

20/20

Poems & Images

John Ryan

I dedicate this book to my daughter Gemmarosa and her Generation Z contemporaries. Their awareness and want to deal with society's serious issues is greater than preceding generations.

It is our responsibility to encourage their motivation and provide them with tools to construct a world with a better foundation in which they were born.

20/20

It's seems strange to consider that since early into 2020, nearly all of the 6-7 billion adults on our planet were contemporaneously talking and worrying about Covid-19 infection.

In the same period, great numbers of people around the world began to wake up to the cries for long sought social justice for people of color, a recognition that the darker side of human nature has not been arrested. 2020 contested science deniers with record breaking heat, fires, floods and related destruction, strong evidence that Mother Nature will not to be bested.

All of History is bookmarked with turning points. One hopes the ravages of this year have left us with no choice but to acknowledge the deep physical, social and spiritual damage accrued in our lifetime. As we go forward, we shall soon see if our steps bring us to a different place where we are able to respect our earth, science and neighbors.

I am drawn to public and personal moments that trigger a corresponding need to register them artistically. The subject matter determines my subjective voice and how it is served by styles that range between abstraction and figuration, typically in paintings and colored drawing.

More recently I am writing poems that pair with my paintings and drawings or, vice versa, make an image that suits a new poem."20/20" Is my fifth book of this type. The images are all drawn in pencil with variations of dark to underscore the themes. No matter the season, this was a colorless year.

Dark Clouds Approach

Shore crabs scramble
and sanderlings scurry.
Water quietly tugs my feet.

Marram grass catches
breeze and sand that stings.
Inside a big bay house

there are letters on a table,
watercolors framed on walls,
coffee brewing on the counter.

The TV is lit with
Breaking News:
people kneeling in protest,

face to face shouting,
gas clouds glowing,
windows covered with wood.

The storm marches forward--

waves lift, then crash,
white lightning scratches black.
Nature makes her point

then slides away
leaving all her trash:

gray and pink stones smooth like opal
sticks of wood that drift sea to sea
antique bottles still not broken.

Crabs return and crawl past shells and weed.
Fish splashed onto the beach
writhe and gasp, eyes wide open.

On the Waterfront



Concrete piers stretch
like grey tongues
between splintered pilings

that once moored proud ships
with canvass sails and iron stacks.

Freighters filled the harbor,
unloading cargo from decks

for tugs to push upriver.

Then bright minds discovered
abandoned docks,
furtive corners where tides

splashed dirty shoals as if
rinsing mouths with broken teeth.

Fresh opportunities for:

fairs with “cutting edge” art.
slips for yachts with helicopters atop
concerts that go all night

space for mega-cruisers
with cornucopian displays

and ballrooms made of glass.

Till strange winds blew and
the river was flat.

Tugs turned a hospital ship

and that was the end of that.

ICU

Inside this theatre, you break walls
and battle every front.

It's where time stretches
in search of a decision.

It's not a flywheel
built for precision;

more a maze
made by a devil.

Its trail littered with choices,
hoping some are right.



Reprieve



There Was A Fighting Chance

when London's mothers sent
children to be sheltered in a shire

while sirens wailed and flood lights
chased planes that dropped

bombs whistling
onto muffled cries below.

Today there's no such din.

It's quiet except for bird song
and music in my ear as I stroll

and people look askance.



There Is Another Kind of Quiet

like the rattle of tractor treads
on a humid summer night.

Or the sounds of a family, a tavola,
seated in the garden

as nonna swishes flies
and mother passes plates.

Daughters roll their eyes,
at father's same-old jokes.

Church bells echo in the valley.
cicadas chorus, a gufo hoots.

In the nearby town
you can hear the cheers,

drums roll, voices pitch,
medieval flags soar.

Shadows cry silently
inside fortress walls

that once stopped
invaders/neighbors

but not a devil's leap.

Corpses wrapped in sheets
burned on pyres

made with wooden doors,
prayers were unanswered.

Death cut the field by half.
Memories strewn,

just stories now.

