

**ASHLEY GARRETT**



**TAROT IMAGES**

*with poems by*

**Billie Chernicoff, Lila Dunlap,  
Robert Kelly, and Tamas Panitz**

**Ashley Garrett**

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## THE ASTONISHING TAROTS OF ASHLEY GARRETT

The best advice, instruction, on the use of Tarot cards I've ever heard was offered by the poet Stephen Jonas. Through the kindness of Gerrit Lansing, I had come to know Jonas, and one evening in the mid 1960s was present at one of his Tarot sessions; he was talking with the remarkable Carol Weston. He told her: *Look at the card and remember.*

Remember. Putting it all together – how this image, never seen before perhaps, would (by the hypothesis of magical incarnation that rules cartomancy) suddenly rouse in you awareness of processes and practices germane to the moment, your moment. You look and you remember. You remember what you never knew, see again what you have never seen.

When I walked into the light-fueled huge studio she shares with Brian Wood (whose fierce contemplative paintings I continue to write about), I saw on Ashley Garrett's side of the space a table laid out with what seemed half a hundred of the most potent Tarot images I have ever seen. Not one was a conventional Tarot image, not one in fact was a representational image at all. What they were was an astonishing array of small abstract paintings that worked, instanter, on the mind the way Tarots are supposed to work, summoning from the less available parts of our conscious abrupt visions of order and process. I dared not look closely at too many of them or the sunny afternoon with these new friends would have vanished into trance and silence. I picked up one or two, and each one spoke to me.

Immediately I wanted these cards, all of them that I could see, to be made into a book or a deck, a book that would collect these new and potent images and give them to a society much in need of news from the interior.

For these cards of hers, and I have no idea whether anything like that was her intention or in her mind at all, these images *are the new Tarots*, not smirched by too much commentary, unsoiled by the way the Tarots have been coopted in story and film, or trapped in occultist orthodoxies. These are the brand-new images of the oldest world. And we will use them both for delight, as with any pictures (we are children who love pictures) and for the profound researches into the self that the dear old Tarots have given us for centuries. You can see more images on Garrett's website: <https://www.ashleygarrett.com/>

—Robert Kelly



## **The Decision**

*Am I man or angel?  
One arm, one wing,  
my heart already a rose,  
genitals swollen,  
thigh fleshy, eye open.  
Not my mouth,  
but mind  
wakes, something  
soft and fast  
happens like doves.  
Are they words?  
Are they my words?  
Now they're gone.  
Either way,  
I can see  
I'll be lonely.  
Either way,  
I'm likely to fall.*

To decide is to cut,  
a violence.  
Better to wait  
till there's no need.  
Better to flap and flail  
and not know.  
Ask anyone,  
ask me.  
You enchant me.  
Do nothing.

– *Billie Chernicoff*



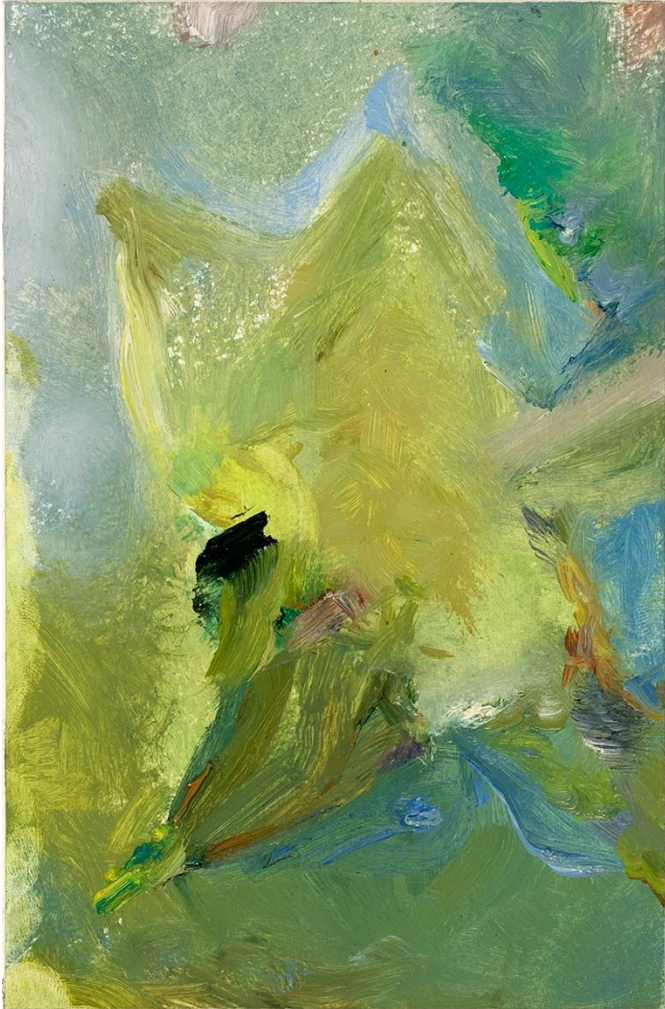
## The Pool

It's true I hid this pool  
just as I hid myself  
in it, lifting my dress  
and wading in,  
knowing  
it would excite you.  
I hid it in the woods  
of your recurring dream  
in its own vortex  
under its own torrent,  
water I sang over  
falling for its orchids,  
bracken and pine,  
the not so innocent  
perfume of our  
happy narcissism,  
an outdoorsy dream  
with birds and flowers



mistaking each other  
for laughter.  
Now I see I was disclosing  
by concealing this  
pool, this card, myself,  
and that feels right,  
doesn't it?  
That's one way,  
a good way.  
Blessed secrets.  
Still, I imagine Artemis  
rising naked for once  
into the light,  
letting anyone see.  
That's a good way too.

