

THE CAPILANO REVIEW



*Only the score of a man's
struggle to stay with
what is his own, what
lies within him to do.*

Without which is nothing.

— JOHN WIENERS, *A poem for painters*

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Allen Sutterfield / AT PHARAOH'S

SEE YOU AT PHARAOH'S
reads the ad of yesterday
WHERE WATER AND CORDOVA MEET

Water was black, short for a favorite fruit of the southland now available everywhere, strange fruit. So big a growing in the garden. Not natural that fruit, one little seed then THIS. Water played and sang bass. Cordova had once liked Imogene Cocoa but never looked like her though in her mind Cordova seemed a name that should. She actually thought of herself as Minnie and was often surprised when surprised at home especially alone to be called Cordova because she always was Minnie at home. But Cordova wasn't a stage name, she sang, it was her real name, and actually Minnie was a stage name, if you thought about it, although she never used it on the stage only Cordova, which she never used at home, meaning alone, though others did. In fact Water and two others maybe three only knew Minnie. She wasn't outwardly surprised when Minnie at home and somebody said "Cordova!" she covered, but inside she was shaken. Then she began to get used to it, though sometimes it still happened. She wasn't sure but what it wasn't good that it still happened. What if it didn't happen?

Water and Cordova met at Pharaoh's and continue to meet there, no secret about it. It says so on the sign, even. They were well known the Big Black Man (Boogie, yeah!) and Cordova. Liked? Who cares. Many came to see and hear. They were impressed that Cordova did not look like Cocoa. (No one should look like Cocoa, everyone silently thought.) They were surprised. They never thought about Water looking any different. Awe-striking. A monument, this human body! Huge. Black. Those muscles! That sheen! The ripples! A little eddy of muscles under his left shoulder blade, Minnie saw these more than any. Shallow shoals between his ribs, smooth over the bedrock sternum.

Water was all Minnie's man. Cordova didn't let on, except just enough, so that everyone thought they knew. In reality of course no one did but everyone agreed not to mention it. Thin and Arthur thought they were different in this but they weren't. They didn't know about the little eddies under Water's shoulder blades. Minnie, Minnie.

Water takes the shape of any container and when they were alone Water took the shape of Minnie, Cordova was strictly somewhere else, but Water did not have to change his name, he never did, he was always the same, he was always Water.

Of course he wasn't always the same but he Water did not know this and so he was, just the same. He did not know it and he would certainly refuse anyone trying to tell him, he did not want to know, he knew. That's when the sudden whirlpool you would see as all Water's forces rushed rapidly to his face and you knew: Danger. Don't take your boat there. Don't fish in those waters. Danger: back away. Water was not a knower. Water was Water and he took the shape of Minnie as they were alone and other times he took the necessary shape or the one he wanted but the shape he wanted most was Minnie's and Minnie of course was in her best shape with Water.

Minnie was not Water, Minnie was an earth shape, Water took Minnie and Cordova went out into the city. Cordova went off by herself at those times, hoping of course one day to be allowed to stay with Minnie when she was the shape Water did take. But when she was not she went out into the city, away from the bar where she was known, any of those bars, and found naturally someone, more or less anyone, rawbone she preferred and they would go to a room. In the room there was no taking of shapes, Cordova was not interested in that, she only wanted Minnie's shape and to be taken by Water.

Here she allowed herself to be taken in the form of whoever but she really did the taking: she enjoyed taking him and knowing he was thinking he was taking her but really she was only taking him to be the shape of Water though he did not know, Water did not know, Minnie knew sometimes but not when she was with Water, but Cordova knew all the time and that is how she enjoyed it, he undressing her but she using his hands to take the shape of Water, laying herself on the bed for Water, who had no shape, but Cordova providing a shape for Water to fill, to take, to fill out to full, to almost burst — she chose Rawbones because you can work better with crude materials, there is more to be done, they don't mind as much, the rawbones did not know what Cordova was doing but they felt it good, they liked it, they got what they wanted "and then some, Man, that chick!" and Cordova liked what she was doing though she did not like them, each time she made them into Water's shape and with each doing she made herself into a shape Water could take, in her mind she did this naturally her body was involved though it was doing and not the knowing, she knew how to make her body do, she was better in the body even than Minnie, she thought, but Water never saw Cordova and Cordova would take the rawbones and smooth them out in savage heat and sometimes, even often she got what she wanted at the moment and would fall into Water's shape, would feel herself taken by Water only when she was going downstairs afterwards she would then feel just Cordova and know it had been a quick dream she Cordova had had and not the dream of Minnie.

But Cordova sang and sometimes the Rawbones would be there, once and more than once there would be the quick glint of knives, angry red slashings, the club would throw them out, but she never attached herself to the Rawbones, except the one way, as she desired and they knew that and she knew that but they did not know why and Cordova did. That is how she knew she was stronger. But she was weak when alone, Minnie would take shape and she would go away, often without remembering, until again she would, when going down the stairs. Water simply never knew. He did not want to know, he did not really want to know what he did not know, he knew he wanted the Minnie he was privileged to see, not PRIVILEGED but it was in a way. Well. Water and Cordova met at Pharaoh's but Minnie is alone, Cordova.

Robert G. Sherrin / TWO PROSE PIECES

DREAM THREE HUNDRED

I see the soft edge of motion and the hard touch of its sudden stopping. I see the farm girl at her window flapping eiderdowns at my passing. I see the cobbles or the asphalt or the concrete roll by only a few feet from my face; the tree branches that come at me like whips from nowhere; the mileage posts that threaten my kneecaps on fast corners; the hidden rock that could clip my ankle and crush it in my boot. I still see the red bus on my side of the yellow line.

There was a bike behind me and one in front. It was a shady road, the pavement moist, the regular seams of tar thumping under the wheels like a watch ticking loudly. The trees formed a tunnel ahead of me, allowing sunlight to dimple the roadway, tossing the gear changes back at us, making the passage of time a useless thing. We were motion and though you were on the back of my bike, I was alone and leaning into the curve.

I remember your hands in my jacket pockets. Your fingers on my ribs like a pianist's on the keys. You played a delicate tune. You'd been playing it with me a long time. You talked softly to me on telephones, whispering from great distances, arranging meetings that turned always to quiet affairs in the woods, each of us on a separate stump, not talking, not staring, not at all comfortable. You had walked and I had ridden to meet you. The motorcycle tilted away from us in the afternoon humidity, the sun highlighting the exhausts, the fairing pulled tight like a mask over the front end, the little lip of the seat's rear edge. All so quiet. We practised saying nothing. We practised saying goodbye.

- Gotta go.
- Okay.
- Wanna ride?
- No. I'll walk.
- Got two helmets.
- I wanna think. You go ahead.

Always the same. Me kicking at the machine, wrists twisting, toe tapping, gears clicking to certainty. I couldn't explain to you what a waste of time our meetings were. So the bike spoke for me, a brief wail then dirt and dust and my disappearing down the back roads, standing on the pegs over potholes, yelling, drowning the bike's voice and your silence in my sudden, short words. I don't recall them but they were loud and angry and were intended to echo back to you as you walked home. They were intended to insinuate themselves into your thoughts, push them aside and let you know that I could be mad and vindictive and passionate and funny and worth the effort. My departures always ended on the autobahn.

I would pull the goggles down and ease into the traffic moving quickly into high gear, the wind only now sucking at my lips. Then I'd slip my ass into the curve of the seat, the part where you were supposed to sit, and I'd duck my head until only my eyes showed above the visor of the fairing. There was no noise, only the elements of it: the motor vibrating, the tank a large tingle of explosives under my chest, the front end like the leading edge of a bullet far beyond the weapon's propulsion, living dangerously, temporarily, on its own.

Soon I'd be in a pack of autos: fast ones, slow ones; German ones, small anonymous boxes of power; French ones, low and sleek and nearly silent in their hydraulics and evilly swivelling headlamps; Italian ones that were blood red and flowed quickly; American ones that barked with energy and dodged in and out like nervous animals. But I was something nearly unseen therefore worthy of notice. I cruised up, downshifted, pivotted to one side upshifting — a suggestion of sound in the road noise — a swivelling of hips, a dancer in the fast lane then a sidestep back into the traffic. Me, almost flat, wrists cocked or uncocked; me, flat on my stomach at 176 kilometres per hour.

At times my mouth was open. Whenever I changed gears I growled a little, up or down in my octave of mechanical sounds. When I passed cars I shook my leathered ass and waited for the honking horns. I wanted men to hate me because I was faster and sneakier and less predictable than they were in their leather upholstered sedans. But they loved me because I was alone where beside them sat thin women with accessible desires, women who listened to music on seats that reclined into a back seat that, even in its narrow dimensions, hinted at steamy sheets. I wanted women to hate me because I was there one moment and gone the next, because I was almost touchable but always out of reach. But they loved me because they knew my thighs still vibrated when the bike stopped. I was the subject of those caged voyeurs who looked up from paperback copies of Réage and adjusted their shades to watch me working my machine. And they loved me because they couldn't have me, because they wanted only the suggestion of motion, of something fast and uncontrolled. They were the kind who sat back and watched while I was the kind who jumped and danced for someone else's pleasure.

I drove the autobahn and weaved in and out of traffic, cursed everyone. Cursed you particularly, called you bitch and other things. I cut drivers off, slalomed the white line, closed my eyes at 193 K's and counted to five then opened them and let the wind eat away at me until the speed dropped and my face stopped fluttering and my knees grew sore from pinching the tank and my ass loosened up on the fear that saw me plucked by the wind from my machine. Eventually I pulled off the autobahn and stopped and sat quiet listening to the motor cool, waiting to see if I could curse you anymore before I headed home on a back road where I knew of a pay phone by a bridge.

You had to say yes. You did. We had to meet and talk. We did. You were forbidden to ride because it was not only dangerous and unladylike but also promiscuous. We rode anyway. At night with the lamps off, the white line was Morse Code in the moonlight. From behind your thighs closed in on me like insistent pincers. There was air to breathe and air to cut through. There was air to rustle with our passing. There was air to record our sounds and there was air to shield our motion after the ride was over.

There were others who joined us. There were rides into the meadow land where our sounds were swallowed whole and only small things like frogs produced an echo. There were moments of flying when we crested a rise and floated over the pavement until the forks dipped and we fell forward. There were times when the sunlight turned the distant road to water.

That day there was a bike behind and one in front and the six of us were weaving and turning down the forest highway, left side on the yellow line, a fast insect of noise heading south in the spring. The air was moist and remained with the skin, almost palpable in the mouth, tasting of cedar, smelling of privacy. There was nothing on the road but us.

The bus was red. It carried school children. It crossed the yellow line. Of that there is no doubt. He honked, I admit to that. He sideswiped the first bike and it collapsed. But the road curved right and the bike's motion continued left, directly into the rear wheels of the big Mercedes. There were sparks and fire. And yells. Yours, mine, the school children, those dying, those about to.

The bus missed you and me. I'd braked for an instant and swung right, heading for the shoulder while panic slowed everything: the bus red with cries and wide open faces, its honking a wild northern sound, the driver's eyes huge, his hands in the air; the first bike torn up in the rear wheels, the rider and passenger fluttering and flopping like rags in the roadway. A helmet bounced like a soccer ball.

And the impact of the head-on as the third bike failed to swerve fast enough: perhaps the rider caught in a blind spot of sun, perhaps a sideways glance that took part of a second from his reflexes, perhaps he was frozen into death like a deer who steps onto the tracks and is stunned by the train's lamp. Who knows? It was metal on metal. It was very very loud then very very quiet.

We had skidded and swerved and slowed and finally slid into the dirt. Your hands still in my pockets. You looked calm, you lay quietly on the gravel.

—What happened?

I shrugged. Slip away, I thought, don't force me to show you. And you did. Shock pulled you under. You went unconscious.

I walked alone to the highway. School children were running toward me, hair flying, tears falling, screams uncoiling in the tunnel of trees. I thought I heard birds starting to sing. I opened my arms to the little ones who grabbed at them, yelling and wailing and pointing at the bus; some pissing, some weak and sitting on the pavement; others strong, running madly from side to side. I saw oil flowing from the bus' front end. I saw the bus driver staring ahead, upright and stiff in his seat. I saw the three bikes on their bellies in the road. I smelled dust.

The children huddled around me on the centre line. They hugged me and pleaded with me and cried to me in German. I smiled and looked down. I spoke to them in English. I said

— It's only a dream, my dears. Only a dream.

I said it again and again, again and again.

FORCED OUT

He stood in the outfield, one hand padded with leather, the other tucked in jeans. On his head a white cap with blue stripes, on his chest a shirt with the word EAGLES in scroll. His eyes were tired from staring at the infield, seeming further away than the twenty yards of stubble indicated. To play the infield you had to be able to catch and run and yell snappy phrases, little poems of exhortation to the pitcher. The infielders also wore full uniforms.

He looked into his glove and saw the name of a baseball pro in gold lettering, the black leather like a darkened theatre, the words Golden Diamond seeming to promise perfection, smelling not only of saddle soap but also of the cloudburst slide into third on a risky triple, of the lightning steal, of the pleasant pain of a snagged line drive. But where he stood was pasture land and he and the other two were like heifers cut loose to do as little damage as possible.

Be alert. Be alert out there. The coach's voice in falsetto, a million light years away.

Beyond the confines of the playing field people were gathered. They made him sick. The men sat on the hoods of their dusty cars, their fat thighs spread, a bottle of Stampede Ale clinched in their crotches, fingers in their mouths, whistling or yelling or belching. It was important to them to be noticed. And the women in their canvas chaise longues perusing the *Digest*, the *Home Journal* or *Confessions*, not trusting their hubbies to talk only of baseball or their sons to speak properly on and off the field while keeping their young hands away from their groins in public. The girls off to one side, talking and squealing of Tampax and virgin pins, of so and so's wienie displayed furtively and momentarily in a tent under a hot sun with mothers whistling from stoops for lunch, suspicious of the silence and heat buzz around the teepee in one neighbour's back yard. Then there were boys who did not play, who slouched across the stubble, along the foul lines and beyond the outfield, trailing nooses of rope, boxes, sprung wires, traps to snare gophers. The animals were killed and their tails removed for the 5¢ bounty offered at the station store.

There were, of course, the gophers; scores of thousands of them squeaking in the night, scurrying past, underfoot anytime you strayed from paved road to prairie. Holes were prevalent beyond the last line of officers' houses, holes that could snap a horse's leg, that could tear up ligament and twist cartilage in a man. At an NCO's softball game one outfielder had run backward, hands up, to grab a long fly ball only to step awkwardly in a gopher hole and break ankle and arm in the fall. The fire crews arrived the next day, pumped water and aviation fuel into the burrows, ignited the mixture, watched, waited and listened as the gophers boiled underground.

Traps had been set under houses. Fires were lighted, armies of men and boys with sticks beat the grass and herded the rodents toward a drainage ditch filled with oil. Bulldozers buried the writhing, greasy squeakers. High thistle would grow there. A sweetness, a scent of near vomit would hang like old perfume over that ditch all summer.

Be alert out there. Backem up, backem up.

There was a dull crack in the distance, a .22 or a ground ball to short. The outfielder took his eyes off the troop of boys parading past to see the short stop make a play to first. The cheers swelled for a moment, a sound almost of pain or a wind tearing quickly at high wires then mooing away as the distance between him and the game grew. The boys, the gopher hunters, had moved toward the dugouts, one swinging a weighted plastic bag.

One down, two to go. Gotem swingin like barn doors. The backcatcher, oddly gopher-like in his gear squatted down and raised one finger.

The outfielder pulled his cap lower and crossed his legs. His back was tired from standing in one place too long. He watched a gopher pop its head up not ten feet away, sniff the air, then scuttle to another hole. They were not beautiful creatures. Their teeth were often yellow but their eyes were large and soft, dark brown, like hot chocolate being stirred. The pupils showed the fire of misunderstanding. The creatures did not understand that they were unwanted things, dangerous so the rumours had it: had attacked in a group of forty a small child and killed it with their slashing teeth and rabies; had

shit in people's food; had eaten away tires on aircraft; had undermined the runway when they gathered by the thousands in spring at the end of the airstrip, a wavering of brown on the pale grass. The great Lancasters would drop in to land, engines whispering almost feathered as back pressure built to stall speed. The gophers were undeterred. They mated in a frenzy until it was time to depart. The rumours were only rumours, tiny packets of air that circulated around the base. It gave everyone a reason to kill in the spring when the juices ran a little wild after the cold winter.

The sound of a Harvard trainer, bee yellow overhead, pulled the outfielder's eyes from the burrows around him and he watched the noisy plane dip then founder as the student pilot lost power and pressure in the bank. But the engine wailed back to life and the plane moved over the pale sky. Loud voices rose to draw the boy's attention to a ball rolling into right centre. The fielder stumbled to it, tossed it awkwardly to second. The runner was already on his way to third but was trapped. He hesitated, pitched himself back and forth in the narrowing gap, the ball drawing closer like a slow white bullet, the runner in agony trying to avoid it, twisting like a gopher at the final moment when the third baseman ran him down, forced him to the dirt out of breath and instinct, dispatched him with a tag to the shoulder. The infield was a tightly knit group and now they romped around each other as the parents clapped and whistled and stopped reading and drinking for a moment. Fathers were shaking upraised beers and bouncing their soft asses on the dusty hoods of their cars; the mothers were cracking thin smiles at the antics, their features hardened by the need to grimace at boys imitating men who wanted to be boys again; the knot of girls had swivelled to watch their lovers-to-be rolling in the dust, noting judiciously the taut buttocks and tough chests; and the boys, hunters, moving further from noise and notice of the elders, lugging their sacks of animal, bringing out the knives, relishing that ritual as much as the thought of nickels sliding over the oiled counter at the store. The game went on.

Shoot to me big fella. The catcher's thin chant barely reached the outfield.

The left fielder stood patiently. The urine was growing in his bladder. He tightened his thighs and felt the pressure in his groin, the little thing a little bigger, the sac tight and dimpled like the casing of almonds. He narrowed his gaze on the group of girls and

wondered if their gaze ever narrowed on him, considered him in their calculations, ever wondered about his wiener as they squealed their analyses behind the bleachers. Did they watch him as he walked alone to that spit beyond the hump of the drainage ditch where the Harvard had crashed last year? Where he forced himself to look at the torn metal, rust in the yellow, the pilot's seat ripped and bent, a stilled gesture in the aged canvas, rubber knobs and control lines pocked with snow? Did they watch as he kept a look out for a severed finger or forgotten limb, then pulled it out and pissed over the empty seat? It seemed appropriate. A salute of comprehension, a tattoo of disdain over things crumpled, once almost human in their airborne and mysterious grace, now only too human in poverty and awkward silence. At odds with their surroundings. Did they ever wonder about him?

Another crack. The boy turns and hears the voices, louder than ever, the syntax directed at him, the high tension striking an electric chord in his chest. The ball at its apex now arcs toward him. He stares up, making all the minute calculations, gauging, the wind, the need to dilate pupils, the drift of the ball due to overspin, the expected impact of a hard object moving fast, the inevitable cushioning of one thing against another, turf, leather, or flesh and bone. One hand forgotten, still in pocket, the other raised, the boy questioning the movement as he makes it. And the ball drops suddenly, even after the noise and nervous reaction, to the centre of the black glove, into the heart of that baseball player's name. There is cheering from a distance, a gurgle and bubble and tinselling of sound. He doesn't think twice about it, just starts the long trot to the dugout where he will be told he is first up.

Hit it Robbie, hit it.

The noise is overpowering after the outfield, like moving from the back pew during the sermon to the altar rail for communion. He has a moment to himself after the others slap his shoulders and yell at him: Otta go, Wayda be, Howda hangin there. The coach smiles, thumbs up, claps his hands, calls for homeruns and alertness, promises a trip to the DQ for a win. The boy makes for the on-deck circle, selects a bat, turns to walk past and behind the dugout where he can warm up.

A mother is berating her son, shaking her index finger, her frame thin and angry under the flowered dress. Her hair is red and bobbed.

Why do you have to kill for a nickle? Why do you have to torture them like this?

The son has no explanation. He shrugs. The outfielder stands quiet, bat to his side as he stares at the boy's right hand: A plastic bag with two gophers sucking for air. Their yellow teeth grab at the plastic, their eyes wide, legs in motion, the bag drawn to their features, the thrashing slow and dim as if projected by a distant lens.

You stop this right now. And the mother turns away, yanking the hair from her face, cursing at the flaccid hubby who squats on the Buick's hood. Her face moist with futility.

The umpire calls for a batter.

The boy with the plastic bag walks over to the boy with the bat and takes it from him. He lays the bag on the stubble and goes to work. Six solid hits stills the slow-mad thrashing, the last blow breaking the plastic, tossing fur and blood in a short burst. He returns the bat and walks away.

Let's have a hitter. The ump lowers his mask, calls a last time.

The outfielder takes the bat automatically. Wide eyed he finds himself at the plate, the wood a little red on the fat, the ground in the distance wobbly with movement. The crowd is a blur of sound, the beating now a building pressure in his upper groin, hands very cold on the sanded wood, throat closed, lips dry, mind not focused. The catcher, in crouch, balanced on his hind legs, chants

Shoot to me big fella, shoot to me.

Salmon Harris / RECENT DRAWINGS

I tend to think I don't get rid of an image until I've done all I can to it. . . . Theoretically, I guess, you could work on something all your life, like one image. Lots of people have. Some days you get up and go to the studio and you say, "Naa — I just can't work on that anymore, I've got to find another image." Then you start looking for one — that gets even more ridiculous — or to get ideas and then go out and put visuals to them. I don't trust those kinds of ideas, not at all. It just doesn't work that way for me. When it becomes a conscious kind of effort, then you might as well go work on the railroad. It's got to start by pinching your optic nerve. I don't particularly care if it's a mouse trap, or a wedding photo, or a hockey player as much as I care about why it's making me look at it again and again.

— SALMON HARRIS*

* *Salmon Harris March 4-April 2, 1978, The Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, p. 14.*

IMAGES

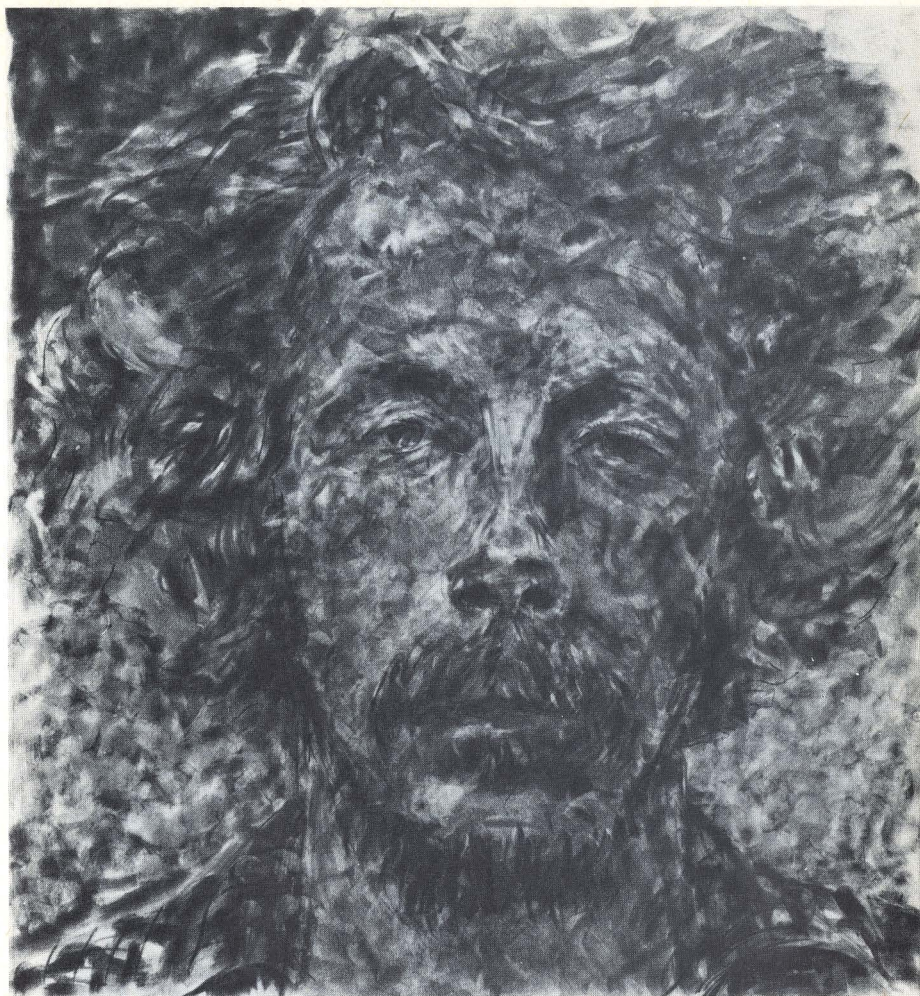
Self-Portrait, 1977, graphite on paper, ht. 71.1 cm., w. 66.1 cm.

Bride and Father, 1976, graphite on paper, ht. 91.1 cm., w. 66.1 cm.

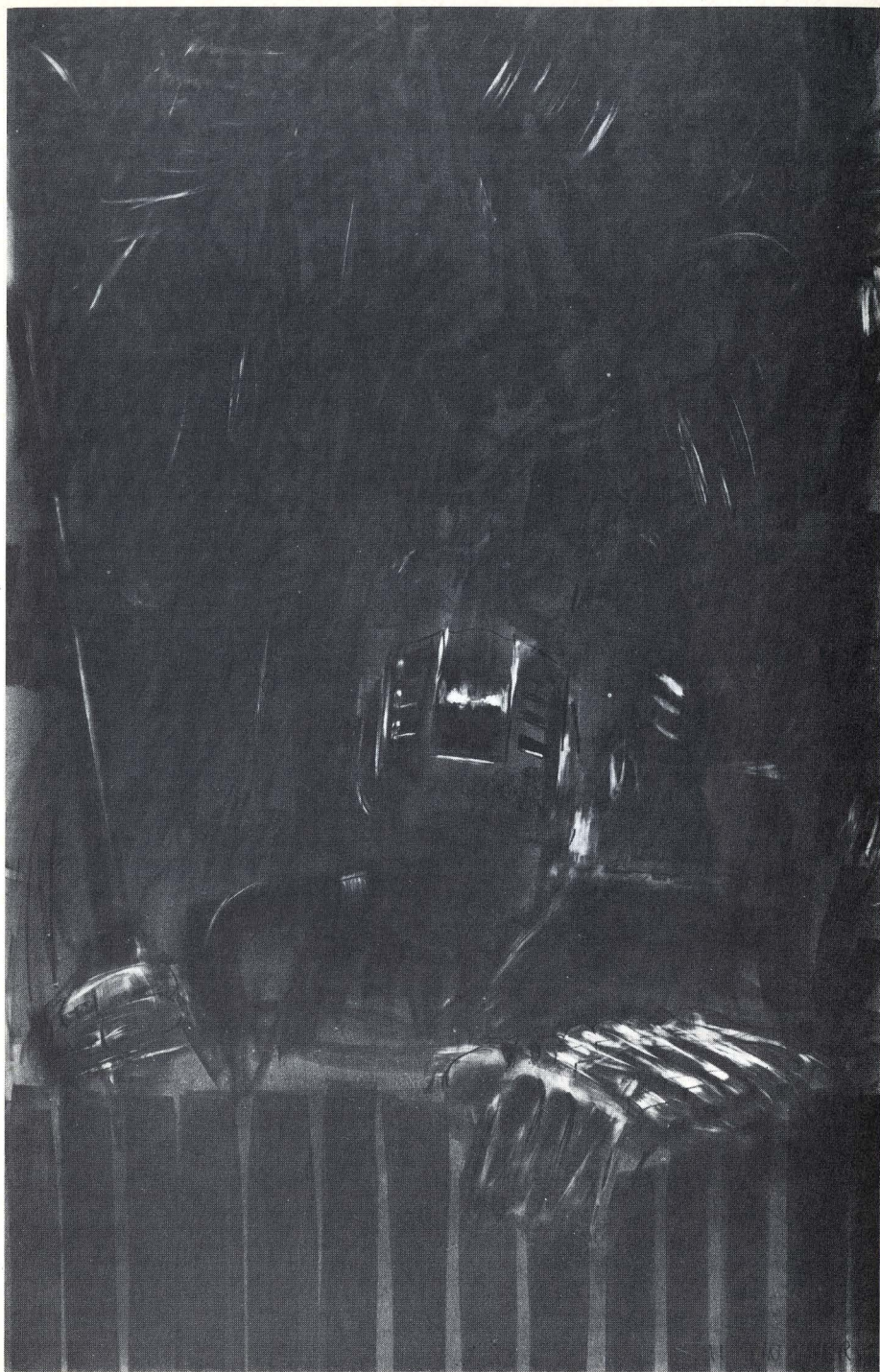
Single Hockey Player (Dark), 1976, graphite on paper, ht. 101.6 cm., w. 66.1 cm.

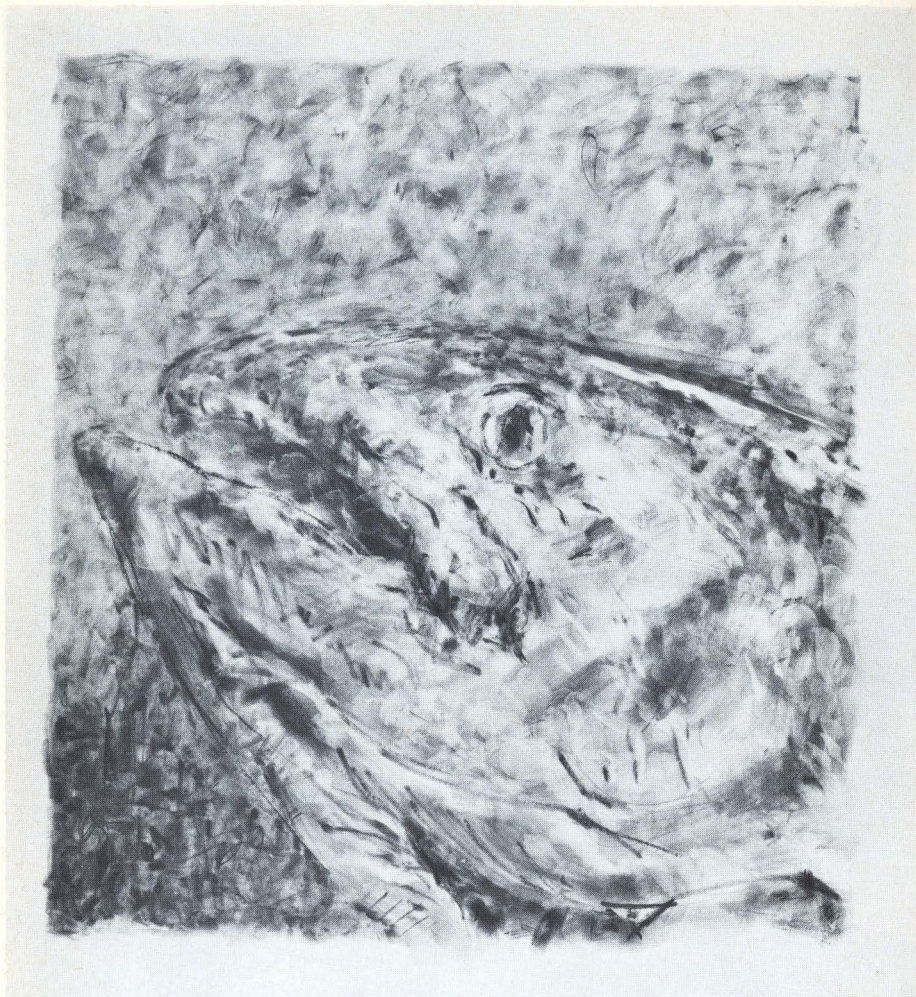
Fish #2, 1977, graphite on paper, ht. 71.1 cm., p. 66.1 cm.

Photography: Tod Greenaway









Monkeys Toucher & Recent Drawings

The drawing is a study of a monkey in a natural pose, looking down at a small object in its hand. The monkey is depicted with a long tail, a large head, and a small body. The drawing is done in a simple, sketchy style, with the monkey's body and tail rendered in a light, almost transparent manner. The monkey's head is the most detailed part of the drawing, with its eyes, nose, and mouth clearly defined. The monkey is holding a small, dark object in its hand, which is the focus of its attention. The background is a plain, light color, which makes the monkey stand out. The overall impression is that of a quick, gestural study, capturing the monkey's pose and expression in a few simple lines.

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The drawing is a study of a monkey in a natural pose, looking down at a small object in its hand. The monkey is depicted with a long tail, a large head, and a small body. The drawing is done in a simple, sketchy style, with the monkey's body and tail rendered in a light, almost transparent manner. The monkey's head is the most detailed part of the drawing, with its eyes, nose, and mouth clearly defined. The monkey is holding a small, dark object in its hand, which is the focus of its attention. The background is a plain, light color, which makes the monkey stand out. The overall impression is that of a quick, gestural study, capturing the monkey's pose and expression in a few simple lines.

Monique Fouquet / RECENT DRAWINGS

Each drawing represents a fragment of a universe of shapes, light and textures to which I see no end or rather no borders. The numbering of each drawing is solely for practical purposes. Each drawing is completed and yet it is part of an uncompleted piece.

I find it very difficult to dissect and to put into words the significance of the elements of which my work is comprised — maybe because my feelings about them change all the time or because I simply acknowledge them as part of my environment, part of my vocabulary.

It has recently occurred to me that it would be possible to determine the limits of my knowledge of French and English by looking up every page of the dictionary and checking out the words I know, but it is impossible to determine the limits of my visual vocabulary because there is no frame of reference, no standards to compare it with.

This is what fascinates me.

— MONIQUE FOUQUET

IMAGES

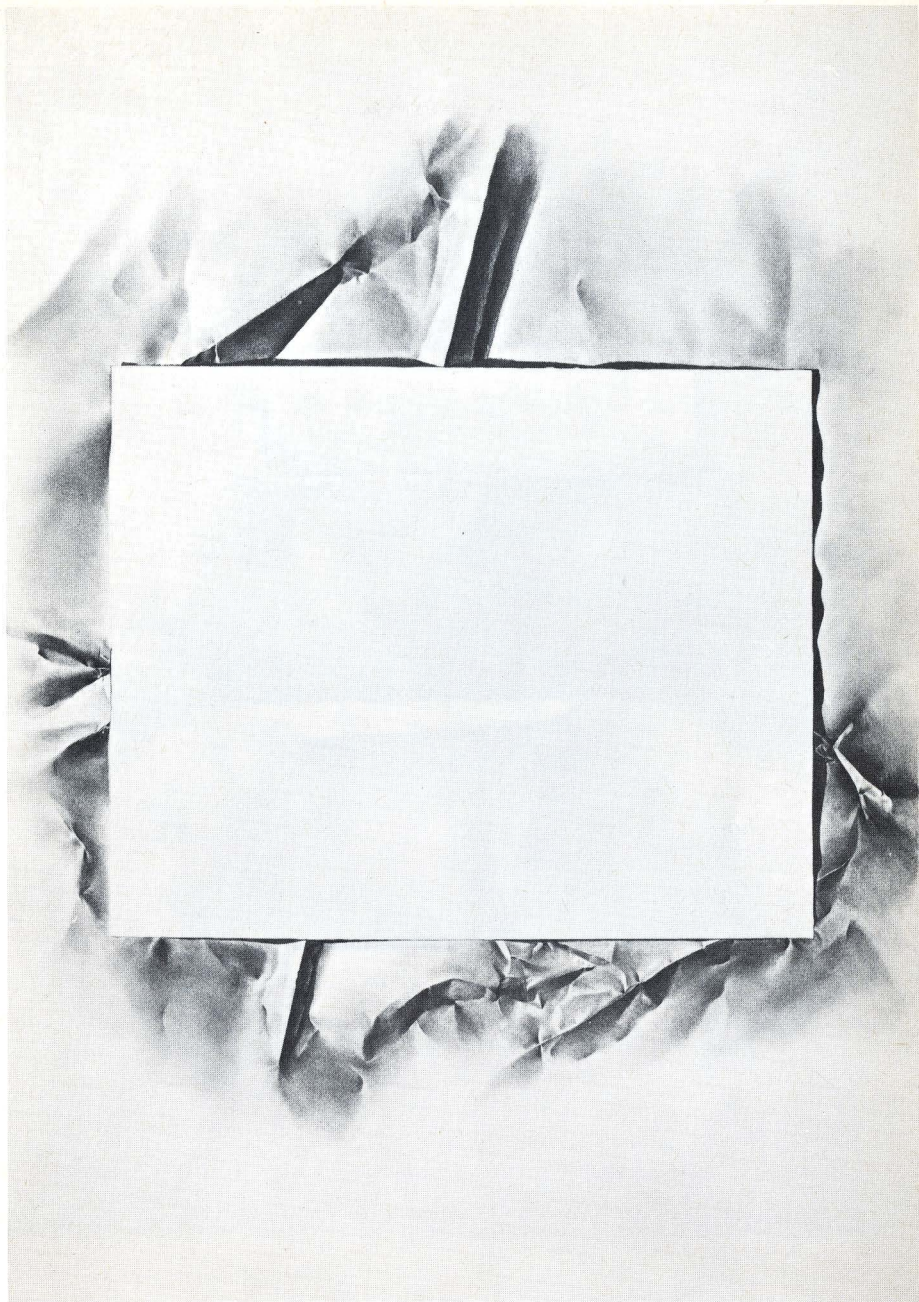
#25, 1977, graphite on paper, ht. 56 cm., w. 76.5 cm., collection B.C. Central Credit Union.

