

Oil upon Oil

Brooke Elizabeth Smith

Like the sound of laying the warp, whispered names
resonate within the grained, muraled, marble
and curtain walls of this holy place, and veil
the light and air with your form, hands
and face. Mother, sister, friend, I look for you here and hear
your voice in the water's cool promise of oil.

Innocence and experience rainbow in the slow oil,
palmed from the silver ladle, the small bowl. Names,
like holiness, converge to the center place; I hear
them and see your image layered on the marble
partitions; for years now, neither light nor hands
have removed that shadow. Look, you still veil

this place: diaphanous or opaque, the veil
of yourself is warm and scented yet with the oil.
Looking down the rows, I recognize your hands,
or ahead in the lines following Eve, whose names
I breathe, I see the lines of your marble
gestures; if you only whispered, I would hear

BROOKE ELIZABETH SMITH is a poet living in the Washington, D.C., area.

our conversations interlacing the covenants we hear,
counterpointing the ordinances we veil.
Fleshed and robed, names rustle toward the curtain of marble
questions, the altars of profound intention, the oil
of the inner sanctuary, and who seals the promise and names
the unspeakable in the true tent made with hands —

before us, the High Priest entered One made without hands;
A lamp mirrors the circle and the water we hear
splashing a bead upon the Silences who name:
Is not this a brand plucked from the burning, who veil:
the tree of life in the mount of granite and the oil
of victory. I will watch here at the marble

wall. I will wait for you to ascend the marble
stair; I will not vision other-world hands
or another day to do this: to taste the oil;
I, too, will not be comforted until I hear:
The day of the righteous is come. I cannot veil:
Here is the last place, now the last time, and ours the last names.

Emma, Joseph, Sarah, Abraham, whose hands part this veil,
whose ears hear the New Song, who soften with oil
the bruised hands and marble feet and wrestle for the Names.