

Raphael Kosek

Black Place No. 2, 1944

Georgia O'Keeffe

This is the place where we all crack,
the snaking fissure where lovers fall away:
the disappointed, stunned, the failed
and finished.

This is where the earth opens and we slip
into something that goes so deep
into soil, into rock, into pink-fleshed
granite

--the place where we must learn
to love our life when we have nothing,
the rock hard bed of it, grey pillow of stone.

This is where we break our teeth on beauty,
swallow silence for our daily bread.
If we dare look up, white clouds
churn in the broken blue,
and yes, the horse will find his way
home, with or without us.

Raphael Kosek

Calla Lily with Red Roses, 1926

Georgia O'Keeffe

Why did you lay the calla down
on a bed of roses, past red,
running over-ripe to purple
petals darkened with desire?

Your swan of a lily
curls her neck in a cumbersome
beauty, the yellow pistil
bannered in graceful intent.

We are all flowering,
dropping tender leaves
into the pool of fervent wishes,
leaving home.

Lily, the yellow dust of your heart
smears on our cheeks
and we are nothing
if not greedy for this life.

Landscape sans Christina

“Lonely” my mother always complains
about the paintings hanging on my walls,
bereft of people: late winter sun
bruising the silent snow, a river
toiling out to sea, a marsh where
no one stands on the bridge to fish – only
the grass in collusion with the wind.

Why, she asks, does no one paddle
on the water, or rest on a bench,
her face half-shadowed under a hat?
No bicycle wends its way up a gentle
slope, no dusty-eyed child steeped
in summer, no stark figure bundled
against the cold.

Why this preference for the uninhabited?
I have wondered myself --
the stippled forest where no one hears
the tree fall, but fall it does
cracking and splitting in wild devastation.

Andrew Wyeth sometimes regretted
painting Christina into “Christina’s World,”
believing that from the weathered grey
of the sentinel house, the gunmetal gleam
of the ocean always just over the rise,
field inclining upwards to meet
the paled sky, we should *feel* her presence
yearning in that sea of grass
endlessly grounded, her lovely and crippled
body, redundant, after all.

Raphael Kosek

Red Canna, 1924

Georgia O'Keeffe

You are not a flower but a firestorm,
nothing hotter than your reds and yellows,
the purple bleed of your exploding heart,
grief offered up gold as joy.

You are the hoped for mardi gras,
the Friday night of the soul.
Anyone who burrows into your lips,
the crackle of your flame,

anyone who wakes and wakes
in the stirring sheaves of your heart,
does not go home again.

Raphael Kosek

At the Rodeo, New Mexico, 1929

Georgia O'Keeffe

You understand we don't all ride bulls
for a living, but the yoke-yellow eye
in the center of your garish corral
says we may as well
crack ribs in the dusty ring
of this life, ride high fliers
until the bloodshot eye
of some aggravated beast
has it in for us,

until we are welted in blue-black --
just another color of blood,
until the flesh of our dream,
the huge risk we take

is carnival pulp under
the sharp hooves
of whatever rides us

and the brutal well-meant
cries of strangers rain down
like hard chips of turquoise sky.

Raphael Kosek

White Rose with Larkspur No. 2, 1927

Georgia O'Keeffe

Anywhere you want to go is here:
blue larkspur pillows white rose.
Rest in the rumple of petals,
their blowzy beauty
careless of your sins,
your griefs.

They don't puzzle about
where love went, or what
your life is really like.
If you are tired,

they will take you
the way clouds do,
one after another.
Go, fly to them.

It is better to trust
the way they lean on air,
blue-shadowed body of rose,
than anyone's red heart.