



# COMPASS ROSE **north**

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COMPASS ROSE  
north

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# Introduction

With the launch of this inaugural issue of Compass Rose Literary Journal, we have officially begun our journey. We welcome you along.

Friends for many years, but joining forces creatively in 2022, we established Compass Rose as a journal that aspires to promote the work of the wayward, the ambitious, the unknown, the lost, the found, the many - directional voices. We read for beauty in language that seeks to understand.

On the directional front: what better place to start for this inaugural issue, than "North"? What is north? What embodies north? A physical certainty; a geographical region. A spiritual guidepost; an emotional state. A person. A place. An experience. A memory, an aspiration. Have we found our north? Has north proven elusive? Or been taken away from us? What are the ramifications when as a collective we do not follow or ascribe to the same north? When does north offer comfort? Or distress?

The contributors to this inaugural issue contemplate many of the above questions through their poetry, prose, and visual art. We feel incredibly fortunate to bring you their voices, and thank each author and artist appearing herein for entrusting their work to us.

We hope you enjoy the journey in these pages.



Kelly Easton  
Editor



Lauren Rapp  
Art Editor

## Oh compass tree—

announcing North,  
somber, mossy North  
beside a crowd of blown-in branches,  
wind's fingers pointing eastward  
(keening banshees, saffron Ganges)  
far away from naked maples,  
from rattling oaks,  
from here—

from here  
to distant  
selves  
in unlost  
places  
you locate  
me in  
larger earth

## In Winter

Each of us in the north is handed a new room  
now and then—freshly built, clean lines, clutter-free

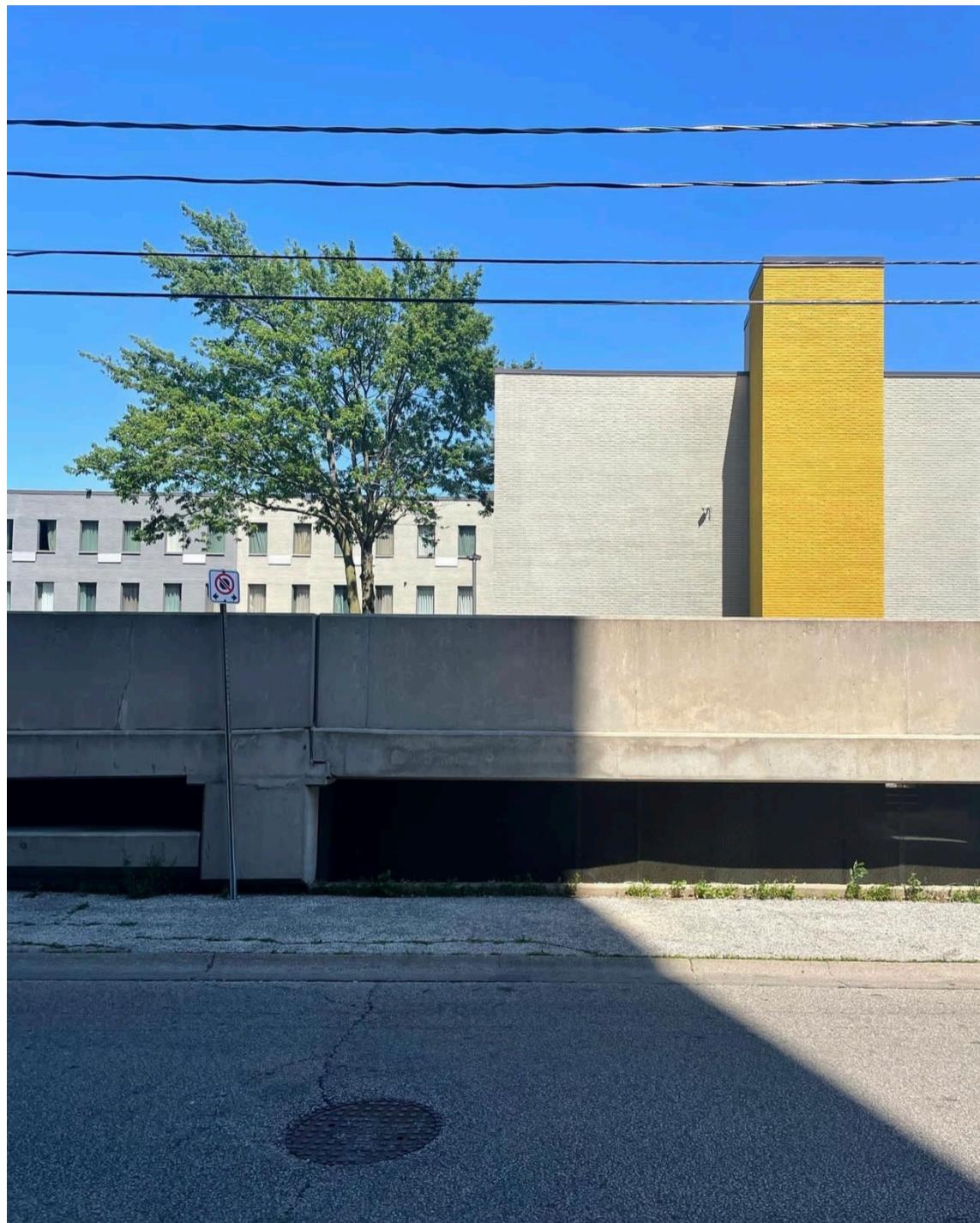
and in this orderly place, we too are different.  
We take on extra layers; we become larger.

We glide on thin blades in horizontal space  
or skim the steep sides of softened mountains.

Mostly we follow others, squirrels and birds,  
but each of us has known what it is to be first.

If we choose, we may fill the room with simple kin  
all in white; our own colors startling us.

We leave signs of ourselves everywhere across  
these sparkling carpets, even as they dissolve.



That Windsor Aesthetic, vol. iii  
*digital photograph*

# The Atlas, Worn

The atlas, worn, well-used,  
lies on a shelf beneath  
a grey layer of dust.  
Maps of the once unknown,  
now called to mind in a moment,  
colored lines on a field of white:  
stories for a week of nightfalls.

## 1. Indiana, 1970

The freshly mown meadow rolls  
downhill from the front door,  
then rises to the strip of asphalt  
road that curves among maples  
planted twenty years ago to grow  
fifty, one hundred feet apart, &  
heads west to drop behind a hill.

