

To protect and serve

He walked upright,
eyes dark and deep-cut as night,
a tall and strapping man
but beneath the killer's knee,
handcuffed and cheek in the dust,
body and breath arrested,
he called for his mother,
just like a child, like another,
a boy who ran
like scared children do,
and raised two hands
on command,
but turned to face a
peacekeeper's bullet
in this sleepwalking land,
this home of the brave,
as pavement turns to grave,
life worth less than a crooked dime
and skin color still a crime.

-Rebecca Friend

Unbroken

For Glen

The patterned bowl is short-sided, browns and rusty orange, with three nubby legs
It is of a type from Costa Rica, a gift from my boss on sabbatical
Thanks for my fort-holding.

I should eat out of it instead of just looking at it collecting dust
Filled with the last week's or month's doo-dads
Paper clips stray bit of a food wrapper
It should have some lovely cheese.

I often wonder how he packed the bowl and got it back unbroken
Imagine him off on his own away from everyone and all his
Myriad responsibilities, tossing dirty clothes into a crappy bag

Probably with a broken zipper
Because at the office we all worked to pack and unpack his thoughts
Arrange his day focus his attention
Someone at home or work would be in charge of gathering his days.

I feel especially appreciative of this little gift
And have kept it safe over the moves and years
Maybe I shouldn't eat out of it after all.

-Chris Arvidson

Ars Poetica

Dabs of paint on canvas.
Brushstrokes pull the colors
this way and that,
twisting blue and green and gray together.

Layered paint rises from the surface.
Bumps and swirls and sweeping lines
Beckon to my fingers,
Pull me toward another world.
As if touch would tell me more.

I don't go.

The practiced hand that made this scene
Looked and broke apart what lay before him,
Distilled line and color,
Stripped away distractions.

When he stepped away,
Only what was true remained.

I step into his absent place,
stand rapt before his work.
Trace his lines, revel in his colors,
Put together what he broke apart.
Find my own truth.

It is all I can do.
It is enough.

-David Collins

THE SEED DOESN'T DIE

After "Graine," by Alain Le Boucher

This intricate body
speaks the legacy
of dance—

a teardrop of skirting,
spine carefully bent,
teeth nearly touching

and the intricacy of moves both
calculated and free.

The many connections
of a brain
at work,
seeding

together
and alone,

train going up
that first mountain.

Almost I see
lift-off

a galaxy of stars—

-David Radavich

Resist

Corrugated Black femininity
sits erect, metallic, unflinching.

She stares above her stiff straw necklace
at you, resists your “ethnic” descriptions.

Like the black halfpipe beneath her,
the years of strangling
capitalism & industry,
she is curved, anonymous,
rigidly held in place

but no one is her owner, not
the artist, not the gallery.

-Kat Bodrie

Wreck Of The “Ancon” In Loring Bay, Alaska

A hawser cast too early, slack fire
in the boiler—and all is riven.
Ebb tide pulls and the *Ancon*
breaks her keel on a hidden reef, listing
so steeply her starboard sidewheel
is nearly dry, shrugged like a shoulder
to the chill gray sameness of sea and fog.

Fast between two worlds of hope
she leans toward a lightening sky
and the headland she will never round,
yet so close to shore a loud hail
should right her. Knifing out from dark bushes,
a fallen trunk and shoreline merge
to suggest a prow, ghost of a ruined hull
and a long forgotten ore.

Written by Kenneth Chamlee

Vincent

~After the Immersive Van Gogh Exhibit – 2021

black flies swarm circle in swells before his eyes inside his head
four hundred land on wet paint frantic like the artist to escape
he bakes in raw golden wheat outside the pan
the crows spot it they hunger for him pluck flies from the canvas
drenched in melted-butter sun blinded at midday unlike the light of night
when stars turn to white-hot egg yolks swirl under an Indian yellow moon
chased by curly gusts of gossipy wind
a burnt umber cypress gyrates toward the turbulent sky
shadows haunt a slumbered village steepled tightly secured against stark bright
demons diverted with cobalt-blue brew a threat only he can foresee
oils glide off brush tips guided by the erratic hand translated into voices of insanity
images shimmer like a desert mirage beauty spawned by genetic whirlwind
for a moment or a year

the doleful sound of a distant train
takes him to Rouen or Tarascon
while his mind contemplates that other
form of travel,
the one he counts on
to transport him
to the stars.

-Linda Phillips

Wall in the window

Inspired by *Window on Havana*
by Dick Handshaw

A world of cinderblock and stucco
grows on the sunrise side of my
window,
beyond the grey shadows and
the shuttered border
of my four room flat,

like a wall bleached and patched,
not a blue-green habitat
where forest overlaps the sky,

no background of earth sounds
or the mercurial music of the wind
scaling the trees,
no mandolin and woodwind
symphonies,

just two disenchanting house plants
potted in dust and terra cotta,
still life against a whitewashed
landscape,

my windowsill turned arbor
faces the hallways and harbors
of masked residents,
of rising tenements and
dying sentiments,
downward spirals of

life gone viral,

but I'm anchored by a clothesline
across the alleyway
bringing colors of the day
on a runaway breeze
as bluejeans dance a jig,
hand towels wave a greeting
and tiny bathing suits wiggle
like toddlers in a row,

I can't see the rainbow or
smell the forest's breath
but I can still see the wind.

