## **SESTINA** poem by Amanda Quaid

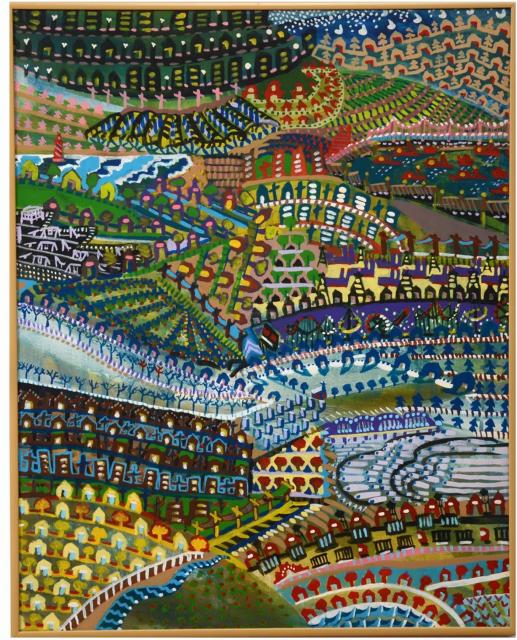


Image: "All of Us" by Lou Storey. "Sestina" was written by Amanda Quaid for Rattle's Ekphrastic Challenge, April 2023, and selected as the Artist's Choice.

We buried him behind the church before the carnies came to town. Now at night, you can hear the laughter all the way to Lover's Lane and past my house. I miss the quiet, if I ever really had it. They tell me it's the sound of progress.

My Daddy once measured my progress on a worn-down wall inside the church. He used a pencil to mark it, confirming that I was the shortest kid in town. Then he drove us back to our house the way was longer then—and laughter

bandied back and forth between us, laughter like there had been progress toward something like friendship, our house a little more like a home than a church that day. At that time in our town, men kept to themselves, and that's all there was to it.

I've heard there's a village, though I've never seen it, where boys run naked by the sea, and laughter tumbles forth from the carnelian huts in town. On warm June days, I wonder if progress will take me there, where church can be found not in a building or house

but in bodies, in eyes and in beauties that house secrets, and some days I want that so much that it hurts. Could bodies be church, I wonder, could voices, could laughter be church, and is it a yielding to progress to forfeit this town

and find, I suppose, a different town, a brightly-colored candy apple house where I could feel the call of progress move in me and with it joy and life and song and laughter in this body I could come to call my church?

But a town, in spite of progress, has a gate, and it becomes a little higher every year. At night, the laughter reaches all the way to my house past the church.