Lock Down



Gondoliers stay at home
but St Mark's pigeons still stir
when the hammer meets the bell.

On my street, passersby move aside
and shoppers stand on circles

like rooks on a board.

Chants and Shouts turn the corner,
store fronts are shuttered

and FINAL SALES must wait.

Doormen stand at ease.
Revolving doors don't spin.

From apartment windows,
faces press the glass
to watch city birds lifting

as empty buses pass.

Symptoms

The pulse quickens

fever elevates

cough attacks.

Fearful expectations

press the chest.

Thoughts of surrender

as lines drawn

plot a curve shaped

like a mountain

or a heart.

On the Hudson

barges and boats slide
keeping schedule like
clock hands passing time.

Grey sky meets grey water.
Docks are empty as just
seagulls stand watch.

The city is still. You can hear:
ducks in the park,
footsteps in the street

delivery bikes' bells ring. But
not the muffled sounds
of the widow upstairs

in her cotton dress
and squeaky shoes
as she shuffles room to room.

Remember Last Year

how spring air cleansed
winter from our weathered souls

how the green shoots and
first bright flowers called attention

how their scents perfumed your hair
and tree buds blushed as

we walked the riverside.
Beside

not apart.

The City Seems a Monastery

millions alone
waiting to leave their cells

to sing Vespers
with howls, pans and bells.

My Daughter Turning Eighteen

2020 is like no other.
It's not what you had in mind.

Bookmark it
for what was
and what can be.

Imagine the flood of ink
(virtual, I think)
that will order words describing

scourges that emptied
and crowded the street.

So much to consider
in this year like no other.

You can find retreat
in that corner of your mind,
a fluorescent grotto

where shadows dance on walls
and imagination flows,

splashing visions
on future history
where nature

is more kind.

My City Doesn't Have a Waterfall

redwoods hollowed by time or
rivers rushing inside canyons walls,
washed with moving light.

It does have beach to stroll
to watch clouds in formation
or a lone osprey in flight

but please, stand apart.

There is music to be heard
Local gardens cared for
pop-up markets with plenty

but please, stand apart.

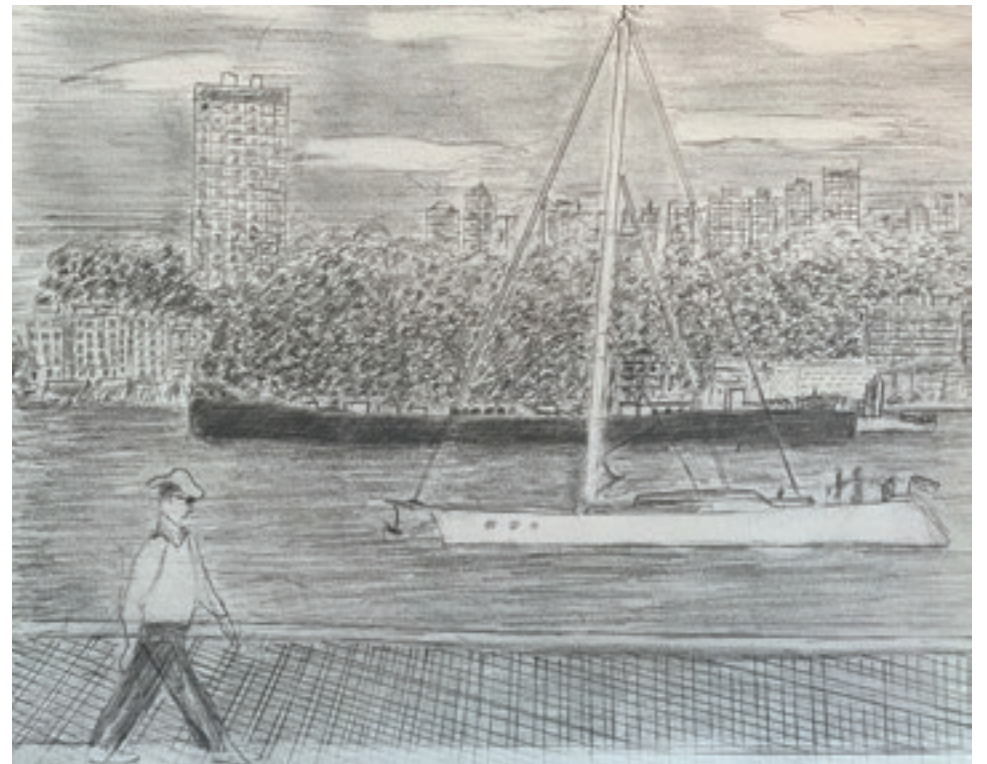
Smell chapel candles burn
see light shine pass leaves
hear an ingenue sing.

