

The Helen Lawson Paintings Project

July 2009

Editor: Lesley Burt

The Helen Lawson Paintings	
<p>Diagonal Storm</p> 	<p>Global Spine</p> 
<p>Harvest Moon</p> 	<p>Holding Leaves</p> 
Contributing Poetry Kit Poets	
<p>James Bell</p> <p>Jim Bennett</p> <p>Lesley Burt</p> <p>Bob Cooper</p>	<p>Philip Johnson</p> <p>Stuart Nunn</p> <p>Sherry Pasquarello</p> <p>Timothy Stone</p>

About the Project - About Artist and Poets - Appendix 1 and 2
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Diagonal Storm



James Bell

Diagonal Storm

to draw a diagonal is to draw a division
that excludes sight of the moon
you can see in a clear sky - for there is

no place for division where the clearness exists
with no discernable plan to join up as it does

the gulls make a racket on a straight shoreline
where a bend comes in after a distance
for nothing goes across the river course

except when the wind storms in from the South West
and a piece of angled Atlantic pays it a visit

then the river is in your face
hurtling you into any shelter you can find
not then a river for contemplation - a stretch

for the imagination on a fine morning without negatives -
inverted colours always come at you from odd directions

is the unnatural curve of a bridge across the river
the sigh of a breeze from the East in sunlight -
these have no force - so a storm when it is diagonal

means business without the intention and moves on

Jim Bennett

diagonal storm,

across the map
the isobars
move in diagonals
the storm will reach
the Wirral by 6pm
the weather-lady said
she was wrong
the storm arrived
at 10 this morning
just after the phone call
from your mother

Lesley Burt

Diagonal Storm

Any other day, we might say the breeze
is cool; relish the feel of wool in winter.
On the quay, feed ducks, amused because
swans approach as a full-speed flotilla;
fight for bread. We would gaze southeast across
the river to the church; appreciate
reflections of clock-tower, willows; discuss
the family, Christmas; holidays, art, sport.

A different slant today: from sideways on
an ice-cold blast hammers the sky to steel;
the turning tide is etched by acid rain.
Our foreheads, mouths, are knots of anger still.
We walk side-by-side but silent, sullen.
No rainbow yet; no promise of a lull.

Bob Cooper

Rain: The Right Angle

Slanting rain
at right angles to the roof

flows to the gutter,
the pipe, the drains, the river

then on to the sea, the ocean,
to rise again, become clouds

that will eventually be
the source of slanting rain.

Timothy Stone

Diagonal Storm

I always have a prepared response
forming my pawns around the king
for like a whirlwind in she swirls
raining down bolts of lightening,
and with my carefully built defence
I take her blows on the proverbial chin
while occasionally I too go on the attack
but only with a modicum of verbal drizzle,
to find she has moved to pastures new
and as I arrive my words are but a shiver.
She never fights head on, toe to toe,
no hand to hand weaponry, nor fisticuffs
but I hear her thunderous approach
see the black clouds riding triumphant in front
feel her winged chariot leading the charge
as she cries victory riding in on the Diagonal Storm

Global Spine



Jim Bennett

fish; backbone of the world

the fish were left behind
when we left our home
we had no choice
it came so suddenly

all our years of property
lost in an hour
and Tom's fish
looked after for years

left in a powerless
lightless tank

two months later
they let us have an hour
to get some other things
we took the tank

four fish had survived
in the water enriched
by their dead

a female was pregnant
and later gave birth to
a new generation

they swim in the tank
cleaned and cared for
a memory of what was

Lesley Burt

Global Spine

Standing sideways by the lorry
where rows of sacks are stacked
Bert grabs one by its top corners;
turns and, deft as a dancer, swings it
onto the leather pad between his shoulders.
Coal-dust ingrains his shirt-collar
in spite of ardent scrubblings.

Bends beneath the bulging bag,
through the gate, down the path
to Mrs Williams' coalhole.
Exhales as it empties into darkness;
repeats with another hundredweight.
And again, next door; again in various quantities
along streets in several towns,
six days a week, whatever the weather.

Still stooped, he lights a roll-up
outside his allotment shed;
admires big yellow flowers on the marrows
and small red ones on the runner beans.
Tells the neighbour he feels like Atlas,
what with the weight of feeding family,
and the whole damned world's home fires on his back.

Sherry Pasquarello

global spine

bones stiffen then bend
twist
moves
rounded hips
in the rhythms

of millennia

thick neck shakes
as she laughs
tremors roll across soft belly
fingerbones snap

sweat pours down
and desserts bloom

spine cracks
whips and thrusts
eyes shine
dark with stars

lover moon is high
tides rise and lap to
kiss
wet thighs

and she slows
bones soften
slip around and hold
the light.

