

Can Serrat Summary and Checkpoint Update
Suzanne Bottelli - 30 November, 2018

During my time at Can Serrat (3.5 weeks in April 2016) I was able to read several books of poetry and prose; record and reflect on my mountain hike to the basilica of Montserrat; draft six poems; conduct research into several aspects of the Watchung Mountains landscape in my home state of NJ (USA); and encounter the personalities, atmosphere and phenomenon of historical memory in El Bruc, Catalunya. All of these have informed my ongoing work and thinking.

The poems and material I developed in my time at Can Serrat has been fruitful in a variety of ways. Two of the poems that I first drafted there in El Bruc (“Murillo’s Saint Catherine, c. 1650” and “American Grubble”) have been published in literary journals (*Scoundrel Time* and *Isthmus*), I have read from this work in a variety of public settings (including Elliott Bay Book Company and the Jack Straw Center for Cultural Arts), and my expanded book manuscript (including this new work) was a finalist for the 2017 Black Lawrence Press Poetry Prize. My larger, research-based poetry project has taken new directions in terms of the explorations I was able to begin while I was at Can Serrat: into the archives related to the Barcelona-born and New York/NJ-based Modern School Movement; the memoirs of Free Acres, NJ resident Konrad Berkovic; the Cold War era placement of US Nike (anti-ballistic) missiles in a forest clearing near the site of the deserted village of Feltville, NJ; and photographs from the post-industrial factory ruins of the Ironbound neighborhood of Newark, NJ.

In all of my work, including this project, I am inspired by place and by memory. I seek to interrogate my own personal connections to landscape, and I am interested in the ways in which narratives of any place’s history automatically distort something in claiming to stabilize or define it. The attached images include a somewhat chaotic “mind map” of my ongoing project, an example of one of many photographs that is inspiring/haunting me lately, and electronic images and/or publication proofs of my poems in their published versions. Unfortunately, these poems and the photograph are copyright protected, but you are welcome to publish the mind map image if you wish. I believe the reading that I gave in El Bruc was recorded, so you should also have that file. Let me know if you wish to see (or hear) more and I can work on further samples to send.

I hope this update finds you well and that Can Serrat is thriving! I was delighted to see a full house of summer residents featured online, and I hope to see you all again someday. I have been sidelined for the past several months by losing my mother, and by unexpected surgery and treatment for breast cancer, but my prognosis is good and I am nearing the homestretch in my second round of chemotherapy. It has been a lousy year, but I am feeling ready to get back to my life and my writing. Best wishes to you all.