



# *Starry, Starry Night*

*an ekphrastic anthology*

*inspired by Van Gogh's masterpiece*

## Editor's Note

The torrent of entries for *Starry Night* took me off guard. I was expecting there would be many more than usual, because Van Gogh is an evergreen ekphrastic inspiration, and because what poet or writer isn't moved by his exquisite work and life? But I wasn't prepared, even so. Although I selected almost fifty entries, I left more out in the cold than ever. At least ten of you sent multiple pieces this time, with one person sending eleven poems on this painting!

Choosing which works to publish for any aspect of this journal is the hardest part. I find it so difficult that I publish extravagantly, every day, and two special editions a month. This means we publish well over a thousand poems and stories every year, a time-consuming habit, but one with so many rewards. And yet that is probably not even five percent of the ekphrases we receive. Art moves us, it helps us find the words.

Thank you to every one. To those whose works appear here, and to those who don't. This is a very special community, a worldwide circle writing about art and sharing the riches with each other.

Please share this ebook freely. It is free, but extremely valuable. Please share it with every reader you know, and anyone who loves art. This booklet is an invitation from all of us into the world of *The Ekphrastic Review*. Invite more readers to us, so they can read these writers, and all of our writers, those in our archives, and those ahead. Thank you.

love, Lorette

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## Failed Ekphrasis

I pull inspiration from a stranger's mastery. Watered-down creativity that swirls in a melancholic reflection of deepening shades of blue. This pen's ink smooth on a no-longer-blank page layering metaphor instead of oil paint. Cast-off words and phrases collect on the margins. Scribbled—then crossed out and abandoned for something that burns brighter. I search for my shining star. The perfect pairing of shape and sound. The song that thrums through marrow and sternum. But the air is crisp with the crunch of wadded-up paper. It rings with the absence of magnum opus.

*Gabby Gilliam*

Gabby Gilliam lives in the DC metro area. Her poetry has most recently appeared in *Tofu Ink*, *The Ekphrastic Review*, *Cauldron Anthology*, *Instant Noodles*, *MacQueen's Quinterly*, and three anthologies from *Mythos Poets Society*. You can find her online at [gabbygilliam.squarespace.com](http://gabbygilliam.squarespace.com) or on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/GabbyGilliamAuthor](http://www.facebook.com/GabbyGilliamAuthor).

## Stars Like Eyes

facing each other across my oval bathtub  
two views of Arles, one in blistering sunlight  
the other in cool waves of starlight  
memories of a June week hotter than August

heat of the Provençal summer broiled  
our fragile brains, evenings not cool enough  
for recovery overnight, even when clothed in  
damp facecloths and wet socks

waking moments in the wee hours  
compelled to seek night air  
where traces of our galaxy  
stream curling above the dark blue hills

it struck me then, how the stars, like eyes  
traced my progress in that sultry night  
their yellow orbs study me still  
from the wall above my bath

*Adrienne Stevenson*

Adrienne Stevenson is a Canadian living in Ottawa, Ontario. A retired forensic scientist and Pushcart-nominated poet, when not writing, she tends a large garden. Her poetry has appeared in more than thirty print and online publications in Canada, the USA, the UK, and Australia, most recently in *Bywords*, *The Elpis Pages*, *Silver Apples*, *WordCityLit* and *The BeZine*.

## **Ghazal for the Starry Night**

Never has the sky owned such a moon, we know,  
but truth is a lie with beauty strewn, we know.

Through long nights, he dreams awake, awaits  
his morning star to paint rough-hewn, we know.

Dawn edges cobalt hills. A Dutch church spire,  
impossible in Arles, needs be his rune, we know.

He dreams a view his window never knew,  
grasps by revelation creation's tune, we know.

He seizes brushes, crumpled tubes of oils, lays down  
impasto, re-imagines his cerebral typhoon, we know.

We can listen, now, to stars, build brains. Yet faced  
with his roiling swirls we, breathless, swoon. We know.

To hear the sky, I need your artist's truth, Van Gogh.  
Galaxies collide. Each celestial wound we cannot know.

*Alice Campbell Romano*

Alice Campbell Romano is a poet and translator of Italian movie scripts who lived in Italy for a dozen years, then returned to the Hudson Valley with children--and a dashing Italian movie-maker husband. Her poems, short stories, essays have been published online, in print journals and anthologies. Most recently, poems were accepted by *Willows Wept* and *Beyond Words*. Alice workshops her nearly complete, first full-length collection at the Hudson Valley Writers' Center.

## Dancing

On a night made of feathers  
where wind-birds wing  
we sleep in our earthbound village.  
Secretly swifts rove and roil,  
murmuring starlings dance,  
rushing the stars as they pirouette,  
awhirl with the glowing moon.

If I could simply awaken,  
I'd race to that jay-blue night  
and like the dark cypress, lengthen,  
and fly to the brightening sky.  
I'd skim and scoop to the heavens  
and swallow a gulp of joy  
to swirl my dreams a lifetime through  
with ballets from the night.

*Marla Sterling*

Marla Sterling's writing is another passion in her life following careers as actor, storyteller, and teacher, with degrees from NYU in Education and MFA from Manhattanville College in Creative Writing. Her work has been published in *Plum Tree Tavern*, *Scribes Micro*, *Connecticut Bards Poetry Anthology* and elsewhere. She lives in Connecticut, where contact with the garden, woods, and beach invigorate and inspire her daily.

## **Starry Night**

On fire with zeal to save the lost, Van Gogh  
Slept on a mat of straw and preached to poor  
Coal miners, their kin, and others of low  
Estate. Yet sensing life had something more  
In store for him, he left that world behind  
To study form, anatomy; his art  
Could lead to God as well as words. A mind  
Could bend toward heaven, following the heart  
Into a flower bursting with the sun.  
In later years he would hallucinate,  
Yet still pursued his goal in an asylum,  
And dreaming dreams transcendent he would paint  
White clouds, a crescent moon, eleven stars  
Ablaze with light, reflecting those they are.

*Sharon Fish Mooney*

Sharon Fish Mooney is the author of *Bending Toward Heaven, Poems After the Art of Vincent van Gogh* (Wipf and Stock/Resource Publications, 2016) and editor of *A Rustling and Waking Within* (OPA Press, 2017), an anthology of ekphrastic poems by Ohio poets responding to the arts in Ohio. She has presented ekphrastic poetry readings in multiple locations including the Arts in Society Conference, Paris and Groningen University, the Netherlands. She won the inaugural Robert Frost Farm Prize for metrical poetry. Her ekphrastic poems have appeared in *Rattle, First Things, Modern Age, The Lost Country, The Ekphrastic Review, Common Threads* and several anthologies. Website: [sharonfishmooney.com](http://sharonfishmooney.com)



## **Starry Night: a Jigsaw**

This year's Christmas jigsaw, tackled from sharp edges  
of my New Year despair. You sensed old undercurrents

and broke our tradition—you eschewed the old nights  
building competitive corners, the meetings in shadows

to fill gaps and construct new pictures of our own order.  
How quickly I made up the border, how it locked me in!

The silent screamer at the window was first to find me.  
I thought it was a fragment of a star but soon I realized

how various stars are; how lemon's hemorrhage dries  
to cyan, turquoise planets hurl shards of ivory crockery

to litter celestial river-beds, while pink star-roses bleed  
nearer the horizon. Finally, I recognize it as my own face

in a plummeting fireball. My family's village follows me,  
its treacherous roofs, sleepless windows, the heavy lines

of that brooding church, the steeple feigning confidence.  
Suburban vegetation, port-stained hills elude me still—

details too close to those of sky. A flight of brush-strokes,  
teeming flocks of migrant geese, orphans, grief, swallows.

