

Unique Among the Sameness of Time

after The Seasons, Louise Kikuchi

Each day has its own shape.
Some shrink from too much light,
some spill over rain-soaked edges,
ringed like silver-rimmed dimes.
Distorted circles around the sun.
Not one perfect —
a cloud-shaped strawberry,
an almost full moon.
Imagine the potential of a polka dot day.

Days wear the seasons.
In winter, muted gray fleece-lined coats.
In summer heat, days don dried blood
red dresses or taupe when the fog comes in.
But in fall and spring, the turning seasons,
when flora bloom and die,
days flow in satin, sage green and plum.

Each day sends out sparks,
signs it was present,
unique among the sameness of time,
connected to yesterday
and the one to come.

Valerie Sopher

Unbuttoning, A Confession

--after Button Rain by Margaret Davidson

Tipping an avalanche of buttons from a tin
was Grandma's snow-day game, no two alike
to right desperate cuffs, so we'd jigsaw them
into a buttonscape as she recounted her
admirers, flannel shirts with toggle faces,
broadcloth—collars buttoned down, names
unfastened where fine threads were pulled,
cloth scissored away, only buttons saved.

Okay. So you've caught me unbuttoning,
pouring out my own stash of trophies,
mostly flat and plastic, a few crafted from
ivory or pearl, some with rim or swirl,
petite to XXL though size doesn't matter,
just the art of arranging and rearranging
subtleties of hue, whites, beiges, and black
quarter-spun into a collage of relationships

Soon undone that begin by casting buttons
like bones to let the mouthless oracles
portend, answer whether or not I should
test my luck again, stalk the newest
mother-of-pearl straining to draw together
silk, cotton blend, or buttercloth while trying
to hold back the pop, drop, and roll to the tin.

— Linda Vandlac Smith

A Mere Seven Lines

after Emerging Face, 1976 by Georgia Munger

An assumption of egg

bird's nest beret, or witch crow hat

I could cursive my name,

Corvid,

with a quill plucked from my skin

dip deep into the ink of night

to sketch a memoir of feather and flight.

—Janette Roseburg

Nourish

after Emerging Face, Georgia Munger

black ink bleeds into fibers, swoops
to the left and up to the right
a bird's head starts to appear

yolk and albumen have formed a beak,
an eye, a feather as the moon has risen and set
over the nested shell

what nourishment waits in my soul
what mulch has developed as the earth
has rotated under my feet?

I dig down with pen to
find a worm aerating dregs of cramped dogma
feel warmth from decomposing regret

my pen becomes a brush as I dip into
layers of rich soil and paint myself wings

—Ann Stinson

My Favorite Color Word is Indigo

after Indigo Hyacinth, by William Slater

If I stumbled into this landscape, I'd know
violence and beauty.

Only the lower spectrum
exists here, and the void that is black.

When green is hopeful, this
is what it looks like.

I choose to believe they breached
the wall for goodness

and those storm clouds will bring more hope
to the green.

—Deb Moore

Up Close and Personal

from "Studio Chairs 2," 2010, oil on canvas, by Eric Elliott

They say a Master is someone who spends 10,000
hours on his craft. Try, try again.
In 3rd grade our art teacher Mrs. Samstag
taught us about perspective using rulers and angles,
how light comes out of a train tunnel.
We drew bowls of pears and formed 3 dimensional
masks out of metal.
We sketched wooden ducks
upside-down, guiding our hands to draw
the lines our eyes saw, rather than allowing our brains
to distract us, fill in how we think ducks actually look.
Mine was a surprising likeness, more skilled
than if I'd tried the regular way.
We made nature prints on clay, and I was the one
who left my fern green and whole, its beauty the art
itself. I didn't want just an imprint.

What affects us close up? Warm sunlight
bronzing our skin through an open window,
the first strawberry of summer,
the day Butternut got hit by a car?
What things soften with a wider view-
what still wounds, regardless of time?

There were times in my teens
I found my father
impossible. Protocol so important, the order
of things, the handwritten note
after the job interview, the thank you card,
money in savings, changing the oil,
going shopping for a blue turtleneck,
coming home with a blue turtleneck,
how a man walks street-side on the sidewalk,
and opens car doors, and offers an elbow.
Flour is sifted for a cake.
All of those interminable hours.
More than 10,000 hours.
For 254,040 hours in my 29 years
he was my father.

Now, across time and distance,
I would give anything to see him
sitting in that chair.

