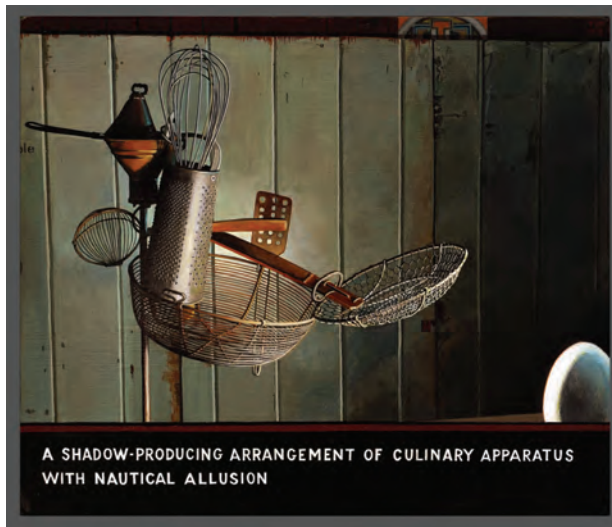
The combining of text and image interests me, sometimes as a way of simply providing information, at other times adding an enigmatic or poetic element. Hand painting the text encourages terseness. My painting is often motivated by the desire to create a more permanent record of ephemeral things. I recognize the futility of the effort but find satisfaction and humor in the attempt.

Since 2018 my work has been represented by the George Adams Gallery.

A magical addition to a friend's statue.



TONY MAY: *Wasps* acrylic on wood, 13" x 11", 2003



TONY MAY: *Shadow Arrangement** acrylic on wood,
13" x 11", 2003

**A device contrived to cast a large shadow on a concealing shoji screen.
Part of the show Domestic Odyssey at the San Jose Museum of Art.*

The beginnings, plus a late addition to the Home Improvements series.



TONY MAY: *A Kitchen Island* acrylic on wood,
13" x 11", 1979



TONY MAY: *Alley Fence* acrylic on wood, 13" x 11",
1980



TONY MAY: *Mended Sidewalk* acrylic on wood,
13" x 11", 1980

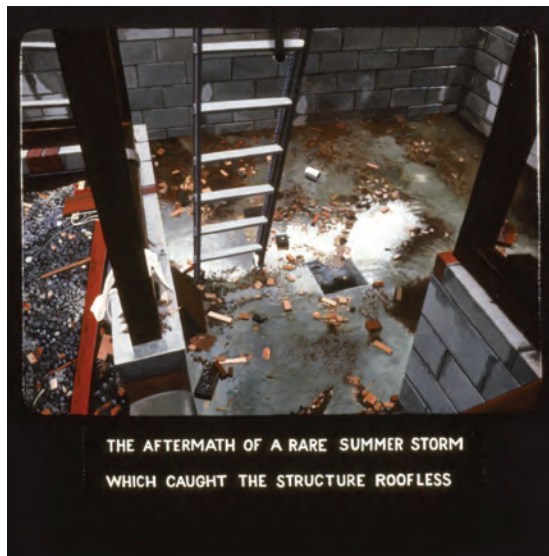


TONY MAY: *Thirty Nine Years Later* acrylic on
wood, 9" x 9", 2018

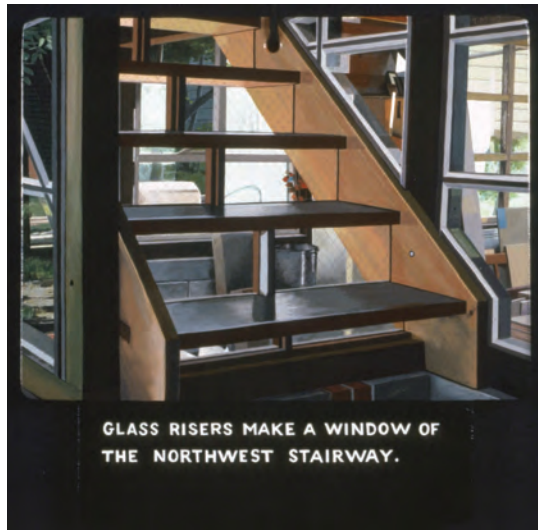
Paintings from the Views of the T.House series.



TONY MAY: **Maquette** acrylic on wood, 9" x 9", 1983



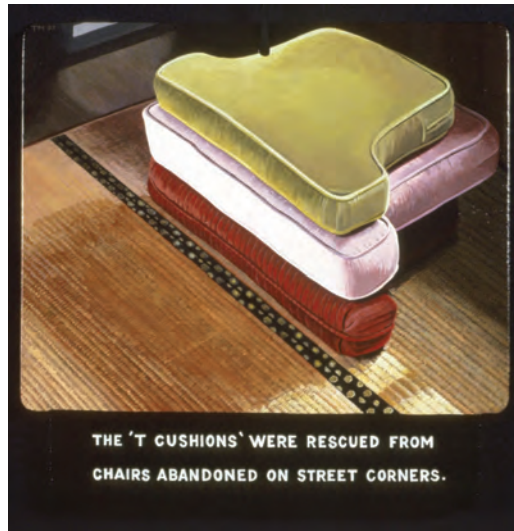
TONY MAY: **Aftermath** acrylic on wood, 9" x 9", 1992



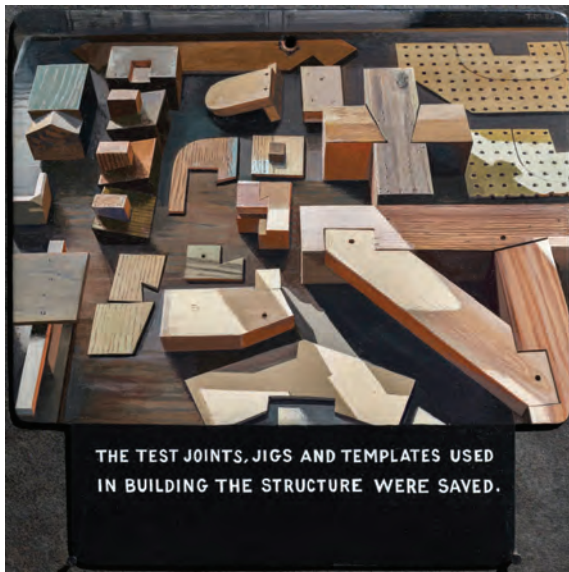
TONY MAY: **Glass Risers** acrylic on wood,
9" x 9", 1982



TONY MAY: **T. House at Night** acrylic on wood,
9" x 9", 1992



TONY MAY: **T. Cushions** acrylic on wood,
9" x 9", 1992



TONY MAY: **Test Joints** acrylic on wood, 9" x 9",
1992.

Paintings of art involving books.



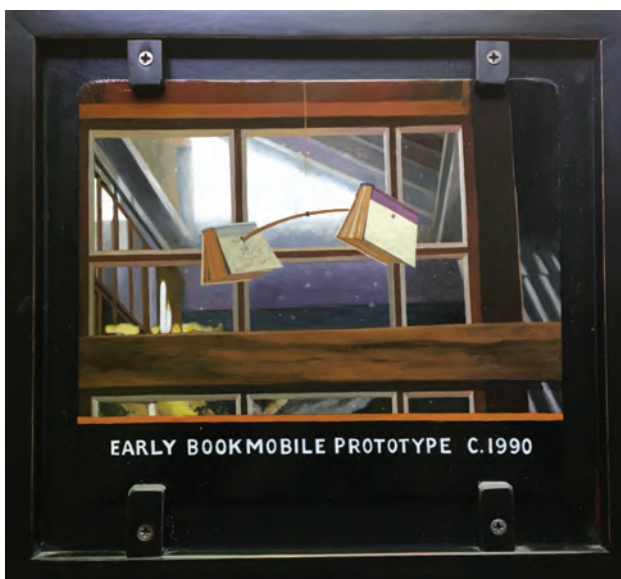
TONY MAY: **Book Shelf** acrylic on wood, 9" x 6", 1982



TONY MAY: **Book Roof Test** acrylic on wood, 11" x 9", 2001



TONY MAY: **R.C. Boat** acrylic on wood, 13" x 11", 1976



TONY MAY: **Early Bookmobile** acrylic on wood, 9" x 8", 1990



TONY MAY: **4# Book** acrylic on wood, 9" x 9", 2021



TONY MAY: **Four Books** acrylic on wood, 9" x 9", 2022

Miscellaneous Topics



TONY MAY: **Gratia's Decoy** acrylic on wood, 9" x 9", 2018



TONY MAY: **The Mitered Corner** acrylic on wood, 9" x 9", 2013



TONY MAY: **First Rain** acrylic on wood, 9" x 9", 2015



TONY MAY: **Tea Warming Appendage** acrylic on wood, 9" x 9", 2024

*Some paintings referencing work by other artists:
Nauman, Wiley, Thiebaud and Duchamp.*



TONY MAY: **Fireplace Flue Stopper** acrylic on wood, 13" x 11", 1986



TONY MAY: **Non-Slanted Step** acrylic on wood, 9" x 9", 2021

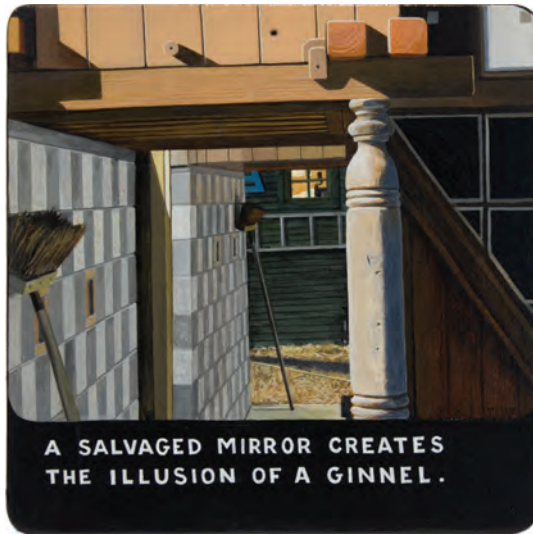


TONY MAY: Ethan's Cake Request acrylic on wood, 9" x 9", 2020



TONY MAY: Rue Larrey Door acrylic on wood, 9" x 9", 2025

Deep Views



TONY MAY: **Salvaged Mirror** acrylic on wood, 9" x 9", 2017



TONY MAY: **Looking Down** acrylic on wood, 9" x 9", 2021

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 ninth annual poetry prize.
Stephen Kuusisto was this year's judge.

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2025 Winners

1st Prize: "Veer," Emily W. Pease, Williamsburg, VA
2nd Prize: "Mother Lode," Michele Parker Randall, Sanford, FL
3rd Prize: "Once Opened," Melissa McKinstry, San Diego, CA

These poets have received awards of \$1,000, \$500, and \$250 respectively, and Gary Young of Greenhouse Review Press (Bonny Doon, California) has produced an original broadside of Emily Pease's winning poem, "Veer."

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2025 Finalists

"Evensong," Sébastien Luc Butler, Brooklyn, NY
"Lorca in Love," Justin D'Alesandro, Parsippany, NJ
"Jury Pool," Robbie Gamble, Brattleboro, VT
"Elegy for JOANN Fabrics," Ian Hall, Tallahassee, FL
"Nightmare," Lee Varon, Cambridge, MA

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Selected Semifinalists

Justin D'Alesandro, "Uncles"
Delicia Daniels, "Sonya Massey"
Sandra Chavez Johnson, "Things I Could Not Forget"
Kurt Luchs, "Lucy Looking Up"
JoAnne McFarland, "Steady"
Melissa McKinstry, "Personal Ad"
Lee Varon, "Before Internet Dating"
Lee Varon, "Dating with Disabilities"
Donald Wesling, "Monarch Chrysalis Case"

Veer | Emily Pease

My mother said, *remember*, cigarette
tucked between two fingers, *remember*
who you are. 1940s Hepburn, thin

smoke browning her nails. *Remember*
who you are. Again, again. But who
I was, I wasn't sure. When she lifted

her knees, pushed to let me go, did she
know? Infant daughter, birth-bruised.
Years later, I climbed to the roof, met

stars. Because it is hard to know
who you are, who you are not. Outside
in the dark: my cat's red eyes. Feline

stepping over leaves. She knew who
she was. Not me, yet. In the morning,
shaving, my father seemed sure. Hummed

hymns, tacked prophylactics behind
the headboard. Finding one, I went
straight to the dictionary. In order to know.

How one small package gapes open a door.
Remember who you are, my mother said
each day when I left the house for school.

Meaning: don't veer too far. Something to do
with family. In art class, our teacher stepped
one foot on a chair, mounted his desk. Short,

stout, bearded, first name Dean, hand tucked
inside his coat, renamed Napoleon. What
he did not say: I'm gay. We all knew anyway,

who he was, what he was not. How he drove
to school in his top-down Impala, thin hair
lifting from his scalp. In class he liked to say,

when you draw a line, don't be shy.

Mother Lode | Michele Parker Randall

Imagination turns spiders into upturned hands
grasping, green the color of just opening leaves

on a Red Maple. The morning wind tidal,
rushing in and back, pushing sand and pollen

across a concrete pool deck. The pool an ocean.
I hung upside down, knees hooked over thick,

swaying branches twenty-five feet skyward.
Imagination turns spiders into tactical machines,

all hinged elbows and ankles, bolts and gears
screaming for oil. They spy on the girl

who is not up-right, whose friend drifts near,
tan and black, furred, speaking in coded yips.

Who can call it folly to conjure worlds that exist
within us? Imagination a pulsing, winding vein,

ore we mine and mine. The upside of looking
at the world flipped, the loosing of masks, thoughts

of *what would people think*. The unfinished atlas
underneath my skin, each sky, every tree revered,

and a pull to climb again, climb tonight. Count
meteors and pick which comet to inhabit next.

Once Opened | Melissa McKinstry

can we ever fully close?
Ask the egg, the womb,

the moon, the wound,
isn't the rush

of knowing sharp
and keen? Face to face

with the newborn's gaze,
we're also in the grace

of hospice, suspended
between the swell

of sweetpea pods
and their papery curl

of husks, listening
to the waning chorus,

the echo of blue-gray
in the glacier's crevasse.

Ask any mourner, any
mother. Ask me.

—after Liz Kalloch's painting by the same title

Elegy for JOANN Fabrics | Ian Hall

As we speak, private
equity is getting the last shred of tenderloin

off the bone. Their spreadsheets & algorithms cut
cleaner than any oncologist. I'm talking margins

that'd make a CyberKnife blush. *Grandmas are supposed to
knit & work needle*—according to a jowly man in my Facebook

comment corral—*now they just laze around & watch
pimple-popping highlight reels. Thanks, feminism!! Crying*

shame, another man laments. *That store always smelled
like those candies old church ladies kept*

*in their big kangaroo-pouch purses. Takes me right back
to way back when.* Midst this hypertensive talk

of handheld brains & global gubbermint conspiracy, I'm
thinking of the jobs lost, of the kitchen table

come-to-Jesus moments that are looming
in Greater Flyoverville. Of missed rent & the bite of that COBRA

premium. It's more or less the same tired story: communities
gone hardscrabble. Cars up on cinderblock. More people

know the going price of scrap than starting
wages at that ghosted battery plant. A constitutional Right

to Work state, by god. Coal miner, roughneck, lint
head—all made redundant, rarefied as the dodo. & now

the bell tolls for the JOANN Fabrics *team member*. All in a day's creative destruction. But me, I'm an optimist. Always

look on the bright side: those superstore layoffs have more time for their hobbies. Listening

to Dave Ramsey while they drive Uber. Learning to code, grind crypto, or maybe even

crochet.

Jury Pool | Robbie Gamble

The gilt clock hands
rotate slowly, so much time
you can almost watch it extrude

through solemn courtroom
air. So much oak: paneling,
lecterns, unforgiving benches,

a forest felled and reassembled
into neoclassical austerity.
The defendant is a Black man

sitting still in a swirl of white
court officials. He is practicing
fierce patience, concentrating

as if he holds the sole antidote
to the toxin of verdict. He is
charged with distributing drugs,

and as I am being excused from
service on unexplained grounds,
this is all I will ever know of him,

this and the frame of his broad
shoulders rising and falling,
while judge and lawyers

horse-trade jurors in a sidebar,
assembling an optimal twelve.
Outside, asphalt is hot and creaky

under afternoon glare, and I
find my car, slide back into
a concourse of open possibilities,

having cosplayed a citizen
to segue through the briefest
whit of another's life sentence.

Evensong | Sébastien Luc Butler

along my walk cedar waxwings bleed
through cattails / wolf-spider eggs pulse
rotting logs / each year my heart tires more
while saying nothing / my synapses prune
in the hands of avid landscapers i'd like to
but will never meet / i imagine
they've my great-grandmothers' faces
their cold fingers like rain
extinguishing burnt earth / that time after storm
i watched wasps rise out of their dens as smoke
it's loss / but not exactly the same as sad / how i imagine it
will be when i owe nothing to anyone living
only the dead / should be able then
to make a house of ruin / past the woods
an abandoned warehouse catches dusk's light
better than maple leaves / contains more shades
my bones grew until they didn't / count suffering
among the gifts of god / some say
there's an oak's dark hollow
where we'll find each disappeared thing
weighed with loam / a basin to sift
all little oblivions

Lorca in Love | Justin D'Alesandro

and with the sun
the carnations came rising
vermillion-stained, vigorous things
bore lungs to breathe the air that raised you
gardener of my life
you emerged fully formed
from the crown of your father
wise, clad in wet earth and linseed oil

gardener of my life
hands of great work
pull the lead from inside me
past the sepal
extricate the shrouded heart

Nightmare | Lee Varon

for my son, Jose

*In March 2025, the president sent 238 men (mostly Venezuelans)
to El Salvador's maximum-security prison, CECOT.*

I try to sleep
Others sleep
with no sheets no pillows no mattress

They are taking my son
away in the night—
Will I join the mothers
with their worn shoes
waving white scarves?
Surely, I'm too old to be afraid

They shave your head, my son—
Between two masked guards
you walk bent down, hunched over,
like the others who have no face

40,000 people—
no sheets no pillows no mattress
A place, my son, with no sunlight
held in a cell how many hours 20? 21? 22? 23?
When does fear break/ crack into shards of nightmare?

