



MYSTIC MOUNTAIN

Whispering in the Wind

WILLIAM MICHAEL ZUK

POETRY BY

AFROSE FATIMA AHMED



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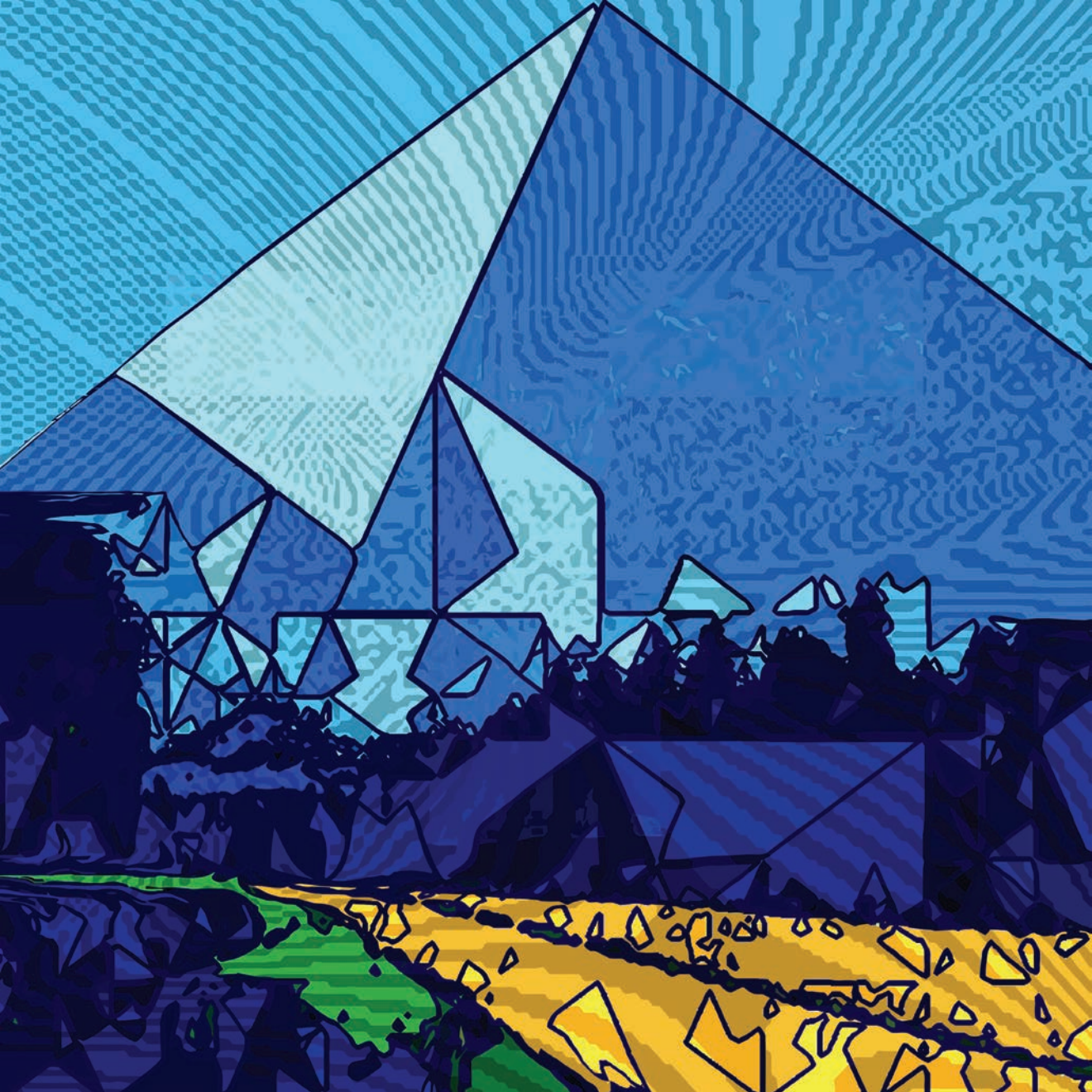
AFROSE FATIMA AHMED

Revised Edition 2020

Based on a set of 23K gold stenciled prints and the poetically narrated film *Mystic Mountain* by William Zuk co-produced with Jay Larson.

Design and Layout by Jay Larson.

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Dedication



To Brita and Robb who gave their unwavering love and support throughout this project with its gems of colour and evocative words.

To the power of gazing and imagining and the celebration of mountains everywhere, I pay tribute.

Opposite page:

Diamond Mountain. William Zuk.
Adapted from a 2003 artwork, National Art Education Association Juried Electronic Art Exhibition. Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Foreward



Artist Bill Zuk and poet afrose fatima ahmed are an inspirational fit. This volume is a result of a chance meeting. She, an improvisational poet penning poetry-on-demand, banging out verse on an old manual typewriter. He, an accomplished multimedia artist and printmaker exploring new creative horizons of digital image manipulation. Both bring the immediacy of improvisation to their respective tasks. Their two backgrounds also merge as complementaries. afrose brings her immersion in revolutionary Urdu poetry and the spiritual landscape of both her central India homeland and the shores of the Pacific Northwest. Bill finds a spiritual passion constantly refreshed from his wide-ranging interests in aboriginal belief systems and a fascination with the vast polar landscapes of the Canadian North. Their pairing reveals a special bond they both share with the earth, raw nature, and the drama of civilizational evolution in response to both.

The meditative linkage of sacred text with hyper-coloured images owes its origins of course to late medieval illuminated books of hours. And like them, here the poems and illustrations

work together to transport the reader into another world, a world which the artistic and poetic imaginations merge and intertwine. Voices, words and lines, shape-shifting metaphors and colours, palimpsests of emotions and meanings comprise the soundscape of this cosmos for which we are encouraged, for a moment, to suspend disbelief. afrose's verses exhibit an almost sonnet-like intensity, brevity and compression of phrase and metaphor. Bill's images are tone-poems in vivid colours and bold graphic shapes and forms which often jump from the page with trompe-l'oeil effect.

The volume opens with Calling Moon. The poet contemplates an ancient goddess seeking musical measure, a harmony of spheres, in the clockwork movements of the heavens; on the accompanying page a shadowy flautist plays into a starry firmament while the earth floats away suspended in a psychedelic mist. These visual and poetic metaphors are extended in Cosmic as both artists continue to explore the notion of measuring infinities, the mariner's astrolabe as a way-finder to chase the stars, to reach into eternity.

Mountain Ice brings us down to earth, or at least the dimension of its deep history. The image conjures up layers of glacial till refracted through an abstract prism. The poet imagines us dancing across long-forgotten and abandoned Pre-Cambrian river beds. Wind Tree appears as a skeletal tortured form set against a deconstructed boulder-strewn landscape. The poet, however, seeks the embrace of its branches, hoping to find solace from the well-springs of creation embedded deep in the embers of a not-yet-extinguished ancestral spirit. Camus Manna is a concrete West Coast reference, the flowering plant presented with botanical verisimilitude reaching into a distant mist-enshrouded sun. The narrator-poet responds with an exhortation for revelation, to break through the veils that obscure our experience of the life-forces that course through the natural world, the regenerative cycle from seed, to flower, to earth. Nighthawks, in the pairing of that title, flock across a penumbral sky, escaping a jagged fiery tumult to a quieter star studded universe. But we also learn hawks will readily accompany us as mentor-companions as we journey through the dream-world of sleep, and even death.

This dance of the two artists finds perhaps its most intimate embrace in Hidden. Surging abstracted forms suggest furnace-red mountain peaks rising through a shimmering luminescent mist to challenge a foreboding, even threatening sky. Stars are mere pinpricks in the far distance. The tightly woven imagery of the poem reflects on the creator as painter-poet. Herein the hues and tones are drawn from the very life-forces of an anthropomorphic landscape to give itself not just the substance of coloratura but also form to the messenger of its own meaning.

Bill Zuk and afroah ahmed take us on a stimulating meditative journey. “We are such stuff as dreams are made on; and our little life is rounded with a sleep” in the words of Shakespeare’s Prospero. We should offer thanksgiving for that, and to them.

Professor Martin Segger.
M.Phil; FRSA; FCMA,
Research Associate, Centre for Global Studies,
Professor Emeritus & Adjunct Professor,
Department of Art History & Visual Arts,
University of Victoria.
Victoria, British Columbia.
October 2018

Introduction



Mystic Mountain, Whispering in the Wind was conceived from drawings, photographs, 23K gold stenciled prints and a series of titled images interpreted in poetic form. The images originate from the aura and majesty of mountains and their connection with ancient times and cosmic forces. Poetic interpretations add an eloquence to the artwork, and a harmony of ideas born out of a unified storm of creativity.

Mountains, those mystical wonders of the world with ancient stories told in sediment and stone, whose distant past reaches deep into the swirls of mist and time; mountains that connect us with the stars and the far reaches of the universe; holding us spellbound with their majesty and lofty heights; mountains where we can gaze and reflect and imagine, and lose ourselves in reverie. Let every child - let everyone have mountains in their midst.

*Some of the greatest artistic accomplishments
grow out of sharing ideas, working together,
and creating with a common purpose.*

wmz

*When visual art and poetry combine
with one another, they become powerful
vehicles of expression.*

wmz

Whispering in the Wind



I hike the grassy slopes and rocky cliffs to the ‘mountain in the sky’. A fog horn drones, then echoes in the billowing rolls of grey. Perfumed moisture lingers in the morning mist. I breathe deeply of its essence.

Rough-hewn boulders scatter on a rocky ridge, reminders of a distant past when everything was ice and snow, when mountains were carved into pointed peaks. Now flowers blanket the grassy meadows with dashes of yellow, blushes of orange, and a sea of purple waving in the wind. Gnarled oaks lean into the gusts while butterflies hide in blossoms and shadows.

I reach the mountain top where the roundness of the world lies before me. This is where ravens ride the open winds and nighthawks dip in dangerous dives in the darkness of the night. This is where the cosmos opens up to twinkling stars and comets streak with flashing tails.

And this is where the wild wind whispers secrets in the silence of the night.

Mt. Tolmie is located in an urban neighborhood park in Victoria, British Columbia. Its bedrock forms part of my home and yard. I have come to know it intimately over the years, hiking its slopes, sensing its majesty and life forces, and observing its unique qualities as a vibrant ecological system worthy of care, protection and restoration. Creating stenciled prints, poetic narrations, and film productions concerning Mt. Tolmie's spiritual nature and mystical wonders has been a pleasure.



