

YOKO SUGIYAMA

NOEL SLOBODA

The steady grunt and bang at New Year
comforted her after her husband
disappeared; she never understood why
women shouldn't wield a *mochi* mallet.

Her daughter helped her, turning
wet rice as it began to take shape.
The steady grunt and bang, the shaft
chafing her palms, reminded her

of Kimitake, brush flashing across parchment,
slicing through sheets, as though he traded
blows with someone on the other side
of the page. He had a different face

thudding against her in early morning,
the same one he wore when pressing
barbells toward heaven—as if
gods accepted iron sacrifices.