ForeWord Reviews

The Fire Landscape
Gary Fincke
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Gary Fincke has published sixteen previous books of poetry and short fiction. His new book of poems, *The Fire Landscape*, explores with almost radioactive language the dangers and fears of a generation—"The Fluroscope Era," as the title poem of one section dubs it. Each of the poems in this collection, like the old radium shoe-fitting machine, looks through surface detail to the human issues at stake. The book includes two sequences, "The Salk Years" and "The Shooting" (at Kent State); both sustain a strong narrative voice throughout, driving deep into the issues, the tones, the emotional pitch, of the era. But the reader is not lost in the past, not nostalgic, by any means. By the sheer energy of concrete memories, the poems open into an awareness of the brilliance of being alive that informs the present. Other poems in the collection, other celebrations of crucial symbols and events in time—the building of bomb shelters, a deadly school fire, a girl tied to a tree by her brother who says she is a "commie spy," a giant tarantula horror movie, a crash in a T-bird, girdles, and white gloves—might appear to be elegies, but instead become vehicles for finding wisdom, and a faith in the objects of our lives to provide that wisdom. In "Glitter Stars" Fincke tells of a student who constructs a throne room for the second coming of Christ, with cardboard and plywood and desk blotters and failed light bulbs, finding "each object holy." That kind of dedication to the project of telling the story of our lives informs this splendid, skillful collection.

Gary Fincke is director of the Writers Institute and a professor of English and creative writing at Susquehanna University in Selinsgrove, Pennsylvania. He has won the Bess Hokin Prize from *Poetry* magazine, the Rose Lefcowitz Prize from *Poet Lore*, two Pushcart Prizes, and a PEN Syndicated Fiction Prize. His poems, stories, and essays have appeared in *Harper's*, *Newsday*, *The Paris Review*, *The Kenyon Review*, *The Georgia Review*, and *American Scholar*.

Fleda Brown