

Winter in June

A collection of ekphrastic flash fiction and prose poetry by

By Lorette C. Luzajic

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Review by Joan Leotta



Warning: Reading this collection of prose poems and flash fiction inspired by visual art will be a mind-bending experience—in a good way. Think of it as a gyroscope, turning your inner world upside down. Luzajic cleverly puts the title poem at the back of the book as a nod to the fact that the unifying element of this collection is how it expands and even changes the reader's understanding of art and our own lives, piece by piece. In each work she finds a way to explicate

the art, astound us with her perception/reaction, and image by image create a path into our interior selves and new perspective from which we will then, forever, view the world.

Reading, I made notes on so many poems, I can't possibly insert all into this review, so I selected three poems to use as examples of way Luzajic, a master illustrator paints her word pictures on our minds and souls. In ekphrastic poetry, prose, or fiction, the usual path is that a literary work is inspired by a work of visual art. Art begets art. Luzajic is a visual artist as well as a writer. Her collages and abstract paintings make exceptional use of negative space as well as color and shape in their depictions. These prose poems and flash fiction are quite capable of standing alone and I can imagine visual, musical, and dance artists being created as companion pieces to *her* words. Art begets art twice over.

“The last time I showed up at midnight”, the very first work **in the collection** is inspired by one of her own pieces of art. Much of the short prose deals with what is said and what is unsaid, as in the negative space in a painting. For example:

“The humidity had an aura of its own, pressing the small of my back and my neck like an intense and patient lover. I fumbled for ice, but only thin shells fell to my hands. There was a low pulse of jazz, so faint I knew it was the ghost of last night’s music gone. And she leaves a note, or things about it to let you know she is gone.”

And then the powerful end line: *“I thought about leaving a note before I disappeared forever, but I knew you’d know I’d been there.”*

Every word works the magic of pulling us into the world of the poem, as if it were a physical room and the piece recreating a memory of our own. Her deft control of imagery is as strong as if she were painting a picture with her brushes and palette of colors. After reading the poem, I swear I heard jazz and my jazz records are packed away! The power of the end line lies in the negative space, what does not happen—she thought about leaving a note but did not. Even though she would be absent when he (I assume) returned, he would know she had occupied for some time, the space that is now vacant. The poem leaves an intellectual aroma that lingers in the mind like gardenia petals once present but now crushed and tossed away.

The eighteenth poem/flash piece, ***Dandy Warhol***—is, on the surface, a piece of travel flash about a visit to the Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh, PA. Here the paragraphs work like the rungs of a ladder. We are taken down (and then up again) into the heart of what makes Warhol great. She describes the difficulty of arriving at the museum in a way that parallels our relationship to the difficulties of understanding this enigmatic man, Warhol, and what is behind his “Pop” art. Just much of Warhol’s *oeuvre* is gathered in one place to offer insights into the man, Luzajic’s selection of pieces to describe offers us insights into the man, into herself, *and* holds up a mirror to the reader, for self-examination.

For example, in one place says, *“The museum is grand and austere, missing the frantic speedy frenzy of the freaks you found were friends. It all feels like some sort of epic parody, except for the kicker at the core. That you were the real deal, the coolest one among them.*

....How did you do it? How did you command the bold and the beautiful and all their millions? You and your tooth- shorn stubby fingers, your pasty pallor and Einstein wig.”

Winter in June—the final poem in the book, literally turned my world upside down. I read it more than three times before I could bring myself to close the book.

“In June, the deep of winter, the moon is eternal and the sun does not rise. You imagine night horses with ice in their manes, galloping across snow-capped mountains. Where would you be if you weren’t here? Maybe there, a little farther north, where Malbec flows from the limestone and men like this one dance the tango.”

Yes, before reading this, I knew intellectually that winter is comes in June on the other side of the equator, (and I have even spent a July myself in southern Africa with my wool clothing and winter coat), but my mind continues to register “summer” with June. The poem startled me out of the complacency of the every day. As I alluded earlier, the work took my inner gyroscope and set it spinning. She caused me to rethink my experiences, literally turning them upside down, much as the relationships she described are turned inside out by what occurs. Winter in June—the very premise broadened my perspective. The creative power in the poems comes through so strongly that I found myself making notes of lines that triggered a poetic response of my own.

This is a book to read again and again, letting her verbal brush strokes carry you out of the everyday and into a portrait that will open you to new ways of seeing. I highly recommend it.