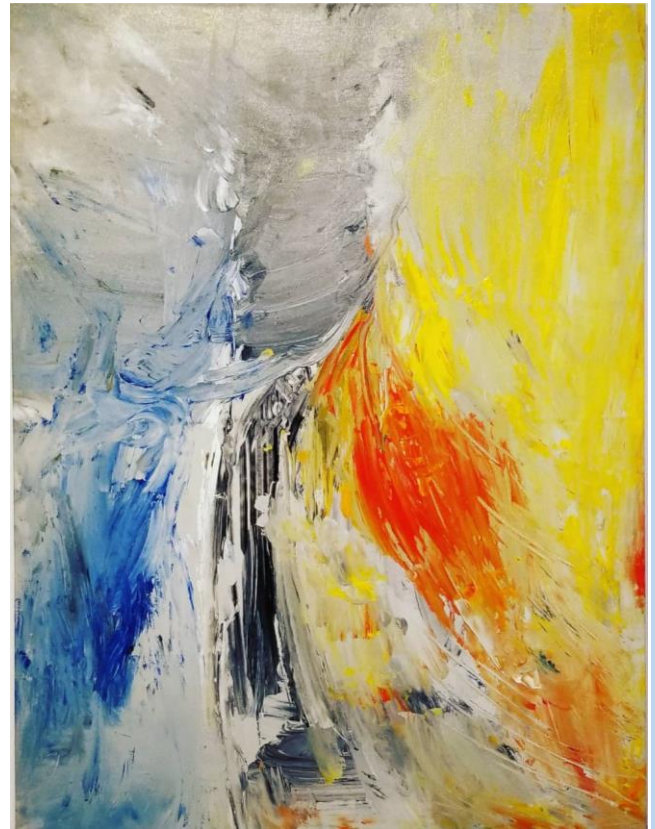




MONTHLY CONTESTS WINNERS IN 2022

The winners of the 2022 Monthly Contests, adjudicated by Alice Pero, are:

- January (Nature, Landscape):
 - 1st Prize: Pamela Stone Singer, "Forest Air"
 - 2nd Prize: Jane Stuart, "On the North Side"
 - 3rd Prize: Gwen Monohan, "Focal Points"
- February (Love):
 - 1st Prize: Jerry Smith "Lovers"
 - 2nd Prize: Jane Stuart "Crossing the Moon"
- March (Open, Free Subject):
 - 1st Prize: Jeff Graham, "A Certain Day's Every,"
- April (Mythology, Dreams, Other Universes):
 - 1st Prize: Debra Darby, "Awaken."
- May (Personifications, Characters, Portraits):
 - 1st Prize: Carol L. Hatfield "Cloud on the Ground"
 - 2nd Prize: Joan Gerstein "White on White"
- June (The Supernatural):
 - 1st Prize: Pamela Stone Singer, "Buffaloes Escape"
- July (Childhood, Memoirs):
 - 1st Prize: Anna J. Jasinska "My chicken egg apron"
 - 2nd Prize: Lynn Axelrod "Fenestra"
- August (Places, Poems of Location):
 - 1st Prize: Sean McGrath "10/21: At Sea, After Light"
 - 2nd Prize: Colorado Smith "Tigers of the Tsangpo"
 - 3rd Prize: Teresa Bullock "Born Again"
- September (Colors, Music, Dance):
 - 1st Prize: Jane Stuart, "Watching Time Go By"
- October (Humor, Satire): No award
- November (Family, Friendship, Relationships):
 - 1st Prize: Richard L. Matta, "Shucking Shells"
- December (Best of Your Best, awarded or published poems):
 - 1st Prize: David Anderson "Where Plovers Complain"
 - 2nd Prize: Carla Schick "She Painted"



*Janusz Maszkiewicz, "Super Blume"
mixed media, 55' X 42'*

ALICE PERO Alice Pero joined the CSPS Board as a Director at Large in May 2019 and became the Chair of Monthly Poetry Contests in January 2020. She was elected the 10th Poet Laureate of Sunland-Tujunga in April 2020. She has published poetry in many magazines and anthologies, including *Nimrod*, *National Poetry Review*, *River Oak Review*, *Poet Lore*, *The Alembic*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *The Distillery*, *Fox Cry Review*, *The Griffin*, and *G.W. Review*, and others. Her book of poetry, *Thawed Stars*, was praised by Kenneth Koch as having "clarity and surprises." She also published a chapbook *Sunland Park Poems*, written as a dialogue with Elsa Frausto. Pero teaches poetry and is a member of California Poets in the Schools, a nonprofit dedicated to empowering students to express their uniqueness through writing, performing and publishing their own poetry. She is also the founder of *Moonday*, a reading series that has been on-going in the Los Angeles area for upwards of sixteen years. Ms Pero has created dialogue poems with more than twenty poets. She also created the performing group, *Windsong Players Chamber Ensemble* and performs with them as a flutist.

FOREST AIR

You cannot see
but know yourself as light.

Wings hoist you to the top of a tree.
You see meadows' waves
and luminous wildflowers.

Touch tongues of birds.
Swallow night air.
Cleanse your lungs.

Let forests' darkness wrap your body.
Open your mouth to stars.

Geese fly into autumn.
Their flight brings lavender sky
and iridescent feathers.

Soon branches will bend with winter.
Pine and wind-scented air
remind the forest is near.

*Pamela Stone Singer, First Prize
January 2022*

ON THE NORTH SIDE

Walking through darkness
-another sleepless night—
my foot hits a star

But the wind blows shadows
across time...
and in the distance,
the moon sighs
and earth,
a painting,
comes to life—
shells in a bowl
flowers,
still-life fruit
made of wax

The sky quivers.
I reach for
my bow and arrow—
nothing is there,
just the owl
and moss that grows
on the side of trees

Jane Stuart, Second Prize, January 2022

FOCAL POINTS

Vision strays to flowers
color-stripping newer fields.
Focusing our winter minds
on this warm rebirth
with spring-like zeal.

In weeks bright hues conceal
and blot now wider bands
of the thickest green.
Till we whimsically retrieve
many lodestar strands.

Holding in both hands
pale asters or daisy arrays.
Radiating spokes near
where petals appear torn
from thunderstorms.

Leaving small gold centers,
found round as magnet eyes.
Attracted towards one's
soul-searching for what
possibly may bloom beyond.

Gwen Monohan, Third Prize, January 2022



Janusz Maszkiewicz, Untitled, oil on canvas 1.5 X 1.5m

FEBRUARY 2022 - LOVE

CROSSING THE MOON

We met on a ship crossing the moon,
a cruise of moments
made of steel and glass
through deep blue seas
and mountains hard as sand
that has been packed
by hands in icy gloves—

Oh love is wild!
and this was our romance,
a foxtrot played and danced to
by the stars.
We moved above earth
in chiffon veils
and vests of champagne corks—

continued >

Our glitter crowns
shined in the shadows
of a thousand tears
because this was pretend
and love oved on,
leaving us a world of indigo
and fading light.

We don't know why
but the ship docked at dawn
and we became fireflies
in sudden flight
on tomorrow's wings
that bloomed tonight.

