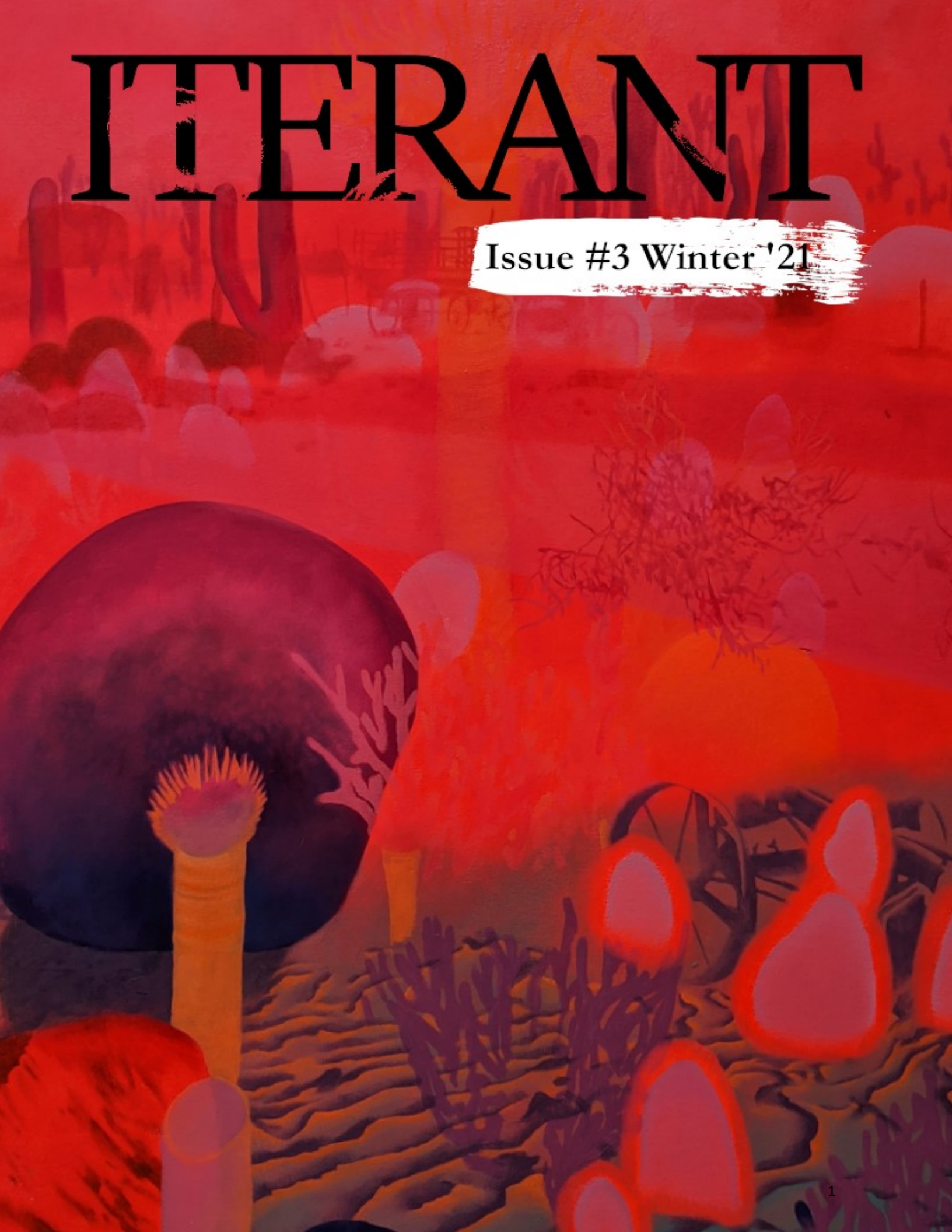


ITERANT

Issue #3 Winter '21



PARADISE LOUNGE

WINTER, 2021

ITERANT

ISSUE #3, WINTER 2021

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ARTWORK IN ISSUE 3

by KELSEY SHWETZ

"Seed of Desire," 2020, Oil on Canvas, 42x50 inches



Kelsey Shwetz's paintings are comments on our environmental state and glimpses of a post-anthropocene world; the atmosphere is uninhabitable for humans, only vegetal life and geological forms adapt and flourish in the torrid air. This world is a not so distant future, an alternative planet, or a computer simulation, where a new narrative is dawning and often the only figure in the landscape is the viewer. The artist sources reference material from constructed environments such as conservatories, botanical gardens, and scientific dioramas, as opposed to working from the “natural nature” found in parks, forests, or the wilderness. By working from photographs and sketches of constructed spaces versus completely natural environments, she makes paintings of alternative landscapes, where the space and foliage is familiar yet estranged, recognizable, but not quite right. These paintings take on a theatrical cast; they hold the charge of a transgression that has just occurred, or set the stage for an event or action that is about to take place.

“Burned by Wetness,” 2020, Oil on Canvas, 40x60 inches



RAINY EVENING

Someone catching sight
Of his reflection in a store window
Impersonating a person
With blood and guts
Fleeing from someone,
Yet afraid to take a closer look
At that one in pursuit
With no more substance
Than a ghost picture
On a black and white TV
In his dead parent's bedroom,
With the station long off the air.

PARADISE LOUNGE

One sucker still left
In that dive across the street.
The woman sitting
In his lap topless,
Her smile frozen
Eyeing the one on stage
Stroking her crotch
And gasping for air
As if drowning in live mud.
The hell-like metropolis
Emptying at this hour.
Flies changing places
On a corpse, or so they say.

SOME FOLKS OUT LATE

Unknown bird, you shrieked
Once, then twice more,
As if a knife slit your throat
In one of the huge oak trees
At the far end of the lawn.

