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COVER

Seth Pennington, Design

Holly Farrell, "Life Jacket," oil on masonite, 2016.

www.hollyfarrell.com

→

An arrow at the bottom of a page indicates the stanza does not break.

DOUG RAMSPECK

Winter Trance

I have been studying the migration
of the years, the dull heat of their passage

a strange fire. And because they are holy,
gravity slips through them, these cycles

of sleeping and waking as quiet
as the space between heartbeats,

the stillness of January fields,
the men by the fence at the roadside

in their orange jumpsuits,
the winter crows oaring out of the trees.

MARTHA SILANO

I have to deepen my know

ledge because it's shallow like a tarn
in late August, because I don't

have a grasp on the rate of melting,
on the sponge-like Greenland firn

which had been keeping the oceans
from rising. My trifling know ledge,

unexcavated, undredged, forbidding me
from having down pat the warming

of oceans, the movement north
of commas and pikas, little egrets,

the strengthening of tropical storms
with names like Matthew and Gaston.

My ledge, lacking gravitas, brims
with gaseous laughter, with buoyant

conclusion and calamity. I will find me
a walk-behind trencher, a skid-steel loader,

and I will dig this sad excuse for a reef
into a mantle. With my significant foxhole,

I will gorge and moat, trough and dig
till I've hit bedrock, will make this ledge

of mine a mountain—more sloped, more shored,
more earthworked; I will scoop and scrape

till I surface the contents of the whale
that washed up on a Spanish coast,

fifty-nine plastic items in its gut—two flower pots,
spray canister, thirty-seven pounds of trash bags.

With this trailing pipe, I track the moth,
the mole-like Pyrenean desman elevating

MARTHA SILANO

eight inches an hour. With my modish know
ledge, I will no longer possum but posit

not a wall but a walrus's need for ice—
its floating preschool, its staging ground

for lunch. On my berm they'll glide
and glissade, congregate, give birth.

DAVID EBENBACH

Holding Feathers

One time—I was just off the 42 bus, backpack-heavy in my youth—there was a pigeon, and it had gummed its feet with tar. Talons like dark dough. Already in a circle was the whole gang of people who'd never seen each other, but still they had their roles. One guy lived in that row house right there and so he had a towel, like a thick dish towel, and there was one woman who knew about birds because she had cats. Somebody held the pigeon and someone else got rubbing alcohol while I bent over the scene and knotted my hands. People had Q-tips out. At one point two of the neighbors looked at each other—squatting on the sidewalk, a knee each on the slate—and said *This isn't working*. And then they were holding feathers.

DAVID EBENBACH

The Flower

The poet from Iran
was born before her parents,
is what the interpreter says.
It means she knows everything.
When we give her the tour,
she says, Let's go inside,
where she keeps wearing her
white coat. In the campus chapel
under the new ceiling, beside the new
stained glass, she asks me
if I go to church every week
and I have to say I'm Jewish.
She takes the quietest step
backward. And when we get to the room
where she's going to read she sits
in the row in front of me and turns to say,
Sorry to give you my back.
What you say in Iran, I know, is
A flower has no back.

G.C. WALDREP
chronicle (ii)

muddy dahlia
of my heart,
pronounce me

whole—I
convoke eye's

ark-signature,
(I) slew & splay
a hive-vein's

brighter aspect

heretic-peen
unforge myself

as braille-
chapel, spline

adrift in nights

tender spine
of being-breath

undappling
in its gene-mote

I pledge my
(brutish) anthers

to your dream-

festival, one-
& only-hospice

G.C. WALDREP

On the *Conferences* of John Cassian

I cross to the outer garment where the wound waits. The wound is an old friend. The wound is expecting me. I wrap the wound in bits I've snipped from the inner garment and then, side by side with the wound, we turn back to face what we've left behind. *It looks so cold* is what the wound says, from its wound-mouth. It's not what I would have said. It's not my general feeling. But it's important not to disagree with the wound while the wound is talking. So I wait for awhile. The sun sets. Flocks of geese spin overhead, drafting consciences for politicians I'll never vote for. It is all very beautiful. *Are you done yet*, the wound asks, suddenly. No, I'm not.

