



Image from The Independent (UK)

Clive Matson

Walking to the Polling Place

on a sunny day
in the sixth extinction.

Single steel leaves,
precisely molded, decorate
benches along the walkway.
Half of them missing.

In the side yard
lemon tree and datura
with broad, flat leaves
shake in the breeze.
No rain today.

Yells and happy screeches
from the courtyard.

Kids playing hockey, kickball,
tag and race around the plaza.

Voters line up in the building
way down the hall.

A woman exits her booth,
eyes downcast and grayish aura.
“I voted” sticker on her lapel.
Red, white, and blue.

Change my registration
so my vote could matter.
Fill out forms,
ponder my choices:

“One corporation, two corporation,
three corporation, four.
One war, two war, three war, more.”

Shake my head, shake out that meme.
Better tear things up, probably. Start over.

Press my “I voted”
sticker on my shirt and walk out.
Took my breath away,
sweating and thinking,
thinking in the booth.

Trip on steps to the courtyard.
Catch myself, almost fell on my face
smack-dab in the hockey scrimmage.
“It’s a dangerous game,”
says the schoolyard lady.

Homeless guy out front
sleeps on a patch of lawn.
Brown-stained paper
scattered around.
No clue what he feels.

No assurance my vote will be counted.
The day’s message:
Way past time to get it right.

Take a loose, deep breath
and straighten my shoulders.

Walk home from the polling place
on a sunny day
in the sixth extinction.

Clive Matson hung with Beats in New York in the 1960s. He reconnected when he read “Hello, Paradise. Paradise, Good-bye” at European Beat Studies Network in Paris 2017. He won the 2003 PEN Oakland Josephine Miles Award and City of Berkeley's Lifetime Achievement in poetry 2012.