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editor

Troy Jollimore

assistant editor

James Moog

book/design/digital layout

Emily Choi

photos/artworks

James Moog

Emily Choi

Paola Ferrario

cover art

Emily Choi

special thank you

Neal McFarland

legal counsel

Micah Zeller

available for free:

<https://www.divagations-advancedleisure.com/>

submit online: info@advancedleisure.com

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comment

from our editor

To *divagate* is to digress, to wander, to stray from the path. Something that poems are always doing, I think; or at any rate, it's part of what I expect, look for, hope for in poems. The sense that we are no longer walking down the expected path, that a new course is being charted in some manner. Even if only for a moment. One divagation might be followed by another, after all; it's always possible to digress from a digression. Perhaps all this divagating is just a way of finding one's way, so that the ultimate end is a return, back to the original road, if not back to the starting place. But older and wiser, so that it is not the same place at all, because we are not the same. Or the starting-out place is the same, but we know it now, we can really see it for the first time, as in those famous lines from T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*.

All I know is, I nearly always enjoy it—in a poem, in a novel, in a film—when we suddenly depart from the plot, lift off in some other direction altogether, as if something had struck the artist that they just *had* to tell us about *right now*, some other story that demanded immediate recounting, some origin story or bit of background or filling in of a minor character who turns out not to be a minor character at all, because nobody, after all, is a minor character in the story of their own life. I enjoy the sense that there are thousands of places we might have gone and did not, thousands of doors we might have opened, each with a room behind it worth stepping into. Art, one would think, ought to give a sense of the inexhaustible richness of life. While at the same time presenting that richness in distilled and intensified form, making it somewhat easier to get hold of. In real life, in the midst of the everyday, so much of life's potential richness escapes us. Art allows us to maintain the fiction, for a little while anyway, that this is not the case, that life's richness is inclined to make itself available to us and that we are well designed to grasp it.

I am, in my poetic tastes, fairly old-fashioned. I don't just mean that I appreciate, when they are well done, the use of traditional forms, and rhyme, and regular meter. (Though I do.) I don't just mean that I still want art to be beautiful, at least much of the time. (Though I do.) But also that I like poems with a subject, and I like—*really* like—poems that seem to give me a sense of the poet, the individual who is the other partner in this brief interaction. That said, I also like poems that constantly digress from their subject, as should by now be clear; poems that feel like they have a subject, though I can't quite put my finger on what it is; poems where the identity of the speaker seems unstable, chaotic, constantly shifting, perhaps even unreliable to the

point of hazard. I like, too, poems that screw around with tradition and form, and push against their limits; poems that complicate my notion of what beauty might be or might mean in a complex world; even poems that push against the limits of the language itself, in the attempt to find words for something that has yet to be captured by the language. So, I like innovation. I like the new. But what is more Modern than liking the new? And Modernism is a hundred years old. It's yesterday's news, it's old hat, it's your parents' theory of art. Or maybe *their* parents'. Liking, desiring, decrying the current state of things and crying out for the new—these are no longer new. The desire to push back against the old-fashioned is very old-fashioned.

Such is the situation we find ourselves in. No wonder it can feel impossible to live in such times, let alone to write. In the abstract it *is* impossible, surely, to do something truly new, to write a good poem. And then I come across one, in one place or another, and I am refreshed and restored. Someone has, once again, proven that poems can still be written in the only way possible: by writing one, an act that makes the skeptical implications of abstract reasoning seem foolish and irrelevant. Every new poem, if it works—if it really is a *poem*—is urgent and compelling; we *needed* it, even if we did not know until the moment of its encounter that it is what we needed. All we knew was that we needed *something*. And here it is. What do you say when you find a good poem you did not know of before? Sometimes I say *Wow*. Sometimes *holy crap*. Sometimes I say *Well, would you look at that*. And nearly always I find a friend, and I say to that friend, *Hey, you have to read this*. I hope you find something in these pages that seizes you, arrests you, stops you in your tracks; something that prompts you to divagate from the path your day was otherwise taking; something that makes you say some of these things, or something like them, and makes you go looking for a friend with whom you can share the news.

— Troy Jollimore

Cynthia Boersma

The Prayer

How did you know
to pray *now*, Odysseus, storm-shattered, drowning
in strange seas? After all, you hadn't prayed before—
the goddess came or she didn't; your mind flashed,
whip of your striving heart, flashed like bronze
in the battle-blazing sun. What do you know now,
naked and new among mortals, brine-choked, strangled
by the sea's heaving swells, sea water plunging
into your nostrils, your mouth, your throat, plundering your lungs—?
Did you finally realize, crafty-minded wanderer,
bone-weary, that even *your* last breath belongs to the gods?