With your brown skin your tattoos
they are taking you away in the night

I search for anti-anxiety meds
But the nightmare breaks through—
no sheets no pillow no mattress

I will join the mothers in the streets

Uncles | Justin D'Alesandro

the uncles, fish men
men of fish and men who
marry to completion
men who look down
men of promise
men who hold no shame
on the outside
men with titles
 my favorite son macho dad of the year papa lobo
men who love father
men put in gourds, bones of men
fish bones, fish men
men who drink
men who say one more round before i go
men who tip over ten
men with necks who grab
necks of beer who kiss
necks who go neck and neck with
other men who have three fears
 losing mama losing the family weakness
who cause a riot
men who riot, men who revolt
men who slam
men who love their son until he is thinking about
men who come home
fish men, men of boats and oar and horses
men who bring luck
men who lick it up
men who feast men with teeth
men who devour
tear the earth apart atom by atom and say look at what i had to do

Dating With Disabilities | Lee Varon

She was a matchmaker for people
with disabilities.

Don't focus on your disability, she'd chide.
The cowboy with a prosthetic leg asked
how was this possible? And the woman
with no face said, smiling, focus on your
good leg. I said, learn the art of lying.

The man with a prosthetic leg said: You can't hide
hollowness. The woman with no face said
accentuate your figure. I'm accentuating
my memory. Remembering the time
in winter I woke up staring into clouds.
Fell into clouds & they followed me home.
My cabinets were stuffed with clouds.

I ran to the shore—
I could no longer walk so painful
were its grains of sand. I could only see clouds
but I could remember everything—
flocks of terns rising,
orange beaks screeching in alarm.

Poet seeks comping from an upright bass. Someone to walk the fingerboard like long lines running toward the right margin, someone to turn to when there is nowhere to go but a hanging indent. Must take me along. Must pluck me, cajole me, & feed me. Best if your 4 notes school me to consume the music, swallow the instincts, gulp the space between the next breath & no breath. Knowing the joke in every solo is ideal. Is it something like: we're not dead yet, but we will be, & if that's imminent truth, what can't be said? Must listen when the sky whispers I've got you, the water moans I want you. When the horn is muted & the drum is brushed. It's past midsummer here, so knowing how hot light muscles through thin windows is good too. Knowing the ride pattern of smells before rain is even better. Last month I swallowed the full moon, number 330 since my son was born, number 18 since he died. Must know how that tastes—like a Charles Mingus solo, hip to ribs. Must be willing to become scroll, shoulders, & F-hole. Must be willing to admit such implausibility of life.

Before Internet Dating | Lee Varon

I am a cripple. I choose this word to name me.

—Nancy Mairs

people with disabilities met at crip dances.
I went to one; considered suicide afterwards.
I never got around to it.

The man with a prosthetic leg
knocked it against the floor
to gain the floor. Everyone stopped talking.

At the crip dance
I was embarrassed that I was embarrassed.
I believed in disability rights. I was

an invisible cripple. I could pretend I was normal.
He grew on me
he in his mournfully sloping cowboy hat

cowboy boots fake alligator—
this beautifully imperfect one. He knew I was lying;
he didn't care.

He told me his name—I wrote it down, tucked it
into my shoe as the music played
& we waltzed off together

as if we would dance for a thousand years.

Things I Could Not Forget | Sandra Chavez Johnson

How the hallway tasted like soap and blame.
How the beds hated to be made.
Even they knew something was hidden.

The way one person paints another
with misfired empathy. The gravel that would jump
into my throat when asked to say more.

This poem is not about grief but about swallowing water for fifteen years.

Despite everything asking to be forgotten, I remember
the claw of my backpack when I moved in with my sister
and her husband—
The dread of his car door when I had no one else to call.

My silence remained dark and rough,
something you drag through the night.

I saw everything.

To reshape myself into someone I would have
been if I could have been, I dreamt days, remade
myself an ocean or its waves.

I carried a secret the way a child might carry—
There's no metaphor here.
I carried it.

Sonya Massey | Delicia Daniels

Sonya Massey, Beautiful Black vessel
released
to an antiblack mission

Sonya Massey, Beautiful Black vessel
released
to antiblack mantras

Sonya Massey, Beautiful Black vessel
reconstructs

Black Survival:

1. Strong black women answer doors within 3 minutes
2. Strong black women boil tea to maintain their health
3. Strong black women have faith

In the name of Jesus

Steady | JoAnne McFarland

*But I am black as if bereav'd of light.
William Blake, "The Little Black Boy"
Songs of Innocence*

I place my fist beside the vase

There there

these petals soon will fall

I couldn't wait for my beauty to arrive

I went out looking

I went out looking for my prize

and soon I found

I had to beg

I looked around for what wouldn't

break me

The deeper I went

the blacker I got

Overcome by the quiet I slept

Monarch Chrysalis Case | Donald Wesling

(Gr. chrysos, gold)

One found attached on underside of arm
Of chair, one on the rolling dolly's metal
Bar: pale green color of a drawing room
In England, rich but understated subtle,
In form a tiny acorn with gold dots
Encircling the cap, more patterned gold
At base. The light green gathers gold and shoots
The observer's eye a little stab as old
As insect evolution, older than us,
Who've figured how this works. Like leaves
Are mini-folded in their buds, the two-
Wing flyer's tucked and origamied:
Elaborates the case that it bursts through.

Lucy Looking Up | Kurt Luchs

Gazing up the golden stair
made of polished oak
the twenty-year-old chihuahua
is losing what's left of her mind
each tiny foot on tip-toe
she peers heavenward sometimes falling
coughing and wheezing and
coughing again like a smoker

who's never going to quit
and every time she looks
she circles leftward in place
little brown Mexican whirlwind
her nails clattering like dice
coming up snake eyes
what is she looking for
the gods of course all of us

are always looking for the gods
who left us at the foot of the stairway
to paradise no more able
to climb than this feeble dog
the gods in this case being mama
and papa upstairs showering
in the cruel heedless manner
of all gods everywhere

cleaning what's already clean
while we mortals wallow in our filth
deaf as Quasimodo
and very nearly blind too
like this creature with one swollen eye
that's all milky cataracts and another
that's pure black sightless pupil
the only thing that still works

is her nose which tells her the gods
are upstairs committing godly
unspeakable acts
in realms of indescribable bliss
while she circles around and around
looking up and falling down
around and around and again around
looking up and falling down

Gold | Ellen Bass

Who would have thought the portal would be
a parking garage in Phoenix
and we'd be twenty again, tender and dazed.
We didn't forget who we were
or who we were married to.
One martini, icy and sweating.
A dozen oysters, almost alive.
And in the cool of the underground, when
your mouth bruised my throat,
I allowed only a small whimper. It was enough
in that it was not enough.
My wife and yours kept my hands
from reaching under the gold
of your shirt, kept you from the bone of my hip.
There are always conditions. Persephone,
forbidden one seed of the pomegranate,
could take Hades into her over and over
in that damp cavern, their sexes swollen.
All that we were forbidden.
But we were granted this.
As if you'd left my single bed a minute ago
to get a glass of water.

Telegram | Gabriella Gutiérrez y Muhs

I will send a telegram / Enviaré un telegrama
A los dueños del amor / to the owners of love:
The squirrels, dogs, babies and orangutans
Las ardillas, perros, bebés y orangutanes
Who know not how to read our writing;
the equivalent of planting carrots on concrete.
Que no saben como leer nuestra escritura;
el equivalente de palantar zanahorias en cemento.

Enviaré un telegrama simplemente por hacer ruido
El telégrafo hace bellezas al teclear mi mensaje.
I will send a telegram, simply for the noise
The telegrapher makes while it taps my message

Let's make love simply for the pleasure of knowing
The sounds we make while knowing the product is love.
Let's plant carrots on concrete, because intention matters
Let's send a telegram to people who cannot read it,
For the pleasure of sending it and hearing it. Let's communicate.

Hagamos el amor simplemente por el placer de conocer
Los sonidos que hacemos al saber que el producto es el amor.
Plantemos zanahorias en cemento, porque la intención importa
Mandemos un telegrama a gente que no lo pueda leer,
Por el placer de mandarlo y escucharlo. Comuniquémonos.

ARTIST'S STATEMENT: CYNTHIA BRANNVALL

I am an art historian and an interdisciplinary multimedia artist who works and lives in the San Francisco Bay Area. I teach art history through a global lens at Foothill Community College as full-time tenured faculty. An advocate and ally for social justice and equity, my artwork explores identity formation envisioned in an imagined deep time terrain of memory, reclamation, and the geographies of forced and voluntary migrations of body and spirit.

I make paintings and sculptures out of vintage and antique clothing fragments and textiles as a nostalgic lure to evoke a soft-landing place to ease into complex conversations about race, labor, history, and slavery. The faded, frayed, stained, and torn fabric fragments conjure the presence and labor of women. The patterns and marks in the materials I use as a media function as potent signifiers of labor, trade, industry, slavery, luxury, baptisms, weddings, funerals, gender, and history. I imagine the abstract patterns in the material as protein folds of DNA that migrate across bodies of water and continents through the bodies of ancestors.

My work engages intersectional entanglements and collisions of history through a feminist lens to explore themes of identity. My art also exists in an interstitial space between craft and fine art, the past and the present, painting and sculpture, landscape and portrait, abstraction and representation, history and the present. I believe that to be fluent and at ease in these margins is to understand the movement of people, ideas, and resources through forced and voluntary migrations with clarity, empathy and honesty.

My work has been widely exhibited in juried group exhibitions in the San Francisco Bay Area, San Luis Obispo, Los Angeles, New Orleans and Washington DC, and has exhibited in multiple museums—MoAD, San Francisco; New Museum Los Gatos; Triton Museum; Marin Moca Museum of Northern California; Museum of Art and History, Santa Cruz; Museum of Contemporary Art, San Luis Obispo; and Euphrat Museum at De Anza College.



CYNTHIA BRANNVALL: **Nestled in Identities** photograph of the artist, historical, contemporary, and satellite map fragments of America, California, Africa, and Sweden printed on rice paper and beeswax on wood panel, 16" x 20", 2019



CYNTHIA BRANNVALL: **Francis Ellen Watkins Harper** 19th Century blouse, beeswax, damar, resin, approximately 17" x 20" x 14", 2020–2021



CYNTHIA BRANNVALL: **Claudette Colvin** vintage blouse, beeswax, damar, approximately 19" x 20" x 14", 2021



CYNTHIA BRANNVALL: **Fannie Barrier Williams** Victorian era blouse fragment, encaustic and resin, 18" x 14" x 9", 2023



CYNTHIA BRANNVALL: **Roar** Pink vintage 1950's era dress splayed open, resin, 4' in diameter x 6" in the center, 2022



CYNTHIA BRANNVALL: **Pink and Blue** After unknown photographer, image from the artist's archives of family photos printed on gampi chine collé, pink and blue powdered pigment, 24½" x 32", 2019



Not Quite Tame

CYNTHIA BRANNVALL: **Not Quite Tame** Vintage birdcage, globe, sea fans, vintage and antique trim, lace, and crocheted doilies and trim. 19" x 36" x 12", 2024



CYNTHIA BRANNVALL: **Fulfillment** photograph of the artists father, historical, contemporary, and satellite maps printed on rice paper and beeswax on wood panel, 16" x 20", 2020



CYNTHIA BRANNVALL: **Generations** photograph of the artist's daughter, historical, contemporary, and satellite map fragments of America, California, Africa, and Sweden printed on rice paper and beeswax on wood panel, 16" x 20", 2019



CYNTHIA BRANNVALL: **The Threads That Bind a Divided Nation** Vintage and antique textiles painted on stretched crinoline, white thread in long stitches, 58" x 36", 2020

What if, after the hood flew up while we were driving,
the freeway packed, you didn't have the good sense
to stick your head out the side window and steer
from the center island one lane at a time
toward the nearest exit ramp? And what if I hadn't
done the same, to guide you past the shine of cars,
yelling Go now, go now! What if instead we had plowed
into them like a crow with a broken wing, our young
bodies flung through glass in the days before
safety belts, you in your beaded vest, me in my skirt
of fire. Remember how we stood on the roadside
like two lit matches, amazed to be alive, two flawed
humans having achieved the impossible, you
peering up under the black hood, clicking the broken
latch over and over, both of us knowing what breaks
breaks without warning.

The Great Wall of China cannot be seen from Space,
but you can see swarms of city lights at night, and if you dropped
a penny from the top of the Empire State, the most
anyone down there would feel is a slight sting. We do
not use only 10% of our brains, we use the whole
enchilada depending on what we're doing, and bulls
are not enraged by the color red or blue or yellow,
as bulls are color blind- it's waving that silk cape
that ticks them off. You *can* put a baby bird back
into its nest, and hair and nails do not grow after you're dead,
the skin shrinks back. Toads don't give you warts
and you can't go blind from masturbating and men
don't think about sex every seven seconds, though they
fantasize about it on an average of once a day.

We'll Always Have Paris | Stephen Kuusisto

In the sea, the beautiful sea there are translucent creatures and it's lovely to say it out loud. You can tell a lot about people as they shout from the battlements. I myself am a see-through person though walking down the street some of my innards are visible. On the corner of Lexington and 42nd when the light is good you can see my spleen coming at you. It happens quick and because you have no companion you can't tell anyone. It's a mystery to me how this works. I know you know what I'm talking about. I suspect you've thought about this. You've seen strangers observe your own spleen perhaps on a bus. A man looks up from the paper and there's your purple balloon right in his face. He was an English major long ago. He thinks: Must I observe you?/must I stand and crouch/Under your testy humour? Like anyone who sees a free floating spleen he knows how to laugh and cry at the same time.

Problems of Self-Realization | Stephen Kuusisto

The businessman slumps at his desk. He's faintly unwell but not enough to call the doctor. He voluntarily sacrifices himself to his vocation. All his co-workers do it. And because he doesn't know about the iridescent moon-glow snake in his adrenal medulla he only knows aspirin—his external object of worship. He really doesn't feel himself. Long long ago he left the inner man behind, the one who knew the difference between the untouched deepest parts of himself and someone like Christ. He has almost nothing. He has bits of lead soldiers in his gut. He has lottery tickets deep in his pants. It's been years since he's read a good book. It was something about unconscious automatism. He remembers the silly sweater he was wearing back then. The one with knitted elves on the front which he gave away because the elves appeared to be drowning.

Late Fall | Joseph Millar

The day dawns shrouded and overcast
broken by world disasters
following one after the other
though the storm has ended the drought
and the streets shine black
and the buckeye leaves
heavy with rain
rattle the window.

The gray rabbit sleeps with its paws
folded under the clean
dry breast-fur
keeping its counsel of vigilant peace.
I take out my pen in the silence,
I pass through the gates
of nothing to say.
November: more sky
than grass, more
sea than land,
more night than day.

Spring Insomnia: Words for Kelsey | Susan Glass

We wake at three
and find our way outdoors.
Ceanothus and mock orange dizzy us, heady scents:
what moonlight smells like.
I stand barefoot in pajamas;
you snuffle the apple tree,
then rustle under blackberry vines.
Far off, a mockingbird rollicks,
frolics through labyrinthine scales,
a wild night xylophone.
New leaves on the apricot tree
twitch into being even as the air,
balances between two days,
holds and creates the oncoming second,
moment, illusion of time moving.
You return, your paws damp as basements.
Together we breathe,
and shimmer.

Four Love Poems | Tim Fitzmaurice

Letter 1

It should begin with
something ... some something
to show it is not for everyone
but is intended just for you.
It is something meant.

I would like to know
how to write such a thing
that will slide slimly into
your single hand handily.

But it is a locked thing
This secret of fondly,
of finally finding you
sitting just there and
reading just now.

The gulping in,
the drinking in of it.

Do you know that today
I am deep in confusion
and sadness. I am sorry to say it.
I can only imagine that it
falls like my night upon your day

because your sweet shine
is still shining shinily
so fine to think you are
thinking of me while I
am thinking of you.

The world is so often an
unopened envelope and a neglected
letter. It should have been either read
or never written.

I am you can see
dancing around this. Not
getting to the point and
it is clear I am not
sure there is any point
to be gotten to.

I have already forgiven myself for this.
I knew that if I did not have the
permission to write something inept
that I would not write anything at all.

Letter 2

Yes in prison my student writer said
tell us how
to write love letters!

What do I know about that?
Did some Roman perfect this
and I missed the lesson
in school oh yes where they told me
this is how you do it? That
you can seduce sighs
from stones with this charm.

What is a love letter?
I know what is not a love letter ...
that last thing I wrote to you.

You are not here.

Okay so a love letter begins
with an emptiness.
with a hole.

That is certainly true
of this man who is a murderer
who is bereft
who asked me
to teach him to write a love letter.

Oh I could not tell him
that at that very moment
I saw your face
your crooked smile.
It would have
been a torture to him

A love letter is nothing less than this.

Letter 3

A love letter is saying something to a person
that they want to hear and then saying to them
what they do not want to hear and
maybe by some kind of
cross infection of speaking between the longing
and the acceptance, and the swallowing of
the one, will move irresistibly into
the other.

A love letter is about freedom.

Letter 4

Well the letters had to start somewhere.
I knew it would not be a simple start
and it is not.

But now
that I have done it so wrong,
maybe I will do it finally right.

Did you hear
the bird last night?

The one that I sent it to you.
It had to go a long way
to get there.

I am not surprised
that it was exhausted.

But it still sang.

New Poems & Art—Salinas Valley State Prison and Beyond

Over the past decade, *Red Wheelbarrow* has remained committed to publishing the voices of incarcerated writers, especially those being held in California State Prisons. Prison psychologist Dr. Benjamin Bloch and the poet Ellen Bass began a workshop at Salinas Valley State Prison in 2015, and offshoots of that original workshop exist to this day. *Red Wheelbarrow* is grateful to be able to continue to feature voices of incarcerated writers in great part thanks to crucial art-and-writing-in-prison programs supported by Right to Write Press, The East Bay Community Foundation, and The William James Foundation. Even through the pandemic, teachers and volunteers like contributing editor Rose Black and William James Foundation writing workshop teacher Tim Fitzmaurice have continued to work regularly with many amazing, devoted incarcerated writers, both in person and through the mail. Dr. Bloch once wrote that “in a world where volition is systematically crushed—and not only by the people in uniform—the writing 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.”

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The 80s | Ubaldo Teque, Jr.

Aqua-net hairspray, white & pink can, extra-super hold.
Pop-up hairstyles, the pompadour ruled.
Eyeliner, black gloves, high energy disco & freestyle
kept me up at night, and at the principal's office.

White or black Jap flaps—*no socks!*
Tight slacks, jeans, collar shirts, black leather jacket.
Left ear pierced, gold cross earring, black leather boots, or creepers.
Rockabilly, stray cat look *always!* the main attraction.

