

Merle as Muse



Poetry Inspired by the Art of Merle Rosen

Merle as Muse



Poetry Inspired by the Art of Merle Rosen

A Chapbook Project of

BLUE ASH REVIEW

A MAGAZINE OF LITERARY & VISUAL ARTS AT UC BLUE ASH COLLEGE

2018

Merle as Muse:

Poetry Inspired by the Art of Merle Rosen

A chapbook project of *Blue Ash Review*

University of Cincinnati Blue Ash College

Copyright © 2018 by University of Cincinnati

The editors of *Blue Ash Review* gratefully acknowledge and give thanks to the estate of Merle Rosen for permitting the inclusion of her work in this publication.

Originally published as a PDF insert in the premier edition of *Blue Ash Review Online* (Fall 2018), released to coincide with the 50th anniversary of *Blue Ash Review*.

Rhonda Pettit, Editor – *Blue Ash Review*

Claudia Skutar, Editor – *Blue Ash Review Online*

H. Michael Sanders, Media Editor – *Blue Ash Review Online*

Amber Kuftic, Editorial Associate

Michael Ziepfel and Emily Gross, Graphic Designers

BLUE ASH REVIEW
A MAGAZINE OF LITERARY & VISUAL ARTS AT UC BLUE ASH COLLEGE

Merle as Muse

Poetry Inspired by the Art of Merle Rosen

Contents

Introduction	1
Karen George – “Creator, Created”	3
Richard Hague – “A Venus By Merle Rosen”	5
D.R. James – “a:::::maze::::d”	7
D.R. James – “A Pretty Good Friday”	9
Eileen R. Tabios – “Possibility”	11
Janet McFadyen – “Untitled Poem”	13
Kevin Oberlin – “Papa Duck”	15
Pauletta Hansel – “Divining”	19
John Trause – “Portrait of Me by and Artist I Never Knew and Who Never Knew Me”	21
Rhonda Pettit – “Figure Beyond Our Means”	23
Roy W. Jones – “In the Garden”	27
Michael Henson – “Poem on a Painting by Merle Rosen”	29
Matthew Birdsall – “Beyond the Reach of Being Extinguished”	31
H. Michael Sanders – “Women Running”	33
H. Michael Sanders – “A Tribute Poem for Merle Rosen”	35
Robert Murphy – “Mummy Portraits”	37
Grace Curtis – “Until You Merge”	41
Contributors	43

Merle as Muse: Poetry Inspired by the Art of Merle Rosen

Introduction

Merle Rosen was a prolific Cincinnati artist whose art includes acrylic painting, mixed media/collage, works on paper, and sculpture. The fact that she was color blind might surprise those who have appreciated the rich colors of her playful, surreal figures that collectively seem to speak to us about our existence from a world other than ours. These works have been widely exhibited in a range of venues in Ohio (Cincinnati, Columbus) and Kentucky (Covington, Louisville, Lexington), as well as in Scottsdale, Arizona and Kharkiv, Ukraine. A substantial portion of her work is held in corporate and private collections throughout the U. S.

Merle was equally known as a gifted art instructor. She offered courses and headed programs at the university level, and taught all age levels, groups and individuals, privately at her self-named studio, Blackbird Studio (“merle” is a French word for “blackbird”). She also gave workshops, demonstrations, and lectures in the Midwest as a member of the Golden Artists Colors Working Artist Program. A friend notes that Merle was particularly good with children, and could recite the entire “Jabberwocky” to them.

She was an artist of eclectic tastes and sensibilities, “repurposing” objects and materials in her art and home before the word gained currency. She loved to find bargains in thrift stores, display them in her home, and pass them on to others at the right time. The spontaneity and collage quality of her art was mirrored in her home, garden, and cooking.

Her death from brain cancer on June 19, 2017, left a void in the Cincinnati art scene.

In January of 2018, poet Grace Curtis put in motion a reading of ekphrastic poetry in honor of Merle Rosen. Poets associated with Dos Madres Press of Loveland, Ohio, were invited to select one piece from Rosen’s art works, and write a poem inspired by the work. Poets made their selections from among those available digitally or “in the flesh” prior to their sale at the Caza Sikes Gallery in the Oakley Square neighborhood of Cincinnati. Rosen didn’t title these works, which both challenged and liberated the poets to set their own course with the work they had chosen. Grace organized the reading schedule and arranged a slide show of Rosen’s art so that each of her works was projected as its corresponding poem was read by its author.

On February 23, 2018, more than fifteen poets gathered at the Caza Sikes Gallery to read their poems. Robert Murphy, publisher and editor of Dos Madres Press, hosted the event.

No one, not the poets themselves, the gallery curators, or the many guests and friends of the artist who came that night could have anticipated how the depth and range of the poems in response to the equally expansive work would prove to be such a wonderful highpoint in the intersection of art and words. After the reading, several in attendance began asking how we might share this work with a broader audience. Editors of the *Blue Ash Review*, two of whom participated in the reading, offered to include the collection of art and poems as a chapbook, contained in a printable pdf file, within the first online edition of the magazine.

Friends have described Rosen as a force, an individual, a “ruffler” of feathers, smart, full of vitality, a healer, energetic, and full of life. Her bold gestural art embodies all of those attributes and more. It creates a perfect backdrop for the poetry in this collection that reflects her amazing life and art.

According to Rosen friend, Kathleen Bain, “The magic of Merle was in her attention, her presence, and her ability to take you to a place in the conversation that you never imagined you could get to.”

Rosen’s art has clearly taken the poets in this collection—most of whom did not know the artist personally—into a conversation with the art and with the artist that they, too, could never have imagined. It is hoped that by reading these poems presented here with photographs of the art, that you, reader, will be drawn into this magical dialog as well.



Please note that none of the artworks by Merle Rosen included in this volume were titled by the artist.

For more information, go to:

www.merlerosen.com

<http://wvxu.org/post/loving-tribute-local-artist-merle-rosen>

www.dosmadres.com

www.cazasikes.com

**A SHOW OF ART
BY
MERLE ROSEN
HER FRIENDS
COLLEAGUES
& STUDENTS**

**OPENS
FEBRUARY 9
5-9pm**

**CLOSES
FEBRUARY 25**

1949-2017

Merle Rosen

A Tribute

**POETRY
READING
FEBRUARY 23
7pm**

**CAZA SIKES
GALLERY**
3078 MADISON RD
CINCINNATI, OHIO
513-818-9527
cazasikes.com

Creator, Created

Karen George

I.

Luminous yellow,
head shaped like an egg,
eye a spinning wheel
spirals violet, green, teal, ochre, aqua.

