



PICTOPOEMS
PROJECT

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Photography Students

Karissa Anderson
Samantha Bird
Lucas Burney
Emily Eberhart
Miles Gruber
Kennedy Her
Hannah Kieth
Cameron Kramer
Lauren Mahnke
Esther Stoy
Sarah Stuart
Megan Surface
Kylie Tschida
Lydia Velishek

Poetry Students

Amanda Gade
Nina Gallimore
Emma Hausladen
Gianna Hogen
Lucy LaValley
Abigail Schooley
David Som
Miranda Templeton

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	Roger Boulay	

Preface

The collaborative works in this book were inspired by artist and poet Kimberly Blaeser. For years, Blaeser has conducted her own research into the relationship between words and images. She refers to the resulting artworks as, “pictopoems”. This term became a launching point for students in the Studio Art course, The Constructed Photograph, and the English course, Advanced Creative Writing: Poetry, to consider responding to each other’s medium. Blaeser visited with both classes and gave lectures about her pictopoem explorations. Students were then assigned groups and a poem by Blaeser to study and respond to using either photography or words. They were then asked to respond to each other’s images and poems. The resulting artworks are assembled in this book.

Blaeser encouraged students to think beyond merely illustrating each other’s work. She advocated using images and language to “break open” or capture an “illusive beckoning” that an experience may hold. Her visits with students were a call to get inside a moment and speak to its ethos.

The works in this book are the result of many edits and drafts. Students made dozens and dozens of photographs. Many wonderful poems didn’t make the cut. It is worth noting that this collaboration between students and Kimberly Blaeser occurred entirely remotely. Students made this work in the spring of 2021, during the Covid-19 pandemic, and the resulting art is inevitably a reflection of that experience and the limitations it put on what kind of art it was possible to make.

Thank you to Kimberly Blaeser for sharing her work and inspiring our students. Thank you to our students for attempting what is normally a very difficult undertaking in very trying circumstances. We hope you enjoy the book.

James Armstrong
Roger Boulay

PART ONE

**Selections from *Copper Yearning*
Poems by Kimberly Blaeser**

Pica

Eat the upside down Vs of forest ^^^^,
Each small stuttering----dash of rustic roads.
My pedals devour miles; my shaded eyes,
Names: Big Foot Beach, Devil's Lake.
The taste of mythology on my tongue,
This cartographic hunger. Now tip
The tiny cups μμμμ of lakes
The blue spilling veins of ancient rivers.
Pause for fill at each crisscross view
///// of bridges, of tattered railways
vanishing into planted fields of forever.
Inhale lingering scent of wild on onion–
this papyrus, this map of belonging.

Of Nalusachito and the Course of Rivers

For Louis

I would have gone to him then—in the lost river.
The character who lived haunting the edge,
his keen raw in the night, a scream decades loud—
the mixedblood scream that opens us.
Like male rain always falling in the stories
Streaming myth and planting seeds of shadows.
Those dark and true near beings, who lean
always a whisper step away—kin to desire.
How long this dark cast of shadow, bodies
emptied of light; this dry bed of absence, waters
a remnant disappearing from sight? No measure
for this—for us, beneath the patient moon.

Such shapes, not figment nor pacing shade
of panther—but the thin pen of hunger
hunting names stolen, erased, buried. Half-forgotten
half-remembered. Bifurcated. But refusing each
printed erasure: treaties, maps, formulas—
complicated calculations, destiny in degrees.
Here inscribe soul math, of latitude and blood.
Yes, I would unbury the bones of story
lie down beside them in nameless river bottoms,
rivers dried and waiting for Thunder
those beings of myth and copper-laced ether,
those harbingers—those Ancients.

Prairie Thunder

Bleached Bones. Their empty eye sockets
still seeing the sacred prairie—
this brown fecund earth
round and heaving
like a buffalo's back.

Mashkode-bizhiki—
skulls 180,000 deep,
dem bones rising more than four men tall
to the exact height of colonial indifference.
Bison herds. Their thunder old
and gone.
Mine on this page—loud
like memory of rifles from trains
or clatter of 50 million skeletons
bison becoming fertilizer and fine bone china.
This evil, brilliant as the strategy of Kit Carson:
the genocidal slaughter of Navajo sheep—
each the slaughter of a livelihood.