Two milk crates packed with 12inch records, two technique,
1200 turntables, pyramid mixer, earphones, cerwin Vega-box speakers,
and helicopter lights made everybody look fast in the dark.

The Teddy Boys, the Alexandria Hotel, The Hong Kong Cafe, DQs in
East LA, & the Casa Camino Real made us sweat.

Dropped Volkswagen bug relaxing on Porsche alloys, Toyota Celicas,
Datsun B210s wearing deep dish custom tires.
Black rubber 12inch Pep Boys Car antennae, on top an orange 76-gas station ball.

No sound system, but the ghetto blaster hiding in the back seat will do.
Way past midnight, racing towards Rampart & Beverly, World-Famous Tommy's
double chili cheeseburgers or King Taco in East LA, or San Pedro Street.

Low budget. Some dead, some disabled, others in prison.
Goddam Pepsi Generation.

Evolution | Ubaldo Teque, Jr.

Captain Crunch looks good, costs too much.
Tony the Tiger, Lucky Charms, Cocoa Puffs
taste so good in my dreams.
Corn Flakes and two spoons of sugar—
“*Theeer Gate*,” Dad would say—
carried me and my little sister through.

Elementary, Jr. High. Payless shoes
made it possible to feel
in style. Selling crack cocaine
brought in name-brand shoes, clothes,
records, and a video arcade
addiction. At 15, I owned

my first car, a '79 Mustang.
Same year, I joined the gang.
At 17, first arrest.
Paroled a month before
turning 22, no education
or vocation. Fear of impoverishment.
Public hazard, private gain.

Cold Vibe | Ubaldo Teque, Jr.

Inside, a cold vibe roams
the wings and hallways,
hibernates in the cells.

On streets it runs loose at clubs,
house parties. The addicted
don't stand a chance,

and the dope fiend is headlocked
into dangerous debt. Nothing matters
once pulled into the fold.

Lies and shamelessness kick into gear,
intoxicate year after year. Faces
suffocated, tangled in drapes and

speaking to walls. *Hotel California*
plays in the distance. Halfway to hell,
cold vibe will take you there.

Pay close attention, it's everywhere.

Juana Said Yes | Ubaldo Teque, Jr.

for Juana Arzate Teque

Of all the times I wish I would've
stopped you to converse,

I cursed myself as you strolled on by.
Tu sombra y espacio left me thirsty
all alone not knowing your location
or who surrounded your sizzling energy.

I drowned in loneliness, polluting my body
with toxic things.
Handsome deceit attracted fireflies.

No me tengas remordimiento por no averte parado.
Your eyes ate me, your walk just like summer.
Te prometo el cielo y las gotas puras de mi amor.
No sword can cut our love.

Never forget the 21st of September,
or the jewel box with carved flowers.
No pesas y no te conviertas en aire.
Sin tus odos or ponytail me pierdo en
el infinito, and all the Decembers til my
last breath can never be alive.

Mesoamerican Love Story | Ubaldo Teque, Jr.

for Juana Arzate Teque

Your spider web voice breaks off
the civil war within me.

Streets, alleys and chaos disappear.

Your warm embrace takes me where
the trees and plants speak to one another.

A red rose rests on the left side
of your wavy cinnamon hair.

Your bare feet breeze by the branches
and celebrate freedom dancing.

Earth *thumps* to your step.

To have a taste
of your crimson lips.

To the East our ancestors gaze
at our mistakes, sorrows, and joys.

—after G. Anthony Topete

On the Day 18 Flower | G. Anthony Topete

after "Meditations in an Emergency," Cameron Awkward-Rich

I wake up and it breaks my heart, Mi Cora, Mi Cora
Seven-hued lilies of Te-net-sa-li,
The flowers of the goddess Xochiquetzal . . .
Toltec Queen . . . Adelita in the sky
Your long black hair
Like a black cat with a shiny tail
One with the Aztec wind
Ese hermosos lunar arriba de tus labios
Is one with the Aztec wind . . .
Your Brown Beret
And lil Kung Fu shoes
Are one with the Aztec wind.
Walking with the wind
Talking with the wind
Above the clouds
You were born of the Aztec wind
Libra a star from a Southern constellation
A woman of the Aztec wind who doesn't say a thing
Only asserting a living Chicana theory:
**Visionary leadership, boldness, optimism, and the ability to see
The bigger picture.**

*

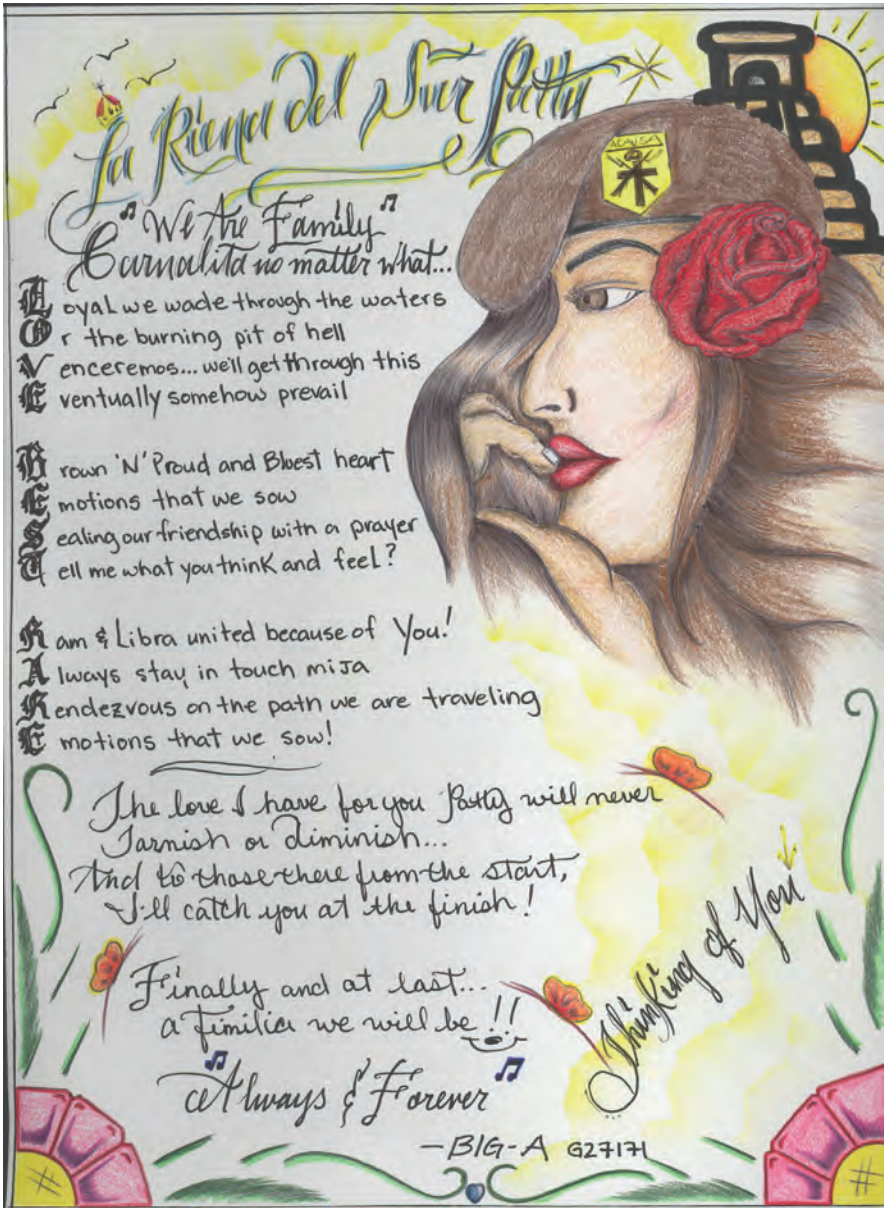
Dancing! Waves, waves, waves!!! Autumn, Autumn, Autumn!!!
With a blue sky, and a silver ocean.
It's your world, Mi Dulce Amor,
Mrs. Leticia Xochi Topete . . .
To the music of your sexy deep dark eyes, dance!
Beautiful barefoot Queen!!!

*

Purple and Pink. . .
Purple and Pink tulip flowers
Fell in love but once.

*

The manipulations of love,
A widower's delight,
Treasury doors opened in a single moment.
And
You were a ray of sunshine.
Truly your LOVE was HEAVEN SCENT.
Oh, how the joy of us did shine . . .
A day without promises falls into night.





Manifest Destiny | G. Anthony Topete

Much has been written about prison life, including quality and size of the prison facilities, overcrowding, conditions of accommodations in cells, quality of food, the ability to maintain relationships and contacts with individuals and family outside of prison, treatment by staff and the Parole Board of Prisons, subjective perception of deprivation, quality of relationships with other prisoners, and the violence that is a part of prison life. However, the purpose of this essay is to point out the benefit from institutional-based education in a variety of ways, in addition to decreased recidivism, such as 1) The development of personal skills and attributes, 2) Building pro-social networks, and 3) Strengthening prosocial bonds to traditional institutions.

My name is George Anthony Topete, #G27172. I was born in 1965 and I grew up on the Barrio streets of East Los Angeles, California. I served 9 years in the U.S. Army Infantry, and three years as a Red Cross Director of Disaster Services. Also, I served as the commander of the AV Chapter#3 of The Brown Berets. I have now served almost two decades on a 7 to life term in some of the most violent prisons CDCR has to offer. During my time behind the Wall I have seen inmates experience various types of provocations, abuse, and degradation. The prison environment often causes inmates to become more aggressive, lazy, and/or lonely, and some even develop mental illness.

But here at CMF (California Medical Facility), I have seen something exceptional take root, which I can only describe as the evolution of evolving standards put into action in the Education Department, MOAEC (Mountain Oaks Adult Education Center). First established by Principal Nessi, and fine-tuned by Principal Dr. Johnson, and refined by Principal Ms. Bowman, something I have never seen in any other CDCR prison anywhere. Here it feels and is run like a real school, which culminated in being awarded the Distinguished School Award last year.

Everyone here is vested in the education of the students, from the clerks and the T.As, to the Office Technicians, like Mr. E. always doing his utmost to track down student transcripts, including Veterans' Joint Services Transcripts, to the hard work of the Testing Coordinators, like Mr. Dodson, Ms. Billing, as well as teachers like Mr. Epps. And the remarkable efforts of Ms. Vito and Ms. Clemens, our Solano College proctors. While true incarcerated individuals face many challenges in pursuing higher education, the programs started here under Warden Cueva (who has recently retired) have been powerful tools to combat the challenges of Prison Life, the education department here at CMF-MOAEC has several programs to provide supportive services for all students, including college students.

In closing, I'm still on my journey of evolving and growing, and I'll never stop. I came to prison in 2009, but instead of giving up, I used this as an opportunity to better myself through education here at MOAEC-CMF. Today I have been published online at Humans of San Quentin.com, and in three books—*Colossus: FREEDOM, An anthology of Voices across the CARCERAL wasteland*; the *Red Wheelbarrow*, 2023; and the *Red Wheelbarrow*, 2024.

Earning my place in PTK (BETA MU GAMMA CHAPTER), and my AA Degree from Solano Community College has been one of my greatest academic accomplishments. Given my background, I am very proud of what I have achieved. Because if this 60 yr. old from the barrio schools of E.L.A. could succeed, anyone can. And for those who have. . . I believe that our ability to access and complete some form of college degree or credential will increase our chances of overcoming post-incarceration barriers. They tried to bury us, but they didn't know we were seeds. Education is the key to the future.

My Heavenly Angel | Andrew Jesse Hernandez, Sr.

Earlier today, I had a dream
So realistic, it seemed to be,
I was relaxing upon a hilltop
Where an Angel, had appeared to me.

I asked if I was hallucinating
Softly she replied, "No. Why must you doubt?"
Feeling as though it took me forever
For my response to come stumbling out.

Eventually, I'd found my tongue,
When surprisingly, I blurted out,
You're so Angelically beautiful.
"True beauty's within, NOT from with-out."

Awe struck, by my Angels simple answer,
Innumerable questions, I must ask.
Gracefully, with soothing comfort, she spoke.
Sincere compassion, is called for this task.

What is the purpose for your presence?
Why choose to reveal yourself, to me?
Am I deserving, of this Blessing?
She said, "Have FAITH, and you shall soon see."

This celestial being, crafted, by GOD
Took hold of my hand; as she led me on,
Instant inner peace befell upon me.
Ensconced in the LORD'S embrace, we move on.

Whisked Heavenward, above the night stars,
Gazing downward now, upon the earth,
"Why do you think I was sent to you?"
I said, *because I was feeling hurt.*

“I have been sent, in response, to your cries.
By GOD’S GRACE, I’ve come to ease your sorrow,
Through HIS LOVE and MERCY, I’ll strengthen you,
Preparing you, for a new tomorrow.”

Looking beyond this single moment,
Seeing HIS grandeur and divine plan,
“Now, can you see why I’ve come to you?”
“It is so you may LOVE, once again.”

Awaking, from my insightful slumber,
Astoundingly, I’d recalled everything.
Once our gaze fell upon one another.
I declared, “You’re my Heaven sent Blessing!”

Ride the Lightning | David Massette

Relampago, Blitz, Folgore, Lightning,
From Zeus or Thor or Vulcan?
Vivaldi's Summer Concerto has a shepherd who weeps at the lightning,
While Nietzsche's Higher Man wants to be lightning—
Zarathustra's tree, the lonely tree, waits for the lightning . . .
Is lightning good or bad?—Does it lie beyond good or evil?
Despite a proverb—the fact remains—lightning does strike in the
 same place twice.
Lightning rods (now here comes the social parallel for a turn)

“The quiet dogmas of the past do not meet the exigencies of the stormy present.”

We keep seeing lightning hit over and over and start fires . . . I myself
have been hit by lightning many times. . .

Wer viel einst zu verkünden hat
schweigt viel in sich hinein
wer einst den blitz zu zünden hat
muss lange—wolke sein—

whoever has much to proclaim one day
keeps much to himself in silence
whoever has to kindle lightning one day
must for a long time be a cloud.

— The clouds are ripe with lightning —

An Ode to Caissa | David Massette

O Dear Goddess of Chess

How I love you best

 Your own rule

 Is “Don’t be a fool”

And with the pieces make of them

 A mess!

O Dear Goddess of Chess

Why do we love you the best?

 Your lessons so cruel

 If we be the fool

Checkmated we failed the test!

Weirdo | Koray Ricé

Nobody understands me / they say I'm a weirdo
tattoos on my body / dam they seem to fear those
black Doc Martin steel toes / they say I wear weird clothes
they seem to be scared of me / cuz I wear a trench coat

I like to spike and dye my hair / I don't wear what others wear
I like my music to blare / so people hear it everywhere
people never treat me fair / talk bad about me but I don't care
every time I go somewhere / everybody stops & stares

Nobody understands me / they say I'm a weirdo
piercings on my body / lip nose eyebrow ear lobes
black Doc Martin steel toes / they say I wear weird clothes
they seem to be scared of me / cuz I wear a trench coat

Nobody understands me / I'm misunderstood
I couldn't find one friend to play with / in my neighborhood
their parents told 'em I'm a witch / and that I do drugs
but they don't know my household's strict / my father is a judge

people treat me like a crook / they always give me dirty looks
they say you shouldn't judge / by the cover of the book
in high school they called me a freak / they treated me like rotten meat
'til I grew up made music and blew up / now things have changed.

Invisible | Koray Ricé

While I look & feel human, I think I'm really *Ghost*.
3 children, one older, one younger than I.
Not old enough to hang with the oldest,
Too old to hang with the youngest.

Yesterday I *fell* in the living room,
Nobody seemed to notice!

4 dinner plates, 5 people at the table,
me, the 5th, had no plate.

Today mother rushed off to work.
She sat 2 whole lunches on the counter for her 3 kids!
Wow! Both peanut butter & jelly sandwiches.
What!? I have a peanut allergy!

Father walked right past me! Said *nothing!*
My birthday!?

I think I should dye my hair the color of the rainbow.
Take *that* Mom!!

While I'm at it, I'll get ½ my face tattooed, *Dad!*

Then get *both* my eyebrows pierced, *Big Brother*.

Along with my nose, bottom lip, and both my cheeks!
Little brother.

Two red hoops, a silver bull ring, a yellow spike, & 2 orange ball studs!
Trust me, it wouldn't matter!
I'm *invisible!!*

I-Sight | Koray Ricé

Eyes open—Steel, concrete, barbed-wired electric fence.
Eyes closed—Steel, concrete, barbed-wired electric fence.
Eyes open—Identifying people at a distance from their walk.
Eyes closed—Identifying people from the sound of their voice.
Eyes open—Snow-covered yard. Freezing my black ass off. I'm more tropical!
Eyes closed—It is snowing, I'm shaking. Nothing I do seems to warm me up!
Eyes open—Oh, what a picture! Such a beautiful woman. Natural, make-up free!
Eyes closed—Off to dream-world. Searching for a dream lover.
Eyes open—5 feet from a guy getting stabbed 82 times. All I can do is watch.
Eyes closed—Sweating, running, being chased by wolves. Wake up!!
Eyes open—My face, neck, chest, and back are covered with sweat.
Eyes closed—But I can no longer find peace, sleep evades me.

Black Christmas | Koray Ricé

If you've never been to a "Black Christmas," read this, close your eyes, and imagine.

There's always one person in a Black family who plays host to all the family get-togethers: birthdays, 4th of July, baby showers, Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Years (maybe). I'll take you now into a Black Christmas, since this is usually the most festive time of year.

In my family the host is a female. She's a cousin. My Grandpa is her uncle. I'll let you do the math to figure out what cousin she is. Anywho, this cousin is real territorial about who brings what when it comes to food. Don't, I repeat, Don't! cook & bring a dish she's cooking, or you're going to get your feelings hurt: 1) your dish will mysteriously disappear and/or 2) you'll get cussed out.

Cooking is a sensitive subject for my family. The individual who hosts feels like she doesn't like or trust every family member's cooking. Like, seriously, I remember the one family member who was told "don't cook/bring anything." Well, she did anyway and the host smiled in her face, "Oh, you brought a dish, huh?!" "Oh, girl, you didn't have to bring anything!" Soon as the person was out of earshot the host turns to me and says, "Go throw this away. I've been to her house. She's dirty." It shocked me, but I did as I was told. (By the way, that's what we're taught in Black families: 1. respect your elders 2. do what you're told. I didn't have no other choice. I was living with the host.) Soooo, 30 minutes later, the woman asks the host, "Hey, where's my dish?" The host smiles, then lies straight to her face, "Oh, girl, it was soooo good, it's gone. It got ate up."

