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*ekphrasis magazine*

issue four, 2023.



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# Dear Reader,

Paintings, ponds, pub signs, and picnics – these are just a few of the objects you’ll encounter wandering into the pages of the latest issue of Ekphrasis Magazine. These objects are restless ones: textural, poetic, graphic, cinematic, and technological creatures.

While preparing this issue, we were struck by how much movement there is within these works, and how much they call upon us, as readers and viewers, to move as we shift to momentarily share their view – be it analytical or lyrical, distant or immediate. Our position to the object is constantly shifting across this volume. Su Fang Ng and Andrei Molotiu bring us along as they draw closer to art whose lushness is both tantalizing and threatening. We find ourselves inside the work itself in Akiko Russotto’s, Christien Gholson’s, Annika Gangopadhyay’s, and Sarah Harrington’s poems. In André Marques Chambel’s city symphony short film, *Monumento a Vincenzo Vela*, time itself seems to hinge around the statue of a long-dead artist. The photographs, sketches, engravings, and films collected in this issue are charged with kinetic energy. These works punctuate one another, addressing and answering in their own mediums.

“Paralyzingly delicious,” Rikki Santer writes (of a friend’s blintzes), but these works seemed, to us, to be the inverse: catalyzingly delicious. In every case, we felt ourselves carried forward by these pieces. They sweep us along, pushing us towards a richer understanding of their referents and responses. Word and image magnetize obsessively towards one another. It has been our goal to cultivate that sense of charge that sparks forth from each artist’s unique gaze.

Welcome to the fourth issue of Ekphrasis Magazine. Thank you for continuing to be a part of this project.

With thanks,

Michell Rose Chow, H.R. Link, & J. Castro

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Graham Day

## HETEROGLOSSIA

*Heteroglossia* is a bound collection of thirty images, collages and colored drawings on existing prints that have collages and coloured drawings added to them. The term “heteroglossia” was first used by Mikhail Bakhtin (1895–1950), a Russian philosopher and literary theorist: “heteroglossia is a double voiced discourse, as it serves two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions: the direct intention of the character who is speaking and the refracted intention of the author.”

## SELF PORTRAIT WITH WRECKAGE

Paula Goldman

Display no photographs, cloak your mirrors  
for perpetual mourning, likewise, the lines dreamt  
into your cheeks, the *schmiß* from dueling,  
your forehead's gray sky, wide with the wingspans  
of grackles. Disallow birds of prey, especially  
near the eyes. Flashes of self-doubt fly like darts.  
A thin cruciform splits your brow, pigments peeling,  
hoarfrost in a burnt out forest of eyebrows.  
Above your mouth, a mustache of dried rivulets run  
to a parched Nile delta.  
But would you call those lips now?  
Once tenderness swam like minnows  
in swift currents.  
Dürer's *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*  
partied at your house.  
Define your fine cross-hatching, depth,  
3-dimensionality.  
Shadows fall until you disappear  
in Rembrandt's pitch black.  
Hands are more difficult—  
you're on your own there.

## MY FRIEND'S CHAGALLS

Rikki Santer

——— *with gratitude to Roz Chast*

I'm thinking how paralyzingly delicious these blintzes are that my dear friend serves me as I'm sitting in his dining room with his mother's needlepoint tablecloth and Chagalls all around. A home gallery of so many signed lithographs of little Jewish towns, their earthy darknesss and chatty tones commingling with these fluffy Jewish cousins of crepes—O bless higher content of butter and egg. And these blintzes would swallow themselves if they could, surrounded by the centrifugal staccato of an absence of gravity for floating roosters and floating cows, with our floating cherries quivering lush in sherry sauce. And I would marry these blintzes if I could as they shimmer under swirling blues of moonlight, lovers caressing and angels plump as dumplings all yoked to the magical ordering of dreams. And my friend's eyes glisten, and my lips grin sticky sweet and the fiddler and cello-goat serenade us as the genius of Marc Chagall looks on, wise in the secret life of things.

## JÉSUS-CHRIST NOUS OFFRANT SON SANG

Christien Gholson

——— *after Gustave van de Woestyne*

1.

The god of death is always with us, constant companion, hanging off his cross with his crown of thorns, brushing against our skin, staring at us through red-rimmed, bugged out, bloodshot eyes, always curious, wondering if we have felt it yet, that sudden shock of being alive, the lucid-ache of I am here. Inside that intense stare is kindness, a non-human kindness, the same kindness found down by banks of the Willamette river just now, between the wind and black cottonwood leaves.

2.

There are two, positioned at the bottom of the cross, at the bottom of the painting. A Mary figure, in a nun's habit; and a blonde child, pale, orphaned by some twentieth century war massacre, asked to stand beneath this cross, hold her hands in the same bowl-shape the nun makes – but the girl's sorrow is focused on something else, something beyond the body on the cross, something she knows will always be moving through her body, shape her story until the day of her death. And the god looks out of the painting at me, as if to say *You see... You see how it is...*

3.

This god knows our death, the one born with us, that grows with us, our doppelganger, invisible twin. Mary looks like a silent film star expressing horror and hope at the same time, as if the god's gaze has ignited the death waiting inside her, given her access to its knowledge. The god keeps looking out at me, dares me to believe that we have the right to experience all of our emotions, to experience them any way we can, sometimes tied together in a confusing knot all at once, and so know that ecstatic lament I am here.

