

THE CAPITANO REVIEW



IN MEMORIAM

Michael Carmichael
1950-1988

There was a stained glass factory on a bank of the river that flowed between our village and France. A workman gave me scraps of glass and a shoebox to put them in — red is the colour I remember. We lived across the alley from the slaughterhouse, across a street from a church. One day, I guess I was six years old, I sat on the steps with the shoebox on my knees and said, "If there really is a God make this glass into a truck."

And then I opened the box.

— Michael Carmichael, *Recent Work*, TCR #43.

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Elizabeth Herron / FOUR POEMS DRIVING WEST

It was cooler, you said, to drive at night,
and so we did, sticky from hamburger and
coke at the cafe, the white pillows from home
under our heads, blankets too, packed
behind the front seat so we sat, legs stretched
straight ahead. It made it easier to sleep
like that, the back seat a bed. How pale
and smooth our faces must have looked,
slack with sleep, floating past in the twilight
like watery moons or bowls of milk
as we drove through fields fragrant with
corn, wheat, grasses whose names I never knew,
their redolence released in the dampening dusk
of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois.

Now I close my eyes and lean my head against
the headrest, face turned toward the slow lane
through glass in another time, another place,
going twice as fast in the fleet of traffic,
someone else at the wheel, other children in back,
what we were so far away now—the small universe
that seemed complete, expanded over time,
particles falling apart. Yet the years spent
seem no more than spilled milk
between the haunting smell of summer fields at
evening after dew sets and this now.

The chafing wind pushed back your hair, a rush
against your cheek, those fields filling the car,
a sweet humid air, as we drove steadily west,
all our trust in you, all we knew of safety
held between us, invisible, unconscious,
a gravity evident only in recollection,
the then unnoticed scent of each other's hair, skin.

The car contained us wholly — we could even quarrel,
so certain were we we would never lose each other,
never separate — and you, with the burden of us
we did not know we were, you with your secret thoughts
driving, driving us into the dark.

MYSTERIES

The angel wings ignite with the flame of the season. She is white wax, slowly burning. Slowly sinking or rising, one cannot tell which. The flame brightens then fades, then brightens again. Your face obliterated in the smokeless light.

Now the eyes of the woman in the icon look again into mine. I am you, they say. I am your bitter innocence, angry and full of hope. Sadness. Your undeniable self, cathedral of pain, prayer in the mouth that closes on each word of longing.

The telephone rings in the night
and I reach for the alarm. It goes on ringing.
The night is a dream that begins again each morning.
These are the mysteries—

a heart that pounds inexplicably in silence;
a letter that does not come
or perhaps it comes and the page is blank.
From the runes a blank stone is drawn. Your face

a memory no longer singular but composite
of all the moments bent close. Your voice
a series of transatlantic disclosures—
the farther away you are the closer you get,
or is it the other way around?

In the light beyond the angel's wings
seen through them
is a sky staccatoed with branches,
last red leaves mixed with flame.

White curtains, the tangled sheets, darkness,
the angel spreading over us.
What has become of her?
Moth-soft she perishes
into herself.

This morning the paper white narcissus opened
their first petals, after weeks
rooted in rock and water.

SINCE I SAID IT

Blue, since I said it. A blue to stop the traffic in your head. Stop. The traffic. Blue because — just because. In the art of glass mating, he said, and then corrected himself. Why not, I wondered, leave it at that? Blue blue glass. Transparency pressed against itself. Something hard, a hip bone bitten into yields a tough taste. Biting, so they say, is an act of love, an attempt at incorporation. And what was it she told me — to have to have. That's how she defines it. Blue blue, since I said it. Blue bonnet, blue onion, blue goodbye. Blue the way stars are, far away. Blue because — just because. Blue escallier. Blue, since I said it. Not just the head but the heart stopped. More intense since — Frequency a matter of inverse relation to — Transparency itself, fragile as blue, since I said it. Solitary wandering blue. Blue longing. The blue distance between objects of mutual attraction that cannot touch.

