

LAUREN CAMP

Again on the Again: *Fifty Days at Iliam*

—a painting in ten parts by Cy Twombly, 1978

Sing, Goddess, sing of the rage of Achilles, the days of war
and black purposes. When the painter draws a line

he hears the battle between drawing and drawing,
as the black waters of the Greeks move to the ships.

Pulling his thick crayon, he grabs hold of the shield
he is drawing in Bassano in Teverina; he leans

his fist over each smeared study. He waits,
and salutes the long call of discipline. His waiting

is nearly a circle, wide as his arm, an explosion. Each day
he draws ghosts, or he sits by his mind watching the sea.

The sea is white three quarters of the time, just white,
he says to himself. He scribbles the war.

Patroklos. Achilles. He repeats the names
in his stone studio until he can sketch them.

■

The painter doesn't pace. His precision is only a line
of tragedy forming in the form of light. *The gods all sat assembled.*

At night he reads the war,
and in the morning when day's white cuff presses down,

color trembles and nods, then lands on itself again.
He looks out the window at the slurry of the winter sea.

His hand touches the large canvas with the red language of dying;
he rubs in nine years' battle he fought into the scrawl

of the oils. A. A. A.: each letter loud and undisciplined.
Will he sleep tonight, after holding the red and red of the gods?

■

Using his darkest crayon, he draws a crescent curve for grief,
nestles into the arm the white of loss, digging out

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the rapturous first stroke of vengeance. His hands are warm,
and the crayons he is holding

tell him how to draw the cycle.
Without slowing, he scribbles his theories

in alizarin and blue pigment, the theories which are tones
and lines. Is he traveling or unraveling?

He is used to these lapses of certainty. He holds the pencil
like a dagger. Erases and deciphers this battle in his hands.

■

He works the canvases together, fighting them, unrelenting.
Space forgives the sound of the words he has read,

never a sound but the scratching
of the tool in his hands.

The line chases, not moving away, until it has never
stopped; space gathers at the corners.

The battle is fought again on the again.
It will always be this way,

the rapturous names of the gods getting smaller.
He pushes each letter away.

Outside his studio the night is naked,
the dark music of fighting moves over

to the very last sentence of color,
a voluptuous white that harvests the drone of the sea,

a battle of where the beginning begins:
what is unpainted, the myth of the gods,

what is liquid or heaven.
Up close, devastation: ten canvases with a trail of exertion.