

For a Better World

*The Best of
2004–2015*

Saad Ghosn, *Editor*

For a Better World

The Best of 2004–2015

*Select poems by 100 poets from the 2004 to 2015 "For a Better World," the yearly Anthology of Poems and Drawings on Peace and Justice by Greater Cincinnati Artists

and

*Accompanying illustrations by 100 Greater Cincinnati visual artists

Saad Ghosn, *Editor*

A Publication of SOS (Save Our Souls) ART

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“For a Better World” is a publication of
SOS (Save Our Souls) ART



Special thanks and heartfelt gratitude to:

All the poets and visual artists included in this book

The twelve reviewers who donated their time and knowledge in the selection of the poems included

David Maley who generously donated his time, skills and talents in designing this book

Bill Howes who has been a staunch active supporter of SOS ART and *For a Better World* from their beginning

SOS ART is a 501c3 Organization which Mission is to:

*Encourage, promote and provide opportunities for the arts as dynamic vehicles for peace and justice and for a change

*Encourage artists to use their art as their voice on issues of peace and justice that concern them, their community and the world

*Facilitate the creation of a local community of artists who will network and collaborate together using art as a means to impact issues of peace and justice in the community where they live

*Use the arts to speak about, inform, educate and create a dialogue on issues of peace and justice and thus bring about positive change

*Use the arts to introduce basic values of peace and justice in the youth

*“To all the artists who
use their art as their voice
for peace and justice
and for a better world”*

table of contents

- 16 Foreword
18 Introduction
- 22 **Robyn Carey Allgeyer**
• Cut Flowers
illustration by **Spencer van der Zee**
- 24 **Maura Anaya**
• On My Way
illustration by **Jan Brown Checco**
- 26 **Karen Arnett**
• Imagine the Shoes
• Mohammed's Return
illustration by **Stephen Geddes**
- 28 **Franchot Ballinger**
• Precious Seed
• Fine Dust
illustration by **Halena V. Cline**
- 30 **Valerie Chronis Bickett**
• Grounded
• A Spade A Spade
illustration by **Emil Robinson**
- 32 **Matt Birkenhauer**
• 'Twas the Night Before Congress
(With Apologies to Clement Moore)
illustration by **Dana Tindall**
- 34 **Barbara Bonney**
• Finding Baseball
• Freeway Sins
illustration by **Lisa Jameson**
- 36 **Forrest Brandt**
• Hidden Rituals
illustration by **Robert JM Morris**
- 38 **Mary Pierce Brosmer**
• I Have Two Orchids: February, 2010
• Watching the Dead on Television
While Eating Supper; October, 2006
illustration by **Tom Towhey**
- 42 **Robert Bullock**
• When Tom Peacock Came Home
illustration by **Bruce Erikson**
- 44 **Timothy Cannon**
• River of Freedom
illustration by **Kelly & Kyle Phelps**
- 46 **Neil Carpathios**
• Pain Is Weakness Leaving the Body
illustration by **Kevin Harris**
- 48 **Michel Cassir**
• Gaza the Summer
illustration by **Kevin Barbro**
- 52 **Ella Cather-Davis**
• Broken Things
illustration by **Kim Rae Taylor**
- 54 **Vickie Cimprich**
• Seven Little Portions
• Package from Home
• Rogation in a Time of Terror
illustration by **Gary Gaffney**
- 58 **Cynthia Perry Colebrook**
• Detritus
illustration by **Roscoe Wilson**
- 60 **Madeleine Crouse**
• Colonel Roberts aka W.W. to the
Residents of the Bishop Gadsen
• I Want to Tell You
illustration by **Mark Patsfall**
- 62 **John Cruze**
• Blue Mute
• Long Season
illustration by **Christopher Hoeting**
- 64 **Angela Derrick**
• Who We Are
• On the Way to the Prison
illustration by **Tina Tamaro**
- 66 **Donelle Dreese**
• The Request
• The Torchbearers
• Invasive Species
• White Coat Syndrome
• The Black Flower
illustration by **Lisa Merida-Paytes**
- 70 **Spike Enzweiler**
• The Far-Flung Effects
of Donating Blood
illustration by **John Hankiewicz**
- 72 **Kate Fadick**
• Because I Need It
• Autumn Rituals, 2001
• For the Anniversary of Any War
• Lectio Divina I, II, III, VI, IX
illustration by **Christian Schmit**
- 76 **Mark Flanigan**
• The Agnostic's Prayer
• gone doctor
illustration by **Tim McMichael**
- 80 **Gary Gaffney**
• I Am Not Dead
illustration by **Kate Rowekamp**
- 82 **Karen George**
• Give and Take
• Newly Homeless
illustration by **Ken Swinson**

