Simile: Willow and Ginkgo

by Eve Merriam

willow in winter
photo © Cor Kwant

‘Light 1’
painting © Atsuko Kato

The willow is like an etching,
Fine-lined against the sky.
Then ginkgo is like a crude sketch,
Hardly worthy to be signed.
The willow’s music is like a soprano,
Delicate and thin.
The ginkgo’s tune is like a chorus
With everyone joining in.

The willow is sleek as a velvet-nosed calf,
The ginkgo is leathery as an old bull.
The willow’s branches are like silken thread;  
The ginkgo’s like stubby rough wool.

The willow is like a nymph with streaming hair;  
Wherever it grows, there is green and gold and fair.  
The willow dips to the water,  
Protected and precious, like the king’s favorite daughter.

The ginkgo forces its way through gray concrete;  
Like a city child, it grows up in the street.  
Thrust against the metal sky,  
Somehow it survives and even thrives.

My eyes feast upon the willow,  
But my heart goes to the ginkgo.

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Eve Merriam (1916-1992) is a poet, playwright, director, and lecturer. Born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1916, she attended Cornell University, University of Pennsylvania, University of Wisconsin, Columbia University, and has taught and lectured at many other institutions. She is one of the most anthologized poets in the United States today. She wrote more than fifty books for adults and children, and she won the Yale Younger Poets Prize and the National Council of Teachers of English Award for excellence in children’s poetry.

Other poems about the Ginkgo:
Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: Ginkgo biloba.
Elena Martín Vivaldi: GINKGO BILOBA [ÁRBOL MILENARIO].
Howard Nemerov: The consent.