An abstract painting on a black background. The composition is dominated by large, expressive brushstrokes in yellow, red, and blue. The yellow forms are the most prominent, appearing as thick, rounded shapes with some internal black and white details. Red forms are scattered throughout, often as sharp, pointed shapes or thin, flowing lines. Blue forms are primarily on the right side, appearing as vertical, rounded shapes. There are also some grey and white elements, including a small red circle on a grey shape on the right. The overall style is gestural and expressive, reminiscent of mid-20th-century abstract art.

BLACKWASH CANAL

JASON LABBE

NALBLA
CKWASH
JASON LABBE
CA

SIX POEMS FOR X

INTERIOR TALK RADIO

Find the station
not of static but
translucence. Name it.
Lock the dial, walk
backward, canal-bound.
There is nothing left
to believe in or
want but everything,
and no dead air is
standing. Tune into
what slides out of place—
rotten tomato,
book you should not read,
rusting Cadillac.
Dwell in that report,
extend your neck
to improve reception.
Beckon the brother
you didn't hear vanish
and broadcast his name.
Thirty years will pass.
To assuage the grief
that thrives in distance.
He was never born
to sand in Baghdad.

FOX IN THE ROAD

If you can forget
what he said say it
again. The process
begins in a glare—
the water's tepid,
the green canal stalls.

If you lose the cause.

In his car, air off
and needing repair.

The water, the road,
beside each other.

Listen, you are *there*
with the time of day,
say, just before dusk
when a fox comes out
of the brush to cross
where?—into traffic
is so obvious.

Not beyond reproach,
nor beyond despair—
if you remember
one thing he believed
baby say it twice
in a whisper and
with sunglasses on.

THEN EIGHTEEN BLANK PAGES

In his diary
(close it) a distant
grey road (drive away)—
sandy and rancid.
Sudden explosion
into white silence
decades of quiet
could never preclude.
You don't recognize
any world you made
or lead him into/out of.
The stars no longer
above or the ground
bound between covers.
Only the canal
could contrast Baghdad
falling unmentioned
on a station of
dead air. By degrees
of the gun he slung,
the belief is lost.
The cause of despair.
You can't see yourself.
You can't see his white
arms, longer than yours.

THE TRAIN IS WHITE AND THE MOON IS STRONG

You would throw yourself
out *there*. To bridge, from
your window (always
when you are not in
bed) hours, terrible
and happy, to sand.
Together it glides
into view. Follow.
The train is a theme.
It won't stay away.
You miss no ocean,
just the green canal
vanishing in light
and continuous.
Nobody told you
to notice, to stretch
headlong, to reach from
a theme of no rain
that won't go away.
Hear the train. Take it
into your white arms.
What you're living
toward is unlike what
you tried to borrow,
one shore extended.

COVER

Duck floats the canal
and who is bathing.
Call your light odor
Song Against Washing,
Wash Against Burning,
Poem Over Blackwash.
Under the algae
an old stone road, and
this new road's over
where tracks were pulled up.
Alongside the first
thin road crept freight trains,
their men and cargo.
The trees before these.
Your dreams of shrapnel
float over the bank
and who is praying
for sudden thunder.
Duck under the leaves
soon to turn orange.
A sign warns against
approaching nesting
swans and who would
expect anything
but hostility.

FLIGHT-LONG, UNERRING

Inhabit that warmth
and leafy smell, odd
moments by the sink
on humid evenings.
No dead air above
cold water pouring.
The grey road follows
the slow green canal.
He did not vanish
but drifted across;
you listen for him
as the train travels
your inner signal
extending evening
as a vapor thread
whose farther side
is morning. The moon
can never be white.
The fox was not white.
His shit car is rust.
Tomorrow's always
flight-long, unerring.
His call dissipates.
Or the green canal
reverses its spell.

BETHANY DUSK RADIO

for M

1. *Gap-toothed*

Static in the signal, cobalt dusk breaks up in branches
but only one of us believes it. It's difficult
not to feel curious about the temperature
of a higher elevation. Or an estranged city at sea level.

In a minor key we describe a town seen in passing
as a dream embellished in its telling.

