**When I Saw the Mona Lisa**

Lisa Molina

Like ants at dusk processing in line, we finally enter the glass pyramid filled with treasures of paint and marble. The train to Paris delayed, I have only sixty minutes to rush through these hallways on this backpack-pilgrimage of my young adulthood to find her.

Frantically scouring the guide to her home within these catacombs, a blur of people, paintings, and sculptures become peripheral color and light in my panicked tunnel-vision quest. I turn a corner, almost colliding with the security official. I see the crowd of craning necks and hear a mystical collective whisper of various languages as if in prayer.

Without so much as brushing against anyone’s clothes, I weave my way through the throng of onlookers, like a cat perfectly navigating the rooftops of France. I find a perfect line of vision between narrow shoulders in order to gaze upon the woman I have traveled thousands of miles to meet.

I hold my breath. Squint. She is so small, plain, thin-lipped. I exhale.

Ashamed, I look down to the shoes that have traveled so far, but I feel her eyes on me as I am racked with guilt of disappointment and judgment. All the fame, theories, conspiracies, thefts, legends, lore, and expectations of this woman—who partially bears my name—come flooding through my being in a confusing cacophony of inner voices.

Is she famous just for being famous? Just another reality-show socialite? Have I been caught in the celebrity hype that has been so carefully constructed to sell tickets to tourists? Have I, once again, committed the sin of worshipping a god that can never live up to my expectations?

I shuffle sideways to see from a different angle and dare to look her in the eyes. They pierce through mine as arrows of light, burning into my retinas.

All becomes sublime, suspended silence between us, as I have the sacred realization that I too, am small, plain, and thin-lipped.

It is she who has always gazed upon us: without judgment, without disappointment. In her eyes, we are the masterpieces.