

From *The Illustrated Statue of Liberty*. Faith, as she works on yet another painting of Lady Liberty.

Learn to Paint

Faith

1.

This room looks like hell.
You know how I live — one day to the next.
I find a surface, it wears me down.

What choice is there? I work
on the painting, the big one.
I consider the attack. Clear in my mind
each stroke comes down
like the armourer's hammer.



2.

Start with a gesture; let your hand, without looking
follow a shoulder, a back. Learn
to work quickly: forget just as fast.
Space has a color.
A line always moves
away from its weight. Let it leave.
Take a step back and see what you are:
just a motion. Nothing else is
and nothing else matters.

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3.

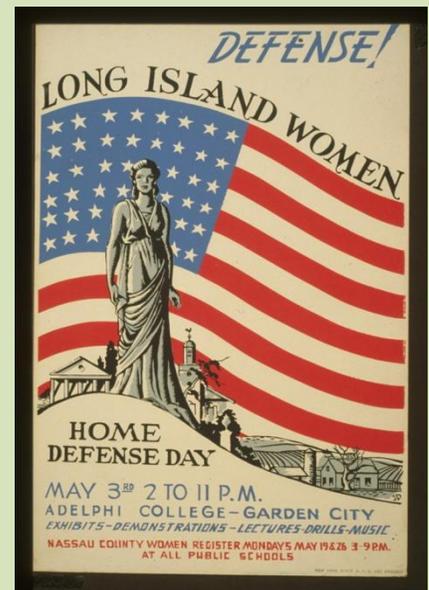
Next you must list
all that you owe:

The light as it came on you; the foot
you failed to caress or the mask
you say you revealed (with what? Art?).

A paucity
brought you to this.
Mostly the question: What if I fail?
What if failure
is all I can do?

4.

When you are ready with
scraps of cloth and
your oil,
you must forget everything.
A moment ago you weren't ready,
but now you are.
Before the first stroke
makes the canvas bloom like the roof of a circus tent,
a bud of green paint
slides down the side of the cup into a pool,
equally green. This is the moment,
its surface is bottomless.
All you can do is begin.



5.

I was wrong.
Light will not wait.
This hour, this exhaustion
is the space you have made for attention.
It must be pulled, dragged ahead
by what you do not know.

Sacrifice choice,
give up on wisdom.
The world doesn't need another prophet.

6.

You think it's too hard. It is.

7.

Now you are ready.

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Singhalese woman awaiting deportation at Ellis Island.