**'Mystic Mountain
Mosaic' image.**
*Canadian Review
of Art Education
cover. Vol. 46, No.
1 (2019)*
William Michael Zuk

Mystic Mountain



*I dream
Of snow capped mountains
That stretch
Out to the sea.*

*I dream
Of all the places
That set my thoughts
Afree.*

*The mountain
Calls
With slopes
Of rock and snow
My mind
Lingers
In its beauty
My thoughts
Begin to slow*

*I listen
To the wind
In trees
Their boughs
Swing to and fro
The rhythms
Of my heartbeat
Grow so ever slow*

*I see
The streams
Of morning mist
Rising from the deep
I dream
Of billowing
Rolls of fog
Gathering
In my sleep*

*I hear
The swish
Of swaying grass
Bending with
Such ease
I see
A spider
Spinning threads
Weaving spirals
In the breeze*

*I hear
The rattle roll
Of thunder
Rumbling
In a cloud
And the patter
Of the rain drops
Growing
Ever loud*

*I feel
The warming rays
Of sunshine
With flowers
Yellow, blue and red
Strengthening
Fond memories
Flowing
Through my head*

*I see
The flight
Of a thousand
Butterflies
Dancing
At the peak
Soaring
To the misty blue
I wonder
What they seek*

*I hear
The calming call
Of night birds
Bringing daytime
To a close
The whirring wings
Of nighthawks
Their air
Whispers
As it flows*

*I gaze
At beams
Of silver moonlight
Shining from afar
And rays
Of glowing starlight
From a very
Distant star*

*I see
The dance
Of the Aurora
And the glow
Of rippled light
And dots of fading
Twinkling
In the silence
Of the night*

*And in this
Time of stillness
My mind
Is swept away
To enjoy
The quiet
Of the moment
Let the mountain
Have her way*

*May peace
And calm
And stillness
Be found
In every place
May it stir
Our hearts
With fullness
And fill
The world
With peace and grace*

Epilogue

*Come
Come on
Come on celebrate
Come on celebrate the mountain
Come on celebrate all mountains
Come on celebrate
Their glory
And their
Greatness*



Film script for
Mystic Mountain
by
William Michael Zuk

Calling Moon

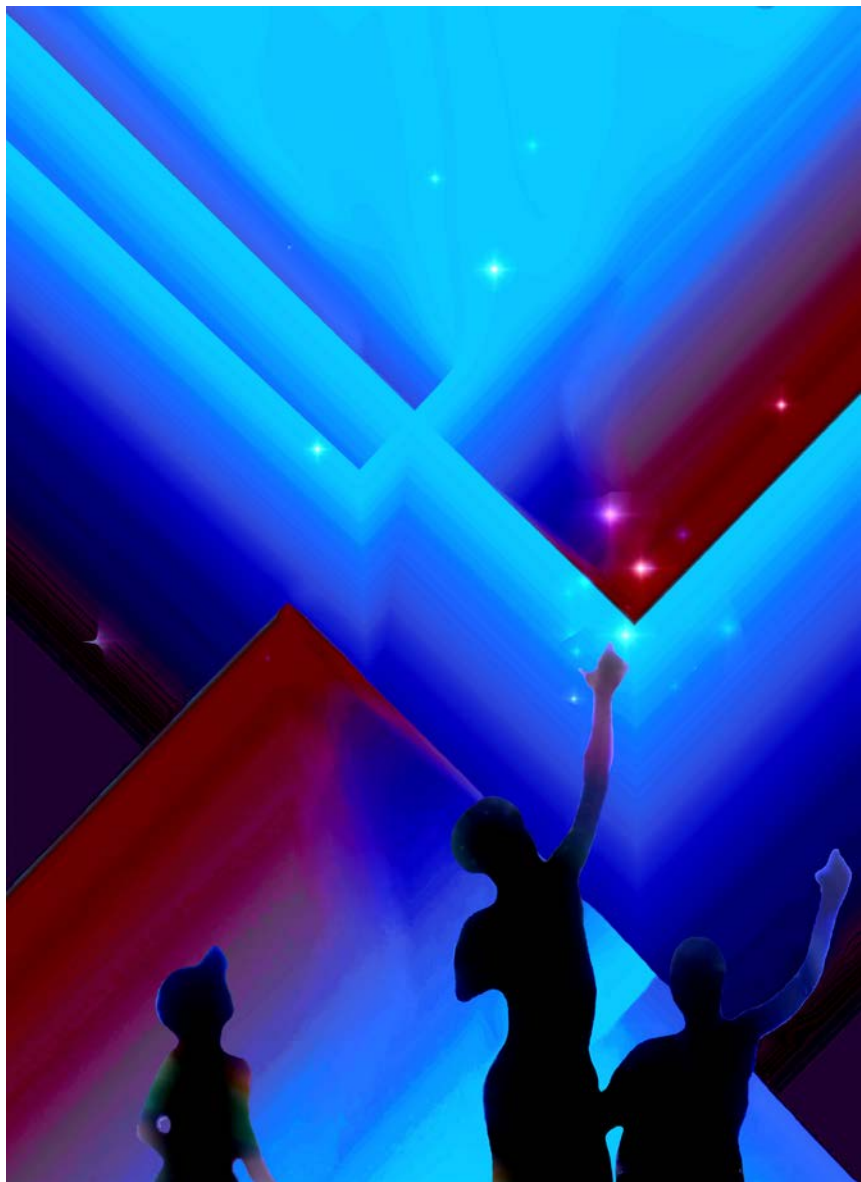
I massaged melody out of the ether.

My flute played the music
of the moon & her attendant tides,
my hair whipped as the land breezes
left the earth for the open skies.

My breath fed to me
by whispers of distant ochre horizons,
the goddess of great gears
of the clock of the cosmos
performing mouth to mouth,
my fingers tapping
a harmonious Morse code onto my instrument,
uncovering the song of souls
caught in between worlds.







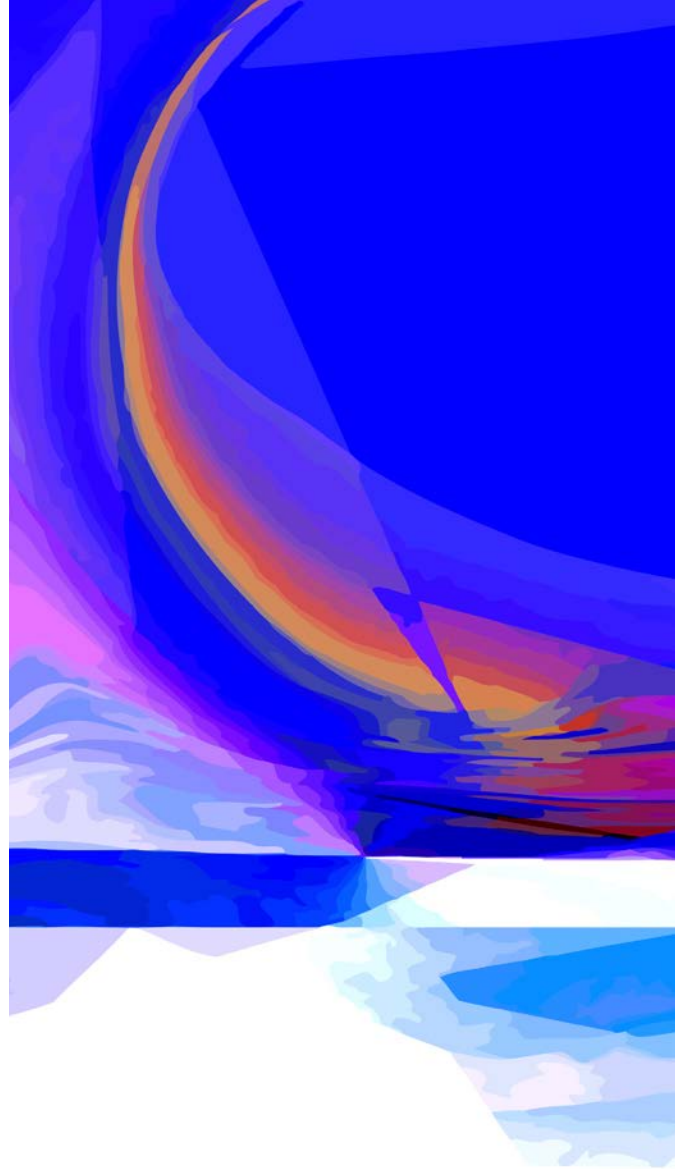
Cosmic

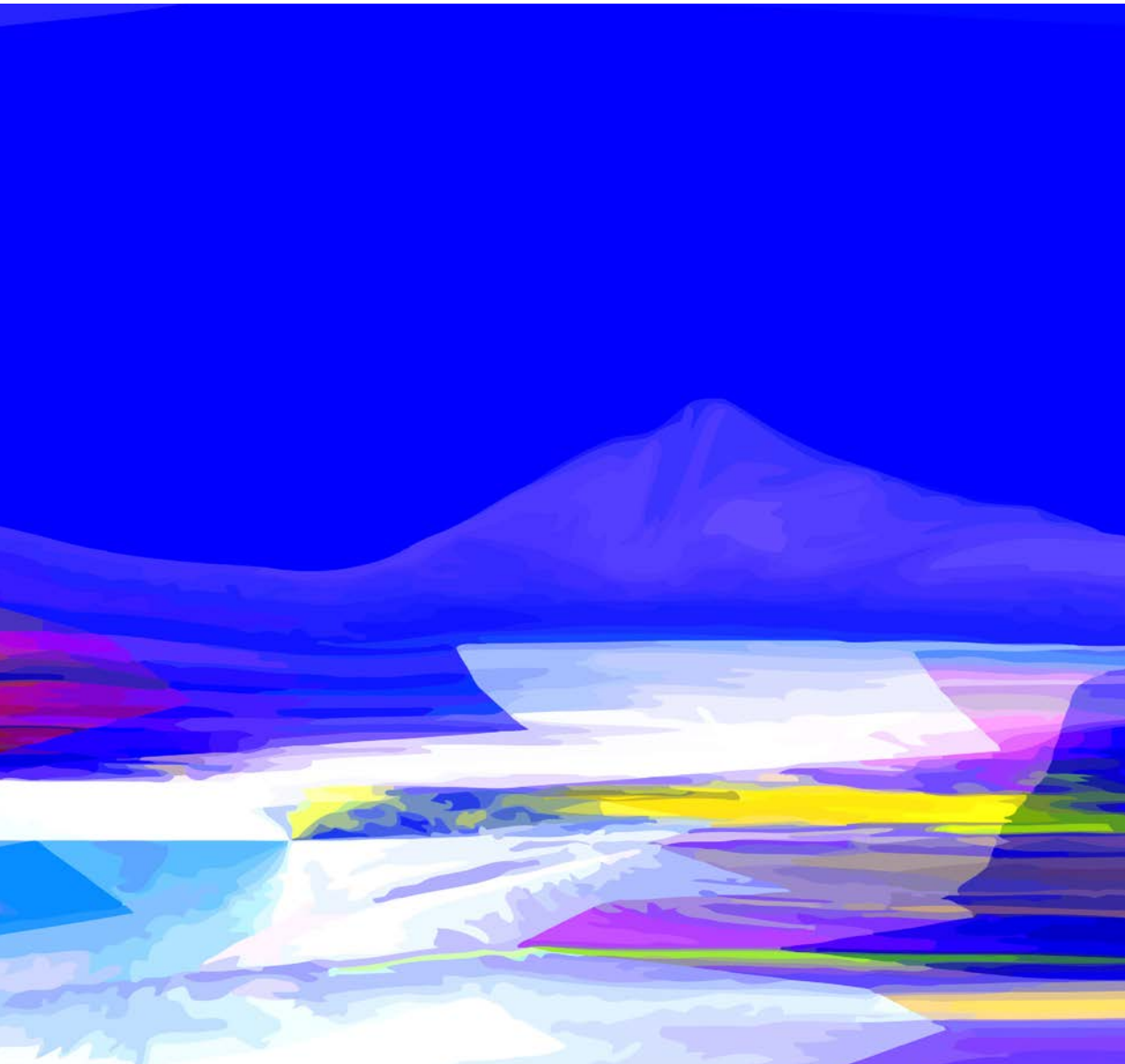
This dance was not
spiral, but a triad embodied.