—Kristie McLean

The Beautiful Beetles

after Aurora Jellybean, Virginia Shaw

Aurora Jellybean
what is there not to love
charged particles from the sun
and colorful sweet candy

This butterfly is a landscape
colored pencil its medium
subtled by muted paper
creamy and reminiscent of school lunch bags
it's center
takes you beyond the horizon
over the edge of the earth
like a waterfall
to the depths of questioning
anchored by frivolity
small pink and yellow hearts
like homemade 2nd grade valentines

brown eyeballs omniscient
looking wildly outside the frame
wondering how beetles
impinged their freedom
how can eaters of dung
be so beautiful
bejeweled and glossy
blue like ocean water
with excavated gold
gleaming and shiny in the sun

jealousy rages through the butterfly
simply a specimen pinned to the wall

— Lesly Sanocki

What Is Yet to Come

after "Untitled (Man Reading Newspaper)," William Cumming

A life, soul-sized,
its boundaries uncertain
the wind summons the future
seeks guidance for the road ahead

I hold the clouds in my hands
rest the swallow against my cheek
and dream of the mountains
murmuring answers

I call out to the lone wolf,
rhinestones filling his eyes:
shine a light into the darkness,
be my spirit angel

The puzzle pieces remain scattered
lessons pitter-patter on little feet
through grass yet cool and dark
while knowledge gallops away into the night

— Lea Galanter

Woman, Spotted

after Veruska Vagen's dot de verre painting, "The White Hat"

Beneath / your white hat
Taylor Swift / red lips / languid
Daisy Buchanan / eyes / blue / daring
me / Step closer / No / too close
your allure / blurs / From a distance /
your visage / emerges / Pure / color
glass dots / converge / Sixteen-hundred / fired /
fused to clear glass / backed / in black
I see / reflecting / in your glass /
my torso / juxtaposed / below / your face /
My face / too / endured fire / blistered
beneath summer sun / burn damage /
hidden deep / last layer / of my epidermis /
percolating / miniscule / basal cells /
pure cancer / spots / waiting / twenty years
to surface / scars / visible / close-up

—Merna Dyer Skinner

Two Stories

after Thu Nguyen's, Late Afternoon Sun, 2011

I'm staring at what could be
my neighborhood—
the swirling curving tire tracks
erasing snow
on a residential street,
the white pickup
parked in front of a house,
American flag, snow-tipped trees
that fit on parking strips,
green street sign,
long shadows
below gray sky,
streetlights ready to glow,
and all the slanted white roofs
of two-story houses.

The second-story
was what caught the attention
of the Vietnamese
immigrant student
back in the '80s
when I was working
at a local high school.
I said, "Last night,
I could see snow falling on sidewalks
from my upstairs window."
Said he, "Do you really have two floors
in your house?"
There was no point after that
for me to say
I wasn't rich.

— Mary Ellen Talley

Come

after Untitled (Northwest Landscape with Church), Morris Graves

A misty, midnight sunscape acknowledges me,
Then invites me into the silvery grays and pale waters,

Come,

No shiny cars, no darting animals,
 all is calm, content, tucked away for the day,
No nondescript, unnoticing people,
Just me, descending into the quiet pull of the river,
the river that gently washes over the banks, laps across muddy dirt paths and swaying grasses,
 swish and ripples of paint, all of it becoming flowing river,
Just me, swept into the cool waters,
 bumps smoothing away,
 worryes washing away,
The squared, boulder Church and it's attending timber poles watch the
 transformation,
me becoming water,
Letting go and letting the water take me where I go,

— JL Heath

Simple

*after "Emerging Face," ink on paper
by Georgia Munger*

Seven black lines make
an almost circle broken
by a chick's head
with a beak and an eye rising up out
of the egg.
Simple
like the boy in second grade
who stuttered
who drew 15 blocks scattered on one side
of his paper
and a tower of blocks
with letters on the other:

n
e
v
e
r
can
be
n
e
r
v
e

— Susan Landgraff

Therapy Discussions

after Breakfast at Clearcut, Jack McLarty

Slumped over the table, he had cigarettes with his coffee. Contained—
through the glass the land was once lush and green. The powerful saw
transformed timber into lumber. Littered with stumps, the landscape continues to bleed
as the stump of a man sleeps off his breakfast. He doesn't know the land turned on him,
stabbed him in the back after he ordered his staff to flay all trees.
Lit cigarette dangling from loose lips, he wheezed.

Leave no tree standing.

The earth fought back and the cigarettes betrayed him. They gifted him lung cancer and it spread—
spread like butter across his back to his heart. Poisoned his blood.

He's sick, like me.

I speak of quitting to my therapist.

Do you think smoking is wrong? You should only quit for the right reasons.

Right and wrong are confusing to me, blurred.

What do you want?

I don't want to be slumped over the dining table sleeping off breakfast.

I look down and see blood spilling onto the floor, is it mine or the blood of the land?
I belong with the fallen trees.

— Stephanie Albrecht

Flint Corn

*after "Controlled Surprise" (Indian Corn)
colored pencil on rag paper, Margaret Davidson*

each hard kernel protects
the soft endosperm, each a part of one cob
family unto itself

in the bluegrass and bamboo family,
each kernel – brown, black, copper, yellow
and ruby red – under their sheaths

growing in the sun and rain, ripening
in fields and mountains since ages past, these kernels
food from the wise ancestors.

—Susan Landgraff