

H. Gene Murtha Senryu Contest Results 2019

FIRST PRIZE

ultrasound gel
as she circles the probe
I read her face

Madhuri Pillai

This senryu won first place because it perfectly captures a potential moment inside Gene Murtha's emotional universe, while remaining wholly original and delicately-crafted within Madhuri Pillai's direct experience. The "ultrasound gel" in the first line makes immediate cool contact with our skin, and concisely sets the scene in a medical examination room. We first think of an expectant mother visiting for a routine checkup, but then remember that ultrasound exams are alternately used to look for tumors and other signs of serious illness. This clinical exploration inside the body is reflected in the speaker's eyes searching the subject's facial expressions for clues ("as she circles the probe \ I read her face"). Whether or

not the poet was invited to watch the ultrasound monitor during the exam doesn't matter, because the first hint of any concern will be found in the face of the one who circles the probe. Another rich complexity of this poem is its ability to allow for a multitude of possible viewpoints: Who is "she"? Who is "her"? Who is the "I"? I've read this senryu from any number of points of view, and each angle delights and intrigues in its own novel way.

Brent Goodman

SECOND PRIZE

strip-o-gram
everyone's standards
go lower

Elizabeth Crocket

Just like many successful senryu, this poem explores the complexity of human/social relations through the lens of a single event. At first read, this snapshot can be enjoyed as a simple satire – a lighthearted jab perhaps reproaching those involved in this bawdy “social” event. But like a foot strategically inserted between the door jamb to keep the door ajar, this senryu affords an opening that seduces inquisitive readers to explore more, inviting deeper conversations regarding the role and responsibility of the individual versus the group. Whether it’s for a birthday or a bachelor/bachelorette party, Strip-O-Grams are typically for the individual, but performed in a very public setting. The poet’s specific use of the word “everyone” immediately challenges the role of the individual, be it the reader, the recipient of the Strip-O-Gram, the person who sent the Strip-O-Gram, or any of the guest/participant of the event. In an instant, “me” becomes “we” and the individual is stripped out of the senryu and the poem is

thrust into the realm of the public, asking the heady question of “what happens when the individual relinquishes responsibility to group standards?”

Kelvin Fujikawa

THIRD PRIZE

shriveled flesh
the impermanence
of bath bubbles

Kelly Sauvage Angel

Here is a poem that triggers a multileveled set of emotions. I confess I have no real memory of my time in my mother's womb, but I firmly believe that memories of bathtime as a small child are the best and closest proximity in my imagination to the warm fluid life in the womb. As we grow older the trials and stresses of our daily life can be left behind, if only for a short time, in the wonderful peace that a bubble bath can provide. And yet, even though the impermanence of our bathtub revelry is always present in our minds we stay until 'shriveled flesh' prompts our slow but smiling exit. We wrap ourselves in a soft dry towel and both our conscious mind and warm flesh remember how our mothers (or dads) carried us back to the safety of a sweet smelling crib.

There is a moment of satori contained here as the warm glow of bubbles light up our eyes and then disappear

gently in the tub. I thank the poet for giving us a poem that so skillfully conforms to all of our deepest memories.

Mike Rehling

HIGHLY COMMENDED
(in no particular order)

family reunion
bad breath
has a name

Roberta Beach Jacobson

chess match . . .
I choose a bottle of whiskey
to be my rival

Ivan Gaćina

birthday candles
I blow out
an old dream

Lucky Triana

I dream
someone else's dream
hotel pillows

Terri L. French

shrinking all
my flaws
thumbnail photo

Valentina Ranaldi-Adams

all day rain
sending a second
friend request

Michael Henry Lee

pilot burial
he still speaks
from the black box

Tomislav Sjekloća

writer's block
my father's
eulogy

Claudette Russell

a mute man —
his parrot repeats
the silence

Aljoša Vuković

divorce papers —
a stray dog
adopts me

Corine Timmer

border war
the price of tamales
on a slow day

Darrell Lindsey

baggage claim
his and hers
the second time around

Robert Witmer

first date
I slip into
old habits

Lori A Minor

you and me
taking a selfie
separately

Dan Burt

Ceasefire . . .
a soldier comes home
wrapped in moonlight

arvinder kaur

history class
my girlfriend whispers
forget what happened

Srinivasa Rao Sambangi

cancer diagnosis
i add a red lipstick
to my collection

Madhuri Pillai

shooting stars —
the dash between
born and died

Colleen M. Farrelly

sunshine —
she spins the sunglasses
round and round

Kai Rands