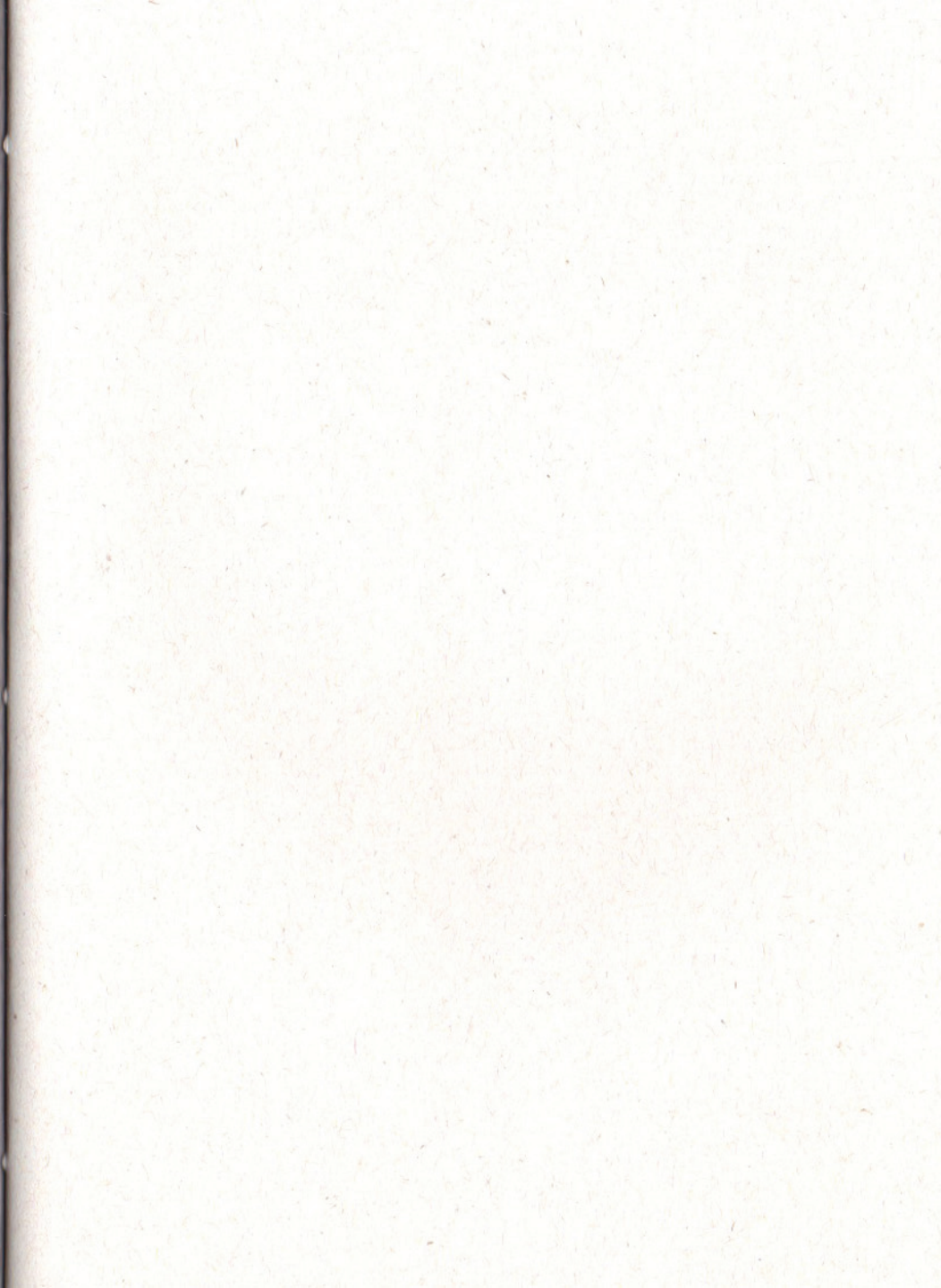


A red ink sketch on a textured, light-colored background. The sketch depicts a landscape with a winding path or stream that starts from the top left, curves towards the center, and then continues towards the bottom right. Several clumps of grass or reeds are scattered along the path, particularly on the left side and near the bottom. The lines are expressive and somewhat abstract, suggesting a natural setting. The title 'the duck's wake' is centered in the upper half of the image.