Don't leave the stage empty,
please play a part.

Normality



Hudson 84



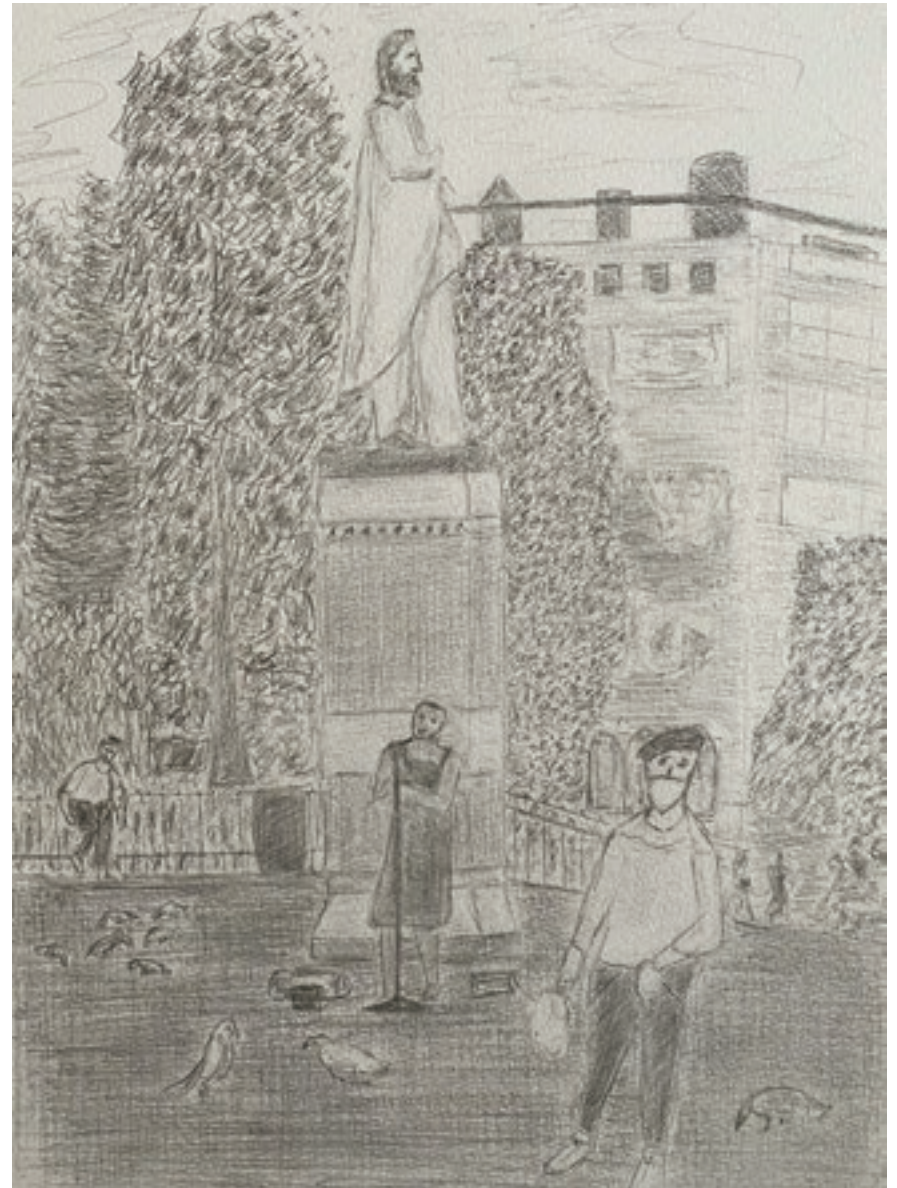
Shakespeare Statue



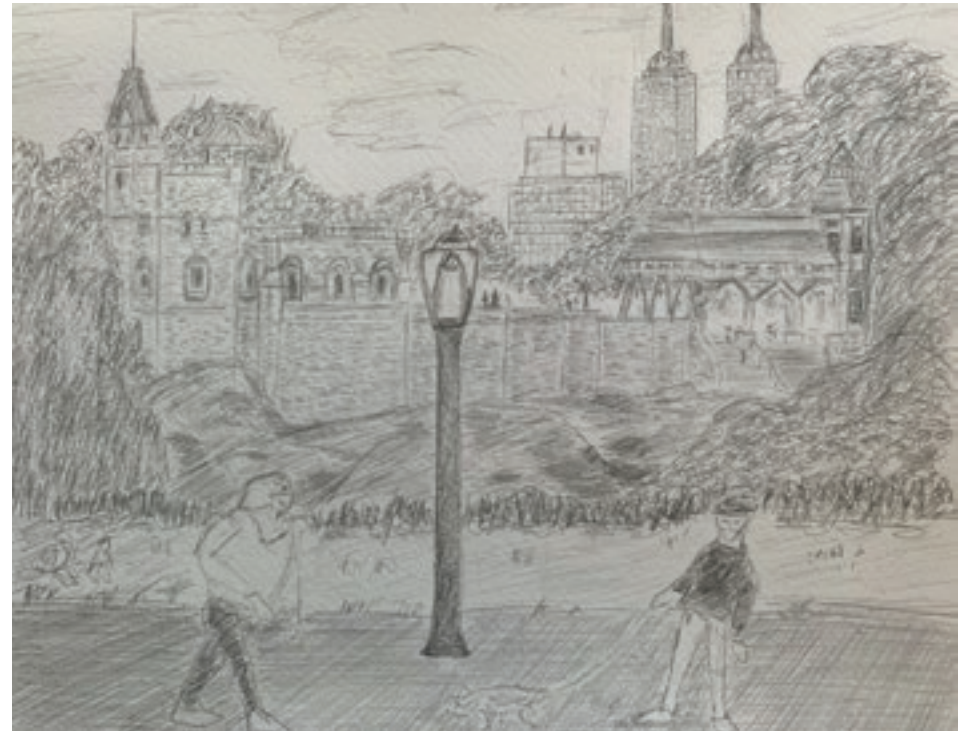
Riverside Garden



Union Square



Belvedere Castle



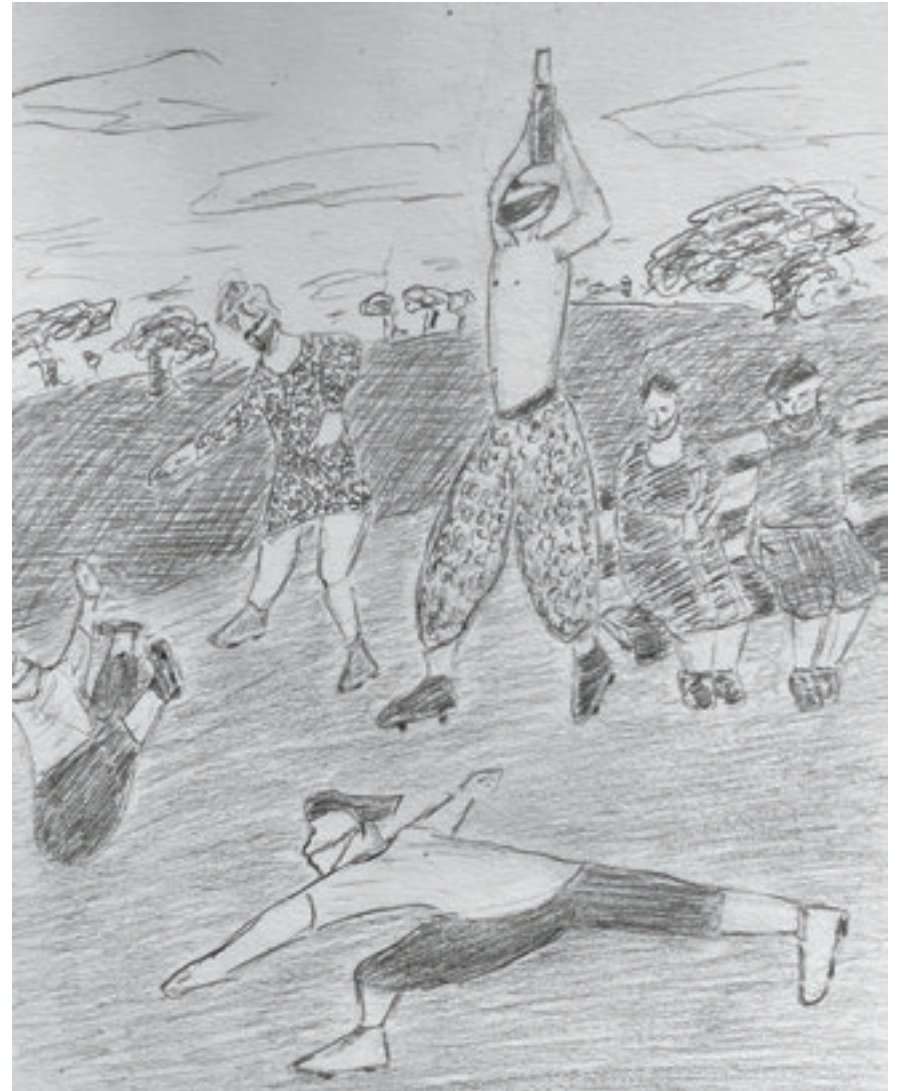
Farmers Market



Family Time



Moving On



Thoughts That Burn

come from a silent shore
where nereids bathe
and sages spawn wisdom

carried by currents

to assemblies
in the street

marching

shouting

anger searing

like lava flow.

Day Light Dazzled



until 2020m when the
Arctic forest burned.

Before you saw:

dry snow blowing
over white wolf tracks -

nacreous clouds that floated
above a quiet world

where cliffs crumbled
causing giant waves,

translucent, blue and green,
that spilled into caves.

Kelp washed inside