Harvest Moon



Jim Bennett

Harvest Moon

the footpath around Whitewell common
smelt of morning and dew wet grass
it even had the look of fresh sunlight
the sort that is cool and stretches shadows
into the west and makes giants of us all
that's how the day started
a walk with Charley
before the drive to the Lakes
for our snatched late season break

in the afternoon we stopped at
Wordsworth's house
saw the couch he would lie on
In vacant or in pensive mood
the guide claimed it was the actual one
mentioned in the poem

at our holiday home
not far from Ruskin's view
we eat outside
as afternoon faded into evening
then as night fell
we watched the moon rise as the sun set

although it was far away
we could hear someone playing
a Neil Young album
and Harvest Moon echoed
across the night

Lesley Burt

Harvest Moon

Godfrey's garden
slopes towards Mandeville,
overlooks John Crow buzzards
riding thermals on wide wings;
visited by Doctor Birds,
ticks, wasp-striped caterpillars;
a tangle of frangipani, coffee, peppers
beneath avocado and banana trees;
some kind of food for picking all year.

Our last meal with him
is ackee-and-saltfish, rice-and-peas,
sun-ripened mangoes;
on the veranda, he says
England must be great:
cool, plenty of rain,
electricity, punctuality;
he recites 'Upon Westminster Bridge'.

We admire the sky -
no streetlight pollution -
say how hard to believe, back home,
we'll see the same moon
wax and wane up there;
although from a different angle.

Bob Cooper

Harvest Moon In Aston

In the car park outside Tesco's
while a huge pale moon rises
above the bottle bank slowly
cornflake packet after packet
are squidged in on top of bags.
How they bend to belong, then rustle,
as the boot lid's slowly closed.

Philip Johnson

Harvest Moon

cheese

out of the harvest picnic basket
carried away to the wash by the madness of rain

cast off the world's edge in a foaming rage

waxed

in the night sky
pale of face

moon

caroused by the love song of a nightingale nest in a mass of cream

Stuart Nunn

Harvest Moon

A cloudless night, following hot
on a day of field-sweat, love-sweat,
when rabbits by dozens made the dash
from shrinking barley-stand
to hedge-scramble. A day
when everyone went home rewarded,
rabbits hanging from ham-strings,
the larder and pot waiting.
A day when horse-flanks
jounced us home through the plat,
the straw-stink, ankle-prick.

Someone to climb with
on the half-built rick as darkness
clots like cream on the day's crust.
Someone whose finger can point with yours:
Sea of Tranquillity,
Sea of Vapours,
Sea of Nectar. Someone
whose skin's lunar geography
is unknown. Someone whose name
will fade while moon-flesh lingers.

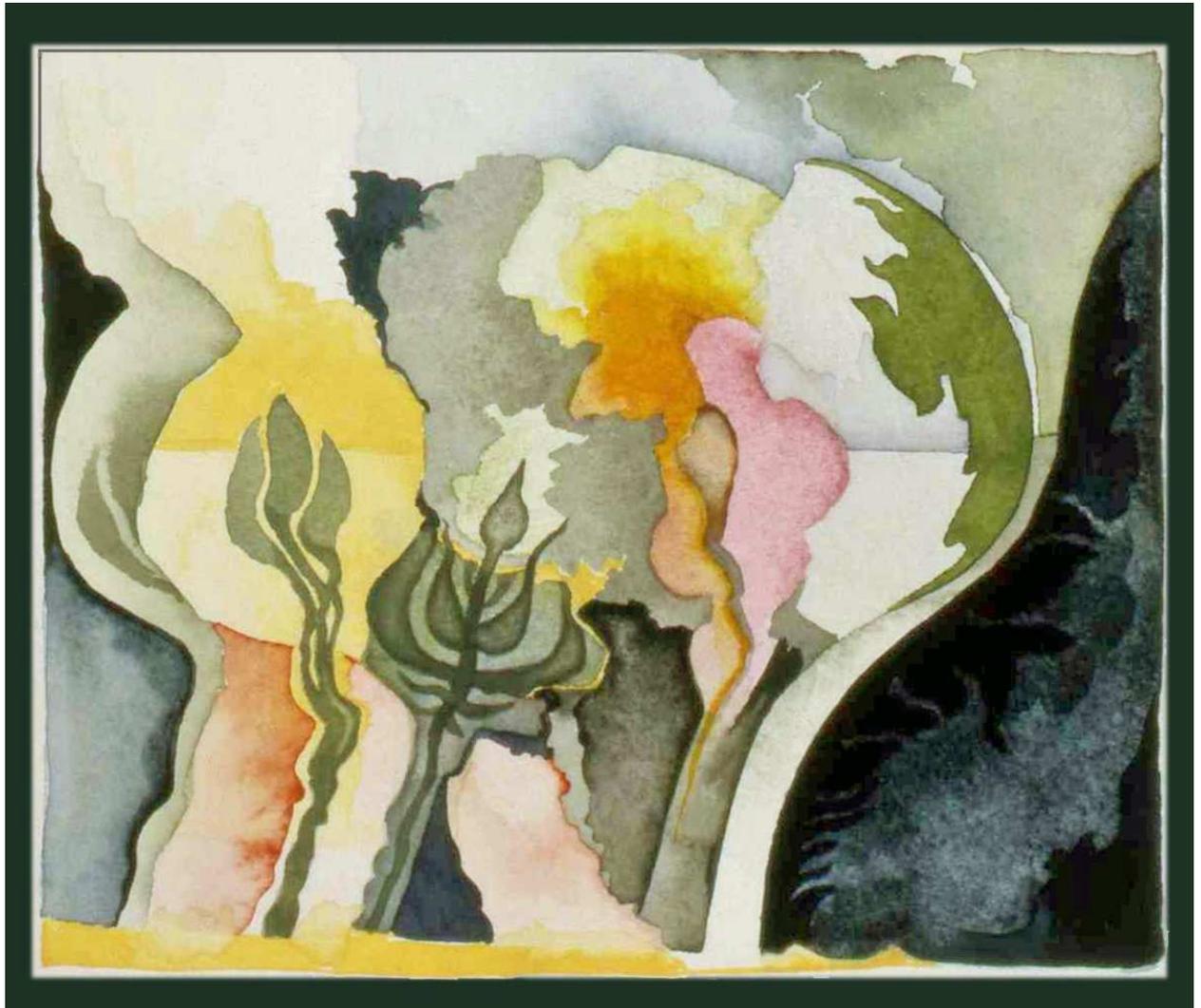
A lifetime's a telescope to look down
the wrong way at the old moon blinking out.
Today's moon ships us back
into that straw-scratched, girl-filled past.
How strange it all was.
Then and now.

