

## *A Gallery of Saints*

**Enrique Martinez Celaya** calls his new group of paintings—fifteen in all, each showing large flowers against a thickly painted ocean—*portraits*. I think of the flowers as saints, each painting the portrait of a saint.

Like saints, the flowers are dressed in robes: bright orange, white, midnight purple, pink, yellow, and blue. The colors mark the orders, the denominations of belief. The vestments fold and whirl, the velvet of galaxies and caskets, resurrections of the loam. No symbolism is required: the color of the creed is the saintly deed. Glory and fragility grow in a gallery of need, and the martyr's wilting neck is one with the colors that bleed.

Like saints, the flowers come from elsewhere. Heads lopped off, ripped from the earth, they have gone to seed. But in paint they appear anew, the preachers of chapels coined in sun: private knights of apocalypse, auroras from the eclipse, lifted in prayers to what is not there.

The ocean is their place, waves spun from the horizon. Not to annul the distance, not to deny it exists, but to enrich the emptiness, the flowers sport their shapes of exemption, a life brighter than ours. Theirs are the colors of the crude, writ in dramas of amplitude, a troubadour's song that ceases before long. Incense and burnished bride, hallowed smell and honey's hive, they bloom to the sailor in a trance—lotus for the starved, shore to the sinking crew, spiced with the salt of what is not true.

I am, says each, a vision you cannot name: a calyx and crucifix of the same; a map for the navigator when tide is to blame. As wreaths they will quit, flow away, in solitudes of disarray. But for a moment they arise, cross the ocean at a bound, kiss the ground. The petals on the breast are what they know best.

But the vision does not last. As the sailor drifts, he doesn't see, until too late, the living flower of his fate: the savior's robes, sunset spread, in devices unread: to *non-sequitur*, mother of the stars, and the dreams that are ours.