

Introduction

The booklet you have in your hands is the collective effort of a number of people--most significantly, Woody Shepherd, the artist whose exhibit "Painted Perceptions of Cache Valley Canyons" inspired the contributors to this volume. I want to thank all those who submitted work for consideration and to the writers represented here. We have a range of people included in this mini-anthology, from musicians to natural resources majors, from English graduate students to freshmen in expository writing...and even a couple of faculty members. I also want to thank Victoria Rowe, at the Nora Eccles Harrison Museum of Art, for her support and Amy Sullivan, for her design expertise.

The material here is far-reaching. Some have described the exhibit as a whole and tried to make sense of it compared to previous experiences in museums. Some have imagined entire paintings coming to life. Others have used the paintings to trigger personal memories and meditations on nature. All the writers involved hope you enjoy not only Woody's wonderful paintings but how they have been muses for other creative expressions: poems, short essays and microfiction. Enjoy.

Christopher Cokinos
Assistant Professor of English
Adjunct Assistant Professor of Environment & Society

Matthew Adams

Alone

I stand in the shadow of a willow
Its long arms caress my shoulder
The stream, cold, its crisp voice speaks

I listen
To the sweet cedar and the rush of pine
The baron tree stands against the breeze

I see jagged rock fold the sky
I long for the sky

It's a lone walk from shadows
To light bright blue

*In response to
"Painting the Blacksmith Bluebird"*

Marisa Peterson

Exploring "Porcupine Sunshine"

The sky looks cool, but the air is humid, sticky and hot. Flowers are growing, indian paintbrush perhaps, but they do not cover up the scent of dirt and decomposing leaves. I carefully watch for poison ivy and poison oak, glad I wore my jeans despite the heat. My fingers brush my forehead to move my hair out of my eyes, but it is already pulled back. I carefully watch for spider webs and subconsciously move my hands across places where branches have touched me. It is a precaution against bugs; that is Indiana Jones territory.

I can feel that my cheeks and nose are pink, and that when I get home tonight I will be that happy exhausted tired. The way you feel after a day at the beach or stomping around in the mud, exploring the bayou. When your legs refuse to carry you any further, and a light sunburn keeps you warm even after the sun has gone down. After a day like that you can sleep any where, the floor, the back of a van, a pull out couch and swear after that it was the best sleep of your life.

Emily Gilliland

Vanishing Acts

“Ox Killer Hollow” response

Tangles of limbs and branches—mint green, olive green, army green, crayon green, spring green and blue green—thickly painted in worms of paint, fists of paint, fingers of paint, snakes of paint. Slick leaves painted wet and bright, the sun shining through them, revealing the silhouettes of the twigs beneath them. Shady, empty, dense woods, with a floor covered in wood chips and last year’s leaves. Woody Shepherd stenciled two maple leaves: two white silences amid the cacophony of foliage and scattered light. Named “Ox Killer Hollow” perhaps for the blood reds slipped into the forest floor, the shallow crimson puddles and trickles below the pinecones, fallen branches, and younger shoots that hide the ground behind their verdure.

I remember a place like this just off the highway between Rexburg and West Yellowstone, on a Friday afternoon in August, the day after Joe and I broke up for the first time. He had driven us to the stadium the night before and fingered the knobs on his steering wheel while he talked. I couldn’t watch him, so I stared at my hair elastic wrapped around his rearview mirror from the first night he took out my pigtails to play with my hair. He said we weren’t going anywhere. I found the door handle without looking and pulled it open—the air was chilly from that evening’s rainstorm, and the breeze made me feel electric, clarified—and I stepped out of Joe’s Bronco.

I wasn’t sure what to do next until I heard his door open, and I fled: I ran down the dark streets and when I heard his footsteps padding the pavement behind me, I cut through yards, jumped over a small hedge, ran past a swing set in a local’s backyard. He stopped chasing me, and when I was alone, I lay curled up near a curb and cried. Nobody saw me because it was already 1:30 a.m. and all the university students have midnight curfews on school nights. The stars looked glossy around the white glare of the street lamp. The black street reflected wet and radiant. The grass felt sharp against my cheek, embedding thin ridges in my skin. I craved the grass, the dirt, the sky, the smell of the nearby lilac bush in the way I craved them walking home alone from kindergarten on a stormy afternoon, when the air and the colors are more clarified and deep, more real.

He asked me the next morning to go to West Yellowstone. We pulled off to drink from a natural spring just inside the dense forest of oaks, ash, birches and maples lining the highway. The water was cold and sweet. The foliage lay thick on all sides and I idly plucked a maple leaf and stripped it into pieces while Joe went farther into the woods to pee. The sun slipped in against the bigger, floppier leaves that spread their soft, polished faces in the light, putting the leaves beneath them in shadows and secret corners with beetles and potato bugs. Two squirrels danced on the nimble arms of birches and beeches, leaping and chirping and scattering leaves. I pointed at them for

Joe to see when he returned, but when he looked, the squirrels were humping. He didn’t laugh. He met my gaze and I blushed because of what he thought I wanted him to see. I looked at the red clay under my feet and the squirrels ran off into the tangled nets of stems and branches.