Jane Stuart, Second Prize, February 2022

LOVERS

She hikes to the waterfall twice a year
once when new-greens leaf the alders
and again as redbuds flame amber-pink

At dusk she lights a candle in the rock
for wind from the falls to flicker
She splits dark pools, gliding

Somehow together again, they
float the lips of the cataract
tumble down torrents

Her breasts engorge at the flood of him
She suspends breath
shallow murmurs

Lying on black basalt beneath stare of stars
she rubs her skin with sage and slumbers
in the sand to rhythms of the roar

At dawn she drops the dying candle
into the dark, murky depths of that
River-of-Might-Have-Been

Jerry Smith, First Prize, February 2022

A CERTAIN DAY'S EVERY

Neither late May rain, nor memory of,
nor memory of such scent,
but scent's cataloguing of recollections.
Rain as timely as late May.
Late May as sudden as rain at such a time.

*
Everything has led me yet ill-prepared me for this:
the sound of water taking in itself,
hybridized with the sound of the taking in of itself
of water,
which lands into a backlash of rising,
to mix in with its mixed within.

*
Rain round and about rain,
falling as fallen-upon mid-fall.
Drops just amply to hear,
scantly such so that impacts dry
before spaces between connect.
Not too much, yet just enough
to linger with and within
without the want for more,
for more than enough.

*
Light rain landing on light rain landing.
Rain between rain's between,
forming course mid-fall, fall-formed,
following through its follow-through
on-to-wards
leaf to leaf to loam to the eversilent
symphony of the seed, the sweetest
brutalities of the seed's destitchery.

*
Rain and the scent of rain and the taste of rain
slides round and down partly parted lips
to fall to, land amid, and settle with(in)
what buried's soil of making and taking,
tilling the grave's cradle of what was—
existing as is, becoming what come.

*
Of the hundred things I wanted to say,
nothing came out of my mouth.
After that came after that, and after that
came the day cradled in soft though ceaseless
rain.
When the conceptual of what was unutterable
became such silence said,
the cosmos collapsed and reconfigured
into the gloss of a miscellany of intentions.



Janusz Maszkiewicz, "Trans Fretum," mixed media, 36' X 48'

Jeff Graham, First Prize, March 2022

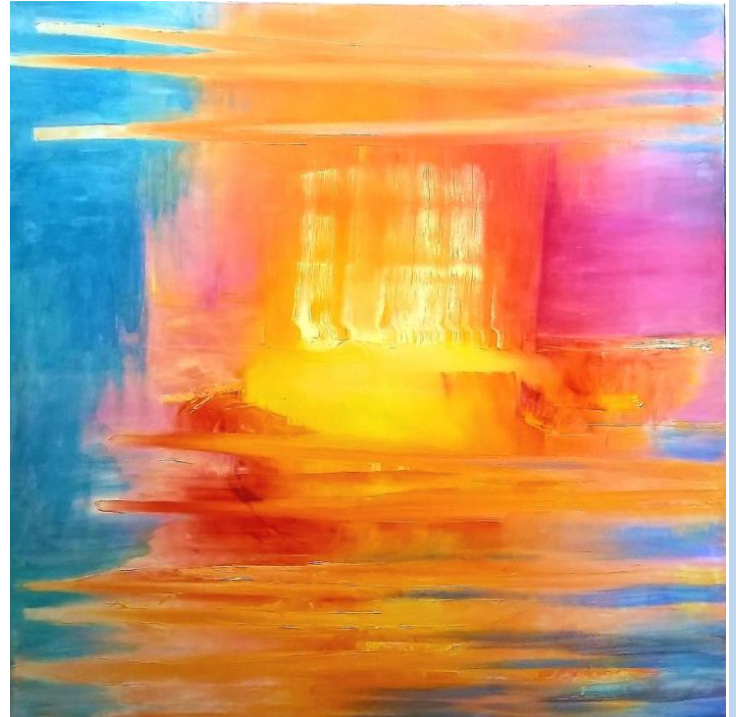
AWAKEN

Find the strings
Ride the gleaming scales of the fish
 blazing melon, gold, scarlet
 nocturnal sapphire
before vanishing into the ocean at dawn.

Mooring the dreamless
dream remembering in tow
listen to the tides of morning.
The fishtail reveals its secret.

Awake to awaken
In waves of shimmering water,
The mystical call of the whale
beckons.

Awaken
Find the strings.



Debra Darby, First Prize, April 2022

Janusz Maszkiewicz, Untitled, Oil on Canvas, 1.5m X 1.5m

MAY 2022 – PERSONIFICATIONS, CHARACTERS, PORTRAITS

CLOUD ON THE GROUND

(for my mule, Andromeda)

Never one to be
lost
in fog -
she calls
it
to her.
She shines
white as any opal -
 with a quiet
 fire
 in the belly.
The fog holds
the four-beat
drum
of her pearl
hooves
and keeps it all
to itself.
The sky recognizes
her

molds and
forms
soft cotton
sculptures
in her honor.

Cloud
on the ground
she is -
with one flick
of her tail
the rain
obeys
and we ride
the afternoon
on a veil
of grey...
 iridescent
 at the core....

continued >

Carol L Hatfield, First Prize

WHITE ON WHITE

I am asphyxiated color
The empty page
Hair as you age
Chalk popcorn mayonnaise
Seashells the foam on waves
Teeth nails Beluga whales
Dental floss and kidney stones
Dover's Cliffs Rover's bones
Baby powder a Princess phone
Icicles Polar bears and clouds
Baking soda cauliflower shrouds
Marshmallow rice baked potatoes
The Pope's robes wherever it snows
Jasmine egrets angel-food cake
A dove a swan a whooping crane
Bras and briefs pills cocaine
Coconut cottage cheese for brains
Piano keys dandelion seeds mozzarella
Girls like Snow White or Cinderella
Noise knights and virginal brides
Collars crimes white-knuckled rides
Elephant sales and Siamese cats
Jack Sprat's wife's fat lab rats
White House peace dove surrender flag
Honking geese and their oval eggs
Wedding dresses White wine dregs
Calla Lily whipping cream ivory lace
White bread white trash Caucasian race
Pure as driven snow Good Humor man
Robes worn by the Ku Klux Klan
Adorn me at an Asian funeral
And I will deliver death's benediction

JUNE 2022- THE SUPERNATURAL

BUFFALOES ESCAPE

Wrapped in cloaks of snow, buffaloes
live in Moon's lightning-green eye.

Embedded in their bones
palimpsests reveal eternal life.

Etched with star drawings, stick figures and shapes
from outer space, their horns speak stories of worlds

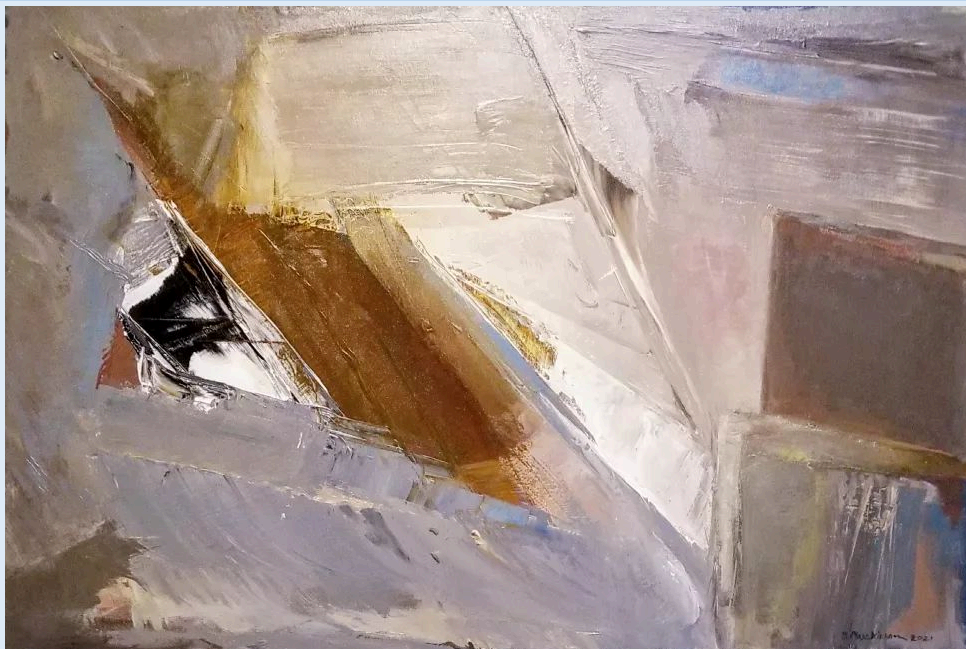
where they travel calm plains.
Water songs and ceremonies, their messages.

