

Let's Talk About It: Picturing America
The Work of Freedom: Individual and Communal

Poetry Selections

“Looking for Bodies” by Patricia Smith

I.

Slowly push the door open with your foot
because wood that has been wet for so long
gives to touch, imitates flesh.
Do not kick the door open,
no matter how weirdly your heart drums—
there may be something all wrong behind it.
Push and immediately revel
in what could be ordinary, if ordinary was—
a crusted saucepan, toppled rockers,
pine framed portraits of freshly
baptized babies, old homes, toothy aunts.
Allow yourself a lunatic smile as you spot
the bright ghosts of skirts and workshirts,
or the spiraled grace of decapitated dolls
spinning lazily, bumping your knees,
all those signs of ritual and undone days.
Eventually you will need these diversions,
you will lock your fractured heart upon them,
because what you will see next will hurt you
long and aloud. The monstered smell sings
her out of hiding, and at first you believe
that one doll, plumper than the others
and still intact, survived the deluge,
but then you—

II.

guide the gold of her into
your arms blessing the droop
and blown skin marveling
at the way her soul rides
slickly on the outside of
everything how it ripples
the water how it so deftly
damns your hands

Patricia Smith, “Looking for Bodies” from *Blood Dazzler*. Copyright © 2008 by Patricia Smith.
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