FETAL DEMISE

When I went to see you after you lost the baby your husband was in the kitchen. You and I sat and talked, you under a pink quilt, your face pale as the flesh of a broken branch, but I wanted to see him before I left. He must have heard me walk toward that room because he came down the hall and stood at the edge of the light and when I looked up at him I had never seen his face like that before, as if the shadow of the hall were inside him, not he in it, an undertow visible in his eyes. He sagged against the wall, a man who has for years strutted through the room, all six feet three of him — a husband we watched with the pleasure of watching a beautiful man-beast roam his house, his low laugh resonant in our bodies — he sagged against the wall with the gravity of that shadow pulling him down, and when I reached to him he held on — his big calloused hands, his body which had always seemed to me so utterly solid — and I was the flotsom he clung to, or the shore or you (he couldn't hold onto you like that, you had to be so still), or his grief sister, trying to understand or just trying to live with what had been lost and his fear for you which was like another presence in the house.

Davide Pan / SELECTED WORKS
LUI E LEI IN VICENZA







The artist's statements are developed from the text of an interview with Davide Pan, held on 31st May 1988, with Camille Brietman and Barry Cogswell.

Going back to Italy added to the work. I was still doing my usual things. The influence of classical art and architecture was always present, but the best thing was the great garbage, which I used to make my pieces.

When I was going to school in Venice I was staying in Vicenza, about fifty miles to the northwest, and every day I would walk for fifteen minutes from the station to the Accademia. In Venice they pile up the garbage in Campos—little piazzas or squares—and a big boat goes by picking up the garbage, the furniture, the fridges, everything that is thrown away, in fact, like a floating garbage truck. On the way to the Accademia I passed through five campos.

If you look at the sculpture of *Lui E Lei* you can tell what the parts are. The hair is done with fruit crates, and *Lei*'s little broom is from the garbage. *Lui*'s shoes are my dad's shoes from our apartment in Vicenza and so is the tie. The boards at the back, the steel legs and most of the other stuff came from the garbage.

Lui E Lei is now in the lobby of the Hotel Castello in Vicenza. The hotel owner came to the Accademia and bought them. I had planned to do a video with them going from the school to Vicenza taking the route that I took each day, walking through the campos, crossing the bridges, taking the train, but being unable to do that I took a series of photos, some of which are shown here.

The director of the school did not appreciate the type of work I was doing. Education there was quite academic, and he didn't appreciate my walking into the Accademia carrying garbage. The other students picked up on the idea very quickly, so that eventually lots of students were carrying garbage to school. I had signed up for sculpture, but the professor insisted that before doing any three-dimensional work we had to spend months drawing, and before doing our own projects that did not entail working from a model, we had to present a project outline, have complete drawings and a cost breakdown, and have him make corrections before we could start. That is not the way I work; many of my pieces take less than an hour to make. I tried to explain to him that, if I did a drawing first, I would put all the energy into that, and would then not want to make the piece. I work very spontaneously. I sometimes sketch a piece out, but I don't use that long drawn-out planning process; it doesn't work for me.

Interestingly, in the first term there, I came across information regarding a forthcoming major juried art exhibition, which I decided to enter, and this was only two days before the deadline. So using my usual process and some old ski boots of my Grandfather's, I put a piece together, entered it and was not only accepted, but had the piece purchased for the gallery collection. There were fifteen hundred applicants, less than three hundred selected, and twenty or thirty chosen for purchase and a second exhibition in Verona. Neither the Director of the Accademia nor the sculpture instructor ever spoke of it to me. Some of the students were not pleased either, since some of them had been trying for that exhibition for three or four years. The exhibitions were the "70 Mosta Bevilacqua La Masa," Venezia, and the "Linea diretta" in Verona.

