NOCTURNE WITH A WAX MODEL OF MADAME DIMANCHE

The grooves of the horn deepen in the evening.
Madame's face protrudes from a shelf.

Her countenance, mounted against two blocks of wood,
held there by fasteners, while a ten-inch protrusion
dangles from her forehead. The “cutaneous horn”
as the sciences call it, nearly covers her right eye.

In her widowhood, she must have kept her doors closed
as merchants filed away, closing their wagon trailers filled
with beets and sorghum. In the darkness of her apartment,
the wet pavers gleam under the narrow light of the oil lamps
and the vendors cart off into their separate orbits. The horn
above her eye constantly shadowing her sight, so that Paris
splits into partitions of dusk.

The light, for sure, is leased.
A little wine spills from a discarded glass, as a custodian sweeps
the tatters from a reception. The patrons are gone, though
their fragrances dangle above the rafters. A spray of flowers
here and there, falls from the ceiling of the exhibit hall.
And here is Madame Dimanche, patient above it all.

The echoes of the reception bend as the lights dim
and the doors close on this theater. Her face, bright as a wet jewel.
Hers is a ghost face. Her white throat and eyes, falsely socketed. Their glass filled with secrets, some sweet nothings with the pale museum incandescents reflected in them. The peculiar horn leans out of her forehead, extends down to her chin with the saddest of trajectories. As though her brain voided its own water. A fountain in winter frozen in mid-air as water valves close, its narrow stream fixed. Or the horn, monumental as grief for her lost husband, continued on as a physical thought. A keratinized invocation of love.
NOCTURNE WITH NEEDLES PINNED IN BEAUTIFUL ROWS

after “47 Needles,” a photograph of an exhibit in the
Warren Museum at Harvard Medical School by
Rosamond Purcell

Because the night is arrayed in linear teeth
and because the only great things we leave
to gods are the enormities of our suffering.
Therefore, row after row of needles

arranged in their stiff, celebratory lines. The sheen
of them, dizzy in the museum light. Their casings

streaked with bits of rust, as though the blood
from madness's veins hardened into a thin cake,

instantaneously. How they must have throttled her,
kept the river of her arteries edged with snow.

The rattletrap heart of her, beating into slower and slower
cycles as needle pricks skin and plunger dips
down into that thing, deeper than memory,
rimmed with ice as green as arctic depths.

Therefore the caesura—her breath lapses and jumps, cleaved
as one apocalypse into another. Then bewilderment

as the city lights bleed into its own intoxicated celebrity.
The skyline, sudden from this vantage point, having fallen
on her back in the park. The air’s cold lassitude oozes thick
while autumn leaves tessellate the ground and tanagers
eclipse the trees with heartbeat after frantic heartbeat,
The little pins lost in the body cinch closer
to the core. Her blood pumps its frenzy, out of sheer boredom.
Because that is what gods do. They ease into the body
with flaming tongues and lips and blush. Their bluster,
their glory into the pure and glistening gutter. Out of collapse
comes the question. Or rather, the story about the body,
which is the story about the next chapter. The next glistening row
of needle. And the now.
Now they singe a sheet of paper,
indifferent militants saluting from the encasement glass.

Their attentions secret and distant, having been asleep
outside the body in this place that is cold and obscene.