altar to an unknown god

selected poems by marianne bickett

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Sample of poems in this collection:

altar to an unknown god

2009

sea birds frolicked in a frenzied
cacophony not unlike a round glass ball
shaken by the curious hand of an
inquisitive child – the snow
scattering within, a winter scene encased.

it was as if, i,
the hand of some odd god,
detached and observant,
disturbed them and they plunged
and splashed and swarmed
like bees about a hive.

the air thick with wings and
beaks stuffed with fish.
a gathering, a feast.

among the waves lashing against a sandless shore
of fossils entombed into boulders dressed by
sea smoothed stones,
i built an altar to all who hunger
and wept for perishing worlds.

Giant Sunflowers in the School Garden

2010

Gazing down upon children looking up,
the bright yellow petals of this enormous flower
dazzle against the brilliance of
a blue that no word—cerulean nor azure— can describe,
unless you think of it in that moment….
it sounds something like a gasp.

There's a warm feeling in my heart,
watching birds fetching sunflower seeds, dropping hulls,
and fluttering with winged enthusiasm.
Giant heads nodding and watching
the children as they paint them.
They stand as sentinels in the garden
in rows by the fence peering and, yes,
I think, even listening.

To be able to look right into the face of the sun
with wide seed-filled eyes that follow the arch of our star
across the vault of the sky from dawn to dusk:
Who does not love the sunflowers?
The children settle now in the radiant shadows
with masterpieces clutched in their small hands.

Rest now, yellow petals, rays of sunlight,

the day withdraws.

Your work, as teachers, today is done.

Rest now.

Later, with much less effort may you watch the stars.

Fog Day

2016

White fuzzy gloves
finger over the Santa Cruz mountains
this morning,
Clutching the oak and the pine
with an ethereal silence.

Later.

The nebula has sunken into the city,
woven into a thick blanket over the land.
The eyes of the world close.
One can only see inward.

Moonrise

(Upon a Summer's Night in Oregon)

2022

Branches of tall firs brush silhouettes against the east.
Lambent moon peers with wily beams dazzling in escape.
The moon's peripheral Northwest arch rises.
The east is full. All else is less so. Moon-talk a glimmering whisper.
Mostly dark listening for light.

My First Bon Dance

2026

My flesh melts into soggy drips
on the hot pavement where a shrine
rises from the humidity: what doesn't kill you, dances!
An old woman joins the syrupy spin of clapping hands
that weave into a giant school of smiles. Everyone swims into the bobbing colors of
pink and white paper lanterns. though the man in drag doesn't seem
to know he's talking to a fish.
That's all right, everyone is happy. Really happy.

Keep moving, paint a halo around the moon with your feet.