and flushed back out to sea.

Ships now move freely,
beside convoys of ice,

that start to split apart

like puzzle pieces on
a dark blue table.

Bears pose on
pathways shattered

Caribou race across tundra

pulling mud, instead of
grass and shrub.

From Far Above

the Amazon's

twisted lines

look like

a fissure,

a crack

pushed apart.

Between sweating walls,

brown water rushes
pulling loaded barges

that ply the river
with trucks, saws,

whiskey and knives.
Green canopies cover

huts made of leaves and metal.
Children laugh and shout

at fathers pulling nets.
Mother pigs suckle

and dogs mostly sleep.
Elders stare

as smiling strangers
motor ashore,

then light fires to burn
poisons in the air.

Word Parts Are Being Ripped

as if memory can be pulled
like the root of a broken tooth.

Coronis was an ancient beauty
a victim of Apollo's wrath

punished with a plague
that marked her with scars.

Tear a page from Ovid
and the poems fall apart.

Mexico's food is savory.
The world loves its beer.

Elizabeth's reign as Queen
gives her right to the Crown.

"Covert" "coven" and "covet,"
are words that might trigger

this

agony, unspeakable
courage, beyond,

let Corona stay in Queens.

Distancing

Crowds of thoughts
crash together

and spin out of control.

Imagination carries
expectations to heights

then push them off the edge.

Lessons unravel
inside history's scrabble.

Pointless not to see

when you're told
"The morgues are full"

you must distance

from the self
you thought you'd be.

Color Line Crossed

A character hangs
on sentence's edge.

Stair- steps down

word

by

word

footsteps carving out a trail.

