

Where We Reach

by M. D. Friedman



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*- for Mariamne
the light of my soul*

Thanks to all the artists who inspired me and graciously allowed the publication of my various representations of their work. Also a special thank you to Tom Katsimpalis whose articulation of his insight into the creative process inspired "Echoes of Tom" and whose artwork inspired "We Fly."

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Section I: Threats of Love



i wish now

i wish now
i was with you
under this moon
as full as my anticipation

i want now to be
skin to skin within
your arms again
emptied of my desperation

as if our lives
between had
never happened
freed of regret

would that i could
have known then
what now i know
and we again first met

alone in this darkness
i begin to pretend
the same moon
rides your night

strong and fragile
as the eggshell
moonlight
i reach for you tonight

forgive me

I must warn you
I have been thinking of you
absorbing joy from you
breathing you in
like the sleet that glazes the petals
I am dangerous for you

you see, I keep wanting
you in the darkness
not just soul to soul
I can't separate that other
the desire of lip to lips
that passing ache
of skin brushing skin
the lingering harmony
of the thick spring fog
nurturing the unfurling leaf

please forgive me

Variations on William Carlos Williams

Variation #1

I grasp you
like a wheel
holding on
as you turn over
and over again
as imperfect
and sweet as a plum

how I cling now
to your skin and how like you
I am shining in my tears
like a new born
dripping with the dew
of my birth

suddenly it is you
that lifts me
from this cold
dark grass
that drags me up through
the whispers of our humus

it is you here again from somewhere
that whirls me like a fragile dream
a cameo in stained glass
spinning through the clouds
into the sun-bleed air
now as I let go

Variation #2

this is just to say
that what turns you
lifts me

that what you were
saving for breakfast
I have already eaten

that what matters
has past and all that is left
is an empty box

there never were
any chickens
nothing is white for long

The Question of Lovers

*Walkin' by myself I hope you understand
I just wanna be your lovin' man
— J. A. Lane (a.k.a. Jimmy Rogers)*

these hands that peel me now
from where do they come
dry as fire
their fingers are not mine
nor their warmth yours
not any I am used to

I live in my own world now
a glistening globe of halo
each night my weather changes
as I toss, I turn, the clouds shift
like the pillows beneath my head
never quite right

I know little
of these yearnings
that strive to pull me down,
my soul in knots
cramping up in resistance
like an arthritic fist

I know little
of these reaching flames
that sear a lonely
beauty into this night
my skin hisses from the hot friction
of foreign fingers brushing over me

I know little
of the busy bakers
who kneed
my hurt out
like raw
dough

I know
these hands
all mean
well and their
hot thick touch
is meant to heal

they are all
reaching now
to bring me along
to warm me
in the fiery oven
of their caring

I pull
myself
forward
hand by hand
in a chain
of becoming

this bright night
twinkles now like
a dark eye
that flows
with fiery
tears

all around me there is a flickering light
sleep is impossible
I stick to my crumpled sheet
the smooth clinched cloth
thickly padded into my hand
bloats me up into my dream

I lay here
breathing in
the strange air
of this luminous night
it saws its way
into my lungs

I know
the burning chill
of the long night
will lift
with the dark
that rises each dawn

it appears again I am
the last
to remember
the last
to wrap myself up
in the cold vacuum of pain

my world
awakens
bled of color
nothing is left untouched
no friends are left
who can understand this

there is only one way out
the crisscrossed
tangled trails
still piled thinly
like fallen branches
on the forest floor

they build ragged layer
upon dark layer
rejected kindling
recrossing the path
obscuring my way
back to the beginning

this is the dream
I dreamed
I ran from
I run from it now
in my dream
it is finally time to rise

much of what was
is left still
(the dark scars have always been here)
I see it all shine now
through the stars of my eyes
and through all their storms of salt

here in these
last hours of the dawning
there is nothing left
to understand
the dream
frees me

nothing is left
to complete here
as this bright
night turns again
into another
shadowed day

I burn as cleanly
and powerfully
as is possible
for one soul
bursting with life
alone

I know absolutely
the abundance
of each moment
that continues for
as ever far
my every breath will take me

it is true
my heart
has been
shattered
into
bliss

I sink like a spinning tear
back down into that time
of rest and green
my fears fade like falling shadows
cast into that pewtered pond
faintly freckled with reflected stars

I remember
this place now
born of blazing pain
this first
and last place
of me alone.