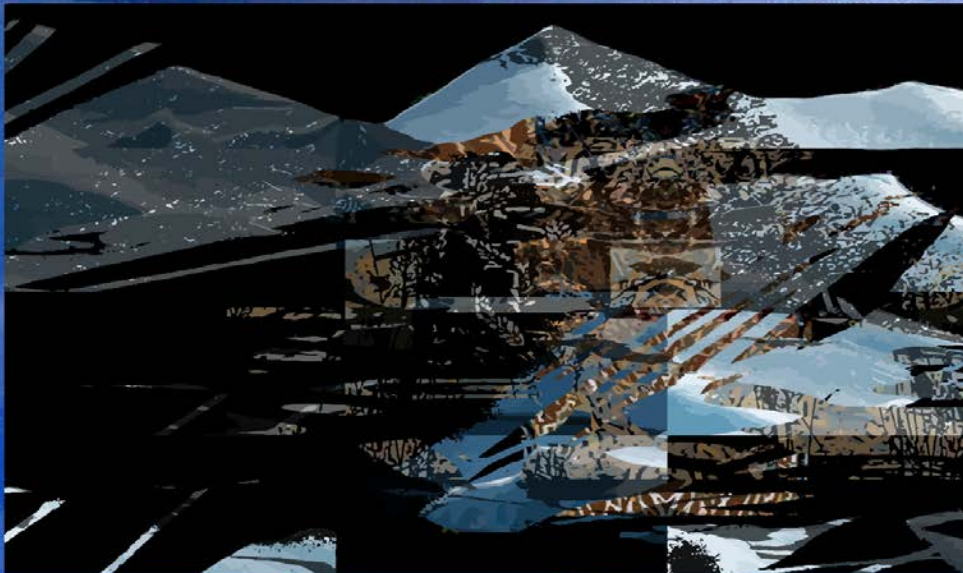
The three dots
of the constellations
most beloved by mariners
creating points to which
we could raise our index fingers
and see home sketched
there, somewhere just beyond
the sky, our cheekbones
cutting an illustration onto the heavens
the way the painter cuts oil pigments
with a hard edge, first mulberry, then
dyes sourced from the depths of the milky
way itself.

Mountain Ice

This is all we have left: a mountain
of ice where once rivers meandered,
light at the golden hour bent
as a dancer's arm, ourselves disembodied,
floating above the surface,
no boots on the earth,
no long suffered journey,
no dream of ecstasy or agony,
no, nothing at all except
the smell of surrender
on an arctic air,
faith and trust
in the firmness
of a glacier
now melting.









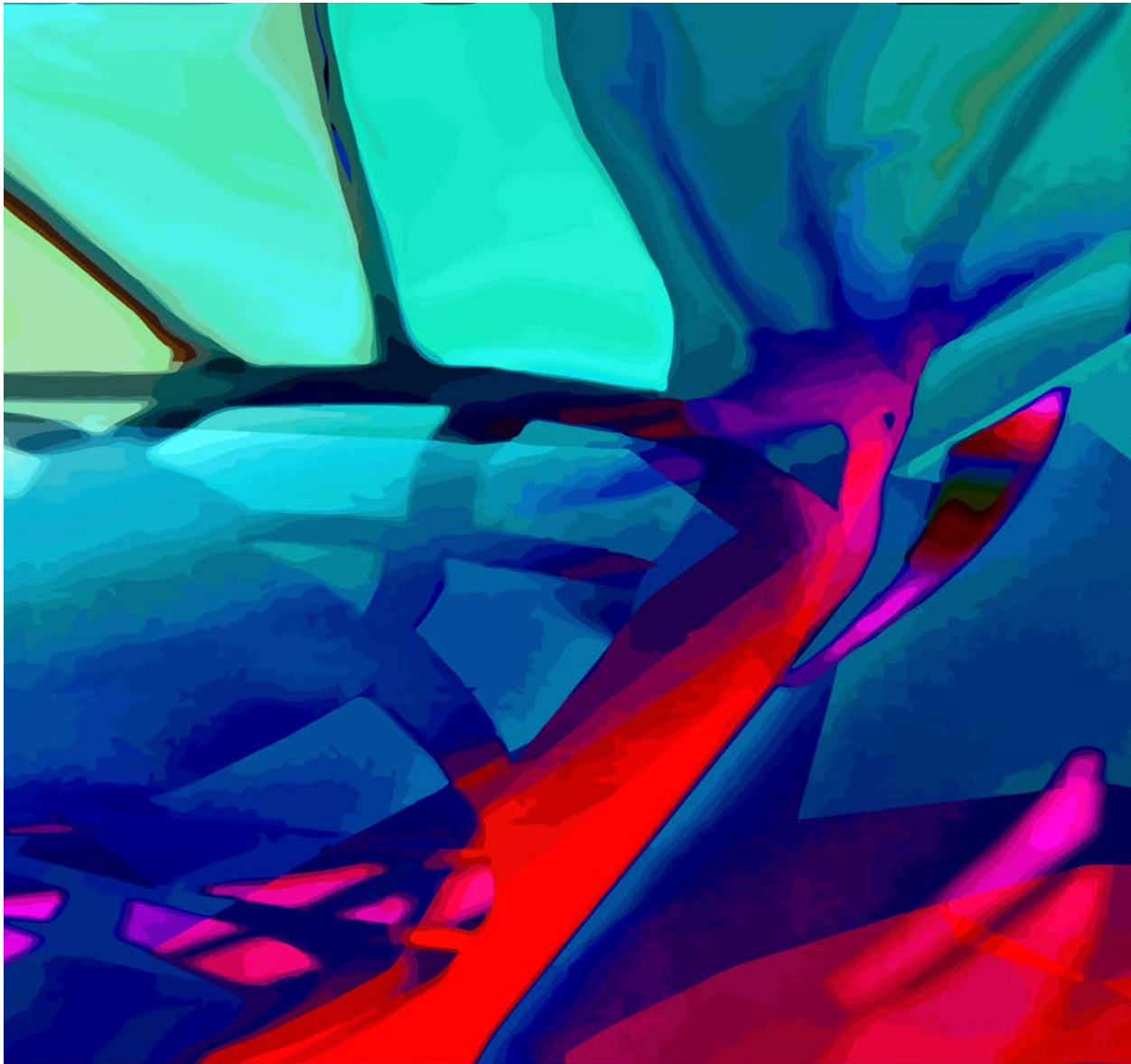
Mountain Mosaic

In the episodic serialization of the Sierra Nevadas, this season's finale is an outbreak of pine bark beetle, eggs laid in a bed of cambium, large pines laying themselves to rest after letting down the generations. Contrast this plague of pines with new life peeking out from the hallowed ground of past battles and future beauties, wondering if this world will make a good home.

Far Away

Place a bet with the deities
of this land: for every moment of intimacy
experienced with another human (which is both
the gold & the honey of your
soul's purpose), how much profanity
will become solid? Can the chained
body dance? Are we all doves
waiting for either flight or forgetting?
Stretching our wings, we want to be present
but the fossilized bones of mammoths
whisper to us from far away.







Wind Tree

It has been so long since I had arms
around me. I went to the wind tree
& asked her to touch me
with her swollen joints,
caress me with her fur coat
of pinnate leaves, whip me, even,
if she would, so I could feel something under
my skin again, feel the fire from deep inside me,
stoked up by her ember
long preserved in a bundle
of lichen.





Stretch Wind

The desert landscape sings back to the night sky,
white tents constellating the rolling hills of black sands.

Folds in the canvas are mysterious,
lamp oil light licking each woven fiber in turn.

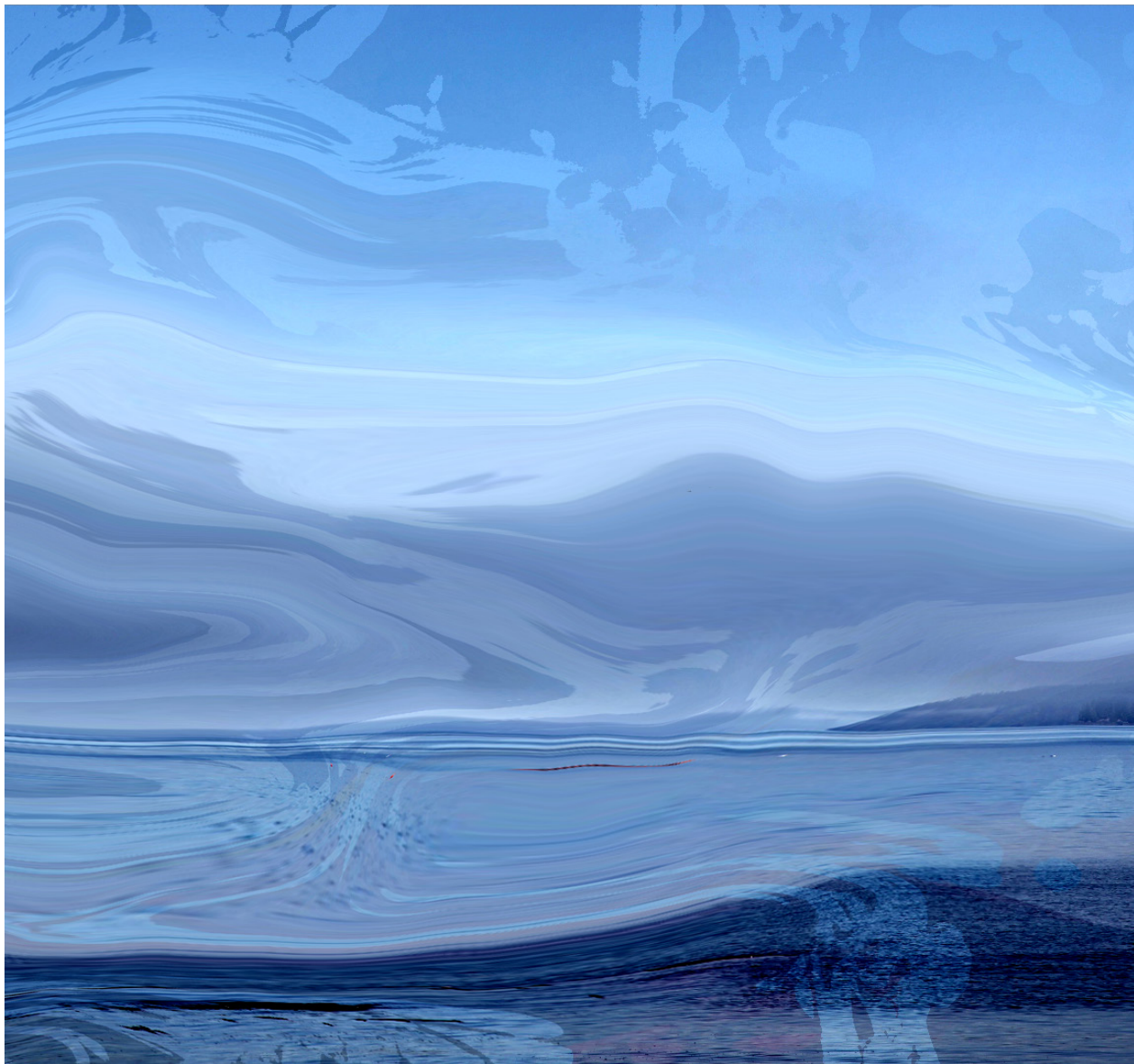
With every crease, I count a new cousin,
the explosion of the generations,
finding ourselves as individual knots
in an eternal tapestry,
telling stories of a once nomadic religion
where movement was worship, rest was ritual,
travel itineraries our invocations, & pilgrimage,
the only rite of passage.

Big Tree

Go down to where the old growth
cedars live & prostrate yourself
before them. Make an altar
out of their exposed roots,
pray that all of us can possess
just a portion of their connection
to the earth's core, grounding us.
Breathe deep the scent of cedar leaves,
those incantations of air,
& exhale a sacrifice, a gift.
Give CO₂ back to the forest.



