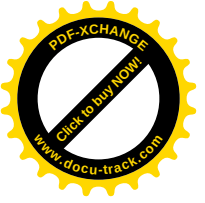


PAINTING POEMS

HAZEL FRANKEL



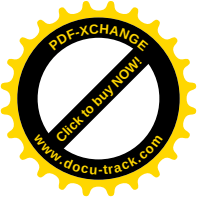
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Marble, Paper, Stone

I

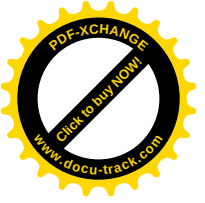
He touches her all over,
as Rodin molded her all over,
her hip with his hand,
her mouth with his kiss.
Upright, rib to rib,
sculpted curves are not icy;
yielding lips are not rejecting;
containing hand does not bear a whip.
With marble-black caress
they are passion-linked.

II

Brancusi incised the granite forever:
His lovers lie
face to face,
lip to lip,
eye to eye,
one block of nubbed, cream stone.
On their horizontal spit,
they could spit in each other's eyes:
spit each other out.
Bound closely,
they are in bondage:
he rigid,
she angled and cornered and edged.

III

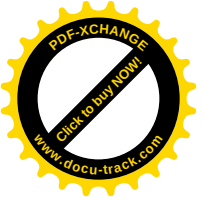
But Klimt's lovers are voracious



as the man holds in his hands
her face and her future.
He leans over her, into her, enclosing her.
Their jeweled kisses
are an envelope stamped with passion.
Gilded together,
his sinew, her curves,
they meld together into their surroundings
in their love-tower
on a bed of rain.

Note:

C. Brancusi: *Lovers*; 1907; granite.
A. Rodin: *The Kiss*; 1886; marble.
G. Klimt: *The Kiss*; 1907; oil on canvas.

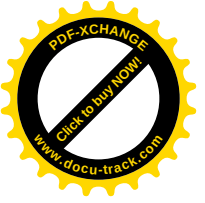


Pluto and Persephone
(After Bernini)

King of the Underworld,
you are besotted with your love;
yet you tease and torment
until all she wants is her freedom.
Your fingers dig into her flesh;
you overcome her by brute force,
not tenderness.
She is your lover,
yet you take her as if it is your right.

Bernini,
your marble
breathes his panting;
we can hear her soft pleas,
see the beating pulse in her soft neck,
we recognize the expression on her face.
Pure Persephone.
Pluto, the sullier.
Even her mother couldn't save her.

The final act
is one twist away.

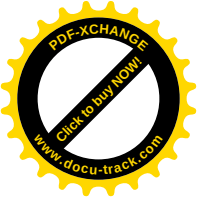


In Tow

(Monet's *Wild Poppies*, 1873)

Between the carmine-crimson poppies
you drift along the cleft
between avocado-green hills.
Your pathway is hidden but fixed
as you follow its inevitable track.
Your face shaded,
we cannot gauge its expression.
Your sedate home on the back horizon
contains your history
with the roof shut.

She dreams along behind you,
your little girl:
effective jailer.
On her hat-ribbon the poppies are tied.

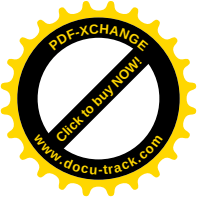


The Weavers
(after Velasquez)

In Ovid's myth,
Arachne challenges Athena,
the Goddess,
to a weaving competition.
Athena saw the loveliness
of what Arachne had made
and destroyed it.
Arachne hanged herself,
but Athena, wanting the last spell,
turned her into a spider:
The odds were unfair from the start.

As I weave my tapestry,
someone keeps cutting my silk,
knotting it or changing the pattern,
woof instead of weft,
until my thread is a tripwire,
and I am unable to see
round to the front
when it's too late
for me to change direction.

Ovid's fourth Metamorphosis
was Velasquez' first stroke
and thread for my thoughts.
But I had forgotten to take the curse into account:
the goddess had already won.



