

ERIKA PERLOFF

Flows to the Sea, 2012
Pastel on sanded paper, 9 x 20 in



courtesy: the artist

CASANDRA LOPEZ

A New Language

My words are always
collapsing

upon themselves, they feel too tight
in my mouth. I want a new
language. One with at least
fifty words for grief
and fifty words for love, so I can offer
them to the living
who mourn the dead. I want

a language that understands
sister-pain and heart-hurt. So
when I tell you Brother

is my hook of heart, you will see

the needle threading me to
the others, numbered
men, women, and children
of our grit spit city.

I want a language to tell you
about 2010's
37th homicide. The unsolved,
all I know about a man,

my city turned to number,
always sparking memory,

back to longer days when:
Ocean is the mouth
of summer. Our shell fingers
drive into sand, searching—we find

tiny silver sand crabs we scoop
and scoop till we bore and go
in search of tangy seaweed.

We are salted sun. How we brown

to earth. Our warm flesh flowering,
reminding us of our desert and canyon

blood. In this new language our bones say
sun and *sea*, reminding us of an old
language our mouths have forgotten, but our
marrow remembers.

Casandra Lopez was raised in Southern California's Inland Empire and has an MFA from the University of New Mexico. She has been selected for residencies with the Santa Fe Art Institute and the School of Advanced Research, where she will be the Indigenous writer in residence for 2013. Her work can be found or is forthcoming in literary journals such as *High Desert Journal*, *Acentos Review*, *Weber: The Contemporary West*, and *Unmanned Press*. She is a founding editor of *As/Us: An Indigenous Women's Space*.