Dancing on the Moon

those two from above
they're dancing again

I hear the drumming of bare feet
in the turbulent pulsing of blood
that fills your arms as you reach for me again

those two come tonight
like flickering patches of light
scattered across the dappled forest floor

like the abandoned
flames that fill your eyes
that burn into my own again

you have this way
of lighting me up
of firing the dreams that line my heart

something in your touch
smolders in my flesh
as your love warms my night

something smooth as scented oil
lingers where your lips
brush my skin again

each day you awaken shining
more intensely than the night before
and the jagged shadows of my fears

scatter like mice spooked
by the thunder of wind-cracked
trees slamming to the ground

trees that smite the earth of their making
trees that whirl in the moment's dance
through the eddied air of their birth

we stand naked to the storm
swaying to exhaustion finally
shattered in an awkward woody bliss

fully immersed
in the lonesome rattle
of the last fallen leaf

our bodies ease
in and out of each other
as delicately as the moonlight

falls across the rippled lake
as assuredly
as our breath rides the wind

the driving lure
of our love
calls us out again

to savor the final fragile silence
wrung from this unsteady night
we dance upon the moon again
with feet of light

Letter to the Oldest Light in the Universe

*there were times when I could believe
we were the children of the stars
and our worlds were made of the same
dust that flames in space -- Mark Strand*

So this is why we
expand into the night,
why we stare as if entranced
into the seamless ether.

To simply learn how
you flood the other's space
with bursting light
while still a universe

apart is why
we search the end
where our beginnings
dance in place.

I see now how you warp
from there to here
without the slightest
wrinkle of motion.

I have come to understand
your ways of explosively tricking
a moment of flame
from the engulfing emptiness.

So we whiff, and I hold inside
my lungs the vacant musk
that shadows
your extinction,

that whirls perpetual
your shattered birth
from the scorched
center of our love.

I write now to say
I admire
what fires you,
what compels you
to warm the other,

to touch that distant
place inside
where we
are each
most alone.

I admit, I have stalked you forever,
never knowing why,
yet, somehow, always
yearning for more from this
idle sifting of the vacuum.

Now that at last
I've found you,
I wonder do you still burn
from the edge of the known
like a diamond blistered

by dark flame?

Or have you finally winked out,
as cold and smooth as a glass eye,
long before your alien
luminance ever saw us?

For how long now,
in our little bubble of air,
have we breathed unaware
the splintered ash
of your demise?

I yearn and wobble
from the falling edge
of my own decaying orbit.
Do we share
the same gravity?

Will your ever-bending,
self-consuming light
stroke for one flashing instant,
the thrusting black hand
of my persistent loneliness?

Always will I cling with fervor
to your distant fire
even though we both know
the moment of letting go
is all that endures.

It is this desire
to break into flames
upon inhaling the smallest
spark of meaning
that unites us.

I am sorry
I missed
your birthday.
Please stay in touch.

Section II: Making Something of the Art



A Pocket Park Poem for Loveland's Mother & Child

(from a sculpture entitled *Moulding Our Future* by Denny Haskew
built on the ashes of the old French Bakery)

something is not right
the boy is too old to be nestled bare skinned
against his mother's breast

(her nipples hard now from fear)
he is too big to be carried without strain
(although the curve of his leg

so smoothly rides the curve
of her hip as if they were one creature)
he is stern beyond his age