DENISE BERGMAN

he opened the window's slit and climbed in

a friend suggests "compassion" "society" "circumstances." I tell
her I don't care

I don't care if he was born into a tangled skein of back-stabbing
brothers. so what. wrestled under the see-saw kicked in the face on
the slide. I don't care. told tough it out don't cry no dolls god
forbid no Lamb Chop mutant turtles and plastic characters whose
names end in tron. I don't care. high fives slaps on the back never
an embrace do I care. no. army boot camp be all you can be not
who you want to be. I don't care. my dog would have lived a
simple dog life and I after forty-one years would be writing about
the mockingbird mimicking a squirrel to scare the neighbor's cat or
about medical supplies blockaded from entering Gaza. do I care if
his father left town his uncle pulled him into the woods. no. what is
beaten out of the boy what is forced into the beaten-down boy so
what. I don't care

I slept through the rattling unoiled half-broken sash cord rollers. I
slept through his steps on the floor. a moon was somewhere and
somewhere was rain

blood on my shirt from my mouth never washed out. do I care
where he came from. no. I don't care

he had a mother he did. he he he had a mother. she caressed him at
least once he knew a caress. do I care. no. I don't care

DENISE BERGMAN

Detonated

Deeded sand underfoot, in hand
Packed and patted
Cold stone grit specks and dust familiar as our first

Shaped and shadowed hands.
Hands. Old old ages of hands, hand and hand-
Prints, before gust or breeze.

Handfuls handstamps pails. Sand-
Scapes: abalone moonsnail razorshell and calloused heel flakes.
A particle's fragments' fragments.

Used to be outer layers of packed sand trickled
Scattering the end of day
Blurring the background like a mirror.

Muscle under the sand sculpture's windblown skin
A new
Skin until it too the weather crumbled.

Used to be weather
Happened when we didn't make it happen, happened
Despite.

Used to be tides
And craft and chance and homemade calendars with penned
Numbered days.

My expectation was time-exhausted
Smithereens
On a beach of slow erosion.

But this
Explosion on trial in a court of explosion.
Someone can't wait—

In a wink our mothers' maiden names.
In a blink the cuneiform tablet, Mesopotamian comb
Carved tender ewe.

DENISE BERGMAN

The current charged.
Ancient earth's fierce fire through filament-thin
Detonator wire.

DENISE BERGMAN

Camoufleur

German Expressionist painter Franz Marc created nine tarpaulin camouflage covers, assuming that those in the style of Kandinsky would be the most effective against aircraft flying at 2000 meters or higher.

Art masters, you'd think,
would cautiously
mete out their talent, deal it
ace by king
in lucky breaks, not treacherous
losing streaks.

Blue Rider, swashbuckling
the blind forest,
trampling hens-and-chicks sedum,
moss clumped on your horse's
ivory hooves
you trekked vale to battlefield.
Was there no better
use of your palette—slippery blue,
green jest, brown fleck—
than the flickered delusion
under which we hide
disguised,
hide, as time rearms,
as arsenals rearm
with time?

Franz!
mocking Wassily's blue circle, red square,
forging your friend's serpentine
black line—
war steals then fences provenance,
smears charcoal deceit
while behind a studio's primed
stretched canvas
or in a field under draped raw cloth
a horse whinnies
and its belly growls.

XANDRIA PHILLIPS
from Black Eyewitness Directory

Elmina Castle

at first only the rivers and I wept
for you in your journey (like the waters')
from tropical interiors to the estuary

slap of the ocean's cupped hands
and then your absence became religion

as easily as creating meaning from loss of limb
you fell into crates that rustled from within
to the tune of the wind's phantom chorale

The Good Ship Jesus

you and I spoke the same language
so we cursed and sang and closed each other's
mouth to preserve moisture, and with the ocean
at our backs we shuffled through piles of death

and then you were in that pile, but I never
stopped talking to you—not even after I found
my legs—not even after I found my pupils refused
to shrink in their want for gathering darkness

