
THE 2026 O:J&L CHAPBOOK SERIES

Poetry: All forms & styles

Eklephrasis: A Writer's Portfolio

MIRÓ'S WARS



JOHN BRANTINGHAM

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MIRÓ'S WARS
Ekphrastic Poems

JOHN BRANTINGHAM

DEDICATION

For Shaymaa and Ann

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“Joan Miro's *The Beautiful Bird Revealing the Unknown to a Pair of Lovers*,” “Joan Miro's *Bird's Flight in Moonlight*,” and “Joan Miro's *Bleu II*” were published in *Louisiana Literature*.

“Joan Miro's Person *Throwing a Stone at a Bird*,” and “Joan Miro's *Wall of the Sun*” were published in *The Stickman Review*.

“Joan Miro's *Catalan Landscape (The Hunter)*” was published in *Feral: A Journal of Poetry and Art*.

“Joan Miro's *Constellations in Love*,” “Joan Miro's *World Trade Center Tapestry*,” and “Joan Miro's *Harlequin's Carnival*” were published in *Rabid Oak*.

“Joan Miro's *Portrait of Vincent Nubiola*” was published in *As It Ought to Be*.

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JOAN MIRÓ'S

head of a catalan peasant

THE PEASANT'S EYES are planets lit by a sun
that blazes out of frame to the right.

His hair is a red wave and clouds in flight
or maybe they are nebula that have begun
to form a new star. His beard is of flames
shooting downward, and he stares directly
at us, challenging us with what might be
seeing through us, what might be genius.
And this is, perhaps, the healthy regard
Miro had for his neighbors, seeing
them the way we should see everyone,
seeing how each person in his life had worlds
forming a vast interior life, knowing
that this beauty is what it means to be human.

JOAN MIRÓ'S

bird's flight in moonlight

WHAT STAYS WITH YOU is the silence mostly.

Outside and you happen to be looking at
a plane or Venus and then an owl, quiet
and glowing white, glides across your sky.
Miro captures not the glow but the glide,
and although it might happen all the time,
it feels magic, and how it's there then gone
disappeared as the bird finds a place to hide.
Open your eyes, and this is what the world
is beyond the newspaper, this is how
perhaps Miro lived beyond Franco's terror.
All men like Franco want us all curled
fetal in front of the T.V., cowed,
but Miro gives us a life beyond their horror.

JOAN MIRÓ'S

bleu ii

BY THE TIME Miro was in his 60s,
he'd learned enough about this world to travel
beyond representation. Meaning unravels
in a universe that operates randomly,
ambivalent to pain, ambivalent
to need so he showed us how to see
inside the color blue, how if we quietly
watched, we'd move to a space that was silent.
He teaches us that there is something beyond
thought, something necessary inside us
that we forget, that can be found in blue
moments, blue skies, the blue ripples in a pond,
found if we take the care to clear out the mess
in our heads, stare, and listen for what's true.

JOAN MIRÓ'S

characters and birds party for the night that is approaching

BLESSED ARE MIRO'S BIRDS, for their flight across
the night sky shows us what is possible.
Blessed is Miro's star as it twinkles
above leading stray magi home who were lost.
Blessed be his dancing men, who are laughing
at themselves and the ridiculous fate of us all.
Blessed be these characters who in their small
party fight against the future that is coming.
For Miro knew better than most the evil
that stalks all of us, that would destroy lives, end
nations, make hope seem naive, but still
his characters dance because they have a will
to joy because hope is unsophisticated,
and despair, the favorite game of fools.

JOAN MIRÓ'S

constellations in love

THE CONSTELLATIONS we were given were
at war with each other, with nature
or with themselves, Greeks in their labors,
hunting for food or hope, running from fear.
These were the stories those long dead sailors
used to discover where they were and how
to get to the next place, leaning over the bow
of a boat guided by all that ancient horror.
And here Miro changes how we see the sky.
You cock your head, and Ursa Minor isn't
Arcas turned into a bear to fool Hera. Our
guiding North Star is now a part of Sally,
single mother of two girls. She hasn't
stopped loving. She scatters stars around her.

JOAN MIRÓ'S

dog barking at the moon

MIRO'S DOG IS BARKING, but when dogs yowl
into the sky, they might as well be singing,
because they fill the world with the longing
cries that they are here and want to be loved.
And isn't that what singing is for?
It's the same as Miro's ladder into space,
and whoever set it there hoping to place
a foot upon the moon that mutt adores.
Miro paints hope so accurately. He
captures the way desires are so often
rooted in naivete, the way dreams
might be laughable, could even be silly,
but also that losing those dreams is when
we descend into a nonlife, pointless and mean.