I hide in cypress darkness, hook my position on an errant  
bough as notes of earth and midnight sway. Oh, it's so late

to slip into bed—you're half asleep but I must tell you how,  
when I close my eyes, all those colours swirl: violet, purple

undulating veins, a sacred heart pulsing a small sun's halo.  
Slivers of night—shattered glass—cut deep but fit together.

*Monica de Bhailís*

Monica de Bhailís is a researcher and emerging poet living in Dublin, Ireland, recently published in *Mslexia*, *Crow of Minerva* and *Honest Ulsterman*. She won the Red Line poetry contest (Ireland) in 2020 and is a current recipient of a Words Ireland mentorship grant to work on a series of poems about family grief.

## A Letter to Vincent

A songster praised  
your starry, starry night,  
as your rhythmic brushwork raised  
the morning star and moon,  
a sky made garrulous with light,  
colored oils in curling motions,  
your window view that soon  
unleashed your chained emotions.

Geometric  
sky-maps, packed with whorls  
that flush with pulses -- vast, electric --  
a valley, pocket-sized,  
you set beneath celestial swirls,  
while a torch-shaped cypress fills  
the foreground you devised,  
and mist obscures the hills.

A steeple looms  
from earth to fluid sky,  
beyond your spare asylum rooms,  
in hope or bleak despair.  
The void exists and all must die.  
Such mental whorls are never far,  
yet still we all can dare  
through "death to reach a star".

*R.W. Rhodes*

Royal Rhodes taught classes in global religions, spiritual literature, and death & dying for many years at Kenyon College. His poems have appeared in *Red Wolf Editions*, *Snakeskin Poetry*, *Cholla Needles*, and *The Montreal Review*, among others in print and online. He has also done a number of poetry/art collaborations with The Catbird [on the Yadkin] Press in North Carolina.

## **Mercy 7 (Starry Night)**

Each day I follow the same path, stumbling along into renewed hope, and then collapsing into disappointment and despair. All plans end up in disarray, even the most promising, the careful, the cautious. The same result—as if I had randomly chosen nothing, beginning with all my bets hedged, the dice tossing relentlessly over and over. But no lucky streak makes an appearance to disrupt the routine. I start, over, again.

Gaia wears a crown  
of light, ebbing and flowing  
with the seasons  
of the moon—fertile, holding  
timelessly both life and death

Why this spectacular talent for failure? I would refuse the honour if I could figure out how—  
who to contact, where to go.

I wonder why I even bother to try. No one notices. No one asks how I am, why I'm still here, why I seem to be spinning backward faster and faster, ever deeper and deeper, into the vibrating void.

just stardust, sparkling,  
scattering as energy--  
waves that collide

*Kerfe Roig*

Kerfe Roig lives and works in NYC. She has long admired Van Gogh, whose paintings have a luminosity that draws the viewer into the process of creation itself.

## Van Gogh's *Starry Night*, 1889

Morning stretches in bed, eyes on the ceiling's stippled starburst pattern to distract me from pain and stiffness. Every day new beauty above: sequences of crows' feet, silhouettes with large noses, back-to-back *k*'s (my first initial), plants with mirrored lateral roots, pulpy oblong leaf blades divided by vertical midribs, a child's scrawls, a lost language of crosshatches. Squiggly mayflies—the one that followed me garage to bedroom, horde I didn't see dangle in my camp shower stall until already wet and naked. Harmless, prehistoric wonders. Nymphs live in water a year, but when they emerge adults survive only a day or two, never feed—no mouths. Their threadlike legs and tails unnerve me same as daddy longlegs.

The flaws, inexact length of the stars' spokes, or skewed distances apart, where they veer from their axis, is what spurs the allure, where two rays converge when they weren't intended to, as when lines curve to form upper and lower lips, plump at their soft centers, and I'm pulled into the pleasure of kisses—lips after lips paralleled, waiting to wed with others.

Night headlights whorl the ceiling blue, green, gold, and I'm submerged under a sea, peering up through water's slosh to the cobalt star-and-moon-struck sky. Transported to a Provence hillside home, snug, gazing out my window at cataclysmic, ecstatic heavens. Or walking with a future lover beneath that spasm—anticipating our first touch, kiss, rapture.

*Karen George*

Karen George is author of five chapbooks, and three poetry collections from Dos Madres Press: *Swim Your Way Back* (2014), *A Map and One Year* (2018), and *Where Wind Tastes Like Pears* (2021). Her work appears or is forthcoming in *Adirondack Review*, *Valparaiso Poetry Review*, *MacQueen's Quinterly*, *Indianapolis Review*, and *Poet Lore*. Visit her website at: <https://karenlgeorge.blogspot.com/>.

## **Starry Night**

The roar is immense, the sound waves  
setting in motion this cosmos, this noise in your ear  
stinging like dark green trees  
much taller than spires, but not as alive  
not as blessed, not as missed, not as uncertain  
not as desperate, not as screaming, not as far away

the sound waves and the waves of light  
merging in the seer's mind to form  
this image of true wonder, this illusion of genius  
that you alone know to be despair

There is a moon calling, the only voice  
to be heard in this mercurial void tonight. It is the moon.

She might be the only one to be able  
to take you down from flying with the universe  
to be yourself again, tonight

calling you by your name and knowing what we cannot know  
whether you've forgotten it and set all this in motion  
to maybe get back on track to yourself or you remember it all too well  
but just haven't heard it said, for a while

*Jakob Brønnum*

BIO: Jakob Brønnum has published 41 books in Danish. His work has appeared in *La Piccioletta Barca* and *Beyond Words Literary Magazine*. He lives in Sweden with his family.

## Poison in the Stars

*Asylum of Saint Paul, Saint-Rémy, 18th June 1889*

I discontinued his digitalis as soon as I saw that painting — crescent moon in a saucer of gold. Stars, haloed with light, burning like street lamps in a mist. All that tumult and so much sky! Venus hung in a nebula, low on the horizon. He will have seen it fade from his window before dawn.

The drug can cause xanthopsia. He wanted Indian Yellow for a wheatfield. It was hard to get. His brother sent it. Cow piss smell but Vincent insisted it was the colour he saw. Why else would he paint a sky green?

Adverse effects include arrhythmias, blurred vision, unequal pupil size, the appearance of coronas around points of light. He told whoever listened he was being poisoned. Dr Rey disagreed. An aura before the fit is a more likely inspiration than toxicity from foxglove.

That didn't explain the slow pulse, its rhythm chaotic at times or his pupils — the large one, drinking in light; the other constricted as if holding out the world.

*Dr T Peyron, Medical Director*

*Denise Bundred*

Denise Bundred was a consultant paediatric cardiologist in the U.K. and is a Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians. She has an MA in Creative Writing and won the international Hippocrates Prize for Poetry and Medicine in 2016. She is writing a collection of poems about Vincent van Gogh — some in the voices of the doctors who cared for him in the final years of his life. She has poems in a number of anthologies and poetry magazines, including *The Ekphrastic Review* (October 2021). Her pamphlet, *Litany of a Cardiologist* was published 2020.

## Stars of Asylum

*"Seeing the stars makes me dream."* Van Gogh

It takes an avid hand to help  
a driven mind go writhing through  
midnight skies, gouging deep furrows  
as it goes, to send them swirling  
like blue waves in space, frothing

with surf, crowning moon and stars,  
spilling dreams onto villagers below.  
The tallest cypress dwarfs the church spire,  
sends the dark burning flame  
of itself up to the heavens.

Each stroke of his brush moves  
night on, like the second hand busy  
at his clock. Soon will be time  
to mourn the stars snuffed  
out by the first light of dawn.