My face is heated as I consider the globs of heavy greens against the canvas of “Ox Killer Hollow.” I want to fall forward into the ponderous faces of the largest leaves with their veins stretching their skin like sails to capture the heat. I want my face to fall into theirs and feel the waxy coats on my cheeks and feel the sun on the back of my head and down my neck. I want to dig my hands into the sticks and chips and cones and feel the dirt under my fingernails and spiders tip-toeing across my knuckles. I want to breathe the humid breath of photosynthesis until my eyes turn emerald and my mouth fills with sweet williams and wild roses and my tongue becomes a pistil with a stigma at the tip to receive the forest’s pollen, while my hair becomes Indian paintbrush and my legs become worms’ meat, and my body decomposes into blood red Idaho dirt, rich and fertile, buried in growing mint greens, olive greens, bright greens, blue greens, water greens, and dark greens.

Emily Gilliland

Hidden Hollow
“Sink Hollow” Response

Pools of red and purple confront
fire orange and dancing greens—
a discordant clamor of oaks, aspens, birch—shadows beneath the
leaves dapple
drowsily. My arms are patterns of maple,
cottonwood, sycamore. Thorns scratch
my skin in thin white lines and red stems
sticky with prickles pull my hair and stickers hooked to my socks
scrape my ankles.
I am ten years old.
I am in a dark, tangled spot.

I see cadmium yellow and periwinkle just past
the twisted, spiderwebbed entanglement
of limbs and sticks, vines and scrub oak.
I see an open expanse—just beyond
this air thick with dust and pollen—
and a golden cottonwood breathing
softly in a breeze, sprinkling leaves like coins.

Pushing forward, a stick jabs my eye,
a daddy longlegs crawls up my shirt,
burrs end up in my training bra.
I think of school: Mrs. Siler and her stupid
stories about poodles chasing vacuum cleaners,
and our fifth grade field trip to the Morgan Cemetery
where we made chalk tracings of lambs engraved

on the tombstones of dead little kids, and Macayla,
whose dad came home over Christmas Break with a sex change,
after she checked out seven library books over the limit
and lost them all, how the librarian gritted her teeth behind
her cerise lipstick, how Macayla informed me
at recess that if you go in a dark bathroom
in front of a mirror and say bloody mary bloody
mary bloody mary and turn three times, a dagger
will slice your throat while you sleep that night.
She said Santa isn't real and neither is Jesus.
I learn the only real words are words I don't know:
french kissing, masturbation, suicide,
miscarriage, fuck you, tampons.

I flick a wolf spider from my shirt cuff.
I'm afraid of black widow spiders,
their bloody hourglasses and McKay Miller
sleeping overnight in the hospital. But I keep pushing
against the crooked branches and hooks and barbs
because I can hear a creek bubbling in the cherry woods
and the sun looks so warm on the spinning gold leaves
of the giant cottonwood. I know I will be rewarded
if I can reach his feet and lean my ear against his trunk
where he can whisper truth from the ribbed bark
if I can just get past this spot.

Kacy Lundstrom

Like Broken Glass

She cranes her neck, trying to embed memories of the passing colors in her head as they walk. She likes the chartreuse color of the leaves, a word she likes as much as the color itself. She mulls the colors in her head as they walk: chartreuse, cobalt, indigo, cyan.

She turns to find him standing in front of a painting, more defined in shape than the others. "Porcupine Sunshine," he reads aloud, too loud for the heavy silence of the nearly quiet museum.

She scoffs. "You don't like it?" he asks.

"It's not quite as interesting as the others," she replies, as she begins to pull him towards the next painting.

"It's the most real, and it's cheerful. Keep looking," he says, standing solidly in front of it.

She looks. "Those branches slice through it like broken glass. Not cheerful."

"But you're not looking at what's happening through the branches," he says as he points above them to the top of the massive wood panel.

She contemplates the sun. Thick globs of paint move within the nearly perfect circle. A white glaze emanates from the orange orb and hovers in the crevasse of two gray-purple hills. She follows the movement of the painting down to the corner where white paint drips like blood from deep brown branches forming angular shapes at the edges.

He continues backing away from the painting, tugging at her to move with him. She stands firm, her eyes focused on the dissipating shapes that blur in globs of color swathing the canvass in layers too numerous to count. She likes it better here, where she can barely keep from reaching out to feel the paint push beneath the tip of her finger.

He doesn't let go and they stand, arms pulled back at an odd, straight angle. "I love that river. I love the way it cuts through the canyon, the way it brings light," he continues.

She shakes her head as if it hurts to hear him. She hates that the distance from the painting has allowed him to turn it into a photograph. She hates that he is afraid to find himself lost in the color. She hates that he's so damn happy. She feels him tug.

"Come on, Sweetie, let's look at the other stuff."