Dolius

Old farmhand, bent over the rows in the far field
where you can work alone and in silence, away from grief,
grounded by years, stiff, shuffling among the tender plants,
old earth-soaked callouses crusting your big hands—
to you she came breathless across the endless fields,
old mother who tends you well, who rubs salve into your labored hands,
who trims your thinning beard, enveloping you
in her warm, musky breath—spring onions
just pulled from moist soil—her chest heaving now—
wheezing through her strange accent, “Come! Come!”
The meal is ready. The goat, hot and steaming on the table
laid before the man who has come glistening like a god.
“He has traveled far. He is hungry. He waits for you.”

The Great Card Table

The whiny ghosts with their high thin bat cries flock now
wild at this hour, as if she is one of their own, dropped
from the eaves while they were clinging tight. But she sits quietly
with her headphones on, bent over another jigsaw puzzle,
the one with the cozy scene on the cover — always
this one — a warm fire and comfy sofa,
suggestive basket of yarn overflowing
beside an overstuffed chair; of course
a dog is curled near the hearth, or a cat.
Of course, there is a “hearth.” The bright fairy tale
colors come broken into 1,000
identical pieces, their edges rounded
and smooth as if it doesn’t hurt at all.

She has set up a large card table in the empty bedroom.
Night by night she sorts the little pieces
under a small lamp, piecing together the straight edges.
When a rectangular border completely encloses the empty center
and all the rest remains broken apart, the scattered bits
whickering wildly beyond the edges, shrill
beyond the bounded, flat, white space (quiet here,
within the unfulfilled enclosure
after the soft snap of the last piece of the edge.
But the perfect picture keeps never
coming together) — she breaks it apart,
this great yearning, with her still-beautiful hands,
Palmolive fingers imperceptibly shaking,
unraveling all she has done.

There is no hurry.

This is not a shroud. The nights are long.
They will come again, over and over,
persistent — the ceaseless complaints of the dead,
whining in their squeaky bat voices,
wild as if she is one of their own, dropped away
from their deep, dark roost. But she is still nestled there,
small wings folded against her brittle fur, clinging tight.



Don Quixote falls from his horse in despair. James Moog, Monoprint

Peter Champion

7:05 A.M.

Sun in the crowns of magnolias and on flapping
plastic half buried in manure

sun on the painters' ladders and sinking to fractal
waves in the plunge pool at Hidden Falls

sun on the fields outlying
and the limestone bluffs of Pike Island

curving east as earth
falls into more sun meaning successive

sheets of fire in which to
come to the things of the world

already withered daffodils
magnolia petals on a

truck with the boot
snow trillium run rampant



A group of pigeons brainstorming before walking into a store in Insa-dong, Seoul. This way, they can stay warm for a bit before getting noticed by the storekeeper. <Photo by Emily Choi>