Ha, imagine that. Some people do snack, but it was early in the morning. The family had only been together an hour or so, and nobody had eaten anything yet.

At a Black Christmas cooking starts 2 days in advance (well at least for my family it does).

At a Black Christmas the real eating is done around 5-6pm. This gives people a chance to arrive, catch up with each other, and then get drunk enough to play nice with the family member or someone attending the get-together they don't like.

The morning is really for the kids. They're busy playing with toys and with each other.

They open their presents, and presents that need to be assembled are put together by the teenagers, aunts, uncles and/or random adults who know what they're doing. You don't want to be the kid who's stuck with those who don't know what they're doing while everyone else is having fun.

The afternoon is for catching up with everybody. If you have a sports fanatic aunt or uncle, they're busy rallying up enough people to go outside and play some sports. This is Black Christmas, so the sport is going to be either basketball or football. Depending on the vibe we might play both.

For the less athletic the sports will be for fun, but for the others this is serious. The midday is also spent watching sports on TV, getting drunk, and giving the kids sparkling cider so they can feel grown or older.

Bragging rights are on the line. Well, that's noon 'til like 1:30-3pm. Now this is when some people will start drinking or getting some type of intoxicated. They do this because this is what they do, or they know they have to put up with somebody or some folks in the family they don't like, can't stand... shoot, may even Hate!

While there are many good things about Black Christmas: friends, family, memories, and comradery, there's a bad side to Black Christmas too.

There are always one if not multiple people that get drunk and break up the get-together. Alcohol really is liquid courage! The more one drinks, the shorter their patience gets. And the looser their tongues get. With Black families this happens so much that we're making bets on which family member we think is going to break up the party.

The family gets together for the elders in the family. It's the grandmothers and grandfathers, and great aunts and uncles who want to see the family together. So some folks show up with plans to leave & go do their own thing solo bolo, or with their friends or the family they've created. It's the drunk one, with no plans to leave, that always starts some B.S! The drunk one probably has priors, too. They do this because they know they can get away with it. The host isn't going to kick them out, They're family! So that's who ruins the party.

Let's get back to the party. While the adults (and some teenagers) are floating on cloud nine, it's always one kid that's more curious than the others his age, and he/she is busy sniffing around the adults and not hanging in the room with the other kids, like he/she was told to by their parent(s).

(Yes, contrary to popular belief there are lots of 2 parent households for Black kids. More than what's thought or believed.)

This kid is snooping around the adults. Should this kid catch the right adult who is mostly intoxicated they are going to get a small sample of some alcohol or one hit (maybe two) of pot. I've been this kid, which is how I got my first sip of alcohol. My grandfather saw me sneaking and peeking. He calls me over, holds out his glass, and says, "go ahead, take a sip." Well, I took a swallow. Pops then advises me, "Don't tell yo Momma!" Cool! Our secret. For your curious minds, Paul Mason was the alcohol.

Soooooooo, now evening has rolled around. Time to eat! The kids are sent to the kids' table. Kids get fed first. Why? Don't know. You got multiple ages, starting at 4-5 years old up to like 12-13 years old. I guess to make the kids feel cool they're given champagne flutes with sparkling cider inside. They can now join the toast. Next to get their food is the women. Men and boys go last. Once everybody has a plate we pray over the food and give thanks for the food, family, and to be alive. While some put a little of everything on their plate, me I get a can of cranberry sauce, a small piece of turkey, fat slice of ham, a load of homemade mac'n cheese, a fat slice of sweet potato pie, and a big spoon of yams. That's my meal. It's way more food there. Greens, stuffing, duck, corn on the cob, gizzards, ham hock, black eye peas, green beans, cauliflower, BBQ chitlins, BBQ pig feet, neck-bones, cornbread, biscuits, multiple cakes, pies, muffins, okra (fried), etc. Enough! I'm getting hungry. Two lucky kids get to break the wishbone in the turkey. Even though my family was poor I didn't know we were. All this food & gifts. Oh, in my family there's more gifts passed out after we all eat. So that's 4-5 PM. People are now fed, high, and drunk. And if you got somewhere else you can be, or need to be, now is the time to get there. Remember that drunk family member I mentioned earlier? Yeah, the doomsday clock is ticking down & it's about to be bad. Somebody's about to act like an ass or show they ass. This is what I miss when thinking about the holidays in prison.

This day is full of fun, family, and memories are made. This is why people will tell you I grew up poor but didn't know it. You have so much fun that it isn't until you look back when you're older, like wait!! I never got every gift I asked Santa for. As a kid all you remember is what you did get, the fact that you get something made everything okay.

There's two sides to everything. So here's the bad side of a Black Christmas. Just like all other Black get-togethers somebody gets so drunk they start tripping and end up breaking up the party. This is usually the person who made up their mind, "I'm drinking all I want and I'm not leaving. I'm here for the day, most likely spending the night," because they're too drunk to drive home safely. Since they're family they feel "Aint no way the host is going to kick me out, I'm family." This is true. And this person probably has priors of getting drunk and acting up so they know they can get away with their behavior again.

The intoxicated gets off that alcohol aka truth juice and the more they drink 1) the bolder they get 2) the shorter their patience and 3) the looser their tongue gets! This drunk person is usually bringing up something from the last get-together or may bring up something that is years old, possibly from childhood or their teenage days. It's funny the issues people hold on to. That is until they get older, a little more honest, get drunk, then tell their truth.

For us Blacks in the family, that's not the target. We find this hilarious! This is real life drama! not reality TV! no scripts here! It gets to a point where certain families make bets on which family member is going to break up the get-together. Even knowing the good time will be brought to a halt, we Blacks still continue to show up at the next family get-together, because it's a great time even in a hard time, and not being there when some stuff jumps off leaves some disappointed they missed it. Hearing about it never does it justice. It's just different to say "I saw..." rather than "I heard..." because with recaps the recapper puts their spin on the story. They can make a simple thing sound life-changing, or award-worthy.

If you are not Black and have a Black friend, do you wonder why don't they invite you to their family get-togethers? This may be one reason, if not the reason why: as Blacks we deal with our family because we have to, they're family. But we are not about to air our dirty laundry, especially to another race. In reality all races have at least one family member they're not proud of.

What I miss most about Christmas is my family getting together. But I can only hear about what happened, since now I'm serving a 55 double life sentence in prison.



***Series of woodblock prints and texts made by
women incarcerated at TANIVET's prison in Oaxaca.***

***By Lucia, Kelly, Mabel, Adriana, Perla, AK-P, Concepción,
Mey, Fann, Piromanx, Nelly,
Jessyka (set free), A. Porras (set free)***

**Art teacher: Angel Eduardo Lopez
Coordination and photography: Margaux Guiheneuc**

The **Gráfica Siqueiros** engraving workshop was founded in 2017 inside the Santa María de Ixcotel Prison in Oaxaca de Juárez. Created by César Chávez and Jason Pfohl, the project offers incarcerated artists a space and the materials to freely express themselves—learning new skills that help them release emotions, generate income, and prepare for their future reintegration into society and the artistic world.

Margaux Guiheneuc, a French tour guide who has made Mexico her home for the past seven years, has supported Gráfica Siqueiros since 2021. She visits the prison's art studios, bearing the artists' works and words beyond the prison walls through exhibitions, online sharing, and by showing them to friends, family, and the clients of her tour company.

« I deeply admire their resilience and talent. The incarcerated artists became life teachers, opening my eyes to the transformative power that art practice and writing can have on ourselves and those around us. They inspired me to create and to see life from a different perspective. » Margaux Guiheneuc



We are pleased to share that two of the women artists (Jessika and A. Porras) involved in the Miradas series regained their freedom just weeks after the workshop.



“Miradas” (translated into English as **“Looks”**) is a series of prints created by thirteen women from the Tanivet Detention Center, near Oaxaca City, where an art studio opened four years ago, offering classes accessible to all incarcerated women.

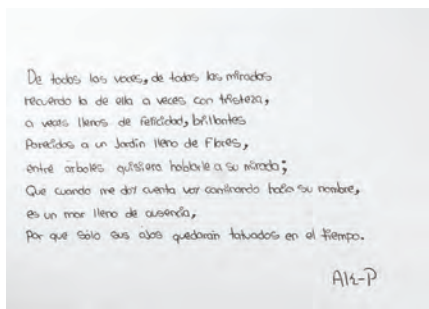
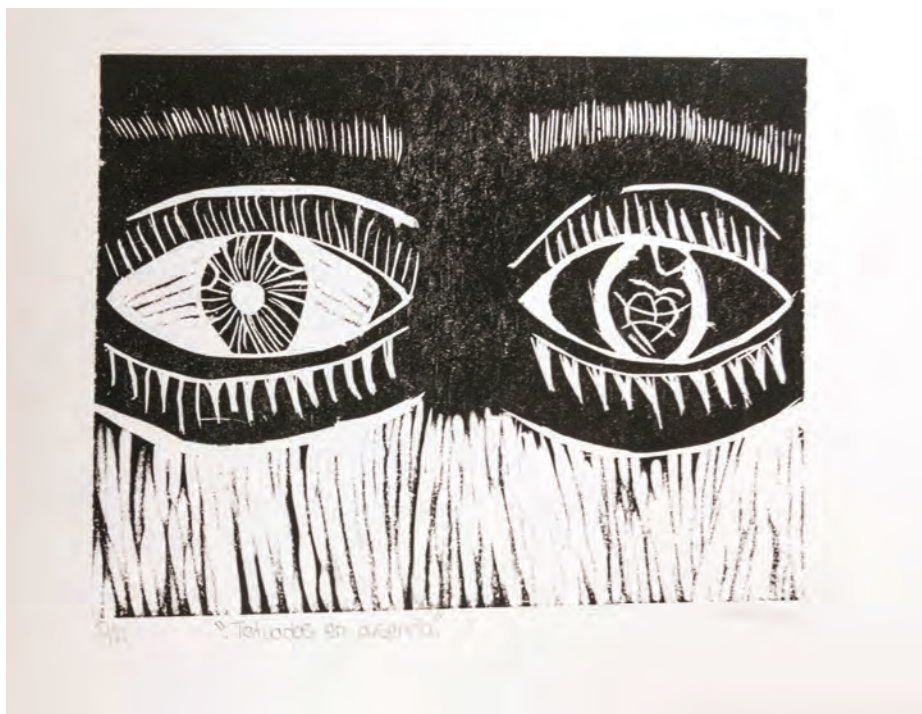
Guided by Oaxacan artist Ángel López, the participants had only a few sessions to shape and share their ideas through the lines and cuts of their woodblocks. The workshop concluded with a writing exercise, adding words to their artistic expression.





The photographic reportage by Margaux Guiheneuc, taken during the workshop, offers readers a glimpse into the atmosphere of the classes while respecting and protecting the women's identities.

Together, the art, the words, and the images give multiple layers of interpretation to readers and an intimate window into the humanity and talents of the incarcerated women.



Tattooed in Absence

Of all the voices, of all the looks
 I remember hers sometimes with sadness,
 Sometimes filled with happiness, bright
 Like a garden full of flowers,
 Between trees I would like to speak to her gaze;
 that's when I realize I am walking towards her name,
 It is a sea full of absence,
 Because only her eyes will remain tattooed in time.

AK - P



Perplexed gaze observing outside of me, I delve into the silence and find the nakedness of my soul. The truth is that waiting hurts, but to me, who almost wait for nothing now, my knees hurt, although I believe the pain means nothing. It's just that there is something in the darkness, there is something wet that cracks, moves my flesh, every atom of my body.

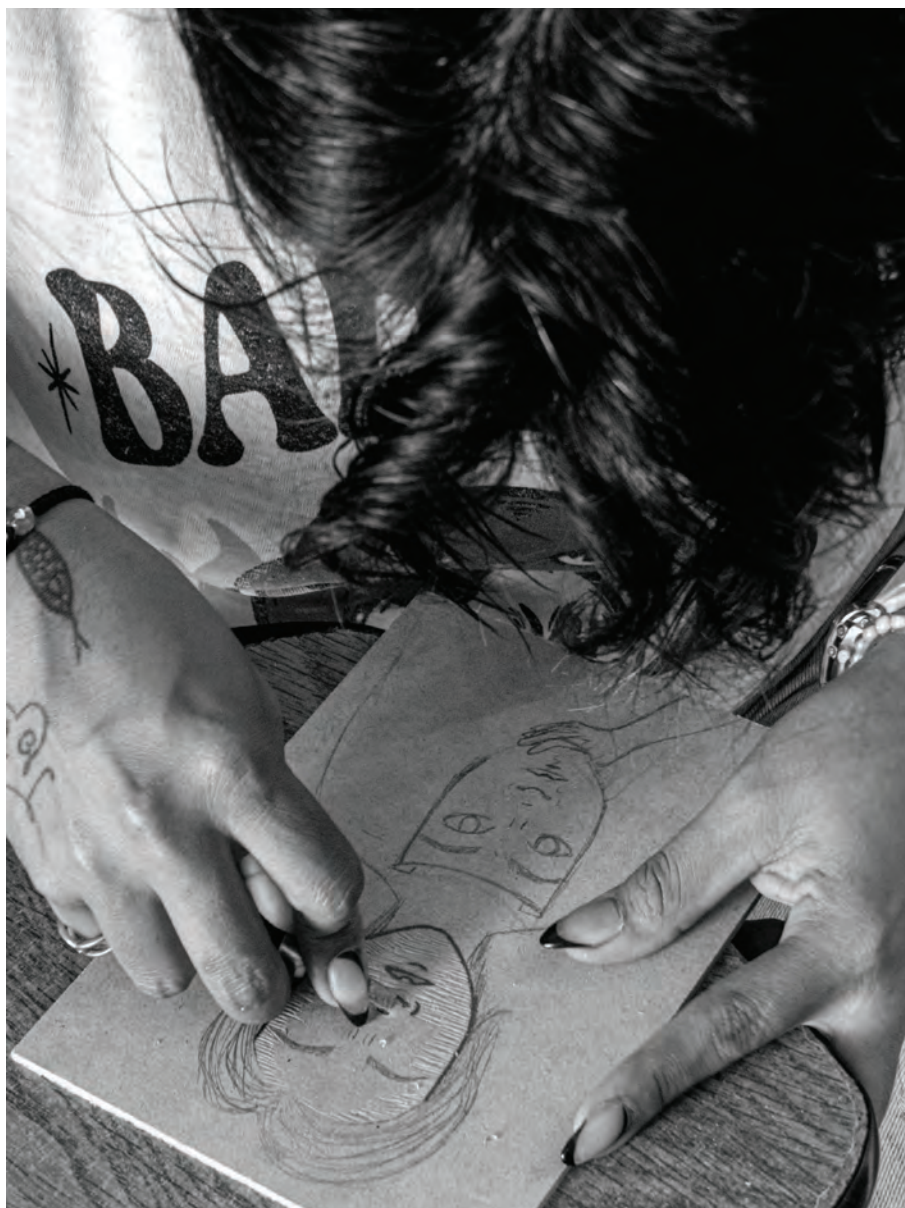
Tomorrow will arrive, a destiny, a new path where the looks meet in the light, truth and love. I don't lose hope because through silence stands peace in front of me.

I breathe, I observe, I gather strength to fight with

Nails and claws.

I needed to find myself inside this place, to observe in the glances of other women, the need and the feelings that cry out for freedom.

Perla





1/A la Otra Cara Kelly 2023

The Other Face

Many times, many many times, it's better to put on a mask of "Everything is fine," walk around with this mask from 6:30 am to 10:00 pm, then collapse at night, because of this damn routine, a routine that's been going on almost 3 years and seems to have no end.

Sleeping, walking, dreaming, and living blindly, is my day to day.

Kelly

• Muchas veces, pero muchas muchas, es mejor ponerse una máscara del "Todo está bien"; Caminar con esta máscara desde las 6:30 am hasta las 10:00 pm, después derumbarse por las noches, por esta maldita Rutina, Rutina que tiene ya casi 3 años y parece no tener final.
Dormir, caminar, soñar y vivir a ciegas, es mi día a día.

Kelly ✓



"Abundancia del Corazón"

A veces lo visto es y cuando se ve y se siente algo es fuerza
Un sentimiento, el árbol me representa, los frutos y los frutos
reproducen, creciendo con la raíz, la fuerza es la base, los frutos
con todos mis sentimientos. Entonces mi dibujo es:

El árbol de la vida
» Vida

La energía me da los frutos de la vida y la vida
que vive en mí cada momento y segundo de lo que es
humano la naturaleza, el mundo opaco de los sentimientos

Nelly/2025

"Abundance of the Heart"

Sometimes life is, sounds like, looks like, and feels as if it were down-to-earth. The tree represents me, I am a woman, that gives fruit. I reproduce, I feed with the root, strength is my trunk, leaves are all my emotions. So, my drawing is:

« The tree of my
Life »

The energy makes me want to speak, think, and feel that the beauty of nature, the world are worth every moment and second despite all the adversities.

NELLY /2025



The 14 Seconds of Incentive

14 Seconds of Uncertainty
 14 Hours of Illusion
 14 Weeks of Reflection
 14 Months of Learning
 14 Years of Faith, Hope, and Love...
 Freedom to create, love, live and
 take.

Mabel

4/3
 das 14 Segundos de incertidumbre
 14 Segundos de incertidumbre
 14 horas de ilusión
 14 Semanas de Reflexión
 14 Meses de Aprendizaje
 14 Años de Fe, esperanza y Amor...
 Libertad para crear
 amar, vivir y tomar

A Flight of Freedom

From the prison that confines my body, but not my soul, I discovered that to fly, I don't really need to feel that there are bars preventing me from exploring life from the streets, but rather that with my inner self I can fly wherever my mind allows me, and I discovered that my mind travels without limits, to places I might never reach outside.

Concepción

"Un vuelo de libertad"

Desde la prisión que enjaula mi cuerpo, mas no mi alma descubrí que para volar, no necesito realmente sentir que existen rejas que no me permiten explorar la vida desde las calles, sino que con mi interior puedo volar hacia donde mi mente me permita y descubrí que mi mente viaja sin límites a lugares que tal vez afuera no podría llegar.