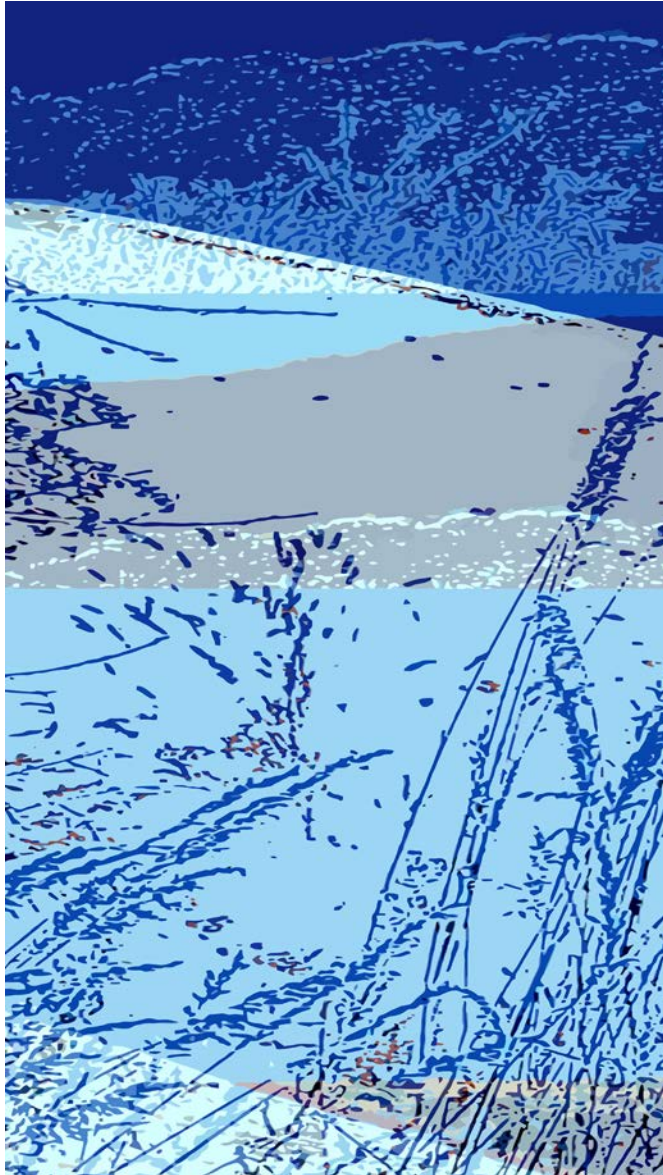






Fog Dream

When in search of that
which becomes even more opaque
when one shines a light on it,
I set out seeking fog.
When the invisible
becomes viewable
& every dream is laid out
upon the canvas for us to read
in the turning gray-silver wisps
of the night steam, to be deciphered
as leaves of tea in the bottom
of a porcelain cup somewhere
in the old city of Jerusalem,
just inside Damascus gate,
to foretell the consequences
of our decision to not decide
anything & the ensuing wrath
of the ocean.

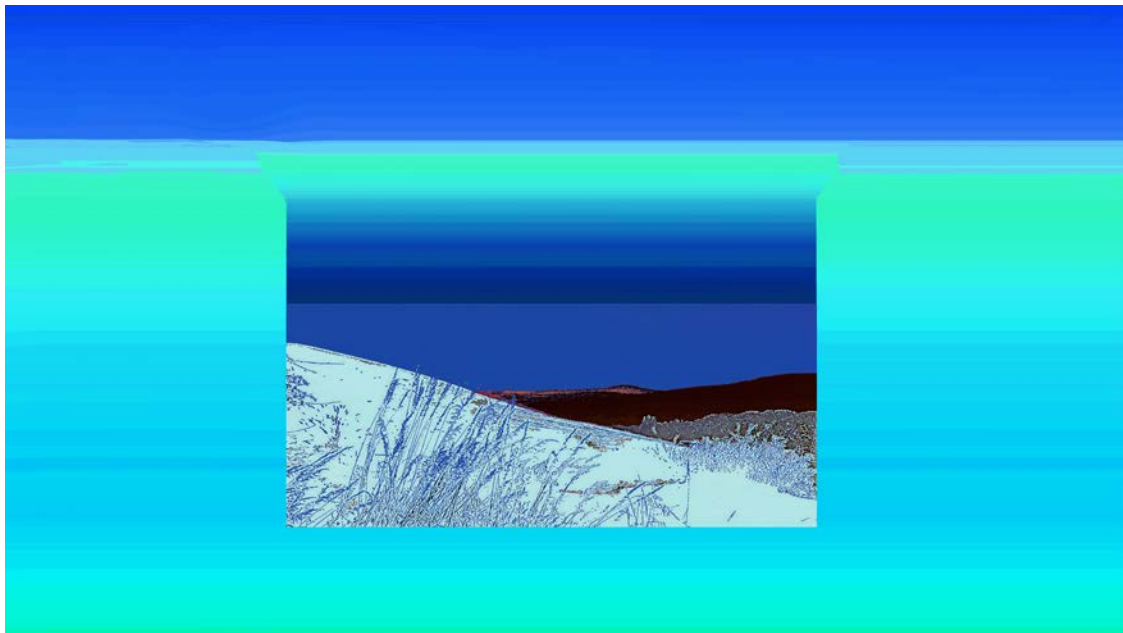


Slice

The landscape is a gentle
butcher, a loving barber
of the earth - with the knowing
that to cut is to make
whole again & that what is raw
in our snow-swirled souls
must be tended, the wilds
coaxed into gardens, the angles
in their mathematics emulating
the music of angels.

Mountain Grass Window

The view from his window
asked for this: to stay silent
until the colors of the sky
undulated
& were folded back into
each other, the way I watched him
fold butter into dough
flaky crust for the tasting
on our last morning together
before he set out
among the mountain grasses
swallowed up by the density
of their annual gathering.





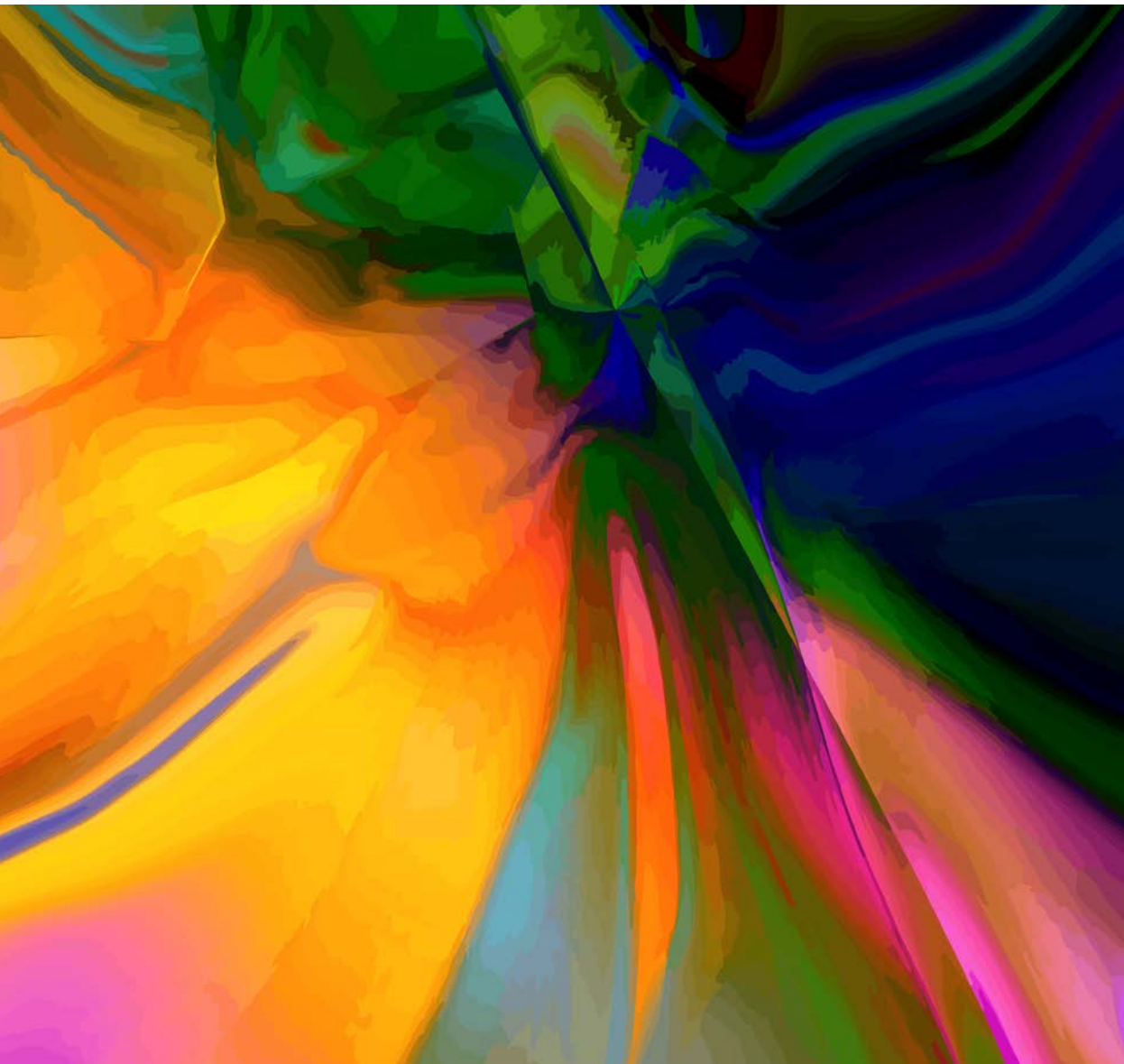
Wild Grass Mountain Robe

When on the jagged plains,
the bluster of a breeze
deprived of dewdrops
makes of itself a sea creature,
to swim through the depths
of living green. I pluck strands
of the earth's hair, plait her
tresses of trees into mats & baskets
to hold my people &
what nourishes us. In the architecture
of the elements, I am called
back: to an ancient cave, shadows
marching along the walls, in & out
of primal paintings, reciting
myths.

Blush of Orange

Sometimes the air
stops heavy
in its movement
& bunches up
against itself as if
it were the reluctant legacy
of silkworms. A tsunami
of California poppies stripping
eucalyptus leaf and cactus
blooms overtake our bodies
of flesh and folly the extinct
colors written into the DNA
of the atoms in the land breeze
making mariners of themselves
wanting to leave
the ordinary
for the unknown.





Dash of Yellow

Riot of scotch broom
in the golden hour, a horde
of invasive imperialists.