4.

Years go by without me looking at this painting, forgetting its printed on a postcard trapped inside some box in the closet. I pull it out, half expecting that the god will have disappeared from the painting while I wasn't looking, leaving Mary and the girl and me alone, to continue the story of our grief, of our fierce and haunted emotions, so that when the face of our death reveals itself to us, we will reach out, touch its cheek, welcome its embrace. Out the window, cottonseed from black cottonwood trees that line the riverbanks south of here float through a grey sky; snow on a cool spring twilight.

UNTITLED Irina Tall



# ON LOOKING INTO RUDOLF'S *TÜRKISCHE CAMMER*

## I.

Above through swirling patterns filtered light  
Illumine darkly the bare museum space.  
Faded red speaks softly of battles past,  
Though we must imagine walls, long since gone.  
Rudolf feasted in real Ottoman style  
With his nobles gathered round in a tent,  
Embroidered exquisitely in gold and silk,  
Among hundreds such sumptuous pavilions,  
Recreating an imperial tent city.  
In another dim corner of the gloom,  
Deep red robes cascade almost to the ground,  
Imposingly large flags half a tent-sized—  
It would take four strong men to carry one.  
Schwer tragen says the woman beside me.  
Trying to make out the Arabic words,  
The *shahadah*, Islamic creed of faith,  
Confused I transpose her vowels and ask,  
*Schwer zu lesen, Arabischer Sprache?*  
My mistake; she was thinking only  
Of the fabric's weight, not the creed's demand.  
What must it have been like this tent city,  
A magnificent display of crimson  
And gold a fluttering in the light breeze

Su Fang Ng

Standing in the green fields of Saxony?  
Captured tents of previous Polish battles,  
A rare Persian curved sabre Zorinyi  
Carefully kept to present the elector,  
All made their way into his *Wunderkammer*.  
But Rudolf wanted an entire city,  
For wedding celebrations *à la mode*,  
And pre-Lenten *Fastnacht* festivities,  
Latest Turkish style in a German state.

## II.

The tent city rose suddenly  
As if they built it overnight.  
No celebrations here, no feasts,  
Instead a long winter of Lent.  
Women carry crying children  
Past hordes of assembling young men.  
Tired old who make it this far  
Used to smoke in *ash-Shāms's ehwahs*,

Now encamped on Turkish soil they  
Cross if they dare *das Mittlemeer*.  
*Deutschland, Träumesland, ist Ihren Ziel*.  
“Germany,” that’s what they all say,  
At the border of the blue sea.





III.

Much have been expenses in silver gold  
To procure precious objects rarely seen;  
Round distant circuits of trade have they been,  
Carried on billowing waves in ships' holds.  
Oft of one these ones to each other told  
The *Mutti* who opened up her demesne,  
In whose quiet one breathes a pure serene,  
Where once the prizèd cargo had been sold.  
They star'd at the horizon; tired eyes  
Say, surely this can be no wild surmise.

# WARBURG: ANNUNCIATION: A STILL LIFE

Sophie Shrubb

Silence.

Grey drawer rolls open. The noise rattles through its neighbours and off the blank faces of floors and ceiling. It beds down in the heavy set volumes lining the walls. An audible clunk as the draw reaches the end of the runners.

Silence returns.

Whisper of papers being leafed through.

The drawer is bursting with ochre folders, the edges are turning bronzey from ageing grease left by the hands of others. Cardboard folders nestled in larger cardboard folders, each meticulously labeled in various scrawling hands.

The folder at the very back of this drawer is labeled in ink pen, easily recognisable by the telltale blooms at each letter's terminal. The ink is turning blue-brown. All caps.

'PORTRAITURE GENERAL PROBLEMS'.

The sun is setting; apricot rays pour over the edges of nearby London and through floor to ceiling windows. It tints the folders contents. A constellation of face-less eyes and flattened men in ruffs are doused with bilirubin.

NOTE:

Female model is to be dressed in rich Marian Blue. Her sleeves should billow out to fill all the way to the edges of the chair. A pair of heavy set clasped hands are to be resting where her lap should be, pinning down the curtain fabric gown - these can be borrowed from Greek or Roman statue parts in other drawers (raid the GODS & MYTHS sections for spare limbs). Arms should be severed at the wrist, but no blood or bones should be visible; nestle the amputated ends into the gown to disguise them.

(note to set designers - please find an alternate colour seat for female model. She has become the armchair)

Wooden room divider should be set up behind the chair on the right hand side, fitting snugly around the edges of the arm chair, as though it were about to enve-lope/embrace the female model. A thick off-white gown should be draped across the gap where the centre two panels create a right angle so that it hangs away from the wooden panels like a phantom body. Male canvas head is to be placed atop the gown/wooden screen body. He should look down upon the female model.

Wooden screen extends away from male body as wings. Just too large marble limbs sit atop the room divider - one points up toward the ceiling (God), the other relax-es on top of the wings.

NB: Figures must look complete.