JOAN MIRÓ'S

fascinating personage

MIRO'S PERSONAGE does not blink. He does not
look away or miss the larger meaning
of your actions, what you are doing
with your long guns and tanks. You are caught
in his eye, and your only choice is what
you want the watcher to see, to decide
if you acted so badly you want to hide
from the eye, no forgiveness, just disgust.
We are all in fact witnesses to horror,
and the watcher is not gone just because Miro
has died. To him, evil is never banal.
It is shocks what is sacred with the terror
of your smugness. We see you smirk while you show
the watcher you are pathetic, ignoble.

JOAN MIRÓ'S

harlequin's carnival

MIRO'S *HARLEQUIN'S CARNIVAL* is not my kind of party, but then I never lived through the Great War. Miro had suffered with the rest of Europe, and it must have seemed like the end of drudgery, the end of pointless death and famine, the end of newspapers that were reporting the death of friends in other countries. Or maybe he knew it was only a pause. Maybe the color and hooting glee suggested by Miro's figures were just right for that moment, what he needed because war, he knew, was hovering always near, and he might as well lose himself tonight.

JOAN MIRÓ'S

dutch interior

FORGET THE GREAT WAR that crashed through Europe
ten years earlier. Forget Hitler's war coming.
Forget the world-wide depression sweeping
its way through cities and towns that will stop
up whole economies. Forget brutality.
God let us just forget all that for an instant
and let our fears and hatreds become silent;
this moment, let us forget our enmity.
For the inside of this home can be
the paradise of domestic tranquility
most of us search for. A dog and a cat
sit watching us from the floor blissfully
as we sing with our friend much too loudly,
knowing songs loose us from the cares of this earth.

JOAN MIRÓ'S

message from a friend

THE WHALES HAVE MESSAGES, maybe for us,
maybe not. Maybe, probably they are
singing just to each other, but under this star,
Miro's whale calls for us to rejoice
and float into the air with him to find
the dreamworld. Maybe the whales do sing to us
too, messages desperate to convince
us to act a little more like their kind.
Miro's do anyway. Miro's tell us
about a world away from all this war
because they're not going to stop the violence
They feed on it. They take it in their mouths
swish it around like wine, pleasure in fear,
revel in their enemies' final silence.

Also, Miro references a message
from Calder the title friend, who had much the same
theme going in his work, who reframed
the wind so we could see its passage
in his mobiles, and so we see the form
of the formless, so we can listen
to the breeze and whatever wisdom
or truth can be discovered inside storms.
Calder and Miro met between the wars
and found a place of peace in the little space
that existed between them where they could
listen to wind and whale sing against terror.
There they could show us what a waste
tyrants voices are against those speaking for good

Miro's whale dances in the wind
floating above the sea
while Calder's air does its own spin.
Miro's whale waits for the green
night so no one will judge how free

his whale-dances are in the wind
while Calder's dance day and evening,
but they both show us how we
could also have a cetacean spin.
We mostly stand in the museum, hand on chin,
but this is knowledge beyond thought really.
This is whale-dances in the wind.
This is truth. This is what we find
if we stop rumination and just be.
While Calder's air spins,
this tyrants think they can win
but what they cannot see
is Miro's whale dancing in the wind
while Calder's air does its spin.

JOAN MIRÓ'S

the beautiful bird revealing the unknown to a pair of lovers

BIRDS SPEAK TRUTH like the wild geese who call
back and forth to each other that they are
here, that they will not get away so far
they cannot find their way back. Crows tell
their truths too, and in the mornings I can
hear them shouting something across the corn field
down the road from my place. At dawn, I see
them telling each other nature's sacred plan.
And Miro tells us that goose and crow have
something to reveal to lovers. People
need to be led to themselves. We're all trying
something dangerous when we decide to love.
We're presenting ourselves as we are
to a world that is often unforgiving.

JOAN MIRÓ'S

*the lark's wing, encircled with golden blue, rejoins the heart of
the poppy sleeping on a diamond-studded meadow*

THIS DISTANCE BETWEEN you and me between
Miro (now passed on) and us (walking about)
is illusion. What Miro figured out
is that all of these many and unseen
connections between us flame joy when we
understand the world as it is, a system
of interconnection, a place where wisdom
comes through our connection to lark and poppy.
And Miro suggests that opposite state
of being here as well with that black line
slashing through the middle. There are those
who choose to wallow in a desire to hate,
whose cynical joy is to create and define
difference, who never want that distance to close.

