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Amputations

Trent Hickman

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A poem by Trent Hickman

Amputations

What a discovery you made, Vincent
Van Gogh, alone in your room
that Christmas Eve
when you slid a shiny blade
along your skull

and severed half
of your right ear.
The glitterati
would call it insanity,
sheer craziness,

pure scandal.
There, quivering and graceful
in your hand, you met
the finest art you'd ever created—
its fine hairs, now glistening

with shiny ornaments of blood,
its dying pink flushed
more delicately than the best
mother-of-pearl, its slim
ridges rising from the lobe

and fluting up to the edge
of the cut. Sunflowers
and starry nights dimmed
beside it, and the pastel
grace of irises blanched

at its beauty.


But even as you marveled
it wilted into a gray tatter,
a cool curl of flesh folding
in on itself. Days later,

it was only a withered bat's wing
you kept in a small box.
You would not glorify it
on canvas. Instead, you
prepared a solemn self-portrait:

in it, a tumor of bandages
upstages your long Dutch frown
and juts from the side
of your head, gauze
covering a gruesome wound.

I know your loss. Mine
is the same. I too have spent
a Christmas Eve cradling
my immaculate conceptions,
my fresh-hewn darlings

still gory from the ink
of my pen. All artists bleed.
We carve holes in ourselves
so that everyone else
stays whole.

 *Trent Hickman will receive his Master's in English in August 1996, following which he'll pursue his PhD at New York State University at Stony Brook. Trent has had his poetry published in several literary journals, including Negative Capabilities, which is even more respected than Inscape.*