- 84 Diane Germaine**
• Today the Ash
illustration by Rod Northcutt
- 86 Michael Geyer**
• Atomos
• Tacking
illustration by Holland Davidson
- 88 Susan F. Glassmeyer**
• The Strafing
illustration by Michael Stillion
- 90 Nicole Grant**
• When Will We Ever Learn?
• Any God: Poem to Iraqi Women
illustration by Brenda Tarbell
- 92 Gerry Grubbs**
• In the Orchard
• He Sang
illustration by Billy Simms
- 94 Arturo Gutiérrez-Plaza**
• Mrs Gardner
• Song for Phillip, My Spanish Student
illustration by Lisa Hueil Conner
- 98 Barbara Gutting**
• A Lesson
• We Said Your Names
illustration by Frank Satogata
- 100 Richard Hague**
• Galway Kinnels Reads James Wright, Martins Ferry Ohio, April 13, 1991
• Xenia
• Under His Garden the Sounds
• Think Again, O Pilgrims
• Unfinished to Do List
illustration by Merle Rosen
- 104 Tierney E. Hamilton**
• Did I Say to Bring the Ancestors?
illustration by Terence Hammonds
- 106 Pauletta Hansel**
• Coal
• The Purpose of Poetry
• If I Ever
illustration by Cynthia Gregory
- 108 Karen Heaster**
• Richard
• Love's Boundaries
illustration by Lisa Treelynn Scherra
- 110 Jimmy Heath**
• Brick
• Crack of Dawn
illustration by Tracy Featherstone
- 112 Mike Heilman**
• Caution
illustration by Emily Sites
- 114 Michael Henson**
• Memorial for the Homeless Dead
• Postcards to America
• Prostitute at Walnut and Liberty
• Poem for Esme
• The Poets Drive East into Albuquerque
• To Tom McGrath in Heaven: A Letter from the Ark
illustration by Joseph Winterhalter
- 118 Judi Hetrick**
• A Cicada War, or Praise and Lament
illustration by Kenton Brett
- 120 Jeffrey Hillard**
• As I Watch the War in Iraq, I Consider Two Poetry Books Carried by Yusef Komunyakaa in Vietnam
• Iraq Bathed in the Rainbow of CNN
illustration by Rob Jefferson
- 122 Sue Neufarth Howard**
• Boss Rant
• Haiti Quakes
• A Mystery
• Whatever It Takes
• Rounds
• Locked Away
illustration by Kimberly Shifflett
- 126 W. B. (Bucky) Ignatius**
• Beatitude Adjustment
• Small Step, Giant Leap
illustration by Jonathan Gibson
- 128 Carol Igoe**
• Ike Blows In from Texas
• Thomas Merton Speaks to January 2012
illustration by Catherine Elizabeth Richards
- 130 Manuel Iris**
• Homeless
illustration by Stacey Vallerie Meyer
- 132 Eric Jefferson**
• patience
illustration by Claire Darley
- 134 Nancy Jentsch**
• Persistence of Memory: Ludwig
• Snapshot
illustration by Charles Grund
- 136 Nancy Johanson**
• Clay Oracles
• Death Poem
illustration by Diane Fishbein
- 138 Jerry Judge**
• Happy Hour
• Deep in the Heart
• The Lizard
• Friendly
• Rhythm
• The Psychology Class
• Smith & Wesson
• Cleansing for Americans
• Heather
illustration by Farron Allen
- 142 Victoria Kahle**
• A Piece of Peace
illustration by Susan Byrnes
- 144 Steven Paul Lansky**
• Onion Poem
• Oilface
illustration by James Alan Sauer
- 146 Carol Feiser Laque**
• Footnotes
• The Help
• Art History: Halloween
• A Palestinian Woman's Lament
• Nighty Night: Spring in Iraq
• Chicken Little
• An American Dream
• First Communion
• Dorothy Following the Yellow Brick Road into the Yellow Brick Wall
illustration by Matt Reed
- 150 Jacob Lucas**
• Dreams That Never-Were
illustration by Kyle Penunuri
- 152 Richard Luftig**
• In the Free Clinic
• Faith
illustration by Jenny Ustick

<p>154 Anni Macht • Rosa Parks <i>illustration by</i> Ellen Price</p> <p>156 Stanley Mathews • Pierre and Rosetta <i>illustration by</i> Albert Webb</p> <p>158 Juanita Mays • Billy Goats Gruff • Stay the Hands of Hatred <i>illustration by</i> Reid Radcliffe</p> <p>160 Constance Menefee • The Other Soc Trang <i>illustration by</i> Curtis Goldstein</p> <p>162 Kate Merz • A Simple Question <i>illustration by</i> Chrissy Collopy</p> <p>164 Amber Mikell • The Symmetry is Man-Made <i>illustration by</i> Nicole Trimble</p> <p>168 Frank D. Moore • COWBOY PREZ <i>illustration by</i> Jonpaul Smith</p> <p>170 Justin Patrick Moore • After the After Party • Mill Creek Blues <i>illustration by</i> Michelle Red Elk</p> <p>174 Diego Mora • The Red Path <i>illustration by</i> Frank Herrmann</p> <p>176 Christopher Morriss • The Avenger <i>illustration by</i> Kurt Nicaise</p>	<p>178 Clark Mote • Upon Reading the Scoreboard • Apparition <i>illustration by</i> Yvonne van Eijden</p> <p>180 Ali Mramor • Undoing the Babylon Within <i>illustration by</i> James Oberschlake</p> <p>182 Mike Murphy • Come! Bring Food & Music! <i>illustration by</i> Jeff Casto</p> <p>184 Mary-Jane Newborn • Denaturing • As the World Warms (<i>Lyric</i>) <i>illustration by</i> Kathleen Piercefield</p> <p>186 Nicole Rahe • Mr. didn't fix it • without fear, a conference <i>illustration by</i> Andrea Knarr</p> <p>188 Mary Anne Reese • Inauguration <i>illustration by</i> Tom Lohre</p> <p>190 Kathleen Riemenschneider • Genocide: It Happens Everyday • ABU GHRAIB One-Step <i>illustration by</i> Stephanie Cooper</p> <p>192 Timothy Riordan • A Curse of Words • Slogan World • Veterans Day • Waste Management • dulce et decorum est pro patria mori <i>illustration by</i> Casey Riordan Millard</p>	<p>196 Armando Romero • Valparaiso • The Digital Tree • Sugar on the lips • Blossoms of Uranium • The Poor • Domestic Assignments <i>illustration by</i> Matthew Bustillo</p> <p>200 Brian Ross • I've Got a Great Life Here <i>illustration by</i> Kurt Storch</p> <p>202 Mary Jo Sage • Night Invasion <i>illustration by</i> Kelsi Sauerwein</p> <p>204 María Clemencia Sánchez • Limoges <i>illustration by</i> Kim Flora</p> <p>206 James Alan Sauer • Save Our Shit <i>illustration by</i> Julie Baker</p> <p>208 Susan Scardina • U. S. Probation <i>illustration by</i> Jimi Jones</p> <p>210 Linda Ann Schofield • Anniversary Gifts • Consequences <i>illustration by</i> Lizzy Duquette</p> <p>212 Curtis Drake Shepard • Black Boys Dream <i>illustration by</i> Cedric Michael Cox</p> <p>214 Larry C. Simpson • Arribada <i>illustration by</i> Derek Alderfer</p>	<p>218 Sherry Cook Stanforth • That Mountain • This Time • On Locust Hill • Dog Day Cicada • Las Calles de Granada <i>illustration by</i> Terri Kern</p> <p>222 Gwyneth Stewart • Unrooted • The Gospel of Trees <i>illustration by</i> Theresa Gates Kuhr</p> <p>224 Aralee Strange • Big Her • Stop Look & Listen <i>illustration by</i> Jay Bolotin</p> <p>226 Tom Strunk • As You Stood before the Soldiers • Streets and Alleys <i>illustration by</i> Carrie E. Pate</p> <p>228 Amy Carden Suardi • Survived <i>illustration by</i> Todd Reynolds</p> <p>230 Steve Sunderland • Vet's Sangha: 2005 • Gentleness <i>illustration by</i> Barbara Ahlbrand</p> <p>232 Jean Syed • Starvelings • Split Screens on CNN <i>illustration by</i> Leslie Shiels</p> <p>234 Kathryn Trauth Taylor • Property Line <i>illustration by</i> Lindsay Nehls</p>
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236 Sharon Thomson
 • Advent
 • The Year of Our Lord, 2001
 • Before the Bighorn
illustration by **Celene Hawkins**

