



## VERSE IN PLACE

MARTHA SERPAS

### Ghost Trees

*Pointe Aux Chênes, LA*

Toward season's end when butterfly trawls spill  
purple-eyed shrimp, and a cool north wind scatters  
mosquitoes across the bay—moon's running,

crabs are fat, blowfish surface with hardheads  
and flounder like minnows to a lantern—under  
a giant moon like this you can see ghost trees,

a stark statuary across the marsh. You'd think some  
grave digger tended these lacy roots, trimmed the grass,  
and whitewashed the skin of their contorted branches.

(If live oaks walked, you might guess these looked back  
and were quicklimed to their lonely, twisted spots.)  
As if through a peephole frame, you see the past—

a ridge of green smoke, the vestige of fresh  
water through the chenière—dissolve in the haze.  
Salt has blanched the bark stone-smooth—no olive-

colored leaves hanging like lures—the ghost trees hold  
only the memory of solid ground, their coiled roots  
braid nothing but brackish water and air. Storms

can't challenge this specter—frozen in agony  
or ecstasy, who knows which, and what does it matter  
when their shining bodies keep forking the darkness?

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**MARTHA SERPAS**, a native of South Louisiana, is a poet, professor, environmentalist, and hospital chaplain. She has published three volumes of poetry: *Côte Blanche* (New Issues), *The Dirty Side of the Storm* (Norton), and *The Diener* (LSU Press). Her fourth, *Double Effect*, will appear in August 2020 from LSU Press. Her poems have appeared in *The New Yorker*, *The Nation*, *Southwest Review*, and *Poetry*, as well as a number of anthologies, including the Library of America's *American Religious Poems* and *The Art of the Sonnet* (Harvard University Press). Her essays on Cajun culture and the environment have appeared in *The New York Times* and *Image: A Journal of Arts and Religion*. She co-produced *Veins in the Gulf*, a documentary on Louisiana's land loss; and with Michele Burgess, she has collaborated on three artists' books, *The Diener*, *Ghost Trees*, and *Reliquary*. She holds degrees in English and creative writing from Louisiana State, New York University, and the University of Houston, and a master of divinity from Yale Divinity School. She teaches creative writing at the University of Houston.



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