(Please adjust the lighting to pick up more of the angel's face. He is being absorbed into the back wall)

The platform should be very small, not much larger than the space required for the wooden screen and arm chair, with only just enough room for the artist to manoeuvre between the two 'figures' to perform readjustments. The platform should be brightly lit to create a still life/frieze effect.

Female Model/Mary is to be as still as possible during the performance.

Male Model/Angel Gabriel is to be as still as possible during the performance.

Total performance should last approximately as long as a painting.  
ARTIST (to sitters from off of platform): Please, hold very still.

*Lights come up. Tobacco stain yellow light floods in and drowns everything. Deepest sapphire blues turn a sickly bile green. It makes skin look waxy and luminous.*

*Nothing moves.*

*Pause.*

*Female model's head wobbles on the back of the arm chair, the severed shoulders begin slipping on the smooth upholstery. The wooden frame of the back of her head makes a soft thump as it hits the room divider wings. Her chin crumples into her chest making her neck disappear. Her stretcher shoulders now jut out forwards at an awkward angle from the opening of the neck of her dress, disconnected; it makes her collar bones look broken as though they were about to break through from beneath the fabric.*

*You can now see the naked side edge of the canvas as it is caught in the yellowing stage light. Female model now stares up into the greenish robed armpit of the Angel Gabriel. She doesn't blink.*

*Air Conditioning kicks in with a mind fogging wheezy drone, making the insides of your ears throb. Satin finish paper catches the manufactured wind and flutters the richly draped clothing of the models, giving them breath. It makes the rich black shadows quiver.*

*A dry cough from the air conditioning causes the edge of the female models gown to flip up suddenly, showing four varnished mahogany hooves and two weighty marble feet, severed from their legs and sat on coasters. One foot is arched, as though it were part way through walking. The other foot is flat to the floor - these can also be borrowed from Greek or Roman statue parts in the other drawers (see Diana → Single Figure → Standing drawer/folder).*

*Artist enters from the front of the platform, with back to the audience.*

*Artist takes off the female canvas head and gently places it back into the original position - balanced on the back of the chair, the edge held up by the model's gown. The neckline of the gown dips down a little in the centre to reveal upholstery ribs. The movement of the light on the velvet sheen of the sofa makes it look as though*

*her chest were fluttering with shallow breaths.*

*Artist tugs at the neckline of the dress and covers her arm chair chest. Stops. Continues to readjust the volume of fabric trying to regain the original pleats and dips and folds across the chest. Female model now looks into the belly of the Angel blankly.*

*Artist smooths the lower portion of the gown to cover the mahogany hooves. Only marble feet should remain seen.*

*Artist exits stage to the right (as seen by the audience).*

*Male Model/Angel Gabriel continues to look down on female model/Mary in silence and without moving. Female Model/Mary continues to look into the belly of the Angel/Male Model in silence and without moving.*

*Pause.*

*Yellow lights dim. White fluorescent lights rise and the scene turns greyscale.*

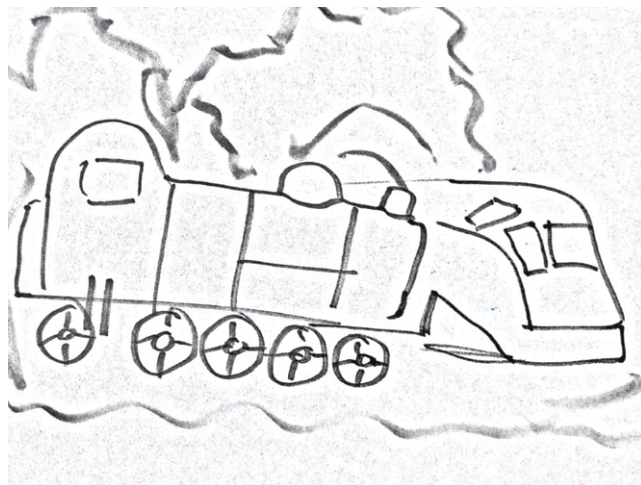
*The shadow cast by Angel Gabriel's left hand (as seen by audience) reaches down toward the top of Mary's head.*

*Bric-a-brac bodies become apparent. The stark white of the appropriated limbs presses itself up against the viewing surface, becoming flat in this new brighter light. Robes become more obviously borrowed from other surfaces in the home - the metallic glint of grommets from curtain rings are now visible. The naked edges of the canvas heads leap out against the umber tones of the rest of the scene, exaggerating the awkward angles of this Laconic composition.*

*Pause.*

**CURTAIN**





*film* MONUMENTO A  
VINCENZO VELA

André Marques Chambel

As estátuas pegam nas pessoas  
e atiram-nas aos molhos.  
Esgotamento do inanimado.  
As estátuas na cidade de Turim  
semeiam joio, como o Diabo.  
Com pés quadrados esmagam  
as casas da paisagem urbana.  
Vozes mecânicas que perfuram  
os ouvidos da criança em mim.  
Foi nesses 20 dias que eu conheci o Amor.  
Ao mesmo tempo, conheci a Morte  
que o matou como se fosse uma formiga.  
Uma psicose coletiva, como uma epidemia.  
Um cheiro de vinagre  
no ar do Corso Stati Uniti.  
O monumento a Vincenzo Vela  
havia-se levantado do seu assento.

