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Man in Korean Costume

Jennifer Kwon Dobbs

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about 1617 | chalk on white paper

Black strokes enrobe his body
and document a gaze. This is my face

orange in drugstore foundation, my white mother's
spring palette. I follow texture

in Peter Paul Rubens' sketch of Choson textiles.
A merchant vessel's outline

moors in an invisible shore. This is my body
cleaved but still a map

of surfaces becoming a woman.
Blood quickens. Brown mounds

ancestral script on my chest. The Flemish
master shades the right ear and pillows

the lips, as if seedlings
fester; the figure demurs but gives in

to a connoisseur. Which details prove
he's Korean when liquid blue liner

slants my eyes into a mask?
Again Rubens paints him awestruck

obscuring a Moor's profile, witness to
St. Xavier's power to resurrect

two white men and a woman anguished.
Her infant remains veined marble, an idea

the white mother's immortality is infertile.
She teaches me broad, upward strokes jaw to ear

prevent wrinkles. If I ask how the crimson
robe tears away from my womb each month,

she sorts her brass vanity's cargo.
Apprentices clear studio tables for clothes

the Jesuits removed from four Korean boys
enslaved, specimens for an altar

mural to entice the pope to canonize
the order's founder. When my white mother

curls my coarse hair with a Marcel iron and teases
my bangs into black meringue

she is a maker of miracles. In Antwerp
still life is the artist's signature.

