

# ESCOM Journal

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*The Literary and Visual Arts Publication of the Emeritus Students College of Marin  
September/October 2024*



*Jeff True*

***INSIDE THIS ISSUE: Naked Ladies, Halloween, Worlds on Fire, Autumn***

### Spawning Through Flames

Jake leaned wearily back against the wide slats of the Adirondack rocking chair rolling the burned wood taste of scotch over his tongue. It seemed the perfect foil to the smokey night, and he hoped it would help rest his mind and relax muscles tight from lack of sleep. Spawning fish reached his stretch of river three nights ago, their heavy bodies waking him with crashing slaps as they threw themselves against the surface of the river. The forest fire, burning through a sheer canyon, lighting ancient firs like candles from the wrong end and the salmon on their last life affirming swim had left him sleepless and ineffably sad. Along the most spellbinding creek he knew the trees would be crowning out in a terrible, yet mesmerizing blaze of sparks, some of the pines, laden with resin, exploding like bombs as the fire headed towards the deep, clear, pools he revered. This morning, the sky almost cleared of smoke, a wan blue appeared but the wind had risen fanning the fire downriver back to an inferno and the narrow valley cradling the river, which was once again filled with acrid smoke. Setting sun burned through the ashen sky, a red coal turning the river the color of blood.

From the porch of his small house, he looked down a steep bank to the river watching the fish casting themselves above the water, turning in midair to land full force on their sides. Poor old girls, they sounded big as suitcases when they hit. His wife once told him how *mittelschmerz*, that releasing of the egg, could sometimes leave her breathless with pain. If one egg could do that to her, what about the hundreds of eggs that burdened the fish? Maybe this dashing of themselves against the water helped ease their discomfort.

The sun hung smoldering above the river. Then an ember breaking from it dropped onto a riffle and the whole river burst into flames. Jake jumped from the rocker to hang over the porch's log railing, gazing with disbelief as he watched the huge fish soaring through the fire, flames licking their tails. Suspended above the



Laura Milholland

burning river they spewed out translucent coral eggs and then the males braved the fire, jumping high, misting the eggs with their sperm. The fire melted the eggs into quicksilver minnows that rained through flames, glittering, to sink into the river's swift current. And the grand old fish kept soaring higher, their rotting white fins turned to wings and floating high above the burning river they shed their heavy scarred bodies with the dull blackened scales. Scales just minted, gleaming silver, and bodies no longer heavy, but sleek and sinuous, cartwheeled, then dove through the flames to swim back down river toward the sea.

The sun slipped into the river with a hiss and the water extinguished the flames that moments before had burned so brightly. Jake stood transfixed in the gathering dusk. He shook his head to clear away the fantastical images. Had he finally fallen asleep to dream? Then lines from a poem by Mary Oliver, his favorite poet, slipped into his memory.

“And now you’ll be telling stories  
of my coming back  
and they won’t be false, and they won’t be true,  
but they’ll be real.”

It gave him overwhelming comfort to believe these creatures had more secrets than just finding their way, in what struck him as insurmountable odds, back to their birthing place. He drained the whisky from his glass knowing that finally tonight he’d sleep.

Susan Connelly



**Equinox**

Fall begins  
 today light and darkness share equal time  
 and outside as you walk you can feel  
 that hint of briskness in the air  
 our earth is getting ready  
 for the dormancy of winter.

Rain has already fallen  
 an unexpected storm that helped the trees begin  
 to shed their leaves and many dance around  
 the grass and walkways to the sound of blowers  
 that invade the quiet morning  
 as gardeners gather them in piles.  
 The compost bin is full-potential soil  
 for renewing garden plots in Spring.

