

JULIE POITRAS-SANTOS

Sharpshooter

after Winslow Homer, 1863

Nobody knows when the first men started.
We learned to hunt to feed our hunger.
Sound of the river and distance, sound of the winter and wind.

A camp was erected in spring not far back from the shore.
Some scrambled up trees in the dark.
They studied the movements of prey.

The way of the needles, the scent of the clay in the earth.
The scent of the pitch on the skin.
A boot in the crotch of a tree.

Shadows rise with the sun, the hop of a cardinal or sparrow.
Shouts spill across from the shore in silence.
An echo of animal feeling in turn.

The painting without the wall of the frame.
The painting and the sequence of events off stage.
The face and the hand and the hand.

The diagonal marks of his gaze.
Pride in the marksman's skill.
Lifted the sight to his eye.

Hiding the stock in the blind.
Drawing the bead on the other.
Numbers unknown at the time.

Balanced the gun on the hand and the shoulder.
Balanced the arm on the knee on the branch.
The thumping of blood in his ears.

Contracted and tensed for arrival.
The touch of a brush on the canvas, a dab of cadmium red.
The sound of—absolutely nothing is moving.

The crack and the split of the echo in half.

Recollection aligns with the suffering.
History will tell us: "the nation."

Of mastery we'll ask many questions.
A ghost just passed in the glass behind you.
The gun was aimed at a man.