

## Nine Boxes

*after Sol Lewitt and for Molly*

|                                                        |                                   |                                                             |
|--------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| Spring<br>stood there<br>all body                      | In the small beauty of the forest | you put this pen<br>in my hand and you                      |
| whose hosts are a disturbance<br>of words within words | Glimpsed through the<br>branches  | a few red and ochre leaves                                  |
| When I was eleven<br>I found a private river moving    | through a grass,<br>larkly        | heard the trees, their diffidence<br>greater than my noise. |

Lorine Niedecker: "Untitled [Spring]" - George Oppen: "Psalm" - Evie Shockley: "— shall become as —" - Robert Duncan: "Often I Am Permitted to Return to a Meadow" - David Biespiel: "Seki" - Hélène Dorion: from "Hearts, Books of Love" - Linda Gregg: "Untitled ['When I was eleven']" - Caroline Ebeid: "letter to the Corinthians" - Jennifer Chang: "The World"

## Wall Drawing 172

Lines through the center of the wall toward midpoints of sides and corners

Common towhees in the olive tree out back, song that wakes me

Sonic Gopher Spike song as it empties a dumpster

Robo Taxi song as it glides through empty streets at dawn

Clank and bang, garbage truck song repelling rodents from the yard

## Wall Drawing 289

Fourth wall: 24 lines from the center, 12 lines from the midpoint of each of the sides, 12 lines from each corner.

When he says he wants to paint the old car green  
I wonder what he means:  
beach glass or underside of leaf,  
lizard toe, M&M, shamrock in shadow,  
peridot in an antique ring.  
Which shade, which blade of grass:  
this one in sun, this one in sprinkler's stream.  
Which wavelength, which beam of light:  
spectral and constant, or volatile, changing,  
my perception so different from his.  
The sheared jewel-face of a wave  
(we call it the green room deep inside)  
or walls in the dining room of our first home,  
where the baby's first food was avocado  
and we lay all day on a frayed mint carpet,  
smell of tomato plants through window screens.  
All August we wore that green scent:  
petrichor and lightning, attar of herb,  
hint of fertilizer, whiff of aftershave in the bathroom.  
It's all subjective, a measurable property  
altered by interpretation:  
Army fatigues, so many empty beer bottles,  
kiwi flesh, pea, weed and bramble,  
faded Ithaca T-shirt he left crumpled on my floor.

Smell of tomato plants through window screens  
and walls in the dining room of our first home:  
petrichor and lightning, attar of herb.  
We called it the green room deep inside.  
Which wavelength, which beam of light,  
which shade, which blade of grass:  
spectral and constant or volatile, changing.  
I wonder if he means  
beach glass or underside of leaf  
when he says he wants to paint the old car green.  
Altered by interpretation,  
all August we wore that green scent.

It's not subjective but a measurable property:  
this one in sun, this one in sprinkler's stream.  
My perception so different from his,  
faded Ithaca T-shirt left crumpled on my floor,  
hint of fertilizer, whiff of aftershave in the bathroom.  
Peridot in an antique ring  
altered by interpretation:  
the sheared jewel-face of a wave,  
or lizard toe, M&M, shamrock in shadow,  
smell of tomato plants through window screens.  
The baby's first food was avocado  
like the walls in the dining room of our first home.

Altered by interpretation,  
spectral and constant, or volatile and changing  
when he says he wants to. Paint the old car green:  
kiwi flesh, pea, weed and bramble,  
peridot in an antique ring.  
Hint of fertilizer, whiff of aftershave in the bathroom,  
smell of tomato plants through window screens  
where the baby's first food was avocado.  
Which wavelength, which beam of light?  
Beach glass or underside of leaf,  
faded Ithaca T-shirt he left crumpled on my floor,  
Army fatigues. So many empty beer bottles.

All August we wear that green scent  
when he says he wants to paint the old car green,  
spectral and constant or volatile, changing.  
Petrichor and lightning, attar of herb:  
this one in sun, this one in sprinkler's stream.  
Beach glass or underside of leaf,  
Army fatigues, so many empty beer bottles,  
lizard toe, M&M, shamrock in shadow.  
We lay all day on a frayed mint carpet  
and it's all subjective. A measurable property?  
Faded Ithaca T-shirt he left crumpled on my floor.

The sheared jewel-face of a wave  
like peridot in an antique ring.  
August we wore that green scent  
and lay all day on a frayed mint carpet  
in the dining room of our first home  
(we call it the green room deep inside)  
where the baby's first food was avocado.  
My perception is so different from his,  
spectral and constant or volatile, changing.  
Army fatigues, so many empty beer bottles,  
kiwi flesh, pea, weed and bramble:  
which shade, which blade of grass?

Which wavelength, which beam of light?  
I wonder what he means,  
but it's all subjective, not a measurable property:  
hint of fertilizer, whiff of aftershave in the bathroom,  
petrichor and lightning, attar of herb.  
We lay all day on a frayed mint carpet,  
faded Ithaca T-shirt left crumpled on the floor  
beside Army fatigues, so many empty beer bottles.  
Walls in the dining room of our first home:  
beach glass or underside of leaf,  
lizard toe, M&M, shamrock in shadow  
or one in sun or one in sprinkler's stream.