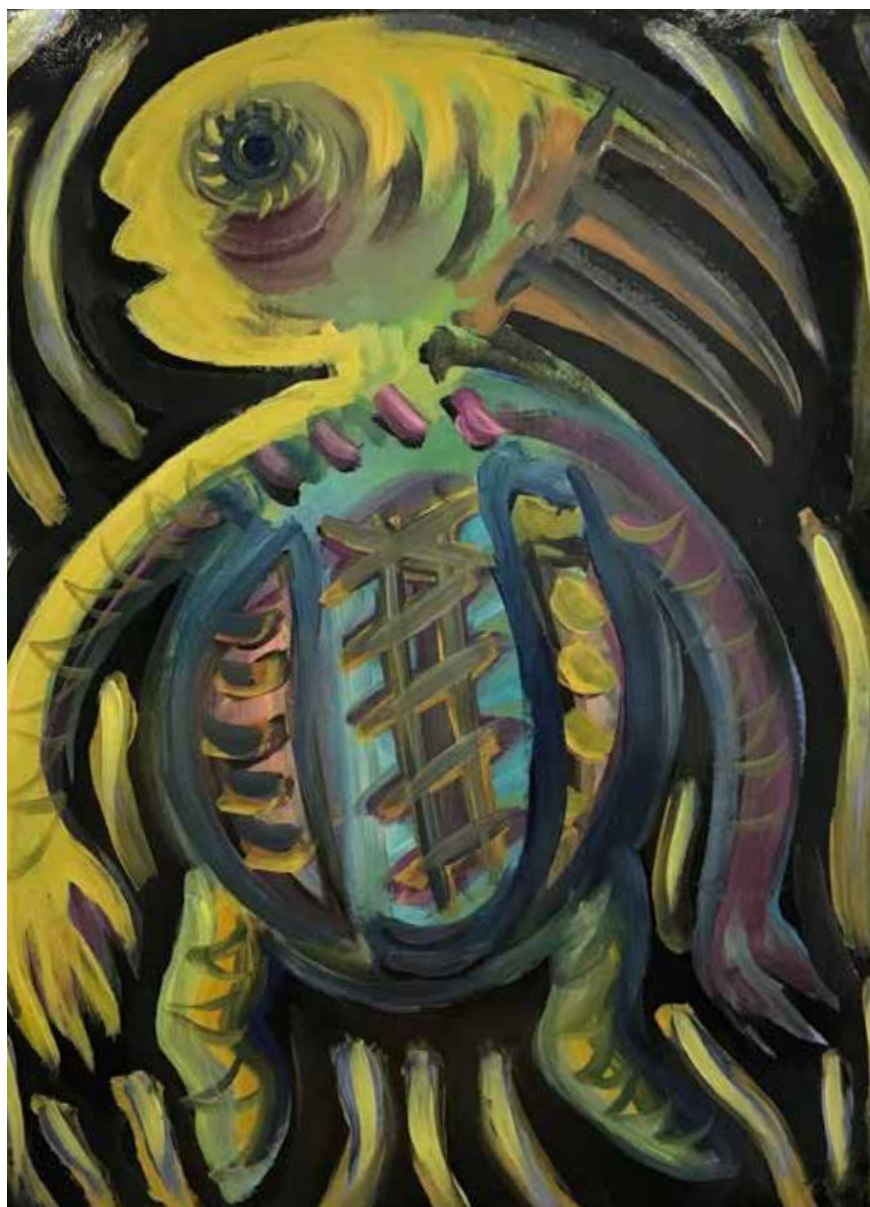
The Creator, World Turtle,
carries Earth on Her back,
shell crosshatched down the middle
the color of mud.

Long, strong arms make a frame
that mirrors curved lines devouring
the black void she floats in—
parentheses, bent lightning streaks—
ragged breaths from her nostrils,
words hurled from her open mouth,
engorge, incubate.

II.

Big-bellied hatchling
in the nest of night.
Flight feathers pierce her skin.
She releases sharp trills,
craves food, warmth,
more, more.
Her keen need curdles the air.

She strains to hear, feel
the prickly heat—
sound waves of her mother's velvety
wingbeats.



A Venus By Merle Rosen

Richard Hague

Here is the birth of color,
nativity of fecundity and light,
emerging verdigris-motherearth-
amethyst-and purple-blue
from her ancient cave of begetting.

Here she is, aglow, streaks of sky's azure
lining her shoulders,
flanks pulsing with light, and
her midpart, womb engorged
with richest mud, ochre,
ash-of-rose, umber— "primordial ooze"
aswirl and potent as clay, the making stuff
of pottery and painting, of senses' multitudinous joys.

Here she is, maiden-mother:
once sleek and moist as a fresh shoot,
now fat and full, swollen ripely as an apricot,
round shallot of mysteries,
vast bulb ready,
dense with seed
as a pomegranate,

and just below, her woman's cleft
original, flesh-gate, narrow door
from which we depart,
male and female,
at first silent,
then squawling

to see how bright all is
outside, how new, how squiggled,
curved, blended, serpentine
and spotted, blotted,

and
how dark and smoothly moist
the place we've all come from and emerged
to now's prism, its annunciation:

Behold! Be held.

