

Roald Hoffmann

The golden age

It begins with vision
and ends there too.

Here, hills lolloping
down to unseen sea,

islands above the fog.
Elsewhere, the fields

around Haarlem, flat
as they can be. But

tear yourself away
from Ruysdael's clouds

to be pulled in
by the white sheets

of fabric spread across
the fields, and now

the mind's telescope,
not held in check

by optics, zooms in
to the sharp rise

of peduncles of
a field of tulips

the Queen of Night
bloom, or lowly garlic

scapes. One can't stop
the flow, now we are

elsewhere, where cut
flowers sit in vases,

and nearby oranges
glow. Someone's

showing off how well
he can do reflections

off pewter or a glass.
Why not pull in a skull, or

brace of pheasants, as if
we needed reminding

that demise is next to
domain. But the reflections

are good enough to show
a window, so off we soar

again, into it, out and
about, to soul-touch

the land we'll walk in
and, rejoicing, rejoin.

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A Colombian artist in the islands

Iguanas came late in life
to Enrique Grau, sprawled
across each other and the pages
of his Galápagos sketchbooks,

He drew the marine “imps
of darkness”; *Amblyrhynchus
crustatus*, raising its snub snout
out of water, soon to dive,

El Niño-willing, for algae, then
back to the porous rocks for warmth.
He drew the land iguanas,
basking and saurian, on lavishly

rendered rocks, in the makeshift
shade of a gnarled bush.
Grau returned to his Cartagena,
there in charcoal and pastel,

on meter and a half square paper,
worked out his obsession with
the spiky crests, shadows, the
squat threat of these cactus-

chomping, torpid lizards. They
have also not left my mind
ever since I saw Grau’s iguanas.
I went to the islands, out for wasps.

hoping the lizards cross my path.
But it wasn’t to be. Grau died.
And now I imagine: Enrique
and I are sitting on a hot rock,

watching the iguanas forage.
A swatch of pink — that’s *rosada*,
Enrique says, in heavily
accented English, and looking

much like his selfportrait.
Have some water, Enrique, I say.
And do you think they need some?
They're still, and just then one

changes into a dragon. And back.
I blink, touch Enrique's hand.
Did you see that? I did, he says —
Allosaurus fragilis, I should think.

What does an iguana dream about?