Wander hills and valleys: cone flowers, golden rod, milkweed.
Speak the holiness of earth.

Pamela Stone Singer, First Prize, June 2022

LEFT: Joan Gerstein, Second Prize, May 2022

BELOW: Janusz Maszkiewicz, "Agatha's Dream," Mixed Media, 48' X 60'



MY CHICKEN EGG APRON

My grandmother said I must sleep two times—once under the pear tree, once under the attic skylight, before can come to the kitchen and put on my eight-pocketed chicken egg apron and run among purple heads of burdock to the nests hidden in the thicket near the chicken coop. Then, I comb the bush till I hold in my hands and shine with straw an alabaster egg. I return to the beginning and must wait. Again, I am a day and two sleeps away, trusting that next morning, if I follow the plan, I will find my treasures. Meanwhile, I collect odd symmetries, study luster and trace veins growing through the forms.

I fill the hours putting opal coils of snail and dry poppy heads spilling black seeds in my pockets, until I am certain I slept two times. I have dreamt in the storm of pear blossom. I have dreamt under the starry attic window of finding the ideal oval forms. But if I cannot get any, I pick pieces of tree bark and collect pinecones, and stash them in my apron pockets as if they were what I wanted. They are not, yet they gleam warmly of still-sticky droplets of resin, I cannot resist. My fingertips curiously dip into the liquid amber— it is unexpectedly warm and bitter-sweet.

Anna J. Jasinska, First Prize, July 2022

FENESTRA

Papermill Creek flows in wide
 –our own Missouri. Midmorning
 jacks snap at mayflies.
 Sunlight translucens
 through their wing fenestra,
 splays in dapples of gleam.
 Air almost visible like gnat-buzz.
 Pickle weed greens out wide
 to greet them all like a mother
 holds a family together.

You break the mesmer,
 elusive beneath a splash.
 Nothing solid, not mud-swirl
 curled against the current,
 not the embankment crumbled
 one dirt speck at a time
 –granular drownings,
 nearly unnoticed.

Then LOL up you pop,
 whip water from your hair,
 bobbing cork, glistening grin.

If only Father were as buoyant
 when he dived in the Sound,
 --not wading, not scanning.

Quick bottom spun him silent
 on the ghostline
 of his infant fontanelles.

Gleaned from the sea, shut
 until his lungs heaved
 a bolus of saltgrass onto sand.
 Beach heat unwaxed pores,
 plasma bathed his heart, and
 our breath mingled in the light,
 resumed its daily circuit
 in the dark of our bodies.

Lynn Axelrod, Second Prize, July 2022

continued >

10/21: AT SEA, AFTER LIGHT

The marine wall poured onto the coastline,
this evening's moving mountains—
went the sailboats, went the doves,
lines of sunset streaked through
like tunnel paths for the seagone.
More boats, droves of pelican and cranes
fleeting from sight, making their winged exit;
the air was wet with longing.

I shivered on the shore
underdressed, ill-equipped to harness
all the heaven before me,
so much of it leaking out,
coming in at once.

I can't have a cold room when it knocks—
I should have fire in my lungs
and only a little fear in my heart,
I should learn to warm myself
amid the wavery sea,
to be still in the absence of light.

Sean McGrath, First Prize, August 2022

RIGHT: Theresa Bullock, Second Prize, August 2022

BELOW: Janusz Maszkiewicz, Untitled, Mixed Media

BORN AGAIN

Flying low, skimming insect-like
above the water
I surrender myself mute
to the sea plane's droning.
I am fit tight into its small body,
trapped, strapped in, no time for fear,
no place else to go
except maybe Africa
where Beryl Markham floated like this
above giraffe-groomed acacia,
savannas worn by wildebeest,
and dusty trails shuffled by
lines of leathery elephants.

Looking down, I think I see
through ocean's ancient skin
a silvery pod of porpoise,
great blotches of whale
lumbering south the way they do
for warmth and food and sex.

From here nothing is hidden from me.
From this gull's view, I see it all.
Smoke clutches a cabin in a wood
all shades of green;
cotton ball sheep hurry
toward their heaps of hay.

But too soon,
I am delivered gently
onto ocean's face. I am born again
on her wrinkled skin.



TIGERS OF THE TSANGPO

*Three Asian rivers. the Sutleg, the Karnali, and the Indus flow
in the three cardinal directions from the sacred Mt. Kailash.
The Yarlung-Tsangpo flows a thousand miles east across
the Tibetan plateau, then splits the Himalayan massif
before becoming the Brahmaputra in India.
Within the Tsangpo's great bend south
lived two tribes of Buddhist hunters.
The Bön people were prey
here before them.*

The few trails in this Great Bend are trod by hunters
or Buddhist pilgrims who pray at remote shrines
as river rhythms reverb among yak-butter lamps,
cranium-cups, tsampa barley cones in stone bowls
and prayer flags in caves where no breeze blows.

The celadon glacial melt of the Tsangpo is kayaked
only during midwinter low-water, when kayaks painfully
are portaged around waterfalls and Class VI maelstroms.
The Tsangpo compresses to ninety feet in its narrowest gorge.
Five hundred feet above, its sheer wall displays
highwater marks scoured out in June, 2000.

Clarified air and tumultuous rapids drown sound:
freight trains of water, standing-wave haystacks,
bus-sized boulder mazes, ten-foot rooster tails.
River-wide ledges with torrential tow-backs
can spin a body for hours.

Underwater tongues and flumes
squeeze light into bubble vortices;
whitewater cyclones swirl eddy lines.

Below blood-red rhododendrons,
a snow leopard sprints across a vertical avalanche chute
forcing a golden takin to bolt straight down to the Tsangpo,
snapping pine downfall like twigs.
A ten-foot tiger lunges onto the back of the eight-hundred-pound
takin and severs its spinal cord with three-inch canines.
The cheated leopard retreats, slinking back up the chute.

The Tsangpo chisels down through the collision of continents,
becoming the Brahmaputra, then into Mother Ganges,
and finally the Bay of Bengal.

