

AUSTIN VELDMAN

An Examination of Origins

The year was 1944. The setting was a farm
in the Netherlands that I have only seen in portraits

in my mind, a collection of ideas of where the beans grew
and the fruit trees stood and the pond waited. The story was

the Germans came down the road with horses and wagons;
the great German war machine. That summer, the Dutch men

on the farm relieved themselves on one cabbage blossom
in particular. And when the Germans came again

demanding cabbage for their Kohleintopf, my grandfather's
father, grinning like Hitler had walked himself into the North Sea,

picked the special cabbage for that special moment...
If those Germans, wondering why their cabbage soup

tasted a little different than their Rhineland variations,
had knocked on that farm door demanding answers

I may not be here now. *Here* as a place I am always escaping
and then returning to, like a fox whose home is the wilderness

but hunts near the chicken coop from time to time. But only if to catch
a hen he must first jump a barbed fence and outrun the dumb hound

and only if we can understand wilderness to mean, used here,
as a place where all the collective art is being made this moment,

now living, growing at the touch of sunlight
beamed out of knowing fingers, dripping from the end

of brushes into streambeds. I, like the fox, am pulled
between warm waiting eggs and what is possible in the wilds

where we belong. Earth as a wilderness
I am breathing in, exhales numbered like miles

crossed over the Atlantic and over states in a new VW
bought with egg-money, miles traveled to the south bend

of a river. I saw a fox loping down Erskine as I returned
from what is one half of this gravity, the wilderness a port

below brick and windows, a desk and clear intentions. Earth
as a wilderness. The fox just clever enough to survive the winter.