

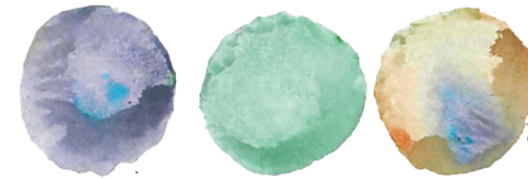


Art  
&  
Soul

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&  
Soul

Artwork, Poetry, & Photography

*M'Liss Runyon*



Poetry

*Victoria L. Davis*

*Robin Havenick*

*J. D. Mackenzie*

*Jane White*



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Design & Artwork by M'Liss Runyon

Edited by Jane White

Printed in the United States of America

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where copyright protections also apply.

ISBN: 979-8-218-96480-1



## Process

*"Creativity takes courage."*

~ Henri Matisse

This book started with the exchange of a few abstract paintings and short poems between two friends. Sometimes J. D. would write a poem first, and I'd do an abstract painting in response, or the reverse would occur. This collaboration is known as ekphrasis - a very special relationship between the writer and artist. The process, which began so slowly, sped forward into a gentle, magical expression of love and trust among us five artists - an intersection of words and images and a love for the ways in which art changes our lives.

~ M'Liss Runyon



When I was a young child, I started drawing to express myself. As a very shy girl it took all my strength to be around others. Art gave me a way to just be me. Although I thought my obsession with the art books and supplies my mom endlessly doled out hid me from the world, quite the opposite took place. They opened magnificent vistas. My extreme dyslexia and speech impediment made a pencil or a paint brush the best possible therapy. They traded the obstacles of voice for a different form of communication.

Then came painting, then photography, then art school. And then came my life as an artist. My personal narrative has been shaped by the basic building blocks of art. Color and abstraction became my voice, helping me find meaning and unity in my universe.

Over the years, I've loved taking photographs, making videos, painting abstracts, and drawing - making art in every form. This book is the culmination of my artistic journey thus far. Here words inspire images and images inspire words. In this book the poetry of four deeply passionate friends wedds with my vision. Here's to *Art & Soul*.

~ *M'Liss Runyon*

I learned by heart and recited my mother's poetry as a young child. Now I write and recite my own poetry to my grandchildren. All my life, language has been my mecca, poetry my spiritual guide. It was my great fortune, as a community college teacher for twenty years, to serve as writing mentor, to help create a poetry club, a soul community for young poets, to witness and celebrate the ancient power of poetry. These days, I practice poetry among family and friends. With each gesture, I learn new ways to celebrate.

~ Robin Havenick



In my professional life, I have played a part in many collaborations designed to bring innovative arts programs to my community. Directing the Writing Center at Linn-Benton Community College was a rewarding collaborative dialogue with students. But my writing is most often a solitary process. I have written plays, a memoir, and am currently writing a book of personal essays. When M'Liss invited us to respond poetically to her abstract paintings, a collaboration unfolded that was equal parts trust, creativity, friendship, and joy. I feel deeply honored and grateful to have been a part of it.

~ Victoria L. Davis

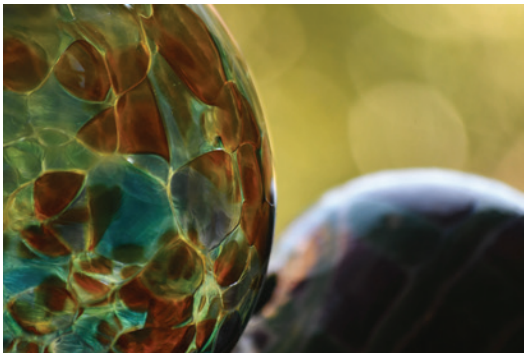


All my life, my passion for language has brought me many gifts - as an avid reader; college speech, writing, and lit teacher; actor in and director of readers theatre productions; volunteer supporter and mentor of nascent readers and writers; solver of crosswords, player of Scrabble, and lover of wordplay; and as a contributing editor of personal, family, and local histories, prison reform and peace brochures, and three poetry books, including this one. As an aspiring poet, I'm thrilled to be part of *Art & Soul*.

~ Jane White

Poems, stories, and art help me make sense of the world. I especially love how ekphrastic projects summon our senses while revealing the passions of two or more artists. The darker days of the pandemic inspired us to build community through this collaboration. After previous careers in hospitality, heavy construction, and higher education, I've saved the best for the present: poet, partner, father, and gardener. My previous work is scattered throughout obscure college presses, state parks, art galleries, and my mother's refrigerator. And now - with heartfelt gratitude for M'Liss, Jane, Robin, and Victoria - here in *Art & Soul*. Enjoy!