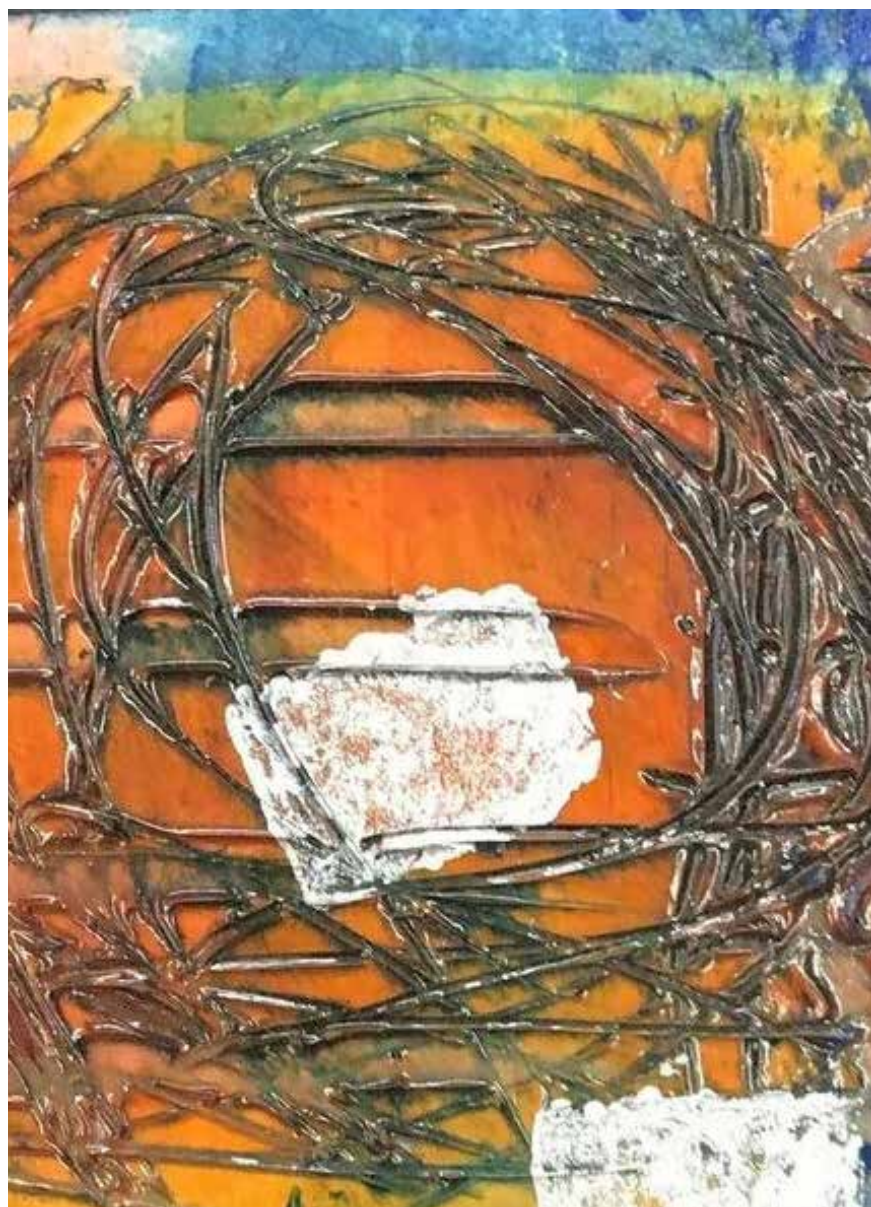


a::::maze::::d

D. R. James

—after an untitled painting by Merle Rosen

::dive in anywhere::::go 'round and 'round
on pearl or coral::::cross on cobalt::
::stall against the black mass::::the black
slabs that finger under rivers of rose::
::your hazel eyes will search unmirrored the
rings like years::::vibrato'd, banded angles::
::your sparrow childhood will scan for
the far mouth of corn stalks::::inflict patient
waiting before screaming::::scrawls in clay
will cue the silliness of ancient glyphs::
::saplings will bend and sing to the wind::
::darkened leaves will unhem and dawn's
paradise will shatter, the constellations
of fine lines torn apart for a merciless
afterward waving like harsh flags::
::but then a familiar vermillion will send
autumn's frost dissolving, diurnal hours
zigzag-falling like freewheeling feathers::
::until tonight ages into its sedate pitch::::those
baffling coils slacken into cool-jazz Taps::::and
you view the horizon glimmered and wobbled::