Tuskegee, Alabama

in a fit, you slapped my fingers onto your
forehead and asked me to pull off the horns
growing there, and I felt and saw nothing,
and I told you these horns were lovely

someone told you that eating chicken would
shrink your brain and darken your skin,
but there wasn't much else lying around,
so I called it duck and pried open your mouth

Angola Penitentiary

I am the one who visits you and I swallow
a key for every year you're put away
and I swallow our entire home and I stuff
books and television shows into my pockets

before I can slip you a single comfort
between your teeth they pick me up shake
me and confiscate everything on my person
into a box labeled CONTRABAND

AMANDA BALES

Brisance/Advice for Beheading a Chicken

Cut high and leave brain stem.
Enough, hear tell, that a man
once toured a headless pullet
sustained by grain water he
dripped down esophageal hole.

Cut low and blade meets bone.
Enough, I know, to call
a second strike, a third,
as many as it takes
to get the job done.

Space enough for error,
a measure learned by IED,
and so this morning saw you
pinned to floorboards, my face
mine and not mine as you labored
my name until I collapsed.

Light stretched, but we lay
as if in shadow of a predatory bird—
mouths pressed to pulses.
Your hands hatchet burdened.

DAVID SALNER

A Shift of Sand and Steel

1. Whistle and Scrap

The whistle, so I should get my ass in gear,
get ready for what's shrieking toward me:
grinders starting up, stone wheels spitting bits of sand.

A litany of scrap: clatter of magnet as it gathers
to its truck-size breast a car wheel, Camry quarter panel,
stainless sink, bent John Deere steering column,

crumpled dishwasher, bundle of rusted rebar, bucket
of roofing nails, screen door, bank
of busted high school lockers, coil

of wire trailing through the scrapyard
like the bald tail of a rat. Trolleying
toward the furnace room, screeching on rails,

this crane and its quiver of junk
drifts then roams, sways into a wide arc
to take the swing out of the load, hovers

above the open hellhole of the furnace,
obeys the index finger twirling down,
down with the load, down

with it, ready, ready—
fist opening—
ungodly crash and molten tramp trash stink.

2. But Lovely,

some of this world, I think.
Like after sandblasting, the way steel looks—
a morning sky, gray clouds in a creamy

endlessness, no shine, no pit, no blemish,
a pewter muteness from which everything
of night and day has been honed out.

Sand goes airborne on the whisper
of a better time, dazzles as it floats in rays
that slant through corrugated eaves.

It falls on hardhats, into the pockets
of beastly hot twill coveralls, cakes in snot.
I pull the dusk mask tight

across my face so that the paper smell
blows back with every breath. Oh hell,
let's get the damn shift over with.

3. Aladdin Thermos

A tin box sits on a Formica counter in the lunch room
with grimy stickers advertising *STP*, *Skoal Racing*, *Ducks
Unlimited*, and all the union strikes I've been part of.

Inside the box, Chinese leftovers. "Take them for lunch,
Lily won't eat anything but mac and cheese."
I'll wash down the salty beef and broccoli with coffee,

still hot, from an Aladdin thermos that sees me
through daylights, afternoons, and sleepless
graveyards—its steel shell, like my lungs,

pitted by silica, rusted by chlorine gas.

4. A Dream of Quitting Time

From break to break, I'll wish my shift away,
shower off sand, go out into the crystal clear
all-clear of quitting time—midnight in Arizona,

soaring like a nighthawk over Guadalupe,
this town I work in, where Yaqui Indians
have been driven into the corner

of a long-lost nation; sail further
to Apache Junction, home of *Nate's Used Cars*
and GIRLS, GIRLS, GIRLS; to Globe, Morenci,

where copper towns are dying, leaving high-rise dumps
of orange tailings, listless hills of slag;
or down the dried-out Gila River, into a basin

of forgotten lives, where Brandi Riley
says goodbye to Jason Sanchez, a loud kiss,
a silent night in Casa Grande;

or float above a lonesome bird's eye
of saguaros; careen on desert monsoons
almost to the border; to Bisbee, home of the famous

deportation, surrounded by the tufts and brambles
on the otherwise bare-assed Mule Mountains—
I'll float into the desert night beneath a firmament of sand.