Timothy Stone

Harvest Moon

So bright that orb of splendance,
So elevance, carved in grace
As lovers woo below the boughance
Joined by the silk thread of rayance.
To us its giance is all powerful
Hugging and embracance of all
Reapance and sowing of life
With deliverance of the harvest
Waxing and waneance monthly
Currance of coughs for the elderly
It rolls before my awessance
And I bow before its exidance
Until the festival with explodance
We all do the Harvest Moon Dance

Holding Leaves



Jim Bennett

Clutching Leaves

in the library there is a picture
a librarian standing with his arms wide
clutching the leaves of destroyed books
in his outstretched hands

his face looking upwards
his feet rooted forever on the Earth
the barrel of a rifle pointing
straight at him

there is no second photograph
showing the dead librarian
no note to say what happened
no way to know what the books were

just a man clutching pages
it must have meant something to him
it must have been important
to die for a metaphor

later I found out that it was
a scene from a film
that the man was an actor
not a librarian

he would have dropped the pages
into the pile around him
and gone home after filming ended
but maybe that didn't matter

Jim Bennett

Holding leaves

the sycamore held on to its leaves
long after autumn and the
first squalls of winter

now golden
they catch the sunlight
a gold leaf shining
on a tree of possibilities

Lesley Burt

Holding Leaves

Chrysanthemums: summer over.
Keats' mellow sunshine
encourages bees to forage,
wasps to feed on rotting windfalls.

I clip, prune, sweep paths,
rake twigs into heaps,
prepare for winter; impose order,
close another year.

Celandines sparkled here,
surely only a moment ago.
I gather up an armful of yellow leaves
as if I could breathe spring back into
dry skin, crisp veins.

Bob Cooper

Holding Leaves

In between pages of Wordsworth's Duddon Sonnets
are two mountain ash leaves that mark the pages,
what I once read in the places they mentioned.

Each scrapes, seems as dry as poems not yet known
until what they've hid finds their words in my head
and then, once more, they tremble.

Philip Johnson

Holding Leaves

she used to have a house under which to roof a family
and garage the hog she intended to build from scraps

she dreamed of roses and lavender borders
green lawn

a pond for fish to tease the cat

the cat to tease the dog
and a dog was to chase the postman

alas

before the postman could come with his sack
the hubby ran off with some other woman
and his employer's daily take

owing scores to mates (former mates)
money lenders and the rent he never paid

dear god

it was mid december
with santa's smug face

and a palm full of leaves in her fist

Stuart Nunn

Holding Leaves

Imagine this.

We find the perfect lace-leaf, beech,
sycamore. You offer it, echoing your palm.
I press my hand to yours. The leaf's
rough, fragile between our skins.

What little we have stirs between us.
You hold our sap-green leaf to the light.
Release it. It floats, finding its place.
Wind rustles the tree's gratitude.

Find them everywhere, sycamore, beech.
Hold their skeletons, flesh-sapped,
to the light. See the diagram
of leaf-hood, life-map come clear.

Timothy Stone

Holding Leaves

When my brother, Robert
was a child,
he held leaves in his hands,
wrapped carefully in his palms.
He had the touch
of a still breath on a heart.
Even in anger
the rubber-coated shapes
sprang back to life;
veins bulging with sap.
While a jagged-edged stem
or a thorny spike,
never slashed, or cut
his chubby, childish flesh.
Any form of leaf, he could wave
gently up and down my cheek,
tickling me, making me giggle.

Whenever, I'd choose a leaf to grasp,
it fragmented in my clumsy hands,
that crushed the brittle, fragile skin,
and as tears fell, he'd give me an
apologetic smile.