She pries her fingers free, stretches her fingers wide, and moves closer. She notices how the sun sits behind the branches, and realizes the dark stripes are not broken glass, but tentacles, grasping and splicing through every blurry shape. The sun, like everything else, seems no match for the encroaching branches.

"What are you still looking at?" he asks, impatience leaking in, or perhaps annoyance that her fingers no longer intertwine with his own, but curl in a tight ball, shoved at the bottom of her denim pockets.

She considers his optimism, the sun, the dark lines, and the colors she has ceased to attempt naming. So god damned optimistic. "I'm waiting for the sun to break through the trees," she says softly, moving so closely that she can no longer see shapes; all she feels is the movement of the painting encroaching in upon her, the struggle of colors sliced through with thin, black lines.

BJ Myers

Dual Nature

Many people think of nature as serene, calm, and tranquil – but a closer inspection of nearly any scene will reveal chaos everywhere. No environment exists without constant change and movement. Woody Shepherd has captured this dichotomy in his paintings: a view of his painted scene from a distance reveals a clear, detailed picture, but a closer inspection reveals a flock of colors and a swarm of brush strokes. I was amazed by the range of colors he used – colors that would not normally be associated with plant life, such as bright red, orange, purple and pink. Bright, sharp colors in the foreground and soft, blurry shapes in the background added a stunning sense of depth.

He also used many different techniques and tools to apply the paint to the wood. Sometimes brushes created a smooth effect; sometimes the paint looked like it had been squeezed right out of the tube. Sponges created a leafy texture or were used to create repeated floral patterns. Masking created layers of paint with a sharp contrast, such as the rays of sunlight present in *Cache Paradise*.

I was also impressed by the artist's ability to create a specific mood in his paintings. *Sink Hollow* was filled with bright, moving colors in patches of life; *Shadowsmith Fork* had long, drawn out vines in the monotonous shade of death. *The Elbow* conveyed

Anne Stark

A Narrative Response to Color and Imagery in Woody Shepherd's

Painted Perceptions of Cache Valley Canyons

- | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| A. Fall Green, 2006 | F. Devil's Gate, 2006 |
| B. Beaver Basin, 2006 | G. Porcupine Sunshine, 2006 |
| C. Sink Hollow, 2006 | H. Cache Paradise, 2006 |
| D. Ox Killer Hollow, 2006 | I. Shadowsmith Fork, 2006 |
| E. Blacksmith Bluebird, 2006 | J. The Elbow, 2006 |
| | K. Hell's Kitchen, 2005 |

- a. Leafy sprays on the ash trees frame the window. The black coiled ropes of her hair fall over her throat, and her husband's hands unravel them. A splash of color ignites as he leads her to the bedroom past the spilled box of crayons on the carpet. Yellow green. Periwinkle. Blaze orange. "With sudden intensity, as if she saw it clear for a second, she drew a line there, in the centre. It was done; it was finished."*
- b. When Otis was one-year-old, the three of them lived in Married Student Housing. There was no tub, so she washed her son in a basin. The basin was white enamel lined in red. Water like glitter speckled on his skin, his little parts floating in Johnson & Johnson suds like otters. She molded his hair into mountain peaks and snow covered treetops.
- c. She brushes the leftovers of sandwich makings into the sink. The petals from the roses he gave her already litter the matte surface. Their second anniversary has passed, and the stems in the vase have all but spilled their blossoms. She pulls out the camera from the closet and shoots a picture. Crumbs and roses on aluminum, she calls it.
- d. Her son fell off the swing while she was pushing it. Her mind was on other things: sheathes of ivory paper and the color of gentian violet. She saw the crimson gash right away and she kissed it and took him home from preschool and rocked him in the chair till her husband arrived. There's a hole here, the tooth pushed all the way through, he said. She couldn't stomach the trip to the doctor, but pressed her husband for every detail when they returned. The scar was a silver-blue star on the lower side of his lip. For years she couldn't look at it without guilt.
- e. Let's have a picnic, she tells them. You and me and Otis. They pack a lunch and put it in a buff colored bag. She drives the car. On one switchback taken slowly, her husband calls out, Look at the bluebird. A mountain bluebird next to the yellow Mule's Ear. I don't see the bluebird, Otis cries. Where's the bluebird, I don't see it.
- f. Once when she was at work, insulated from both news and the fresh air, and her husband was home doing the breakfast dishes, Otis tottered out onto 1000 North through an open gate. Neighbors and friends joined in on the search. Compact cars filled with craning necks canvassed the block. Her husband set out on foot. An hour later he saw his son emerge from a gas station restaurant in the hands of a dark haired Indian woman. I feed him naan until you arrive, she said. Her sari was gold and green and lavender.

g. She lost a turquoise necklace once. It was a present from her mother. It had small beads around the neck and a large pendant surrounded by little silver rays. Turquoise is the symbol of tranquility, someone had told her. She retraced her steps. She advertised. She prayed to Saint Anthony. She didn't find it. But sometimes she can feel the little quills of silver caressing her Adam's apple.

