

On a Mural in the Rutherford Reading Room, University of Alberta

Nancy Kang

the silence kneels, high on the wall
a picture, as wide as a box car
still painted over, a missionary pontificates

(smell his sweat in these leaves)

as Noah had a wagon,
not an ark he clutches
a handful of seeds,
a string of beads

Natives squat, cooperation stretched
dog-lean in nakedness
pale and sour these pre impressions
that leave moisture for moths

fellow feeling, flat grass on a ruddy brow
in the moment of the trade, dust will rise
an ant with wings gnawing
plywood, wheels of fire, squinting
at this homogeneous sagebrush and acrylic

steeple poker, a chorus of crosses
made by tipi tops
brushed a dry mouth
shut

some eyes linger over the smooth felt of a cap

pressed, stiff leather, ironed in the sun
orange heat rash on the skin like lichen
the man's lips mimic prayer, he
chews the loose skin, waves a hand
tears off a piece thoughtfully
ruminates
the spot of life
is a mounted man, red-clad, spilled across
the smoke of priests and
the oil of black hair.