

Joyce's Journal

A monthly dispatch from Joyce A. Miller, Writer



SPRING IS HERE!

Spring is here but I have to say that I've been feeling some stress with life lately. The world feels like an uncertain and frightening place right now, so what have I been doing about it? I've tried to focus on things that are within my control—being thoughtful about where I shop and how much social media I consume. In times of uncertainty, creativity can be a refuge. Writing is therapeutic by itself. But creating fiction during tumultuous times connects me to other women writers like Octavia Butler and Isabel Allende who responded to uncertainty by making meaningful storytelling. My writing exists in a different sphere than these masters of the craft, though I draw inspiration from their insight.

What I'm reading: I just finished **Sipsworth** by Simon van Booy. Following the deaths of her husband and son, Helen Cartwright returns to the English village of her childhood after living in Australia for six decades. Her only wish is to die quickly and without fuss. Over the course of a week, a chance encounter with an abandoned pet mouse gives her a new reason to live. Now I'm delving into **Cooking with Picasso**.

A GLIMPSE OF
WHAT'S INCLUDED:

**My attempt at some
blackout poetry.**

'You'll recall in February's newsletter that I had a library-themed word search that caused a major glitch when reading the newsletter on a mobile device. The plan was that if you completed the word search, you would be entered into a drawing to get a signed copy of **Mrs. Gari Melchers** when it's released this summer. Due to the glitch and to make it fair, I threw all the subscriber names into a hat and drew Paul Neumann's name as the winner. Paul will be receiving a signed copy this summer!

April is National Poetry Month. Blackout poetry is a great way to work on rekindling and improving your creativity. Blackout poetry is a form of appropriation art where the artist finds a new poem in pre-existing text. This can be written word from books, magazines, or newspapers.

As the bonus for April's newsletter, I'm attaching my attempt at some blackout poetry. Maybe it will entice you to try some yourself? If you do, please tell me about it in an email; or post it and tag me on social media to let me know.

I live in the Church Hill section of Richmond, VA with my husband and my retired racing greyhound. Before I started writing, I worked for 30 years at a nuclear physics research laboratory.

Do what you came here for!



JOYCE A. MILLER, WRITER

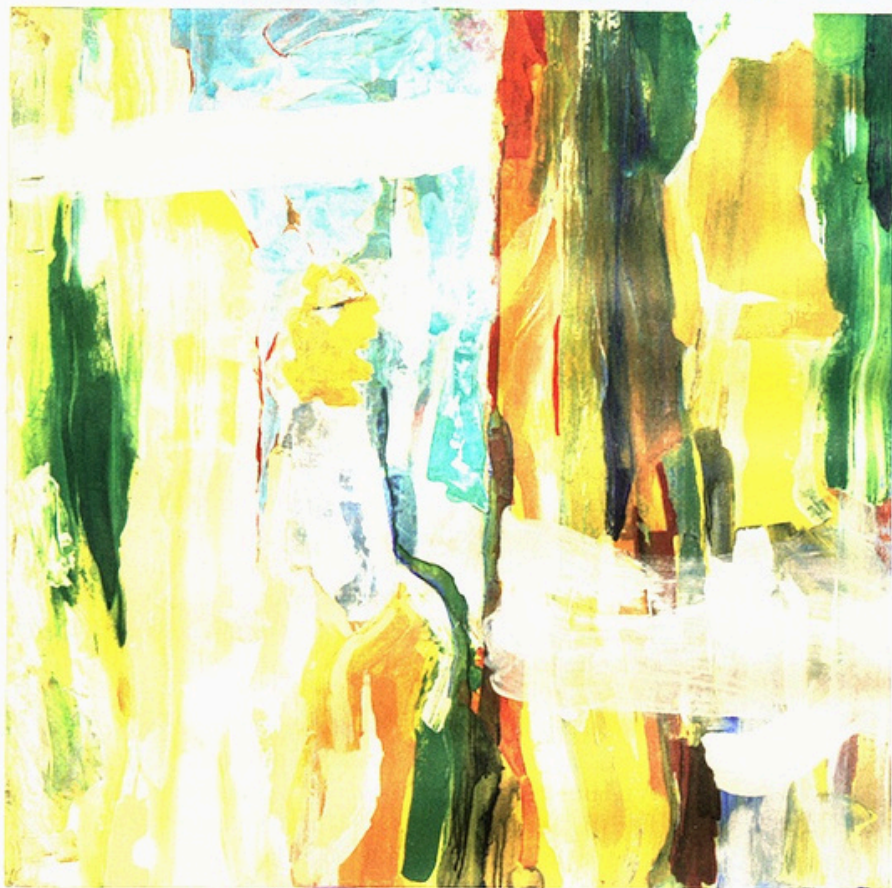
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ILLUMINATIONS

