

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?