It made the child in his mother's arms
Stir restlessly in his sleep.
Earlier there'd been talk of war
And of the weather we are having,
When darkness came suddenly,

Blurring our faces in the yard
With what stayed unspoken
In the deepening silence.
A lake of blood still visible,
Where the sun had gone down.

TANGO

Slinky black dress
On a wire hanger
In an empty closet
Its doors slid open

To catch the draft
From an open window
And make it dance
As in a deep trance

The empty hangers
Clicking in unison
Like knitting needles
Or disproving tongues



"Dry to Puffy," 2018, Oil on Canvas, 62x50 inches

EXTRAVAGANCE OF CIXOUS

How you are, or are not, “engaged.”

How the body lies,

A dialectic occupying the trees.

How I’ve given you everything,

And now I have none,

Or wait, the stubborn rush of composition

Is like a primitive hanging there.

How we have everything we asked for,

And the apocalypse is far away.

Wear it loosely dear, it feels like home here.

EXTRAVAGANCE OF KANT

Deep inside, the shabby narratives.
I want nothing that's touching me.

Letters shattered by our spells,
The undertone of wood on a porch.

I want nothing but to be myself,
And the inked dawn falling all over

My face and hands every day.
I say it's endless, and the monologues

With their brilliant templates go missing
At intervals, while the nearly frozen

Air offers so much diminishment.
I would like to escape on this highway

And go directly to the self, standing
In splendor, untouched in early spring.

EXTRAVAGANCE OF DARWIN

Increments or lettered instructions,
No reason to pulse after a bird's wings.

I still didn't understand the novel until
The last sentence.

The soul here occupies the voyage.
What is more persistent

Is the quick dust of stars,
And the mercury of moon-rocks.

Rhythm of afternoons,
The spurts that come out of them,

Show me blithely to the next word
That lies sleeping in its cave.

EXTRAVAGANCE OF FREUD

Unpoliced id eating ginger,
Wandering, wrapped in tape.

The four horsemen in every
Sense of the word.

Sex is so boring! The blue
Gleaming of the sky,

A little coke and a plate of
Chips, gesture and description,

An apparition of you, whose
Imagination did not condemn.