*Statues pick people up  
and throw them by the numbers.*

*Exhaustion of the inanimate.*

*The statues of Turin  
sow tares, like Satan.*

*With square feet, they crush  
the houses of urban landscapes.*

*Mechanic voices that pierce  
the ears of the child in me.*

*It was in those 20 days that I met love.*

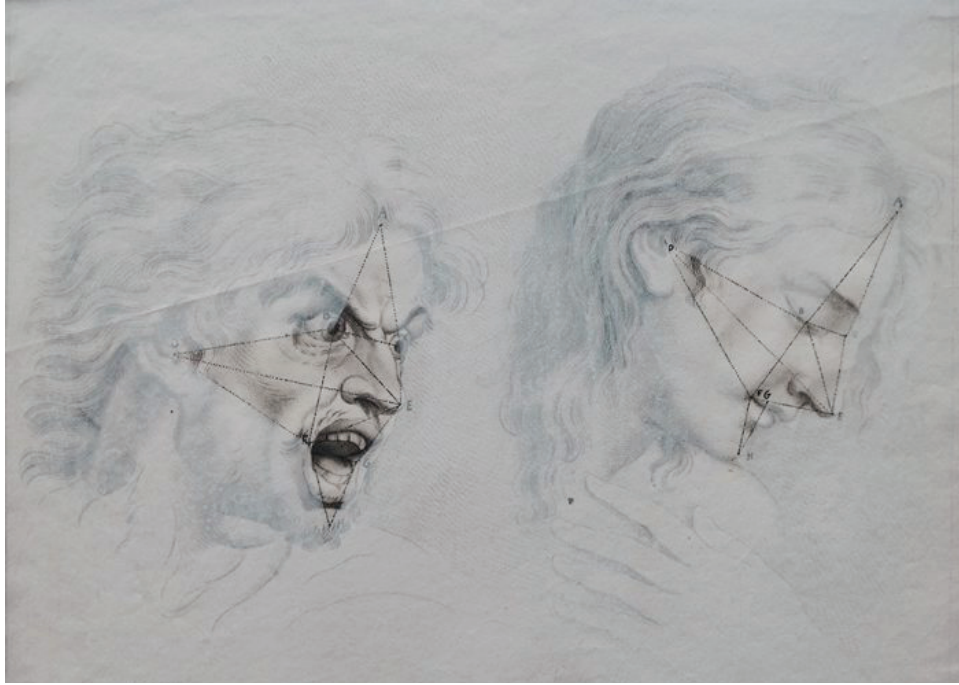
*At the same time, I met death,  
that killed it as if it were an ant.*

*A collective psychosis, like an epidemic.*

*A vinegar smell  
was in the air of Corso Stati Uniti.*

*The monument to Vincenzo Vela  
had gotten up from its seat.*





*Graham Day*

## HETEROGLOSSIA

What Bakhtin theorized in literature, Graham Day has applied to images. The two voices/images in Day's work represent the combination and interaction of the Dionysian nature (the figure) symbol of the spontaneous chaotic life force and the Apollonian nature (the geometric figures) alluding to control, rational thought. So, Pythagoras is entangled within his silver theorem, Apollo content with his golden regular cube. Belasarius in old age contemplating his idealised model of the perfect battle plan.

## THE DREAM OF THE FISHERMAN'S WIFE

Akiko Russotto

——— *after Katsushika Hokusai*

On a small island,  
a fisherman brings fishes  
to his wife.  
She cooks them to her perfection  
and falls into a dream.

In a Romanesque landscape,  
at the narrow shore,  
she flirts with strange  
discoveries on green kelp  
carried by the high tide.

In a palace washed  
by the beating foams,  
somedays exotic,  
sometimes grotesque,  
she takes her maiden voyage.

Her pulse moves faster,  
excellent for the fish lessons.  
She dives to follow them  
into the amber glow.

Suddenly she knows  
that she is not a fish,  
and hears washed whispers of a phantom  
in the fine black flotsam,  
sadness says hello to pleasure.

The fisherman's wife returns  
to write her memory  
in the sand and forgets all.  
She dreams of the silver waves  
reflecting shiny schools of fish.

