

in the days of early polyester

by Celeste Gainey

you don't know yet you are flammable;
jars of Miracle Whip, tubs of Polly-O in the fridge.
Your moral imperative on ice, the vertical blinds rattling shut,
sleek sofa of solid kerosene resisting your body's impression.
You keep saying, *Cotton, cotton, the touch, the feel of cotton,*
but you are drawn to the slinky boy shirt with the Kandinsky-like print, fancy
your stubbled side-burns whiskering
the top of its Byronesque collar—long points gesturing toward
no-tits torso, slim hips, bell-bottomed legs, Frye boots.
It feels like Velveeta against your skin, something you might scrape off with
the blade of your Swiss Army knife.
It seems to reject you. Still, you can't stop
parading your shirt through Washington Square Park
in the hot afternoon sun—looking for combustion.

Celeste Gainey is the City of Asylum Poet Laureate of Allegheny County, 2020-22.

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