h. Even though they now live in the tiny hamlet called Paradise, the kindergarten teacher recommends child registry with the state. To ward off the unimaginable, she thinks. As she transfers Otis' hand into the grip of the uniformed officer, she sees her son's eyes light up. His fingerprints on the sticky white sheet of paper look like red-brown leaves.

i. Mauve is the color of old ladies, her husband tells her. Someday, I will be old and wear mauve, she says. A mauve dress with a yellow scarf. Behind her she hears the clock ticking in the kitchen. Tick Tick Tick. Did you know we breathe a thousand times in one hour? she tells him. Outside the wind under the poplars is whispering these words in the shadows: "summer afternoon."

j. He skinned his elbow when he fell off his bike in the driveway. His tires caught in the loose gravel, he said. The elbow was pink and bloody and speckled with grit. Bigger than a gravel rash. Dripping pink and purple and orange. This time she took him to the emergency room for 20 stitches, 4 of them an interior suture. She pictures the thread dissolving into his bloodstream. Function into form.

k. The heat builds sweat on the appliances. Her underarms are damp. The pink beans are boiling in the pot. The tomatoes need weeding. Okay, she thinks, I can do this. She puts on a black shirt over her tank top and opens the porch door. She bends over the terracotta pots, the heat searing through the shirt to moisten her shoulder blades. The traditional dress in the desert is black, she tells herself. Black is cleansing. Black is the absence of color. White is all colors, despite what you think.

*Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*.

Phoebe Prather

“Hell’s Kitchen”

The root of chaos is stillness. Commotion would be nothing if quiet did not occur, thoughts would not evolve if contemplation was not sought. Branches bearing vibrant leaves have fallen, blocking paths, filling the spaces. Deep litter and shed twigs cover the ground. A stream roars nearby, clouding the senses. There is the feeling of having no where to go, until one relaxes the eyes, ahead is a window, a gap, a space through which all is still, unimpeded ease stretching off into the distance. If only it could be reached.

The paint is rough, layered in thick streaks and globs, colors constantly mixing, battling for attention. Will the eye notice the warm oranges or the maples, or the cool greens of the aspens? Dark smooth trunks and branches cut through the color, fighting behind the scenes of color. But interest is drawn to the center, the eye of the hurricane, the stillness in all the chaos. The middle is smooth, one layer of paint, a golden meadow, a distant purple mountain range, a horizon spreading into the rich blue of the atmosphere.

The mind is chaotic, clouded with thoughts battling for attention. With each thought comes another, and another, and another, until the mind is cluttered, whirling, unable to follow a straight line, to complete its journey to fruition. Ideas spring up from the periphery, only to collide with practicality. Will any revelation occur in the jumbled pile up of the mind? Something occurs at the breaking point, when it seems this maze can not go on, the mind stops, entranced by an image, a feeling, captured in stillness, allowing time for recuperation, for true thoughts to be stored and the rest to drift away, left behind in the chaos as the window of clarity is opened.

Katrine Cox

Sit Too Close

I sit too close
Streaks of black
Curves of lavender
Shuffle and squint

A pace within
Strips of pale
Dabs of grey
Teeth gnaw on a haggard nail

On the inside looking out
I am drowning
A tangle of trees
Knots of golden grass
Writhe and snap, slick, empty
fingers of wood

Half of half
And turn again
Tall they be
Lost am I

A riot of color
The silence begs
Whisper of wind
Caress of leaf

Close my eyes
Step in back
Now see.

For once sit too close
Reveal in it, breath it
See

Logan Lindstrom

From Artist to Patron

I was caught in a moment of silent reverie as I stood gazing at the depictions of cache valley, Utah, in the Nora Eccles Harrison Museum of Art. The art work of Woody Shepherd conjured up thoughts of my past and caused me to look inward for answers. As long as I can remember I have enjoyed looking at paintings and pictures, from winter scenery to portraits, they all seem to have some unknown quality. A quality I can never seem to put a finger on, something to catch the eye or trigger the deep unsettled pining of our souls. Art has been a way for people to express what words cannot since the dawn of time; a way to free our emotion based desires and satisfy the yearning of our inner selves.

Artists seem to portraying themselves and their perspectives in their art but I have found that reflections of my own life are what I see in pictures. The scenic paintings I scrutinized used a wide array of natural and unnatural colors and tones, to express the view of the artist. Also the paintings seemed to have a common theme in that the depictions seemed to be very close, almost in my personal space, though I was ten feet away. Near the center of the work was a small opening in which you could see a distant view, suggesting to me the artist felt oppressed by his life and surroundings, to keep from succumbing to the demands of life he would focus afar off.

After this line of thought persisted for some time I had an epiphany. I realized the way I saw what the artist presented was not necessarily what was intended, but what it connected with in my life. I found that I like art, not because of what the artist is able to do with a brush, but because art relates to me personally. I can see myself and my life and in their work. The painting no longer represents the artist, it represents me.