his eyes fix upon
the burning ruins behind
he points mutely toward the sky

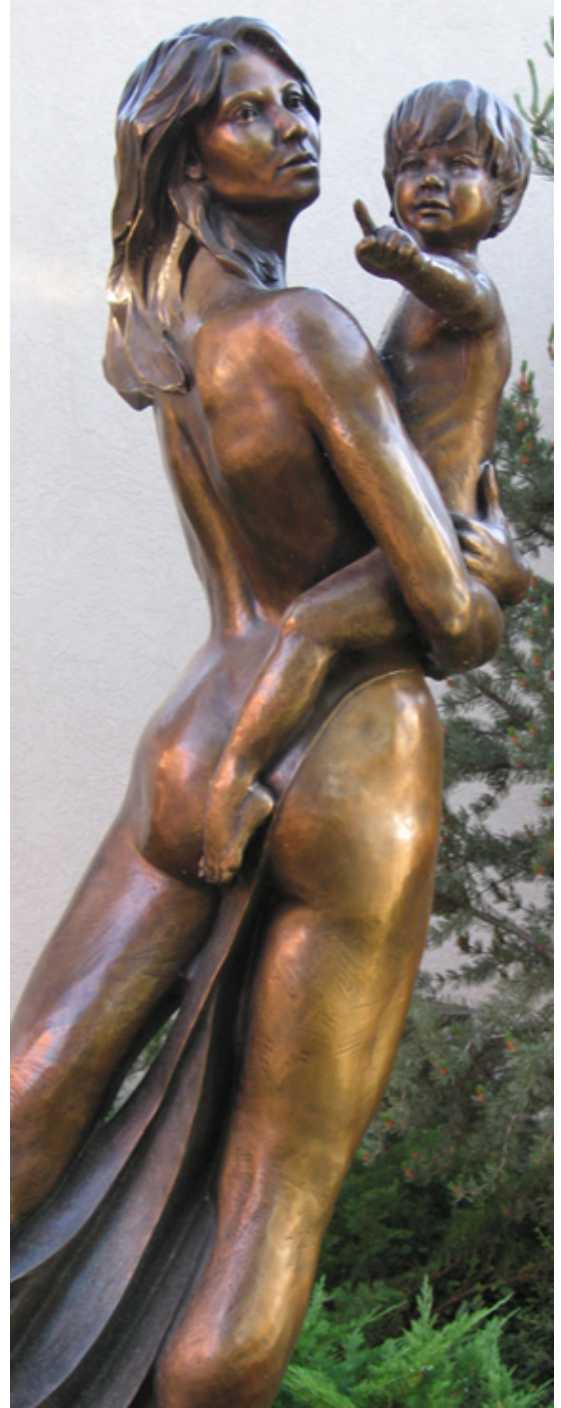
where dense smoke still rises
his finger follows
the dark creased swirling

of all that is left from what he has known
of home. his mother too
throws a blank look back

an empty metallic stare
brimmed with a hollow ache
this last hidden tear, a lost echo

of the thunder that made him
flames drip
from her thighs

frozen now into bronzed waves
she is thinking how
she should have left years ago



Found at an Exhibit of Found Art

(with thanks to Gene Hoffman)

Before the kachina doll
with a headdress of box straw,
beneath an *Abstraction* in plastic,
on this hard practical carpet
worn by both the keeper and the kept,

I sit stilling myself in public
in complete deference
to the passing troops of critics.
Like an artist I am drawn
to that negative space given life

by a juxtaposition of just such
“whimsical” work of the human heart.
A pirate poet incognito, I am here to lift
a piece from the deliberate peace
of these eclectic treasures.

I hide now amongst
these ruins of steal
and plastic and fiber.
I am safe for now, guarded by *St. George*
in *Aluminum, Rusted Metal & Car Reflectors*.

I am protected by the *Winged*
Tiki of hanging driftwood
that hovers
over my right shoulder
like a wizard’s familiar.



Whether splintered falcon
or clumsy wind chime, he
perches on the wall behind me
awaiting my whistled command, but kachina
still holds out to me

its handcuff and chains of cardboard
weighed down by inner clock parts
wound anew from eclipse and cross.
Again he invites me in
with his papery grin.

Yet, somehow, I remain uncaptured.
I keep to the mowed flat of this carpet,
and here, in this place between demons of artifice,
dangles the day I found my own artifact
on the ruinous plain of Mesa Verde.

Where led by a shade in the long
after light of the lightening storm,
I glided as I was guided
over glistening rock and dusty clumps of red mud
straight to a sharp curve of pottery.

Perhaps once a fine smooth shell for sacred water,
now just a jagged shard the color
of ancient flesh, heavy with the dusky
smell of rain on crumbled brick,
and though the words are clearly posted

on every kiva, although each sipapu
opens like a hungry mouth from the other world
to forbid it, I keep it here with me still
deep inside this hidden place
on the broken edge of my poetry.



