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History of Art: Stories (Yellow Shoe Fiction)

Margaret Luongo

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The stories in History of Art examine the definitive, yet paradoxical, preoccupations of humankind -- namely art-making and war -- and the emotions that underpin both: passion and sentimentality, obsession and delusion, ambition and insecurity, fear and envy.

Luongo casts the infamous, famous, and unknown in these sublime vignettes, from Marie Antoinette and John Lennon to the designers of fictional typefaces and the painted soldiers in Stanley Spencer's Great War Memorial. Drawing each work together through the dichotomy of art and war, Luongo also presents a mother who leaves her family so that she can illustrate the war for civilians who have no understanding of it; a Canadian artist who sketches the beach at Normandy while a German sniper observes him; and the daughter of a World War II veteran who struggles with his troubling legacy.

In addition to the collection's subjective focus, the structure of History of Art works to build creative tension. Luongo's use of nontraditional forms -- flash-fiction sequences, a bird-watching guide, a word problem -- are expertly deployed to heighten the sense of trauma and inventiveness found in these stories. In both content and construction, Luongo approaches the ageless themes of creation and destruction with striking novelty, humor, and mastery.

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