LAUREN CAMP

Father to Narrow then Stranger

I said, Fix
your buttons.
He said, We have to see

if it is Saturday.
A man with the weight
of belief

in one of his pockets,
and these fill up
fast. He said, We have to move

the bodies, and since he was not
broken
by such talk, I endured

his broad
deviance. He said
he would have to —

and when he said it
again, then left it
at that, I smiled

with terrible tangles
in my love. We were told
to expect such

knots. He wanted
it to be
Saturday. He could go empty

those hidden days
in between. I watched his fingers
scan his glossy picture

on his door. This was all
of him. His fingers formed
his own double

LAUREN CAMP

collars, ecstatic
exhausted cheeks. Lost,
you might say,

but we didn't. I said, The sun
has again become
rain. I said Dad, and he tried

to arrive
with a new sentence. He said, Out
in the earth, time moves

like an angel.
His watch swept

the hours. I said, Let us
take what's not
even there. He listened.

LAUREN CAMP

I Pull Into the Walgreens Parking Lot

To elapse this story means to knifework & life-ease
the unbearable. So when he calls, instead of driving, I sit hushed
in this repeated city beside the embarrassed crisp trees, too much

concrete pigment. My father outlines his now-failure
& death & discontinue. Again, again, whatever won't quit
his mind: the bike the bag the way the seat

made people disappear. All the while, the body
of with & against buds without nouns, but I know
his crammed overgrown frets that hasten

to anger. The dashboard clock goes on, the same numbers
re-ordered. He tells me how he fingerknicks his scalp
of its allegiant spots & I love that head

that's sun indulgent, that orphans its smallest terrors. I watch
people walk along the nearby folds of road. A whole hour
through his joists of memory. My fingers fish my purse

for random dirty sweets. I'm seeing through glass
how we were five & sweaters & faith
wide enough to sing God's names & later down

to one, one, one, one. I have to figure
he is an old man hammering dozens of times
on the story & its contamination. The whole city can see me

sitting here as his words curve to my throat. I take them,
take them; you can't want a man to be quiet without
stuttering with death. The words back-to-back flint

every next thought. You might think I wait for every clump
of foul from his pockets. I can't stop the time
to headlong my silence. There are days breaking this blood. Days after

to slip under its flank. That's why I'm in a parking lot
holding my hand in my tired hand & saying
love, the word stuck to my palm. This teaches me

LAUREN CAMP

not to hurry & this is not enough. *Love, love*
& again the traffic light burns up with red. The sky falls
toward night. Saying it in every available absence.

MICHAEL BAZZETT
The Men Who Disappear

There is no box with mirrors.
It happens as someone watches.
They go out to the woods to live.



Most change their names. One

liked birds. Also archery, often running
his finger along the feathered fin

that held the arrow true in flight,
the feature known

as *fletching*. So Fletcher Starling it was.
Whether changing names changes

other things is uncertain. These circumstances do not
submit easily to terms of cause and effect.
There is no bureau one can apply to

with such questions, a lack of authority
that would be appalling were it not

the norm.



The man finds shelter and quits shaving.
His wisping hair and beard become
a nest for his nose and cheekbones.

His features sleep silently, side by side,
like something discovered in a quiet glen.



One problem
with these men
who disappear

is that once
they do it
they're still here.

When they walk
mountain streams
broken reflections

stalk them:
a fact that should
be obvious yet

often eludes them
until the moment
they see two

eyes floating in the water.



Many of them become proficient
at tasks we relegate to earlier times:

knot tying, whittling, reading
the weather as a well-thumbed manual.

Handling boredom like a claw hammer
that both drives and pulls the shrieking nail.

Understanding that the sounds *own someone*
are locked inside of *lonesome one*.



The observer of the disappearance
is often an interested party.

Female witnesses are not uncommon.
These women swear that someone was

there not two weeks ago
and now, *this*. They indicate impressions

left in couches and easy chairs, claiming
That's not the man I married.

These words are undoubtedly
true yet sometimes understanding

takes years to arrive.

