

MAP OF THE FOLDED WORLD

AKRON SERIES IN POETRY



MAP OF THE FOLDED WORLD

Poems by

JOHN GALLAHER

The University of Akron Press
Akron, Ohio



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13 12 11 10 09 5 4 3 2 1

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

Gallaher, John, 1965-

Map of the folded world / John Gallaher. —1st ed.

p. cm. — (Akron series in poetry)

ISBN 978-1-931968-62-1 (pbk. : alk. paper)

I. Title.

PS3607.A415M37 2009

811'.6—DC22

2008053226

The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1984. ∞

Cover: "An Abundance of Caution," Acrylic on paper, Amy Casey, 2008.

Part pages: "Stacked," Acrylic on paper, Amy Casey, 2007.

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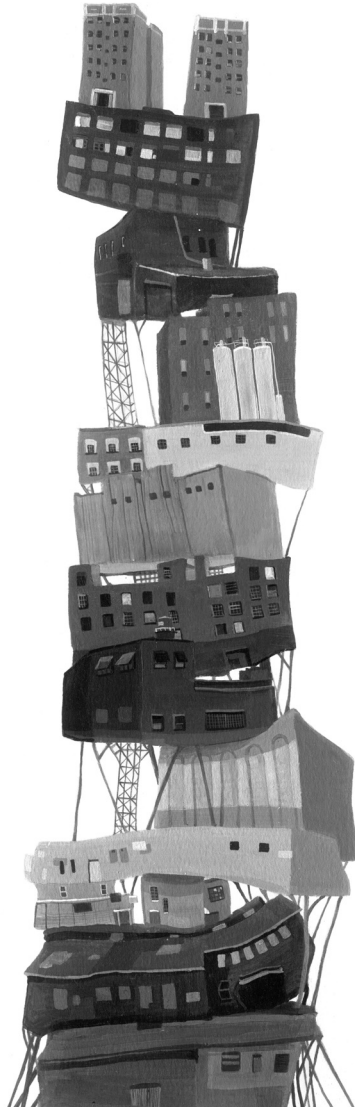
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There are known knowns. There are things we know that we know. There are known unknowns. That is to say, there are things that we now know we don't know. But there are also unknown unknowns. There are things we do not know we don't know.

—*Donald Rumsfeld, 2002*



one

Watermelon in the Afternoon

Several grandmothers are in a half-circle
eating watermelon from plastic cups.

Let us not forget to act differently.
Let us not forget
to start the music, to play the music loud.

And stir the chairs as they empty.
And close the rooms.

Call the families, then. The several families
down the hall.

Go tell the skinny girls.

The trees are up against the windows.
The wind is up against the trees. And everyone lies down
where they fall.

And this other part, where we think only
watermelon, only
flaring color.

Who knows you should have had
more sense?

Who knows there is more sense?

Earth-tone Anecdote

They are speaking in the other room,
about the family. They are speaking,
and weren't the families over,
and roiling. Didn't the families take off
and return, and in returning,
take off—

These were the first stories told me.
And wasn't I harder then, more
demanding,
in need of explicating.

Wasn't it something for the mind
at the top of the stairs, where the children sit,
listening.

In the doorways they bend behind,
didn't the families sound like crumpling paper,
like cedar in the fireplace,
and the white doors to the kitchen.

Weren't all the doors open then,
to the yard, to the trees this way
in the wind.

Didn't their singing please you.

And isn't pleasing something only seasons do.
A bit of wind in the trees.

They are closing the windows. They are
speaking in the other room,
about the family.

Weren't the children up
and flying
about the chandelier.

Didn't they find the chimney
and go.

The Danger in Plans

If you are just funny enough,
if you can just run fast enough,
no one will ever die.

Do you remember that?
And are you better now?

And all our meaning statements.
All our looking at things.

The women laughing around the table
in the kitchen.

Trouble on the way, and great joy.

I'm okay with it, but who's to know
the way I might feel
back then.
The men standing in the yard,
talking and laughing.

You forgot to watch me close my beautiful eyes,
the unspeaking gods
in a row,
at the edge of anything, toward.

The music of that.
The becoming. And maybe you are there.

Maybe you have ten coins.