~ J. D. Mackenzie



# Stories

that's what we are

different forces

different weather

*~ M'Liss Runyon*



## Chopsticks

Many years ago I went to dinner at a Japanese restaurant with a man who I was infatuated with. We ordered. The waitress brought only chopsticks. He picked them up, adept at their use. I had never eaten with chopsticks before. Amused, he demonstrated how to use them. I fumbled, again and again, never one to learn physical skills easily. The waitress came by and I asked her if I could have a fork. She looked at me coldly and asked, "Are you in a hurry?" I could not speak, humiliated. She brought a fork, but I ate without enjoyment.

Years later, when I was struggling in my first Tai Chi class, my husband urged me to be patient, to be content with one movement done well. Sometimes it takes years to understand the value of humility.

*~ Victoria L. Davis*

# I Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest

As a child  
peering with binoculars  
through the 6x6 window  
of our dining room  
which faced the grounds  
of the  
mental hospital

I'd count the patients  
wondering  
who are they?  
what are they doing?  
why are they in there?

Padded cells  
contained moments  
behind closed doors  
that's how I see  
that's how I think  
remembering them  
helps me become whole

~ M'Liss Runyon



Oregon State Hospital Grounds  
Salem, Oregon



## Tri-angulation:

After Dobbs

Man: "You'd better not be!"

Doctor: "You're at risk at your age."

Woman: "Another child in this angry house?"

Earth: "Not one *more* soul on this dying planet?"

~ Jane White

## Ancient Trigonometry

She's not thinking of  
the Shirtwaist Fire  
the Nazi pink ones  
the Golden smoke  
or the Bermuda sink  
only of the dark ones  
because

laughing down the mountain  
she knows

she'll have her pick of the singles  
drinking in the après bar  
she always has

a third to create the never-ending triangle of her life  
her committed partner, her latest "love"  
her lonely self.

~ Jane White



## Dusty Light

It's a small moment of magnitude  
Eyes feeling overwhelmed  
Soft winds brushing against the colors  
Electric light singing through the flowers  
The ocean in the background humming  
My heart takes a deep breath of hope

*Drinking in the light.*

*~ M'Liss Runyon*



*Big Sur  
California Central Coast*



## Northern Lights

I'm methodically searching a remote corner of Alberta trying to find the section homesteaded by my grandfather. The prairie here is vast and the nights are bewitching. It's one thing to read about the aurora borealis and quite another to experience it with my own eyes. The colors appear in enormous, rippling curtains of light, my color more than all of the others combined.

*~ J. D. Mackenzie*

She did everything with intention.  
In Memory of Julie Green

I peek over with my goggles on.  
The water is clear and I can see her just a few lanes over.  
Her arms are long and slim. Elegant.  
Gliding slowly with a grace of an exotic fish,  
moving through the water with a peaceful rhythm.  
No flip turns, no fancy strokes, just calming movement.  
Every movement intentional.  
I keep thinking it's Julie, but that's just me dreaming.

Julie always told me how much she loved the water.  
She would look dreamy when we talked about swimming laps.  
It was the same gaze she would give the universe  
when we chatted about foods she could no longer eat.  
Missing those simple pleasures.

Julie had always wanted to bike to the pool with me and swim beside me.  
In my heart, she did. Two mermaids in bliss.  
Grief can swim by us, slowly and beautifully.

~ M'Liss Runyon





## Riding the Waves for Eila

Your words reached us at the top  
of our climb trailing into the forest high  
above sandstone cliffs hugging the sea's  
sandy beach where you stood waving.

We could not see your arms swaying side  
to side, your feet shuffling in the sand,  
your blue sunhat bobbing in ocean mist  
mixed  
with all the other shapes along the beach.

But your words, delicate as when vast  
waves thin to shore: *Bye Nonni! Bye Papa!*

I turned, rode them back out waving  
wildly. *I LOVE YOU EILA*, I shouted into

that wide open sandstone canyon.  
Did you hear them? Carried through

sea mist, on a returning wave,  
riding the current of my love  
for you.

~ Robin Havenick

*Late February at Finley  
for Mary V.*

A Mallard drake balances upright on the water,  
a balletic display.  
His desired responds  
with less strenuous, yet sensuous moves  
inviting him to mount her.  
In seconds it's over and then  
they swim away together  
their future cast.

Dozens of Tundra Swans share the Mallards' marsh  
an immature Bald overhead  
and in the East some more rare magic -  
six snow-capped volcanoes  
keep silent vigil.