*Helen Heery*

Helen Heery lives in Manchester UK. She is published on both *The Ekphrastic Review* and the *Reflex Fiction* websites. Two of her poems were shortlisted in the Bridport Prize 2020.

## Passengers

A pair of octogenarians zipped through the midnight streets on their Mobylette. Past the boucherie and boulangerie they flew. Past the fountain, church, the Bar du Marché on the outskirts of town, where the last few stragglers downed neat absinth, rubbed their eyes in disbelief as the veterans raced by. Her ponytail streaming behind like quicksilver, Céleste threw back her head and laughed. She wrapped her skinny arms more tightly around Sylvie's waist and yelled, 'To the mountains!'

Clutch in, down a cog, full gas. Sylvie took a deep breath. The night air was heavy with the scent of lavender. Beneath the blue olive trees, a chorus of cicadas chirped. A billion stars lit up the sky like navigation points. Pictures from her past whirled through Sylvie's mind: an apartment block with its roof ripped off; a small girl scrabbling through rubble for her doll; Céleste, in turtleneck and Capri pants, leant against a jukebox, giving her the eye; the gaping earth swallowing her mother's coffin; Céleste's fingers entwined with hers, with matching wedding ring.

Past the funereal cypresses, the fields of ripe wheat and into the purple mountains Céleste and Sylvie rode. Above them, the crescent moon pulsed, the Morning Star blazed. At full throttle, they scrambled on and up the mountain track. Close to the summit, the rear tire lost traction, the handlebars lifted and hand in hand, they flipped and rose, their bodies dissolving with the swirling stars.

### *Jane Salmons*

Jane Salmons lives in Stourbridge in the UK. Her poetry has been published in a variety of webzines, journals and anthologies, including *Poetry Salzburg Review*, *The Ekphrastic Review*, *Ink*, *Sweat and Tears* and *The Emma Press Anthology of Illness*. Her debut poetry collection, entitled *The Quiet Spy*, will be published with Pindrop Press later this year.



## Artist's Statement

Decade after decade I have watched the masses react to my *Starry Night*, and I continue to shake my head at their declarations.

*A masterpiece!*

*Vincent's greatest painting!*

*Moving!*

*Visionary!*

*I have no words to express . . .*

Sometimes a chuckle like a distant rumble of thunder escapes my lips. If they knew it took me less than one mad hour and more than two doses of Digitalis to paint it, would they feel half as much as they do?

I don't deny that it captures something of the way that I was feeling at the time. My state of mind was chaotically kaleidoscopic that night. When I looked up into the sky through the bars of my window, all I saw were the swirling angry eyes of God accusing me of one transgression or another. And when I looked down, I saw nothing but the blue and green flames of a world on fire.

That night could have easily been my last on earth. All it would have taken was one quick slice across my throat with the moon that I had purposely painted like a sickle. But I knew the guards would have staunched the bleeding before the last drops of life ran out.

In the end, I had to wait a whole year before I was finally allowed to be alone. Even then, with a gunshot to the gut, I lingered longer than had I intended, delirious and full of visions I couldn't muster the strength to paint. Sometimes I wonder that if Gachet had been able to save me, would my greatest painting have been something one can only view from death's threshold?

But who am I to judge the way that others perceive me and my art? After all, life—and most certainly death—is just a matter of perspective. For instance, whenever I ask someone where I am now, I am told that I live in Heaven. But honestly, I have my doubts. Every night, no matter where I look in the sky, the drab backs of stars leave much to be desired.

*Kip Knott*

Kip Knott's most recent full-length book of poetry, *Clean Coal Burn*, is available from Kelsay Books. His first collection of short stories, *Some Birds Nest in Broken Branches*, is forthcoming later in 2022 from Alien Buddha Press. You can follow him on Twitter at [@kip\\_knott](https://twitter.com/kip_knott) and read more of his writing at [kipknott.com](http://kipknott.com). Currently, he lives in Delaware, Ohio, with his wife and son.

## **starry night**

the ear does not matter, nor does love  
nor hunger, nor the madness in my mind  
you say that painted stars are nothing new  
past masters drew them so exquisitely

but you were not beside me, when  
that vision poured like cataracts  
across the whirling skies and fell  
in rapid strokes across the hungry canvas  
stars, moon, silhouettes of trees  
seductive clouds, swirling in the breeze

what matters is not who has come before  
what colors or what strokes came into play  
they may have painted countless blinking stars  
small points of light amid the darkened sky

none of them have seen what i have seen  
alone in my own starry night

*j.lewis*

j.lewis is an internationally published poet, musician, nurse practitioner, and Editor of *Verse-Virtual*, an online journal and community. When he is not otherwise occupied, he is often on a kayak, exploring and photographing the waterways near his home in California. He has three full length collections and several chapbooks to his credit.

## Starry Night

A certain sway in the curtain's movement—  
wind forms a van Gogh cypress in its folds.  
The version in my head's got magic like  
a clicking on of the light at midnight.  
Whose struggle was it to swirl that chicken  
yellow moon and stars through the sky river?  
It changes direction and stutters with  
staccato voices arranged in circles,  
beyond which is felt an odd sensation—  
everything roils in pitch-perfect union.  
The blue rolled trees and mountain waves' humped backs  
vibrate with a manic celebration.  
Dashes scatter yet hold together tight  
circular stars and squares of human light.

*Jessica Purdy*

Jessica Purdy holds an MFA in Creative Writing from Emerson College. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in many journals including *SoFloPoJo*, *Lily Poetry Review*, *One Art*, *Hole in the Head Review*, *Museum of Americana*, *Gargoyle*, *The Plath Poetry Project*, *The Ekphrastic Review*, *SurVision*, and *Bluestem Magazine*. Her books *STARLAND* and *Sleep in a Strange House* were both released by Nixes Mate in 2017 and 2018. *Sleep in a Strange House* was a finalist for the NH Literary Award for poetry. She is poetry editor for the upcoming anthology, *Ten Piscataqua Writers*: <https://www.tenpiscataqua.com/writers/>. Follow her on Twitter @JessicaPurdy123 and her website: [jessicapurdy.com](http://jessicapurdy.com)

## **Starry Night at Sugar Grove**

The lines  
are straight and swift  
between the stars  
we feel small  
beneath  
this canopy far and far  
away and yet  
a voice riding bright  
upon its beams  
seems  
to beckon us  
to a place beyond  
them all  
a place conceived  
within the illumined  
large of our minds  
where the Source  
of all light  
once spoke  
the world into existence—  
we stand  
in the hand of Him  
who portioned out the stars—  
arranging  
deepening  
enchanted night

*Michael Escoubas*

Michael Escoubas is the Senior Editor and Book Reviewer for *Quill and Parchment*.

## **Starry Night**

I note the stars, normally pinpoints of light,  
Here pictured as enlarged  
Blazing orbs, crowding the blue night sky.

Then there's the wind, visible curlicues  
Spiraling across the canvas,  
Licking stars' edges, lashing tree limbs.

And the sun, livid and round,  
Fixed behind the crescent  
Moon, a murky fingernail.

All of these showing what's  
Really behind what we see –  
No mere empty sky; mere bright pricks; pale Cheshire grin.

No – the subliminal is huge, Van Gogh tells me.  
Observe the stark white steeple,  
And how it contends with the dark evergreen.

*Jeremiah Johnson*

Jeremiah Johnson spent a decade in China, teaching everything from ESL to American Literature to Fiction, a cultural experience that has inspired much of his writing during his twenty-five year journey as a poet and essayist. He is currently living in Cumming, Georgia with his wife and two sons and is teaching First-Year Composition and World Literature at the University of North Georgia.

## **Of All Trades**

*for K.W.*

Stillness of a thousand microscopes.  
A starlight machine\* transforming particles.

