

SOFT EMERGENCE

I have no idea what it will be like
to hug people again, to be close,
to look them in the eye
without a screen between us,
to see their smile—in real time.

I can't imagine
eating out of the same bowl—
taking a handful of nuts
that others have touched,
buying food without washing it,
not seeing people
as carriers of disease,
not scrubbing down
everything in sight.

When this is over
will my cells jump for joy?
Will I come out okay?
Or will there be dark holes
that linger,
the scent of rubbing alcohol
bringing it all back?

I wonder if my heart
will explode when the veil lifts.
Or will there be
a soft emergence,
one foot put slowly
in front of the other,
not too far, not too fast,
like toes dipping into a cold stream,
and pace my arrival gently
into the new world—
whenever that may be.



The Meeting of Art and Poetry

prose, poetry, and artwork by
Sherrie Lovler

I write poetry as a way to tap into the creative wave of life. I have heard of songwriters who snatch a song out of the air or have the feeling that if they don't write a song down as it comes along, someone else will find it instead. These ideas intrigue me. I am not interested in channeling a poem, as some do; I am looking for collaboration. I want to show up and meet the "other" halfway.

The first poems I wrote were assignments in fourth grade—one for every month, each enhanced with a drawing. I saved February's with my Valentine's Day poem and a big red heart with Cupid's arrow pushing through. It hung on the bulletin board outside our classroom, boasting a gold star.

The next time poetry came to me I was sixteen. A friend told me her birthday had been the day before. I wrote her a stream-of-consciousness poem in the style of Dr. Seuss about being a day late. I was learning calligraphy at the time, and I lettered the poem in my finest italic and made it into a hand-sewn booklet. For the next four years, I created greeting cards with drawings and original poems presented in calligraphy for all my family and friends.

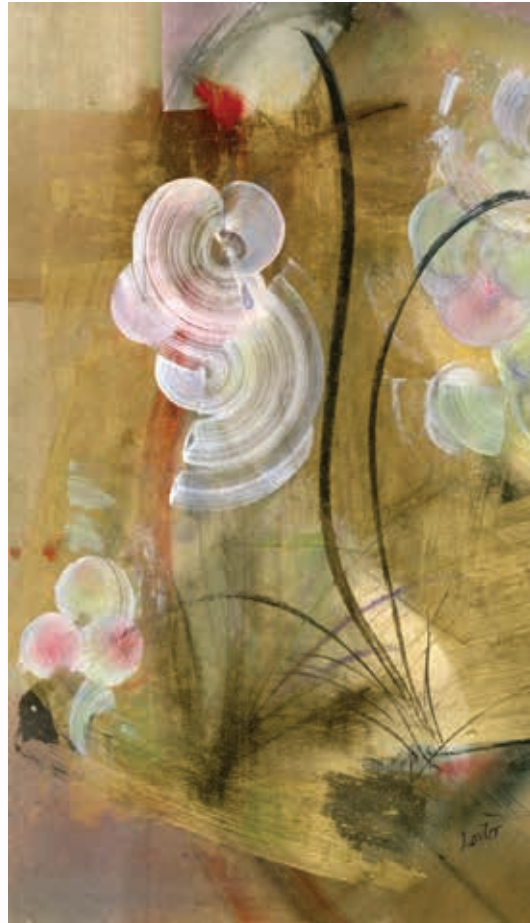
Decades later, a new romance inspired a series of exchanged love poems. I enjoyed the inspiration and made a secret vow that if a poem started to come, I would write it down no matter where I was or what I was doing. They started coming when I was in the shower or driving, perhaps as a cosmic joke to see if I was sincere. Because I was, the efforts culminated in a book of twelve

love poems between us, each with its own calligraphic painting.

After the flurry of love waned, I wanted to keep writing. I sought a better way to write than being at the mercy of peculiar timing. I set up a spiritual practice of writing twice a week—"spiritual" because it grounds me, makes me aware that life extends beyond what can be seen, helps me gain a deeper connection with my internal self, and keeps me tapped into the intuitive knowledge that time, solitude, trust, and repetition bring.