JOAN MIRÓ'S

the sun

THE SUN, OF COURSE, is not a constant.
It just lasts a little longer than we do,
but it warms Miro's figures who
splash about in this new bright Spain.
'This is 1949, and they have made
it through to the other side of yet
another war, and I hope have not thought
of little tyrants excited to invade.
But Miro's sun, even after his canvas
crumbles, even after Spain goes away,
even after the sun novas or collapses,
will still hang in his canvas sky, massive,
red, and warm. Even when little men play
their death cult games, his sun will persist.

JOAN MIRÓ'S

world trade center tapestry

THIS MORNING, I find myself thinking
about Miro and how the tapestry
burned on that day. I think about how we
watched it on the news, the towers coming
down again and again. This morning,
I'm thinking about all that art Nazis
stole and destroyed or lost. I think about how they
taught it in school. I think about it burning.
This morning, I'm thinking about this poem,
which will be lost during a tragic moment,
and if I'm lucky someone will mourn it
and me. If I'm lucky, it will be forgotten,
except for someone who will say it meant
something to him. He'll wish it wasn't lost.

JOAN MIRÓ'S

*a dew drop falling from a bird's wing wakes rosalie, who has
been asleep in the shadow of a spider's web*

MIRO IN THE LATE 30S isolated
himself from the terror outside while
his work slipped into a fantastical style.
The titles alone must have insulated
him from reality, a way to slip into a world
which made more sense. A way to find what
actually mattered, a way to tell us that
dreams can show us what we all need.
And Rosalie, she wakes from that dew drop
to nap amnesia, free from preconception
or judgment. She sees the earth as it truly is,
open to possibility. The farmer's crops
spread out in a field below her, the farmer's son
daydreaming nearby laughs, then softly smiles.

JOAN MIRÓ'S

catalan landscape (the hunter)

MIRO'S HUNTER can walk his landscape
with enough serenity to smoke his pipe
because his world is abundant with life:
birds, snakes, deer, and fish sufficient to take
and feed whoever is waiting at home.
So this chore is a pleasure too. He'll bring
back dinner, but now he can take time to think
the long thoughts he has when his mind can roam.
Miro's hunter has figured it out, of course,
not to live a simple life. No one does.
He understands what is real and what is not.
Food is real. The deer he stalks, his horse,
his wife, his kids, the way the sky changes
color, how right now at dawn it turns butterscotch.

JOAN MIRÓ'S

fireworks

MIRO PAINTED HIS FIREWORKS BLACK, they being
memories of bombs, being memories
of towns burning, torn flesh, whole families
in Spain ended by Franco, a society sinking
into the worst chaos of the century.
He fled Adolf, ended up with Franco.
That must have seemed to him just how it goes
in those days when no one in Europe was free.
Miro must have taken the bombs with him
wherever he went, as we all do,
but he took the dream of his childhood land
with him too. Yes, he splashed canvases with grim
memories of death. But there were memories of new
life painted with close care too, alive and green.

JOAN MIRÓ'S

hope of a condemned man

THIS WAS 1974 and Miro,
having outlived Nazis and fascists,
now faced a world where the communists
pushed against whatever we were. And Franco
(let's not forget that fucking monster)
was still alive. At eighty, Joan might
have felt like a condemned man, felt
the world's heartbeat getting fainter, softer.
Except, I think the point of these paintings
is hope. The point is that there is color
also, that there is something to reach out to,
that there is something larger than the meaning
of our deaths; we're all doomed, but there's more.
There's that spot of yellow always breaking through.

JOAN MIRÓ'S

may 1968

IT'S THE HANDPRINTS more than anything else,
Miro painted fingers and palm and pressed them
against the canvas again and again
this most intimate signature of self,
saying to the world that he stood with these
students who fought a new brand of tyranny,
that he would paint this perfect obituary
for kids trying to make a new Paris.
So many petty gods had risen up
in his life, you'd think he would have been
exhausted, but evil does not end. It shifts.
Miro shifted with it so it didn't scrub
away the good his generation did when
he might have shrank from Europe's conflicts.

JOAN MIRÓ'S

person throwing a stone at a bird

MIRO'S PERSON, (let's call him a child),
(let's call him a boy), his eye stares
with the horror of the moment after
the rock has been thrown and that wild
flash before it hits the turkey, and nothing
will be as it was. It's the boy's shock
that nature has given him the power to take
life from the bird, to take it from anything.
The bird who probably sees it coming,
who probably knows how this will end,
who probably understood the fate of all birds,
waits without fear, without complaining.
He waits for the unjust universe to extend
its black finger, to touch him, mutter its word.

