



The Drawing Lesson

Kelley Aitken

First things first, I say, you've got to
organize the page and establish where
the shapes are in space. We're astronomers,
these pencils our telescopes, her face a distant
constellation. Show us, they say as I loop ovals
across white paper. It's not about getting it
perfectly but getting it down, honing happens
later, these are approximations or approaches,
birds in flight that will eventually land, which,
according to their frowns, is a load of claptrap.

So I talk planes, saying everything is faceted,
the face a soft diamond. Their temples flutter
with exasperation, their hands with mild panic
and *I don't understand* snaps like an elastic
at the soft inner wrist of my patience.

K. Aitken (✉)
Toronto, ON, Canada

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“Can I touch your face?”

I press that cliff wall of understanding,
cheek and brow into which I'd push
a geology of drawing. Concavity, I say,
and protrusion; it's all planar. Three fingers
lifted, shifted, placed against cartilage,
muscle, the gentle upholstery of flesh. See?
But what I really mean is: Feel?
Your face, facing so many directions.

They've got the goon show going,
malformed potatoes, eggs wearing
wigs, Nefertiti's neck, their drawings
are *hydrocephalic* and

in a flash I'm back at crip-camp, London,
Ontario, and my beginnings as an art teacher:
With every busload I'd hide in the arts-and-
crafts cabin while they sang, “There might be
flies on some of you guys but there ain't no
flies on us.” Half of them no longer alive for
me to draw their wonky bravery. By the time
they got back on the bus I saw their massive
skulls and sloppy grins as just another
manifestation of the body's wide diversity.
We were all weightless in that pool.

Now I'm talking shade and light, the
particularities of downy warmth or shine,
the grease of the face, its bacon and grist,
bumps, knobs, follicles, stray hairs, eyebrows
like Nike slogans or wheat fields, the sag
where skin, fatigued, no longer resists
the planetary pull *but you can't use line*
because it adds a decade. Areas of tone
will bring this forth out of nothing, like
we were brought, once.

I'm using words, the grand
obfuscators, to make form clear. Drawing
is about looking, I say, for the umpteenth
time. Put down what you see and check what
you've put down against what you see but
maybe too much of life is measuring. We
press on, fingers to cheek and pencil
to page, coming away from these
nights like wet noodles because I
persist in pulling, from them, such
scrutiny as we so rarely offer or receive.

Our eyes on the beautiful Tati, our hands
around pencils with rounded tips. In
cross-hatched mass and smudge, some
vestige of spirit catches. Decades later,
whoever looks at these will see her
as we do, tonight.