

Barriers of Electricity

Cindy St. John

I know it wouldn't really look this way, rose bushes for miles
inside the galvanized wire fence
that surrounds the Aberdares National Park,
some of the stems weaving out of tangled leaves
skyward through the metal links and charged
with 6,000 volts: electric
red, yellow and white, petals standing out like hairs, molded
as if artificial, the kind of perfection found in objects on the brink
of explosion.

Once a man bought me a red rose on the street in Pigalle.
after drinks and dancing, I was eager for any amount
of sexual tension, or attention.
The world's largest electric barricade
protects the flowers from elephants, rhinos and monkeys
while Kenya becomes Europe's largest supplier of cut flowers
following the same route that wasn't always so fragrant—slaves and ivory,
skin and bones. A flower, like a person, is two-thirds water.
Enough water for 20,000 people for a year
is shipped in the stems from Kenya to Europe.
DDT and Dieldrin, insecticides illegal in most countries,
found in rotting hippo carcasses,
flammable.

I lost the flower long before the misunderstanding.
There are places where we still don't belong.
It's mostly women who sell flowers in the Parisian markets,
women who tend the flower fields in Kenya for \$1.85 a day and many lose
their sight, hair and skin from the chemicals.
It's in the work, in the flesh, teeth,
water, in the bare colors spreading like rivers,
like capillaries through each smooth charged petal.