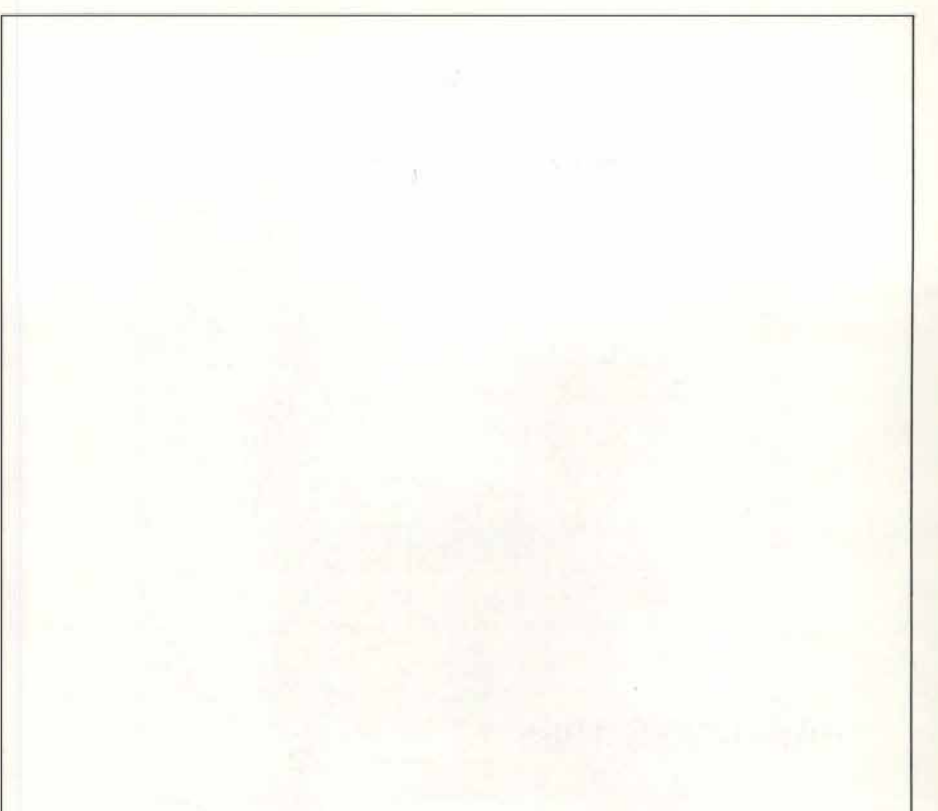
I saw good recent art in Italy, but at the Accademia the good things were hidden away. People seemed to find it difficult to be free, just to let go. We had the galleries of the Accademia just upstairs with the works of Veronese, Tintoretto, Tiziano and all those guys. It's one of the major galleries of classical art in Venice. I loved it and would go up there every chance I had. The influence has been coming out in my work since that time, particularly in the use of composition and colour.