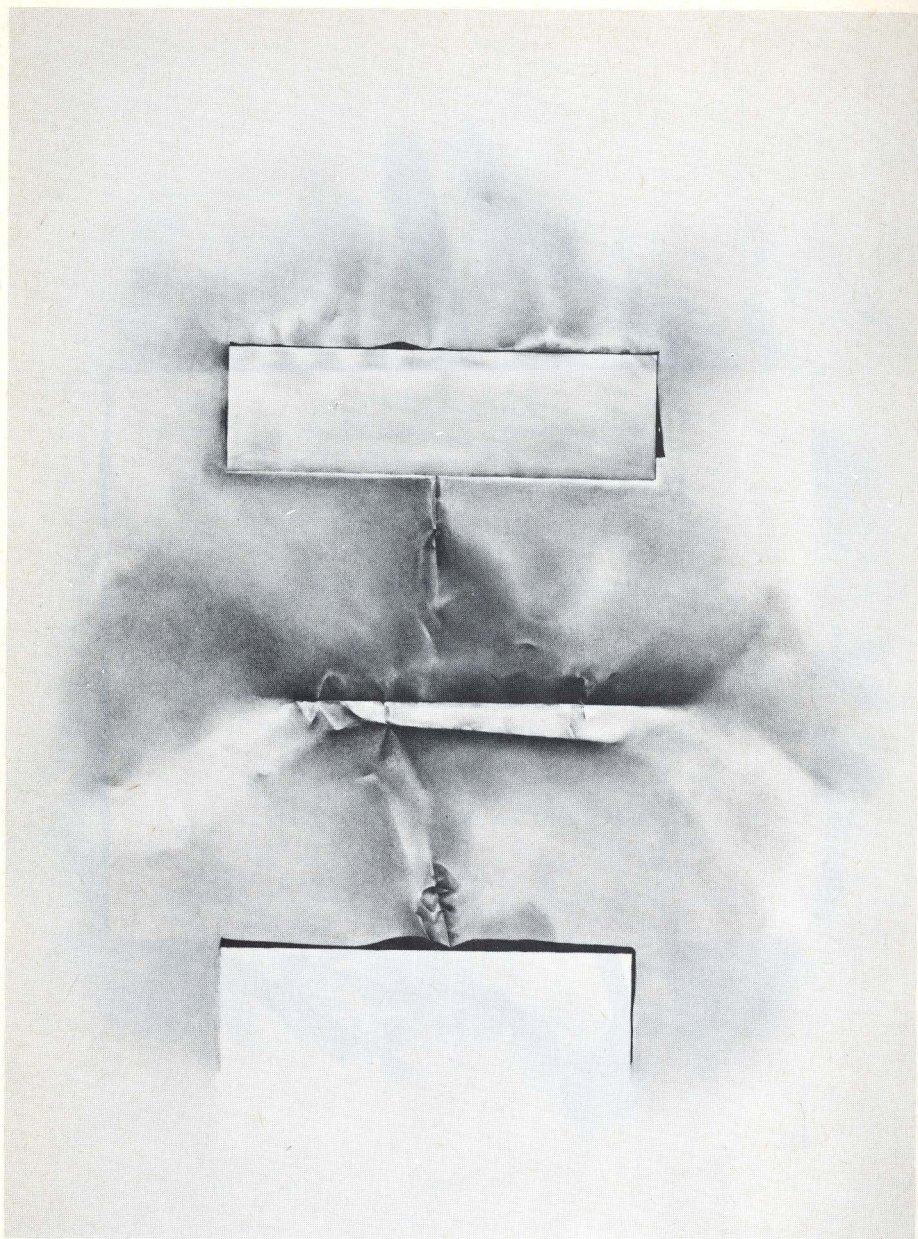
#26, 1977, graphite on paper, ht. 25.5 cm., w. 53 cm.

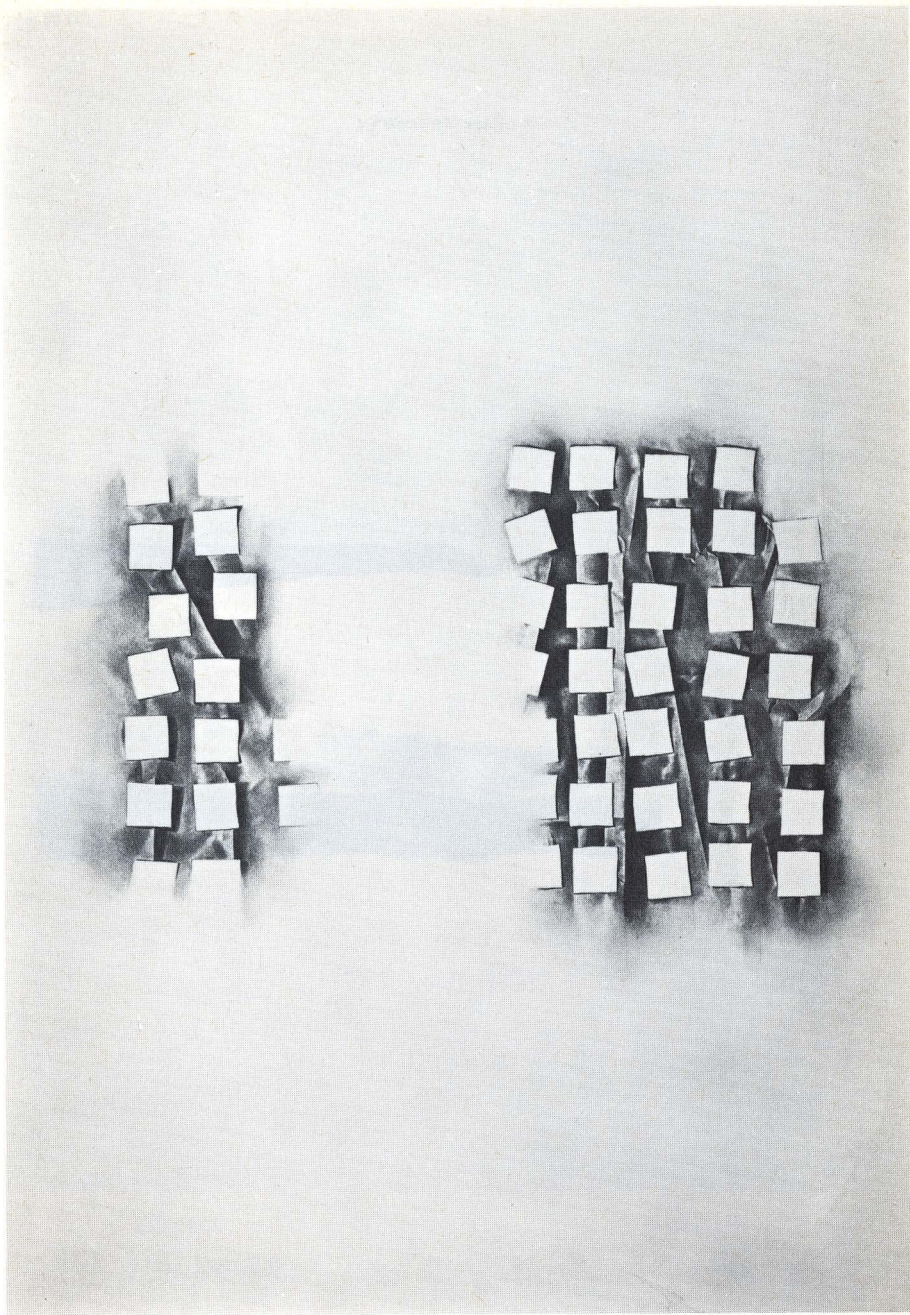
#23, 1977, graphite on paper, ht. 53 cm., w. 75.5 cm.

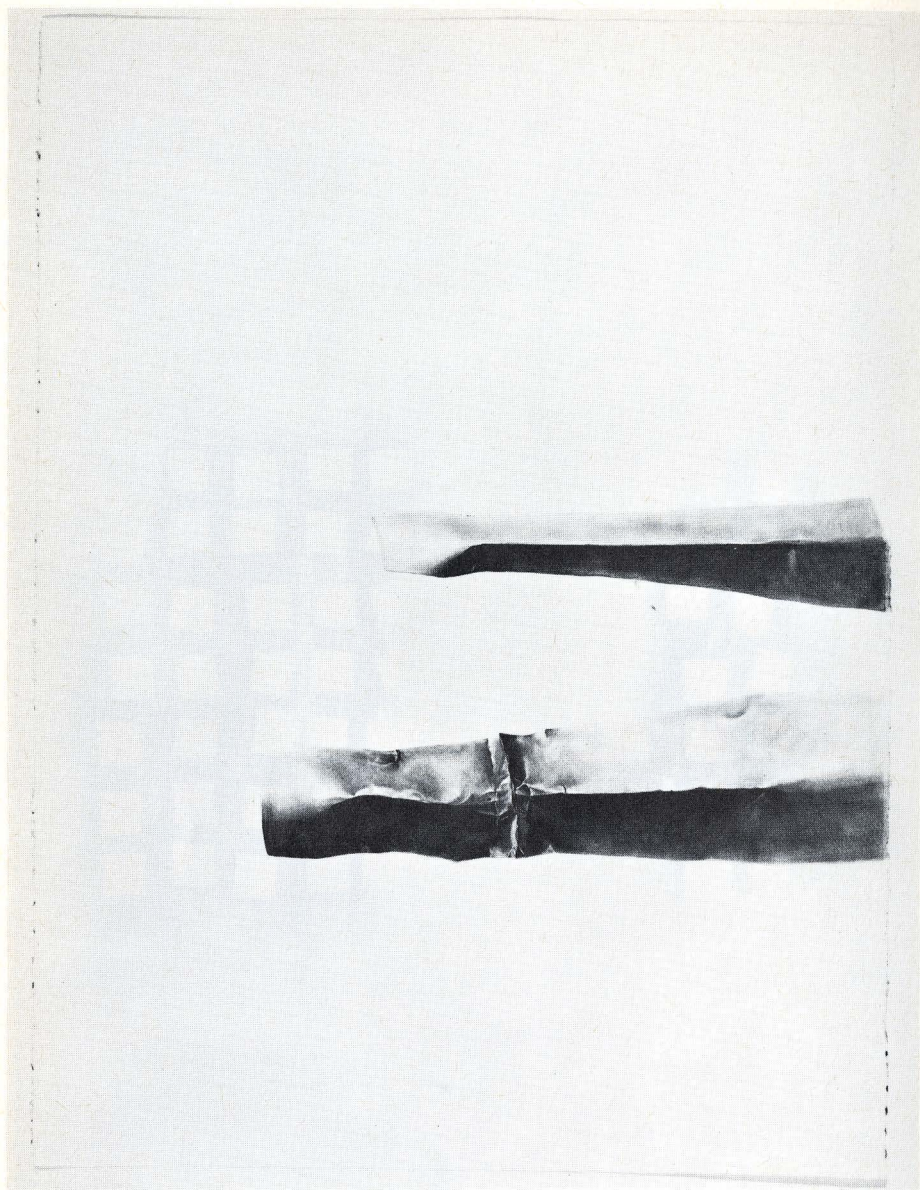
#29, 1977, graphite on paper, ht. 56 cm., w. 76.5 cm.

Photography: Tod Greenaway











THE HISTORY OF THE CITY OF LONDON, FROM THE FIRST SETTLEMENT TO THE PRESENT TIME.



Audrey Thomas / TWO PROSE PIECES

TIMBUKTU

“... up the River to Timbuktu.” For the past few minutes she had been doing the jelly-fish float, head down and arms around her knees, bobbing just below the surface of the water like a cork. The sea was a little too warm, a little too sticky, to be really pleasant, but it was better than going back and sitting under the striped umbrella with Mrs. Avis and hearing once again about Sabina’s malocclusion or the latest piece of villainy on the part of the Avis’ cook-steward. She had just stood up and was shaking the water out of her ears when she heard — or thought she heard — the end of somebody’s sentence: “... up the River to Timbuktu.” “Rivah,” the voice said, “up the Rivah.” She looked around. The glare from the water was almost unbearable and she had to squint. Several people were near enough to have been overheard: a solitary overly-tan woman lying face down on a blue and orange Lilo; she was the closest but there was no one for her to say *to*. Only the brown, ringed hand of the woman moved with tiny movements, paddling the air-mattress away from the shore. And anyway, she thought it had been a man’s voice, soft and southern, yes, but definitely male. Where was he? Who was going up the Rivah to Timbuktu? Perhaps because her ears were still full of water, perhaps because she had been disgruntled when they set out for the beach, the words had presented themselves to her with a strange, almost symbolic force. “Timbuktu-ou-ou.” Curiously erotic and beckoning, the sound of doves and train whistles calling through the open bedroom windows of her childhood.

A large beach ball landed with a thud and a splash in the water just in front of her. She tossed it away, absently, not bothering to look around for the owner. The blue-green water was full of men and women and children, almost all of them white, and more couples and family groups were spread out on mats under the huge *Air Afrique* umbrellas. The men were enjoying a morning without work, for this was Sunday, and the women were worrying about what to have for Sunday lunch. “You will have a cook-steward,” Philip said, a few days after he proposed to her, “and he’ll do most of the cooking.

Actually I've had the same man for years. But it's always cold chop on Sundays — that's the usual day off." How strange she had thought it — then — having a man for a servant, a man to clean and cook and put away the laundry (a washerman to do it). "Lucky you," Philip's mother had said to her just before they sailed, "fancy having someone to do all your work for you." Philip's mother believed firmly that a woman's place was in the home. She was getting on and yet she still, servantless, kept her house immaculate, tended a garden which was not only beautifully neat but well known for its beauty of color and texture and shape. She put up her own jams and jellies, did her washing on Monday, ironing Tuesday, mending Wednesday, baking Thursday, and walked three miles to the village every day to do her shopping. Three afternoons a week she played Duplicate. The father was a retired grammar school teacher. He raised fuschias and long, delicious cucumbers in a greenhouse at the bottom of the garden. Every leave Rona and Philip went back to Sussex to visit them. Rona wanted to go to some place like Abidjan or Accra or maybe even drive to East Africa, but Philip pointed out quite reasonably, that they were getting on and he was their only son. And they did get up to London for several weekends. Philip bought new shorts and shirts while Rona went to the Royal Academy show or the Victoria and Albert (her favorite museum) where she laughed over all the Victorian sentimental paintings — a young soldier approaching a little group around a simple gravestone and the caption underneath: "Too Late." In the evenings they went to plays. They both loved London although it had become "wickedly expensive." It amused her to think to herself in the idiom of the English — "chop," "up to Town," "super," "Sunday joint," "wickedly expensive." She couldn't say these things aloud without feeling self-conscious — even after all these years — but it amused her to think them. Out here under the relentless clarity of the African sun, the English seemed so terribly, terribly English. Never mind, she probably seemed terribly, terribly Canadian — or American, she should say. To the British and Europeans there was no real distinction. And yet if she had said to a Scotsman, mistaking him for Welsh, "Oh well,

it's all the same thing, isn't it?" he'd walk away in a fury and only refrain from knocking her down because she was a woman. And the children at the school where she had taught, with their "Ta-ra, Miss" and cups of "tay" and "Our Mum, she," "Our Eddie, he." Constantly saying to her "Please Miss, speak English," when she forgot and said truck for lorry or running shoes for plimsoles. Mrs. Avis, the wife of Philip's boss, had been in Dakar ten years and still didn't speak more than a few words of French. Menu French and Steward French, that's all. She prided herself on this fact and she wasn't the only wife like that. The husbands, of course, spoke the language — it was part of their job. But with the women, or some of them, it was as though if they should learn to speak French, French *thoughts* might creep in. The fortress of smugness and insularity behind which they hid might be invaded or even over-run. Rona was terrified of becoming like these women, practised her own halting French at every chance she got. And made such chances. Went not just to *Printania* to do her shopping (where leeks hung in bunches, perfect apples mounted in pyramids so immaculate one hesitated to disturb them, one found imported pate, imported wines, bins of chic bikinis, air-conditioning, wives of French diplomats and bureaucrats in big sunglasses and chic little dresses) but also to the market in Medina. There she heard the "ordinary" Africans speak French, as well as their own dialects, the French an altogether different sounding thing from the Parisian French on the Plateau, the section of the city where the Europeans lived. The market sprawled in front of her, crowded, noisy, smelly, hot. It both repelled and attracted. Small children ran after her — "Hey! Madame! Un p'tit cadeau!" Fat market women called out to her to buy their manioc or tomatoes or ground-nuts. She would buy an orange and *whisk* it was peeled and a little plug cut out so that she could suck at the sweet juice until all that was left was a soft pulpy sac. The market women laughed at her French and she knew she was overcharged; but she persevered and now most of the regulars knew her — enquired after her health and showed her their "pickins," as Mrs. Avis and her friends would have called the fat, solemn little babies who slept in the shade of their mothers' stalls or were bounced and fondled by an older brother or sister. Philip wanted a child. It was hard to use the word "desperately" about someone as calm and self-contained as her husband, but it was the word that occurred to her. He was more than twenty years older than she was — it wasn't just his parents who were "getting on."

Each time they went on leave his mother made some oblique reference to the childlessness of Rona and Philip and she always felt a little sorry for Philip as he maintained that this was a joint decision:

"We need time to get to know one another."

"Five years?"

His mother smiled at them over her tapestry.

And when she saw the black babies, asleep on their mother's back, snug, secure, untroubled; or wide-eyed, gold earrings in their ears, hair done by an older sister or "Auntie" into a dozen intricate braids, it wasn't just her heart that lurched. It seemed to her that her very womb ached with longing. The fat market women laughed.

"Madame, combien des enfants avez-vous? 'Ow many b  b  s?"

"J'en ai rien."

They would pat her flat stomach with their broad capable palms and some would offer her beads or little fetishes, recognizing the longing in her face and convinced that she was barren.

Why couldn't she then? What was holding her back? Just this morning it had come up again. Jennifer Phelps was back from England and they were supposed to go round for tea at four o'clock and see the baby. John had been interviewing nurse girls although he knew that Jennifer would want to make the final choice herself. Philip had got up early and made the tea, as he always did on Sundays. He brought in the tray and sat down beside her on the bed. It was very early and the flat was still cold.

"You'd better get back in bed," she said, sitting up. "It's chilly."

He smiled at her and stayed where he was. Philip's best features were his eyes which were of an incredible clear blue — almost the blue of the clear unfaded sky over Dakar. He had put a bunch of violets (god knows what they must have cost him!) on the tea-tray. She reached out her hand to him.

"What lovely flowers. When I was a child we used to pick violets and give them to our mother in little bunches. She had a pretty yellow egg cup — the last of a set — and she'd put the violets in that. But they weren't big like these, nor so velvety. These must have come all the way from France!"

"They did," he said. "I saw them in the window of *Marchand's*."

"You're extravagant."

"I thought of you."

(She was touched and flattered and yet a tiny, disloyal part of herself wanted to shout out, "There are gorgeous flowers for sale on every street corner in this city. Gorgeous *indigenous* flowers." But that wasn't fair. Neither she nor Philip were indigenous. Perhaps the violets were the right thing after all. Why was she so irritable with him? She reached out her hand again.)

"Philip, put the tray on the floor and come back to bed." Suddenly she had such a desire to hold him and tell him how much she cared about him and how grateful she was to him for rescuing her from —.

She always slept naked but had put on a loose cotton robe to sit up and have tea. Now she took it off.

"Come back to bed," she said again. "I'll make another pot of tea."

Both the wives of Philip's co-workers and the market women seemed to think it strange that she had her sandals made in the market and often wore a piece of cloth, a "pagne" as it was called here, wrapped around her for a skirt. Early on in her stay she had found this the most comfortable and modest garment for her walks around the city. In the market she had wrapped the cloth around her awkwardly and the women, laughing, had shown her where to start so that she would end up with her legs in two separate sections of the cloth. Now she could walk freely and not be hobbled by the length or straightness of the skirt. She was not really trying to be African — she was too intelligent and self-conscious for that, and never wore her long skirts in England except perhaps to a party or at home. And she knew that many of the bold and brilliant designs favored by the Senegalese (portraits of Senghor or current football heroes, wax prints in bright oranges and greens and purples) did not suit her skin or coloring, and so she chose the more subdued patterns and colors or bargained for the lovely indigo tie-dye cloth. Philip did not really disapprove of this — not in so many words. But he wasn't too happy about her wandering away from the Plateau. If she *must*

go, he urged her to take Hyacinth, their steward, with her. But the steward did not like her — he had been with Philip and his first wife (“Wifie One” as she and Philip referred to her) in Abidjan; Philip, when he transferred, arranged to bring the man with him. He was devoted to Philip and not at all pleased when his master came back from overseas with a new, young wife. And Rona discovered she was not good at giving orders. The English seemed to have a knack, so did the French. Perhaps a sense of Empire still lurked way down deep in their subconscious. It didn’t help, either, that Hyacinth was a man and older than she was. “Would you mind,” she would say. “S’il vous plaît?” And whatever it was she requested would probably not get done.

“Put the tray on the floor,” she said. She liked making love on Sunday mornings while it was still cool and fresh and Hyacinth wasn’t in the kitchen chopping up fruit salad for their breakfast. The city was quiet too — or quieter, for Dakar was never really still. She liked that sense of Sunday morning and the privacy and coolness. She took off her robe and pushed the sheet down with her legs. “Come and let me thank you properly.”

(“I don’t want to go and see Jennifer’s baby,” she thought, standing in the lukewarm sea and staring absently at the graceful dugout canoes which moved slowly across the horizon.

“I don’t want to go back to England and have a child in an English hospital away from my husband and bring it back to turn over to a nurse girl and then send to England at the age of seven, ten at the very latest.” There wasn’t a European child on the beach who was over the age of ten. Yet these were all excuses. She could modify or even change conventions. She didn’t have to have a nurse girl or go back to England to deliver her child. What was she *really* afraid of? To whom was she complaining in that fretful tone?)

She felt confined on the Plateau with its broad avenues and plane trees, its shops run by Europeans and catering to European tastes. She felt that she had somehow jumped from youth into middleage without going through — what? Something indefinable, something she sensed but for which there was no name. Occasionally she would see a young couple, packs on their backs, moving about the city or sharing bread and cheese on a bench. Afterwards the names of the streets seemed to mock her — *Place de l’Indépendance*, *Boulevard de la Libération*.

Philip was a cryptographer for the Foreign Office. He had had a taste of Africa during the War and had yearned to come back. Sitting in St. James's Park in London, or in coffee shops during those first few hectic weeks together, she had sat as Desdemona must have sat with Othello and listened to Philip's stories about Gibraltar, Malta, Morocco, the Ivory Coast, Senegal, where he was now living. Standing in the water, knowing she should have something on her head if she was going to stand like that much longer, it came to her that perhaps she had married Africa and not Philip. She turned and looked back at the beach. There was a whole group of people under the Avis' umbrella now. Mrs. Avis usually brought an enormous thermos of gin and orange and held informal court on Sunday mornings under the big umbrella. Today — as it was getting towards December — they were probably discussing how many turkeys could be smuggled in, in the diplomatic pouches.

The women sat around her on woven straw prayer-mats, not on the side with the mosque of course; there was no need to be offensive and the mats were just the thing for the burning sands of the beach. The women thought Rona was peculiar because she didn't come to their coffee mornings and had been married five years without presenting Philip with a child. It was a good life for the women out here — or so it appeared on the surface. Yet a phrase of Oscar Wilde's (or somebody from that era) came back to her as she looked at them: "and as for living, our servants will do it for us." Released from housework and cooking and childcare, they seemed lost somehow, aimless. Perhaps the slaves had felt like that after emancipation. They were good common-sensical women, not much given (like their French counterparts) to "style" and witty conversation. Their talk was mostly about servants or their far-away children or what they would do on leave. Rona found them incredibly boring, even the younger ones like Jennifer Phelps (she had bought Jennifer's new baby a small ivory bracelet for a teething ring. Philip pointed out that it would have to be thoroughly disinfected and not to be hurt if even then Jennifer didn't use it). Most of the wives had been knitting matinee coats or embroidering their batiste nightgowns for weeks. The baby was now three months old — he had had to stay in England until he was old enough to have a smallpox shot.

"Actually," Philip had said, "John Phelps was in *Marchand's* buying a special bouquet for Jennifer. He called out to me and that's how I happened to see the violets in the window." They were sitting in their robes in the cool dining room. Rona put a spoonful of paw-paw in her mouth and waited for the inevitable gentle question.

"Darling girl, why don't you go off the pill for a while? Just for a few months and let's see what happens."

The two paunchy young men over there. It must have been one of them. Their pale puffy bellies hung down over their bathing trunks like bread that had been left to rise and then forgotten. She knew one of them — or knew who he was — an American from Maryland. He also did de-coding and she had seen him and his wife at a few parties. "Rivah." Of course. It had to be him. She had heard him talking once. His wife had been explaining to someone that she always kept the money when they went out. "They think Mastah's got the monah and ah've reallah got it — it reallah fakes 'em out." "Ayeh, sure do," her husband had said, in confirmation. "It surely does just that." It was the same voice that had said "Rivah" and "Timbuktu."

She saw Philip swimming way out; he was an excellent swimmer, very slow and methodical but beautiful to watch. He would be a little while yet. She began a side-stroke that would bring her just a little ways above where the two fat young men sat in a rubber dingy, talking, each with a beer can in his hand.

"Excuse me," she would say, "did one of you mention Timbuktu?"

The train for Bamako left on Tuesdays and Fridays. She had not been able to find out much about the boat. The two men had had their tickets arranged through a friend in Mali. She carefully found out what boat they would be on for she was determined not to travel with them. They had not been pleased when she approached them and gave her what information they had reluctantly. Perhaps they were afraid of what their wives might think. They were gonna do a little huntin' in Mali as well, they said. She saw them back in Maryland driving dusty trucks with gun racks in the back and maybe big plastic dice dangling from the rear-view mirror. Gettin' drunk on Sat'day night at the Legion. It was hard to imagine that these coarse men were working in the American Embassy. Perhaps they were good at their job — perhaps code work was more mechanical than she imagined it. It probably beat spreading manure and praying for

rain. They weren't exactly *unfriendly* to her, but clearly they thought she would cramp their style. Been out in Vietnam, perhaps, and picked up French and a taste for the exotic. Went back and married the girl next door, or from the same district anyway; but the dreary monotony of farm life no longer appealed. Out here it was always summertime and the livin' was always easy. She thanked them and swam away. That night she told Philip she wanted to go to Timbuktu and they had the first real quarrel of their marriage.

"I can't get away just now," he said uneasily. (Jennifer Phelps had been plumply radiant with Jamie asleep in her arms.)

"Alone," she said. "I want to go alone."

"You can't do that!"

"Why not?" And added angrily, "I'm neither a child nor a fool."

"What about your job?" She taught French twice a week at the American Embassy School.

"I can arrange for a substitute."

"Why Timbuktu?" he finally said, exasperated and worried.

"I don't know," she answered truthfully. "I don't know anything about the place really. Its name means something to me even though I never knew where it was, exactly, until I looked into the Atlas this afternoon."

Philip turned his wedding ring around and around with long, brown fingers. It was an unconscious and very moving gesture.

"I realize you haven't been completely happy here," he said, looking at her with his uncanny blue eyes. "Sometimes I even think I was wrong to ask you to marry me and come away with me." She opened her mouth (to say what?) but he smiled and shook his head.

"Let me finish." (Round and round went the gold band on his thin brown finger.) "You were very young when I met you and had just been through a bad time." (How she had wept in his arms, how comforting it had felt to let go! How surprised they had both been when, in response to his innocent question, "How did you happen to end up teaching school in Birmingham?" she had promptly burst into tears.)

"We had both been through a bad time." (Round and round.) "I fell madly in love with you, you know — with your open-ness, your intelligence, your wit. You seemed so different from . . . from any other woman I'd ever known. I think I used Africa as a kind of bait — the way a rich man will sometimes use his money to get the woman he wants." Again she opened her mouth and again he motioned her quiet. But she could not keep still.

"I love you!" she cried, "I love *you*. Surely you know that by now!" He nodded. "I know that. But you don't love this life."

She shook her head, her eyes full of tears.

"I don't know what I want — I just know I have to get away for a bit. Right away."

"Why not Paris, then," he said brightening. "What about two weeks in Paris? Perhaps I can even get compassionate leave. If we told them you had to see a specialist —"

"Why would I go to Paris and not London?" she said reasonably. "And anyway, I want to go to Timbuktu and I want to go alone. I don't feel real any more. I don't feel as though I'm a separate person. It's as though there were some limb or set of muscles that I'm not using, that I can feel shrivelling up, atrophying. If I don't go now I'm afraid I'll never be able to go anywhere alone again. I'll end up like those women who run off to the Hotel Croix du Sud as soon as their husband or driver calls for them. Eating their meals in the restaurant. Looking fearful over the balconies. Afraid to go anywhere alone. Please Philip," she said, "please understand." He managed a smile.

"I'll try."

So here she was leaning out a window as the train slowly pulled away from the throngs of people on the station platform. Philip became smaller and smaller and smaller — a tall lean figure, outstanding amidst the crowds of Africans. The corridors were jammed with people leaning out the windows — in spite of the warnings — “*Defense de se pencher au dehors de la fenêtre*” — posted on the wall. As the train curved slightly, she could see two white children being held up to look and wave good-bye to someone. She reflected almost immediately that they must be new to this country for their faces were plump and rosy. They did not have the lean, pale, leggy look of children on their second or third tour. They were two cars up — she really should go and see who their parents were. (Yet knew she would not for she did not want to get involved with anyone in any way — it was necessary that she be alone.) As the train picked up speed she went and sat down on her narrow bed. The fans were not working yet and the tiny room was like an oven. She had seen the man in the next compartment take out a prayer mat and calmly kneel down, his face turned, to the East. Even on a train he did not forget his duty to God and to Muhammed.

Later on, in spite of her excitement and the violent swaying of the train, she had fallen asleep with the compartment door open. When she woke up she saw that he was facing the other way. The train had changed direction. A very devout man — perhaps he was going to pray all the way to Bamako. She did not know a great deal about Islam or the Muslims although she knew a little bit more, now, about Timbuktu.

Maureen Avis had given her a bag of apples, three Mars bars and a warning to lock her compartment door. “Rape,” she said. And added, “Don’t smile at me my girl, it’s happened.” She ate a Mars bar and drank some of her store of bottled water then leaned out the forbidden window into the night. Africans moved constantly to and fro along the cars — gusts of laughter and excited talk blew back in her face like smoke. It was completely dark out and the moon hung, yellow as butter in the indigo sky. She felt tremendously free, speeding through the night like this to Timbuktu. Well, not actually to the mysterious city itself but to the Niger, at least. She saw herself in her small cabin waking up to the sounds of the river, going out on deck to watch the mists rise into the clear blue sky. She had not yet

seen an African river but imagined it broad and muddy and full of crocodiles. Too much Humphrey Bogart. She smiled at her romanticism.

She and Philip had walked one Sunday to the Muslim cemetery, its gravestones all turned east towards Mecca. How simple life must be to a True Believer. There were things you did and things you didn't do. She had been several times to the Grand Mosque on the Allés Coursin and had visited the small women's mosque on the side. From what little she had seen it was not a very good religion for women; but then what religion was? When the train passed near a village or a compound she could see the glow of charcoal fires and oil lamps. How strange the people in that village would find her — a white woman travelling alone and with no other purpose than to get up the Niger to Timbuktu.

"There's nothing to see," Richard Avis had warned her. He had flown up a few years ago. "Oh, there's a nice Sudanese mosque but precious little else." Rona smiled sweetly at him.

"I expect you're right," she said. Philip told her Richard had suggested they take a few weeks' leave and have a holiday. There were planes to almost anywhere from Dakar.

"He thinks I'm bushed," she said, pleased that she knew the lingo. Philip smiled. "I expect so."

"Do *you* understand, Phil? *Do* you?"

"I'm trying."

How could she help but love him? Tonight there was a big dinner party at the American Embassy. All the diplomatic and British Council people were going. She would have put her journey off until Friday — what difference does a few days make when one is going to Timbuktu? Yet in the end she couldn't do it, even though she suspected her husband would not show up without her. Her bad self wished that he would go and fall madly in love with someone else. Wife One had walked out on him and gone back to England — she had hated Africa and had asked him to choose. Back to Sussex and muted colors, muted emotions, everything safe. Rona had met several

men who had been out here for years without their wives. Once handsome men who drank too much and were always invited to parties. Men who went home on leave and had African "girl-friends" and sometimes African children as well. Yet neither husband nor wife divorced one another. The wife had respectability, a regular allowance, and a husband who only "bothered" her for six weeks out of the year. The husband had the prestige he would not have enjoyed in his own country plus his personal freedom. So long as there was no scandal, no real "ocular proof" of what was going on, everyone turned a blind eye to the girlfriends. But Philip's wife divorced him as soon as she could. He gave her grounds and did not contest the actions. He said he felt that he had let her down. "As he feels he has done to me."

The train had a wonderful horn — almost like an English hunting horn — a long clear note that raced along beside them for a bit, then fell away. A nervous young Frenchman came and stood beside her for a while. He was a linguist with some foundation, and was going to Mali to study the Tuareg people. He wore a short-sleeve shirt and she could see that his arm was still swollen from his shots. At one point he went off and came back with two cold bottles of orange juice. "Jus d'Or," she said. "En français c'est très belle, n'est-ce pas?" He told her there were some other Americans ("Je suis Canadienne" — "Bien sûr" he replied impatiently) on the train. The parents of the two little girls — "Ils sont religieuses" — and a man who was travelling by himself. They were all in his car — but only the single man spoke French. Very good French.

"Pas comme moi," she said, smiling and sucking on her juice of gold. She felt as though she were sucking on the cold orange moon.

"Ah, non! Vous parlez très bien." The pungent smell of his French cigarettes filled the corridor. A man she had loved, a man who had loved her and left her after she had crossed an ocean to be near him — he had smoked Gauloises as well. Then she had thought it exciting that her hair and skin and clothes always smelled so Continental. He had written her a letter in the middle of the night — or maybe written it long before and got up and left it on the kitchen table — propped against the concise Oxford Dictionary of the English Language. "Dear Rona, I've looked and looked but there is no nice way of saying this."

They had a tiny flat up above a jeweller's on Goodge Street. She was twenty years old and desperately in love. The gas stove ("the cooker") took pennies and only a certain amount at one time — so how could she be sure if she stuck her head in the oven? In the end she fled to the grime of Birmingham and Bishop Ryder's Church of England Infant and Junior Schools — such a grand name for such a shabby, slummy place. One little girl had nineteen brothers and sisters: "Dear Miss, Please excuse our Ethel becuz she had to stay home and help with the new baby." After a while she found that because she was now working in England she often had no sense of being there. She got up, ate a hasty breakfast, stood on the corner outside the fish and chip shop and waited for the bus to Five Ways. There she jumped on another bus which took her down into the old heart of the town. Then she began to walk. She realized that this was how England must appear to the English and that came as a revelation. She was not a tourist any longer. "Ta-ra, Miss, Ta-ra." The shabby children ran out of the schoolyard to play in the shabby streets. She put her lover behind her except sometimes in dreams, and began to enjoy herself. To go to museums, the art gallery, the newsreel theatre. Even to take the occasional trip to London without too much pain.

(The young man threw his cigarette out the window and the sparks flew out like fireflies, into the dark blue night. He gave her his card and the address where he was staying and went back to his own car. The smell of his cigarette lingered for a long time in the narrow corridor.)