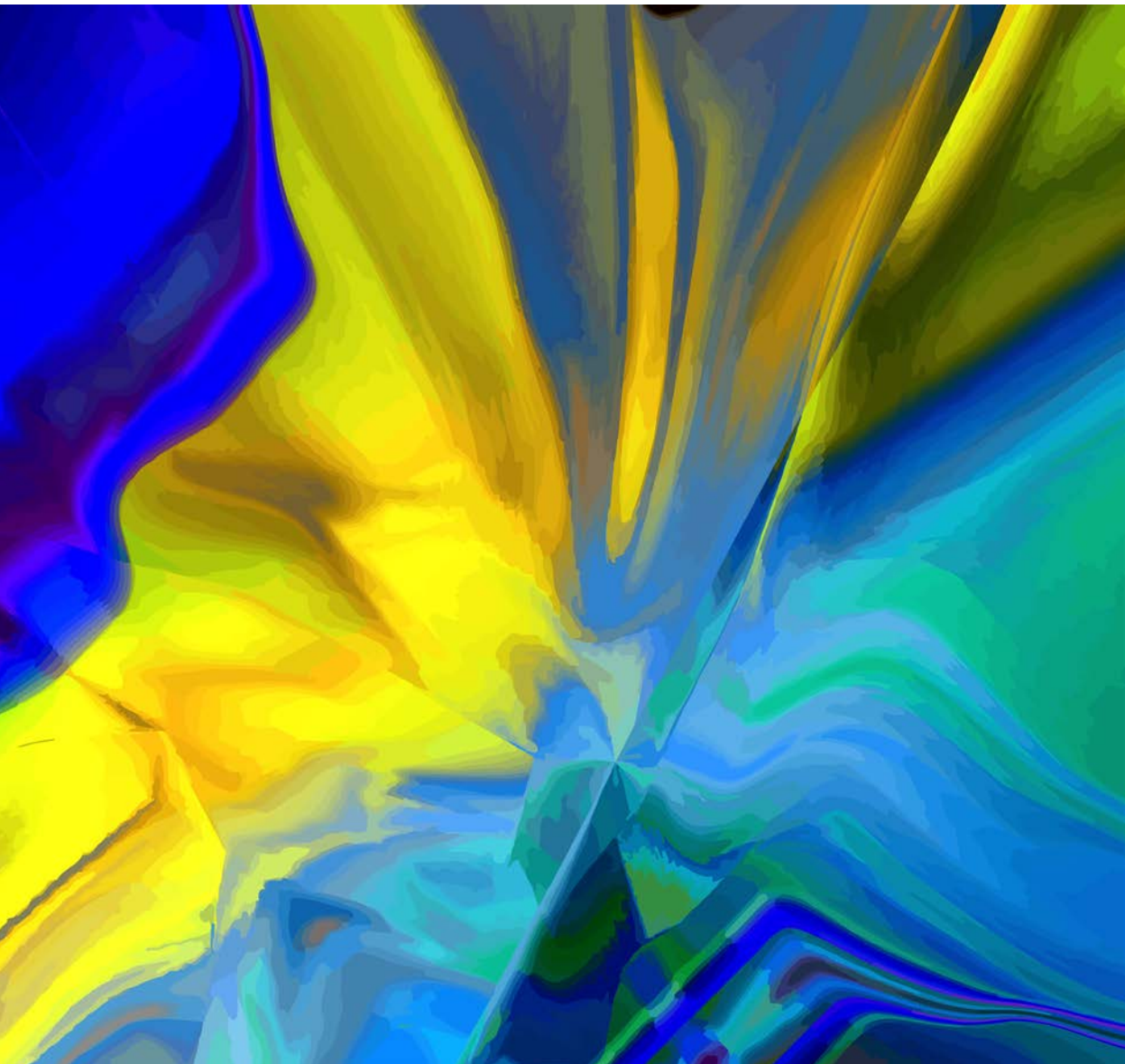
Tender belly
of the dying bee,
lodged in the grate
of a speeding truck.

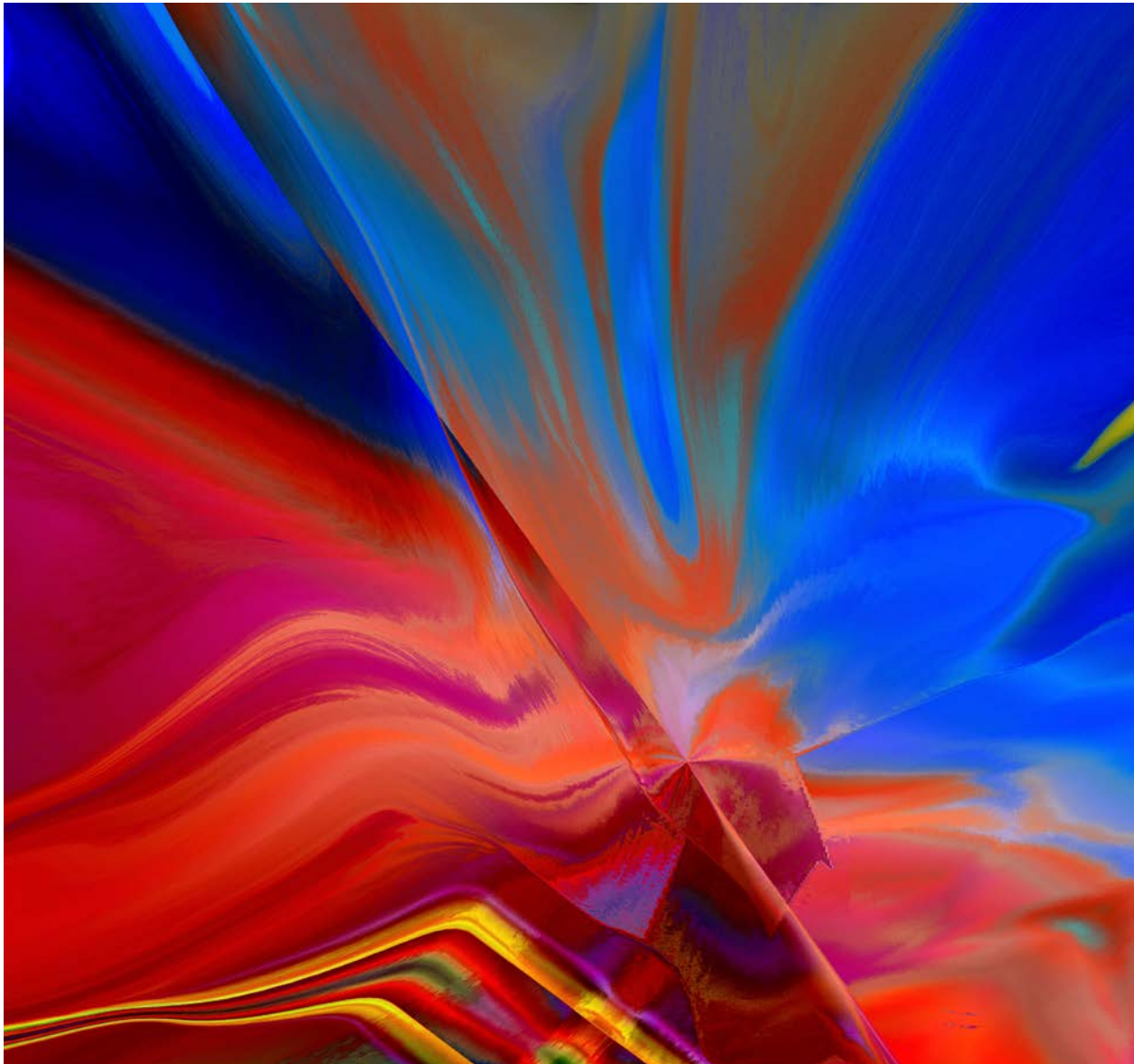
Dandelions, edible
& healing, transformed
into a many seed-podded
nuisance.

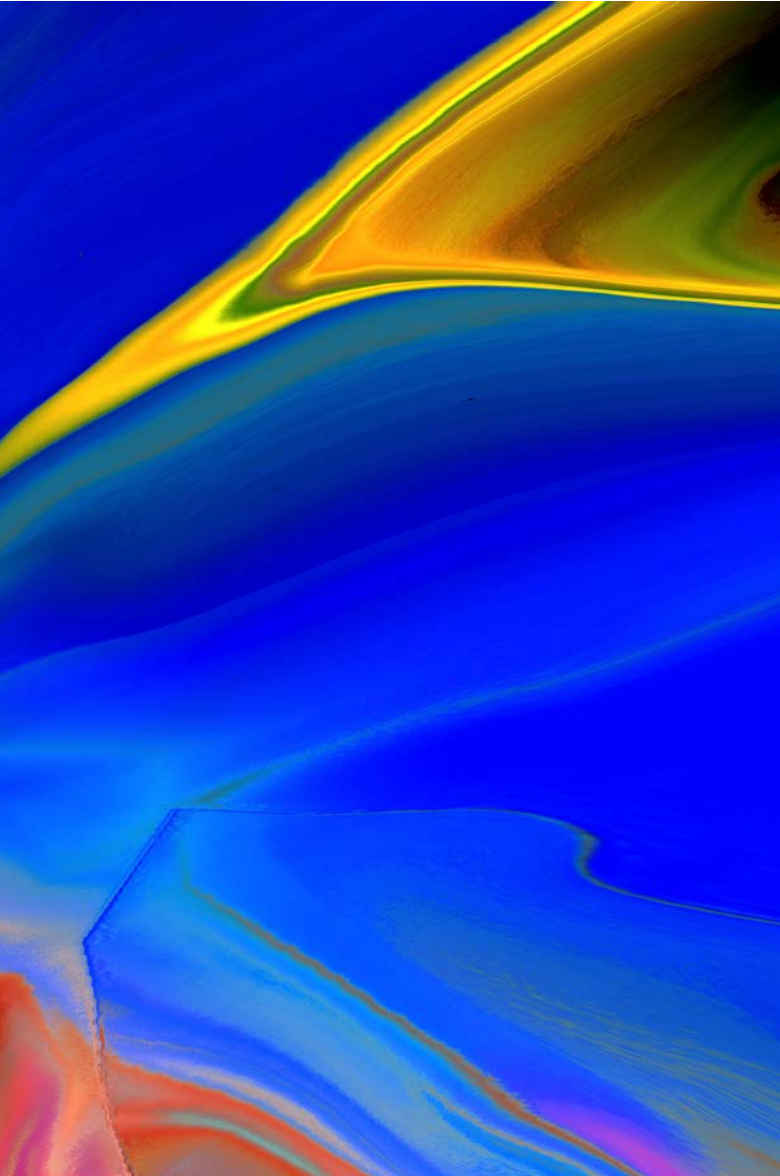
Figure in a coat
of sunshine waiting
in an unlit train station.

Mug of morning brew -
chalice holding a medicine
that prepares us for this world
of sharp flickers in yellow.









Hummingbird

Take that which never ceases
her beating, the footfalls of a heart
that would emerge triumphant
out of any mad dash
through a maze of leaf & petal,
oak & arrow. Bring her to a stasis,
a contemplative stillness, cultivating
mindfulness in a ruby-throated
wonder. Ask her to embrace the winter,
allow cold to enter under the coat
of her wool feathers, to be one
with what will abolish her.



Camus Manna

When I walked
with the 500 veils
between myself & the rest
of the world, I could not sense
that sustenance is everywhere. That
tiny plants break through seeds
& reach out of a dark cave
of soil with the one desire
to feed me. To be a part of the weave
by entering me & becoming one
with me. & that when they sit quietly
on the forest floor among the humus
& the hush of wild places,
they are not so blind as me,
that they are there to see & feed
& only ask to be witnessed & welcomed
in return.

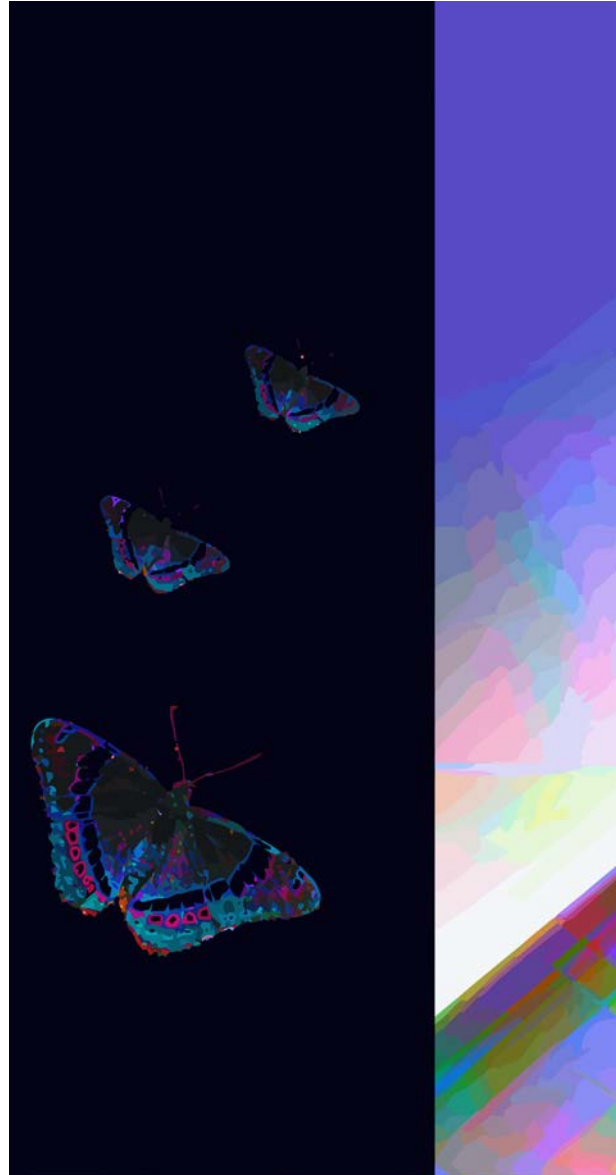
Butterfly Flute

It was our hubris that built the pyramids
in imitation of heavenly peaks.