Tyler Mclean

Beautiful Tranquility

As the sun lazily rises over the mountain rim it casts its warmth on the new summer day. The leaves dance quietly in the gentle breeze. The river wanders its way down the canyon. The familiar sounds sights and smells remind me of the serene peace that nature offers. Nothing else in the world can bring such a sensation of tranquility as nature does.

In viewing the works of art I was at the mercy of my memory as it vividly brought back so many experiences and feelings. With the picture in front of me and my memory working with it I found myself not in reality anymore. I seemed to be back in my memories as though they were present reality. As a rambunctious little boy my adventures always took me away from the world. This was so fun for me to get away from all the chaos of urban life. One such adventure brought my friends and I to a small clearing in the middle of cottonwood river bottom. Almost unanimously we all stated this would be our secret getaway. We found a nice old willow tree by the creek to build our fort. I remember sitting in the finished tree house just listening to the birds chirp and the water trickle down the tangled creek. Paradise would be an appropriate name for such a place. All of this brought back into existence by a painting on a wall. Like a rainstorm cleaning the earth, as were my thoughts purified by the natural beauty of the paints on a canvas.

The aesthetics of the paintings is what brought back the vivid memories. The bright colors of the paints made it seem more realistic. The flow of the design, or the balance of the picture. Summer, a time of the year when everything is bright with color and energy. Caught like a deer in the headlights I gazed at the simple pieces of these paintings. For some reason I could not leave the other dimension I was in.

Brady J. Marble

Sunlight In My Mind

Light poured down from the sky as if welcoming my presence to the world. The pavement lay frozen beneath my feet as I hustled to the museum. A man's painting of a country, I knew better than anybody, wasn't quite my ambition for this morning walk. This thought brushed through my mind as fast as a morning biker on their way to a class.

My early arrival at the lobby left me alone to my thoughts. Peering through the glass doors, my eyes caught sight of large art pieces and abstract figures looming in the dark, waiting for the morning sun to warm them for public viewing. Memories drifted of museum visits of enjoyment I'll never forget. My small body would jump to a stop when I found an interesting activity or magically attractive painting. The large open floors of the museum I was now looking at set a stage for my mind to replay these joyous moments, as the morning light seeped through the windows.

The child of my mind disappeared as soon as another student entered the lobby. My heart sank as the childhood I had seen, flew by, leaving me grown up in this lobby on an early Monday morning. We entered the museum one step behind our instructor. I was taken back by the fun figures and strange art taking up the edge of the floor. I instantly began having fun; I wanted to explore the dark museum as if to discover some ancient artifact or dead body. Possibility lay beyond each doorway and shadow.

We made our way to the top of a large, shallow staircase. Upon turning the corner, paintings of abstract nature filled my view. I strolled around the well lit room to find a painting, something that I could recognize and relate to. Around a corner and further into the exhibit, I began to change my perspective of my situation. So much like my early childhood memories, I unexpectedly began having fun.

The art pieces were taller than my own frame. I couldn't see much in the abstracts but I understood what they were depicting. One was a view of a canyon from behind a vine entanglement; another, a small clearing seen through pine trees. 'How unbelievably familiar' I thought. Moving closer to the large painting, it was as if I were expecting to step through frame and go back to this place I knew. Large blots of thick oil paint, random in color. Intrigued by the depiction of a dead tree, I noticed the use of bright oranges and blues. These paint blotches stuck out so far that I had to get a slanted look at the painting for a perspective of the thick oil paint. My eyes suddenly forgot what it was they were looking at. I stepped back; ten, twenty, thirty feet till my eyes saw the original image. The bright colors of blue and orange were virtually inexistent, as my eyes searched sharply for these colors amidst the depiction of trees. The shadows of these trees were incredible. This place could truly be anywhere; and wherever it was, I had been there. The forest glen I saw in the painting wasn't one certain place. It simply showed my summer escape. This view my eyes recognized as I had spent so much time myself in the mountains above this small Valley.

The sunlight in the pictures jumped out just as I saw rays of the sun dash the frozen ground outside I had recently walked upon. The sunlight I saw gave me hope, a dream I keep in my mind for the rainy seasons. When no clearing is in sight, I think of the sunlight warming my skin. Some call it meditation; I don't have a name for it. I know it takes my pains and stress away and leaves me with a surge of endorphins in my body. I love the sunlight, nothing compares. May it never leave my mind.

John Seay

The Spectrum of Communion

The quilt of leaves that overlaps the forest floor sponges beneath heavy steps and is rearranged. Overhead the canopy of brittle branches spider-web the cloud-dark sky and creak and crack like the splayed fingers of elderly men. The colors in this wooded wild are alternatively vibrant and muted with approximate oranges and reductions of red. Here, the many mechanisms of nature act in perfect accord.

In the forest there is a heightened sense of perception. Sounds and colors shift and change as atmospheric conditions beyond their control move them. What these eyes see now can never again be recreated—with each second the forest breathes and shifts irreparably, allowing more light in here, limiting it there, or changing colors gradually and as the sun begins to set. The forest is like the river, constantly moving, constantly the same, and yet constantly changing—different from one second to the next.