Now you cycle through town,  
tools in a trailer. A bit like a knife

grinder. The elderly will call you in.  
A dicey socket, a broken heirloom.

You bleed their radiators, grease  
a rusty joint, paint a faded wall.

You will fix their ballcock,  
hang their Starry Night.

Because now you crave  
the solid, the hands-on.

The hammer hitting metal.  
A drill that lets you vibrate.

*Elsa Fischer*

\* (The starlight machine using the energy of light to transform particles was presented in September 2018 in Saint-Malo by a team of French and Swiss scientists.)

Elsa Fischer comes from the Netherlands, studied Art History at Carleton University, Ottawa, lived and jobbed on four continents and currently lives in Switzerland's capital where she is a "yelpie" rather than a "woopie". She tries hard to convey her love of poetry to the natives and is a member of a workshop for expats. She has two pamphlets in the UK and poems published in magazines and anthologies. She endeavours to age with grace."

## Vertigo

blue night —  
sky swirls,  
round and round  
it wobbles —  
spins —  
in circles it goes.  
faster and faster  
like a merry-go round,  
a ferris wheel  
or a drive-through tunnel  
in a video game.

oh, please, grant me stability!  
— I roll on my side,  
but the world doesn't stop.  
independent of me  
It gyrates, rotates —  
please stop! I cry,  
I wish to get off!

turn on the news  
alas, no reprieve —  
the world spins.  
wars, famine  
hurricanes, forest fires  
are all coming at me,  
closing in, encompassing,  
swallowing me whole.

the planet rotates.  
clinging to its rim  
I hold tight —  
trying to survive.

*Tova Beck-Friedman*

Tova Beck-Friedman is an artist, a filmmaker, & a poet. Her work fuses poetry and moving images to create cine-poems, that have been shown in festivals, museums and galleries including: The International Artists' Museum, at the 50th Venice Biennale; The National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington DC; The Jerusalem Cinematheque; The Newark Museum; The Norwegian Short Film Festival@ Grimstad and more. Her poems have been published in *Whispers and Echoes* magazine, Extinction Rebellion Creative Hub and *Fevers of the Mind* magazine.

## Resurrection

Your window on my bedroom wall  
opened to a longed-for world  
where hurricane-force stars could wield  
whole towns transfixed in blue, in thrall  
as heavens roiled and mountains rolled  
and drowned my bedroom's wherewithal—

but how I loved to feel its drowning  
every boredom-shrunken head  
buried in a tidal waving  
swirled farewells, the would-be dead  
born as midnight's body turning  
my still life to lightning-rod.

How blue the sleep, how deep the burning  
lamps of ache and love and fear,  
to be at last, right now and here!  
As plump as dreams, the purr of morning  
curls between my arms, aware  
of rising flames of cypress, churning

all our human solitude  
till galaxies ignite a wedding  
dervishing my blues, spreading  
twilight's resin as perfume  
and wheels of myrrh and musk exude  
a thousand nights in a single room

*Siham Karami*

Siham Karami is the author of the poetry collection *To Love the River* (Kelsay Books, 2018), which Kim Bridgford called “a love story about life.” She has published work in the *Orison Anthology*, *Smartish Pace*, *Tiferet Journal*, *Able Muse*, *Third Wednesday*, and the *News Station*, among others. Twice a Laureate prize winner in the Maria W. Faust Sonnet Contest, she also won third place in the Beulah Rose competition, and can be found on [sihamkarami.wordpress.com](http://sihamkarami.wordpress.com). Visit her on Instagram for her often-quirky amateur nature photography @sihamkarami.



## **Truly We Are Made of Star Dust**

It was dark when I retrieved the mail last night.  
I was startled to see stars, in the clear sky, bright  
even in the city, Orion's belt as sharp as ice.

Do you remember your 76<sup>th</sup> birthday? It was your  
76 Trombones Celebration. I even found a tee-shirt  
with 76 tiny trombones lined up in rows, gold on navy.

But the night before, I watched you fall forward  
gasping in pain and we spent the night in the ER,  
coming home late to a dark, star-filled sky.

Now when I see Orion, I see the constellation that  
watched over you as you started on your certain path,  
and my mind wanders to where I scattered

your ashes, under the tree next to the pond,  
and on top of your mother's grave on your birthday  
when you would have turned 80.

We are forged from the fire of dying stars -  
I look for you reflected in the night sky.

*Mary C. Rowin*

Mary lives in Middleton, Wisconsin. She was nominated for a Push Cart and her poetry awards include prizes from The Nebraska Writers Guild, and *Journal from the Heartland*.

## The Break

We used to watch the stars together. Leaning shoulder to shoulder in the balmy air, eyes lifted to trace the constellations. Until one night I saw the stars come loose, the world's end promised, beautiful and terrible. I saw what you didn't, couldn't see. For you the stars were still, fixed in their familiar patterns, all was as it had been, all was well. But mesmerized, I saw them spinning out of their orbits, surging across the sky in pinwheels of white fire, waves of light coming down on us like a galaxy tsunami I could not unsee.

Trying to convince you, useless, you saw no, felt no threat, for you the stars still marched in ordered ranks across the midnight sky. The world's roof solid and still safe. You said I was dreaming, mad, mistaken, wrong.

But I knew they were coming, falling like hot sparks through the blistered air, knew they would burn all they touched, white phosphorus cinders on our skin, flames that could incinerate the world, worse than a bomb, more final than a forest fire, exploding over us where we could find no shelter, no bridge or tunnel close enough, no rescue, no escape, no way to stop it, no where to hide. That night the end of us, sudden and hard, our stars divided, split, never the same.

*Mary McCarthy*

Mary McCarthy is a retired registered nurse who has always been a writer. Her background in art makes Ekphrastic writing a favorite for her. Her work has appeared in many anthologies and journals, including the *Ekphrastic Review*, *Third Wednesday* and *Earth's Daughters*. She has been twice nominated for the Pushcart, and recently for Best of the Net.

## **Dragons in the Sky**

A roar fills the sky left by our mother  
and I cannot take her place  
as my brother hears my stories  
and I hear his versions of our childhood  
to ward off the sky above  
swirling out of control,  
and he says “no  
it was not like that.”

Van Gogh’s stars shimmered  
oversized above the hamlet with its thin-line steeple  
and at the Saint-Remy asylum his narrow perspective  
widened. He lost “the dread of the thing”  
others’ madness up close  
an illness where eyes measured by waves  
are painted on canvas.

My brother sits at our table eating lasagna  
when he admits running through  
an intersection. Hit a bicycle.  
Grazed metal, spokes rotating. As if the problem  
is the cyclist’s complaint and the insurance rate  
will soar. Yet I know the wish—  
crash under a dark sky  
by his own hand—  
not mentioned.  
I put my fork down.

Dear brother, are your stars pulsating like Van Gogh’s,  
more like sea than sky  
breeding dragons  
that fly and sink into  
deep blue.

I can’t lose you yet I have little roar of my own  
in a river-sky of swirls, stars like suns multiplying  
too bright  
and the moon, gold crescent  
surrounded by yellow  
not enough for you.

*Laurel Benjamin*

Laurel Benjamin is a native of the San Francisco Bay Area, where she invented a secret language with her brother. She has work forthcoming or published in *Lily Poetry Review*, *Turning a Train of Thought Upside Down: An Anthology of Women's Poetry*, *South Florida Poetry Journal*, *Trouvaille Review*, *One Art*, *The Thieving Magpie*, *Black Fox*, *Word Poppy Press*, *California Quarterly*, *Mac Queens Quinterly*, among others. She has work published in the *Ekphrastic Review* and has been a finalist twice. She runs writing groups, is affiliated with the Bay Area Women's Poetry Salon and the Port Townsend Writers, she holds an MFA from Mills College.