Tuesday and Friday mornings are my writing times. I wake up, make a cup of tea, and go back to bed with a few books and my poetry journal. Centering myself with a breathing exercise, I "welcome" a few poets and teachers who have come before. These include Dr. Maya Angelou, Angeles Arrien, Rumi, Rilke, Edna St. Vincent Millay, and Mary Oliver. Having these poetic spirits around helps me feel I am not writing alone.

I read from a spiritually oriented book until a phrase or a sentence catches my attention, and I begin to write. For years I read Bill Plotkin's [Nature and the Human Soul](#), a couple of pages at a time. Other books I have used to inspire poetry are [Anam Cara](#) by John O'Donohue and [An Almanac for the Soul](#) by Marv and Nancy Hiles. The poems come quickly, saving editing for later. I am not after "good" poetry; I am after the practice. For fourteen years I have followed this path and have written thousands of poems. My guiding principle is "with quantity will come quality," and that has proven to be true.



REUNITING WITH BEAUTY

Morning is here.
I awake to the newness
of the day,
I awake to the adventure
it holds.

Today, like every day,
I have a chance to start over—
to greet the sun
to smell the flowers
to bathe in nature
and breathe her in.

Today I smile
with the universe.

Today I accept
the invitation
that beauty brings.

By training and profession, I am a calligrapher and an artist, not a poet; yet it was through poetry that I found my way in painting. After writing poems regularly for two years, I felt I had opened a door to creativity—something both elusive and tangible, and indefinable. At the same time, I was at a standstill with my visual art. Calligraphy is a very exacting skill,

and while there are many trends moving it toward abstract painting with illegible writing, I was after something else. The question arose: “How can I use this intuitive portal through which I write poetry to help me paint?”

The answer was to paint images to go with the poems—not illustrations, but something that resonates with the feeling of



EMBRACING ETERNITY

I take the path
into the unknown
with deep secrets
and vanishing horizons,
the feeling
of never arriving
because there is no place
where eternity lives.

It is a depth
that can never be reached
a longing that is never filled
an entwining
that can never be close enough.

It is the endless journey
of life creating itself.

the poem. At first the paintings were created quickly, matching the ease of the poems. But over time, both the paintings and the poems became more sophisticated. Reading the poem out loud before I paint helps to “hold” the poem within me as I begin. I can feel the poem’s emotional impact and relate it to color. I often begin with a mark that represents the poem—energetic or soft, large or small,

solid or broken. Sometimes I begin by adding water to the paper and brush ink over it. This leads to an unpredictable outcome and a mysterious quality to the piece.

I use the same principles in painting as in writing poetry: staying non-judgmental as I work and staying open to the creative flow. I listen to all the rising ideas, such as “use indigo here,” or “gold leaf there,” training

myself to hear this inner voice and to trust my intuition.

Making a conscious choice to omit words from the paintings breaks from the calligraphic work I did in the past. I don't want my art to be read; I want it to be felt. I find great freedom in the calligraphic line when not trying to create letters. The marks become asemic writing—forms that have no literal or alphabetic meaning.

For years the poem came first and then I created a painting for it, although occasionally, the painting came first. Recently there is a shift to the poem and the painting happening in the same week, and they belong together. There is a feeling of homecoming when a painting finds a poem or a poem finds a painting. I also want the paintings and the poems to each stand alone, although I think the experience is more powerful when they are paired. Working in the two disciplines pushes both the paintings and poetry to new depths, as if they have to keep up with each other, as if they care about each other.

An unexpected outcome of this work was my book [*On Softer Ground: Paintings, Poems and Calligraphy*](#). With its publication came opportunities for poetry readings and a solo art exhibit of the paired paintings and poems, and it inspired new classes for me to teach.

