

**Bird/Wind**

**Tall Grass**

**As the Crow Flies**

**The Stranger**

**Eye and Mind**

**Modern Art**

**The Medium**

Featured Poet  
Arthur Brown

## Bird/Wind

Whirling, nameless, black-tailed and brown,  
larger than a sparrow, perhaps a canyon towhee,  
a bird came to a standstill in the air—  
halted by the wind outside the two glass doors.  
It had its back to me, its wings and tail  
in disarray; its immobility  
flat out in motion hard to reconcile  
from where I sat, and at a loss to say  
itself what was the matter, so it seemed.  
For what had been invisible but known—  
the sky in which the bird could fly—now leaned  
against it. All its facts had come undone  
in that the bird could not maneuver in  
so wayward, weird, and racked a medium.



## Tall Grass

Alert and frayed against the wind  
below the near horizon of the ridge  
among the purple flowers and yellow stalks—  
mute orator or matador,  
a pass of the muleta, now a wave,  
a gesture of appeal, another, now  
of resignation, bowing, dispossessed;  
one instant frantic, calm the next,  
one-armed, or single-sleeved, your head a spine,  
your spine a moving yellow line  
fixed at the end that's underground,  
lengthened above, and making visible—  
beyond the glazed, foreshortened door,  
above the stucco wall, beneath the sky—  
the wind unsettling lilac leaves  
against the gray and black coyote fence  
as figure turns to background then returns;  
sensing, signaling, direct, you are  
no more or less in time than I,  
no more or less embodied, in the round,  
a subject and a style—to whom I owe,  
as to a human being, a gratitude  
that only at one stroke can be expressed  
before the wind subsides.

# As the Crow Flies

“The I of vision is not nothingness.”

— Maurice Merleau-Ponty

How do we know the crow  
is flying farther as we sit and watch?  
It flies above the wire and below  
from left to right—it rises, circles round,  
and disappears behind the cottonwood  
into the distance we presume  
because we see it less and less.

But what is seeing then—what turns  
the light against the retina  
to sense, direction, meaning, what you will?  
We’re speaking of the distance to the eye,  
but to the eye there’s only stimuli—  
the crow a spot of black against light blue  
whose flight the light-dark contrast contradicts.

The mind is in the same sky as the crow—  
from sky to eye to wire to cottonwood—  
and as the crow flies so does time.  
It flies in recollection, flies  
into the future of our past, into  
the past of our own future—flies from these  
invisible horizons to that other.

# The Stranger

“The structure of the world demands that we  
cannot see without *being visible*.”

— Jean-Paul Sartre

The aggregate of rock that paves the road  
one instant to the next appears to swell;  
appears to eyes a body's length away  
as might the sea to yellow beady eyes  
more distant from the surface overlooked—  
the rocks of varied shape and size and color  
varied like the waves and waves behind the waves

that roll to shore. The walking man whose eyes  
are on the ground—whose look  
moves to and from the ground  
along a multiplicity of lines  
no sooner drawn than lengthened or cut off—  
surpasses what he sees. His look  
takes up the rocks, whose distance, color, form

were he not walking there would disappear;  
takes up the facts and chance of things  
behind, before, and on all sides of him—  
there in the round beyond the sides revealed.  
Were someone opposite, another eye  
would see and could be seen to see  
the objects of the world that gleam as it does.

Each gleam on every corner of a rock  
that makes a buoy for the slanting sun,  
the angled surface of each rock,  
and every shadow falling from each edge  
of rock assure the man, the spectator—  
who is his vision and mobility,  
a figure on a ground—he's walking there.

In seeing the road he sees a stranger, too.  
Our consolations come from humble things,  
our look's adherence to a world  
composed of earth and sky—  
the sense of air, a bluish medium,  
diagonal lines that correspond to depth  
and give the height and breadth of the horizon.



## Eye and Mind

“The painter ‘takes his body with him,’ says Valéry.”