John Gallaher

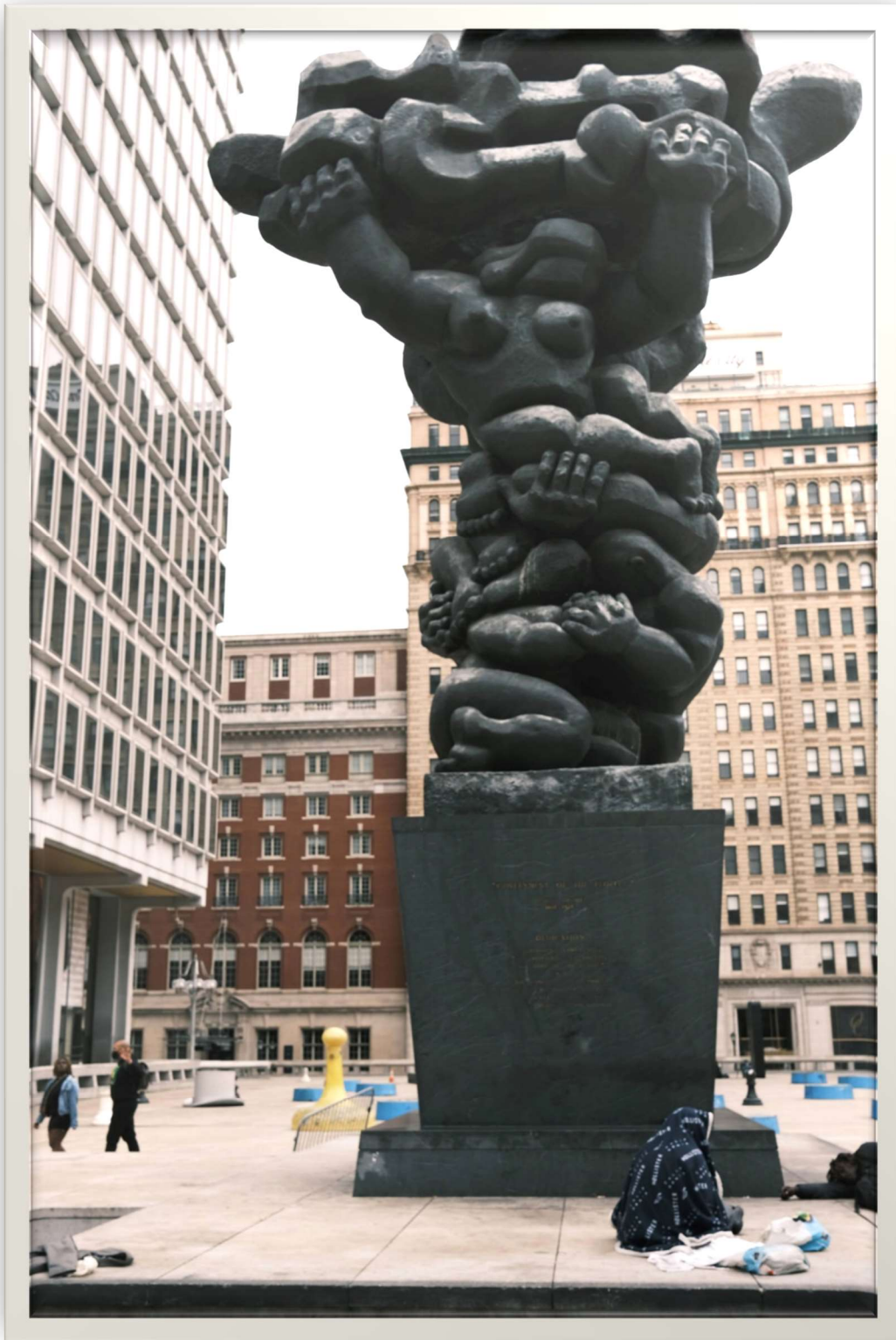
Today Is One of the Days of the Week

I know a few things. One, bananas are radioactive. Blame potassium. Blame the little talked about facts about how bad everything is for you. Another, I'm in the fifth decade of my angsty teen phase. One of the joys of travel is you can pretend you're someone else, and you're anywhere. When no one can see me, I'm Steve McQueen. How about a feigned accent at gas stations? Yes, please. Funny thing: my father dies, and when I get to the community guard gate, my name isn't on the "OK People" list. I promise, Gate Guard, it's OK I go to his empty house and go through his things for the next three days. At some point, no one is interested in your prized possessions. Therefore, I'm trying not to be a broom. I want to be a safe. But you don't always get what you want. Or what you need, either. The Rolling Stones were wrong on that, we all know it, and who's talking about it? The trees? At the funeral, next to the church, some guys were burning stuff in the backyard of a house, in a dumpster, being metaphorical, the smoke going gray then white, and I imagined they'd just elected a new pope. "In the presence of your creator," the priest said. This week I was in a traffic jam heading into a dazzling sunset. Even with my eyes closed, it's everywhere. During the week of the funeral I listened to 408 songs from this year, including remasters of Pavement and The Beatles. The Beatles' album, *Revolver*, sounds as if it was just recorded. "As if" is a handy phrase. Hear it the way I hear it: Rita makes a speech at the burial, about barren women,

about how she's a barren woman, as my mother was,
and "barren women have to adopt." And the children
they adopt, she says, they love, "as if
they were their very own." The temperature is dropping all day.
It was fall. It will be winter by midnight. As if
over a cocoon. As if
we will grow wings and circle the flowers of summer.



