

*Lance Larsen*

## IN A ROOM WITH SEVENTEEN REMBRANDTS

Look at her, a seven-year-old sketching herself—on the fly, on her portable whiteboard, in the Louvre. Lacking a mirror, she touches her ear then draws, pulls at a braided pigtail as if straightening a snake, lays down three twisted lines. Now her left eye, now her right, now the freckled paradox of her nose. A demanding operation, taking her face apart in three dimensions and reassembling it in two, until even her crooked mouth disappears into art. She adds crocodile tears to her alter ego—falling in pairs to create a puddle ocean around the word “BORED.” Now both visages of despair make a circuit of the room. Three patrons look away in French, one ignores in Italian, one clicks by wafting a Dutchy perfume. How can my naïve American nod make any difference? Still, I offer it up. I have traveled half a planet and forty-five years, nine Metro stops and a case of jet lag to fall into Renaissance luminosity. Yet what pins me to the moment is an impromptu ink face. And little girl feet, squirming, as if she had to pee, as if we all did, as if our sentence, even in the most storied of European cities, never changes: keep the body happy. We build salons to store the destruction of time, then pretend to float above destruction. Sometimes beauty wears me out. I would prefer to waltz the taciturn guard with his oh-so-French moustache, hoist Scraggly Girl to my shoulders, maybe kiss her mom, whoever she is, on her blind mouth. Smile at the sketch, Scraggly Girl smiles back. Smile at her straight on, she looks away, surveying the room for the quickest face to lose herself in—one of those dime-a-dozen Rembrandts hanging on the wall.