—*Billie Chernicoff*



## The Oxbow

A river lost in thought  
like Lao Tzu,  
the court astrologer  
who gave up his post  
and abandoned the past  
as well as the future,  
those twin addictions,  
to go where he liked,  
like water, a koan.  
You can see him here,  
a fool at home  
on the edge of an abyss,

not dark or terrible,  
quite another country,  
of citrine light  
and meadow flowers,  
Queen Anne's Lace,  
the white of paper,  
each umbel with its single  
tiny dark purple mole,  
its just off-center,  
virginal floret.  
Did I say meadow  
or island?  
Or star that fell  
through his mother's gaze  
to conceive him.  
They say she labored  
under a plum tree,  
and there are a few  
visible here, rosy  
smudges from above.  
Lao Tzu was born  
an old man  
with a white beard  
and here he sits  
under a plum tree,  
still on the way.  
He has the black hat  
of an errant rabbi,  
or the center of  
a wild flower  
you knew as a girl  
and still know,  
but I digress,  
I stray,  
and so should you.

—*Billie Chernicoff*



## The Mollusk

A metaphor for salt,  
wisdom, wet  
fleshy wit,  
see the man in the boat?  
The woodwose,  
priest, green  
ordinary man  
who weeps leaves  
and leaves.  
See its mouth  
and heart,  
the anal rose,  
a breathing

figure of speech,  
the labial tent,  
proscenium  
of the mysterium.  
Why did you come,  
is that your question?  
The sea is your lover,  
no need for else.  
Selfish shellfish,  
no advice. Clitoral,  
literal, liturgical,  
I could have called this  
Pleasure or Coming,  
nothing like anything,  
no advice.

—*Billie Chernicoff*



## **The Vineyard**

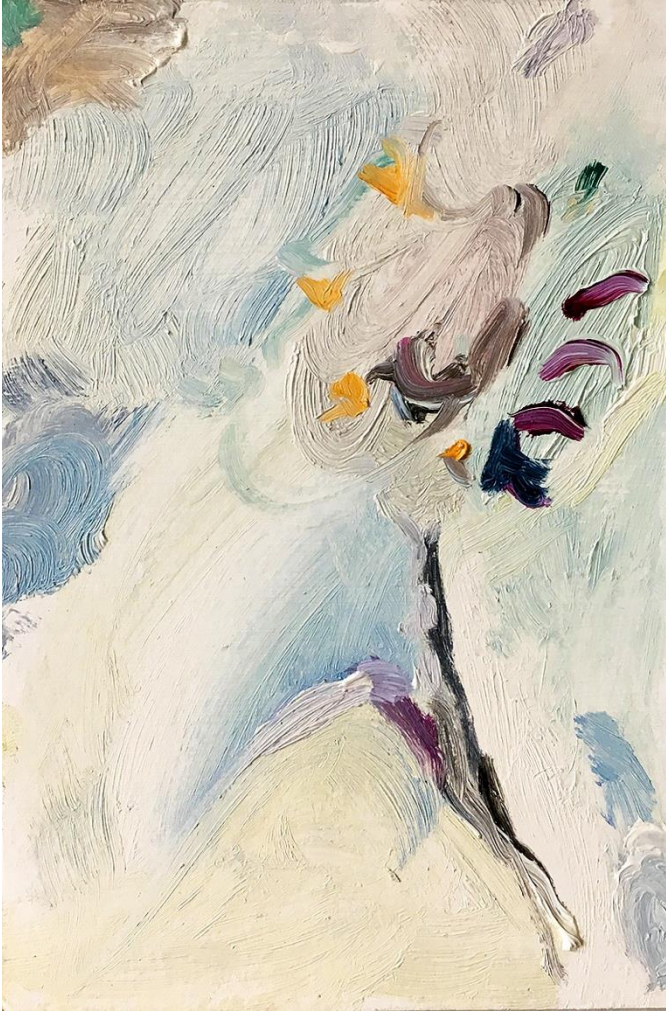
You will inherit a chateau  
whose terroir is identical  
almost to heaven,  
a mirror image.  
The only road is the sun,  
drifting through the old vines  
and green declivities  
where you hesitate  
as if you could choose.  
The vigneron  
pours you a glass of the near

black wine of your estate,  
tasting of smoke and seedy fruit.  
He wants you to do as you please.

How slow the bees are in this warmth.  
When you crouch in the lavender  
a motherless ecstasy bears you down  
to an even more physical world.  
How you love things, in sun or shadow.

That's all I see, Kore.  
No one hurt or lost,  
no scorpion on the sill.

—*Billie Chernicoff*



## **The Mountain Goat**

Properly mountain nymph,  
not goat at all,  
above the tree line,  
beyond salt.

Go to a high place, alone.  
Cast off the mean and pretty  
things people say.  
Lie down like a child in the snow  
and close your misread eyes.  
There.



Let the sun gild your horns,  
your dreams dream themselves.