240 Michael Todd
 • Unphotographed Boxes
illustration by **Antonio Adams**

242 Kathleen Wade
 • City Stoop
illustration by **Jennifer Grote**

244 Frank X Walker
 • Urban Architecture
illustration by **Cole Carothers**

240 Gary Walton
 • A Practical Self Improvement Program 2010
 • The Ghosts of Christmas
 • The Lack of Bees
illustration by **John Wolfer**

250 Fran Watson
 • 1944
 • What It Is
illustration by **David Umbenhour**

252 Annette Januzzi Wick
 • Voting at the Waterford
 • Missing Home
illustration by **Judith Serling-Sturm**

254 Tyrone Williams
 • The Sun Also Sets, Black-Eyed
 • After You
 • Noneased #14
 • What Depends
 • Of Bootstraps and Grace
illustration by **Suzanne Michele Chouteau**

256 Ken Williamson
 • The Rain, My Mother and Common Sense
illustration by **Anthony Luensman**

258 Jeff Wilson
 • After the Oil Is Gone
illustration by **Paige Wideman**

260 Bea Wissel
 • For Neda
illustration by **Constance McClure**

264 Poet Bios
280 Artist Bios

Langston Hughes in his entreatling poem, "Harlem," wrote:

"What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun? [...]

Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?"

In this *Best of For a Better World* edition, one hundred poets and one hundred visual artists express their artistic passion to making our community and national dreams of peace and justice a reality. These dreams have been tragically deferred. In the 2004 first edition of *For a Better World*, Saad Ghosn and Michael Henson wrote ... "the role of artists is that of visionaries, of revolutionaries, setting the path to change, to effacing the wrongs." That role continues and maintains a long tradition of the arts striving for social justice.

The women and men artists featured in this volume are of all ages and ethnic/cultural background. Their words and visual art articulate a world of peace, justice and love that they believe will and must prevail. They are not afraid to confront the evil in our hearts and in our country. The poems and drawings reveal rage and sorrow at intolerance, racism, sexism, poverty and lack of caring for the environment and our future. They write and draw of a future which can and must embrace diversity, equality, kindness and peace. Each of these lofty concepts is broken down into life and death real examples. As in life, many of the poems and images are raw and painful, but hope and faith still permeate the pages.

In an interview with Bill Moyers, Adrienne Rich said, "If poetry is forced by the conditions in which it's created to speak of dread and of bitter, bitter conditions, by its very nature poetry speaks beyond that to something different. That's why poetry can bring together those parts of us which exist in dread and those which have the surviving sense of a possible happiness, collectivity, community, a loss of isolation."

The desire of all featured in this collection is to help end isolation and to bring us together to make our dreams a living reality and to accept and love each other.

Thanks to all who contributed and, of course, thanks to Saad Ghosn for all he does to make a better world.

Jerry Judge
Poet

For a Better World, a yearly anthology of poems and drawings on Peace and Justice by Greater Cincinnati Artists, was published for the 1st time in 2004, following the 1st SOS (Save Our Souls) ART exhibit and event of creative expressions for peace and justice by local artists.

The 1st SOS ART was held June 2003 at SS Nova (later The Mockbee), on Central Parkway, Cincinnati, Ohio. It took place right after the invasion of Iraq, in the wake of the Patriot Act and of the War on Terrorism, initiated by the Bush Administration in response to the Sept 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on America.

SOS ART's initial intent was to break the isolation of artists who wanted to say something through their art regarding the then ongoing events, but who could not find a venue allowing it, and/or who were intimidated of doing so due to the prevailing climate of fear. SOS ART also meant to bring these artists together as a networking community, strengthen their voice and facilitate their dialogue around issues important to them.

At the 1st SOS ART, a group of poets called "Poets against the War," spearheaded by local poet Michael Henson, also participated in the event, reading their poetry and engaging the audience. This triggered the beginning of a friendship with Michael and the idea of a yearly book of poems and accompanying illustrative drawings to give voice to local artists on

subjects of peace and justice. The book would then become a companion to the yearly SOS ART event at which it would be launched, and its participating poets invited to read their poetry during it.

For a Better World was then born. It has been published yearly since, from 2004 until now, and has been very successful at providing an opportunity for many local poets to be heard on issues of peace and justice of concern to them. Included in the fifteen yearly issues published to date have been more than 400 local poets and more than 400 local visual artists, all ages, backgrounds, academic achievements, notoriety. Many of them are well known published artists, and others exposed to the public just for the 1st time. *For a Better World*, in this respect, has maintained the well established tradition of SOS ART, that of being democratic, open to all, and inclusive of all voices.

A couple of years ago, an idea emerged to select the best poems of the 1st 12 issues (those of 2004 to 2015), to pair them with invited well established local artists for illustrations, and thus to create a book to celebrate the best of our artist community. Twelve local reviewers including poets, writers, literary critics were then invited. They were each given one of the books to review and asked to select from it what they would consider the best 15 poems. The invited reviewers were Valerie Chronis Bickett, Mary Pierce Brosmer, Daniel Brown, Donelle Dreese, Mark Flanigan, Richard Hague, Pauletta Hansel, Matt

Hart, Michael Henson, Jerry Judge, Sherry Cook Stanforth and Gary Walton. Based on their selections, a *Best of For a Better World* book was compiled; it comprises poems by 100 local poets and illustrations by 100 invited local visual artists.

This book, presented here, contains diverse poems by their form, style, and content. Depending on the year, some address marking events of the time; others, more general in their dealing with issues of peace and justice, speak variably of war, violence, freedom, equality, poverty, racism, immigration, politics, love, spirituality, kindness, compassion... Each poem, like a song, propels the voice of its poet for what can be changed, also for its dream of a better world. Many of these poems are accompanied by also diverse illustrative drawings by invited local visual artists. The illustrations, using various media, dialogue with the poem, adding their own vibrancy, beauty and power to the poem's already strong message.