* * *







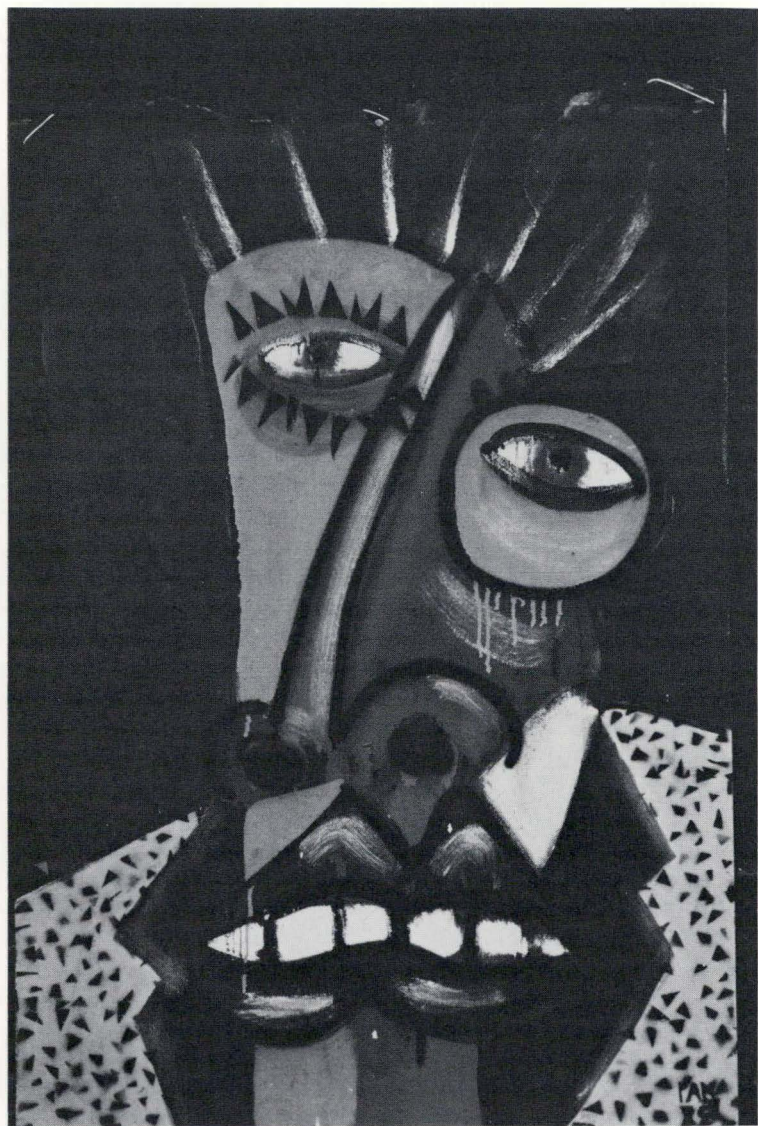


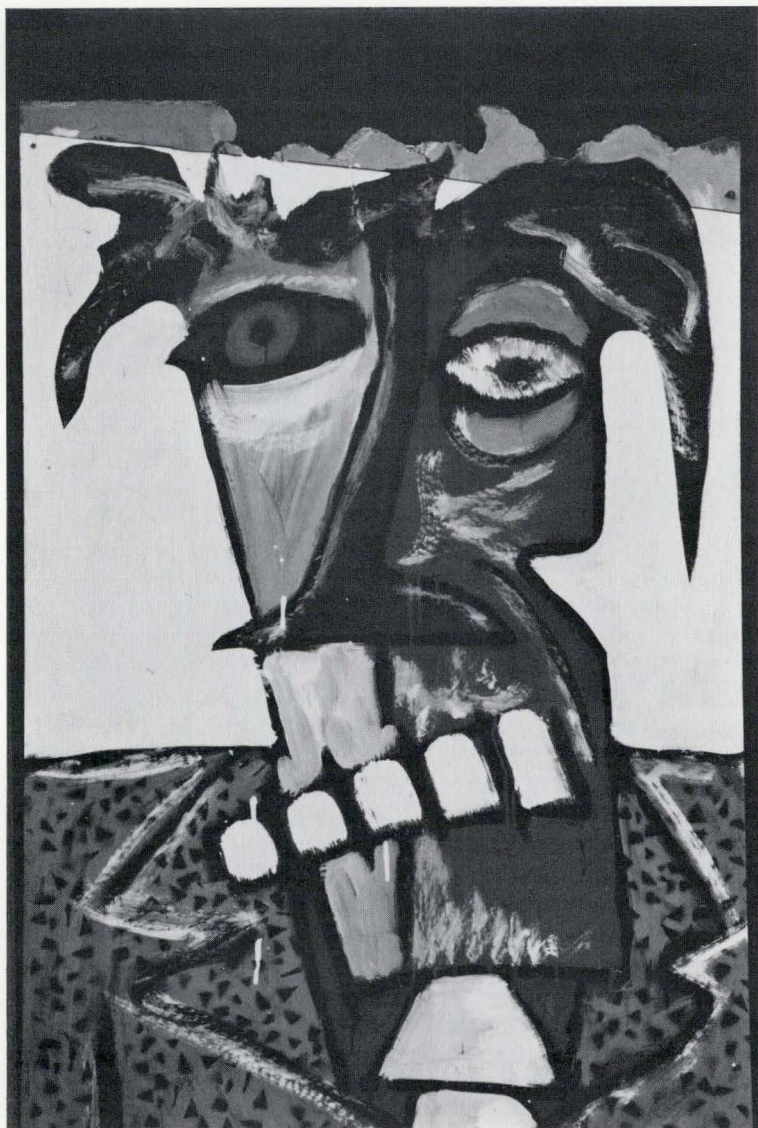
The image, *In the Accademia*, that is used on the cover shows a head in the Accademia courtyard, and comes from another head that was on the ground. It was a beautiful marble head, and every day that I was there the head would have a rag on it. The janitors would put their rags on the head to dry. I took slides of it each day, and it was this that gave me the idea to treat these sculptures in a different way. I gave this piece to a friend as a wedding gift. I had taken care to wrap it in an old sheet with the nails sticking out. When I spoke to the woman some time later, I found that she was displaying it wrapped in the sheet. She thought that was the piece.