In the red & gold leaves, on  
an afternoon bleached pale  
by a still-warm sun, she says she  
would leave if she had a place to go.  
Behind the words, a soundtrack,  
a score like the breaking of  
wine glasses in a thick brown bag.

The bedroom is slightly larger than  
the bed. There is no room to run,  
no place to hide. Refuge is an idea,  
the printed page, the following day  
& days & almost one year before  
they take the long road east &  
the state line falls far behind.

## 2. Illinois, 1972

Cars move through the alley, early  
morning & after midnight. The planes  
overhead slip lower toward O'Hare,  
hardly interrupting their red noise.

Like the bricks of the six-flat, hard to  
think of being elsewhere, doing any  
different, sharing another's mortar.

Who is going this time, bags packed,  
note left on the kitchen counter?  
More than a hundred thousand miles,  
hotels, rental cars. Routes inked-in  
draw the load factors of a wheel  
rocking back & forth as she does  
between pillow & edge of the bed.

In the dark room, her profile against  
the light intruding through the blinds  
from the streetlights. A serial going  
somewhere except for two trips  
taken with one-way tickets & no  
plan to return. We have left, more  
than once, finally as a party of three.

### 3. Maryland, 1974

Cabin fever is no longer diagnosed  
or much discussed, clinicians use  
other terms, symptoms the same:  
the wide eyes with darkened,  
deepening rings beneath, the hands  
that rise of their own accord, faint  
wanderings that accomplish little.

The house in the woods, more than  
two days' walk from the city, sees  
a dust storm, feels the heat that  
kills, survives a season of damp wind,  
shudders with gales of snow & ice,  
echoes the sound across the fields  
of a pickup truck rolling empty.

Rage builds with surly talk, then  
dissipates in the vapor trails that  
stretch across the Appalachians,  
the plains, the Rockies. Old  
arguments wear thin, long threads  
pulled across a continent until the

pants & jacket can no longer be worn. / /

#### 4. Rhode Island, 1976

Liberation once each year, a night  
spent running wild in the field, the  
chemistry of Olduvai man spilling  
out on the street, in on the rug.  
Tight discipline brings weariness,  
dissolution of contract, gnawed by  
tenants in abandoned textile mills.

Exposed to light & sea air, the paper  
floats like ash, falls apart, wind-borne.  
Plans etched on the ceiling in the dark,  
in the hostile envelope of sheet &  
blanket, in the silences between  
threats knocked down by screams &  
troubled dreams without wakefulness.

The air moves off Narragansett Bay at  
the same time of day, each day, as  
exact as the length of time it takes to  
cross the Cove to the church. Churches,  
fragile upon examination as the contract.  
The cycle is the routine, short ink lines  
radiating from nowhere, & not often.

#### 5. New York, 1978

Rhododendron run amok, mortar-eating  
ivy in a fight for height & light, green  
triangles peak through cracks in the porch  
& dare a foot to step there. We swore  
we would never come here & here we are,  
staring through windows that do not close  
slamming heavy doors that do not lock.

Grass overpowers flagstones in the walk.  
A sneeze two doors down echoes in  
the hallway. The woman across the street  
calls her cat at two a.m. So we turn on  
each other, another rage, another silence.  
Up against this history, a small package,

EUGENE STEVENSON

swaddled nerve ends & talcum chemistry. / /

The changes come: flag stones set in concrete, ivy cut back, rhodo trimmed to woody stalks, new planks wedged on the porch, windows slide shut with a bang, doors lock with finality. Now we escalate the war, draw darker blood, rub salt in old wounds, wounds that refuse to heal.

Hospital, anesthesia: not enough & in the wrong place. Getting to be a habit. First there is the look, then the smell of decay. Strip away the bandage, then the skin until we do not recognize this place or the people who live in it. A sad, cheap victory: ivy against the stone.

## 6. North Carolina, 1983

Everything is new: brick, wood, glass, grass rising, a green tide from the clay. Sounds: *Sherwood Forest, Boona Vista, Hey!*, pickup trucks rattling at dawn, the whish of a thousand golf clubs, chain saws clearing, hammers nailing, the *pop pop* from the tennis courts.

New name, new place, new country.  
Were we pulled here or pushed?  
The oaks are not new, they are dying,  
hollowed up their middles by hordes  
of black ants. Down they come  
*Bam! Bam! Bam!* stretched in a path  
like hay in a selective microburst.

Yard twenty feet deep in a jungle  
of jagged limbs, leaves, more leaves,  
askew & belly-up to the hot July sun.  
The work is steady, chopping wood,  
chopping oaks into fireplace fodder.  
The thuds of the mallet ricochet  
past the houses, well past dusk.

## EUGENE STEVENSON

Well past the nightly rituals of bats  
hunting & feeding, dislodged by  
storm & progress. Time to end this  
labor, working the will against nature.  
In the pull of new, old, contentment  
& dissatisfaction, fatigue creeps like  
a southern night, swallows the starlight.

### 7. New York, 1985

White pines weep their needles, sob  
their cones loudly against window &  
roof, drapeless windows, glass rattling  
with each footfall, copper roof, green,  
age lines dark along the seams. Night  
wind whispers up the staircase with  
the *tick tick tick* of the thermostat,

the rumbling of the furnace, from  
basement to third floor & back down  
through a black & white chill. How  
long, this time, how long & why?  
Restless sleep, hoarse breath, bones  
tired as the joists, backs turned in  
ignorance, malice only for ourselves.

The floors are uneven, rest easy away  
from the walls, carpets covering the  
mistakes of previous owners, while  
the current owners make their own &  
make their own, until they turn to  
dust just as the masonry holding the  
foundation together crumbles to dust.

### 8. Illinois 1989

The winter wheat crop offers only  
little hope, a gift of copious rain  
instead of snow & ice at the end of  
the season, mild following a long,  
parched summer with fields disked  
in the midst of repeated dust storms,  
more seeds planted for another try.

## EUGENE STEVENSON

Does the farmer weep to himself  
as he plows under a stunted crop  
or when the homestead disappears  
at the sheriff's auction? Does the heart  
break over ears of corn the size of  
dill pickles, or when the house, sold,  
& the land, sold, enfold new owners.

