

Tamar Yoseloff

Florida

We breathe Copper Tan, roasted cashews, adrift
in a sea of day-glo— windex blue, flamingo,
a yellow like the ball of sun that sears my shoulders.

Pale next to musclemen, their perfect girlfriends,
you look out of place. I have brought you here,
it's my fault. You make more sense in rain.

Suddenly a band strikes up, all oompah brass,
kettle drum. Your face is stone. I slide my tongue
over my lips to seal your taste.

Nearby a child drops his perfect sphere
of pistachio on the sidewalk, starts to wail,
his face a carnival mask of pain.

We turn a corner and there's the ocean. A toy boat bobs on the
horizon. We have come to the end of the country, run out of words.

Studies for a Portrait of a Young Woman, Delft

She knows that she was born
from the descent to Hell,
twisted bodies tumbling
down the Bible's page.

She tiptoes into church, afraid
her heels fall too hard,
takes a pew in darkness,
the pastor haloed in prayer.

She shields her eyes
against his glare, white stone
cast as gold, the tiled floor
fretted with light.

Her needle is swift, plants
a garden on plain cotton,
a girl on a swing, flowers
she cannot find in nature.

The men roar in the parlour.
She hears the chink of glass,
breathes their sweat, rich tobacco
from the New World.

She knows how their eyes
trace the lines of her gown,
follow the rise of lace
at the bodice. Their voices fall

when she passes to the courtyard,
takes up her willow broom. It whispers
its small song against the brick.
She raises her face to the sun.

The Sea at Aberystwyth

This is the end
of the world. The wild west, but not the frontier.

The old monster is roaring on the beach again—
kids run along the front in shirtsleeves, chasing

his fury, one great dark wave after another.
Oh rain, wash them clean.

The Norwegian tourists bask in a thousand ways
of getting wet. The windows of the Marine Hotel

are caked with guano. Maybe the rain will do the trick.
The seagulls swerve in the air stream.

The Spice of Bengal dims its lights, its one customer
sated. Time to wander into night. What we want

lies broken on the shore, what we can't have
stays black on the horizon;

the moon of the zebra crossing
flashing for no one.