I look down at the ashes I hold of my brother
and remember my crushed leaves.
I say to myself that it didn't really matter.
Or did it?

About the Project

I gave PK poets the titles of four water-colours painted by my friend, Helen Lowson, and asked them to write poems inspired by one or more of the titles without seeing the painting until the final document was produced.

Firstly, my thanks go to everyone who has contributed to the project, which I have enjoyed immensely: to Helen, for the glorious watercolour images, to all the contributing poets for exciting and memorable images created in words, and to Jim Bennett who has provided advice and support, and produced the publication in its online version.

The idea for the project arose from my Poetry Kit Masterclass project, when I wrote a sequence of poems in response to paintings. One of these poems, in conjunction with the original Matisse, prompted another artist friend to create a collage and I wrote a further poem in response to that. I am fascinated with the way visual images are experienced, created, understood, and how they can instigate a 'chain reaction'. When I was looking for an appropriate and beautiful image for the front cover of 'Transparent Words' earlier this year, I remembered how much I like the watercolours that my friend, Helen Lowson, had painted, and chose one of those because the image seemed somehow 'fitting'.

In relation to this, it is interesting to know how Helen's paintings were named - i.e. how words were attached to what originally existed as purely visual images - so here, in her own words, is her explanation of how she attaches a title for the images she paints:

I make a picture out of a strong feeling need, non verbal, apart from, as I paint, an inner conversation that goes along the lines of "I need a circle here and this must be blue and somehow this wants to be wiggly and stripy....."etc. ... hope you get the feel of that ... and then, maybe years later (or on demand if the picture is being made public) I get a sense of a title I can live with that tells me which painting it is, connects it back to me as a verbal filing note but leaves most of my original nonverbal experience intact sometimes I have the reaction, "oh so that's what it was about!"

The exploration of creating and sharing images created visually and in words is explored further in the Project Appendix, where contributors and non-contributors comment on the process and result.

About Artist and Poets

James Bell

James is a long time member of the PK poetry forum. A Scot by birth who lives and work in Devon. His chapbook "the just vanished place" appeared from tall-lighthouse in 2008 and a full collection will appear in 2010 from the same publisher entitled "fishing for beginners".

Jim Bennett

Jim Bennett lives near Liverpool in the UK and is the managing editor of www.poetrykit.org. His most recent publication is a poetry collection called "The Man Who Tried To Hug Clouds" Bluechrome Publishing 2004 (2nd edition 2005). Jim teaches Creative Writing at the University of Liverpool and tours throughout the year giving readings and performances of his work.

Lesley Burt

Lesley Burt is from Christchurch, Dorset. Her qualifications are in teaching and social work. She retired in January 2009 from a post at Southampton Solent University as a lecturer in social work, since when she has been engaged in several poetry projects and activities. Her poetry has appeared in poetry magazines and online.

Bob Cooper

Bob Cooper lives in Birmingham. He has won five pamphlet competitions in six years. A later full length collection is available from:
<http://www.arrowheadpress.co.uk/books/allwe.html>

Philip Johnson

Snapshot: Diagnosed with Crohn's Disease 1982. Fortunately, though I have had 2 Resection Operations - April 82 and again April 2006 - I have mostly enjoyed long periods of good healthy remission. Presently employed as a Senior Care assistant come Care Team Leader. Former member of the Board of Directors at the Princess Royal Trust Cheshire Carers Centre.

For me the spark of inspiration can come from anywhere at any hour - from people watching to the things I hear or read or even in the middle of the night (events must mull in my subconscious before outpouring). By far my best work is written spontaneously.

Achievements to date: Hard copy published by: Poetry Now, Anchor Poets, North West Disabled Writers Group, Das Alchemy, The Ugly Tree; Poetry Scotland, Mid Cheshire Writers Group, Cheshire Carers Centre Newsletter, National Assc for Colitis & Crohn's Disease newsletters, local, regional and a national newspaper.

Electronic Formats: Write Away, Caught In The Net, The Red Pencil, and The Writer's Hood, Transparent Words; Caught In The Net

Guest Editor of Transparent Words "Special Edition" December 2006 and, presently, compiling sound files towards production of a compact disk on behalf of The Poetry Kit List giving opportunity for as many of our member's voices as possible to be heard.

Helen Lawson

Helen Lawson has lived in Dorset for a long time and manages to paint only when no living asks to be earned. Many years ago, after art college, she was a lecturer on a Foundation art course, helping students discover what they really wanted to do with their talent ... this led to retraining as a counsellor, from which she is now retired. Creating paintings is central to her life as feeling, but in practice, sadly often gets marginalised. Those included here were all painted between 1980 and 1986.

Stuart Nunn

Stuart lives in South Gloucestershire and belongs to two poetry groups in Cheltenham and Cherington. He has had work published in various magazines and anthologies produced by the groups.