Herd after butchered her of grassland bison
did not become shield or shelter,
become par fleche bags or travois. Martyred tatanka
bodies—not harvested for pemmican or soap
in this insatiable buffalo war. No rawhide
for drums, for stirrups, moccasin soles, or saddles;
no sturdy hair for rope, horns for implements.
No stitches taken with sinew. No arrows
launched from buffalo bow strings—
the majestic skulls of these exterminated
will not grace altars in sacred ceremonies.

Canyon on the Edge of Years

An infinity of rims.
My sight adrift pursuing the sand-colored
rust-lined heather-hued peaks.
Ancient. Land that diminishes
The tiny rubble of electronic dailyness.
A tuning of shadows,
of geometric patterns. An ageless dance
as second by copper second
light spills itself, recklessly
now plunges to the tiny sliver of river—
yes, the carving Colorado a taper of history.
And we inert and anxious, boot-clad
unweathered in our lotioned, minute humanity.
Hopi call you Ongtupqa. Sacred land.
Place of emergence.
Here the dark crags and whorls of becoming,
precipice upon precipice
receding beyond simple sight—
(breath in landscape) this impress of lost gods.
Dream hands that whittle, the pitch of songs
in caves, wing colors on rock walls—
inscribe me here in mountain regalia.

Bronze Lumen

tick of sap dripping,
now flutter-drum of partridge—
palette of spring trees.

copper crane bodies
ride impossible stilt legs
across fields of June

small fox, backward glance
tail burnished by autumn sun
feet first into leaves

hills a smudged sorrel
evening canyon spools light
air holds drum and sage.

amber-eyed stallion
mane tangled with winter sky,
hooves stomp ancient ground.

when snow swirls like breath
vague gusts rise on flat expanse—
ghosts in ocher light.

Winter Aurora

Boots under bath robes
we huddle in the Wisconsin night,
here, too, we whistle
to stalagmite points of light.
Sky shimmers neon
flickers green purple green—
waasanoode
ancient woodland spirits.
The torch of your feet
A northern pathway,
each footfall a spark, a call
to beckon us to the land of makwa.
There somewhere in solar wind,
Niibaashkaa, dark travelers
lift their muklaks high
dance sky.

PART TWO

**Photographs and poetry by
Winona State University students**



curious

a squirrel claws her way up stiff branches,
bristly fur illuminated by living flame,
rushing water, an ancient anxiety
that has kept her alive at least this far.

she sits there, twitching,

staring down with open eyes
toward the vast expanse of a world in which
it is best not to be curious.



Overflow of Pain

I find myself walking through the fields of flowers,
no direction or true end point. My lost mind brings me
to the smell of the lake and my feet find their way to the edge. I look at the calm water and take in a breath.

The water brimmed close to the top of the grass it was bordering on overflowing but the embankment held strong. I wish my eyes were that strong but the tears continued to fall down my face. Imagining my body slipping into the water and letting myself float on the top like a duck before it dives under for food. If only it was that easy to let myself drop down to the bottom, feel the floor of the lake on my feet and watch the fish swim around me.

Forgetting the pain in my heart and silencing the voices in my head. But the water is too high no swimming allowed today.



Apple Pie

Wash your
hands.
Take the knife.
Make sure
to
cut
the Wolf
River apples
correctly
and miss
your fingers.
The sound
of the
'slice'
Fills the
Room.



The blade
goes through
the skin and
then the meat.
The sweet
smell of
freshly cut
apples lingers
in my nose.



Ice and the Snow

I can speak of the ice and the snow that reigns in the North. But in truth we do not speak. We do not speak of the snow. We do not speak to the ice. I could tell you all about the romance of the winter. How lovers find time to keep each other warm for a chilly day fuck, when a pair of summer sweethearts find a wilted flower encased in some frost.

They hold it to their hearts, and wishfully say 'some things survive in winter see' But I would be false in saying that the glimmer of the ice keeps us warm.

