

## JAN WURM

*Three Men in a Boat*, 2010  
oil on canvas, 36 x 48 in



courtesy: the artist

## CAROL V. DAVIS

### The Equation

Consider the equation between poison and beauty:  
Does each black stripe on a monarch butterfly add to its  
lethal potency?

Females with wings of Jerusalem gold, the males boasting  
a deep rust with a black spot on their hind wings.  
Do such gaudy colors attract or repel birds hunting a mouthful?

Heavenly plants are often the most poisonous:  
Angel's trumpet—and the Easter lily, a symbol of the Virgin  
Mary—both deadly.

In Victorian times each flower was assigned a meaning:  
*Marigold* = jealousy  
*Lily of the valley* = purity of heart, sprung from Eve's tears

A man I loved asked me to plant oleander; I refused, convinced  
he would succumb to the curve of its petals, lick its white lips.

Later we walked through a meadow of clinging nettles,  
dead-ending at a small pile of bones.  
He did not notice the ducks lifting over the water.

**Carol V. Davis** is the author of *Between Storms* (Truman State University Press, 2012). She won the 2007 T.S. Eliot Prize for *Into the Arms of Pushkin: Poems of St. Petersburg*. Her poetry has been read on NPR radio and Radio Russia, and at the Library of Congress. She teaches at Santa Monica College, California.