

Roland Leach

MY OWN PRIVATE GUERNICA*

I am in the top right hand corner,
the head tilted back so far
that it appears like an ostrich with goitre,
the stubs of jointless fingers
reach for the small lit window,
but my eyes stare backwards,
tear-shaped and lidless,
beyond the borders of the frame.

I have always wanted the other side of the edge,
like a character wishing itself flesh.
Here I am the static corner-piece.
I have been admired from a distance
by those, catalogue in hand,
wanting a quick fix of culture,
but most end up discussing the symbolism
of the bull & the horse's mouth,
the horizontal incisors pointed like tips of missiles
aimed on a fulcrum of tongue to the left wall.
I have heard a thousand possible metaphors
and one who said the painting bled on holy days.

Would I be more famous if I climbed away?
The thick hairless arms dragging my head
across the frame, to huddle on the marble floor,
to tell them the head of the bull is just a head of a bull.
Or are the staring eyes,
the hands on chin and useless chat an illusion?
And would it just be one great falling,
like those imagined by those early sailors.

This picture is not my own.
I do not like the amputees:
the legs, arms, heads,
not a torso in sight.

It is why I am in the corner.
I am bodiless.
I imagine there is a body waiting
on the other side of the window,
ready to attach itself to me
like that perfect lover we all hope for.
But I am scared to climb further
into the picture.
There might be just white canvas
and no entry back.
Outside the frame there is
at least one hand.

The others stare with fish eyes
towards the globe of light mid-picture.
I don't know if they're happy,
but they have their small god to wish upon
till the filament withers
and cracks in darkness,
besides they're only fucking heads after all.
I have arms and though they are no more
than planks of 4 by 2, they can reach.
It is my curse says the head of the horse.
He thinks he is the centre of the artist's dream.

With arms I am Eve and Prometheus.
Outside the painting I would find
the hand that left me without a body.
I do not ask for anything,
not even a body.
With one hand I would grasp the other,
bending back the stiffness of thumb and three fingers,
leaving the middle finger raised to the sky.

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