

The Garden, Echoes II

by Vivian (Xiao Wen) Li

i.

Ink-flowers peach and shy,
tulip-bulbs,
flame candles. Within broken rocks and sparrow wormholes,
the woman in red plays the gǔ qín—
underneath the pavilion head,
the young spruce-wood chair echoing
her mezzo-soprano voice beneath cherry blossoms.

Lingering alone:
to long for the scent of a song.

ii.

water spills through the head of heaven,
sky and pond interlacing fingers and foam—
Western winds blowing to China, to the graves of my grandfather and grandmother.
Memorial,
the yellow-shirted me who spun, responding to
“beauty” at fourteen. When we bowed before the tablets with faces
foreign to us. The ground chilling on my palm—
when these stone tiles reveal faces we remember,
how long will our memories last?

iii.

In this garden built
to bridge between West and East, chillier on this south pavilion,
bamboo, cherry blossom. The ink of a general has not yet dried.
Go, the black-and-white pieces sing. Find prosperity, propel mind to action.
Brushes hang, vertical behind the jade statue of Guān yīn, merciful
to us who stumble by.

Rocks, smooth-edged and rising,
tiny mountains. Perhaps Chén Xiāo broke them in his youth,
testing the strength of his love for his entombed mother.
The two-plank bridge to the Tīng
closed off with bamboo sticks.
Beyond, a waterfall cascades over stones.
My fingers freeze from excess yīn,
fog haloing my fingers.

iv.

Intangible Threads

in tessellated moments,
a spiral;
straight edges. Gold pins leading to the edge of a quilt
or dark hole.

Spreading in straight formations, a building
swallowed by pride. Above,
remains of pinwheels thread
dangle silver beside to white.

Echoing threads of factory,
woven quilt, her maternal line's lineage. Her father, represented
by factories, thick paints on canvas. Her mother, thread and textiles,
the woven fabric of Sūzhōu's creators. Herself, caught between
West and East.

v.

Mountains emerge through rhombi and trapezoids,
dancing along the edge of what remains;
white space in black and silver; divide, sparkle.

A shirt unfolded,
a pomegranate blooming open,
stairs in parallel falling to earth,
opening sky and 天堂 to us.
And in the hallway connecting canvases to passersby,
the sound of an artist resounds: 苏向

vi.

like paintings, the shadows on walls
are the shadows of the world
they are recording the stone, trees, everyone, and everything,
breathing, ever-changing, momentary—
transient homes for the passers-by—