

YARI OSTOVANY

Fragments of Poetry and Silence (for Schoenberg), 2015
Oil on Canvas, 38 x 38 in



COURTESY: THE ARTIST

LULJETA LLESHANAKU

I Came, I Saw, I Left

Hunched inside a forty-five degree corner,
eyes glued to cartoons
and the light of the TV screen
forever projecting on the nape of his neck.

Looks like a statue in the park
but that's not it exactly. It's my father,
who's just chosen
the expression I'll remember him by.

No one expects anything from him.
In fact, he might continue to sit still there
for another million years,
like a fossil inside amber,
surrounded by forgetfulness and forgiveness.

And my grandparents' profiles, what were they like?
They stood posing for twenty minutes
in front of an old camera, for a daguerreotype,
until smiles evaporated from their faces
leaving them exposed
vis-à-vis the main purpose
and bitterly dignified.

John Coltrane never looks straight at you. It's difficult
to remember one of his gestures or looks. He simply plays jazz.
Measures time with his feet. Vigilant,
his melancholy intervening at the right moment,
like throwing a jacket over a nude woman.

Van Gogh sketched portraits seen from the back
naming them, "Orphan Man with Long Overcoat,"
"Orphan with Top Hat"...
Or did those backs sketch him?
It's a question of speed:
it depends who's faster.

When my three-year-old daughter, Lea, afraid
of cameras,
needed a passport photo,
I took her in my arms and we posed together.
The photographer's solution?
Cut her face from mine with scissors,
detaching it from the context.
She feels calm inside that false identity;
has yet to discover the betrayal.

This joyful crowd of youth, their feet teetering from
too much beer
comes out of a club and disappears
into the wide métis cheekbones of midnight.

Anxious sleep-wasters,
they stumble through night's buckram robe
like statues at the moment of inauguration.

Meanwhile, statues of heroes and rulers in city squares
look like they've won the game against time.

With a triumphant expression
like that of Julius Caesar,
all of them say: "I came, I saw, I conquered."
But wasn't he the same Caesar
who, with bulging eyes and a knife at his throat,
spoke his last: "You too, Brutus?!"

—Translated from the Albanian by Ani Gjika

Luljeta Lleshanaku received the Crystal Vilenica Prize and the Albanian National Silver Pen Prize. She is the author of six poetry books in Albanian, with two English editions published by New Directions: *Fresco: Selected Poems* and *Child of Nature*. Her collection *Haywire: New & Selected Poems* (Bloodaxe Books) was a finalist for the 2013 Popescu Prize.

Ani Gjika, Albanian-American poet and translator, is the author of *Bread on Running Waters* (Fenway Press). Her poems and translations have appeared in the *Seneca Review*, *Salamander*, *Ploughshares*, *AGNI* online, *World Literature Today*, and *Fishhousepoems.org*.