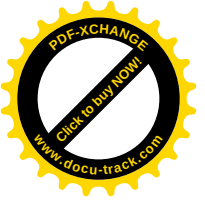
Marisol Couple
(Bicycle Race 1952)

What I have in front of me
is a photograph of a sculpture,
mixed media:
two bikes side by side;
On them,
two tower blocks of wood,
a man and a woman,
not in tandem,
not touching.

They can't:
they are armless.
They stare straight forward,
their wheels
turned slightly in:
a concession to politeness.

He is number 1, of course.
From the expression on his face,
behind his dark glasses,
he'd be quite happy if she didn't go along.

She is the smaller block,
numbered 2 on her chest,
though the race hasn't even begun.
Above her face, embossed on the wood
is the face of another man.
Is this one the one she is dreaming about?
Or is he suffocating her too
as they wait to begin?

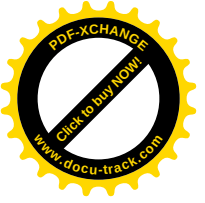


Then they're off.

Marisol Man,

If you'd dance with her,
you could fit together perfectly.

Instead, kissing is a flat experience;
when you lie beside her,
you turn your face away.



Willendorf Venus

Civilization

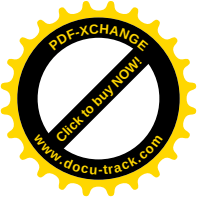
buried you under its weight.

Your apron of flesh testifies to
your fertility, his virility.

Your multibreasts are funnels
siphoning you off,
suckling your babies all at once,
not one by one:
the soft place for them to fall.

Nothing has changed:
they are still feeding off you
and so is the man.

In a drought,
you would still sustain them,
ripping your pelican-breast.

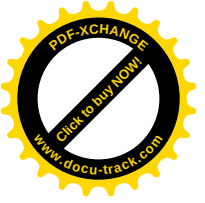


When Christo wrapped the Reichstag

he took yards and yards
of winding sheet
and went round and round
to bind the building,
conceal the steel.

You take yards and yards
of winding sheet
and wind over and over,
to seal me,
your favourite thing;
then comes the cord
cutting through skin and flesh,
sculpting me,
voiding me of breath.

It took two weeks for Christo
to cut the rope
and release the Reichstag.
You did not know
how I would soon be
beyond your rope:
an obelisk to Houdini.



Mother and Child

(P. Bonnard c 1899)

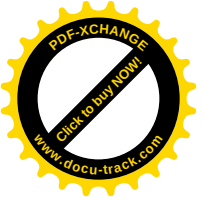
“Marthe. Come. I want to paint you outside today.”

Pierre adjusts his easel,
holds two pieces of card together
to contain an unusual view of the lavender hills.
She comes, wiping her hands on her apron,
tucking in her blouse, mumbling about lunch.
He turns away.

“Sit on that stone. Turn sideways. Cross your legs.”

With soft lead, he blocks in the pear of her body.
Will it be oil painting or etching, multicolour or monotone?
He thinks of her as she bathed that morning,
a floating mosaic.
“Fold your arms. Hang them by your sides. Non.
Where’s Bonnechance?”
He places the cat on her lap.

The artist breathes with the leaves,
recreates the woman’s curves,
encloses her in almond buds,
enfolds the blossom of her face in the sky,
her fingers in the cat’s soft fur.
He lifts his straw hat, mops his brow and surveys the page.
“Time for lunch.”
On the terrace, stiff and languid,
she passes lobster salad, tomatoes,
cherries, Brie, a warm hunk of bread,
his coffee, strong and black.

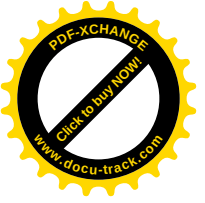


She raises her glass of rose to him;
He goes on chewing.

“Fetch Gatchet’s child.
I’ll give the mother two francs.
My picture cannot be ‘Marthe avec Chat.’”
The boy trips along beside her
as they sing and giggle back up the hill,
swinging their linked hands.
“Bon. Good. Now sit and hold him to you.”

Sweating, she pushes away the memory
of the grey-green light,
their dawn rough-and tumble.
She would marry him in a heartbeat,
if he’d ask.

