

ELIZABETH LANGEMAK

Illinois Cornfield as Nude Descending Staircase

As is the case with Duchamp's painting
we are not trained to imagine less
than a full field, no less than a shuffle
of form wherein one figure sways,
behind it a series of selves leaning
forward on brace root ankles,
lock-kneed and peeling on tawny stalks,
the echo that leads to now, to one
plant at the ditch's verge. October gusts
comb crooked parts through rows,
and the plants rattle their low-growling
engine of cob and leaf shifting
and bowing in girlish angles.
It is not newly made for you, this sound,
it is the sound that tracks each stalk
like shadow, the sound that haunts these
hiplike husks, these willowed legs.
Might the painter ask, where the corn
without this field of trail? Might the painting
answer, where the woman still unshucked?