Or might you need salt?

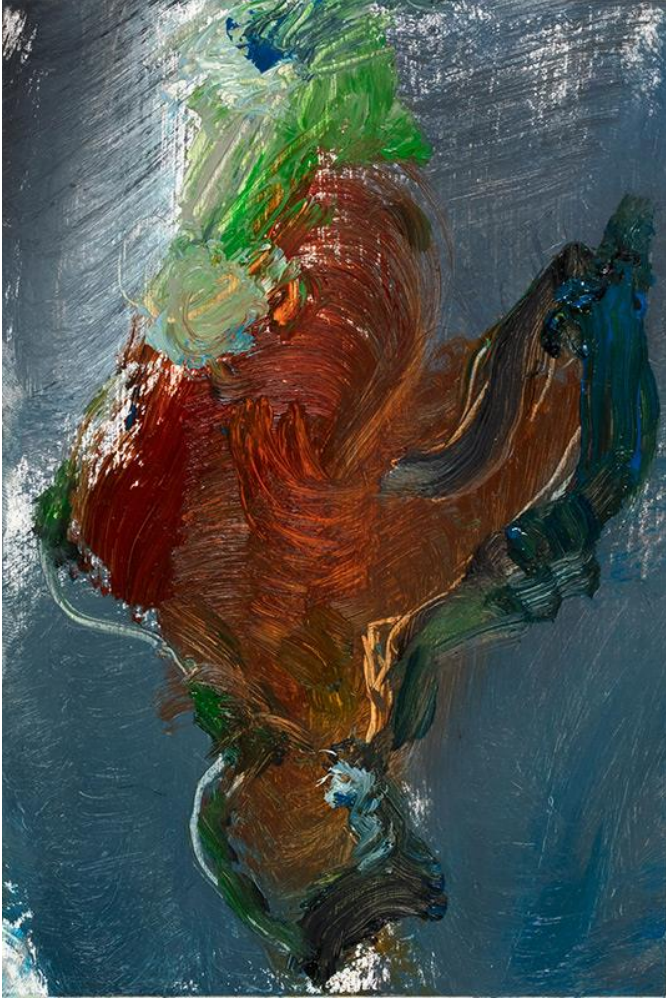
As a salt subject  
you may feel lost,  
even unloved.

In that case

Natrum Muriaticum

is your remedy,  
a week at the beach.

—*Billie Chernicoff*



## Sovereignty

He rubs the earth as a lamp,  
summons himself, djinn  
of his native clay.  
The mist of his will,  
woody, resinous,  
hot, grassy,  
acquires limbs,  
torso, tongue.  
Born whole from a clod  
or a single bee,  
from any one  
of a thousand darknesses,

Africa,  
neither symbol nor subject  
of its congeries,  
he is its own shape,  
its language and king.

— *Billie Chernicoff*



## **The Sun**

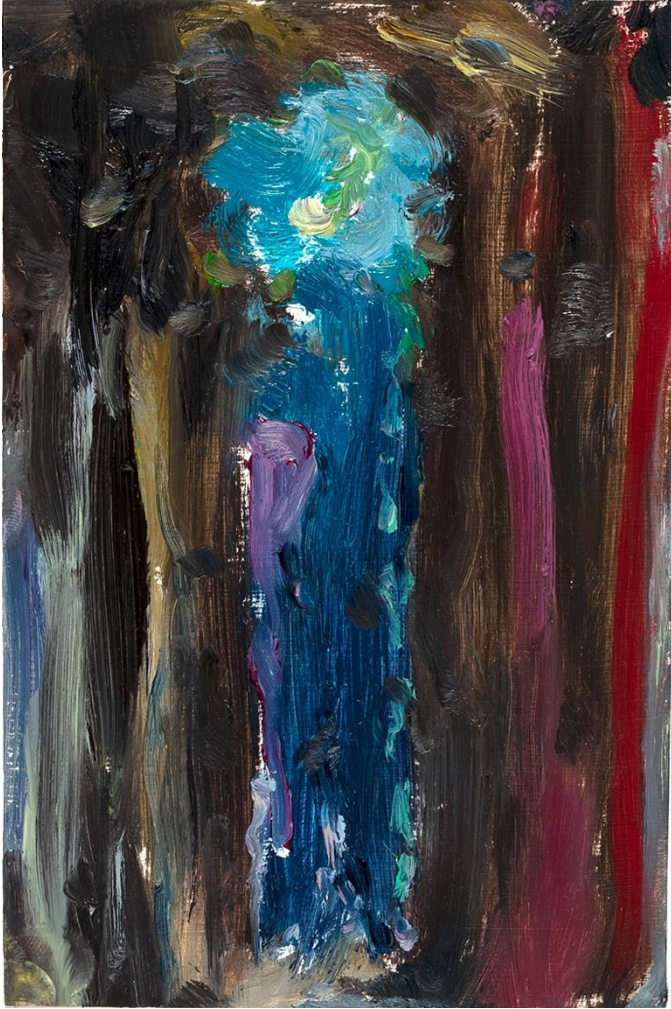
Love is not what you think.

Rhythmic chaotic origin of "the."  
*The drama in heaven.*

Face to face with the first things.  
Above all, color.

Close your eyes,  
you'll see.