DEVOTIONAL

I am writing this
to you among these
strangers on the 2
train because you
sometimes half-laugh
that you would love
for me to write
a poem for you—and
not that other kind
of thing I often do,
that elliptical, art-
thick wandering
that delays *I*
love you
for well-after
the spectacle, or
the heart-fraught
rhyme, the cave
cathedral, a
painted scroll
bound with locks
of hair. How easy
it is to lose track
of the truth,

the marrow of you
and I together
all these beautiful
years. *I love*
you I am tapping
with my thumbs
as someone's grandmother
snores beside me
clutching bodega
plastic, a weathered
Bible. *I love you*
I am saying now
in my head, opening
my eyes to find
myself looking
face-to-face
at a child
eating his corn muffin,
punching his
sister in the arm.
Last night, in the fog
of a fever and stress
headaches all I
wanted was soup,
its slivers of roast
pork, its green
onions and the warmth
of broth in my chest.
And last night you
filled our last clean bowl
and held it in a towel,
touched my forehead,
and said *Here you go*.
At this stop, I transfer
to the 1, which slides

local up into the Bronx
for what feels
like hours. Let me tell you
again without ornament
and for only you
and I to hear
in my voice
I love you.



"Greenhouse," 2019, Oil on Canvas, 35x35 inches

HOW NOT TO HATE YOUR DYING MOTHER WHO MORE THAN ONCE TRIED TO KILL YOU

Listen to “Bells for Her,” and think about amends. Use noise-cancelling headphones when she whistles. Cackles. Eats, slurps, belches, smacks. Quotes Farrakhan and the Honorable Elijah Muhammad. Rants about whitefolks. Rants about laundry. Rants about your brother-in-law, your son, your father, your ex, always men. Talks about whatsrightwhatsrightwhatsright. Talks. Remember how much you fight for care as her mind slow-shatters. Practice yoga in the lowlit morning, when the only sounds are calm. Try to beat her into the kitchen to make your smoothie. Fail. Listen to her once-melodic voice hum and scratch out a song you don’t know. Forget about how she said you should never sing, your voice wasn’t up to it. Scratch. Move the unbreakable dishes to a lower shelf, so she can reach them. Forget about the time she slapped you to the floor for leaving the refrigerator door open, then lay on the orange couch, arm over her eyes, in a drunken sleep, and forgot whatever she did. Leave the refrigerator open. More Tori. Watch the arctic squirrel shiver herself awake and think about Black women and girls cop-shot in their beds. Accept that spiders will web up the bottoms of your windows if you don’t go out on the porch. No one goes out on the porch anymore, if they’re in danger. You’re in danger everywhere. Even your own house.

MY MOTHER WANTS TO DO EVERYTHING, BUT

At the checkout line, she inspects all the produce
I'd chosen without her, loaded into green
compostable bags. Smile sly, eyes aslant,
This one don't look good, she tells me,
referring to one of the Meyer lemons I picked to make
gluten-free lemon bars for my son as a surprise,
turning the knotted oval in her palm to note imperfections.
I want to say they're supposed to look different,
a deeper yellow. But I don't want to argue, check my tone
after taking in a tired breath, act caught: Okay.
I keep putting our food on the conveyor: canned black beans,
frozen peas, fresh ginger, vegan oat bread, red peppers.
My mother tries to overtake me, but, at 81, can't move
that fast. She gets in the way. I use my body to help her
feel like she's not: step back, wait. The cashier
takes an orange out of a paper bag, then asks my mother
if the oranges are navel oranges. *I don't know*,
she scoffs, *they're just oranges*, as if the cashier's effort at precision
insults her. I nod. Halfway home she talks about the thinner skin
of other oranges, the ones whose names she can't remember
but describes via ease of peeling. She means Valencia.
I say nothing, since she doesn't ask if I know; she's in a world,
smooth rinds spiraling under her nails without breaking,
juice trickling down her wrist if she's not careful enough.
She never wants to stop.

