

ELIZABETH GEIGER

Side Table Still Life, 2022
Oil on linen, 42 x 36 in.



COURTESY GROSS MCCLEAF GALLERY

REBECCA FOUST

First Night in the Room above the Junk Shop

*“We are the dead,” he says.
“We are the dead,”
repeats Julia behind him.*

—George Orwell, 1984

they climb the metal stairs into the room with water-stained walls
that glow rectangles on rectangles in the late light
slanting in through the crack where the boards have fallen away
in one narrow strip from the window & the rays
make everything beautiful even the splintered sills
even the rat-gnawed rug even the sheets gray with age
he stops & turns & holds his palms up to her level
with his heart & she steps out of her overalls & into his hands
leaning forward on her toes off-balance
so sometimes the pressure is more sometimes less
& sometimes not there at all as he traces tiny half circles
first one side then the other then both a call
nudging her into response & inside a wave
swells as her most secret & tender self likewise stiffens & rises
what she'll remember later after the room is in splinters
after the stairs are torn down after they have renounced
each other in their separate cells—how parts of her innermost self
rose on their own to yearn closer to him & by now
in the illumed room she is herself a rose deeply cupped
multipetaled & fully open his eyes fathomless holding hers
through it all his face touched on one side by the light
his face looking down open & breathing & breathless
& real & there every hair & pore his remembered hands
& eyes real & there there there there
his eyes looking down at her

Rebecca Foust's seventh book, *Only* (Four Way Books 2022) earned a starred review in *Publishers Weekly*. Her recent poems, found in *The Common*, *Five Points*, *Narrative*, *Poetry*, and *Ploughshares*, were runners-up for the 2022 Missouri Review Editors Prize and won the James Hearst, Pablo Neruda, and Poetry International Prizes. Recognitions include Hedgebrook, MacDowell, and Sewanee fellowships and a Marin County Poet Laureateship.

Note

This poem is spoken by Julia to Winston, the protagonists of *1984*, and is from a longer manuscript of poetry inspired by the unsettling parallels between their world and ours today. This poem focuses on the characters' relationship, asking the question, "In such a world, is love possible?"