

MARCEL

BURNSIDE SOLEIL

For a month, I have been living here,
and often sit near the back bedroom
wall, mice scuttling behind

the tiny framed self portrait of Rembrandt,
laughing, skin crinkled like gold leaf.
He's Zeuxis in that one, I think—

Zeuxis and Parrhasius, I remember
the contest between them, how Zeuxis
painted grapes so true—what do I mean here?—

that birds flew down to feed, yet Parrhasius
depicted a curtain concealing his work,
the verisimilitude fooling his competitor.

Yet of the two paintings, I'd most want
to see the grapes, not a curtain, of course,
these grapes clustered purple, reminding

me of walking with Marcel, one or two
blocks away from here, the mulberries
bloodied on the sidewalk. My son—

he gathered in his small hands the fruit
fermenting, this wild sweet melt,
this jam scooped from the ground.

It's true. There were no birds.
About our backyard beech, my father
once told me a lightning bolt singed

the heartwood and pith like a wick.
He blanketed the little fires charring
the sapwood. There were no birds

on the snag for weeks, he said, which
must be untrue. I prefer imagining
the tree swallow in the cavity, and I know

it was summer then, but what if I say
winter? What if I want the swallow's
blue glare? I cannot tell you how to love.

*Burnside Soleil grew up in a houseboat on the bayou but these days is a pilgrim
in New Orleans. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in Kenyon Review,
New England Review, and elsewhere.*