

EKPHRASIS FOR A PHOTO FOUND AFTER THE FLOOD

Sugar Land, TX, 1957

The sugar factory wasn't far from the prison, & that's a good measure for my grandfather: sugar or criminal, constellations of granule or salt-on-the-rim echo. He used cow bones to coax the molasses away while a man plotted his escape from nostalgia—that rabid dog of running toward, then backing away when memory's sudden leash gets too close. Affination was the process of separating a decade from its stalk. Affination was my mother's hand in the syrup. Affination was chasing the ghosts away from the furnace. When Pedro Infante died, it rained airplanes, & the workers gathered around to sing corridos as they built their grief into crystal basilicas for grocery store shelves. Refined agringados. Abuelo's hands went from cotton candy to wasps' nests & back again, dunked in buckets of ice-cold beer to soothe the long, mechanical days stamped on his timecard. Back then, the clock moved like small, rotating hammers—rapid exchange for more & more hunger. ♡

Yellow Brick, Broken Sign With Lighthouse, flashe and gouache on wood panel by Alex Waggoner.





EKPHRASIS FOR A PHOTO TAKEN AFTER THE FLOOD

AFTER THE GREAT HURRICANE, there is Isabel. Isabel with the industrial fans giving back the pobrecita dust, drying out what's left of Houston's bathwater, Isabel with the vinyl floors peeling & curling away from the walls like her skin does to the bones. With her cigarette patiently keeping time. Isabel, always with her back turned. Isabel with her stove not in frame, the oven's intestines spilling out indelicately. Isabel with her kitchen island cluttered: Maxwell House coffee containers full of volcanic ash, pastel Bakelite bowls, half-empty bottles of spit & water, Crisco stacked like regret. Isabel with her left arm on fire, Isabel with her hand in knots, Isabel with flour still under her fingernails. With the curtains she made, the dress she made, the pants she hates wearing because she couldn't make the roses come alive on them. Isabel on a dining room chair, waiting for her husband to resurrect from gunpowder, dripping milk into her teacup. Isabel & her collection of aluminum foil, how she'll put the Styrofoam universe back together on those old hangers scattering the floor. Isabel, with her body thin like an old recipe no one can find anymore, the one for her tortillas that keeps disappearing. Isabel, with her instructions on how long to let the dough rest, & how long was it? Thirty minutes? An hour? ☹

Iliana Rocha was the 2017 Southern Foodways Symposium poet-in-residence. She is assistant professor of creative writing at the University of Central Oklahoma. Her work has appeared in the Best New Poets 2014 anthology, The Nation, and Blackbird. Her debut collection, Karankawa, won the 2014 AWP Donald Hall Prize for Poetry.

Carro 2, acrylic, enamel and gouache on wood panel by Alex Waggoner.