Winter in NYC <photo by Emily Choi>



Street view in front of Jacques Lipchitz's Government of the People located at the Municipal Services Building Plaza, Philadelphia City Hall. <photo by James Moog>

Kevin Prufer

Many Corridors

Richard said he was a failure and I said,
in what way?
In every way, he said,
and I said, *but you've published*
seven novels. How can you be a failure?
And he said,
failure is a relative term,
and I said, *so, among people*
who've written seven novels, you're a failure?
He nodded.
I haven't written a single novel, so to me
you're a big success, I said.
And he nodded again,
looking out the snowy window.
Because you haven't published a single novel,
he said at last,
your opinion about failure doesn't mean much to me.

+

I drove him to the hospital.
We rode the elevator to the 15th floor.

An old Mexican in the waiting room
wheezing into a plastic tube.
I mean, the plastic tube extended
from his nose into a sort of tank.
At least you're not
as bad off as that,
I wanted to say. At least here
you're a kind of success.

+

----- Kevin Prufer

The heart is a muscular organ
divided into chambers:
atria and ventricles. If you were to enter the heart
the wet walls would tower over you.
You would lose your way
among its passages
like that tourist in Tangier
in the novels by Paul Bowles I was reading.

He groped along those midnight alleys,
drunk and miserable,
each passageway giving off to another

+

until he stumbled over the ruined body of a man
he knew.

He touched the bloody face.

It was the purveyor of counterfeit papers
with whom the tourist had quarreled,

dead,
the tourist's hands wet with his blood.

+

I was driving Richard home from the hospital.

They were going to have to operate
on his failing heart.

We drove past the frozen duck ponds,
then the snow-capped cars in the Bi-Lo parking lot.

Richard said,
*the chapter where they interrogate
then imprison the tourist
is one of the greatest in literature.*

I helped him up his slush-covered front steps—

+

The heart is a prison
and blood flows through it.

For months, the accused tourist
lived in its cavities.

The guards jeered at him.

He grew thin on soup and cockroaches,
awaiting a trial
for which his conviction was certain.

+

Surgeons slipped
from one white room
to the next

holding glittering scalpels
over the chests of sleeping patients.
Bright lights, a red incision
propped open by steel retractors:

In this manner they repaired Richard's failure
and sewed him up,

and soon the scar grew thin and pale.

+

It is ironic
that the tourist had to murder the only kind guard
to escape his imprisonment for murder.

The final scene,
when he exits the prison at last
into the bright and wind-whipped
Moroccan air
is immortal—

+

Richard struggled on, writing one more novel
hardly anyone read.

Then his heart gave out.

It was a good novel of elegant despair,

a novel about friendship,

a sick old author and his young assistant,

in whom I recognized

a version of myself.

It's long out of print now.

+

Out of print, I remember Richard saying
long ago

when I was young and he was such a success.

Out of print. It's a kind way

of saying dead.

The State of the Nation

The Subaru was on fire and the little brown dog
in the driver's seat
would not stop barking
while the engine burned
in the Payless parking lot,
and now a young woman ran from the sliding doors,
holding her key fob,
crying out the dog's name,
and when she squeezed the fob,
the burning car
squeaked and the headlights blinked,
and when she finally got to the car
and opened the door,
the little brown dog
tumbled out onto the asphalt.

+

And we all applauded,
while the dog gasped
and barked and the young woman
stood in front of her burning car
cradling the dog
which I now realized
was geriatric, really,
a very frail old brown dog
that licked her face,

+

and the car burned on,
and the crowd thinned now
and the smoke thinned too,

Spotlight

He was famous and dying.

The spotlight blinded him
and made a halo of his white hair,

and his voice trembled as he began to read
his poem about the heron.

+

But I was distracted
by the gray mouse

poking its pink nose out
from beneath the podium.

It sniffed the thick air,
then ventured a few steps into the open

before retreating under the podium again.

+

For an hour I watched that mouse

+

and when Janet said, My God,

for the rest of my life, I'll be able to say
I heard him read "The Heron"

for the very last time,
I could only nod, vaguely,

recalling how the mouse stretched its neck
to peer beyond the spotlight

as if it, too, wanted to see the audience.

+

Yes, I told Janet, yes,
the poem about the heron.

We were driving home, past
the avocado warehouse, past
the Mexican flea markets and the homeless.

She was talking about that moment
when the heron rises from the dock,

a frog dangling from its beak,

and aren't we like that frog,
our backs broken gripped

by—what? The power of the state?

+

I couldn't sleep.

I had been writing poems about American justice,
but I kept retreating into

a kind of metaphor
I was adept at. Lazy.

