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## Vissi D'Arte

There's a lot of operatic ink on the old man in the gym:  
on his left scapula, Tosca's *vissi d'arte. vissi d'amore*,  
on his right, *please help me to be more beautiful*  
and at his flanks, longer inscriptions I've got no time to read.

No barbed-wire bands or vines clasp his arms, no designs at all,  
just blue words sitting against his albino skin,  
topped by short cropped hair, already white,  
and a sharply pointed beard neatly trimmed like a devil's.

Soon art and love will begin to sag and what will his surgeon think?  
Or the pathologist who flays him or the mortician in his lab floating in  
a wave of formaldehyde, like typewriter correcting fluid,  
the soul escaping from its dermatological thesaurus

into the wordless ether? What they think will depend  
on who they are, their literary or sexual orientation. Perhaps  
he hopes one will say this was an educated man, a romantic,  
a devotee of culture, desperate to hold his art as close as a lover.

Michael Salcman  
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