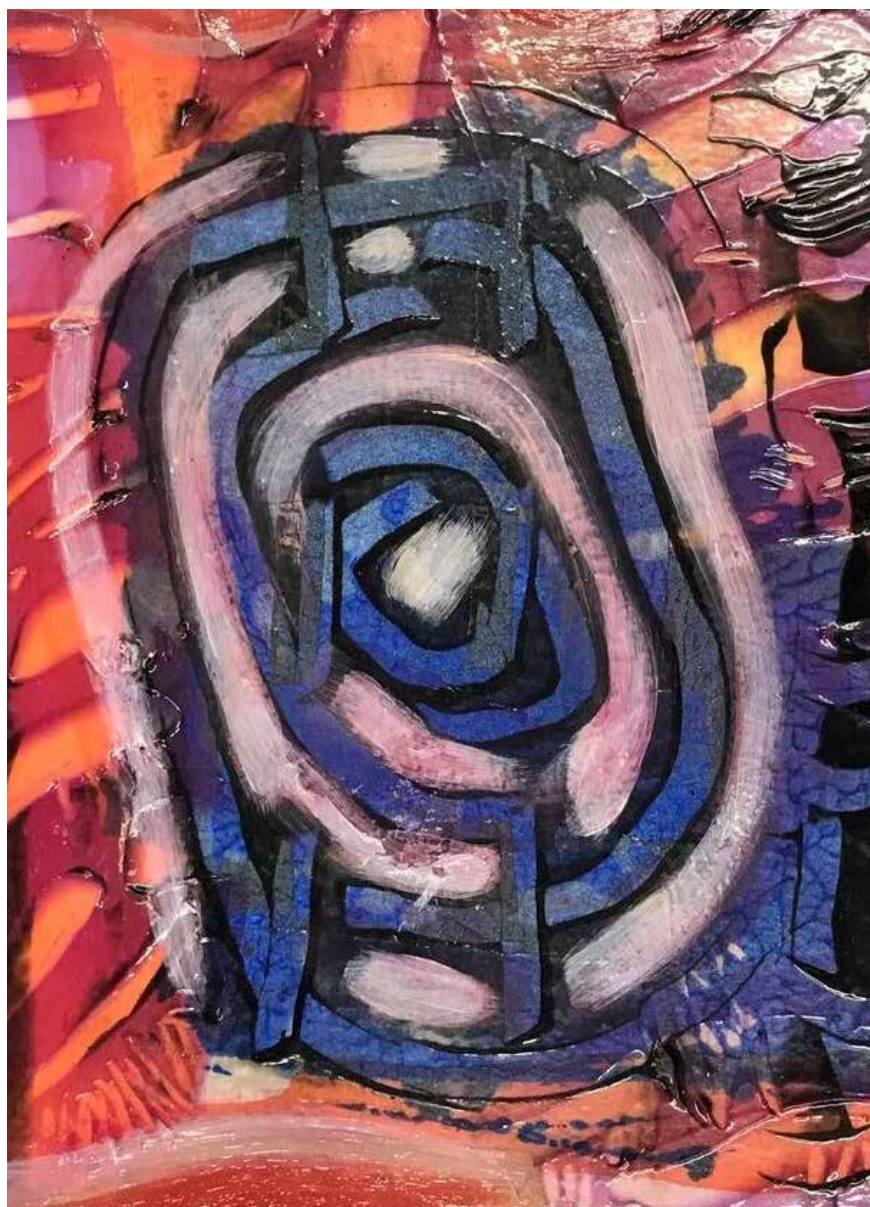


A Pretty Good Friday

D. R. James

—after an untitled mixed-media painting by Merle Rosen

Concussion of stone rolling
to seal then unseal a tomb?
The burden of spring grass
to underlie dried blood?
The foolish conclusion that spirit
has dispersed like fragments
of a shredded shroud? All is not
black! Some even believe
the walls of their various hells
have cracked! In any case, some-
one's scarred tabernacle's in fact
on the move again, thin hosts
stacked deep within like questions
forming behind an infant's forehead,
the start of sprawling squalls
to swamp the house that holds them.
Any melancholy face? Gone. The dark
then chill that surfaced, gone, too.
Skull Hill's slope has flattened,
and blessings of lament have escaped
through budding trees out into blue.
The center ring of braided thorns
becomes a soggy nest and unravels
naturally in this happy mud
under feet that walk the ground
amidst its mushy doubt. Meanwhile,
new light dares roping in around
the edges like a careless thief
absconding in the wrong direction,
and few men or women seem to care
how fast or slow the going, whatever
fretful gossip tries to offset the shine.



POSSIBILITY

Eileen R. Tabios

Yes
I am
possibility. I am

here with arms
stretched wide
open

to-
wards what
I know not

but anticipate with
sun warm
upon

my
heart and
yours. Together we

will share light.
Look at
me

as
I begin
to open eyes.

Oh!
Such colors
on the blanket

you laid out
for me.
You

affirm
my hope
to mature into

color.
I am
mostly blank canvas

now. But we
know I
will

burgundy,
will turquoise,
will glow gold

after
opening eyes
towards a universe

seeing,
acknowledging, welcoming
little ol' me.

How lovely the
ocean becoming
my

eyes
because I
see water. We

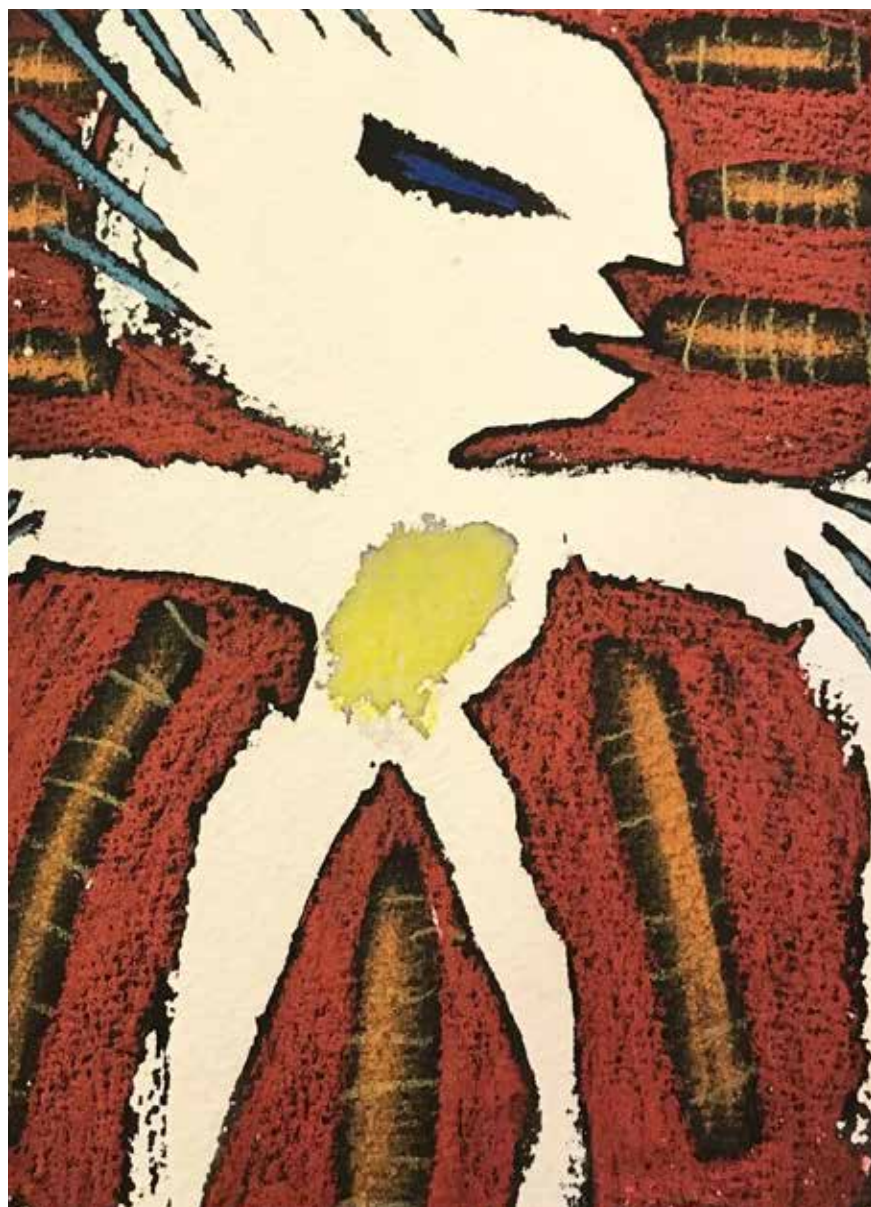
all
want to
be seen, thus

become.
Welcome my
possibility, and I

will
grow into
your cherished rainbow.

Already I've begun
with blue,
yellow ...

(Author's Note: This is a poem written in the form of a "Flip-Flop" hay(na)ku.)



Untitled Poem

Janet McFadyen

A dark woman rises from a black dream,
her cardboard cutout body pinned
in profile, except the eye which gazes
directly out at us like a call to witness,
the way the eyes of ancient Greeks pull the viewer
into whatever turmoil the figures inscribed,
not just “them, there” in a forgotten rite
around an urn, but “us, here.”
The eye asks us to take action,
to take note of how she is affixed
against a canvas as if she were not
the blue path to the sea nor the night sky but only
a construct. So the estuary of her hair
spreads out like the foot of some gigantic bird
pinning head, neck, arms against
a landscape that was never hers, simply
an abstraction of acid and rust. But see
how her skin glows indigo, how her hand
recently torn from her mouth
leaves both parts ragged and unsure.
A new channel, an exhalation of “O,”
rushes from the blackness of her chest
still crisscrossed by chains. Even so,
even so, she fixes her eye upon us,
saying “never again,” and “no,” and “now.”



Papa Duck

Kevin Oberlin

5.