Still, let us flatter the gods by manifesting
a butterfly in every note of a hymn
played in dedication to the pantheon.

Sing, ephemeral winged insects of kaleidoscopic madness,
wild geographies charted upon your backs,
for tomorrow is assured to be unavailable for today.

And still, I stand before an obelisk of divine proportions,
golden means melting under the heat of an approaching sun,
sacred geometries sauteed over spirals of gas flames.





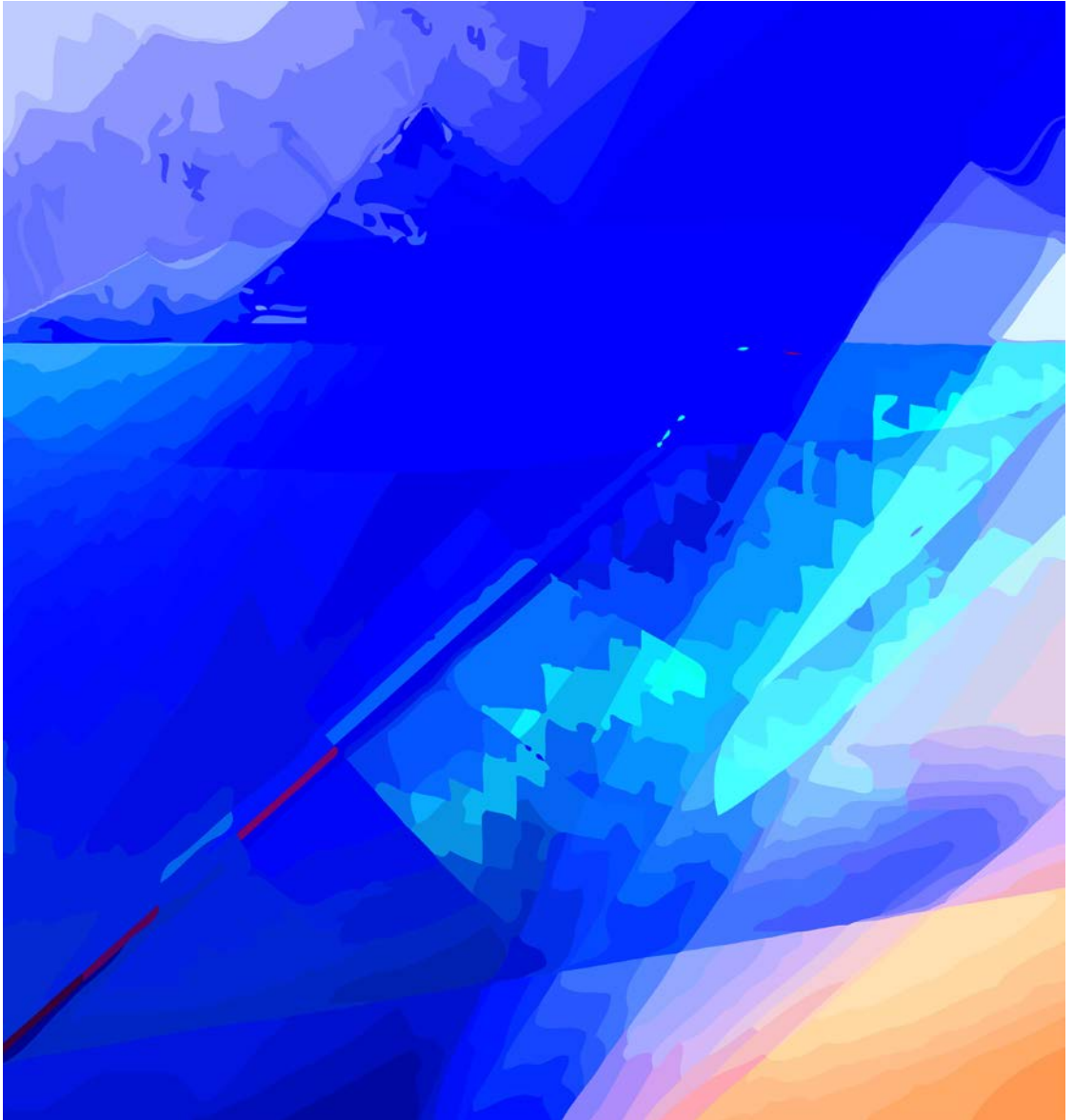
Geo Mountain

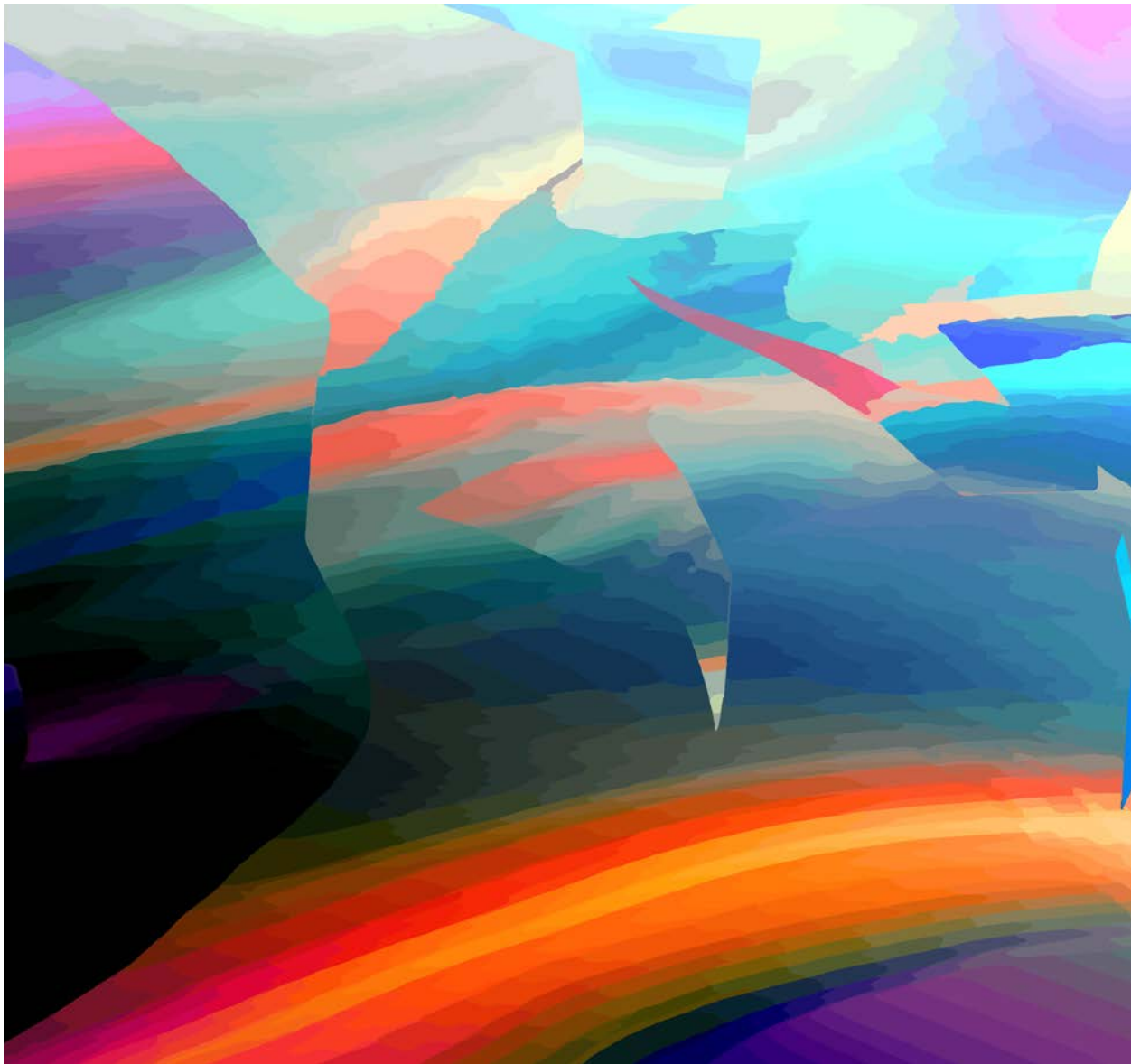
How many ranges
live inside one mountain? How many
future forests can be found
inside the one Douglas fir?
When do lines & angles
suddenly become more
than themselves? Coming into
form as the young woman does,
waiting at the window of her forevers,
watching future lovers
walk away into great
uncertainty.



Forming

Hold your hand in
your own hand. Feel
this building block
of your own life, particular
in the way you shift
your feet at night, how
rhododendrons are your favorite
flower although you cannot spell them,
how you have your mother's fine
features but you fear they will become
masked by fat as hers have. Yet you are
universal, of the same essence as villains
& heroes both, in your breathing, your burping
& bumping into things, the way you can't
allow yourself to feel everything &
how your heart has been smashed.





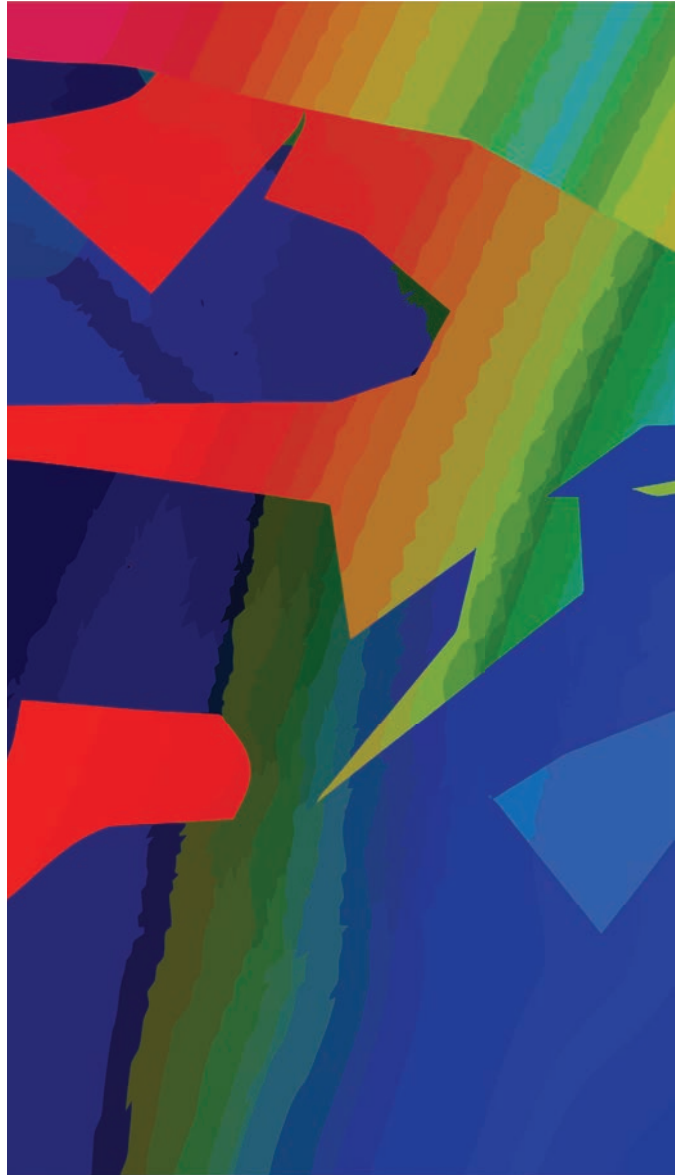


Rainbow

There are shadows inside
every rainbow, a pot of
questions & concerns
waiting at the end of
every arc. This new year's eve
even the full moon
was as bounteous as a bacchanal
& the sky's sea layer illuminated
a faery ring so vast & voracious
I felt it was a portal coming to swallow up
the earth with me at its center
& as I prayed for
& to
& with
the fire we were inviting
into our ceremonial pit
for just a flash
I saw all the colors
of the rainbow
escape from white light
& then melt away.