*~ Jane White*



*Finley National Wildlife Refuge  
Willamette Valley, Oregon*

Paint & Grief  
In Five Movements

I paint fast,  
it's how I make sense of  
wanting time to stop.  
Urgency rushes over me.  
Grief waves over my body  
like a shadow.  
The strokes are wet  
and  
I try to let go.  
Each stroke is a new color,  
but these colors are not my usual ones.



First Movement



## Second Movement

Looking up at the twisted old shore pines  
all bent all crooked,  
I feel my mom's blue eyes pierce me -  
her short hair that was never cut straight  
reminds me of these trees -  
peering down to see what I'm doing,  
they guide me through this moment.

My fingers remember the last time  
I opened the door to the family cabin  
in that old magical forest.  
The smell pulls me around  
to look at the stove I cooked on for a lifetime.  
Dark white and well used  
it held the cast iron skillets  
that I kept scoured and well oiled.

Gigantic Douglas firs standing so tall -  
a proud ring around the cabin to protect  
the spotted owls and cool dense earth below -  
flash back to me.

These memories are beautiful and haunting.

The fire took it all  
and left our world in shock  
with a deep wishing it had never happened.



*Third Movement*



As I pick my last color  
and dip my paint brush into it  
I feel freer than when I started  
just a few minutes ago.

The smell of the salty ocean has me wishing  
I could have seen my dad paint just once,  
just one time, so that I could hold, in my mind,  
just one small piece of how he saw the world.

He painted large drippy loose abstracts  
then once he was done would burn them  
on the beach in the evening as his ritual.



*Fourth Movement*



*Offth Movement*

I am my father when  
I don't see why I should keep my art  
for anyone to see.  
More grief folds its arms around my heart in gratitude.

As I start to clean up my brushes  
I remind myself  
to look at the stars tonight  
because the sky will be so clear, so pure.  
As clear as it is in that old growth forest  
that is now gone,  
burned like my dad's paintings.

The thing about the stars is  
they don't hesitate to leave our lives;  
they stay as bright as when we can see them  
always looming over us all.

This moment brings me closer to understanding  
something I can't explain about grief and  
the expression of love in the past.

*~ M'Liss Runyon*



What we all deserve  
An homage to food banks

It's no small task to ask for help in a time of need.  
Little faces peek through the window with soft smiles,  
Kind souls pointing at fruit, onions, and coffee cake.

Fewer empty bellies and perhaps a hot meal soon.  
Light hands wave a thank you as they walk away,  
Taking with them a small bundle of community love.

I'm on my knees to think of those without.  
Crazy how helping is therapy -  
It's as good and pure as sunshine.

~ M'Liss Runyon

## Rio Grande Collage

Face to face with a coyote covered in beautiful winter fur, there's no place for fear, only respect when you remember where she sleeps at night. Same with the bighorn sheep on the next ridge over, too beautiful to christen, as if doing so might mess with his magic. Weathered wooden doors hewn from hardened history, from groves that gave up when the footpaths widened. Rivers ranging from trickles to stage fours to parched memories. The rare high desert bloom that lives somewhere between surrender and hope. And what of the invisible? The grit on the wind, the outmigration of despair, the rent due when lovers can't agree on the setting or the tempo for their stories. It's all right there, until it's not, carried away by winds ranging from gentle puffs to gales that unravel antique windmills. You'll be boarding at your gate within an hour, but think hard before you leave. It'll all be here when you return, but will you still be you?

*~ J. D. Mackenzie*





## O Spring

you saucy wench  
rousing us from winter  
with your tips of green  
barely thrusting through  
beds of leaves and matted weeds

lured by those green tips  
we are drawn outside  
to rake away debris  
with eager hands chilled  
by wet earth not yet warmed

we long for more  
and just as we grow impatient  
you dangle crocuses  
yellow, purple, cream  
peeking out, tucked here and there

you have us in your thrall now  
hungry for your flourishes  
of daffodils and tulips  
willing slaves to  
weeding, planting, fertilizing

intent now on our own efforts  
we nearly miss the moment  
when your beauty  
suffuses the earth  
permeates the very air

it is almost too much  
almost

~ Victoria L. Davis



## Before the Rains

Tiny sails of autumn  
leaves flicker crimson  
gold in blue skies

till giddy in this dance  
a few let go together  
to rise

high and wild  
like flares of joy  
feather-light and free

~ *Robin Havenick*

*Glanbe'*

Consuming summer  
in a conflagration of color  
sweetgum  
sumac  
viney maple

You, too,  
ripe, rosy  
red-headed

I'm falling  
falling

falling

~ *Jane White*

# One More Damn Thing

After the 21st century version of the 1918 flu  
Only worse  
Then our own version of the Great Depression  
This one with better pictures  
Now the civil rights movement of the 60s  
Re-born again on Twitter and Instagram

