

After Rousseau's *The Dream*
Museum of Modern Art, 2016

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Signature as big as two
of his painter's palms,

he shares a flourish of river
under the U, as if to claim:

my body, my water,
this planet. And you.

Gabelou of too many tolls,
he chose paint

as proclamation,
left the gates of Paris

for the easel
that promised nothing.

It's easy to look down
the primitive nose,

the veined foreground
fronds as too craft in craft.

Until the pachyderm eye,
our own.

Never mind that he never
set foot in a rainforest

tangle, relied only his hothouse
eye, the transplanted

specimens under the glass
roof of Jardin des Plantes.

How not to miss his penchant
for menace, predilection for feral,

the baited wait of crouch
and hunt? And what of that

odd hand—his own?—
ever unsatisfied,

not reaching for flower
but expecting absence instead?

Rousseau, if I were to tell you, *Starry
Night* hung beside your *Dream*,

that more stopped for your sofa
than his sky, would you have believed

any of it? I doubt you would have
doubted it. It is why we cleave

to you, you who proclaimed
it was

until it was. They say Picasso's
famous eye unjungled you

from the critic's
bite. But I'd like to think we see

too—maybe in the cymbal
plate of her breasts,

or the thumbtack
strike of her navel, or even

in how you push against
the bones, create humor

in the ordained
wisp of whiskers.

How could we expect otherwise
from a man undulled

by the constant
drop of coins?

How could we not want to know
what strings

your violin hands played
in your head

as you stretched
your body for this canvas?

I will always be greedy
for the underbelly of the snake,

wishing it not hidden
by the glade.

But maybe I am wrong to want.
That the serpent

is undone
under the imperfect

moon should be enough.
But then the lunar howl

returns me to the sly
pupiled nipple, her finger

that points for the intentional
leaves, woven into the shape

of a dress, the hourglass
that emerges only

when we stalk
against the positive space.

These are the truths
of your tricks and antics,

And we wait for them—
align our lion's eye—

like the drop of an orange
ripe from the primate's hand.