

Ways of Seeing: Carracci

by Bill Yarrow

I have become interested in Carracci—
Ludovico Carracci, Bolognese
contemporary of Shakespeare
early Baroque artist, cousin
of Agostino and Annibale

whose 1612 painting
Body of Saint Sebastian
Thrown into the Cloaca Maxima
is a masterpiece
of the frozen moment

Sebastian is limp in a sheet supported by
muscular soldiers. His hands hang down,
his eyes are shut. Is he asleep? More likely
unconscious. After all, he is about to be
thrown into the great sewer of Rome

Unless one rotates the image:
then he becomes beautifully
vertical, his dreaming body
like a sleeping bird floating
in warm, soft air

Then the closed fists and flexed
forearms of the executioners
are seen impotently attempting
to hold him down but nothing
human can prevent his rise