## BOX

Emily Robinson

What if I told you my greatest desire was a box? I want it so badly. I think about it multiple times a day. And talk about it with multiple people a day. During sex, I asked my boyfriend if he wanted it, even a little bit. Sometimes I tell him I love [Redacted], the creator of the box, and he tells me he knows. I think he believes, if the opportunity presented itself, I would leave him for her. Now, you may be wondering, how could I covet a box? Am I a cat? Or a child? Alas, I am not. A mere six months ago, I would have been just as confused as you likely are. What's so magical about this box? Well, it's not jut any box. It's a wooden box with handcrafted holes carved into it—and sustainably built, no less. Not that I fully understand what it means to be a sustainable wooden box. So it goes. But that's not all! The box isn't hollow, no, it opens up! And inside it comes with goodies: artfully designed, wooden weights, an exercise towel, and a wooden dowel rod. Now, surely, you must understand why I desire such a box! Oh, no? You don't? Well, it costs thousands of dollars! Are you interested now? Oh, duh, no, obviously not. That's the one detail that's keeping even myself from possessing my beloved. But do you understand my yearning? Perhaps I'm not explaining the box correctly. It's not only a box. It's an ideology. It's a lifestyle. It's a new style of movement. It's the future of dynamic exercise. Do you love your body as it is? Or do you want it to be perfect? Or more perfect? [Redacted] lost six pounds after creating the box, and using it daily. And she was already...don't you understand? The box offers salvation. The box offers answers. I watched a Youtube video of a woman reviewing the box, but turns out she didn't have it. She built her own. I thought she was going to make fun of the box, and say how crazy someone must have to be to buy such an expensive...box. But no! She wanted the box so badly, and seemed so sad, like me. She said, how nice for the people who can afford to have the box. It's so dynamic and the dowel connections really seem to help you elongate and work stability in a whole new, and improved way. My heart broke for her. For us! And look, deep down, I know...it's just a box. I could make a makeshift box and call it day. I could keep working out as I do now. I enjoy my routines, I do. But...how do I stop the brain rot that's started? How do I wake myself from this greedy, needy brainworm that believes deep down I will never be enough? How do I forgive myself for coveting such an obscene display of privilege. Of excess. How do I escape my brain that wants to consume more and become less? How do I have it all and disappear? That's the appeal of the box, right? I'll give you my house and my car and my firstborn child. Just make me small and beautiful and lovable. Make me different and better. Take my money and change me into something perfect. Or maybe not perfect. But more perfect. Forgive me [Redacted] for I have not yet caved. I have not yet resigned myself to my basest desires. Though, I've admitted to myself, and my loved ones, it's a matter of time. I've prepared them for the inevitable. When this happens, or that happens. When I make this money, or don't spend that. As a treat, I can throw away days of labor for another tool to continue the endless pursuit of becoming...better? On the outside? Butatwhatcost?



## JOANNA VISITS THE FRAGONARDS AT THE FRICK

Andrei Molotiu

Harold's return from Berlin was only twenty-four hours away when, dressed for the first time in days in something else than exercise clothes or nightgowns, Joanna walked out of her building. She flagged down a cab and told the driver, "The Frick, please." It was a cold and overcast late morning, with that aimless emptiness of Manhattan early Januaries when, the holidays over, two and a half months of winter still await to be slogged through. As the taxi cruised down Central Park West then made a baggy loop through the park, she observed the pedestrians: mostly joggers and dog-walkers stoically going about their duties, then, as the taxi stopped at a light, a mother and father with two daughters, maybe six and eleven. The parents and the older girl hunched forward with their hands in their pockets as though they'd had an argument, but the younger sibling, in a pink parka and a knit cap with teddy-bear ears, twirled behind them on the tiptoes of her red, salt-streaked puffy boots, her head tilted up, her arms out. Her mouth moved as if singing, or maybe trying to catch raindrops. (A few splashes had appeared on the windshield.) Joanna wished she could keep watching her twirl, but the light turned green and the cab sped on. It dropped her off in front of the museum, itself stone-grey. She paid the admittance fee and made straight for the room she was seeking.

It was a roomful of Fragonards, colorful, frothy, and lush, the kind used in art-history textbooks to illustrate the term "Rococo" (if, for some reason, the authors didn't pick the one with the swinging lady flinging her shoe and her beau staring up her petticoats), spanning, above the dado, the full height and width of the walls. On one canvas a frill-collared swain, holding out a rose, chased his beloved across a park clearing; in the next painting over, the two of them or a nearly identical couple embraced while rereading their old love letters. On the

adjacent wall, facing the windows, two more paintings flanked the empty fireplace. One showed the two lovers illicitly meeting on an overgrown terrace under a statue of Venus. The other had them posing for an artist: the swain kneeling at his lady-love's feet, she crowning him with roses, all three surrounded by hollyhocks and boxed orange trees. (The wall label told her the painting was filled with "matrimonial connotations.") The clothes were shimmering ivories, yellows, dark pinks; the flowers sat fatly on the canvas, a couple of sharp brushstrokes per petal against the blended backgrounds; and above the lovers vegetation rioted into the sky, pines jettied into the regions of clouds like dark-green vapor trails.

Her footfalls rang across the Versailles-patterned parquet. The paintings on the next wall were somewhat different; the label informed her they'd been added to the series two decades later. One featured an apotheosis of cupids, rising into the skies from a dark conflagration with some demonic, yet still cupid-like, fiend; the way the blue section was stacked atop the brownish-red bottom half reminded her, strangely, of a Rothko. The other canvas was quieter: not a couple but a young woman alone, leaning back against the marble shaft of a column on top of which sat a globe-shaped sundial, its gnomon the arm of yet another cupid, this one moth-winged: it was noon. (Funny, thought Joanna, looking at her watch: it was just about noontime in Manhattan too, in the real world; she'd hit the once-daily moment when the painted sundial was right.) The painting's palette veered toward rust, as if autumn had arrived. The young girl's head was tilted back in melancholy; she looked enervated, spent; the label called her *Abandoned*. It seemed a sad way to end the exuberant cycle.

