**Desert Still Life**

Tim Raphael

This is no pilgrimage,

just a morning walk

up the big arroyo,

following jack rabbit tracks

in snow. Each heartbeat

a flashed snapshot.

Cholla, juniper, piñon

in white crystal bloom

against fine sky,

one crow’s cadence

of wing and space.

I attend to my steps.

In autumn,

plein-air painters

set up on these mesas

and try to contain

a whole desert on canvas.

My unchurched upbringing

didn’t feel like loss

until I moved here

without words sufficient

for this light and sky.

How do I convey

what it is to yield

to immensity

without a claim

to a word like *faith*?

Trivial as the morning moon

in all that blue,

I stand, slack-jawed

before rock stacks

a billion years old,

stripped of the smock

of soft things. I want

the language of miracle,

of resurrection,

language for water

that births cottonwoods

and willow from stone,

for the Sangre de Cristo

at dawn,

for the endurance

of wild things:

a hummingbird’s

tiny bowl of nest.

Rebellious gratitude:

on the cliff ledge,

a mountain lion.

Molten power in its fleet

departure up the face,

more river current than leap,

flowing uphill in effortless drift,

the boom of its tail

a rimrock shadow

that leaves me sure and unsure

of what I witness.