Colorado Smith, Second Prize, August 2022

WATCHING TIME GO BY

The dance!
The dance you say
is everything time gives
earth-people waiting to be born
again

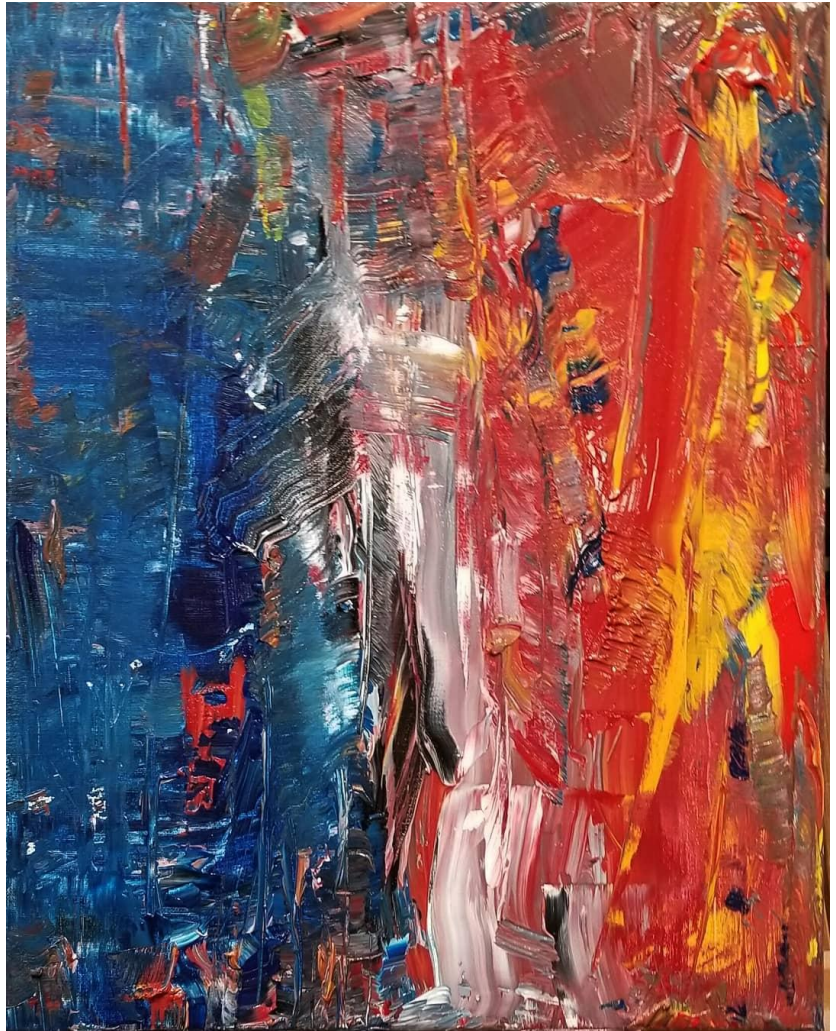
Stage left
stage right-tutto
va'ben' -you say-red shoes
cross the stage in leaps and endless
bounds

Night brings
another flight
through triangles and squares.
The passing moment turns itself
again

Planets
vanish, dancers
follow-shadows fall in
empty holes. All motion is
mystery

Lines of
sudden white light ...
your feet find yesterday
and then fall into tomorrow.
No change

Jane Stuart, First Prize, September 2022



Janusz Maszkiewicz, Untitled, Mixed Media

NOVEMBER 2022 – FAMILY, FRIENDSHIP, RELATIONSHIPS

SHUCKING SHELLS

We met and moved like a breeze from bar to beach, the moon witness
to her unveiled dress. Her pearlescent dress button lost in abandoned restraint,
hidden in the sand. Symbols simplify explanation. But in time, more missing buttons,
my unbridled imagination, and the possession monster roiled and churned inside me.

raspberry moon
a dark cloud
on a patch of sweetness

On my face and lips, moonlit bubbles break like little hearts compressing and filling
with the tide. Sand string undertows pull at my feet, anniversary tears in my eyes.
My son's small voice calls me back to the beach, says "mom pulled her favorite
dress out of storage and asked me to ask you can we find some oysters,
a missing button?" We start looking.

sharp beach glass
the slow path
to forgiveness

Richard L. Matta, First Prize, November 2022

WHERE PLOVERS COMPLAIN

When my body rouses at the slightest
and I fear you will not return and our lives
shrivel from the world's trumpeting,
I go in silence, to rest where your spirit speaks,
where plovers' complaints precede the dawn,
in a cove where waves continually crest and crush.
I come into the resonance of music
not mediated by voice or strings.

David Anderson, First Prize, December 2022

Medusa's Kitchen, <http://medusaskitchen.blogspot.com>, 16 Feb 2009
Second place, August 2009 contest, California Federation of Chaparral Poets
What Was Within: Poems, Christian Faith Publishing Co. 2022

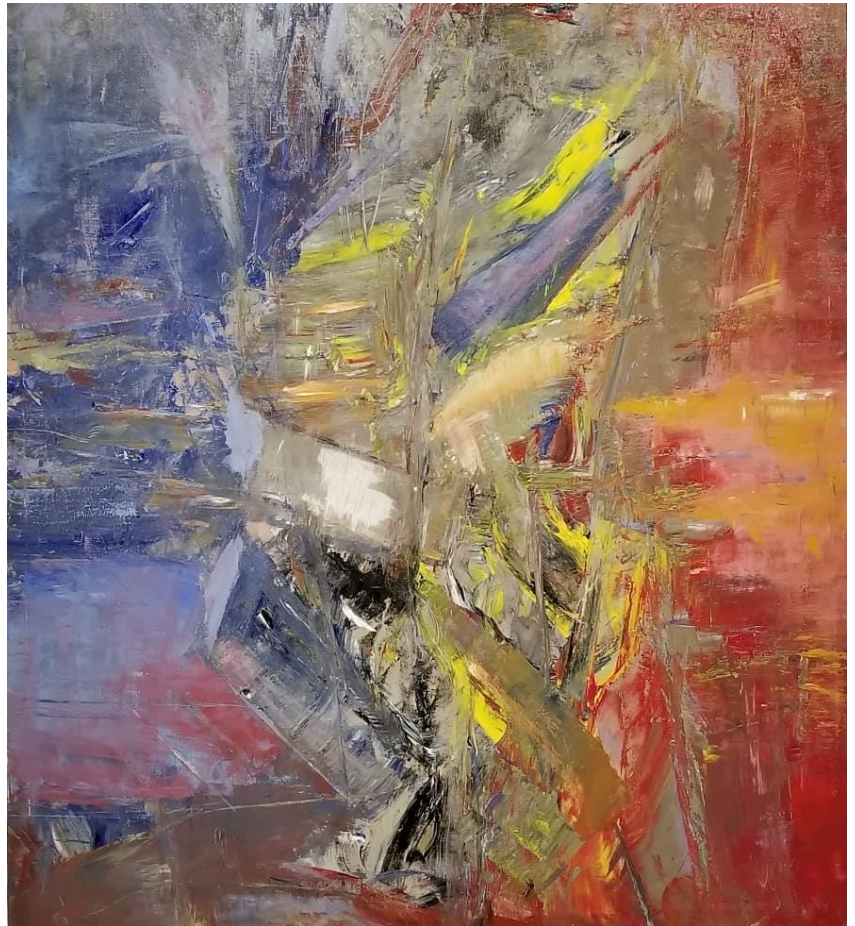
SHE PAINTED...

She painted portraits,
walking through dark alleys.
And as she watched
the moon vanish
behind the rooftops,
she caught glimpses
of her eyes
peering through dark windows
waiting for her hands
to take the brush
and cast a shadow on the wall.

