

Gene Frumkin

Selected Poems



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Frumkin was born in New York City and received his B.A. from the University of California, Los Angeles, in 1950. Having held jobs as a bank teller and journalist, he started writing poetry seriously after taking an adult education class taught by Thomas McGrath. He eventually started the journal *Coastlines* with Mel Weisburd in 1955. In 1966, Frumkin moved to Albuquerque, New Mexico, to take a teaching position at the University of New Mexico where he had many distinguished writers as students such as Gloria Frym, Joy Harjo, Simon Ortiz and Leslie Marmon Silko. His poetry appeared in *Chelsea*, *Conjunctions*, *Evergreen Review*, *Kayak*, *New Letters*, *The Paris Review*, *Poetry Magazine*, *Sulfur*, and *The Best American Poetry 2002*, edited by Robert Creeley.

Locust Cry. New Mexico: San Marcos Press, 1973

Saturn is Mostly Weather. Selected & Uncollected Poems. El Paso: Cinco Puntos press, 1992.

In the Margin of the Text

Myself standing in the margin of the text
which is Cuba:
black soldiers on pages of sugar
Standing beside a sycamore
in a saucer of flowers
royal palms overlooking
the rooftops like giraffes
the morning cruising around me
on a slow bicycle
I glance at the jagged edges of heaven to the north
and know that elsewhere men move ahead
the hands of the sun

But in our city

Cuba is not a place but a checkerboard
Castro is a cartoon
and his government a crime
I think I'm living in a secondhand world
in which too often I've surprised myself kneeling
or reaching for the sky

The poems I wanted to write

for those Batista murdered in their honest passion
for the saplings of the revolution
for Castro's beard and other prophecies
are out of sight political prisoners somewhere
Instead I watch the snails
on the walkway
listen to the children
in the house
to the conscience of the bluejay
on the limb
and feel immortal as a housefly

Goddess in the Neighborhood

Her fingers smell of lime
In the outdoor basin
 goldfish repeat their glidings
 interminably without sound

Birds alight fly off
Grass is available
The goddess of quiet Sundays
 escapes her clothes

 to seize her image
 in the fish-laden pool
No blemishes there
 sees no hair in her armpits
 one breast is

 round as the other
White and weightless imprint
of body on water she is
 frozen in love
 satisfied...

BEHIND THE FENCE SMASHING OF A DRIED LEAF

Who is it

Someone's breathing
destroys the image

frightens the birds of her limbs
She scatters into human nakedness
 runs heart spurting

 through leaves and petals
 fallen limbs

pursued by incubi of sunlight
back to her house
swamp of quiet pastel mosquitoes

Of Time and Place

A blue pelican converses
with an Egyptian lady
on my wall A crowd outside
gathers to watch a

man's hairline recede
(My neighborhood needs a vacation)
Lately I've noticed
cigarillo stubs

in my ashtray (made in Korea)
and remember a jug
designed on an Aztec theme
Quietude is my house

a mass of old sunlight
Pursued by my neighbors'
armed rooftops / tomorrow
tomorrow's pale mountains

A Man Preserved in Stone

Habitué of shadows the man in purple robes
for whom secrecy is a palace whose only subject is himself
who wants his problems thinned his rough edges clipped
who wants to be watered like a lawn
He is climbing the mountain
by Erector Set complete with printed compass
Or you will often find him in the park
gathering the rust of sunflowers speaking to a mallard
copying the patterns of the water
Scan him closely He is a man preserved in stone
in the frieze of his fear he is a reservoir of desire
Once he bursts your warning finger will not stop him
There is no telling how much of the world
he will translate into love There is no telling
how many mornings will riot how many stars vanish
how many women bend until he is safely himself again
But then in that resurrection
he will rule as the grass rules the earth

Those Years We Were Together

Drops of a xylophone resound in a cave
the small suns of his name
falling into night

Those years we were together

he offered me his name eagerly
with all its ribbons and rust
its raw nobility its helium and flecks of blue
He said 'Now we're two streams meeting in one river
We'll sit in a dim light and trade visions
like old storytellers Between us
a feather will be enough'
How could I admit such equality?
I tell you my knees were too smooth
my blood too purple! My eyes looked down
and saw his gift lurching in the streets
his love in perpetual safari
his aimless love
trying to assassinate me

Now somewhere he may be drinking his name
into the sea

my friend

that enormous ship

towed by a carp

The Party

There in the corner
two wounds

are bleeding quietly
to each other

In the center
of the room the talk
is tictactoe.

always ending
in a tie

A joke cracks open
the eggplant night
and it splatters
everybody's face

A virgin

thinks it's turd
and screams

A bombardment of owls
silenced only by the first
cymbals of moon clattering
the pool

The bodies compose
a sonata
by Karlheinz Stockhausen

Inside

the wounds
have trickled under the sofa
and will remain there
in dust and darkness
scabs for tomorrow's
cleanup lady

Elsewhere kisses melt
in glasses
Love swims in milky puddles
The clock snores
The DeKooning on the wall

tries to utter a human cry

Upstairs

a tiger prowls the rooms
and soon will cross the border

The Poet On His Lunch Hour

Day to dayness Berries rotting while churchbells
shrink to peanuts Walking at noon through newspapers
through summer conspiracies of bosoms
seeing myself arriving at store windows
looking like hay My plan: to keep moving
through the tarpaulin air that smells
of yesterday's cremation 90 degrees
says Federal Savings & Loan Flick At 12:17

Parlor game: can I avoid recognition
For an hour I would like to be no one
There is the lady with the windmill spinning
in her hat there the old foot-soldier with the billboard
in his throat: 'Repent!' 'Read the Bible!'
These two are almost no one
But I whose eyes button down my collar
who am walking too near my salary
my head in a telephone am almost someone

The sky above Martindale's Books
is a sunflower They must be sick of me here
but open the dogeared pages of their smiles as usual
I come here a horse to its bag of oats
and for a while hide my head in language

Always buildings slowly slyly surrounding my hour
entombing me Coffee among Mongolians
Yet one businesslike hello and no book
may help me any more Better throw pies
at policemen or go chagalling in The Back Room
It may happen too: someone in my personal hour
pronouncing that last chaotic hello
Someday in chalklight the birds too crisp to fly
And lo, I'll be nothing but a black dot
in a perfectly white square completely myself

open and visible to all