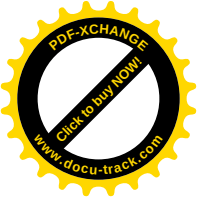
The painter binds woman and child together
in the white space,
the soft folds of her bombazine skirt, her unraveling plait,
the boy’s caress of her peachy skin.
He records the faint sweat on the down of her lip,
the tiny crucifix resting between her full breasts,
and the swell of her belly
that he knows is only the play of light.



A Sestet of Edward Hopper Women

I Morning Sun.

She gazes through the naked window.
The grain of its frame
reflects in the shadows
on her shoulder
and down her neck.
The blue of the sheet
shadows the pillow behind her.
A reddish factory building
obstructs her view.
Blonde-dark,
some tendrils escape
a tight bun pulling her hair starkly back.
She cocoons her arms
around her drawn up legs,
pinned forever to the bed.



II Hotel Room

Her bags are not yet unpacked.

Legs hang over the side of the bed,

crimped hair on bowed head,

her face completely in shadow.

I cannot see her eyes

as she holds his letter,

with both hands.

I can guess at what it says.

No mere delay this

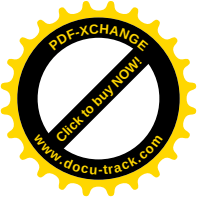
but an ending,

on the hopeful double bed,

between the white-dead walls,

where her dancing shoes lie

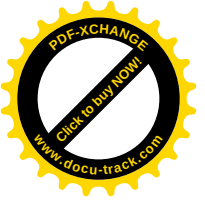
askew on the floor.



III Evening Wind (1)

I cannot see her face
obscured by her long dark hair
as she looks towards the empty open window.
The curtain billows,
mirroring the curve of her crouched body.
One knee is on the bed, the other half-resting on the ground.
From her rumpled bed,
she looks from her dark little room
towards the white light
where the outside beckons.

Looking outwards;
looking inwards:
the water jug has been replaced in the basin
after she washed,
after he left.



IV Interior

It is summer.

The walls glow.

The fireplace is empty.

The duvet is pushed,

ochre and crimson,

to the end of the bed.

On the rug,

her head turns away,

one arm softly drooping,

the other,

comforting,

between her legs,

shaking off,

as if she could shake off,

the heavy carpet,

the laden walls,

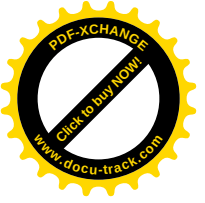
this leaden winter,

and transport herself

to where he is,

as the clock on the mantel

ticks away.



V. Evening Wind (2)

She looks up.

The wind blows the curtain towards her,
preceding his warmth.

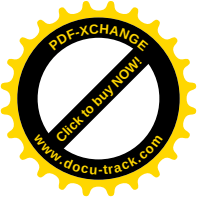
Her position is open,
awakening.

The artist has touched her body
as he will
soon.

The sheet is pure as longing,
empty as her arms,
skin folds to contain
the uncontainable.

Delicate-dark, she leans forward
for, any moment,
his breath.

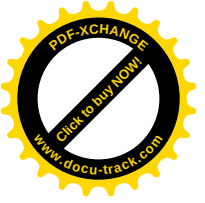
Then he'll be gone again,
his touch
a wind's whisper.



VI Room in New York

Acid walls;
three paintings aligned;
his shoulder towards her.
He reads the news,
the exploits of others.
She presses an expressionless note
with a desultory forefinger
on the black piano.
Excluded from his exploits,
his imaginings,
her shoulder is to him.

Together, they are enclosed by the window frame.
The closed door stands between them.

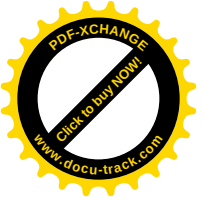


Declining Female Nude

What I'm thinking
as I lie under Edouard's gaze,
is that this is only one of my incarnations.
But I want you to know that I'm not
just some slovenly pussy cat
who would share her milk with strangers.
I have to question
why the artist wants to paint
the limitations of my hot flesh
when, instead, he could undress
my mind and know its nakedness.
But, let me reassure you:
his egg white will remain safely on his palette.

