

Vanitas

The eyes go first
as if wiped from a puddle
of old skin,
only to recall every pore

and aging dimple
at the door
of lips unlocked,
a mouth wanting more

once as smooth as river stones
tossed off a cliff,
a crooked nose, nostrils
collapsed or tunneled,

muzzled above chin and cleft,
a jawbone chiseled
then back again
to a furrowed mezzanine,

lost in time, to thought,
the mise en scène, a penthouse
once called the skull,
to busted pulleys, rusty cogs.

My Argument with Keats

But what if Keats had it wrong? That there is no truth in beauty.
What a crock. With all else to distrust in this world *why not* beauty?

This is for skeptics not blubbering Romantics, arguing for pathetic fallacy
assigned to animate our ideas, our feelings, living or dead, for beauty

by taking the eye hostage. While in some circles
it remains a mortal sin, forbidden, frivolous, the filthiest word: beauty.

“This is a sphere of activity in which we are permitted to remain
children all our lives,” said Einstein on the subject of truth and beauty.

But maybe Dante was on to something—other than his long parade
into oblivion—that to awaken the soul into action is *because* of beauty,

and I’m not talking about the natural world or old master paintings
guarded on museum walls for our short-lived beauty.

Or Dickinson, too, was right: “It is not caused.
It is.” And wisdom seems even rarer when it comes to youth and beauty.

Which brings us to Kafka who, like Einstein, had a similar theory
that anyone who retains an ability to see it never grows old. A real beauty

of an idea—but go ask Emerson—that without expression
the enterprise is boring, perhaps a terrible beauty

brings us to subjective revelation and—if you ask me—I’m okay with that.
If you’re listening, John Keats, these are the facts: there is no truth in beauty.

Days Go By

for Weldon Kees

When some good news about now
wouldn't be so bad
if it wasn't for the tick-tock fatigue
and the long-winded sighs.
And this is why whenever you hear
the sound of rain, you hear contempt
for your despair. Days go by
when things for the most part
are suspiciously unclear but still shot
in black and white.
It's your tsunami of a year
the calendar lost, a grid X'd off
you'd climb through
if you could, then disappear

Henry in Myanmar

Henry overdosed in a hotel room
somewhere in Rangoon.
Everybody knew Henry had a problem
but assumed it was recreational.
Henry liked to party

and party hard young Henry could,
easily and alone.
Sold his bar in Shanghai
to some Kiwi and he was gone.

It's easy to imagine Henry dead.
Empty vials and face down
in a puddle of vomit. The white powder
that singed his nose . . .
“Inconclusive,” said the coroner,

as far as any evidence goes.
The pillow. Its stench.

Piece By Piece

When your slice of the pie
on its paper boat set sail years ago,

or that last piece of the puzzle
goes missing in its privatized hell.

It's your anonymous posh, a life
part chaos part curious pleasures

courtesy of Frank O'Hara
or Hieronymus Bosch.

It's your *pièce de résistance*
simply not to get fleeced.

Heading east or west
on a tablespoon of gasoline

while getting lost
between Istanbul and Nice.



That skein of squawking geese
as you took grave rubbings

off the stones at Green River,
talking to the deceased.

This world isn't holding its breath.
Take it all down. Take a memo:

Everything falls apart piece by piece.
And that's when you learned

about broken things
and those you'd lose along the way.