Looking into mirrors
she painted sunsets.
And as she watched
her face vanish
with the fading light,
she caught glimpses
of the moon
peering through her windows,
waiting for her hands
to take the brush
and cat the final stroke.

Carla Schick, Second Prize, December 2022

Published in *Primavera*, Vol 4, 1978



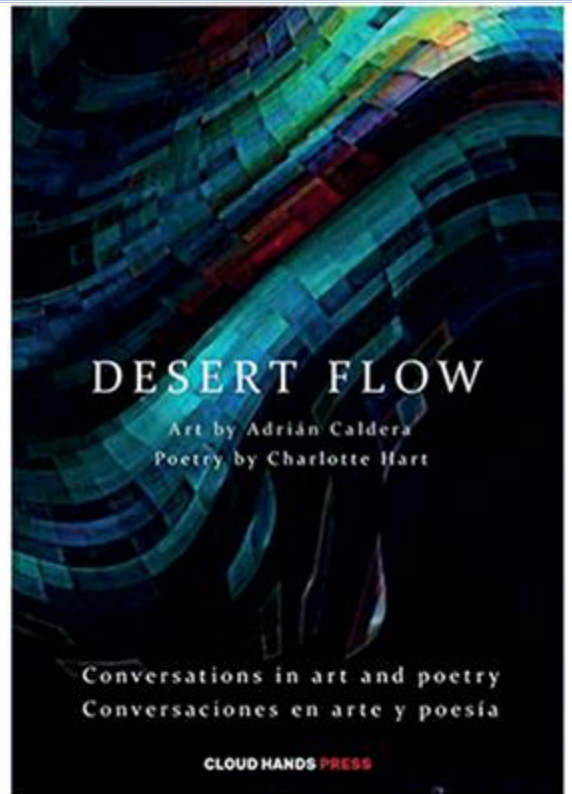
Janusz Maszkiewicz, Untitled, Mixed Media, 48' X 60'

Desert Flow. Art by Adrián Caldera. Poetry by Charlotte Hart
78 works of abstract digital art & 78 poems in English ~
78 poems in Spanish. Published by Cloud Hands Press
US price \$30, ISBN: 978-0-9861649-0-6
To order: <https://www.cloudhandspress.com>

Cloud Hands Press has outdone itself with its latest gem. *Desert Flow* is a collaborative project featuring creations by abstract digital artist Adrián Caldera paired with poems by Charlotte Hart. Although, a student of ekphrastic poetry, I was unprepared for the challenge presented to my sensibilities by Caldera and Hart. My goal, in this review, is to capture some of their synergy as each artist's work bears the footprint of the other. There is a conversation in art and poetry which flows like a desert in bloom from hearts nourished by love.

Charlotte Hart's introduction and Ethan Plaut's foreword helped me understand the genesis and development of *Desert Flow*. Seemingly, by chance, (I don't believe in chance, by the way) Hart saw a Caldera digital creation on Twitter in the spring of 2018. Her unsolicited response to Caldera's work began a long exchange of art and poetry. They have never met and, so far as I can tell, have no plans to meet. Caldera resides in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico; Hart lives in Chicago, Illinois.

Caldera's rich colorations within his near-genius abstract creations moved Hart, spiritually, emotionally and psychologically. In her words, *Looking at his beautiful colors and widely varying shapes gave me a door into my inner life*. Let's discover together some of the delights on the other side of the door.



Can't Wall the Sky

This sunlight moment
takes me with great speed
over long distances,
very gently, very kindly,
to the house we have built.

A four-dimensional hypercube home
that casts a
three-dimensional shadow
the endless parameters
of our lives:
tenderness
devotion
the splendor of all
no moment small
in the slow smile
of our days
in this world
of change and commotion,
we are secure
five senses
here.



I'm moved by the way Hart takes shades of sun, couples them with lines suggesting distance, movement and dimension, then merging with some of life's most important heart-feelings.



I Thought It Was You

My heart leapt out of my chest
and beat furiously in the air.

I touched the tarnished silver tube
holding the rolled prayer.
I opened the door and went in.

No, you were not.

Remembered kisses
exquisite pleasure
sensation of yearning
for my treasure
delirium of my disbelief!

Your colors and shapes flew
burnished red, rue and indigo
from the bare branches of my mind.

Your brazen spirit
burst meteor bright tonight
in me
then left me alone.

Hart's testimony (see my opening) to Caldera's art *opening a door to my inner life*, comes to life in this poem. How precisely a work of art breathes life into the human spirit is best left to the individual to know and explain. Perhaps this is what Wallace Stevens once referred to as the "Angel of reality." What Stevens meant was the ability of poetry to lay bare the poet's "brazen spirit." To bring forth variegated colors of life and their latent emotions . . . emotions that "beat furiously in the air."

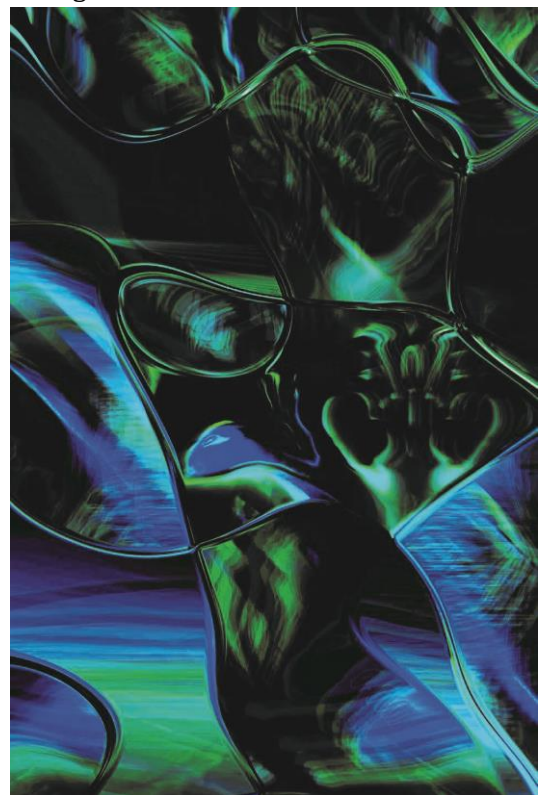
My Love Will Live Forever

Unseen as currents
in the air and sea,
forever.

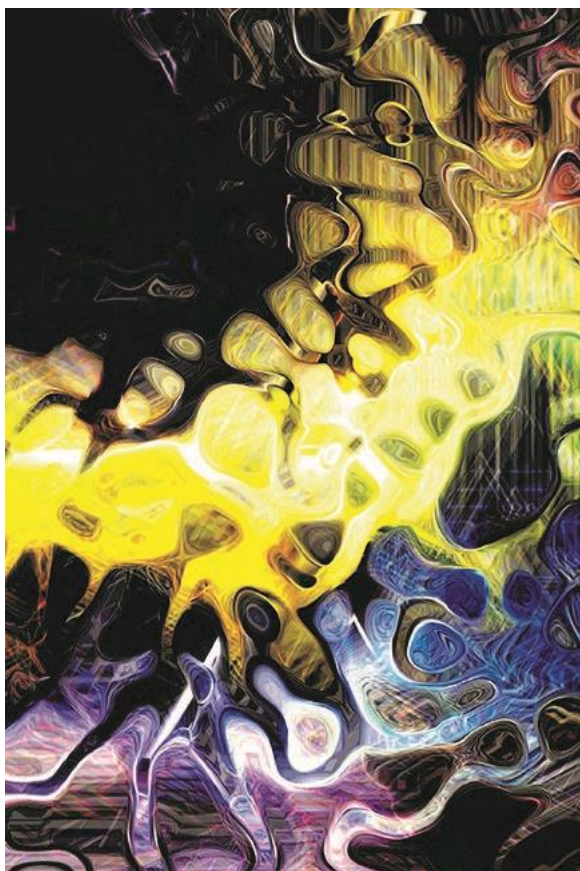
See the seeds and spores
floating in wind,
and the iridescent plankton
illuminating the shore?