MICHAEL BAZZETT

The Monster

They didn't notice it at first
because of the adrenaline
coursing through their bodies
but the monster was too old.
Its muzzle had gone grey
and a number of its claws
were cracked and broken.
It even trembled with a bit
of palsy when it settled
back on its fat haunches.
And every time it put
somebody's head into its
mouth and tried to shred it
clean as a plum from a stem,
one of its teeth broke and it
howled in pain and spit
the person out with splinters
of brittle enamel clinging
to their sodden clothing
and then they too began
to scream or possibly moan,
if they hadn't already begun
to slip from consciousness.

Strictly half-assed, said Steve
and he dropped the sword
he'd received upon arrival
at the refurbished warehouse
painted to look like a cave
with a coupon for himself
and five guests to do battle
with a bona fide monster
of "cannibalistic mettle &
unequivocal medieval rage."™

Fluorescent lights flicked on
when the manager entered
wiping sweat from his head
and apologizing profusely.
He wore a navy polo shirt
with the company logo

→

as did the chagrined trainer
who was attempting to lure
the monster back inside
its chain-link enclosure
by offering it a rank knot
of chickens tied to a pole.
It mostly just seemed tired.

Brian climbed unsteadily
into the unmarked Ford van
they used as an ambulance
and Paul held a wash cloth
to the puncture wound
in his neck with one hand
but he had a beer in the other
and already he and Steve
were beginning to laugh
about how half-assed it was
and the manager promised
that next time would be
better, that a new one was
en route from Arkansas
and still mostly feral, so
next time they might see
what it felt like to be alive.

MICHAEL BROWN, JR.

Freedom

Salt laid across my lips breaks down to stardust.

So, when I speak, I spit creation.

Now these scattered lyrics are beautiful, but they are not mine.

My fears still fang to nascent lead-cracked muscles. And cording spirituals and soliloquies

Struggle to sing from coke-locked jaws. And the sackcloth flesh

Of freedmen frame my shadow. Now, all these things may beat my heart, but these visions

Do not live. They haunt. I hear them all. And they're echoing through my soul.

It sounds as if from a tomb. And I awake all these nights, sweating, having swung

Pendulous through history. Now I wake and see the lips of lion-like ladies speaking up the sun,

Though they call it "God." And I hear this great migration of laughter

Swaying rapturously through the close-knit buildings. And I take joy in this music, dancing now,

Dragging all those phantoms with me. All black, all shouting. And in this beautiful babel, I lose

My name and lunge into a body.

SHARON DOLIN

A Good Dream Should Be Kept in Mind

What if I've forgotten the dream / what if
I was awakened hurriedly / what if the forgetting
is what I keep in mind / what if it's the fretting?

There was an ocean / there was a metallic
wave / there was alarm of no speech /
symphony of echoes / assault of wind.

Is this the dream I must keep in mind:
blank radiance of a faceless embrace?
I have had too many coffees / too many

dreamless nights / far too many
stuporous mornings trying to rouse
myself into some entrancement

of the believable good.

CLAIRE SCHWARTZ

Geula Amir speaks

again with the american journalists
who come to call
my sons *murderers*, again
with my sons who rise redly
waving their four good hands
like their best name has been spoken
by the wide blue mouth of their god
or prime minister, O,
when a child dies, the village keens,
when children kill, there is only
one mother to kneel & lap
the blood from their names,
O forked & feral tongue,
i spit in the tea & carry the cup
to the journalist perched on the couch
i cleaned just this morning, whose bald head
shines like something polished, O stupid sun,
O futile gesture, smokestack, yeshiva, fanatic
in one hundred languages, O headlines,
bylines, ball bearings, rigged & riddled,
O new & no speech of mine,
when i die, who will be there
to write the end of history?

Note: Geula Amir is the mother of Yigal and Hagai Amir, right-wing Jewish brothers and conspirators who assassinated Israeli Prime Minister Rabin. Although the brothers take outspoken pride and responsibility for the well-documented assassination, a third of Israelis, including their mother, do not believe they are guilty.

KATHLEEN HEIL
The Denby Sonnets

1.