JOAN MIRÓ'S

portrait of vincent nubiola

BEFORE HE STARTED PAINTING, Miro had
 a nervous breakdown, which seems rational
 given that this was Spain, and a quiet hell
 had cracked open in Europe, his world gone mad,
 and what could he do but watch and resist
 as Franco and Adolph got together
 to dream up cynical new ways to sneer
 at what could be if we would just coexist.
 And then Miro started to paint, which seems
 more than rational. More than sane. *Portrait*
of Vincent Nubiola was an early piece.
 Miro catches him in a pipe-smoking daydream,
 his elbow resting on a table with fruit,
 a tulip, and wine. He's at the kind of ease

that Miro must have dreamed of. Fields stretch
 out beyond him, fields where he will no doubt
 return for the day's work, worrying about
 things that matter while Miro will sketch
 and paint and find a place where he can stand
 against what is coming. He will turn
 toward the surreal, even as Europe's dictators
 call it degenerate, and it is banned.

I imagine the two of them, Miro
 still young, but wise enough to be alarmed
 at what is building. Nubiola is
 a professor of agriculture who knows
 Miro's genius, a man with training and wisdom.
 They sit and talk of the coming hostilities.

"It feels like the end of everything that's right,"
 my imagined Joan says. Vincent replies,
 "Every generation feels this. It's an endless fight."
 And Joan can foresee an endless night
 of terror. He thinks of all who will die

and to him it is the end of everything that's right.
And Vincent remembers stories of knights
in his childhood and King Alfonso's lies,
and he knows this is an endless fight.
Old men get a sexual thrill at the sight
of young men dying. They get off on cries
of anguish, and maybe it's the end of right,
but he tells Joan they'll keep moving despite
the horror of old men's pornography.
This, Vincent tells Joan, must remain an endless fight
because these old men live for this kind of blight,
but this world was made for Miro's kind of beauty.
We must keep going to keep everything right.
That is the beauty of our endless fight.

JOAN MIRÓ'S

the farm

WHATEVER GROUNDING THERE IS to be drawn
from living on the same lands that feed us,
whatever value our hometown grants
us while we are on our journey upon
this earth, seeking out the truth fate gives
us all, whatever the memory of childhood,
whatever meaning tilled earth that resides
inside of us has to give us, it is here, alive.
Say what you want about Hemingway,
but he felt something in *The Farm* when he saw
it. Perhaps it drew him into a pensive mood.
After he bought it, perhaps he spent days
floating inside it, letting that tree's curve draw
him to the landscape inside him too.

JOAN MIRÓ'S

the vegetable garden with donkey

OF COURSE, it's the small things, isn't it?
A donkey pulling up a clump of grass
by the garden, and the hypnosis
you get watching the wind in trees. Forget
Paris, Miro; this right here is truth.
I dream of it sometimes too, but we
both know what a trap, what work it can be
to chase down all those things that don't matter.
It matters to find something that's real,
to get away from grinding competitions
for reputation, to work on the art,
not the name. It matters that you can feel
the earth under your feet, and smell the sun
warm the soil. This Miro, is where you can start.

JOAN MIRÓ'S

wall of the sun

THE HIGHEST WISDOM is hope, even when
it seems wrong. The Greeks told us to doubt
and fear, but after a life of war you pulled out
that hope for us. Miro, your colored tiles, damn
if they don't get me where I live. I wish
I could see through your hope, live inside
your hope, understand your hope, stride
this world with your hope as my only aegis.
Because so much of life is spent fighting
off the cyclops, irony suffusing his eye,
a smirk on his lips, and it doesn't look
like we have a chance. Miro, he's looming
over me every single day, telling me I'll die;
he'll throw me in a pot to watch me cook.

ABOUT THE WRITER:

JOHN BRANTINGHAM is currently and always thinking about radical wonder. He is a New York State Council on the Arts Grant Recipient for 2024, and he was Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks' first poet laureate. His work has been in hundreds of magazines and *The Best Small Fictions* 2016 and 2022. He has twenty-three books of poetry, nonfiction, and fiction.

