

Jeffrey Pethybridge

Serra at Work

Astronaut-like in an asbestos-suit
to caliber the forged steel-cube's
white-hot edge matter worked from the molecule
up to a 77 ton ode

to Charlie Chaplin no poem is
ever that pure that absolute
among the skateboarders and das Geschmier
its weight a force a mass reforming the city

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Whipping a wax-pencil over
butcher-roll muscle-memory
more than instinct intends the hand
a skater whose leaps and arcs over

the frozen lake seek shapeliness
and yet the process of seeking
itself becomes a shape of leaps
and arcs the skater makes over

the frozen lake in time the leaps
and arcs the skater and the place
become one shape begun in wax-pencil
and muscle-memory the frozen lake

the mind that sun-reflecting lake
a field walked measured by walking
the simple and sensuous confidence
of walking through a field or frozen lake

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After the censorship a litany
of insults the griping judge's campaign
the senator's griping campaign
too the hearings and trials

and rulings founded on property rights
over the poorer angel of speech
after the wreckage of work
wrought and the engine of anger has cooled

now bitter no longer the spark to work
the ethic of work remains so too its image
poor angelic Giacometti plaster
dusting his hair and trousers and boots finally

taking a night-meal though cancer has wrecked
his stomach but he must eat to work against
his death not yet finished its work in him
this is no romance but how work rebukes

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Slow boiling pith to pulp paper-scrap
run through a blender the whole soup slathered
over a salvaged screen-door and deckle
fan humming to dry the sheaves to gather

the mind's violence his mantra work
comes out of work and the perception of work
contesting the world's gross inordinacy
that work is alchemical

and in its solving-actions
experience and the contents of experience
become known to man as a chemical-
soul remade in objects in persevering

actions as downtown a park grayed
by paper-ash and carcinogenic
dust will not be torn out of mind
so this work this autumn paper-making

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Walking the sleek architecture
of the Pulitzer arts building alone
except the sandwich in my pocket work-
book with its obdurate gap

of actual work notes for future work

heard confusion for Confucian

rain on sidewalks their cracks glancing
lights under the façade of tenements

like a Tibetan thangka last finishing
the icon's eyes animating
dedicating the image

from Kafka's notebook

now the sirens have a still more fatal
weapon namely their silence

a vivid-waiting

livid awaiting then the shock of tar-like

impasto paint-stick circles on handmade
paper the shock of recognition in-
cohere yet not trailing to in-
coherency resolved in words

slow boiling pith to pulp the park grayed
by paper-ash and carcinogenic
dust and the second work of art
taking place as words are taken down

reckoned the first work of the poem attention
a concentration capable
of reckoning all the dates and silence
is part of the process

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Moving furniture three days a week now
in coveralls and gasmask to throw
a ladle full of molten lead
an arc and an aleatoric art