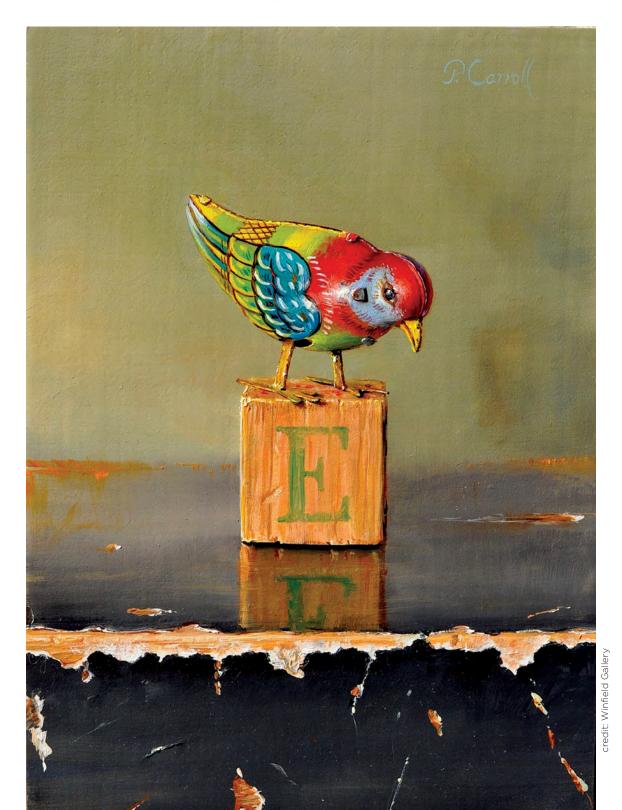
PAMELA CARROLL

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



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 wrenif 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, upstreet, and other journals.