Sherry Pasquarello

Sherry Pasquarello - Pittsburgh Pennsylvania; published in the Individualist Newsletter, Black Roses, online at the Amateur Poetry Journal, Alchemy Lit. Mag, The Writer's Hood And Caught In The Net; member of the international PK Poetry Kit List Workshop and included in the Anthology Project Dec. 2004 and In National Poetry Day projects; recently in Four Volts, UK PK#10 and the Picolata Review, National Poetry Day Project UK 08; a list administrator for the PK list; featured poet PK June '07#20; member Pgh Women's Blogging Society and honorary member Pgh Men's Blogging Society(they like my comments)

Timothy Stone

I have been writing poetry for approximately ten years, although it tends to come second to family life. For a period of time I was quite regularly performing at open mic. sessions in Liverpool, but now tend to stick mainly to writing and sitting at my computer screen.

Appendix 1

Comments on Process and Anthology

The Helen Lowson Paintings

Diagonal Storm



Global Spine



Harvest Moon



Holding Leaves



Comments by the Artist - Helen Lowson and Poetry Kit Poets:

Jim Bennett

Lesley Burt

June Clitheroll

Bob Cooper

Philip Johnson

Stuart Nunn

Sherry Pasquarello

Timothy Stone

Comments by Helen Lawson

I was surprised (and pleased) that so many of the poems seemed to click with the paintings as I'd felt them, and the bonus is that I really like them too! One or two of the poems added new elements I hadn't thought of/seen before....which has set me off onto the next bit of painting road.....thank you all so much.

Helen Lawson

Comments by Jim Bennett

Some thoughts on the project.

Before I talk about the project can I just give a vote of thanks to the facilitator, Lesley Burt. Lesley produced what I found to be a memorable and exciting hybrid exercise, and for that I would like to give my thanks. It is interesting to be asked to give a response to a project as often the process goes unnoticed even by the practitioner. In the case of this project though perhaps there are a couple of memorable aspects which I found particularly interesting and I am pleased to have had the opportunity to revisit and reassess.

One of the most outstanding aspects was the fact that being given a title which I knew to be the title of a watercolour by Helen Lowson, a very fine water-colourist, focussed me on the unknown and unseen picture. This for me created a strong bond between the words and the visual. Although I consider everything I write to have strong imagist properties, this exercise made this link the strong centre of the process. It was also clear from the outset that the titles had some abstract qualities and I don't recall if I knew or simply surmised that the title had been put in place after the painting was complete, in other words was simply an interpretation of the art, or in more other words, a poem in itself.

This was how I saw it; the task was to write a poem, about a poem that was interpreting or commenting on a piece of art. I did not know what the art was like and it was always in my mind that because of this the resulting poem could only ever complement it and not comment on it. This eventually became the way forward for me. Divorcing the titles from the pictures and considering them as abstract concepts in their own right meant that they only need to inform the outcome and not determine it. This was quite a freeing way of looking at it for me and I think it made the titles have more possibilities.

clutching leaves - well that sounds very direct but I was wondering what was clutching leaves, and what sort of leaves.

diagonal storm - a very abstract concept, Dickinson's "telling it slant" came to mind.

global spine - A lovely idea and one which I have a number of ideas about some which I might pursue in the future. In the end I settled on a quote from my father who said, "fish are the backbone of the world." I don't suppose it holds up beyond coral and food supplies, in the same way as "bread is the staff of life." does, but I respond to it.

harvest moon - I love this title for me it is the title of one of a great music album by Neil Young. A few years ago I was on holiday and sitting out one night when "Harvest Moon" was being played somewhere, but the sound was drifting in on the evening breeze. A blissful moment that stayed with me and one I always wanted to get into a poem so no contest on this one really.

This then became my approach and the outcome poems became for me a collage of a number of images. After the poems were written I found that, in my mind, there was a connectivity between them which I explored in a mixed text image collage which was done really more for myself to illustrate the process. The title Salt Pie Lane was from a road name in Kirkby Lonsdale, where I was when it was being written.

Some thoughts on the paintings;

The Helen Lawson Project facilitated and edited by Lesley Burt involved giving four titles to be interpreted by a group of poets. The poets had only the titles of the art as a start point and that is quite unusual as in most cases of poetry reacting to art it is more usual for the poets to see the visual image rather than just its title. Having said that I believe that the project was a great success from the point of view of the poetry and I have already spoken about how it affected my own poems. I just want to touch a little on the actual paintings by Helen which I did not see until after I had written the poems that were to be published alongside the paintings.

The four paintings are abstract and show a muted, controlled approach to colour and luminosity (as far as can be seen from the electronic reproduction) on the part of the painter. The colours are limited but sit well together in all the paintings and it is this degree of control and the limited pallet that draws the paintings together as a group. As for their substance, I think two words describe the artists style for me, angular and organic.

Diagonal Storm has an intercut of straight lines giving the impression of construction and detail, but at the same time the shading and edging to colour give the impression of depth and dimensionality.

Global spine has a shaped section and what looks like a spine curving in an egg shape. The theme of enclosing within curved structures is evident in other paintings also, but this might down to the editorial selection for this project, and not necessarily a theme in her work.

