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Song of My Embroidery

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Song of My Embroidery

Julia Kashuba

My skin sings the song of my
embroidery:
my follicles, like needle holes,
perforate me
with fine threads from Ternopil,
decorating me in the Byzantine
cross-stitchings of my Motherland.
My ornamentation tessellates
under the surface,
with chevrons and mallows,
and the Tree of Life patterns
with roots that extend into
Ukrainian soil
the way the veins under my skin
bloom from the veins of my
ancestors.
In this choral litany, I fluctuate
between alto and soprano
between English and Ukrainian,
and as my tongue slips between
languages,
the needle dives and rises through
my skin.

Ukrainian embroidery has sung its
way
into American suburbia
with unknowing people wearing
my skin
as a fashion trend.
I will sing my culture to you
I will let you read our history off
my skin
but these coral beads around my
neck
belong to me,
from my great-grandmother,
for the Ukrainian blood
starved, lost, remembered, found,
and poured into our children,
into me,
into these beads of coral.
Ukrainian blood
is woven into our embroideries,
and our skin sings the song
of our history.