

## Talking to the Artist

*after Alfredo Arreguin, Zapata's Messenger*

Hey, Alfredo, when did my ex-husband model for you?  
Unbelievable. I knew he was living on the border,  
the border between the US, Mexico,  
and sanity. Now, here he is in oil on canvas.

You sure got the mustache right,  
dark and daring with just the proper  
up curl. The hand in one pocket  
is spot on, and the gun

yes, at the end, I was always afraid  
there would be a gun. But Alfredo,  
the eyes and furrowed brow, pure genius,  
and then, the bottom half of the cross  
peeking out. How did you know?

The clincher, so recognizable, is the whirling  
background, squaring, circling, screaming.  
Oh, and I'm there too, the blue bird at the bottom,  
ready to fly away.

*Bev Fesharaki visited the Museum of Northwest Art while writing with other poets in LaConnor. She fell in and out of love (see poem) with Alfredo's amazing image of Zapata's Messenger and is more than pleased to share her imaginary conversation with the artist with other art lovers.*

## In Our Masked Faces

After Alfredo Arreguín's "Cholula"

The faces, all the same, almost black and white,  
rubber-stamped generic humans. But wait,  
stand closer, look again, ask questions.  
Why are some heads upside down?  
Rebels, iconoclastic skulls, scattered  
throughout the crowd. And not just one or two  
but enough to mount an insurrection.  
Museum guards abhor such misbehavior  
in the gallery. These go-against-the-grain skulls  
might wield pens, not the recommended pencils.

Is it a function of my brain that it registers  
the upright faces first, only later takes in,  
extracts uniqueness from geometric shapes?  
Differences in eyes, their color and contour,  
open or winking as if to say "we are the keepers  
of secrets." More regularity in noses than in eyes  
and though this painting is more subdued than  
Arreguín's brightly colored sister piece, this one  
draws me in. No easy answers here. Just more  
to see the longer that you look. Don't move along.

Stay here. Enter the labyrinth of lines.  
See how emotions percolate between them.  
upper quadrant (your heart  
resides in one) periodic blue diamonds.  
They look like flowers. Moods pulsate

through the faces and the waves  
of blue. Let's call this work "Humankind,"  
a tale of people wearing masks, no different  
from every other city in the world. In our  
masked hiding, we reveal what matters most.

Sylvia Byrne Pollack

The poems of Sylvia Byrne Pollack ([www.sylviabyrnepollack.com](http://www.sylviabyrnepollack.com)), a hard-of-hearing poet and retired cancer researcher, appear in Floating Bridge Review, Crab Creek Review, The Stillwater Review and many others. A two-time Pushcart nominee, she won the 2013 Mason's Road Literary Award, was a 2019 Jack Straw Writer and a 2021 Mineral School Resident. Her debut full-length collection Risking It, was published by Red Mountain Press (2021.)

Alfredo Arreguín, "Cholula, 1975"

Adorn me in geometry and I will sing

Think not of riddles  
or motile power  
or blank slates

The loom that made me, meme-web,  
changed the world  
at least twice over

Hands covered in gold leaf, azurite, and verdigris  
unfurl and stretch my skin  
then tattoo it  
till I'm shining in oil-slick couture

Who's to say that I am not  
the painting  
the artist  
and the medium

That I'm not a new-world Trinity  
singing for you to enter  
this labyrinth and  
save yourself on an Emerald Island

After Alfredo Arreguín's *Emerald Island*

*Renée Guillory is a writer, musician, filmmaker, and visual artist whose poetry has been published in The Blue Guitar Magazine, Smith Magazine, and TRIVLA Journal. Early writing (essays, reviews) appeared in many southwestern publications, including High Country News and Arizona Daily Sun.*

## After El Collar

*after Alfredo Arreguin*

My face is formed by faces.  
My eyebrows arc  
this troublesome  
wingspan of dreams.  
Repetition arouses me  
because I know  
a smidgeon of variation  
can settle cacophony  
as it gnaws at the world  
of back brace and tether.

I purse my ruby lips.  
Nowhere is there blood  
of tight curls  
where pain grasps scalp,  
although once or twice  
my sister pulled my head  
so far back  
to bind my hair  
in chemicals  
of Tonette spirals  
that I begged her stop.

