Sketches of Naked Fruit

Carmen Lowe

First, a flurry of five-second sketches:
time only for a thick smudge
of charcoal and few dry lines:
bulk of body, light on skin.
Charcoal says "sketch-sketch"
across a drafty roomful of rough paper pads.
No Picassos here
but 30 eyes of 15 women, shifting
perspectives, distort this blatantly nude
body—bending, tilting, swaying
in the middle of our classroom—
into planes and contortions,
missing faces of so many demoiselles
de Avignon.

The shock of the nude
disappears, and I have dismembered it,
the body up there:
it is a still-life—
peaches and pears
on the stained arm-chair next to the flowing bedsheets.
Thirty minutes to draw: shape
a lump of flesh into two-dimensional
gradations of gray—
"swiss-swiss" says my graphite stick
on the smooth good paper,
lick-swiss into valleys
of skin, muscle, bulges
of thigh, crevices in belly and under arms;
curve light across shoulders and breasts,
carve dark into public hair and toes:
such an odd-shaped fruit.

It is a she now
and with a real fruit:
the class can smell the pungent
spray as she peels
her orange during break.
She robes herself in blue flowers
and barefoot, walks from easel
to easel, peering
into art's cracked mirror.
The sketches show
she doesn't shave legs or arms
but they don't tell
how she rode her bike
to the studio in the rain
or how her body
is like ours: small, lopsided
breasts, too much fat
bulging in the wrong places:
beautiful. Intimate and quiet,
we're back to drawing—
"swiss-swiss": charcoal
calls with a hiss
like black snow.
The room is warm
from the space-heater.
I can still smell the ghost
an orange lingering
in the warm air and
I can smell her
sweat: the fragrant fruit
of the still-life.
sketches:

- sketchbook
- charcoal
- paper pads

the flowy bedsheet.

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