## Van Gogh's *Starry Night*

A sleepy village in Provence  
never looks up at soundless fireworks,  
never dreams the sea has churned up  
tsunami waves to toss the moon and stars  
about like phosphorescent jellyfish  
or flaming bales of hay. A cypress  
stands witness, but looks suspicious –  
perhaps the burnt out torch  
that began this spectacle.

How could Vincent paint sound?  
Listen. Metallic clanging –  
like the turning of gears  
about to pull apart the cosmos –  
or unveil a new one.

Only Vincent understood this wonder,  
born from his hand. The rest of us,  
at best, pretend we're peering  
over his shoulder. See him nestled  
between the hills, perpetually dreaming  
of this night?

*Alarie Tennille*

Alarie Tennille graduated from the first coed class at the University of Virginia, where she picked up her B.A. in English, Phi Beta Kappa key, and black belt in Feminism. Retired now, Alarie delights in having more time to read, write poetry, and hang out at *The Ekphrastic Review*. Her latest poetry collection, *Three A.M. at the Museum*, now spends its nights, starry or not, at The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art Gift Shop. Please visit Alarie at [alariepoet.com](http://alariepoet.com).

## Visitation

From a charity shop, an unexpected gift from Van Gogh; preloved but unopened, in one thousand pieces; she hugged the box tightly all the way home.

She could not begin straightaway. The door had to be double-locked, curtains closed, a light switched on; a quiche heated, sliced, eaten; the knife, fork, plate washed, dried, stacked away. Afterwards, she had to apply soap to each hand, undertake a vigorous scrubbing of fingernails in hot water before using a fresh towel.

Only then was it time. Carefully, she extended the table, placed her puzzle mat in position, turned on Radio 3, allowing Chopin's *Nocturnes Op.9* to seep into the room. A glass of red wine in hand, she finally placed the box on the mat on the table. Did her fingers twitch as she did so? Perhaps. Who knows? Who was there to observe as she peeled off the seal, tearing a slither of a blue hill from the lid in the process? Though, there was no doubting her thrill as she revealed the box's contents. Before her, sunbursts of midnight blues, whites, spinning golds.

She set to work, tipping her new world out onto the mat. Fingers picked, mixed, rejected, selected. Lips sipped. Eyes assessed, darting from flecks of sky to halos, to fragments of a charred cypress. She fondled each edge piece, fiddled with outlines in her quest to slot shapes together, forever checking brushstrokes against the image. Not that it was easy, even with her pricey daylight-lamp on. Shades merged; lines distorted; shapes became amorphous blobs; weird shadows swirled across her vision. She scolded herself, swore, refilled her glass, stared at Vincent's too-bright crescent moon, wondering why tonight everything seemed tinged with yellow.

She didn't hear the whispering at first. It began as a hiss, emerging out of the radio set as Chopin's music ended with applause. She was still intent on finding the missing piece of church steeple when a puff of air tickled her left ear: "*You're a failure. Do you know that? A useless failure!*"

Those words, over and over, growing more insidious with each repetition. She ignored it; pressed hard with her fingertips, flicked pieces wildly in her hunt for that elusive snatch of blue grey. When her big toe stubbed against it on the carpet, she expected the whispering to stop but it became louder, more insistent, more agitated. So, she gulped more wine, poured herself another. By now, her ear was throbbing. She thumped the radio's off-button but still she heard his voice. Her fingers wrestled frantically with a tangle of curled trees that trailed both lower corners but refused to click together. Her glass toppled over; a blood-red bloom trickled across rooves, stained celestial bodies, slowly smearing the stars.

She rose, swayed towards the sink for a cloth. As she did so, a sharp stab of pain wrenched her left ear.

*Dorothy Burrows*

Based in the United Kingdom, Dorothy Burrows enjoys writing flash fiction, poetry and short plays. Her work has been published by various journals including *The Ekphrastic Review*. She tweets @rambling\_dot and has never attempted a jigsaw with 1,000 pieces.

## Staring at Stars Wondering About Van Gogh' *Starry Night*

In my own bit of sky, neighboring houses rise up where Van Gogh had hills. A cypress in my backyard anchors the scene, similar to his. Stars grace my sky abundantly, but never swirling for me as they did for Van Gogh. I've stood under Orion, Sirius, the big and little dippers, and all the rest but they do not repeat that secret dance or me. I've tried moving myself to see if that will bring about Van Gogh's same vision. I've twirled like a small dervish, and then looked up. I was dizzy, yes, but the stars remained still. I've tried closing my eyes and opening them at intervals of ten, fifteen, twenty seconds, and sometimes more to see if I could note a movement. I've squinted, shaken myself, looked through bottles, guzzled good burgundy and even brandy to try to see what he saw in that sky. Yet, when I've finished, though my stomach may be in motion, the stars remain still. A shooting star that opened up my mind, my heart, to the heart of the problem. After it passed, I realized the beauty that *I* see and the *way* I see it—my own cypress, my own sky, are a gift to me. Although I'm grateful Van Gogh shared his swirling vision with the world, the joy of what *he* experienced, I need to share the joy in what I see, but with pen, for I am not a painter.

*Joan Leotta*

Joan Leotta plays with words on page and stage. Her poems, articles, essays, and short stories have appeared or are forthcoming in *Yellow Mama*, *The Ekphrastic Review*, *anti-heroin chic*, *Haunted Waters Press*, *Verse Visual*, *Silver Birch*, *Verse Virtual*, *Crimeucopia*, *Bould Anthology*, and others. She is a 2021 Pushcart nominee, received Best of MicroFiction in 2021 from Haunted Waters. She was a 2020 nominee for the Western Peace Prize. Her chapbook, *Languid Lusciousness with Lemon*, is out from Finishing Line Press. As a performer, she tells folk and personal tales featuring food, family, nature, and strong women.

## Night Lights

Mom tucks me in, nice and snug, beneath my quilt of pastel multicolored wildflowers. She prays for me, and then it's, *I love you, I love you too*, and she leaves.

My thoughts shift to a movie I saw where a man scales the outside of a building in the dark, with the help of suction cups on his hands. I turn away from the rough, tan curtains of my second-story window to face the crack in the door. Mom's left the hallway light on.

\*

After supper in my grandparents' apartment, just around the corner from our own, Grandma would offer my family a scoop of ice cream from the carton. It was often a cone capped in orange sherbet and wrapped in a sapphire-blue floral napkin.

By then, the evening would have cooled off the brunt of the desert heat. My brother and I could carry our decadence outside to the still-warm concrete stairs and sit down beneath the night sky.

Unlike viewing the sun, there were no rules against moon gazing. As I licked, I could stare at that circle of honey light as long as I liked. And as it glowed above the tips of the tree branches and basketball hoops, our neighborhood seemed to soften. To feel a bit more storybook.

I could usually hear my mom and grandma chatting through the window screen, and maybe someone stirring iced tea, as I licked the lump of sherbet methodically. First, smoothing the mound into a flat plane, then nibbling around the soggy cake cone's rim, munching the embossed letters, all the way down to the stump. There, pockets of sweet tang were held in the wafer's somehow-still-crisp honeycomb base. And I was at ease — sitting in darkness — sitting in light.

*Bethany Rohde*

Bethany Rohde's poetry and prose may be found in such places as: *Tweetspeak Poetry*, *Moms On Poetry*, *Emily D.Tea Traveler*, *Every Day Poems*, and in the e-book, *Casual*, published by T.S. Poetry Press. If she could spend her coffee break anywhere in the world, it would be in the imagined place she used to draw as a kid (and still does). She'd lean back against the smooth trunk of a shade tree surrounded by undulating, grassy hills and watch the sway and flow of the blades.



