

Landscape with a Blur of Conquerors By Richard Siken

To have a thought, there must be an object—
the field is empty, sloshed with gold, a hayfield thick
with sunshine. There must be an object so land
a man there, solid on his feet, on solid ground, in
a field fully flooded, enough light to see him clearly,

the light on his skin and bouncing off his skin.

He's easy to desire since there's not much to him,
vague and smeary in his ochers, in his umbers,
burning in the open field. Forget about his insides,
his plumbing and his furnaces, put a thing in his hand

and be done with it. No one wants to know what's
in his head. It should be enough. To make something
beautiful should be enough. It isn't. It should be.

The smear of his head—I paint it out, I paint it in
again. I ask it what it wants. I want to be a cornerstone,

says the head. Let's kill something. Land a man in a
landscape and he'll try to conquer it. Make him
handsome and you're a fascist, make him ugly and
you're saying nothing new. The conqueror suits up
and takes the field, his horse already painted in

beneath him. What do you do with a man like that? While you are deciding, more men ride in. The hand sings weapon. The mind says tool. The body swerves in the service of the mind, which is evidence of the mind but not actual proof. More conquerors.

They swarm the field and their painted flags unfurl. Crown yourself with leaves and stake your claim before something smears up the paint. I turned away from darkness to see daylight, to see what would happen. What happened? What does a man want?

Power. The men spread, the thought extends. I paint them out, I paint them in again. A blur of forces. Why take more than we need? Because we can. Deep footprint, it leaves a hole. You'd break your heart to make it bigger, so why not crack your skull

when the mind swells. A thought bigger than your own head. Try it. Seriously. Cover more ground. I thought of myself as a city and I licked my lips. I thought of myself as a nation and I wrung my hands, I put a thing in your hand. Will you defend yourself?

From me, I mean. Let's kill something. The mind moves forward, the paint layers up: glop glop and shellac. I shovel the color into our faces, I shovel our faces into our faces. They look like me. I move them around. I prefer to blame others, it's easier. King me.