Night Ravens

I want to become intimate
with a covid in the evening.
Lie in repose under the branches
of a western red cedar,
practicing my raven call
inside my throat. I will set out
keys to old churches &
silver buttons from my grandmother's seal fur coat &
the brass corks from bottles that had sailed
the seas with messages from the long lost,
all at the altar of my raven.
I courted the covid.
I wooed this dark visitor
in the hopes of laying my head
for just one night
on his feathered arm.

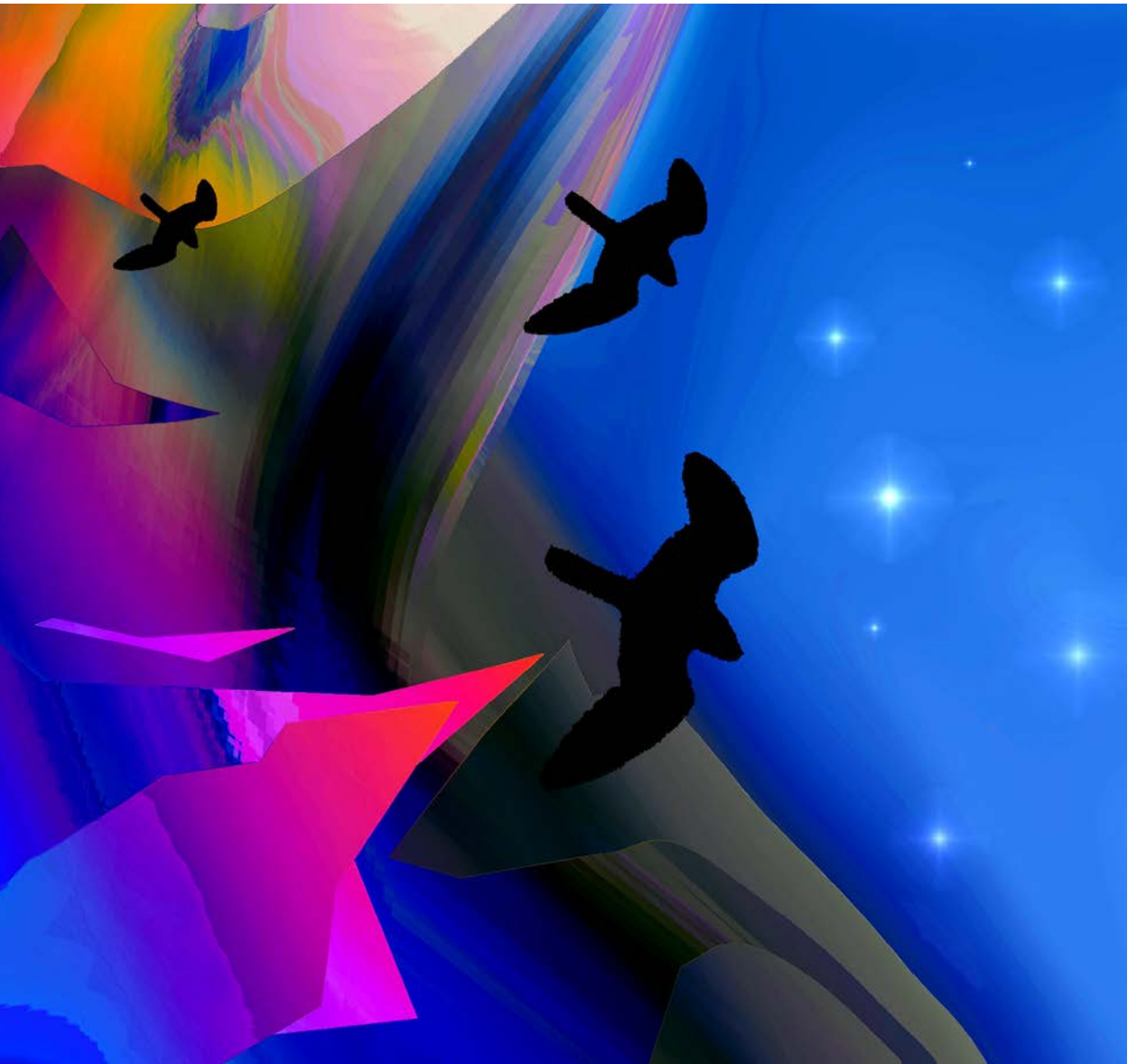


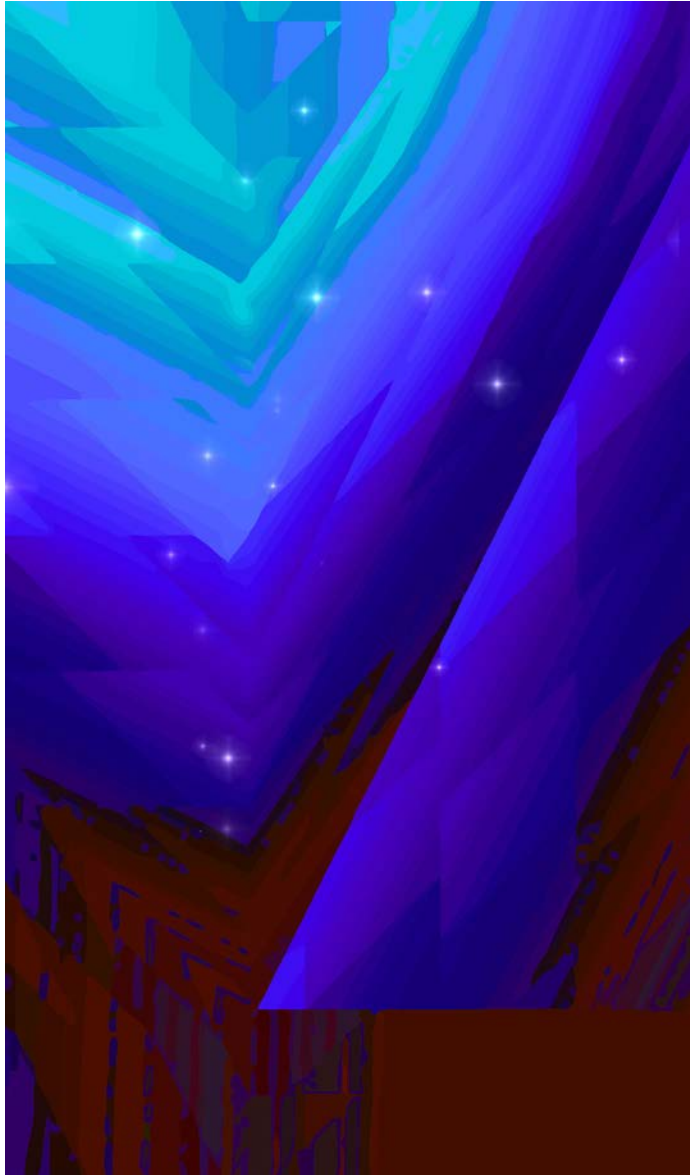


Nighthawks

When we transition
from this world
into the ether, it is said
one hawk will accompany us
through that endless night,
will guide our dreams
with the artfulness of the painter,
as if we were their tender
young, will teach us
flight. So when birds of prey
make themselves known,
inscribing circle eights
onto the infinite canvas
of the bountiful sky, say
a prayer of gratitude
for the carrion carriers.







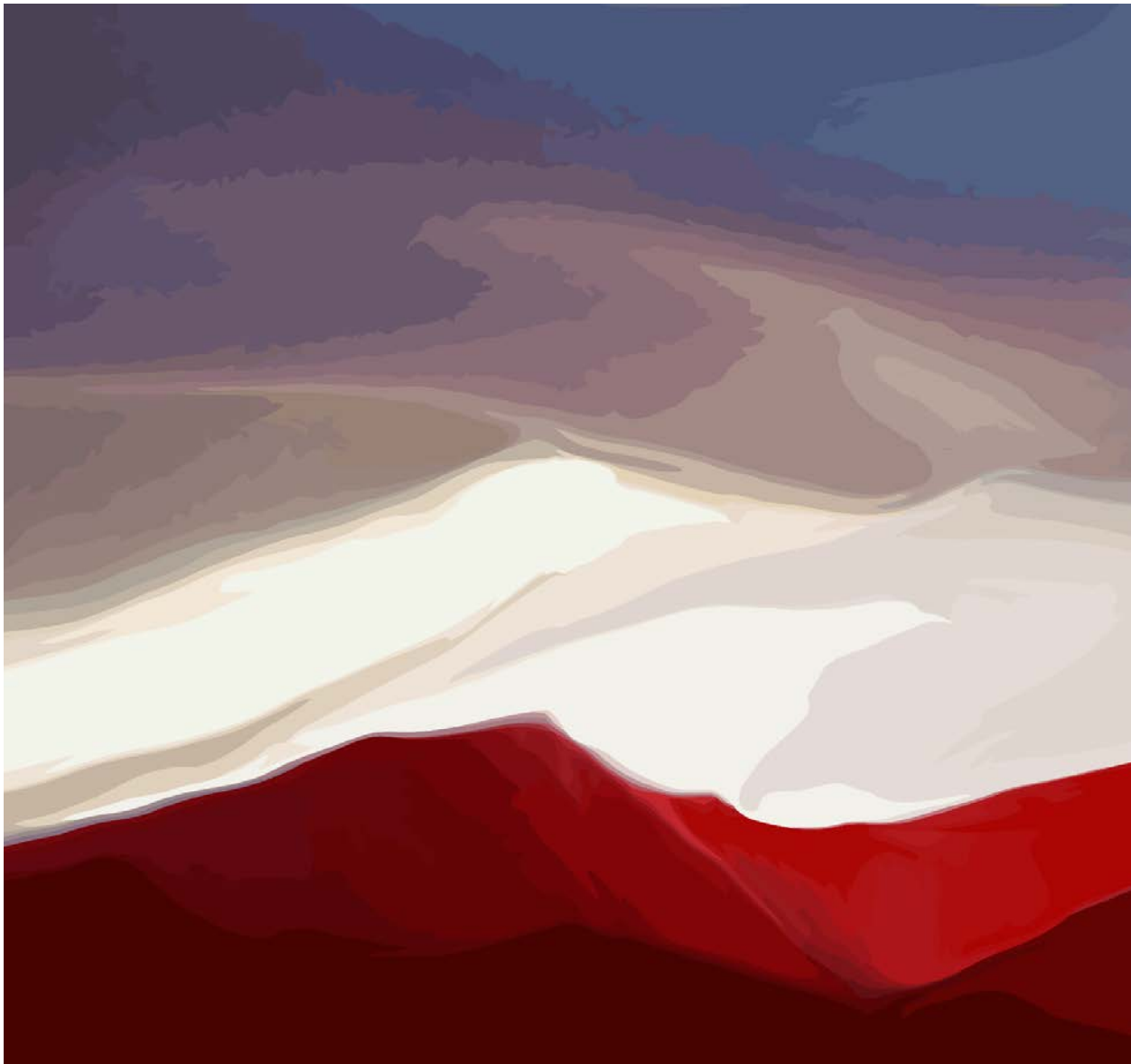
Shine Aurora

Every star is an opening.
Every moment in cosmic history
an eon of black & blue
wondering, the heavens dyed
with blueberries in their voracious
devouring. Every iris of a living
being is the reflection of the galaxy
their heart hails from, a blueprint
& a treasure map all in one,
guiding children of the light
through the sunless skies.

