



Sean Sexton's Palette
2014, Photograph by the Artist

Philip Levine

Immortal Birds

There's a battered scrub jay lives
in the lemon tree in my back yard,
has a voice like tin snips dragged
across a steel file. He must think
he's a choral director; the mockers
join in to become an oratorio
of teamsters punching out.

I thought when I left Detroit
to head west I would find groves
of orange trees, a vast land tilting
slowly toward the severe peaks
of the Sierra Nevada, I thought
I'd left the corrugated world
behind in Flint and Wyandotte.

Where are the fabled birds we
read about? Miguel Hernandez
climbed a tree in the Atocha Park
so that Neruda might hear the song
of the nightingale. My jay jabs
his thick beak into a lemon, gargles,
and croaks out the anthems of Ecorse.