

## BRUCE POLLOCK

*Large Indigo 3*, 2016  
oil on linen, 102 x 68 in.



COURTESY THE ARTIST

## ANNIE STENZEL

### It was Not Yet Called Silicon Valley

She's clad in crisp polyester designed to rebuff chemicals: baggy lab garment with snaps from neckline to midcalf. This shapeless armor was worn over . . . anything, actually: it didn't matter what was underneath the many-times-splashed and, did I mention? fireproof fabric worn all day long, except at lunch.

Head covering, gauzy but severe, was not intended to spare one's coiffure. The object was to keep rogue hairs from falling onto glass plates, silicon wafers—future semiconductors, once they were razored into tiny chips. The roar was perpetual: great ventilators sucked every possible speck of dust from the clean rooms, and the temperature was never permitted to vary.

Harsh fluorescence overhead in the areas light was permitted; muted reddish gloom in one room, where three basins held stinking liquids: develop, stop, and fix. At the end of the row, water, filtered within an inch of its life, running ceaselessly to rinse the glass plates clean. Three portals: a door-sized one for the worker and two plexiglass windows for the heavy trays of work, coming in and going out.

How in the world did she manage? Decades after her final eight-hour stint in the factory, after stumbling outside one last time to squint at the full-color, scent-free, silent day, she still marvels at those years: how, stationed, solo, in that foul chamber, she could scour the restless reaches of her mind for good company. And because it was too noisy for music (or even Muzak), she could sing out of tune at the top of her lungs whatever she wanted.

**Annie Stenzel's** poems have most recently appeared in the print journals *Kestrel*, *Ambit*, and *Quiddity*, and in the online journals *Lunch Ticket*, *Rat's Ass Review*, and *Unsplendid*. Her work has twice been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and once for a Best of the Net. She received a B.A. in English Literature and an M.F.A. in Creative Writing, both from Mills College. Stenzel is also a letterpress printer, never happier than when her hands are covered in ink. She pays the bills by working at a mid-sized law firm in San Francisco.