

PETROGLYPH  
AMERICANA

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# PETROGLYPH AMERICANA

SCOTT EZELL



EMPTY BOWL PRESS

*To Mooze and Bean(r)—*

*friends on both sides of the Great Water.*

## PETROGLYPH AMERICANA

*“What we carve with engines and antennae  
will be weathered by millennia.”*

*—Jesus P. de Koch*

**petroleum** *noun* [late Middle English : from medieval Latin, from Latin *petra* ‘rock’ (from Greek) + Latin *oleum* ‘(olive) oil.’]

A thick, flammable, bituminous, yellow-to-black mixture of gaseous, liquid, and solid hydrocarbons that occurs naturally in the upper strata of the earth, can be separated into fractions including gasoline, naphtha, kerosene, fuel, and lubricating oils, paraffin wax, and asphalt, and is used as raw material for a wide variety of derivative products; oil.

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LONE PINE

I hitchhiked to America, back  
across the ocean from a dozen years  
of other shores—

home,  
to presidential hitmen, genocide engines, the dust  
of burning mountains  
sloping to the sea—

diaspora of one  
over and over,  
300 million trails, but

I am alive  
within the wrack and wreck of the world,  
ink and oil stains on my hands.



In a San Diego cul-de-sac  
I load the Blue Shark with notebooks and guitars,  
the car door hangs open  
like a mouth about to speak,  
an old friend slaps a hunski in my hand—  
“lay it down on red when you get to Vegas, man,  
and let it ride.”  
I slam the door, fire up the engine  
and drive the afternoon up I-15  
with loose tailpipe and rusted wheelwells,  
pinecones on the dash,  
north through chaparral hills

quilted with avocado orchards,  
gardens of granite,  
boulders like the backs of whales—

desert glare and shimmer of mirage,  
daguerreotype clouds spill like iodine and mercury  
into the silver sky,  
machines blow leaves off sidewalks,  
trash trucks hum and lift  
plastic recycle bins  
stained with grease and wine—  
potted plants hang  
from clay roof tiles and stucco walls,  
sailboats list in driveways,  
garage golf clubs  
rust and wait with metal shafts  
for the clutch of hands,  
the impact of balls on tees,  
piston exertion of gasoline  
strains against continental mass,  
jet planes glide  
condominium horizons.

East L.A. freeway scene,  
the most exotic landscape  
in 10,000 miles of return—  
lipstick-colored cars  
idle and stall  
on blackened concrete lanes,  
a million metal bubbles  
thrum with fossil heat,  
each carries a single human heart  
up the road, up towards  
heaven,

tinted windows seal cool  
against the burn of sun and stone—

turn the radio  
to the station of your choice,  
pound the ceiling, stomp the floor,  
but it's never loud enough  
to break down  
or ascend  
with a heart of rock and roll.

*Visit Nellis' Sunrise Vista Golf Course—a championship course  
with chipping, bunker, and two putting greens. Air-conditioned  
clubhouse features a complete pro shop and snack bar!*



Exit the interstate  
into valleys dun and gray, the southern edge of the Sierra,  
shoulders of stone lift cracked and straining peaks to  
occlude the sun, light straddles and slides the sky  
over Kramer Junction, Inyokern, China Lake—  
from the edge of China  
the same view unfolds  
across the Karakoram  
into Afghanistan,  
Afghanistan is just  
a mountain ridge away  
from these  
mud-colored valleys, this  
violent thrust and thirst of stone—  
we lack only bramble huts, flocks  
of sheep, the memory of songs, they lack only  
bomber planes, industrial currency,

the refinery fuel to drive  
carbon and steel  
into every mile, every pore.



North Hiway 395 to Lone Pine,  
portal to Mt. Whitney,  
kick around town at dusk,  
watch pro football in a bar,  
read *Hamlet* between plays,  
hut 1, hut 2, alas poor Yorick.  
Locals talk irrigation rights, and  
drink pitcher beer by neon signs.

Stoplight blinks  
the empty street—  
up towards Whitney, snow  
banks the edges of the road.  
Radio static in the speakers of the Shark,  
park by a trickle creek,  
read by headlamp  
in my Tibetan tunic and Uighur cap,  
sleep in the car, surrounded by the slur  
of water over stone—

12 years ago I climbed this highest peak  
of America's contiguity  
to begin a journey, now I wonder  
what I have done but burn  
miles and years  
with a desire to sink  
into some yen or myth of home,  
a subterranean lake of crude  
black and infinite  
beneath the crust of earth—

wake  
to dawn across Whitney and Muir peaks,  
wash face in snow-stream,  
drone of a power transformer  
across a dirt road, within  
a fence of razor wire.

Coffee and pancakes in the Lone Pine diner, walls a-crowd  
with cartoon murals of wagon trains,  
black and white portraits of cowboy movie stars,  
sharp sideburns and greased-up hair,  
yellowed to the color of apple flesh.  
A cut-out John Wayne  
stands by the gumball machine,  
hands on holstered guns—  
a skinny kid with goatee and Harley-Davidson cap  
pushes a dishcart like a hangover  
down the naugahyde aisle,  
purgatory of egg yolk, bacon rinds  
and ketchup stains—  
“need some more coffee honey?” Pop music bleats through silver speakers,  
my waitress bumps her ass to the beat and sings along.  
“I love coming to work,” she says, “I got three kids,  
it’s the only time I get  
to be alone”—  
out the window, across the street,  
sunlight shines like oil on plywood knots and grain,  
blue chalk lines and metal brackets,  
new shopfront facades.

*Nevada hunters have gained access to a portion of Nellis  
Air Force Base.*

*For the second year in a row, hunters purchased tags for bighorn  
sheep on Stonewall Mountain.*

*Hunters and fighter pilots now share nearly 60 square miles of land—  
Until 1994, the land had never been touched by sportsmen.*



Idle the engine of the Shark, disengage  
the clutch and drive  
past a sign for the  
Lone Pine Paiute-Shoshone reservation,  
a historical marker invites me to read  
“how the west was won”—

a spotted woodpecker with a bright red comb  
cracks at the bark of a desiccated tree—  
I saw the same bird in Sumatra  
as I hitchhiked north to Banda Aceh,  
riding the roof of a minivan,  
orangutans and gibbons in the jungle canopy—

Hiway 136 unscrolls like an asphalt tongue,  
east to Death Valley and Vegas—  
at the edge of the road an Indian woman  
shuffles like a blunted spade  
into a schist of desert light,  
thick braid of hair  
down the center of her back,  
her serape stained with  
sweat and dust.

DEATH VALLEY