DAVID HERNANDEZ
Where Is Ana Mendieta?

and cross the threshold to continue
doing what was loved

while alive, signing every second
the contract made by breathing.

Over and again returning to the natural world
for materials, turning it to canvas, its shores
and riverbanks,

its creeks, the cracked
mosaic of parched earth,

grassy fields shuddering from gusts

from Iowa to Mexico.

What a mysterious and bountiful canvas
to breathe in,
to work in, the way it lingered
following a day’s work,

its lush scent

rising from that content and weary body.

Here, the person known as Ana Mendieta
is nameless. Here, shapeless

and pronoun-less, without a self.
Here, dreaming of terrain and given one,

dreaming of body and given one
so hands can excavate into the landscape

the abstract shape of a woman.
In death, see, dream and given are one.

Do you understand? If there is distance
between the two, that is want, and want is
for the human heart. Want is why
the sweet juice from ripe fruit

seeps down the back of your fingers and
around your wrist bone

and rivers along the slow curve of your arm.
And want is why you weep.

Here, there is no here

where the making continues.

Hands shape a woman-body

and she becomes the absence

in wet sand. She fills

with ocean and reflection,

mirrors the sky as clouds

glide across her torso,

across each limb, the keyhole

of her face. When she releases

the ocean to the ocean, the clouds
dissolve, and dreaming brings

tempera powder, shower of red
to make her shape luminous as

lava and stars and blood and want.
"My art is the way I reestablish the bonds that tie me to the universe."

It continues. Is always now, always present tense. Arranging stones on the shadow side of a mountain, positioning white egg rocks that follow around a woman-body until she becomes a new letter added to the alphabet. She ignites at her center and the fire rises and snaps its bright flags. A flurry of embers leap and spiral, leap and spiral. Flames fill her shape—right to the rocks—and a voice commands hold. The fire listens. Folding and unfolding upon itself. The voice says cross and the fire crosses and is heard across the mountain, replacing shadow with conflagration. And she is heard.

and cross back over the threshold
to shuck off my clothes, cover my nude body
with dark mud,
press up
against a primordial tree, spine to trunk.

and close my eyes.

A photo is taken and filed under ART
to make a distinction between it and life.
There is none.
There is only the cosmos growing and breaking
as you do. And the palpable force
to grow or break.

It is why my mud-covered body aligns with the tree, why the shutter clicks.
Camouflage, it is called. How the body disappears
and is seen
    only if you look
carefully, as if to say the body is
one with the tree. It is. It is also one
with the mountains,
    burning or green.

And one with the undulating ocean.

And one with the gauzy clouds.

It is one with the leaves shifting above you
and one with the unpinned ones
    that land in your path
like open, brittle hands.

The answer is simple, real as the cells
whorled at your fingertip: Ana Mendieta

is everywhere.