From their safe perch at Grandma's,  
the kids relay their daily news in the  
voices & tones that read crop reports,  
no mention of how the sun looked  
rising through the oaks & pines in  
the tree break or how the pond felt,  
chin-deep, at the end of a hot afternoon.

Farmer abandons his field, his field  
abandons a planned life, that life becomes  
a foreign room, just room enough for  
a bed sagging with its history: the locus  
of a circle, where origin & destination  
merge, the gap in the arc beyond gone,  
the circle no longer growing dreams.

### **9. New York 2002**

One year later, a different kind of death,  
the kind that leaves the inanimate standing,  
but takes all life away. Aircraft leave from  
Kennedy & Newark, leap to Amsterdam  
& Oslo, to Hong Kong & Beijing. Aircraft  
arrive from Rio, Sao Paulo & Buenos Aires,  
from Tokyo, Seoul, Taipei & Singapore.

Rhythms of commuter trains, subways,  
bridges, tunnels flow in eddies along streets,  
avenues uninterrupted, save missing a face  
here & there, a voice now & then, strident  
gait, uplifting grin. All life, no. Important  
yes, important for the passport unstamped,  
the map with no new lines drawn.

### **10. North Carolina 2020**

EUGENE STEVENSON

He is no longer strong enough to ask  
for a gentle touch in return. He sees  
now there is no perfect place, only  
the places of great joy, the places of  
great pain, & the places of both, all of  
them equal, insistent in their living  
still in their grip on remembrance.

Once, the atlas lay upon the shelf,  
now it lies buried in the bottom of  
a desk. Too weary to bring it out,  
to add a line, recall other lines, match  
stories with hubs, recount words &  
moods that mark its creased geography.  
No map good enough to have answers.

# Flight

When I could no longer speak to fate  
nor answer my unsanctioned desire,  
I sought Amelia's escape from the  
binding earth and its narrow sight.

This is how I came to skim clouds

and surrender the weight of earth's  
claim; gravity believes the angle of  
words as they fall at our feet, while  
the sky bides its time, waiting for truth.

# Litany for Angry People

I call upon the noble dead from their lofty graves  
to be witness to my evocation and last anger;  
how I wish they were still alive and watching today,  
how the empire they fought and defended to build,  
unconquerable by mortal foes and Titans of war,  
startled by the power and splendour of its shiny glory,  
under the bloody sacrifice of the Almighty Lord,  
crumbled through dangerous rulers without wisdom,  
knowledge, strength, foresight, passion, and pity,  
like Nineveh and the ancient cities of Troy and Greece.

I call upon Okigbo to wake from peaceful sleep  
and slaughter monsters of his nation with poetic weapons,  
till they become the bloodbath, kneeling in savage blow;  
where is the sharp, piercing voice of Wole Soyinka?  
a golden, two-edged sword driven into the heart of fools  
who plunged our society into dirty, stagnant waters.  
at this dithering hour, Achebe should have lived,  
when our country needs more than ever  
to forfeit death with all its peace and glory,  
and decry the dawning doom hurrying like a spear  
to pierce through the heart of the land and rip apart  
the soul of its beginning, laying waste its heroic wealth.

Rise, Ben Okri rise, Femi Osofisan, Teju Cole  
and Sefi Atta, so everything good will come to us  
when we wait for Angels like Helon Habila.  
how deep have great things fallen apart?  
Nothing is at ease in this erstwhile Open City.  
My heart bleeds, and my soul fragments as I sing this litany  
of the fall of the brazen giant of Africa and the world,  
once a conquering empire, a mother to all nations,  
now a crumbled colossus, the statue of the Atlantic.

For those who lived through the years of impunity,  
inspired to fight for the independence of our nation  
mired in bloodshed, debauchery, and cannibalism;  
for those who lived during the old war of conversion,  
whose hearts broke like dry, cracked knives;  
through the loss of their conscripted family heroes,  
or through the irrational shelling of civilian shelters;

for all who escaped from their lands and homes,  
resided in foreign lands, their source of livelihood lost;  
all who lived through the painful agony of death and pain,  
slaughtered in their sleep, kidnapped in their homes;  
sprawled in the vast field of hunger and starvation,  
Kwashiorkor, an easy weapon of mass destruction,  
by those clutching the Holy Bible under their armpits  
and the Holy Koran between clenched teeth.

For all who fell to the secret sword or the machine guns  
of nomadic cattle breeders from the deserts of the Sahara,  
who destroyed their farms and plundered their crops?  
whose children went to the farms but returned as corpses  
butchered by machine guns in the hands of cattle?  
structured to graze and consume illegal leaves  
which had sustained generations and nurtured cohesion;  
all who acquiesced in the brutality of their brothers  
for refusing to grant them illegal grazing rights,  
who soiled their fingers in the oil of the nation?  
through the exploitation of the local miners on the rig,  
beating and subjugating the natives into savage subterfuge,  
carted away as poignant prisoners of conscience  
lacking the grace to conduct law and order.

For those who fell victim to the breakdown of society,  
from the kidnapping of the state by sanctioned hoodlums,  
who wield heavy arms acquired through a false state?  
stitched together with shrewd political thread and needle,  
unskillfully woven, unable to avoid constant tear.  
all those who run about with scars of their nation,  
mutilated by merciless men wearing military fatigues,  
never the known gunmen of a freedom-surviving state  
who swore a solemn oath to protect others with their life,  
but belong to the murderous unknown by coerced obedience,  
to sacrifice their conscience and destroy their morals.  
There have been years of slaughtering innocents,  
who dared to rise against a frivolous, criminal state?  
governed by an imposter, fanatic of power and ignorance,  
ready to unleash massacre upon those who ask questions,  
declared infidels of a spurious country, enemies of the state.

Had we had enough years of servitude and toil,  
this freedom would have been bloodier and costlier

than all the wars of conquest and emasculation,  
fought on a thousand fronts within our murky minds;  
perhaps this would have been the true freedom at last,  
unaffordable for the dethronement of its glory and power,  
which our soldiers would wear with solemnity and pride,  
as well as honesty and humility in their stout boots;  
who, though mighty in their various, infinite skirmishes,  
must know the ideal colour of national independence  
bought at the dire cost of future honour and pride.  
let all our exiles return from their narrow, safe cities,  
where they mobilise the diaspora, engage with the world  
to understand the plight they did not understand,  
and ally with holy truth and graceful wisdom  
to restore sanity, the dignity of human life and service,  
and help build a nation of love and pure obedience,  
where the law rules and the law always prevail,  
where humble accountability and respectful responsibility  
are the hallmark of a disparate people united by grace,  
bound by hope, bound by unalloyed, tolerant faith.  
we would win and lose a trillion battles on our way  
but in the end, we will have victory in these frenetic wars  
and become again the noblewoman with a trusting torch.