The forest is different, too, from five more steps down the path, or ten back up it, or with one eye closed tight against the wind, shimmering the light and blurring the edges of the forest. This same scene again is different when viewed from across the valley, or from above. Cezanne was aware of this phenomenon; he painted the same mountain over and over again, capturing it at all hours of the day, and throughout different seasons, in a process something like taking communion.

Perhaps Cezanne wondered how something immemorial and yet transient could be adequately apprehended. Perhaps he recognized the qualitative and intrinsic difference between nature and expressed nature, and that to express something

is to exclude something else. Reproduction is, at best, recreation of the inspirational object, a copy for which there exists no original. Every attempt at recreation, then, is metaphor, and metaphor is the essence of all communication. The forest is a tangle of metaphors, the mingling—and source—of all meaning.

Even with eyes closed the unobserved shapes are still present—even in darkness the forest exists, though it is light that illuminates it, that plays across its edges, highlighting those burnt oranges and reds or healthy greens that might otherwise have remain obscured. When the lights are flipped on, these shapes become apparent—and their forms bolster the landscape of colors. Another metaphor of space exists between the viewer and the viewed, and the sundry dimensions of awareness that comprise our human condition resolve this disconnect. The myriad lenses of our perception provide harmony.

In the forest, the lattice of leaves overlap like multiple meanings, like the interplay of connotations and denotations. How can these meanings be adequately assembled? Perhaps every landscape painting is simulacra, fantasy, surreal. Everything that is painted is painted because something else was not—or could not be—painted. Maybe the answer is at the center of it all—that swathe of wet paint, that final stroke that instead of seeking to approximate the thing, now recreates it. This process—this act of recreation—is the apotheosis of artistry, and a true tribute to nature.

R.A. Daines

Part One: Life

I can't see what's in front of me.
I eye bright piercing light
a way of looking at the world and seeing too
much being blind then

Walk closer to the painting,
hands out blindly
see that
life
isn't
paint
see life like that though

Too much like chocolate covered cherries too
sweet too dripping too red an eye candy store

lids slide shut.
sun beating down
lashes burn
The sky a brilliant shade
of blue is every shade
of grey.
Landscapes flattened out far away
close up a branch hits face

grass behind it just a blur. Not as real as the sting
in your eye sore.

The eye takes in too much
drinks too deep
detailed branches turn out to be flat
the sun isn't meant to be stared at

white
neither is the moon
white
but grey
detail shouldn't be found, but imagined
passed over and painted in later as
memory demands.

Part Two: Life

Taste a snatch of light

then remember sweeter, deeper, on the
edge of tongue sliding down throat taste
depth of perception layer on layer of paint
having never tasted at all

Read the rules in an add for Bacardi
It should bounce down
like fun life is
so it does
bubbling
at every party we remember
drunken detailed fun.
Fuzzy or Hazy.
Just so. Our head bobs to the tune
of magnolias swinging.

in the morning light eye sore life.
I can't see what's in front of me.
eye bright piercing light

a way of looking at the world and seeing
too much being blind then

Ryan Miller

The Neon Forests

Sitting in the forest garden
away from the Armageddon race
the grey damp scene
the visions through
panes of leaves

tranquil still
of lavender trees
the yellow green leaves
the tree branch veins
staining the pallet, deranged

cobweb cables,
and thorn brush nails
the still life sonata
of neon nonsense,
the chaotic objects
progress
of ordered madness

blue brook broods
perfect, pine brook interludes
the fly trap holds,

the snakeskin limbs
dark mirror streams
brilliant opaque reflections
shining through
the panes of leaves

C. D Clawson

Layers

Storyteller, priest,
doctor or musician.
All know this simple fact:
we live a life of layers.
For every truth there is a fiction.
For every right there is a wrong.
No healing without harm.
No sound without silence.

This, too, the artist
knows; he works in layers
of light.
A color alone is but
a blinding tone no
matter its
warmth, its
radiance, its
penetration.

It stands
without change or end or meaning
dimensionless.
Wider than infinity; impossible
to comprehend for
we live a life of
contrast.

What would this blue
plane be without this shining yellow
orb? Or the white
of sunlight without the blue-black
somber of shadows?
No shimmering river
to cut through this
sage-swathed canyon.
No crisp leaves
to conceal these wiry trees.

Layers to limit and enliven.
Layers to cooperate and create
in contrast.

Amanda Erickson

Chasing Yellow
“Sink Hollow”

he's painting the Ocean,
upside down
and with a forest in the way.
the sunlight's the tree. the focal point of the collage.
you could touch it,

but your fingers will come back wet.
It's the most vivid explosion of “the secret garden”
I've ever seen.
Dribbles of paint,
leaking,
escaping,

oozing down from up
black: absence of color.
white: absence of color.
speckled, poisoned forest--leaking toxic under the cover of a smile.
garden of Eden graffiti.