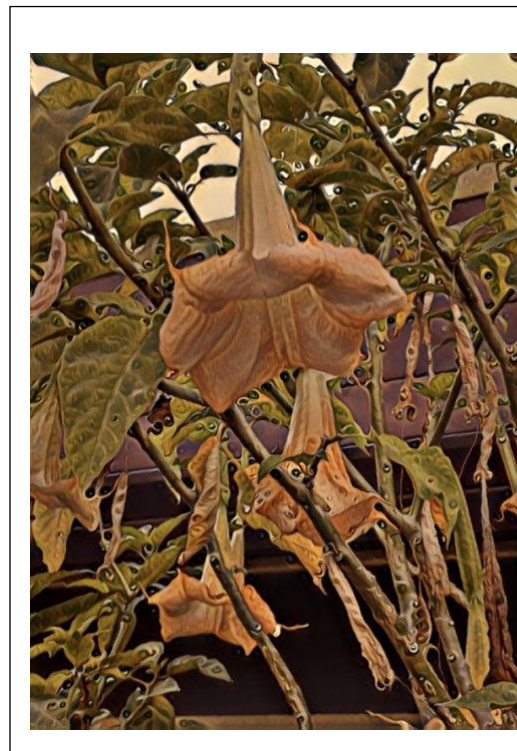
Colors are more vibrant  
 the light has changed as the sun  
 lower in the sky brings warmth  
 and the mornings require sweaters.  
 Evenings grow cooler and  
 from now on until winter arrives,  
 every day is a little shorter and darkness  
 begins to surprise us  
 coming earlier than we expect.

I love the change of seasons  
 the ongoing cycle of life  
 growth and harvest  
 dormancy and renewal  
 mirrored in our own experience  
 as inhabitants of the earth.

Anne Mulvaney

**CONTRIBUTORS!**

Would you like a beautiful color copy of the Journal  
 that features your work? You can now pick one up at  
 the College of Marin Kentfield Welcome Center on  
 College Ave, or in the IVC in the ESCOM Office in  
 Building 10.



*Photos (this page) Laura Harrison*

**Ode to Autumn**

Summer has passed. The watergrass gone to seed, maples lost their green, fields have turned yellow.  
Autumn with its golds, reds and rust crisps the air with its morning mist.

Autumn, stirs my old bones, adds spice to my step. The smell of wood burning stoves, and wet fallen leaves, stirs thoughts of pumpkin pie, fresh baked bread and hot minestrone soup.

I walk in the forest, talk with the redwoods, ask about their little saplings, watch the crows saucily scrapping in a Monterey pine. I sit by a stream and listen to water ripple over pebbles and around rushes. Look: a tiny lizard sunning himself on a rock.

Autumn, time to breathe in the essence of me.

Carol Allen



Amy Glaza, Quilt, Mixed Media

**Naked Ladies Two**

They always return  
August pulls them up  
In backyards, open fields  
dirty highways too  
One last summer's hoorah  
Just for you—

Pink is more springlike  
but their nude bare stems  
Reveal something else

Is it root memory  
Or simply a sort of singularity  
An Amaryllis Belladonna's sweet poison  
That seduces us so

The trumpet flowers announce  
The onset of Autumn  
And her cousin death  
Not far behind—

-Marcia Taylor Smith



Naked Ladies, Amaryllis belladonna



## Aftercare

I'm called the DOA Officer. A misnomer. I'm not sworn to uphold animal welfare laws. What I do is pick up dead animals throughout Marin County. I drive a pickup truck that I call the Dead Truck. It has a camper shell, so folks won't see the carcasses in the back. No one likes to see that. This isn't true. On the side of the road loading a dead deer, without even looking up from my work, I can hear cars slow down to a crawl. Death invites curiosity the same way a flame does but getting too close makes us recoil. Death is the Afterlife, something for later.

I recover raccoons, squirrels, skunks, birds, deer, coyotes, possums, foxes and cats hit by cars. For them it's not dignified. They can't present themselves as they were. But they're past caring and not in pain.

I was trained by Malia, a rancher and a barrel racer. A formidable woman and a knockout blonde who took no crap from anyone: a by-God Cowgirl, at home handling livestock dead or alive. She would winch the deer into the truck bed, one right over the last. One day she was winching a doe into the truck and knotted a garbage bag over the head. "Is that out of respect for the deer?" I asked.

"No. It's to keep the fluids from leaking out of its mouth into my truck." Now that the job is mine, every animal gets its own bag.

In this job you'd have to be a little crazy not to think about death. Makes me appreciate being alive. I've seen how quick it can cease. If people could see what I've seen they'd keep their cats indoors.

