

Claire Bateman

Grip

It's nearly impossible to
sketch all the way out
to the paper's edge;
the lines force their way
inward as though
compelled to seek
a gravitational center.

To break that field's hold,
you may poke holes
in the vellum using
a small device designed
for that purpose:

the gravity-defying,
line-releasing awl with its
delicate biomorphic prongs
which retract a nanosecond
after puncturing the surface
so as to not mar the next sheet,

and then release
a film of sealant
that hides but does not
saturate the wounds.

Now you can range;
now you can adorn,
rearrange, and ply
your space. Now
you can rampage.

Habitat

Though no doubt she can sense our presence, the solitary gown doesn't startle. Stitched of taffeta and crinoline, with pearl buttons down the back under the pinned-on veil, and six hoop mermaid petticoats to buttress her, she holds her ground atop a craze of asphalt crack lines and sprouting chicory, mustard grass, and thistle.

In the dusk, she looks as though she could generate her own microclimate — a swirl of snowflakes, perhaps, even in this unseasonable heat. And surely the neighborhood could use a tender, feathery mantle of white: the pavement's pitted and churned; hyenas lope across formerly fastidious lawns; wild pigs forage in rose gardens overrun by scrub.

Feral yet unafraid, she must have wandered away from her pack, though she won't be alone for long; the others can't be far off, and they move swiftly, not only when they're hunting, but just as often for the sheer sensation of wind through gauze. From the air they'd look like spun sugar dollhouse dresses (if planes were still flying, of course) but here on the ground their elegance is inextricable from their ferocity.

According to legend, it's lucky to catch a glimpse of them at full speed, but whether or not that's true, it does fill the heart with joy to behold them in the wild after all those centuries they spent trapped in wardrobes or pining behind plate glass.