***Starry Night* Pantoum, Using Opening Lines  
from a Letter Vincent Wrote to Theo**

This morning I saw the countryside  
from my window a long time before sunrise,  
with nothing but the morning star,  
which looked very big . . . in the night sky.

From my window, a long time before sunrise—  
Venus, looking down at me looking up,  
looking very big . . . in the night sky.  
How beautiful she is, and how cruel.

Venus, looking down at me looking up.  
Does she know how much I love her?  
How beautiful she is? how cruel?  
When she glides across my dark cell,

does she know how much I love her?  
How I am spellbound by her fire  
when she glides across my dark cell  
like a temptress I can never hold?

I am spellbound by her fire,  
by nothing but the morning star,  
the temptress I could not hope to hold  
this morning, when I saw the countryside.

*Margaret Dornaus*

Margaret Dornaus holds an MFA in the translation of poetry from the University of Arkansas. A semi-finalist in *Naugatuck River Review*'s 13th annual Narrative Poetry Contest, she had the privilege of editing and publishing a pandemic-themed anthology—*behind the mask: haiku in the time of Covid-19*—in 2020 through her small literary press Singing Moon. Her first book of poetry, *Prayer for the Dead: Collected Haibun & Tanka Prose*, won a 2017 Merit Book Award from the Haiku Society of America. Recent poems appear in *MacQueen's Quinterly*, *MockingHeart Review*, *Red Earth Review*, Silver Birch Press, *The Ekphrastic Review*, and in numerous anthologies.

## Starclock

Only while the North Star  
stays steadfast will cinder comets keep  
their loops, their iced domains: restless, wheeling.

Only if Polaris holds  
will mistletoe berries flare out,  
afire in the branching ball of cosmos.

Only while the North Star holds  
will all star-paths be plotted, charted,  
will their circles sweep the zodiac dial of space.

And only if Polaris holds  
will a moon swirl silver in its lunatic ellipse,  
deranging manic painters with brushes daubed in yellow.

If not, star-maps may fray out, burn out, be confounded  
when all the ticking cogs of time  
collapse—unsprung,

unwound.

*Lizzie Ballagher*

Educated in England, Ireland, and the USA, Ballagher has lived a long and curious life. Diverse experiences on both sides of the water have seasoned her poetry. A member of the Society of Authors and the UK Poetry Society, she now writes mainly about landscape. She blogs at <https://lizzieballagherpoetry.wordpress.com/>

## **Starry Night**

It is Walpurgis Night  
star- and moonshine twinkle  
through the glass-like ether  
Below me in the cleavage  
between the ancient hills  
lies the town and its church.

But tonight is Walpurgis Night  
their god's hold on reality  
waned moon-like with each passing hour  
while primordials awaken  
an eldritch distortion begins  
twisting both matter and ether  
remaking the world into that  
which she the blessed one can tread

One final glance above  
reveals the brush strokes of a god

*TS S. Fulk*

TS S. Fulk lives with his family in Örebro, Sweden as an English teacher and textbook author. After getting an M.A. in English literature from the University of Toronto, he taught English in Prague, CZ before settling down in Sweden. Besides teaching and writing, TS S. Fulk is an active musician playing bass trombone, the Appalachian mountain dulcimer and the Swedish bumblebee dulcimer (hummel). His poetry has appeared (or will appear) in books by *Perennial Press*, *The Button Eye Review* and *Wingless Dreamer*, with "The Chosen One" earning a first runner-up award.

## One Breath

When you are old and gray and have no sleep you walk on with no purpose to the movement of your feet or the grinding pain in your hips or why memories explode into color and the night sky loses its shape and becomes like this night, the night before you, the one you can see; becomes like all nights now, yesterday a gray bespoke suit, tomorrow another village beneath the silky sky flowing like the bed sheet that will soon cover my final bed. Will I die alone, in my room, or will I be wandering here, alert like a murderer awaiting the coming revenge, no longer sleek in step as I troll from side to side of the street, buoyed in the boat of the night, stars melting and falling onto the town's edge, the trees in their last moments, leaning and swirling like the melting stars, though there is no wind blowing as I hold my useless stick, my bowed head lifting forward like the slightly bowed forward lean of wind-pressed sapling, the last home a pistol shot into the deep shadows. Once the sky was still and the broken stars lighted the night, spinning new images and ideas like empty boxes stacked to fall; the efficiency, the miraculousness of thoughts flowing as I sped along the steady streets, years before and years after my head exploded, so much I didn't know I do not know in the end, all the patterns and currents leading to new beliefs that rose and faded, ripping apart the place I perched, my mind full of the heat that fired and died the way wild new sunflowers fire across fields in spring only to dry up before fall, like the swirling sky dissolving into nothingness.

*John Riley*

John Riley has published poetry and fiction in *Smokelong Quarterly*, *The Ekphrastic Review*, *Better Than Starbucks*, *Banyan Review*, *Bindweed*, and many other journals and anthologies. EXOT Books will publish a volume of 100 of his 100-word prose poems in 2022. He worked in educational publishing for many years and has written and published over forty books of nonfiction for young readers.

## **Away in Dreams**

Caterpillar on windowpane  
Caterpillar crawls away  
Away from fou roux  
Away red headed madman  
Madman of Saint Remy  
Madman with Irises  
Irises wheat fields isolation  
Irises in thick streams  
Streams of undulating Cobalt  
Streams of the Rhine  
Rhine river take me  
Rhine put me under  
Under your blanket  
Under your depths  
Depths of Indigo mind  
Depths of illuminated sorrow  
Sorrow and thin confinement  
Sorrow dripping from paintbrush  
Brush and palette demons  
Brush me aside St Remy  
St Remy scintillating lights  
St Remy taunting my window  
Window cracked at midnight  
Window my tortured soul  
Soul like a vise  
Soul of asylum  
Asylum of barred protection  
Asylum saturated in beauty  
Beauty of Alpillles Mountains  
Beauty slices through pain  
Pain profound echoes  
Pain persistent menace  
Menace soaked in turpentine  
Menace in closed corridors  
Corridors locked for safety  
Corridors muffle the sound  
Sound reverberates as colour  
Sound of Theos voice  
Voice crawling into corners  
Voice lightly coaxing  
Coaxing me together  
Coaxing me brother  
Brother he insists  
Brother father caretaker  
Caretaker of my loose mind

Caretaker of The Yellow House  
House of my dreams  
House of melancholy  
Melancholy  
Dreams

*Debbie Walker-Lass*

Debbie Walker-Lass is a poet and writer living in Decatur, Georgia. She has been published in *Ekphrastic Journal*, *Natural Awakenings*, *Atlanta*, *Poetry Quarterly*, and *Haiku Universe*, among others.

## Van Gogh's *Starry Night*

His clouds wheel over the earth  
in swept blessings, wreathed

above the hills and pressing down  
their blue beneficence, bequeathed

to the quiet town. The painter is locked  
in. Passively Saint-Remy receives his

bounty; in canvas, unlocked, but  
heavy with the weight of the cypress

presaging its dark portent—this death,  
his death, with Theo near. Oh!

Painter, how your work inspires—  
such pity, such fear, such joy, and oh!

what love it generates! You've gone  
beyond your intractable world into ours.

A welcomed death(?) But how your work  
penetrates, how beautifully your art lives on.

We'll tuck your forever sadness into the wind  
and let it twirl skyward above the clouds.

*Carole Mertz*

Carole Mertz, graduate of Oberlin College, spent years as a professional musician. She is book review editor at *Dreamers Creative Writing* and reads for Kallisto Gaia Press. She has published recently with *Wilderness House*, *Quill and Parchment*, *Quarterly Review*, and *Mom Egg Review* with forthcoming work at *River Teeth* and *Northern Appalachian Review*.