Let me tell you everything to know about travel:
somewhere a brown horse is stuck in the mud.

Every low stone wall that snakes across pine forest
to intersect a smaller property or border
mountain laurel traces back, further and farther.
A single stone wall. A canal digital with interruptions.

Predicting our future location is simple. But
measuring the particulars of compensation is complicated—
if a traumatic accident brings a small fortune
which portion of the ocean evaporates? Then where?

Evening pivots as a key change
and withholds the cymbal crashes. Woodsmoke and rain
find a radius of crushed stone, no cardinal
at the center. My left ear aimed west I listen for a train.

2. *Flung Likeness*

Where certain combinations of dusk-light are difficult
Walt Whitman is best experienced
on the molecular level. As vapor, as cloud, as the formation
of objects and animals. All is work and near to everything

here in future conversations. It is difficult to believe in karma
when petty, jealous biomass succeeds. Listen:
conservation of energy, a new mantra: no work is ever
wasted. The snake furious in its basket of cellular interference.

*

As though stone desired placement, your left hand swerves
in hyperbole to suggest *physical labor*. How about nothing else
meriting a series of plaintive questions, exuberance
without action, sound waves propelled into negative space.

The trees are bare so now I can count them. Exposed
just above the brush the low stone wall snakes across acres,
marks out some expired grid. You can see across
almost to the other side. In stone a trace

of earlier ice. Consider the uncountable floating particles
as a stick, virtually soundless
without its surroundings, washes up in the canal, further
displaced. Pick it up, put your headphones on.

3. Beginning with a Theme by Joe Brainard

I remember dinners on your fire escape.
I remember a pot of rice falling to the floor.
I remember us riding the subway with a video camera.
I remember trying to predict the future.

Our occasional hostility toward one another
resembled a shore in winter. It was difficult
not to feel curious about the temperature
of the water. Difficult not to touch it.

Walt Whitman, man of rivers and of every transition
ground to ether, bequeathed himself to grow
from my stolen wallet. From fire escapes and water towers,
from F train faces and sidewalk chatter.

As for fashion, black was The New Expensive
before grey was The New Ambivalent.
I kept my pants but changed my shirt.
I dream of money. Whatever.

Everywhere we live with a river on either side,
a world of seas. Only one of us can swim.
Or, we both can swim
but only one of us believes it.

4. *Park Life*

Clouds no longer decompose and recombine
objects and animals
when we dream with increasing frequency
of drifting into a blue expanse. A portion of the ocean

and you in all your water will evaporate,
supposedly. A cosmos rarely of water is expanding,
allegedly. From memory sketch kudzu
on the tracks, years-ago Virginia. Listen for a train

in the static. If rate times time equals foothills growing
into mountains, conservation of matter
means no atom's ever wasted—
no woodsmoke, no rain, and still a radius of stone

with us at the center. Do we hear the roof, do we hear rain,
or do we praise a new combination? Afternoon dissolves
and aluminum dusk breaks up, light in clicking branches
we don't have to leave behind to need. Maybe

the city washes away. For now recognize my throwback
to Wu-Tang—I listen and watch for a vixen.
Later allow me to demonstrate not listening for the buck
as I turn off a CGI universe on a plasma screen.

5. *Here and Homeward Bound*

Fact is that no machine could kill Pound, only
incite new ideas in sound, in the momentum
of fast rattlers and flat wheelers into negative space.
Windows open, book open—the record is spinning

into a difficult landscape. It is difficult to predict
the particulars of the future, more so to believe in karma,
and it is difficult not to resent the falling temperature
where certain combinations of dusk-light are difficult.

Some animal approaches if you don't listen. After the leaves,
before the leaves, we resent a familiar predicament:
Morning noise floor of dry leaves, no barrier—
that sting in the chest, in the gut, you can't put a thumb on it.

*

Swerve onto a fainter highway, into desert. Imagine
iced tea served on a lime Formica side table.
With your left hand make a plaintive sort of gesture,
lights flashing. So much of driving is out the window.

