

Patricia Dobler Poetry Award, 2012 Winner

— SPONSORED BY CARLOW UNIVERSITY'S MADWOMEN IN THE ATTIC —

At the Brera, Milan

By: Michelle Maher

The breadth of the chest
seems immense, the face strained as if
in troubled sleep, the marble stillness of the corpse
matches the red-veined marble table
on which the body rests.
There is no place else to look, we are thrust
almost atop the body. Its torn flesh,
from which no blood flows, is draped with linen.
Foreshortened legs and tiny feet. Look,
there is a jar of ointment by the pillowed head.
Beyond, an open door leading to a burial room.
The body seems beyond decay with its flowing hair,
smooth, bent arms, and hands loosely curled
into cloth as liquid and still as poured stone.
At the center of the canvas, the bulging drapery
at the loins reminds us this had been a man in his vigor
now stretched on a slab as if poised
to catapult into our midst.
The world to come has not entered here.
A reddish glow covers everything, and even
the weeping figures shunted to the side—
St. John, the Virgin, Mary Magdalene—
aged, ravaged with grief, are incidental
to this Dead Christ Mantegna
painted for his own funerary chapel
which stands before us as if made
for our own, the room of our witness,
which we enter, and are still.

About the author

Michelle Maher is a professor of English at La Roche College, a private, Catholic college north of Pittsburgh. She has two Master's degrees and a PhD in English from Indiana University, Bloomington. Her poems have appeared most recently in *The Georgetown Review*, *The Atlantic Review*, *Pittsburgh City Paper*, *U.S. 1 Worksheets*, and *Voices from the Attic*.

Judge: Toi Derricotte