A SCULPTURE OF JOSEPHINES

For Sylvia Shalit-Itkin, sculptor, grandmother

From each slab of moon
she pulls out a Josephine
like Rodin pulls the hand
of God out of marble.
There are four of us, all
her granddaughters, all named
Josephine, made of full, Gibbous,
half and crescent. She once lived
on the moon in sinkholes full of water.
The moon making rhythm
from moonquakes into iambic
pentameter spells that help make babies.
We each hold a burning key
that she spraypaints gold
When the moon is full
and she can't sleep.
We are molded with braids
on our heads that hold candles
whose fire is earth lava
in a dream Yahweh had.
For us everything is diaspora
narrative. There are birdcages
constructed in our chests

where inside carrier pigeons
Are trapped. I open the door.
All is process, myth and flowering cervix.
Our wombs like pomegranates
from which tigers emerge.
My cousins, the other Josephines,
hold out eggs in their palms.
Appendages grow out of us,
arms twisting together, lovely
arms reaching for amicus briefs,
that bring law and order
to ovulation, to fertility.
All the Josephines dream
of a string of paper blue birds
hanging like Tibetan prayer flags
from the ceiling of the sky.
Moon soot cakes the window
of the warehouse where Grandmother
sculpts in the office furniture graveyard,
among Steelcase files and Herman Miller
desks: each of us can pause the sea
with a Bakelite elevator button
going up and up. The sea is calm tonight.
Time is not linear. We are delivered
to a place by a marble bench
where under thorny William Baffin roses
she sits with our grandfather while courting,
watching the moonrise over Brooklyn.
As her grandchildren we will go forth
and populate the earth,
so that history cannot be stopped.

INTO THE MISTAKE

What is a mistake
but a misunderstanding of the mystic?

My mistakes spread
like sumac trees, heavy clouds
at the perimeter, stalking.

My hidden questions rejoice
in my arrival here, a bouquet of pink clover,
an understanding that quells
an argument. I walk

the desire line of path with my bow,
toward the straw filled boss, it's bull's-eye
my third eye. The translucent wings

of white bramble on thorns and tall grass,
lead here to the upper field. Missing the mark
is what some call sin.

On my way back the thick urinous stink
of plum trees and flop. The neighbor's Guernsey
calf in her pen like a ghost in the machine.
How can she want a field when she's not yet been?

In the loud high-pitched moan and moo,
the greenness calls like a shofar.

Blessed are You, Ruler of the world.

I pet her spotted nose, then wave.
She's become my parents
disappearing on a boat into the mystic
sea, being as I am made of the oars, bones,
and blossoms, the string physics
of their mistakes.

FERTILITY

A cathedral of oak
looks upward toward
slivers of revelatory light
like the kind at the end
of the tunnel people talk
about when they die
and come back. This is

the way trees divert
us from their roots,
that grasp old forest
burial grounds, lambs
to the slaughter injected
into the life of orange
and red foliage. The world
is on fire, melting polar
opposites. Huddled, divine,

alive, their fungal
networks call to divine
the future. Here time is
not linear, and fallen
leaves drip like ritual
candles. The crown
of the tallest, leaves a ring
of thermodynamic ardor.
Queen of Divination

by Photosynthesis,
a kind of intimacy

with Being. The rain
makes the tree's witness
vulnerable, which is how
the living can be
begotten of the dead.

Inside each tree, a scroll
of commandments. The slow
pulse of each tree's signals
from each root consort
like a drip of sap, sugar
knowledge of what is Holy.

They sway their pheromones,
a coquette's trickery. Their roots
heard only unto themselves

in prayer at 220 megahertz,
if only we could transcribe
it like a court stenographer,
inaudible to us mortals.
Their swarm intelligence
makes them a religious tribe
in diaspora worldwide,
trying to stop

the great undoing.
The oaks make
a dwelling place
that holds the catafalque
that is the dark
mortuary of earth where

what was and will be
follow the call
to reincarnate before
it's too late, as the oaks
give the communion
of air to the world,
their sacred honor
and duty to make
the prophecy of rain.

The forest beheld me,
stares inside me, my pupils
dilate, eggs ripen,
cherubim in Solomon's
temple. Wherever
we're exiled the Shekhinah
the trees made went
with us. I have knelt
at their wonder.
The fruit of my womb.
I have been
Blessed.



Beneath you
the amethyst caves vibrate and groan,
the earth's emptiness.

Mushrooms of pleasure
molt into dark cupolas.

