

CHARLES JENSEN

Instructions Between Takeoff and Landing

First, remain calm. Stow loose articles in the overhead bin or the space beneath the seat in front of you. Keep necessary in-flight items like prescriptions and headphones within easy reach. Command your bladder to relax. Listen to the preflight instructions. Identify exits. Identify suspicious passengers. Identify those who are suspicious of you. Smile at the flight attendant. S/he may need to assist you in case of an emergency, and you do not want him or her to hate you. Do not be a douchebag to the person sitting next to you. Come to an agreement about the armrest. Place your feet somewhere, you know, out of the way. Remain in your shoes. If you feel the need to pass gas, please, God, don't. In the event of turbulence, hold on to something firm. Do not hold on to your seat neighbor. In the event of severe turbulence, hold your tongue. Do not scream and kick the seat in front of you. Do not shout, "Dear God, dear God, we're going to die." Do not be caught praying to your God unless you really think it's the end. Do not flail. Do not whimper.

In the event of a water landing, do not change into your bathing suit. Do not change into your birthday suit. Do not change anything about what you are wearing unless it is to add more clothing. Keep your eyes on the exits. Keep your eyes on suspicious passengers and crying babies and people who are praying. They might know something you don't. Or you may read a magazine. You may read *SkyMall*, for instance. Consider purchasing the litter box disguised as an indoor planter, for instance. Contemplate your life. But do it silently. Contemplation does not require your voice. If you can, try to get a little sleep. When the plane begins its descent, you may look out the window to ensure the plane doesn't crash. You may stare right at the Fasten Seat Belt sign until it clicks off because then you will know you haven't died. You may then unbuckle your seat belt. You may then reach into carry-on items within easy reach. You may then thank God or whomever you want to thank you survived. You may thank those suspicious passengers for not being terrorists. They may even thank you back. As you deplane, please do so row by row in an orderly fashion. Remain calm. When you step off the plane, remember to breathe.

Charles Jensen is the author of two poetry collections, most recently *Nanopedia* (Tinderbox Editions, 2018), and six chapbooks. The City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs designated him a 2019-2020 Cultural Trailblazer, and his poetry has appeared in the *American Poetry Review*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Field*, *The Journal*, *New England Review*, and *Prairie Schooner*. His manuscript *Instructions Between Takeoff and Landing* was a finalist for the 2020 Catamaran Poetry Prize.

PHILIP ROSENTHAL

40° 54.544' N, 73° 48.026' W, 2020
Enamel on panel, 24 X 32 in.



COURTESY THE ARTIST