

VOLUME 2/3

POEMS
FROM THE FIRST ANNUAL
ARTISTS THRIVE SUMMIT

SEPTEMBER 6-9, 2017
BEREA, KENTUCKY

**THE MADISON
COUNTY HANDBOOK
FOR ARTISANS**

**REBECCA
GAYLE
HOWELL**

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The Stone Carver's Note

To whatever home you call home—
a door, locked; a mother's place;
a family, that dream state—compare
When you find the big stone rock,
the one bigger than all that,
put your skull face to her skull face,
stand Still Let, what?—God, Time,
Boredom—shade your eyes
Then, with night-sight watch
how song fills air with old unrest,
disturbs snake and creek,
moves, erodes Even this strong rock,
both gate and guard, smooths
Even you Forget trinkets
Here, the map we grave To begin,
leave home Go home
Enter the wood's inscape

The Balladeer's Note

What you need to know
is story, the tale

The Rising Action
The Trickster

You

Be it love
or theft

Be it Pretty
Polly

Pig in a Pen
That Railroad Man

Can you hear it?
How the story

never changes
How it's about you

and isn't

The Banjo Maker's Note

For the pot, open a gourd
The original seed
The Canteen or Calabash
Bushel Basket or Corsican Flat
The low tone
Dry it empty in the sun
Let your mistakes come
to you and pass
Days of last summer air
Resonator days

Once tough, stretch
a skin against the edge,
string the bridge across
sea and self, the ghosts
who hymn to us in sleep
Who passed here?—
in reach of the other
A hip steeped in filth
Cloud of hair

String not gut but steel
or fishing line
A strong string that bleeds
when played

What you are to make
is both drum and scream

The Orchardist's Note

Beyond the rows of razor-cut
corn stalks, already taller
than your sight, that field
you planted because
you needed, and the hogs
needed and the hogs
get what they need,
beyond the beans and cabbage,
the coal bin, even out past
the smoke house, splinter
church to how all this works,
walk past that winter house
into the dappled clearing;
drop to your knees Shovel
with your two hands, break
ground, go deep
as if you are to bury a thing
you adored, a dog perhaps,
or a daughter barely born,
a thing constant and without
demand, and when your hands
have hauled up the last rock
from this rock soil, when you
are as low as a tree roots,
spit Your secret
out your mouth, your hush:
that once you loved
Then move sky and earth
back over this place, fill
Persimmons are a fall fruit
Pulse red and sour Remember
your sugar when you come here
to gather, when you come here
again, in time

The Beadworker's Note

Bone
Acorn
Pinecone
Teeth
Juniper
Seeds
Glass
Plastic
Bleached
Cow
Goat
Buffalo
Unbleached
When you
dream
in bead
sew
body
yes
sew
death
Join
what's
too long
been put
asunder
And
with
copper
clappers
with
small bells
carved in
guardians
walk
in
Announce
Now is
the coming
of the snake

Now is
the time
to shed
What you
are wearing
is every-
man's skin
So pleasing
and afraid

The Potter's Note

Take the full round moon
in your hands, a slab of clay,
and slap it on the wheel
while spinning, wet
your hands, your fingers
and nails, and cup it
with the sole force equal
to its ocean pull, your force
Take your thumbs,
opposable and prized
among your fellow crawlers,
and with a motion too small
to matter, open
a bowl steep and ready,
wide, a basin that, once set,
you will tip to your lips
and drink the light
collected for you
long before you were
erased; you will drink
and be made

The Granny Woman's Note

When serving birth
Summon the womb
Open every window
every door to the house

to the barn to the room
Let them come on through:
those cold rains, the rot-lonely flies
the waspers of this world

Tell them now is the time

And when your job is other
when they've declared
a body a corpse
Stay up all night

no matter

the hour or ghost
When serving death
again serve birth
Open

every window
every door Draw close
to that chest once filled
with God's air

And place your mortal ear
there, listen
for what this womb might
invite in you

The Seed Saver's Note

Comes a day when
white sky wakes
in rain

a wet cool then cold
when morning warms
and noon, not

Comes a day when
change brings change
Leaves blow

rearward and redden
in mind of summer's
last flames

and the abiding trees
show themselves as
they are:

high-lonesome
reaching for touch

Come to this day
as you are: hungry

Don't pretend
Your ravenous lot
Your bottomless pit

will teach you
if you listen

Take the seed
that wants to grow
again

Cradle her clean
dry her
name her

by your name
Then sleep

The Mask Maker's Note

It's for the dance

silly

Serious pursed mouth
Cheekbones, cobalt
Eyes, cut out

This is what I do
for you

I hide you
from your sham
I unhide you to

The Crow Kingdom
The Stampede Herd Kingdom
The Get-All-The-Way-Down Kingdom

from which you, Laughing,
come

The Basketmaker's Note

They're called staves, right?

Stave: as in, to break a thing by turning it inward
as in, to stay, as in, don't be afraid, my darling girl,

be the strong one, hidden
and planted, the underpinning

around which all the rest gets wound

BIOGRAPHY

Rebecca Gayle Howell is a 2019 United States Artists Fellow. Her other awards include fellowships from the Fine Arts Work Center and the Carson McCullers Center, as well as a Pushcart Prize. Howell is the James Still Writer-in-Residence at the Hindman Settlement School in Knott County, Kentucky and the poetry editor for *Oxford American*. Her most recent book is *American Purgatory*.

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