## Back then I knew

we would be exploring the ocean in a mega submarine,  
able to enforce peace, but in truth, a science vessel,  
in truth—a war vessel. *Enforce* means torpedoes  
and phasers, and anger—an emotion we haven't stamped out.

I would be talking to dolphins and stingrays in English, clicks and whistles,  
tail twitches would be translated, and my thick human tongue would click back. The animals have their own language, their own medicine.  
I want them to taste my fingertip and heal every limb and cortex.

That the sea turtle with three fins would save me.  
Our eyes connecting, speaking when I could not utter the heft  
of my shoulders and how, if only I could lagoon in the blueness,  
soft corals, blood orange jams of the underwater dunes,  
sunlight would find me, "hope" would bathe me somewhere  
between baptism and soft washcloth tracing my shoulder  
and brow.

Fire would still be as important as when it was first mastered,  
but instead of roasting meat and boiling stew,  
it conquers row housing, marching people, all things in the way.

I would leave footprints in the sunburned sands.  
They would be covered by sediments, debris, oceans  
I wanted to make peace in, and they would fossilize,  
proof of sunlight, proof of battle, knowledge  
that one could always walk away.

## Caged Sprouting

I take out the trash,  
flies vacating the can  
into muggy breeze—I know  
it is not the Grand Canyon's.  
I timed that wind,  
waited for rustle of bramble.  
I heard the wind miles away tunneling  
until my hair was tossed and turned  
into sunlit embers.  
Here there is only leaking sour milk and cat litter.  
Nothing wild about cleaning toilets,  
nothing new about spraying Tylex.  
I cannot lean over the edge and bite ancientness.  
There is no sensing the sacred,  
no umbra shifting as I watch  
the sun dive behind my left shoulder  
and the canyon wink out before me.  
Here. Crickets, cicadas, small life.  
I sit in mushroom garden,  
tucked away from dish detergent,  
wander the dusty path  
in dreams.  
The rock so different.  
The river so different.  
Both the same age as the clay field I rest on.  
I sprout amongst pepper and toilet spray,  
the flies,  
dreaming of five o'clock shadows  
and the musk of the wild.