As I continue this practice of writing poetry and painting, I might go for weeks without writing a “good” poem, or I might start several new paintings in a day and take a year to finish them. It doesn't matter. What matters is I keep tapping into the creative flow, keep showing up, trusting intuition, and meeting the “other” halfway. ❖

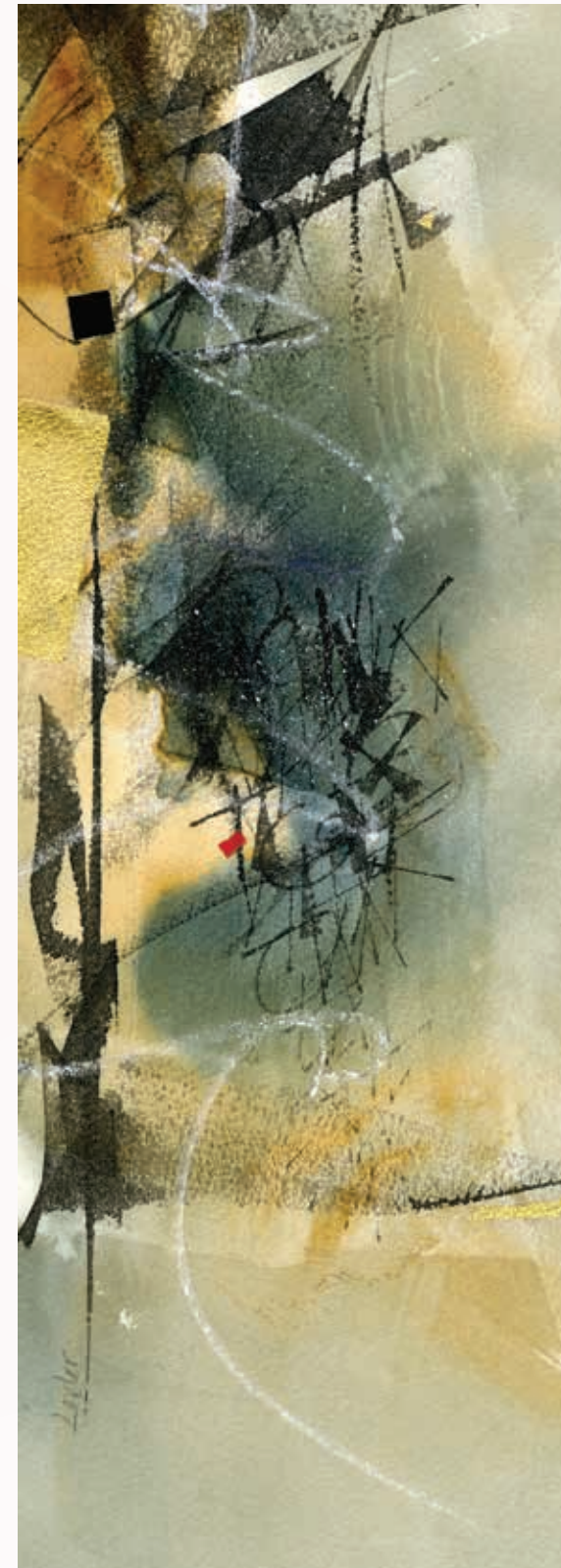


DAYS

I live inside the day.
This boundary that separates
one time from another,
one sequence from the next.
A framework
giving form to the formless.

One day
piled on top of another
broken into minutes, hours, lives.
The breath of the sky
guiding me through dark,
light and dark again.

But it's the fullness I'll remember,
the breeze gushing into my lungs
the valleys, moon, star,
feelings that cannot be contained,
the vast worldly other-ness
of spirit touching my bones.



EVENING

Feel
with evening
as the moon
enters my veins.

The awe at first sight
from sliver to full.
The stars
once hidden by the sun
now shine
against the darkened sky.

Every night
this show.
Every chance I take
to feel with evening.
Every falling star
my own.