In the aftermath of fire, the ears of sugar beets
fidget in windswept rows to catch the siren's wail
as the hook-and-ladder passes up car after car,
a brick hurtling as if frictionless. There's no resistance

between cries for help. Across the fields and far
away we roll, sometimes disaster chasers,
sometimes heralds of crisply separating skies,
our unmarked exit strategy, the fields iced over.

4.

Papa duck called, "Quack, quack, quack."

3.

When only three little ducks come back, we worry.
That's what we do, faces without heads or noses,
responsible guardians. Femurs and fibulas gnawed clean,
our cemetery's pickets, betray our backwards thinking:

the wolf who cries boy patrols the border, his order's
up again, and that chicken mashed flat from sky,
we've heard of him. But three establishes the pattern, the dot
hitched to the dot dot, the yadda to yadda yadda.

Mother cocks her head, muddy brown, a dirt-
black eye difficult to pick out in the dry
grass at the creek's edge, but her accusation's clear enough:
they followed me just fine. Whoever coined the phrase

"ducks in a row" clearly hadn't met you, you goose.
I put on my hat and skates. It's all that can be done.
The sweet smoke of a barbecue, the black and tan steeple,
the raccoon poking its finger in a soda can. The mammals.



Papa Duck (continued)

Kevin Oberlin

2.

Papa duck went out one day
wearing his cap and roller skates.
Papa duck called, "Quack, quack, quack,"
and felt he'd stepped into a commercial for accident insurance.

There were other jokes to be made here, he was sure of it,
about canaries, about the call of the pastoral, about
wetlands bulldozed for farms razed and paved for traffic.
Why don't ducks use Twitter? They're just quackers.

1.

Ladybug, ladybug, fly away home,
your house is on fire, your children, alone.
And what of the boy who looks after the sheep?
He's under the haystack. Papa duck weeps.

Papa duck blanches. Papa duck hurtles,
brick-like, straddles whole fields as they thaw.
Papa duck's fury stokes the sun. His quacks
panic ambulances. Rumble strips and gravel trip

him into flight, a leap over miles of orange
and white barrels, haystacks and history, state lines,
police lines, a crime scene eclipsed in the gray
drizzle, Papa duck a sheet of cloud above

his precious strays. Somewhere, mid-flight, the seat-
belt light pings on in the avian brain, as it must have done
for Chicken Little, as it always did for the Roadrunner:
what if they're less precious than prodigal, less deaf than dumb?

0.

When Papa duck dreams, all of his little ducks come back.
At least for a brief nuzzling of bills. At least for the holidays.

Divining

Pauletta Hansel

Whorls and whoosh
the world in flux

not you

not yet

your rooted feet
among the ancients

you are waiting

What calls you
to be born?

One ear cocked
your eyes resist
the upward swirl

time's relentless pull

You rest
against the now



Portrait of Me by an Artist I Never Knew and Who Never Knew Me

John Trause

Oh, you who do not know me know me,
imagined me, perhaps, in black and
white, yes, and gray and even yellow,
a saucy fellow in jaunty hat,
but not a cool cat, jazzy, nothing
like that, a bit split, perhaps, but not

giallo

black dahlia, white gardenia, even,
or yellow rose of Texas, no, not
white roses, LA, Cincinnati,
but Easter Island, monolithic,
and aquiline, prodigious, posed and
past poised or poisoned probably, not.

NOTE: Inspired by *Untitled [Man in Hat on Yellow Background]*, 2017], oil painting by Merle Rosen.



Figure Beyond Our Means --for 0100V by Merle Rosen

Rhonda Pettit

Bow-legged and cut off
at the ankles,

is your long black body
your wild black hair

burning or aglow
against the blue field that wants

you, that seems to be
in you

as bloodline
or bone
or both

as contours of a face
possible mouth
two eyes

without iris
without pupil

yet far from empty of expression,
intention, or focus

(am I
reading your mind or mine?)

returning my gaze

(those eyes)

breaking the frame of the face

(those eyes)

as if to say: No cul-de-sac this face! No
pavement on which to enter,
wheel around & leave! You
begin here.

as if to say: Who are you to look at me?

When will you read outside the lines
others have drawn for you
you have drawn for yourself?

as if to say: Seeing and being
are far beyond this body
far beyond this blue
that cannot own me

(am I
reading your eyes or Merle's?)

