

# Afterimages

*Poems*

Lenore Myers



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## GALLERY 1: REGARDS TO BALTHUS

## *Young Girl at the Window*

Ghost of a chair, curved  
wood. Louis-something.  
Insubstantial.

So sparsely painted, a bit  
of wall shows, like a touch  
of breastbone beneath  
a blouse. Not really a chair.  
And the room is not really  
a room, the girl not a girl.  
She stands, hands on sill,  
window cast slightly  
open to whatever's *out*  
*there*: a greening tree,  
orange and tan country  
houses, yellowish hills,  
edges softening in the gray  
-blue haze, till houses  
and trees are but a puff  
at the center of the canvas:  
The window will never  
be wider than this!  
And the breeze—*isn't*  
there a breeze? Drifting  
among the elm leaves,  
blousy scent of lilac  
at the window sill,  
paying no mind to where  
things should (or  
shouldn't) be, a touch

of blue or a child slipping  
in and out of the frame.  
While we, we come in  
to a room, just looking  
for a chair.

**Balthus** (1908–2001)  
*Fille à la fenêtre*, 1957  
63 × 63 3/4 in.  
Oil on canvas

Metropolitan Museum of Art of New York

Not currently on view

## *Still Life*

One evening's simple  
meal refracted  
into reds and blues  
and greens, strange  
geometries  
of what we think  
and what we think  
we see.

Unremarkable  
potato, bread, and water  
on a desk meant  
for writing. Repast  
of an artist,  
circles,  
rectangles, triangulated  
hues  
assembled like schoolgirls,  
mannerly for the moment—  
the chair,  
the crockery,  
cloth draped  
the Dutch way—but  
poor, coarse canvas.  
Composed  
feints:  
dull skin prodded  
by a fork, a side of boiled  
potato vanishes



Anyway

one wants to look,

unobtrusive

glass untouched, still

pristine

**Balthus** (1908–2001)

*Still Life*, 1937

24.5 × 19 cm

Oil on panel

Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, Connecticut

As an art reviewer said:

“Hammer and knife have done their foul work;  
the dinner table, in better times . . .  
an arena of civilized exchange,  
now a ruin and a wreck.”



Hubert—he'll stay beside me to the end.  
"The past remains within us, an affliction,"  
my artist says now. An affliction.  
Is this what I've become? He sees himself  
in everything. My little artist, victim  
of a force that's broken all of us to pieces—  
Blow men and violins to bits, but leave  
the trees, the country in its silence, green  
and golden, velvet stillness of the hills.  
A life I never knew.

And what of this  
posed body, blush abandoning its soft,  
sweet hull, breasts and thighs  
mottling under loamy browns and grays?  
My artist draws the knife upon the floor,  
extends the handle past the frame—me, you,  
*accuses?* Her arms stretch up, unresisting.  
She does not touch me, no. What, that morbid  
tangle—? Nothing like *my* body! And yet,  
that face—gray, like a sickness in his brush  
emerges, heavy lidded, blotched as if  
with filth and rain . . . Don't turn away, please, don't  
go. Forget this stiffening body, face  
an afterthought: Don't let this be my own—

**Balthus** (1908–2001)  
*La Victime*, 1939–46  
132 × 218 cm  
Paint on canvas

A privately held grief

*Thérèse*

She's composed now,  
just a girl in an adult  
chair, sunk in  
the room, her face  
a sallow window  
on a closed  
interior. Her gaze  
brushes past  
you, and me,

self forgotten  
as a dream. Electric  
illusion of slight  
hand resting lightly  
on the knee—ah,

glossy pink  
remnant of brush  
stroke at her cheek.  
But the canvas  
is really board—

turning  
green and sour,  
acidic in disrepair.  
Still, life might be  
captured

in this narrow room,  
manipulations  
of light and shadow  
and color, convincing  
the mind you can touch.

**Balthus** (1908–2001)

*Thérèse*, 1938

39 1/2 × 32 in.

Oil on cardboard mounted on wood

Somewhere in the basement of the Met

## Mother, 1975

She's looking at the camera,  
mostly—eyes slightly  
    shifted  
to something just outside  
    the frame. She said it  
was me,  
but we don't see  
me, just  
    a pile of leaves.

Did my father try to capture  
the half-glance

(sensing the something)

the soft pink  
    slip  
of eye—the divided

moment of her?

**Harold Myers, Jr. (1927–2005)**

**Untitled, 1975**

5 × 7 in.

Photo print on matte paper

In a long-disused file cabinet in a storage unit

## *The Triangular Field*

Beyond the hedgerow, just  
a scritch, barely human  
form, so close to being  
landscapey—two triangles  
away from serious  
grazing sheep, indistinct  
as growing grass. Waving  
in the solemn green, a blue  
someone hailing from  
the larger field—calling  
another someone—  
we'll never know who,  
or if they heard. The horse  
is grazing comfortably within  
the reassuring geometries,  
these green, orderly lanes  
of light and land. Across  
the golden field, aglow  
in summer's lengthening, an  
apple tree seems to leap  
into the light, screaming  
beneath her bouffant of leaves—  
isn't it usual to see  
something a bit wrong?  
But leaping is unfolding

life, its nervous squiggles,  
in plain sight—here it is  
only seeming, and horses,  
undisturbed, lack perspective.

**Balthus** (1908–2001)

*Great landscape with trees*, 1955

Convolutions of wood pulp daubed with ink

It must be held somewhere?

## About the Author

Lenore Myers was born to artist parents who tried to live as semi-bohemians in the suburbs. When that fell apart, the author spent her childhood and youth moving between different towns in Northern California. After spending more years moving around the United States and abroad, she returned to the greater Bay Area to be near family while raising her son. Her chapbook, *Regards to Balthus*, was published by Seven Kitchens Press in 2023. Her poems and essays appear in a variety of literary journals.