She stepped back to re-examine the other panels. (She'd had the room to herself since the beginning, and by the sound of it—the hallway was quiet—no one was imminently coming in.) The happy chase, the mock-solemn crowning ceremony, the sweet

nostalgia of the letters; even the adjoining painting seemed to promise a triumph of love; then *this*? Nothing prepared one for it. She felt upset for the girl (why had her swain taken off?); or rather, she felt annoyed that the cycle didn't make sense.

The windows looked out onto a small, lifeless lawn; then a stone-and-iron-grille fence; then Fifth Avenue with its buses and cabs and, beyond it, the barren trees of Central Park. It was summer in most of the paintings; fall, maybe, in *Abandoned*; the dead of winter outside. Were that sundial in New York City, she thought, maybe across the street in the East Green, today it wouldn't even be right: it wouldn't be casting a shadow at all.

She stood, in that museum room, between two parks: one maybe real, but—like the winter, like the cold light of the city—currently dead; the other the sculpture-strewn, luxuriant one in which the painted figures dallied, which seemed to stretch from panel to panel, to go on beyond the walls. That park, she thought, was a place she'd like to visit; climb through one of the frames into a canvas and lose herself in that summer, or even, if she must, in that fall.

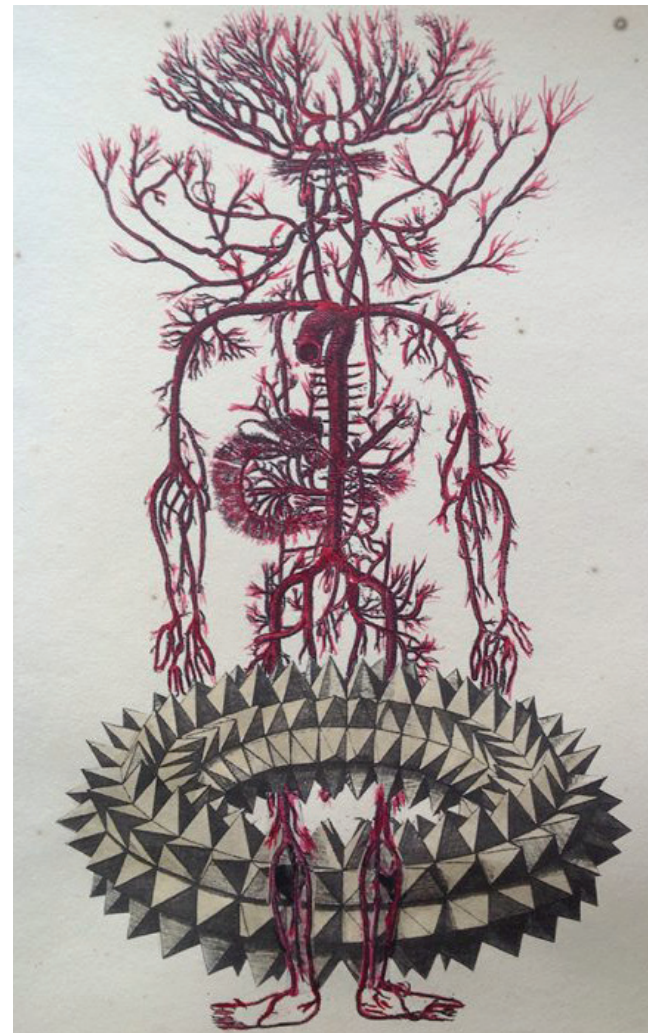
Lose herself in the paintings; in a greener, warmer, more inviting space. It wasn't the first time she had felt that urge. It reminded her of when, the weekend before she'd started fifth grade, her parents had taken her and a friend to a theater in Morristown to see a movie that had just been released: *Mary Poppins*. She couldn't stop talking about it on the ride back to Chester, over Dairy Queen sundaes, and until her mother put her to bed; she begged them for the soundtrack album and couldn't stop singing the songs for months; and she instantly offered its title in reply to the "your favorite movie" question for the next few years, until teenagedom shamed her into a different answer. By that time, she had grown particularly embarrassed of having always declared her favorite scene to be the cartoon one, where Bert and Mary danced with animated pigs and turtles and penguins



and geese. She'd adored the thought of jumping into a chalk painting and entering a brighter, more beautiful world, one away from the drab blacks, tans, and greys the characters wore in their everyday life; a world where everyone dressed in immaculate white taffeta and coral-pink silk, in red and orange stripes and blue bowties, in straw boaters and bonnets with lace veils. In that world greens were greener and blues were bluer, forest floors were sumptuous flowerbeds, and you could even float five feet above the ground if you chose to, at least as long as your partner, who kept his feet solidly on the ground, held your hand while you soared.

Well, she'd certainly found the right partner for that. Feet solidly planted on the ground: check. But had she ever bothered to soar? Another thing to avoid thinking about. She realized that she was aching as much as her ten-year-old self ever had for that serene, unmoving but immaculate world beyond the gilded frames. The nearly three decades in between seemed to have passed in a flash. What had she done with herself? Schools, boyfriends, jobs, marriage; she'd grown up (outwardly), then grown old... Well, started to grow old, let's say. Set off on the road to old age. Yet it seemed like scarcely an instant; did that mean she only had another instant left before...? She kept herself from thinking the word. Her ten-year-old self *had* planned to soar; she knew that for a fact. Would her ten-year-old self be disappointed in what she'd become? There was no need to speculate. The girl who'd left the Morristown cinema that evening with her parents and her best friend, skipping with joy, that girl was there, in that very room at the Frick; and she was disappointed indeed.