For the lovers will drift apart. And that frost will not always protect that bloom. Even the goddamn snow will be your end—the drunk man who got lost in a blizzard can tell you the same thing. When we found him in the morning, there was a smile on his face. Oh, the beauty he must have seen! To be part of a blizzard. Once the frostbite melts from his tongue, and his stiff hand can clasp the bottle once again I'm sure he'll tell the lovers that they'll be okay in the end.



Coming Home

Broken, splattered, plastered
across three states
which one is safe
to call home?

I have crashed
to the floor like a glass
of red wine. Sending veins

of blood to spread
through
the carpeted floor.

I am the wine
I am the stain
I am the shards of glass
I am the whole damned mess

but

I pick up the pieces and
try to create
something completely brand new.

A messy mosaic,
an indistinct scene
a woman who finds home
in her own
presence.





Stampede to Change

Hooves clomp on the ground as herds of wild beasts trample the dirt below. Crushing everything in their way.

No care in the world over what harm they are causing. It is not until the beasts are gone and the dust clears that the real damage appears.

Isn't that how it always is? We don't stop to see the damage is already done. One small action, a cascade occurs, and something drastic changes. One beast. A stampede of beasts can cause the world to crumble.



Butterfly Stitches

I can count the tethers and threads holding my emotions hostage behind the façade of a fake smile and jokes about needing coffee in the morning for your safety, on one hand. Fissures creep along the cobble-banded walls I have built up around myself in a tightly swaddled cocoon, and soon enough, that dam will break; I'm not sure what will happen then. Will the nightmares win?

I'm the Boogeyman and I'm coming to get you.

My mother always asks why I'm so tired all the time, as if the dark circles under my eyes aren't evidence enough of the effort I put into making it through each day of mindless schoolwork and psychological warfare. "You look like you got punched" she'll say – yeah, and I feel like that would hurt a lot less than the barbs and insults.

You can't see me!

I chant, over and over, hoping that one day I may will myself invisible from judging eyes and the isolation. I pray that the voices will one day come seeking me out and I could say "you can't see me" and have them brush right on by me – no effect. No pain. No tears left staining my pillowcase at night like sweat stains or piss after a nightmare.

It doesn't matter what your name is.

Pride. Anxiety. Insecurity. Nagging Endless Depression. It all spells out "pained" anyways. Does naming it really change anything? A diagnosis on paper doesn't stop me from living with it. Highschool is cruel, but my mind is crueler.

You're not good enough. Nobody cares how you're doing.
You should just stay in bed. Give up!

No. Fuck that. I will not allow this to overcome me. I refuse to walk on eggs shells and butterfly wings around myself because I am afraid of what I might find if I allow myself to process everything – to spend time with my darkness. I used to watch WWF with my dad at night when mom wasn't around – our secret – and I wish I could become my own Undertaker, and tell the bad thoughts to go fucking bury themselves and

Rest in peace.



drakes

two lives suspended in a time on water
a place that not even the slightest tragedy could kiss
them or blow it's bleary-eyed 2 a.m. cigarette smoke
at their lackadaisicality

with no words between them, they allow their hackles
to lower again perhaps internally musing on the pas-
sage of confidence
that ambushes in the intimate moments
leaving you dry-mouthed as you converse of past
nights, sharper nights

the satin slip of smooth water beneath their evening
feet quiet chatter, crickets on lily pads
fingers in the grass and a deep long sigh
as the breath of one becomes another
two sincere confessions of universal nescience

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HARSH LINES CARVE OUT THE SKY
ITS OWN VERSION OF MOUNTAINS

TRAPPED FOR MILES AROUND
NO BIRDS TO BLOW BUBBLES
OF SONG AROUND THIS INDUSTRIAL

NO FRESH AIR
FORWARD AND SKATE
BY THE BEST

RETURN TO HOME
TO GRAVEL ROADS
AND COMFORT MOUNTAINS

CUTTING THROUGH THE SKY
AN AIR SO CRISP

IT'S AS IF THE TIME AWAY
HAS TAKEN ALL THE MEMORIES
OF THAT TASTE AWAY FROM ME

DUNN RD

SIFTING SHADES OF GREEN,
THE PULL TO NATURE
A STRING IN MY CHEST

SPRING 2021

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