



## War of the Foxes

**Richard Siken**

Copper Canyon Press (Apr 28, 2015)

Softcover \$17.00 (96pp)

978-1-55659-477-9

A poet for whom face value represents life at its most treacherous, Richard Siken's 2004 first collection, *Crush*, was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award and won the Thomas Gunn Award and a Lambda Literary Award.

*Raphael, Saint George and the Dragon, 1504–6*

*It's hard to talk about what you believe while you are believing it. Fervor reduces thought to shorthand and all we get is an icon. Give a man a weapon and you have a warrior. Put him on a horse and you have a hero. The weapon is a tool. The horse is a metaphor. Raphael painted this twice—white horse facing east against the greens, white horse facing west against the yellows. The maiden flees or prays, depending. A basic dragon, the kind you'd expect from the Renaissance. Evidence of evil but not proof. There's a companion piece as well: Saint Michael. Paint angels, it's easier: you don't need the horse. Michael stands on Satan's throat, vanquishing, while everything brown burns red. All these things happened. Allegedly. When you paint an evil thing, do you invoke it or take away its power? This has nothing to do with faith but is still a good question. Raphael was trying to say something about spirituality. This could be the definition of painting. The best part of spirituality is reverence. There are other parts. Some people like to hear the sound of their own voice. If you don't believe in the world it would be stupid to paint it. If you don't believe in God, then who are you talking to?*

MATT SUTHERLAND (Fall 2015)

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