Excerpt from Siteseeing

Ariel Gordon and Brenda Schmidt

Between February 2021 and March 2022, Ariel Gordon and Brenda Schmidt wrote a collaborative poetry manuscript, formatted like a call and response. Ariel intended to write about urban Manitoba, the city and its trees, and Brenda was to write about rural Saskatchewan and birds. Over the course of the year, the matter of place took over and the intentions branched and flew apart. They both wrote birds and trees but also moose and mushrooms, pronghorns and wild turkeys, and people making their way through it all. They wrote climate as it was manifested in drought-stressed trees and stunted crops covered in grasshoppers, in wildfires and wildfire smoke hanging over the prairies. They wrote home as they found it.

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The goldenrod takes gold
in the floor routine.
I am floored
by how much it has spread
in spite of the drought.
Everything else is suffering.

Crickets cricket at my feet,
cricket in the pasture
where a cow lets out a moo.

A sad moo. No bull this year.
The cow is a cull soon
headed to market. I think
it knows. The herd of culls grazes, their calves sucking, bunting. The cows look tired.

The pasture looks tired.
I am too. I want the gold to mean something.

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I want it all to mean something, the flooding/drought of end times. On the mountain yesterday, we heard people yipping like coyotes, the landscape otherwise empty, & noticed how pristine our windshield was. Time was, a drive across the prairies meant a wriggling horizon of horror.
Strange, but I miss it. I miss July thunderstorms like a diminishing aunt I haven’t seen in two years.

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