My brain has two globes connected by a bridge,
(the corpus colossum),
where I secretly wander, alone.
Here are my moist meninges, each known as a meninx,
(No, I did not say minx).
Firstly, the outer membrane, the dura mater,
(tough mother, to you Latin fundis),
that encases the map of my world in blood;
then the pia mater, (the tender mother),
that nurtures my thoughts;
and here, at the back of my head
is my medulla, my marrow and core.

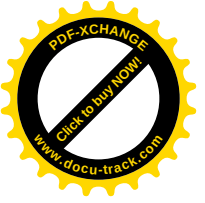
So, even as I lie here, cold and unfed,
surrendering to my grey matter
that is really jelly-soft and rich red



as I caress Romeo with the words of Juliet,
None of which has anything to do
with this man's obsession
to match my flesh to some tube-pink;
nor with his desire to denude my dumb-blond beauty
and reclothe it for the whole world to see,
hiding his desire behind a curtain of chiaroscuro.

Here she comes now, our discreet chaperone.
How little we need her.
You see, paradise for me is this bed
where I can become a part of every book I've ever read.
The condom of my mind shields me
from the grubbiness of being paid;
from his disrobing gaze.

So then, come; tonight, Flaubert.

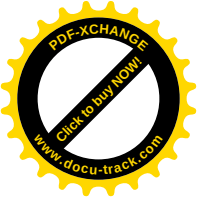


Picasso's Mistress

Which one you might well ask,
so I'll give you my credentials.
I was his model
after he saw me at the Lapin Agile in Montmatre.
That sounds glamorous,
but it really isn't anything more than the local pub.
I see that you look at me askance;
your questioning eyes undress me and I blush:
I am only a naive country girl, after all.
You are wondering
if my right breast really does overlay my left;
whether I squint in the glass
at my nutcracker nose;
and what he was thinking
when he laid those thick black lines
around my seductive curves,
flattening me out.

Still, he painted me ugly but made me feel beautiful
when he told me to twist my body a little more to the side;
to let my neck tip so that my long hair would fall down my back;
as he ran his eyes over my skin and his brush along my spine.

Who knows what he saw when he looked at me?
Did he think this progression of geometrical shapes
would emphasise my bone structure?
Yet he made me his own in those pictures,
and who else but he could get me such a wide audience?



Scapegoat

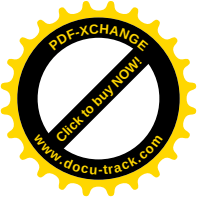
After *Monogram* (Robert Rauschenberg) 1959

1.

Well, here I am, the New York ram,
but can you see how the artist has nailed me down
onto this carpet of royal blue?
He must have thought I would throw my weight around
when all I want to do is to dance with my ewe.
As it is, with this ring of rubber round my neck
I can't see where she is.
So, I have nothing to do but fantasise
about a partner who would look past my fatal flaw.
I'm sure *she* would be able to figure out
how of getting rid of this thing.
It makes me wonder about artists' intentions.

2.

So what's a girl to do?
He's right, you know.
I'll always be behind him
or else on the circumference
of his turning world.
I am both life giver and lifesaver
But there is no other talent around here
and my angora locks are not wings
As he emerges from his tyre
it puts me in mind of a diaphragm
or a teething ring,
but kids would just be another kind of burden
and I'd be sure to lose my shape

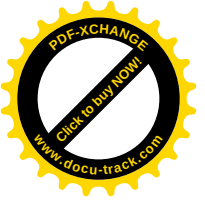


when liposuction isn't an option.

I stare at his rump and his chastity belt,
then at my reflection on the floor,
hoping we are just a temporary installation.

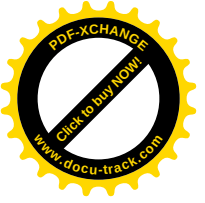
3.

Pacing round the sphinx
with its Firestone necklace,
I check my catalogue.
Perhaps Rauschenberg thought
that the ram needed a life-jacket
as he stepped through the triumphal arch,
but one stamp of his shank bone would seal my fate.
No crowd pleaser, he pleases himself,
his sheer weight and size
counteracting the flotsam around him
and his placement below me on the floor.
Beast of bondage
in the Boiler Room
he gives audience
but I give him a wide berth
and look forward to lunch.



