



Image: "Shadowland" by Arthur Lawrence. "Pilgrims of the Mound" was written by Conal Abatangelo for *Rattle's* Ekphrastic Challenge, October 2023, and selected as the Editor's Choice.

PILGRIMS OF THE MOUND

poem by Conal Abatangelo

after Genbakukuyōtō

By the riverbank, where the herons
no longer fed, for lack of food
and lack of herons, they pulled bodies
from the water until the days began
to drop low in the horizon. If the sky
cleared, the cloud remained, and near
to the ground, the sun bloomed
dimmer than all the summers
before. There came a rain like night
which swallowed all colors, painting
in ash where ash had not been. Exhumed,
exhausted, returned to the land. The workers,
even as they buried, began too to drop
dead. In the coming weeks, the months,
the long years, a whole people became
a vault, a chapel, then the mound.
The line of ghosts unburying itself
each time a bomb speaks, even if no one will
listen for it.