

## MARY KARLTON

*Flamenco Dreams 1*, 2009  
Mixed Media Collage on Canvas, 30 x 24 in



COURTESY THE ARTIST

## JACQUES PRÉVERT

### To Paint a Bird's Portrait

*for Elsa Henriquez*

Paint first a cage  
with the door open  
next paint  
something pretty  
something simple  
something lovely  
something of use  
to the bird  
then put the canvas near a tree  
in a garden  
or a forest  
hide behind the tree  
say nothing  
don't move  
sometimes the bird comes quickly  
but it can just as well take many years  
before deciding  
Don't be disheartened  
wait  
wait years if need be  
the pace of the bird's arrival  
bearing no relation  
to the success of the painting  
When the bird comes  
if it comes  
keep very still

wait for the bird to enter the cage  
and once it has  
gently shut the door with the brush  
then  
paint out the bars one by one  
taking care not to touch any of the bird's feathers  
Next paint the tree's portrait  
choosing the loveliest of its branches  
for the bird  
paint likewise the green leaves and fresh breeze  
the sun's scintillation  
and the clamor of crickets in the heat of summer  
and then wait until the bird decides to sing  
If the bird does not sing  
that's a bad sign  
a sign the painting is no good  
but if it sings that's a good sign  
a sign you can sign  
in that case very gently pluck  
one of the bird's quills  
and write your name in a corner of the painting.

—Translated from the French by Jacqueline Michaud

**Jacques Prévert**, born in 1900, was a French poet and screenwriter whose work is enormously popular in the French-speaking world and beyond. His most highly regarded films formed part of the poetic realist movement, and include the legendary *Children of Paradise* (*Les Enfants du paradis*). His poems were an inspiration to the Beat Generation in the United States. Prévert died in 1977.

**Jacqueline Michaud's** translations of Francophone poets have appeared in numerous publications, including the anthology *Poems for the Millennium: The University of California Book of North African Literature*. She has published two collections of her own poetry, *The Waking Hours: Poems & Translations*, and *White Clouds*. Her poems have also appeared in journals, including the *New England Review* and *Per Contra: An International Journal of the Arts, Literature, and Ideas*.