In Her Own Image

In the beginning
She went spot, stripe, splash,
painting wishes on flamingos, winds on tigers,
whirlpools on tanagers,
secrets for panthers, storms for wolves
and tidal waves for jaguars.
Then She sculpted
agapanthus in emptiness, camellia against the dark,
frangipani for following, bougainvillea for birth,
jacaranda in jeopardy,
oases of shrike and sunbird,
mirages of hibiscus and rose.
Finally, She stuck fuzz and fur
spines, spikes, prickles, barbs,
onto every silky surface She could reach.
That was the end of Her work-play day.
She was exhausted. She had vertigo.
She had run out of ideas and energy, collage and paint
and so She left woman delicate peach.
The next day She felt rejuvenated.
In a flash of inspiration She took
the flood of poppy and the iris of the sky
and added these to woman
so now whenever she is pierced,
a torrent bursts her banks
and her subterranean river
runs bloody and churning,
her breaking heart undammed.

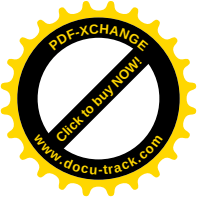


Chair

Straw and empty
except for your pipe.
No ash.

In the fields,
your straw hat shading you,
you paint the dry corn,
the sunflowers.

Overhead,
black dots in a clear sky.
Were their voices calling you?



light/dark

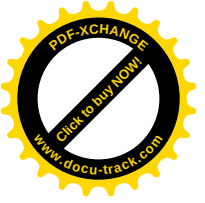
His paintings:

yellow impasto bursting
from backgrounds of turquoise;
packed fields and vases
filled with disarray;
sunflowers rearing,
dank green and over-weaning.

No bees or butterflies –
grey played with black
inside his head,
contending with those sun rays;
He left them here forever,
their possibility.

That day,
stabbing through the opening
of a plastic packet with red writing,
a single, torn-off spear –
my moonflower,
its pearly-headed petals
an improbability.

Even now there are no florets.



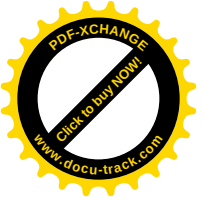
I am no van Gogh

Woman painter, solitary,
overlooking suburban silence
and Barberton daisies that brightly elude
the heavy impasto of those sunflowers.

In his room in Arles, two beds,
one for himself
and one for the friend who had just left,
or who never came.

Now children race
past the sunbursts, the crippled chair,
his unmatched, cracked boots
aching with the memory
of the raven-cawing cornfields.

At my easel,
I listen to the doves in the eaves,
the barbet's rhythmic tapping on the bark,
the double bed behind me
empty reminder.



On choosing not to paint a self-portrait.

Could they have been wrong, those old masters?

If not, why do I not want to look

long and hard, as they did,

and paint my own face?

Perhaps Rembrandt didn't mind

looking at bags and carbuncles?

I mean, it's not exactly pretty, his face,

yet he painted himself a hundred times.

Was it ego or was he hoping to improve on the model?

Van Gogh's self-portraits diarise the changing seasons

as they move towards a crescendo of crimson slashes

on the day colour took over.

As for Lucien Freud,

his energy is directed at photographic accuracy,

which is all very well for him,

but why would I want the world to see my undressed cellulite?

Did Rembrandt's self-portraits

compensate for Saskia and Hendrietje?

Were van Gogh's ravens fair exchange?

Does Freud's genius blind him to the ravages of age?

Perhaps it's just different for men?

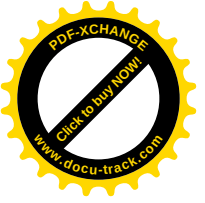
As I dare to draw myself

there is no cloak:

so my eyes slide past

the reddened cheeks,

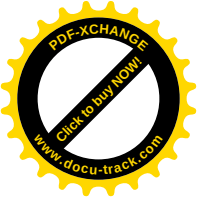
the bump on my nose,



my pinched lips losing their laugh line,
so like my father's.
Only my hair recalls
my Baez days of dancing possibility,
as long as I keep it on –
and keep the colour up.
And my eyes whose pupils are too close together?
The lore says that this indicates shiftiness.
I say they make me look like my mother.