My perception so different from his,  
I wonder what he means  
when he calls it the green room deep inside.  
All August we wore that green scent.  
It's subjective, a barely measurable property  
like the sheared jewel-face of a wave.  
Where the baby's first food was avocado,  
we lay all day on a frayed mint carpet:  
which shade, which blade of grass?  
Smell of tomato plants through window screens,  
this one in sun, this one in sprinkler's stream.  
Petrichor and lightning, attar of herb.

Hint of fertilizer, whiff of aftershave in the bathroom  
 altered by interpretation  
 when he says he wants to paint the old car green.  
 Kiwi flesh, pea, weed and bramble:  
 which shade, which blade of grass?  
 We will call it the green room. Deep inside:  
 lizard toe, M&M, shamrock in shadow.  
 Which wavelength, which beam of light?  
 I wonder what he means  
 by a peridot in an antique ring,  
 sheared jewel-face of a wave.  
 My perception so different from his.

## Wall Drawing 273

First wall: Red lines from the midpoints of four sides.

Dilation and vessel, an increase or rising—can you  
feel me breathing here though this is just  
a page? What is a mark without the hand,  
the pumping heart behind it? Primary source:  
primordial, primal filter, not an invention  
of light but bathed in it, sanguine link  
between the narrow portals. Why did we ever  
read new critics, believe in the separation  
between blood and art? Like babies, these words are  
not autonomous objects: read close but not too.

On the tour, we pressed bugs between our fingers  
and stained them shades of crimson. I'd already read  
the book that told the story of the cochineal  
and pretended at surprise to spare the guide's  
feelings. I felt the bloody crush and crack and thought  
of a story I read in school where they hung a blood-stained  
sheet outside the wedding chamber to prove  
the bride a virgin. I remember nothing  
but the sheet and knowing blood between my legs (can we  
please not talk of that?) never felt like celebration.

Ask me about my spectral coordinates: I don't know  
where to tell you to look, and I find you not  
by touch or smell or this strange calculation but  
by calendar and contrast, chroma and tint. What's  
the madder? I want to make jokes but am too serious:  
want to want to, I guess, like passing by the place in Vegas  
where table dancing wasn't even the most outréd thing  
on offer but "steak bathing in tomato ovaries,"  
written without irony or the slightest thought  
of Agamemnon

It comes down to symbol: the monster's  
autobiographical wings or the adultress's shield,  
Lady Lazurus's flaming hair in the air or a field  
of opiated poppies, unlike the California ones  
in our backyard that can't muster  
themselves any bolder than golden. As a fiery child,  
her costume horns matched her hoodie that matched  
her skinned knees: no green growth, no ubiquity, not  
everywhere like the sky  
but in everything.

Second wall: Blue lines from four corners.

Imagine you didn't have the word: what would  
you have said of my eyes then, these little pools?  
Or the place my veins rise against my wrist like  
lace, a pale and brittle ice. We all know Homer  
called the sea wine-dark, and most days out there  
he's right: no need for other uniforms. It's when  
the clouds slake the ocean's thirst and its aura's tamed  
that we can move beyond the scarcity of language  
and name its shade or tone. Semi-precious stone,  
metal, plant: be sure it rhymes with hue.

I don't want to be ironic or coy: want to strike  
the borderless elemental, but it's crowded and  
I can't hear myself think: not at this hour in this dress  
on these nights with this philosophical inquiry. What new thing  
can I say in so few lines? In the next room, an Instagrammer  
before the Flavin striking poses, all these codes for cool.  
Newspaper asks "Why Are We So Obsessed?" with a reading list  
of all who trod the path before and better and they claim  
the satin bowerbird too, which you can Google  
and while you're at it: "Why is the sky?" Phrase unfinished.

I mention the ocean too often, she says: *you make it  
your whole personality*. Nothing I was born to and for years  
a love begrudging: its power and its sting unknown  
in the lap of lake (which when I close my eyes is colorless clear  
to the bottom and in the distance a perfect row of boats,  
oars raised against the wind, a syncopation). In the wrack line  
this morning, plump wet bodies of velella velella,  
by-the-wind sailors, their angled fins illuminated  
in rising sun so at first they seem to sparkle, carry  
light like gems. Inhale. They also carry their rotting stench.

An exercise in attention: the rug's royal warp and weft,  
navy stripes on the bath towel second from left, each  
product's font, typeface, and weight, even the wavy line  
along the rim of a porcelain cup. The wind blew  
in so long and hard last night I woke  
to find the yard confettied, glittered with my bright  
and ruined salvias, my once-tender  
roses: the scattered buds psychological, an opponent  
process. I planted sweet peas in all their shades  
late again this year, so there's something still to wait for:

Third wall: Yellow lines from the center.

When you know what you're looking at, the seeing  
gets simpler. This isn't an argument for or against  
abstraction, but even if it were, I would say the titles  
make my point: Van Gogh's house, the order  
of Rothko's colors, Vuillard's curtain, Albers' study  
on departure: with each I know where to start.  
Should I have begun with this canary  
to learn if the approach holds? There's nothing arbitrary  
about the yolk of it, the golden ratio, which  
is the artist's math: irrational and constructible, it  
decomposes. Of all the body's liquid systems, bile  
is the one we need to read if not to write, to digest  
if not compose. In my first house I painted every room  
a different color but now I keep them plain. Hers matched  
her name, though I swear I didn't plan it: a vintage color  
that felt gender neutral since we didn't know. Where the lines  
cross, I look for meaning, something greater  
than the sum: green flash at sunset, spring's first fast lilac,  
orange peel removed in just one piece. Not a paradox:  
all together they are either a dark void or a white light.