

# Barriers of Electricity

Cindy St. John

I know it wouldn't really look this way, rose bushes for miles  
inside the galvanized wire fence  
that surrounds the Aberdares National Park,  
some of the stems weaving out of tangled leaves  
skyward through the metal links and charged  
with 6,000 volts: electric  
red, yellow and white, petals standing out like hairs, molded  
as if artificial, the kind of perfection found in objects on the brink  
of explosion.

Once a man bought me a red rose on the street in Pigalle.  
after drinks and dancing, I was eager for any amount  
of sexual tension, or attention.  
The world's largest electric barricade  
protects the flowers from elephants, rhinos and monkeys  
while Kenya becomes Europe's largest supplier of cut flowers  
following the same route that wasn't always so fragrant—slaves and ivory,  
skin and bones. A flower, like a person, is two-thirds water.  
Enough water for 20,000 people for a year  
is shipped in the stems from Kenya to Europe.  
DDT and Dieldrin, insecticides illegal in most countries,  
found in rotting hippo carcasses,  
flammable.

I lost the flower long before the misunderstanding.  
There are places where we still don't belong.  
It's mostly women who sell flowers in the Parisian markets,  
women who tend the flower fields in Kenya for \$1.85 a day and many lose  
their sight, hair and skin from the chemicals.  
It's in the work, in the flesh, teeth,  
water, in the bare colors spreading like rivers,  
like capillaries through each smooth charged petal.