Virus Vigil

Poetry by Jim Blackburn
Art by Isabelle Scurry Chapman
The Cormorant Hermann Park

At Hermann Park in the afternoon
Walking away the stress of the day.

The tree rises above the lake,
A mute sculpture of nature amidst the water
That brings back the cormorants day after day –
A virtual beacon, a sign to migrants,
A safe harbor for the weary travelers,
With fish aplenty in the bayou beyond,
A place for the cormorant,
A fishing machine dressed in black
Diving beneath the surface,
Flying within the water like within the air,
Magnificent creations of nature
Simply fishing.

And after consuming the water’s scaled beings,
The cormorant lands on the wooden lake sculpture,
And spreads its wings in a ceremony grand,
Feathers held out in suspended animation,
Readjusting now and then to focus the sun,
Using nature’s gifts once again as its own,
A black bird at peace on the limb of the tree.

And I smile and say hi, greeting my friend,
The teacher that has shown me to see
That nature has much to offer and give
If we only we are open to ask and to hear.

I turn to leave and let out a deep breath,
Blowing away the stress of the day,
Release provided by listening to the black bird
In the leafless tree in the lake in Hermann Park.
Double-Crested Cormorant

Driving along Stewart Road  
On the bay side of Galveston Island.

The wetland swales are blue dots  
And long dashes rimmed by green,  
Pools of life amongst the stilt houses  
And canals of the West End scene.

From behind the salt cedar  
The splashing catches my ear,  
Small waves of water emerging,  
Something exciting is very near.

I stop – waiting – watching,  
And then the avian parade begins,  
Rounding the corner roseates emerge,  
Pretty enough to break a lens.

Pink feathers bright from shrimp  
Seined through their bucket beak,  
Followed by the mariners emerging,  
Black bird heads up for a peek.

Four, five – then ten black forms,  
The cormorants a living submarine,  
Joining to fish with their pink allies,  
Adding gravitas - a serious mien.

They move together as a battle line,  
A feeding machine of pink and black,  
Pushing the shrimp and mullet ahead,  
All forward motion, not looking back.
Onward march the feathered troops,
The silver fish sparkling in the sun,
The finger mullet racing before them,
At pond’s edge, nowhere left to run.

Efficiently working for their daily fare,
The cormorants impressive with creativity
Working with pink ones to fill their beaks
Putting to rest another good day’s activity.

So next in Galveston take Stewart Road
To see what’s happening nature-wise
And say hi to the cormorants fishing the pond
And establish for yourself some natural ties.