

## GRAHAM NICKSON

*Sun in House, 2014*  
Watercolor on paper, 22 x 30 in



COURTESY THE ARTIST

## ROBIN ESTRIN

### Heel

I have always admired the gundog  
for his agility, the way he tears across  
the stubble field in pursuit of his master's kill.  
I have loved his finesse, how he holds  
the dead weight in his slack jaw like a lover  
inert from a night of drinking. There is loyalty  
in the way he passes her off to his man,  
who stands by like a chill pimp.  
And what self-control he has, the gundog,  
with his contentment to salivate,  
to come, to sit, to stay. He does not bite to kill.  
Perhaps this is his nature; perhaps this is  
an exemplary dog. You see where I am going:  
There is a dog that comes for me in low light,  
begging for scraps. When he takes me  
in his mouth, I roll over; I come; I play dead.  
Shock is not a survivable state, God no—  
ask anything that has lived in the mouth of the dog:  
the rabbit, the pheasant, the fox.  
O meat and potatoes! this game of fetch,  
this *I do for you what you can never do for me*—  
it is no good. Here is the image I offer,  
the showing & the telling: I, too, was taught  
to love without teeth, to hold the kill  
in my mouth and hum my ugly song.  
Perhaps this makes him pathetic.  
Perhaps this makes me a very good dog.

**Robin Estrin's** poem "Heel" is the winner of the George Hitchcock Memorial Poetry Prize. Estrin is a recent graduate of the University of California, Santa Cruz, where she studied literature, politics, and book arts. She is a recipient of the 2016 Chancellor's Award for her senior thesis, "Yours, Truly," and a finalist in the 2016 Bucknell Seminar for Younger Poets. This year, Estrin will serve as the volunteer coordinator for the Young Writers Program, a nonprofit that organizes creative writing projects in schools throughout Santa Cruz County.