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A Portable Workshop

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co-editor of many Flash and Sudden Fiction anthologies, the latest are *Sudden Fiction Latina: Short Stories from the United States and Latin America* (2010) and *Flash Fiction International: Very Short Stories from Around the World* (2015)

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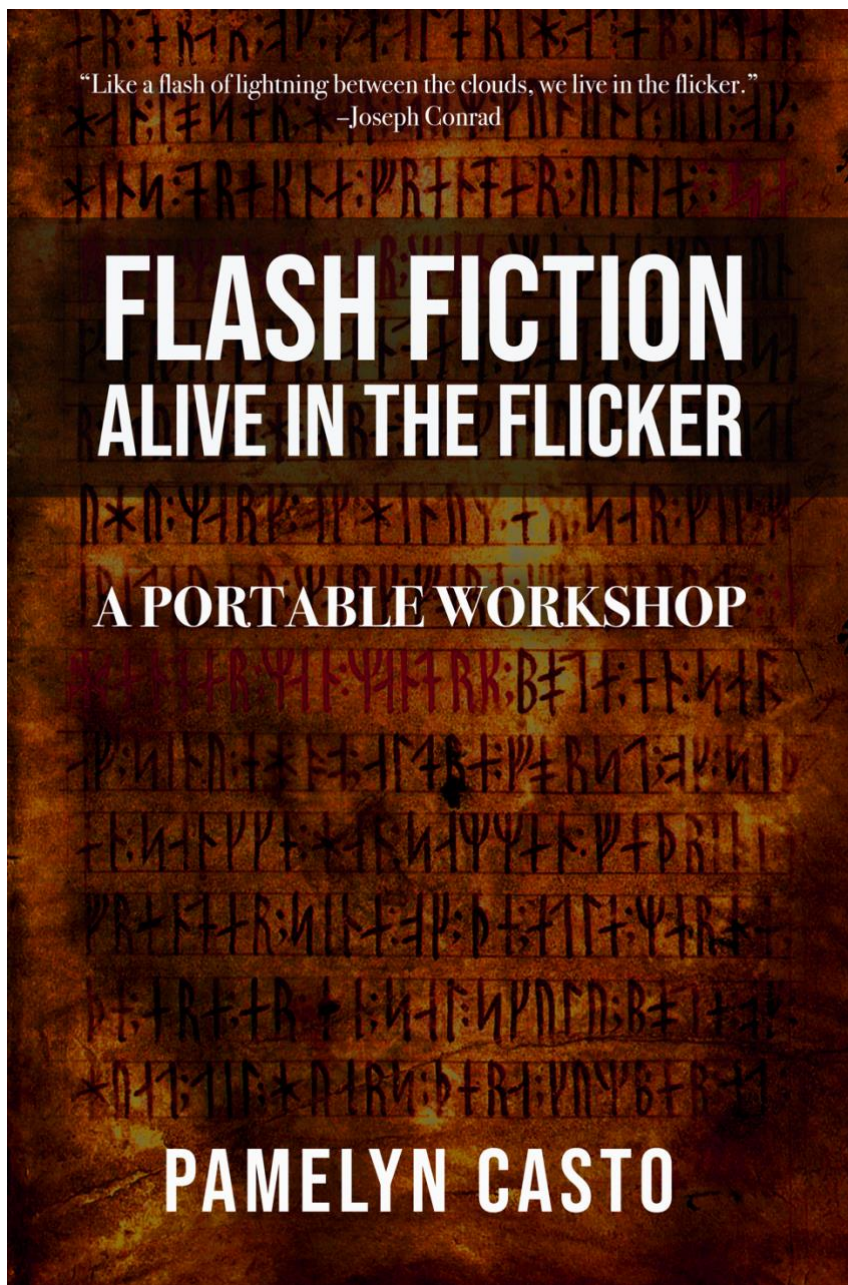
translator of *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (2018) and co-editor of *Stone Wall Book of Short Fictions* (1976)

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editor of *The Rose Metal Press Field Guide to Writing Flash Fiction* (2009) and founder of *The Best Small Fictions* (founded 2015)

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for Pamelyn Castos's *FLASH FICTION: Alive in the Flicker*

Daniel J. Nicholas

Reviewed in the United States on August 26, 2024

Verified Purchase

If I were to teach a class, this book would be required reading or a course outline for discussion. Bravo, Pamelyn! In addition, I look forward to your monthly blog to start up again.

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Reviewed in the United States on November 23, 2022

Verified Purchase

Pamela Casto's new text, *Flash Fiction: Alive in the Flicker*, is a must have "portable workshop" workbook for anyone who desires to learn and practice the many forms of flash fiction.

W.R. Rodriguez

Reviewed in the United States on October 5, 2022

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An authoritative overview of the genre, combined with practical advice on the writing process and an abundance of writing prompts.

Norman Jensen

Reviewed in the United States on April 2, 2024

Reading is great but hands-on prompts are even better.



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