

PAMELA CARROLL

Bird E, 2013
oil on canvas, 8 x 10 in



credit: Winfield Gallery

HANNAH FRIES

Winter Wren

There are birds I've heard and never seen,
voices rising through the forest like a cold spring.

A wink of wings. The rest obscured
in the trembling leaves.

What I heard on a mountain trail
made me stop, get out my notebook

and try to notate, drawing
descending triplets, then ascending, an eighth

rest here, a tone of indiscernible length,
so melodic and yet—erasing, listening,

hearing differently each time—
I couldn't get it right.

Like the time I dreamed of bluebirds for a week,
how sometimes they surprised me,

flying into my face, flutter of summer
sky, pale blaze of rusty breast,

then gone so fast I didn't know which way to run
to find them. Sometimes there was only

a clearing, bright blue feathers strewn—
or laid—about the floor. As though

I'd stumbled upon a threshold,
and didn't know if I should cross.

Things would be different if I were the girl
in the fantasy book I read as a child—

the girl who befriends the cuckoo bird
that every hour comes out of a clock door

and takes her with him, slipping through
some thin place

into layers of hidden worlds.
No one ever believes you

when you come back from such a place,
your escort a clock-piece made of wood again.

I described the bird's untranslatable song
to anyone who'd listen until

someone explained: a winter wren—
if you slow a recording to half

or quarter the speed, you'll hear it
harmonize with itself—overtones,

halftones, sung at the same time.
Not one clear note to copy down by pen,

but each holding another's intimation
that rises almost unbidden

from in between what we perceive
and what beckons from beyond it.

I stand in the clearing,
one hand holding an iridescent feather,

the other open, palm up
to the azure sky.

Hannah Fries lives in western Massachusetts, where she is associate editor and poetry editor of *Orion* magazine. She is a graduate of the Warren Wilson College MFA Program for Writers and the recipient of a Colorado Art Ranch residency. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *The Massachusetts Review*, *Rhino*, *Water-Stone Review*, *up-street*, and other journals.