Concepción

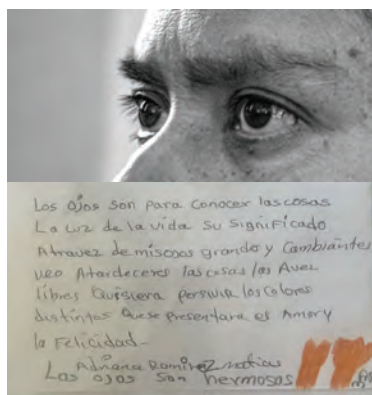






Eyes are beautiful.
 Eyes are made for discovering things,
 The light of life, its meaning.
 Through my big and changing eyes,
 I see sunsets, things, free birds....
 I would like to perceive
 the different colors
 that present themselves as love
 and happiness.

Adriana





Mirando desde el interior viajo,
 cobijo el amor perseverando
 sin perder la esperanza, entrando
 dentro de mí así lo más profundo
 para ser auténtica, real de sí
 misma, con lluvias de estrate-
 gias de libertad, con pies
 en la tierra sintiendo las
 hojas que al moverse hacen
 música de vida.

Perla

Looking from within, I travel, I
 shelter love, persevering without
 losing hope, going as deep as
 possible inside myself to be
 authentic, real to myself, raining
 down strategies for freedom, with
 feet on the ground, feeling the
 leaves that as they move, make
 the music of life.

Perla



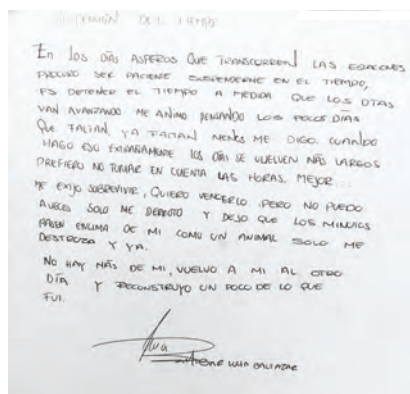


SUSPENSION OF TIME

During the harsh days that transition through the seasons, I try to be patient, suspend myself in time, stopping time as the days go by. I encourage myself by thinking about the few days left, fewer days to go, I tell myself. When I do that, strangely, the days become longer... I prefer not to take the hours into account, that's better. I command myself to survive. I want to get over it, but I can't. Sometimes I just surrender and I let the minutes climb over me like an animal, they beat me and that's it.

There is no more of me. I return to myself the next day and I rebuild a little of what I was.

LUCIA







Death

1. feminine

Cessation or end of life.

In traditional thought, separation of body and soul.

Cerebral

1. adjective

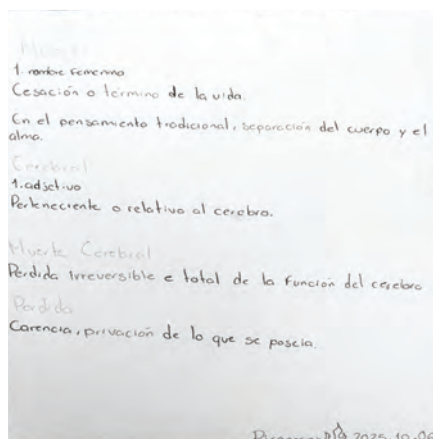
Pertaining to or relating to the brain.

Cerebral Death

Irreversible and total loss of brain function

Loss

Lack, deprivation of what one possesses



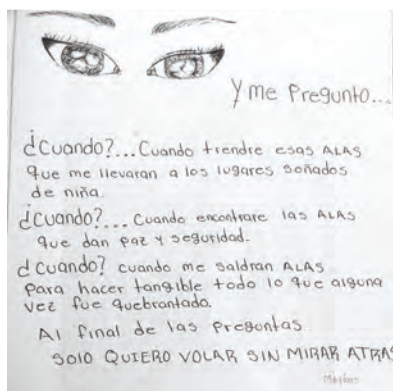
Piromanx 2025.10.06



And I Ask Myself...

When?... When will I have those wings that will take me to the places I dreamed of as a child.
 When?... When will I find the wings that give peace and security.
 When? When will I have wings to make tangible all that was once broken.
 At the end of wondering,
 I JUST WANT TO FLY WITHOUT LOOKING BACK

May / 2025

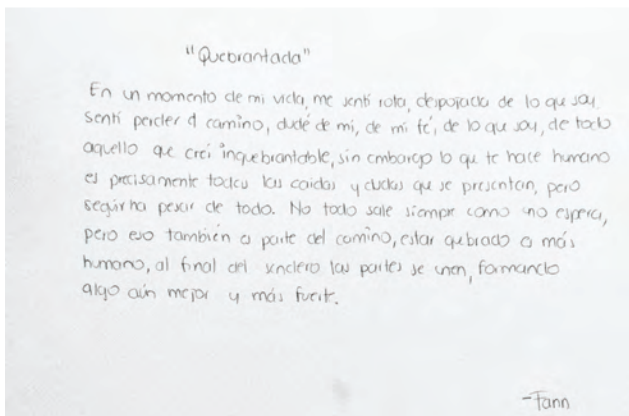




"Broken"

At one point in my life, I felt broken, stripped of who I am. I felt I was losing my way, I doubted myself, my faith, who I was, everything I believed to be unbreakable. However, what makes you human is precisely all the collapses and exclusions that occur, continuing despite everything. Not everything always turns out the way you expect, but that's also part of the path. Being broken is being more human. At the end of the path, the parts come together, forming something even better and more powerful.

FANN





« Piece of a gaze »

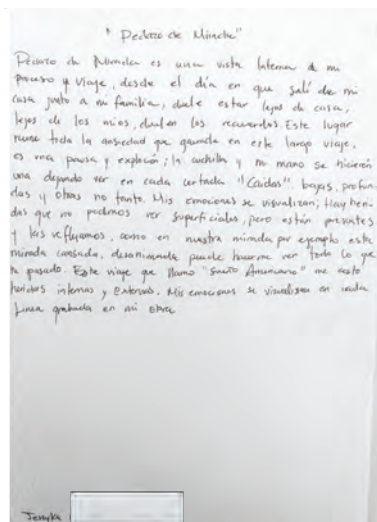
"Piece of a gaze" is an internal view of my process and journey, from the day I left my home with my family. It hurts to be far from home, far from my people. The memories are painful.

This piece shows all the anxiety that I collected during this long trip, a pause and an explosion; the gouge and my hand merged, showing « drops » in every cut, low, deep and others not so much.

My emotions are revealed; some wounds can't be seen on the surface, but they are there and they are reflected in the eyes, for example—exhausted gaze, discouraged gaze that show what I have been through.

From this journey that I call the "American Dream," I have paid the price with internal and external wounds. My emotions lay in each line carved on my work.

Jessyka





How Many Drops

How many drops have to be deposited
in a pond to form an ocean? What is it like
to wash the absences away over time?
6 elements that surround me in my consciousness,
I am the gaze of dad, mom and of the brother
who is in the moon roof, my sister who sings
over the sea, that agitation of the basketball,
the rhythm of the sun when it enters,
into the rooms of the uncertain.
Now I am just a name on this awkward journey.

AK-P

¿Cuántos gotos se tienen que depositar
en un estanque para formar un mar?
Como son las ausencias para deslazarlos en el tiempo,
6 elementos que me envuelven en mi conciencia,
Soy la mirada de papá, mamá y del hermano
que está en el techo lunar, mi hermana que canta
sobre el mar, esa agitación del balón de básquetbol,
el ritmo del sol cuando entra, en las habitaciones de lo
incierto.
Ahora yo solo soy un nombre en este viaje incómodo.

AK-P



P/A "TORMENTA" A. PORRAS

"STORM"

The physical confinement hasn't been as difficult as the emotional one. It's been hard for me to break the chains that bound me for so long to endless suffering but at the same time to unrepeatable joy. Today I'm not the same as yesterday, but I continue fighting to be better in the day to come.

A. PORRAS

"TORMENTA"

El encierro físico no ha sido tan difícil como el emocional, me ha costado mucho romper las cadenas que me ataron durante tanto tiempo a un sin fin de sufrimiento pero al mismo tiempo a una alegría inapetible, hoy no soy la misma del ayer pero sigo luchando para ser mejor en el mañana.

A. PORRAS

Birthright | Francesca Bell

They hauled me in, squalling,
small thing washed out of her
on a current that smelled of sea
but was not sea. I was stained,
stung by tears she choked back
as she carried me, such long months
from when her father died
until it was safe for me to come.

They say I did not stop crying
my first half-year outside
her body. I gasped, flailed.
Like someone drowning.
Even now, I taste it, grief ghost
in my mouth that does not leave.
All my life, I am heavy-laden,
skittish, afraid of deep water.

Bodies of Sound | Jessica Cohn

I stir in the company of bells.
Their tones seep sound, rounding

sound within as if to question
the existence of emptiness.

Such smallish bones at the side
doors of the head stir such precise

visions. By millimeters,
just eight & seven & three:

Malleus. Incus. Stapes. Broken
in three to be less likely to break.

In the company of poets, I stir
as well with their tones on tone

& their questioning. My thoughts,
though I'm never fully sure they're

mine alone, ping with their planets,
acorns, labyrinths, noticing.

In this muddled world, upright
angels drag dirty hems on sidewalk,

searching for eye contact, the chill
of nearness, ring of an inner voice.

While above the streets, a bell fills
& empties to become a bell, as words do.

Smaller senses stir the larger,
all that passes as time.

Indigenous inexplicitus | Ayaz Pirani

When I say my name
people act like I've handed them fire
or a baby they've got to say something about
now that it's in their arms.

They didn't know my planet was there
the whole time,

behind the curtain like stabbed Polonius.
I fell off a cliff

when I decided to be born
among strangers.

Now I lie on the ageless beach
like a hearthrob.

It took centuries to stop
thinking about things

I never got to lose.
They were already gone

before I'd noticed
they weren't there to be lost.

I'm trying so hard to discover
or rediscover

an undiscovered country.
Who can blame me

for fascinating the birds
as I walk through the forest?

Note: *first published in Kabir's Jacket has a Thousand Pockets,*
Mawenzi House, 2019

Anti-Martyr | Ayaz Pirani

I don't have to love my lashes
to be a prophet among my people.

You'll never see me on fire
or at the moment of impact.

My glories aren't blazes.
I won't drink blood or eat brain.

My people don't ask for my head
to be put in the lion's mouth.

They don't mind if I lie in gutters
since dust ignores me.

None of them want to see me in pieces
or remembered as a wisp of smoke.

I'm not to be kept in dungeons
or away from my favorite food.

I'm not the kind of prophet
you worship or stone.

Don't worry about the jokes I tell.
I'm just trying to keep the birds happy.

Note: *first published in Kabir's Jacket has a Thousand Pockets,*
Mawenzi House, 2019

Wedging and Cutting Clay | David Allen Sullivan

What you stock stalks you.
What you hold onto holds you.

You say you picked the gentian,
but the gentian picked you too.

When the ear of being opens
the wire of the world slices through.

E.D. Visits Watsonville California, 1942 | David Allen Sullivan

Tired of cheap white folks
haggling down the price
of her finest China
and etched porcelain plates

Jan Nakamura hefts
a set of eight off
the makeshift table
in front of the house

she'll be leaving tomorrow
when she boards the bus
to Manzanar—steps
towards the sidewalk—

and lets them go. Shatter
silences rummagers. Cools:
*Take as many as you want,
now they're all free.*

End of It All | David Allen Sullivan

I give myself away - inept spy -
give up the ghost - float -
hands churn at my sides -
fledglings - strangled - remote.

I give up everything - empty
myself. But this damned spring -
trapped inside - is already filling from
beneath - rising with new offerings.

Silence Is So Accurate | David Allen Sullivan

You are always standing
before a Rothko Painting.

Break off a bit of your heart.
Hurting never stops

Not a Lady | Jennifer Lagier

McCall's magazine dictates Mom's
child-rearing philosophy during the 50's.
She painstakingly stitches, then adorns us
in matching Sunday best dresses,
constantly scolding me to act like a lady.

Influenced by Saturday installments
of the Cisco Kid and Lone Ranger,
I envision myself a cowboy,
wear red boots and matching Stetson,
carry cap gun revolvers.

While prissy cousins
sit politely in the living room,
skirts and blouses unwrinkled,
I jump from the barn roof
into a dry manure pile,
arouse mother's ire.

She spends my formative years
attempting to smack and shame me
into total submission.
I learn how to compose plausible lies,
a talent that serves me well
as a storyteller and writer.

Ashes to Apparitions | Kim Johnson

My grandmother ashed cigarettes out of the driver's side window and told me it was snowing in the middle of summer. Poured vodka in her coffee and swore it was holy water. Placed her cookie jar on the mantel and claimed it was my dead grandfather's urn, so I wouldn't touch her Oreos.

She loved to run errands, making me an accomplice to all her petty crime sprees. Took me trick-or-treating for my birthday, which meant we shoplifted at the supermarket. She slipped cosmetics into my socks and placed handfuls of Halloween candy in my pockets as hush money. At the liquor store, she stuffed her bra like a Thanksgiving turkey, with miniature bottles of vodka. On Easter, we stole change from mall fountains with a wet tube sock as an Easter basket, which dripped all the way to the exit, so the mall security guards would know which direction to chase us. She took me to plant Christmas trees in the front yards of men who had screwed her over. We used trash as ornaments and toilet paper as tinsel.

After each unarmed robbery we committed, she would drive her getaway car down the highway with one knee on the steering wheel. Eyeing the rearview mirror, her left hand applied red lipstick and blue eyeshadow to flirt her way out of a speeding ticket. Her right hand reached over the passenger seat to buckle my seatbelt, then fished for her holy water in the glovebox. She took swigs of spiked coffee from her to-go cup. As a native Louisianan, she had no respect for California's open container laws. She gunned the engine of her old station wagon, rosary beads dangling from her rearview mirror, and a bobble head doll of the Virgin Mary glued to the dashboard, who repeatedly shook her head.

I guess it comes as no surprise that she died on All Saints Day. All my favorite sinners end up in Heaven, eventually. Yes, even Mimi, patron saint of petty criminals, most wanted grandmother in the Bay Area suburbs. I often wonder if I've disappointed her, with no children of my own to join our crime family. Late at night, I still get the urge to drive the getaway car down abandoned highways while my grandmother rides shotgun. Check my rearview mirror for the red and blue lights of police sirens. Notice my grandmother staring back at me, with red lipstick on her teeth, and smeared drugstore blue eyeshadow. When my speedometer hits 85 mph, I reach over the passenger seat to buckle in her urn, so she can feel the wind in her ashes.

Grandma Was a Bullfighter | Claudia Meléndez Salinas

To the rhythm of Pérez Prado
Ita danced
Mambo, que rico mambo
Mambo, que rico e e e es
Curvy hips swaying gently
to the sultry Cuban trumpet so
badly wanting to be Mexican daring
to tempt men around with
dreams of passion and forbidden lust

A woman
a woman who dared to think the
world could be an endless
night of dancing and dreaming

Conquerer, not conquered
tights of silk and satin
waistcoat and jacket
velvet red cape at
the ready to entice her prey

Rock forward and back
uno ... dos... tres... cuatro...
cinco... seis... siete... ocho...
maaaaambo
on stilettos cleverly disguised as heels

Paris, je ne t'aime plus | Claudia Meléndez Salinas

It looks oh so glamorous to sit at sidewalk cafés
au Champs Elysées lift up
a croissant, to your mouth, with your pinky
raised, and watch the Gauls saunter down la rue
avec ses bonnets et foulards.

I want to be there, escape my First World reality
the homeless encampments in Chinatown
under our freeway passes the numbing
isolation of hospice-stage capitalism.

Close my eyes and be transported
to charming Francophone jazz clubs, listen to rising
Third World chanteuses tel que Césaria Evora, Sona Jobarte,
Josephine Baker, or even mongrel
Third-First world artistes tel que Stromae.

Hold my lover's hand and take a stroll
le long de Seine breath in the
air so full of crêpes, of Africaine sweat
the aromas of Senegalese street vendors
chased away by les gendarmes
their wares scattered in their wake.

Admire the statue of Henri le Grande,
père de Fort Caroline and slave produced sugar cane
the Luxor obelisk, so gallantly taken from l'Egypte
Napoleon's tomb, Les Invalides,
le histoire magnifique de un pays qui aime la guerre.

Paris, je t'aime even if tes
fils invaded my country once upon a time
dans un Cinq Mai
and I don't know how to live with myself for that.

Light Rain in April | Dion O'Reilly

Una bruma

neblina fuerte

Dolores whispers

she isn't real

I left her in Spain

with the apricots

the purling fountains

and spotted fish

with my parents

in their world

of worry

waiting for wired money

that never came

I followed her

from room to room

changing sheets and scrubbing sinks

Dolores Dolores

with her dead baby

just my age

She taught me

albaricoque jardín

manantial

the softness

of a comb

she taught me tangles

were no one's fault

I learned el abrazo

after sewing a button

forgiveness

for having lost it

I learned the smell

of hand soaps

hecho de olivo y limón

and how to fold

small towels

into flowers

One day an American

gave my father

cash for a check

enough for gas

and three loaves

of stale bread

we crossed mountains

higher than clouds

back to Gosport

We have no scar for happiness

someone said

Dolores Dolores

in the rain

susurro de agua

olivo y lágrimas

You were kind to me

Why does it feel like a scar?

The Lovers | Kimberley Bermender

Run your hand, delicate trace
over my scabbed parts, chase
and burn, the metallic bite

This is how we hold, make right
all the wrongs we've done each other

Spike drips sacred water
soil in your veins new shoots
blood flows black in rich dirt

Reminders to live, to scratch
a life from need's empty torch

Scratch again for beauty, a poem
a tattoo, your forgotten name
carve your fortune in a silver petal

Tell me what to write
with this body

The Anniversary | Julie Murphy

for Bill, 1951- 2017

Where we lowered the bucket into the well of each other. Where we
listened for what languages we would speak. Kindness or cruelty.
The bench where we first sat and talked.

He asked *are you a cat person or a dog person* and I said dog
even though my pet was the other. He in his starched-
collared shirt. Me with my short red hair. Bare shoulders.
The void of ocean surging below us. Rotting kelp

in the spray. Later, we stood at the surfer statue
and he placed his hand over mine as it rested on the rail.
The feel of his skin. The salt on his lips meeting mine
as we said good-bye.