Suzanne Jackson captures the transformative power of light

BY HILTON ALS



"Frozen Elsie" (2000) allows you to appreciate Jackson's authority as a painter.

"South of Pico," by Kellie Jones—a 2017 book about a circle of Black artists in Los Angeles in the nineteen-sixties and seventies—is a landmark work and a great gift to contemporary art history. Among the many things I admire about Jones's text is what she doesn't do in it: obscure the fact that she and vital works and lives she examines with fashionable but ultimately draining theory-speak. Instead, like a latter-day Vasari, Jones creates a tangible world in which her subjects—the spellbinding Senga Nengudi, Alonzo Davis, and Maren Hassinger among them—display the energy and purpose of creators whose activism is expressed through their work, and who believe in community, artistic and otherwise. One of the artists Jones's

book introduced me to was the inventive and spiritually astute Suzanne Jackson, whose uplifting show "Light and Paper" (at Ortuzar Projects) has little to do with oppressive power structures and everything to do with the joy of making and the transformative power of light.

Jackson, who is eighty, came of age as an artist in a Los Angeles that was far from the center of the art-world grid, and you can see, in some of the earlier works in the show, how the area's expansive landscape and desert skies influenced her practice. There are eleven pieces on display at Ortuzar, all produced between 1984 and 2024, and there isn't one that doesn't revolve around light and how to represent it or capture its ephemeral nature. A lesson learned or remembered

when looking at Jackson's work: natural light does not sit still, and whenever your eye tries to rest on it—in the corner of a room, in a garden, on the pages of a book—it shifts and changes, changing your perspective, too.

Light suffuses "Blooming" (1984), for instance, an acrylic wash on paper. It enters not through a portal in the picture—there is none—but through the artist's imagination. And you can tell, from the soft way it envelops the flower at the center of the image, that it won't be around forever—and nor will the bloom. Here, Jackson's hand moves with great delicacy, but without being precious—she always pulls herself back from outright cuteness. The flower's strong, curving stem makes the work not so much forceful as definitive. But the stem is also just a line. That's the thing about Jackson's art: the moment you notice a distinguishing shape or gesture, like light it turns into something else.

Jackson has always followed the sun, actually and metaphorically. Born in St. Louis in 1944, she grew up in San Francisco, where her parents moved during the Great Migration and then in Fairbanks, where her entrepreneur father bought property when Alaska was still a territory. At age 13, Jackson studied painting and theatre at San Francisco State University and danced at the Pacific Ballet. She performed in a music circus in California and worked on a musical-theatre tour of Latin America (I think the word "irrepressible" was invented for people like Jackson.) In the late sixties, she moved to Los Angeles, where she worked a variety of jobs to keep herself afloat and took drawing classes with Charles White, at the Art Institute, which was where she first met her fellow Black artists Debra Hammons and Dan Condit. Soon, she decided to turn part of her own studio into a gallery for artists like these who had few opportunities to show their work. At Gallery 32, Jackson staged the now historic exhibition "The Sapphire Show," which presented Black female artists, including Nengudi and Betye Saar. She also showed the Black Panther minister of culture Emory Douglas's portraits of other Panther leaders. Jackson wasn't very concerned with the gallery's financial success (what interested her was getting the Black community involved). Despite