I hope that the beauty and poignancy of both included poems and drawings will travel beyond this book, touch the many, and plant seeds of peace and justice and of a better world wherever they fall. That they will also celebrate our rich community, bridging it with values of love, tolerance and compassion.

Sadly, some of the included poets and visual artists are no longer with us. This book is a salute to them and to the many marks of peace and justice they added to a better world through their lives and their literary and visual art. They are Jimmy Heath, Frank D. Moore, Mike Murphy, Timothy Riordan, Merle Rosen, Aralee Strange, Fran Watson. May they rest in Peace! They are being missed.

My many thanks go to all those who helped, directly or indirectly, in the making of both this *Best of...* book and all the *For a Better World* books published to date. They also go to all the included poets and visual artists who contributed their art and vision to them; to the twelve reviewers who donated their time and knowledge in the selection of the poems included here; to David Maley who donated generously his time, skills and talents in putting this book together, creating its elegant design; to Bill Howes who has been a staunch active supporter of both SOS ART and *For a Better World* from their beginning, always helping with all the minute details of their achievements and success.

May peace and justice and a better world always prevail!

With gratitude,

Saad Ghosn

Editor, *For a Better World*
President, SOS ART

drawings

and

poems



mixed media, collage, on paper; 11"x8.5"

Spencer van der Zee

Robyn Carey Allgeyer

Cut Flowers

Primroses from a roadside hedge,
A handful of Black-eyed Susans
Tied with ribbon.
Zinnia, dahlias, daisies, cornflowers,
Gathered by the armfuls and

Placed under his photo.
Wreaths of carnations, of grapevines,
of roses
Damp with dew tears
Freshly shed this morning.

Nineteen years old
Life on the brink of meaning.
Dreams a month away from
Reality.

Was he thinking of college
In January, of home
In Glendale at his
Mother's Thanksgiving table
When the IED* ended all thoughts,
All feeling?

Today a village mourns a life.
Flags held tightly as flowers
In a child's fist.
Tears run down cheeks of

Strangers united in grief.
Do we fill this empty place with
Hate for faceless, nameless men?

A mother lies in bed seething.
Hate eating at her heart's remains.
She wonders how small it will become.

While a speck of her son,
Placed in a flag-wrapped box,
Is her only evidence
This was once a man.

Neighbors waiting respectfully,
Clutching flags and grim faces,
Watch the hearse pause for sixty seconds
Before an empty porch.

(Sixty seconds –the time it takes
A young man to bound from his car
And run the distance to his front steps.

Sixty seconds – the time it takes
A young man to change
His mind at the recruiter's office.

Sixty seconds - the time it takes
A young man to jump off
An armored vehicle before it explodes.)

Today a village mourns.
A mother looks at life without
Her son in it.
A war continues undeterred
By the sacrifice.

A well-tended garden, less a few blooms,
Goes to seed only
To flower another Spring.

**Improvised Incendiary Device*

(Published in *For a Better World 2007*).



watercolor, on paper; 9"x6.25"

Jan Brown Checco

Maura Anaya

On My Way

On my way to save the world
with my boot straps pulled up tight
Volcanic enthusiasm oozing out
I began teaching people how to fish.
I read a book about modern techniques
But people by the water
have been fishing since time began.
The hooks I brought were not available in the country.
I garnered attention and laughter as a novelty.
Can you get some more hooks?
A boy stole the ones I had
then used them in front of me.
He taught me
how to collect the right bait
pointing to strategic places
fish like to bite.

On my way to save the world
with my boot straps holding on
I read a book on how to conduct a meeting.
It did not tell me that people only said they would come
to be polite.
Those who would show up
wanted to know
if I had the money to
replace a community water pump
or if I would teach their son English
so he could go to the states.
With free seed and fencing from the USA
I went to plant a vegetable garden
charged with teaching
farmers to eat green vegetables
with their rice and beans.
But the old man they call 'Chino'
took my shovel
dug up the whole garden.
Not women's work.
He was 70 with elegant chivalry
sweating in 100 degree heat
in a task for no one but me.
He demonstrated the seeds
need a higher mound
to keep slugs away.

On my way to save the world
with my bootstraps wearing thin
Women who knew the value of a good breeze
showed me
what a sad state I was in.
Could not get my whites white in the river.
Did not have a man or a baby.
Did not know
the difference between a clean dirt floor and a dirty one.
How to light a wood stove with a piece of rubber.
How to shine floors with coconut husks.
How to cheerfully wait for men who did not come.
How to feed a family

when all the wages were lost to the cantina.
How to serve men first respectfully
even if
they were cause of all money
gone to drink.

On my way to save the world
with boot straps losing sway
Fauna and flora were in control.
Rules well lived.
Do not fall asleep on top of mosquito net.
Scorpions are not deadly but make tongues numb.
Flip flops destroy feet on rocky roads.
Spiders monkeys are thieves and bandits.
The poisonous toads that circled at dusk were protection
from the Men peering in cracks of my shack at night
Starting rumors of who I was sleeping with.
Some followed me and asked me to marry
thinking my eruptions of enthusiasm
attraction.
Passing la cantina,
Overhearing drunken arguments
as to who had imaginary
sex with la gringa.

On my way to save the world,
my boot straps thrown away
I lost myself
In playing with children
In exotic rashes and dysentery
In breathing the fire of sugar harvest
In whispers of the ocean
In offerings of the sun's passion to close the day
In using a machete to open my door and butcher a pig
In the pangs of holding a baby willing it to live
In cooking and bathing and pooping outside
In patience and hospitality I did not deserve.
My safety was threatened.
My world in pieces thrown about the planet.
I could not find myself as I swam in the fishbowl.
Good intentions, hard work nor books could find me.
No one human could have all what was needed.
A girl out of context can only live into answers
Knowing the kindness received greater
than any change left in my wake.

On my way to save the world
I was saved
over and over
by people with no bootstraps to pull up.

