



JOAN LABOMBARD

Collected Poems

EXTREMES AND MODERATIONS:
EARLY SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA POETRY

A TEXT-TECH PAPERS PROJECT

Extremes and Moderations

Early Southern California Poetry

Extremes and Moderations is a Text-Tech Papers project devoted to recovering poetry written, published, and circulated in Los Angeles and Southern California. Each volume brings neglected books and poems back into view through carefully prepared texts, archival images, biographical context, and a clear record of the surviving sources.

Edited by Brian Kim Stefans

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Joan LaBombard

A Critical Reading Edition

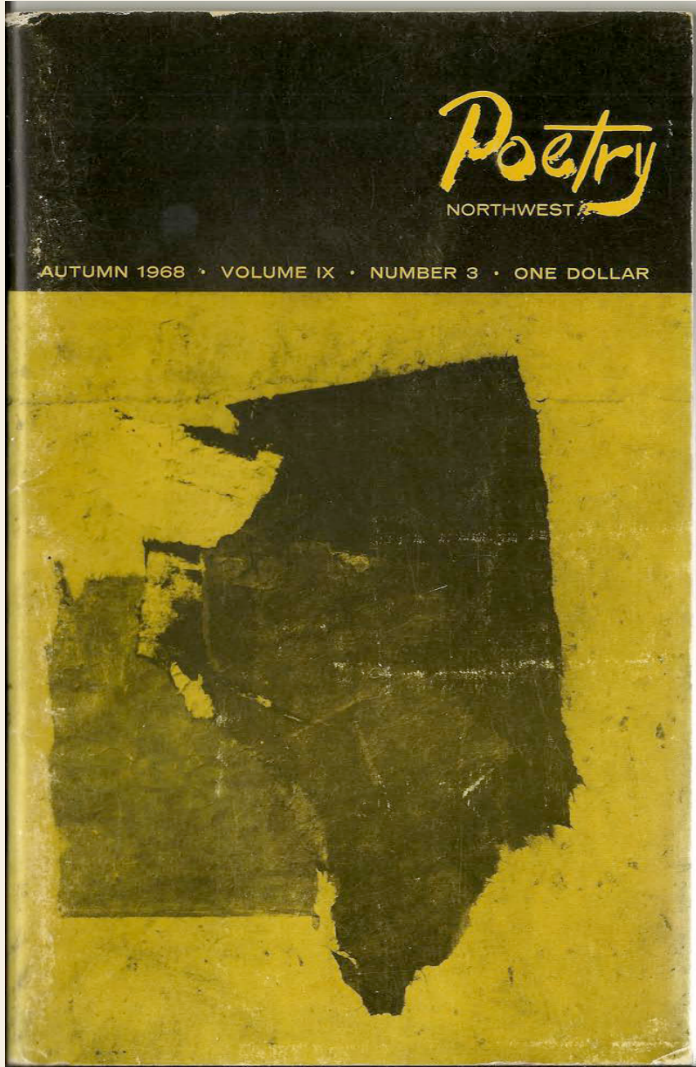
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Archival Images

A short selection from the source record



Cover of the Fall 1968 Poetry Northwest, which published LaBombard's "Ohio: 1925."

Editorial Note

This is a reset reading edition, not a facsimile. The poems were transcribed from the original book and periodical scans in the local archive rather than from earlier reader PDFs. Narrow source-page wraps have been rejoined; stanza divisions, purposeful line indents, subtitles, epigraphs, and internal section headings have been retained. Unavoidable display wraps use a hanging indent. Obvious scanning debris was removed without silently modernizing diction or punctuation. Book and periodical titles are italicized in editorial matter, and every poem begins on a new page and ends with a source note.

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Introduction

Joan LaBombard's poetry survives in scattered magazines and three late collections that are now difficult to obtain. What can be read shows a patient, exact poet of memory and ordinary objects. In "Ohio: 1925," hoses, porches, games, music, and a river carry childhood through decades without turning it into easy nostalgia. "Marbles" transforms a boy's pocket and playground into a dangerous little cosmos. LaBombard grew up in Santa Monica after being born in San Francisco, published for decades, edited and encouraged other poets, and eventually gathered her work in *Calendar*, *The Counting of Grains*, and *Winter Watch of Leaves*. This interim reading edition presents the two complete poems available in the project's local periodical scans and records, rather than conceals, the three missing book witnesses.

Biography

Joan LaBombard was born in San Francisco and raised in Santa Monica, California. Exact dates of birth and death have not yet been verified. By the early 1950s she was placing poems in literary magazines, beginning a publishing life that continued for decades.

LaBombard married Emerson LaBombard, an aerospace engineer. Her writing life unfolded alongside family, community, and service work rather than through a conventional academic career. Available biographical notes connect her with veterans, senior writers, and poetry organizations in Southern California.

