



Forbidden City (Phoenix Poets)

Gail Mazur

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Forbidden City (Phoenix Poets) Gail Mazur
from "Mount Fuji"

A draughtsman's draughtsman, Hokusai at 70

thought he'd begun to grasp the structures

of birds and beasts, insects and fish, of the way

plants grow, hoped that by 90 he'd have

penetrated to their essential nature.

And more, by 100, *I will have reached the stage*

where every dot, every mark I make will be

alive. You always loved that resolve, you'd repeat

joyfully—Hokusai's utterance of faith

in work's possibilities, its reward, that,

at 130, he'd perhaps have learned to draw.

Gail Mazur's poems in *Forbidden City* build an engaging meditative structure upon the elements of mortality and art, eloquently contemplating the relationship of art and life—and the dynamic possibilities of each in combination. At the collection's heart is the poet's long marriage to the artist Michael Mazur (1935–2009). A fascinating range of tone infuses the book—grieving, but clear-eyed rather than lugubrious, sometimes whimsical, even comical, and often exuberant. The note of pleasure, as in an old tradition enriched by transience, runs through the work, even in the final poem, "Grief," where "our ravenous hold on the world" is a powerful central element.

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