## Impression

Once I listened to  
a soliloquy  
performed by  
Leonard Nimoy  
as Theo the brother -  
it made me cry, I wrote  
a poetic response

Sunflowers, always my  
favorite van Gogh, I wrote  
about lovingly in verse,  
stood in Musee d'Orsay  
surrounded by Vincent

My son in second grade  
painted starry night;  
I framed his art, humble  
impression, his stars  
shone just as bright

*Julie A. Dickson*

Julie A. Dickson admits that Vincent van Gogh is her favorite artist, for his art but also for expressing his pain through creativity. Art, like poetry can be cathartic. Dickson's poems have appeared in numerous journals including *Ekphrastic Review*, *Open Door*, *Misfit* and *Sledgehammer*; full length works are available on Amazon. A Pushcart nominee and past poetry board member, she writes often and reads aloud to her rescued cats Cam and JoJo.



## Supernova Lonely

Perhaps a nightlight drew them inside  
on this, the longest day of the year.  
Husband and I talk of tomorrow,  
pull the sheets up,  
and when I finally turn off the lights for sleep,  
thirty flash-lime tails illuminate the ceiling  
as if stars descended from heaven  
and gifted themselves,  
our own private Starry Night,  
swirling constellations,  
shooting stars arching,  
blinking--  
fireflies flash their loneliness  
like glinting tears in moonlight.

If we had some similar way of calling for company--  
the whole world would blink space  
so bright as if we were a star on the brink of supernova.  
The shock wave would announce  
our collapse under the weight of it;  
the loneliness and our molecule remains  
would spread like rushing waters through the universe,  
sweeping up interstellar gases as a last resort  
to grab hold of something more than what is lonely  
until all that is left is a faint prismatic glow,  
a reminder of how bright desire can burn.

*Julene Waffle*

Julene Waffle, a graduate of Hartwick College and Binghamton University, is a teacher in a rural NYS public school, an entrepreneur, a nature lover, a wife, a mother of three boys, two dogs, three cats, and, of course, she is a writer. Her work has appeared in NCTE's *English Journal*, *La Prensa*, *The Non-Conformist*, and *Msexia*, among others. She was also published in the anthologies *Civilization in Crisis*, *American Writers Review 2021*, and *Seeing Things* (2020), and her chapbook *So I Will Remember* was published in 2020. Learn more at [www.wafflepoetry.com](http://www.wafflepoetry.com).

## Song of the Cypress Tree

Soon, when Time comes calling  
I will settle myself  
on the slump of your shoulder  
and Death will take us to another star.

It may not have the light touch  
of Venus, an aria for strings  
but the lullaby will soothe you asleep  
in the curl of the moon's wane.

Her lyric will calm the brush  
that agitates your soul  
in that swirl of turbulence  
that is the artist's curse

and you will find Eternity  
in the roll of the hills, the moon  
and the stars that sprinkle hope  
over the shadow of my voice.

*Kate Young*

Kate Young lives in England and has been passionate about poetry since childhood. Her poems have appeared in *The Ekphrastic Review*, *The Poetry Village*, *Words for the Wild*, *Poetry on the Lake*, *Alchemy Spoon*, *Dreich*, *The Poet* and *Fly on the Wall*. She has had poems in two Scottish Writers Centre chapbooks. Her work has also featured in the anthologies *Places of Poetry* and *Write Out Loud*. Her pamphlet *A Spark in the Darkness* is due to be published by Hedgehog Press in March. Find her on Twitter @Kateyoung12poet.

## Struggle Hushed

*(To Vincent Van Gogh Regarding Starry Night)*

I sense awareness ably drawn  
of soul immortal cast upon  
the waters of its fate as bread  
awaiting eyes forever fed

by cypress gnarled from its ascent  
against the odds to which it bent  
within the sight of perfect spire  
that also rose as silent choir

of siren call away from gloom  
(that lamps illumine room by room)  
to endlessness of glittered sky,  
resplendent in imagined eye

as hope and dream remaining bright  
in struggle hushed by starry night.

*Portly Bard*

*Old man. Ekphrastic fan.*

*Prefers to craft with sole intent  
of verse becoming complement...  
...and by such homage being lent...  
ideally also compliment...*

*Ekphrastic joy comes not from praise  
for words but from returning gaze  
far more aware of fortune art  
becomes to eyes that fathom heart.*

## the centre cannot hold

I think I understand now  
even when we are separated by light  
(years of space) and the sky shows me how  
to chart the movement of each night

even when we are separated by light  
from the waxing moon. But  
to chart the movement of each night,  
the window can't be shut

from the waxing moon. But  
every night they lock the cells, and though  
the window can't be shut,  
they pull the heavy tapestries closed, so

every night they lock the cells, and though  
I've learned to memorize the patterns of the sky,  
they pull the heavy tapestries closed, so  
I can't see the stars with my own eyes.

I've learned to memorize the patterns of the sky,  
(years of space) and the sky shows me how  
I can't see the stars with my own eyes.  
I think I understand now.

*McKenna Themm*

McKenna Themm is graduating with her MFA in Creative Writing: Poetry from San Diego State University in May 2022. Her poems have been published by several journals, including *The Poet*, *Ekphrastic Review*, *Bryant Literary Review*, *pacificREVIEW*, *The Headlight Review*. Her chapbook *Ever Yours, Vincent* is forthcoming from *dancing girl press*. She has been nominated for the AWP Intro Journals 2022 Award. She is the founder and editor-in-chief of *boats against the current*, the managing editor at *The Los Angeles Review*, a Content Strategist at Archer Education, and the MFA Director's Assistant at SDSU. Find her on Instagram and Twitter @kennathemm.

## **Wild Night in the Heavens for M. Van Gogh**

*a love letter from Linda Brandt Myers, February 14, 2022*

The sky aflame with whirling dervishes of light  
from the brush of our fevered, favored madman, who  
looked out one night from his window in the asylum  
in Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, and saw it all  
— that sky we couldn't see until shown how.

And how he showed us — a cyclone of brightness high  
above the cypresses, the commune in Bouches-du-Rhone,  
at the mouth-of-the-river in southern France where he  
committed himself to painting his way out  
of madness, invented a village for our minds.  
(It's hard not to imagine the state of his.)

In 1899, his brother, Theo,  
his sole support, footing the bill from the Netherlands,  
sending words of love, encouragement, faith.

Then, just before sunrise, the sky exploded, he'd said,  
not in so many words, but in phthalo blues,  
ceruleans, cadmium yellows, the whole shebang,  
the only thing to do was to squeeze the tubes,  
seize the palette knife, wield the paint-laden brushes

like swords, go at it and at it for all he was worth,  
pushing forward against the canvas wall,  
muscling out his vision, getting it wrong,  
and wrong again and again, until it becomes  
finally, the vision he sought to share with us,  
madness be damned, it's all there on the wall,  
an ocean away from the source, for all to see.

*Linda Brandt Myers*

Linda Brandt Myers is a widely published poet.

## **The Night We Lose the Stars**

Why do the stars weep? In general, it is because the sky can no longer hold their weight. Their expectation; duality; needs and desires. Goals so far reaching that not even the sun can compete. Only the moon, and then not it's whole.

When do the stars play? When inked in blue and deciphered into coins. Remembered by imagination long since carried into the ground. Dreams shattered into the dust, buried with their roots intact. To be resurrected as trees on an avenue of hope.

When can we touch the stars? The tears are wet; they hang on a limb and fight for attention. The lights of houses dull with respect, and shift their gaze inwards. Tender strokes of love are bitten at by wolves, leant on by thieves and lauded by the sharks.

