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A Painter, His Model and a Woman Looking at Hats

Carolyn Marsden

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A PAINTER, HIS MODEL AND A WOMAN
LOOKING AT HATS

We wish these two could pose
with the windows open,

modest in the sunlight's plain paint.
But it's 1913, the curtains are pulled.

The model sulks under her flame of red hair.
It's a hard job to fix her on canvas—

the painter must keep
his crayon-pink lips to himself.

Does he want to lay down the brush,
take his pipe from his mouth,

and turn to her?
There's neither time

nor peace in a shut-up room.
Faces of deep-sea fish keep rising

from the paint spilled on the floor.
The air reeks of the sea,

shadows breed.
And perhaps it's those oiled bodies,

fish, he must keep himself from.
The picture disturbs us.

We were told
that people then

were simple and correct.

We were shown

the painting of a woman looking
at hats.

Her skirt is one brushstroke,
she glides evenly on the hem.