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Self Portrait with Dissection Tray

Amy Leigh Kucharik

Southern Illinois University Carbondale

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Amy Leigh Kucharik
Senior Honors Project
Self Portrait With Dissection Tray



Self-Portrait With Dissection Tray

There's shellac in my mascara and every time I blink
it really counts, like I'm a plastic-lidded baby doll shaken

up and down, open-shut, open-shut, dangling
from one leg over a sidewalk. I'm wearing green lipstick

because verdigris is my favorite color, but you tell me
I look like a dead girl, you gutless necrophiliac.

I was never your baby doll, never your painted lady,
but you plastered me in papier mache made from the pages

of biology textbooks, sawed through it, ripped it off again,
anxious to discover precisely why I slipped

that night in the shower. I only know
that the humid air was too thick to breathe, that I woke

with my head in a patch of mildew, groped for a towel
and stumbled in the darkness toward my room. I thought

I was crazy. You cite this evidence, and go for the brain
like a Day of the Dead zombie, famished for the human

soul, for the secret of our existence. You've got me shelved
and categorized in specimen jars, phylum and species,

eyelash, brain cell, lock of hair. I'll tell you a secret: forget about
the brain. Forget about the heart, too, though the Egyptians

supposed the soul was caged there--my dilettante
heart needs only to be plastered, painted over; it's all surface,

like candied hearts that dissolve in colored sugar layers, red,
purple, orange, the center a sour white chunk. I'm a grand

charlatan, fantasizing dye jobs in gas station restrooms, but
despite your formaldehyde I strip away layers of pretense

with acetone--baby doll, butterfly, cursor, strobe light--until
nothing is left but the white hard bone.

Jerry Lewis

Grandmother's in the nursing home and now
I own the refuse of her dismantled
house--antiques pillaged before the estate sale
& junk nobody else wanted.

Like the Martin and Lewis comic book, where Jerry
lowers his exaggerated jaw to guffaw as Dean Martin
rescues the hourglass blonde princess--crumbling,
yellowed, out of date--This stuff is worth a lot of money.

Antique ghosts will haunt me
when she dies; some of them are here already,
cushioned in Aunt Virginia's armchairs or folded
between my grandfather's handkerchiefs and ties.

Jerry Lewis is out sweeping the lawn with a broom,
like Bela Lugosi's last scene in Plan 9 From Outer Space:
he walks out past the porch, he pauses, looks about,
picks a flower, wanders down the yard...

These are antique men, black and white men, soon to be ghosts.
Janitor, grocery store, coal mine men. Old men
who play croquet and pull up dandelions. In the nursing home
they roll and lean in their nightmare wheelchairs

while Grandmother flirts with the physical therapist.
She doesn't know her house is stripped for sale
or that I feel her dish drainer
in the roof of my mouth. Jerry Lewis

is on television, looming over a sloping kid
with arms like broomsticks,
and my grandmother wakes, says
"It doesn't seem fair, does it?"

David Berkowitz to Anastasia Romanov,
December, 1974

There was no one left to kill,
said Sam. So I smoked a cigarette
and meditated on
the demon dogs and those bodies
strewn across the floor, the
Romanovs all laid out neat and dead.

There was no one left to kill.

Father, Sam,
Rasputin, the *devil*
made me do it but the whole time
it was for you, my pretty
little maybedead girl. You are,
I am, a relatively small and
relatively nude
heap of sweaty palms
and half-formed
homo-neurotic fantasies. I remember:

I used to live inside a Russian
symphony, angry Christmas wet
dream, an open sleigh.

I made love to.

Somebody assassinated me; they
found my furcoatbody bloody
in a landfill, lightly glazed
with snow.

They call me Mister Monster, serial
madman, 44caliberRasputin,
open slay.

But I smoked and there were the bodies
and
I saw you naked pale and smiling
with fur-streaked cheeks.