When do we go home? As the last breath is drawn; as the brushes are cleansed with flammable oils and ignited into green flame. When we look up instead of out, and wish our world into a place of blue calm. The night when we lose the stars.

*Zac Thraves*

Zac Thraves is an inspirational speaker, performer and writer; he runs workshops and events using the arts to challenge how we approach our emotional wellbeing. Zac is also a published poet, and heads the MidKent Poetry Stanza Group, on behalf of The Poetry Society. Several of his books are published on Amazon, including *The Self-Harming Pacifist*, about his own experience with depression, which is currently being developed into a theatrical show. Zac was born in Kent, UK, and remains there with his partner.

## Vincent Saw It All

He painted the whirligig, keeping it simple for us. He (like all other visionaries before him) was considered quite deranged. And now we stand before his Starry Night and know.

Millions of years ago, an explosion in the centre of the Milky Way blasted out energized material (that's what they tell us today). The material is still visible now. Vincent felt it on his skin. Of course, the concentrations are 45,000 light years wide. A sensitive like him couldn't miss it.

A massive shipyard of ancient galaxies, a helix-shaped black hole energy cannon, a star-munching entity in the southern sky... and the residents of Saint-Rémy, a village happy in its provincial slumber, content in the knowledge that wild imagination isn't seemly and will be dealt with.

Glorious anticipation  
Goosebumps proof of truth  
All shades of light

*Rose Mary Boehm*

Rose Mary Boehm is a German-born British national living and writing in Lima, Peru. Her poetry has been published widely in mostly US poetry reviews (online and print). She was twice nominated for a Pushcart. Her fifth poetry collection, *DO OCEANS HAVE UNDERWATER BORDERS*, has just been snapped up by Kelsay Books for publication May/June 2022. Two further manuscripts are ready to find a publisher. <https://www.rose-mary-boehm-poet.com/>

## **If Your Window Has Bars**

If your window has bars you must bend them.  
God gave you eyes for that purpose.  
If they trap you, look closer for

gaps you can dream through.  
When they call the sky blue, look harder:  
which blue is bluer - midnight,

Persian, or violet; which is as precious  
as sapphire, your eyes or mine?  
Everything's there to be loved,

and each way is up when you stand on a star.  
Relish its flames of infinite hues,  
their sways, folds, and flickers.

Parallel lines long to be curves, coiling  
themselves in spirals and swirls if you let them.  
If your asylum has bars you must bend them.

*Paul McDonald*

Paul McDonald taught at the University of Wolverhampton for twenty five years, where he ran the Creative Writing Programme. He took early retirement in 2019 to write and research full time. He is the author of over twenty books, covering fiction, poetry, and scholarship. His most recent book is *Allen Ginsberg: Cosmopolitan Comic* (2020).



## Vincent's Dream

I was filled with lapis lazuli  
and glistening stars last night  
slumbering on a carpet drifting  
through the sky in between clouds  
The massive closeness of the air  
and smell of blue like all Blue Gentians  
in the world had come together  
with their lean spicy scent  
Landing softly in a meadow I followed  
the rolling clouds to a valley where  
houses were conversing their secrets  
Entering the closest one  
a canvas and paint stood waiting  
What could I do but paint

*Jackie Langetieg*

Jackie Langetieg is a past Jade Ring/Bard's Chair winner and has published four chapbooks, two collections, a recent memoir, *Filling the Cracks with Gold*, and *Snowfall*, her most recent chapbook. She has had poems in *Verse Wisconsin*, *Blue Heron Review*, *WI Academy of Sciences*, *Arts & Letters*, and other journals and anthologies. She is a member of the Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets, and the Wisconsin Writers Association. She is retired from government civil service and lives in Verona, WI with her son.

## Over a Steeple

A New Mexico sky swirls in a night not yet night  
but the sun cast to moon and stars over a steeple  
as you climb a hill to Las Truchas.  
Galleries wait at the top lonely as Vincent.

There is no place to get away from a night's sun  
except down a winding road to a restaurant  
where you can sit and talk to a man  
in a disheveled hat who knows these mountains.

He will say what you already know  
confirm your suspicions that the only ones  
to trust are the two horses who nuzzle the fence  
because they once roamed.

The people are stranded like you  
but know their way around confusion.  
Because you don't, you stand a chance.  
You may be set free.

*Kyle Laws*

Kyle Laws is based out of Steel City Art Works in Pueblo, CO where she directs Line/Circle: Women Poets in Performance. Her collections include *Beginning at the Stone Corner* (River Dog, 2022), *The Sea Is Woman* (Moonstone Press, 2021, winner of its 2020 award), *Uncorseted* (Kung Fu Treachery Press, 2020), *Ride the Pink Horse* (Stubborn Mule Press, 2019), *Faces of Fishing Creek* (Middle Creek Publishing, 2018), *This Town: Poems of Correspondence* coauthored with Jared Smith (Liquid Light Press, 2017), *So Bright to Blind* (Five Oaks Press, 2015), and *Wildwood* (Lummo Press, 2014). With eight nominations for a Pushcart Prize and one for Best of the Net, her poems and essays have appeared in magazines and anthologies in the U.S., Canada, and Europe. She is editor and publisher of Casa de Cinco Hermanas Press.

## **I Ask Van Gogh's *Starry Night* to Forgive Me**

I want the stars to stop their frenetic twirling  
before one is impaled on the church steeple.

I want thoughts to stop running  
through my mind like shrieking cicadas.

Let me sleep, undisturbed, under the cypress trees  
whose roots grow straight down,

never interfere with a grave,  
never tickle the dead.

*Sandi Stromberg*

Sandi Stromberg once attended a book release party at Van Gogh's family home in Zundert when she lived in North Brabant, Netherlands. One of her essays about living with the Dutch is included in the book. Her poetry has also been translated into Dutch and published in *Brabant Cultureel* and online in *Dickterbankje* (the Poet's Bench). She is a dedicated contributor to *The Ekphrastic Review*, which has honoured her with one of its Fantastic Ekphrastic Awards, recently nominated her poem "Widowhood" for a Pushcart Prize, and twice nominated her poems for Best of the Net.

## Stargazers

Melly and I talked to each other in soft murmurs and told each other star-stories, just the way Mom used to when she read to us at bedtime.

On those quiet summer nights after Mom died, Dad would take his Criterion RV-6 Dynascope out onto the upper deck of our cabin in the mountains where we lived. He never asked us to join him, but we missed Mom, so my sister and I would huddle on the wide balcony set away from the trees that whispered in the night air. Finally, Melly and I would bring out our sleeping bags and pillows while dad adjusted and re-adjusted the telescope's settings. She and I would tuck ourselves in and turn our eyes skyward, looking for our favorites, the easiest to see: Orion and Ursa Major, and the rest.

Dad talked on softly about the "exquisite definition" of the RV-6's optical system, and its "state-of-the-art electric drive." Melly and I whispered of valiant sky warriors and large lumbering bears, both constellations tracking steadily across the night, as reliable as time. With only our eyes we could see gatherings and families of stars, all in ferris-wheel whirls.

It was on those nights that we learned how it was easier to see things if you didn't look directly at them.

We'd drift quietly to sleep and wake up the next morning, with dad sleeping on the couch, his back turned to us, looking like a stranger. And we'd turn away and stare out at what was left in the sky: the stretched cirrus clouds, made of silk, shimmering in the day.

### *Kate Flannery*

Kate Flannery lives in a small college town, where she also practices law. Her work has been published in *Chiron Review*, *Shark Reef*, *Ekphrastic Review*, and *Golden Streetcar* as well as other literary journals. Her heart remains in the Pacific Northwest where she grew up and returns occasionally to breathe.



Starry Night, by Vincent Van Gogh (Netherlands) 1889