

**N u c l e a r**

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**J u l i a n a S p a h r**

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*Only a cripple in knowledge can believe that God created his creation without unfolding it.*

--Paraclesus

*Art has something to offer towards civilization's understanding and mastery of the nuclear age we have created.*

--James Acord

we are born to be awake not to be asleep  
things that grow and unfold are things that lead  
the art of shape—the mass and void  
the glow of radiation passing through liquid  
the stream of gamma rays  
random bursts of bubbles

a man toiled in rocky soil  
a man built a house  
a man cured another by means of a remedy  
all the time nature was changing certain elements into others

the chain of names begins  
Lucretius Epicurus Leucippus Democritus

as the atom splits  
a man creates out of dust  
a woman grows to give  
a body that cannot be discerned  
our crude eyesight is exposed  
things one cannot see have become things that hurt  
no longer feeling, wisdom, art  
the visual lies  
what lies behind it burns  
the littlest world of woman now contains atom  
a light that illuminates us more than the sun and the moon

the impure becomes pure through fire  
the energies of the sun and the man-made hydrogen bomb  
the sun an enormous nuclear machine

changing the balance of the elements  
a small amount of mass converted into energy  
results in a huge amount of energy

it is not gold  
not the gold of the common herd  
but life  
energy is called life

a small boy wanders in the darkness holding a hydrogen balloon  
a fire ball touches the ground then rises

hair bristling at the back of the neck

Roosevelt Stagg Princeton Einstein

the splitting of an atom into smaller atoms  
the fission of heavy atoms  
fission bombardment mesons neutron proton cellular fission

the chain reaction represented by a game of marbles

a great wave swept over a flat land  
a crater was scooped out of a desert floor by a giant's hand  
a raging fire storm burned out much of the city  
in the waning moments of civilization  
the light of a thousand suns  
Bikini Atoll Marshall Islands Eniwetok Atoll  
Monte Bello Islands Sinkiang  
by fission by fusion  
man had released the power in the atom

the atomic number is 92  
the atomic weight is 238.03  
a silvery metal, softer than iron  
fission of the atom results in the release of energy  
named in honor of the planet Uranus  
uranium is not a rare mineral  
the impact of atom on atom creates  
uranium fathers plutonium

Hiroshima Nagasaki

coyotes eat rabbits that lick salt of contaminated sodium deposits

remains stored in underground tanks  
contents as hot as ever—thermally radioactively  
the Manhattan Project Fat Man Little Boy

the renaming of time  
the way the self measures—foot and fathom  
how to measure this new length through the self  
time now a brisk wind  
half-lives that exceed years  
or Roentgen Becquerel Fermi Curie  
each new time brings death on its train

sediment ponds where radioactive waters cool  
contaminated clusters of buildings

there is an urgency to be respectful of this material  
these are sacred sites  
these are illustrations of necessities

the human element haunts

cages of mildly mutant rodents  
the nuclear worker  
the porter in front of Grand Central station  
the weather the water the radio the cancer patient  
the tip of the paintbrush in the woman's mouth  
the revigator which infuses radon gas into drinking water  
the function of vital substances  
the blood forming organs  
the lining of the stomach and intestines  
the skin the sexgland

an americium-cell smoke detector  
a tritium-powered exit sign from a commercial airliner  
X-ray tubes containing cobalt

now photons hit the page  
reflect through the pupils of your eyes

it may cause burns disease death  
it may harm future generations by causing mutations  
lantern mantels thorium hearing-aid batteries  
tritium heavy water uranium glazed Fiesta ware

when one feels the warmth of the sunshine  
when one does not feel the x-ray  
it is there

where is medicine science agriculture fuels peace  
here is Three Mile Island Chernobyl



but the dose determines the poison

carconite used to color war paint  
uranium salts and sand produce mosaic tesserae  
fluorescent chartreuse of canary or Vaseline glass  
sodium uranite in ceramic glaze yields yellow orange black

a brilliant res-orange produced by uranium  
an appeal to modern taste  
bright, solid colors over stream-lined forms

before the atomic bomb the only proven use for uranium

one must set entity against entity  
each becomes the mate of the other  
actinium to lawrencium  
the forge of nature produces  
wood grows but not as board and charcoal  
clay exists but not as pot

only through purity of motivation  
the idea of transformation  
really transforming the self  
three pennies in the foundation of a building  
welding splatter  
dried flower petals  
the claws and shoulders of a desiccated cat  
the seed that rots to bear fruit  
decay that begins birth  
it is not about gold

when the goal of seeking is the hidden  
nothing is hidden because there is an art of signs

the storm is the solar system

as the energy is liberated  
one must learn to see

an old man opened his eyes,  
raises his son's hand  
to his cheek, dies

Vulcan is an artist

the nuclear age is about process  
the movement of particles the mass the speed  
the actual transformation of elements  
the release of the energies of the universe  
neutrons are the chisels of the nuclear age

the gaseous tail of the comet always streams out away from the sun

we are all in this  
it is our nuclear age  
cosmic radiation of our bodies—  
tritium carbon 14 potassium 40

Richland Hanford White Bluffs  
Know Knukes  
Be a Nuclear Family, Radiate Love  
We Glow for God  
Home of the Bombers  
Nuke 'em till They Glow  
a mascot dances wearing a flight suit helmet  
oxygen mask  
Little Boy stickers decorate a lunch box  
a bar serves Nuclear Ice Tea  
80 and 150 proof gin vodka rum

the age of stone several hundred thousand years  
the age of bronze five thousand years  
the age of iron two thousand years  
we are fifty years into the nuclear age

to see the closeness of art and science

the atoms of vision that will not further divide

a whole technology that sees only swords is lost  
there must be a plow and with it a statue  
science answers questions

art answers questions  
to carve out of salt is to feed deer  
a necessary illumination

the myth makes it universal

the domain of the timeless a symbol valid for all time

a horse's skull atop a five-foot trapezoidal column

enduring materials

interplay of planes and curves

exoskeleton zygomatic arch parietal bones

the slickness of saliva to the mouth

the unity of both the mass and the void is the radiation that passes through it

the light of radiation fills the void

while the serpent that eats its own tail is the repeated symbol

cyclotron synchrotron ablation maelstrom

a frog waits

vanadium accelerator inoculant

a king prepares to reap

Geiger counter reliquary

a winged sun waits atop a pedestal to rise

hadron baryon meson quark

a man stands amidst tumbling bottles

pumps valves gauges thick slabs of leaded glass  
elaborate emergency devices

the lion reaches up to eat the sun

disintegration transformation