Here
the concrete pries open my eyes.
Here the demon dukes and princes

grind out their cigars
on my wrists.
Wicked King Wicker,
John Wheaties,
Son of Sam,

but I feel the snow, the snow,
the sleighbells, black white red drops
of blood on that exquisite whiteness,
and I miss my pretty princess
most of all.

pickpocket

You say "pockets aren't for what you take
with you, they're for what you pick up along the way."
And it's true; when I look at you I see
one pocket full of Star Wars, the other containing
the bones of small mammals and my eyeteeth.
Eye, aye.
I've been ayeayeaye-ing
whenever the phone rings, dreading
your voice like a stab to the thigh.

"This tea is delicious!" you
exclaim with a whistle.

Go whittle a cock that can wake us at dawn.
Your brother's pajamas are woven
from the poems you stole-- "Poems?
What poems?" you say, with a yawn.

O, the dawn,
the dawn, the cock on the lawn,
your finger, the trigger,
(the pot and the kettle) the dew and the
sonnet
I write you:

A lightsaber is worth a thousand words
*because photon torpedoes exemplify
the very essence of postmodernism!*

But no, that wasn't what you meant at all;
it's incoherent--drivel--it has to be trouble.

I was imitation YOU, see, dressed
in snakeskinboots up to my neck
Doc Martens--aphrodisiac!
lightsaber and shotgun buried deep in the pockets
(these things are supposed to be illegal)
Disassembled--euphoric!
Let us go Laser-Tagging all over the campus!

Concatenation; lost concentration;
pockets, Divergent--climactic!

O, pore little cusses, O sudden pianos,
sudden clauses! Sullen canvas!

Your trespasses cut a path clear through my pockets.
(your phallus, my paintbrush, and blood
in the inkwells)

That dancing kama-sutra girl = a constellation
of tea leaves on the bottom of the cup. Yep, I'm
reading your fortune. It says:

Your pockets are full of my jewelry, my Legos,
my parts and my pieces,
machinery
without which I'm lost.

sound

*When you hear music, it's gone,
in the air, and you can never
capture it again,* said Eric Dolphy,

but I say he meant when you *play*.
Certainly the notes that blasted
out the bell of my silver Conn 8D

French horn--a dazzling
monstrosity of tubing and valves,
an antique toy train modeled

after an H.R. Geiger landscape,
lacquered slick, reflective, cool brass,
with its delicious metallic mouthpiece kiss,

with its round sound that could ring
out/make dogs howl/carve a hole
in the ceiling--

certainly this music gave out
at least two years ago, when I shut
and latched its snailshell case

like a tomb. Dissonant
notes from my stringless Japanese electric
guitar have already vanished
into the atmosphere.

But when I hear music sometimes it's etched
in memory, precise as a diamond
needle's laser-carving inside my skull.

Take a look at the law man
beating up the wrong guy, and Bowie
codas into a wrenching Coltrane.

Or I dream an electronic
game theme,
or Dolphy, Schoenberg, each paints
his own hypodermic/apocalyptic vision.

Route 13

Driving east, driving west, it's
every man for himself. My car
breathes the familiar scent
of old clothes--reeking of the past

obvious as billboards, plain
as a raingauge, clear as a catalogue
of cigarette butts piled in the ashtray.

I've seen the seagulls feeding;
I know what it's all about:
a tonka-green jacket, a jeep,
men who drive the
caterpillar steamshovels
[surprisingly easy to rent or own].

Portable portents: they fire their cannons;
they don't wait for the FedEx trucks
on Route 13 to get us there. They

don't wait for the FedEx trucks
to deliver the meat tenderizer,
the pulp romances, the Star Wars toys.

I know what it's all about. Piles
of black denim heaped in the backseat
like hipsters and dopesters
and starry-mouthed pucksters
who play us for the fools we be.

I've lain awake conjuring angelic jesters
and apple licorice Medusas
on the silver-screened lining of my eye.
They live in the hem
of a flannel night gown; their voices
echo in the deafening hallways
of my estranged brain.
It's every man for himself.

I've been the mouse-eyed
hippie mama gathering
old lovers in the folds of her skirt,
driving west, driving east.

I've seen the seagulls feeding,
swooping grey arcs that frown across
the lucid unlucky sky like old lovers'
cigarette butts flicked out the window

of a car going eighty on Route 13:
you never see where they land.
I want to be unencumbered
from lifeless things, all these clothes,
all those toys. Unlucky luckies that
stick to us like flies on the windshield.