The Artist and the Bird


I have carried this painting in my head
a goldfinch
perched forever
on its wooden feeding box
its looped chain
keeping it captive

In the last year of his life,
age thirty-two,
he painted it – dreaming
the possibilities of paint

Each day in the cobbled courtyard
he passed the bird on its brass perch
grain seeds in his pocket
watched intelligence flicker
in its watchful eye
The day he decided
*I will paint that bird*
he found
the rail empty
a swinging chain

Painted from memory
the bird still in his head
he gave it to the Delft lady
who so loved
her little *Puttertje*

A good Dutch housewife
she used it as a cupboard door

ANNE KOVAL