

MARY CHRISTINE DELEA

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Still Life

Self-Portrait: Child in the rose garden,  
girl, girl reading,  
young woman knitting,  
young woman seated on a sofa, resting in the studio,  
the pink dress, roses.

Summer's day, after luncheon  
in the dining room, clothes drying.  
Two profiles: the sisters, friends—Dr. Lincoln's daughters—  
Julie daydreaming, Lydia crocheting in the garden  
at Marley. Red apples, red hibiscus.

Off to sea, into the blue,  
a mother. The boating party,  
sunset bound. The black place.  
Silence. Autopsy.

Lilacs in a window.  
Mother, just a whisper away.  
What a human being is,  
thinking about death.

What the water gave me: her husband,  
wounded deer, sad man with roses—  
memory, the heart.  
Birch trees by the river,  
Pennsylvania landscape, bird bath.  
The sisters, out of body, without hope.

Self-portrait: woman with pearl necklace,  
the fig mother weaning the calves,  
a mother from faraway nearby.  
Maternal caress, maternal kiss,  
right here, at home.

## ABOUT THE POEM & AUTHOR

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Mary Christine Delea created “Still Life” from the titles of paintings by women. About the poem and the process of composing it, she writes:

I do not always write poetry based on prompts, themes, forms, or challenges, but I do enjoy it, and when I do use some kind of a prompt, the results may or may not stick to the initial catalyst or prove worth revising. The sparks that work best are the ones, of course, that I have an interest in. One of my interests is in paintings—I love art museums and looking at art online, but I have absolutely no talent myself in this area. Part of my art appreciation is in learning about women artists—there are so many throughout history who are not given the recognition they deserve.

A previous call for poetry submissions from a different journal asked for ekphrastic poems, and I had written two after finding pieces by painters I had not previously heard of (Annie Hopf and Alma Thomas). When I saw the *Heron Tree* call for found poems, my brain was already in the world of women painters; my love of doing research got me online for hours, looking at art and learning about more artists.

“Still Life” was written using some of the titles of paintings (and a few collages, 3D assemblages, and mixed media pieces) I found in my research. At first, I limited myself to art from the 1800s, but I then opened up to both earlier and later artworks. Once I compiled a list of titles—which I would happily still be doing had *Heron Tree* not had a deadline—it was clear to me that *Still Life*, with its multiple meanings, would be my starting point; so many women (and men) in the 1800s painted a still life. After that, I became—as I often do—another person whose story could be told as a mini-biography and it could incorporate all the meanings of the title.

Mary Christine Delea is the author of *Ordinary Days in Ordinary Places* (Pudding House Publications 2000), *The Skeleton Holding Up the Sky* (Main Street Rag 2006), and *Did I Mention There’s Gambling and Body Parts?* (dancing girl press 2012). Her work has also appeared in *The Hollins Critic*, *Remington Review*, *Broad River Review*, *The Comstock Review*, *Mid-American Review*, and elsewhere. She lives in Oregon, where she has served as a Poet-in-the-Schools in rural middle schools. She can be found online at [mchristinedelea.com](http://mchristinedelea.com).

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