

Towers and Trees:
The Urban and Rural
Landscape
Poetry and Paintings
By Oberlin College Students

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Pennsylvania by Highway

Nava Etshalom

1

Lining the turnpike are fast-food complexes
and narrow towns, mourning their steel heydays.
Only by virtue of dynamite do we pass the valleys
where cows stand in disappointed rows, invisible indoors,
plugged into milking machines and bottling plants.

2

The secret truth, despite the sharp highway that gets us
there
and the ugly truck stops that sustain us, is

that out of the plain of eastern Ohio, Pennsylvania swells,
sexy, ripe and deep. Secret valleys open themselves
only to those who round highway curves with open eyes.
Roll the window down and let spring in, watch
the green unwrinkle.

3

Ascending into winter, the mountains are soft with snow.
The Pennsylvania flower is the mountain laurel.
She has yet to show herself, but the Appalachians
hold their breath, cradle her seeds tenderly.

Desert Glass

Sarah LePage

the air is tired
hot and aching
sand rakes the ground
weaving together a small girl
she carries an Apache tear
smoothed by her cracked palm
holding it to the sun she sees herds of elk
racing between her fingers
silver mountains stretch high piercing the red sky
body and land join as she brushes her hand
across the ground
releasing crystal to the earth

Stream

Megham Purvis

I know this walk, as well as I know the river at its end:
a jolting downhill of uneven sidewalks and back streets.

I learned each block's length, each zebra crossing
until now I walk barely seeing, knowing as I reach the
water

that this place is for me. This spot, where the branches
graze the water at high tide, had a helmet fished out of it
eight years ago,

iron with coned points, a reminder of the Vikings that
sailed the Thames,
that they still lie buried in its impenetrable, wide water.

I've added my own humble artifacts to its rushing,
a fumbled, new-born heathenism: Please, just let me stay.

Brigid hear my thoughts as they rise. India ink on white
pressed paper,
plush against my fingers, like part of my own hand.
I dream

of jumping the low brick wall, boosted by the cement
benches,
and plunging into it, fingers wide and palms down,

letting it fill my eyes, my mouth, seeping in like lost
blood

until I can rise without swimming and walk

with my body of it, of the grass I step in and the
branches

I use to pull myself out, being everything I touch:

this final learning, this only immanence,
of flowing north and feeling the muscles in my legs pull

through Whitehall and Trafalgar, towards the
Restoration brick
of Gower Street, and saying to every crossroads, every
building

and the dark, breathing earth beneath it: I know you.
We are each other's roots and I feel you grow.

The Long Parade

William Schutt

Bloomberg's in. It's all over
the news. Winter's tamed pole shows
no sign of reversal, none of her
old selves. At dawn my mother tiptoes
on my idle, prodigal behalf.
How long's it been? More of the same,
That hair, Goodness the smoke!

The city is mine only by name;
the hound knows me by my choke.

On everyone's be-balconied lips, *loss*,
but nothing appears lost -- should it?
Central Park West's adorned itself
yet again. The cocktail wives festoon
their old throne perch; a kissing leaf
is strung in the air like an aimless tune.

I've not seen these floats in years.
The winds set sail to park leaves;
old mother swathes the dog's ears
like they were her son's. What thieves
these educators are; the mayor --
on his last hinds -- passes without
my cheer. The crowd's holler
hunts its hero; silence is my doubt.

Come what may, smoke runs
from each roof like a burglar.



Naima Bond
A Blessing
Oil on Paper



Heather Phillips
Cracked Earth Series #7
Oil on ragpaper



Laura Mellor Weller
Something Special
Acrylic



Gloria Adams
Dimming
Acrylic and Oil

Lowcountry

Rebecca Silverman

i.

At noon the muscadine juice is hot
and thinned like blood.

The seeds stick to legs and fact:
snakes are slipping between
the trellises, and they are black
and patterned black.

ii.

The west window's panes are cracked,
the lampshade the orange of
cow-itch blossoms, trumpet shaped
and poison, but the sides

of the roads are wisteria, the color
of eyes at night, lavender;
the smell is sick:
ferment under grapevines,
smell of scraps for chickens.

iii.

Dawn smells in early fall
of chamomile; the spread of flowers
in the sky means dawn.
At dusk the petals fall wilted
on the ground, and turn to dew.

iv.

The four o'clocks by the chicken coop
bloom at seven. Inside,
a chicken nests with snakes,
birthing their eggs. Old women
empty their grits
to make eggshells; the contents
of the land, when roosters crow,
are gray upon the gray ground.

Another Flight of Steps

After Frank O'Hara
Emma Straub

How funny you are tonight, Ohio.
Your flashing red stoplights which call
pathetically to no one, to everyone
who is not waiting to cross the street.

Dear strip mall have you met
Fifth Avenue? Très snob maintenant,
mais oui, but there is something nice
in Ohio, a boy without clothes on

who doesn't quite like the movies
or steak or vodka or lots of things
that are without question wonderful
but he reads poetry in two languages

and who can argue with that. Oh,
Ohio, hello. I am paying homage
to your square boundaries, your
straight highways, your malls and multiplexes,

your flat chest, your pale skin patterned
by Midwestern fields, your Indians,
your wall-to-wall carpeting. Tonight
you're making me smile. Perhaps

I'll buy one of those houses along Route 80
out by the airport, with the insulation
still exposed, and cover the windows
with pictures of mountains and stand on the roof

shouting, "oh god it's wonderful/
to get out of bed/ and drink too much coffee/
and smoke too many cigarettes/
and love you so much."

Primary Growth

Chaya Thanhauser

This is a landscape but
you already wrote it. A field

of faded weeds is *Sumac*
and *Teasel* to you.

Out of sight of the water tower
whose heart beats steadily

over town, the road runs old
and drunkenly past the bones

of three houses. The first two burnt
to the ground, one chimney left,

a stubborn witness to what it should
have held inside. What you wrote

edited me out, left another stubborn
chimney. The third house just gave

up one day, slouched down and folded
like a losing hand of poker. I guess

they took the train when they left –
used-up railroad ties lie in a corner

of the field, a pile of
condensed movement.

On our way back to town
we stopped to watch the sunset faraway

and still. I waited for either you
or it to make a move.

You wrote this landscape
is *equally abandoned*

*by people and attended to by biotic
forces.* You let me see your journal

so I could quote you on that,
but what you'd written

about landscape fell somehow
on the same page

where you wrote about *dinner and
a walk before bed as lovers do,*

as we did too, but not in this instance
and that fell beatingly somehow

onto a bone house, a furred hand,
a folded wing, my watertower heart.

This is a body but you only see landscape --
February, final glow of sky, scattering of geese.

Anthology selected by Pamela Alexander, Associate Professor, Creative Writing Program, Oberlin College

Exhibition curated by Sarah Schuster, Associate Professor, Art Department, Oberlin College

Exhibition Jury:

Paul Yanko, Visiting Assistant Professor,
Art Department, Oberlin College
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Art Department, Oberlin College
Stephan Borys, Curator Western Art, Allen
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