All that was left was an infestation  
A wicked, mean-looking orange bee  
Who moves with stealth and speed  
Who stings like a taser dipped in iodine

Please, when it feels like  
We've had enough for now  
Let there not be  
One more damn thing

~ J. D. Mackenzie





*Salishan Spit  
Central Oregon Coast*

## Why I Don't Miss Summer

Rain in Sun. Gray skies thin to blue.  
Oak trees' long lanky shadows reach  
across soggy grasses. Glistening  
is the word I wake to. How raindrops  
sparkle, how wind plays with rain in waves,  
how field grasses tiptoe towards the Sun,  
the skirts of the firs swaying to a winter  
tune even the crows know.

*~ Robin Havenick*



# Forgiveness

He's in prison for life, this I know for sure.

Does he eat fresh strawberries from a prison garden?

Does he pick lettuce in the spring?

I bet not.

The smallest acts of kindness do matter, this I know for sure.

Even those behind cold steel walls deserve compassion.

Even those inside padded cells deserve nourishment.

I wonder if his parents care.

I bet not.

~ *M'Liss Runyon*





## Being Present

I love story. Most of the visual art in my home, though varied, is representational. But this piece reminds me that color can be enough, that the intersections of colors create movement, provide energy. I do not need to project the blue as a heron in flight or wonder about the wriggle of red or question the overlays of orange; being present brings its own delight.

*~Victoria L. Davis*

## Falling, Or Not

Times like these made her think about feathers  
stills from her childhood, wafting slow-motion

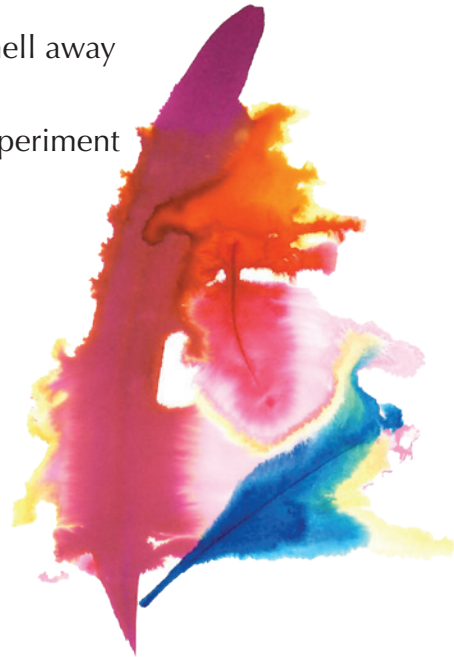
Memories of feather boas in the antique trunk  
in grandmother's attic, saved for playing dress-up  
like the divas in black and white movies

Feathers in ornithology class, the projects and images  
under the microscope, questions on the test  
about features found useful in flight

The tired metaphor of taking wing, getting the hell away  
from whoever caused the latest round of grief

More and more she saw things like Galileo's experiment  
dropping everything from a high place  
things both heavy and light, all of it falling  
at the same rate, hitting the ground  
at the same time, the only difference  
was the sound things make  
when they leave our hands and give way  
to forces beyond our control

~ J. D. Mackenzie



## Acknowledgements

*I would like to thank my friends, my family, and the community for the endless support through the years. Thanks to Jeff for being a gracious husband - and someone who loves art deeply, gives me his honest criticism, and helps guide me when I get a little lost. Thanks to my most loving and kind friends - the "super group" that has helped me stand taller in times of trouble and danced with me in the best of times. Thanks to my brother John for being the best sibling a sister could ever ask for, and to my parents, who believed in education, loved nature, and guided my path as an artist.*

*J. D. played a role early on because when he saw me struggling with personal issues, he set forth a plan to help me paint to his poetry. The exchange was priceless in the evolution of this book, and I'm forever grateful.*

*Thanks to my mentors in this book, Victoria and Robin, who so generously took this journey with me, creating thoughtful bonds and powerful poetry. They are amazing friends, who extend unconditional love to help others and to advocate for a better world through poetry and education.*

*The biggest thanks go to Jane for her tremendous ability to be a first-class editor, wordsmith, technical advisor, collaborator, and beautiful friend. She is a whirlwind of love and compassion, and I feel enriched by all that she has taught me. Art & Soul would not have happened without her.*

*Dreams can come true!*

XOX  
*m. lisa*