

Poetry Porch: Poetry

On Plimack Mangold's Winter Landscapes

By Joan S. Soble

In January, I try to rise early enough
to watch the thin gold filament
of day's first light appear in the east.
I like to think it sweetens the lives
of those whose cars idle to warmth
before they head to work
in the daily darkness.

In January, I pull from my shelf
The Paintings of Sylvia Plimack Mangold,
often turning first
to "Nocturnal Ellipse."

Years back, when I first saw it
in a museum, it felt like home,
though I'd never lived in a
sparse, sprawling, rural place
revealed before dawn each day
by sporadic headlights sweeping
around a main road's curve.

Was the painting landscape or portal?
Was it urging me to go forth
to seek and find some blank
expanse of land or road
beside which to plant myself—

or inviting me to pass through it:
at eight feet wide, it could easily
have enfolded me, enveloped me,
pulled me through it—
but to where?

Some place within, I thought
one morning, noting how
that still hour often centered,
grounded, and lifted—highlighted
purpose and put me right before
the engine of sun powered up
and thrust me into the asking day.

Not that I haven't dreamed of living
in those nighttime landscapes'
open wintry spaces. But it's
their empty, peopled peace
that speaks most to an inner place
where stillness and light
hover at the edge of darkness
in the core of home.