On TV,
a black man was saying to three cops
that he didn't do it,

and a cop was saying he'd have to do better than that.
I didn't do it,

the black man said again,
right into the camera

----- Kevin Prufer

as if he was talking to me,
as if he was peering into my living room.

+

By then, Janet was asleep,

so I turned off the TV and took my drink
out to the front yard.

I was a little drunk, yes.

The streetlight glared down on me,
as if I were the problem.

It was haloed by hundreds of flying insects
that swirled and hummed

and batted against the glass
in the thick black air.



► Paola Ferrario's website: <https://www.paolaferrario.com/>

Daisy Fried

photo by Paola Ferrario (see p. 25)

Ice Buffalos of the Mind, or Those Grazing Ruminants

Those grazing ruminants, they're stuck on the carpet tundra, they can't figure out who pooped out the silver xmas balls, nor what the hunk of dolomite is or why that mysterious pyramid mason symbol off the dollar bill is doing sitting on that artifact of obsolescence, the CD. They want mosses and lichens, they want to rasp it off rocks with their rough tongues, why this featureless and straitened wasteland, why the shadow of the monstrous yeti photographer looming on the backdrop, they wonder? Will this be the end?

I think of this as The Ice Buffalo Photo, though I suppose the figurines must be white yaks. A funny little diorama. Those ice buffalo yaks, they're sweet and fine and sensitive, purposeful and gentle and a little vulnerable.

Yet I'm troubled by it, this photo, why? It seems to me a photo of a mistake, thoughtlessness, negligence, dropping the ball, not very consequential, but something that could be cleared away, tidied, allowed to rest. A photo of friction and static, threatened by whimsy.

Still, this is also only evidence that someone once surely-lovingly, or amusedly, constructed it before it garbled and bits and pieces of it got taken away.

Why shouldn't things jumble and deteriorate?

Are the yak buffalo blaming themselves? Are they the untidy, irretrievable (as to meaning) thing? Or is the mess me, identifying with whoever made the diorama then neglected it, by omission or commission, or because, I don't know, maybe they sickened, maybe they couldn't come back and clean it up or clear it away. Then again, am I not so much like the person who manipulated the objects, arranged them in their showcase, as like the photographer casting the shadow of her strong legs to loom (threat? god?) above the wee beasts?

I was going to ask why I seek myself in everything I look at but it's a useless question, a pretense at wondering. I'll describe, instead, where my brain goes, looking: to the scene at

the end of *Snowpiercer* where woman and boy leave wrecked train to venture into the slightly thawing world, heading up a ridge—where a hungry polar bear waits. I think of being at the Jardin des Plantes in Paris when Maisie was 5, of the snow leopard there who came down a short hill behind the glass that contained its too-small habitat, its massive bottle brush tail in cautious position, and just stared out.

Rilke's famous panther poem is set at the Jardin des Plantes and can be found on a sign post in the present day near the snow leopard exhibit. I don't recall any panther during our visit, but the poem would do for any caged wildcat. The opening lines, approximately translated: *His gaze, passing and passing behind bars, / grown so weary.* Rilke also marks the huge strength, and the damage done to him, in his pacing *the smallest of circles, / like a dance of centripetal power, / in which a great will stands stunned.*

A zoo designers' exercise in acknowledging damage while not apologizing for damage. Poets are always good for that!

Maisie had a stiff stuffed snow leopard she called "Guardian" who came with us when we traveled and was important to have nearby when she was sad or scared or sick. The Jardin des Plantes gift shop sold baby black panthers, in honor, I assume, of Rilke, and also baby snow leopards with cute blue eyes, pink noses, and kitten mouths, quite furry and snuggly. They were 5 euro per, about the size, I am guessing, of the yaks in the photo, and I bought her one of each. She left the zoo with a baby predator under each arm and a Guardian snow leopard back at the apartment on a street called Villa Stendhal in the 20th arrondissement behind Pere Lachaise cemetery.

From a Facebook post about that time: "Maisie is as I write boning and skinning an imaginary rabbit to feed to her stuffed snow leopard which, being an endangered species she keeps safe from 'dying out all the way' by wrapping her in her pink sweater. The rabbit is because she knows a hungry snow leopard might go for larger prey, if she doesn't keep it fed. "That's its nature. Now I'm taking out the rabbit's skull—*urhh!*—now I'm wrapping up the fur."