Every word we said,
every smile,
every kiss and tear
flow hidden, fresh,
indestructible.

Hart's poetic style flows from deep within. As demonstrated by "My Love Will Live Forever," hers is a poetry that is disarmingly



simple on the surface. Don't let this fool you. Each word belongs. Each word is irreplaceable. Poetic devices such as sibilance, alliteration, and thoughtful endline decisions are consistent hallmarks. Rhymes are occasional and usually interlinear. Her cadences are rhythmical and delight the ear with the musicality of words.



The Will of the River

goes in its golden flow.
You know it's
shimmering touch.
The currents carry you,
sunlight submissive.
You are the boatman
the boat
the river
the flow
the going
beyond
anything can show.

This poem captures, for me, some of the essence of the relationship between Caldera's abstract digital art and Hart's poetic responses. Within the poet's contemplations of the art, I sense her love of color, love of energy within the paintings themselves, which resemble dormant desert blooms, already present, but needing water from the poet's pen to bring them forth.

Just as the river has a will of its own, Caldera and Hart's, *Desert Flow* blooms with synergy, once we allow, as did Charlotte Hart, his *beautiful colors and widely varying shapes to open the door to our inner lives*.

Michael Escoubas

MICHAEL ESCOUBAS REVIEWS HAYLEY AND THE HOT FLASHES BY J.J. FERRER

Hayley and the Hot Flashes by Jayne Jaudon Ferrer. 294 pages. Small Town Girl Publishing.

ISBN: 978-1-7378411-5-9 To Order: <https://bookshop.org/p/books/hayley-and-the-hot-flashes-jayne-jaudon-ferrer/18537319?ean=9781737841159>

"You are, frankly, my only reason for living, Miss Swift." This line stopped me cold. Already, held hostage by characters wearing such monikers as "Bubba," "Topsy," "C.J." "Rhett," and "Suzette," I had to find out more.

But wait . . . let's back up for a moment. *Hayley and the Hot Flashes*, by Jayne Jaudon Ferrer (think actor and entertainer, Jose Ferrer, no relation) is her first full length novel. This delightfully entertaining work will give readers the answer, not only to the above-noted quote, (the whys and wherefores), but will even offer some wise advice about living life to the full.

First off, put yourself in Hayley Swift's place. Once on top of the entertainment world and the country music charts, she's now facing twin challenges of advancing age and professional irrelevance. No one *wants* her. No one *needs* her. Her career, her life, needs a jump start.

What could former superstar Hayley Swift do to recover her past iconic life?

Ferrer is a down-to-earth writer. She writes about real life. Who among us has not lived in Hayley's shoes? (Adjusted, of course, to individual circumstances). Who among us has not stood with Hayley, at Robert Frost's crossroads in "The Road Not Taken"? That fateful junction, where . . .

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth . . .

Indeed, at this point, Hayley feels like the name of her former band, *Road Kill*. It seems that somewhere in the distant past, Nashville talent scouts offered Hayley a contract.

First crossroad: Hayley signed and left her four backup singers ("The Girls Next Door," soon to be, the "Hot Flashes") behind.

Later, Hayley is heard to say, "Isn't it funny? When I worked here, (at a small-time ice cream shop, the *Dairy Dip*) all I could think about was leaving. Then when I left, for a long time, all I could think about was coming back. I guess we never value our treasures till we lose them, do we?"

Second crossroad: What do we do in life, when it is time to deal with the past and move on?

The inner conflicts the *Flashes* go through is worth the price of the book. At last, however, they decide to reprise their group, go on the road and "swim with the big dogs."

As Jaudon develops her story, she chronicles with gentle adroitness, the humanity of each major character. Flaws surface, memories of rejection must be dealt with. Meg Norris, a talented backup singer, recalls being blamed by her parents for consequences that happened, "in a blaze of hormones in the back seat of Ty Dorris' vintage T-Bird." Instead of supporting Meg at this critical life-juncture, a crossroads of sorts, her parents' parting words were, "You stupid little slut! That boy was gonna start at fullback for Ole Miss!" Now, some thirty-five years later, Meg must make a life-changing choice.

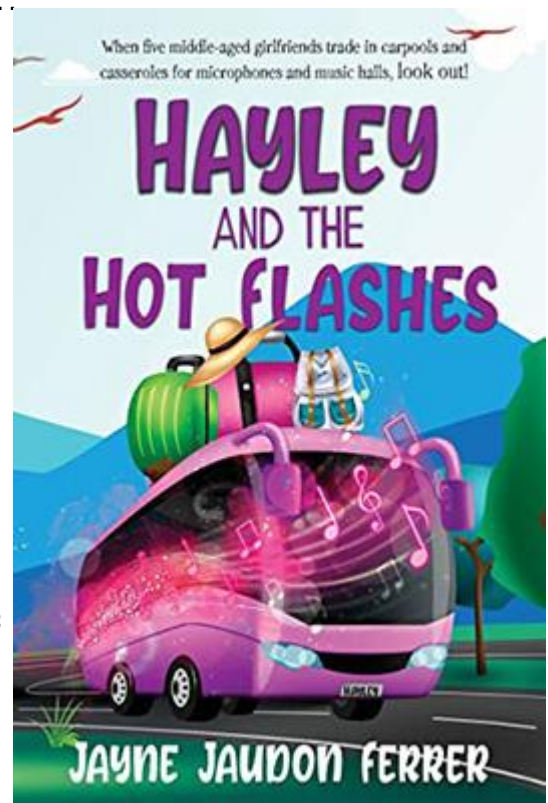
Over the landscape of time, this out-of-practice quintet of talent learn how to take risks. They hit the road in the rugged environs of country music, where popular acceptance is everything. Audiences must "like" you, moguls of the entertainment industry must see you as a "saleable" product; If DJs don't "spin" your records, you don't stand a chance of success. All of these are big "ifs" for the newly rejuvenated *Hayley and the Hot Flashes*.

This story is captivating. Jaudon's characters are people you may know. They may be you! With that said, Jaudon is a skilled storyteller. She surprises . . . the moment I thought I had the next thing pegged; I was delighted to be wrong.

Third crossroad: Ask the right questions of life. Your reviewer posed the following question at the top:

What could former superstar Hayley Swift do to recover her past iconic life?

But was this the right question? Jayne Jaudon Ferrer, has written a novel worth reading. It is funny. It is hard to put down. It has something to offer. In the end, the questions it poses and answers will make you stop and think.