—*Billie Chernicoff*



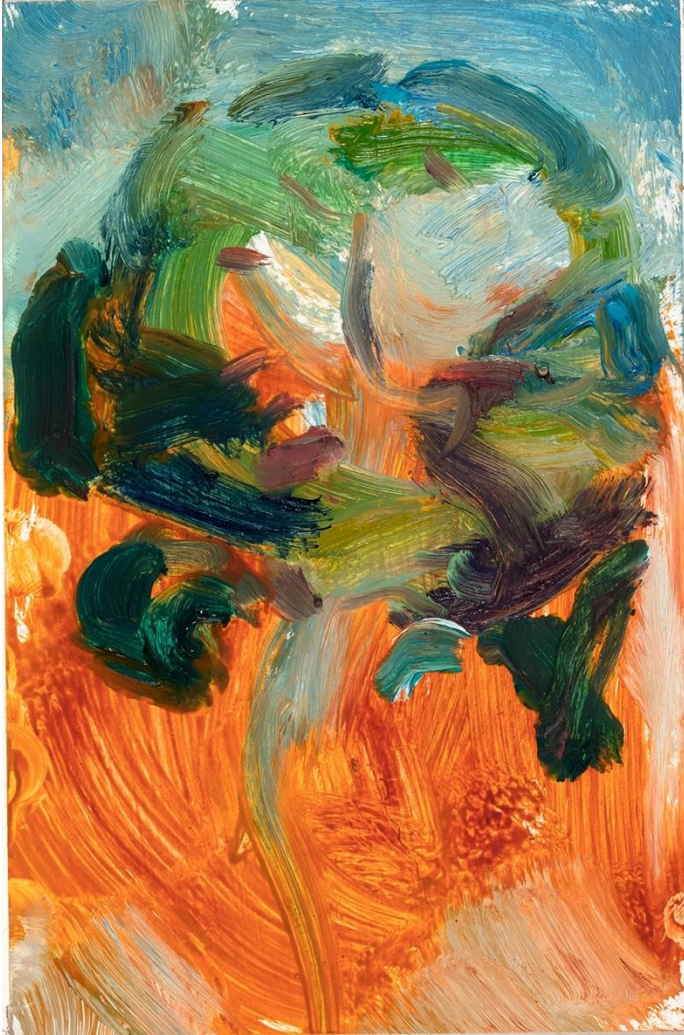
## The Obstacle

It's my job  
as well as my pleasure  
to remove obstacles  
from your throat,  
your ear,  
all your flight paths  
and allées.

To that end I become  
each obstacle -  
the cloud in your eye,  
stone in your shoe,  
your fear of snakes,

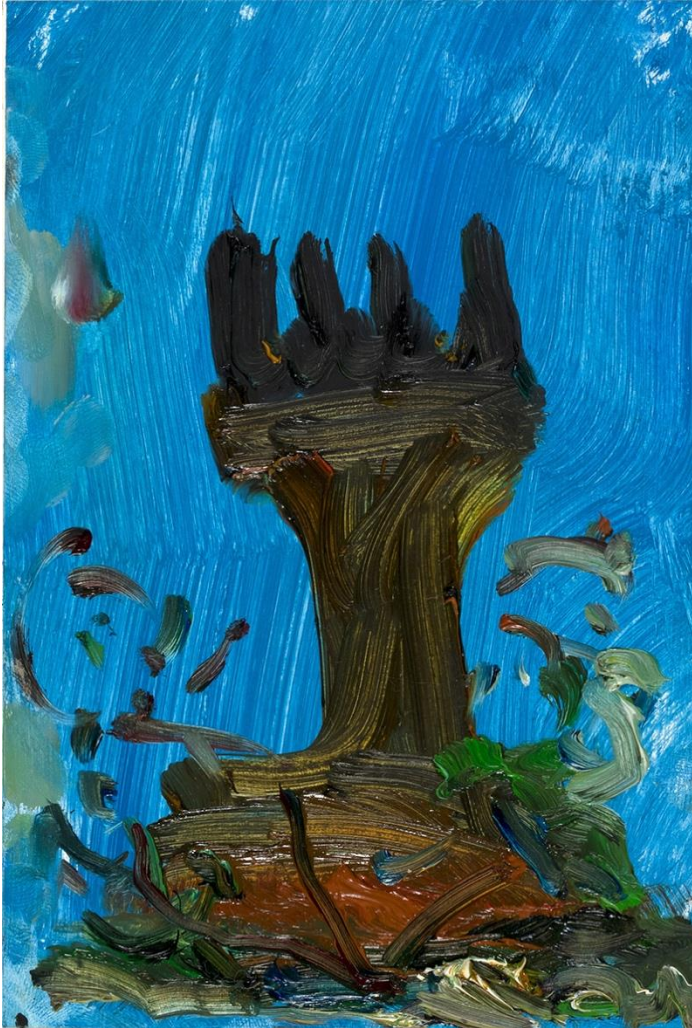
fear of falling.  
Neither mother  
nor lover  
you never had,  
though I do  
love you  
in my way,  
as you must  
love me in yours.  
I'm the obstacle.  
When I step aside  
trees part for you,  
mirrors open like doors.  
Also called the teacher  
you can see I'm nothing  
but a blue sky  
with a rose in its mouth.

— *Billie Chernicoff*



Hungry girls need to eat  
even if it means this cactus.  
Yum, prickly floral, rouge and rogue  
maroon sideburns on starkly  
stern gentleman of the desert  
red rust bust underneath  
his low shoulder, carrying little  
but his beans and clean air.

