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Grinding Cobalt and Vermilion

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GRINDING COBALT AND VERMILION

The artist does not confront the world, but infinity. It is just that our ideas of infinity are changing.

—Rufino Tamayo

Mongo Santamaria isn't Mozart, but you paint to him,
a Basque beret and moccasins tapping, conga
beating exact as a heart through your life,
as Rothko did to his time's masters.
It matters that we saw them, that room
in San Francisco of his already darkening
plains of color. That you pressed my arm,
led me to the pulse the paintings moved from
as blood and breath move, surrounding a body.

Who spoke to us after him, perhaps an unknown woman
in a cottonwood canyon, drawing with cattlemarkers.
Hidden in the chalk cliffs above the turquoise
and abstract lake in our dream of Montana,
she is just on the edge of our minds.

If only for planting the gardens at Giverny
he painted, perhaps it is Monet
molding the clay banks of the pond, improving
his vision, the manipulated explosion of poppies.

Grinding cobalt and vermilion,
you of another century, in a land with violent
history, stain otter on shields of rawhide,
search for the key to DeStahl.
One grandmother's blood a mystery, your skin
darkens each year as chokecherries,
nearing equinox, smoke in the sun.

Cottonwood I will compare the honeyed scent
of any western river to where it does not graze
wild and beyond reach. Scent of sage,
crushed between your two fingers, sacred
as these heritages, rise as rosemary,
at my touch, rises from your hair.