

A Singing Wire: Duets of Poems & Photographs

Virginia O. Bush

Ryan J. Bush, Photographer

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A collaboration between photographer Ryan J. Bush and his mother, poet Virginia O. Bush, *The Singing Wire* pairs their work in order to “peer through the veil of the ordinary into a contemplative, non-verbal, timeless place beyond words.” Although the photographs and poems weren’t created in collaboration, there’s an undeniable dialogue in the work and their union’s orchestral that truly sings.

Containing excerpts from seven photographic series dispersed between ten poems and a final essay, the book displays synchronicity, absent of any impulse toward ekphrasis or illustration. Poems and images are placed on equal footing, neither responding to the other, but each communing across the page’s gulfs.

Both Bushes prove fascinated with shifting perspectives and lyrical movements. While the poetry “proceeds at walking pace ... driven in its movement by curiosity and in its pauses by what is arresting,” the images balance on the fulcrum between order and chaos, forcing the eye to rest on stillness and be tricked into a sense of movement.

Interspersing the poems with so many visual images heightens the tension, pacing, and mnemonic thinking of both. The dialogue between “Penelope Takes To Poetry,” which troubles the saintly depictions of Odysseus’s wife, and images from “Writing the Divine” is a memorable example among many. At one point, Penelope promises herself that when she’s finished weaving, she’ll let herself finger her suitors’ “curling hair, / set lips on skin, / embrace solidity.” It’s a promise she’s unable to keep, and the following photographs’ haywire charcoal lines evoke that fabled weaving, its warp and weft irrevocably snapped.

The Bushes are imminently gifted in their respective crafts, and their collaboration resonates with an extreme generosity of spirit and a true desire to welcome people into a more expansive experience of the world—one that, like poetry or visual art, “is a human concern, one that should speak to a shared humanity.”

LETITIA MONTGOMERY-RODGERS (July/August 2019)

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