

For you, a sample of Kenneth Pobo’s poetry collection, *Loplop in a Red City*—just a sample, a small part of the wonders the entire book offers. What does this sample have that the book doesn’t? Reproductions of several artworks that inspired *Loplop*, and the poet’s thoughts on how he transformed into poetry his heartfelt relationship with these artworks.

“[Kenneth Pobo] has long been a master of the short line free verse personal poem; in this collection, he’s let the paintings charge his work with experimental verve and at times, a surreal edginess. The poems are exuberant, filled with daring imaginative leaps.... *Loplop in a Red City* is a testament to the power of art’s ability to inspire.”

— J. Esch, *Turk’s Head Review*

“There’s no ego here; it’s laid bare, without any ribbons or bows, and in that simplicity, somehow more complex than most.... Pobo’s talents for finding the right words, his precision as an artist, sing from the canvas in this collection.”

— Jerrod Edson, author of *The Moon Is Real*

Mystery and Melancholy of a Street

Painting by Giorgio de Chirico

For decades I've been the little girl
rolling her hoop down a strange street,
a shadow creeping up. I have a name
for it, Death. Maybe it will overlook me

a while longer or until the hoop gets away
and lands against a fading arcade. What if
I've misnamed the shadow? It could be
Life—I want it to stop and talk to me,

let me rest from rolling the hoop,
but Life may have many streets to walk on,
people with a stronger need to talk.
I could hide in the circus wagon, wait

and see who the shadow is, but I'm scared
of the dark, scared I'll get trapped
and be taken far off. I grew up in
a land with purple lilacs and salmon iris.

I didn't want to leave but I did. I remember
Nature as the aunt I loved who moved away
and died. It may be dusty doorways
and nervous buildings from now on. The shadow,

who knows, could be my own,
some form of me that dissolves
in motion.



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This poem is a study  
in identity—not as  
a fixed thing but  
something more fluid,  
almost like the colors  
of a kaleidoscope.  
The speaker's gender  
isn't clear.  
Is s/he female? Male?  
Death and shadows  
mark the journey.  
Motion and stillness  
come together.



### Loplop Introduces Loplop

*Painting by Max Ernst*

I have a painting to show you.  
It's the real me.

Or it was when I painted it. Now  
I think someone else painted it,  
a stranger. Does it matter  
who signs what? Maybe while

painting, but later, once I, Loplop,  
am flotsam, my name will drop  
one more feather,

falling, blowing away. Even  
in death my feathers will travel,  
will enter the world in ways  
I never could—