Michael Escoubas

**NINA MILLER REVIEWS JOEL SAVISHINSKY'S
*OUR ACHING BONES, OUR BREAKING HEARTS: POEMS ON AGING***

49 pages, \$14.00, published by The Poetry Box (Portland, OR). ISBN 978-1-956285-33-8.
<https://thepoetrybox.com/bookstore/bones-hearts>

As someone who worked in a hospice for many years, and who is now in her mid 80's, I was especially moved by Joel Savishinsky's book of poetry, *Our Aching Bones, Our Breaking Hearts*. This is a courageous collection about a subject many of us avoid: our own frailty and mortality. Savishinsky writes with remarkable poetic skill about the wide array of losses we experience as we grow old, including aspects of our own functioning like memory and aching joints. In "Waking Up at 77" he notes

"... as soon as you change position, something will hurt, and you don't want to know what that something is today. Curiosity has become very discrete, and sleep the rarest of pleasures."

Savishinsky captures the loneliness of those who live on when their peers have died and they have moved into care facilities. He also touches, with painful honesty, on his own history, as in "Maybe the Traffic Cop Calling Never Left Me." The impact of Covid in "Viral Load" is both a personal tragedy as well as a powerful political statement.

"The virus has done to us
what we have done

unto others, separated
children and parents,

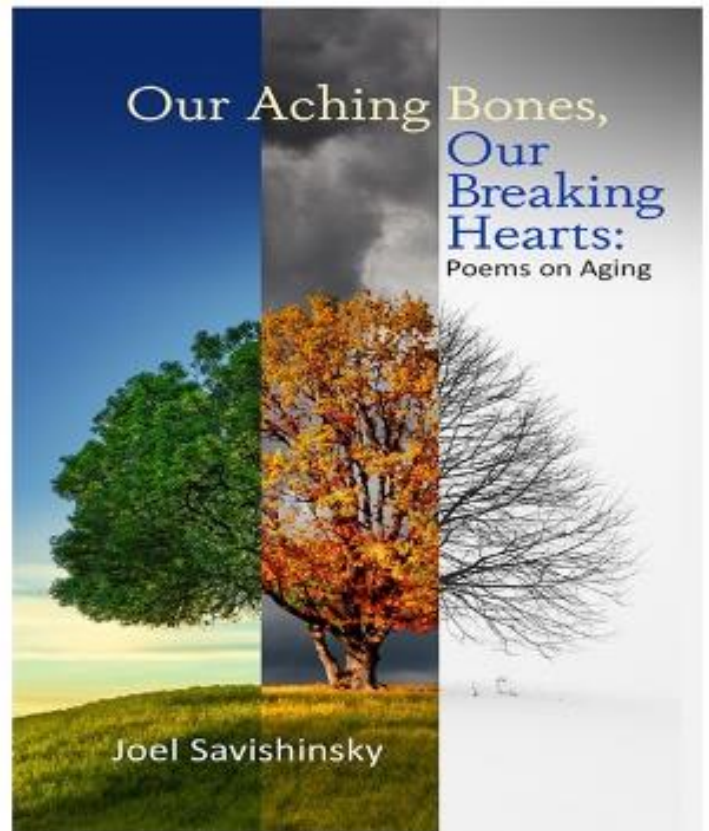
spouses and lovers, put
families and friends, barely

beyond words, across the borders,
sometimes seen or heard but

never touched, their skin the home
of our final hunger."

But these are not only solemn poems. Savishinsky has a wonderful sense of wit, as in the poem "Ambush." After noting how a variety of plants, trees and bushes had distracted him during his attempts at mindfulness and concentration, he ends by confessing to the reader: "But I admit I am a very bad Buddhist, so I will stop / here and spare us both that business about the lotus." Many of his poems deserve to be read out loud, because he has clearly paid careful attention to the sound of words, as in "The Carpenter Bee" and "The Raker's Progress." And while I find it difficult to pick my favorite poem in this collection, I think "Cherry Tree at Midnight" touches me most deeply, in its tender description of a long marriage:

"Now it does not immediately register whether
the startled cry he hears from a deep dream was
his or hers. It has been so long they have shared
the same fears, the same bed, swapped phantoms as



a common endowment, making this legacy a currency with which to buy time, mortgage a future, pay for the lost rhymes and reasons of a doubled past.”

Our Aching Bones, Our Breaking Hearts is a wonderful collection, and I hope there will be more coming soon from this fine poet.

Nina Miller, a founder and director of both a crisis center and a community hospice, is the author of the novel *The Mother of Invention*.

MICHAEL ESCOUBAS REVIEWS *CRYSTAL FIRE* BY TROCHIMCZYK & TALWAR

Crystal Fire: Poems of Joy and Wisdom, Editor: Maja Trochimczyk, Art by Ambika Talwar. 144 poems ~ 14 paintings ~ 188 pages, Moonrise Press, October 2022, 188 pages.

Poems by: Elzbieta Czajkowska, Joe DeCenzo, Mary Elliott, Jeff Graham, Marlene Hitt, Frederick Livingston, Alice Pero, Allegra Silberstein, Jane Stuart, Ambika Talwar, Bory Thach, & editor.

ISBN 978-1-945938-58-0 (color paperback)

ISBN 978-1-945938-57-3 (color hardcover)

ISBN 978-1-945938-59-7 (eBook)

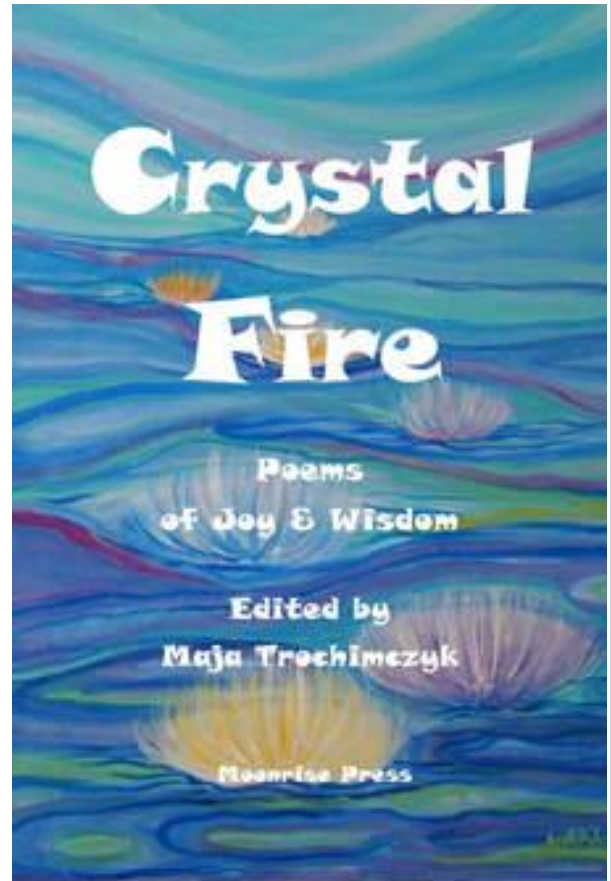
<https://moonrisepress.com/crystal-fire-anthology.html>

The Sublime Senses

Until the heart stops
it desires.

Until the mind stills;
it aspires;

Until the senses
take their leave
they deceive—
such dreams they weave ...



I chose this poem by Ella Czajkowska, as the perfect lead-in to my review of Maja Trochimczyk’s stunning new anthology *Crystal Fire: Poems of Joy and Wisdom*. In two succinct quatrains Ella’s poem captures my emotions. While defining abstract terms such as Joy and Wisdom is like trying to nail jello to a wall, key words such as “desires” and “aspires” speak to me. I desire Joy; I aspire to Wisdom. Both words are beyond my reach. Stanza two, hints that I must take a pause and allow the subtleties of the imagination to inform me. Through the superb efforts of 12 talented poets (8 women, 4 men) fresh light has been shed upon your reviewer’s quest. More on this later.