She took another glance out the window: she didn't want to step back out onto the street. She didn't want to sit again in a taxi smelling of gas fumes (unless... unless it took her somewhere warm and wonderful, like taxis had used to, even a month ago). She didn't want to be alone tonight in that cavernous apartment. She didn't want to make small talk with Harold, tomorrow, about his European trip. She didn't want to host any



more parties. She didn't want to keep looking for a new job. What she wanted was...

What she wanted she couldn't have. What she wanted made no sense. It would never have worked out. She had done the right thing ending it.

No, she resolved. What she wanted most of all, at this point, was to enter one of those paintings; which constituted about as realistic a goal. She still remembered Bert's spell. (She'd learned the dialogue by heart from endless viewings of the movie, whenever its title—no sooner spotted than circled in red crayon or marker, with big arrows and exclamation points around it—jumped at her from the grid of *TV Guide*.) And though it proved thoroughly ineffectual, though the girl, Jane, then asked—once Bert, she, and her brother had jumped *onto* the painting but in no way *into* it—whether something was supposed to have happened, though Joanna knew perfectly well that nothing had or ever possibly could, it wasn't as if she hadn't tried it herself, just in case. More than once, before her favorite paintings (the *Grande Jatte* in Chicago, where they'd vacationed the next summer, then the poster of it that had hung on her bedroom wall until college; Van Goghs and Monets wherever she could find them; then, later, a Claude with shepherds and ruins at the National Gallery), she'd thought and winked and done a double blink: maybe, maybe, this one time... She'd always pretended it was a game. A silly game. And yet...

Then, in the movie, Mary Poppins intervened. (Joanna could hear her voice in her ears as clearly as if the movie's soundtrack were playing through headphones.) Mary upbraided Bert for his nonsense. She told Jane's brother, Michael, not to slouch; she counted to two; then, magically, they all were swept in.

Well, for Joanna, the no-nonsense approach hadn't worked either. No painting had ever welcomed her in. At least she'd never slouched, there was that (though she wasn't

sure she could attribute it to the movie); she'd always had pretty good posture, her mom and her phys-ed teacher and her trainer at the gym had always told her so...

She didn't want to go back into the outside's leaden light. She wasn't *in* the paintings, but she was *with* them, at least. She could just about imagine, if she tried, the Frick's Fragonard room as another terrace in that imaginary park. The Frick itself was a refuge: it contained summer and love and light; but her refuge would close at five o'clock, and she'd probably grow hungry or thirsty or tired of standing long before that.

In the end, she left the museum without wandering into any of the other rooms. She'd meant to cross the park back on foot, but by now a cold, steady drizzle was falling, so she gave in and hailed another cab; then, later, once the rain stopped, she walked over to the Fairway, mentally composing the menu for Harold's first dinner back.





## MOUTH

Sarah Harrington

—— after “*The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living*” by Damien Hirst

you could say I lived in my head  
but I also had a tail  
seen now, separated from me  
and a heart, pumping blood from  
one to the other

it took the stillness of blue formaldehyde  
and a museum schedule and—likely—  
an expensive grant to take a look  
at the way I ran between the parts of myself  
I kept separate

separate  
like the way I was taught  
to walk in art museums  
by my first grade art teacher  
who was also my mother

put your hands behind  
your back, don’t touch  
anything, nod at  
the art if you like it  
but only look

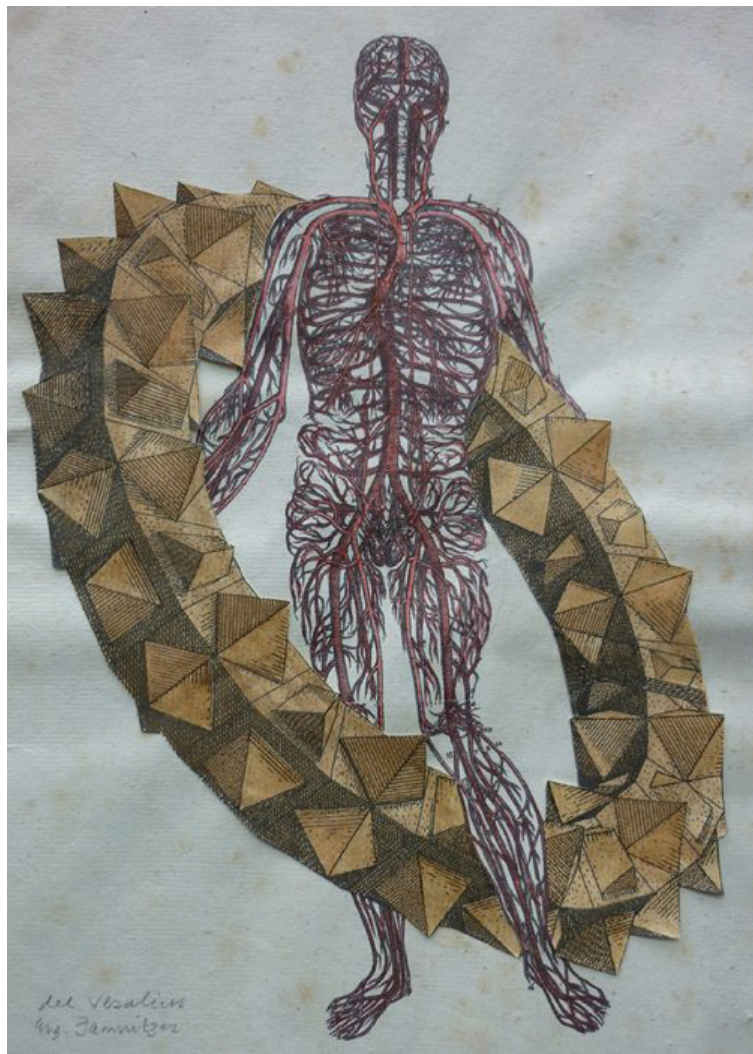
the only part of my body  
touching the wholeness  
and separateness of my body  
is the gaze——