—*Lila Dunlap*



Big fist make little difference,  
said the fish to the ruined  
submarine. Kiss my kelp,  
touch my mine, where the rusted spines  
of this vintage bomb  
talk to the tickling barnacles  
when you dive down to find sharks  
or treasure. The ghosts of dead sailors  
dance drunk with anemones  
reddish-coloured rainbows  
just out of light of the shallows.

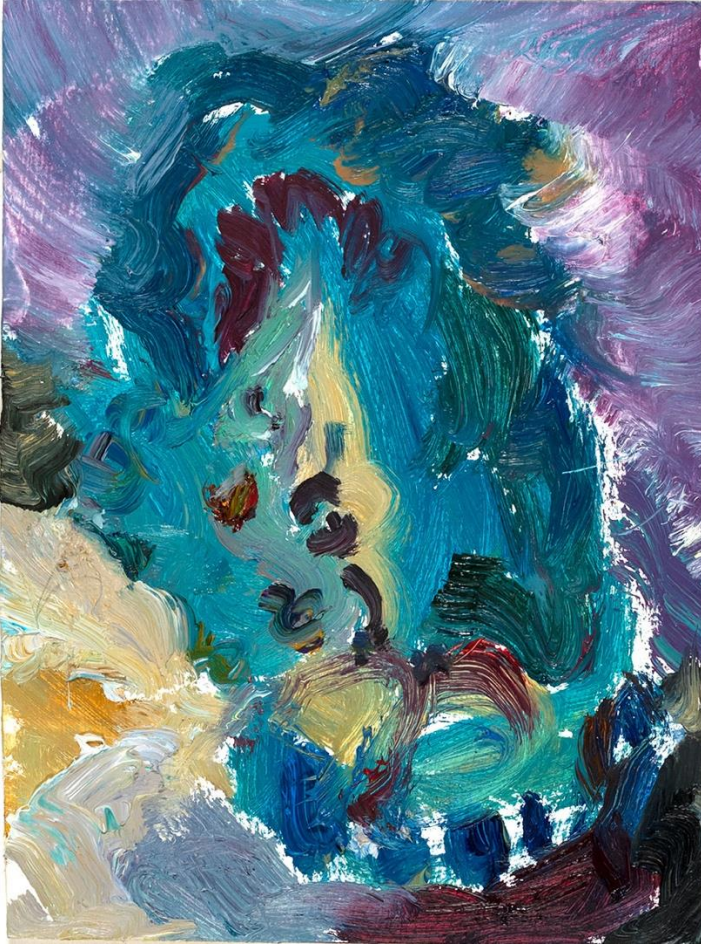
—*Lila Dunlap*





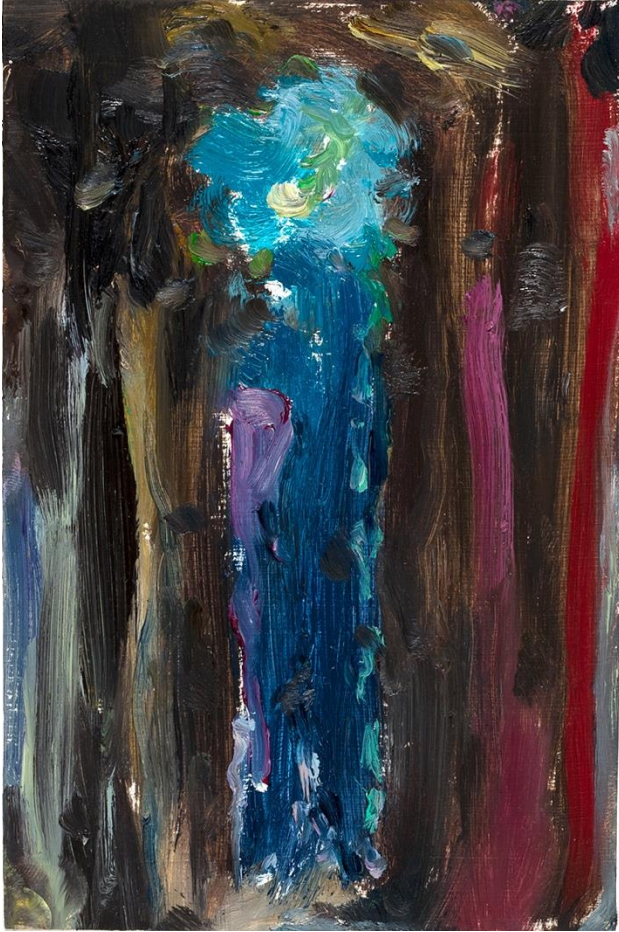
The road blows bran  
misted memory of vineyards  
at the close of October  
I can't help but think of Van Gogh's  
twisted *Wheatfield with Crows*,  
or so I remember,  
the last dance before death  
(for both the artist and the land)  
a girl in a brown dress  
empties grain onto the earth  
its own winter soup  
thick and meaty  
rich with oil and complete starches  
as rainbow and ruinous  
as vaginal fluid  
dripping after a rainstorm.

