

SAN MATEO COUNTY POET LAUREATE



Poetry Reading *by*

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About this poem:

“Cleanroom”

What spaces do we think of as landscapes?

What landscapes do we encounter in poetry?

For many of us, a landscape is an outdoor scene, usually pleasing, perhaps untouched (or minimally touched) by human activity. Landscapes and nature figure prominently in poems throughout history and across cultures.

The first poem I recited at the beginning of my term moved through landscapes in the coast range, and hinted at the suburban valley where we meet this morning. I think of that poem, and the one I am reading today, as complementary, because most of us spend our days in indoor spaces. We might not see sunlight at all on weekdays in the winter months, depending on our work and workplace.

I offer this poem in the spirit of acknowledging one of the many places where some of us spend our days, and of broadening the range of subjects and spaces we encounter in poetry.

Cleanroom

Do not shed
your DNA here.

Restrain your hair.

Let no exhalation
fog or mist the air.

This jumpsuit, these
tissue boots
will rein you in

as no other
fashion can

while the bouffant cap,
in blue or white,
is the great

equalizer, making
grannies of all
as we tend

the sensitive
but tensile strong

that by dust specks
come undone.