

ANTHROPOCENE

The time it takes to fill a bottle with milk,
for the breast to replenish its reservoir
from whatever mysterious milky glacier.
Some day these ice caps will melt.
This is just an age, an epoch, a season.
Remember what happened to the dinosaurs?
whisper the small mammals that somehow got away with it,
out from under the radar of the meteor dustbowl.
Just us and those tiny feathered lizards.
Dude what about the trilobites?
They once were fucking ubiquitous,
churning up the seas
with their armored plates and thrashing tails.
The electric breast pump wheezes and clacks.
Some day it too will be forgotten in a tar pit,
or crystallized in amber, along with
the ants and crumbs on the countertop,
or viewed with interest in this rock strata
dating its evolution of particular
jar shapes, phalanges, and tube-like feelers.
Will the mammals keep up?
The milk makers burning everything down,
the forests, the black air, the fiery sky.

5 TO 200 ARMS

Nerve endings, pulse-point concentrated into the shape of
the color blue, deepening into
the underside of autumn's fanciful carapace.
The sun raises its cup, and its 5 to 200 arms along with it,
and bears no ill will to my face turning away.
Sir, this is no time for magic
or the reproductive figure of a rabbit pulled from a top hat.
Was that the flourishing of a cape or just
a flap of the fabric of my life,
a little flimsier, a little slipperier, than I had thought it.
Sorry, I'm about to get on a plane to fall in love
with a person named Marina Cosmonaut.
Though lacking a head, teeth, or jaws, the stars
devour us with their fateful energies,
and we put on our glass head spheres
the better to breathe with—
become our own best Specimen X we'd never dream to part with.
We're all just meat tied to the spiritual line,
radulas raking, cellular metal ticking North,
a parachute of frothy mucus bubbles sailing us home.
I mean, come here you sexy cosmonaut, in your
heavy boots of lead, to live again.

GROCERY STORE 10 p.m.

How did you not see at first that the truck
had fallen face first off the loading dock?
The moon is an ember burning in a bowl of water.
What did you do with the coupon?
We are all particles orbiting a dark center.
Today the baby revealed the socks hidden in the blender.
Perseid meteor showers on August's horizon.
Today is your father's birthday or you have already missed it.
Someone bumped into you and you couldn't breathe.
Today we said, "Is it so bad?" And the baby said, "Yeah."
Every painting of blue you wanted to step through.
It was right there before.
Smoke from the wildfires on all sides
mixed with pungent ocean air.
Caution tape an afterthought around us.

SOLVE FOR X

If I say “fossil fuel”
or “turn about is fair play,”
it’s OK if you look at me
like I’m a unicorn
in spectacles—

just spare me the Ferris wheel of eyes,
the full moon rising over the ghost home.
And don’t come at me like some Hermes on a Sunday
with your winged flipflops
steam-ironing the streets.

I just mean the seas are rising
and our beds with it, and the dolphins
are picking the locks of our subconscious,
busting open our dreams
like a poorly packed cardboard box.

You can keep your sexual dimorphism
(if you still want it, that old plaything).
Just admit the truth
of the skunk and the scrub brush.
And I will take one more turn
on the ancient airport parking lot exit spiral.

You won’t get any medals but go ahead and say it:
the nuclear family tract home choo-choo pollution puke fest
is killing us.

But never say what’s killing me,
right here, today,
the secret X in the apartment complex.

SNAKES' TONGUES

A snake's tongue can be black, or red, or cream, or blue.
It licks the scent particles off the air,
and in stereo (hence the split speaker).
I don't have such a booming vomeronasal system,
though when alarmed, I, too, sometimes extend the tongue
in exaggerated fashion. It's rare that I track infrared
with my heat pits, though sometimes I do still take hits
off the tree of knowledge, think about the time
before I chatted up that dame, when I was real leggy.
Look, I didn't lie—we didn't die (then):
our eyes, like our tongues, were opened.

UNRELIABLE ART ANALYSIS

Scanning quickly, I'm trying to tell the difference
between the poem and the fiction, the long-form reporting
and the anecdote. Which page do I turn to
if I like this painting for the wrong reasons?
Namely, that I am in this small waiting room
waiting for radiation 5 days a week at close quarters.
I spend a long time not fully processing its pastels.

This is either a flower or an echinoderm?
Or maybe just a beach scene and I am turned up very high.
There is also a locker with a glass front door
filled with warm blankets and you can just take one
(or even two) for yourself to carry in.
There's some chitchat in the hallway maybe.
"What has happened underground?"
is not something they ask.
Now the robotic tube slides over my body,
except my hands, out in front of me superman-style,
both of which are clutching crystals,
and on my wrists the Virgin Mary
on a tangled golden string from kindergarten
and resurfaced now (a miracle!) just in time
and the hemp bracelet B. wove for me (strength and flexibility),
and I don't mention Archangel Michael who stands
outside the tube by my head and definitely not
the shadow goddess who slides ninja-like into the tube with me,
covering my body with hers and protecting what she can.
I don't mention this to the med techs, that I believe
in both the kitten and the conspiracy.

The techs leap out of the room before we start,
because it is dangerous in this lightning pool.
Charity for all, malice for none,
but it left out the third team from the equation.
I am convinced it helped, it all helped.
Even the doubts. Even the "you made it!"
certificate at the end of the 6 weeks,

signed sweetly by the whole med tech team,
like I was graduating. And here I am, turning the page,
turning into a poem, it's a long story,
or no, just a thing that happened, used to happen,
just a sailboat-flower-echinoderm I used to know.

SIERRA NELSON

Sierra Nelson's books include *The Lachrymose Report* (Poetry NW Editions) and, collaborating with artist Loren Erdrich, *I Take Back the Sponge Cake* (Rose Metal Press). Nelson is also president of Seattle's Cephalopod Appreciation Society and co-founder of performance art collaborations the Vis-à-Vis Society and The Typing Explosion.

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