What is a bust but a loving beheading? A small muscle in his back, unrendered, must have relaxed into the vinyl cushion of a barber’s chair. Could he even see himself, through sound’s bright thrall, the mirror whitening with museum air, cutting him close to a future where spectators pick through picker’s stalls? Of Parker, her stone balloon remains upright in contradiction—part who he was, and part who she showed him others seemed to be. It is easy to feel she had no right—unless, of course, she loved him—but even then, the winds in California were still American, and the stone she chose, a sandstone, color of a Santa Monica dock at sunset, bleeding into shore. Over the black rock, she felt his lapidary blindness: lapped by just-daughterless waters, only ever surviving effacement. So you can feel the grain of desert in her right to testify—though she couldn’t quite get the eyes—could not lie, nor bear to see them hold the grief of muteness.
The eyes of a dead man are rendered immortal
Etched into the pelt of unforgiving bark
Two deceased beings, one united soul
No eternal rest for the decaying
A life lived for two

Please stop staring or he might stare back

Empty sockets accuse you
Push his lids down before you confess
Once a reflection of the painful infallibility
Rising to the heavens, eyes presented the Truth
Freedom lifted from the cold mass of a cadaver

Please let the restless be at rest

What happens to a man like Charlie Parker?
Gone a place he twice sought out
Demons chasing him across dirty city streets
Even they can’t stand the stench of poison

Please, please, soften your gaze and let him ascend

Bird rises, wings weighty, smothering silence
No breath left to breathe into the brass
Only a statue bouncing between curious gazes
The eyes of a dead man are rendered immortal
Dreaming of Dad

after The Campo Santo, Venice by JMW Turner

Drop deep and yes, dream –
not of the familiar, but instead
dissolve your conscious mind
in mirrored towers, canal-
swirled leaves See through
bleary mountains blue as sky,
misty sky white as a cloud-moth’s
reflected symmetry Sink
your thoughts in lagoons
of lethargic logic, swim them
under the scum-thick surface,
breathe them with sleep-frilled gills
in an underwater Upside-down
where the mundane – boatmen’s
vulgaries, floating detritus – flows
through reflections of lofty sacred
spires and imagined storied shores
and your living oblivious spirit
glides right up to the cemetery isle
and chats casually
with the dead
just as if
he’d never left
The Siren Stamnos

When draped in petal skirts rather than plumes
    The notes allure with sweet perfume instead;
Carnations bleed a swan song still in bloom
    As verdant death subsumes lush waves of red

    That surge like wine in guts too frore for prayer
    And gather on the rosewood slab as grime.
    A phantom atoll merging urn and lair
Exudes a spice derived from sparser times

    And teases beauty as relief prolonged,
    A pallid solace far from friendly berths.
Bouquets affix a sage inhaling song:
    All happenings upon the floral earth

Are yours, one who survives, approach and eat
    The rotten choral wreaths’ flagrant deceit
Don’t you see the bee on the flower,  
   sucking the pollen like a child with a lollipop?  
Don’t you see the brown butterfly, 
  perching on an orange sea, a captain of his own ship?  

Don’t you notice the shells lying around the table, 
  tucked behind the bright flowers?  
Don’t you notice the sag of the plants, 
  their life draining away?  

Don’t you hear their leaves crackling 
  and browning to dust?  
Don’t you hear their whispers, their pleads, 
  their promises and secrets?  

Don’t you feel their pain, 
  their whispers of redemption?  
Don’t you feel the brush of their petals 
  running across your skin?  

Don’t you know their colors by heart;  
  Cobalt, 
  Indigo,  
   Cornflower blue  
Coral, 
  Peach,  
Bronze  
  Apricot  
Burgundy,  
  Maroon,  
Silver,  
  And gray  
And more, and more  
   So many colors  
And more, and more,  
   So much pain  

Don’t you see the grim reaper’s scythe 
  Of decay?  
Don’t you see their lives, their longing, 
  Their shadows, their pain?
Madeleine Kreps

The Last Gift He Gave Me

Filled with colors that are lovely, yet ominous. Wilted, some thereal. Some are radiant while timidly hiding in the shadows. Linger between the leaves lavishly intricate flowers, highlighting their elegance.
Divested and bested, I’m headed to where I rested, bopping and hopping and slopping to the bayou rhythm of my attested wet condition, too dry from coopting and adopting the too long afternoon days of your bleached sun.

My spotted ribs, scarred but hoping, soaking and smoking the oppressive humidity of this swamp heat, but not the hillbilly lucidity of your unwebbed feet stomping out my mud.

This watercress morass I possess might seem a mess, to you, Nonetheless, these lily pads caress rather than possess, and offer an amphibian-man, like me, more peace than all the cultivated cruelty your culture can confess.

This watery flesh, glistening its distress under your duress, can breathe in the colored eaves of these fallen, damp leaves. To leave? Please, it'd bereave. And I ain't about to play that game. I'd rather walk than talk like you.

So I’m full on leaping into this flooded prologue, the ripples carrying away all your scorching, seething recordkeeping. And I’m gonna keep on keeping all that noise from creeping into my heart and bog.
There’s something in my mouth that feels a bit like static.

Like the buzz of a flickering neon sign.

Like the fuzz, black and white and redbluegreen of a television set when televisions were a set.

And now everything is a television set that is constantly on and if I speed down the road I see them walking—

Square heads and glass faces and a power cord snaking out of their neck.

It’s gotta be the red pill or the blue pill or the yelloworangepurple pill.

There must be a way to plug them in somehow.
Lydia Snyder

Outside, Looking In

The dancers twirl and spin about,
Their skirts aflame with color,
While across the river, I stand without,
On the outside, looking in.

The river, blue, splashes noisily past,
The waves untainted by light.
On the farther side, the party lasts
As I stand outside, looking in.

I hear a song, I see them smile,
But I only feel confused.
They sing and dance, and all the while,
I wait outside, looking in.

There is a bridge which upon,
I could easily cross.
But if I did, would I belong,
Or still be outside, looking in?

The lights reach out across the river,
And stretch their beams on me.
I shy away and consider,
Perhaps I want to be outside, looking in.

For if I cross to that other side,
Will I still be myself?
Or will what’s truly me have died,
When I’m no longer outside, looking in?
Sweeping, searching, blinking, twinkling  
The lights over the sea are the sprinkling  
Of colors that shine so bold so true  
The colors that are the components of you

The yellow for the happy cheer  
When ones you love are close and near  
It blinks under a soft gray haze  
Entwined in the emotion maze

The orange one is a drop in the sky  
Like cool ice cream in late July  
Dripping down the cone like the setting sun  
Melting into the night when the day is done

The blue one like the sea shines on  
Like the chair in the little salon  
Where you sat so patient, so still  
As the hairstylist trimmed with skill

The purple rays stretch on through space  
Like the walls in the room you once laid  
They dance and spin until dizziness wins  
To the music of sweet violins

The colors mix together and beam  
With all the wishes of your childhood dreams  
They still burn their consistent light  
A handful of stars on a warm, clear night