So, I'm going to tell you about something. Insider stuff. I'm radio dispatched, and every so often get a call to pick up an "owned, dead dog" at a residence. On arrival, I always take a breath and get ready to help the family. A few don't really care, but most are in a state. Some feel deep loss, some feel shame their dog is old and stinky, some are worried he may leak, lots don't know how to engage with death.

They say to their kids: "Don't touch!" A few are good with the death of their pet. The enlightened few who've walked the last mile side by side with their dog.

When I go in the house and meet the family, I always bring the paperwork. I ask where we can sit and fill it out. I get their info then ask what the dog's name is. What breed is he. What color is he. Notice I'm asking in the present tense; we've just begun a ritual, and we haven't come to the part yet where they relinquish him. By the time we've filled out the form, I've told them about my German Shepherd, Frank, who's been gone five years, who I held as the Veterinarian injected him. I tell them how I felt the life leave him as I crooned in his ear. How I still can't bear to have another dog. They know now that I understand how they feel, and they're more at home, in their home, with their dog. Sometimes we all just sit in the kitchen swapping dog stories for a while.

At last, it's time for me to look at the dog. I ask permission and we go out to the garage or bedroom. Almost always the animal is covered with a blanket. I ask if I can look and turn back the blanket from his face. Again, almost always, the expression on the face is calm. I look the people in the eyes and tell them their dog went easy, that there are a lot worse ways to go, that they don't have to torture themselves worrying. I pet him, unhurriedly caressing the head, telling them what a beautiful dog he is, how well-cared-for. Often the people will follow suit, sometimes even encouraging their kids to give the dog a goodbye pat. To me, this is the crucial part of the rite. The farewell.

Finally, I explain I'm going to put him in a bag and ask if they'd like to have a private moment with him. Afterwards, I put the remains in a large black plastic bag and carry them out to the truck with dignity and respect. I never stack them. They have their own place.

Mike Holland

**Hawk**

*Estancia Valley  
New Mexico May 1998*

High above, the feathered aerialist balances  
along unseen wires of wind;  
Where desert light and tasseling exhalation  
eddy her aloft  
against a washed canvas slip.

Ridged minarets of ruddy stone  
Deny the downward shackling earth  
And I – pinioned by gravity  
    death  
    separation –  
crawl, yearning, toward my  
valley fastness  
where I will hide in damp  
    cool dens  
away from arrowing acrobats'  
release into thistled ether.

Untie the bond  
Let go the perch  
Forswear the net  
Let go

Amy Carpenter



*Harvey Abernathy*

**The Grade**

Corte Madera  
driving south  
    on the east side of  
the 101grade

Climbing the ridge –  
the solidarity  
of  
fresh  
houses,  
these chimneys  
    like headstones  
graying the hills  
    commemorating  
    a wind-  
rich, bird-winged  
    shoreline.

Joan Taschian



*Nancy Outenreath*

### Travel Embers

Not wanting to experience the tourist-impacted Canadian town of Banff, we headed north out of Calgary on the last day of the Stampede.

We had arrived too late for calf-roping and the saddle broncos only to see a few celebrating cowboys ambling downtown, their tall, stiff hats a bit askew.

Our plan was to drive to Jasper via Edmonton but first a quick detour to Drumheller and the Royal Tyrrell Museum located in Alberta's rugged Badlands. Kids know it as the world's largest collection of dinosaurs while paleontologists research and study the province's largest collection of fossils. Queen Elizabeth II dubbed it Royal status on a visit to Alberta.

It all started in 1884 when Joseph Tyrrell found the 70-million-year-old skull of a carnivorous dinosaur (a flesh-eating huge lizard) near Drumheller. The museum opened 100 years later named in honor of the geologist who made this significant discovery.

Walking in the contemporary museum through displays of life on Earth during the various geologic eras, one eventually reaches the final storyboard outlining what happened to dinosaurs. Scientists theorize that a huge asteroid or comet smashed into Earth around 66 million years ago reducing sunlight, causing major climate change, igniting global wildfires and.... the demise of dinosaurs.

