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Artemisia in Ecstasy

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Artemisia in Ecstasy

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Artemisia in Ecstasy

Emily Francisco

After Saint Mary Magdalene by Artemisia Gentileschi. Currently exhibited in the Galleria Palatina of the Palazzo Pitti in Florence.

Is this she

the woman of golden skirts
one who clutches at her breast

as if tormented by some

innermost burst vein of longing
black room lit from beyond the frame

(because agony is best felt in the dark)—

she who cut her long golden tresses
in penitence

frayed ends threads of hair

hanging like shredded sinews
by the ears—

I can see her, gilded dress

falling from her shoulder
in an act of spiritual freeness

her bare collarbone blessed

by the sacred unseen flickering flame
and it is to me she glances emptily

woman-hero of my New Testament

tortured paintress
humble barefoot Maddalena—

The lips part

and in that singular silver
breath of piety

(or perhaps it is regret)

she becomes the afflicted
no longer a face of fortitude

yielding instead

to the aging of feminist progeny
her story exhaled

before me and into my lungs

with the sigh of longevity
and it shimmers—

saturated with the thick

iridescent narrative
of one who has endured