ARTIST'S STATEMENT: FLO OY WONG

I'd like to introduce how I came to create *The Baby Jack Rice Story* installation that was shown at the recent *Invoke History* exhibition at the Euphrat Museum at De Anza College. This project began in 1993 when I was invited to become an artist in residence at the Headlands Center for the Arts in Marin County. I loved the Headlands campus. It offered me an opportunity to write and make art about extraordinary stories of ordinary people, in this case about the people in my family, and specifically my husband's southern-based upbringing. My husband, Edward Kow Wong, and I met when I was 13 years old. While we were dating, he told me many stories of his childhood. It is a little-known fact that there were communities of Chinese in the South. I was fascinated because Ed was so different from the other boys I knew in Oakland Chinatown where my parents had settled as well, from the People's Republic of China, known as *Joong Gwok*.

Ed's father emigrated to the United States in 1919. He went to Augusta, Georgia because his brother had already settled there. His older brother had established a grocery store. Ed's Father, Wong Yet Choy, joined him. Later on, Wong Yet Choy opened a grocery store on his own. What is important about this story is that history, American history, is a big part of what transpired. In 1882, the Chinese Exclusion Act forbade the entry of wives of Chinese men who were settled in America. Wong Yet Choy's wife, Sue Shee Wong, was able to emigrate, because Ed's father claimed to be an employee of the Chinese Consulate.

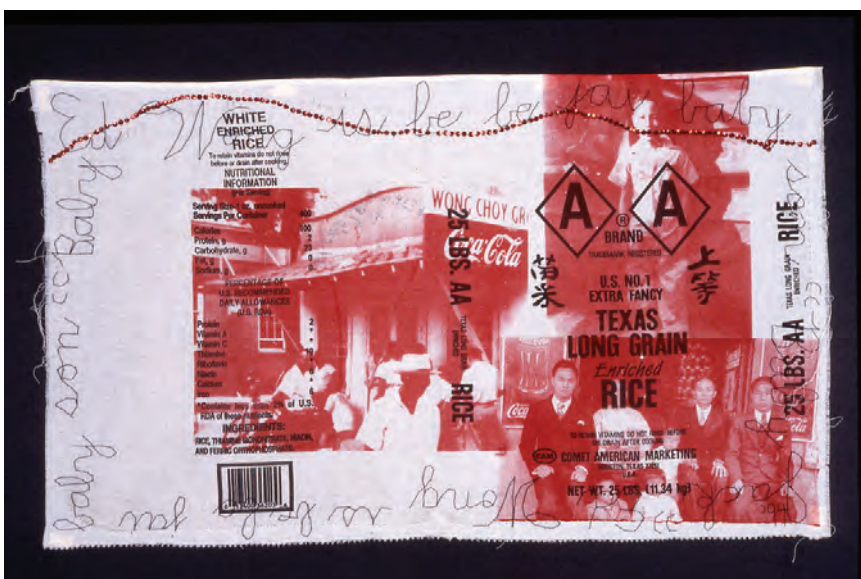
In 1960, Ed and I were married. A year later, in 1961, we decided to go to Augusta to do more research about his family. When we arrived in Augusta, I could not believe how vividly his stories came alive. Prior to the implementation of the Jim Crow laws, when Chinese had been allowed to live in other parts of Augusta, Ed's father had opened his first grocery store, which then became a gathering place for the African American community, mostly the men, during that time. So, Ed's family lived in a Black neighborhood on Wrightsboro Road during Jim Crow. The Chinese grocery stores also served as banks to many of the African American people—a place they could cash checks and get money. It was very difficult for blacks to go into the main part of Augusta. Two African American boys became his best friends. That was only possible because his mother, Sue Shee Wong, allowed her sons to play with Blacks. Boykin and Cush, who are honored in this work and central in many of *The Baby Jack Rice Story* panels, lived near the Wong Yet Choy grocery store. They came over quite often to help stack cans and other goods on shelves so



FLO OY WONG: from *The Baby Jack Rice Story* mixed media, dimensions variable, 1993–1996



FLO OY WONG: from The Baby Jack Rice Story mixed media,
dimensions variable, 1993–1996



FLO OY WONG: from The Baby Jack Rice Story mixed media,
dimensions variable, 1993–1996

that Ed and his brother Larry could leave the store to play with them. Boykin and Cush deeply influenced Ed's life. Boykin taught Ed a lifelong teaching, "You got to be brave." Ed is 91 and about to turn 92. He has used "You got to be brave" with me, our children, and our grandchildren.

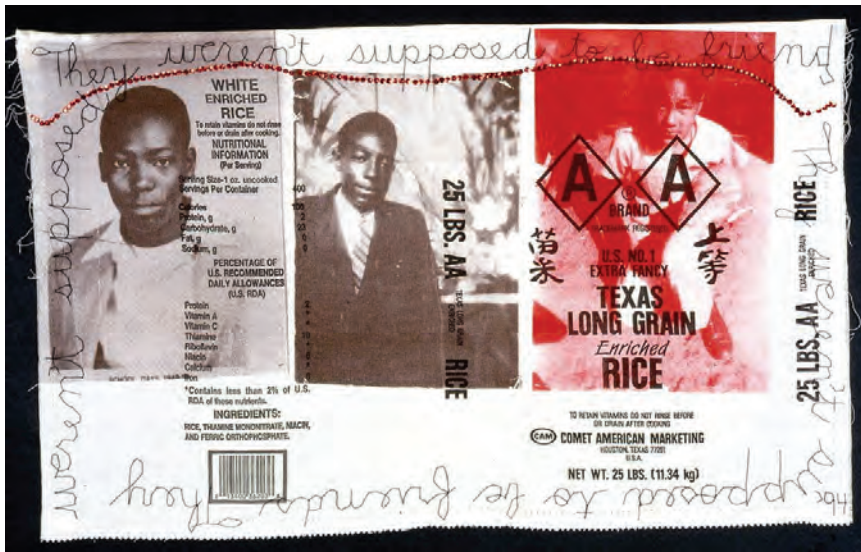
To make *The Baby Jack Rice Story*, I used rice bags as a symbol of Chinese in America. In Chinese culture, when we wanted to show our caring love to members of our family or community, we would say, *Nay Hecka Mengha*, "Have you eaten yet?" We were showing that we loved them although we never said that directly. As an artist, I had saved many rice sacks for years. I knew that someday I wanted to use the colors and



FLO OY WONG: from *The Baby Jack Rice Story* mixed media, dimensions variable, 1993–1996

words and images printed onto the rice sacks as elements of an art project. *The Baby Jack Rice Story* is a collaboration between my husband Ed and me. Eventually I worked with a professional silkscreener to print the archival photos on the rice sacks.

Among my art supplies at home, I happened to have sequins, beautiful red ones; they were stashed in my sewing cabinets. I liked using the sequins to make art. I've never made a distinction between high art and



FLO OY WONG: from *The Baby Jack Rice Story* mixed media, dimensions variable, 1993–1996

low art. When I sewed those sequins onto the surface of the rice bags, they sparkled when I shined light on the piece. There were holes left from the threads that had been ripped out, so I decided that I would fill in the holes with the sequins.

I also have a history of using American flags with the rice sacks. In my other installation, *made in usa, Angel Island Shhh*, my rice sacks were partnered with American flags. *The Baby Jack Rice Story* is a part of this larger cultural and historical project. *The Baby Jack Rice Story* has now been shown at Angel Island in San Francisco Bay, and at the Ellis Island Immigration Museum in New York.

In Chinese culture, we love family and community. We love telling the story of the Chinese in America and addressing the courage of our parents. Ed's mother and father, Wong Yet Choy and Sue Shee Wong, boldly created a family that allowed their children, some born in the U.S., some not, to all fully and freely become Americans.

In the finished installation, I used approximately 30 rice sacks and archival photographs. It took me three years to finish the work. I did this with the help of an assistant, Theresa Because, who was a student at De Anza College. I also particularly wanted to honor Ed and his family for

establishing a place of residence in the African American community, and to honor the lifelong friends he made there.

In terms of craft, this work has two deep influences. As an art student, I had become acquainted with the outstanding quilting work of Faith Ringgold, who told her stories on quilts. Faith had wanted to write her stories and publish books for children. When she approached the publishers, they said, “You’re a quilter, you’re not a storyteller.” They turned her down. Brave, courageous Faith decided to put her stories on her quilts. And when I became acquainted with her art and her wonderful techniques, I was inspired to tell my stories around the edges of the rectangular rice sacks. I wrote the stories first in pencil, and then I used a needle and a black thread to write out the stories. This exploration, inspiration, and encouragement from Faith led me to create *The Baby Jack Rice Story*.

Hanging my *Baby Jack Rice Story* at the *Invoke History* exhibition in 2025 brought me back to the Euphrat Museum. In 1976, I had returned to community college as a schoolteacher who had stayed at home to raise my children. I did not know what I was doing. I attended classes taught by Lee Tacang. I was in awe of his use of rice sacks at his Euphrat installation. This was the first time I had seen a museum show in which someone was using rice sacks as a symbol to represent Asian American culture.

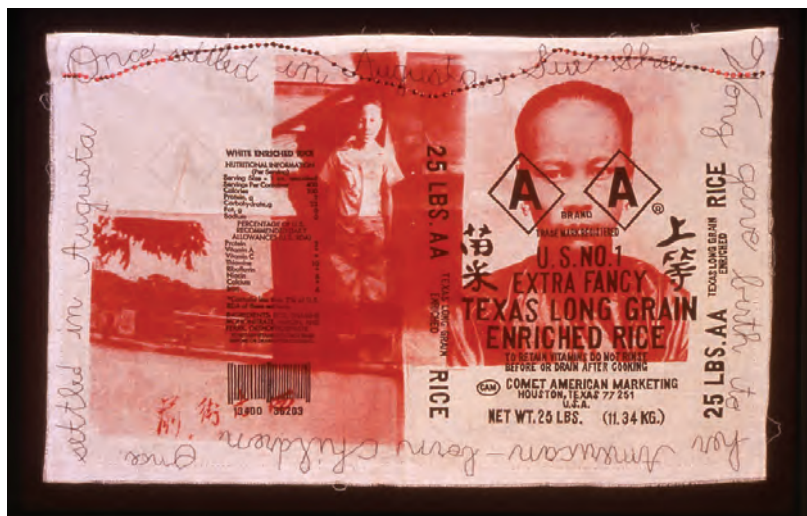
When I was growing up in Oakland’s Chinatown, relatives gave rice to our family when my father was shot (by a village relative)—to provide us solace and comfort. When I saw Lee Tacang’s installation, I couldn’t believe how the rice sacks he used affected me, personally and culturally. Lee Tacang was a wonderful inspiration while I was at De Anza College.

Jumping forward to 2025, Euphrat Museum executive director and curator Diana Argabrite decided to create her *Invoke History* group exhibition. She included me as one of the artists. I was excited that I would come back to the site of my art training in my late 30s, to share *The Baby Jack Rice Story* with new audiences including students and the supporters of the Euphrat Museum. I am grateful to have had a warm and close history with De Anza College.

Cinquain | Flo Oy Wong
Boykin
tells Baby Jack
You gotta be brave You
gotta be brave Baby Jack gets
brave brave



FLO OY WONG: from *The Baby Jack Rice Story* mixed media, dimensions variable, 1993–1996



FLO OY WONG: from *The Baby Jack Rice Story* mixed media, dimensions variable, 1993–1996

Nuestro acuario / Our aquarium | Gabriella Gutiérrez y Muhs

Our aquarium is transparent
Nuestro acuario es transparente

Yours is not
El tuyo no lo es

My friend, the tamal making lady at Carnitas Michoacán, in the corner of the sun, outside.
Mi amiga, la tamalera en Carnitas Michoacán, en la esquina del sol, afuera.

I know you see your small mirror, borrowed from another detained mother, and wonder:
Sé que ves tu pequeño espejo, prestado por otra madre detenida, y te preguntas:

How big will your daughter's mirror be? How clear the image? How small her highlights
How clear her aquarium will really be....after five generations of fish in your family?

¿Qué tan grande será el espejo de tu hija? ¿Qué tan clara su imagen? ¿Qué tan pequeños
sus reflejos? Qué tan limpio, su acuario, será de verdad?...
después de cinco generaciones
de peces en la familia?

Crazy Horse Speaks | Bob Dickerson

I will take Blondie by her hair.
Drag her across the river
past the fallen soldiers
and lay her across my grave.

(Yes, she was an exceptional girl,
first in her class at Yale,
married Dagwood at thirty,
the sandwiches followed soon after.)

The bugles send smoke to the skies
while the cannons shake with anger.
The teepees drag their feet along the river—
we pray our children will find new lives.

White men, black men, Indian chiefs,
beat your tom toms, together for once.
Mr. Dithers is planting the pipeline
in the home of the brave and the free.

The hole in the ground gets wider,
it goes round and round and round.
Fill it full of heat and memories
and then sit back and watch it blow.

Comedy is Deeper Than Tragedy | Bob Dickerson
for Slim Pickens

Make way for the comedy.
Roll up the oceans like the rugs they are,
cut the trees off at their knees,
render them lame for all time,
flatten the hills with the fury
that beats in the human heart.
Use the roving ice for drinks.
Hey there, Mister Cuba Libre,
where did you hide those missiles?

And you, Uncle Jack,
now that the front room
has lit out for the territory,
now that the back room
has lost its Nazi allure,
keep strumming your guitar,
the green one you stole from Queenie.
Lord have mercy, those fingernails they do
snarl like a snake.

Bright eyes, come sit next to me.
There's a hurricane in my pants:
my parents put it there.
There's a sink hole in my soul.
I put it there.
See that total eclipse bearing
down on us.
The mandatory background check
came up short,
as background checks often will.

Oceana flings her sequined petticoats upon the sand
| Sam Kauffman

As if to toss the seaweed
From the swirling edges
While she dances with the wind
With each turn she swings her skirts
In thunder
As she passes—faster, faster—
Until her laughter
Foams upon the waves
And in the early midnight dawns
She turns to cover up
Her turquoise evening gown
With capes of fog so thick
The soaring gulls seem to carry
This her summer train
To quickly change into a dress
Of silver satin,
Bound with trims of frothy sprays,
Rising and swelling
When morning reaches for windy afternoons
She teases sudden lightning outbursts
Leaving behind,
Upon the outstretched strands,
A foaming lace of pearls
That decorate her now rippling dress
Of brilliant sapphire blue
Drawing it around the world
In flowing currents
To follow, forever follow, the lilting music
Of her lover moon,
Softly singing enchanted melodies,
Ever beckoning his earthbound bride
Unto himself
To watch her gaily waltz upon the rolling seas
Circling to his rune.

A Moment Before Vanishing | Adela Najarro

It is time to plant
forget-me-nots in the garden.
Fill soil with seed and notice
how blue petals open, call, ask
to be named: azure, celeste,
teal, indigo.

Too many bones have melted.
So much decay
of cloth and memories.

What is the color
of a dinosaur feather?
Who last held my hand?

If only to step into my ethereal self,
hover next to a hummingbird.

I will become
a slight movement,
a shudder, an exhaled breath.

But not today. Instead, I call out
in my mother's voice,
Stop that! You know better!
I can learn the art of kintsugi,
pour molten gold into old wounds.

Walking past strangers,
it is possible to notice
flames from the sun's corona
spark inside. Stop

and wonder. There is no need
to fear. The earth breaks open,
a delicate shoot unfurls as leaf.

Soon, flowers will bloom.
Teal, indigo, an entire universe
opens in my hands.

At one corner of the wide intersection of Cloverdale Boulevard and South Cloverdale Boulevard, a boy crouches on the seat of his chrome trick bike in the too-bright sun, the too-hot day.

We who are passing through hunch in our plush cars, listening to Pandora hum across air-conditioned hiss. We glance at the boy—his peck of delinquency, his shock of hair. Rounded over handle bars, he's on tenterhooks, on polish steel, gumwall, rattrap. Hermes or Mercury—time gives all the same gods new names. This kid. He'll learn soon enough— he's not king of anything. This town is mid-size. Chronos ate his children, and that's all we remember of that story. We in the cars know it's all clicks across the retinal field, illusory flash of cornea and then turned around and upside-down. We live inside a system we don't even worship anymore.

When the light changes, the kid crosses—little boy, little bike—then little more than half way across the kid shifts his weight, a lean-down, bend-over move that whips the silver bike around and around and suspends the boy in the hot air, his hair an arrow piercing heaven.

Then he's crossed. He waited his turn and he crossed South Cloverdale Avenue and he did that fancy trick for himself or us, who knows. Now he's off, down the other side in his hang-down pants, his flap-tongue shoes. What he did passes the way all wonders pass. We are that blessed—every moment is taken from us.

Ghosting by Gaslight | Partridge Boswell

Cobbled streets flicker in midnight mist.
Fine, be a hypocrite—the new world as

full of contradiction as the old and you're
a headlight, dear. Just be honest. Tell the truth

until the next fad vernacular wades ashore
and plants a flag to flap and fade on the beach.

Is it safe to be recording this while you're driving?
The Über student parallel parking and Amazon

van beeping back down the ages, the freshly
painted crosswalk ahead reflecting your solitary

refinement. Kindness is penance, a kind of penny
sadness. Wouldn't you rather relax on your deck

overlooking the canyon, lingering in cricket song
sipping the golden cider of your idle letting go

to the lees? I have to be careful what I say with
the trees listening, erasing a million cells of what

wasn't is until recently. Listen to me or keep
your ear buds in, I'm a spot-on lip reader with

a cold sore: where your mind goes is your own
LLC. Silence is the hardest song—no whammy

bar to bend or moan. Drink the flickering moon
while you can, don't rue. I'll get back to you.

International Confederacy of Trolls | David Denny

A Danish artist uses recycled materials
to create giant trolls that occupy our local
redwoods. Nice to have some Norse trolls
again, even if they are recycled. American
trolls, mad with girth and greed, are invited
into the halls of power. Decorated in suits
and ties, they sit in gilded rooms where cameras
perpetually roll. Iceland never left their ancient
trolls behind when it embraced modernism.
Even brave Icelandic children know better
than to wander too far from home. These trolls
the Danish artist has fashioned are safe enough
for children to climb on. American trolls move
from golf resorts to posh ballrooms to lavish
feasts with Russian, English, and Israeli trolls.
Like stone guardians, the Icelandic trolls stand
placid on barren hillsides overlooking the sea.

Tuesday Morning at the Coffee Shop | David Denny

January 21, 2025

The Gingko trees along the boulevard,
so vivid and bright
in the green soup of summer,

now just naked helpless twigs—
they look the way we all feel,
like we've been bitch-slapped

by fortune—we remain standing,
stunned and chilled by winter's
cruelty. Our national crook has just

taken another oath he has no
intention of keeping. We check
to see if the sky is indeed red.