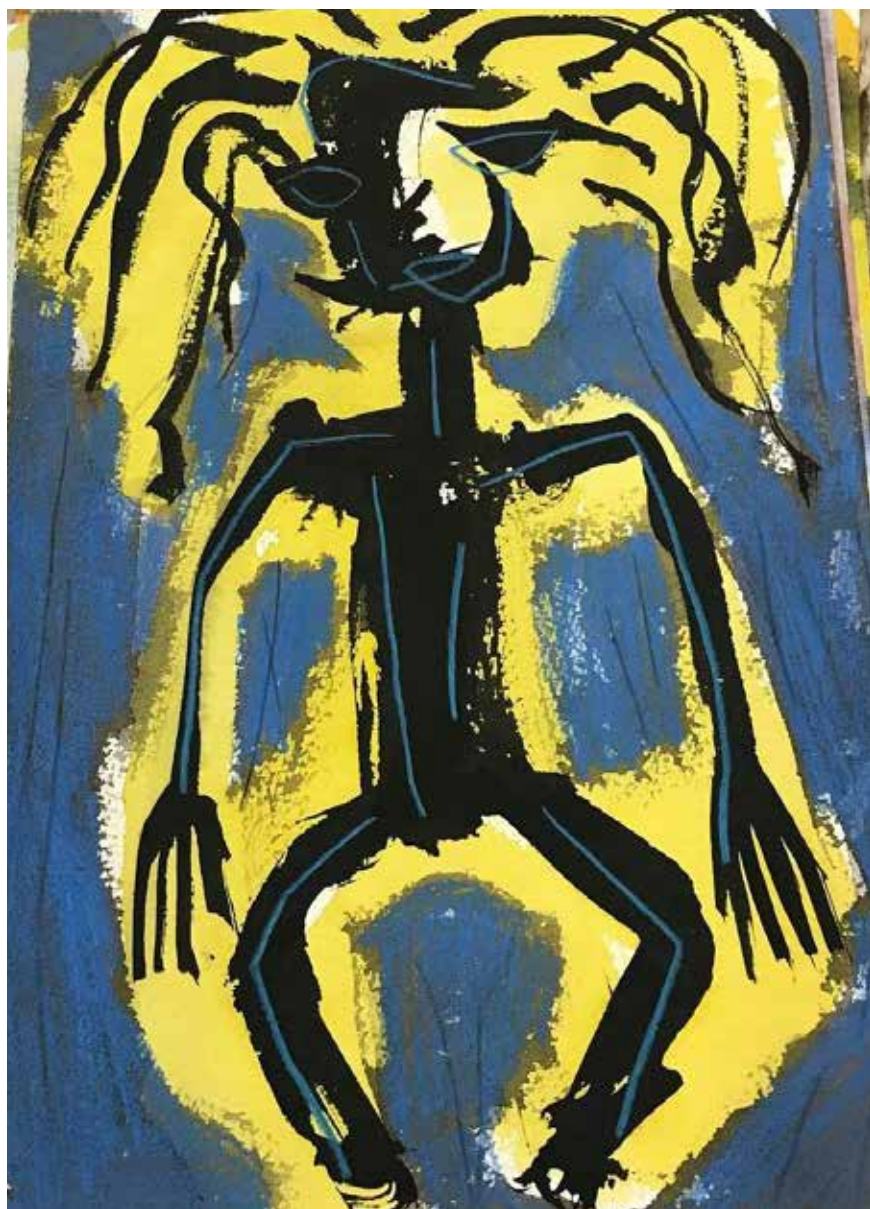


Figure Beyond Our Means (continued)

Rhonda Pettit

Long arms, long-fingered hands
not raised in praise-song or lamentation,
they hang at either side

rakes of distinction
ready, perhaps

to smooth broken ground
to gather that everlasting Something

Merle won't name won't let you name.

How am I drawn to you?

Not seen through the digital veil
of my phone, but in flesh
of color and line:

Figure on paper
unframed and small:
a breeze could flutter you about
like a cut-out by Matisse

Figure on paper
un-named:
if Merle had named you to complete you, words
would stand in the way of seeing

beyond the counterfeit possible
beyond the fugitive blue

for us she painted for you,

How was Merle drawn to you?

Latent within that small white sheet,
what secrets did you share

that day she opened
the paints, picked up
the brush

and –

(Note: *everlasting Something* from Henry David Thoreau, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*)

In the Garden

Roy W Jones

And it was good
But no one knew

How could time pass
When every day are so much better
We forget the days gone?

And it was good
But no one knew

Tomorrow is taken for granted -
Absent the possibility
Days should ever have to end.

And it was good
But no one knew

Being immune to hate
Leaves love numb -
A tongue without taste.

And it was good
But no one knew

Free will granted -
Yet, devoid of evil options
Is just semantics.

And it was good
But no one knew

The power to do wrong
Was granted
When the seed
Was planted.
Before it was ever bitten
Its *existence* was tempting.

But now, *finally*,
Free will was real
Decisions had meaning, because
Decisions had consequences.

It was good
And the first moment
We knew it was,
It was gone.



Poem on a Painting by Merle Rosen

Michael Henson

She has given us an image,
in brush-strokes thick as my thumb,
a man, unmembered,
a face in the frame of the imagination.
The bones of brow, cheek, and chin
turn themselves to the right,
but the eyes cant left,
drawn to something
outside the frame of the canvas.
I imagine this man
standing at a corner
where he has just come from work
or from buying his family's bread.
The city is under occupation
and there is danger in the unaverted eye.
The face of the Leader
is plastered onto every pole
and is splashed
among the electrons that flood every screen.
It is not safe
to see what he is seeing
and yet he cannot fully look away.
What is it that the man cannot help but see?
Someone . . .
They have taken someone . . .
The people who take people
have taken someone.
A girl too quick with her laughter?
A woman too free with her tears?
A man broken with anger?
They will break him now for certain
and we may soon find the splinters of him
dumped in an alley
or on the side of a road
where the crows
will worry him down to bone.
And the woman?
And the girl?
We may find them
In places
too painful to think about for long.
The man will see the signal to cross.
He will cross
and he will go safely home.
Perhaps, very quietly,
he will tell what he has seen.
He will be offered food:

fruit, rice, a bit of lamb.
But he can only eat
a little broken crust of bread.
It will stick in his mouth
dry as a host.



Beyond the Reach of Being Extinguished

Matthew Birdsall

The mustardseed shimmer stroking the background of the canvas
glows from Dylan Thomas's sun in his final birthday poem,
a poem he gifted to himself at age 35, because I know Merle has,
as Thomas put it, "sailed out to die," and maybe I was reading his work
before I sat down—now any yellow would seem mustardseed-y or
maybe the shimmer is another Western forest fire stretching six stories high—
a galumphing mass that is to destroy, Graham Greene's post-War schoolboys
who ignited irony in his short story "The Destroyers," and maybe
I was listening to the news from Santa Barbara on my commute home
about the blowtorch-like burning of the Thomas Fire—282,000 acres incinerated—
fire is on my mind—it's catching—either way, she wanted us to notice the light.

The irony of this--me, here, reading about Merle, a complete stranger,
two other writers who are aren't connected except through this discursive rant
as I try to build an afterlife relationship on stage for an audience of strangers
to deconstruct in about 90 seconds— isn't lost on me, but it doesn't stop me
from wondering if you were the one—you, the one in the painting—to start the fire—

watching the breeze float your smoldering cigarette free from your fingers
becoming a mythical bird fighting its own ashes or were you a bystander
feeling the need to seize the heat of the moment with your phone—
jelling your own image in the Cloud somewhere with a selfie
capturing your preferred angle—up and slightly to the left—
like your artfully-too-small top hat—a photo you then shared with Merle?
Or, are you a kind of Merle? Is that a top hat or one of the lids for my saucepans?

When your eyes appeared in lead each line dashed
across dried, layered acrylic paint marking
a stage of growth for a primal painter
or a stage of revolt for a woman forever finding
new places for old things, did you know I would imagine
the world burning or was it the artist who sent the wind
to snatch the browning butt from your jaundiced fingertips
knowing it would land on a patch of spent grass
beyond the reach of being extinguished, so I could see
her rise from the flames as I learn to see myself
in the negative space?



Women Running

Inspired by an Untitled Work That I Call, "Woman Running with Abandon"

H. Michael Sanders

Part 1 – Women Running: Play-by-Play

midnight palpitations
bouncing and fulsome
running palpitations
the bodies of women
running and twisting
running and bouncing
palpitations at midnight
palpitations of bodies
heads thrown back
darkened twisting
bodies and darkened city
running at midnight
twisting palpitations
bouncing, bouncing
running and bouncing
sweating in abandon
fulsome bouncing
twisting bodies of women
darkened midnight running
the bodies of women
palpitations of bodies
waves breaking
darkness
men wondering

Part 2 – Women Running: News Report

Women running through the darkened city
 streets at midnight with their bodies twisting
 and bouncing in fulsome palpitations...
Women running and sweating through their clothes,
 hotly running with heads thrown back in abandon
 toward the breaking waves at the edge of the town...
Leaving the men in darkness to wonder what just happened.



