

Two Poems by Chris Giovacchini

**The Sign of the Cross**

Decades ago, I first saw the crosses, during border town sorties, and traveling  
overland  
In a pickup, along the entire length of Mexico. On desolate desert roads, next to  
the crumpled  
Remains of burnt out old sedans, they sprouted. On winding, remote, mountain  
passes  
Without shoulders, they hung on ledges outcropping from stone, with a name, a  
photo,  
Pictures of saints, the Virgin of Guadalupe, plastic flowers soiled with road grime,  
and small  
Votive candles, invariably lit

The cross sightings sharpened eye and alertness. Driving two lane roads in states  
Of disrepair, with care and precaution, strained wits and reactions, leaving one  
stressed,  
And exhausted by dusk.

Crossing back to the first world, they remained, sadly looking on, across the  
grubby,  
Dusty, border. Over a few decades, tenaciously, they've followed, finding their  
way.  
Once unknown, now commonplace, the crosses have emigrated, adapting and  
naturalizing,  
Flourishing, as weeds or wildflowers, undeterred by agricultural inspections.

Cars whizz past such a cross shrine near my home.  
A roadside memorial of potted plants, flower vases,  
flute playing guardian angels, whirligigs, and leis,  
a black mitt and softball, sentimental cards,  
and a small wind chime,

Down the road, a white picket cross sprouted. There is a yellow daisy planted.  
A pink tree rose in a pot, a wreath of fading artificial flowers,  
A little angel wears a gold woman's name tag.  
A small cross leans against the larger one.  
A forlorn, sodden white teddy bear sits between the two, keeping a silent vigil.  
"We love you and miss you," reads a handwritten note.

Northern crosses resonate with their poor comrades throughout the Mexican frontier,  
Marking the spot where some soul transitioned.  
Cross cultural exchange, giving permission: to grieve, to process, to let go,  
Kindly eroding away the edges of our lives.

### **La Pietà**

After the long line, it was smaller, than I had remembered,  
As if it had mummified.  
I missed being close to it, running my fingers along it.

Although, even at this distance I could see the shining polished  
Knee and thigh where hands had buffed  
Involuntarily through the centuries.

I remember touching its coolness, trompe l'oeil  
Of the white marble bunched and folded as cloth,  
The dislocated right shoulder,

Thirty years later, behind the bullet proof glass and the barrier now,  
A sculpted chunk of white snow, suspended in time,  
Soiled no more by passing traffic

Like a glimpse through a car window of a roadside accident frozen in a  
Flashing, passing frame, a woman crouched, holding a man,  
The mesmerizing misfortune, darkly spellbinding,

The woman's face frozen, in an agonizing, compassionate glance,  
Mirroring the frustrating, irreversible, sequence of events,  
That strive to convey the loss only remotely imaginable,

Of a mother cradling her dead son