Her poems appeared in venues including *Poetry Northwest*, *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic*, *Blue Unicorn*, and the *Christian Science Monitor*. "Ohio: 1925," printed in *Poetry Northwest* in 1968, is a long backward look in which sprinklers, porches, children's games, music, and the Ohio River become a structure for historical memory. "Marbles," printed in the same magazine in the late 1970s, shows her gift for making a small object carry mythic scale.

LaBombard received recognition in the Borestone Mountain Poetry Awards and was active in California poetry networks. She served in an editorial capacity with *Blue Unicorn* and continued to publish individual poems while assembling books.

Her collections were *Calendar: Poems* (1985), *The Counting of Grains* (1990), and *Winter Watch of Leaves* (published in the early 1990s). None of the three full texts is presently in the local archive, so this edition does not claim to represent the whole surviving corpus. The biographical dossier and periodical witnesses establish a substantial career whose books, correspondence, and complete publication history remain priorities for recovery.

Magazine Poems

Recovered magazine poems, 1968–1977

Two poems recovered from complete local periodical witnesses; the author's three later books remain unavailable for transcription.

Ohio: 1925

Now at the dark's perpetual descent,
I remember the hoses, looped like snakes,
The arcs of silver spilled in little lakes,
All that rainbow bridge to summer, bent
Under the hanging stars. They swung so low
Our shirt-sleeved fathers grazed them long ago;
Giants with silver whips, who could crack down
A shower of stars to cool our parching lawn.

That time of summer, there was always time.
Shrill voices counting: twenty, ready or not,
And bodies light as moths or a firefly's
Glimmer among the elms and then wink out,
Or at the statue-maker's sudden whim,
Swing from his hand in easy equipoise,
Creating marble myths of girls and boys,
While the water falls like silver over them.

Our porches bloomed with shy and spinster aunts,
Daisy, Olivia, Elizabeth—
Their names a nosegay or an orchard's breath;
Among the potted ferns and bric-a-brac
They fluttered fans or flirted gauzy sleeves,
Caged in a latticework of trumpet leaves,
And made a constant litany of talk
Till porches darkened and the cage went black.

And in the smothered furnace of the street
A moony Ford goes by on muffled wheels;
Boys and their mongrels spin like Catherine wheels.
Under the maples where their elders wilt
One banjo plucks a tune, and two guitars
Follow the tinny plinking charitably
And as another fumbles for the key,
The gloomed catalpas blaze with sudden stars.

Come home. The coast is clear. The river's voice
Ravels the labyrinth of space and time.
The blurred canoes, the dance pavilion swim
In wrinkled splendor on the water's face

And the riding lights of towns along that shore
Hang like a chain of tears we bargained for
When first we set our small boats bobbing free,
And never dreamed the river flowed away.

Here in another town the sprinklers jewel
The blue suburban dark with their clear fall,
And other voices chant the ritual
Of lost and found by patio and pool
And other children streak like meteors
In the forbidden country of the street
On tipsy wheels or skittish, silver feet—
The kicked can tinkles sweetly down the years.

I remember the hoses' steady arc
And women gentle as the names they bore
On porches spiced with rose or lavender,
Hung high like cages on the honeyed dark;
Daisy, Olivia, good night, good night—
As clear and changeless as enduring myth,
The water falls through time of its own weight
And sings with the Ohio's risen breath.

Publication. First published in *Poetry Northwest*, Fall 1968, pp. 51–52.

Marbles

They are his planets,
his suns and milky spheres, his red Mars.
Their clustered fires seethe in his pocket
compelling his mind
till he must touch them, count them
over and over for luck;
aggie and cat's-eye, his brilliant clearies,
the prized green shooter
where all the leaves of all his summers burn.
Ambling onto the playground,
he chinks the ring of a universe.

Other boys drift over
to watch a champion set out
marbles like pigmy moons, globes of ice
and crystal, closed worlds
with miniature rivers in them,
colored like sky or tigers, vivid as blood.
It is Genghis Khan baiting his surly chieftains
with hope of treasure,
who hunches beside the circled suns, and aims
that Pearl of Marbles, which obeys
his eye and cunning thumb
so wickedly.

Publication. First published in *Poetry Northwest*, Winter 1977, p. 15.

Bibliography

Selected primary and secondary sources

Book and periodical titles are italicized throughout.

Works by the Author

Calendar: Poems. 1985.

The Counting of Grains. 1990.

Winter Watch of Leaves. Early 1990s.

Works About the Author

No substantial published biographical study has yet been located.

Colophon

Publication and production notes

This critical reading edition was edited by Brian Kim Stefans for The Text-Tech Papers, Los Angeles, in 2026, as part of *Extremes and Moderations: Early Southern California Poetry*. The poems were reset from the source pages identified in the publication notes and datasheet. The book was composed in EB Garamond on a cream field at 6 × 9 inches. The cover uses original abstract artwork prepared for this edition.