Even the clouds look dazed
and disoriented as they wander
across the otherwise empty sky.

How to keep on, even so?
Our sadness deepens
as the light grows pale.

Baristas chant "Welcome!"
as we trudge to the counter
for sips of a hot dark brew,

the brew in which we divine
our hope—"Welcome in" they sing
in a key at once false and true.

Said The | Patrice Vecchione

Said the feet
to the socks,
“Your softness
comforts us.”

Said the feet
and the socks
to the shoes,
“You hold us
just close enough.”

Said the feet,
the socks,
and the shoes
to the earth,
“Never once
have you run out
on us.”

Before a Reading | Stephen Kessler

Something will surely have to be left out,
some masterpiece you didn't know you wrote,
evidence of the genius you never were,
never had, because when you added it up
there was nothing left, nothing was there
in the first place before it disappeared
and you were left holding nothing
but your own ignorance, it was brilliant
to recognize all the ways you missed
almost everything except those few hours
of something like bliss in the fleeting embrace
of someone you thought would exist
always like this, held in enlightened
illumination, even in the dark where you could feel
what felt most real, illusory as it was—
that's what you must reveal in its naked truth
even in some language you never learned
because to say such words would mean so much more
than you ever understood or dared to write.

My Word | McTate M. Stroman II

I write to relieve my stress, don't profess to be the
best

Fresh out the box, I'm ready to rock from here to
Bucharest

Cause I studied the east while chilling in the
West

Everyone from Brother J, to Sun Tzu, and the one called
K.R.S

My soul puppets the flesh, catch wreck from mic
checks

Now at "Wisdom God," yo, I still
manifest

To slip into a zone of my
own

Release the emcee through my Chi like,
ohm...

And tap into the universe and disperse a
verse

Balancing slang like Yin and Yang to avoid
the curse

Of wackness, I lie focused and I
practice

My lyrical gymnastics

While studying the “Art of War” Master Sun Tzu, type
tactics

So when this world gets drastic, I’ll simply write another
classic

Rhyme, line after
line

Cause the sign of the times are like, graffiti on my mind

A picture painted perfect, in the grand
design

Full of words, rarely heard in this world of the
absurd

I’m blessed with finesse, the rest is merely
nerve

Cause on the road of life, I tend to swerve with the
curves

Not worried about a thing, cause see I roll with the
Superb

That’s my word...!

A Hundred One Line Poems | Andrew Gent

1.

Frost scribbles on the window.

2.

The trees do their winter dance.

3.

Wooden fence posts with names painted on them, like a cemetery in single file.

4.

In the spider's cookbook, the pages are all stuck together.

5.

Oh moon, tell me that story again.

6.

Recipe for disaster: add one human.

7.

The laws of physics are immutable. You, sadly, are not.

8.

I erased the note I wrote you, one letter at a time.

9.

The river mispronounces the names of the drowned.

10.

The snail sleeps in its car, in the middle of an empty field.

11.

What does summer furniture do in winter? Black skeletons standing in a white room, looking for somewhere to sit.

12.

If you cut water, it bleeds. If you cut glass, it cries.

13.

An afterthought, filled with music.

14.

Death, and its thousands of practical jokes.

15.

The wind holds its breath. The trees count to ten.

16.
The mayor dropped by to ask how he was doing.
17.
The wind doesn't ask.
18.
The past is past is past.
19.
The future is just a dream the past had of us.
20.
There is no present. Only the future rushing past.
21.
The grass knows what it wants.
22.
The chalk outline of a cloud.
23.
The chipmunks and the squirrels argue for hours.
24.
Nightmares are in black and white. Dreams are in color.
25.
The moon closes its one good eye.
26.
Truth is an addiction.
27.
When the movie ends, the audience is empty but the theater is full.
28.
The sky is a door we cannot walk out of.
29.
Paper butterflies and acetylene flowers.
30.
The leaves regret the tree. The tree regrets the leaves. The rain hides their tears.

31.

The starfish of memory, the nautilus of dreams.

32.

The mirror sees everyone but itself.

33.

Love on paper is only on paper.

34.

Pretend you don't exist. It will be true soon enough.

35.

Let's get one thing straight: the mind cannot be happy and the heart
does not make sense.

36.

The magician's final act:

37.

The sound of glass holding its breath.

38.

The snow's alphabet: stone, stick, fallen icicle...

39.

The stars were once gods, then dreams, now just pinholes of light.

40.

Nightmares are the world telling you what you are afraid of.

41.

Actors crave an audience of thousands. Poets hope for a thousand audi-
ences of one.

42.

The snow has forgotten what it came for. Its pockets are empty, turned
inside out.

43.

He has heart-shaped cufflinks to prove he wears them on his sleeve.

44.

Poet. Psychic. Wrestler. Bartender of last resort.

45.

Current resident of the return address for the Beyond.

46.

The wind creeps up on you and steals your thoughts.

47.

We are an equation that cannot be solved.

48.

Susceptible to other worlds.

49.

All my wounds are self-inflicted.

50.

Sometimes it seems my dreams have dreams of their own, dreams of another dreamer.

51.

You need to learn to write yourself out of hell.

52.

The poem never ends, but the poet fails to notice.

53..

The invention of the imagination.

54.

The bric-a-brac of a thousand yesterdays collecting dust.

55.

There are things you don't realize until it is too late. But too late for what?

56.

The skin of a new day.

57.

Memories are fossils. Another time, another person pretending to be you.

58.

The museum of the soul is closed on Mondays.

59.

No, it is not alright.

60.

Poetry is its own worst enemy.

61.

I press my face into the hair behind her ear and whisper anything but words.

62.

Language is a distant planet.

63.

It takes a thousand light years for a single word to reach her.

64.

Someone told me I was kind, but what kind he couldn't tell.

65.

The gods were busy throwing bones into the fire.

66.

Rain: a paint-by-number landscape.

67.

The spider sees only flies.

68.

The candle's assistant, fire.

69.

I left the trees out to dry.

70.

At best, the earth puts up with us.

71.

We are the beautiful wreckage of the middle class.

72.

Words are useless when they are most necessary.

73.

Are there no adults among us?

74.

The stupid teenager who said he wouldn't make it past twenty-five is still alive within me.

75.

The wind has a house of its own, the windows always open.

76.

The dust is doing its slow motion pratfall lit by the early morning sun.

77.

Strangers are lovers who just don't know it yet.

78.

Or enemies with the wrong address.

79.

There are no shadows on the sun.

80.

The assassin inside chooses his victims at random.

81.

Someone has hung a "No Vacancy" sign on my dreams.

82.

The night clerk cheats at solitaire.

83.

All night, every night, the cicada winds his clock.

84.

The river never asks. The stars never explain.

85.

The rain writes on the window in invisible ink.

86.

He was the last non-playable character in a playable world.

87.

Something something the meaning of life blah blah blah... (the voices
in my head)

88.

The days show their age. Scratched and dented, with the remnants of
better days caught in their teeth.

89.

Given time, you can learn to get along with almost anyone, except yourself.

90.

It would be nice if we could occasionally act like adults. But we aren't. We are children trapped inside aging machines we can no longer control.

91.

There are words that will never recover from what you have done to them.

92.

Tell me I am wrong. Go on, I dare you.

93.

The calendar counts backwards from one hundred.

94.

The cardinal in my backyard claims to have seen god. Who am I to deny it?

95.

The sun has told the same story for over ten thousand years.

96.

The moon, on the other hand...

97.

There is the sense, in modern times, that beauty is an illusion brought to fruition in the eighteenth century to replace the religious concept of purity which failed to survive eight centuries of war and infighting. Or so I am told.

98.

The clouds gather over the city, holding their breath.

99.

The forecast calls for protests, followed by a brutal crackdown by paramilitary troops in unmarked vehicles.

100.

If it is a dream, you are the dreamer and the next dream will be your waking up to discover who you have become and what is left of the world you once knew as your own.

Father to Daughter | Barbara Bloom

he brought us to the unfinished house
on the private estate of people
he knew slightly
my mother had made a picnic
and spread a blanket under a huge live oak
its branches offering some shade

the house was a wedding present
he told us
father to daughter
you could see it was grand
though it was just the skeleton of a house

the daughter had killed herself
the night before the wedding
and construction was halted
the very next day

why was he so drawn to this place
that was a mystery and so much
missing from the story
as it was from our own

I imagined the girl
must have loved someone else
and would rather die
than marry the man
her father had chosen

my mother passed around the sandwiches
cheese on thick French bread
a hawk circled overhead
its red tail catching the sun

look my father said
pointing upwards
there was going to be an elevator
imagine that
an elevator in your house

Sheet Music | Barbara Bloom

Our daughter wasn't even a year old when Frank left.
I saw him last when he came over, much later,
to collect a trunk of sheet music
left behind after his hasty exit. There was a soccer game
on the playing field as I walked him
out to his car, and kids in bright shorts
were running and shouting.

The perfect blue of Monterey Bay stretched out
below the town, and an offshore breeze
tugged at my skirt.

I held my daughter's hand
as he pried open the rusted lid of the trunk,
more interested in its contents
than in us. *How could you
have left us?* I wanted to say.
How could you do that?

Suddenly, hundreds of carpenter ants
rushed from the crumbling, ruined pages of his music,
carrying their eggs in their mouths.

Contributors' Notes

Ellery Akers is the author of four poetry collections: a 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.

Ellen Bass's most recent collection, *Indigo*, was published by Copper Canyon Press in 2020. Her other poetry books include *Like a Beggar*, *The Human Line*, and *Mules of Love*. Her poems appear frequently in *The New Yorker*, *American Poetry Review*, and many other journals. Among her awards are Fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation, The NEA, and The California Arts Council, The Lambda Literary Award, and four Pushcart Prizes. Ellen co-edited the first major anthology of women's poetry, *No More Masks!*, and her nonfiction books include the groundbreaking *The Courage to Heal: A Guide for Women Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse* and *Free Your Mind: The Book for Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Youth*. Bass founded poetry workshops at Salinas Valley State Prison and the Santa Cruz, California jails, and teaches in the MFA writing program at Pacific University.

Francesca Bell is author of *Bright Stain* and *What Small Sound* and translator of Max Sessner's *Whoever Drowned Here*. Her work appears in *ELLE*, *New England Review*, and *Rattle*. She is Marin County Poet Laureate, translation editor for the *Los Angeles Review*, and teaches embroidery and poetry at San Quentin.

Kimberley Bermender has a master's degree in photography and a bachelor's degree in creative writing. She teaches poetry, photography, and art journaling at Cabrillo College Extension, and has recently published *Liminal Space* (available on amazon.com). She hosts 'Inter|Act', a popular community spoken word open mic. She previously taught junior college poetry at the New School of Dawson College, and has also taught technical writing and creative writing classes. To learn more about Kimberley and her work, go to maginei.com.

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.

Barbara Bloom lived in Santa Cruz for 45 years, attending UCSC, and teaching English and Creative Writing at Cabrillo College. She has published three books of poetry, *On the Water Meridian* and *Pulling Down the Heavens* (both with Hummingbird Press), and most recently, *Missing Orion* (Shanti Arts Press). She now lives in Bellingham, Washington, in a landscape of sword ferns, lakes, and tall conifers.

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, most recently through Ireland in 2025. They've released two albums: <https://loslorcas.com/>

Cynthia Brannvall is an art historian and an interdisciplinary multimedia artist who works and lives in the San Francisco Bay Area. She teaches art history through a global lens at Foothill College—and starting in 2026-27, will teach at De Anza College. Her artwork has been widely exhibited in juried group exhibitions in the San Francisco Bay Area, San Luis Obispo, Los Angeles, New Orleans and Washington DC. Cynthia was selected for the 2022-2023 Emerging Artist's Program at the Museum of African Diaspora in San Francisco where she had her first solo exhibition in 2022. She was awarded a 4-year studio residency at Cubberley Artists Studio Program in Palo Alto and has exhibited in multiple museums—MoAD, San Francisco; New Museum Los Gatos; Triton Museum; Marin Moca Museum of Northern California; Museum of Art and History, Santa Cruz; Museum of Contemporary Art, San Luis Obispo; and the Euphrat Museum at De Anza. Cynthia has published short essays for exhibition catalogs and has served as a juror for exhibitions and public art commissions.

Sébastien Luc Butler was born and raised in Michigan. He is the author of the chapbook *Sky Tongued Back with Light* (Black Lawrence, 2026) and *Viscera* (Four Way Books, 2027), finalist for the National Poetry Series, Autumn House Press, the Michael Waters, and Levis Book Prizes. His poems have been recognized with the Patricia Cleary Miller Award, and have appeared or are forthcoming from *Narrative Magazine*, *Pleiades*, *Blackbird*, *Bennington Review*, *Black Warrior Review*, and *Indiana Review*, among others. A former Poe/Faulkner Fellow in Poetry, he reads for *The Adroit Journal* and lives in New York City.

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.

A long-time reporter, nonfiction writer, and editor, **Jessica Cohn** lived in the Midwest and Northeast before moving to the West, where she's started a successful poetry practice. In fact, Jessica was the winner of the 2025 Great Northwest Book Festival Poetry Prize for her debut collection *Gratitude Diary*. Her poetry has been widely published and has been heard on the California Central Coast radio program The Hive as well as at the annual Santa Cruz arts event Celebration of the Muse.

Justin D'Alesandro is a twenty-five-year-old writer from New Jersey. He has published two poetry collections, *1,000 Swimming Pools*, and *Dancing with Luciano: A collection of poems & writing*. Justin loves storytelling in all forms; he is a poet, playwright, and screenwriter.

Delicia Daniels is a poet, activist, and person who stutters. Her first publication, *The Language We Cry In*, was selected as the Discovery Prize winner for the 2017 Writers' League of Texas Book Awards. Her second poetry collection, *Abolition Chronicles*, was selected as a finalist for the 2023 Center for African American Poetry and Poetics Book Prize, The Poetic Justice Institute Prize (2023), and the 2025 New Southern Voices Poetry

Book Prize. Derrick Austin selected *Abolition Chronicles* as his Runner up choice for the 2025 New Southern Voices Poetry Book Prize. Daniels is currently a poetry editor for *Fence*. Her poems have been published in *Callaloo*, *The Writer's Chronicle*, *Obsidian* and many other literary journals.

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

When **Bob Dickerson** passed in 2025, the Bay Area lost a legend of the local teaching and poetry worlds. Bob sent *Red Wheelbarrow* poems before he passed, and we are honored to include them in this issue. During his rich creative life, Bob published poems in *Tarantula*, *Beet Magazine*, and *The Coffee House Papers* and was a featured Poet of the Week for *Nomadic Coffee*. He has also collaborated with the New York artist Karen Hatch to create the bestselling objet d'art *Woodsman*. Avant-garde bookmaker Roger Berger assembled a museum-quality volume of several of Bob's works entitled *Selected Poems and Other Oddities* (Reece Brothers Publications, Tirane, Albania). Accompanied by singer-songwriter Ina Johnson on the banjo, Dickerson often performed his poetry at Flash Fiction Forum, Kim Addonizio's annual Poetry Salon, Peninsula Literary Society, the fabulous Willow Glen Library, the Stoneham Jazz House Concert Series, Peter Kline's Cafe Bazaar Writer's Salon, the annual Beat Poetry Reading at the Beat Museum in San Francisco, and on street corners throughout this great land of ours. His work-in-progress upon his death was *Bring Me the Typewriter of Jesus Ponderosa*—selected poems. We will always miss Bob and remember his special blend of irreverence, passion, devotion, loyalty, and soul.

Robert Fanning is the author of five full-length collections of poetry: *All We Are Given We Cannot Hold*, *Severance*, *Our Sudden Museum*, *American Prophet*, and *The Seed Thieves*, as well as four chapbooks: *The Good Sea*, *Prince of the Air*, *Sheet Music*, and *Old Bright Wheel*. His poems have appeared in *Poetry*, *Ploughshares*, *Shenandoah*, *Gulf Coast*, *The Atlanta Review*, *The Common*, and many other journals. He is a Professor of English at Central Michigan University, where he is an awardee of the CMU Faculty Distinguished Service Award, as well as a two-time winner of the CMU Excellence in Teaching Award. He is also the founder, facilitator and host of the Wellspring Literary Series, a vibrant community event featuring Michigan poets in Mt. Pleasant, Michigan.

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, a mensch, and a devoted writing workshop leader at Salinas Valley State Prison.

Robbie Gamble (he/him) is the author of *A Can of Pinto Beans* (Lily Poetry Review Press, 2022). His poems have appeared in *On the Seawall*, *ONE ART*, *Post Road*, *Salamander*, and *The Sun*. He is the poetry editor for *Solstice* Literary Magazine, and he divides his time between Boston and Vermont.

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

Blind since birth, **Susan Glass** held a residency at the Cummington Community of the Arts in Massachusetts and earned her MFA from the University of Massachusetts/Amherst. Susan worked as an English professor at San Jose State University and West Valley Community College. Now retired, Susan co-edits *The Blind Californian*, a magazine for the California Council of the Blind. In 2022, Susan released a new book of poetry, *The Wild Language of Deer*, which won the Elyse Wolf Prize offered by Slate Roof Press. Her poems have appeared in *Snowy Egret*, *The Broad River Review*, *Birdland Journal*, *Fire and Rain: Ecopoetry of California*, *Honoring Nature: An Anthology of Authors and Artists Festival Writers*, and elsewhere. Susan lives with her husband John and guide dog Omni.

Taylor Gorman is a Pushcart-nominated poet whose work has been featured in *The New Orleans Review*, *The Cincinnati Review*, and *The Red Wheelbarrow*. He lives in Santa Cruz, CA with his cats.

Margaux Guiheneuc is a French tour guide living in Oaxaca, Mexico. She specializes in giving tours of Oaxaca art, handicrafts, hiking, and bird watching, and also works weekly with inmates on art projects through Grafica Siqueiros at CERESO Villa de Ella and Cereso Feminil Tanivet in Oaxaca. You can contact her through vamosoque.com/vamosoquetours@gmail.com if you want.

Gabriella Gutiérrez y Muhs is a poet, literary critic, writer, professor and friend and supporter of many poets, comadres, and young people. She has published, authored, and/or edited 18 books and her memoir *Fresh as Lettuce/Fresca como una lechuga* is forthcoming.... She spends her free time with Osa, the family dog, Rico, Tello, Eric and many of her students and friends. She loves her dozens of cousins deeply and looks forward to what our country will become, she has no fear...and holds her loved ones close.

