

Fabric Collage After Vermeer

(for Sylvia Spar)

They didn't satisfy you,
the Old Masters. You brooded over them,
meditating adjustments.
You wanted to translate them
into your own vernacular,
the scraps and patches of your woman's life.
Or prod the two dimensions
of their stilled world back into three.
Or maybe you just wanted
to darn their socks.

In Vermeer's kitchen
the woman pouring water
wears your dress.
Is that why she pours so intently,
remembering when you wore it?
She has aged
since she labored for Vermeer,
her mouth loosened, face smudged,
blanched with what has passed
just outside the kitchen.
Her jug of water has thickened into milk,
the loaf of bread crusted over.

For decades you have lived with her,
salvaging remnants from your life
to mend hers. You have stitched her
back together, restored to her
the grain and texture of her womanhood.
You have tidied up
after Vermeer,
thrust him back out of the kitchen.
In paying homage
you have mastered him.

Winifred Hughes