— *Lila Dunlap*



Big blue blustery solid  
genital rush.  
This is a solid expulsion  
via which we view the organ.  
She shows us how deep  
we need to go  
to reach her manhood.  
She keeps a little bit of sand  
in the corner of her room.  
And a leggy red bird  
spreads its wings  
right at the fulcrum  
where she opens her legs.  
Meanwhile Amazonian black ants  
trickle out from inside her  
willingly.

— *Lila Dunlap*



Our bubbling fades to reverence  
and we gratefully stand at attention  
ready to kill or give birth to our god,  
see him wash up unspoken of  
on the sand. Ask me  
was the water blue or grey  
that day, was the sand of coral or glass?  
Face-down we worship you,  
strenuous as our worship is,  
make us a cult for you,  
and we rub down our temple with blood,  
our window frames with lead paint,  
and look to the larger sea that awaits us,  
across that thin and whistling bridge.

— *Lila Dunlap*



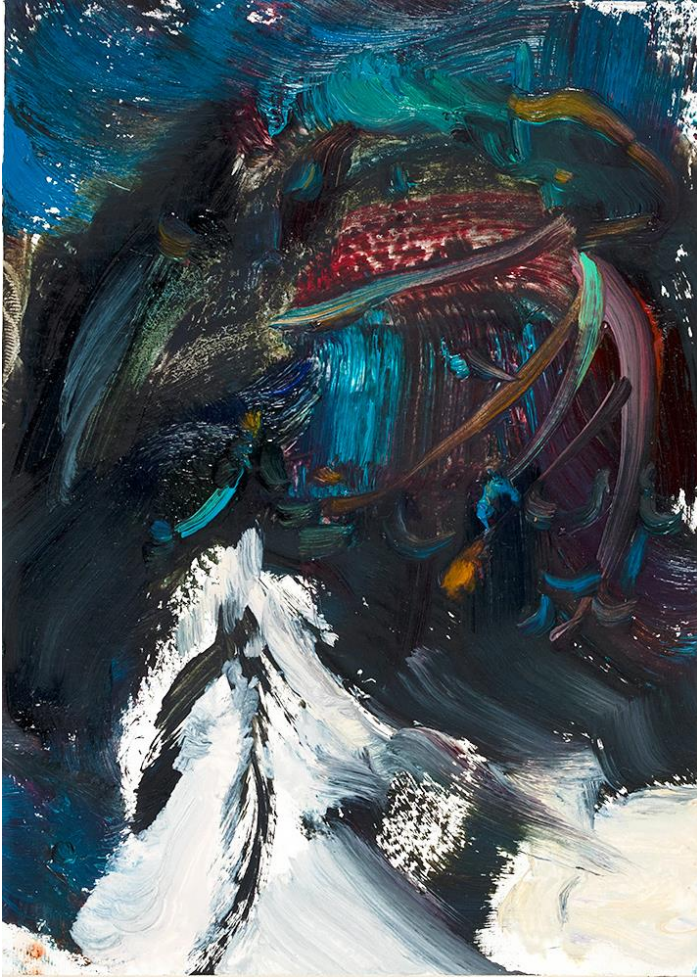
Begins with rose, ends with a leap,  
End me, cries the Heavens,  
see me splatter. He adds his hands  
to the apple, and we find ourselves  
soaring fast through the firmament.  
Nothing happens but creation.  
Watch the world work,  
being everything inside its orgasm.

—*Lila Dunlap*



A blue swivel, an Inuit child  
asleep in his blankets of fur.  
Outside the night rages on,  
as unannounced and wild as any city.  
Flocks of lantern-bearing or lantern-headed ghosts  
prance by, outside on the snow.  
Nearby, an eel sleeps, pulsing, his belly  
full of food, and beyond this mess  
of broadness and particularity  
the sky makes its way to a hazy morning.

— *Lila Dunlap*



A Christmas of who or what has never seen the light  
(as all Christmases are).

The wolf on spider legs salutes the rising red  
and howls as best he can. Some snot  
escapes through his teeth,  
and he can see that it is green.

Upward white Christmas trees dash and dance:  
Spruce and Fir we are! Yule-logs  
to be set on fire by our Lord.

And God like a flaming Ferris-wheel  
having buried one son bears another  
and the demon turns his dark cloak  
to cover his dirty blue face.

