

KAREN MASSEY

Lesson

I mark my name at the top right corner,
cautious with margins,
noting the pressure of the graphite tip
against the page's pale skin.

It's the first grade.
We bend over notebooks
in our neat rows of desks. Learning
the alphabet, one letter per day,
the careful array of balls and sticks, strokes
reaching between blue lines, circles
between red. I am

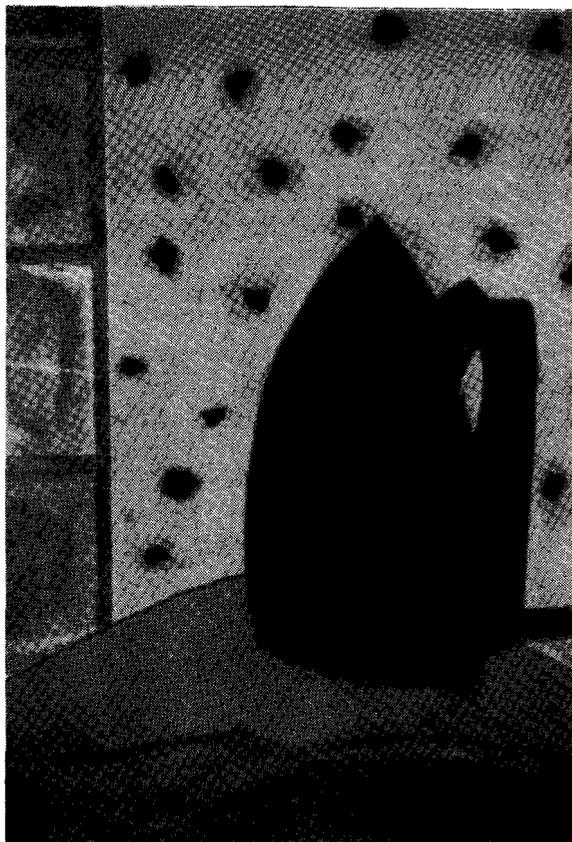
not so good at this, I want to print
smaller letters, not the swollen forms
the teacher favours. She tells me
I am trying too hard, I hold my pencil incorrectly.
But I want to print, so I can learn to write.
Already I write my name in its fluid form.

We practice the letter *I*. The capital
I, remembering to keep *his* back straight,
to draw the cross-lines that make his hat and shoes.
I imagine the letter *I* dressed
in black formal attire. He must be like my grandfather;
my father wears a uniform.

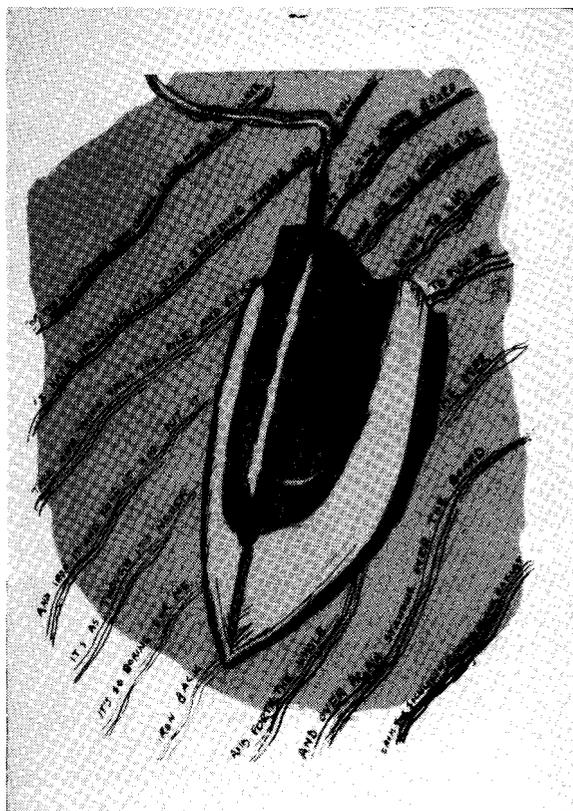
I remember only this one printing class,
learning this important upper case—
how I unconsciously avoided it,
how it wasn't until I was 22
I could write poetry without inserting myself
as *i*.

I still hold a pencil my odd way,
balanced on the callous on my middle finger.

*Karen Massey is published in Canadian Author & Bookman
and Contemporary Verse 2.*



Shlomit Segal, Ironing, Collage, 1987



Shlomit Segal, Ironing II, Silk Screen Print, 1986