While this mass extinction of dinosaurs and at least 50% of all plants and animals alive at the time was indeed catastrophic, a chance survivor exists. Avian dinosaurs were ancient, large, feathered flying birds that lived about 85 million years ago. Chirping outside your window are their descendants. Like "Phoenixes" rising from their predecessors' ashes, the legendary Arabian bird, the only one of its kind, worshipped in ancient Egypt burned itself every 500 years or so then arose rejuvenated.

Perhaps this is what forest fires do today.

Back on the road to Jasper, driving among endless yellow fields of canola-oil-producing plants left much time for thought and I was reminded of a

paleontology class I took as an undergrad at Cal long before environmental studies appeared as a Major degree offering. I couldn't recall discussions of mass extinction. It was a time of peace and love. Now I was anxious for the tall trees, glaciers and mountain lakes of Jasper National Forest.

Dipping into a valley southwest of Hinton on Hwy 16 provided our first view of the Canadian Rockies, 8,592' Whitecap Mountain obviously named for its glistening white peak. Continuing through pristine, untamed landscape of clean flowing rivers, turquoise-colored lakes, and lush wide valleys we arrived in the low-key, former railway town of Jasper now the modern hub of the forest, a town of 4,500 visited by nearly two million each year.

With only two main thoroughfares, Patricia St. and Connaught Dr., Jasper is a quick drive-through unless you need to stop for a bite to eat, stock up on some provisions or perhaps a souvenir. We parked near the train station, and I jumped out to purchase a couple of t-shirts. Vaguely reminiscent of Truckee, California my husband suggested I take a photo to compare. For some reason I declined saying I could remember the town.

On that beautiful sunny 16<sup>th</sup> day of July, we headed south through the 11,228 sq km. National Park on the Icefields Parkway pulling over to view the roaring Athabasca Falls, picnic and watch tourists walk on the glacier at Columbia Icefield and halt abruptly to allow the big brown bear grazing on the side of the road to make a move. Awe-inspiring wilderness, beauty and serenity. Mother Nature is good.

Mother Nature is bad. A week later, on July 23<sup>rd</sup>, lightning storms struck Jasper National Forest causing the largest wildfire recorded there in the last 100 years. Folks had only thirty minutes warning to evacuate, and one-third of the town of Jasper was burnt to the ground.

Jasper National Park remains closed and under an evacuation order. Officials say flames could stay ablaze for months. Jasper residents will be allowed reentry for the first time scheduled for August 16, 2024. They will be the only ones touring.

Not mass extinction but will this Phoenix rise?

Diane Panagotacos





*Susan Connelly*

**Walk in West Marin**

huckleberries are sweet  
the R months have arrived

leaves tawny amber  
scarlet crunch under foot

the first Dungeness crab  
washes up on the beach

gulls feast on upturned bellies  
soon only scattered shells remain

down the shore curlew's  
curved bill drills for lunch

burning oak logs tang the nipping air  
days shorten jacket weather

another season to give thanks

Barbara McDonald

**“China Virus”: Invisible and Other**

Pushed, kicked, beaten,  
Spat on, killed.  
Asian hate. Please wait.

We came in 1835's,  
Mined gold, farmed fields,  
Built railroads, our sweat yields.

Washed laundry, cooked food,  
Cleaned homes with care,  
Cared for all, everywhere.

Built schools with pride,  
Attended with honor,  
Became scholars, our banner.

Doctors, nurses, engineers,  
Dentists, lawyers, we stand,  
Civil servants, we hand.

Fought for this land,  
In every fight,  
We are Asians, 2.4 million in sight.

We are Americans,  
Our work, dreams, hopes,  
Our children, the future's slopes.

Not others, not invisible,  
We shine bright,  
We are Americans, our right.

Vaccinated and strong,  
We come of age,  
In this land, we belong.

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Imperfect union  
Racism: “Black Lives Matter”  
Justice now for all

ray fay, m.d.



**World on Fire**

Aerospace Corporation, Los Angeles, 1963

It didn't take long to get a secret clearance at the age of 20 and I was soon employed in the art department as a delivery boy for 3x5 illustrated charts used to brief Air Force officers. Eating my bag lunch in the vault, I casually flipped through images of The Apocalypse, casualty maps, secret underground launch sites, priority target sites and the consequences of an all-out planet killing war.