Harvest moon uses elements to construct an image which invites a landscape construction from the viewer. The repeated circular, elements give the impression of a prismatic effect which is very engaging, the whole being enclosed by two tree elements which square the painting. I like the blue swatch which cuts through from the left corner, inviting the comparison between the sky and a stream. The organic nature of the various centre elements makes this piece work in a way which is truly a fine picture.

Holding Leaves is another interesting image. The title suggests hands, and although some of the elements could be seen in that way, for me it has more the feel of an illustration of a flower opening. The field in which the centre flower is contained again has a number of elements that could be seen as larger natural elements, for example trees.

So four interesting images, all of which are fully realised and display a strong sense of composition.

It is clear to me that if I had seen these images before writing the poems, the results would have been different in several cases. Can I extend my thanks to Helen for allowing her paintings to be used for the project. I have enjoyed the paintings and the project, tremendously.

Jim Bennett

SALT PIE LANE

standing arms wide
clutching leaves

face looking
rooted forever on the

upward's

upward's

upward's



Like
a scene
from
a Film

leaves lying in a pile
around him

long after autumn and the
first squalls of winter

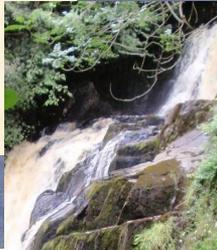


now golden
they catch the sunlight



Like Tom's fish
looked after for years

But left in a powerless
lightless tank



four fish survived
and one a female



gave birth to
a new generation



Whitewell common
smelt of morning and dew wet grass

and later at our holiday home
not far from Ruskin's view

we waited
through the day until

the Harvest Moon shone
across the night

Comments by Lesley Burt

I guess the idea for a project focused on images arose for several reasons. For one thing, I seem to have quite a visual memory; I mean I am more likely to remember something that is attached to a visual image. An example of this is that I find I can pronounce a difficult or strange word more easily if I can see as well as hear it. I am aware, especially from some experiences of teaching, this doesn't apply to everyone. I very much enjoy the visual arts, especially paintings. I am also very interested in the way people communicate in general. All this adds up to a fascination with how individuals envisage things; how they create and respond to images, including what they bring with them to interpreting images. Images in poetry are fundamentally important to me. I am sure that many PK poets have written in response to paintings, and that is an idea for another interesting project. But this time I wanted to see what diversity of images the titles would produce.

The process, for me, was to choose, from Helen's list of paintings, some titles that I thought had the potential to conjure images. My assumption was that most PK poets would find it reasonably easy to write in response to 'Harvest Moon' and 'Holding Leaves' and that 'Diagonal Storm' may be less easy and 'Global Spine' would be very difficult. (The number of poems submitted for each title suggests that was indeed the case.)

I avoided looking at the images until I had written a poem under each title, so that even though I had seen them in the past, I would be as close as possible to experiencing a similar process to the other poets.

I like the discipline of 'having to' write on a particular topic, form etc. so I enjoyed the process of letting my mind wander across the titles to see what images appeared. I found the 'Holding Leaves' poem came more naturally and easily than the others; although a harvest moon provides images, they are often associated with famous paintings, so - as others found I think - it was hard to avoid cliché, but seeing the night sky in rural Jamaica was a special experience. 'Diagonal Storm' suggested something natural but unusual - some kind of metaphor about mood, and 'Global Spine' had to be backbone.

I am really delighted with the resulting collection. The images and associations are as varied and interesting as I hoped they would be.

Lesley Burt

Comments by June Clitheroll

Some thoughts on the project from a non-contributor.

I always find ekphrasis a challenging and exciting aspect of poetics. At its best it succeeds in developing another aspect to the visual art with which it, or the poet, is engaging. At other times though it becomes little more than a lame description and importantly the distance between success and failure for a poem can be minute. This project did something differently, it took the titles of artworks, which were unseen by the poets, and asked them to engage with what they imagined the titles to be describing. It could never be a lame description, because the poets had only those titles and their own imaginations with which to work.

It has to be understood that in many respects that this was a double bind as the artist who produced the watercolours had no idea how the poets would be representing the titles or who this would relate back to the completed paintings.

Did it work? Oh yes. Lesley Burt, the editor, or perhaps curator might be a more apt title, of the exercise has done an admirable job in bringing these strands together, and as with all of the excellent PK projects some outstanding poetry has been produced as a result.

I think that this exercise shows something else also, and that is the strength of an internet list server groups in developing a support network, and I would suggest, a school of writing. In the past groups have grown up around places, institutions or people and these have developed a style or philosophy which is broadly recognisable. In the later part of the 20th C groups tended to be more support networks than a pre determined style. Even the "Beat" poets tended to interpret their style in different ways and the poets and writers tended to be friends that supported each other, promoted each others work, and It has long been my contention that the internet has the capacity to enable poets and writers to work more closely in groups in order to give mutual support and it is this that defines a collective and perhaps this loose group of differing styles is the 21st Century equivalent of a school of poetry.