Philip had insisted that she wire ahead to the Grand Hotel and make a reservation, if only for one night. She did not want to do anything so formal, but he had pointed out to her that sometimes the train was as much as two days late and that she might be very tired by the time she got to Bamako. In fact, the train was only a few hours late but it arrived after midnight and there was no moon. She was glad, then, of Philip's advice, and followed a porter with a large white "2" stenciled on his shirt, to a waiting taxi. Just as she drove away she glimpsed for an instant the two children, two men, and a

pale, pretty woman who must be the children's mother. They got into the taxi behind her. One of the little girls was sobbing fretfully, like a child who has been awakened from a deep sleep and forced into its clothes. She heard the soft girlish voice of the mother — "There now, there now, hush," before she drove away. But she was too tired to speculate, too tired to do anything but stagger up the imitation marble staircase behind the night clerk whom she had had to shake and shake before he would wake up. He was obviously contemptuous of her because she had insisted upon a room without air-conditioning — "non-climatisée." It was not because these rooms were cheaper but because she hated the chill artificiality of air-conditioning. She preferred rooms with the old-fashioned three-bladed fans where the change in temperature between inside and outside was not so extreme. Philip agreed with her, thank god. The flat they lived in was fashionable but old, and air-conditioning was put in only at the tenant's request. The young clerk muttered something under his breath as he opened the door to the room. The louvred windows were shut and the place was stifling and airless. Never mind. She gave him a nice tip and shut the door. Having adjusted the louvres and given herself a hasty wash (she would shower and wash her hair in morning), she gave a little guilty, loving thought to Philip far away in Dakar and maybe lying awake and thinking of her. And then stretched out blissfully and alone, alone, alone. It took her a few minutes to get to sleep for her body was still swaying from the motion of the train; but only a few minutes, for wasn't she young and wasn't she healthy and wasn't she almost on her way up the river to Timbuktu? Ou-Ou-Ou. Erotic and beckoning. She did not dream, or not in words and pictures. But every now and then she seemed to hear the curious note of the train's horn clear and golden, racing through the night. Jus d'Or.

In the morning she took her passport over to the Surêté, where she surrendered it reluctantly, but was assured that she would get it back when she was ready to leave the country. It was the first time in years that she had been without her passport, and she felt vaguely uneasy. At the bank she had a long wait before she could change her money into Mali francs, and so the sun was already climbing swiftly to the center of the sky (she saw it as some spectator in a cosmic amphitheatre, climbing higher and higher and higher until he reached the very top row of seats) by the time she reached the office of the steamship company. There she had her first real disappointment,

for unless she wanted to go on the boat which was leaving tomorrow — the boat the two American men would be on — there were no more cabins at all. Not for the next boat or the next and, glancing at the Air Afrique calendar on his desk, after that, Madame, it was January, and the River was drying up and who knows — there might not be another boat until the Rains. She bit her lip and wondered what would happen if she gave him a bribe — un p'tit cadeau. This was a funny country: Armed guards at the border and please surrender your passport. Perhaps she would be arrested for trying to bribe an official. The steamship line was government owned. She stood there, uncertain, biting her lip and trying to decide what to do.

"You can go, of course, as a deck passenger, Madame. Like the Africans. But with your skin I personally do not advise it." Little blue plastic streamers blew from the fan on his desk. Could she do that? Could she live on the deck, under the burning sun, sipping bottles of lukewarm Evian water ("Si clair, si léger"), existing on ground nuts and fruit. It was a romantic idea — it smacked of Lawrence of Arabia. Have a heavy, body-shrouding caftan made here in Bamako — find a shop where they sold inflatable air-mattresses. Salt tablets. She already had with her malaria medicine and enterovioform and halazone tablets if she should run out of mineral water.

"Je reviens," she said to the official behind the desk. "I will return."

"If Madame wishes to embark tomorrow — ?"

"No. Not tomorrow. But perhaps as deck passenger on le bateau prochain. Je reviens."

The heat of the day assaulted her as she turned left and absently made her way back towards the cathedral. She had seen a little café there, with glass topped tables set out on a shaded verandah. She was very hungry and thirsty and would eat there. And was surprised that in this most African city — far more African than Dakar from what little she had seen of it — that the café was run by Vietnamese. There were Vietnamese in Dakar, of course, for Dakar was part of the great colonial system of the French-speaking people who had been moved along that system from as far away as Indo-China; but it startled her here. She sat down and gave her order to the bent old woman who shuffled over and then in front of the railing which set off the café from the street, appeared a plethora of beggars and boys selling air-mail envelopes, mosquito coils, lengths of beautiful cloth, ball-point pens, and leather pendants.

"Eh, Madame!"

"Eh, Madame!"

She opened her Michelin map and ignored them. How long would it take to get up the Niger? What if she decided to go on from Timbuktu to Niamey? Her stomach twisted with excitement and when her food came she couldn't eat it and sipped instead at her citron pressé. She felt happy and free — after Niamey possibly into Nigeria and all the way down to the Niger Delta and the sea? — and yet Philip or the fact of Philip was there at the same time — a pull in another direction, a pull not so much of mystery as of love. When they were first together he had bought her a copy of John Donne's poems —

"She is all States and, all Princes, I — "

She loved him, she really loved him, and she thought she understood now just what loving meant. Yet at the same time, passing the public letter writers setting up shop in front of the post office, fresh from a good night's sleep (alone) and a delicious (solitary) breakfast, she had almost stopped and asked the boy to write out for her a message:

"Dear Philip,

There is no nice way of saying this — "

"Dear Philip,

I love you but I'm bored bored bored with the people who surround you — "

"Dear Philip,

It is not so much Timbuktu I'm after but myself."

"Dear Philip,"

"My dear husband,"

"My dearest friend,"

She sucked at her straw and wondered if she could get a freighter back from Nigeria to Dakar.

"Well you'll have to eat *something*, Muffie, or you'll get sick."

Rona swung her head around. Just a few tables away sat the American woman and the little girls. The mother and her daughters had on dresses made of the same material and almost of the same style. The children had on white sunbonnets as well. The two men stood in the doorway which led to the dim interior of the restaurant proper, discussing something — the older man was doing all the talking — with the old Vietnamese woman who had served Rona her lunch. She could not hear what they were saying but the young man seemed agitated — he folded and unfolded a piece of paper in his hands — and the older man looked tired and a little cross. At one point he said something quite sharply to the old woman, gesturing at the table and the young man shook his head and put a restraining hand on the older man's arm. Rona tried not to stare. She was afraid to move her chair to a more comfortable position (from which she would be able to look at them without craning her neck) for fear it would scrape on the concrete floor. She watched curiously as a small child of perhaps eight or nine came slowly up the stone steps of the verandah leading an old woman. The child's dress was clean but torn and faded, and Rona could see that the old woman was blind. River blindness, probably. She had read about it. She had read that sometimes a single child will lead a long line of men and women blinded by the River, lead them from village to village, begging. The couple moved slowly from table to table but few people looked up to drop a coin in the empty jam tin she held out to them. Gradually they worked their way to the side of the verandah on which Rona and the American woman were sitting. (The two men were still engaged with the old Vietnamese.) The child looked at the two American children in their new, bright cotton dresses. She looked at the American woman and held out her tin. "Madame, un p'tit cadeau. Pitié de nous, Madame, Pitié de nous."

"What's she saying?" the older child asked in her high piping voice.

"What's she want?"

The mother's voice seemed less soft, less childlike now.

"She's begging. The old lady's blind."

"What's she begging for?"

"She wants us to give her some money."

"Does she want all of us to give her some money? What's she going to do with all that money?" The child's voice was fretful puzzled.

The African girl stood there — impassive — holding out her tin.

"Tell her to go away," the little girl said. "Tell her she's not supposed to beg. Tell her what the Book says, Mommy."

"Go away," she said. "Shoo. Go away."

The girl didn't move. The old woman began a kind of high-pitched chant, almost a whine.

"Pitié de nous," the girl said again, but without emotion or appeal, the way someone might say, absently, "Pass me the salt, will you?" or to a hovering waiter — "Two beers."

"Go away," the small girl shrilled. "Go away."

The customers on the verandah had stopped talking and were watching the little drama (if one could call it that) between the impassive African child and the white woman. For a few seconds the only sound (and part of Rona's consciousness, used to the noise of the African cities by now, thought how incredibly quiet it is, all of a sudden) was the high-pitched chanting of the shapeless old woman whose skin hung from her bones like a hand-me-down. Then the older of the two Americans — perhaps noticed the strange un-African stillness on the verandah — wheeled around and seemed to take in the situation at a glance. There was a clink of coins and the African child, jam tin on her head, and leading the old grandmother, went slowly back the way she had come. The hubbub of voices began again. Rona turned back to her map, oddly shaken. It was not the begging that had upset her. The opaque eyeballs of the old woman were nothing compared to the twisted and rotten limbs of the lepers. (At first they had terrified her. Most were Muslims and crawled, or limped, or hobbled after her in their long white robes — sticking their claw-like hands in her face, persisting, persisting, persisting. It was as though the sweet diseased breath of Africa blew over them as the gales blew over the palm trees down by the shore, knocking off branches, twisting limbs, bending some of them to the ground. Nothing in her upbringing or education had prepared her for the lepers.) No, it was the determined, almost hysterical manner of the mother and her oldest child. Terrified self-righteousness, that's what it was. The Frenchman on the train said they were Missionaries.

The eldest child had a missionary voice. "Tell her she musn't beg —" Rona ordered another citron pressé and bent again over her map. But she had been shaken. She saw Philip holding out his love for her, not begging — the English didn't beg — but holding it out, saying to her — *Pitié de moi*.

"Deux bières," the American shouted, and sat down across from her without asking.

"Thank Christ *that's* settled," he said, as though they were old friends, he and she, or should I say 'Thank Abdu'l — Bahá'." He looked so good-humored and at the same time so fed-up that she had to smile.

"Where are your friends?"

"Packed 'em off to the Hotel for a sleep — I couldn't stand it any more. The kids are cranky anyway — it'll do them good."

"Are you travelling together?" she asked.

"God no. Do I look like a religious nut to you?" He had on a brown straw hat with a hat-band of a strip of local weaving in the black and white geometric designs so much favored in French West Africa. He took it off and wiped his forehead with a large white cotton handkerchief. The old woman brought him his beers and bowed to him with respect.

"She's a religious maniac too," he said, grinning at Rona.

"Would you believe it?"

"What religion?" Rona asked, trying to imagine.

"B'hai," he said.

"I've heard of it, but I don't really know anything about it!"

"Good. Neither do I, or not much. Just what the Weavers told me on the train." He started on his second beer, giving a deep sigh of satisfaction.

"God I love African beer! How I'll ever be able to drink that American piss again I don't know." He wiped his mouth. "Try some of those pickles. They're delicious. Everything here is delicious. It's not a bad religion, actually, or doesn't seem to be. Preaches universal brotherhood, the end of war, you know the kind of thing. From what I can understand it began as a breakaway Islamic sect. Now, or so the Weavers say, it's all over the world, and even has a Universal Court — sort of like the World Court at the Hague. And probably equally as effective," he added.

"Had you met them before last Tuesday?"

"How do you know I met them last Tuesday?"

"I was on the same train."

"You were!" He looked at her with renewed interest. "How come I didn't see you?"

"I didn't see you either, but someone described you — and the Weavers — to me."

"Well isn't that a shame — we could have got drunk together. I'm P.J. Jones," he said shooting out his hand, "I'm pleased, very pleased I might add, to meet you."

"Rona Hooper," she said, and extended her own hand. "Are you staying here long?"

"Hey, the man's supposed to ask that question!" And laughed because he had made her blush. "I'm only kidding. Strangers in a strange land, as the saying goes — things have to be established. Yes and no to your question. Here in Mali, yes. Here in Bamako yes and no, I come and go."

"Go where?"

"To Timbuktu."

She didn't believe him. He had seen the red circle on her map.

"You're teasing me."

"Not at all. Perhaps I should go on with my introduction. After all, if we'd met at a party and, liking my looks from across the room, you had rushed over to your hostess and said, who is that attractive large — you would say large, wouldn't you, not fat? (Rona nodded) — man over there in the corner? you would have meant not just what's his name but what does he do? Right?"

"I wish I could say 'wrong'?"

"Well, she would say, that's P. J. Jones, his mother named him Pliny but he can't stand the name so you'd better not ask what the 'P' is for, and he's the engineer who is widening the air-strip at Timbuktu . . . 'Wherever that is,' she might add."

"And that is really what you're doing?"

"That is really what I was hired to do and what I've been doing and will continue to do when I'm not running around acting as interpreter for a family of innocents who come out here without knowing any French or anybody except they have a letter from some Vietnamese contact, written in pidgin, whose last name is the same as at least 90% of the Vietnamese population of West Africa."

"Does the old woman know who it is?"

"No, and the contact had promised to find them a house. But I knew she was a B'hai so I brought them here. She maintains she knew nothing about their coming but they do have the letter so it can't really be a mistake. Anyway, she's a good old bird and I think she'll help them. They're to come back tomorrow afternoon at four."

"The woman seemed really angry about the beggar-girl."

"B'hai's aren't supposed to beg. It's also a religion with a strong work ethic. She was offended, she said. D'you know, they hadn't been west of New Jersey in the States — come from around Trenton I think they said. And they get on a plane after saving and working for three years and wham eight hours later they're in Dakar and boarding the train for Mali."

"They must have really deep convictions."

"Really deep something. They don't either of them speak a word of French and none of them has had a cholera or yellow fever shot. Now the littlest kid is feeling really sick because of course they weren't allowed out of the airport until that little oversight was corrected. Nobody checked them when they got *on* the plane." He smiled at her.

"Is all this boring you? I felt I had to talk to someone or explode. I had to find them a hotel room and take them around to the Sûrete and the Bank this morning, and then come here with them this afternoon, and now the first day of my week off is all fucked up — if you'll excuse my French."

Rona began to fold her map carefully, getting all the creases right. P.J. was nice but she wanted to be by herself and think about what she should do. How strange that he was working up at Timbuktu. She wondered if that would be a good thing or bad. He seemed nice and friendly and more intelligent than he let on. Also married. He wore a broad band of African gold on his ring finger.

"I must go," she said.

"That's not fair! Now you know everything about me and all I know is your name. Can't you stay and chat a little longer? Or, better still, how about dinner tonight? Where are you staying?"

"At the Grand Hotel."

"Well, so am I. And so, temporarily, are the Weavers. But we don't have to eat at the hotel. I know a very pretty place called the *Lido*. We can sit outside under the African moon."

"I don't know, I —"

"What don't you know?" He had lost his bantering manner.

"I'm married," she said. "Very happily married."

"I see." He paused, then regained his grin. "But my dear young lady, I'm only asking you to dinner. And I'm old enough, I think, to be your father."

"So is he," she wanted to say, "he's old enough to be my father, too."

"All right. What time shall I be ready?"

"Around seven-thirty. I'll order in advance, shall I, things that I know they do well?"

"That sounds nice. I'll be down in the lobby at seven-thirty."

He made no suggestion that he go with her now and she liked that, although she could feel his eyes on her as she walked away. As soon as she was around the corner she searched out a cab and asked the driver to take her to the swimming baths. And while she swam she thought to herself, over and over, "Will I, won't I," and sometimes, "Should I?" On her way home she stopped and bought a postcard of a Mali trader and wrote on the back of it — "Dearest Philip — I do miss you" and gave it to the hotel clerk to mail. Then she went up to the marble staircase to rest a little before it was time for dinner.

Leaning over the staircase to see if P.J. Jones was down there, for she didn't much like the idea of sitting in the lobby alone, she saw him deep in conversation with the young man she now knew to be Mr. Weaver. She was wearing one of her long skirts, one that she

was particularly fond of, not a tie-dye but a subdued wax print in a dull yellow and brown and a brown scoop-neck tee-shirt she had bought the last time she and Philip were on leave. P.J. looked up as she approached.

"You're lovely," he said, standing up. "All you need are some amber beads. Perhaps we can find some for you — Bamako is a good place to pick them up." The other man rose also and stood smiling shyly at her. He was very thin and pale and his Adam's apple stuck out so much it really looked as though, except for his pallor, he was bound to choke to death at any minute.

"Rona Hooper, meet Joe Weaver.

"Rona is from — where did you say you were from?"

"I'm living in Dakar," she said, holding out her hand. The three of them sat down. She wondered if they were going to dine with the Weavers — if they were to wait until Mrs. Weaver and the little girls came down. And suddenly felt irritated at herself. Two nights away from home and she needed a man to protect her — she should be wandering around the streets by herself, finding some little place that caught her fancy, not going to a meal that had been ordered in advance by someone else. Philip had reached up and grabbed her hand, just before the train pulled out.

"If you need me, I'll come," he said, and that had irritated her too. Need him for what? She had been in West Africa for five years and she knew the lingua franca. Women were respected in this part of Africa, not harassed. This wasn't Turkey or Spain or Mexico — women had power here, and status. So what was she doing with these two Americans, sitting sipping Martinis in the lobby of the Grand Hotel?

"Are you staying long?" the young man said. His Adam's apple moved up and down. She remembered the old songs at the newsreel cinema in Birmingham — "Just follow the bouncing ball." She tried staring at his left ear.

"I'm not sure. I'm just having a little holiday." One felt that this young man would not know a holiday if he saw one.

"I saw your wife and children at the Vietnamese café this afternoon."

"Ah yes! Madame Thieu has been real nice to us. She's going to find us a place to live."

"And then — ?" She could have bit her tongue.

"And then?" The young man looked puzzled.

"What are you planning to do after you find a place to live?"

"Why, whatever needs to be done. Whatever," he said in a firmer voice, "God's will tells us what to do." P.J. drained his glass. "We made reservations so I think we had better get going." The young man seemed almost frantic at this announcement.

"You'll be all right," the older man said, "the menu here is in English as well as French." He went over to the desk and said something to the clerk. Rona thought she saw some money changing hands. "Oui, Monsieur," the clerk said loudly. "Oui, Monsieur, bien sûr, certainement." P.J. nodded then extended his arm.

"Shall we?"

"Will they be all right?" she asked as they went out the door.

"No, of course not. They think the food's too hot and the streets too dusty and the beggars too persistent and Christ knows what else. But they see their duty and they are here to do it. In an awful way I can't help admiring them. Even though I find them naive and ill-informed and a general pain in the ass."

"What can you admire in them, then?" They had decided to walk to the *Lido*; P.J. said it wasn't very far.

"Oh — a kind of romantic vision, I guess. I don't have it or I wouldn't be widening the air-strip at Timbuktu. Think of all the tourists that will bring in. And Timbuktu itself is just a sad dusty town. Maybe it still means something to the Arabic world but it won't mean much to the tourists. Mind that drain," he said pulling her away just in time.

Over coffee — thick sweet Arab coffee — she told him about her plans.

"I wondered what you were doing with that map."

"I don't understand it myself. I stood up in the water and heard this voice mention Timbuktu. All of a sudden I knew it was where I wanted to go."

"I keep telling you, there's nothing there."

"Well, maybe I just want the trip along the river."

"Maybe." He took a sip of his coffee and gave her a searching look.

"What do you mean?"

"Doesn't he care if you wander around West Africa by yourself?"

"Being picked up by strange U.N. types?"

"You could do worse," he said.

"I'm not looking for a man," she said. "I told you, I love my husband very much."

"What are you after, then?"

"I don't know. A sense of my own reality — my separate reality. In order to stay with him perhaps I have to prove that I still enjoy doing things by myself." She laughed nervously. "Does that make any sense?"

P.J. reached over and took her hand. "You're too pretty to be so wise."

"Don't," she said.

"Don't what?"

"Don't make remarks like that. It spoils everything."

"But you are pretty."

"Maybe. But couldn't I still be wise?"

"Of course." But he withdrew his hand and called for the cheque. "L'addition, s'il vous plaît."

They wandered around the city. He showed her where to buy delicious loaves of French "pain" and where to get the best brochettes of beef or chicken. It was fun walking through the African night with him. Although he tended to play the caricature American she could see that he loved Mali and loved his job. He had had to learn the language in order to train his second-in-command who would, eventually, take over from him. He had been designing bridges when the opportunity for this job came. He still wasn't sure, in terms of Malian culture, whether the bigger airstrip would be a blessing or a curse. He had been here 18 months so far and it was going to be hard to leave.

"What does your wife think of all this?" she said, parodying him, as they sat at a cafe having a final drink.

"Oh, she stays in New York and likes her life there. I miss her sometimes. She's a photographer, quite a well-known one. I admire her tremendously."

Rona wished she could say I'm a something, not just I'm a wife. Rona wished she could ask "Do you love her? If so, how can you bear to be apart?" But went on sipping at her glass, long after the drink was gone and the ice cubes nearly melted.

"I think that kind of innocence is dangerous," she said suddenly. P.J. had seemed nearly asleep.

"What?"

"The kind of innocence the Weavers have."

"What harm can they do?"

"They have pre-judged everything and also they put everything in God's hands. Or whatever *His* name. Since there is no such creature everybody ends up running around and taking care of them."

"You sound jealous," he said.

"Oh, maybe." And was surprised at the prickling in her eyes. "But not really. I don't want to be taken care of by God or anyone else. I want to take care of myself."

"Sometimes it's blessed to receive." (She saw Philip holding out his love, his empty tin — *Un p'tit cadeau, pitié de moi.*)

"Sometimes." He yawned. "I have to get up early tomorrow. Get some work done before I take the Weavers over to the café."

"I've really enjoyed myself," she said. "Now I've got to go back to my room and sleep on my decision."

"You're really going to try it?"

"Why not? The next boat doesn't sail for a week. I can explore Bamako and get a caftan made, wander around a little bit."

"Don't do it," he said.

"Why not?"

"I'm not convinced you're 'going to.' I think you're 'running from'." She smiled and shook her head.

"No. That's exactly what I'm not doing." P.J. cleared his throat.

"Do you want to come to bed with me," he said. "You're awful pretty and I've really enjoyed tonight as well."

"No," she said, touched. "But thank you."

"No harm in trying."

"None at all." And so they kissed each others' cheeks and went down the corridor in opposite directions. Once again she didn't dream and fell, this time immediately, into a deep, refreshing sleep. Tomorrow she would really decide: tomorrow.

But did not see P.J. Jones all day and found herself somewhat disappointed. She went back to the steamship company and said she would sail as a deck passenger on the next boat up the Niger. She went into the market and ordered a caftan made out of heavy woven cloth and also a pair of loose trousers.

At noon she was at the Vietnamese café. The same African girl came by, leading the same old woman. It was a repeat of yesterday in many ways, but she liked sitting there and looking out at the crowds. Bamako wasn't divided. Like Dakar. This was a black town, an African town, and in spite of the heat she found it exhilarating. The fact that she did not have her passport no longer seemed to bother her. Perhaps she would not need it ever again. Perhaps she would go up the River and down the River and simply disappear. A new life. Without ties. Without love that chained her, made her a slave to her emotions. Leaning on the bridge in the late afternoon she saw her life spread before her as distant and magic as the mysterious veiled kingdom of Timbuktu. As changeable as the great river itself. Nobody married forever any more. Commitments were like manacles.

"Dear Philip

There is no nice way of saying this."

But she missed him today, really missed him and sent him another postcard, this time of the graceful pirogues which plied the river.

"Dear Philip —

I miss you. Am going up the River soon. Will call before I go."

She was lying down on her bed, quite at ease now that she had made her decision, when somebody knocked on the door.

"Who is it?"

"P.J. Open up."

"Wait a minute."

She put on her robe and opened the door. She had been half asleep and was annoyed at this interruption.

"What's the matter?"

"The Weavers' littlest child is quite sick with fever. D'you think you could baby-sit her while we go to see about a house?"

"Baby-sit!"

"C'mon Rona. It's no skin off your nose. We'll be back in an hour. I want to get a doctor too."

"I'll have to get dressed — "

"Room 220. Thanks a lot." And he was gone.

She walked slowly down the corridor, her anger mounting. Why should she baby-sit these kids. She had come here to be alone and was already in the midst of a whole complex circle of relationships. But when she saw the children she forgot her anger. The older one was sitting by her little sister, whose rosy cheeks had taken on a hectic, unhealthy, flush. "There now," the little girl said in her mother's voice, "there now, hush."

"Hello," Rona said. "I've come to stay with you until your Mommy and Daddy come back."

"That's nice," the child said, as though she had been expecting her.

"Muffin's really sick," she explained, "I have to keep cold cloths on her forehead. That's what my Mother said."

"I'll help," Rona said. "Why don't you play for a while?"

"All right," the child said obediently. She rummaged in a little suitcase and came up with a coloring book and some crayons. "I'm very good at coloring," she said, "I always keep between the lines." It was a B'hai coloring book but reminded Rona of the simplistic pages she used to color at her own Sunday school. Jesus Blesses the Children. Jesus with the Fishermen. Always happy — or positive scenes. Never Jesus on the Cross or Mary Weeping.

Rona was worried about the sick child and lay on the bed beside her.

"What's your names?" she said to the other sister.

"I'm Janet and she's Muffie — Margaret really, but nobody calls her that. We came on an airplane," she confided. "Mommy was crying."

"Why? Was she sad to leave her friends?"

"I don't know. Daddy told her it was God's will." The child carefully selected a color. "D'you think Muffie will die?"

"Of course not! What a strange idea! She's got a very bad reaction to her shot."

"If she dies and we bury her out here, she'll be all alone when we go back home to Trenton."

"She isn't going to die."

"She'll do what God wants her to," Janet said. "It's out of our hands."

Rona found this aphorism, coming from the mouth of a child, almost obscene. On the bed-table by the sick child was a jug of water and a book *Bahá' u' llah and the New Era*. She leafed through it sitting on the bed by the sleeping child. There was an almost Germanic profusion of capital letters: He, His, Servant of the Blessed Perfection, Declaration, Supreme Singleness, the Most Great Peace. But, as P.J. had said, the basic tenets of the Faith were harmless, indeed inarguable "motherhood issues," one might say. "B'hai." How exotic it sounded. Like "The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam". But also sheep-like — Baa-Baa-Baa. She learned that a B'hai accepts his lot with "Radiant Aquiescence." The Weavers didn't seem very radiant. There were a lot of old-fashioned "Biblical" endings on the verbs: enacteth, enforceth, sitteth, cometh, shineth. She shut the book and put it back on the table.

"How's your coloring getting on?" she asked the little girl.

"Okay. When are my Mommy and Daddy coming back?"

"Pretty soon. Are you thirsty? I could ring down and get the boy to bring up some coca-cola. Would you like that?"

"Yes thank you." The child did not look up from her work.

"I don't know how to talk to children," Rona thought. "Or not this child. She's like a little old lady, a little old selfrighteous spinster lady." As if to confirm this, when she put down the phone the child said, "It is forbidden to drink intoxicating liquors."

"It's not forbidden to *me*," Rona said sharply. Yet this remark would not have bothered her coming from the mouth of a Muslim. Perhaps she couldn't accept B'hai simply because it was a religion that was new — or newer than Christianity or Islam? People had probably felt the same about Luther. "Self-righteous bastard," and so on. Anyway, the child was only repeating what she had been taught.

There was a knock on the door.

"There's our drinks," she said, and fished in her purse for some change. But when she opened the door it was the Weavers and P.J. Mrs. Weaver was being supported by the two men — and she was moaning and sobbing. For the first time the little girl's unnatural composure broke and she ran to her mother, clinging to her skirt and looking up at her with wide, terrified eyes. P.J. shook his head and gave Rona a wry smile.

"We've had a little trouble." They half-carried, half-dragged the young woman to the empty bed and lay her on it.

"Ruthie," her husband said, "We're home now, it's going to be all right." This sent the woman off into a fresh paroxysm of weeping.

"Home!" she wailed. "I want to go home!" The sick child awoke at the sound of her mother's wailing and she began to cry as well.

"What happened?" Rona said. "What's the matter? Did she fall?" "Well, it's nothing to get alarmed about," the young man said, "Ruthie's just had a little shock."

"He wouldn't let go," the woman wailed, "he put it on me and he wouldn't take it off."

"Was she *raped*?" Rona whispered. She couldn't imagine it.

"No, no." The young man blushed scarlet. "P.J. and I were sent to look at a house where we might be able to stay and Ruthie went off to find a drugstore, what d'you call it here?"

"A 'pharmacie'."

"Yes. Well, she went off to find a *farmassee* and we said we'd meet her back at the café and if the place was ok then we'd come back here and pack up."

"So?"

"So the place was real nice. A whole group of B'hai people living together in a big old house. We can move in anytime. One of 'em even speaks some English."

"No!" the woman screamed. She sat up, eyes wild and teeth chattering. "No. We're going home. We're going back to Trenton. I'm not staying here another day!" The young man made an effort to ignore her.

"She'll be all right. It's so new to her, you see. She got kinda frightened."

"I've called a doctor for both of them," P.J. said. "He'll be along any minute."

"But what *happened* to her?"

"As far as we can make out she got a bit lost, and while she was standing there trying to decide which way to go, a group of beggars came after her."

"Beggars?"

"Lepers."

"Oh god."

The husband took up the story.

"You gotta understand — as I said, Ruthie's never travelled very much, neither of us have, and she's newer to the Faith than I am. Begging is forbidden to B'hai's. So is giving of alms unless to other B'hai's and out of the common treasury. And she'd never seen people like that before, no hands or legs and faces rotting away. Jabbering at her in French. They wouldn't let her go and one old guy, from what she says, sort of put his stump on her arm and wouldn't take it off." The young woman lay back on the pillows, moaning.

"We went looking for her when she didn't show up at the café," P.J. said, "And then we saw her running along a street with all these lepers coming after her and she was screaming at them that they were devils and filthy and so on."

"Lepers are very frightening," Rona said, "very frightening and very persistent. After five years they still scare me."

"I'm not attaching any *blame*," he said, "I'm just telling you what happened."

"She says she wants to go home," the young man said, "she says she won't stay here and the children are going home." Big tears rolled down his cheeks. "She has to stay. It won't be the same without her."

This time the knock on the door was the grinning desk clerk with drinks and the doctor. Rona donated her gin-tonic to P.J., who looked as though he needed it more than she did. Then excused herself and walked back to her room. Ruth, she thought. "Wither thou goest I will go —" Women had been following men around for centuries, maybe since the beginning. She was very depressed and found she couldn't sleep. She got dressed again and went out into the streets, confused and sad. She bought Philip another postcard — a Tuareg and his Camel. "Republique du Mali. Tombouctou. Les fidèles compagnons." The camel and his master posed proudly under a blue untroubled sky.

"There's nothing up there any more," P.J. had told her. "Just a dusty, crumbling town." Yet once scholars had gathered to study and decipher the mysteries of their faith. Once small boys had been put in chains for not knowing the whole of the Koran while the Kings' daughters walked proud and beautiful and unveiled through the busy streets.

"She is all States, and all Princes, I,

Nothing else is."

A companion was, literally, someone with whom you broke bread. She had been a faithful companion to Philip. She looked at the ring through the camel's lip and the rope which hung down from it. His master's hand was not in the picture but you knew that he was holding the rope. They needed one another, the Tuareg and his camel. What a handsome man the Tuareg was with his black beard and flashing smile! He wore a little leather charm around his neck to keep away the evil spirits. She knew she should go back to the hotel and see what she could do to help the Weavers. If she had been surrounded by lepers on her fourth day in Africa she too might have become terrified and hysterical. And she had travelled. She had worked in the slums of England and combed nits out of dirty little heads,

passed by the school for the “dummies” every day on her way to Bishop Ryder’s. The dummies, with their big heads and coarse features had stared at her through the fence. Sometimes they had called out to her in their thick voices. She used to dream about them at night. And out here she had got used to cockroaches and lizards scampering into the corners of cupboards and bureau drawers. Got used to. Accepted. But leprosy was a word with as many connotations as Timbuktu. Coming from a small town near Trenton, New Jersey, what could prepare one for the lepers? Perhaps Ruth saw their deformities as somehow a result of their begging rather than the other way around. The wages of sin — . She looked absently at the stalls along the roadside. Little tables covered with old watches, old keys, ceramic beads, Nescafé or his Malian equivalent, “Brun D’Or”. Her bare toes were dusty from the red earth. Tomorrow she must get together a really good medical kit. Plenty of salt tablets, bandaids, everything she could think of. The Niger lay out there, as old as Africa itself, a broad highway of adventure and self-discovery. She saw a display of pretty little strings of market beads and bought a few for Janet and her little sister.

When she got back to the lobby P.J. was sitting in a big armchair, drinking.

“How are they?”

“The little girl’s all right. The doctor gave her something for the fever. I’m not so sure about the mother. She’s had a sedative and is sleeping now.

“And Joe and Janet?”

“I had some sandwiches sent up. He’s upset but determined to stay. Apparently the whole B’hai community got together and paid the balance of their fares. One way. They haven’t got much money — he’s a carpenter and figured he could get work.” He sighed. “I really don’t know. I seem to get involved with the wierdest people. Present company excepted, of course.”

She sat down opposite him.

“You’re going to give them the money, aren’t you, if they want to go back.”

“Oh he won’t go back. He’s just not the kind of person who could renege on his duty to God.”

"But the woman and the children?"

"Yes. I suppose so."

"You've already offered it."

He smiled at her.

"You think you're pretty smart. Well what if I have? I expect she'll calm down; but you and I both know that Africa isn't for everybody and maybe, if she knows there is a way out, she'll be more likely to stay.

"Timbuktu," Rona murmured.

"What?"

"Nothing. I must go up."

"Have you eaten?"

"Not yet."

"Would you eat with me again or would you be bored?" He paused. "I've had a call and have to fly back up tomorrow instead of next Monday. It can be a kind of farewell party — or temporary farewell if we run across each other in Timbuktu."

"All right. Where shall we go?"

"Leave it to me."

It was late when they returned to the hotel. After dinner he had taken her for a ride on the river. She felt peaceful again, peaceful and sure of what she was doing. The crescent moon — how appropriate, she thought — hung in the sky above them.

"Thank you," she said, "I've had a lovely time."

"I don't suppose," he said "that you'd care to fly up with me? You could go on by boat from there and those American fellows you told me about would have gotten off."

"No. But what a generous offer."

"You're sure? No strings attached."

"I'm sure."

In the night she heard a knock on the door. She held her breath and pretended to be asleep. He knocked again and went off down the hall. She wanted Philip's arms around her; she wanted Philip and her freedom. How could she have both? She tossed and turned and thought the morning would never come.

As she went out (late, so that P.J. would already have left) the desk clerk called to her.

"Madame! Your fren' have left you somthin." He held out a small brown paper parcel and leaned over the desk, grinning, while she opened it. Inside was a string of heavy amber beads the color of dark honey. She put them on.

"Eh, Madame. Ca vous va bien!" Smooth and golden as the words of the Prophet himself. There was no written message, nothing.

As she left the hotel she happened to glance up at the Weavers' window. The louvres were shut tight although it was nearly noon. She paused for a minute, then realized what had caused her to look up. In the room behind the window she could hear Ruth Weaver's plaintive wail, over and over —

"I want to go home I want to go home I want to go ho —"

Rona sighed and walked back into the hotel. She didn't even know what she would say. She didn't even know whose side, if any, she was on.

"Téléphonez le medicin," she said to the boy at the desk. "Vite." "Hurry up." Then ran up the marble staircase. The amber beads, like love, hung beautiful and heavy around her neck. "You go to the people who need you," P.J. had said to her last night, "you go to the people who need you."

But he was in Timbuktu.



CLEAN MONDAY, OR WINTERING IN ATHENS

A friend wrote later: "How awful it must have been! The *isolation* of these romantic, foreign places — I know it well. If you're going to smash, it seems, there's no place like Oaxaca or Tangier or a little village on Crete."

I fled the little village on the early morning bus. Two months earlier, in a rented car, we had stopped off for coffee at a tiny cafe. A retired army colonel who spoke some English asked us if we had any children. "Not together," we said. "You must drink much Cretan wine and make love and then you will have a son and name him Minos." He repeated his witticism to his cronies, this time in Greek, and everybody laughed. The bus rattled past the place where we had stopped.

"Why do we hold onto our pain," a character in my latest novel asks, "as tightly as to our pleasure? Let it go."

I spent the day in Herakleion waiting to travel overnight on the ferry to Piraeus. The agent told me that night's ferry was the ARIADNE which seemed to me, in my distraught state, to be singularly appropriate for hadn't she, too, been used and discarded by the man she loved? I was making sure that *I*, at least, would not be left behind on an island, sleeping, while my lover sailed away to Athens. I booked deck class just to guarantee that I would be miserable. It was the end of November and the winter rains were beginning. The agent told me, however, that if I got down to the boat early I might claim one of the small number of bunks available, free, to deck passengers.

Just before I left for the boat (sleeping on the deck in the rain didn't really appeal) I sat in the square where we had been drinking ouzo only two days before, celebrating my birthday.

"Look at the AVIS advertisement," he said.

"I see it."

