

# CutBank

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## Subjects

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**SUBJECTS (THREE PARTS)**

*For Artemisia Gentileschi, accomplished and recognized painter, 1593-1652.*

1.

As to the paintings, hers were a Baroque  
kind of home therapy, vicariously  
sizing up the rapist as if he were an unplucked  
chicken: Dispatch the job, written all over her brush  
and face, mirroring *Judith Slaying Holofernes*.  
Knife, virgin-white sheet, speckled with blood.  
The rapist's fist balled against the female  
breast, ever so weakly, due to a deep  
slit in his jugular. And yet, vengeance  
can be delicate. Look how tenderly,  
in *Jael and Sisera*, Jael pounds a peg  
into her enemy's ear.

2.

Maybe you call it lapis lazuli, maybe royal blue.  
The fabric is rich as the first unfolded evening,  
the premier gentian. Blue's throaty, trumpet voice.  
Against a golden shift you have the stunning  
first day and night in the firmament. You have  
first cousin to the great. You have Judith,  
in blue, her breasts slipping out of her bodice.

The heart beats wildly. Judith's maidservant  
looks over her shoulder, fearing anyone  
walking in on the act—catching the two women  
carrying Holofernes' head off in a basket.  
Such rustling satins, deep folds, dresses  
as recitations of a story's favorite lines.  
They do not want one single omission.

3.

*Cara*, the painter's self-portrait. She reassures her skin she loves it still. Even after the rapist has handled it, her body is the ever-present model for a rounded arm, a shadowed eye, which side of the face to reveal.

Her hand flies, at work even in sleep,  
when she reaches for her man, his sex, she  
weighs its bulge, measuring what might be  
Holofernes' size. Would robes diminish it?  
So the only blob one sees is his severed head?

Her stove, her oven, the strip between  
her legs. She is the hottest woman in Florence.  
No one dare touch her. Before she even  
enters a room, she's already painting  
her reaction according to who sits where.

The beauty of an inner room! Jupiter's  
sperm spraying as stars through the portico  
windows. A once-in-a-life-time evening,  
a golden storm that catches a maiden's breath.  
And Danaï, the subject, catching the stars in her fist.