

Harvest

by Janis Barlow

Out of green-gold hillsides of Vietnam,
the urgent whisper of soft grass, the booming

call of the Crested Argus
from a thick tangle of trees.

Two young brothers hunch under the fiery sun
digging up sweet potatoes for their pigs.

Steam rises over the bright and ample field,
the wide brims of their hats catching light, and the heat

pressing its damp palms into their small backs.
Into the earth, the cold grey tips of their shovels;

out of the earth, the smooth orange flesh of sweet potatoes,
the knobby hard shell of a bomb.

Into the silence and peace of their mother's kitchen,
a blast twenty years late from another world.

She is making pho, her lips pursed
over a spoonful of the rice-noodle broth.

The sun floats above her immaculate kitchen,
above the amusement park where children play

amid war relics – battered helicopters and planes, even
rockets – to the coast,

where fishermen in colorful wooden boats pull up nets
pulsing with silvery fish,

where women in salt fields
balance snow-white mountains on their shoulders,

their heads bound in cloth leaving eyes
barely visible through slits, eyes that speak

of sadness, a sadness they gather and bear on their backs.
The sun floats above pink rivers that bleed into the landscape,

above the shattered field strewn with the ripped bodies
of sweet potatoes, pebbles of bone, the stench

carried to seared edges of a green sky, to a mother
making soup.