June Clitheroll

Comments by Bob Cooper

There's a famous quote by Kingsley Amis I can almost remember where he's complaining about more poems appearing about paintings. But the exercise we did was not about a painting but the titles paintings carry. And titles ain't easy.

I find the relationship, the dialogue, between a title and a poem intriguing. I used to say titles come from a different part of the head to the part that the poem comes from.

I guess, for writers, the issue is compounded because both the title and the poem are usually made of words.

I usually find that the title I find I'm happiest with for a poem comes when I'm getting used to the poem and what it's doing and the most satisfying title, perhaps the one I end up with, emerges a day or two after most of the drafts have been done and the piece is almost complete.

I assume - rightly or wrongly! - that because a painting is relying on its visual presentation, its size and the relationship between its colours and the shapes they present, their words are usually only in their titles. The relationship between the title's words and everything else that is the painting, is therefore different. I suspect I look at many paintings before I look at their titles but I start reading a poem by seeing the title first.

I also recognise, particularly with the invention of printing, the Psalms were read and referred to by their numbers, and Shakespeare's sonnets, collected about a century later, were also referred to by numbers. I'm glad word-titles eventually became most the most popular way of recognising poems - even though they were probably as difficult to find centuries ago as they are now. I think it could be interesting to compare the relationship between titles and poems and titles and paintings in history.

But even if I'd thought these things during the time I was working on what I eventually wrote and finished the pieces I did I don't know if any of these thoughts helped me. I think knowing that I knew there was something that was visually colourful, with its own size and shape, made me feel uneasy. I felt inhibited and had to struggle to try and forget what I knew I didn't know. All the time I was trying to banish the thought: *this title belongs to, is owned by, something else!*

I can sometimes struggle to link the illustration on the cover of a poetry book to the content but I appreciate the ones that I feel work well. Perhaps that's where poets have the upper hand... But that's also where I look at the picture and not its title!

None of these thoughts made writing any easier!

Bob Cooper

Comments by Philip Johnson

Don't know how else to put it other than to say the themes offered in this challenge gave me chance to exercise some of the troubled spirits roaming about at the back of my mind.

Philip Johnson

Comments by Stuart Nunn

I don't really want to comment on the results, other than to say I thought they were admirable.

I did think there was a slight problem with some of the titles you gave us, in that they related directly to some visual element, which only made real sense once we saw the picture. I'm thinking of Diagonal Storm, where 'diagonal' relates only to the picture and not to something inherent in storms. I know people managed to get round this and it doesn't invalidate the exercise in any way, but it does suggest that some titles are going to work better than others. To take two opposite examples - 'Bar at the Folies Bergeres' presents poetic possibilities that 'Number 1, 1949' doesn't. However, show us what Manet and Pollock did and either will produce poems.

Just a thought.

Stuart Nunn

Comments by Sherry Pasquarello

I can't say much other than when I read the title I thought of the Earth as a goddess, a fleshy wonderful sensual female. The poem wrote itself after that image.

Sherry Pasquarello

Comments by Timothy Stone

Unseen Images

I found the whole process quite exhilarating. Unlike when you are given a title and asked to write a poem; there is something exciting about writing to a painting/picture that someone has already interpreted, yet you don't know what image they have conjured up.

The titles as well were obscure enough to be able to have freedom of your own imagination, although I must admit that I could get nothing into my poetical mind for 'Global Spine' and struggled as well with 'Diagonal Storm'. I guess what is good is seeing how my PK colleagues also interpreted the "blind pictures", as opposed to oneself. It is also interesting to see how they have used the different styles. Titles are not just about the words, but also about styles, format and thought.

Thoughts on the Anthology

It was good to see the contrast between *Diagonal Storm* where the theme of weather was taken by all poets, as opposed to *Global Spine* where the more ambiguous title was interpreted in completely different ways. However, free verse is used throughout which I suggest indicates that the titles had a less rigid structure and text about them, allowing that creativity and less structure. Once again there is a wide spectrum of styles and material with *Harvest Moon* and *Holding Leaves*. Interpretation quite widely varied such as "Leaves" has been taken as book pages and leaves on trees.

I was not sure what to expect from the paintings and in truth I know that my poems would have been somewhat different had I seen them prior to the poetical attempts. I would hate to have to say which poems relate closest in style and subject to the pictures and their titles.

A great project that produced good work from my colleagues and it was fantastic to see it all come together with those excellent pictures. I would love to have another go sometime should the opportunity arrive.

Timothy Stone

The Helen Lawson Paintings Project: Appendix 2

The Potter's Pink Paintings - Artist: Helen Lawson



The Potter's Pink Poems - PK Poets:

James Bell

Jim Bennett

Lesley Burt

Bob Cooper

Waiata Dawn Davies

David Supper

Calaya Williams

Introduction to Appendix 2

The challenge for this Appendix was to explore images used by the artist and poets in a different way: this time, the title - which is the name of a particular watercolour paint - was given to Helen and the PK poets at the same time. For me, the process highlights the influence of personal associations attached to all kinds of things, including language and colours and the focus that a random word or phrase can provide for the creative process.

