

MACK CARLISLE

## Double Bluff

They say these are good problems. And yet  
the subject is taxed by lack of definition.

She finds herself instead  
in the thesaurus. Repeating  
the same vapid acts again  
and again. Said and done.  
Shut down for the season.  
She numbs.

The subject snaps out, dries her face  
under the angry hand dryer in the washroom.  
Let the magic ensue. Want me  
to be naked when you arrive? She asks.

The subject attends an art opening.  
Who does she think she is?  
She wonders aloud. A representative.

A sometimes lesbian passes through the house. Adopts  
the animals, smashes up the kitchen, takes up farming  
in the bathroom, cares. They look at each other.  
The subject thinks of her decade in college.

The subject can't seem to stop.  
There is intention. She speaks  
softly. They always tell her  
what she already knows. The doctor  
says there's nothing they can do  
about her hearing, has a fancy word  
for it—the fishbowl effect. This is a conversation.

The subject drifts. He says:  
*Good night crabcake.*  
A train bellows.

The subject's toes have broken loose.  
Hoarding money and seeing so much  
in such a short time. The deep silence. Cold.  
Tall pines. Rest. This is only 30-something  
years old. The subject swollen, ashy, and peeling,  
raw and overworked.

All that's asked is to appreciate the small things.  
If you fail, make up for it in turn: Wear a flag  
like a blanket. Determining the future.

The subject drinks a tequila old fashioned.  
A bit too sweet. She's not making acceptable words.  
Gets over it. Goes the wrong way. Powders her nose.

The subject wants to erase.  
The house. The job. The cars. The complaints. The illness. The aches.  
Erase it all and start fresh. Clean and new with none of the grit  
of this, her daily life, mucking up  
the pretty picture.

The subject wonders: is this really  
what I was after? Topiary trailing  
silently along.  
He's speechless, but is he really devoid  
of insight? The subject is stolen somewhere out by the airport.

The subject researches reasons  
why people enjoy performing  
in attempt to understand why  
she doesn't, but wants to so badly.

Shoplifting her life, the subject makes  
her way to the beginning.  
Scratching 'til there's no skin left.  
Excited to sleep.  
The horn awakens her.

The subject is asleep at the wheel.  
Thinks Adderall might be the answer  
to her lack of achievement.  
Wonders if her art will improve.

The subject leaves bottles of urine around  
your high school, a punk rock anti-establishment  
anti-art bio-emission installation.

The subject dreams of the prom. Shoes and dress  
picked out. Terrified to wear them. Not about to attend  
dateless. Struggles with desire and reality. Unaware  
of how to be a successful woman outside the bedroom.

The subject tries to live up to the parameters placed around  
her and the trajectory you set in motion. Worthy  
of being a favorite. Socially capable, appreciative, and humble.

The subject renames the book: *Likewise*.  
And other things you already knew.

The waves keep crawling toward us.

The subject is  
confused. A small man, lost inside  
himself. Unsure. Forever in everyone. The subject feels  
more like herself. Feigns death and finally living, no longer  
intermission. What is lasting anyway? To live with one's self.  
Tired. With story after story.  
Carried up another  
flight.

Mack Carlisle is a genderqueer writer, multi-disciplinary artist, and educator in Portland, OR. Mack received BAs in Fine Art and English from the University of Massachusetts, an MA in Teaching from Pacific University, and is an MFA candidate in Visual Studies at the Pacific Northwest College of Art.