Now a shade falls over you,
a chittering, the talk of infinitesimal spirits
too slight for understanding.

You open yourself
your mouth your eyes your forehead
with a sharp stone carried from childhood.

The owl
fastened like the moon against the night,
is pale, intent on your sorrow.

A vine climbs the darkness up
where blooms invert, huecos florecidos...

Before you disappear, a disfiguring music
comes in the form of a hummingbird
who mistakes your eye for a flower.

YEVTUSHENKO WAS THE KING

When the drunk Russian
on the F train pulled out
his flask, people moved
to other seats, but not me.

He said: *you're reading Yevtushenko
in English*. I was. He told me
his father, in the Thaw,
of which Yevtushenko was the king,
wore jeans with battery-powered
xmas lights up and down the legs.

Do you have to go? he said. I had
gathered my things, we were
at my stop, I would like to hear
him in English. I said I'm sorry,
I have to go, and I went
and I'm still going.

POEM FOR MIROSLAV HOLUB

The Gloomy Octopus lives
inside the book forever

while the tea kettle is boiling
I can look into its eyes

and it stares back at me
but does not love me

for it is gloomy, and
the octopus inside the book forever

is made of ink that reflects
light and is reflected in the mind

and what the mind makes
says Holub, is only there to shore up emptiness

“the primary and secondary emptiness”
which he never explains

VILLETTE VILLANELLE

Lying underneath a Sweetgum tree
in a foreign country under the sun
following the swallows only less free

than they, that's from a poem by Shelley
too sore to move at all after my run
lying underneath a Sweetgum tree

the sun is at its height, she joins me
years later she still thinks I'm the one
following the swallows, only less free

by just a little, like we're all doomed to be
sometimes her sad face brightens, she says it's fun
lying underneath a Sweetgum tree

with the kids, did I mention them? there are three
because we brought the best friend of my son
following the swallows only less free

like everyone in love but with a family
who drifts away from themselves & is stunned
lying underneath a Sweetgum tree
following the swallows, only less free

IT IS THE DEVIL WHO RULES THE WORLD

I begin with the snow
the tang of cold
and all that is white —
the daily decay of the sun
that as an afterthought
mimics each hour as the last.

This iron sky so plagued
am I wrong to still love
the misery that comes in the early dark?
We all die with the first blow
only to be buried among the rocks
and crows of a field.

 You have time
to stare down the night;
you have time to lean on a rail
of fence and call to the adolescent shadows.
Maybe you will manhandle the black,
no, not manhandle, maybe you will
sculpt what you do not know,
what you do not understand
into something that is
only a reflection
of yourself.

THE DARK COMES ON

inking the marina, the docked white-sided yachts,
their sails as sharp as knives ready to slice
the lake water that edges too close
to the shore, their fiberglass glow the last to be seen
as the sun goes down. How easy to mark
the dark in the mountains where coal
once lit the night, the fields where furrowed rows
mocked the rays of the sun. The darkness arrives
in bits as if on bat wings, erratic,
hungry for what fills the night sky with
hum and buzz. A certain pitch slides past
lawns recently shaved, edged and dressed
as if donning new pleated khakis. Night feeds
on night; the darkness grows: a dog's mouth
open and panting, ready to bark, howl, growl.

A COVEN'S COUNSEL

The last of the dead leaves fall
like missed opportunities, renunciations in copper
and sulfur, each their own legato lifting & lowering
on a slow shift of wind. And for a few months
our lives are lived within the flames;
we can imagine the stake, the woodpile at our feet,
our eyes turned towards heaven.
But soon the cool, wet days of winter
silence our complaints, calm our burning
skin & when we walk past the river,
we hear the carillon of stones and fallen branches;
ecstatic, we know that deep chorus —
bone on bone, like the crystal vibrations of a glass
rubbed and rubbed, rung out until
it gives up its song. Lift up that song.
We are always the instrument.
The landscape always our ministry.