—*Lila Dunlap*

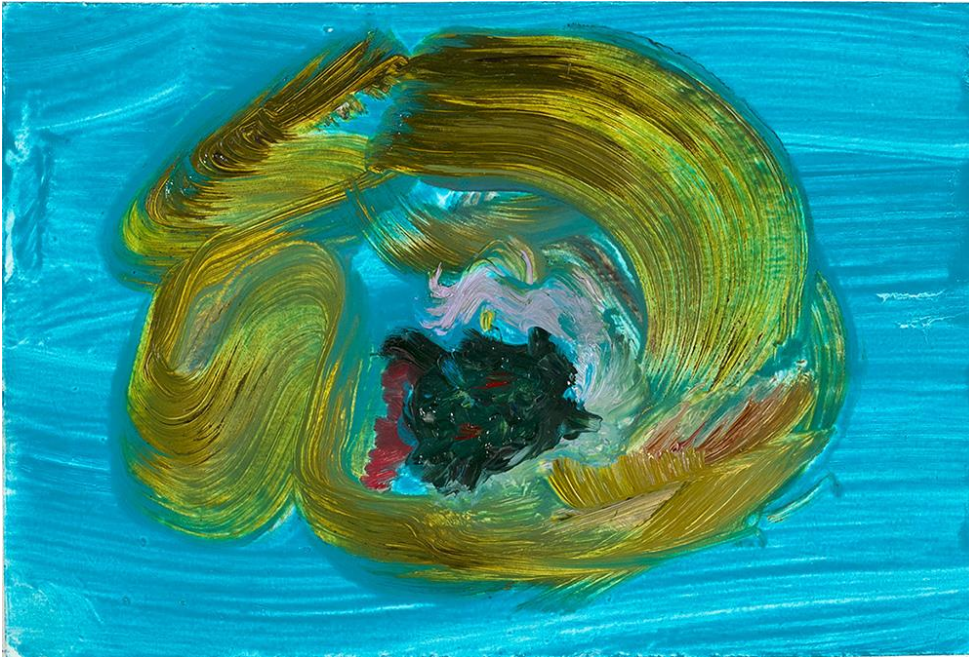


The holiday cake is round.  
The celebratory bread.  
Babka, king cake, galette des rois, a holy circle,  
(all but the Yule log, not Christian at all).  
And here you can see the brandied cherries  
studding the sun, shielding our eyes from our God  
while the fuzzy blue sky bubbles  
with the help of this warmth  
ripples like silk in springtime ecstasy.

So round and round the ladies dance,  
the girls of our village, feet in the dirty grass  
immune to filth, elevating the cake, the coin,  
the loop, the face which looks back at the heavens  
and recognizes it as such.

—*Lila Dunlap*





Under the water the wretched fish of the deep  
cannot aptly celebrate the birth of our Lord, but they do their best.  
They swim fast in a circle and maintain between them  
a sprig of Christmas vegetation  
dotted with berries and tied with ribbons  
to complete their undersea wreath.  
I don't know what to think of this tradition.  
It is said that when our Christ was born,  
at that same moment the cat Christ, and dog Christ,  
and giraffe Christ, and crab Christ were also born,  
each according to his species.  
That being said, my grandma also told me  
that: "A fish isn't an animal,"  
so it is hard to pass judgment on this one.

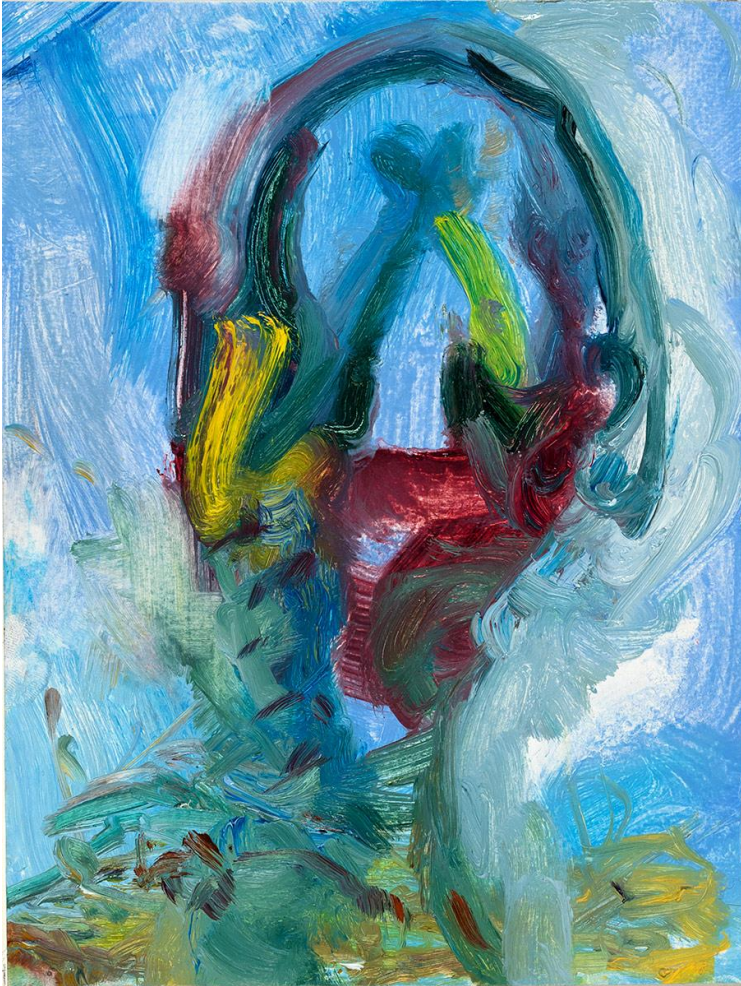
—*Lila Dunlap*



Little dance moths  
do during the day  
-light hours, a book of hours  
is the very progression of the sun  
as we see it from our gardens.  
The text is the squashes  
fattened on the vine.  
Healthy cucurbits  
mumbling psalms  
in late afternoon.  
A blue bird lands  
on the sprout of a pumpkin  
suddenly weightless  
in this quiet wind  
of paradise, a walled garden, aware  
and looking at itself and all else  
surrounded by night

beyond the wall  
and the dusky rhythms  
of the jittering blood  
within the dancers  
exchanging their skin  
with one another and the cosmos  
make this brightness possible.

