



**DOUBLE
TAKES**

NEIL ELLMAN

DOUBLE-TAKES

NEIL ELLMAN



© MMXII Neil Ellman
Published by Fowlpox Press
ISBN: 978-0-9881088-6-8

CONTENTS

Gentle Ascent
The Large Blue Horses
Middle Blue
Cru i R
The Vanquished
Rope Swinger
Bird Flight
Male and Female
The Moon-Woman
Scenecio
Botanical Theater
Twittering Machine
Whirl
Circle
Modest George Inesco
Contentment Island
Indian Summer
Onement III
Dancers on a Plane
Flag
Flags II
Mappa del mondo
Homage to the Square: Joy
Homage to the Square (Memento)
Big Red

Gentle Ascent

*(after the painting by Wassily
Kandinsky)*

For Mayer

1

Tiny miracles ascend.
Toy soldiers
rise from an open hand.

2

Butterflies, wakened by the sun,
flutter to the light.
A gentle breeze lifts their wings
like candy-colored balloons
in a carnival of sky.

3

The slightest movement
in a toe, a hand
baby steps taken
one by one
redeem our faith.

**The Large Blue Horses (Die Grossen
Blauen Pferde)**

(after the painting by Franz Marc)

Indifferent child, barely eleven,
the century turned blue
day from green to blue
horses gathering
an equinox
on drum-beat hooves
at her window seat
watching the passing line
of armaments and men
unsaddled steeds
pausing like phantoms
in cold-blue light to rest
ready to die
from white to blue
on frosted glass
she traces a picture
of an uncertain peace
dying horses
in a rime-blue field.

Middle Blue

(after the painting by
Sam Francis)

Blue smoke rises
a column of words
filled with orange
and yellow adjectives
purple adverbial ashes
from the middle world
a message
from the dead:
“Hold fast,
hold fast to mother
earth.”

Creu i R

(after the mixed media work
by Antoni Tàpies)

This wood
this cross
my wounded pride.

The runes
of 'i' and 'R'
conceal my name.

My iambic arms
reach out
to touch the sky.

The burdens
of my days
are done.

The Vanquished

(after the painting by Hans Hofmann)

I

By age
grown hard
pitted like the moon
crushed by the weight
of unrelenting days and nights
abandoned
in its shapeless skin
the marrow of its faith
stilled
spent and bloodless stone.

II

Neither psalms nor poetry
neither the ebb and flow of seas
nor words
can shape the vanquished heart
turn stone to blood
pulse
with the rhythms
of a beating soul
flutter shudder tremble
to life
alive as it was
when the moon was still a child.

Rope Swinger

(after the painting by Hans Hofmann)

Swinger on umbilical rope
clinging to life
a hanged man kicking air
holding fast
these twists and braids
of certainty
taut
from birth to grateful death
no accident of fate
damned
from the start.

Bird Flight

(after the painting by Hans Hofmann)

Listen:
the murmur of wings
cluster
in clouds
of cardinals
and jays
swallows
and orioles
slapping air
hover
dive
glide
and soar
in silent flight—
watch:
and you
will hear
the light.

Male and Female

(after the painting by Jackson Pollock)

Male & female
&/or
one &/or the other
hermaphroditic
parts
entwined
between
each of the other's
appetite
apart
then as one
the longing to be whole
in each other's arms
one
the other
and the same.

The Moon-Woman

(after the painting by Jackson Pollock)

for Gail

She
the impossible she
she
the provocateur
who raises the tide
in my bones
she levitates
she flies orbits
around my soul
she hardens my dreams
she knows
what I feel
she feels
how I feel
she knows
what I know.

Scenecio

(after the painting by Paul Klee)

The boy's face
a kaleidoscope
of squares and arcs
astonished
exuberant
eyes that penetrate
the night
as if the sun
could never die.

Botanical Theater

(after the painting by Paul Klee)

We flowers
say our lines
soliloquies
in russet tones
at center stage
deny the fall
and winter's
discontent.

Twittering Machine

(after the painting by Paul Klee)

I

What species are these
rising from the gears
sput-sput-sputtering sparrows or
twit-twit-twittering machines
the difference between
an armature and wing
apparatus hungry for
its morning meal
or oriole ignited
by the morning sun?

II

Too late for the early birds
of a feather
flocking together
as motors and raptors
shafts and wheels
too late for the engines
to chit-chit-chitter to life
before they come
to their inevitable stop.

