

## This Week's Montage

—With a Smile

## Comparative Haiku

selected by

Allan Burns

The boundary between haiku and senryu has always been problematic in English. It has been defined various ways, with reference to both form and content. Perhaps most commonly, if rather simplistically, it has been asserted that haiku are nature-oriented whereas senryu are human-oriented. Other accounts say that haiku are “open” whereas senryu are “closed” or that haiku are serious and senryu are humorous or satirical. Or haiku are based on intuition and senryu on intellection. The formal distinction, which has been most decisive for Japanese poets, goes back to the origins of the two genres. Haiku originated from *hokku*, the starting verse of a *renku*, which is cut and contains a seasonal reference. Senryu originated from *hiraku*, the inner verses of a *renku*, which are uncut and do not contain seasonal references. Since creativity is fluid and uninhibited, when it comes to actual examples, we sometimes find that these various characteristics can be combined and conflict with one another in all sorts of interesting ways, wreaking havoc with categories and definitions. As William J. Higginson noted, “it is not always easy to place a poem in one genre or the other” (*The Haiku Handbook*, pg. 233). Some have thrown up their hands when it comes to the gray zone, preferring to speak not of haiku and senryu but of poems or *ku* (Japanese for “verse”). In contemporary Japan poets are sometimes said to be haikuists or senryuists simply because that’s what they claim. See what you make, genre-wise, of the poems below, applying all the tests. I suspect some will seem clear-cut and others not. This week’s gallery is occasioned by Pursuit of Happiness Week. As Yogi Berra once said, “Pair off in threes.”

Yu Chang (b. 1938)

George Swede (b. 1940)

Jörgen Johansson (b. 1956)

stepping out  
with my holey socks  
summer stars

parting her pink robe  
—daybreak

blind date  
I ask the waitress  
for a candle

windowless classroom  
we talk about thinking  
outside the box

warm kitchen  
the rise and fall  
of friends’ laughter

short night  
loon calls echo  
our laughter

last day at camp  
I capture a chipmunk  
in the photograph

1–2 from *A New Resonance: Emerging Voices in English-Language Haiku* (Red Moon Press, 1999)  
3 from *Modern Haiku* 38.3, 2007  
4 from *Frogpond* 32.1, 2009  
5–7 from *The Onawa Poems, 1999–2008*, edited by Paul MacNeil (Ship Pond Press, 2009)

putting holes  
in my argument  
the woodpecker

hot summer night  
she takes off  
her crucifix

thick fog lifts  
unfortunately, I am where  
I thought I was

dropping stone after stone  
into the lake I keep  
reappearing

alone at last  
I wonder where  
everyone is

her bed  
my imagination left  
no wrinkles

exchanging pleasantries  
while hammering  
crab shells

1–6 from *Almost Unseen* (Brooks Books, 2000)  
7 from *The Heron’s Nest* 9.4, 2007

moonstruck  
a man serenading  
the wrong window

art deco knob  
it was here  
i was made

paranormal fair...  
a shadow of his former self  
the ghost hunter

lifted out of his shoes  
he praises  
the bully’s nose ring

cold Sunday—  
walking by myself  
with her

their first quarrel  
ended  
in bed

the stiff glove  
on the ground  
giving me the finger

1 from *Simply Haiku* 3.4, 2005  
2 from *Frogpond* 30.3, 2007  
3 previously unpublished  
4 from *Simply Haiku* 4.2, 2006  
5 from *Roadrunner* 5.2, 2005  
6 from *Simply Haiku* 4.4, 2006  
7 from *Simply Haiku* 7.3, 2009

## Previous Montages

October 25: Halloween Masque  
November 1: The Europeans

## Next Week's Montage: THF

Dave Russo  
Billie Wilson  
Scott Metz