It was all just a bunch of pictures but spiced with my imagination, sliced Wonder Bread, Skippy peanut butter and Welch's Grape Jelly, lunch became quite a cinematic affair.

As I moved on to the next section of charts, my bag of Fritos fell on the reinforced steel floor. In full color, the L.A. Airport, our think-tank, the vault and by implication, my bag of Fritos stood inside bright red circles: *High Priority Soviet Impact Target*.

Yikes! I had just taken a year off after my freshman college semesters. But somehow, it all made sense. Our nuclear threatened schools had conditioned my generation for sudden death: DROP! Right then and there, I suffered an attack of Pre-Traumatic Stress Disorder launched by an attack of Future Shock.

The archives around me dissolved and my high school art teacher, Mrs. Campbell appeared from the rubble, surrounded by paintings from her favorite brown-nosed students. Ensuring our full attention, her tight angora sweater inflated with a significant announcement. She had my attention.

"Class, the homework for tonight is, "Drop!"

Like prairie dogs fleeing from the shadow of a diving eagle, we dove under desks and tables. But there in my impregnable vault, there was no sanctuary under my metal folding chair, no reason to assume the fetal position. Alone and surrounded by multiple scenarios of How to Kill a Planet, I could only reach for the Frito bag and think about transferring to a university far out of the locally targeted Dead Zone.



Marilyn Bagshaw

I continued to stroll through Dantesque visions of possible futures for Earth and pulled dessert from my sack. At last, a vacation poster of a Caribbean Island came into view, peaceful, tropical and without machines of death. A thin communication antenna pointed up out from shallow water. What harm could it do to just talk to the enemy, maybe negotiate a cease-fire?

I read the sidebar. "When atmospheric radiation reaches a level verifying nuclear war, unmanned submarines will launch Polaris missiles to predetermined targets."

We could all be dead and machines would continue destroying dead wastelands. Desperate, I flipped to the next chart hanging down like a huge obituary notice.

Ah, Northern Canada, forests, lakes, mountains, remote beauty of unspoiled nature with just a few developed roads. "ICBMs loaded in containers and trucked in continuous 24/7 motion on predetermined routes are each pre-programmed with launch schemes adjusted to longitude and latitude. As the truck stops, roof retracts, and hydraulic gears lift ICBMs in firing profile. Enemy loss factor 40%. U.S. losses 20%.

I set my applesauce cup down and leaned back on the chair. The date on the artwork read, June 1961. Dreamlike, a slice of Angel Food cake floated up from my paper bag into my hand.

Much time has passed. The arms race cooled down, but Fritos have never tasted the same. Many of the prescient visions hanging in the archives found their way into front rooms of American families on our television screens. Fortunately, many have not. Sometimes, I do wonder though: "What's hanging in the vault, now?"

Brenton MacKinnon

**Shine On**

Strayed  
and far from home  
a lost cicada waif  
siphons light beams  
off the harvest moon  
piloting her underground  
where she can relax  
for the next thirteen years.

lynn arias bornstein



Tom Gannon

**Snug a Bug**

Smug a bug, snug a bug  
You can make yourself a snug a bug  
While you're dreaming of your love  
Snug a bug, snug a bug.

If you don't have a love  
You can still hug a snug a bug  
Put him in your lap  
Give your bug a friendly tap.  
Snug a bug, snug a bug.

If you don't want to smoke  
Give your bug a stroke.  
Read a book instead  
Prop him up to hold your head.  
Snug a bug, snug a bug  
You can make yourself a snug a bug  
With some needles yarn and love  
Snug a bug, snug a bug.