The Art of Time A Time for Art



)inspired by a clock of painted glass by artist Louis Recchia(

the hands of this clock
do not move
the numbers that divide
the hours have fallen over

the seven is gone, displaced
by the zero that fell from the ten
)perhaps it fell for the seven in a plot
where nothing ironically leaves the one alone)

there is an argument here that twists the roads
that tints and taints the happy glittered paint
and yet rectangular bits of mirror manage
to frame a flattened star around the reflected night

a damaged plane is dropping
fattened stick people
like leaflets of propaganda
as it spirals down through destiny

grey factories and cold castles?
punctuate a lunatic landscape
a bold trombonist blares
a tree-bending tune

a shadow clown with arms outstretched
is drawn blindly forward
as if entranced by the wet
sweet jazz of the brazen bone

his inky dunce cap
)separated at last
from the top of his dark head(
magically rises on its own

at the center of it all a sad moon-like face
puzzles at why time has stopped here
(what is the bright meaning in this deliberate pause,
in the happy dysfunction of this functional piece(

lips thick and red with stick
one green eye blued
as if closing to the din of the two Whisperers
(neither a pure devil nor a raw angel)

androgynous clock face, face within a face
pink cheeked and azure
masks without mind
minds without reason

why does this lamp
burn your tortured sky
like a rocket and yet
shed no light here

with black paint on pink glass
the artist signs his name
as if he were brushing it
from the other side
of this painted window

Katherine Writes a Poem about a Poem Written by a Flute

she paces
distracted at first by the Butterfly Bowl
displayed in the adjacent case,
and finally settles like a moth
on the laminate floor
(so cleverly the clone of oak)

Katherine finds between poems
a blank page of dried wood pulp
and begins to write now
her hand bobbing
like so many wavelets
crossing the white pond

her words
like the flute's music
are made of breath
and will dance like the songs
of the wind in their simple
costume of sky

the flute poses hauntingly still
there behind the thick glass,
even the wild pheasant's feathers
tied round this tool of tunes
are neatly secured by thin strips
of wind-dried wapiti hide



Oh proud and preened bird scale, lashed and twisted
in a land without the life of moving air,
still, I know this vermilion feathered edge,
this tip of red tickle must have
careened and flared once
in a fiery dance of bird lust

it is true no wind can come now
cross the golden grasses
to stir a sacred melody,
no air will flee swirling
these finger-smoothed holes
to shape the hollow woven sound

to think that once
this shaft of breath
(now empty even of echo)
screamed as brightly as sunlight
on a cold morning stream
and so called the soul to drink

Katherine finishes for now and yet somehow
from the shining riffled pool of her turning page
will leap a new song of bright breath
one for the one lost today
in this zoo of hollowed trees
under the lights electric



Icarus Triptych in Rusted Metal & Aluminum

(in memory of Gene Hoffman)

~ for Max on his 17th Birthday



pistoned thighs thrust me toward the sun
my shiny new placental wings snap wide
their silky mucussed sheen of silver blistered with the light
bled from the heavy metallic loins of the Mother of Invention

I vault forth and my waxen heart opens
like a dark manifold greedily sucking down air
like a hungry infant mouth suckling cool feathered milk
from a swirling soft pearled breast of cloud

here swaddled in the final triumph
of human innovation
I hang as weightless
as my misty blanket

here swallowed in a flash of zen metal
I tumble forward into the white heat
that melds the worlds of up and down
I ride the whistling song of the wind like a flapping tongue

for we who are born of both fire and flesh
know no home but air
know no food but light
for us there is only this moment of gliding
only the burning music of life

Section III: Portal to the More



The Incipient Schismatics

(with thanks to the artist Katherine Davis)

what window
is draped by
this warm yolk of color

from what hidden eggshell sky
pours this sunset of earth
that mutes the many voices of the screaming wind

i have been here before
in this place of myriad faces
that press like a stampede of hoof prints

into the rain-dappled mud
i have drunk from this drama where everyone
speaks at once and yet only the one is heard

i reach in with my fingers as if to tease these panes
of neon turquoise that anchor the man's brown face
to the cold chartreuse of the phantom sun

i have seen these wrinkles rippling
across the scratchy window
that fingerprints the heart