The book is illustrated by the multi-talented Ambika Talwar. One of her works precedes each featured poet’s contribution. I mentioned earlier that growing in Joy and Wisdom requires slowing down, taking a pause. Ambika’s paintings play a key role ... they whisper Joy. Here is an example entitled “Quiet Rainfall” (see next p.).

As I reflected on Ambika’s painting, paired with Marlene Hitt’s poems, something struck me: Painters and poets share similar concerns, namely, bringing Nature’s message of beauty and spirituality alive in people’s hearts. Da Vinci said it, Poets paint pictures with words; artists write poetry without words. Her poem, “Words from the Garden,” gives me a sense of “Quiet Rainfall,” here’s an excerpt:

RIGHT: Ambika Talwar, "Quiet Rainfall" ~ Acrylic / 1997

Rose and Petunia, Lantana and Sage ...
A passing breeze lifts my hair as I sit pondering
the beauty of the life that surrounds me.

Bushes with plain simple leafy life
display themselves and I speak their names,
Savor the sounds my lips make ...

Hitt's inflections and phrasings surround me with a sense of
raindrops assuming (but not imposing) their rightful place in
the world and even in human life. Could life be about that?
Could it be that Joy and Wisdom have something to do with
such perceptions? The poet's sensuous phrasings continue,

... Xylosma, Sweet Jessamine, Plumbago Blue
and Bougainvillea Magenta, Oleander, Fuschia,
bright yellow Palo Verde, iron wooded and thorny,
Wisteria surrounding it all to make me feel safe.

While Trochimczyk's goal, as editor, is not an ideal coordi-
nation between paintings and poems, the paintings do set a
mindfulness tone as readers step into each section.

Frederick Livingston's "Rainbows Dreaming," brought me up short with a touch of Wisdom I had not considered
before. I have italicized his Wisdom lines. The poem was inspired by Snoqualmie Pass, in Washington state.

Now I know
the blankness of snow
is only rainbows dreaming,

teaming with streaks of red paintbrush
little lanterns of columbine
tiger lilies prowl the scree slope

yellow asters multiply the sun
the hungry green of spring leaves
purple-blue lupine flooding the valley.

Who would ever know
these slopes were covered in snow
one mere moon ago?

What else have I not seen
and called "empty" in my ignorance?
What dreams within me may erupt

from thawing soil,
simply waiting for ripe moments
to answer the generosity of sunlight?



Ambika Talwar, "Initiation" ~ Acrylic / 2003



LEFT: Ambika Talwar, *Dawn Lights*, Acrylic

Before launching into the poems themselves, I was blessed by Maja Trochimczyk's two and one-half page preface. This personally revealing summary of her motivations for giving birth to *Crystal Fire* is indispensable reading. In it she explains her use of "Crystal," and "Fire," in the title. Don't pass over this enlightened writing.

I also appreciated reading the extended biographies of each poet at the end of the volume. Each contributor offers a unique take on the subject matter, thus adding a touch of virtuosity to the whole.

In an age of vitriolic talk, of political and moral uncertainty, amid the dark clouds of Covid-19, *Crystal Fire* draws back the curtain on Love, Joy and yes, Wisdom.

As art and poetry work together, I've come to an ever-deeper appreciation of Wallace Stevens' very practical saying, "Poetry [and painting] is a response to the daily necessity of getting the world right." I can't help thinking that Maja Trochimczyk, Ambika Talwar, and the talented contributors to *Crystal Fire*, would agree.

Michael Escoubas,
reprinted from *Quill & Parchment*, April 2023

CALIFORNIA STATE POETRY SOCIETY

Established in 1971, CSPA is the official state organization representing California to the National Federation of State Poetry Societies (NFSPS). CSPA was incorporated on August 14th, 1985 as a 501(c)(3) organization, so donations above the membership level are tax deductible. Donor and patron support ensure (1) the quality publications of the CSPA continue and (2) our mission to promote poetry and art in California and around the world continues to grow. Information regarding renewal and patron contributions is on the Membership page. The CSPA began publication of the *California Quarterly* in the fall of 1972., The *California Quarterly*, published four times a year, accepts only unpublished poetry. Foreign language poems with an English translation are also accepted. Submissions may be made through Submittable.com, email, website and mail (for those without access to the internet and email addresses).

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MONTHLY CONTEST SUBMISSIONS GUIDELINES

California State Poetry Society encourages poetic creativity by organizing monthly poetry contests. The contests are open to all poets, whether or not they are members of the CSPA. Reading fees are \$1.50 per poem with a \$3.00 minimum for members and \$3.00 per poem with a \$6.00 minimum for non-members. Entries must be postmarked during the month of the contest in which they are entered. They must consist of a cover page with all contact information (name, address, telephone number and email address) as well as the month and THEME on cover page, and the titles of the poems being submitted.

Starting in January 2023, we are accepting previously published poems for our Monthly Contest. Please note the publication where it first appeared on any such poem. There are two ways to submit, by regular mail (enclosing check) or email (using Paypal): 1) by mail to CSPA Monthly Contest – (specify month), Post Office Box 4288 Sunland, California 91041, with a check made to CSPA; and 2) by email to: CSPAMonthlyContests@gmail.com (specify month), with fees paid by Paypal to the following account – CaliforniaStatePoetrySociety@gmail.com. Please include your name and contact information on each page with a poem!

The monthly contest winners are notified the month after they are awarded. All of the winners for the year are listed in the first CSPA Newsbriefs and published in the first Poetry Letter of the following year. Prize-winning poems are also posted on the blog, CaliforniaStatePoetrySociety.com. The 1st prize winner receives half of the prize pool for pools less than \$100. For pools of \$100 or more, the 1st, 2nd and 3rd place winners receive \$50, \$10 and \$5, respectively. There are no exceptions to the prize disbursement rules. Please note: Do not send SAEs. We do not return poems. If you win, we will let you know. Otherwise, there are no notifications.

CSPA Monthly Contest Themes (Revised)

- ① January: Nature, Landscape
- ② February: Love
- ③ March: Open, Free Subject
- ④ April: Mythology, Dreams, Other Universes
- ⑤ May: Personification, Characters, Portraits
- ⑥ June: The Supernatural
- ⑦ July: Childhood, Memoirs
- ⑧ August: Places, Poems of Location
- ⑨ September: Colors, Music, Dance
- ⑩ October: Humor, Satire
- ⑪ November: Family, Friendship, Relationships
- ⑫ December: Back Down to Earth (Time, Seasons)



Janusz Maszkiewicz, "Nocturne," Acrylic on Canvas, 1.2m X 1.2m

The *Poetry Letter* ((Online ISSN 2836-9394; Print ISSN 2836-9408) is a quarterly electronic publication, issued by the California State Poetry Society. Edited by Maja Trochimczyk since 2020; by Margaret Saine earlier. The *Poetry Letter* is emailed and posted on the CSPA website, CaliforniaStatePoetrySociety.org. Sections of the *Poetry Letter* are also posted separately on the CSPA Blog, CaliforniaStatePoetrySociety.com – all poems in one post, all book reviews in another. Copies of Maszkiewicz's paintings are reproduced here courtesy of the artist. Founder of Vienna Woods, painter Janusz Maszkiewicz is a proficient craftsman, sculptor and a preeminent artist in the field of marquetry veneer inlays. ViennaWoodsLa.com.