

Two Poems · *Ricardo Pau-Llosa*

TABACO DE VUELTA ABAJO

He gropes beneath the leaf and smiles,
you'd think it was a skirt.
The best leaves look like the worst
but feel only like themselves. The master
picker knows nothing else but the color
and thickness of ash, the exact pressure
of air passing through the cigar, a dictionary
of desired colors and textures. When he comes
back to a cigar left dozing on an ashtray
his fingers will know if it is still
lit just by its weight.

In the field, cigar in mouth,
he will stretch a leaf between his hands,
holding it before his face like a mirror,
and bring its center to the lit end of his cigar.
Then he will watch the flame grow toward his fists,
count the seconds it takes, note the color
of the flaming rim and the way the orange
splinters fly off. He will do this only to leaves
that rust the sun when held against it.

He laughs when they bring him a foreign cigar
born of plants "grown from Cuban seed."
He shakes the counterfeit next to his ear
like a maraca, his head mock dances a cha-cha.
"Seeds lie. I have three sons,
one is a senator and the other two are judges."
When he runs his fingertips across the leaves in the field
his eyes close. The plants lie perfectly still.