(Published in *For a Better World* 2015).



watercolor, charcoal, ink, on paper; 8.5"x11"

Stephen Geddes

Karen Arnett

Imagine the Shoes

Today we witnessed our president duck
as shoes whistled past his head.
We owe the thrower our gratitude, for imagine
if it caught on, next year's headlines: "Shoe fight
in school blackens eye" or
"Innocent bystander bruised in
drive-by shoe throwing". Kids trade in
their guns for wingtips, hightops.
Metal detectors are scrapped, airport
security personnel file for unemployment,
emergency rooms take on
the deserted look of late night laundromats,
police take off their body armor,
the Olympics introduce a whole new sport,
and kids stop killing kids for their Air Jordans
since even kids know better than to throw away
good money. Our economy returns to solvency
as war becomes an exercise in thrift:
weapons of mass destruction give way
to the \$20 casual loafer, that must be thrown
from a range so close that soldiers see themselves
reflected in their enemy's eyes.
Even world leaders begin to hurl
their shoes at each other in staterooms
to defuse international tensions, settle territorial disputes.
Streets will be named for this hero:
Muntadhar al-Zaidi Causeway,
and schools, and airports. He receives
a peace medal for the courage
to hurl his anger at Goliath wrapped
only in a piece of shoe leather,
after which George W. Bush magnanimously
insists he be released from the prison
where, even now, interrogators are sending
their carefully aimed shoes flying
into his brave face.

(Published in *For a Better World 2009*).

Mohammed's Return

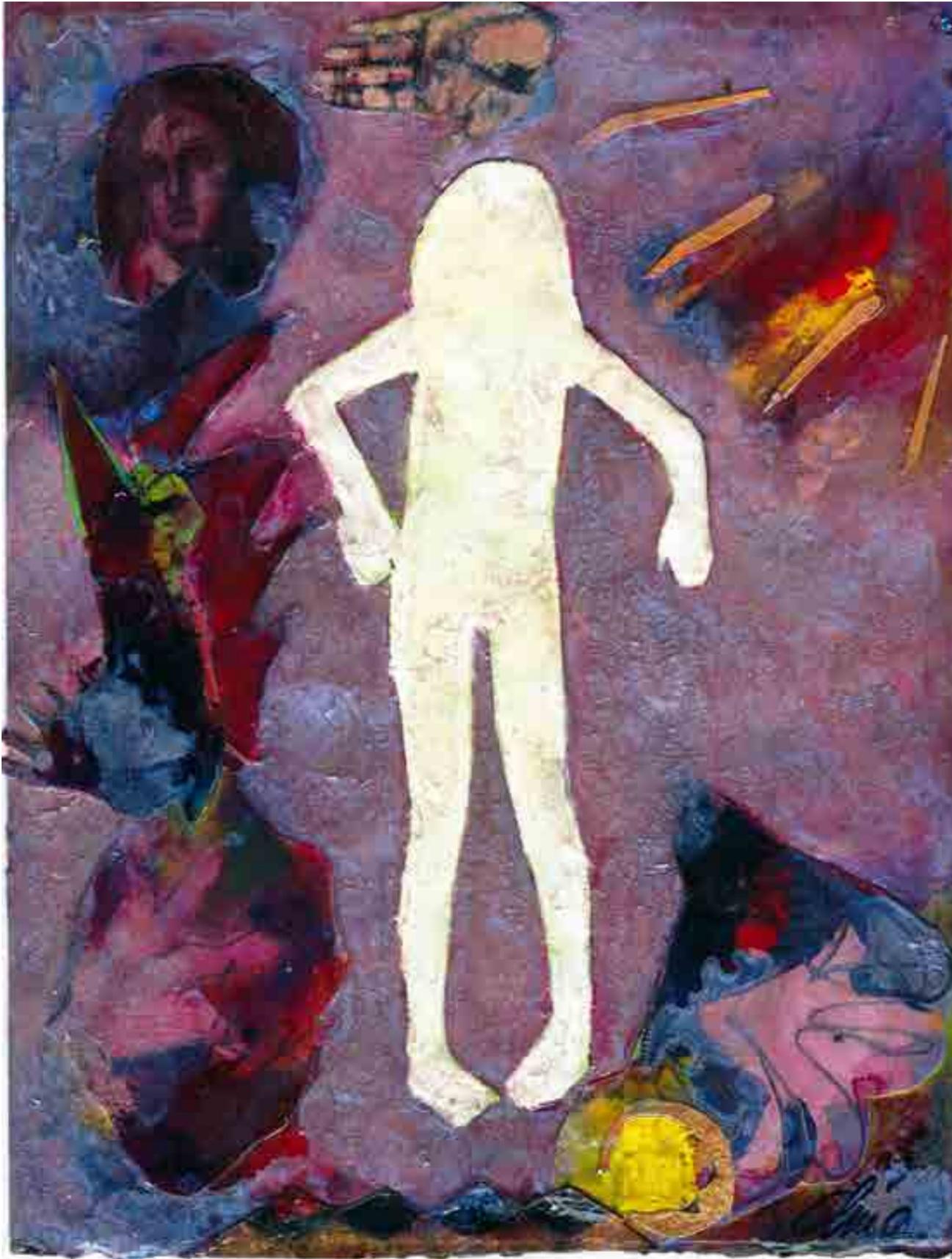
I.
I want to see the tables turned,
George Bush stopped at the border
incoming, stripped of his cowboy boots and jeans,
his counterfeit dignity.
Made to kneel and bend, protesting as latex fingers probe
God damn, I'm an American
words that fall on deaf ears as he's pushed
behind bars, where there's one toilet for two dozen
and no privacy.

II.
Mohamed returns,
steps from the plane
as he has for years
to his beloved American soil.
Half a lifetime of summers spent here,
long enough to grow deep roots.
He wants to see the grapevines
he planted last summer, and the Yankee friend who
gave them, saying *your friendship
is worth 10,000 grapevines to me.*

III.
A perfect evening – the light articulates each
blade, each leaf, flowers of every imaginable
color drenched in golden light. Sparrow and finch
chirp thickly from the trees and a pair of doves
flies over, wingtips singing their gentle song.
Here is home, where roots sink deep
and Mohammed will be once again warmed
by the secure blanket of belonging.
Here is home.

IV.
Five hundred detentions per day, in this land where we are free
to ignore the truth, home of the brave and patriotic
bumper sticker.
Mohamed's deportation followed three days in a concrete cell,
his only crime was the fact of a Muslim birth.
The German Foreign Ministry
continues to inquire why
their good citizen was barred.
His wife can't sleep, and keeps the doors locked.

(Published in *For a Better World 2009*).



mixed media, collage, on paper; 11.5"x8.75"

Halena V. Cline

Franchot Ballinger

Precious Seed

Framed in the open window of the rusting red door,
she's pretty as a picture, the seed of light
shines so in her brown face.
Too young to pick, old enough to be burden,
she waits in a migrant's pickup at field's edge,
waits for another August dusk.
In the hot and hazy Ohio air, her mother and father
are bent in the field's mid-distance, vague question marks.
She watches, murmurs a child's tuneless song,
not knowing yet the songless days before her,
not knowing how she will be about her father's business.