i have seen them shimmer with glacial sunlight
as the wavelets pulse other worldly
atop the breath tickled lake

there is more here than an opening window
that burns with fuchsin sky on glass
there is a crack between the light and fired day

there is a portal here to that other place
you were there
you saw it with me

how the brick dark birds never broke formation
how they simply winked
through the liquid sky into somewhere else

the visitors

walls of incandescent metal
the incessant whir of the electric
punctuated by busy clicks
of buttons and switches
my head inside the glass helmet
radiating splintered lines of color
like a feral plasma ball
jagged ridges of blue midnight
bolts of lavender, waves of deep forest green
the air was clean but tainted with the smell of ozone
and then in my mind everything at once flared clear
myriad petals of pastel light
fell around me like warm snow

I knew they meant well
I had followed the trail of the broken rocket
to find them and then they invited me in
they were friendly enough
strangely familiar and gentle
their bodies were translucent
with lips tinged fuchsia
their breath smelled of amber laced with fennel
their gold-flecked eyes flickered as steadily
as the stars but warmer, like velvet flame
none of this matters I know
you just need to know I went in
of my own will and now I am fine

let me tell you though
what they told me
they said they
had come to bring us
what we all have always wanted
a gift wrapped in starlight
from the dark skies of home
it all happened so quickly
a flash of current
then the exquisite bliss of being fully human
flooded through me
as if I had been an empty vase
and now you see I am blooming

blue cathedral

—Inspired by the symphony by Jennifer Higdon

(Composed in her reflection on the loss of her younger brother, Andrew Blue)

In this place of ends and beginnings
with its congregation
contagious with solitude,

its crystalline walls
filled by growing sky
glowing with a roux of sunset cloud,

stained glass shadows
gyre and glitter,
an ethereal rainbow.

I soar raptor-like
on the sonorous wind that wails
from your dream-colored clarinet.

I become tangled in the luminous skin
of your brother's fragile flutesong.
I breathe his remembered breath.

I know you two
rode the bristled air together
entwined in the harmony of each other's melody.

I shiver with the diva
of the crystal goblet
who shuts her song

from cold glass lips
stroked by wet fingers.
I ring with the murmured

chiming of the temple ball
that rolls in the loose
cup of your hand.

Now I can see
through the gold-coined
eyes of the lost man

how borne on a boisterous crescendo
of brass, you together
climbed the azure

beyond the joyful
shattered ghost
of his dieing.

sugar mist

on nights such as this
void of star or moonlight
it settles into the steely shadow
that spreads before daybreak

it jewels the sorrel skin
of the sleeping grasses
and frosts fresh fringes
of fox footprint

as delicate as darkness
subtle in its stealth
the sugar mist becomes
without pining

seeping up
from the warm earth
billowing over the dormant fields
without a single quiet question

creeping down ditches without regret
you see, we do what we must
to shine and sparkle
in the grey beginning of our day

we live our lives
to always grow love
to feed forever the hope
that there is more to all this

than the crisp silence
that will take us,
more than our never ending
fear for the ice

Section IV: We Arrive



My Two Pocket Girl

After that dance in Copacabana
I begged her that she give me two napkins
that I may write her phone number down twice
and slide one in each pocket for safe keeping.

My mother used to say how her dad, after loosing
his keys or some important piece of paper, would always say:
I didn't have this problem when I only had one pair of pants.
Then she would tell the story

of when he was lucky enough
during the Great Depression
to work at the train station
and how his boss had asked him

to walk an expensive pedigreed dog
that was being shipped across country.
It was the prized pet of some rich, and I am sure very important woman.
The dog got loose and ran away. My grandfather feared he'd be fired.

Then he caught a stray
put it back in the crate that was labeled only "dog"
and then put it back on the train.
I know the story was told for other reasons,

but sometimes I think about that stray.
Am I not like this dog?
Interrupted from life,
on a long ride to disappoint

some unknown, angry woman
further down the line.

This is the way it always happens.
I would not have this problem

if I only had one pair of pants.

Back to the girl at the dance, even with a napkin
in each pocket I still would have lost her number
had she given it to me.

I go back now to that same club
night after night after night
looking for that one dance, that one girl,
that one moment in her arms when I was more.

