

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