the duck's wake

by Jeff Witkin



to Jim with
thanks for all -
Jeff

the duck's wake

haiku, tanka, and rengay

by Jeff Witkin

With special thanks to my rengay partners
and to the poets who have given guidance
and nourishment, especially Tom Clausen,
Jim Kacian, Rick Kuntz, Alexis Rotella,
Robert Spiess, John Stevenson,
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cover art by Lillian Perry

to my family for love and
support through unshared
moments lost to study

and for my friends
and colleagues who
have wondered where
i've been and what i found
along the way

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the duck's wake

evening drizzle
moonlit drops grow slowly
on the bare dogwood

in the sun
before they seep
the glow of raindrops

a gentle rain
and now and again
a cherry blossom

into the reeds
the duck's wake
slowly slips
and around the bend
all desire

a breeze through marsh grass
into a basket of sun
the clank of oysters

morning fog—
a gull lets loose
the clam shell

moving together
the woodrush and the fawn's nose
a hushed summer breeze

a white owl
steals a dream
the waning moon

on the hilltop
clear day all around
the red-tailed hawk

light spring rain
the sound of an airplane
circling above the clouds

just in time —
the tide returns to fill
with shadows from the pier

abandoned garden
doves and dry spigot
drenched in morning light

waving me
from the formal garden
that one wild aster

in a curve of light
the crash and spray
of the full-moon tide;
for a moment with arms crossed
the power of my youth

into darkness
last trace of the temple gong—
a shooting star

clock's ticking—
the still order of books
piled on shelves

awaiting nightfall—
an iron gate
and its rusted latch

wild rose—
on the thorn's tip
a bead of blood

another dream beside me in your own

you say
you don't love me
yet bring me
the scent
of your skin

her eyes
drift to someone else
but her fan, her fan
floats me
perfume from her hair

with the last snow
sounding clear in mountain streams,
how will I endure
these long days without their touch—
your bare arms in warm spring sun?

a slit in the shade
and the moon so easily slips
while through all these years
i've yet to penetrate
the mystery in your arms

daydreaming . . .
you pass through
the scent of peaches

a hawk's glide . . .
on and on
the clear mountain stream

looking out
and beyond—
ocean sunrise

the boundless sea —
a flying fish
has just spanned it

brewing tea
a long way across the river
someone cooking rice

ignored completely—
during the dinner party
a moose on the wall

dinner guests croaking
narrow world views —
a song from the tree frog
awakens me
to shimmering stars

morning dew
sparrows settle
without song

in the dew drop
atop every blade of grass
the pale morning sun

autumn sunset —
a berry between the toes
of a titmouse

leafless willow—
a sagging fence
drops a slat

spring mist . . .
bend of the mare's neck
over the meadow

heat-bowed grass—
the mare's neck moist
in the willow shade

evening approaches
from pine grove to meadow
the slow step of cows

clouds roll in—
the flow of silt down
the dry creek bed

Near Silence

(rengay with John Stevenson)

near silence
a gale in the willow
far below

js

on pine needles fallen
the murmur of lovers

jw

a mountain stream
grows quiet
approaching the lake

js

a thrush alights
between us, a flow of words
unspoken

jw

pause in the story
. . . mice in the walls

js

chrysanthemum
white petals unfold
into night

jw

Gravestones

(rengay with Michael Dylan Welch)

snowdrops—
touching the wind-worn name
of her son

jw

wafted by the breeze . . .
sprinkler spray

mdw

a prayer in the rain
and then another
blossom from the plum

jw

a rusted bucket
by the groundskeeper's shed
. . . a passing cloud

mdw

pollen fills a rift
in the gravestone

jw

bird song fades
into the cherry's scent
she reaches for my hand

mdw

Two Blue Bells Blossom

(rengay with Nir Bhao Khalsa)

before you leave
we speak of death
and plant perennials

jw

in spring resurrected
a woman and her brother

nbk

newly risen
a hosta leaf unfurls
to touch the foxglove

jw

two blue bells blossom
that shall in winter slumber
side by side

nbk

frosted wind chimes
over the sheet-draped bed

jw

flower, fruit, and seed
transform as we
deepen, emerge, scatter

nbk

with a setting sun
the mountain stream takes
a buttercup along
dropped from the bridge that took you
this day and seven springs

learning
nothing
at
the
Zendo

leaving
as i came;
down the path
alone

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