

THE MAIN STREET RAG

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THE BLUE PAGES

MSR REVIEWS

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HEART SPEAKS, IS SPOKEN FOR

Poetry by Marjorie Maddox, Photography by Karen Elias
Shanti Arts Publishing (2022), Poetry & Photography
ISBN: 978-1-956056-06-8, 58 pages, \$22.95

In *Heart Speaks, Is Spoken For*, Marjorie Maddox and Karen Elias collaborate to create a gracefully written, visually entrancing journey. As the title implies, images and poems focus on the heart. The cover—a cracked heart-shaped stone—infuses photography while poems deliver a literal and figurative story, beginning with a donor providing life and culminating in love for *other*.

Cleanly composed and approachable, this book maintains an honest, stark approach to the palpable messiness of matters of the heart. Ekphrastic words flow vascularly into art. The colorful *Two Hearts, Two Windows* intensifies “Quarantine.” The heart-shaped tree stump of Heart Tree becomes a watermark for “Sepia”—a poem refreshing the Snow White and huntsman tale.

“Chiromancy” and Heart Lines synthesize the dark portrayal of a relationship. While Elias artistically enhances the stone within a palm, Maddox depicts the lovers:

*Maybe, one finger at a time, I'd slice,
save only my palm: small, smooth,
this curve here the curve of your cheek,
these lines the red in your eyes.*

Fittingly disturbing, the poem “Memorial for George Floyd in Black and White” describes the picture titled the same: “Cracked, gray-gone-dead: / the stone-cold heart pinned / by the pale blooms of buds ...” Even the poem’s format jars—the meaty first stanza shifting to two shorter juxtaposed stanzas. The poem’s last lines leave one feeling haunted: “... even now the faint scent / of grave-strewn blossoms / beginning to resurrect / the morning breeze.”

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The book concludes with the heart's connection to nature—a satisfying turn enticing readers to take responsibility. The climactic “Day Is Done. Is Beginning.” with Two Hearts presents hearts resting, peaceful. The poet’s “if only” mirrors the artist’s large, solid heart supporting the small fractured heart—and the desire to be whole, to be loved, and to love simply.

~Anne Kaylor

VANISHING POINTS

by Gary Metras

Dos Madres Press (2021), Poetry

ISBN 978-1-953252-42-5, 90 pages, \$18.00

What greater compliment can be paid to one poet than for another to quote an admired line as an epigraph for her own poem-in-the-making? As I read Gary Metras’s handsomely published full-length collection, *Vanishing Points*, I was taken straightaway with “The Birth,” a long poem near the end of the book, and in particular with such aphoristic declarations as “It is the child who speaks to my future” and “the child is full of little dooms / and triumphs / even before he begins.” I will be quoting at least one of these in my own poem-in-progress. I am appreciative of Metras’s poem for that inspiration.

Readers will be dazzled, I think, by Metras’s many deft and quite moving turns of the phrase in the 48 poems that comprise this collection. In “The Birth,” cited above, we read, “Snow / still whispered its hardships under yews.” As well, “The sacrifice of flowers / lit the ward room / where wife and husband bordered / on mother and father. We looked / to the corners as if a lost thing / huddled there [. . .].” This poem is a tightly-wrought, delicately strung homage to the child. Again, the purity and pathos of Metras’s language is on display: “There [was] stammered talk / of a small life squeezed out after hours of struggle.”

Indeed, pathos and empathy are two hallmarks of *Vanishing Points*. The stunning “Adam Returning” can be as much a retrospective of a long and complex marriage with its many vicissitudes, as it is most patently an elegy about humanity’s hapless ur-parents: