

SINA QUEYRAS / Of the Hollow

We imagine Eliot's mind alone in the hollow, empty shells of Rahway, how men move like architecture into the wild and take stock.

We've come here to hide. We aren't sure how we measure up. We are all craft. We bury our hearts. We leave them at home. We are suspicious of feelings. We doubt sentiment. We are tired of confession. We fear the all heart and no craft. We dread the all craft and no heart. We circle outside of ourselves wanting in, we circle inside of ourselves wanting out, we walk with the wall of the world in the dead centre of our gaze and we can never see beyond it.

We are terrified of our talent, of the cost. We cower in the clearing. We shrink in the Salal. We have come to the sanctum, the green, with our desire to be washed clean. We stand on the threshold of our own creation and spit. We think, if we could only walk with a spindle on our forehead, if we had a horse we could fill with all of our loves, if we could enter the vaulted city with our families in tow. Instead turn to the forest. We peer into the spores. We have our knees locked. How will we be women without using the birth canal? We want to cut off our bottoms, we want to be rigid, unyielding. We want to be strong.

Anne Cameron has a face carved out of cedar.

Daphne Marlatt with her words all starched into a peak of foam.

Helen Portrebenko driving a taxi across the bay.

There is a war canoe made of conceptual poems, it floats with a town of small angry women, a ghost warrior in a grass cape takes up the rear, the canoe floats high on the inside passage, and knows no one's name.

On the islands, beyond the fringe, we circle our stumps and dream of casting off. We walk side by side with our cameras strapped, we see everything in twos. With our feet in step. With our hips in check. We walk in plaid with our jeans rolled up. We walk wet with seaweed in our ears. We turn the key. We pump the gas. The rain is falling and we want to move. Dark figures approach us, one rain-slickered arm up like an awning. We will take our punishment. We will roll over and cry.

We dread the quaint, the tubed lawn furniture. We dread the empty knots of language. We dread the time bombs, inevitable, random.

We sleep back to back. We peer into the cavern. We rock on our heels our feet squelching in nostalgia. We are fools. We think our beginning is the beginning. We turn the clock back. We turn our faces back. We turn our backs. We load the stove with wood. We listen to it burn. The rain, the stove, we are hot. We turn and face. We turn and face. We are not in Manhattan, we have not understood how to frame what we see. We peer up at the wet mountains, we peer down at the sea, vertical, green, dark, rivers of salmon from Howe Sound to the Fraser.

We turn and shout.

We want to protect our loves.

We want to cradle the slopes.

We say Cypress is our child.

We say Grouse too.

We say the ocean is our tidal pool, it moves through our lungs.

We say the blackberry bushes are poking through our ribs.

We say our bodies frame everything if you can turn and look, our hands, burrowing into the brambles laid like thick bales of barbed wire.

We want to thumb through nature, we want it beautiful, ordered, containable. We want it to remain and yet we want to enter it like a gallery, cool, smooth, minimal, randomly ordered in leather, elegant as Courbosier. We want to dwell in Charlotte Perriand, we say Arthur Erickson has not slept in a slit. We say we want colour. We want the new pristine. We want the reclaimed wild. We want California Closets. We want to file everything in small display cases. In drawers. Gold embossed moss, pewter cases of leaf fragment. Pouches of dried marigold. Pouches of iris. Pouches of wax. We love our pouches. We love our order. We covet more pouches inside of our pouches. We are encased even as we move through the air. We move and compile. We are an economy of women grieving.

We want to know how to be women artists in the world. We want to know beyond recipes for jam, beyond the thick brush strokes of pre-modernist canvases. How to enter the mind of the world? How not to think in code? Thinking terrifies us. We hide in public so tentative we think the wind might break our bones and yet we come.

We come smelling of tadpoles and silt. We come mossy and sprouting feathers. We come in our layers of fleece, with pain in our groins. We come with our skins like sheathes of dew. We come, we are all of our shortcomings. We come, rolling up our flaws, ready to dig in. We come wrapped like maypoles. We come in leather and lashed sprigs of heather. We are all of our flaws. We are ragged with imperfection. We bash ourselves against lithe hips. We aim, we fall short. We limp into the amber moments sheepish. We are bent with emotion. We are uneven in our ability to move forward, we say, beware of the empty boat but we are often the empty boat ourselves.