

Chicago and December

By W. S. Di Piero

Trying to find my roost
one lidded, late afternoon,
the consolation of color
worked up like neediness,
like craving chocolate,
I'm at Art Institute favorites:
Velasquez's "Servant,"
her bashful attention fixed
to place things just right,
Beckmann's "Self-Portrait,"
whose fishy fingers seem
never to do a day's work,
the great stone lions outside
monumentally pissed
by jumbo wreaths and ribbons
municipal good cheer
yoked around their heads.
Mealy mist. Furred air.
I walk north across
the river, Christmas lights
crushed on skyscraper glass,
bling stringing Michigan Ave.,
sunlight's last-gasp sighing
through the artless fog.
Vague fatigued promise hangs
in the low darkened sky
when bunched scrawny starlings
rattle up from trees,
switchback and snag
like tossed rags dressing
the bare wintering branches,
black-on-black shining,
and I'm in a moment
more like a fore-moment:
from the sidewalk, watching them
poised without purpose,
I feel lifted inside the common
hazards and orders of things
when from their stillness,
the formal, aimless, not-waiting birds
erupt again, clap, elated weather-
making wing-clouds changing,
smithereened back and forth,
now already gone to follow
the river's running course.



W. S. Di Piero was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and received his bachelor's degree from St. Joseph's College and his master's degree from San Francisco State College. He has also had a long teaching career at such universities as Louisiana State University, Northwestern University, and Stanford University, where he still teaches. Di Piero was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 2001. He often writes about growing up in his neighborhood of South Philadelphia, and the Italian-American working class families who largely populated the area.

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