

## RALPH JOACHIM

*Seasonal Variations, 2013*  
Acrylic on Canvas, 108 x 108 in



COURTESY R. BLITZER GALLERY

## AL YOUNG

# In the Realm of Film, A Lyric Form

*in memory of Gill Dennis (1941–2015)*

The realm of film, a lyric form, a poem,  
imagines, reimagines all the senses.  
Imaginations (summer, wildfires) roam  
and rim the dusty edges of our lenses.

You taught us this, screenwriter, yes, you did.  
Your loping walk said, “Show, don’t tell. Act out.”  
To watch a movie, when I was a kid,  
begged for a Bogart grin, a Brando pout;

Black Butterfly McQueen, all big-eyed, yelling  
“Git outta my kitchen!” Or Tarzan in the trees,  
or Chaplin, Crawford, Streisand, Marilyn.  
Your open take—on pictures, poetries—

let you co-*Walk the Line* with Johnny Cash,  
your eyes and ears wide open all the time.  
*Finding the Story* (silence flushed with hush)  
liked where a guitar fits in with a lime;

abuse, not just abuse; a fist, a stab.  
Abstractions do not work on screen. You need  
a tough rememberer with a gift of gab.  
Detail, details, the tales we long to read

beg content and its discontents. You wrote.  
You taught. In all your scripts, you gave it up.  
*The Black Stallion* doesn’t say your name, but spoke  
in all its first-act speechlessness of help,

said, “Save-Our-Ship”; a horse, a boy, a neigh.  
*A Patch of Blue*, another film we loved,  
you lived. You tried. There, Sidney Poitier  
costars with your first wife. Blinded and shoved

by pain, by struggle, you both soon collapse.  
I wrote for Sidney Poitier. I tried.  
I wrote for Cosby, Pryor, Dick Gregory.  
Like you, I wrote the sky, the sea. I cried.

No Korean War vet like you, I’m measuring  
degrees and parallels. Degrees still beep us.  
Kristen, a Peckinpah, your life-love, maps  
and guides you home. No further need to keep us,

much less yourself, in darkness. What a ride.  
Your *Riders of the Purple Sage*, *Return to Oz*,  
your *On My Own*, *Without Evidence*. I confide  
I didn’t know your talent ran to jazz,

the what-it-takes to chart, then lead a band.  
Director, you, nudged Angelina Jolie,  
lush chops and all, toward acting, drama. And,  
behind the camera: you, Gill, poetry.

**Al Young** is a poet, novelist, essayist, screenwriter, and professor. On May 15, 2005 he was named Poet Laureate of California by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger. Young’s many books include novels, collections of poetry, essays, and memoirs. His work has appeared in literary journals and magazines including *Paris Review*, *Ploughshares*, *Essence*, *The New York Times*, *Chicago Review*, *Seattle Review*, *Brilliant Corners: A Journal of Jazz & Literature*, *Chelsea*, *Rolling Stone*, *Gathering of the Tribes*, and in anthologies including the *Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, and the *Oxford Anthology of African American Literature*.