"Well, if the Greeks read 'V' as 'N', how do you think they read that sign?" We were very gay and a little drunk. It was our first day off since we'd come to the island to write. We had also, that afternoon, had our first hot shower in a long, long time. I washed my stiff, sea-soaked hair.

"Everyone is staring at your hair," he said. "It's glowing." I sent him a postcard of the Bull's Head Rhyton from Knossos and put on the back a few brave words and the last two lines of *Lapis Lazuli*:

All things fall and are built again

And those that build them again are gay.

Then I ate a greasy souvlaki and drank a beer and headed down to the ferry.

Looking back now it seems to me that the one word which might sum up my winter in Athens is "bizarre" and that it really began with that ferry trip on the ARIADNE which had led me in, not out of the labyrinth which is life in a big, noisy, polluted foreign city. I also realize now that I carried the clue for my survival there in my own pocket. Once I began unwinding it (although a very scary time would pass before I understood) I would be all right. The clue? Simplify, particularize, create a space in the city of a size that you can comfortably deal with.

I was putting my pack and bags on a bunk near the narrow corridor which led to the deck (in case the ship began to sink in the wintry Aegean I wanted easy access to the lifeboats) when a tall, good-looking black woman came rushing along the passage. She saw me and gave a big smile.

"Honey, am I glad to see *you*!" She was about seven months pregnant and I wondered what she was doing travelling around alone in a state like that. Was she glad to see me because she'd gone into labour? Was I going to help her deliver as we crossed the sea to Athens? She staked out the bunk across from me, threw down her assorted parcels and bags and said, "Whew, now I can undress." Visions of ancient Greek women acting as midwives danced in my head. Why didn't she fly, for god's sake. She could be at the hospital in an hour. She certainly didn't look down and out.

Then she lifted her smock and began to unwind layer after layer of cardigans and shirts from around her middle. I stared in astonishment.

"It's the only way they'll leave me alone," she said. "I was desperate."

That was the bizarre beginning.

We went out onto the deck. She had a bag of peanuts and a bottle of wine. I had a half-kilo of spicy Cretan sausage (the kind my lover had hated — I bought it that day as a gesture of independence) and a plastic bag full of fat green olives. We leaned over the railing, chewing and sipping, watching the other passengers arrive. Priests, gypsies, old women in black, kids with backpacks, entire families who were to keep us up all night as they lay in their bunks and screeched back and forth with no regard for anyone else — city Greeks, I was to learn, are night people anyway, the dark seems to wake them up, not make them drowsy. A woman in a belted raincoat looked up at us and my new friend let out a yell and nearly fell over the railing, waving.

"Carlotta! Hey Carlotta!" The blonde woman looked puzzled for a minute, then smiled and waved back. She had frizzy copper-coloured hair and was deeply tanned. In a few minutes she joined us and after some more screaming and hugging I was introduced. Carlotta and my new friend, whose name turned out to be Mae-Love, which delighted me, had met at the bus stop in Delphi over a month ago. Since then Carlotta had been in Israel and now was back for a few days in Greece. Wonderful men in Israel. Wonderful men in Greece too, especially in the villages. Helping herself to food she admitted that she was attracted to "men of culture." American men turned her off. Three years ago she had been a well-to-do housewife in a Boston suburb. Then one day she said fuck it, dyed her hair and changed her name and took off. She gave the children to her husband and he promised her a small regular income if she would just stay away. A remittance woman, the first one I'd ever met! Now she travels around the world screwing "men of culture." It didn't take me long to realize what she meant. She was on her way to Athens to see if she could bum a ride to Spain; she wanted to be in Spain for Christmas. Had I ever been to Spain? I began to wonder if she had anything on under that tightly-belted raincoat.

Mae-Love suggested we go up to the bar and buy another bottle of wine. It was getting cold and dark and the ferry was about to sail. Carlotta said she didn't have enough money to waste on wine and besides it wasn't good for your skin. We said we'd treat her. She said she'd be up in a minute, her eyes scanning the deck.

We sat at a long table drinking wine. I was carefully drinking in little sips because I did not want to get drunk and start to cry. Carlotta had joined us almost immediately. She had just started a fascinating conversation with a handsome rabbi when his wife came up and dragged him away.

"I can't understand how a man like that could stay married to such a woman."

"Maybe he loves her," I suggested.

"Hmmn."

Mae-Love told me she was a teacher from San Francisco and on a three-month leave. Her husband, her *fourth* husband, was supposed to come with her. But he was a Yemeni and at the last minute, for some political reason, the government had refused him a passport. She had to travel or lose her pay. She was on her way to Egypt before going home at Christmas. She had loved Greece but not the men; the men wouldn't leave her alone. Her husband was a darling, did the Hoovering and brought her breakfast in bed. She showed me his picture. I was desperately trying to remember where Yemen was. The three of us exchanged life stories the way travellers, especially women, tend to do. I'm sure we all omitted some things, exaggerated others. As one of my friends said the other day, "Travel is the ultimate fiction" and of course it's true.

Two young Australians who were sitting next to us were laughing openly at our chatter. We were all three much older than they and must've seemed very exotic. In a few minutes they had joined the party and we were all chattering away. They were archaeology students and would be going home in two days. They, in turn were hailed and then joined by a handsome young Greek they had met in a taverna the night before. He began showing the Australians a pile of polaroid photos of girls. These turned out to be all the girls he'd screwed over the last Tourist Season. The pile was as thick as a pack of cards. I leaned over and looked at a couple of the photos — I expect they were all alike. Young girls with straight hair and big straight-toothed smiles. Girls in blue jeans and with backpacks out for high adventure. There was something really obscene about that deck of photographs. Girls back in Grosse Pointe or White Plains, Chelsea, Adelaide, Montreal, being handed around the table in a bar. It was their innocence and youth that tugged at me I guess. My room-mate and I had come abroad for a year of study and travel twenty years ago. We had both fallen in love; we had both suffered. There was nothing casual about it, ever. Sex was still something special then. Maybe the new way was the best way. I felt suddenly old as well as old-fashioned. Commitment was turning into one of those quaint words one is careful not to use because they date you so. Like "reefer," for example. The Greek, whose name was — of course — Adonis, began giving the boys some intimate details in a low tone. All three were laughing.

A dark face peered in the porthole and then a dark hand rapped. Mae-Love turned around and shrieked.

"Mo - ham - med!"

She had met him in Herakleion, in the Street of the Tavernas and he had given her some useful addresses in Egypt. Everyone shoved over to make room for Mo-ham-med, who was a big man of about thirty with a lion's claw hanging from a silver chain around his neck. He was from the Sudan, he told me, and when I mentioned that I might try and go overland to Kenya he gave me the address of his brother who lived in Addis Ababa. He also offered to put me up in his apartment. I explained I was writing a book and needed to be alone. No one would bother me, he said. I shook my head.

Out of his briefcase he took a pile of cold fried chicken, a loaf of bread and some spicy African sauce in a mayonnaise jar. Carlotta, who had moved down to Adonis' end of the table, saw the food and moved back down to our end. A pragmatist, she knew the other appetites could wait.

The ticket-taker was making his rounds and two hippie girls came over to Mohammed and asked if he would pay their fare, they had snuck on without paying. He gave them their fare and a thousand drachmas extra, making a great display of it. Mae-Love told me that he was a big man in Import-Export. The girls were from the caves at Matala; one had obviously made the scene in India, she wore a jewel in her nose. I felt that Adonis wouldn't try to score with them, they weren't clean enough!

At midnight I left the mad tea party and went below, utterly depressed. After a visit to the toilet, which was already ankle-deep in overflow and shitty papers (you can't throw your paper down the lavatory pan), I lay on my bunk with my eyes shut, listening to the voices of the Greeks all around me and pretending to sleep as young men (this was supposed to be a Women Only section) came and stood next to me, staring, evaluating, as though I were something on a slab at a butcher's shop (which I guess, in their eyes, is exactly what I was).

* * *

That night was a good introduction to Athens, where, sitting in Syntagma Square, drinking a Nescafé (about sixty cents a cup) and reading the TO LET section in the *Athens News*, the little English-language daily, I learned that a woman alone, a "European" as opposed to Greek) woman, is assumed to be looking for a man. The streetcars which run past the open-air cafés on the Square should *all* be labelled "Desire". Perhaps it was naive of me not to realize this earlier but when you travel with a man you are protected as well as defined and in the village where we had been staying no one had ever

been anything but courteous, even if I were sitting alone down in the little square. I was unprepared for the open and arrogant approach of the Athenian men.

"Hello, I have been speaking English for seven years." Sitting down without asking.

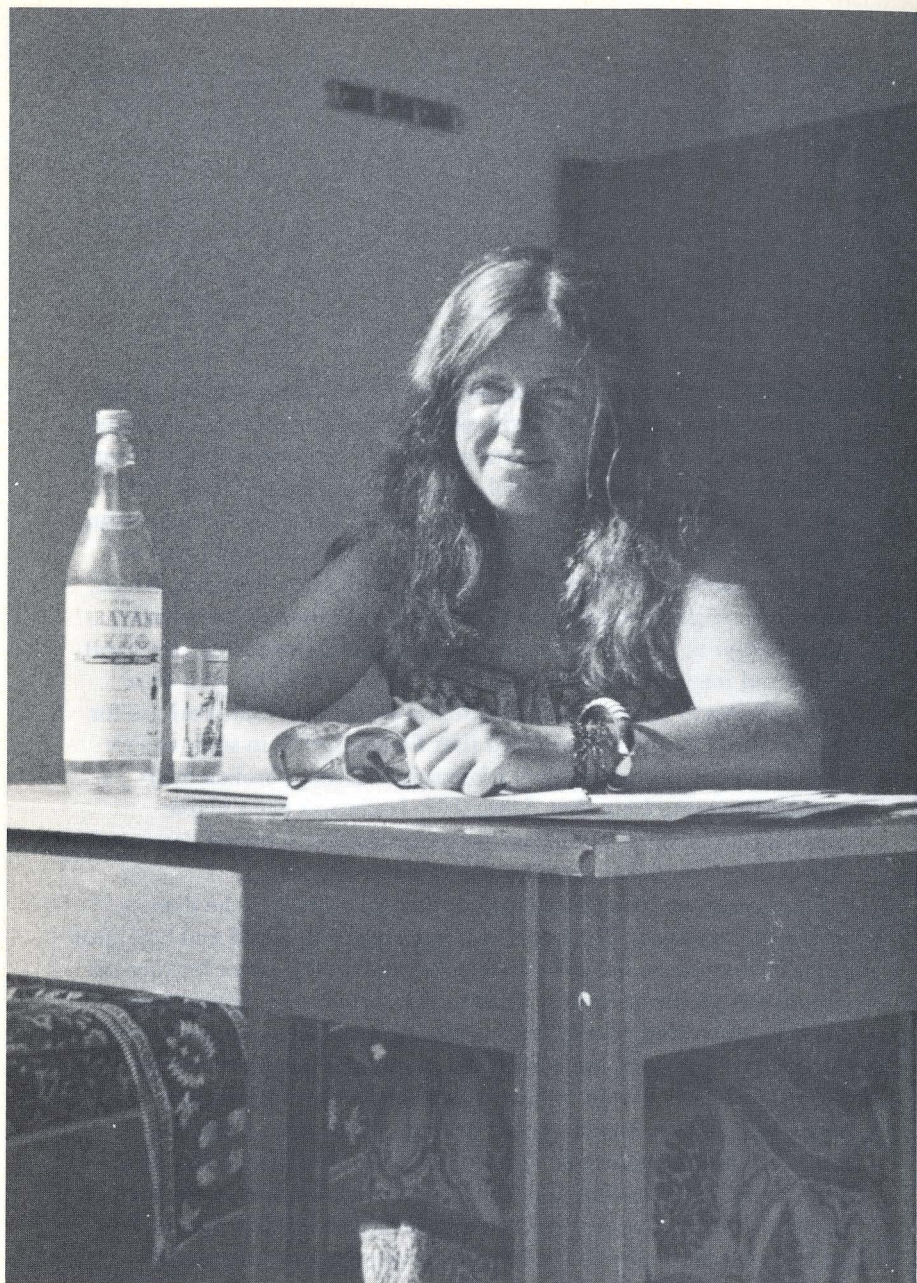
"Go away."

"You want me to go away?" Smiling disbelief. After a couple of weeks the click-click of approaching worry-beads began to make me think of rattlesnakes. I was living in a little hotel and eating out, usually at the taverna next door as I discovered that if I went out alone after dark I would be followed or harassed. I was fast turning into a neurotic. One learns, and by 'one' I mean a woman alone in Athens, to walk down the street never looking directly at anyone, always a little to the side. And one learns that it isn't just the fault of the men. It's all that lovely, healthy young flesh, those perfect white teeth, those tight jeans. There they are, hundreds of them, fluttering like pigeons in the Square, just asking for it. Or so it must seem to the men of this covered-up, still very orthodox society. And don't forget Adonis and his wicked pack of cards. Enough have said 'yes', after all, to make it difficult for those who want to say 'no'. What Arthur Hailey could do with Syntagma Square. Perhaps he would just call it *Square!* (movie rights sold for a quarter of a million dollars). He could put it all in — the cafés, the American Express Company, kids outside holding up signs advertising used Volkswagens or looking for rides, the sweet young things in skimpy pants, the middle-aged tourists, bewildered by the noise and crowds staring at each other across one of the little tables wishing they were back in Duluth, the packed yellow trams going by, the dust, the ornamental orange trees, the airline offices who brought you here too quickly and, for a price, are willing to whisk you away to some other, perhaps less frantic, place. All Hailey would need is a crisis — a kidnapping perhaps, of some wealthy industrialist's daughter. Love Interest. Cameo characters who can later be played by Ava Gardner and Charlton Heston. *Square!* (with a climax on the Acropolis).

I learned that the red-printed signs on lamp-posts and in windows mean "TO LET" ΕΝΟΙΚΙΑΖΕΤΑΙ and I began knocking on doors as well as reading the paper. One day it snowed. One day there was a power failure. I seemed to be suffering from a power failure of my own. I couldn't find a suitable place. My book lay in a wicker hamper,

untouched. "The Funny Trumpet," a guest house-cum-travel group right out of Kesey and the Sixties were advertising their last overland trip to India that year. ("Christmas in Goa," they promised.) I began to think of abandoning my novel altogether, hitting the road. Why not? I had friends in India. Why stay around haunting the American Express for the one letter that would never come, the one I had no right to even expect? India! Why not? I don't know why not. Alone, miserable, frightened to death by the city, I decided to stay a little while longer at least. The magic bus to India was tempting (see great sights and meet new people) but I had come abroad to work on a novel. Going to India would be running away from that. Perhaps for the first time in my life I realized that I was a *writer* in some utterly deep-down committed way. A professional. Even a broken heart couldn't keep me from that. Ultimately India was not a viable possibility. The book would not get written unless I settled down and dug my heels in. Here. In this gods-forsaken city.

I answered an ad and went to live on a tiny street in the district called Philopappau. The house was large and old, a bed and breakfast place in the Season but now, in late November, they were looking for one or two people to stay, at a reduced rate, over the winter. I told them I was writing a novel and needed quiet. There were two rooms downstairs, they said, the best rooms in summer but much too cold this time of year. I went to have a look, chose the one with grey walls and a high, white, wedding-cake ceiling. There was a little blue desk underneath a tall shuttered window which looked out on the street. They promised a gas-fire and said I could cook upstairs in the big old kitchen. 100 Drachmas a day bed and breakfast. \$108 a month. The ad had only been placed for one day. Somewhere, in this hellish city of noise and brown smoke and indifference, somebody was looking out for me. I unpacked my notebooks and dictionaries, my pots and pans and all the little knick-knacks I seem to travel with (a little black



wooden statue, a chinese basket, photos of and drawings by my children, a mustard-coloured woolen shawl). I put up National Geographic maps of Greece and the Aegean, of Crete, an old P & O World Route map showing routes for boats which no longer exist. I set out pens and paper. I turned on the funky radio which the landlord, Dmitri, had lent me. It had come from the Flea Market and was straight out of my childhood, had a polished wood case and plugged in. Lively Greek music filled the room. There were two beds — one could be a kind of repository for manuscript and notes as the novel grew. That way it wouldn't look so empty. I ran down to the nearest big street and splurged on a bunch of orange flowers. These I arranged on the night table by my bed. Then I put the photograph of the man I loved on the night table as well. It was nice to see him smiling there.

When I went upstairs to pay the first month's rent Carole, the landlady, said, "There's a lovely hill here you can walk on. Just at the top of the street and up a path. Philopappau. That's where the district gets its name."

* * *

I think it was probably the loneliest winter I have ever spent. Athens continued to distress me, even though I had a "clean, well-lighted place" to which I could retreat. In such a polluted city the number of cars is terrible and as well as the stink of exhaust fumes there is the damage to one's ears as each driver leans on his horn at any opportunity. The Greeks use their horns like worry beads, honk honk honk honk until the light changes or the traffic jam breaks up. Almost daily, in the papers, there are reports of people, especially old women, knocked down and killed. I learned to *run* across the street when the green "Walk" man appeared. Incredible. I think I had a slight headache from the noise and tension, as well as a sore throat from the filthy air, the whole time I was there. The litter, too, was appalling. Anything that is finished and can be just thrown down in the street ends up there. Their plastic shopping bags, rather in the shape of an English school "pinny" are handed out when you shop. They tear almost immediately and then they, too, are thrown down.

The Greeks are a nation of litterers — consumers and litterers. In this respect Athens could be any large North American city. In what century will green-antennaed, eight-armed archaeologists reach down to this midden heap of synthetic refuse which is modern Athens?

Aristotle said that the ideal city was one in which everybody knew everybody else personally. The only way to even remotely approximate this, in a city as large and crass and commercial as this one is to find a neighbourhood and more or less stick to it. Philopappau became “my” neighbourhood. I only went over to Syntagma Square when I had to use the post office on a Sunday or pick up my week’s supply of London *Times* which were delivered to me at American Express. (The rest of my mail was now coming to the house.) Otherwise I ate, slept, worked, walked in Philopappau. I took an empty bottle or two and walked along BEIKOT (“Veikou”) to the wine merchant’s. For eighteen drachmas (50¢) I could have retsina from a barrel, for twenty, a refill of ouzo, the popular anise-flavoured Greek aperatif made from grape stems. I bought bread, by the kilo, from a little Cretan “supermarket” in the opposite direction. I ate out occasionally, at a local taverna, not listed in any guidebook, where I could get half a barbecued chicken and chips for forty drachs, or a big bowl of fish soup (Greek soups are wonderful) and hunks of bread for even less. The television was on and the jukebox was playing but never mind. Once a week throughout the winter a street market set itself up quite literally right outside my door. (Once a vendor even tied support ropes for his stall to my door. I had to go to breakfast up the rickety spiral fire escape and then come down and out the other door to tell him off.) On Fridays stalls and cases were set up and unpacked as soon as it was dawn and by eight o’clock the vendors were shouting their wares and the local housewives had begun to arrive, pulling their wheeled carts behind them. One could buy small wares such as cheap pots and pans or cutlery or shoes and slippers, washing up bowls,

incense or spices weighed out on tiny scales and then poured into a little cone of paper. Chickens. Fish (shrimps, red mullet, mackerel). Big cream-coloured cauliflowers. Apples. Tangerines. Eggs with yolks the colour of sunsets. Grapefruits so sweet you could peel and eat them like oranges. The street markets of Athens are a culinary delight. I had to get used to the idea that the vendor would slap my hands if I picked out (to be put in the pan of his portable scales and weighed) only the very best tomatoes, the juciest oranges. The Greek housewives would talk back, throw down whatever bruised thing he tried to palm off on them but I would usually smile and accept a bruised tomato or two. Even the overripe ones could be skinned, cooked down and with a sprinkling of basil and a bay leaf or two, make a fine sauce for a spaghetti dinner. By avoiding meat (which is very expensive) and patronizing the street markets one can eat like a king (or queen) in Athens on about a dollar a day. Curried eggs and green onions on rice, thick white beans in tomato sauce, lentil soup, cauliflower/cheese, a meal of the best spinach I've ever tasted cooked up with slivers of garlic and served with yoghurt on top. A feast of artichokes, the leaves pulled off slowly and dipped into a mixture of Cretan yoghurt, salt, freshly ground black pepper and lemon juice. Perhaps for dessert chopped up apples and oranges served with honey and more yoghurt. A glass or two or three of retsina. The good Greek bread! Breakfast, as I have said, was included in my rent. A fresh egg, Nescafé, all the fresh bread and jam you wanted. Dmitri (a Greek from Istanbul) and Carole, his English wife, had leased the house last year and decided to turn it into a bed and breakfast joint. It will probably be torn down in a year or so, they say, to make room for a block of flats. All the old houses in Philopappau are going. While I was there a lovely plaster-work garland on the outside of the house became weakened by rain and pollution and fell off, leaving a place like a large scab on the yellow wall. Carole said it would be impossible to replace; nobody did that kind of work any more. From the flat roof where I hung out my clothes to dry I could see a veritable concrete forest of flats. Why not? Land is scarce and a contractor can put up flats, saving one for himself of course, and live rent-free while making an enormous profit. It's hard to believe that Athens was a city of less than 100,000 not so very long ago.

Dmitri would run by my window at eight a.m. to get the hot bread. I, who had been working since five, slipping out from under my down sleeping-bag coverlet, lighting the fire, shivering, drinking two or three cups of coffee from a thermos I had prepared the night before, would put down my pen and go upstairs for breakfast and a chat. They told me how astonished they were at the young Americans who come and stare blankly at the soft-boiled egg in the egg-cup. How to open it? How to eat? They have to teach them. Carole asks me if Americans don't eat soft-boiled eggs. I try to remember. It's been a long time since I lived in the States and anyway, I married an Englishman. Perhaps they don't. Perhaps they only eat fried eggs or scrambled eggs, hard-boiled or devilled. She shows them how to slice off the top, to dip in a piece of the crusty bread. Eureka!

Meanwhile tourists who stick to the hotels around the Square or in Plaka pay a lot of money for indifferent meals. "Chewing on lumps of grilled meat," as one friend put it. More and more I consider myself lucky to have found this place, this nest, to be allowed the run of the kitchen, to have the street market brought to me.

(On New Year's Day I meet a Greek man in smart camel-hair coat and plaid scarf up on the Acropolis. He is waiting to have his picture taken, with his daughter and his nephew, against the backdrop of the Parthenon. [3 black and white for 100 drachmas. Ancient photographers with ancient, hooded, cameras resting on tripods.]

"Are you from Athens?" I say.

"Are you *kidding*?" He waves his hand at the city in disgust. *He's* from Chicago. Or is now. Athens. You can keep it!

"Parts of it are nice," I say. Good heavens, I'm beginning to change my tune.

"It's a good place to be *from*," he says with a grin.)

* * *

And as well as writing, eating, drinking ouzo and retsina, listening to the radio, I begin to take walks on Philopappau hill. It is a beautiful place, thick with shrubs and trees, and the many rocky paths lead up to the monument from which the hill gets its nickname (it is actually the *Mouse on*, the Hill of the Muses, elevation 484'). From the top one looks across at the Acropolis, which at its summit, is only

a little higher than Philopappau. This view is recommended by the *Blue Guide* as "particularly fine, especially at sunset." If one takes the long way round it's a good walk, past gum trees and clumps of wild thyme, the sea glittering five miles away on the left, the Acropolis itself out of sight until one gets to the top. Lovers come here to be alone, schoolboys to play football in one of those natural amphitheatres below the white cliffs, old women to pick various greens which will be boiled or used for salad. In the springtime the hill would be dotted with millions of tiny wildflowers, as though it had been embroidered. Tiny blood-red poppies, grape hyacinths, miniature daisies and iris, yellow flowers whose name I never knew. I would pick nosegays and stick them in glasses in my room.

The first few times I walked on Philopappau in my new bright blue hiking boots which somehow made me think of cartoon characters, there was no incident. Then one afternoon I saw a man peering at me from behind a bush, a silly smile on his face. Carole admitted that sometimes local perverts went there to hide in the bushes and masturbate.

"Everyone knows about it, really. They'd never hurt you." I was annoyed. This was "my" hill, my only real exercise of the day. I didn't want to be put off or frightened as I had been around Syntagma Square. I kept climbing the hill every afternoon sitting with my back against the monument, watching the sun turn the Parthenon, the entire Acropolis a warm bisque colour. "If *it* has survived all these years," I'd say to myself if I felt particularly low or lonely, "it has survived Turkish cannons and English archaeological vandals and Time himself surely I — ." "All things fall and are built again — ." Climbing Philopappau and looking across to the Acropolis at sunset was becoming some kind of symbolic act, some kind of reaffirmation of my own art. If the occasional odd person wanted to watch me from behind a bush (and I deliberately did not look for them as I climbed) well, let him. Greek society is very repressive — that's why

pornography is so popular here. The local cinema, the MITZI shows at least one porn movie a week, black stars or bits of masking tape stuck over the genitalia on the publicity photos outside. What can a lonely man do in a repressive society but fantasize in one way or another? (Many Greek men, if unmarried appear to still live with their mothers. Two told me, with utter frankness and no simpering, that they had slept in the same bed as their mothers until they were twenty-one. One, still a virgin at twenty-nine, even added the incredible detail that he had slept with his arms around his mother's breasts!) So I told myself it didn't matter, it was nothing to do with me at all. I *told* myself all these things but underneath I was quite uneasy. The Tourist Season was over; often I was the only one up at the monument. Coming down I could *feel* that I was being watched.

Then one day, as I was lost in a kind of late-afternoon day dream, remembering my little village in Crete, wondering if I would ever go back there, if I would ever get over the terrible sense of loss which still haunted me (at one point I had written a poem, never sent, to my love and ended it with the line "why don't you stay out of my dreaming?"), a man stepped from behind a tree and began to walk towards me across the flat, open, crest of the hill. He had on a long, shabby, gabardine raincoat and I knew what he was by the silly smile on his face and the way he was holding his raincoat closed. I also realized very quickly that there was nobody else about. I got up and tried to look unconcerned but I was very frightened. Did I go back down the way I had come up, which was longer, but more open, or did I take one of the steep, narrow, densely shrubbed paths which would quickly get me towards the main avenue? I decided to try the quick way, walked briskly to where a path began, trying not to turn around. I could hear him laughing behind me. It was no good. I began to run, slipping and sliding on bits of rock, terrified that I would fall. He ran after me shouting what I could only guess were Greek obscenities. As I got near the bottom I had to glance back. He had stopped a few yards above me and was frantically jerking himself up and down, laughing. I ran the rest of the way home and threw up and then drank a large glass of ouzo. It seemed that the pathetic satyrs of Philopappau had defeated me.

For a week I simply walked in the neighbourhood, edgy, angry at the whole society, maybe even the whole world, furious that I was being denied the right to climb my hill in peace. I noticed that the MITZI had yet another porn movie on, starring a girl who was billed as "The Black Emmanuelle." It was in English but the projectionist would turn the sound down so that the patrons could pay attention to the subtitles. Would my pervert be in the audience or had he achieved his thrill for the day? Down the street a mother held the ladder while husband and son centered a new sign over their little taverna.

FAMILY ENVIRONMENT

it said. All that expense and the thing was spelt wrong! In my present state it seemed to me not just pathetic but sinister. Family Environment indeed. Athens had quite the opposite. The pollution was moral as well as technological. What would Plato have thought of his city now?

Another woman staying at the house mentioned at breakfast that she had been accosted and chased when she went up Philopappau to see the view. I told her my story and we decided to go to the police. It sounded like the same man and perhaps he was really dangerous. I looked up words in my Collins Phrase Book. The closest thing I could find was:

"That man is following me everywhere." And on the next page:
"It is very annoying."

In fact the chief of detectives spoke some English. I explained that we were afraid, that the men who hung around Philopappau were sick, that the hill was an advertised tourist attraction and we wanted something done. The chief said something to the sergeant who had shown us in. They both grinned. Then he leaned across his desk: "These mans . . ." playing with his pencil and smiling. "These mans are only for lookings, not for doings."



"They are for doings," I said, "when they start chasing people." He promised to send a plain-clothes detective to the hill but we both felt that he wouldn't do a thing. I would have to write to the *Blue Guide* and tell them to revise their comments on the view of the Acropolis from Philopappau:

"Not recommended for women travelling alone."

The two policemen were laughing together as we left.

* * *

I decided to take Greek lessons at the American-Hellenic Union, six weeks of intensive Greek for two thousand drachs (seventy dollars). The Union was a long way from where I lived. I would ride the tram one way, walk home the other. That way I would get my exercise. I began getting up at four instead of five, writing four hours before breakfast, then an hour afterwards and then, on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, off to Greek. Most of the people in the beginner's class were linguistic primitives. They had never studied a language other than their own. They could not remember that adjective and noun had to agree. They had never thought about conjugating verbs. There was an American man married to a girl from Crete, a man from Syria who spoke Arabic and very little English, a girl from Ethiopia who dropped out. The teacher was very impatient with all of us except two boys from Liberia, Seepo and Timothy who were training to be ships' officers (all those Greek ships flying the Liberian Flag!) and who studied three hours every day. In the second week they were transferred to Advanced Beginner.

The teacher would hold up a magazine photo pasted to a piece of card. In Greek she would ask:

"Who is this?"

"This is Catherine Deneuve."

"Is she young?"

"Yes, she is quite young."

"Is she ugly?"

"No, she is not ugly, she is beautiful. She is *very* beautiful."

"Who is this?"

Only if we were all stumped on a word or a phrase would she give us any instruction in English. I liked it, began walking around my neighbourhood with new eyes: TABEPNA "taverna", ΠΑΝΤΟΠΟΛΕΙΟΝ "grocery store", and the one I loved best, ΜΙΑΡ "bar." (Marlon Brando's photo outside the cinema one day:

ΜΑΡΛΟΝ ΜΙΡΑΝΤΟ) I never became good at the orthography. I could handle most capital letters but not the small ones, particularly when faced with such things as our long T sound which might be written, depending on the word, *ι, η, υ, ει, οι, υι* . But began to speak a little, to the woman in the local post office, the baker, the Cretan grocery store man and his family. I stopped pointing and started talking and everyone was delighted. I was also learning to think in kilos and grammes. I even attempted that tongue twister *ένα τεταρτο* (ena tetarto kilo), “a quarter of a kilo of” (margarine, olives, sausage). This always brought a laugh. Perhaps you have to be born Greek to be able to say it properly.

I called out to the old woman across the way, “It’s a nice day” or “It is very cold” or in response to her greeting I replied that I was very well thank you and herself? or that I was (wonderful Greek expression!) “so-so”, [“etsy-ketsy”]. I could even stand outside the ΜΙΤΣΙ and know what was today’s show, what was Wednesday’s attraction, what was coming soon (not that it made much difference).

In class I learned that a married woman is: *η παντρεμενη* (ee pantre-menee) or *η συζυγος* (ee see-zee-ghos) but that I was *ελευθερη* “free”.

The bus stop was a “stasis”.

“Monodromos” was a one-way street.

There were little green 3-wheeled vans for hire throughout the city. They were called ΜΕΤΑΦΟΡΑ “metaphors” and this sent me running to my Skeat.

The yellow manuscript pages piled up. The winter passed.
“Μενω στην ΑΘΗΝΑΙ” I could say, “I live in Athens.”

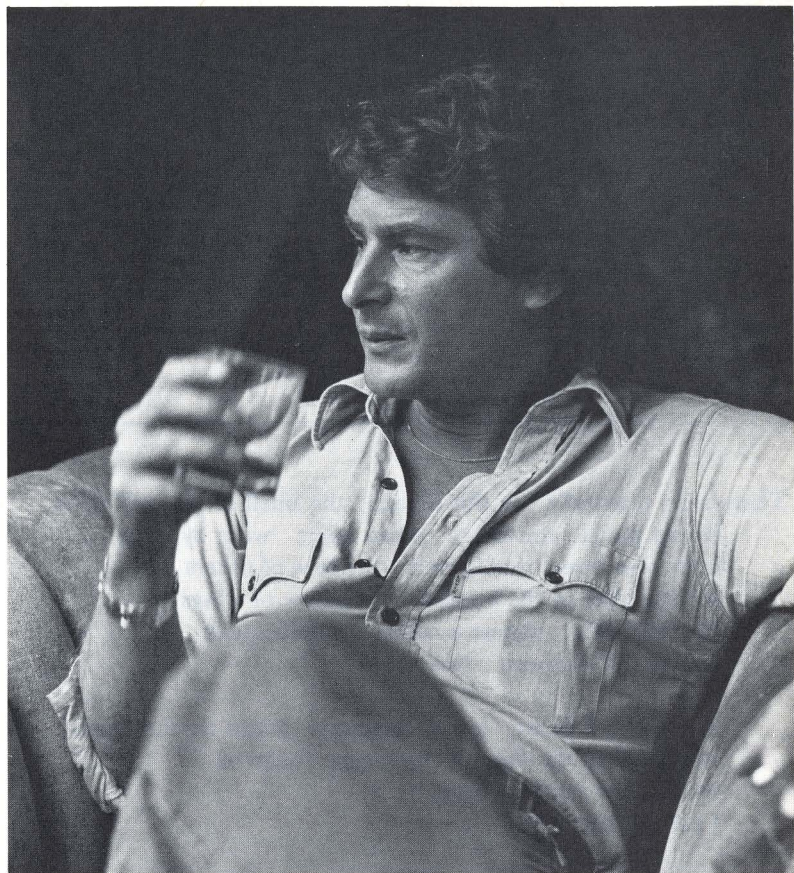
* * *

One day Carole said she had been up on the hill all afternoon with the dog and it looked as though the perverts had all gone. She went with me the first time I returned. There were new leaves everywhere and the first wildflowers had appeared. I decided it was time to stop being afraid. Either the police had really cleaned the place up or I had exaggerated the problem. I started taking regular walks on the hill again, on weekends and the days I didn’t have classes.

On Clean Monday, the day before the beginning of Lent in Athens, everybody flies kites from Philopappau hill. And I mean everybody. Even the Prime Minister comes long enough to hang onto a kite string and have his picture taken. Families and lovers bring picnics and there is a general holiday. I went up the hill to watch. There were literally thousands of kites in the sky, all of a uniform hexagonal shape with long, be-ribboned tails streaming out behind. Mothers set out food while fathers helped children to launch their kites — a rather difficult feat as one cannot run very far, with a kite, on that hill.

I never did find out where the custom came from — nobody I asked seemed to know. I sat under a tree and ate hard-boiled eggs, bread, feta and tomatoes, drank half a bottle of wine. A few shabby gypsy girls danced to a tambourine in a rather desultory manner while their brothers or keepers demanded money from the picknickers, many of whom had brought their transistors which blared pop music as they ate. A FAMILY ENVIRONMENT nevertheless. Then I looked up and saw a used condom hanging from a branch. And then up into the blue sky where thousands of brightly coloured kites flew lazily about in the February breeze. Suddenly I saw the whole thing as some kind of wonderful Cosmic Ejaculation for, with my eyes squinted against the sun, the scene looked like nothing so much as a heaven full of brilliant spermatazoa, the apotheosis (a good Greek word) of all the fantasies of the men of Athens. I laughed and laughed and laughed. Somehow I had come to terms with this awful, vulgar, filthy, never-to-be-recommended city. I *did* live here. I was okay; I would survive.

Tomorrow, I knew, the hill would be covered in litter, the delicate early flowers crushed under a mound of plastic refuse and broken kites, their wriggling tails now soiled and still. But today — today it was lovely. A “diplomat”, I had learned, was literally one who could look both ways. In the months that followed, while I finished my book and lived my solitary life and winter turned into spring, I learned to take the diplomatic view of Athens, a city which is probably no worse than any other. I began to relax and enjoy.



Pierre Coupey / A SPECIAL SECTION

COMPASS

There is no dragonfly in this dream the smell of piss still thick
on my pants the heart taken apart wing by wing
in its own insect intelligence the love of others
coming alive in the transparent shadow of wings
the breathing almost a color I could speak
clearly an anguish rose

to write as I paint layers, mistakes intent on the tones
composed in the flesh of the lovers Beloved
the stink of any love song
I am not sick with

You don't owe your life to anyone he said
God questions all of this imagine
a heart without color your life
gone into

the dragonfly

the ladybug

the ghost

the diamond rainbow

•

¶ One morning as I was sitting in the garden beside the pool, a dragonfly lighted on this paragraph of the Motherwell book and rested there for the better part of an hour:

A true history of modern art will take account of its innumerable concrete rejections. True, it is more difficult to think under the aspect of negations, or to contend with what is not stated. But this does not justify the history of an indirect process being written under the category of the direct. I do not see how the works of a Mondrian or Duchamp can be described apart from the description of what they refused to do. Indeed, a painter's most difficult and far reaching decisions revolve around his rejections.

