

To the Air

TO THE AIR

POEM CYCLE BY PAUL MAZIAR
SCULPTURES BY CYNTHIA LAHTI

great
fainting
spells

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Acknowledgements

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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.

Note

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.