*

*

*

My commentary is disorganized and wandering, and my mind wants to reject the garbled business in the photo, and yet it takes up residence (the photo in my mind, my mind in the photo). I like this photo because it seems to me a photo of mistake, negligence, lapse—not very consequential, but negligence, lapse, even so—something that could be, like things in my mind, cleared away, tidied, allowed to rest. But then those little buffalo, like the snow leopard, like the rabbit's skull, and Maisie grunting *urhh!* to wrest the imaginary skull from the imaginary carcass—they start to be that threatlessness that mimics threat. Just like the human condition usually is, until someone actually carries out a threat. Until, say, some men

rampage and rape. And some others retaliate ten-fold. And others look on applauding, or help behind the scenes, or carry out the harm themselves. A passing theory: all violence arises from a simplification of mess.

Rilke's panther wearily sees nothing beyond the bars of her cage except sometimes the veil over the pupils lifts, and she sees something beyond herself so that an image enters her limbs' tense silence. (Rilke's panther is male, but I decided to change that.) Then the image that enters evaporates in her heart.

A panther is not a yak, and a real panther who enters a poem is not a sawdust and plastic yak buffalo who snowily invites a photo. And yet, I like to imagine the yak sees the photographer as the photographer is seeing the yak. The shadow of the photographer is trace evidence of herself that the photographer leaves for the yaks. The photo is also evidence of a charming, disturbing mess, that another unknown person left in the world.

Of course I messily am trying to write an *ars poetica* for my brain, my life, my poetry, the ice buffalos, silver balls, weird fragments and silver discs of the mind, all the ruminant untidinesses I carry with me, my irresolutions and unclaritys. The things I begin and don't maintain. The things I keep on with that seem always to be in danger of slipping my grasp into half-legible nonsense. But the ice buffalos of the mind do sometimes snort away the trouble. Sometimes my mind clears, the veil of the pupil lifted. Then they say, you are *nothing but human*. *It all evaporates in the heart, or wherever. But keep trying. You might as well keep trying.*

*

*

*

“I took the picture in Buffalo,” said Paola, “where any large cowlike animal is perceived as a buffalo, so I enjoy the fact that you perceived the albino buffalos as white yaks. It is a photo of more than one mistake without judgment. My photography could not exist if in the world there were no ordinary non-tragic failures.”



Object of living no. 2 (vase created by Alex Olson), Emily Choi, charcoal drawing.

James Richardson

Cosmological

Somehow it's easier to believe on a snowy day
that the universe is expanding faster and faster
and growing colder. Was that the original plan?
You'd think if what the Lord made had made him happy,
he could have stopped after that first week,
or, if we truly disappointed him,
after an extra galaxy or two,

but I worry he might have been like one of us
who loses faith in a dream, but can't admit it,
and just puts his head down and works harder and harder,
hoping that More is More, and setting
every day some kind of personal record.

In this, we might all be a little like the snow
that gladly and excitedly at first
takes the shape of whatever it happens upon,
but after a while, in the broadening imprecision
of repetition, loses its edge,
until the world it used to be touched by is nothing
but snow and more snow and deeper and deeper snow.

Antipodes

for john

Mom used to say, when we were bored with our summer,
Why don't you dig to China? And we would dig
until we were bored again. It was hard
and thankless work, piercing the planet,
but we dug intermittently through August --
school, and not despair, was the end of it.

Actually, a hole dug from the New York area
straight through Earth's core would come out
in the Indian Ocean southwest of Australia
and immediately fill the water,
and if it was dug by boys, that hole would be smallish,
so I know what to watch for. And even now,

though my brother's...elsewhere, and I've lost
some of my zest for the impossible,
I'll take a moment to bend over a little pond,
the darkness in a stream where the trout hide,
that place in the woods where the rain stays and stays,
and sometimes, oftener than you'd think, look:

there is a face, there is the other sky!

*For the destination of your personal excavation, see <http://www.antipodesmap.com>

Big Puddle

It's one of those child-words,
puddle, that no one ever
got around to updating,

so humble and essential
I can't at the moment
think of a synonym.

Two kids, anyway,
on their knees in the mud
dabble archetypally

(or maybe it's *muddle*)
on the shores of this big one,
which reaches curb

to curb, though shallowish
for fingerlings, and even
for a pollywog

probably too ephemeral.

But it is in the small
oceans of their minds
an ocean without peer or synonym

bearing the voyages
of sticks and leaves,
with fans of ripples serving

well enough as rogue
waves of the Atlantic.
Which, proportionately,

they are.