A tradition is not a police regulation
every kind of oddity of device or
accent, square as a cover of mature
suburbanites down in the rumpus room.
When you listen closely, there is nothing
everyday about art. A life of enormous energies
keeps pouring itself according to its fate into
the imaginative world of dance. An expressive
play of changing proportions shocks
sensitive persons; they are not treated as
pictorial possibilities. They retain their weight.
The art of dancing must be a real thing
to some people some of the time:
the trouble of keeping in balance.

2.

The trouble of keeping in balance
may be compared to lifting a table
by one leg and keeping the top horizontal;
a fine art of understatement, she throws
up the leg in a flash, a formal limitation
of movement. The extra power is like
a sense of transport. People are so
to speak their better selves. A step
action can also be a magic emblem.
Dancing became exhilarating not only
to do, but also to watch, to remember,
to think about. A voluntary, a purely
human attentiveness. Unless you catch it
in motion, you don't catch it at all.

3.

In motion, you don't catch it at all—
she seems to watch over her integrity
with too jealous an eye. You often look
at a free meter and listen to a strict one,
the difference between getting the ideas
and following. Rationally it seems odd
to confuse the metrics of music with
musicality, as pleased as a hen
who has just laid an egg. What
are all those bison floating on
if not on a steady beat? The risk is
part of the rhythm, a single revolving
vibrating shape which kept changing
in the air, a prehistoric pleasure.

4.

In the air, a prehistoric pleasure,
a kind of crooning. Painful
situations, strokes of wit,
hallucinating contradictions—
there is nothing comfortable
to rest on. The glamour of momentary
success is no solid foundation. But
dancing that makes sense is so rare
it is worth being serious about,
power and unction in her hips,
knees, and instep, her elegance
of motion, her private integrity.
A bit of insanity, it has been
doing people good for a long time.

5.

Doing people good for a long time:
classic steps turned inside out and
upside down—retimed, reproportioned,
rerouted, girls dancing hard and boys
soft; the victim has been struck square.
Some people complain such dancing is
mechanical. It seems quite the opposite
to me. American ballet is like a straight
and narrow path compared to the pretty
primrose fields the French tumble in
happily. A certain sanctimonious decentness,
a note of expensively meretricious tastiness—
I felt again the homeyness of the first time,
like a party where everybody acts nice.

Note: All text is borrowed from the dance criticism gathered in *Dance Writings and Poetry* by Edwin Denby, Robert Cornfield, ed. Yale University Press, 1998.

MACEO J. WHITAKER

Skunky Bunker

We can't all be Otis Redding.
Let the duet singe your soul.
Ignore saxophone bloopers +

the clang + clack of drum-
sticks flung staccato to tile.
Cacophony. No coffee—black,

iced, Irish—required. Stall-
bound. Yayo bouquets high-
light set breaks. It's late. O-

paque. ATM's busted, as is
the lock. Though lungs grind
overtime, windpipes do not fade,

nor do game, thinned-out aortas.
Score. Glorious hymns. Relax?
Dirty verb. We wax + blow up

as green smoke lights the low hat.
Two floors up, a beggar's foam
cup collapses inward, alien slop

crushed on the sidewalkscape.
String picker with no strings, he
hums a song he can't sing, man.

Clouds cull smog water for issue.
Across the street, reggae thumps
from a gaping bodega doorway.

The world is slow + heavy.
The world is rolling + fake.
The world is sham sham sham.

But not downstairs, where we
hunker + hanker in this bad, bad
bunker, bracing for an attack that will never, ever, + I mean *ever*; transpire.

COLETTE INEZ

How We Got Here

We walk, a dapper couple
holding hands in May
on Broadway.
Too late for the movie,
we find a sidewalk table and chairs.
Lincoln Center, and it's Paris, sort of:
chic, convivial crowd,
trees coming into their own
Cezanne green, the sun
our Edith Piaf singing "La Seine."
Autumn back then on the rue de la Sorbonne,
Marthe et Georges discussing Kant's "Critique
of Pure Reason," wine swirling. How they stumbled
into each other's desire, *qui sait?*
Love, my start a year after yours
in the Borscht Belt, Labor Day. Sylvia and Max.
Pop knocks back a little schnapps. Syl, too.
So who knew?