To the Air
TO THE AIR

poem cycle by Paul Maziar
sculptures by Cynthia Lahti
Maziar’s writing was commissioned by Stephanie Snyder, and is among a series of writing commissioned by The Ford Family Foundation’s Critics and Curators Program, with founding Editors Stephanie Snyder, John and Anne Hauberg Curator and Director, The Douglas F. Cooley Memorial Art Gallery; and Sue Taylor, Associate Dean, College of the Arts and Professor of Art History, Portland State University. The commissioning institutions and their partners share a goal to strengthen the visual arts ecology in Oregon, and a key interest of increasing the volume of critical writing on art in our region.
In loving memory

Bill Berkson, 1939 - 2016

Larry Fagin, 1937 - 2017
Take it easier.

— Joanne Kyger

I made myself a target for strokes of luck.

— Peter Schjeldahl
You come through past and present changing your heart by the virtue of day transforming into the night. Is it mind or an illusion that sky covers the material world and our forms achieving a weightlessness just looking up mocking the nightingales.
Hello you magnolia
a blind addition
to the air
flowing far ahead
of my life.
What a destiny
given and received.
You know it
the billowing dream
taking us away
just like wine.
Over stone bridges
two become one
pacific standard time.
There is laughter
There is nostalgia
There is mud
There is fog
There is surprise
There are pirouettes
There are strawberries
There are ellipses
There are moons
There are breaths
There are glimpses
There is whimsy
There is flying
There is space
Wonder of depth
in a form
lost in flatness
till the next
brush with substance.
When held aloft
everywhere a gleam
continuous with you
and your shadow.
Fine by me—
celebratory darkness
wanted
in lieu of
the old optimists
buttoning their lips.
Made by dictation
from the sea
or a stampede
laying hold of
this little world.
The objects live
willed into being
a malleable hillside.
First came dust
and then water.
Nothing the universe
hadn’t seen before.
On the street
a hopeful scene.
Cynthia Lahti’s friends—
citizens of Oregon
by way of
something like work
but much better—
are little forces
sleights of hand
that escape fires
and emerge twinkling
with apparent life.
Piece of cake
am I right?
Sometimes it seems
they might sing.
The coat rose
from the closet
in my story
hanging time up
in its place.
Washing over me
poetry and music
make matter real
in the universe.
Bones are clay
temporary and hilarious
serious as dancing
which nevertheless ends.
But days continue.
Behind the door
your secret harp.
I know you
yet life’s abundance
can’t be seen
all the way.
Not at once.
Acts of imagination
reconfigure our days
moment to moment
moon to moon.
Delight and despair
make life lifelike.
Goes without saying.
I’ve been enchanted by Cynthia Lahti’s work since the moment I first saw it—thanks to my friend, the poet James Yeary. I’ve awaited the occasion to celebrate the imagination, surprise, strangeness and humor in her art, through writing about it, and was thrilled when Stephanie Snyder suggested that I respond to Lahti’s work with poetry, for the Oregon Visual Arts Ecology Project. This book is a record of a few weeks of pure magic that occurred in January and February, 2019. Much love and endless gratitude to Stephanie for allowing this total dream of a book to be a thing. This poem was sparked by and is also dedicated to the swoonworthy Cait McDavid.