

Sonnet Scroll

Dedham Plate with (Backwards) Dolphin Border By Jennifer Clarvoe

1.

When does the artist fully disappear
into the work at hand—the daily round
become a task that centers in the here
and now, a subtle balance to be found
between gesture and will? The line will know
how to perform like Giotto's perfect O,
the end in the beginning embryo,
the all in the unknowing where to go.
The dolphins that cavort around the rim
of this old plate were painted in by hand
according to a pattern—but they swim
upside down and *backward*: in the end
the artist let them stay, for error's sake,
contrariwise, delighting in mistake.

2.

In the end—but maybe in the middle,
halfway around, resistance starts to trouble
the brush's flow, the surface in a muddle
undone by undertow: the will must wobble:
what to be done now that we've come this far?
E/ach dolphin is suspended in mid-wave,
facing a nodal bubble drawing near
but never nearer. Choose now what to save:
the plan impressed before you chose a brush,
the fluid motion that compelled your dive
into the circle, senses in a rush,
lost in the patterning in which you live—
How can you keep it going if you learn
the *first* turn that you took was a wrong turn?