* * *

PAINTINGS 1985

The portraits are not really of individuals. I think a great deal about the political system, the misuse of power, and corruption. The people portrayed are not average people. One, for instance, was called *The President With a Blender and a Wife*. Mostly they are concerned with freedom or the physical or psychological violence done to people, for economic or other reasons, but they are not intended as illustrations of situations. I like to use the richness and succulence of the colours to counterbalance the roughness of the images. I find that the colours attract whilst the grins and images repel, keeping the viewer off balance. The apparent violence in the paintings does reflect an anger in me. I have been told many times that I seem so different from my work, and I would say that, if anything, putting these images on canvas or paper is a way of relieving the potential for anger that could develop from the frustrations of our society. People often ask me about the teeth, since they appear in nearly all my pieces, and I can only reflect that people show their teeth either when they are angry or when they are smiling or laughing.

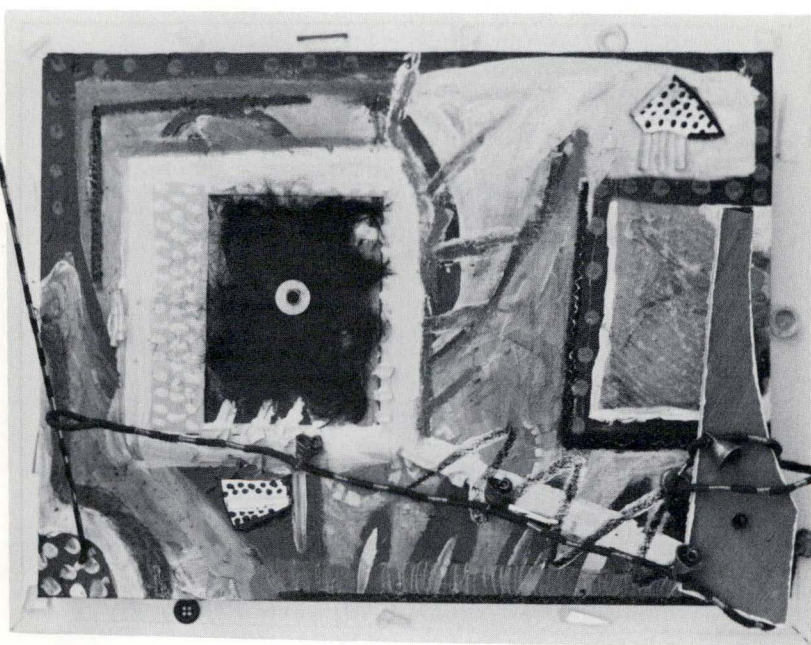


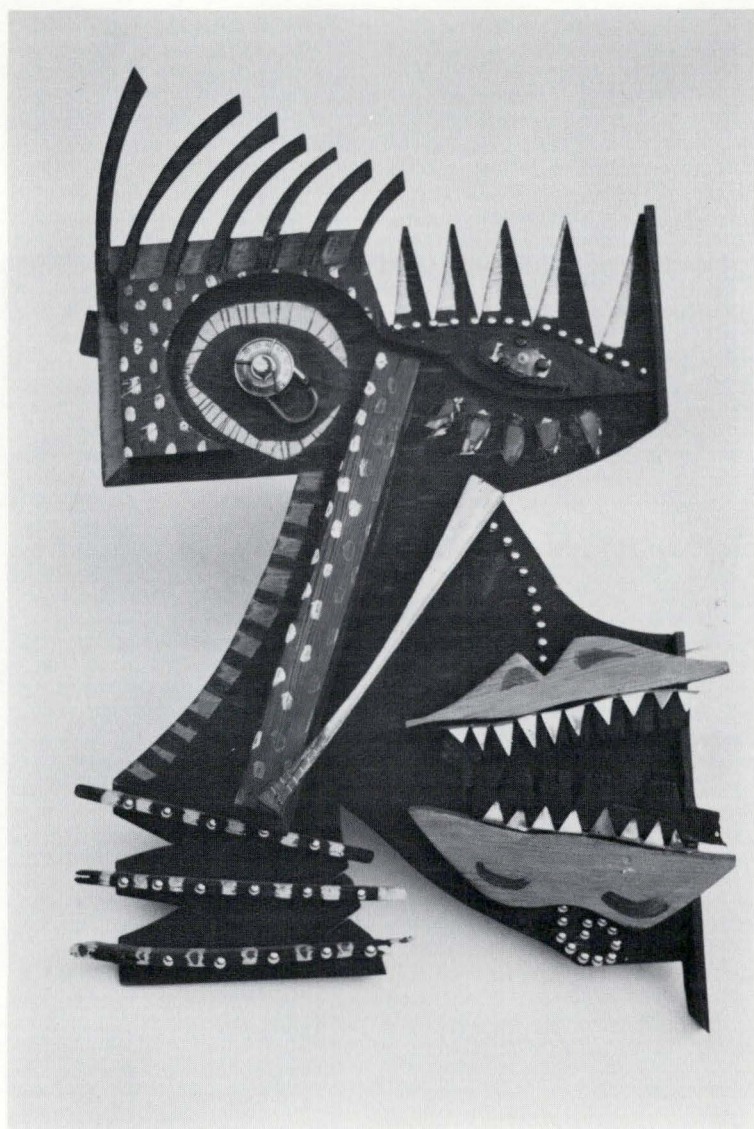




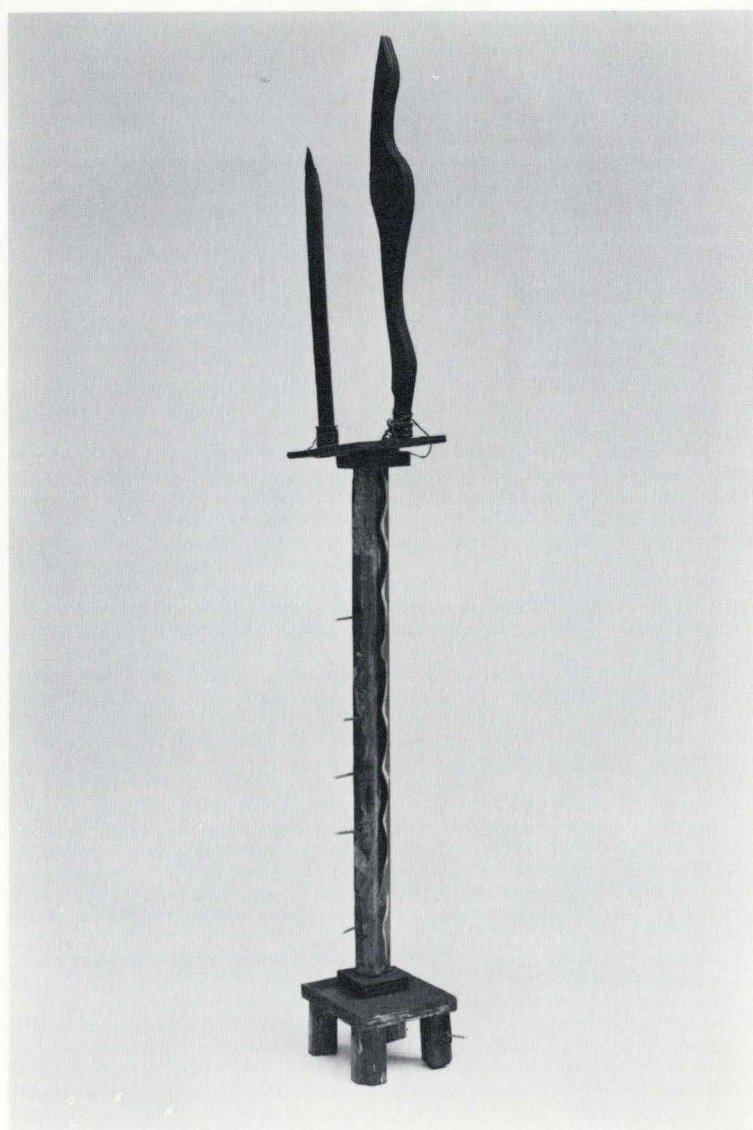


















IMAGES