Perhaps the best approach
would be a face-blanket,
a Jackson Pollock called *Symphony Twenty Four*?
Then you would have to guess
what lies beneath
the stabs, slashes, dashes and dots,
and I need never know how you see me
as you filter me through your lens.

See, it's too scary for me,
and anyway, for looking inside myself,
my eyes are too small.



Self-portrait at the dam

The willows change with the light
flecking the canvas.

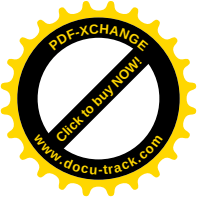
The water blackens in kraken-depths,
then clears.

Ducks' wings reflect across and beneath,
half-hidden and hurrying;
air lifts and sinks,
blue and hoping,
stroking my neck
with a Monet-touch.

My face waves in the water;
LadyofShallot-hair jags;
my brush dips over the highveld grass,
the wild geese and the black darters
as they stretch their necks towards the blue sky,
above and below.

Rouen in Emmarentia:
no cathedral; no haystacks;
a strange palette of black and brown
as the light goes down.

I am no Monet;
I am my own mistress;
I am mistress of the veld.

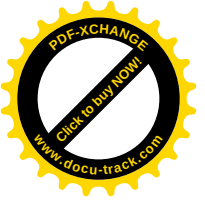


Red Painting

I find you in the cellar
sixteen years later,
a small canvas
in a rough wooden frame,
sanded by student hands
to meet a long-forgotten deadline.

In memory
you filled a wall,
a space,
a vacuum;
grew huger every year,
a tornado of possibility;
the raw energy of hotwired, overlaid brushstrokes
the black-with-scarlet tempest
of myself.

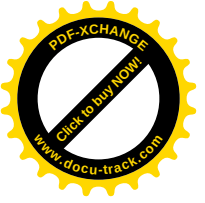
My future was set in
your fearless chiaroscuro waves,
an apocalypse certain of redemption.



Landscape

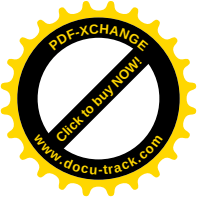
Mont St Victoire
and the Bibemus Quarry
fascinated Cezanne to the point
of obsession, so that he painted it over
and over, experimenting with the light.
Now, if you stand and look from the mountain opposite,
at any time of day, you can see what he meant,
the gradient of the slope, the heat of the climb, the distance
from Aix, are all still there.

Nothing you can think is original:
crouched in anticipation, he reconstructed his mountain
in baroque blue, rococo-ochre, nouveau-red;
the colours swirling in and around his head,
became instead, controlled blocks, planned, ordered, regimented.
Earth reaches for sun, field for moon, artist for truth:
no limit to colour, painting, words, poem; the sky's the limit.



Still Life

Cezanne,
when he was arranging
Still Life
with Cupid, jug and basket,
intended that the edges of the wooden table
should not
be level
where the cloth ended,
in order that
he could physically suggest
multiple view
points
simultaneously;
and so,
when students imitate his great art,
they find
that using one naked eye for accuracy
is as useless as a ruler
for getting it right,
and
makes as much sense
as my
words
so lovingly arranged on my page,
and that, really, for the best perspective on life
they should
just use their common sense.



Snail

(Matisse 1955)

You strut your multicolours to the crowd,
collaged dreams of psychedelic green and blue,
lava orange, sundance red.

All of a piece, you are anything but fragmented;
light-hearted, you are not burdened down;
house on your back, you are not stuck.

Dancing snail,

blithe,

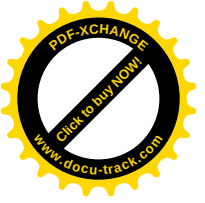
flirting,

almost-flying,

antennae stretching,

spiral spinning,

the air shines through you.



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