The Way We Live Now

I told as much of the truth as I could imagine.
And something about the largeness of water, with your bridge of
orange and your bridge of sandalwood.
And the oceans sloshing at the trees.
With the meek bridges and the splendid bridges.
Look, everyone is out on all the bridges, to and back.
Connectivity, they're saying, so small.
And I have this argument to make.
Forth then, and fro.
And each shore is the shore.
And each shore is the last flight out.
The press of bodies slowed us to a near stop.
Did you see my rapid leg just then, or the other one?
When we all got to the end of grammar and began to float.
It was only tall and taller.
And then your bridges were somehow gone.
The train and the kissing bridges.
The sad and silver bridges to stand on all night.
And we all shared one thought.
One crowded thought.

What We're Up Against

On the way home from the funeral
we stopped for lunch.

Lunch was like the singing. Lunch
was like the flowers. The hole,

where we all began standing around
each other's buildings, eating,

and bringing more buildings with us.

When the air started thinning,
we sang that living was like this. We sang
for the ambulance

in front of the house. We waved.

The doctors stood around
mumbling
and checking off racing forms.

You breathed out and out
over the back wall you made
out of Coke bottles.

Someone in the other room
was playing a piano.

What are we going to do now,
we asked, placing sandwiches

in front of the empty seat
over and over,

until that's all there was.

On the Map of the Folded World

We're at a great distance.
Little specks of things.

We have this hunger.

So let us contemplate the hand. The distance
of the hand.
The grasping of the distance.
The hollow of the eye.

Let us say we are walking into a building
we'll not walk out of.

We know we're all here
somewhere. The table is set.
There are plants along the window.

Out of curiosity. Out of the body
travel.

We consist of smaller things.
"The curtains kept swaying."

We'll tell each other about it.
We'll accuse each other of not caring enough
about what we care about.

As we're all folding
from our houses. Folding into the yards.

Our flaming streets. Our streets
in flame.

Keys to Successful Disappearing

The statues are congregating in the courtyard,
and the dolls are all staring at us. We're running about.

We're laughing in the shrubbery. What were we, anyway,
sixteen or so? Jenny

asks. We must've been visiting someplace
important. I think it was the house

of an ex-president. And then we were reminded that alcohol
is a toxin. Roosevelt maybe, or Jefferson,

mounted under the shelf. Just to stand there (*shhh!*)
and to keep standing there, the room

doing flippy-flops. And not to be saying anything.
Nothing, really. And Buffy and Bucky, almost, out

in the field house. This's the old geography,
Mr. Cartouches said, organized and out-of-the-

way, yet totally accessible. Jenny touches the mirror. Waves.
What an atrium, we thought, and this

embossed mirror to keep it all in place.

I wish I could remember where that was,
and had a set of directions.

When One Has Lived Too Long Among Other People

Because life is a puzzle
isn't it, there is a person framed
by a window, stuck
on repeat.

Once they carried the entertaining
sunset around. Look, isn't this
entertaining?

And look, isn't it your body
that does the dreaming, the settled sunsets
stuck on repeat?

I am writing a note, I am not
falling down. I am writing *X*
of windows. I am thinking
there is no more.

That these are larger boxes
in this city, stuck on repeat.

We call it the apology of.
Or we call it the apothecary
landscape of.

I'm standing in a hospital room,
dusting you, for days.

If everything could only be cleaner.

When one has spent a long time
among others, the windows
are these little windows.

Here is a flower stuck on repeat,
to cross the summer rooms, to write
the summer notes.

The Rejected House

Strangers arrive with their old lovers in town
for the weekend. None of us
has ever had it so good. The shelves are full
of rubber fruit. Teeming, we say.
There's a television on. It's a tennis match.
Someone's whispering *love*
into a cell phone. The person on the other end
is asking
for pictures of this house
that was rejected
for being a surface house, a distant house.

"Look," Margo says, "I'm made of glass
and covered in glass." And the yard is full
of chickens' blood
and pianos on fire. And the chickens are full
of the blood of yards
as vans full of illegal workers pass
with pickups full of illegal workers
throwing each other into the ocean
many miles away
where we hear there are no oceans.

Many miles away, I'm holding the house
over the flower bed, so my desperation
can have an easier view
of another summer of birds
falling from the sky
onto this house that starts and stops. This house
that turns slowly above me in the breeze.

Why did I never realize
the house was so light, was this light?
Can this really be what all the fuss was about?
Just something with a little blood on it?