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Erin Mellor

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Ekphrastic

by Erin Mellor

Lavender Mist (1950)
Artist: Jackson Pollock

Creativity drips. Pooled pigments congeal into a dizzying topographical map of contemporary hues. Physicists claim that the drips in Pollock's painting mimic naturally occurring fractals in nature, such as Fibonacci spirals in seashells, emerald blooms in Queen Anne's Lace, glacial fjords in icy-inlet places, and limbs of lightning that blink across night skies. Unrestricted geometries.

I think of my favorite landscapes, the places that hold fractal-like memories, irregular and infinite. I remember counting the horseshoe crabs dotting the low-tide shores of Kiawah as tiny sandstorms of wind-whipped dust tickled my ankles. I remember hanging perpendicular to the lapis waters of Kawarau River in Queenstown, acutely aware of all my senses for what felt like the first time—staring at the lichen-covered cliff walls, my throat dry and tasting of wind, the smell of wet rocks, asphalt-like, wafting upwards, faint music drifting from the gift shop and my hands touching nothing yet grasping coldness as if it were a tangible medium. Thin bungee cords proved the tether of my existence and the catalyst of my flight. I remember the faded dock where I first contemplated worth and beauty, beauty and relevance, relevance and circumstance.

Staring across a dark lake always makes me feel as if I'm about to drift into brilliance, but without a proper vessel. Hazy lights from neighboring boathouses striate the blue-black canvas of water. Search around in the small pocket of life you carry. Do you, too, think grand thoughts that cannot be labeled? Once dawn yawns a breath of pink and purple across the sky, once the tides lose their inkiness and mutability and catch the light, reflect the sun and dancing dust, once the saltwater grotto you are trapped in releases you; do you still try to capture the brilliance? Does mediocrity stare back at you from the page, as I have so often felt it staring up at me?

The color lavender does not speckle the canvas of *Lavender Mist*. Pollock painted it in an old barn by Accabonac Creek on the East End of Long Island. I like to imagine this balding man, cigarette in mouth, paint canister slightly tipped in left hand, creating inky puddles under weathered wooden beams, fashioning a mist of colors that could not be labeled.

Look at his mess of oil and enamel and aluminum. Spirals and swirls and domed cathedral-tops caught in an unremitting feedback loop. Dribble out the banal, it seems to say. Banality is the harbinger of brilliance.