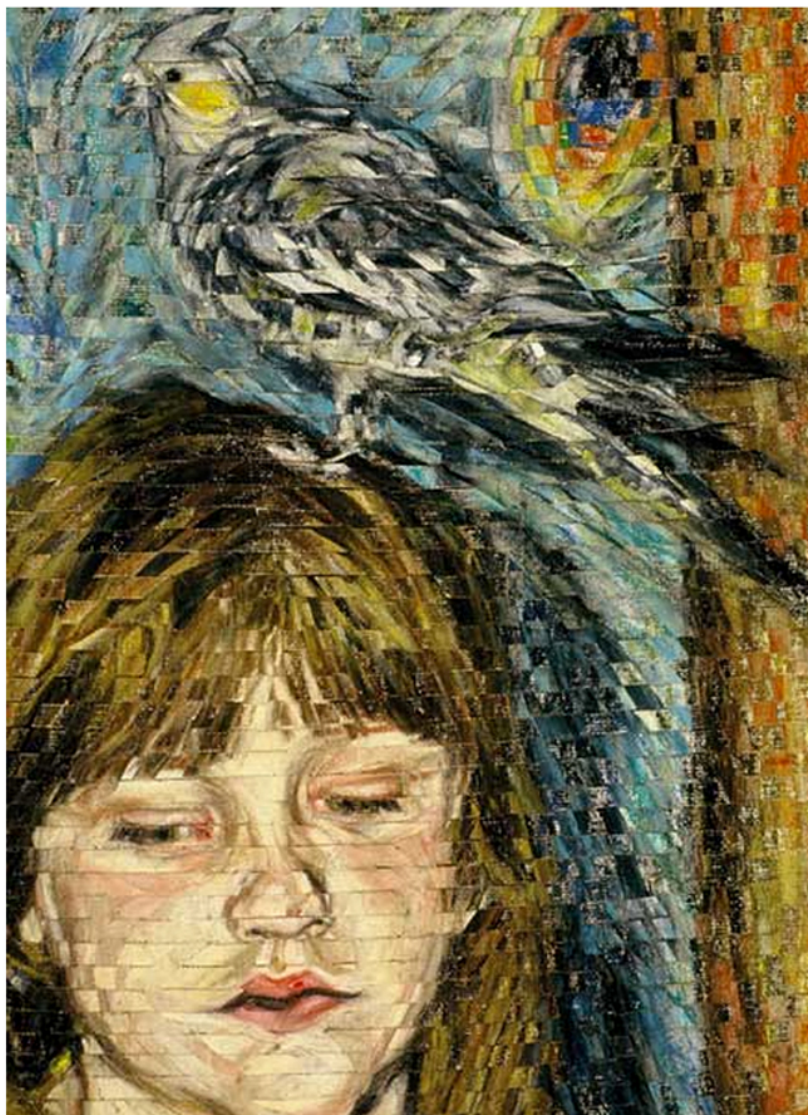


Poetry

Children of the Flood

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Detail of "Saying Goodbye" by [Gail Skudera](#), 1992, 24" x 42." Media: oil pastel on canvas, woven.

Children of the Flood

We finally knew at the heist of our house
by water—a depth trick of the cold
that wicked up our jeans—what our father
had seen. He'd watched the camphor clouds

smother the tiny screws of punctured light
that connects the beams of something huge
moving over us toward daylight, his hands
measuring the distance in quintiles.

Rats were already floating in the street, choked with floss,
their pink claws among the diapers and Styrofoam.
It rained. The streets became the trash,
the trash the water. Our neighbors scooped plastic

bottles in garbage bags & slung them back at the current.
And then they did it again. But our father
would lift us in the structure bolted for animal weight.
We believed in death. So we obeyed.

While the adults forced the horses and stubborn sheep
on the ship, our job was to lure the *winged* ones—the doves
the most difficult as they scooted up to wires
we could only touch with the mind.

And we closed the door on life and lived in the hull
through wind and rain, and through our thought:
the seeds of gooseneck strife buried,
the softened roots of trees tilting under the garbage-

glutted water. We waited. We thought we could see the wind
slapping the water—a white shock, the ridges stilled by the sun.
The sky was a jar of blue that held us in the light.
Our father was listening for nothing: we knew the sound

of bones settling in mud. And the dove,
we were to catch it—plastron fluffed,
a shield of health—when it came back to us.
But we were children. We coaxed it

out of the beams above the oxen. We fed it
grain from our hands. It was already sick.
So is the earth

dry? we wondered.

But we said, *Throw it. Throw it out.*

Read more:

[National Poetry Month 2014, poem](#)