

**SUSAN BROWNE**  
Chiaroscuro

The Italian birds flew over the garden where this morning I stood on sunstruck tiles next to an olive orchard, thinking how fortunate to land here, eating the earth, drinking the vineyard, raveling to Rome to a room of Caravaggio that nearly stop me from breathing, especially the painting where Mary, her skin incandescent, leans out of the gloom to help her young son try to crush the snake's head, his little luminous foot on top of his mother's, the details eerie and real as if I could touch each figure and feel the plush of flesh, as if the serpent could uncoil and slither out of the frame. Later, in the taxi, the driver tells me about the shooting—a nightclub in Florida—and then I'm back in the garden, mumbling a prayer although it's only us who can save us, as I watch the birds cross the sky, sweeping the light into their dark wings.

Susan Browne's poetry manuscript *Just Living* is the winner of the 2019 Catamaran Poetry Prize. Her poetry has appeared in *Ploughshares*, *The Sun*, *Subtropics*, the *Southern Review*, and elsewhere. Her first book of poetry, *Buddha's Dogs*, was awarded the Four Way Books Intro Prize, and her second book of poetry, *Zephyr*, won the Steel Toe Books Prize in Poetry (Editor's Choice). Other awards include prizes from the Chester H. Jones Foundation, the National Writers Union, the Los Angeles Poetry Festival, and the River Styx International Poetry Contest. Browne teaches at Diablo Valley College in Pleasant Hill, California.

**CAREN CANIER**

*Ulysses*, 2008  
Mixed media/oil on panel, 40 x 50 in



COURTESY THE ARTIST