The sun lays its dusty smolder across the field,
and a darkening veil falls over the eastern sky
under which her parents now return, faces drawn,
bearing the heavy sheaves of their days.
Her voice flutters about them in the parched light.
Was she ever a song carried in their hearts?
I imagine her mother at some past day's hot and brittle
end waiting
while her man—harrowed and harvested himself—
hovers over her, sparrow frail, embracing her with dusty wings.
No annunciation here, his finishing grunt the only Magnificat
for more fruit to be bruised at our tables.

(Published in *For a Better World 2008*).

Fine Dust

"Grandpa was Austrian, not German," my mother repeated,
a fine distinction missed by little Yakov
as Hitler trod the Judenplatz during my childhood.
It mattered to her, of course, after the war,
after the inescapable knowing: the gas, the ovens,
the Jewish ash rising sacrificially, the fine dust of guilt
settling over everything spoken *auf Deutsch*
and further, finding its smothering way half the globe distant
and powdering perhaps even my little Yankee tongue
which had not yet tasted my other, closer inheritance,
the bitter fly ash of names like *Pit River, Sand Creek, Wounded Knee,*
Tulsa, Birmingham, Mississippi, and more and more,
falling unseen but no less searing
and burning in the same cinder night.

(Published in *For a Better World 2004*).



gouache, on paper, 11"x8"

Emil Robinson

Valerie Chronis Bickett

Grounded

When I bring it up with friends
they forget I told them,

so while I'm thinking about it,
let me tell you again

about the couple I know who spend
three hours every morning

making love
and let me emphasize

every and
love.

No exceptions.
5:30-8:30 A.M.

A man and a woman around sixty
follow a protocol—

meditation, yoga, chances
for emotional release and

plenty of time for union
as they put it,

staying in union.
Eleven years now,

this couple has been making love
every day.

Getting up early for music and oil
and touching

in their suburban home,
indistinguishable from the ones next door

where couples like us
are finding more and more good reasons

to skip it.
Twenty-one hours a week.

All their movie time and date nights
rolled into the mornings

when they lower their sights
on the lower chakras

and see the world from there,
there where the Mid-East

Peace Talks and Global Warming
seem manageable,

there where the mother feeds,
and the baby finds her lovely.

A Spade A Spade

Ninety years and one tenth of it
with a deteriorating brain
and yet you were there—
the same body, the same fight
for privacy; so much so that
at first it took four attendants
to bathe you and this only
two months before you died.

We put you out in the cold,
sent you finally to the place
where we subdue our elderly
with poison darts, kill
under cover, administer the
regulated anti-psychotic
with the black box warning
all of us ignore.

Death to our elderly, quicker.
Death to the long siege
of weightlifting, waiting.
Death when we want it.
Death when the powers
of attorney vote for the drug
they say brings back life
to the dying brain.

(Both Poems Published in
For a Better World 2010).



acrylic, on paper; 7.5"x10"

Dana Tindall

Matt Birkenhauer

'Twas the Night Before Congress (With Apologies to Clement Moore)

'Twas the night before Congress, and all through the House
Not a creature was stirring, except for some louse
Who took down the stockings hung by the chimney with care
In hopes that a square meal might soon be there.

Poor children were nestled all snug in their beds
While visions of breakfast danced in their heads.
Their mom in her work clothes, and dad with no job
Looked long at their children and withheld a sob.

When out from the Capitol, there arose such a clatter
That Christ sprang from his Throne to see what was the matter.
He peered down to earth and saw in a flash
How the Kochs had bought Congress with ill-gotten cash.
Their gold on the breast of the new fallen snow
Gave a luster of greed to the building below.
When what to Christ's wondering eyes did appear
But a miniature sleigh and eight tiny reindeer.
With a prickly old driver with a heart filled with sand,
Christ knew in a moment, she must be Ayn Rand.

More rapid than eagles her coursers they came,
And she whistled, and drove them, and called them by name:
"Now *Bachmann!* now *Barton!* now *Duncan* and *Cassidy!*
On, *Rand Paul!* on *Ted Cruz!* *Tim Scott* and *Mike Lee!*
To the Capitol dome and its wholly-bought members
Now burn away! Burn away! Burn all to embers!"

So up to the dome top the coursers they flew
With a sleigh full of noise, and St. Ayn Rand too.
As Christ walked to the Rotunda, and was turning around,
Down the chimney came Ayn Rand with hardly a sound.
She was dressed in a pant suit, from her head to her foot,
And her soul all tarnished with ill-gotten loot.
A bundle of moochers she had flung on her back.
She looked like McScrooge with his gold-laden sack!

Her eyes—how they burned! And her expression, how bitter!
That Christ shook his sad head to have made such a critter.
The butt of a cig she held tight in her teeth
As the second-hand smoke formed a ghastly death wreath.
She had a pinched face and a sickly-thin frame--
She was stingy and cranky and filled Christ with shame.
She spoke not a word, but went straight to work
And emptied her sack and called all those poor "Jerks!"

"You deserve to go hungry, you dumb parasites!
You'll get no food here! Get out of my sight!"

Then Rand sprang to her sleigh, and gave such a yell,
That the Devil awoke from his slumber in hell.
But Christ heard him exclaim, as he rubbed his red eyes,
"Thank God for Ayn Rand, and her greedy allies!"

(Published in *For a Better World* 2015).

Barbara Bonney

Finding Baseball

I have not thought much about baseball since she died.
The Tigers rise and fall without my notice;
stadiums are debated, built and worshipped in
while I buy groceries.

She never knew she loved sports
until my brother asked her to catch final scores
for him on the radio on school nights.
So she listened while ironing in the dining room—
Ernie Harwell's voice floating over Dad's white shirts,
Al Kaline and Norm Cash just names she heard over and over
until they stirred hope.

On Michigan nights in July, they listened together,
the iron and her face steaming over sheets
and more white shirts,
my brother sprawled on the floor sharing the box fan.
When Ernie's voice gained momentum, climbed higher
and higher,
the iron paused...

hits, runs, steals and nabbed catches
all brought whoops from my timid mother
but grand slams elicited a near-dance from this woman
who was never allowed to dance.
The church and her marriage kept her ironing;
her son gave her dance.

(Published in *For a Better World 2006*).

