

Mimesis Upended: A Reluctant Nod to Mr. Wilde

How did she see peaches,
never seeing a Cezanne?
this mother of my mother
who passed to me, across a generation,
her own deep-burning need for Beauty.

Or so I'm told.
"You remind me of your grandma,"
my mother used to chide as she coaxed me
from pages abloom with Renoirs and Monets.
"Only she loved honeysuckle and Indian paintbrush."

I don't remember.
I knew her only when she was old
and her mind was gone
and she waltzed with strangers in her ruby robe
and sang, "Have you seen my new shoes?"

How did she see flowers,
knowing no O'Keeffe to lead her
deep into the sultry depths of poppies?
this daughter of desert basin who journeyed once
as far as Blue Bench—one day's ride.

“You’ve got your grandma’s eyes,” great-aunts
peer out from afghan barracks and decide.
But I know better.
She saw unaided (unencumbered?).
She saw direct, all by herself. I can’t.

How would I see orange without Albers,
thick-crusted bread without Vermeer,
eyes without Eakins, light without Turner,
my own still bath-wet form reflected
without hosts from Phidias forward?

Proud fashioners of Art (of life?)
these benefactor-thieves,
bestowing their vision while robbing my own,
granting me what grandma never had—
The prejudice of education.

—Sharlee Mullins Glenn