A Tribute Poem for Merle Rosen

Inspired by an Untitled Work That I Call, "Eyes That Twizzle"

H. Michael Sanders

I thought that I could write a tribute poem,
But instead I just coughed up verbal foam.
The array of words that I now blankly utter
Are truly nothing more than merest mutter
Beneath my hot breath, and with heaving sigh,
As the dumbest of mimes, I should certainly cry...

But here I stand quaking, a quite bloodied poet,
Making rhymes in couplets I'll most surely blow it.
Twitching watery eyes begin to twirl and to twizzle,
As conviction grows firm that my poem will soon fizzle
Into cacophonous chatter that careens through my head,
My hair stands on end and I'm surrounded by dread...

I neither think nor breathe, yet my recitation continues,
The verbiage lacks focus and is weak in the sinews.
I'm pacing and wailing, and mostly radiate heat,
My mouth a vast box receiving both of my feet.
Left standing on spindles, my back starts to ache,
And I crawl from the scene like a biblical snake.

Now Hear This:

This poem, when read aloud, is presented in an exaggerated, but irresponsibly inaccurate and inconsistent British accent in which the initial couplet is rhymed, with the words "po-em" and "fo-am" inexplicably broken into two syllables each.



Mummy Portraits –

Robert Murphy

Funny isn't it, faced
as you are with me now.
And come to you as a bit of a shock.
Like the shock of the new.

But, surely you knew . . .
there's no hiding from what's true . . .

A face brought to mind,
the body left behind.
I'm the one alive here,
not you.



Please don't stare.

It's my secret not yours.
(you have your own to care for
in the garden of beware)
Can't see.
Can't hear.
Can't feel it to be near.

The Other,
who would reach out to you,
if you were truly there.



Aren't my purposes my own?

What business of it is yours to know
who I am, or what it is I do? Was, did,
from your perspective.

Are you sure you want to go there?
Find something of myself in you?

Can't place my finger on it either.
I'm not as you see me here . . .
no one ever is,
not even where beauty reigns.
Being as we are,
wherever we are,
in the eye of the beholder.

Anyway, haven't you had days,
nights like this too . . .?



Startled you, didn't I . . .

Who are you anyway to be so in my face?
Got a reason for being here,
or are you just curious?
Lost in thought?
Or, maybe, like so many others,
looking to find yourself.

It's all a bit too serendipitous,
don't you think? Us meeting like this.
Well, actually, it's not the thinking part,
but the words that lead us astray.
That should give anyone pause.
Not that it ever kept me

from speaking my piece.
Or handing out names.

By the way, what's yours?

Say, while I have you here,
(Or is it that you have me . . .
what am I without you after all?),
by chance you don't know anything
about the third law of thermodynamics
do you:
that perfect crystal thing, in the absolute
of zero?
How about fractals, Fibonacci's curve?
Revelations of Divine Love,
by that goodly anchorite,
Dame Julian of Norwich?
The Cloud of Unknowing?
The Gnostic Gospel According to Thomas?
Was it the doubting one, do you suppose?
Or maybe that play within a play,
where the play is the thing,
and the building of a better mousetrap?
The Tibetan Book of the Dead?
The Perfumed Garden?
Dr. Day? Paracelsus? Giambattista Vico?
His "Verum esse ipsum factum":
"What is true is precisely what is made."
His magnum opus, *Scienza Nuova*?
Eschenbach's Parsifal, or *The Diamond Sutra*?
Did you know Johnny Appleseed
was Swedenborgian?
How about Friedrich Von Hardenberg,
aka. Novalis?
Did you ever meet him?
No, . . . of course not.
How about the alchemical Newton,
Ianesco's *Rhinoceros*?
Husserl, Heisenberg? Or maybe
Die Moritat von Macke Messer?
Bertolt Brecht, Kurt Weil, Lotte Lenya?
Ever want to be a Donne, or Dante scholar?
Have the body, if not the soul,
of Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*?

Well, damn, and damn . . .
and "Curiouser and curiouser! . . ."

You're a bit on the quiet side aren't you?
Cat got your tongue?
Have you out on a limb?
You know what happens to cats, don't you,
and what they drag into the house.
Here one moment, gone the next.
The Queen of Hearts had it right, you know.
What was it she said to Alice?
"Why sometimes I've believed
as many as six impossible things
before breakfast."

(I've believed in a few myself,
along with the butter and strawberry jam
I put on my morning toast.)

Look, friend, I'm no circus freak,
or from Ripley's Believe it or Not,
not even something you ate
that disagrees with you.
But hey! Perhaps
I remind you of someone else,
someone you once knew.
Your uncle Bill perhaps, or an aunt Sue,
familiarity in the breed of contempt.

Either of those names ring a bell?
Well, hell, if not, bell the cat, I say . . .

Ah, I see it in that hang dog look of yours . . .
you've come a long way
to meet up with disappointment.
But tell me,
is that a beam in your eye,
or merely a mote?

Still, before this whole conversation began,
one sided as you might believe it to be . . .
before you turned me around in expectation,
thinking that my hair was on fire,

I was heading for that darker,
calmer, cooler patch of blue
up ahead and just to the right.

How about you?

Mummy Portraits – (continued)

Robert Murphy



Come closer,
this will be of interest to you

(knowing who you are as I do)

It's a *Self Portrait*,
the design encaustic,
though in this case not
the traditional colored wax,
but melted ambergris
laid down over the invisible
scrimshaw megalithic
of a shark's tooth.

The alchemy comes in
when distilled, then descanted,
as it is here, disguised
as a lapis lazuli ice cube.
Giving to it that most
desirable of qualities,
it's, *Je ne sais quoi* . . .

There are matching earrings too
from fresh water pearls
black as night inlaid
with the whitest of moonstones.
Molten gold the likes of the sun of Ra,
egg yolks for stars.
Of course, Isis's own,
taken from her swallow's nest,
while she was but one wing among the many.
Sorrow at flit above the river Nile,
in search of her beloved Osiris.

And don't forget the other accessories:
the tortoiseshell pen,

fashioned from the very carapace
upon which our dear world rests:
the ink cochineal,
the flow upon the page,
diluvian, almost panspermic.
And, O, yes, the signet ring,
with an imprimatur practically papal . . .
try it on either hand,
the sinister one or the righteous,
any finger will do.
Which when taken all together,
in ensemble, don't you think . . .
as much as me,

is you?