A Dream to Examine  
*digital painting*

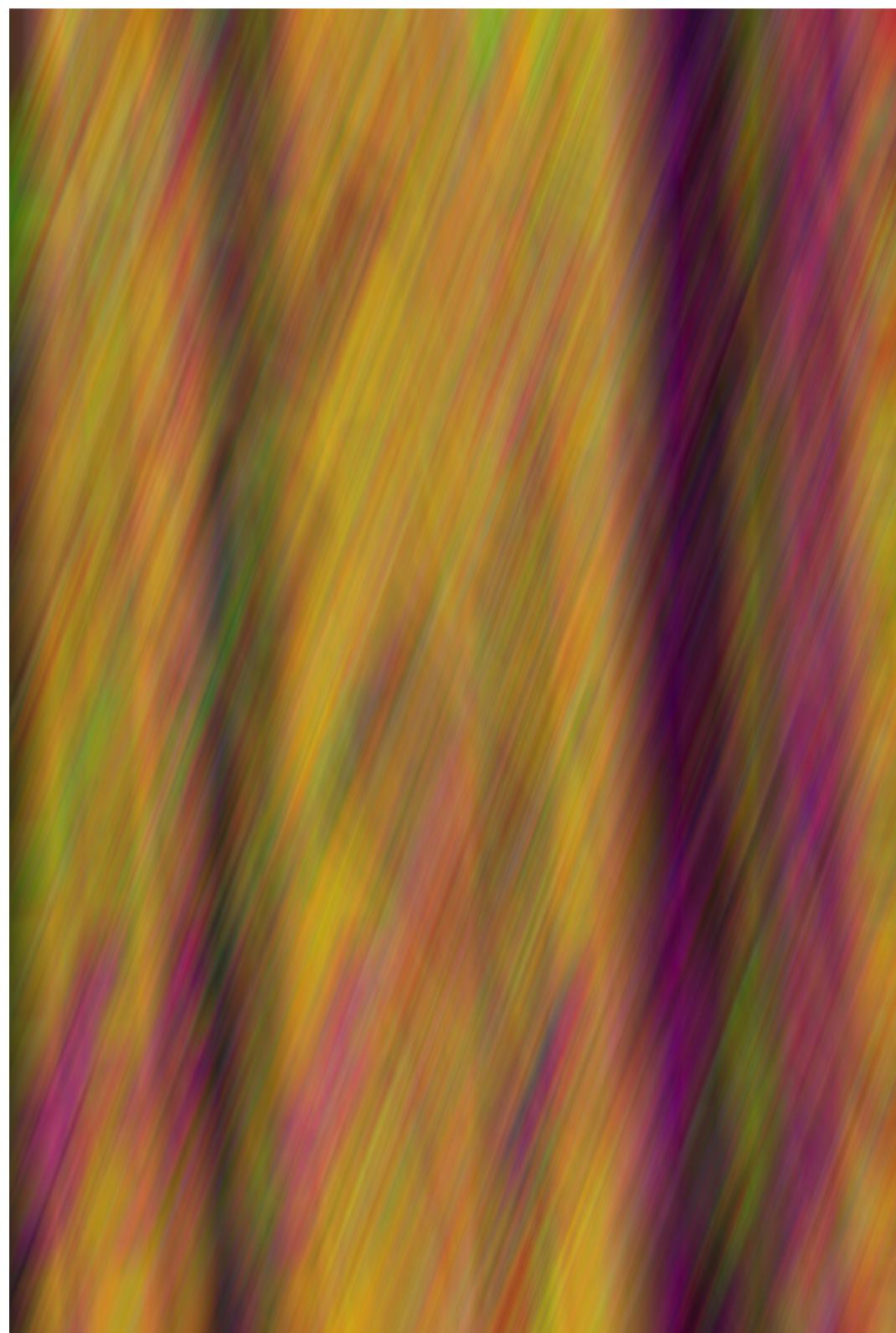


A Phoenix Begins  
*digital painting*

EDWARD LEE

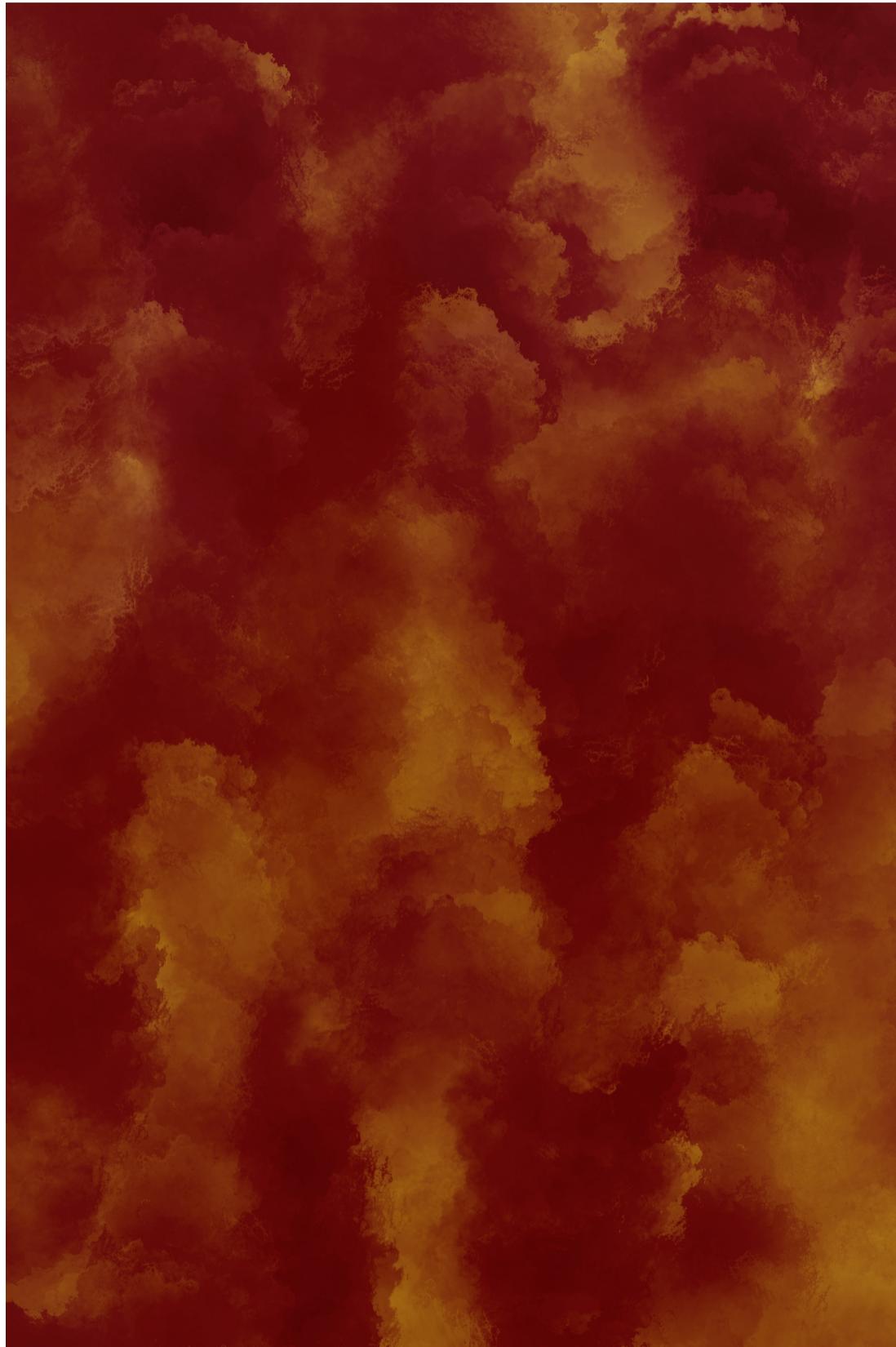


Epiphany No. 24  
*digital painting*



Interspersed across Time  
*digital painting*

EDWARD LEE



Promises Granted  
*digital painting*

# The Cricket's Last Song

A pigeon landed on the head of a towering sculpture, cocked its head to one side, and pecked at the marble man. A sudden but brief silence swept the piazza as if the pigeon switched off the din to let a cortege of angels fly over the Renaissance.

"When it's suddenly quiet, angels are among us," said Joe to his daughter Sophie.

The pigeon flapped its wings and landed on a G for gelateria. The humming and honking joined a lone cricket's shrill shivering among the giants in flesh and stone.

Sophie perked up. She tugged her father's shirt that had lost its freshly-ironed crispness. She stretched her arm in an out-on-a-limb pose.

"It's a cricket, Daddy. I've never seen a cricket before." Her eyes sparkled.

Sophie met her father's helpless gaze.

"Darling, we have tickets. If we leave the line, we'd have to wait longer."

Joe and Sophie played a game of tug-of-war, pulling toward the colossal gates or the escalating song of the cricket.

Joe remembered the first time he held a baby bluebird in his palm —the mother with one eye on a worm, the other on the boy with scabs on his knees, stroking her baby in blue. Joe used to let ladybugs clamber tall blades of hair and his orange freckled arm, watched spiders weave ephemeral art, and just before Sophie won the tug-of-war, the fireflies from his childhood danced and glowed.

The cricket rubbed its wings. The friendly giants observed the creature's hind legs that could leap great insectile heights, fine feelers like harp strings, its infinitesimal shape against slabs of marble, gold and bronze and its amazing voice in crescendo.

Joe reached into his pocket for a map turning his back to the letter S, a spiral of bare shoulders, black straps like conveyor belts cutting into clammy necks, and thumbs thumbing glossy guides.

The pigeon coated the letter G in white and then swooped. Joe followed the bird's trajectory.

"C'mon, time to go." Joe swivelled his daughter and yanked her away from the vulnerable insect. The pigeon seized the cricket.

Joe thought back to when his mother lay on her death bed. "Hearing is the last to go," a nurse said, but he remained silent. A host of angels flew in from the open window carrying a cool breeze.

Years later, Sophie tried to remember the Belltower and the Duomo, the Primavera in a golden frame, the bowls of vanilla, strawberry and caramel, but only the cry of the lonesome cricket lingered.