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21-25 *Selected Paintings*, 1986, mixed media on burlap, oilcloth, plastic, wood, and old curtains, sizes from 4' to 7'.

27 *Toy Painting*, 1988, acrylic and enamel on canvas board, bells, and Davide's hair, 18" x 14" x 6".

28 *Biting Chief*, 1987, wood construction, 29" x 20" x 5".

29 *A Voice From Somewhere*, 1987, acrylic and enamel on wood, 30" x 25".

30 *Forca*, 1988, burnt wood and nails, 53" x 9" x 5".

31 *Ambassador*, 1988, burnt wood, 44" x 11" x 9".

32 *One More Cross*, 1988, wood and enamel, 33" x 10" x 9".

33 *To Heather*, 1988, mixed media on burnt wood construction, 28" x 9" x 4".

John Pass / *EMOTIONAL LIFE OF WORDS*, Book I
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It amused us
those mornings woken early
to discover names and invent
decidedly human capacities

for the animals, birds
landmarks, light
breezes and the astounding
variety of plants.

So we grew into our lives
godlike, with gods
as companions
and the origins of science
our whim. A shivery, silky

suddenness, delicious
thrill of recognition

surprised us
in everything

till aging
who could quibble
with what had been so vivid
now almost

transparent, our daring assumptions
faded in the old books
to headings, attic
definition

emphatic of a precipitous sadness
we had no stomach for, no means

to divine.

AND INVENT

What's known next to sun on water
