

EIGHT EKPHRASTIC POEMS

By Neil Ellman

Imaginary Bride

(Hannah Hoch, painting)

I imagine myself
the bride of the universe
betrothed to stars and galaxies
my wedding dress a cloud
of white-hot gas.

I am wed
to the infinite, interminable
flow of time
like blood through arteries
leading from my heart.

For want of my want
mine is the marriage of the flesh
to dreams
of the beginning to the end.

I imagine myself
eternity's bride
only alive
in a truth of sorts
within my mind.

Convergence

(Jackson Pollock, painting)

Out of nowhere
dimensions converge
all manner of distance
traversed in a singular warp
where motion matters
as time explodes
sputters and then implodes--
all things, living and dead,
from yesterdays and now
gather where they began.

Regrets

(Jasper Johns, painting)

Regret breeds regrets:
It multiplies and expands
like the universe
but in its own
of "ifs" and might have beens
could haves and should haves
growing larger and louder
In the empty silence
of the mind
knowing no limits
to its capacity
becoming the only reason
to exist.

Civil War

(Larry Rivers, mixed media on paper)

Civility be damned
there is nothing civil
about this war.

Aim the Gatling guns low
and cut them in half
to make them feel
the pain of secession
and pangs for their homes.

Slow as they slide
like snakes up the hill
ten thousand serpents
ready to kill
to obey their lords
as we are to defend our own.

God bless the Union
of Heaven and Earth
somewhere in the hills
of Vermont.

The Invisible Man

(Salvador Dalí, painting)

I

If he were
if only he were
if he only were
only he
and only he
an if
would know
he were
invisible
as if an if
knowing if knowing
is enough
not more
than if
he knows
how much more
than real
he is.

II

He is what he is
a tangible thing
invisible
yet there
he is
what he is
more is than if
more real
than not
he is the if
that was
the was that will.

The White Line

(Sam Francis, painting)

Yesterday and tomorrow
now and when
the earth revolves around the sun
clockwise and counter
day to night and then to night again
and I, a traveler on a shaft of light,
speed along the line between
two timeless worlds.

White is the line between
reality and where
beginnings have their source
and ends continue on and on
through amaranthine space
blacker than the here and now
where light carves passages
through our lives.

Moonlight in a Gust of Wind

(Alexander Calder, lithograph)

The sun, always the same
from east to west
constant in its movement
shape and light
predictable enough
to be a god.

The Moon, rising and setting
here and there
Wolf Moon, Snow, New and Blood
more like ourselves
buffeted by the wind.

The Sun in its Jewel Case

(Yves Tanguy, painting)

Although difficult, it is essential
that you maintain control
standing still without an eyelash moving
listening for the whine of engines
or the hum of dragonfly wings
as if doing something
will make the slightest difference
when the moment rises
like fingers out of the froth
or falls like a fist from the sky.

Clear your mind of memories,
the inconsequential habits of a life
lived without second thoughts
leaving it an empty gourd.

close your eyes, breathe deeply,
crush a hyacinth in your palm
and let the petals float away
on fire—

in the end, even the sun
in its jewel case
no longer breathes
and the wind
can barely speak your name.