## Inside Out

Out back, through the chilled  
October window,  
mourning doves work  
the frosted ground  
under the empty feeder,  
searching for seed  
still left in the uncut grass.

Out front, cars keep coming  
down the dirty street,  
looking straight ahead  
beyond their engine's whine,  
pushing by the small  
unpainted houses.

A tree spreads  
its stick shadows  
across the windowsills.  
Inside, he steps closer,  
pecks at the glass  
with the car keys  
until strong enough  
to unlock the door.

Out, the day settles  
under his nails.  
He scrapes by  
wanting to return home.

# Michigan

Now we live in the land of thick green sweaters,  
of the original bare-branched tree  
sticking up out of the snow,  
the one that they put on calendars  
sold in warm places  
where people do not possess  
thick sweaters of any color.

Everyone here has such a sweater—  
perhaps not green  
but robust, or at least significant,  
bearer of its own unique history  
and power for warmth.

Ours was bought long ago on a trip to Maine  
at L.L. Bean headquarters  
when we could only afford one  
for the two of us to share,  
before the kids were born  
before we ever imagined  
taking a job in a place that is frozen  
more than half of the year  
and muffling ourselves in multiple layers of clothing  
on a daily basis.  
I have mended it  
multiple times,  
always to great satisfaction  
because such sweaters are like  
cast-iron pans: they are for life.

Don't believe the dates on that calendar.  
Winter starts here in October  
and continues until May  
when one day  
(it will be a particular day,  
to arrive unexpectedly  
like the resounding trumpet of Judgement)  
the winds from the great Michigami  
viciously tear off the gray over your head  
and paint it such a vivid blue

MOLLY LYNDE

that it sears your eyes to look at its sharpness,  
and you have to stifle the impulse to scuttle for cover  
when crossing the plaza with the frozen fountain  
(think of a mouse fleeing an eagle)  
because Midwesterners don't do that,  
and you feel naked  
under that heartbreaking openness  
in spite of your two undershirts  
and the other layers on top of those.

But with that fresh wound  
you suddenly have no recollection  
(no recollection at all)  
of the months spent  
waiting for this entity,  
this devastating but necessary electric wake-up blue,  
this living, throbbing, supercharging assault on the senses,  
shaking you awake  
reminding you  
that you are indeed  
still alive,  
you can come out of the blurry gray dome  
and you can take off your thick green sweater now.

## En Route to the Upper Peninsula

We flee from the busy south  
following our private north star  
every mile mercifully distancing us from  
the broken sprinkler  
the garage door in need of repair  
the yard in a dismal state  
and too many words  
spoken and unspoken.  
When we arrive  
the trees sweep us up  
in their crooked embrace  
and the cold lakes  
wash us clean.

## Ipseity and Sorrow

In other words

it is always only as the frigate-birds  
abandoned to the threadbare sky  
above the puffins, terns and tossings  
and all the salt-rimed clutches rattling  
on their shallow niches

that we first meet

life's icy onslaughts in our slender down,  
pop-eyed, trembling, requiring of the gunmetal air  
some warm wiggling thing, some placation  
of this emphatic void, an answer  
to the rummaging vacancy down deep

and puzzle on our perch  
at the wheeling world's wonders,  
until at the limit of our pacing impatience,  
we hurl our awkward hunger from the rock  
into the swarming light, committed  
to the noisy empire of boundless flight.

## Sedna's Song\*

Reluctant at the shingled shore,  
ever wary at the water's edge,  
the girl I was held fast her brother's hand,  
as we all waved the brave flotillas on  
through the luminescent floes and cheered  
to see the hunting parties weaving  
out of whiteness into sky-dark open water.

Recollections of that windy world  
will now and then intrude  
upon my limbless sadness here, invade  
this home among the murky currents  
of the ocean floor  
where death is everywhere and life  
swirls noiselessly in wild profusion.

From here I observe your trepidatious hulls  
glide swiftly overhead, into this domain  
where danger waits, where I am now myself  
become your danger, this place from which  
I surface, from time to time,  
into that world that once was mine  
to perch this maiden's terror on your shoulder  
and whisper into your watery, sleeping sight  
the bloodstained gunwales of your crime.

You will know my voice when you draw near  
the sparkling sororities of seal, the raucous  
rookeries of walrus, the sudden glamour of the char,  
the ill wind's rising rumble from the north,  
and the dreadful tossing chop beneath your craft.

But what, oh people, do you remember of that sky  
the day I ventured out with father and brother,  
that sunlit day when our gentle morning's breeze  
portended the howling gale, and of the composure  
of those resourceful menfolk, deciding all at once  
to pitch their female ballast into the ink-dark deep,  
headlong into the tentacled, carnivorous sea?

*\*Guardian of the sea, bane of seafarers and provider of the sea's bounty, Sedna is among the major figures of Inuit folklore. By most accounts, she was born human and was tossed into the stormy ocean by her father and brother to prevent their boat from foundering. When she clung to the rails of the craft, they cut off her hands.*

## Enough North

Far enough north, the growing of our good  
land of earning stops as a final tide.  
There we enter strong enough, strong enough  
to purchase pride and will from our lacking.

And that man that woman that child  
are the suffering signs we must suffer.  
Their circumstance has wrought them so  
burning a blaze from which  
we run to our fires hot and calm.

We move no farther north than what marks  
our resolve to step another notch toward  
that country of winds.

Where are the temperatures for swimming,  
the green grasses of hot hues, the warm sands  
underfoot in our own lands?

Instead, we chop-block the lens of glass waters  
at our feet, and build our homes of water  
where each has a hole for coming and going  
and for watching the shades that flutter the mile  
where the south will also be soon to close in.



Ancient Oaks Figure A23  
*collaged photograph*

## Are They for Real

Nowhere near a half-full or half-empty absence occasions her to celebrate *big*. But *small* treats and passing observances count as units. Often there's a fatness of space lolling right next to him in bed—his oddities. All of that portends a playground he pretends to fill away from her presence: strifes, scorn and fallacies of composition. In the dandy hours when darkness barely holds off the crack of dawn an epic dream goes broke. She can't offer the joy of her arms fussing over what escapes to look for in *Méjico*—her eyes soft, mouth like a sugar doughnut seduced by touch. She wants to slay the wit in his silence just before it seeps into another one of his worlds. *Are they for real?* You get better than half a chance climbing loose sand.