— Robert Motherwell, "A Tour of the Sublime" (*Tiger's Eye*, December 15 1948), in Frank O'Hara, *Robert Motherwell* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1965), p. 40.

¶ Later in the day a ladybug touched the Spicer poem I was reading to my class. Then the ghost entered the room and my voice in the form of a little wind. As I was driving west from the college in the evening, the sky opened and showed an immense rainbow in the shape of a diamond. I was wearing dark glasses. The dragonfly poses the question: where does one live?

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INTERVIEW

Sharon Fawcett, Ann Rosenberg and Bill Schermbrucker interviewed Pierre Coupey at Sharon's home in Vancouver, 18 March 1978. The transcript that follows has a few additions and many deletions from the rather exuberant original eighty pages.

AR How did the journal drawings start, Pierre?

PC Accidentally. My original intention was to do a set of drawings for Robin Blaser's *Moth Poem*. I went out and bought felt pens and paper, but when I got home I found I'd been given the wrong kind of paper. That's the first accident, because I'd wanted an opaque paper, not a transparent parchment. My instinct was to rush back and get what I'd asked for, but it was too late in the day by then to go over to town, the shop would be closed. This is the virtue of living in North Van! So I said to hell with it and started to draw, and was surprised to see the strange way the felt pen ink behaved on the parchment, which was totally unexpected. After drawing for a bit I began to see possibilities I couldn't have imagined. So that's the second accident, the behaviour of the ink on the paper. I began to play, just trying to find out everything that might happen between the ink and the paper, and began to accumulate an inventory of strategies and effects. When that got boring I started to do "sets" of drawings for Robin's book, working with the poems in front of me. Half way through the third set, after a month's intense work, I suddenly became bored and exhausted, not with the poems, but with the drawings — they began to seem facile and unreal to me. Out of this boredom, I started drawing a face, just for a change, to do something different, since the other things were abstract configurations. And I became interested again, excited at how this face began to emerge from the different combinations and layers of ink. I got this drawing of a red-haired guy who looked romantically introspective and tortured. He seemed to be asking for some kind

of response, and without even thinking, I started writing a note on the left side of the drawing — there seemed to be a space there also asking to be filled — with my response to the drawing, and that was the beginning. Then I thought, ok! journal drawing! and wrote it in at the top, Journal Drawing #1, and also gave it a title, *Le critique se regarde dans le miroir*. Third accident: a form.

SF What's the date of the first drawing, Pierre. And how long did you work on them?

PC That first one is dated December 17, 1976, and the last one in the series, Postscript #10, was done December 30, 1977. About a year.

SF You've worked with writing and images before. How are these things different for you?

PC Yeah, I've been trying for a long time to find some way of combining writing and images spontaneously, without artificially subordinating one form to the other, or self-consciously blurring one into the other, and for the first time I felt this is something I can do, this is a way of attacking that problem. It happened so swiftly. I think I did three or four that night, just looking at what was going on. The informality of the process attracted me deeply — after all, these weren't poems, nor were the drawings done with the intent they would stand formally on their own. I liked the fact that both the drawings and the notes could be swift notations, without pretense to high art. I found something liberating in that.

AR Have you ever kept a journal separately?

PC I once tried to keep one, with an absurd seriousness on my part. I've always been impressed with the kind of intelligence that can work in that way. Both Bill and Sharon have read me portions of their journals, and what they were saying in them seemed to me very valuable. I liked Audrey Thomas' attention to detail in her *African Journal Entries*. I liked the apparent candor and energy in Stan Persky's journal entries, which *The Review*

also published. I thought the journal was a terrific way to record and examine experience. But when I tried to do it, I found myself too self-conscious, I was embarrassed by my efforts to be "interesting." You know, you buy three or four special books in which to write all these great thoughts, etc, and with all that self-consciousness and preciousness I never could write a damn thing. I gave it up.

SF What is it about the drawings that relieve you of some of the self-consciousness?

PC I guess it's because I do the drawing first, and then write the note in response to the drawing, from what's there. Although I change the procedure sometimes, it's easier for me to respond to something concrete in front of me, rather than try to think of something to say.

BS As a generalization, I often feel the writing is a talking-down after doing the drawing, that the drawing is not only the access into the experience, but also the fullest statement of it. The writing is a discussion afterwards.

PC There might be some truth in that. The notes demand a critical response and you know how dissatisfied I've been with much of the writing, though I am less so now. I haven't as yet found the energy to make a critical review of the whole series myself, so I can't speak with precision on how the notes and the drawings interact. But I'm happy to hear what people say on how they work for them.

SF Brian Fawcett says that the drawings deconstruct the text.

PC Yeah. You could also say that certain of the notes deconstruct the drawings. The relationship between the two components is always intimate, and in the best of them, complementary, or dialectical. Once they began to develop, I wanted both the writing and the drawing to be spontaneous, unpremeditated, and equal. The writing is never composed in advance or revised afterwards: the notes stay on the page where and as they were written in their first form. I decided to take that risk because I wanted the writing to be done as swiftly as the drawing, and that it be as irrevocable as the drawing. I can't revise the writing without destroying the drawing.

BS Since about 1972 you've chosen very personal formats, textures and forms for your work. Do you feel the journal drawings are your most successful form, do they satisfy you more than the others?

PC Some satisfaction kept me at them for over a year. At the moment I do them they're great fun because they are so immediate, and I never know what's going to happen. On the other hand, they're disturbing because they were usually done in a moment of crisis. But the fact I can't go back and correct them, try to make them better, if not "perfect," means I'm stuck with a lot of stuff I might wish I hadn't said. But I've censored them in another way: I've destroyed or withheld the most embarrassing ones, some twenty drawings in all. In others, I've written over the notes with a second layer of ink to make them less legible, which sometimes makes them into more accurate images, because of the added darkness. But, as I said before, the notes aren't poems, they don't aspire to "high" form. Those that are entirely legible, I accept with their flaws, even because of their flaws in instances. When I look at them only as images, I'm often quite pleased by the relationship between the written component and the drawing. I find something formally satisfying in them. At a distance the writing sometimes appears as an undecipherable, mysterious texture.

BS I'm interested in how this whole series of accidents, those pens, that paper, perhaps even your kitchen table, came together in some way and triggered them. You became incredibly productive. Sometimes you'd phone people in the middle of the night, saying "Listen to this, listen!" You were very excited about what you were doing. It was the most intense working continuum I've seen you in for a long time.

PC Yes, it was intense, and the most productive in terms of quantity. I was on the edge for a long time, but I'd rather not talk about those midnight phone calls, except to say that the journal drawings did take over my life during that year, and somehow reshaped all my relationships in my world. Instead I should fill you in on some background: two years ago I found myself selling

the oak desk I'd always considered my personal writing desk. Almost everywhere I've lived I've had a study in which I had my books, that desk, and an electric typewriter, and this was the special and exclusive place in which I lived as a "poet." Suddenly I found myself selling this damn desk, for which I'd lost affection. It began to seem large and clumsy, an obstacle. A month later I sold the typewriter as well. A few months later I realized I wasn't so much giving up the desk and typewriter as I was giving up my precious self-identification as a writer, a poet. I think now I was trying to give up all the preciousness and isolation of having a special place in which to be a poet, in which there was all the equipment and atmosphere necessary to the accomplishment of "the great task," which of course I wasn't doing anyway. I found I couldn't identify myself in that way any more. Shortly after that I moved to a new house. I realized I needed to live alone for a time if I were to get any work done at all, and I needed a house in which I could scatter myself, in which any space could be working space if I wished. I still don't have a desk, and I still don't have a typewriter. I find I can work almost anywhere now, in my friends' houses, at the college, outside in the garden. But the kitchen table is my favorite place, because it's where so much of the rest of my life takes place. It isn't cut off or special, it's simply there.

BS So that it's all an energy of stripping, of trying to get . . .

PC That's right, to try and lay bare my relationship to my sources. If the drawings are a deconstruction of the writing, the writing is a deconstruction of my attitudes and preconceptions as a poet. As much as I'd still like to write a conventional lyric or serial poem, I found I wasn't writing them at the level and pace I thought I should be. I believe in the dictum that form is never more than an extension of content, so I couldn't go on desperately trying to trick out the appearance of accomplished form. That's a misdirection of energy.

AR So it could be a new start, then, in both directions — a new start as a writer and a new start as an artist, because the drawings are figurative, for example.

PC Yeah. Just as the writing was a way of allowing myself to say things I could never get said in a conventional poem, the drawing allowed me to do things I couldn't do through conventional abstraction. Giving up some modernist and post-modernist positions was a way of abandoning myself to whatever was possible at the moment at my kitchen table. That is, to what was actually going on in my life in all its boring and maddening complexity.

SF I'm interested in your statement that you sold your typewriter. And your desk. You were removing yourself from those trappings of production that go with poetry. I think that is a political act as well, to *not* type poems, to not have that instrument of production, and ultimately reproduction, available to you. There's a whole history of what the typewriter has done to poetry. To remove yourself from that, to write longhand, so you see the actual movement of the hand on the page. The forms of those letters become as pictorial an image as the drawings. It's literally the literal, in its most organic natural form. Ann, you said you don't read them thoroughly, or that you prefer the image without the writing . . .

AR No, no. I like it that there's writing there, but since it is . . .

SF . . . but the writing is *writing*, back in its roots, back to its most primitive, in a sense, ground.

PC I never intended the handwriting to be pictorial in the way you just described. It was simply the easiest and most natural way to combine writing and drawing on the same page. Although I began to intuit some of that literalness of the handwriting, as a subject, as early as #12 I think, it wasn't until I started doing diptychs and triptychs, combinations of full page drawings and full pages of writing, that their graphic element was brought to my attention clearly. A friend noticed how similar a full page of handwriting was to a new painting hanging in the kitchen. Looked at from a little distance, the page of writing was almost an exact visual equivalent to the painting. Which seems another happy accident, since it indicates unity in the work. But to get

back to what you said about the rejection of the typewriter as a political act. I agree. I got rid of it at first in a subconscious effort to free myself, simply so I could go on. For all its real advantages, the typewriter has made it easier for people to imitate others, to imitate the appearance of poetry, without knowing what they're doing. It's easy to throw lines all over the page, use multiple margins, make fancy line breaks, use slashes, brackets, etc etc, without having them mean a damn thing in terms of furthering the musicology of the poem. And in the work of so many people you get the feeling they don't even believe in their own line lengths, they're simply there because they look good. It *looks* like a poem, but hardly ever sounds like one. After teaching creative writing, going to readings, and doing *The Review* for so many years, I've seen and heard a hell of a lot of work, and in most of it I could see people betraying their natural authenticity for the sake of meeting the conventional standards of the technique and of the ethos of the technique. I began to feel a great disgust for that, not only in others, but also in myself because I so often found it difficult to believe my own line lengths, And that's one of the reasons I no longer want to teach creative writing or edit *The Review*. It's also why I'm not writing lyric poems. I don't want any more of that. I can't be happy as a painter to work only to please the vagaries of an art market, and betray the sources of art there. That kind of corruption in poetry and art is a corruption at the heart of what might be a political life. What is supposed to be useful information to people becomes simply pretense. Of course, it becomes pretentious to propose you're doing something that isn't: God knows I'm not that sure of myself. And we could quarrel until the cows come home on what "useful information" might be. I want to give myself permission to be myself, and give myself permission to say anything I have to say, whether conventionally acceptable or not, so long as it's spoken straight from the heart and its engagement with the world. The fundamental lie in this "democracy" we inhabit is that we are entitled to speak freely. Women have learned this painfully in

the last few years. I don't presume it's any better elsewhere. People suffer and go crazy everywhere because they're unable to articulate their lives productively and peacefully. It's part of the fundamental political problem we all face: if you're going to do any useful work, whatever your task, you first have to stay with what is real for you and admit all of it, allow everything that's happening in your life to enter your work. I think we all know this. We're past the age of masterpieces, and we don't need propaganda. Poetry should be one way in which we can speak honestly, without playing to preconceived literary, social, or political roles.

SF In terms of what you're saying here, you're probably all aware of John Wieners' "Poem for Painters," and the image in this part of the poem is so much the kind of image that runs throughout the journal drawings:

At last. I come to the last defense.

My poems contain no
wilde beestes, no
lady of the lake, music
of the spheres, or organ chants.

Only the score of a man's
struggle to stay with
what is his own, what
lies within him to do.

Without which is nothing.
And I come to this
knowing the waste,
leaving the rest up to love
and its twisted faces,
my hands claw out at
only to draw back from the
blood already running there.

PC Thank you Sharon. There are a number of things present in the journal drawings as directives, and that's one of them. There's also the presence of Robin Blaser. Without his encouragement I might not have found the energy to start this new work. There's George Stanley's statement on poetry and politics in *Open Letter* (Second Series, Number One), Stan Persky's "Phuoc Binh Statement," Ed Dorn's "Love Song #22," and Brian Fawcett's *Creatures of State*. There's the presence of Malcolm Lowry, William Carlos Williams, Beatrix Potter, and all sorts of painters. I'm also indebted to Michael Ondaatje, David Phillips, Barry McKinnon, Pat Lane, and Daphne Marlatt, among others. This is a partial list of people who work in ways I respect and from whom I learn. Whatever their individual limitations, all of them have an understanding of their particular responsibility that makes poetry comprehensible and useful.

BS An area I think we should cover is the process whereby, first of all they're journal drawings, personal things done at the kitchen table, and then they move out into an audience. Gradually they get shown to close friends, then they get shown in the form of slides and read to audiences, and perhaps they'll get exhibited. How do you feel about that process of making the journal drawings more and more public?

PC In one way I would still prefer to keep them private, since that was the original intention, and only show them to friends whom I can trust to understand them. But I have come to accept responsibility for the series as public work, since I've read and shown them, first in Nanaimo at the Malaspina Poetry Conference, then in Prince George, and more recently in North Van. Showing them at Malaspina was in one way a terrible interruption, right in the middle of them, because I had done up to #30 by then, and that was the first time they'd been made public. I was absolutely terrified of showing them to strangers.

But one thing I've always felt about giving a reading is that you don't rely on past work, which is familiar, or which you no longer believe. You do what you've got at the moment. I feel that's an obligation, to show what your present struggle is. I didn't want to do it, but that's all I had, so I was stuck with my own work.

SF But they're so beautiful, Pierre; you must have had some sense of how beautiful they were, what a shame it would be to deprive people of them!

PC No, I had no sense of their being beautiful, though I might have liked some of the drawings and some of the jokes. I was afraid they were far too revealing and vulnerable. In fact, I arranged the night before to have Pat Lane, Barry McKinnon, and John Furberg meet me at 9 a.m. the day of the reading to preview them and help me decide whether to show them. Apparently they kept the appointment, but I was so hung over I missed it! After that, I had no choice. I went ahead and did it, and the response I got, unfortunately, was that many people liked them and did think they were beautiful.

SF Unfortunately for whom?

PC For me, because I was too gratified and happy. Though I tried not to be. Also, I felt I had come through something. I remember thinking that if I didn't find the nerve to read that writing in public I'd be finished for good.

AR I find it a big paradox with you, Pierre, in all this — the writing is really just the pits of despair and horror and self-dislike. But the drawings are beautiful. I feel better about these not reading them from that point of view. I think, though, that you must have that dichotomy anyway.

BS It's the dunghill and the rose.

AR You have one image of yourself which is very at odds with the other.

PC Yeah, maybe we're all schizophrenics. On the one hand one wants to be the romantic, and give that outpouring of soul, and on the other hand the classicist, and be very rigorous and structured and intellectual. Does that make sense?

SF Oh yes! You just described yourself.

PC Perhaps everyone who makes art has a sense of being at war with himself or herself. There are different directions one would like to go in and satisfy fully, but there's always the contrary which undercuts either of the impulses. You go in one way, and immediately and in the instant the other direction pulls you back. So you're constantly being torn apart — Plato's two horses — the black and the white that Brian talks about in one of his poems. For me that image goes right back to *Circle Without Center*, as the first image in "To Will Is To Stir Up Paradox": "this bridge / which if I walk in one direction / moves in the other." I think the journal drawings exhibit that contrariness within the experience constantly. Perhaps that's why I'm still confused. But to get back to the negative effect of having a "success" in that Malaspina thing: I had to go back home and live alone again, and still have the energy to keep on working in that more or less private way. But now it was with the sense that people knew what I was doing and *expected* something, which was part of what I had been trying to avoid. That's when the whole direction of the drawings darkened. They became darker and far more introspective, perhaps because I'm a contrary bastard and think it's a mistake to cultivate "success." But don't misunderstand, I'm not interested in cultivating failure either. It seems to me the most difficult and important thing you can do if you wish to be responsible is to stay as close to your sources as possible, without any view to acceptance anywhere.

BS You're talking about what the poet is doing in the world, about providing that information which has to be honest, which has to avoid that awful business of trying to fit into the current of what is expected, or what's the vogue. How does that relate to the political?

PC Brian Fawcett takes up as a sub-text through *Creatures of State* the issue of how we're continuously conditioned into being mere consumers and consequently deprived of a true citizenship. If, as an artist, your main intent is to produce a consumer product, and to consume recognition so as to have an edge on your competitors in the market-place, then it seems to me your usefulness becomes suspect, since you are literally turned into a product yourself, a dead thing, when you advance your private interests above a possible public good. If art intends, as one of its objectives, to empower people's lives to be fulfilled and real, then it seems to me the artist must resist the reduction of art into a consumer product, and to insist instead upon everyone's right to speak in an equality that should be more than a dream.

SF Probably art is the only realm where that can be possible.

BS That is the nature of art.

PC Well, if that is a *demand* of art, then I think we should be rightly appalled by ourselves if we don't do our utmost — even if we fail — to fulfill that demand. We reject a prior aesthetic, in whole or in part, only in order to be in a more accurate relation to our time, and to be able to speak from that relationship. We should be against careerism in any profession. The objective, I take it, of anybody's work is to make it and yourself, after you've been of use, useless, so that somebody else can do something else. No? You don't teach people in a class in order to have them come back to you the next year and the year after and the year after. You try to teach in such a way that they don't need you anymore. That is, they are empowered to do something for themselves. Unfortunately, the society we live in insists constantly on our inability to do anything authentic for ourselves: it's always someone or something else, an expert here, a perfect product there, that will do it all for you. This is part of the political deprivation we experience daily. Finally the journal drawings are political, and subversive.

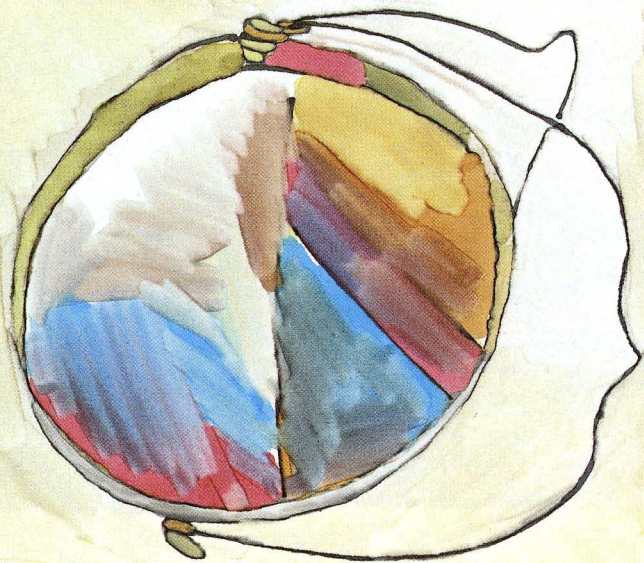
BS Because they assert the personal.

PC No, not because they assert the personal, but because they assert my right to speak as clearly as I can, with all the personal and public difficulty that entails. We have this complex belief that art transforms the real, and it can, if we're conscious and passionate, because it keeps imagination alive and nourishes it. But, if Shakespeare didn't change the world, if Cézanne didn't, if Williams didn't, I mean in an obvious sense, in our whole relationship with mother earth, in our daily economic and social inter-relationships — well, who are we to think that we're going to do that either? We're not. Otherwise the world would clearly have been paradise at least three hundred years ago. And the world ain't paradise. But I think, if art has a dirty function, which it must have, as well as a beautiful function, it's to keep our faces, our noses rubbing into the shit of our lives and of our world, so that we don't forget *the smell*. Don't forget *what it looks like*. Don't forget *where we are*. It's *not* paradise. At least not in our day-to-day living. It's paradise somewhere in our imaginations, which is also part of our day-to-day living, if we didn't have that we would surely die. But we can't afford to propose transcendent beauty all the time, we can't afford to do that because we're walking in a real world.

Le miroir -

M. Couper

Shall it always return
to landscape? Where
face is this? Is the
chrysalis within
contained within
reversing covers? Or a
mirror fewer those
dead things in the
brandy glass in front
of me? Whirl & swirl,
its stream in the sky,
this Pacific edged in
a yellowish grey, the
cold of the tulips I am
not unhappy - the cat
sits on my lap - I talk
to myself in the frozen
food section of the
Superway - do I need
orange juice? I look
for love in the mids of
these miracles.



Journal Entry #9.

January 21, 1977.

No easy way to begin. There isn't the
 room for everything - the events of
 the day are curious for the last
 3 days have been in depression.
 I want to know the place so
 get. Have felt tired, & would have
 done off after take while eating
 workers. feel strange sensation
 of tension in the body. Muscles
 of the neck, back stiffens. Tires in
 March. Saturday night a today
 diarrhea. No energy. The way
 outside black dark. The chimney.
 Making the small garden into the
 house. John. There is no fire. With
 the fire goes - makes. No to car
 out to get. More. beautiful
 crack of the wind. Field. How the
 thing in the middle. How did
 what there? Look as if it is scattered
 in by a dream and not clearly connect
 be. Can't say any clear in body.
 Can't see the light of talking
 explaining. No clear for the
 The cat stays next to me. As we
 all day long looking into my eyes
 constantly with a look of love &
 shared understanding, a perfect vision.
 After supper comes the globe: the
 to tell me of our dream Saturday night.
 in her dream am preparing to fly
 with a spirit that knows no death
 we. Although many years I am to
 do this alone. She has written the details
 down for me. She tells me not to worry.
 She says it's like the Conkine book.
 Earlier in the day Esther brought me
 brown collars from the creek. The
 thought of the dream troubles me,
 and I am afraid to sleep.



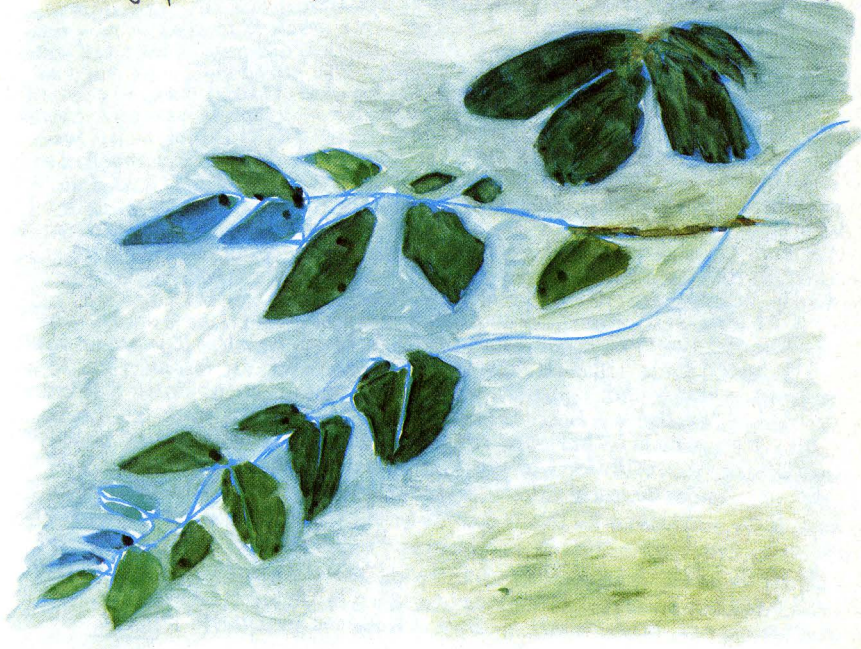
The shabby angst - the endless whining about inactivity - to pay the bills, to dream to write, to paint, to teach, to make & keep friends, to love - The shabby grip the past holds me in - the endless radio with its million-year & voices - words, faces, gestures - unobserved billions multiplying - a flow of steam, machines & bloody wars - The shabby terrorism & expect to strike close to hand - a line myself terrorizing my skin, body into its shabby, my past, & the day later a come to watch, it itself bleated with its shabby games, & wait for someone else, whose duty, job it is to leave the stars out, don't it reach it & settle it & write out the in voice. The wall cry in the distance, it is the heart. The endless elaborate & past identity. Elementary is out of place, at its place & time. The shabby insistence on order - fear in the kitchen's activities - happens in the greater audience - they hear nothing my elders (have few contemporaries) - & the shabby bear. Gravelly & bear. Move. Move. Repeat for revolution, for freedom, for fear, for another shabby election. Love is also withheld - not my own desire in the night, we have lost - the body's fear in the past, drifts slowly to the shaver - lifts a shabby arm & trends the survival of the endless shuddering & bloody war don - Dante & Beethoven sit me up - my mother died before - the mountain, an unknown in the future. The shabby yearning for grace, for this ordinary human feature - love is dead in us - that's for in the forgraine, in the heart. Flaws & worms crawl over my skin. Bottom of. Bottom out. The present paradise of a shabby person & hell - pity - the redemption of the gods who refuse to accept of the evil of the world, a hell, their next fear - the little hearts who find since the attack of murder - Grant another bear, but another dark, weathers & darks. Bend over the eye - pray for the physical rejection of grace - the physical voice of the world. Tell me how exists in the distance. The low legs - the shabby was - they could not tell how we went out of hell. No lot to Canada. No fruit, sheep, no lucking too - what we the ranch, who will accept me out of the world, I don't know? for whom does the performance herself now? for whom the color on clouds, the close in, the fork underneath? the spine of the bottom of their page a full color drawing of the body floating in the pool. Break the body in blue scars, a blue lion with a black plant Cardui belt, black boots. The color of the water is the green. Crystals two more green. The edge of the pool is green. & the howl, the perfect a yellow green, almost gold in the sunset light of the Pacific afternoon. That's would be to getting the world - to get that. A reflection before the vision of Paradise, which is all below my line. To know I can never read that to my father or mother, my brother or sister, my wife or my children. And who would a call was? who knew I heard enough of the person that would? who or not sick of the wrong past & to be had also was? who does not wish to become a ~~character~~ angel?

Sept 20 1977. 1977 journal & memory #12. The corpse of the past.



Journal drawing #43. Oct 2, 77. P. Causey.

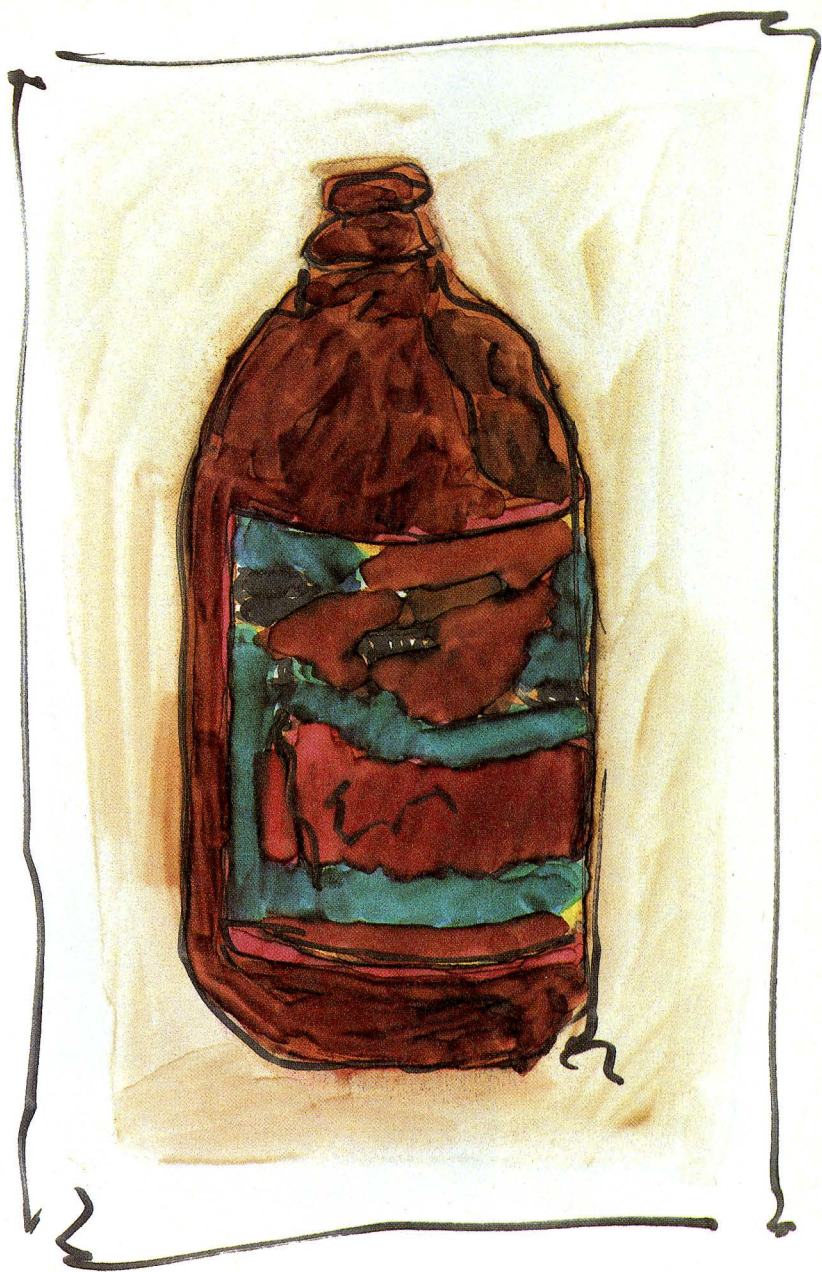
The brightness of the day after love - the sky blue, the complex light on the leaves - the diamond pattern of the wind on my back - the pool rippling, filling w/ the cold here water. The sun flowers precisely angled, attentive, attending from their green temple at the end of the garden. After love, the brightness in the water, the corpse of the feet. The body looks pale & foolish after no more dark kisses, so many words burning into the bright air. Minor music lies in the sun, her ears angled back to catch the squirrel's chirp. Dante & Beatrice play in the tangled weeds by the shed. The ink as bright as glass on the page. The solid hairs of my arm knit points to the pool, my eyes glazed & my brain turning into ice, into water, into ice. The body half-submerged in the cold green light turns, pivots on the navel, abandoned, absent. Dead or asleep, done with, going nowhere. Empty of complaint or desire. So many spider webs. So much hunger.



Sitting here, w/ nothing to say, as in, what have I got to say, as in, is it possible to no locate
oneself - the sun's lance coming to rest on the porcine spot verbally - when all
you can think of is your own sorrow & self-pity, everything you've failed to do and be.
Sitting on the log over the stream, almost lost in the color of the bronze rocks below the green &
white water, the traits of the world, how half the population of this city (at least) is also,
at this precise instant emotionally disturbed - men, women, kids, alone in some room,
on a park bench walking past apartment towers watching other people's lives half-enriched.
And to find your life in this cliché as well in almost a joke, but not quite - Dr. Paul thought of
despised poetry, & how people died every day for want of what is found there - & he is right:
our deprivations, what we want in the shared world - happy to mean w/ a thousand
hearts who can so narrow the multitude - by reaching the beautiful - This Sunday,
this life is almost consumed by the Beat, where precise palate demands the best parts of us
first, the tastiest - the rest is left for the truly lean times. How should I think of you? I
burned the 2 poems I wrote for you yesterday. I am also tired of sacrificing my desire. I
want to be met to share a nourishment. I am also tired of being consumed. How should
I think of you? Of course I should think of the precise way in which you are absent. How the absence
excludes all of its flaws, none of its perfections. Or how the absence is perfect when it is so
defined by the absence of its perfections - I don't want to say how I think of our bodies,
there in the perfection, I don't want any more anymore, I don't want to think! - I cut
that off here, because I'm afraid of the unknown - having travelled there beyond myself
& even the sense of desire without the comfort of being able to return to where I began, or
to the person I began with, without the presence of the companion beside me I do live &
desire. To be so excited & to burn the head & see the bed is empty beside you, suddenly,
& to know it is your own impatience to make the ascent has lost you your companion,
who might have been willing, had you waited only a little longer, to stand there
beside you. Therefore this can be no lament nor analysis, nor plea. Some little recognition,
perhaps, of the swiftness of the liquid air, the bright water, the roomers of the heart.
Even more every sensation, a judgement. I go on talking, to fill the page, to let
myself off the hook of having to move, to do something real, my job. The hook
of the real is under & harsh. Almost no-one is up to it. Will I ever be. Almost.
Hunched drawing #52. October 16, 1977. The Corpse of the Abernethy Dancer. P. 100p.



Keep the language here simple: remember to say what you have to say as directly as possible: without rhetoric. The problem in the last few weeks in the drawings has been in the language: it's embarrassing, self-indulgent, & finally, weak. I have resorted to rhetoric: to phrases, phrases. I have little direct knowledge of. Speak of what you know: nothing else. When I don't do that, I have to mask the words with a second layer of art. I wonder now whether I should take permission to revise, correct, improve. Perhaps I have taught myself as much as I can now learn through an acceptance of the immediate, of flaws, of mistakes. After all, it isn't necessary to display one's indulgences: this work does not need to be printed or shown or read. Nowhere has it possibly been of help? If it could be of use, then it's almost obligatory to make it available. Each day I write simply that all speech is public. That takes courage. I'm not sure what to do: of course I would like to contribute something enduring which would earn me praise. But because I'm afraid of being misread, laughed at for being so vain, so manly, so downward etc. part of the problem in writing first & doing the drawing afterwards, is knowing the original process. But I'm feeling it in art. I'd like to start now, making large & definitive drawings, with coherent & specific language, & scrap everything else so far. But then that takes on all the attributes of the ambition and that I've wanted (or pretended) to refuse so far. A complex meditation, which is what I intended if I can call it anything, is not pop-art. A complex meditation in the immediate, what is immediately before your attention immediately in your attention, what floods in on you when you are disposed to respond and recognize. I would rather not see my own works (almost so on my right hand alone), & I certainly don't want any possible lover to see them either - but what else can I do when I know they're there. If anything has a necessity, it informs, perhaps for no one else, to learn what I can of virtue, and to register the pressures (mostly of the future) of the process. Perfect utterance, like the perfect poem, is yet to be encountered. A speech of signs, of the hand, writing, simply. Almost by itself at its best. But an accompaniment enters, the shadowy twin. The ghostly dark. The ghostly light. By search of the Beautiful - grace, music, color - I have seen to be worthy of someone else's intelligence. Journal Drawing #53. October 30, 1977. CP





Mokey. 20. 27. 77.

Postscript # 6.

Postscript #6 - quit the watch game black, young, ghostly against space & time. Done 6 c.m.
after everyone had left, after all the beer was gone, the wine, the port, and now it's 5 p.m.,
the day so dark as the watch. I feel like killing myself again, & only because the house is
empty. I'm hung over, & I won't have the energy to do anything - either to feed or
annoy myself. Thus being the emphasis is - & afraid to pick up the phone to
call a my dear, for fear they'll hear their stupid need in me, & no one needs that.
Against & again. No one needs your sin again (where in the Virgin for those who have
nothing left). Dear Larry. And we were all so perfectly drunk, high on the bad cases
& laughing @ the grim task of poetry, talking all at once & on the phone, & explaining
our likes to each other again & again. Each one possessed of unworldly
secrets, & talking & laughing each other, telling the stories, doing the dance & simply
high on our being here. And now not & alone, my skin being eaten by the lizards
which foulness, I'm sick of myself & want to laugh, but can't. To tell up the empty
house - what to do between now & the moment - I can finally stop with sleep -
and not have to listen to myself, the scratching pen, the cracking leaves, the noise of my
lips & throat as I drink the last of the dog's milk, sweet port, which slips into my
stomach with the most awful gracefulness. Fatigue. Fatigue. As if the whole world
has come here, stepped out of its nothing left but the hand making the paper
dirty. As if somehow you could look down at them, from the moon, from Venus,
from Mars everywhere at all, & see nothing but in other hands moving back &
forth with its intricate machinery, scratching the paper, scratching itself. I am
being eaten by the apes as between microbes, by the faults & cracks in the
molecular chain - each hair on my hand, a whole America of horror.
Surfers in it of the task of poetry - the task of poetry is the forming of the face
behind the screen - the comic, ghostly face of the watch, trying to leave itself
behind the screen will warm my back & film will hold me when I expect in my sleep to die.
My account: does it matter - I never did. I did not ask for them. You did not
ask for them. No one was asked for them. 17/10/1977. 77.