A coil of red and black  
snakes around my neck.  
I am no Eve  
and will not  
take an apple from anyone.  
Even my ear resonates  
a life of portraiture.  
Can you find  
my eye that closes  
while I listen to Cielito Lindo?

Indeed, I have sat too long for this.  
My spider monkeys  
leapt into another frame.

Mary Ellen Talley resides in Seattle, WA. Her poems have been published in over 100 journals and anthologies. A poetry chapbook, *Postcards from the Lilac City* was published in 2020.

## IN THE PAINTINGS OF ALFREDO ARREGUÍN ...

... a madonna dresses in eyes and stars

on her forehead a star

on her cheek

on her raiment

... she is part of the sky

and spawning salmon leap into the sky

above the Suquamish waters full of stars

where pelicans flap through a jeweled night

... fingered waves froth

fish swifts distant suns

all toss aloft

all spangly

... how right this dotted sky of scales

of green and glow

orange and crimson

where orcas dance

... every people every thing gleams

crystalline atomic  
built of tiny other things  
we cannot often see

... the vexing husband becomes a small doll

Pamela Hobart Carter

*Growing up with two art historian parents meant PHC was very often taken to museums. Now she goes of her own accord, sometimes to write poetry. Her Imaginary Museum, her first poetry chapbook, is in the MONA shop!*

Inspired by *Black Madonna and Child*, *La Alameda*, *Suquamish Waters*, and *Exuberance*

Images from the catalog: <https://photos.app.goo.gl/mj6hEsgkuYzsk9Hi8>

## An Atheist Writing About the Virgin Mary

Torches of red light spiral out  
from her calves, birthing  
more and more butteries.  
She gazes in the distance,  
oblivious to her creation,  
longing for what? Her son?  
A burst of an orgasm?  
The wet butteries between her legs?

Outside the frame: my grandmother  
excommunicated because of the affair  
my grandfather had. In a man's church,  
divorce is laid at the woman's feet.

My grandmother morphed into a migrating  
monarch, moving from the honeysuckle  
of the South to the Saguaro fruit  
of the desert. She took my mother,  
never looked back. Found a new  
husband, had two more kids,  
named one of them Mary.

Never a religious word spoken  
in my childhood. A family tradition  
ended. Still, I stand in awe.  
In front of the most famous woman  
in the world birthing butteries.

Erin Armstrong is a writer and educator from Shoreline, Washington. More of her work can be found at [www.erinarmstrong.org](http://www.erinarmstrong.org) This poem is inspired by Alfredo Arreguin's painting La Guadalupana



Response to Alfredo Arreguín's *Kodiak II*

Under rising moon  
totem figures toss in glacier melt.  
The ice becoming water  
is already blue.

Moose keeps to his path.  
That he has nowhere else to go  
is irrelevant—this  
is his place. He

will not be moved, unlike me,  
intermittent, ambivalent activist.  
How, brown moose, will we survive?  
The stars offer no answers.

Ellen Roberts Young has two full-length collections, *Made and Remade* (2014) and *Lost in the Greenwood* (2020) as well as poems in numerous print and online journals. Her third chapbook with Finishing Line Press, *Transported*, came out in early 2021. She is an editor of *Sin Fronteras/Writers Without Borders Journal*. [www.ellenrobertsyong.com](http://www.ellenrobertsyong.com)

## Crazy for Writing

this — *after Crazy Quilt by Alfredo Arreguin*

I preferred not knowing them  
by sight, slight  
as individuals but once over and twenty times  
those faces intertwined  
upside down  
informed the nearness of Frida:  
this tryptic of almost-but-not  
identical pre-Columbian  
    pre-Columbine  
    pre-columbarium souls

Not knowing is my slight preferred

once over & informed  
by the nearness of a Diego  
(yes we're on a first name basis)  
the recent-cy of Michael Spafford  
whose work for some reason brings to mind  
Richard Diebenkorn

Whose name returns and swirls around the mind  
wondering about the now closed museum  
at CCA<sup>1</sup>, mourning the loss of the final C  
Crafts a would-be a home  
for this crazy quilt.

