



## Vistas of the West: Poems and Visuals of Nature

Edited by Lawrence Kapustka,  
Susan Kristoferson and Lorene Shyba  
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**V**istas of the West is a well-designed, attractive hardback that may grace the coffee table of many a western home for years to come. It would make a good gift to mail to any puzzled easterner who wants to know why westerners claim to live in a modern-day paradise. Susan Kristoferson, an artist and former arts professor, selected the artists, and these full-colour images portray fine artistic accomplishment in many mediums ranging through photography, ceramics, landscape painting, engraving and metal sculpture. Accompanying these images are poetic offerings chosen more to amplify rather than describe the work of the artists. This accounts for the publisher's disclaimer that the art "was curated independently of the poetry, that is, not created to be direct illustrations."

Despite the disclaimer, a juxtaposition that works well here is "Contemplation," a landscape by Steve Coffey, with "Bittersweet," a poem by Patricia Frolander. In a style reminiscent of Van Gogh, a dog (likely a golden lab) in the foreground gazes across an autumnal field to a distant farmhouse, edged before a blue sky of puffy white clouds. The mood is one of indistinct longing. The poem seems to address a continuation of this longing, as if the painting only begins a human story. In a landscape beyond the painting's frame, Frolander recalls summer berry picking and "youth and desire reaping another harvest." But in a surprising turn that leads us back to the farmhouse, and the waiting dog, she writes: "Tears and sweat mingle as she gains the top of the hill,/ gaze resting on the ranch house in the distance./ By now the nurse has cleaned and fed him,/ watching for a recognition that never comes," and the poem ends: "she hopes he's calm today,/ wonders if his vacant mind remembers the taste of chokecherries."

Given the foreword by Doris Daley, an established star of the cowboy poetry circuit, it's not surprising to find some cowboy verses in this book. My favourite is "Closing the Loop" by Al (Doc) Mehl, a sympathetic ode on the ecology of the pine beetle, which is mated perfectly with a gorgeous crimson oil by Cindy Skrukwa entitled "After the Fire." "Comes the beetle, then the wildfire, then the flowers and the grass," writes Mehl. "See, it's not the beetle's fault that all the trees have now gone bare,/ That the hillside's turned to grey instead of green that once stood there./ No, it's all a grand design. It's just a cycle, like a hoop./ And that beetle's come to know he's simply there to close the loop." But I will close this loop with a reminder about an older connection to this place by Dene elder Elizabeth Yakeleya in "The Land: "I love my land,/ That's our food, my son,/ We love our land/ That's our heart."

—Sid Marty has published five books of poetry about the West.