

JULIANNA MCCARTHY

They Were a Famous Pair

like Hope and Crosby or Abbott and Costello they were
the Bear and the Bengal Tiger.

When a studio signed up the Bear,
the Bengal came along to hold his paw. That must have
been something to see; the Bear in front of the
camera acting the part of the bear and his friend
lying beside the trainer out of camera range, but still
where the Bear could see him.

When the director called CUT the Bear would drop to
all fours and pad over to the Bengal,
like a black hearse pulling up to a bright Gypsy wagon,
and the Tiger would stand, touch noses with the
Bear, and lie back down.

When they were hired for their first location
in “Old Tucson,” a made-for-movies western town,
it looked like accommodating the Tiger might be
a problem.

You see, the Bear had his own air-conditioned truck
to sleep in, but the Bengal always slept with his trainer.
Came down to sneaking the Bengal into a motel.
So, while the bar was still open and most of the guests in
a booth or already in bed, the tiger team stationed
lookouts
in the hallway—when it was safe the trainer and the
Bengal sauntered
down the hall and into their room. No telling what they
did to prepare the room for the big guy; somehow
they got away with it.

Hard not to think about the Bengal shut up
in a darkened motel with all the motel sounds and
smells. Nothing around him appropriate to *Panthera
tigris tigris*, while just
on the other side of sliding glass doors was the chlorine
smell of the swimming pool and cool water and
beyond lay
the whole Sonoran Desert: the tomcat scent of sage,
crushed clover, and tall grasses, saguaros moon
shadowed, feather-leaved paloverdes and the musky
scat of mountain lions, wild boar,
and antelope, the gold-eyed flash of a falcon.
How do you measure the sacrifices a friend makes in
support of a career?

Julianna McCarthy is a Schieble Sonnet Prize winner, a Pushcart Prize nominee, and a Los Angeles Emerging Poet. Her poems have appeared in the *Antioch Review*, *Boxcar Poetry Review*, *Tidal Basin Review*, the *American Journal of Poetry*, *Nimrod*, and *Rise Up Review*. She holds an MFA from New England College. Her chapbook *Everything Hurts* was published by Latitude 34 Press in 2018.

BETSEY BATCHELOR

Collar, 2020
Oil on canvas, 44 x 56 in.



COURTESY THE ARTIST