

ART & AG POETRY CONTEST AWARD WINNING POEMS

1st Place:

An Orchard in July
by Lauren Sullivan

I grew here, in the vibrating
Heart of heat
With the thrum of cicadas
Rubbing a desiccated wooden song with their legs.
I languished on the baked earth
Until it drank saltwater from me.
Until it told me
Get up.
I washed dust from my pores,
Sinking into the silt of Putah Creek
Feeling newness.
The orchards were heavy with apricots.
I was sun-sweet and heavy, too,
running my clay hands over round fruit
Over a hope
Growing inside of me, too.

2nd Place:

Ode to the Sunflower Fields on Pole Line Rd
by Danielle Lemay

When I bike alongside the field of sunflowers,
they look like a crowd of bright-penny

first graders, their faces staggered to steal
a peek of the wheeled passerby.

All day their sunflower faces track the sun
across the sky, like attentive students.

My wife and I were lucky to get married
in sunflower season, sandwiched

between the month of suddenly legal
and the month of voted illegal.

Among our four hands we held sunflowers
and a toddler gripping a pair of pink

maracas. We wedded among a swarm
of friends in the natural habitat

of lesbians. Say what you want,
but the fields are for everyone.

Each winter, when the tractor plows the fields
into waves, like a brown ocean of beginning,

who knows what might become of that good
dirt?

I try to keep an open mind, yet pine for
sunflowers.

3rd Place

Stallion

by Jan Haag

I picked my way across virgin furrows,
hundreds of unplanted rows somewhere
outside Winters on a breezy June day under
insistent sun, teetering on unsuitable footwear
toward a lean man whose name I cannot
recall, nor the story that sent me there.

A rookie journalist in a neighboring rural county,
I took tea at noon in my pink skirt and low heels
with service-minded Soroptimists nibbling triangle
finger sandwiches, afterward driving 20 miles
to take an unsteady walk toward a farmer
perched on his high-rise tractor “way out there,”
his wife said, pointing.

What I remember is the farmer’s face astride
a giant beast, snorting through billowing dust
to a gradual halt, as if bridling a stallion that,
given its head, could rear up and buck him off.
The man climbed down from his steed,
wiped his sweaty brow with a red bandana,
tugged up his workpants, smiled kindly.

“What can I do for you, young lady?” he asked,
as if 20-something girl reporters regularly
found him plowing rich earth of his family land
that would, with luck, yield a worthy crop in
a matter of months.

We must have talked; I would have taken notes
in my slender reporter’s notebook. And, when
we finished, he offered me a ride back to my car
atop all that horsepower. Knowing he wasn’t
done with that day’s work—he’d said he had
many more rows to furrow—and not wanting
to delay him, I declined with thanks.

He climbed back up on his stallion trembling
with barely reined-in power, ready to paw long,
shallow trenches into soil. I wobbled my way
back across the field, half wishing I’d accepted his
offer, turning to wave, gratified to see the callused
hand and extended salute of that gentle bronc rider
silhouetted against a bleached summer sky.