Freeway Sins

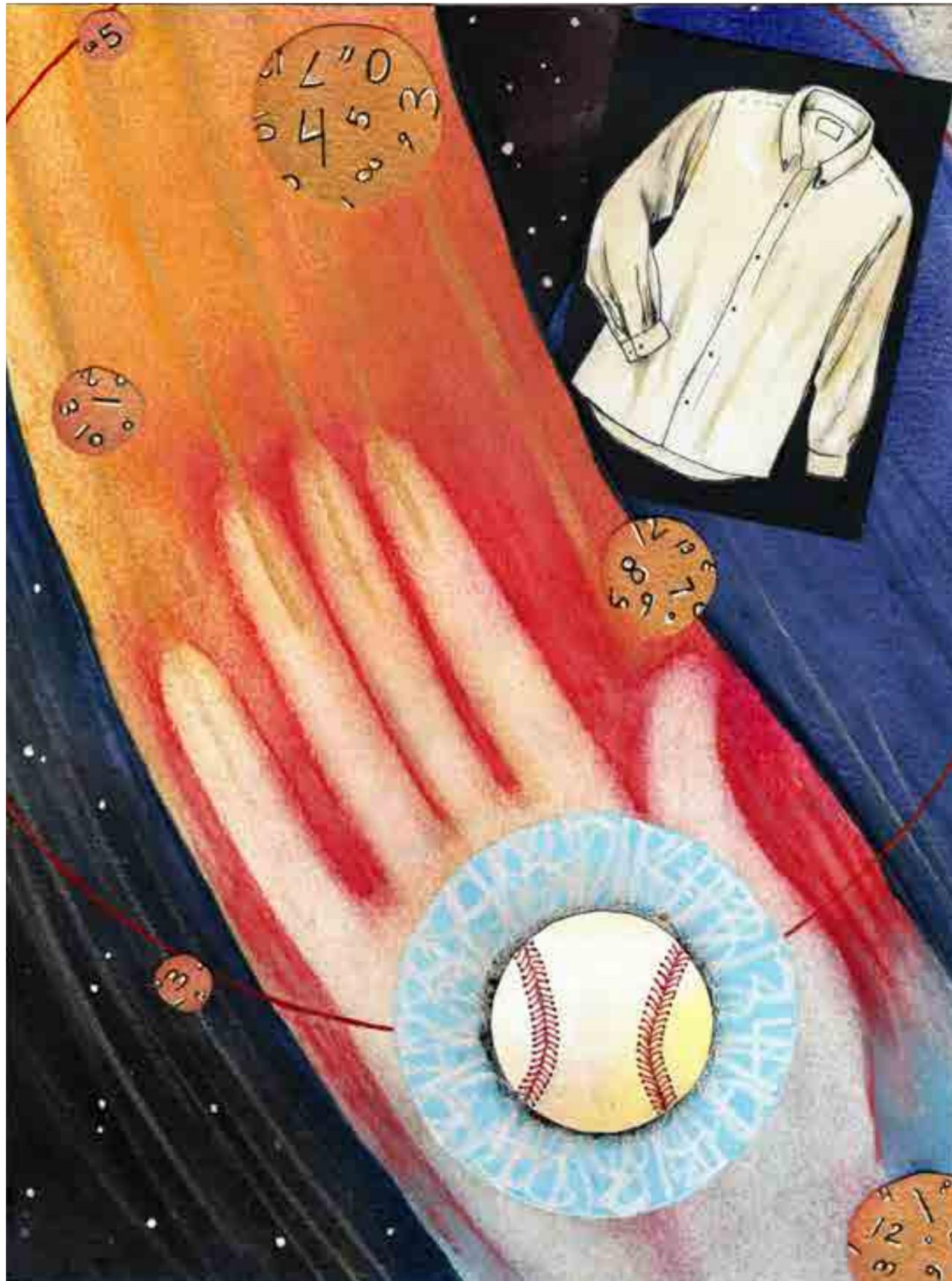
I passed Jesus on the freeway doing 70;
he was 62 vertical feet of white fiberglass and Styrofoam.
Ohio ground mired him to the waist;
his arms stretched up like a referee on a touchdown.
He tilted his face heavenward.

Behind him stood the "Solid Rock Church"
who chose his icon over a gymnasium,
a BMW for the pastor and feeding the poor.
They probably didn't intend for travelers to laugh
or run off the road gawking. I'm sure they meant
for motorists to think holier thoughts
and to sense Jesus lifting their burdens.
I get the metaphor.

But I don't get the pain on his otherwise cherubic face
and his being stuck in an island of a pond.
Every time I whiz by him I feel guilty, but not for the usual sins.
I hear him pleading through his clenched teeth,
"Get me out of here. Take my hands and PULL."

But I can't stop, Jesus.

(Published in *For a Better World 2006*).



mixed media, on paper; 10"X7.5"

Lisa Jameson



acrylic, on paper; 11.5"x9"

acrylic, on paper; 11.5"x9"

Robert JM Morris

Forrest Brandt

Hidden Rituals

It's a hell of a party.
Lieutenants let off steam,
take risks with booze, cigarette
dinky dau and army authority.

I leave early,
wander along an unfamiliar path,
listen to the sounds of the Vietnamese night:
a lone chopper circles overhead,
jeeps and trucks lumber
and whine around the base,
bits of conversation float upon the evening air
as I pass tents.

From a doorway comes the sound
of running water and voices,
rock music rumbles in the background,
I peek inside:
two soldiers, naked to the waist,
wrestle with a garden hose and a body
that dangles from stirrups in the ceiling.

It's the brigade morgue.
The shiny pink skin of the corpse
is pierced by hundreds of tiny holes.
Water washes down the torso,
flows along the arms and head,
plunges in a crimson stream,
curls into the drain in the floor.

I step away,
shake my head,
breathe deep.