Syllables accent anger
no longer sound a plea.

Listen

These words will not fall
and lay like rubble

on broken parts of me.

I Wait to Sing About

a cardinal at the sill
a honeysuckle's drip
a rainbow arching above a hill

a tenor sax that ends the day
with rhythm simple and sweet.
Hand in hand,

not arm in arm
marching in the street,
with hope we can embrace.

A time when songs fly out
from the tunnel of my throat
and take my breath away.



“I’ve Got Your Back”



March whispered as Spring skipped
through winter's door,
scattering yellow over green.

Earthworms scimmaged.
Afternoons lingered
as light turned to showers.

Then the air turned still

and seasons stole away.
New rules were written,
routines revised

who you met
and where you stayed.

Beaches were empty
streets filled with strife.

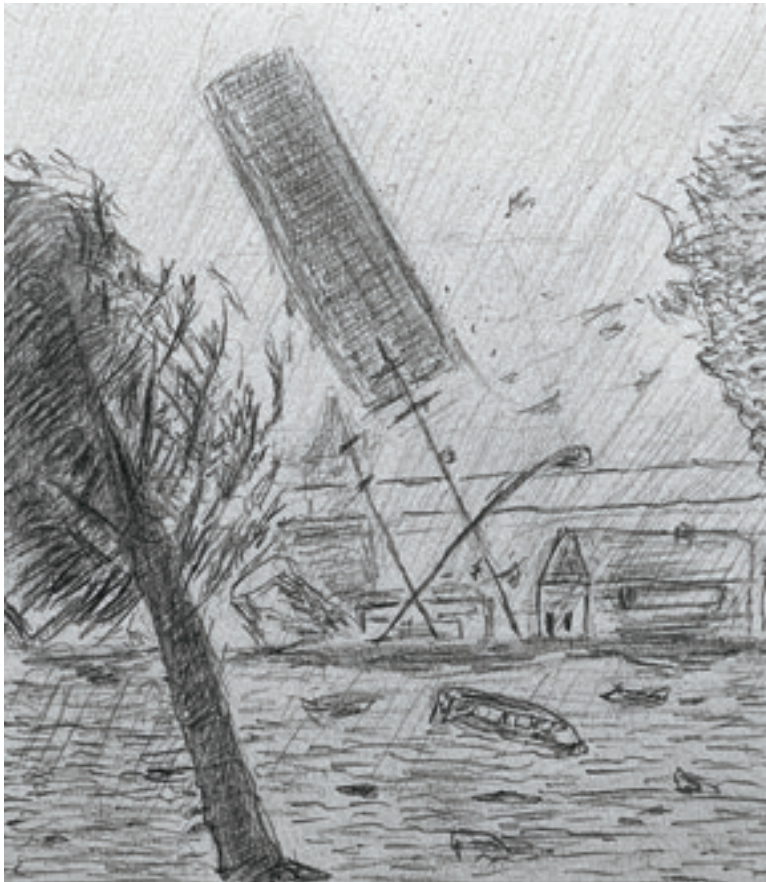
Leaves on elms
will soon rust and fall,
shadows retreat.

I expect winds
will howl not whisper,
when I open

winter's door
and hear millstones
grinding seasons into

another way of life.

Wind and Rain Crash



against the other
as they stutter step

across the shore.
Tides rise and

water breaches.
Palms bend-or break-

like two weeks before.
Cars float sideways

and first- floors flood.
Bullhorns shoutout

hard- to- fathom hope
as hill top houses slide

and same forecasts for Fall.

Smoke Scattered

as if the forest had wings.

Hawks, crows and condors fled
as furious flames licked the sky.

Orange tunnels spun from ridge
to ridge, conflagration

not finished, till
towns crumbled into ash

and brick chimneys

stand alone,
sepulchers to the past.



About the Artist

John Ryan left a Wall Street career in the '90s to pursue a life as a studio artist. He has exhibited his work in New York, Mexico and Italy and considers his paintings and drawings "diaristic" in that they consider a wide variety of personal and emotional experiences. "20/20" is his fifth book combining poems and images.

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