In my ear,
a weathercaster with sincere alarm
urges us never

ever drive even
on a mirror-thin
puddle, lest we sink

all at once to the windows.

Though the kids seem
safe enough, muttering
back and forth

of weighty matters, not
trade and fishing rights
I'm guessing, but

the relative boatiness
of bark and cones
and half-curved

rhododendron leaves.

They could be me
and my brother, gone
longer than they've lived,

as they rise in unison
and stumble off
without a glance, *theyr knes*

a-cold with muddle,
into my past
would we say, or

into their future?

Not very long ago,
decades or hours,
the whole sky thunderously fell,

raging along the road,
though now I can't tell, even
dropping a petal in

and waiting
whether's there's still
such a thing as time,

and which way it might want to flow.

They could be us,
heading for home, their thoughts
not very different, now,

from sky,
and in their pockets,
in our pockets,

just in case, a ship or two.

contributors (alphabetical by last name)

Cynthia Boersma was born on a submarine base in New London, CT and for an embarrassingly long time thought this meant she had been born underwater. She practices as a psychotherapist after decades practicing as a civil rights lawyer. Her poems have appeared in the *Laurel Review* and *The American Poetry Journal*; other work will appear in forthcoming issues of *Copper Nickel* and *Verseweavers*. She recently won first prize in the Poet's Choice category of the Spring 2023 Oregon Poetry Association's poetry contest. She lives in the mountains of Southern Oregon.

Peter Campion is the author of four collections of poetry and of the essay collection *Radical as Reality: Form and Freedom in American Poetry*. A recipient of the Guggenheim Fellowship and the Joseph Brodsky Rome Prize, he teaches in the graduate creative writing program at the University of Minnesota and serves as Executive Editor of Unbound Edition Press. (<https://www.petercampion.net/>)

Paola Ferrario was born in Rho (Milan) Italy in 1963. She received a MFA from Yale University in 1988. Since then, she has completed projects in Italy, Guatemala, Turkey and the United States. She has received several awards and fellowships, including the Friends of Photography/Calumet Emerging Photographer award in 2000 and the Paul Taylor/Dorothea Lange Prize from Duke University in 2001, Puffin Foundation Grant in 2003 and a Guggenheim Fellowship in Photography in 2004 and Harnish Visiting Fellowship at Smith College 2005 to 2011 and 2016 to 2017. Her work has been collected by several museums, including the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and the Smithsonian Museum of American History. She is the author of *19 Pictures, 22 Recipes* 2011. Her writing has appeared in *Art in America*, *Photograph* magazine and *Afterimage*. (<https://www.paolaferrario.com/>)

Daisy Fried is the author of four books of poetry: *The Year the City Emptied*, *Women's Poetry: Poems and Advice*, *My Brother is Getting Arrested Again*, and *She Didn't Mean to Do It*. The recipient of Guggenheim, Hodder and Pew Fellowships, she is an occasional poetry critic for *the New York Times*, Poetry Foundation and elsewhere; poetry editor for the journal *Scoundrel Times*; and a member of the faculty of the MFA Program for Writers at Warren Wilson College and the BFA Program in Creative Writing at University of the Arts. She lives in Philadelphia.

John Gallaher's forthcoming collection is *My Life in Brutalist Architecture* (Four Way Books 2024). His other books include *In a Landscape* (BOA Editions, 2014) and *Brand New Spacesuit* (BOA Editions, 2020). He lives in northwest Missouri and co-edits *Laurel Review*.

Kevin Prufer's newest books are *The Fears* (Copper Canyon Press, 2023) and *Sleepaway: a Novel* (Acre Books, 2024). Among his eight other books are *Churches*, which was named one of the best ten books of 2015 by *The New York Times*, and *How He Loved Them*, which was long-listed for the 2019 Pulitzer Prize and received the Julie Suk Award for the best poetry book from the American literary press.
(<https://www.kevinprufer.com/>)

James Richardson received the 2011 Jackson Prize for Poetry. His books include *By the Numbers* (2010), a finalist for the National Book Award, and *Interglacial* (Ausable, 2004), a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award. His 1992 collection *As If* was reprinted this Fall in Carnegie Mellon's Classic Contemporaries series. His most recent book is *For Now* (Copper Canyon, 2020).
(www.aboutjamesrichardson.com)



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