Coupled Socks

It is not the coupled socks that interest me
as I spread my darks across my unmade bed
but those newly found ones that arrive each week
without a partner. I have always taken it as proof

of the porous nature of our universe, a weekly lecture
on the impermanence of relationship, a poignant reminder
of personal taboo, and of how my own conventional nature
bars me from that place of making my own pairs.

Wearing one black with one brown or even one all white one
with my one sporty red-striped one would be a start.
(After a few washes I am never quite sure
which are dark blue and which are black anyway.)

Still, as regularly as the evening news,
new unmatched "pairs" show up
on these love strewn sheets
where just hours ago we coupled.

I wonder why I continue to try
and mate them even in good light
even after that one wild night when defiantly
I wore a black with a blue and nothing bad happened.

She Has a Mortgage on My Body and a Lien on My Soul

(inspired by a line from a blues song by Robert Johnson)

I am driving too fast to see her again.
No one else will do.
The way she touches me
reminds me of when the lake scatters
the sunlight that rains
down after a storm.

I am taken aback now by how I need this.
I thought I had come so far to get here again
with this woman I have wanted since the night
we met at the Poco concert, when she surprised me
from behind and circled her arms around me
tantalizing me as the stars flickered above me like whirling candles.

So it comes back to this again,
more than 30 years later,
this rebellion of mine against caring,
this reaching for closeness and running
from the near reality of needing anyone,
this fear of having finally what I have always wanted.

It seems I am addicted.
I will steal from whatever
life I have made without her
for yet another fix of her.
I only need her more,
the more we are together.

I bead up with sweat on my sweat
and tremble at the thought
of losing her again.
I will never give her up.
She has a mortgage on my body,
a lien on my soul.

Selling Our Children for Gambling Money

Parenthood is always a gamble.
That crap shoot fusion of egg and sperm,
the flesh explosion of another life into ours,
the atomic challenge of being human
with its associated fallout of trying to be

even a better person than we are.
We seem to forget ourselves
under the mushroom cloud of the nuclear family,
putting aside our wants for someone else.
Every child comes with a price:

those things we settle for,
those dreams we let go of,
and that promise there is never enough time to keep.
Then these children become people of a sort,
and grow in their parasitism hopefully toward mutualism.

We are always seeking
a better life for those we spawn,
perhaps this ticket is a winner,
perhaps just another whiner.
And maybe one day

they will even buy our story.
This morning we wake like every morning,
make our tired bed, fix our low fat breakfast,
and we sell ourselves again. We wonder at where
the time has gone. We wonder

when they grew up and how they know
to speak, to walk, to even breathe now
without our constant neglected guidance,
but we wonder most if they will ever know
how much is enough to ask for their own lives.

Then one morning
all children wake up,
make their own bed, fix their own breakfast,
go out into the world
and sell themselves.

Echoes of Tom

*I am desperate
for meaning
his voice
trailed*

*off like velvet smoke, but I had seen that slightly
skewed window the color of the sun
burning at the top of his painting like the open
door to a broken furnace, I knew it stood for something*