## Harvesting Stars

Roots carry starlight into the earth;  
leaves turn to the heavens  
without remorse.

Plant-life is surely our pointing-out  
instruction.

But how can we aspire to such  
pristine equanimity?

Answers come  
before such questions form.  
The one and precious life  
weighs the sun. I told you so.  
I told you the green promise will lift us.

Regret, frankly, is a shadow  
of what light once was.  
The earth turns around  
and night and day drain our secrets.

The ambrosia falling out of time  
feeds the devils waiting under us,  
wearing leaden boots.

Symbiotic lost and found.  
Starlight, root, leaf – taste the sweet lie  
time tells!

We scrape through woody yokes  
to turn to the sky's skeleton too.  
We invent time and space  
to cover our tracks.  
We pack air and water  
on the raft of questions.  
There is great heaviness next  
to the fire and metal  
we take from the text.  
Take to plan next steps.  
Next steps on water.

We grow contexts.  
But if we want to be like plants  
we must be ready  
to lighten the load by sacrifice.  
Our seed will blow  
away before we are sown  
into the unknown.

Nothing in us  
remembers. We can't change  
earth, water and metal  
into fire.

We forget instead,  
and the silence of forgetting  
brings the rain  
and then soon  
we sheaf the stars  
grown from the deluge.

## Talismanual

In the Serengeti  
Of the night

A wild dream melts on a dark wing.

I'm all tangled up in my wine face  
Looking out of an open

Window, its screen baleen to  
A moth in the way of Jonah.

No mountain light, no cactus light.  
Even the wind took itself away.  
But glimmer still the stars in heaven  
As I'm looking north, northeast to

Polaris, Cynosure.  
Something familiar  
At the end of Ursa Minor.

A kinship spans a galaxy.

## Legacy

A Cadillac  
among tunes to whistle,  
you picked it up  
from that old flick  
hours past midnight

when you sat alone  
guarding the frontiers,  
manning the barricades  
against all that thrives  
in dark.

Within the dance  
we step to daylight,  
I passed and caught  
your music filling  
the subway stairs.

Walking on,  
I hummed along  
and kept the fragments  
incomplete, waiting  
for my own song.

## Beacon Lights

There was a day I became obsessed with your eyes.  
It was the day I found I could not meet them,  
because if I did, their searching (wild) blueness might find me,  
and I would be standing on top of a wind-scraped fell  
and who knows what form I would take.  
Maybe a leaning wind-sculpted Rowan,  
or perhaps I would be a skylark  
disappearing upward into the sun  
or even purpled tangled heather  
covering everything forever.  
And at that time, I was a hare  
all watching and unseen  
and if I left my bracken den  
I might be caught,  
but then again  
I might run free.

There was a day I became obsessed with your eyes  
because  
I had to discover if  
they were a pair  
of circling hawks  
or if they were  
beacon fires  
guiding me  
home.

## The Blue Rose

The rose once found in its common color  
Now finds itself blue though nature's wither  
From vulgaric winds that took on its course  
To trample underfoot like a hooved horse,  
And is without love to nervous the cheeks  
To red innocence that gave the rose peaks.  
For now, in this supposed accepting earth  
Where all grounds are made to retain its mirth,  
The rose without rose finds no rose for one  
And keeps nothing by this empire's setting sun,  
And weeps to imitate the weeps of willow  
That beckon same strings attached to sorrow,  
Looking then out by the blurry eye to eye  
How the earth even lacks the taste to cry.

## No Headstone

for me,  
no slab of granite  
festooned with verse,

lilies, with permanence,  
a marking on a plot  
of land with other sleepers.

no, fire me up,  
offer my charred remains  
to the arms of the north

wind, let me settle  
among occasional pine,  
cross fox, well-traveled

caribou trails.  
return me  
to the earth;

let my rest  
be nothing  
but wild.

# Presumption

On up the time, down  
along a line from east  
    to way out west  
though the world goes  
    the other direction.

These are points and  
plains we put on faces  
screens in a common wheel  
we presume to own, but  
it all precedes and passes us  
    just the same.

# Contributor Bios

**L. Ward Abel's** work has appeared in hundreds of journals (Rattle, Versal, The Reader, Worcester Review, Riverbed Review, Beir Bua, others), including a recent nomination for a Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net, and he is the author of three full collections and ten chapbooks of poetry, including his latest collection, *The Width of Here* (Silver Bow, 2021). He is a reformed lawyer, he writes and plays music, and he teaches literature. Abel resides in rural Georgia.

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**Isabelle B.L.** is a writer and teacher based in France. Her work can be found in the Best Microfiction 2022 anthology, Visual Verse, Discretionary Love, Rabid Oak, and elsewhere.

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**John Peter Beck** was raised in Michigan's Upper Peninsula near the banks of Lake Michigan. He is a professor in the labor education program at Michigan State University where he co-directs a program that focuses on labor history and the culture of the workplace, Our Daily Work/Our Daily Lives. His poetry has been published in a number of journals including The Seattle Review, Another Chicago Magazine, The Louisville Review and Passages North among others.

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**Mary Buchinger**, author of *Aerialist* (Gold Wake, 2015), *einfühlung/in feeling* (Main Street Rag, 2018), */klaudz/* (Lily Poetry Review Books, 2021), and *Virology* (Lily Poetry Review Books, 2022), and winner of the Houghton and Varoujian Prizes, serves on the New England Poetry Club board and teaches at the Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences in Boston. Her poems can be found in AGNI, Copper Nickel, Gargoyle, Interim, [PANK], phoebe, Plume, Queen Mob's Teahouse, Salt Hill, Seneca Review, and elsewhere. Website: [www.MaryBuchinger.com](http://www.MaryBuchinger.com)

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**Kersten Christianson:** Alaskan Poet, Moon Gazer, Raven Watcher, Northern Trekker, Teacher. Kersten Christianson derives inspiration from wild, wanderings, and road trips. Kersten is the poetry editor of Alaska Women Speak. She has authored Curating the House of Nostalgia (Sheila-Na-Gig, 2020), What Caught Raven's Eye (Petroglyph Press, 2018), and Something Yet to Be Named (Kelsay Books, 2017). Kersten lives with her daughter in Sitka, Alaska and enjoys road trips, bookstores, and smooth ink pens.

