

Milk, and: Night Watch, and: He Remembers His
House, and: Ghost, and: Intaglio.

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 **Milk, and: Night Watch, and: He Remembers His House,
and: Ghost, and: Intaglio**

Katherine Smith

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

**Milk, and: Night Watch, and: He Remembers
His House, and: Ghost, and: Intaglio**

Katherine Smith (bio)

Milk

Rembrandt van Rijn

Buckets of fresh milk brought
while she was with child to make her strong
didn't keep Saskia from staining the white pillow red.

A stranger's breast saved our son.
My wife died in our marriage bed,
Her once abundant dowry

filled my empty palm, metallic
ghost I grasped—conch shells of gold,
pewter swords, blue china—spending the last fistful

of guilders. Even before my wife was dead
I too slipped into the wet nurse's bed.

Too numb to mind her parents' outrage, the scald

of my own conscience, I stumbled each day
to a farmyard on the outskirts of town to draw
at noon three elms that stood in a glade

the underside of their heavy limbs a jigsaw
of shadow, trunks and bark lost in shade
the outmost leaves reaching upwards like hungry lips

sucking white streams of light from the sun. **[End Page 53]**

Night Watch

I remember my father's face
at night, among the torn envelopes
holding electric bills, the mortgage,
the phone bill, the house insurance,
the health insurance, the credit cards,

the home equity line of credit —
and I think of the mortgage
Rembrandt never paid down,
the debts for oil and turpentine,
the hog-bristle brushes he used
in those exuberant years before the crash
to paint the great *Night Watch*,
brilliant soldiers looming from dark
ebony, the costly chiaroscuro
never paid for. I see in the humbled face
of Rembrandt's last self-portraits
my father's brow, furrowed
in the dining room's dim light. **[End Page 54]**

He Remembers His House

Rembrandt van Rijn

When I owned my house, I selected thought
from cabinets of coral, stuffed egrets,
mahogany instruments. In my studio,
my students heated indigo
and oil, gold leaf, and turpentine.
I cultivated ghosts with pleasure:
bronze hands that glazed the memory
of my wife in celadon, white jade
ordered from Burma sculpted into a tub
that soothed me like a woman's arms,
my housekeeper stirring lavender into the bath.
The curio-lined walls nourished me
long afternoons I sketched

Amsterdam's bustling streets,
the canals opening onto immensity.
Now my home is auctioned at last,
I've grown common, an old woman,
in ruins, the ashen clock of a public square. **[End Page 55]**

Ghost

Rembrandt van Rijn

In my townhouse overlooking the canal
the whole world was sliding into
taking pretty ghosts, my wife and daughters,
I lived in the world of speaking things.
No man's words spoke to me as eloquently
as emerald feathers, peacock's plumes,
ivory tusks of elephants carved with gods.
The ink on vellum, bound Moroccan leather
meant more to me than Marco Polo's storied life.
What is free will worth if it doesn't fill a house
with precious furniture, ebony clocks? **[End Page 56]**

Intaglio

Rembrandt van Rijn

When first I entered my quiet house
the ebony tulips bowed down.
T it us, my son, burst from the rustling
skirts of his mother's ghost, the one
of my four children to live. His brown
spaniel growled at the dust on my shoes.

I shook them off and, in slippers,
padded to the studio, where

an apprentice placed my silver stylus
before me. I pulled my sketches out,

pressed Amsterdam into ground
that gave way beneath my thumb and finger.

T it us followed every gesture
of my hand, the acidic details dipped

in the ink of his copper eyes. **[End Page 57]**

Katherine Smith



Katherine Smith's poems have appeared in a number of journals, among them the *Cincinnati Review*, *Ploughshares*, *Mezzo Cammin*, *Unsplendid*, *Measure*, *Gargoyle*, the *Journal of the Motherhood Initiative*, *Shenandoah*, the *Southern Review*, *Atlanta Review* and *Appalachian Heritage*. Her first book, *Argument by Design* (Washington Writers' Publishing House), appeared in 2003. Her second book of poetry, *Woman Alone on the Mountain*, was published by Iris in fall 2014. She teaches at Montgomery College in Maryland.

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