Who's behind you. Rate times time equals the ground
growing from hills to ether, sun showers turning into night-
snow, the driver who leads you running out of cigarettes.
Death Valley, the background, not exactly diminishing.

6. *Five Discreet Scenarios with Deep Field Background*

So what now. A shape is opening between a café table
and not knowing how to act comfortable,
the right word, the proper gesture
around no stranger. All that weight in negative space.

*

We had to learn where to live, had to pencil ourselves
into a sketchbook of fire escapes and water towers,
a notebook of F train faces and sidewalk chatter.
One's desire is another's dilemma in crosshatching. Illegible snippet.

*

A world of seas only one of us can swim surrounds
the grid of new growth. Of stone we listen for a train.
Midnight and nothing's
green, neither canopy nor shield. Total barrier. The signal blocked.

*

I have something accurate to say that lacks perspective.
I'll bend the note as though to send and then forgive
ancient mistakes—for instance, hyperbole. I'll package and ship you
exuberance for twenty-five cents or acts of physical labor.

*

Never broke, the cosmos contained as it composed
my stolen wallet, everything of star-stuff.
On the molecular level Walt Whitman illuminates
the signal, our midnight vision of a train, atom by atom.

7. *Snake Fire in a Basket Future*

cobalt signals a branch breaking up
pine snake stoncs a forest
woodsmoke crashes rain withholds
 mountain laurel further back

your left hand swerves near everything
the uncountable floating particles
 wasted the snake in its basket
no work a new mantra

 escape the fire riding a future
the temperature a shore resembled swims
before grey believes Walt Whitman rides
the subway to grow the new video floor

dream with increasing frequency
and hear the center we rain
Virginia listens to years ago
 and you evaporate

pixelate the nocturnal animals
and the music goes gangsta star-stuff
deserts and diminishes what digital universe
atom by atom

8. *Lullaby for Bethany*

Heavy sleep will reveal the door through a rose
quartz wall, not quite a boundary before November
makes steely shapes in branches unlock
the distinction between a dream and a vision.

Not a mundane catalog: a wing clicking, a train
trailing off, the canal's picture but never its odor.
The needle in the run-out groove, heavy beat
in the trees, the loop of static in dead wax. *Continue,*

says the terrifying white delusion by the bed.
As in, bring every dilemma to fruition
and transgress the threshold—twelve leaves up
your freezing spine is never too high. *It's all in pieces,*

now who do you believe? The miles between
your bed and the tower's red are not totally sleeping.
Walt Whitman sing us a lullaby
that drowns out the music of the near-dead,

the jingles for obsolete products, that devil of static.
If I do not sleep and my boot soles never
wear down, how will my beard ever go gray?
Walt Whitman do not keep the snow away.

10. Development is a Threat to Mystery

The transmission of the half-dead crackles
and is half-dead

 a wet wing clicking
 a dry branch ticking

I can hardly hear the present over my obsession
with the city where our night is no longer permitted
 the chatter of a café
 transmitted this distance

Bethany why are you sleeping so early
Has my asking woken you
Will your nightmare of the woods on fire
 occur beyond the molecular level

Does your nightmare progress as a vision
a fresh clearing and another piece of
 the mystique violated
Reception weakens as the dark trails off

I reach and listen to our former city crackle
It tells me the time of night is almost morning
 If something too grotesque crescendos
 singer don't let us listen

11. *Highway Sweetheart*

Which signal received belies direction and speed?
The stray tone in my ear grows into a song in your head.
We open the window to something heavy, blue note
in the trees. Before long the road along the canal runs out.

Salvage is a tremendous habit.
Baby, let me tell you about the number twelve,
the plan I am drawing for a new and unlivable city
of obsolete electronics and broken guitar strings.

There will be a snare drum with a split head
past a toy xylophone lacking mallets.
There are three Barbies behind microphones,
never in a dumpster or landfill. Blackwash Canal transmits

another color, dream of a westbound highway. Where
that blue signal runs out, find us washed up on a not-so-Californian
shore of digital noise. Do not mistake the sand
for pixels, or the pixels for a seagull discovering

a cracker crumb under a cigarette butt.
You could cover a wall with the postcards.
You could leave the window open and over years
let night sounds blow the colors out.