"Afterimage," 2019, Oil on Canvas, 32x28 inches

DREAM OF THE NEW WORLD

There's a big concrete room we gather in
where bad feelings are piped mercilessly

I dreamed I was nightswimming
in the middle of a Russian city
in a warm shallow pool

I put my head under
I thought *Russia is beautiful*

Later I returned
to the type of wet garden fantasy
typical of my socio-economic status

I dreamed my dreams
would cleanse me of what I wanted
to convince others I already had

A working knowledge
of how war is a yin yang

and how to stay full
from sample-sized portions of pasta salads
at corporate health food stores

The sky at night
here in California

is a kind of dead ombre
and I went out under it

I got so high

I wrote a book about walking

Because I think we've forgotten
how to do it

I really think we have

ADVANCED SYMBOLISM

Hours go by with us
reading old books on African masks

I didn't know Picasso
made so much pottery as he aged
He must have been rich

There's a kind of person
who needs to know you know
what polyrhythms are
and I barely do

In a way
it just means "multiple rhythms"

The lake is frozen over
All of the goats are pregnant

My dad is in Eastern Oregon
videotaping geese

Peaking in the hot tub
later with the radiant snow
I remember who to be

I cry and cry
kneading my pale stomach

Time is a room
you fill with objects
you don't actually want

Earlier I examined
two-dimensional art forms

Later bread soaks up my errant fluids

Then later we trap the sky moving
on an old flash drive Earlier

the art farm depressed me
The goats / wait no

Later I milk the goats
Later I remember
that oil is so integral Later
I google the meaning of oil
I don't find much

Earlier was a younger feeling
but I'll have another

Still later
I watch the bright orange
flames raking the air moving
through the woodstove Earlier
in thick fingers

I do know what makes
music into itself

Really it's just trying

Later

I blow dust from the old masters

Write *Mom* on a piece of paper

Run a line through it

HIGHWAY ARCHETYPE

I keep thinking of writing
about what freeways meant
to the folk singers

The truth is I just don't know

To what extent should I be stopped

These are the thoughts of our world
and they are also mine

There are only so many words
So many impulses

There's the highway impulse
& the archetype it reduces to

There's a corn moon
rising yellow over the green sand
I keep thinking

I love poetry & algebra
and they are opposites

One shrinking the other
uselessly / The universe
& what needs to name it

Time bends

& I don't know how

It arcs toward a room service
kind of country
Where all you do is ride

I'm thinking
of a big new road
that isn't new anymore

That anyone can walk along
if they are brave enough

Though I don't really mean "walk"

Though maybe I would have once



THE BODY REMEMBERS

I stood on one foot and reached
into the Fuji apple tree. I was tall
enough to pluck the lowest fruit
but shorter than the belly
of a man who would carry me off
afternoons into the dusty sunlight
to the great museums where
we'd watch the pendulum sway
to show the Earth's slow rotation.
We watched the pegs fall, not
understanding. His hair is silver now,
and I haven't seen him in years.
What I mean to say: My body
no longer remembers the terror.
The dreams have evacuated
the building of my body,
the theatre a dark, plush space
without film reels playing hurt days.
Instead, my body is a bicycle whirring
down the sidewalk, my cape flapping
behind me. I dodge a girl
on training wheels. I was that small once.
The man was my sized. I reached
into the apple tree and brought down

fist-sized fruit. I ate into a new knowledge,
that my body is a planet, which I alone
get to name, and today, I name it
my happiness.

MARRIAGE

I don't quite understand
the shape of my future.
The water a two-temperated
current against my legs.
Of alluvial fields I dreamt.
The idea of marriage:
the great barrier reef with
coral bleached and dying.
Evidence of resilience,
they say, absent a catastrophic
event. Whatever it takes, I've
decided, I don't want
my maternal line to die in me.
I wear my mother's dress.
I watch my body shapeshift.
This face, which hasn't aged
in years, is sunspotted.
I am no movie star. I shrink
from my mother's beauty.
She was, above all else,
good. Her lupus her reward.
Or maybe I am her reward.
I know I'll never be grateful
enough. Between this man
and this man, my eggs are
losing count. Inside your domicile,
how am I to feel alive?

