POETRY

Mother Tongue Land You

by Nastya Kovalchuk



"Leaves" by Martin Swoboda

Tint Journal, no. (), www.tintjournal.com

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Disastrous December seemed like it was only a set piece of Russia in a Joe Wright movie —
?ardboardy birches and fickle affections,
vodka fumes and condensing darkness,
something inherently bad about my dreams of you,
heavy snow and your elbow not touching mine
but I'm still sure it's there.

That night not a single picture turned out to be good —
despite all the lovers reaching out to each other
and me giving you a "Love is" chewing gum solemnly,
with exceptional caution.

The burning of metal,
the failure of my mother-tongue when I call you,
the buzzing of art and slow paced violence,
the sacrifices we make for our land.

I am no match for these — so I put my trust in your eyes
and watch you film the surroundings.

What a pleasure to get to know
how your body becomes the lens
and sees the earth and the sky simultaneously.

I'm sure Lermontov or Frank O'Hara would envy
how good you are at that.

When your adamant, camera-like gaze focuses on me,
I can only be still and wonder
whether it finds my hands more interesting to film
than anyone else's.

Maybe if we make a movie out of that
it would conquer Sundance, it would be a breaking hit
of the East European queer cinema and then
maybe it would be easier for me to talk with, and about, you
in my mother-tongue.

Maybe soon I will write the very best poem about how my words and love for you
are the same thing that can
stop our land and my hands from shaking
and bring sparkling peace to our

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birthplace — a big, tired and heavily breathing animal —
but probably not probably not probably
not *(added in February 2022)*

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