—Maurice Merleau-Ponty

One remembers the position of the body.  
It was just as I lay down in bed—  
the view out the double glass doors  
arrested me. I was leaning on my elbows,  
my head up, my legs stretched out in front of me.  
In the moonlight after the snowfall

the landscape had changed.  
There was something about the colors  
or the shapes in tones I took for color—  
blue-gray and lighter gray,  
blue-gray again, black-green and white,  
the silver-green of the Apache plume;

the colors and the lines.  
Twice framed and interrupted  
by the middle stiles, the lines were horizontal—  
illuminated clouds in the higher sky,  
dark along the contour of the mountains,  
the near hill shaped by juniper and piñon,

the stepped line of the coyote fence,  
and, before the doors, the Apache plume,  
fork-limbed and gnarled, snow-scraped;  
from top to bottom a gradation downward  
from horizontal to diagonal—  
the Apache plume precipitous.

There is something mysterious about striation,  
one thing behind another—cut-outs, collage,  
advancing and receding color planes.  
One move of the head and everything changes.  
Shapes telescope, the lines slide inward—  
clouds cover the moon and the colors dim.

# Modern Art

“Undoubtedly the first man was an artist.”

— Barnett Newman

The mountains up against the sky  
stand featureless, blank as a page—opaque  
construction paper cut and fixed  
against a changing ground; the clouds  
suspended in what’s left of distance, depth,  
and color—yellow sunlight giving way  
to pale, nocturnal blue. Belt-high  
on that horizon, whose expanse suggests  
a girth, a string of golden lights—cut short,  
inactive with the edges of the window—  
glimmers as it concentrates and brightens.

The juniper and piñon, roughly strewn,  
assert a foreground—linear,  
like pointing fingers of a skeleton,  
or filled in, like the heads in front of you  
in some dark theater you had entered  
by yourself—while in the middle ground  
the nearer lights high up the ridge  
suggest the space between the neighbors’  
and our own interiors. They do not break  
the plane, yet they recall the world outside  
the window, hastily dispersed—

the multiplicity of other viewpoints,  
framed and picturesque  
behind the flat, smooth glass.  
The wall and window isolate  
this apparition of disparate things  
made whole, coherent, radiant—  
an object now perceived and now  
imaginary, fashioned by the mind.  
A medium that’s not without extension—  
airy, double-paned, transparent, hard,  
yet given to reflection, dust, and smudges.





Even this notebook paper, small and lined,  
is three-dimensional.  
The words come from the inside out, the way  
old Moses came to Michelangelo—  
a figure slowly recognizable,  
a mass, a surface centered by a core,  
then giving way, thought better of, removed.  
Like Calder's models of the universe,  
they, too, form vectors, lines, and ends of lines—  
are spaced themselves  
in linked and concrete intervals.

But how indifferently the wires and metals  
hang this hour of their apprehension.  
This hour nothing stirs but dust.  
For all that, we can leave the gallery  
and watch, under the hemisphere of stars,  
the running lights against pale black  
and face the wind, the head-on rushing wind  
that rises up into the howling wind—  
the world's primordial expression  
of a depth we only ever sounded in  
our rhythmic and chromatic cries.

# The Medium

The piñon's scaly trunk, one naked branch,  
and twigs—rough charcoal lines that overlay  
the waving deep-green juniper, whose leaves  
accumulate in mottled spires;

reptilian tragedies, bent back and drooped  
in agonies cut short  
and leaving space at farther distances  
for clustered trees against the earth and sky—

pale pinkish brown, soft white, transparent blue;  
the medium adventuring no farther  
than the sky, or light-blotched lidded eyes, no nearer  
than the window frame, the desk and armchair,

halting at the foreground that we blindly call  
the self, although it's hardly more than bone.



## Arthur Brown

Arthur Brown is Emeritus Professor of English at the University of Evansville living now in Santa Fe, NM. He has published two poetry books and poems in *Poetry*, *Southwest Review*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Agni*, and other journals. His poems have won the Morton Marr Poetry Prize and the *American Literary Review* Poetry Prize. He has also published essays, most recently in *Janus Head* and *Philosophy and Literature*. The poems published here are from a new manuscript that was a finalist for the National Poetry Series' 2020 Competition.