Once again, it has been a great source of pleasure to read the poems. I am amazed at the variety of writing inspired by the name of a colour. I am also truly delighted that Helen has participated and produced no less than eight beautiful pictures after a long break from painting.

James Bell

material pigments

imagine saffron aroma
stewing plants
the scent of fresh squid

hear stone grind against stone
leaves crushed
the excited chatter

breathe in aloe flavour
taste it at the back of the throat
see stones of brilliant green

deep blue
herbs hung upside down to dry
mussel shells filled

with puddles of rich red
and clear yellow paint -
over against the wall

rows of desks with projects
in states of completion -
grab the bunch of dried weld

hung on the wall
and put it to boil
for a personal vision

the alchemist's art -
not a dark arts pigment -
Potter's pink is lightfast

watercolour by a real potter
ceramic
not considered toxic

Jim Bennett

Return to Potters Pink

the summer we returned to Potters Pink
the bird drop coated arch was rusted iron
the shops less novel than six years before
the civic hall in need of extra paint

but someone had painted the road sign
the plaque on the letters not complete
so it read like some word in an odd graph
that was indistinguishable for what it was

OTTARS or PIIIK like some foreign words
its letters too strange to sift into a word
but this was the place the smell of chips
and the sound of the bells from the church

familiar enough to be reassuring
symbolic enough to settle all our doubts

Jim Bennett

pale geranium lake

the artist replaced the tube
marked pale geranium lake
in the rack

he could see the lake
reflecting the bank side geraniums
on its quiet surface

he knew if he took the paint home
then that was what he would always see
and all that he would ever paint with it

its just OCD his wife had told him
she had scraped off labels
stuck her own in place

but now she was gone
he preferred his paints without
backstory or names
that shake with images

burnt sienna
magenta
sanguine
Venetian red
meadow green

Venetian red
had connotations
a holiday five years ago
the meadow green
he put them back on the rack

then a tube of potter's pink
and all he could see
were the potters hands
and the colour
of sunset
captured in wet clay

the unknown potter
who captured
pink and left his trade
in the name

the artist looked at it
weighed it
sighed
then put it back on the shelf

Lesley Burt

Potter's Pink

in memory of Maud Potter

Grandma bequeaths wisdom:
anemones - purple, cherry-red -
are the prettiest flowers
to illustrate birthday cards, calendars.

Dustmen are spies
sent to check your rubbish.
Girls should wear knee-length frocks,
study, pay attention to their elders ...

... except for careless old men
who should be on the lower deck
but, instead, descend trolleybus stairs
with wavering walking sticks
that turn downstairs passengers
into Damocles.

Crosswords must be solved in blue ink.
Pale shades are generally best so:
cheer for Cambridge in the boat-race;
and dress men in lovat, not black.
Most hideous colour: all shades of pink,
to be tolerated only for corsets.

Bob Cooper

Potter's (not in the) Pink.

Draw me the hands, the face,
the envelope's sound when torn open
as the statement's eventually read
then the car boot sale,
the bric-a-brac, CDs, vases and pots,
sold to buy for the kids at Christmas.

Sketch me out the Job Centre clerk
who shouts *Potter* like an insult
then talks non-stop till the new forms are signed
before the latest moonlighting venture,
door to door paintings
carried in a bin bag in the rain.

Paint me the night the TV died,
telling the kids to keep hushed
in case the carol singers outside could hear
and more paintings being made,
how the paint stains each finger,
and how long they take to dry.

Waiata Dawn Davies & Lesley Burt

Potter's Pink

While I was away
my grape vine sprouted
green promises of summer;

meanwhile your English
Potter's Pink petunias
became autumn brown.

David Supper

Potter's Pink

Born deep in the earth, at first
a liquid, then bubbling surface-wards;
cooling amongst geysers, faithful, true,
yellow stones shine in clear volcanic pools.

Moulded by a master, a craftsman,
leaches of its water, contained, contented:
back into fire where salt and cobalt
glaze into and onto the surface.

The colour is frozen, held for eternity,
and inside, the water which nourishes
stems that are cut, a vase for a flower -
a pink, dianthus Maimonedes.

Calaya Williams

Potter's Pink

pink potters' fingers
stroked wet, red clay
until clay echoed flesh

until blood tones contained
another blushing potter
collected and recollected

as the first time the blushing potter
was touched by another
touched again and again

touched until flesh and blood
toned anticipation released
until two blushing potters

pink probabilities fractured
arm in arm chinned up and chimed in
face to faced an easel

sighed
brushed a dry canvas
potters pink wet

Helen Lawson

Potter's Pink 1



Helen Lawson

Potter's Pink 2



Helen Lawson

Potter's Pink 3



Helen Lawson

Potter's Pink 4



Helen Lawson

Potter's Pink 5



Helen Lowson

Potter's Pink 6



Helen Lawson

Potter's Pink 7



Helen Lawson

Potter's Pink 8