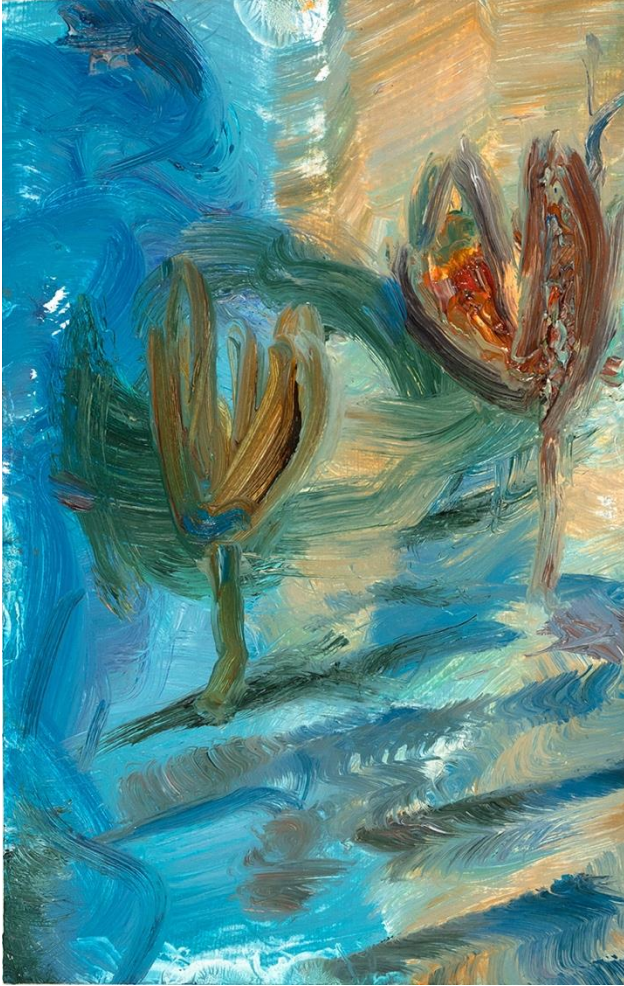
—*Lila Dunlap*



I held the world in my hand  
and had no hands.  
I gave it to you  
and you weren't there.  
This is the dream of the Giant,  
the liberal answer  
to unasked questions.  
When you see this image  
you know you're safe,  
it holds you in its hands  
and it has hands,

it builds a church  
out of sticks and stones,  
brings you into it,  
marries you there.  
When you see this image  
you know you are complete.  
Things have happened already.  
Be quiet and dream what comes.  
This is Alpha and Omega and  
the naked man who carries them  
into the world. Some call him  
the Redeemer, but he buys nothing  
back. All he does is give.  
And what he gives I think is us.

*– Robert Kelly*



The hands of God hold ripeness  
only when we reach up. There is a kind  
of flower that knows this better than I do  
but I can't find it growing anywhere.  
Maybe the subway. Maybe under the river  
Though I think it grows on my mother's grave.  
Everything is far away but God. The young  
Gypsy woman who drew this image  
quickly on the palm of my hand called it  
The Sound you can Actually Hold Onto.  
And when you do, the flower comes to you.  
It feels like the skin of her knee or yours  
and the color keeps changing  
the way you do too.

— *Robert Kelly*



The Dark Decider  
lives in our minds.  
When we think  
this way and that  
the Decider decides  
and we live with it.  
When you draw this card  
put everything out of mind.  
Maybe allow yourself to recall  
a stream flowing past some trees.  
Don't name them. Don't care  
if there are fish in the water

or lovely beings bathing there  
or earnest Baptists at their play.  
Hear the water ripple. Nothing  
has to be decided, does it?  
You're who you are, where you are,  
and the stream keeps going away.

– *Robert Kelly*





Sometimes the swan turns round  
and swims towards the beginning.  
This is The Beginning. Swans  
don't swim. This is how the world  
looked last night over the Catskills  
as the world was beginning. Swans  
walk through the water, bodies a-float,  
legs paddling unseen, what the great  
neglected Eddison called "the policy  
of the duck." This is not the duck  
and not the swan, this is only one bird,  
the bird called Beginning, that flew  
over the river last night, that flew  
a few million years ago over Eden.  
Which I think was Egypt, which Cain  
my ancestor left and moved east  
to the land of Nod, the very place  
my mother sent me every night.  
But that was before the beginning.

—Robert Kelly`



## THE KISS

What else could come so close  
and curve around you inside and out,  
a tyrant tongue around your breath  
and such soft closures on your lips.  
And a kiss is never red, despite  
childish images. Once you've been  
Really kissed you know a kiss  
is blue as Achilles hair, or black  
as your insides at night, in bed,  
bargaining with kisses or whatever

old poetry guessed that people did  
when everybody in the dark is Cupid  
and the only light is the quick  
excitement engulfing all your lips.

—*Robert Kelly*



The beasts who carry  
our flesh-colored star  
on their greenish fur  
– midnight paved with  
olivine, an emerald lake,  
treasure to find  
and never return –

the beasts I ride are daemons  
of books and friends who cross  
our ample world the beasts  
must not and not not  
believe in. Read. Beasts we ride  
across the green text,  
*tabula smaragdina.*

Ride them to the star  
their flesh holds buried,  
purple tinged bow and arrow  
in the hands of *The Hunter*,  
earthly Tammuz; *The Star*,  
this star, must steal from  
her brother: turn outward.

– *Tamas Panitz*