-Rebecca Friend

Aubade for Prague

Inspired by *View of Prague* by Brenda Pokorny

Jars of pickling sunlight line shelves in Old Town cellars.
Tubs of unpeeled clouds carried up to kitchens
are diced into the day's hopes and counsels.
Embered into blazes, hearth fires and stoves
warm cold floors as quick feet skip bodies to their clothes
and on to breakfasts of klobása, fresh houska and coffee.

In one cluttered attic a poet sleeps at a table
by his unfinished sonnet; in another, a painter
nods beside a delft plate of pears and grapes,
a goblet and an unplucked pheasant.

When the artists rouse to sounds and aromas
drifting upstairs, when they open the morning's
brown shutters, roof tiles glow like checkered coals,
ruddy with the night's pulses and prayers.
White monolithic chimneys rise
as Old Town dresses for the day—a necktie
of blue guttering, dormers wedged out like epaulets,
a green shawl of trees around the neighborhood's shoulders
and all the roofs wearing sharp and jaunty caps.

–Kenneth Chamlee

Distance

Inspired by *Rib Mountain Top* by Barbara O'Reilly

A view

and weather like this
conjure plans
of a wicker-basket picnic: Don't forget
the paints, easel set
at just the right vantage
point —

slight breeze bending
arm hair and meadow grass;
ochre tilled fields and crows
chasing new seed;
thick strawberries stretching open
the mouth. One takes in

the commerce, too: rumbling tractor
spewing fumes, highway slithering
to some big city,
snow-white farmhouse where a sweaty,
gingham-clad millennial bakes rustic loaves
for market customers and questions
her life choices. But you

are here:
up in the clouds
or close, getting distance
even from your own life

down there
somewhere

-Kat Bodrie

Whirl

Inspired by Elijah Kell's *Flowerbed Figures*

It opens like the tufted
tissue of a gift bag,
inviting us to imagine
the surprise inside.

A carnival of colors,
all primary, this
circus of spectacle

teases through
red, blue, yellow, black

to the fateful
Greek *mati*
at the center,

fabled eye
and self-protector,

fear and witness
staring out

surrounded by
oceans of sea-forms,

flowers spinning
and dancing

into immediate air

—David Radavich

In Potentia

Inspired by the wood sculpture by Ric Erkes titled *Going Casual*.

Like a traveler stalled on tarmac,
strapped, motionless, into his seat,
dreaming ahead to other people,
other places,
no longer here, but
not yet there,
the wood has a destination,
a destiny unrealized
until the fond eye of the maker
looks into the grain,
grows dizzy with the lines,
until fond hands pull
the daemon within
into the light.
What seems casual,
whimsical, the matter of a moment,
has cause,
was meant to be
from the time the seed
was planted.

-David Collins

What's Happening?

Inspired by the watercolor painting *Choices*
by Catherine Mainous

Of course, I recognized it right away,
this landscape where past, present,
and future bleed together, as I have bled,
as we all have. I started green and worked
my way up, as you did, too, grasping
for blue. Earth always reaches for sky,
even the tiniest seed that breaks through
saltmarsh and sawgrass, green fingers
like periscopes poking for light. I've always
looked for dawn. No, I'm saying it wrong.
Sometimes I searched for dark and found it.
The light came later, after regret,
after wallowing, after guilt. See how
that diffused orange in the corner blurs
into a bridge to nowhere, skeletal structures
never completed. That's what you get
with unrequited ambition. Beginning,
middle, no end. A purple cloud in the distance.
A crane untethered. An unexpected answer
to an unexpected question.

-Richard Taylor

The Giveaway

Inspired by Anne Harkness' painting *A Time to Love*

Look in the mirror

Catch a quick glimpse in a storefront window

The person there...

Who is that?

I see a younger version

The person who lives inside my head

Pretty and youngish and always moving ahead

Not that old, gray version...

The giveaway is the knee

The one with the long, thin, scar

Healing, but slowly

The ebbing pain juxtaposes

The competing versions of the me I see.

-Christine Arvidson

See What the Waters Stir Up

Inspired by Brian Fincher's *Sea Spine*

Coiling Sea Spine, what conjures from the deep
in your serpentine brine? Cylindrical
black tubes, that one glowing red—
chase guns ready to fire at the enemy,
protect the homeland? Or maybe
tubular eyes scan like telescopes
the world, the sea, the universe, me.

Imagine diapason, flute, strings, and reed
piping harmony to all the world
in great booming swells, symphony of
whales, sonatas slippery as seaweed
minuets fashioned for mermaids,
basso-continuo bottom feeders
keep the beat with endless time.

Millennial music impassions a plunge
into the coils of this gyrating wave-pool.
What creatures bob in your sea-green stewpot?
Could that be a dolphin turning spins
with a tentacled squid? Does the sea floor
feature the twists of a Red Spanish Dancer?
Does the swaying anemone carry the melody?

Sea Spine, what if your intentions
probe other dimensions by design?
Swoosh over the Triangle blinking your lights
before Bermuda fades to craggy North Sea,
and off to Antarctic ice shelves
where your green glow turns
unidentifiably eerie.

Sea Spine, before disappearing
into subterranean neverland—
write your intentions in the sand.

-Linda Vigen Phillips