Postscript #10 - Such an old story. He leans into the electric cigarette player. How the music takes a turn, dips, into the bodies into a motion not their own. He would like to cry in his office. He's just another sad old English teacher who hides the knowledge from his colleagues that as he hates himself as much as he pities them, that he doesn't know the difference between a run on & a comma splice. The ruins of civilization in his head, grand thoughts, echo the music. He thinks, it doesn't matter if doesn't a weekend in the woods did diabolically old priests float between the trees, they know what goes down in South America they know old Bach's Variations given piano in the trees, like only in the sky everything mixed up without any political anxiety in warthrusting for a narrow space. - The bodies move as a motion not their own. Not their own. Was anything here to be his, theirs, whose was below, to know, if not to know him. The music is never gentle than it comes to that. He ought to know. He ought to know better. - To take it somewhere. What it needs be taken anywhere. He thinks of studies against orders. He has been ordered not to think. He can remember that, a long time ago. He remembers the crippled elbows at the baseball game. What difference do they make on his pictures? Arms crinkled at the elbow, the body they belong lifting bear to its face. Thus did it get there. Such an old story. Every one's heard it. Someone goes quickly mad in a corner of the room, & he thinks of crippled elbows, the folk singers hands cut off in Chile, the martyr and soldier in Rem death squads in Brazil. He looks his own throat open & hole the pipe of a drum, the smoke rolling through from the last cigarette. The piano in the freesteps, given light on the key. - He's been asked to make plans. Collocos, what is the game plan? What action plan to do, then and. About what. About it. He doesn't know what they're talking about. He has a telephone with a dial and 8 buttons on it. What are the buttons for. To press! The telephone is vacant there's a switch, didn't turn on if there's he never turns it on, never notices that it's blinking an incoming call. Who is it that isn't calling him, who is it calling him. It's on or off. Press the buttons. A mistake maybe, and then then there's a sigh. The music to put an old key to sleep to put an old fool to sleep, the centuries to sleep. To put him in the freesteps to get a better look at the Moon, the dead. To go there. - He will get on the boat, go 50 minutes up the coast. Look the whole time at the water slipping gravity under the height, think stupidly of slipping over the edge, into the soup, the humless peace, hazy on the coast line, small houses, small lives, perfect in their distance from the city, the police squads coming to make them work, to squash complaint. Whiners, who deserve nothing, blessed a 1000 times by the music they never asked for. Aloupy. The Goldberg Variations. 30. XII. 77 - 17. VIII. 78. (36 yrs. old. It's done.)



RAINBOW

Was this the talk all night, coyote's arc,
Spicer's diamond, do we have to
speak of poetry & not know
what hits us, the garden's drift
under the moon light
ready to give up —

It isn't a speech
or helplessness —

It is
a love
missing teeth

eagles & tides
the shock

that whatever you do or do not do does not
disturb the world's angry sleep & the wild
life inhabits that ghostly city,
to fell a forest so dark, stepping

into the orange light, the tiger
lilies & green holly,

summer & winter

whatever leaves you
so swiftly
you can't tell
what it was,

but this: *You stepped*
into my heart I didn't know
You had such power

& there's a silence in the house,
& any description of their breathing would be
a deprivation of what I want.
I think of the pink anemones in the tide pools,
& the coyotes singing on the hillside. It is a distance

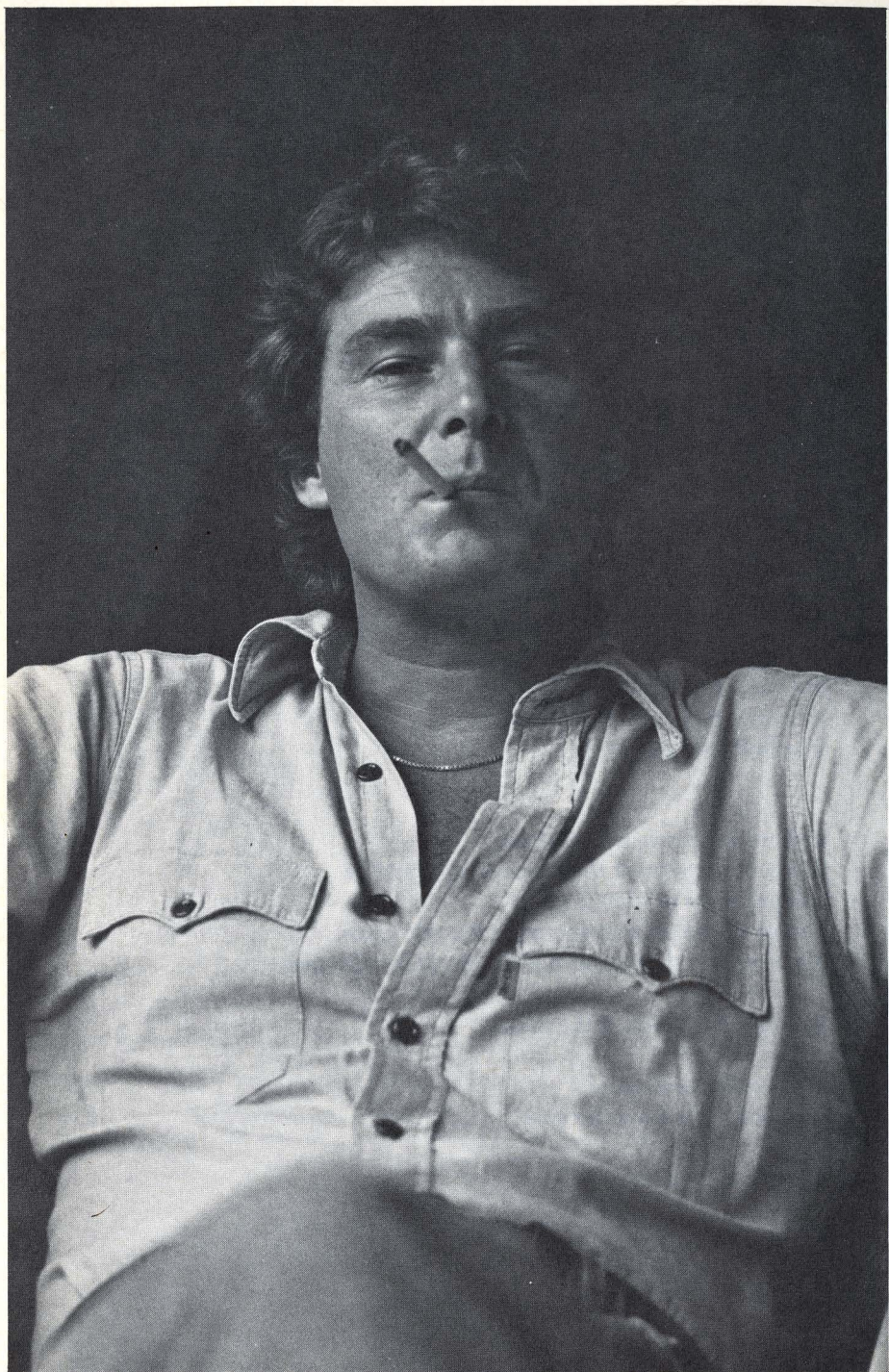
between the dream & the island

the love & the scent of
somebody you know for sure

quarrel & embrace

helpless

•



bp Nichol /
from *THE MARTYROLOGY, book V*

finally the birds are still
stars now visible as
the last light of
the sun is
gone
one band of light across the south horizon “city”

words stop

days pass

reading in the back yard shade
nameless feeling fills the body
thinking constantly of friends
lives we've lived together
what is it makes up the poem
journeynal
a longing work
realating of realationships shape
between the letter & the letter
word & worlds of
friends & where the words begin & end
feelings & the ways you say them
all alongingly the way
which is the day to day life of writing
being
who you are
my saynity
ignoring all the cliches
woe & madliness
sexu & sexme
all a t
or r
which is to say the b
natural
 life one tries to lead

clear spring day
5M minus 01D & counting
deserted freeway 409
cable the kabbala i'm coming home
left at 27 & again at 50
took the Gore
H I J K L &
one (c) more
funereal procession pacing me
is fun real?

echoing in reverse
previous lines
parked at Claireville
drove onto the maps
a different landscape
where my head ends
friends & the unknown begins
interpenetration inter interface
integers of place
& time
the flowers in the garden shift
in the half light of dusk
Josie sings
"it grieves my heart so"

brought back always to this point
friends

fr i ends in that we
that yes
sey what you will
i could sit here now till morning
listening

looking
swallows fly home to their nest above the front door

the purple pink & white flowers
hours of a peace i have grown to love
looking out now over the valley
stretches below the front porch of Josie's home
it is always prayer occurs
a thank you
a wish for Josie's happiness
all my friends
my own
& Ellie
wish she were here
simply to share
a caring we have come to value
all of us
it is the simplest things reassert themselves
love passion honour
make up the will
the thrill of living we have found together
each in our own ways
seek to carry forward to the end of our days

Larry Eigner / EIGHT POEMS

going so fast
you can't see a thing
 what's an illusion

times various places

•

the end of a film

everybody's serious

in the "ballroom"

"dancing"

•

leaves

dead

wind

ground currents

sunlight

reaching through

still

•

piano

clock

after an hour again

the tune, whole thing

is ok

•

so many things
the clock
disappears

•

the tree-roots
disrupt the walk
more and more
up
the hill
stars thick also
some steepness

•
what
to think
of
a
poem
?

•
swing
pull on
the bell
sky
wind
far and wide
shift
signals

Andy Mathisen / FOUR POEMS
threesome — minus one

shoulda moved out last night
then the dark sounds through
your bedroom curtain would
have saved me these lines
but

i got home too late to change history
stumbled in with midnight pizza plastered
on my mouth bearing another
rattling beercase
up the porch

HOTEL WINDOW

Time moves
past this window
Curtains blow this way that
with the wood amplified
and subtle creak
of steps on stairs

Calendars peel off all walls
The window is a calendar for
you see Time moves past

this window

and an old man
is out there
in the lot behind
the hotel

he loves his car
keeps it covered

some mornings
i watch him gently
unpack it

he
neatly folds back
the vinyl cover
from his old orange
55 meteor

puts the cover
in the back
seat

warms
up the engine
and drives away

his bald head
shining

oblivious

HANGOVER

sunday morning
sings too loud
outside the window
traffic howls drowns
the church

the floorboards creak
beneath the carpet
old men hack and wheeze
while dumb chokesetter hands
peeling tension pounds
of flesh loose skin thoughts
fry like bacon

spent half-empty brown
bottles litter the
window sill socks
sit drip stinking off
a radiator in the corner

crows pick
potato chips
from asphalt

St. Andrews spire
is hid behind the
tangled steel and static
efficiency of b.c. tel

the church
its elephant bulk
standing dumb above
the dull town i can make out
small white gulls
littering the green roof

spilt milk morning

Looking out
into morning rain
from Dyved's window
I see
Lloyd Gilmore's Hockey Restaurant
must epitomize Canada

It sports a huge Bas-relief
mural of colorful eight foot hockey players
doing battle
against a real-life backdrop
of grey drizzle tangled wharves
and opaque firs through fog
on Protection Island

Commuters rush by slick on oily roads
A hovercraft drones on in distant fog
anticipating more lost skiffs
in yet another herring season

Rotgut pilings alive with ancient crabs
rummaging under heavier rain for
an existence that differs
only in density

And then there's Gilmore's goddamned
Bas-relief centurions scrabbling obscene
out there in
the rain like
spilt paint

Like us

Hung more Harlequin
than Heroes in the
forever turning tides of
full moons half moons
dog barks and dim-wits
in the flood

George Bowering / WHICH POESY

1

Thou many-coloured, many-voiced vale,
over whose pines, & crags, & caverns sail
fast cloud shadows & sunbeams, art an
agreeable place, Chamonix, made of tired wood,
a mountain outside the toilet window.

An agreeable place, I love you, the strange sleep
which when the voices of the desert fail
wraps all in its own deep eternity.
On the walk back to our pension
I overtook a tiny old Frenchman who sang
in the dark bending street, an old romantic
French song, his soul flowing from his small lungs
to the mountaintop somewhere high above him
in the clouds. Whose wandering wings
now float above thy darkness, & now rest
where that or thou art no unbidden guest,
in the still cave of the witch Poesy.

I lookt from the window of our poor pension,
 to the sun rowdy & confident at home
 there in the mountains. The snow all year
 lies shining over its melting self. I stare:
 has some unknown omnipotence unfurled
 the veil of life & death? Or do I lie
 in dream?

An Indian jet smasht into that peak
 two months ago, an unbidden thought, but I
 lookt & traced a trajectory where in one
 second a 707 turned nine hundred into zero

Nearby the lower slopes are grassy, cows nibble
 about the camera, bells tinkle, the glaciers creep
 like snakes that watch their prey, flowers
 wave their hats, steep cablecars rise
 on every side — recently one line snapt,
 strewing corpses down the glistening slope.
 These mountains only stand, quiet in the light,
 & men kill themselves all over their sides,
 & their place is not known.

3

Mont Blanc yet gleams on high — the power is there,
 the memory rolls thru space & summons
 home, the trees into which the roads push
 are pines, we grew among them. The snows descend
 upon that Mountain; none beholds them there,
 nor when the flakes burn in the sinking sun,
 or the star-beams dart thru them.

A man

doesn't drive a car under a mountain every day.
 It is cool inside Europe's highest mountain,
 beneath considerable masses of rock & earth.
 The road is unusually straight for the Continent,
 over eleven kilometers in length. But
 if to the human mind's imaginings
 silence & solitude were vacancy, this
 painted line across the pavement would be
 the Italian border, the road would now
 slope downward, the air would be warm
 as the first breath of your baby.

John Pass / THREE POEMS

THE PURSUIT OF KNOWLEDGE

I know what I know.
It strikes me as I lie

on the floor to read, one arm
across my forehead, a rectangle
of windows slapped blue, sky-full.

Window, edge to edge entirely
blue, and soft orange light
on the sills and frames
surrounding, of sun.

I do nothing.
I go on reading.
I get what I need
and remember:

I went down close by the tree
where the sun was. The cat
was too. In the branches

it was warm. The cat came over
near my face. A metal-blue
Stellar's jay shuffled
under another tree
in deep dry leaves.

I went some yards, bent down
a branch to get a yellow apple
frozen-through, thawing.
As I did so

another fell. I took two.
I tapped on the window. "Look,"
I said to you, "where the cat is."

Know what I know.

FITFULLY

The leaves blow down and then
the air is still. My only friends

tell me a poem shouldn't be so
perfect. Pieces of the world
are shaken loose in their poems.
They are left hanging.

We argue.

They say the Chinese masters
had nothing else and are perhaps
to be forgiven their perfections.
I sleep fitfully

all night because I love them
and the leaves blow down
and the air is still

shaking.

WORN SURFACES / OLD INJURIES

An overstuffed chair
where heads and hands
at rest have worried
off the pile and cats
have shredded the fabric.

A rotting gutterless edge
of roof.

A grey expanse of water.

Frayed branches of
the leafless weeping
willow.

Split-
ends of hair.

All the weatherings
of attention, of too
much or too little care.

(My dog leapt
unaccountably
out a fifteen-
foot high window.

X-rays displayed
how the leg was broken
under the swelling.)

Under the rain,
the soggy lawn,
the pools on flat
roofs, the dark gleam
of the roads at night,
the soft familiar sag
of the bed

(preoccupied, thorough,
as in my picking up
of the scraps of shingle
windows scatter across the yard)

I favour
a slow-healing
fracture: nerveless
deadened sense

of a companionship
of things. I carry

it awkwardly.
From time to time
it catches on the ground.

Louis Dudek / MORNING LIGHT

The sun, bright lemon from the blinds
falls on the dusty books and papers
of my room.

A thing of white skin and tissue, I
perform yoga on the floor.

Look at my body
drifting in the sun. It dissolves
flaccid as water plates in summer
in the little Niger river.

But the sun
is a changeless metal, the minted light of a star
inside my room.

Kevin Roberts / TWO POEMS

PACKER

Black plank Packer
backs into Ford's Cove
at noon
winching buckets of ice
into Norpac float

a fisherman yells hey Giorgio
hows your sister
right side up for a change
and the squat dark man
crushes an ice ball
flings it at the boat &
more yells shes got round
heels and the Packer crew
forget the winch
toss iceballs at the voices
& fishboats and the bucket
slips
swings and smashes through
the cabin & the skippers out and
barking like a St Bernard &
the crew turn their backs
on the insults shovelling
with easy swings

them bastards got it easy
someone says

ah hell you aint free
with a boss
someone else says
you aint even got the right
to go
bankrupt.

LESSON

It looks easy this
40 ft troller bulling in
to French Creek like it'll
cut clean through & then
a pause
a roar in reverse
white water at the stern
it stops
dead
beside the dock

the first few times you got
everybody yelling you're
floundering like a shot seal

you learn the one
way the boat
kicks
in reverse
way the wheel spins
right or left hand
slowly the boat comes
alive under you
end up trusting your
engine
let the wind crossdrift
you into dock
feeling for that point
in the boat it all moves
about stern to bow

learn to push the boat
up to
the point
where you and the sea
and the boat
meet

Hope Anderson /
THREE POEMS FROM
JUST OCCURRENCES

*"and i come to this
knowing the waste
leaving the rest to love."*

I

i organize the word,
the speech, for its beauty sake
for beauty within the world,
in that world of the amber saxophone
the heart of the world is enfolded,
yet revealed.

things are not separate unto
themselves/wood is fire/it's
the pattern in which we find
ourselves, place becomes luminous
and obscure & where all labour,
all labour ceases.

i sing to you unashamedly
of no subject and there are no
objects.MINE IS FINITE.the breath
goes on, does not conform to thought
changes into splendour, revives the heart.

II

we curl up and die.the
isolation is harsh.it is frosty,
leaves of the rosebush fall,
the phrase stands frozen,
we hold the picture,
you offer cold lips,
they twist the half moon.

(and this is the last
of the dead ones' voices, tonight),
poetry always comes back to us

we remove the frost
from the window, it is the
doing, action shapes the
thaw, your tongue befriends
the firebug

the snowgeese are moving
south, Sonny Rollins translates
his dream, no human form
outside in the thick night,
beer glasses are empty, i wait
again for the voice, a human touch

III

in the bar, we cannot
see the street, she has
Ojibwa eyes, Pierre finds
a name Li Po, She has no mirror.

is naked, the word
made flesh, inside her
the poem, Paradise embodied
destroyed only in the exchange,
some sweetness left in the
stale air, stays in time
in me, in the others
there is no object of Desire

It moves on ahead
into the hard edge
of night

GLENN TOPPINGS REMEMBERED /

Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, December 15, 1977 - January 22, 1978.

Fine Arts Gallery, The University of British Columbia, January 31 - February 24, 1978.



GLENN TOPPINGS is an artist who is still talked about warmly. He was a central figure in the art community when he died in 1972. Greg Snider, of the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, has organized a small exhibition of Toppings' shaped canvases, fibreglass kayaks and sculptures, and his collaborative works. Photographs from the collection of Michael de Courcey give some sense of the milieu in which Glenn produced his last works. Ann Rosenberg has prepared an oral history catalogue with the help of several of Glenn Toppings' friends.

Bibliographical and research assistance was given by Keith Bunnell. Off-printed as a catalogue for GLENN TOPPINGS REMEMBERED, the article will appear in *The Capilano Review* No. 13.

I remember Glenn Toppings as a man who could speak directly with great honesty. I admired the work he did. It has been a pleasure to learn more about Glenn from his friends and associates.

This much is certain. He was a person who projected himself clearly to all who knew him. He was frequently ahead of others in his opinion of what art is or should be, and of the role of the artist. He was prepared to give his energy, ideas and technical skills to others; he was able to articulate well and to live out difficult philosophical positions. His personal integrity was renowned.

The few works that I have been able to see attest to his great interest in the nature of materials and in craftsmanship. They also express artistic preferences: a love of colour that gives way to an intentional sobriety; a depth of glazing and sheen of silver and fibreglass brilliantly polished; a jointing of parts that contribute to a whole; curving convex ridges as though a knife, inserted, had raised up and shaped a tough and resistant skin; tear-shapes, soft circles, rectangular appliqués and, sometimes, peculiar ball-like feet. It is not difficult to sense that all works are from the same hand and mind.

At the time of his death, Glenn was considering a return to personal sculpture.

the black bird flew in thru
an open window of the room behind
his closed eyelids. . . .¹

— AR

PART 1/PAINTINGS AND JEWELRY

(Continuity provided by a taped interview with Colleen Bourke, who was Glenn's wife for eighteen years and a friend up to the time of his death.)

ANN: So, let's get right into it. How long did you know Glenn?

COLLEEN: He was just eighteen. I was in high school and he had finished, though he hadn't graduated. Just back from his third summer logging, he was playing a little pool for money and playing on the ex-Brits, the Britannia Rugby team. After we were married, he worked for Canadian Pacific Airlines and coached their baseball team. He was with them long enough to get his five-year pin and by the time he left he was an executive — the company efficiency expert. In his last year there, three men in their early forties died of either heart attacks or brain hemorrhages — stress related diseases — because the airline had grown very rapidly and the men [former bush pilots] couldn't adapt too well to the pressures. So Glenn said that before he went *that way* he would try something else. The irony is that he died at 41 a death related to the fibreglass he was using.

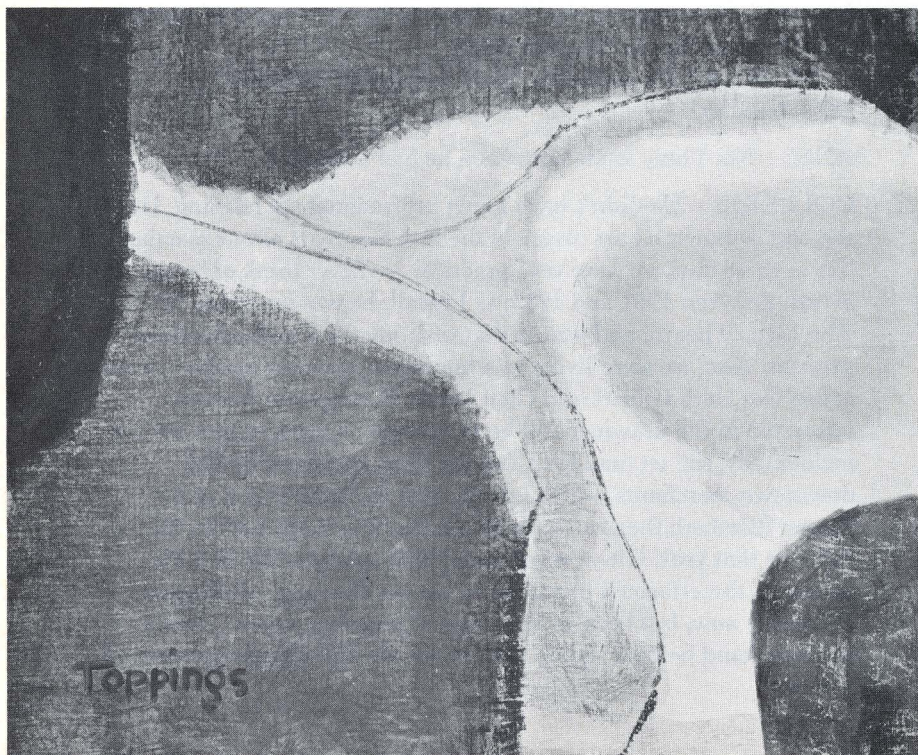
(By the way, did you know Glenn had a cleft chin like Jeff Chandler?

ANN: No, I only knew him when he had a beard.)

COLLEEN: He didn't have much professional art training. He took the odd commercial art course in the first two years of our marriage, but in those days we were very practical — didn't think of being artists. Between 1951 and 1955, as I recall, he was designing sets for The Little Theatre and was at that time involved with *art-related* projects. Also, we were living in a houseboat community that included artists like Herb Gilbert and Glen Lewis. He began to become interested in life drawing, and he took some painting classes. He was, incidentally, the set man for a fashion show sponsored by the downtown merchants, which was the first live production of the Queen Elizabeth theatre. As there was nothing really new to the fashions that year, Glenn emphasized the important colours. He devised a three-faceted board set — you see that type of thing on billboards now, but here, at that time, it was an unknown device — so there could be three quick changes for the three main fashion show colours.

I think it's important to know that Glenn was an East End boy, who had hardly any shoes when he came from the prairies because it was the time of the dust bowl — the height of the Depression: children would put on their bathing suits when they saw a cloud and it always turned out to be dust, not rain. So, on York Street in Kitsilano during the first two months he was here, for him to see the rain on the shining pavement, all the lights glittering, the cars going by, was something special — something that he always remembered.

His parents were working people. His father, who had been a teacher and a farmer, became a milkman here. During the war, his mother had become a welder — or something like that. Afterwards she became a teacher, as she had been on the prairies — a very beloved teacher whose students kept in touch with her. So, eventually Glenn decided to become an artist and, in order to justify that decision to his folks and mine — who thought we were far out because we lived on a houseboat and owned an MG-TC car — he said he was going to take an industrial design course in Europe. We didn't know then that Chicago was the only place you could get that kind of training.

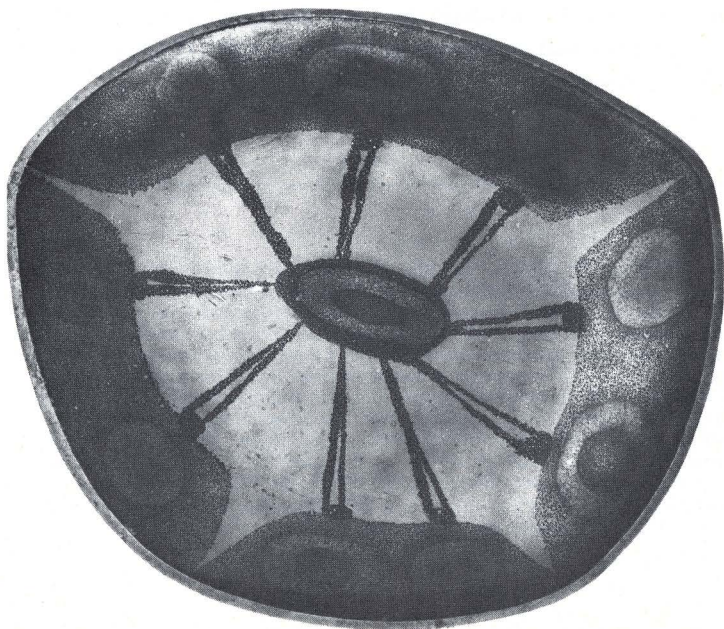


ANN: You went to Europe not knowing what you'd do?

COLLEEN: Yes, we certainly did. We went to Paris and there they'd never heard of industrial design. Glenn enrolled in the Académie de la Grande Chaumière, where a life model was available; but mostly he worked at home and took things to the atelier to be criticized. Soon we moved to Italy, where he did some really good paintings which he showed at a three-man exhibition at the Galleria Numero in Florence in 1957. I still have one painting which he refused to sell.²

ANN: And then you came back from Europe?

COLLEEN: Yes. We ended up coming back sooner than we had planned — back home via the Panama on a freighter. We'd sold our houseboat previously and there was no money left: we had to stay with parents for a while. Then we had a three-way partnership with a little jewelry-making company and stamped out copper earrings (hand enamelled) by the gross. I can't remember the quantities, but it was *ridiculous*. Soon we got into heavier copper stuff that involved many glazes and firings and sold for high prices, back then. The Dorays still have an ashtray that would give you an idea of what the things were like.



We next were living on Howe Street and the walls were peeling, so Glenn made a big canvas to cover the worst wall. He also worked on his jewelry and worked as a checker for Canadian National on the waterfront. As usual, people were trying to hire him and as usual he was resisting — trying to remain on a more casual basis.³ He stayed with CN for quite a while, then in 1962 he started installing shows for the New Design Gallery and working as part-time director for the Arts Club. By 1964, he was doing installations for the Vancouver Art Gallery and the UBC Fine Arts Gallery.⁴ But it was frustrating the way that people called on him when they had impossible jobs to accomplish on limited budgets. I gather from people who are more sensitive than I am, that his brilliance was in knowing at what level to hang works, in properly organizing a gallery room so that individual works were respected and, of course, in being very inventive with cheap materials.

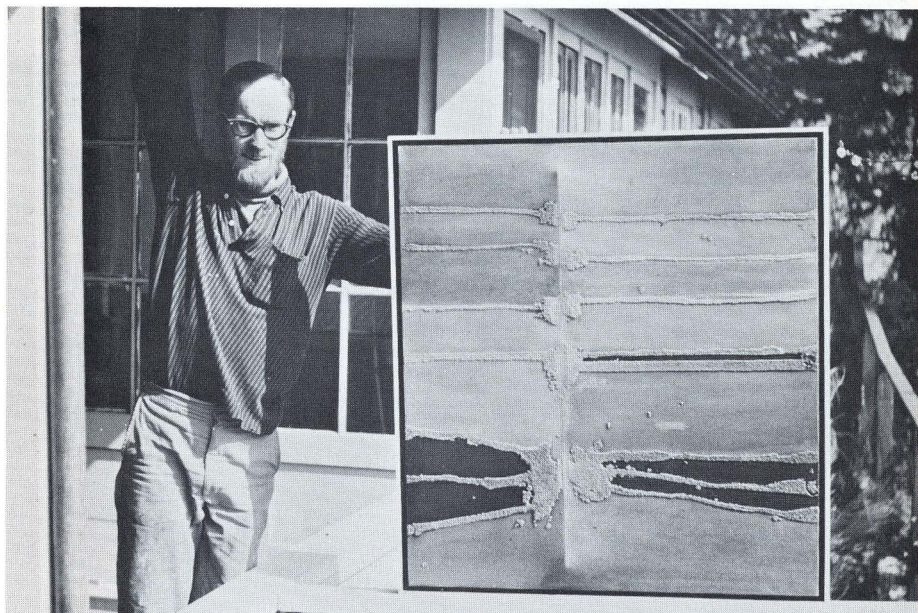
While he worked at the Arts Club he painted quite a bit, and, after we moved to Sunshine Falls, Glenn told Alvin Balkind, whom he'd worked for at The Club, and Abe Rogatnick, of the New Design Gallery, that he would like to have a show. They agreed because they were friends — perhaps they had some idea about his paintings — I remember when we brought them by boat to our house they were just stunned when they saw what Glenn was doing. So, in April, 1962, he had his first one-man exhibition at the New Design Gallery and was favourably reviewed.

NOTE: "Neither the titles . . . nor the colours, which may be predominantly purple or orange-red nor the forms refer literally to the sea, yet . . . the illusion of vast underwater spaces is unmistakable. By treating the canvas so that it resists or absorbs the paint, Glenn Toppings has created a surface now gleaming, now mat, as when sunshine strikes the water or submerged rocks cast shadows into it. . . . The surface is further varied by incrustations of plaster, following the current trend in which sculpture and painting mingle. . . . Another device, which appears to be original with Toppings, is the placing of slats behind the canvas to push it forward into slight ridges. At the point where it is so stretched, it forms a lighter streak. . . . In other instances the slats produce wave-like crests or crosses. Whatever the effect, the viewer, placed at a reasonable distance is not aware how it has been managed, so that no suspicion of gadgetry mars his impression. . . ."⁵

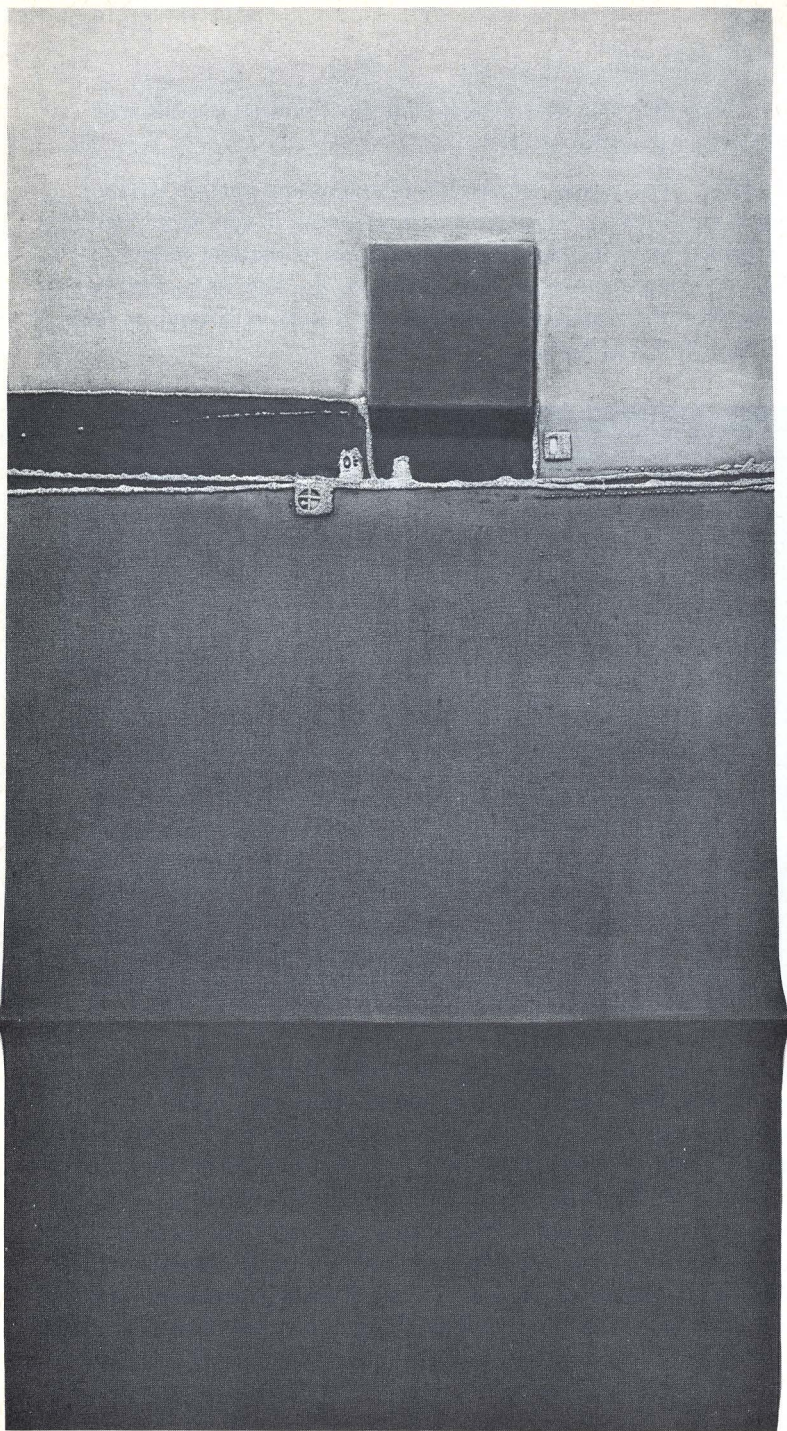
— JOAN LOWNDES

ANN: Then the 1962 New Design Gallery exhibition was the real start of Glenn's painting career?

COLLEEN: Yet, it was: he had lots of exhibitions and his works progressed very quickly. The first ones he did were in very seductive colours [pinks, mauves, pale greens]⁶ and soon he thought these coloured ones were too pretty — too facile; by the time he had his last show with Dorothy Cameron in Toronto, he'd worked through to dark colours like black and brown.



The artists back there were reasonably respectful of his paintings, but treated him like a hick. The most awful thing was Gerald Gladstone taking him around and saying, "Well, my boy, how much is this painting or that painting?" — and I think they were all the same price, about three hundred dollars and then Gerald giving him a lecture on pricing. "You don't understand," he said. "They should all be priced differently; some people want bargains while others want something a little bit better, and so you see, if you'd priced your show . . . blah, blah, blah." He didn't sell anything in the show and a lot of other things put him off — like how Toronto artists fawned over the



critics and how we were given a fantastically expensive party by people we didn't even know. We were hicks, I guess, but we thought *they* were dilettantes getting prestige for themselves.

The Inn on the Park, just new then, asked for some of the paintings and so Glenn let them have several. They were sent back in a damaged condition; they hadn't even been properly crated.

The only bright note was in a letter from a woman who likened his paintings to the *Japanese Garden of the Seven Rocks*. Glenn didn't reveal himself too much, although we had many heated discussions about art, but I know he often felt *misunderstood* — though not in the sense of being put down, nor in the sense of being hurt, because he was very secure in what he did. But he did pity people with a limited viewpoint, especially people who thought that because he had done something like the shaped canvases, that he should progress — proceed — in the way they expected. He wouldn't argue with such people: he'd just go ahead and do something else, and it was soon after the Dorothy Cameron Show that he more or less gave up painting.