Whirl

*(after the painting by
Kenneth Noland)*

Merry-go-round
and round
catch the ring
and hear
Calliope sing
ring around
the rosie
wonder ball
goes round
and round
if you're the one
to hold it last
your time
has surely passed.

Circle

*(after the painting by Kenneth
Noland)*

Trust only
the circle
360 constant degrees
of truth
its area
pi times the
square of its radius
transcendental
irrational perhaps
but true
the only truth
in circles of faith
not even ours.

Modest George Inesco

(after the shaped painting by Kenneth
Noland)

Six sides to every question

unequal

no truth

in equilaterals

the distance between

here and there

disproportionate

now and then

today tomorrow

between

justice & the law

truth in the shape of a hexagram

six-legged vertices

beehive honeycomb

is where the devil hides.

Contentment Island

(after the painting by Helen Frankenthaler)

Write me a sonnet
the texture of blue
its sound
its shape
the scent of its leaves
14 lines
of mimicry
holding in its hand
the blue-mother earth
 hold me
 hold me
my blue song
more blue
than a glacier
in the sun.

Indian Summer

(after the painting by Helen Frankenthaler)

Indian summer comes

18 karat sun

indolent days/nights

birds confused

i confused/august blue

magenta crushed under

the weight of months

leaves confused

befuddlement of clouds

rains color anarchy

& the moon waxes

into golden sky

fall follows

certainty of trees

leafless branches

reach for spring.

Onement III

*(after the Painting by
Barnett Newman)*

Out
of
place
out
of
space
out
of
breadth
out
of
breath
the
depth
of
why
the
length
of
if
no
past
future
tense
none
only
one
out
of
time.

Dancers on a Plane

(after the painting by Jasper Johns)

Dancers on the head of a pin

seraph-pirouette

in unison

arabesque and attitude

pas de bourée

and pas de basque

as one

a web

of arms

legs

lift

spin

glide

bring beneficence

and grace

of wings.

Flag

(after the painting by Jasper Johns)

We know this flag
as well as we know the sky
and its painful certainty—
forty-eight stars
in a constellation's shape
a hunted animal
hounded to extinction
the hunter hunted
by its prey
we know where thirteen
roads will end
with bombs bursting in the air
by the light of an early dawn.

Flags II

(after the print by Jasper Johns)

Tattered, torn by wind,
the many stars and stripes
collide like galaxies—
the consequence of age
inconsequence and war
these flags crackle
patriotic prophecies
before they die in flame.

Mappa del mondo

(after the embroidered tapestry
by
Alighiero Boetti)

This (our world)
stitched together
as if (not quite)
one
of flags/banners
embellishment
of heraldic fantasies

crescents & stars
sabers & rising suns
eagles & maple leaves

black heritage
blue vigilance
blood-red purity of white

Brazil is green (or was)
Russia red (or was)
motley Africa's
erratic
fantastic
warp and weft
threaded in the sea

this (our world)
mappa del mondo
almost as if
it all makes sense.

Homage to the Square: Joy

(after the painting by Joseph Albers)

In every square
there is a square
angled to its heart
the joy of parallels
of space within
a square's
concentric suns
of amber destiny
to golden days
and yellow nights
the joy of symmetry—
homage to the joy
of light
and squares
within a square
angled to its heart.

Homage to the Square (Memento)

(after the painting by Josef Albers)

Nothing in this universe
is square
no planet, no galaxy
nor orbits of the sun
nor perturbations
of the stars
not of this earth
not of any universe
we recognize
except as a memory
assembled in a dream
within a dream
dissembled as a dream
within.

Big Red

(after the painting by
Sam Francis)

Color is light.
light, fire,
fire, fate
fate, red
the universe
on fire
the heart
on fire
mind
bleeding red
shifting
from blue
to unremitting red
casting
its flaring
shadows
red
in the folds
of space
and time.

About the Author:

Neil Ellman lives and writes in New Jersey. More than 500 of his poems, of which at least 300 are ekphrastic, appear in numerous print and online journals throughout the world, from Australia to Zimbabwe. Among the journals in which they appear are *Alba*, *Anastomoo*, *The Camel Saloon*, *Indigo Rising*, *Phantom Kangaroo* and *Yes, Poetry*. Six of his eight chapbooks are also based on works of art, the latest of which is *Convergence & Conversion: Ekphrastic Poetry* from The Knives Forks and Spoons Press.