

The History of Restoration: Grief Mask

The French flannel
in your hand, soaked in solution, drips
down your raised arm,
round your neck, slipping its tiny wet tongue
between your breasts.

The lacquered color that changed
with soot and grease from tallow of altar candles
now comes shocking as the future in front of you.
Your body is contorted, your arms, white, numb.
Everything is slowing down. You'd rather peel potatoes
with your teeth than see yourself smiling
among the people being pulled with you
out of the shadow of the painting.

But you want to get back to fail
the silence, humiliated idiom, to remember
the original face spilling out into the room.

The windows are open
but you are still running out of air.

Visitors tell you to stay up all night with it, to take
the portrait back to its intended patina,
that all those hours will be forgotten in an instant.

The pain in your legs will be worth it.

You'll have no time to eat because
this is an ongoing elegy to the body
dividing its image.

How many times
will you clean, salvage, *stato d' animo*,
inhabit the rush of darkness?

Don't you know: destiny has always been
boring, giving you a glimpse of reconciliation?

And you'll admit, the face was a catwalk
out of the past, your own receding pose.

There now, don't despair.

We have always made strangers out of ourselves
by loving others.

...and my brush, continuously dripping onto my face
turns it to a rich mosaic.

-Michelangelo, from a sonnet on himself at work
on the Sistine Chapel.

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