D-L ALVAREZ
DEREK ELLER

Man's relationship to nature is D-L Alvarez's subject, though it is hard to say whether it is "the nature of man" or "man in nature." The difference is that between psychology and anthropomorphism, yet Alvarez bounces between these diametrically opposed positions informed by his experiences as a gay man. Confronted with efforts to classify homosexuality as "unnatural," Alvarez retaliates by making poetry from the unnaturalness of nature.

A skilled draftsman, Alvarez renders nature's smaller denizens — snakes, birds, insects — in exquisitely detailed vignettes in which animals meet, usually with unfortunate consequences. Blue line drawings imitate paint-by-number kits, with faint numbers marking the spaces to be colored. Rather than prescribing colors as expected, the numbers are keyed to lines of verse written next to each of the achingly lovely drawings, suggesting that it is finished only when colors can be found to match the poetry. But what colors might be matched to the phrases "concealed history" or "the thing words wreck/here/at the end of space/and the beginning of metal" to complete a drawing of a bird holding another dead in its beak in a tender *Pietà*?

A set of small graphite drawings picture insects imitating man-made forms. A termite bores a perfect circle on a wood surface. Ladybugs stack themselves into an obelisk. Five ants form a circle so that their legs and abdomens combine in a star. Alvarez transfers his delicacy to yet another media in a black-and-white video survey of a wooded area. Moving across the ground with the urgency of a beast on the hunt, the camera searches a part of Manhattan's Central Park known for bird watching and furtive homosexual trysts. Giving a queer reading to public space, this uneasy video is at once requiem and paean to male desire, for though the camera searches feverishly, it strikes out. Neither men nor birds were sighted. Still, Alvarez sends us off satisfied with a poetic meditation on the nature of desire.
Grady T. Turner