they will be my soul.

~~~~~  
I was drawn to Ernst's *Loplop* paintings
partly because the name Loplop interested
me—like a child's drumbeat. The name
boils language down to a simple sound.

The Birth of the Idol

Painting by René Magritte

Land runs from water to
the comforts of lemon squares and tea
among Victorian houses. The mannequin

chooses between water's wild whips
and the land whose hornets hang
like pendants, wishes

undialed days would last,
has tried to give birth for centuries—
it's uncomfortable to wait that long,

so it follows the wind's hoofprints
back to Eden, still flowering, still
off limits, a closed park to sneak into.

The Garden of Eden remains a potent story for me. It's the ultimate place of joy and loss. As a gardener myself, joy and loss are in every flower. Centuries dwindle down single stalks. The mannequin or the human, not always easy to tell apart.





Underwater Vision

Painting by Odilon Redon

Get far enough out, drop anchor
and leap into the lake. In the cabin,
your life consists of lists
and exhaust. Underwater, you return
to school with minnows, find mysteries

written on the underside of a lily pad,
a yellow flower
hoisted above a green rope. Ripples
and sun-bits slide toward the bottom.
Be careful—

boulders hide here, could split
your head open. New worlds offer risk.
To the loon, the risk floats mainly above
the water. She dives,
stays under for half a minute,

bobs up while danger looks away. You
swim fatigued back to the boat,
pull yourself over its edge, row
to half open cupboards, bananas
with brown spots.

All aboard the surrealist train—even before surrealism was a named movement, I gladly boarded that train. Redon paid for my ticket. How could he do that, being dead? I don't know. The paintings assure me that anything is possible. His world can be scary. It can be fabulous, too.

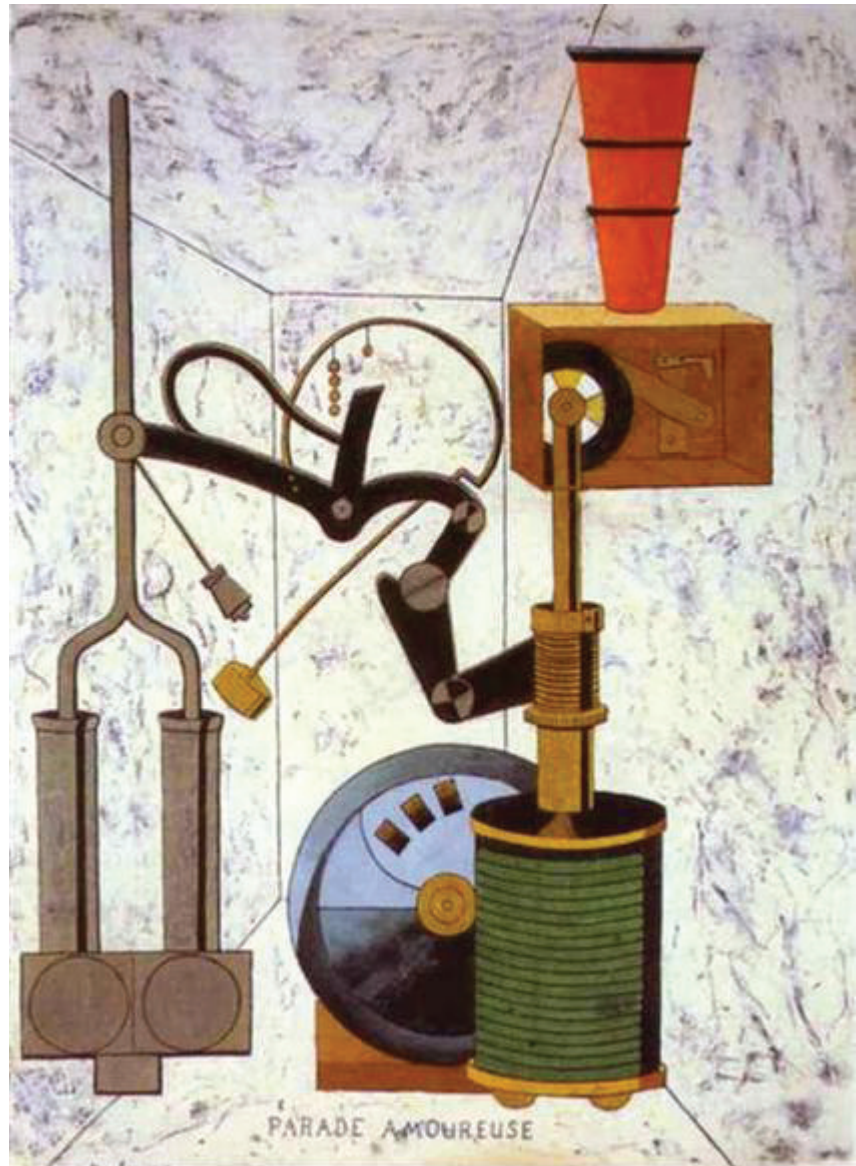
For Redon, reality is often far from the surface. We look and don't see it. The most incredible things happen right before our eyes—and we miss them. How do we “get far enough out” to see more clearly? I think of King Lear who, after causing such damage, is told, “See better, Lear.” Perhaps the vision is submerged. Hard to get to.

Parade Amoureuse

Painting by Francis Picabia

Love, so outdated, I find it
only in resale shops
and lawn sales with
bent irons and obsolete
board games—it holds
a certain charm, like finding

a 1961 Montana map
in the glove compartment
and remembering sex
in a Butte motel, barn owls
barking in pines.



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Commonplace items mark our journey as  
much as large concepts like love or faith. Time  
renders a love affair to purposeless objects,  
yet a forgotten map nudges vivid memory.

## Two Blue Horses by a Red Rock

*Painting by Franz Marc*

A horse imagines grass  
and clover, pauses,  
trots. Death comes quickly—

air out the nostrils,  
ivory mist. Legs buckle,  
soul slipping out  
her left ear to a red rock—

she tests wind  
for an exit, rises  
toward sky's barn  
At dawn  
another horse comes, red  
weathervane—morning,  
a warm blanket, apples.



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Two horses, two realities co-exist. Many think of people as having “souls.” What are the souls of animals? If we could see them, what color would they be? Marc contrasts the red and the blue—in a single frame which seems to attempt to bridle an energy that won’t be held in. Behind the colors: death, the ultimate energy and entropy.

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## Images (in order of appearance)

*Mystery and Melancholy of a Street*, by Giorgio  
de Chirico. 1914. Private collection

*Loplop Introduces Loplop*, by Max Ernst. 1930.  
Private collection

*The Birth of the Idol*, by Rene Magritte. 1926.  
Private collection

*Parade Amoureuses*, by Francis Picabio. 1917.  
Private collection

*Two Blue Horses in front of a Red Rock*, by  
Franz Marc. 1913. Städtische Galerie im  
Lenbachhaus, Munich

“These wonderful poems go way beyond mere ekphrasis. They’re little masterpieces in their own right, bursting with exuberant life from the page and into our memories without our having to know anything about the paintings that inspired them.”

— Robert Cooperman, author of *In the Colorado Gold Fever Mountains*, winner of the Colorado Book Award for Poetry

“*Loplop in a Red City* offers us a taste of super powers: Pobo’s poems present lyrical, verbal play, and we also gain new insight into art, art history, and the painters who created the great works.... Pobo’s poems will provide artistic companionship in the days and years ahead.”

— Marilyn Kallet, author of *The Love That Moves Me*

“There are brilliant daubs of color here, moments where lyrical poems respond to art. Perhaps the concerns of painters are similar to those of poets: who am I, and what has this creative journey meant?”

— Patricia Clark, author of *My Father on a Bicycle* and *The Canopy*