Once again, we face extinction.
The libraries not on fire, but
under dust. I don't believe
in loyalty above happiness.
I dive and dive under
the turbulence. One day, too,
my bones will empty. White blood
cells will mutiny. Do you run
headlong down the hill
into disaster? In the park,
a swarm of gnats insists
on clustering. Insects
claim the interior. The flies
touching my face, again,
again, again and again.

BOOK OF ASTONISHMENT

I don't think that love
is an argument against
the self.

I think love is
for the self, the twin flames
burning at last

into a single
flame, a candle lit for
the long night.

I snuffed the wool,
I snuffed the wick.
I waited dutifully

for my turn
in line. The basin drained
and I read the muck.

The cells spelling
BABY and BORN.
I don't think love

is a decision, like finding
a patron, or saying goodbye
to a soulmate, at last.

The line between the self
and the beloved stretches
into the thinnest membrane.

The ribbon of the afternoon,
the rough footage
which I watched.

There he was, riding away
from a future he glimpsed,
then turning around,

on a bicycle,
returning at last
to collect his destiny.

GOOD SEX WILL NOT KEEP A MAN AROUND

and yet the body continues
into the fields
through the grass and muck

through the cicadas' chirring
they fuck after 17 years of waiting
this monthlong orgy of sex and death

I want to put you into my mouth
like a communion wafer

you go into the dark by feel
as trucks slice through the darkness
the clouds pulled over like gauze

I find myself in love again
with a double agent

perhaps I broke apart
and the crack blackened
into a scar

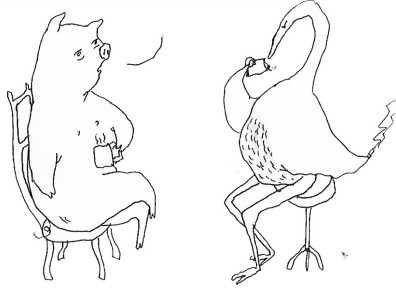
on a bell
I couldn't ring
without a sideways chime

Possible Pig -IN- THE DREAM

BIANCA STONE

WHO DO I HAVE TO KILL
FOR A BRIOCHE AROUND HERE?

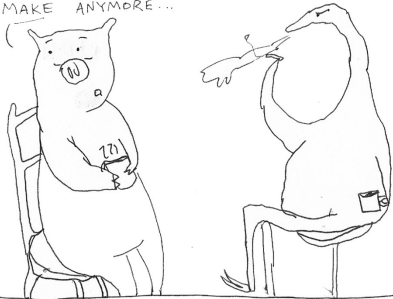
I DREAMED WE WERE
STUFFING CLOTHES IN THE SHREDDER
& I KEPT HOLDING UP THESE
TIE-DYE BEN&JERRY'S SHIRTS...



AND THEY WERE MASSIVE
LIKE XXXL...AND ALL WORN
AND TATTERED



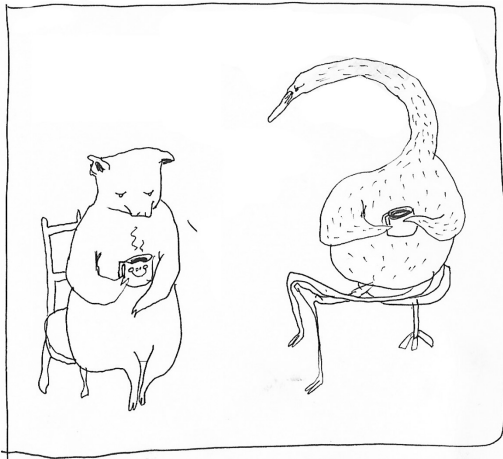
WE REALIZED IT WAS ALL
OUR FAVORITE ICE CREAM FLAVORS
PICTURED - ONES THEY DON'T
MAKE ANYMORE...



WE WERE REMINISCING ALL
ABOUT THESE GREAT BYGONE
FLAVOR COMBINATIONS -



AND I WAS LIKE "WHY SHRED THESE
SHIRTS?? THEY'RE KINDA COOL,
I COULD WEAR THEM AS DRESSES!"



SOUNDS LIKE THE DIET IS GOING WELL..



I THINK, THEREFORE I HAM.

ITERANT

MASTHEAD

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