Until You Merge

after a green and white face painting by Merle Rosen

Grace Curtis

This Self to That Self

nosce te ipsum, know thyself —

and see that

I am That Self and This Self

longing to be in that green place,

empty,

thought-filled,

alive,

bulbous-lipped, a small spec

I want This Self pictured

existing as all there is

as into emptiness. I want winter tones

to be known by name

as song. I want leaf hues

as naught to fall into That Self

as if one could know,

could rattle off a lifespan

as fact. Say two selves exist

and that you can't know any name

until you become the unknown

Say you can't know

trees by heart until you merge

what is and isn't known

look to the hills of a face—

the granularity of a forest

in the blood-red creek bed

outlined in ochre

and be at once

full

vacant

narrowed

awash in sap-green

in a bed of gold air

Let there be staring

as a quality of unknowing

identifiable

as something—

as quiet wonderment—knowing, as if—

for instance, the color of tree bark by shape and

as fiction

as all that cannot be known,

standing on the brink of knowing

Say, you want to know

these nameless selves or

else it doesn't matter

and say both selves know it.



Contributors

Matthew T. Birdsall hails from Dayton, Ohio and his first book of poems, *The Long and Short of It*, was recently released by Alabaster Leaves Press. Matt works in educational publishing and he's the Managing Editor of the *Mock Turtle Zine*. He enjoys all things creative, spending time with his wife and 5-year-old, and well-planned, spontaneous adventures.

Grace Curtis' book, *The Shape of a Box*, was published in 2014 by Dos Madres Press. Her chapbook, *The Surly Bonds of Earth*, was selected by Stephen Dunn as the 2010 winner of the *Lettre Sauvage* chapbook contest and she has been nominated for The Pushcart Prize. Her prose and poetry can be found in such journals as *Sou'wester*, *The Baltimore Review*, *Waccamaw Literary Journal*, and others. www.gracecurtispoetry.com

Karen George, author of five chapbooks, the collection *Swim Your Way Back* (Dos Madres Press, 2014), and *A Map and One Year* (Dos Madres Press, 2018). She reviews poetry at <http://readwritepoetry.blogspot.com/>, and is fiction editor of the online journal *Waypoints*: <http://www.waypointsmag.com/>. Her website is: <http://karenlgeorge.snack.ws/>.

Richard Hague is author of 19 volumes, most recently the prose collection *Earnest Occupations: Teaching, Writing, Gardening & Other Local Arts* and *Studied Days: Poems Early & Late in Appalachia*. He is winner of four Ohio Arts Council Fellowships in Poetry and Creative Nonfiction, and Writer-in-residence at Thomas More University.

Pauletta Hansel is author of six poetry collections, including *Palindrome* (Dos Madres Press, 2017), winner of the 2017 Weatherford Award for best Appalachian poetry book. Pauletta was Cincinnati's first Poet Laureate from April 2016 through March 2018.

Michael Henson is author of four books of fiction and four collections of poetry, as well as stories, poems, essays, and reviews in several publications and anthologies. His most recent work is *Maggie Boylan*, short fiction from Swallow Press, an imprint of Ohio University Press. He is a co-editor of *Pine Mountain Sand & Gravel*, the annual publication of the Southern Appalachian Writers Cooperative.

D.R. James has taught writing, literature, and peace-making at Hope College, Holland, Michigan, for 33 years. He lives and writes in the woods outside Saugatuck. His most recent of seven collections are *If god were gentle* (Dos Madres Press) and the chapbooks *Split-Level* and *Why War* (both Finishing Line Press).

Roy W. Jones is a Cincinnati native who calls himself a multidimensional artist who writes poems, songs, short stories, and scripts. Most of his pieces are freeform or invented form based on whatever ADD fueled muse feeds the mind.

Janet MacFadyen is the author of *Waiting to Be Born* (Dos Madres Press) and *A Newfoundland Journal* (Killick Press), along with two chapbooks. She has had a fellowship at the Provincetown Fine Arts Work Center and a residency at Cill Rialaig (Ireland). She is managing editor of Slate Roof Press.

Robert Murphy is the author of *Not For You Alone* (2004), *Life In the Ordovician - Selected Poems* (2007), and *From Behind The Blind* (2013). He is a 2000 winner of the William Bronk Foundation prize for poetry, and editor and publisher of Dos Madres Press. He is married to the Elizabeth Hughes Murphy, who is both book designer and illustrator for Dos Madres Press.

Kevin Oberlin teaches writing at the University of Cincinnati Blue Ash College. He is the author of the chapbook *Spotlit Girl* (2008), and his metaphorical ducks have appeared in various literary journals including *PacificREVIEW*, *Roanoke Review*, and *Ghost Proposal*.

Rhonda Pettit is the author of *Riding the Wave Train* (Dos Madres Press, 2017), *Fetal Waters* (Finishing Line Press, 2013), and *The Global Lovers* poetic drama (Cincinnati Fringe Festival, 2010), as well as critical works on the writing of Dorothy Parker. A frequent contributor to *Pine Mountain Sand & Gravel*, she is professor of English at University of Cincinnati Blue Ash College, where she is editor of the *Blue Ash Review*.

H. Michael Sanders is an artist, photographer and poet. He is currently professor and department chair of Electronic Media Communications at University of Cincinnati Blue Ash, is curator of UCBA Art Gallery, serves as editor of *MetaDada: International Journal of Dada Mining*, and is *Blue Ash Review Online* media editor.

Eileen R. Tabios loves books and has released over 50 collections of poetry, fiction, essays, and experimental biographies from publishers in nine countries and cyberspace. Her writing and editing works have received recognition through awards, grants and residencies. More information is available at <http://eileenrtabios.com>

John J. Trause, the Director of Oradell Public Library in New Jersey, is the author of six books of poetry and one of parody, the latter staged Off Broadway. His translations, poetry, and visual work appear internationally in many journals and anthologies, including *Rabbit Ears: TV Poems* (NYQ Books), 2015

BLUE ASH *REVIEW*

A MAGAZINE OF LITERARY & VISUAL ARTS AT UC BLUE ASH COLLEGE

BLUE ASH **REVIEW ONLINE**

A DIGITAL EDITION OF THE BLUE ASH REVIEW AT UC BLUE ASH COLLEGE

blueashreview.com

UC Blue Ash College

We make it possible. You make it happen.

Department of English & Communication

9555 Plainfield Road, Blue Ash, OH 45236

www.ucblueash.edu