gaze, internalized  
and passed down  
mother to mother to me

head, heart, free or fin  
look, here  
and then there is the mouth  
roaring, held open  
in space, forever  
letting in or

letting out  
I need you to say it  
say it.





## INSIDE LEONORA CARRINGTON'S PAINTING *THE GIANTESS* WHILE STANDING AT THE EDGE OF A POND

Christien Gholson

Moon-faced, wheatfield hair, she stares past my right shoulder, into herself, the world, right here, at the edge of the water, where geese fly from her white cape. Their wings beat air, stir it into Miocene words telepathically passed between the bird-people embroidered on her red dress, questioning each other; questioning me, questioning you: *What is the name of the child who was able to name each individual bee that ever lived? Can you summarize the geological plot hidden inside the narrative of a feathered snake's eye?*

She is holding an egg. The egg contains the body of this world, where herons nest in high bare branches, their necks secret feathered snakes that fold in on themselves when no one is looking; gold eyes that survey the land below, leaving a gold brand on everything they notice. There's a gold imprint on my forehead that burns. I reach up, touch it and am back in the painting, in the egg that is her body towering over tiny villagers chasing an amphibious, winged tree-spirit, hunting their origins, not knowing what they will do if they ever catch up. Maybe the youngest among them will ask the right question: *What is the color of mercy when the moons of Neptune stop conversing? Can you calculate the root of the root of the word mycorrhiza?*

The blue whale in the sea behind her blows a fish-weed scented spray that illuminates a woman in a boat, arms spread, warning off harpooners, while ghostly sea creatures of every shape emerge and disappear beneath the pond's surface. Ghost crabs, ghost manta rays, ghost sea-insects flown in by giant geese from Proteus churn the water unnoticed, feed on each other unnoticed. *Go back, go back, stay*

*on land, she says, until you can feel these invisible threads between manta ray and geese, whale and wheat, moon and egg, painting and pond. Go back, before it's too late.*

But it's always too late. I have always been inside this painting, this egg, inside this towering body that conjures gravity for spinning geese birthed into a skein-mantra formation that is the world, that is the cliff threshold between land and sea, that is eight turtles side by side on a half-submerged fallen tree mid-pond, all heads stretched toward the sky, staring up into geese shadows, ectomycorrhizal cloud-threads forming a mantle around the earth, around so many questions: *How long will the last blue whale's song sail through the ocean? Will it break the bodies of those who can still hear? Who is asking this question?*

## ROCK-A-BYE, BABY

Nigel King

——— *after the engraving by Paula Rego*

Pine-needles prick my bare feet.  
The sky is the blackest I've known,  
spattered with stars.

They said I was too old,  
too troubled. Too manless.  
But look! He sleeps soundly

as the tree begins to sway.  
I hold his cradle tight,  
stare towards the village.

A small procession winds  
towards me, lantern-lit.  
A tall figure in the front

carries over his shoulder  
something that glints  
in the fateful light.



## OUR QUESTIONS

Paul Jaskunas

— after "Picnic" by Sally Mann

The sky has always waited over us,  
a question changing its colors.  
Gray to white to blue  
to ever-baffled night  
asking, asking –

with the out-flung arms of clouds,  
and confused constellations of stars,  
and tears that gather in puddles  
at our feet –

of what is our hour worthy?

We have never seen the sky like this,  
We have never seen it stifled by smoke.  
Crop soot gives up its black answers.

The sky has gone mute.  
The sun turns away from us children  
who have come to the field  
with our soft picnic blankets



because it's funny the way water smells like sky smells like coal when he breathes  
& *how could the sky be so heavy if there are no stars tonight?* palm stretched out  
eyes watch sand split the water—sand  
drips from this star because the sky is heavy tonight  
because *i am drowning because there are stars tonight—*  
*such a beautiful star*, he says lifting hand &

father smiles out of the embers—son, this is a *rocket*.  
say *r-o-c-k-e-t*.

*r-o-c-k-e-t*, he repeats, *a special kind of star father i will catch it &*

the star catches him,  
sends his head, feet, left & right arms flying in the water,  
floating limbs beside lily pads—coal seeping into sky—

*tell me why, father. tell me why.*



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