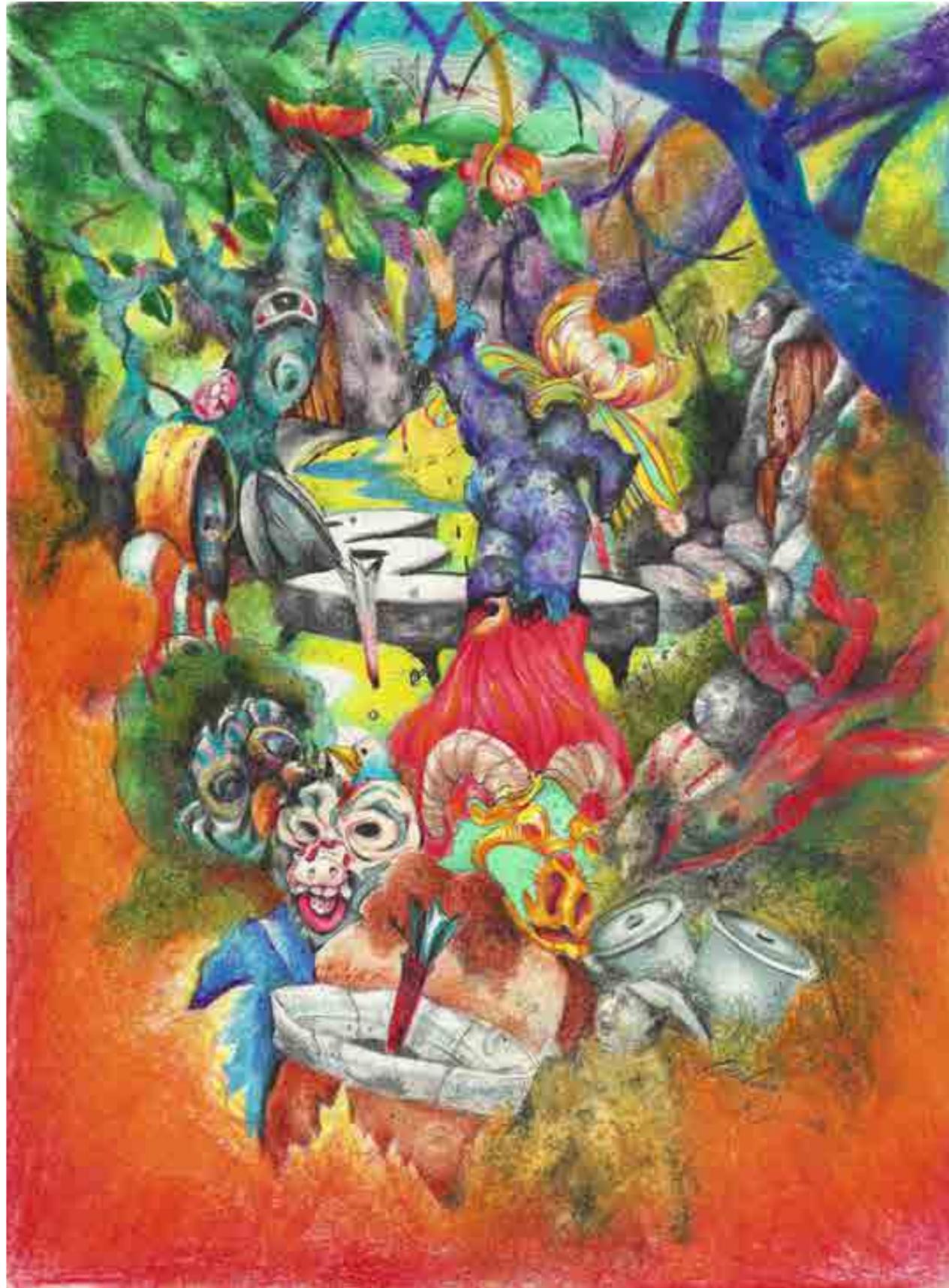
I wonder how these two young boys,
forced to wash the dead,
will blot the scene from their minds.

I imagine them,
years from now,
lost to booze and nightmares.

I wonder why I have been spared
the war's dirty jobs.
What star of grace keeps me safe
in this base camp?

My sleep comes in small snatches,
disrupted by nightmares:
scenes of combat,
of steel and explosives and soft tissue,
of kids tenderly washing the bodies of kids.

(Published in *For a Better World 2011*).



color pencil, on paper; 12"x9"

Tom Towhey

Mary Pierce Brosmer

I Have Two Orchids: February, 2010

I have two orchids in a chill window.
Their backs to the snow, they proffer
fuschia heads on fragile spines,
curving toward this room where I sit,
chill and not so gracefully curving
toward the work of blooming.

We have two wars that we know of,
Both, we are asked to believe
against all the odds and all of history
as I read it, will bring safety to the homeland,
whose homeland I raise my head to wonder?

I have two choices every morning
One: to create a day of purpose and practice,
The other: to hunker down in my discomfort
zone failing to imagine how my efforts might lift
by so much as a snowflake's weight
the mantle of senseless suffering,
might slow the blizzards of spin
while systems fail.

I have two friends in the nuclear winter
of grief. One: her daughter murdered,
makes art and community in a fury.
The Other: his son dead to despair,
will marry, come spring, his longtime love.

Taking my cues from orchids,
from friends avalanche-swept and
willing to claw upward toward air,
I turn my hand, however inexpertly,
to the task of continuing to raise
fragile blooms, this poem for instance,
out of the random and deepening snows.

(Published in *For a Better World 2010*).

Mary Pierce Brosmer

poet

Watching the Dead on Television While Eating Supper; October, 2006

for Tom

*It is difficult to get the news from poems,
yet each day men die horribly from lack of
what is found there.*

William Carlos Williams

You lay down your fork and come to attention.

Someone not paying attention would miss it,
but I attend to your
no-fail attention, so frail
in the realm of what can be done.

Each evening the line of faces grows longer.

My attention falters and I mutter
sweet Jesus, only 19. . .
that one could be a grandfather...
impatient for it to be over.

You lay down your fork,
food cools
time deepens
October is closing.

We are closing in on four years
of a war to bring freedom to Iraq.
Bodies stacked in Baghdad morgues
and loaded in secret onto troop planes
are free of souls, the only mission
accomplished.

Each evening the line of faces grows longer.

Impatient for it to be over,
I remember other missions:
wars to end all wars
ones to stop the spread of communism
the one in Afghanistan to find Osama bin Laden,
protect women from the Taliban.

What would my father think
of his war, the one to thwart fascism
if he could see our president on television.
Our president's attention falters,
he says he never said
stay the course.
he does pay attention
to critics
to the need for a new direction
in Iraq, that his mission is now,
and always has been
freedom

Each evening the line of faces grows longer.

We eat fall foods: soups and stews,
ripe pears, an apple cake,
Soon Thanksgiving recipes will appear
in newspapers.

Each evening the line of faces grows. . .

I see your mission, my love,
how it is now and always
has been, attention.

Each day men
and women
die horribly for lack
of what is found there.

(Published in ***For a Better World 2007***).