Melanny Cowley

The Elbow

Alavender mountain,
a ribbon of red paint skirting
from the bough of a tree
Colors hiding,
even as I discover them.

I recall, like a memory,
The dream.
a loved one's wedding in the yard,
blooms sagging from the trees
in unnatural numbers,
all colors.

Exaggeration of beauty
finds peace.

I don't see the carnival forest.
I walk through it.
I feel the boundaries of color
rip from me,
the excision of reality
drawn from my core.

And I do not miss it.

Megan Farnsworth

Museum Cold

I sit in the liminal space
in the entry way between
the balcony of the museum
and the Woody Shepherd exhibition.

I hear the hiss of the air
conditioning system
and I am disturbed by a
classmate seeking a space
of her own, even as
she disrupts mine with
the whisk of her jeans
as they rub out the rhythm
of her walk between her thighs.

I wonder,
do they hear that hiss?
the museum administrators?
the curator?
do they know that it
detracts from the beauty
Woody Shepherd is trying to
create for me?

I'll be honest. I came
ready to write about how
wasps display things in
white sterile environments.
here, in Logan, Utah, it's no
different than there,
in New York, New York,
the Nora Eccles,
the Museum Of Modern Art

the cold quiet makes
creativity infertile
you really have to dig
for it in your mind
turn over the crusty soil
of these displays collecting

dust and put yourself
next to Woody in his
truck as he drives

purposefully to his place
his temple, his painting.
You have to stretch to
remember the creative power
invested in all these pegged
palates- the leaves, the reeds
the hot red willows by the
breathing stream.

You have to try to be alone
and see, when other humans
want to shape your perspective.
When you drive them away
from before Woody's
Devil's Gate with the same
cold stare this museum
puts off from the ground up

It's not fair for me to discriminate.
I don't roil when an author's
words are printed on a white page.
But the tractable, tactile, transient
nature of book and ink
gives place for personal
journeys on paper.

And really, I came here to think.
to sort things out about
the chill in my life
the cool unconcern of others.
We hide our eyes behind
cathode rays,
when it is here before this
panel I am amazed.
Awed at the realization

that to see Monet
his water lilies on display
caught my throat
jugular up
trained my eye
iris ahead
to understand
how water
how oil
how brush strokes in every green

Woody, your colors make me
live.
Like vitamin D saved for a cloudy
day.

and the only thing that adds to this
experiences and takes my mind
from
listening to the museum hiss,
is knowing that nature grained
pulp and pollen on these
paintings, on the road, with the wind
that blew over Woody Shepherd
and his colors, and layers, and
textures,

molecules and dandelion dander
old wives promising wishes
kept and time spent
and I fear
that love of earth might be
my Devil's Gate. that love,
of this terrestrial sphere might
forever keep me.

My shoulders are chilled.

My curves are cold. Search for
grocery stores. Find gratitude. Turn
a simple search into something
more.

Ben Abbott

“The Elbow”

I also grew up in the foot hills and mountains. Peace is the color of the sun through the aspens that seems to drench the world in a heady bioluminescence. Shepherd knows just as much about as much as me—he knows what the skunk cabbage looks like and that it’s futile to try to identify the hundreds of yellow composites, anonymous in their heterogeneity. They will follow the sun, even in the aspen glow. It’s our desert jungle, a subtropical breathing mass of fresh—contrast to the car-choked city—accessible by bike, by foot, or for Shepherd by canvassed truck. Despite my fierce resentment of motor vehicles, I would sanction his passing. Only because he knows what I know—that there are too many leaves to count, and that the oil-impression he’ll drive home with is just gesture, a sloppy indication of the photosynthesis-fueled genetic blueprint that crafted each twig and waxy leaf independently.

Why the meadow? The trees could obviously grow here too but there’s a break. The forest knew he was coming and made room for his easel.

His sophistication is in impression. Daisy stamps and maple stencils work with suggestive blobs of color—an ecosystem on the canvas and a sheet of Plexiglas when he can’t paint the brush with a paintbrush.

I recognize these places. I know they are Utah and my guts twist when I look at them. They’re seductive, but in a bright and explicit way, like when your canteen is empty but you push on up the blue-limestone canyon.

Populus tremuloides—I wonder if Shepherd knows they reproduce by suckers—that his foreground might be the same organism that illuminates his background.

He paints what the loggers didn’t see, what the developers never looked at, what the city dwellers don’t even know exists: a humming productivity and dynamic equilibrium.

Kristal Shegrud

I have never felt the strain of insanity pulling me, telling me
that I can no longer make meaningful contributions.

Trees grow out of water

I spy through finery branches

The sky and water in harmony

A white path to the water

A daisy sun framed with leafless branches The sun's rays hit the branches, the bushes at the water's edge,
the water- and then it glistens and smiles back at its flower.

My eyes are drawn to the sun. You are not supposed to stare at the sun, but my eyes won't leave it. It
is a perfect circle, but that's not all. It will spread from background to foreground. This sun is active. It's
swirling, spinning, and jumping. The white halo becomes colorful beams that hit everything.