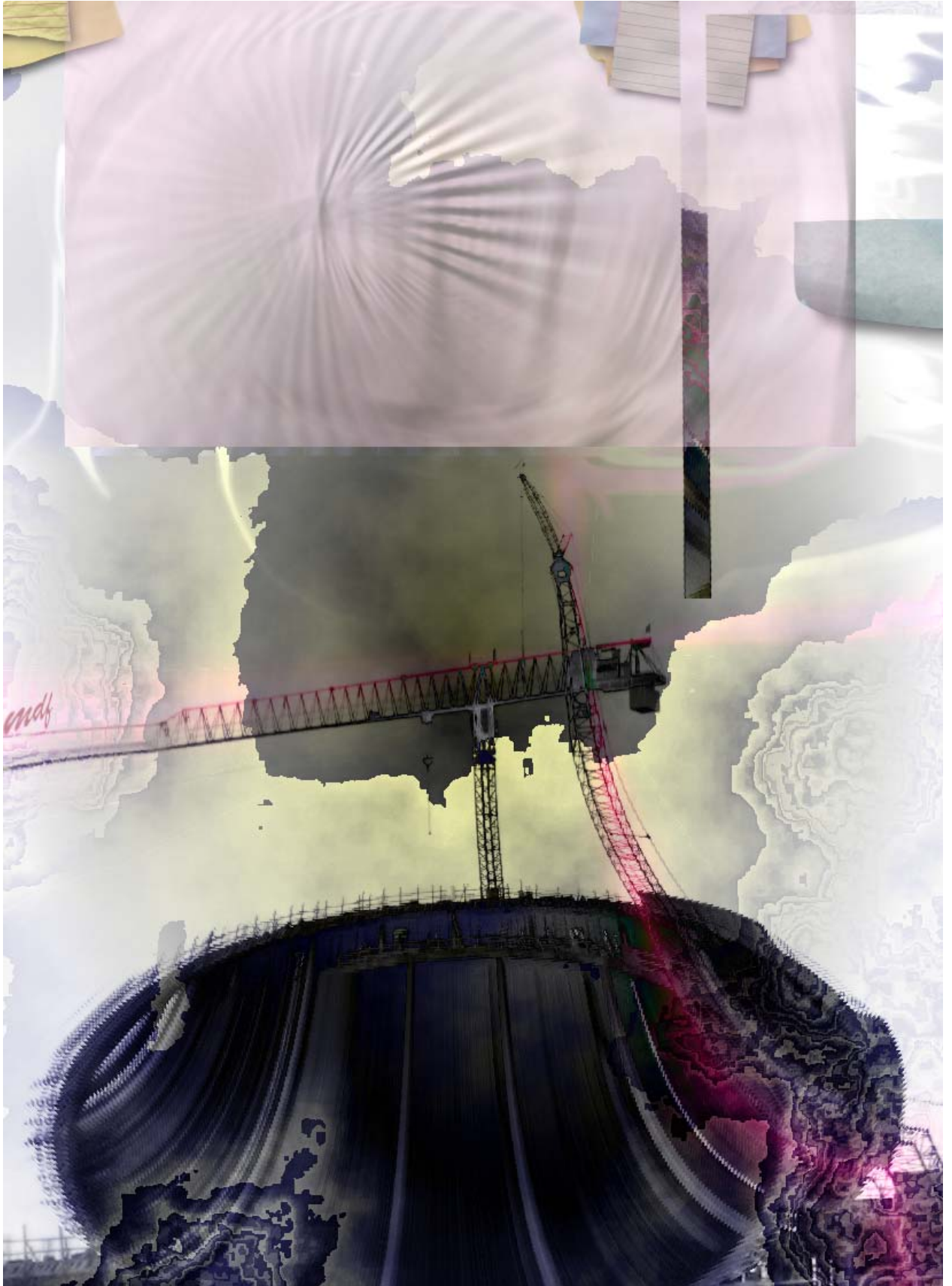
*it is only paint
it started in my dream
and followed me bobbing through the waves of my day
like a swimming dog, always whining,*

*you see, I live in a trance
and I like it that way
there is little else I do
that matters,*

*only these smoldering fragments of vision
that linger until I make something of them
on my own terms, like the light I turn off to sleep
etches in cobalt the sea of my bed*

*and that slanted square
so slightly off center
so bright and blazing white
I had to paint it yellow*

Where We Reach Digital Accident #1





We fly

this night as if it were the edge
of our falling that keeps us afloat,
splitting open with light as we go,

bleeding luminance, as if it were our sheen
that holds us down. Our bodies now as slight
as shadow, slide as freely as the greased
ghost of cloud. We frolic in the curling

creamy steam that rises from the dark power
plant like children, chasing the surf. The blackened
buildings below do not pay us any mind,
no cold stares note our play above this city of still.

We slice the air exuberant, learning
the whims of the wind as we go
clinging each to our own secret
pocket of weightlessness.

There is nothing to this
falling out from ourselves. There is nothing
more real. Like the graceful craning heron,
we arrive to where we reach.



Where We Reach is an exotic romp in the mundane. Nothing special here but that which is special in each of us. With brutal honesty and sometimes acrid humor, M. D. Friedman soars and stumbles from confusion to love.

This is his fourth poetry book in five years and includes many poems inspired by various works of art. M. D.'s photos enrich the visual experience of the reader. M. D. walks in and out of the artwork like it was a grocery store usually leaving with what he needs and without getting hurt.