*Melissa Anderson writes almost relentlessly. A poet, piemaker, neurobiologist and psychotherapist practicing in the San Francisco Bay area for many years, she often still thinks of herself as living out of a pickup acquired while a post-doc in Portland, Oregon. She's had poems in Critica, Croneswords, and the 2022 Poetry Walk in Livingston, Montana; was second prize winner of the French Bread Writing Contest and won honorable mention from Willamette Writers Write.*

## Journey Between Two Houses of Worship

*after the painting "Twice Told," Spencer Moseley*

I follow one black line leading to white  
then another like tracking a zebra  
across a plain - no two zebra's markings  
the same. Like a human's thumbprint.

Or is this a track and I'm a train, until –  
on my left I enter a cathedral –  
sinner that I am, aren't we all – then  
to my right go into a test tube.

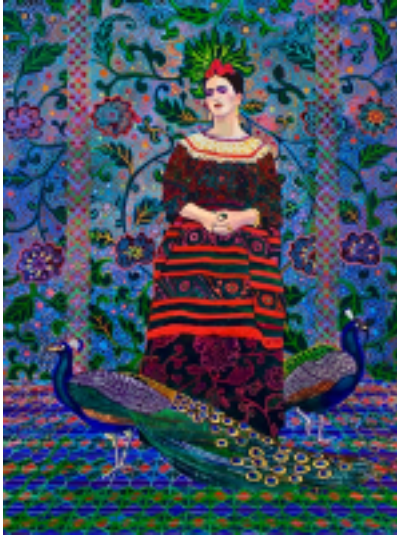
Perhaps they're the same – vessels that ask  
who we are, give back more questions than  
answers. So we follow lines to make sense  
of what we witness. Amazed – as we walk,

mostly upright, on this marble orbiting  
the sun – amazed we don't fall more often.

*Susan Landgraf was awarded an Academy of American Poets' Laureate award in 2020. Books include *The Inspired Poet* from Two Sylvias Press (2019), *What We Bury Changes the Ground*, and a chapbook *Other Voices*. More than 400 poems have appeared in journals and magazines, most recently in *Nimrod*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Calyx*, *The Meadow*, *Tar River* and others. She served as Poet Laureate of Auburn, Washington, from 2018 to 2020.*

## Layers

*with appreciation to Alfredo Arreguin for El Hulpil, 2017*



Thank you for remembering Frida.

A woman of keen beauty and heart,  
her talent overwhelms in the deeper  
realms of emotional art.

Your opulent array of color  
thickly applied in patterns  
over the richly decorated el hulpil,  
paints Frida with beauty and skill.

When the bus she rode  
slammed into a trolley,  
a metal rod was jacked  
ripping the spine along her back.

Both in body and in her love  
she lived inflamed with pain.  
So within every new portrait  
nothing was ever the same.

Why did Frida paint  
her likeness again and again,  
if not for us to hear her better  
fighting through her pain?

Alfredo, you kept her head held high,  
covering the layers with your brush,  
the steel eyes with such disdain,  
clearly you heard her pain.

Your painting illuminates her glories  
but does not refute her truth.  
You added pearly hands  
full of grace, a strength that expands.

*Devorah Harris*

*On her best of days, Devorah Harris wakes to song, writing poetry, and creating prayer-shawls on silk. Nowhere does she love living more, than from her perch on Elkhorn Slough, among the live oak trees and the ever-changing waters.*

## Prayer to the Goddess

*after "Xochiquetzal II" by Alfredo Arreguín*

Goddess of the stars  
hear this prayer  
for our times

through these daunting days  
may your precious feathers  
bring us beauty and wonder

may your fragrant flowers  
remind those who hate  
of the power of love

may the wild cats of heaven  
provide protection  
for the fearful and unfortunate

and may the flutterings  
of your butterflies  
transform our spirits into light —

*Lea Galanter*

*Lea Galanter is a Seattle-area editor, writer, and mystic who came to poetry later in life. Her poetry has been published in numerous journals and anthologies. She ventures regularly into the spaces between words seeking secret messages.*