

LESLIE TIMMINS
TWO POEMS

FROM THAT NIGHT A FINE DISORDER

was born forty-foot square and scarlet,
a great red bird soaring through a blue room
and Matisse finally letting the winged line rule,
enter where it wished, die where it would,
transfusing the whole blue room blood-red,
the table at its centre a moving red feast,
its far edge lash-thin, its near no edge at all
so its patterned cloth floats, floods up the wall
in arabesque arcs,
and then he tears the fabric of the world again,
slices right through to a hillside
where umbrella trees lean broken-spoked
to loosen their wedding-white on a green ground
so simply drawn, a child's drawing, it pierces
the ashen dream that perfection is what we need,
wakes us to play again.

IN THE MORNING WHEN THEY FLUNG THE SHUTTERS WIDE

the cobalt sky, the roofs' green rapture rushed
into the unshielded room.

The canvases leaned like corpses against the wall,
their bruised fruit staining rags below,
their silvery, pleasing leaves mere vapours now.

Amélie Matisse and nine-year-old Marguerite
had agreed: He hadn't got to joy, heated colours,
poured lines as he used to do,
and though a dealer, coming the next day,
had promised to pay him 400 francs a piece,
they took the still-lives away.
That night, all night, they washed and scraped
until all that remained was the white of canvas.

In the morning
when they flung the shutters wide
Matisse could see the field of his holy war,
blues, yellows, reds, greens making their blood-claim
and the sun calling out the same with every shameless ray,
he knowing he'd have to answer.