Chopsy Gutowski is a poet, improv artist, and pianist. Her poems are also featured in *The Jackdaw Review* and forthcoming in the anthology *How to Walk Home in the Dark: Poems on Anxiety, Depression and Mental Health* by Blue Light Press. Chopsy was featured on the Hive Poetry Collective podcast and led The Hidden Doorway Poetry Workshops for employees of Google. She holds an MA in Human Development from Pacific Oaks College and an MFA in Creative Writing from Pacific University. She currently teaches improv theater in Santa Cruz, CA where she lives with her wife and cat.

Ian Hall was born & reared in the coalfields of Southeastern Kentucky. His debut collection, *Creekwater Mansions*, is forthcoming from Eastover Press in early 2026. He is currently a PhD candidate in Poetry at Florida State University. His work is featured in *Narrative*, *Mississippi Review*, *The Journal*, *American Literary Review*, & elsewhere.

Andrew Jesse Hernandez, Sr., discovered his profound love of poetry while incarcerated at High Desert State Prison in Susanville, CA. He has been incarcerated now for 22 years, and has now written over 117 poems. The expressive and communicative functions of

poetry writing offer Hernandez what he calls “a sense of peace and freedom.” His goal is to publish a book of his poems in the near future.

Kim Johnson is an internationally touring poet who has performed at slam venues, colleges, festivals, and performing arts centers throughout the United States, Canada, and Europe. She was a member of the San Francisco Poetry Slam Team and represented the Bay Area at the Individual World Poetry Slam and Women of the World Poetry Slam competitions. She coached three San Francisco National Poetry Slam teams and was an Individual World Poetry Slam finalist. She was a poetry mentor for Youth Speaks and Lyrical Minded, teaching writing workshops at high schools, foster homes, juvenile detention centers, and mental health facilities.

Sandra Chavez Johnson is a poet living in Orlando Florida and was a semifinalist for the 2025 *Red Wheelbarrow* poetry prize.

Sam Kauffman has spent over twenty years writing in various literary genres along with teaching junior high, leading workshops all over the US, presenting for the Literary Stage, CWC and the San Mateo Library. She has been an Artist in Residence at a school in New Mexico. She is an award winning lyricist and poet.

Stephen Kessler is the author of a dozen books of original poetry, sixteen books of literary translation, three collections of essays, and a novel, *The Mental Traveler*. He is also the editor and principal translator of *The Sonnets* by Jorge Luis Borges. *The Redwood Coast Review*, which he founded and edited for sixteen years (1999-2014), was four times recipient of the PR Excellence Award of the California Library Association. His translations of the Spanish poet Luis Cernuda have received the Harold Morton Landon Translation Award (Academy of American Poets), the PEN Center USA Translation Award, a Lambda Literary Award, and a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship. His version of *Save Twilight: Selected Poems* by Julio Cortázar received a Northern California Book Award. He lives in Santa Cruz, where his op-ed column appears on Saturdays in the Santa Cruz Sentinel.

Stephen Kuusisto holds a “University Professorship” at Syracuse where he teaches across multiple disciplines and serves as the Director of the Burton Blatt Institute’s interdisciplinary programs. He’s the author of the memoirs *Planet of the Blind* (a “New York Times Notable Book”), *Eavesdropping: A Memoir of Blindness and Listening*, as well as *Have Dog, Will Travel: A Poet’s Journey*. His previous collections of poems include *Only Bread, Only Light*, *Letters to Borges*, *Old Horse*, *What is to be Done*, and his latest, *Close Escapes*—all from Copper Canyon Press.

Joseph Jason Santiago LaCour is a Filipino and French Creole Spoken Word Poet and Hip-Hop Artist from the Midwest now living in Santa Cruz.

Jennifer Lagier is an Italian American writer, poet, and retired college librarian/instructor. She taught with California Poets in the Schools and served as an Area Coordinator for San Joaquin, Stanislaus and Tuolumne Counties. Her scholarly essays on digital resources and online education have been published in peer-reviewed journals; her poetry has appeared

in many literary magazines and blogs. She is the author of twenty-five books of poetry and has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize. Her poetry primarily includes themes of her Italian ancestry, social justice, dementia, addiction and nature.

Pulitzer Prize finalist **Dorianne Laux's** most recent collection is *Life on Earth*, (W.W. Norton, 2024). She is also author of *Only As The Day Is Long: New and Selected*, *The Book of Men*, winner of the Paterson Poetry Prize and *Facts about the Moon*, winner of the Oregon Book Award. A workbook, *Finger Exercises for Poets*, was released in 2024. Laux is founding faculty at Pacific University's Low Residency Program and a Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets. She lives with husband Joseph Millar and their bunny, Odin, in Richmond, CA.

Grace Li began her life in poetry in Ken Weisner's Introduction to Creative Writing class at De Anza College in 2014. Since then, she has earned a BA in English at UCLA, an MFA in Poetry at SDSU, and is currently a PhD student in Literature and Creative/Critical Writing at UC Santa Cruz who spends far too much time playing music and looking at the ocean. She can be found at glxy.sites.ucsc.edu.

Kurt Luchs (kurtluchs.com and <https://www.facebook.com/kurt.luchs/>) won a 2022 Pushcart Prize, a 2021 James Tate Poetry Prize, the 2021 Eyelands Book Award for Short Stories, and the 2019 Atlanta Review International Poetry Contest. He is a Contributing Editor of *Exacting Clam*. Sagging Meniscus Press published his humor collection, *It's Funny Until Someone Loses an Eye (Then It's Really Funny)* (2017), his poetry collections *Falling in the Direction of Up* (2021) and *Death Row Row Row Your Boat* (2024), and his latest book, the hybrid *Tributaries: Essays & Verses Flowing From & Celebrating Favorite Poems* (2025). He lives in Kalamazoo, Michigan.

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.

Tony May, Emeritus Professor of Art, taught at San Jose State University from 1967 until 2005. Working in a variety of media, his own art has often taken the form of site-responsive installations and has a strong leaning toward the conceptual, the quasi-functional and the whimsical. He believes in the importance of craftsmanship and hands-on involvement of the artist. In 1998 he completed a major public commission for the City of San Jose, which commemorates Agriculture in the Santa Clara Valley. His art has been shown widely in California including shows at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco Art Institute, 80 Langton Street, Capp Street Project, San Jose Museum of Art, the deSaisset Museum and The San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art. He has also exhibited in other parts of the United States, England, France, Japan and Thailand. More recently he has had solo shows at b.Sakata Garo Gallery in Sacramento CA and at George Adams Gallery in New York City which continues to represent his work. (www.georgeadamsgallery.com)

James McCorkle is the author of *Evidences* (APR-Copper Canyon), *The Subtle Bodies and In Time* (both from Etruscan Press) and *Seven Cycles* (forthcoming from Omnidawn in Spring 2027). He directs the Africana Studies program at Hobart and William Smith Colleges in upstate NY.

JoAnne McFarland is an interdisciplinary artist who uses text, paint, fabric, and paper to create lyrical, often politically-charged pieces. The engine that fuels her output across multiple media and genres is her belief that violence and creativity are opposites. She commits to one creative act every day. Recent multimedia collections include: *American Graphic*, winner of the 2024 Wishing Jewel Prize for Poetic Innovation from Green Linden Press and the 2023 Experimental Poetry Award from the Connecticut Poetry Society; and *Pullman and A Domestic Lookbook*, finalist for the 2024 CLMP Firecracker Poetry Award, both published by Grid Books. McFarland's poem "Steady" will appear in her collection: *Psalms of Innocence* which will be published in September of 2026 by Green Linden Press.

Melissa McKinstry hosts quarterly poetry and jazz evenings and curates a community Poet Tree in San Diego. Her poetry appears or is forthcoming in many journals including *Beloit*, *Adroit*, *Narrative*, and *Best New Poets* 2023 and 2025, and was selected for the 2025 *New Ohio Review* Literary Prize and a 2026 Pushcart Prize. An *Adroit* Djanikian Scholar and the inaugural writer-in-residence at the Millay House Rockland, she currently serves on the Alumni Council for Pacific University's MFA program and the Board of the Millay House Rockland. You can also visit her at MelissaMcKinstry.com. IG: [Melissa.GranadaTreehouseStudio](https://www.instagram.com/Melissa.GranadaTreehouseStudio)

Joseph Millar's first collection of poems, *Overtime*, was a finalist for the 2001 Oregon Book Award. His second collection, *Fortune*, appeared in 2007, followed by a third, *Blue Rust*, in 2012. *Kingdom* was released in early 2017, and *Dark Harvest, New & Selected Poems*, was released in 2021. His latest collection, *Shine*, was published in October of 2024. Millar grew up in Pennsylvania and attended Johns Hopkins University before spending 30 years in the San Francisco Bay area working at a variety of jobs, from telephone repairman to commercial fisherman. It would be two decades before he returned to poetry. His work has appeared in such magazines as *DoubleTake*, *TriQuarterly*, *The Southern Review*, *APR*, and *Ploughshares*. Millar teaches in Pacific University's low-residency MFA Program.

Harryette Mullen's books include *Regaining Unconsciousness* (Graywolf, 2025), *Her Silver-Tongued Companion* (Edinburgh University, 2024), *Open Leaves* (Black Sunflowers, 2023), *Urban Tumbleweed* (Graywolf, 2013), *Recyclopedia* (Graywolf, 2006), *Sleeping with the Dictionary* (University of California, 2002), and a collection of essays and interviews, *The Cracks Between* (University of Alabama, 2012). She teaches creative writing, American poetry, and African American literature at UCLA.

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.

Adela Najarro is the author of five poetry collections, including *Variations in Blue*, selected for publication in 2025 through the Letras Latinas/Red Hen Collaborative. Her other works include *Split Geography*, *Twice Told Over*, *My Childrens*, and *Volcanic Interruptions*, a chapbook featuring artwork by Janet Trenchard. The 2024 Int'l Latino Book Awards designated *Volcanic Interruptions* as an Honorable Mention in the Juan Felipe Herrera Best Poetry Book Award category. The California Arts Council recognized Adela as an established artist for the Central California Region and appointed her as an Individual Artist Fellow. Adela Najarro is a poet with a social consciousness whose extended family left Nicaragua and arrived in San Francisco during the 1940s. After the fall of the Somoza regime, the last of the family settled in the Los Angeles area. Adela holds a doctorate in literature and creative writing from Western Michigan University, as well as an M.F.A. from Vermont College, and is widely published in anthologies and literary magazines.

Dion O'Reilly's third book, *Limerence*, was finalist for The Floating Bridge John Pierce Competition for Washington State Poets. She is the author of *Sadness of the Apex Predator* (Cornerstone Press 2024) and *Ghost Dogs* (Terrapin 2020). Her work appears in *Rattle*, *New Ohio Review*, *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *Missouri Review*, and *Rhino*. Most recently, her work was chosen as one of the winners of the 17th Annual *Narrative Poetry Prize*. A podcaster at The Hive Poetry Collective, private workshop facilitator, and co-editor of *En•Trance Journal*, 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.

Emily W. Pease is a poet and fiction writer who lives in Williamsburg, VA, where she taught writing at William & Mary for many years. She is the 2025 winner of the William Matthews Poetry Prize at the *Asheville Poetry Review*. Her poems appear in *Juniper*, *Litmosphere*, *One*, *The Florida Review*, and *Rattle* (Ekphrastic Challenge, June, 2021). Her chapbook, *Long For This World*, was awarded the 2026 New Women's Voices Prize at Finishing Line Press. Her collection of short stories, *Let Me Out Here*, won the C. Michael Curtis Short Story Book Award at Hub City Press in 2018. She holds an MFA from the Warren Wilson MFA Program for Writers.

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

José, at Swan Scythe Press and as a research associate at Palo Alto Veterans Institute for Research and Stanford University.

Ayaz Pirani was born in Tanzania and studied Humanities in Toronto and Montreal, with a degree from Vermont College, Norwich University. His books include *Happy You Are Here*, *Kabir's Jacket Has a Thousand Pockets*, and *How Beautiful People Are*. A short story collection, *Death to America*, is available from Porcupine's Quill. Ayaz's work has been reviewed in *The Globe and Mail* and *Toronto Star*.

Michele Parker Randall is the author of *Museum of Everyday Life* and *A Future Unmappable*. Her works can also be found in *Atlanta Review*, *Bellevue Literary Review*, *Poetica Review*, *SWWIM*, and elsewhere. She feels strongly that embracing work by and about the neurodivergent will lessen the stigma surrounding mental illness.

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, 26 years old.

George Rivera is a San Jose-based artist, curator, and educator known for his 40-year teaching career at Mission College and his work as the former Executive Director/Chief Curator of the Triton Museum of Art. He earned his BA and MFA from San Jose State University, specializing in large-scale drawings, paintings, and mixed-media works. Before his tenure at the Triton Museum (Santa Clara), he served as Executive Director and Curator of the San Jose Art League from 1982-1985. His art has been featured at the San Jose Museum of Art, the De Saisset Museum (Santa Clara University), and Anne & Mark's Art Party. This spring, he is exhibiting at Mission College, featuring large, multi-panel, mixed-media paintings.

Doren Robbins is a poet and mixed media artist from Santa Cruz, California. After twenty-something years traveling, raising a family, working as a cook and as a carpenter, Robbins started teaching a variety of creative writing and literature courses through an extended personal and moral interpretation of Kenneth Burke's idea of "literature as equipment for living," incorporating exploitation, sexism and racism as fact, dreaming as found cinema, and fantasy as deliberate reasoning. Through his interactive workshop teaching style, he has inspired many students to become English teachers, writers, teachers of creative writing, or choose professions related to social and community service. His work has appeared in over one hundred-fifty publications. *Sympathetic Manifesto*, Selected Poems, 1975-2015, from Spuyten Devil, was his fifteenth book. <https://dorenrobbins.wordpress.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.

Ralph James Savarese is the author of three books of prose and four books of poetry. His most recent collection is *NEVER MAKE THEM CRY: CLASSROOMS & COFFINS* (Ice Cube Press 2024).

McTate M. Stroman, II, is a spoken-word artist, guest lecturer and motivational speaker. Over the past 25 years he has had the opportunity to share his inspirational talents at such places as The World Stage in Leimert Park, The Comedy Store on Sunset, Nuyorican Poets Cafe in New York, and Au Chat Noir in Paris France. As a poet, McTate Stroman II is a master of the spoken-word form. His work is characterized by a unique blend of Hip-Hop, Jazz, and social commentary, and his words have the power to move and inspire audiences. McTate's style of poetry, which he calls Break-beat poetry, is a testament to his ability to push the boundaries of traditional spoken-word poetry and create something truly original.

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.

Lee Varon is a social worker and writer. Her latest poetry collection, *The Last Bed*, was published in 2024. She is author of two children's books, *My Brother is Not a Monster: A Story of Addiction and Recovery* (2021), and *A Kids Book About Overdose* (2024).

Patrice Vecchione is the author of two collections of poetry, three nonfiction books, and the editor of many anthologies. Her essay: "Excavating Joy: An Ordinary Woman's Life in Fashion" will appear in the spring '26 issue of *Catamaran Literary Reader*. Patrice is the Poet-in-Schools for the Carl Cherry High School Poetry Program for Monterey County. A visual artist also, her new collage work, *The Guardians*, will be on

view at Sweet Elena's Bakery in Sand City from April 1 - May 31. The opening reception is on 4/11 @ 3pm and a poetry workshop is on 4/25 @ 3:00—\$25 with proceeds benefitting Indivisible. patricevecchione.com

Bruce Weigl's most recent collection is *Apostle of Desire*, from BOA Editions, Limited, 2025. He's in Ha Noi working on three separate translation projects until May, 2026.

Donald Wesling's most recent books of poems are *Citrusy* and *The Fort Rosecrans Elegies*, both from San Diego's Cañon de Chelly Press. Wesling is also a scholar who has published widely on Bakhtin, Merleau-Ponty, Wordsworth, John Muir, Ed Dorn, and many others. Wesling is Professor Emeritus of English Literature at UC San Diego.

Flo Oy Wong was born in Oakland, California, in 1938 and grew up in Oakland's Chinatown. She was in her late thirties when, during the height of the feminist movement that she claims as an inspiration, she started taking art classes. Her first major body of work, her autobiographical Oakland Chinatown Series, emerged from her initial uncertain attempts to find her voice as a woman artist of Chinese descent. The thirty-five drawings in this series (1983-1991), some made directly from individual family photographs and others composites of several images, pay tribute to her extended family's tightly interconnected lives and work as restaurateurs at the Great China Restaurant in Oakland from the 1940s into the 1960s. Wong has continued to honor the experiences of her family and other Chinese immigrants in her subsequent work including with such well-known installations as *The Baby Jack Rice Story*, and *made in usa: Angel Island Shhh*.

Liu Yong (-987-1053) was a Chinese poet of the early Song Dynasty. His poetry was reportedly popular among courtesans and often associated with the erotic life of the entertainment quarters. He was an innovator of the *ci* or song lyric, the dominant poetic genre of the time, in which poems were set to fixed patterns that each corresponded to a musical tune. The music itself has been lost, but over 800 known song patterns remain.

Gary Young is the author of several collections of poetry. His most recent books are *American Analects* and *That's What I Thought*, winner of the Lexi Rudnitsky Editor's Choice Award from Persea Books, and *Precious Mirror*, translations from the Japanese. His books include *Even So: New and Selected Poems; Pleasure; No Other Life*, winner of the William Carlos Williams Award; *Braver Deeds*, winner of the Peregrine Smith Poetry Prize; *The Dream of a Moral Life* which won the James D. Phelan Award; and *Hands*. He has received a Pushcart Prize, and grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities, National Endowment for the Arts, the California Arts Council, and the Vogelstein Foundation among others. In 2009 he received the Shelley Memorial Award from the Poetry Society of America. Gary directs the Cowell Press at UC Santa Cruz.

Bing Zhang came to the U.S. in 2001 from Beijing, China. She received an MFA in 2011 from San Francisco Art Institute. After graduation, she has been painting at her studio in San Jose, CA, winning awards, and exhibiting her work widely throughout California.

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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 سياسيا يجب
أن أصغي إلى المصافير،
ولكي أسمع المصافير يجب
أن تخرس الطائرات

Marwan Makhoul / مروان مخول