Shadows cover long rectangles on the ground; a Foreshadow of the winter that will come, but it's Just a
hint right now- something I know I should worry about, but it's too far away, a dark ridge.

Most of the leaves have fallen, some are still thinking about it.

I love the leaves. Some look like they are opening up like tulips. Some are bright, almost yellow. Some are
starfish and others are bells.

I'll spend time making them look different because they matter.

The goal is to have a reason for all action that takes place in this painting, and then marvel at the beautiful
unintended.

The leaves catch the light and hold it. They are bowls.

Once things hit the ground they get lost blended, unsure of what they are, and what they once were:

I think I was a leaf once.

And in comes purple. Purple, what are you doing?

A slash here, and a hint there

Christopher Cokinos

Blacksmith Bluebird

We name a place even as we change it, and we place names to change--nitrogen cycle, precession, proton decay--and so change becomes a kind of place too, wildness rendered into an announced thing, but fixity's a flux, and Woody Shepherd's glare-flattened cliff--the colors of pale sand, rock of old sea-dead--tower against the powder-blue afternoon, so it's all hard to follow, hard to say, but the cliff against the canvas sky stays put for now and it's beautiful to see.

Don't you love how words compass us, how the paint does too, even as we spin?

So suppose we're in it, suppose we're in the foreground shade beside a lilaced boulder or two, and fallen maple leaves hang caught in stalks of spent cheat and on the leaves of coneflowers, whose brown rocket noses sturdy up toward the midground. Suppose we're under the dainty-angry flurry of blowing leafless branches, their lines and the intimations of lines, which we might call shadows. There's wind and our breathing, the only sounds. Out there, paces ahead to where the trail should be, the green shade ends in a line, a border, at the sunny field. But we don't stand there, warm from our walk, and we let chill air stipple us while black lines whippet, your hair that lashes cheekbones.

That's when we see how the branches are more than black, how they are laced and curled with colors--pinks, greens, blues--as if they capture motion, like the painted waves in Charles Burchfield's watercolors.

All these crazy strands and blebs of color! It's a subatomic change, a new world. In our usual world, touch is a kind of illusion. The repulsive force of electrons means that two objects never really meet but hold near at just an angstrom. We don't really sit or walk or caress, Bill Bryson tells us, we levitate at a distance of a hundred millionth of a centimeter, a distance so negligible we go ahead and call it fact, call it intimacy. But here in the painting, "Blacksmith Bluebird," Woody Shepherd has altered the laws of physics; electrons no longer push against each other, so leaves, twigs, blades of grasses, blades of light, rocks, soil, all can pass through each other--because atoms are mostly voids--the way we imagine ghosts might walk through walls. It must have been that last night, in the painting's canyon, a quantum wind came through and blew things down to their cloudy cores and mixed all this up. Up trail, electrons litter the doug fir duff like pollen.

Therefore, black strokes brush the cliff view so that junipers triangled in the distance might be leaves nearer still. Therefore, branches take on the colors of blossoms. One thing is partly another thing. And do I change the change in the electrons? What else am I?

There are questions worth asking that we can never answer, so what suffices for an answer is simply what we see: like here, the near leaves are these: maple, fall-green-to-gold and mostly fallen.

With those leaves down, we can see the dogwood just over there, how that stand of them flares red trunks and stems, little fires that last all winter until a too-warm spring leafs them out again. That cold front has scrubbed clean the sky. This is a transmutation alchemists dreamed about. The sky is a bluebird.

The sky and the bluebird that is the sky are made by the far flattened cliff and the close lattice of plants, flicks and filigrees and daubs, the pressed impasto too scattered to be strata.

I think, "Ah yes, Leatham Hollow."

The cliff. The cliff beneath the sky. Beneath the bluebird. Beneath the ocean. Beneath the probability haze of wave and particle. This is where we stand, breathing, our bodies touching for the first time, really, our hands passing through tightened skin, the cathedrals we call ribs.

Of course we think of dying. I know the dead impress themselves on earth. The earth lifts them to make of sea a range. (On a map, the mountains are squiggled

lines.) We lift the dead out in places like this--ridged depressions that mark the body, perhaps, of a trilobite--where paint shines and thickens like milkweed puffs, like burst virgin's bower we step across as someone lifts out slabs of fossils to prepare or the painter chains flat canvas in the back of a truck.

And he drives away, the painter, whom we had mistaken for a box elder, protons and neutrons swirling like backwash dust as he heads down a dirt track, then onto Left Hand Fork, then back down Blacksmith Fork Canyon, where the river is running beneath rocks the color of mountain lions watching.

We decide to stay awhile, attenuating ourselves into the foreground smear of blood, no, just red, beneath a maple leaf, no the rendering of a maple leaf, red like dopplered starlight in which we find the lovely quiet of breath that attends change and not-change. We watch as particles settle back into the clouds that keep the things of this world what they are, which are also lovely, and we walk out into cold sunlight holding hands.