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Soprano **Lisa Delan** can be heard singing classical settings of a broad range of poetry on the concert stage and in recordings for the Pentatone label. Her own poetry has been featured or is forthcoming in American Writers Review, Beyond Words Literary Magazine, Burningword Literary Journal, Cathexis Northwest Press, Drunk Monkeys, Eunoia Review, Lone Mountain Literary Society, Mill Valley Literary Review, Poets Choice, The Pointed Circle, Tangled Locks, Treehouse Literary Review, Viewless Wings, Wild Roof Journal, The Write Launch, and Wingless Dreamer. She has been nominated for a 2023 Pushcart Prize.

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**G.J. Gillespie** is a collage artist living in a 1928 Tudor Revival farmhouse overlooking Oak Harbor on Whidbey Island (north of Seattle). In addition to natural beauty, he is inspired by art history -- especially mid century abstract expressionism. The "Northwest Mystics" who produced haunting images from this region 60 years ago are favorites. Winner of 20 awards, his art has appeared in 57 shows and numerous publications. When he is not making art, he runs his sketchbook company Leda Art Supply.

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**Jeffrey Hanson** received a Ph.D. in English and Creative Writing from Ohio University. He lives with his wife, Marilyn, in Bellingham, Washington. Despite fears, anxieties, and feelings of helplessness, we must remember that the Buddha was correct to say: "All is well." That knowledge is a gift.

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**HR Harper** lives in the redwoods above Santa Cruz CA. A gay son of a fundamentalist minister and now a student of Dzogchen meditation, he writes to understand human consciousness in the natural world humans seem to be destroying. He began publishing in 2021. Some of his poems may be found at: <https://brusheswiththedarklaw.blogspot.com/>

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**D.B. Jonas** is an orchardist living in the Sangre de Cristo mountains of northern New Mexico. Born in California in 1951, he was raised in Japan and Mexico. His work has recently appeared in Tar River, Blue Unicorn, Whistling Shade, Neologism, Consilience Journal, The Ekphrastic Review, Innisfree Poetry Journal, The Decadent Review, The Amphibian, Revue {R} évolution, Kairos, and others. His first collection, Tarantula Season, is scheduled for release in 2023.

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**Kollin Kennedy** is an emerging writer in the Dallas area who has just recently graduated from the University of North Texas with his Bachelor's in Creative English Writing. He has self-published a few collections of poetry, including his recent 'Oedipus', and is currently working on a work of prose. He has also published his poems on other pages such as Wingless Dreamer and The Decadent Review, and you can find more of his poems on his Instagram @kollinkennedy

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**Rodolfo G. Ledesma** teaches economics at the Ateneo de Manila University, Philippines. Prior to that he taught for a number of years in the U.S. and Seoul, South Korea, where he won a Best Teacher award in 2010. He is the author of Volume 1 & 2 of the cartoon book "A Dog's Guide to Making It in America."

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**Edward Lee** is an artist and writer from Ireland. His paintings and photography have been exhibited widely, while his poetry, short stories, non-fiction have been published in magazines in Ireland, England and America, including The Stinging Fly, Skylight 47, Acumen and Smiths Knoll. He is currently working on two photography collections: 'Lying Down With The Dead' and 'There Is A Beauty In Broken Things'. He also makes musical noise under the names Ayahuasca Collective, Orson Carroll, Lego Figures Fighting, and Pale Blond Boy. You can find him at <https://edwardmlee.wordpress.com>

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**Molly Lynde** lives in Kalamazoo, Michigan. Her poetry has been published in First Literary Review-East, The Font, Heron Tree, Rue Scribe, and Stonecrop. She co-founded and served as editor-in-chief of Transference, a literary journal featuring poetry in translation, from 2012 to 2019.

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**Kim Malinowski** is a lover of words. She is the author of three books and has two forthcoming verse novels. She was nominated for the 2022 Rhysling Award and the 2023 Best of Net and Pushcart Prize. She writes because the alternative is unthinkable.

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**Ronald Pelias** spent most of his career writing books, e.g., If the Truth Be Told (Sense/Brill Publications), The Creative Qualitative Researcher (Routledge), and Lessons on Aging and Dying (Routledge), that call upon the literary as a research strategy. Now in retirement, he lets his writing lead him where it wants to go.

**John Randall** has worked as a trash collector, a copy editor, an attorney, and an investments advisor. His interests include property maintenance, birds, firewood, the night sky, and the freedom of speech. His poetry is forthcoming from The Florida Review, The Oakland Review, and Paperbark.

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**K8e Sage** is a queer, non-binary, Irish/English trespasser in so-called "Canada". They are an artist, curator and educator who has immense gratitude to work and play on Waawiyatanong territory (Windsor, ON). They have an MFA in Visual Art from the University of Windsor. They have been involved in artist-run culture for the past 10 years, serving as curator for the Ministry of Casual Living in Lkwungen territory (Victoria, BC) and as President of Artcite Inc.'s Board of Directors. They also serve as juror for the Polaris Music prize and produce a weekly queer music program on CJAM 99.1 FM.

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**Eugene Stevenson**, son of immigrants, father of expatriates, lives in the Smoky Mountains of North Carolina. Eisenhower Fellow, Pushcart nominee, & author of *The Population of Dreams* (Finishing Line Press 2022), his poems have appeared in *Delta Poetry Review*, *The Hudson Review*, *Red Ogre Review*, *San Pedro River Review*, *Tipton Poetry Journal*, & *Washington Square Review* among others.

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**Jonathan Ukah** is a graduate of English and Law living in the UK. His poems have appeared in various journals and anthologies, such as the *Poet* magazine, *New Note Poetry*, *New Reader Magazine*, *The Pierian*, *Boomerlit* magazine, etc. He is a winner of the Voices of Lincoln Poetry Contest 2022.

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**Ashley Williamson** is an American poet living in the inspiring English Lake District. She is currently working on her Undergraduate of Creative Writing at Oxford University. When not writing, she works as an industrial radiographer for a small family business in the aerospace industry. She wanders the Lake District, rock collecting and painting. Her poetry is featured in *Wingless Dreamer*, *Sad Girls Lit Mag*, *Cathexis Northwest Press*, *La Piccioletta Barca*, *Beyond Words Literary Magazine*, and *The Festival Review*.

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COVER ART: "There's something spiritual about that stain"  
by k8e sage | *digital photograph*, 2018