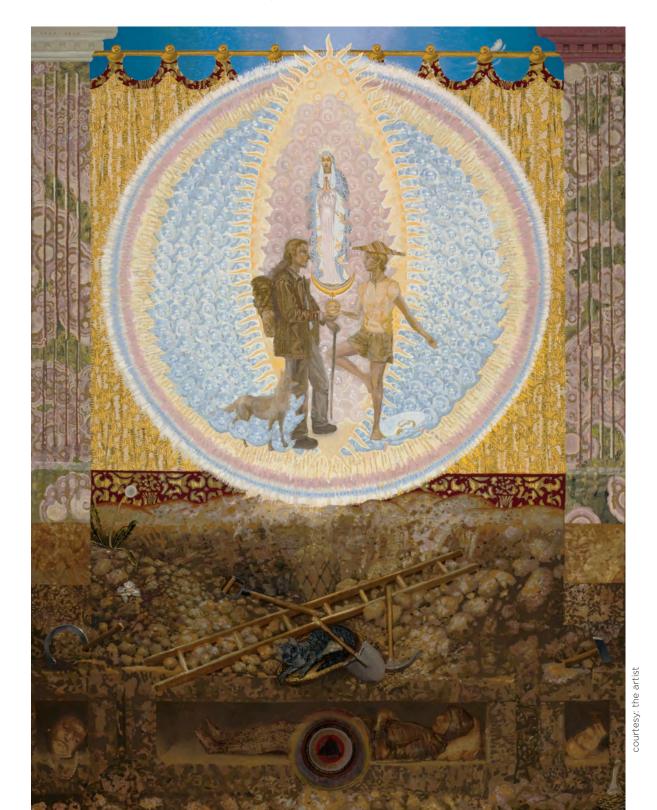
FRANK GALUSZKA

Above and Below. 2006 oil on canvas, 108 x 80 in



RENÉE M. SCHELL

Sestina for César Chávez

to school, a day hot as fields in the Central Valley where the sun crawls across the sky and burns off coastal fog and grief, I read Markham's poem "The Man with the Hoe."

The day my son wore red and black

Millet's painting "The Man with the Hoe" inspired Markham's words, black with the portent of uprising, grief already part of the picture. The fields that yield berries and lettuce burn to tell their story to my son.

In the painting a man in the sun leans on his short-handled hoe. See his crooked back. Muscles burn from the burden of stooping to black soil, pulling weeds from the murmuring fields. My son learns about Sí se puede and grief.

That word is new to him—grief when it means mothers and fathers thirsty in the sun. Children ask, teachers field the questions: What is a boycott? What is a hoe? The assembly gathers on asphalt black as the puzzled looks of first grade. My questions burn,

too. If Markham's poem burned, as they say, like wildfire, his grief of 1899 etched into the black and white of The Chronicle, The Examiner, The Sun, why did we write 1975 before that hoe was banished from the fields?

I wonder aloud to the omniscient fields. How many piles of tools have burned? How did that short-handled hoe live such a long life, caked with grief? After school I will ask my son to tell me the story of red and black,

to tell me why the short-handled hoe rhymes with grief, why the fields fall silent when the back of the neck burns, why the sun, so golden, can shine black.

Renée M. Schell's poetry has appeared in *On the Dark Path:* An Anthology of Fairy Tale Poetry, Cæsura, Granny Smith Magazine, Red Wheelbarrow (student edition), Perfume River Poetry Review, the anthology Poetry on the Move at literarymama.com, and is forthcoming in the anthology Song of Los Gatos. She holds a Magister degree from the University of Bonn and a PhD in German Studies from Stanford University. She is a freelance editor and translator from the German as well as a poetry editor for the Willow Glen Poetry Project and for Red Wheelbarrow (national edition). In her free time she can be found docenting at the Edwin Markham House in History Park, San José.