NOTE: "I remember the day that he came back from his Toronto show. He was really fed up with the gallery scene and he told me he was not going to paint again and, to a large extent, he didn't. The hucksterism in Toronto really got to him, and the Inn in the Park when they were after this and that."

(from a taped interview with Bud Doray)

ANN: The shows and the reviews kept coming — 7, 8, 9, 10

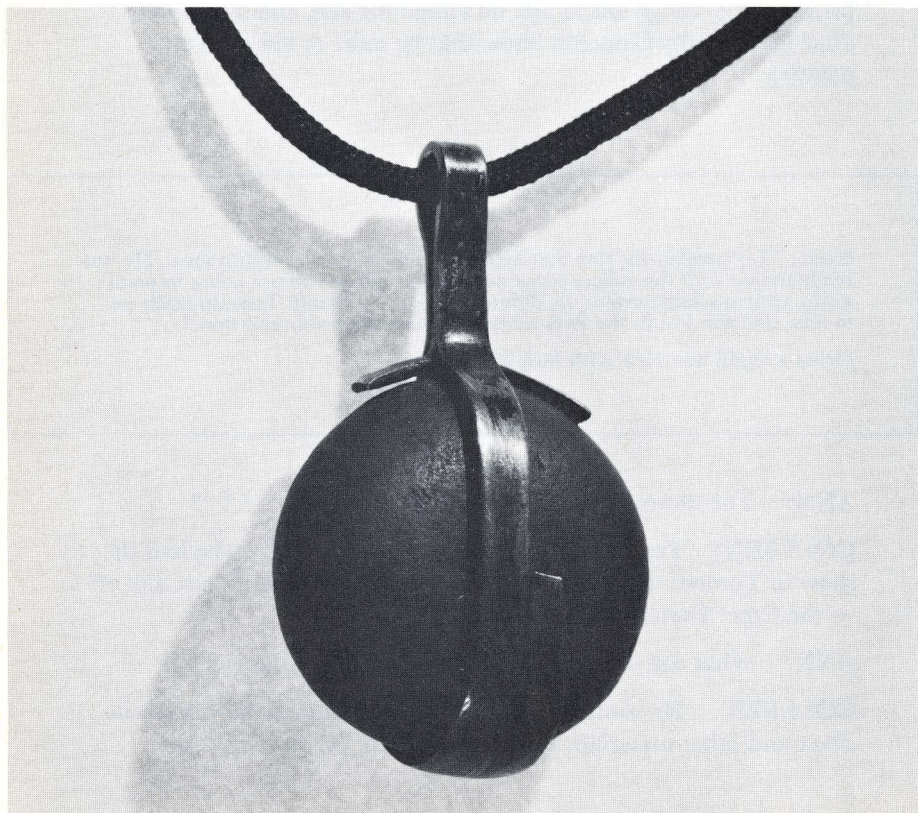
COLLEEN: Yes, but he was getting turned off. When he had the show in Toronto with Dorothy Cameron, the scene really put him off — the hype! Even in those days. . . .

ANN: What else do you remember him doing at this time?

COLLEEN: He continued to make jewelry, though now it was in silver and other materials. Perhaps it was the beginning (of the

expression) of that attitude which turned him away from the *art object*. It was a delight to him to find a humble pebble on the beach and elevate it to the stature of a gem. He took a lot of trouble with his pendants: he would make his own clasps and usually suspended them on a silken shoelace with silver pieces bent around the end somehow.

ANN: I've certainly always seen a connection between Glenn's jewelry and his sculpture — particularly the kayaks. And it's funny you should mention the elevation of stone to gem, because Audrey Doray told me that she had a ring of his that she wore for years. It had a copper rectangular face with three holes in it, looking a little like a conglomerate rock, and when she wore it, people would ask her if the rubies, the diamonds — *the gems* — had fallen out. I guess that would be another proof of how his work caused certain reactions that were



not intended. And I guess, too, that by about 1967 he was changing direction. . . .

COLLEEN: Yes. I know he was thinking about doing sculpture and perhaps he was already collaborating with Brian Fisher on the Montreal Airport mural (and he'd done some things for Audrey Doray). Then we found ourselves talking about "separation" one day and, almost to our surprise, we went ahead and did it. We had always gotten on. At that time, however, our work was taking us in different directions. We grew apart at the time that Intermedia was beginning — a thing which I was more directly involved in than he was.



NOTE: The reviews of Toppings' work were generally favourable and combine with other information to give certain insights unavailable through the interviews.* Meanwhile some negative criticism offered by writers who didn't know Glenn's work or milieu, prompted him to examine his own motives for making art (see Notes 9, 10). Several years after he made his decision to strike out in new directions, his words (as quoted) reflect a distrust of the art scene:

"The reason I abandoned painting is that it's most distracting and disturbing to have an exhibition in the hope that there's a community of literate people only to discover that literacy is so limited that you say to yourself: 'Am I doing it for that?'"

"I found that I was more concerned with three-dimensional possibilities and with environmental factors than decoration. I'm not saying that paintings are just decoration but this is the way they're used whether you want it or not."

Anon., "Film lures our artists from painting and sculpture." Ref. to Glenn working with Tom Shandel. *The Vancouver Sun*, March 26, 1971.

Another quote articulates his reason for moving into collaborations:

"I don't even think about art any longer, just about things and enjoying them . . . I have to find some way of living with the fact that I have a propensity to make objects. . . . And I like to see what happens when two people who have relatively well-developed ideas about what they want, are able to co-operate."

Joan Lowndes, "Singular sculptors," Rev. of Directions '69', The Vancouver Art Gallery, September 1969. *The Province* (Spotlight section), September 12, 1969, p. 8.

As late as 1964 Glenn still shaped his canvases aesthetically:

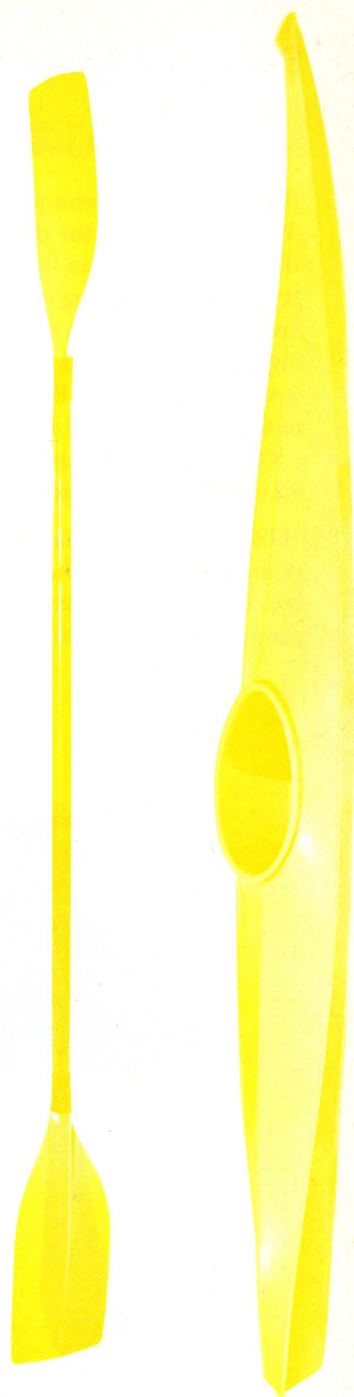
"I want to eliminate any reference to the realities of the outside world, to be concerned only with the purely aesthetic forms in a composition that are not limited to the flat picture plane."

Anon. "Glenn Toppings," *Western Homes and Living*, (April, 1964), pp. 8-9.

By 1967, he had turned back to the real world to find a suitable outlet for his austere vision.

*One learns, for example, that the stretched canvases were: "a canvas sheath stretched over carefully placed wooden ribs creating taut surfaces and contours which impose a volume on the space about the painting"; and that they were given colour and texture by: "Latex, Varathane, Polyfilla, and oils, imposing one material upon another to expose the nature of each."

New Design Gallery, "for immediate release: Glenn Toppings at the New Design Gallery, October 16th-November 2nd." [Press release, 1963.]



PART 2 / KAYAKS AND SCULPTURE

(Continuity provided by taped interviews with Colleen Bourke, Joan and Justine Haggerty, and Jackie Haliburton.)

JOAN: I met Glenn properly (although we'd known each other slightly before) on the day of the first moon landing in the summer of 1968. It was really an incredible day — we were at Carole [Itter] and Brian Fisher's playing croquet *and* watching TV. When those guys finally landed, I reacted very violently: I was *really upset* — felt *really* invaded — and Glenn picked up on that in a way. The next day we went up to Sunshine Falls, and that was the beginning of our relationship. It lasted about four years.

Glenn didn't have any children, but he had Justine and he felt she was his spiritual daughter. . . .

JUSTINE: I was only about four or five when I first knew him. I remember Glenn as the most considerate person I've ever met. He was into two things: his work and people. He was *always* doing things for people, and he used to make household appliances for us. I can



remember a couple of things that happened when he was here. I can remember especially the Christmas at my grandmother's when I got the table; Glenn looked particularly proud to see how pleased I was with it. I guess he just decided that I needed a table . . .

JOAN: Not exactly. I said, "Just go and buy a table!" I remember being impatient: it took months and months for this table to *materialize*. I mean, I didn't know he was making this *piece*. He said, "I'll just knock her up something at the shop."

JUSTINE: It's so beautiful. I never did understand how that thing could be wood: it's so smooth. . . .

JOAN: Well, the top's laminated and it's sanded, right? . . .

ANN: Why did he make you a cloud, do you know?

JUSTINE: He just wanted to make something for a kid that was *really alive*.

ANN: And the other story?

JUSTINE: We had an orange and white cat called Young Man. He was very independent and curious, and one day when Glenn was taking a bath in our orange bathtub the cat came in, walked over to the bathtub and jumped in. We laughed at that!

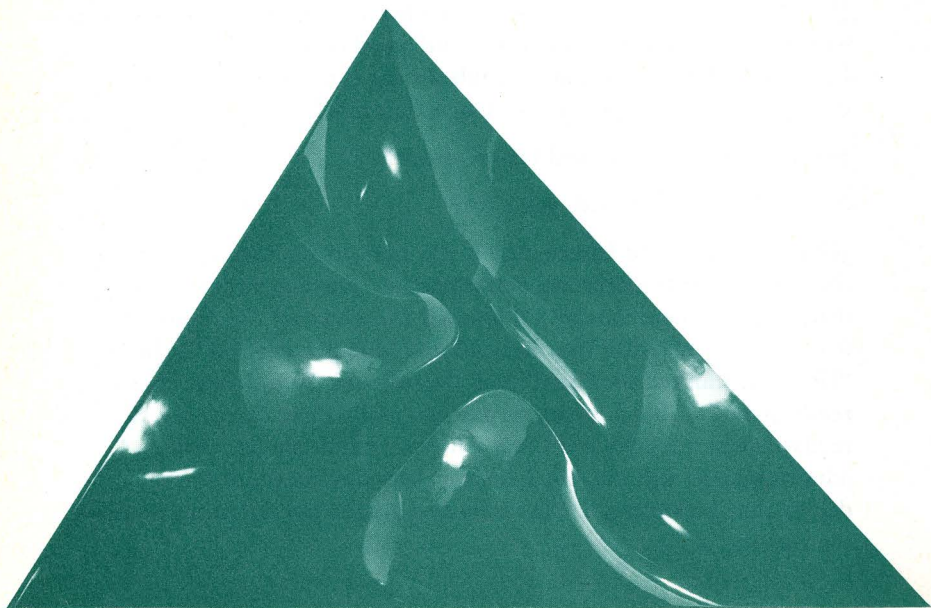
JOAN: The cat matched Glenn's beard.

ANN: Did he play with you a lot?

JOAN: He played frisbee, and if you went to The Grange at lunch time or in the late afternoon, you'd find him playing. I remember driving down there the day I'd finished *Daughters of the Moon* (a five year project), and they were *all* out there playing and I yelled out, "Hey, I've finished the book!" and they all said, "Oh, Joan! That's *really great*." — but I mean, no one was really there *except me*. So really he was an artist and I had a literary mind. He was very admiring and I was too, but I couldn't give him *feedback* to the degree that Jackie could. I'm visual and artistic but not in my bones the way she is. . . .

ANN: What work was he doing when he lived with you?

JOAN: When I was involved with him, he was sitting on committees to form policy at Intermedia.¹¹ And the kayaks happened: I remember him collecting all the data he could find on kayaks, then selecting the bits and pieces that he liked and combining them. He collaborated with Dennis Vance for example on *Fat Emma* — a big brown special thing you could ride in, which he spent weeks and weeks finishing: there would be one bubble and he would resurface the whole thing. Then, the Selman/Toppings *Black Night Rip*. When I knew him he was involved with many different things. He made his last piece of sculpture when he was living with us — a green piece that he sold to Brian Fisher. It fits into a corner.



Glenn was usually in his studio and he was always teaching people. I just know he would hate to be made into a myth. He would resent his friends for doing that. Even when he was alive, they used to speak of him as being a *superb craftsman*, and he hated that. And he would say there were people who would come into his shop who knew a hundred times more about fibreglass than he did — *real boat builders*.¹² He didn't even like having his photograph taken because he felt that part of him would be stolen, and yet the irony of it is that there was something about him that made people *want* to eulogize him — perhaps it had something to do with the fact that somewhere along the line he'd decided to be a good person all of the time. I don't think I can come to the bottom of — go deep into — *why* he put down being made into an image and yet, at the same time, (in some sense) *needed* to be made into one.

When our relationship started, he was out behind a packing crate at The Grange and in the end that's where he went back to — to a monastic kind of life. I didn't find it a problem sharing him around because I was involved in my life and work too. When I was with him, I did a very thorough *domestic trip*, yet I don't think that was what he really wanted; it was still the Sixties, and we didn't create as flexible a situation as we might have now. I mean, now, he could have lived behind his packing crate and come to visit. I think that's what blew it in the end. He didn't express the little things, thought it wrong to be resentful and so, suddenly, one day, it was just over! And even after his death, everybody misses him so much.

JACKIE: I knew Glenn in the last year of his life when he was back living at The Grange. It was really *awful* there, and everyone thinks it contributed to his death. Sometimes he stayed with me. . . .

ANN: So, he never took any precaution against fibreglass?

JACKIE: I guess he didn't and, talking to him, I could see that *not to* was a part of his philosophy of living. It seems that he really didn't care about himself that way, yet he cared about other people. I guess he never thought it would happen: no one ever does, *really*. When I knew him he wasn't *making* anything: he was teaching at U.B.C., working at Metromedia and doing various things for The Vancouver Art Gallery. But he told me he was going to start making things — I have a list somewhere that I wrote down the day after he died.¹³ I do remember that he was going to make a kind of ball that you could

look into — a series of them. . . . I think he knew he was dying (maybe not yet consciously), and so he was in a rush. That feeling of creativity — there's something about it that is eternal.

I didn't think he was living properly, and I knew he was putting a lot of energy into community things and other people. He was involved in beginning video with Dallas Selman and Werner Aellen, did workshops and showed other people how to use it. He made two videos that I remember: one where he compared three fairs — the PNE, a country pleasure fair and one I was involved in at Trout Lake, East Vancouver. It was a really nice comparison because the PNE was all *hard hype*; the pleasure fair quiet and slow; and the last, city-like — *city-ish* — with lots of children laughing. The other one was about playschools.

People thought of him as a truly quiet person and, when I knew him, he may have been trying to go back to something more *introspective*. He felt he had probably killed himself because he lived the way he did, and he was *really regretful*, but I suppose he couldn't have lived *any other way*. He worked right up to the end and the night before he died, he phoned to cancel out on The Cecil.¹⁴ He said, "I just don't think I should." I guess he just wanted to die in his own place at The Grange.

COLLEEN: Glenn made this fibreglass corner piece, an adapter. It had a little plate on it and it was an attempt to go *against the preciousness of art*. I remember he was excited by it because it was also an intellectual statement to other artists. I think the only time I ever saw it was in the room of the funeral home where his body was. There was this fake Constable on the wall and someone brought this piece in and put it into the corner: it was the only real thing in the room.¹⁵

NOTE: In the *artscanada* note that appeared shortly after Glenn's death (see Selected Sources, below) there was a photocollage that included a view of Glenn's own table, upon which was an allusion to the still controversial message inscribed on the "adapter piece." In neat *Letraset* the maker posed Glenn's *life-as-art-object* with the words:

Glenn Toppings 1931-1972

DONE

PACIFIC RIM/WAKE

For Glenn Toppings:

to be chanted by the members of The Grange.

black

A n g e r

w i n g

black

H a n d

w i n g

black

B r i d g e

w i n g

black

W i n d

w i n g

black

E y e

w i n g

black

B o a t

w i n g

black

C a v e

w i n g

black

N i g h t

w i n g

black

T e a r

w i n g

black

M o u t h

w i n g

black

C o c k

w i n g

black

A n g e l

w i n g

black

C u n t

wing

black

A n c h o r

wing

black

T o n g u e

wing

black

T r e e

wing

black

L a u g h t e r

wing

black

w h i s p e r

wing

black

p r a y e r

wing

black

c a n c e r

rising

*

the black bird flew in, thru
an open window of the room behind
his closed eye-lids

the wind the blackbird's wings make
lift'd up his arms
his body itself felt lighter

high above the winds the winding
Fraser the cold night air leaves
his blacken'd wings

*

"The sea has no renewal no forgetting
no variety of death
is silent with the silence of a single note"

*

A
Wake

Awake
Children

BLACKBIRD
WINGS

SHADOW
YOUR BREATH

AWAKE!

A
Wake

O
Death

!

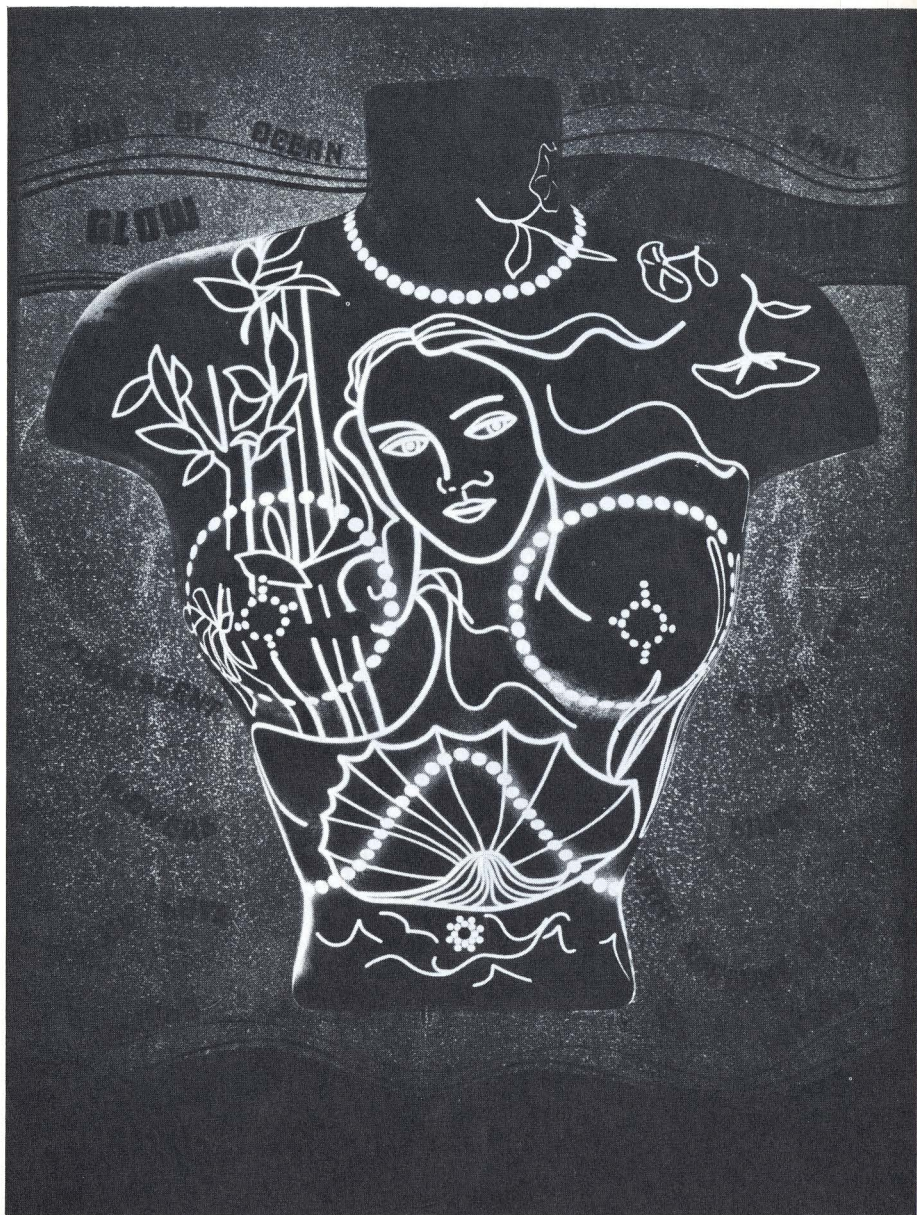
— ROY KIYOOKA

Spring '72¹⁶

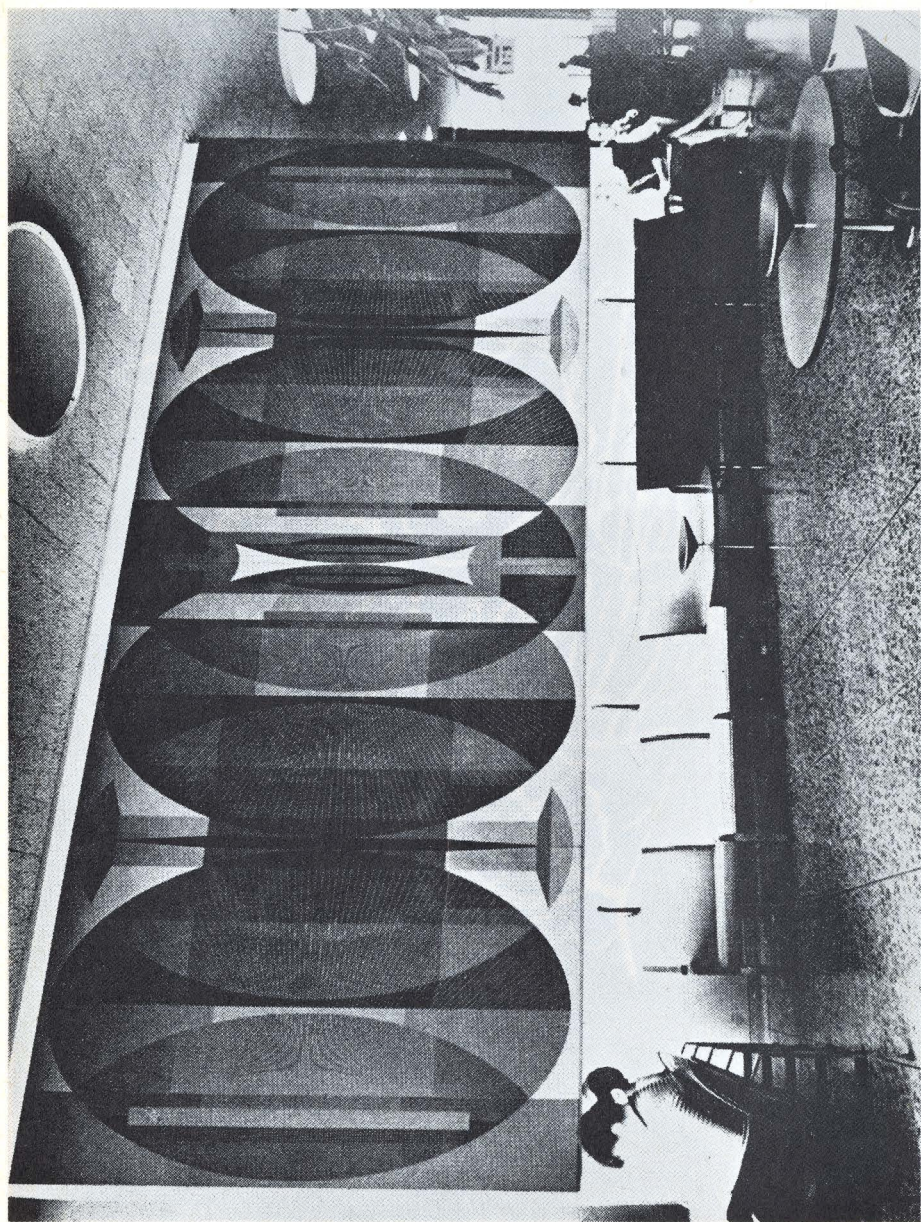
NOTE: Glenn made a black wing sculpture that hung for a while on one of the concrete pilings beneath Granville Bridge on Granville Island. It was, perhaps, taken down by The City; in any event, it is lost. Roy, who was not living in Vancouver throughout all of Glenn's later years, had no knowledge of the sculpture and yet it is powerfully evoked by his chant.

PART 3 / *COLLABORATIONS*

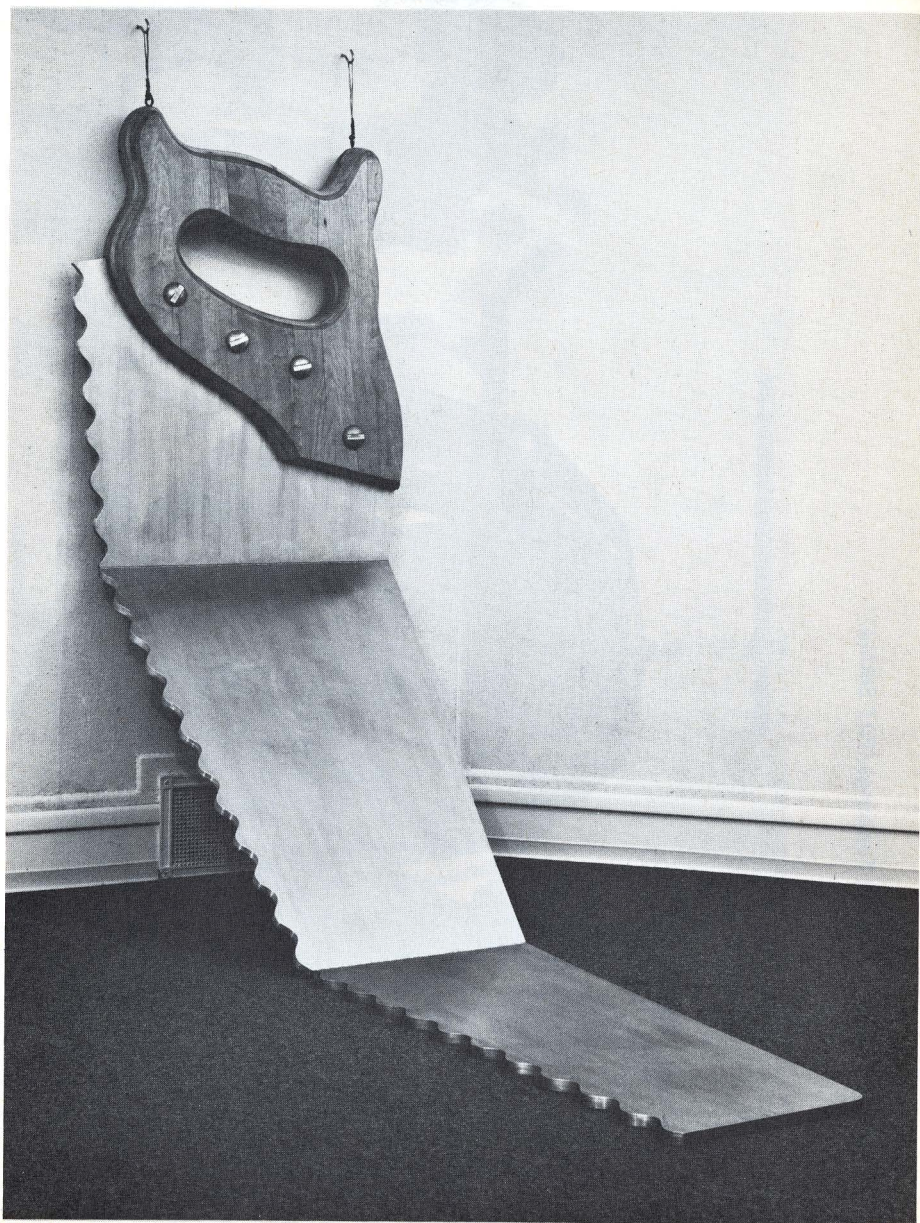
Audrey Doray / *REBIRTH OF VENUS*¹⁷



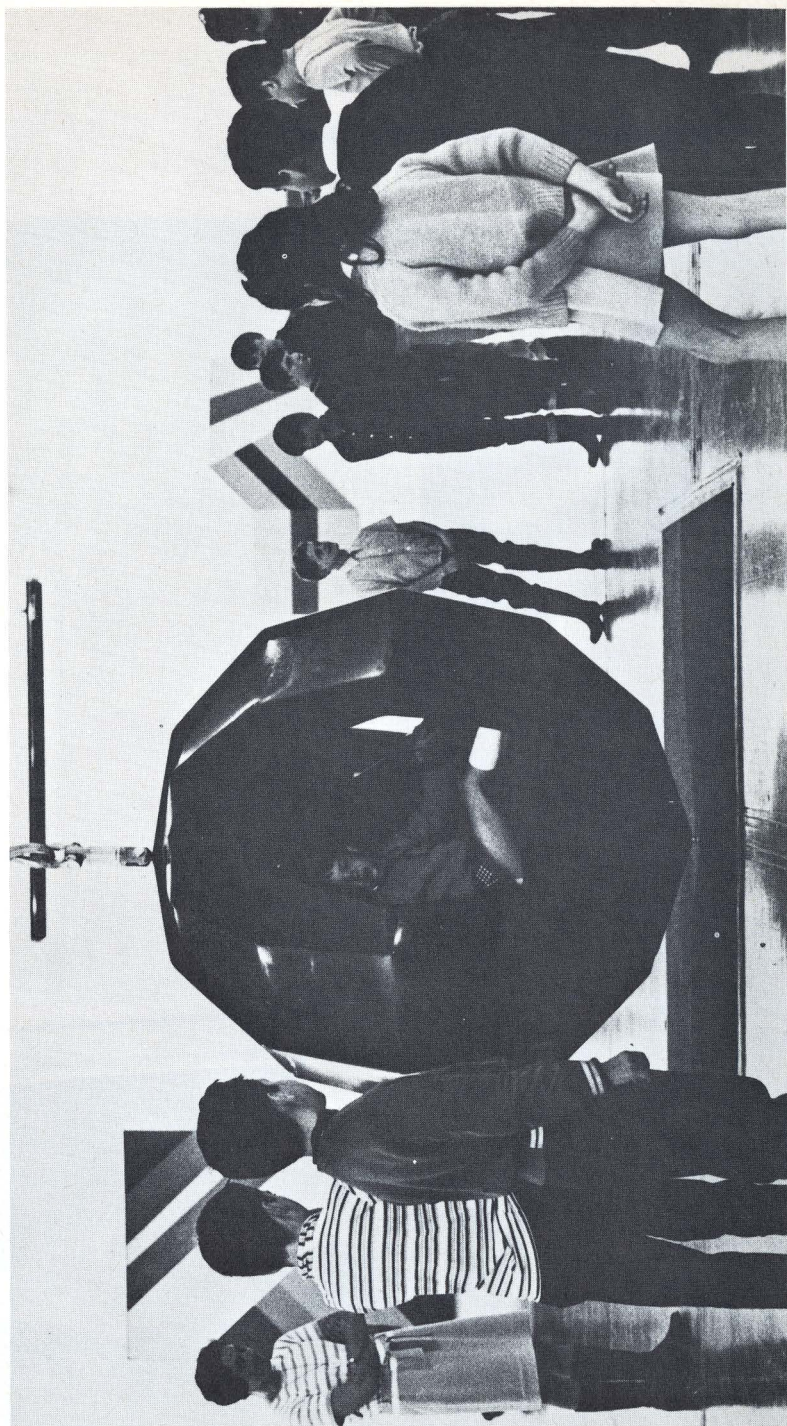
Brian Fisher/NIGHT FLIGHT (AT MONTREAL AIRPORT)¹⁸



Claes Oldenburg/SAW (hard version)¹⁹



Dennis Vance and Glenn Toppings/FAT EMMA²⁰

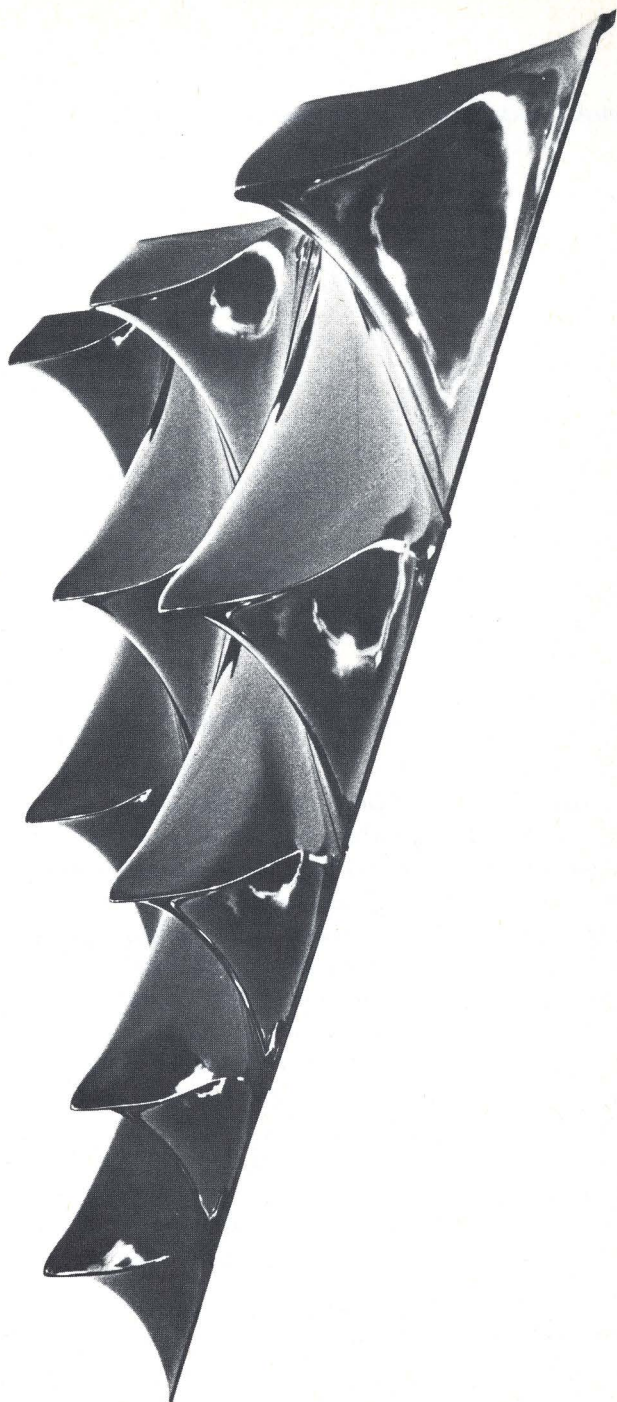


“One day Dallas and I were crossing the bridge on our way to the pub when we started to talk about making an ocean. We got so intrigued that we turned around and came back and did a couple of sketches. It turned out that what we had in mind was very close. Both of us knew how difficult it was to collaborate but it worked out surprisingly easily and with no compromise. We didn’t settle for the middle ground — we were both on high ground and achieved something greater. . . . It’s one of the most satisfying things I’ve done. . . .

“Fibreglass could possibly be exhibited out of doors; it could stand exposure if certain minimum requirements were met, for example, a daily waxing.

“I don’t like permanent sculpture. Fibreglass is permanent but the environment doesn’t have to be. Fibreglass is so light it could easily be moved from one street to another. Our exposure to everything is limited but if we see sculpture in a new environment, it reveals a different aspect.”

(based on a Joan Lowndes interview with Glenn Toppings.)²²



PART 4 / GLENN TOPPINGS AT LARGE

(it would have been nice — but impossible — to include statements by all the artists and gallery workers Glenn knew well. However, while we regret not having contacted Brian Fisher, Dallas Selman, Herb Gilbert, and the members of Topping's immediate family, we feel this sample of opinion will create interest in a fuller study of the artist.)



CAROLE ITTER/First of all, Glenn kindly recommended me for a job in scenic design before we had even met; later, I took Colleen's place at The New Design Gallery and saw a good deal of both of them after that — mostly at Sunshine Falls. For those of us who hadn't had much experience with that sort of thing it was really exciting; they had the best of urban and rural environments *together*. You'd go by boat for one, two, or several days, and there would be good food, good liquor and good talk (mostly about art). Glenn offered encouragement to younger people.