SIX POEMS FOR JACKIE

WHERE

From the hotel window above the courtyard
 one might not miss the pool
 or the canal
 for that matter

If one were to search for disappearance this
would not be the leap

*

We could drive out to the northwest corner
where the roads get confusing and follow
instinct into a mountain We would not notice
our bodies thrown
upon themselves and each other

*

 at which point I could say
I am addicted to little

When sleep took on too raw a texture
I thought *call me Jackie* and our shame may vanish
I was not woken

There was little to do at night but
drive the outskirts

*

If your ring never slipped into the pond
If a puddle could only be circled from its center

If the accumulation of fieldstones
didn't cause the wall's intensity

If the street didn't facilitate the trespasser
If I'd never driven by and admired the horse

If it were not the practice of the addict
to pay/beg for a strange bed in which to withdraw

If you knew the practice of the insomniac
If practice knew only the desired result

If your ring never dropped from the rowboat
and I drove us home without headlights

Dawn was when
there is no then

*

There is little to drive some nights but the canal
rushing
Quiet is as
close as I get

to a pond
that other town
where the craving can but does not dissolve

Each strip moved along
or across is a shining blackwash

WHAT

the left hand that itches to introduce
a warmth
to the side of a horse

the pasture daily driven past

by the right hand as an extension
of grass
and the infinitesimal divide
of touch

the grass as measure of sky
or the degree of green
in the brown horse's mystique

further and farther across the fields
hang stars hardly watched
by the city where

no starlight falls on a cooling hand
and
there is no affectionate animal only

what takes and takes until
your call
the warmth tonight does not deserve

obscures the swirl
the print on the hotel sill

WHY

your hair is damp
black in the picture
thin snow on the slick steps
and anticipating rain
the conversation already
emptied and the truck
loaded with approaching
spring's junk

no ledge ever high enough
to talk us down
without the ring did you think
the nickel is lost
and the dime
sure to be discovered
you are so surprisingly
tall and always lovely

a week away renews
the distance this mood
depends on every edge
of the city I visit
softening through wayfarers
allow me another
encounter with your stature
that windy effect

HOW

With one hand behind my back
and the other ready
 to coast toward my side
of our epic duet sung
across an indescribable boundary
Or

for you I'll remain
 stationary and awake
in the decision the difficulty the

parapet
the quiet around the window

*

With a record playing
with rolling drums rolling me
I don't fucking care
I exhale on the upbeats

*

Via the elevator that rises out of the hotel
Pretending we
can climb so many flights is

impossible
The railing can't save us

*

In another picture
you are hilarious
with the indescribable way you shape
a past of little use
around that contorted face

So many visible ways to say *need*
and always mean it

WHEN

Between waking and never,
only cattle graze the pasture.
The delusion of the horse
is another way to say ghost.
I wake with the feeling not the image.

Every night I spend driving the outskirts
comes before the church service,
a morning of visible rain.
Where I will travel the weather
does not follow. South is sunny

and your phone off or eaten
by the bottom of the canal.
Tomorrow is *your* answer,
my best suit pressed and laid out.
Do not imagine the mites in the creases.

WHO(M)

what else but waking
to your face and fluorescent corona
wearing new dark frames
new enough
not to have appeared before

what else but waking
to you reading a magazine
to me a sort of blurry sister
what else but waking
again

the curtains drawn
or a wall grown across
the window
near some surface far from sterile
transport to infection

the syringe you could not bear
the book you could not bring
the narcotized
whom you could not locate
what else but the window was

concealed a line around
your forehead
what else but straight above
what else but not quite dead
what else was waking again

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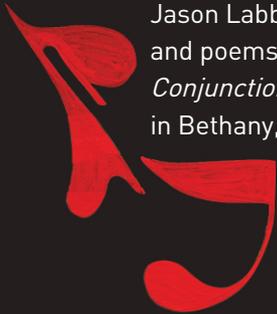
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A red abstract graphic consisting of several overlapping, organic shapes that resemble stylized leaves or petals, arranged in a cluster on the left side of the page.

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