

SAN MATEO COUNTY POET LAUREATE



Poetry Reading *by*

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About this poem:

"Square Nothing"

This poem arose directly from my community project, Spoken Art; it began as I became intrigued by the square shape of a particular artwork (the multi-media painting "Piazza San Marco" by Portola Valley artist Laura Deem). Most paintings are not square. Squareness has unusual properties, in geometric symmetry, in other branches of mathematics, and in our metaphorical thinking.

I recalled the phrase "Square the circle," which implores us to do the impossible. I heard it as both a command to be questioned—or creatively undertaken—and as an ideal to be left aside.

As I followed "Square the circle" and its implications, some concrete elements from the artwork found their way into the poem. These were elements of journey and departure. The poem unfolded from there: I followed the sound patterns of the initial words and images, and discovered where they could bring me as more phrases and images arrived, some quite challenging on a personal level. One of the great gifts of the writing process is the opportunity to meet such discoveries, and to make them into new territory.

Square Nothing

Square the circle,
look me squarely
in the eye and say

we are more
than the layers
of our days.

An overcoat. A face.
The suitcase
of tucked-away

remembrances
to temper
loss.

Square nothing.

Anchor me
as talismans dissolve.

Drop into my palm
the compass

whose North is
synonymous
with love.