

ROBIN SAWYER

12-Bar Blues, 2017
Oil on canvas, 42 x 48 in.



COURTESY THE ARTIST

ALISON LUTERMAN

Praise

The thin soprano tune floated up from under the building,
which was pancaked on its cheap foundation.
Haiti, two weeks after the quake, hell's aftermath.
A hundred thousand buried overnight
in hastily dug ditches, because of the heat.
So no one believed she was really alive,
this girl trapped under rubble for almost two weeks,
until a worker heard tunes issuing from twisted rebar
and stopped, petrified in disbelief.

She was still singing when they pulled her out,
skinny as the edge of a sickle moon.
I watched on TV from my living room
as Darlene Etienne, age sixteen,
was drawn forth from her living tomb,
caroling hymns in Creole.

How many mornings have I struggled
with the voice in my brain
that hisses, *Give up, you are lost?* But this girl
sang herself through the closed door of the grave
and it opened and she rose. Praise the light.
Praise the few drops of water that kept her alive,
dripping from a broken pipe. Praise the slender
thread of song that told them where to dig.

Alison Luterman's forthcoming poetry collection *In the Time of Great Fires* is the winner of the 2020 Catamaran Poetry Prize. Her books include the poetry collections *Desire Zoo* (Tia Chucha, 2014), *The Largest Possible Life* (Cleveland State University Poetry Center, 2001), and *See How We Almost Fly* (Pearl Editions, 2009), and a collection of essays, *Feral City* (SheBooks, 2014). Her writings have been published in *The Sun*, the *New York Times*, the *Boston Phoenix*, *Rattle*, the *Brooklyn Review*, *Oberon*, and other journals and anthologies. Luterman has taught at the Writing Salon in Berkeley, the Esalen Institute, and the Omega Institute, as well as at high schools, juvenile halls, and poetry festivals.