Once, Brian and I, my sister and Glenn went across Canada. We were seven days on the road in a Volkswagen that couldn't go very fast and we discovered that Glenn was the best entertainer because he remembered all the ribald songs that he had learned in the East End

as a kid, and he could sing them for hours. And I remember how he was always *there* in every situation, doing something about it. I see him now employing the rope (for all our things were tied on top) and remember *just how* he did it.

He had a huge respect for everyone he talked to and that's how he encouraged. Let me give you an example: I wanted to fly planes, and when we got to Montreal (where he was working with Brian, finishing the mural at Montreal Airport), Glenn bought a sportscar and let me drive it. I felt I was testing it, so I drove as hard as I could. I took a corner fast and he said, "You'll have no trouble getting your pilot's licence." I really went on with *more confidence*.

I also remember a fine idea for an exhibition he had when he was teaching at S.F.U. He wanted to have heavy-duty machinery all over the campus, treating it like large scale sculpture to be looked at. Insurance complications prevented the exhibition. Too bad!

ROY KIYOOKA/Looking back on it, I think the person who was most like Glenn was Rick Gomez. They both had a kind of stand-offishness toward the art scene and they were men who were not verbal. They were emphatic at the level of craft, both being exceptionally intelligent with their hands: it was the area in which they trusted themselves most. Dallas Selman could relate to both of them, but he had a different turn of mind. Eventually the suspicion that Glenn had of the art world had the unfortunate effect of undercutting his belief in his work as art. It was a *boat* or it was *this*, but he had great difficulty in calling what he did *art*. I believe that his essential rejection of art denied him, to a certain extent, an aesthetic.

Glenn and I had our contentions because he saw me as playing the art game. I lived next door, but I was older than the others at The Grange and had been doing things for years — I kept my independence. The space that Glenn had was a co-operative space in the sense that it was the studio where all the tools that people could share were kept. I think that was an important thing that Glenn and his studio-mates accomplished. It was a place where younger artists went in their formative years.

There was something about Glenn's art that made me uncomfortable. The most telling occasion involved a chess game. We were using a chess set he had carved and it was very intelligent in the modification of the standard chess piece designs, but the chessmen were very awkward to play with. Like him, they were tall and lean; because they

were made of light cedar, they always wanted to topple. I found it frustrating to deal with this when trying to play chess, but people have innately different senses of scale, and Glenn's differed from my own. I think there were few people who would disagree that in the late Sixties Glenn was an important figure, but as an artist he was just beginning.

I think, too, that he was a teacher in the most important sense. First of all, he was willing to work with people, and you have to learn contact with someone. To get away from a literate base to a sensate base, you learn through the act of doing, and Glenn was a *practiced someone* to watch. He was a fabricator: he could put things together. His curriculum was the operating principle of the U.B.C. Studio Program for some years after his death.

GORDON PAYNE/When I think of Glenn, I think Softball. Stretch (his baseball pseudonym) was a great first baseman. The first team we had was the Granville Grange Zephyrs. And The Grange was the studio inhabited by Gary Lee-Nova, Dallas Selman, Roy Kiyooka and others. For a time I saw a lot of Glenn; my own relationship with him was based on a personal rapport. We were good friends; he was a gentlemanly guy.

A gentle but omnipotent wind summons its god of the lightning ball
and thunder wand to its source in the south.

PRAYER

- Oh God of the perfect win loss record and .666 batting average,
hear this invocation from this inferior .405 average first baseman
- Return this gentle Zephyr's velocity that it might subdue the High
wind, the Angels, and six other Kosmic forces in a tournament to be
held on August 19th, 20th, 21st and 22nd
- This joust of Kosmic karmas will benefit the Peoples Defense Fund
and the Feed In in equal parts
- Join the god of the bunt and the change of pace Dazzy Vance that
you both may gust, for a wind that blows alone is uncontrolled
- Oh indefatigable [sic] arm, communicate with me on the microwaves of
Bell.

Your obedient servant of the first gate to the eternal diamond,

Horatio (Stretch) Toppings²³

(addressed to Gordon "Give 'em" Payne, former Z. pitcher)



WERNER AELLEN/Although he wasn't one of the main people at Intermedia, he was one of the *movers*: when there was energy required, Glenn was always there. At meetings when we were discussing a show, for example, he could be a catalyst or coagulant, helping people toward their own decisions. He was a good listener and would give attention to anyone who had a creative urge. When we had our three shows at The Vancouver Art Gallery he was always *there*, even though his things were not involved, assisting Dave Rimmer in setting up the TV wall or whatever was required.

He became curious about video at the time Metromedia was starting in The Grange. He would take a machine and go out to try something. There were a lot of novices around, people with very little artistic talent. Glenn would take time with these people and I really looked up to him for that.

I know that he wished video could be more like film — with each frame exact. Video, as such, was not Glenn's medium because at that time it was so primitive, but he did experiment with it. I certainly remember the two videos that Jackie Haliburton mentioned and another with some artists on the grass in front of The Grange.



GARY LEE-NOVA/What was occurring in Vancouver among the artists in the late Sixties was experimentation in moving from traditional forms like painting and sculpture into visual art that existed in a different form of time: film time, video time, quarter-inch-reel-to-reel-tape time. And because all that technology was so fresh and really didn't come with built-in systems, the materials made at that time in these media very, very rapidly disappeared. First there was the *context* of Intermedia public exhibitions in Victoria and Vancouver in which such materials appeared; then they were exposed and dispersed throughout the community of artists. None of them, fortunately or unfortunately, were treated very precious as were *works* in traditional forms like painting and sculpture. The temporary, temporal ephemeral art forms were definitely coming into sharp focus then, as was the environmental piece in new media.



I think that Glenn used video in a dynamic way, especially when he was teaching at S.F.U. and later at U.B.C. he got the students into acts of seeing and having visual experiences through the aid of video, instead of the more traditional way of introducing art students to the visual world through the medium of pen and pencil. All this went by in a blur (and anyway I was very young when I knew Glenn at The Grange) so I can't remember my exact response at the time. But while I can't pull anything specific out of my memory, I can say that what Glenn was doing with video seemed quite *right and significant* for the time.

TOM BURROWS/My history with Glenn goes way back to the time when he had finished a series of stretched canvases for the Dorothy Cameron Gallery. For some reason, he received negative responses, which put him off, and so he started stretching canvas around frames to build his boats. He was living a rather extreme existence at Sunshine Falls which excited me then, and which may have influenced my present life style on Hornby Island.

He told me stories about his days in the logging camps — how he used to sleep in long-house bunks with airtight heaters. There would be about twenty men in a bunk house. You'd throw matches into the heaters and wake up to them bouncing and roaring. Then everyone would go to work driving trucks down the logging roads to the wharfs, and sometimes brakes would go and the trucks would go off the road. How he *transposed* to the art world, I have no idea!

I'll never forget how he helped me out the December before he died. I'd been squatting on the Dollarton Mud Flats and, just before my house was to be destroyed, I decided to move it further out onto the flats. Glenn showed up and, like a foreman with his logging skills, showed us how to move this mass of materials. He certainly wasn't healthy, but he was out there *doing it*. It was an amazing feat.

And of course I saw him when I came back from England in 1969 and soon we were both working in the Fine Arts Studio Program at U.B.C. By then I was making sculpture and he was a grand source of ideas. He had an amazing conception of how to use materials and he was pretty free with his information. We were working together and he was bringing to our work the experiences he'd had at S.F.U. at the time of the P.S.A. Department revolution. When he set up the program for U.B.C., at first I couldn't understand what was in his head, and yet soon it became clear that he was in favour of student control of the program. In the year after his death, I was acting chairman of the studio department and I instituted all of Glenn's ideas. He was sort of a unionist/anarchist. He was involved with such things as the formation of the Canadian Artists Representation (C.A.R.).²⁴

And I'll tell you something else: the day before he died, he put something to me which seemed to reflect a habit of his thought. He was very interested in television and saw the interviewer, or the people controlling the programs, as having an inordinate amount of power in the interpretation of a situation. At that time, I was doing video and he had done some too. He said this to me clearly: "Be careful about interpreting people's ideas when you're in a position of power." So here I am, ironically, making this statement.

DORIS SHADBOLT/He was a person who became increasingly involved, increasingly able to give his qualities of concern and so he was often asked, by whatever social agencies or energies were trying to make themselves felt, to lend a hand. And I remember that shortly before he died the Vancouver Art Gallery was organizing Art Probe. It was at the time when the New Democratic Government came into power and everyone was concerned about the changes that such a party would bring — wondering, for example, if there would be more support for the arts than there had been under Social Credit. And, oh, you'd hear that Rosemary Brown was interested, or someone else, and there was hope in the air, so the VAG decided to organize a forum for expression and opinion. It was Tony Emery's idea. Soon there were a lot of pink and green papers going around — questionnaires. Everyone was to have an opinion and a voice in this great thing at the gallery. Glenn seemed to be the logical person to ask to undertake the co-ordination of the thing. He'd just come back from a Canada Council job. He came to one or two meetings, but he had to opt out.

GLENN TOPPINGS/

There was a time when painting was a documenting thing. The painter used contemporary situations, historic, religious and so on, like Rembrandt's documentation with portraits. We as artists are using every medium available to us to facilitate the recording of time. Film is more kinetic sculpture, it's closer than video to a high art form.²⁵

STATEMENT

1972

It is not possible to actually believe that the romance of The Garret still exists. Art galleries are museums and should not attempt to be "to day" because "to day" is out there, not *in* anywhere.

Why don't we realize the priorities are so critical? There is no time for contemplation until we have dealt with hysteria. Why do we categorize when what is needed is communication; where is our humanity in the face of isolation and alienation.²⁶

— GLENN TOPPINGS

FOOTNOTES/

(quotes from articles and other materials are exactly reproduced except where otherwise indicated)

- ¹ Roy Kiyooka, "Pacific Rim/Wake (for Glenn Toppings)," *transcanadaletters* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1975), unpaginated.
- ² Audrey Doray remembers Toppings' first paintings as resembling dry fresco. Glenn may have been influenced by the frescoes he was seeing in Florence.
- ³ People were anxious to hire Glenn and to promote him because of his great honesty as an employee. Bud (Victor) Doray told me that when Glenn worked at the CN docks as a checker — a position in which many indulge in a little pilfering — he "wouldn't have stolen a banana let alone a coconut." Glenn further amazed Bud by scrupulously reporting the tiny income he made as a projectionist at the Medical Centre.
- ⁴ Many people (including Abe Rogatnick and Alvin Balkind) have stressed Glenn's fine abilities as an exhibition installer, noting especially that he had a "way with materials." Doris Shadbolt noted that he was the person The Vancouver Art Gallery went to when they had technical problems. "At that time there was no restoration facility around, [and occasionally] there were particular problems that arose with contemporary work that [one knew Glenn] would understand and one really crazy time the gallery had bought a Stella and as the delivery day came closer we did some checking and realized that the painting wouldn't get through the door of the gallery . . . we were in a great flap . . . We knew that when he took hold there'd be no problem and thank goodness it was a nice day. The Stella was laid out on the grass and Glenn performed surgery on it. That's one dramatic example of how he made his technical know-how available."
- ⁵ Joan Lowndes, "Glenn Toppings at the New Design Gallery, Vancouver," *Canadian Art*, (July/August, 1962), 254.
- ⁶ A sense of the sumptuous colour of Glenn's early work is evident through the slides of Glenn's work Gary Lee-Nova took when he was working alongside him at The Grange, his studio on Granville Island under the bridge.
- ⁷ It is difficult to make the various documents at our disposal mesh, but working from known catalogues, Glenn's curriculum vitae and reviews, the following exhibitions are indicative of his exposure. The majority occurred between 1963 and 1964:
 [Three Man Show,] Galleria Numero, Florence, Italy, 1957.
 44th Annual Exhibition of Northwest Artists, Seattle Art Museum, 1958.
 29th Annual Exhibition, The Vancouver Art Gallery, October, 1960.
 51st Annual Exhibition, B.C. Society of Artists, The Vancouver Art Gallery, May, 1961.
 15th Annual Contemporary Exhibition and Sale, organized by the Women's Auxiliary to The Vancouver Art Gallery, 1963.
 The Unquiet Canvas, a group show at U.B.C.'s Fine Arts Gallery, 1963.
 3rd Paris Biennial of Canadian Painting, organized by the National Gallery, Ottawa, 1963.
 5th Biennial of Canadian Painting, organized by the National Gallery, Ottawa, 1963.
 Vancouver '63, (no catalogue published), Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 1963.
 80th Annual Spring Exhibition, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, April 5 - May 5, 1963.

Painters from the West, a group show at Galerie Agnes Lefort, Montreal, May, 1963. (Other participants were Lockhead, Snow, Eyre, Gordon Smith, John Koerner, Shadbolt, Tanabe, and Kiyooka.)

Two from Vancouver, The Dorothy Cameron Gallery (second, Jack Harman), May 4-20, 1963.

[One Man Show] at The New Design Gallery, Vancouver, October 16 - November 1963.

[A Group Show] at The Playhouse Theatre, Vancouver, December, 1964.

[Toppings and Eyre] Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (Gallery XII), February, 1964.

Joy and Celebration, The Fine Arts Gallery, U.B.C., Vancouver, July 3 - August 18, 1967.

Directions '69', The Vancouver Art Gallery, September 9 - October 5, 1969.

- ⁸ "Glenn Toppings avec 'Q O' étonnera la visiteur. Ce peintre se sert de sa toile pour y insérer (derrière son cadre-support) des pièces de renfort qui font onduler le canevas, soit en relief, soit en creux." After remarking on the subtle colour, the reviewer adds that it is a rigorous visual work: "trop froidement calculé."

Claude Jasmin, "A L'Ouest du bon et du moins bon." Rev. of *Painters from the West* at Galerie Agnes Lefort, Montreal, May, 1963. *La Presse*, May 25, 1963.

- ⁹ "The most obvious and striking characteristic of Glen [sic] Toppings' paintings at the Cameron Gallery is that they bulge and sway . . . [A description of method ensues]. This obviously takes a lot of work and Mr. Toppings must think the time well spent in order to defeat the tyranny of the flat rectangle of the canvas. In other words, his whole impulse is architectural and sculptural. He is obviously not a born painter, his work shows no traces whatever of spontaneity and his colors are particularly obscene when he ventures beyond the monochromatic range of browns and blacks. And yet Mr. Toppings can send a picture soaring with a tiny shaft of blue or orange piercing the monochrome. There is an unconvincing atmosphere at this exhibition, a sense of contrivance, as if Mr. Toppings were straining for an effect he had defined intellectually and not yet fully achieved emotionally . . . Mr. Toppings has devised the most pretentious scheme for naming pictures I have ever run into."

Anon., Untitled. Rev. of *Two From Vancouver* at the Dorothy Cameron Gallery, Toronto, May, 1963, *The Star*, May 11, 1963.

- ¹⁰ "Little about either artist's work [Toppings or Harman] reminds the Toronto viewer of the Vancouver art to which he has become accustomed. The pastel English lyricism of Shadbolt and Korner . . . are quite absent. Yet, if it is at once apparent neither artist belongs to [the main schools] of west coast painting, neither does it appear that they are collectively creating a third. . . . Toppings is concerned with form and structure and composition in his painting, yet he refuses to achieve his effects in the traditional manner. His intent is to discover a new manner (which emphasizes architectural) qualities. To this end he has developed a new stretcher. . . . Toppings' great difficulty . . . is having constructed a setting of considerable interest, he has no lucid idea of what use he should put it to. . . ."

Harry Malcolmson, "Two From Vancouver at the Dorothy Cameron Gallery, Toronto," *Canadian Art* (November, 1963), 318.

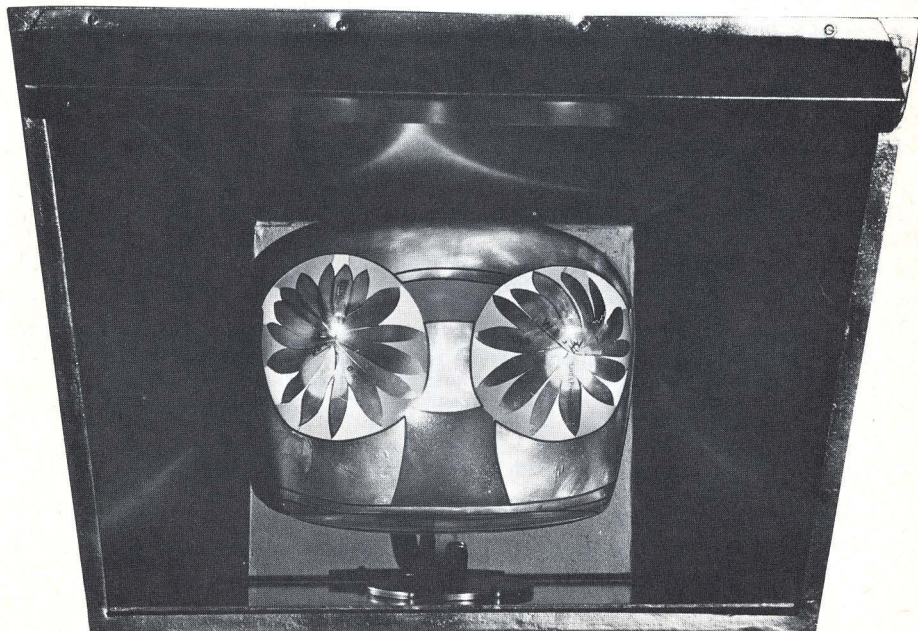
- ¹¹ In the late Sixties, Intermedia was a very important centre for creativity in Vancouver. It was founded in the recognition that there should be an environment that would serve as a melting pot for ideas originating from individuals with greatly differing backgrounds. Intermedia was subsequently incorporated on a non-profit basis under the British Columbia Societies Act. It became a place where painters, sculptors, film-makers, dancers, musicians, technicians, behavioral scientists and others could explore possibilities of artistic expression by combining the various disciplines in relation to available equipment.



- ¹² "There have been very few artists who haven't been harmed one way or another by public relations — harmed in their work which they've altered to accommodate some myth. People really enjoy myth-making. . . . I've been the subject of a number of myths. One of them is that I'm a craftsman. There are hundreds of people working in boat building who are more skilled in fibreglass."

Joan Lowndes, "Singular sculptors." Rev. of *Directions '69* at The Vancouver Art Gallery, September, 1969. *The Province*, September 12, 1969.

- ¹³ The list has not yet been rediscovered.
- ¹⁴ The Cecil is a favourite hangout of Vancouver artists and intellectuals.
- ¹⁵ It was an outstanding *quirky* piece in the exhibition *Joy and Celebration*, that was mounted at U.B.C.'s Fine Arts Gallery in the Summer of 1967. In a very fresh and visually exciting show which (incidentally) included some collaboration pieces, Toppings' early fibreglass work shocked me by its verbal cynicism. Somewhat crudely made in almost a black-purple, it glowered forth a message that had a lot to say about Glenn's disenchantment with the art scene and the art market. I remember approaching him with the comment: "I don't think Vancouver is ready for this!" It castigates simultaneously the commerciality of art and the motives of the typical art investor.
- ¹⁶ Roy Kiyooka, "Pacific Rim/Wake (for Glenn Toppings)."
- ¹⁷ *Rebirth of Venus* and *Armoured Lady* were technically assisted by Glenn Toppings. The former's plexiglass case was made as part of a medical exhibit employing light and sound that Glenn did for Bud Doray. The box of *Armoured Lady* was constructed specifically for this art piece for Audrey Doray.



- ¹⁸ *Night Flight* was painted by Brian Fisher during Expo year. It has a fibreglassed surface that Glenn Toppings provided.
- ¹⁹ The Oldenburg *Saw* (hard version) was made for The Vancouver Art Gallery exhibition, *New York 13*. Glenn oversaw its construction. The laminated wooden top was made to specification by Gerry Geisler; the aluminum and polyurethane foam blade was fabricated at The Vancouver International Airport.
- ²⁰ Judging by the ridges on *Fat Emma's* exterior, I would imagine that Glenn had a good deal to do with the sculpture's visual appearance.
- ²¹ This collaborative work received excited reviews. Charlotte Townsend called it "the best sculpture for quite a while in Vancouver."
Charlotte Townsend, "Directions '69', The Vancouver Art Gallery. . . ." *Canadian Art*, (December, 1969), p. 52.
- ²² This statement was adapted from:
Joan Lowndes, "Singular sculptors".
- ²³ Glenn Toppings, "A gentle but omnipotent wind summons its god of the lightning ball . . . , A poem about baseball." *Georgia Straight*, August 17-20, p. 6. Another reference to Glenn Toppings as "Stretch" is contained in: Brian Fisher, *Winter Hearts and Flowers*: (Vancouver: I. B. HESHE & IT WORKS, 1972), unpaginated.
- ²⁴ Glenn, according to several sources (including artist John Chambers, London), was involved in the formative stages of this society, which is devoted to getting better rights for artists.
- ²⁵ This quote is excerpted from a note on Glenn's 1971 participation in a film by Tom Shandel called *Another Smith for Paradise*. The film was about an entrepreneur-type artist who in the movie's last moments unveils a plaster-over-wire sculpture of a hand in the configuration of *The Finger* (obscene gesture). Glenn made this with Gary Lee-Nova.
Tom reminded me that Glenn was interested in Polaroid photography. He said that Glenn had worked with Werner Aellen on a film called *Stop the City*.
Anon., Untitled. *The Vancouver Sun*, March 26, 1971.
- ²⁶ Glenn Toppings, "Statement 1972," *The B.C. Monthly*, (April/May, 1977), unpaginated.

SELECT LIST OF SOURCES/Prepared by Keith Bunnell

(The variant spellings of Glenn Toppings' name and various other irregularities have been duplicated in this list.)

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- Anon. "Glenn Toppings." *Western Homes and Living*, April 1964, pp. 20-21.
- British Columbia, University. Fine Arts Gallery. *Joy and Celebration: July 8 - August 18 1967*. [Exhibition catalogue.]
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- Emery, Tony. "Words for Glenn Toppings." *artscanada*, February/March 1972, p. 60.
- Finlayson, Dodie. "The canvas no longer a plane." *The Province*, 26 October, 1963, p. 3.
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- Lowndes, Joan. "New approach out at SFU." *The Province*, 16 August 1968, (*Spotlight* section) p. 10.
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New Design Gallery. [Vancouver.] "For Immediate Release: Glenn Toppings at the New Design Gallery, October 16th - November 2nd." [Press release. 1963.]

Selz, Peter with Alvin Balkind. "Vancouver: Scene and Unscene." *Art in America*, January/February 1970, p. 122-129.

Toppings, Glenn. "A gentle but omnipotent wind summons its god of the lightning ball. . . ." *Georgia Straight*, 17-20 August 1971, p. 6. [Untitled prayer invoking the "God of the perfect win loss record and .666 batting average."]

Townsend, Charlotte. "Art for today: Electric Irwin turns sight into sound and Fat Emma swallows up people." *The Vancouver Sun*, 10 September 1969, p. 63.

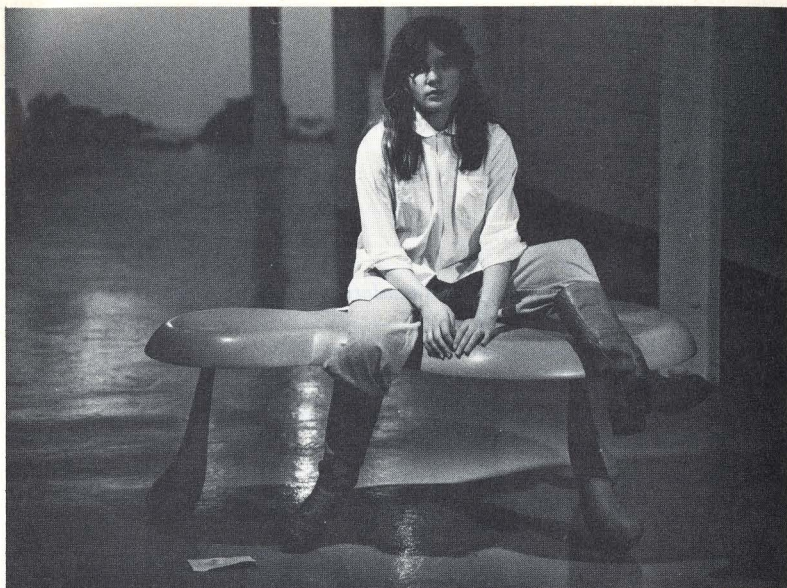
Townsend, Charlotte. "Directions '69: The Vancouver Art Gallery, September 9 - October 5 1969." *Canadian Art*, December 1969, p. 52.

Vancouver Art Gallery. [Exhibition catalogue for *Directions '69*. Headed "Dennis Vance 1940 — Glenn Toppings 1930 — Dallas Selman 1941 — The Vancouver Art Gallery, September 9 - October 5."]

Watmough, David. "Artists' work adorns theatre." *The Vancouver Sun*, 17 December 1964, p. 33.

IMAGES/

- (1) Glenn Toppings
photography Gary Lee-Nova. Transferred to black and white by The Vancouver Art Gallery.
- (2) *Sicily*, 1957, mixed medium, ht. 21¼", w. 25¼".
photography Tod Greenaway studios.
- (3) ashtray in copper enamel style, n.d., approx. 5" x 4½".
photography Tod Greenaway studios.
- (4) Glenn Toppings at Sunshine Falls.
photography Gary Lee-Nova. Transferred to black and white by The Vancouver Art Gallery
- (5) *AQI*, 1963, mixed media, ht. 57", w. 30". (Shown at the Paris Biennial of the National Gallery Ottawa, 1963).
photographer unknown
- (6) rock pendant, n.d., silver over stone, ht. 1.3", w. .84", d. .49".
photography Tod Greenaway studios
- (7) pendant, n.d., silver, ht. 2¼", w. 1.3" d. .15".
photography Tod Greenaway studios
- (8) paddle, n.d., wood and fibreglass, ht. 8", l. 88½".
yellow kayak, n.d., fibreglass, 175".
photography Tod Greenaway studios
- (9) Justine's table, n.d., laminated wood, ht. 20¾", w. 33½", l. 54½".
photography Tod Greenaway studios
- (10) *Corner Piece*, 1971, green fibreglass, ht. 46½", w. 66", d. 29".
photography The Vancouver Art Gallery
- (11) *Self-Explanatory Manufactured Object*, 1967, fibreglass, ht. 15½", w. 51", d. 35".
photography Tod Greenaway studios
- (12) Audrey Doray, *Rebirth of Venus*, 1967, mixed media with light and sound, ht. 28½", w. 24½", d. 11¼".
photography Peter Thomas
- (13) Brian Fisher, *Night Flight* (at the Montreal Airport), 1967, fibreglassed acrylic, ht. 10', l. 23'8".
photography from *Architecture Canada* (September, 1960), p. 30.
Tod Greenaway studios.
- (14) Claes Oldenburg, *Saw (hard version)*, 1969, laminated wood, aluminum and polyurethane foam, l. 14', w. 3'4", handle 6½" thick, blade 1" thick.
photography The Vancouver Art Gallery (Jim Gorman)



- (15) with Dennis Vance, *Fat Emma*, 1969, suspended spherical fibreglass module equipped with sound sensitive induction loops, 5' diam.
photography The Vancouver Art Gallery
- (16) with Dallas Selman, *Black Night Rip*, 1969, 9 modular units in polished fibreglass with assembled dimensions as 11' x 13', ht. 16".
photography The Vancouver Art Gallery
- (17) Carole (Fisher) Itter at the opening of The Vancouver Art Gallery exhibition 955,000.
photography The Vancouver Art Gallery
- (18) Glenn as 'Stretch'.
photographer unknown.
- (19) watching video at Intermedia.
photography Michael de Courcey. Printed by Tod Greenaway studios
- (20) Intermedia performance at The Vancouver Art Gallery.
photography Michael de Courcey. Printed by Tod Greenaway studios
- (21) Performance at Intermedia.
photography Michael de Courcey. Printed by Tod Greenaway studios
- (22) Audrey Doray, *Armoured Lady*, 1969, mixed media with light and sound. A trapezoid — ht. 16", w. at top 23", w. at bottom 19", d. 6½" (on average).
photography Peter Thomas

PART 5 / *INSTALLATION AND A NEW PIECE*

While we prepared this oral history catalogue and Greg Snider of the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria arranged the exhibition, there was little opportunity for collaboration. In fact *The Capilano Review* editors were able to preview only a few of the works ultimately included in the show. It was a pleasure, finally, for us to discover that Toppings' work had stood up so very well. The exhibition was reviewed by Russell Keziere for the CBC and by Ian Wallace for *YVR*, March 1978.

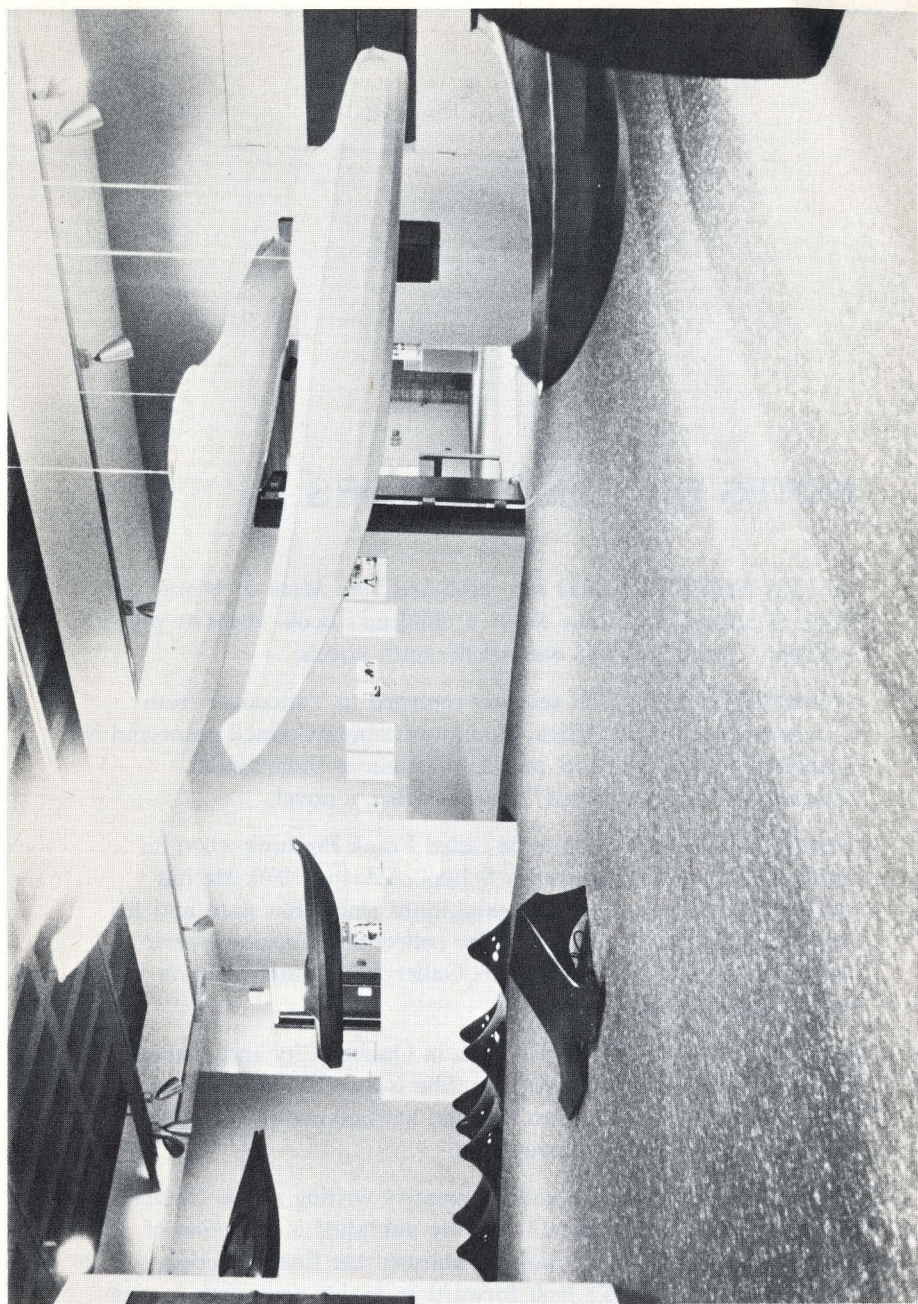
After the catalogue was completed Carole Itter discovered in her files a photograph of the "black wing sculpture" referred to in a note under Roy Kiyooka's poem *Pacific Rim/Wake*. I assumed through hearsay that *Fat Emma* had been destroyed, but learned that only the electrical components are damaged. *Fat Emma* is now the plaything of Michael de Courcey's children.

— AR (August 1978)

ADDITIONAL IMAGES

- (23) Justine on her table at the Fine Arts Gallery (opposite).
photography Sajiw Terriss
- (24) Glenn Toppings with black wing sculpture (next page).
photography Carole Itter
- (25) Installation at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria (following page).
photography The Art Gallery of Greater Victoria





NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

ALLEN SUTTERFIELD has published *The Myth of Words*, a book of poems, and *Stone Soup*, a children's book. He is at present writing a critical essay on Samuel Beckett's novels.

ROBERT G. SHERRIN recently returned to Vancouver from travels in Europe and Africa. He has a Canada Council grant and is working on a second novel and a collection of short fiction. November House published *The Black Box*, a novel.

SALMON HARRIS used to be called Frank Prodnuk when he graduated from the Vancouver School of Art in 1970. He has participated in several group exhibitions since that date and his work is being purchased for major collections. *Salmon Harris March 4-April 2, 1978* at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria was his first one-man show.

MONIQUE FOUQUET was born in Quebec City and studied there at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. She is a recent graduate of the Vancouver School of Art. She had her first one-person show at the Helen Pitt Gallery, spring 1978.

AUDREY THOMAS is teaching creative writing at the University of Victoria this year. Oberon recently published a collection of fiction, *Ladies & Escorts*, and re-published her first collection, *Ten Green Bottles*. We look forward to major new work in due course, after recent months of travelling and writing in Greece, India and Africa, as well as a year in Montreal at Concordia.

In the twelve years since he came to B.C. from Montreal via Paris, PIERRE COUPEY's passionate creative energy has been directed in various ways. A founding editor of *The Georgia Straight* and *The Western Gate* in the 60's, he started *The Capilano Review* in 1972, and edited it till 1976. He has published several books of poetry, the latest being *Four Island Poems* (Caledonia Writing Series), and his visual art in various media has been frequently exhibited — most recently at the North Shore Art Gallery at Presentation House. His next readings will be at Selkirk College, the College of New Caledonia and North West College. Pierre teaches in the English Department at Capilano College. Photo credits: Charles van den Ouden. (The Journal Drawings are felt pen on parchment, each sheet being approximately 35 cm. x 43 cm.)

bp NICHOL. The poems in this issue (from *The Martyrology*, book V) were read last winter at a marvelous reading/performance at The Western Front in Vancouver.

LARRY EIGNER has books coming out right left & centre, from Elizabeth Press and Black Sparrow Press for example, and has had work published in *Bezoar*, *Text*, *Sun & Moon*, among others. He could be living in Berkeley by now.

ANDY MATHISEN lives and works as a logger, fisherman, and one-time restaurateur (Sly Dog Cafe) on Bowen Island. His poems have appeared in *The Stump*, published by the Creative Writing Club of Malaspina College.

GEORGE BOWERING has just completed *The Dead Sailors*, an historical novel about Captain Vancouver's voyage. Much of it was written in Italy and Costa Rica, thanks to the Canada Council. After a year of writing and reading tours, Bowering has returned to the English Department at Simon Fraser University, where he teaches.

JOHN PASS, whose work has previously appeared in *The Capilano Review*, has just had a book published by Cobblestone Press: *Blossoms: An Accompaniment*. He lives in North Vancouver.

LOUIS DUDEK. We were delighted to see Louis Dudek last year. He read "Morning Light" during his reading at the Burnaby Art Gallery.

KEVIN ROBERTS teaches at Malaspina College in Nanaimo. Harbour will be publishing his book of fishing poems, *Deep Line*.

HOPE ANDERSON's poems come from a serial work called *Just Occurrences*, which is still being written. He is currently co-editing (with David Phillips) an anthology of some B.C. poets, and he works at UBC. (Epigraph quoted from John Wieners' "Poem for Painters".)

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with an interview

poetry

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LARRY EIGNER
GEORGE BOWERING
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JOHN PASS
LOUIS DUDEK
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