Silver Rays

I dreamed that the planet
was merely a mirror reflection
of the Beloved's face, as he turned
away from the tavern
where bliss promised
itself up to him, overflowing
the cup, & he instead walked
down the mundane streets
of commerce & propagation,
vendors selling pills for nausea
& potions for sepsis. This, His
only moment of failing & we,
we the simple record of His Fear.







Hidden

At the moment of the full
blood moon, we reached
fingers out to pluck her
pot of acrylic brick
from the heavens' palette.
Made brushes of our livestock
& set the bison roaming,
dragging this burnt umber pigment
along the blurry land with their tails.
Borrowed a little white light
from the high noon sun
to bleach out the overlays,
the covid transmuting into
her opposite, becoming a
messenger of the white ice.

Fissure

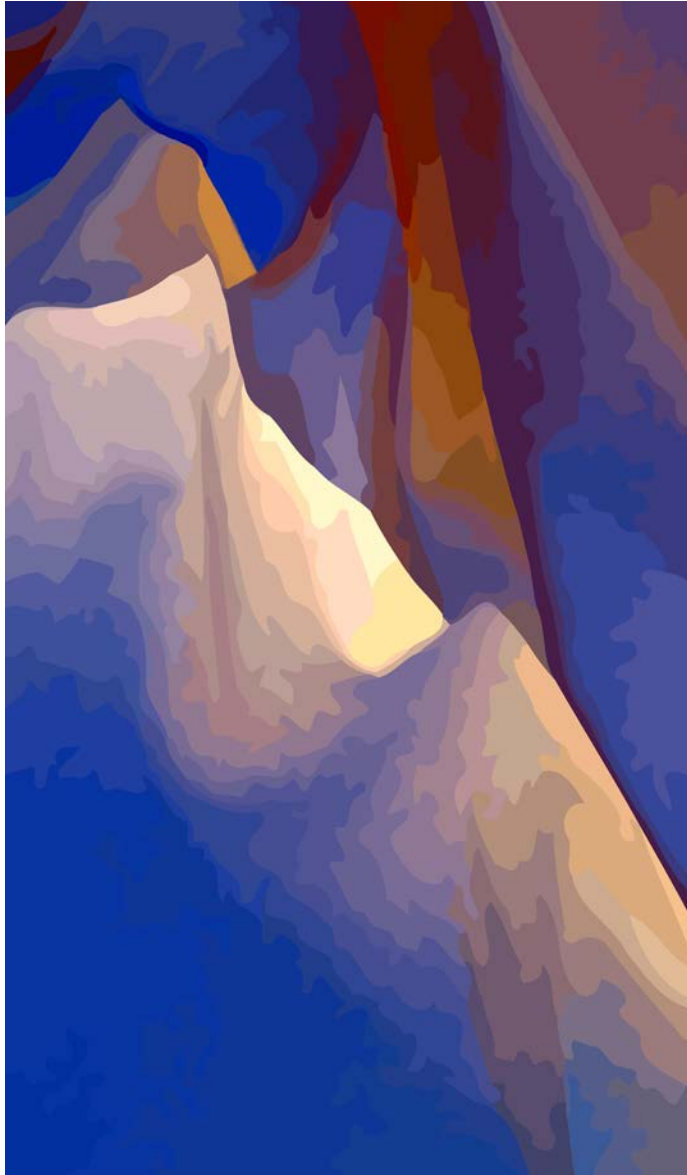
I would make myself a doctor
of the deep unconscious mind-
the cure for narcissism lying
at the extremes of the human
experience. Mountaineer to the tops
of a glacial giant, find yourself small
& needy as a newborn in her air
you cannot breathe, drink from her icy
breast & cry for her
to change your wetness,
keep you warm. Or else
escape to the oceans
where giant mammalian
sentinels will eclipse
you in the deeps.





To the Top

The mountain is a
woman in slumber
a dreaming girl
who finds discomfort
in the earth's fault
lines she cuddles
up against her lovers
all in a range. Every peak
is a crystal, every tree
an uncompromising part
of the herringbone weave
of the silent forests
that blanket the mountain
in winter & in summer
until the wildfires of her
heartbreak
arrive.





Imagine

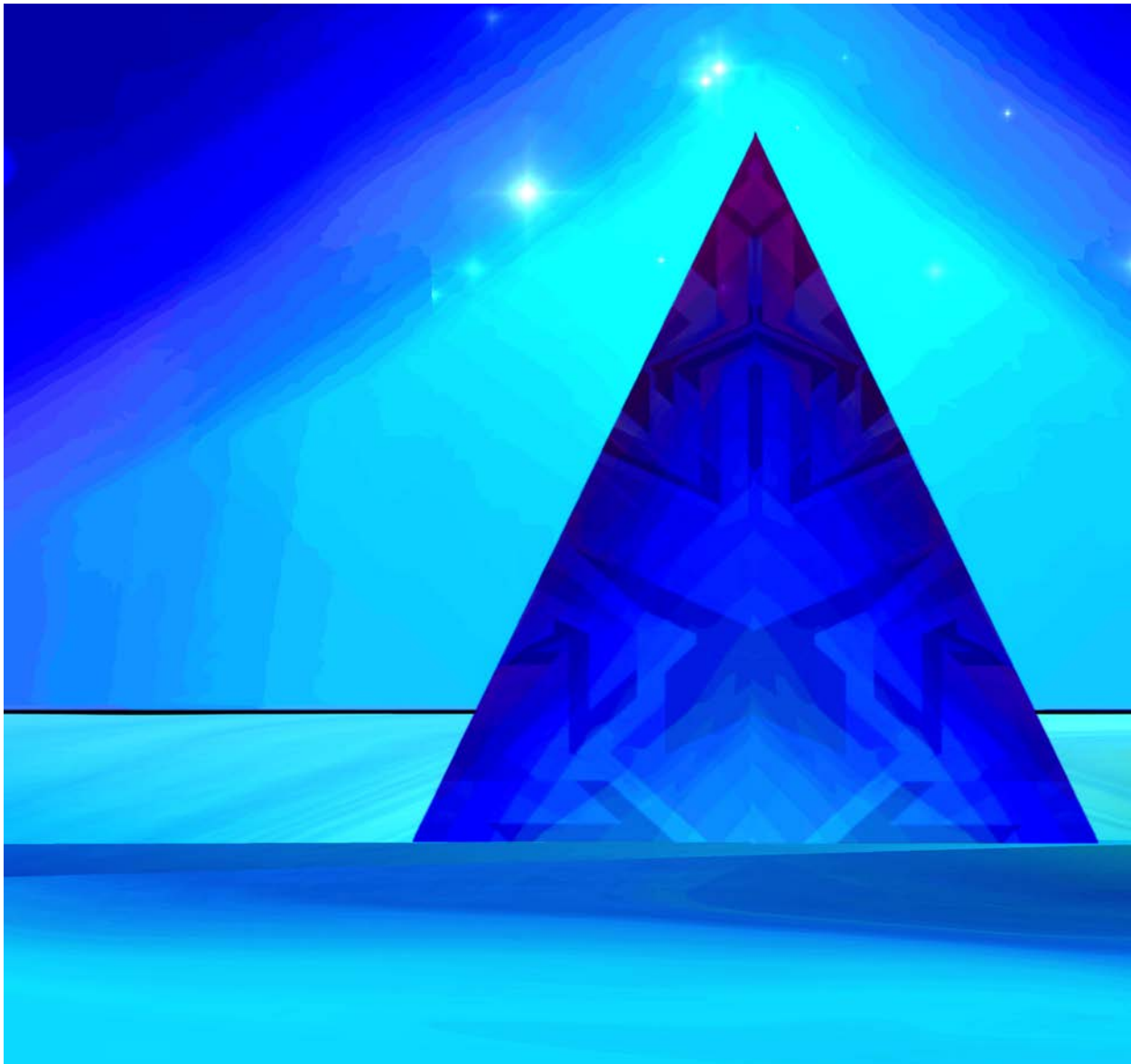
In the unfathomable distance, I see
cities that are both primal &
poetically perched in the next millennia.
These people, inheritors of our decimated
planet, with the wisdom of living ancestors,
the long view of turkey vultures,
those jesters of the feathered courts,
the unflappable wings of the frigate bird,
who soars for weeks over the seas,
resting on ephemeral currents.

Peace

When the world was sleeping,
we inked doves' wings
upon the backs of people,
granting the gift of the bird's eye view,
so that when they woke,
their days were consumed with a survey
of the land without humans
& how every other earthly creature was a polyglot,
how they were versed in birdsong & tree language
& the art of listening
& how dive bombs were performed
with a desire to bring the earth
a fresh breath of open air from the universe,
not to steal from the land's splendor.









Spirit

This object was ice, immortalized.

Every spark of light crowning the point was
a candle wick consumed by fiery illumination.

Unknown figures casting shadows on the walls of
this installation of unknown origin.

Ancient cave paintings enduring, eternal technologies of pigment & stroke,
the poetry of a preverbal child who lives with
one leg across the great threshold, on a land clear of footprints
because its only inhabitants have not yet learned
the audacity of walking upright towards the Beloved
& instead supplicate on all fours.

Mountain in a Glass

It came to be that I sat alone
in the corner of a quiet diner
eating ice cream. The shape
of this scoop was a copy of
a place I once knew in the Sierra Nevadas
& I remembered what I had forgotten:
there is nothing more meaningful
than mountains.
No law higher
than those rugged peaks.
No dance more divine
than the whirling
of the wind
along her ridges.





BIOGRAPHY/ ARTIST STATEMENTS



William (Bill) Michael Zuk (B.Ed, Visual Arts; M.Ed; Ph.D.) is Professor Emeritus in art education at the University of Victoria in British Columbia, Canada.

An award winning multimedia artist with numerous honours and distinctions, his digital imagery, printmaking, sculpture, and film have found their way to the national and international stage on many occasions. His artwork can be found in permanent collections at the University of Victoria, The British Columbia Government Foundation, and the Bienal De Gravura do Douro in Alijo, Portugal.



afrose fatima ahmed (M.A.)

afrose makes her home in California and is an accomplished poet, travel writer, writing coach, and translator of Urdu poetry who uses language in visceral and evocative ways to express her ideas. Her work is found in broadcast and published form but she has become well known for ‘on the spot’ improvisational poetry using an antique typewriter at festivals and other events.

For more information, see www.afrosefatimaahmed.com.



ARTICLES

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EXHIBITIONS

- Zuk, W. (2004). Diamond mountain. Denver, CO: National Art Education Association. (Honourable Mention, Juried).
- Zuk, W. (2018). Calling. Alexandria, VA: National Art Education Association. (Juried).
- Zuk, W. and J. Larson. (2018). Mystic mountain. Victoria, BC: Faculty Art Exhibition. (Film and Poem).
- Zuk, W. and A. Ahmed. (2019). Calling. Print, Poem and Japanese translation. Victoria, BC: University of Victoria Authors' Celebration.
- Zuk, W. (2019). Rising to the sky. Victoria, BC: Saanich Municipal Hall.



LIST OF ARTWORKS

1. Diamond Mountain
2. Calling Moon
3. Cosmic
4. Mountain Ice
5. Mountain Mosaic
6. Far Away
7. Wind Tree
8. Stretch Wind
9. Big Tree
10. Fog Dream
11. Slice
12. Mountain Grass Window
13. Mountain Grass Robe
14. Blush of Orange
15. Dash of Yellow
16. Hummingbird
17. Camus Manna
18. Butterfly Flute
19. Geo Mountain
20. Forming
21. Rainbow
22. Night Ravens
23. Night Hawks
24. Shine Aurora
25. Silver Rays
26. Hidden
27. Fissure
28. To the Top
29. Imagine
30. Peace
31. Spirit
32. Mountain in A Glass