Karen Arnold

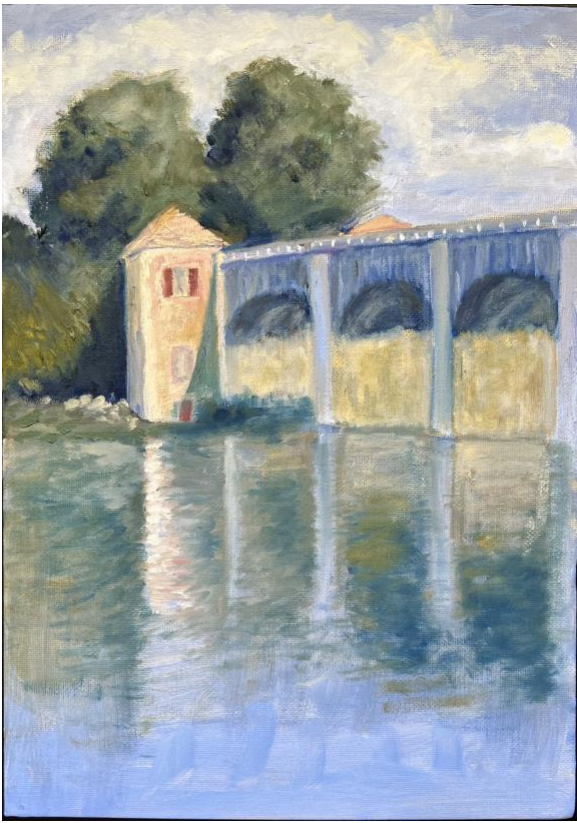


Laura Milholland

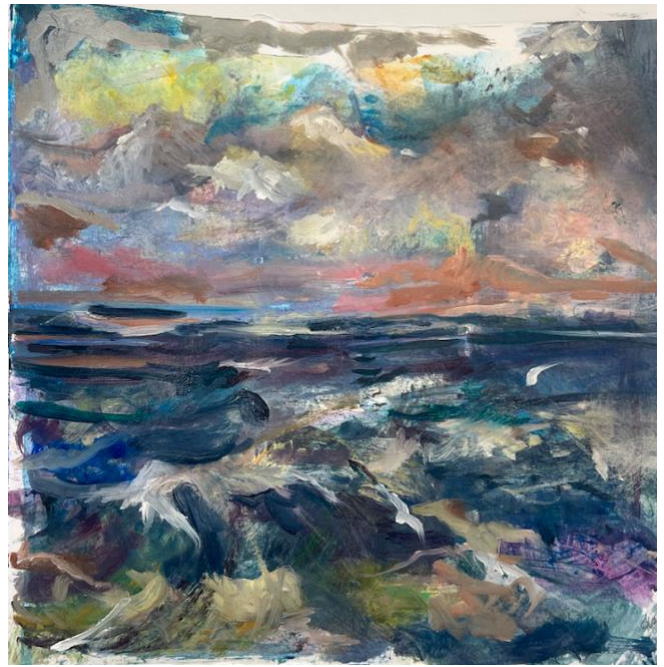
Right: Veronique Fleming







*Jeff Ross, "Bridge at Argenteuil, after Monet" oil*



*Tami Tsark, oil*



*Sharon Fusco, 'Into the Woods,' Acrylic*



*Dana Koffenberger, African Peregrine Falcon, drawing*



# ESCOM

Emeritus Students  
College of Marin

## ESCOM Journal

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**NEXT DEADLINE IS OCTOBER 15**

Please send your **FINAL** draft to

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Submit only one piece of final, proofed work. Changes, unless necessary, will not be accepted after submission. Include your name in the file name and on the page of your document. **You must be an ESCOM member. Membership is free but is no longer automatic with class registration. To join, go to: <http://escom.marin.edu/join-escom>**

**WRITTEN WORK (750 words MAX):** must be single spaced, left margin oriented, and ATTACHED as a Word doc. Do not submit PDFs of written work (as these cannot be properly transferred or edited). **Please submit only one piece per issue.**

**ART and PHOTOGRAPHY:** Borderless images only in file size no larger than 300 kb and attached to the email in the .pdf or jpeg format (not imbedded in email message). **Images larger than 300 kb or saved as a tif file cannot be considered.**

**POEMS: (50 lines MAX including the spaces between stanzas)** If your poem must be centered, please note this. Misspellings, grammatical errors, and erroneous line breaks could be mistaken as the author's intent and not corrected. Proof your copy before sending it in.

Information for "In Memoriam" must be verified with an obituary that appears in an official resource such as a newspaper.