



Goest

Cole Swensen

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Treating subjects from landscape to sculpture to a 19th century technical encyclopedia, the poet is fascinated with light, glass, mirrors, flame, ice, mercury—things transparent, evanescent, impossible to grasp. Likewise Swensen’s lyrics, which, with elliptical phrasing and play between visual and aural, change the act of seeing—and reading—offering glimpses of the spirit (or ghost) that enters a poem where the rational process breaks down.

From “The Invention of Streetlights”

Certain cells, it’s said, can generate light on their own.
There are organisms that could fit on the head of a pin.
and light entire rooms. .
Throughout the Middle Ages, you could hire a man.
on any corner with a torch to light you home.
were lamps made of horn.
and from above a loom of moving flares, we watched.
Notre Dame seem small. .
Now the streets stand still. .
By 1890, it took a pound of powdered magnesium.
to photograph a midnight ball.

“*Goest*, sonorous with a hovering ‘ghost’ which shimmers at the root of all things, is a stunning meditation—even initiation—on the act of seeing, proprioception, and the alchemical properties of light as it exists naturally and inside the human realm of history, lore, invention and the ‘whites’ of painting. Light becomes the true mistress and possibly the underlying language of all invention. Swensen’s poetry documents a penetrating ‘intellectus’—light of the mind—by turns fragile, incandescent, transcendent.”—Anne Waldman

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