smuggled under a cloud cover

between the low islands? Reverie
and the immediate

arrow of fire at you, Apollo's
heroic arm, a hand up—

fate's finger, little man!
You're the one so sing

your little song. Skip
the light fandango. Think fast

in that frenzy become
a world order, ascendance

of the particle, small star, electron
glitz: a Liberace encore, litter

lifted heavenward, sky sheen
and the sea's implacable mercury

to suckle and soothe, sucking under
gods' pups battling the burlap.

DECIDEDLY

"That sky," you exclaim —
"Tintoretto," and I

"Maxfield Parrish," with whom
we usually conclude sky-

wise to those deepening shades
(tone is better) of blue.

Not Tintoretto, we know
but Italian. Florence —

her singular cypresses here
and there on the hills, night's tapers

of dark before it is quite
fallen. "Darker than Parrish,"

I venture. But who and the one star?
Horizon no brush could so succinctly

illuminate. A knife's work? A night's
prescient echo in vaulted —

you know the colour — that confident
slide up-scale of the low

note, hallowed old cave
of the Good and the True

we were born to, strive for, never so
habitable, goddess

brightening through the window
enrobed, unenshrouded, bedded

on a velvet virtù
might proudly have had under

her, or art nouveau smooth
toward latex, the subtlest

tint present but waning
of sentiment (pretty

as a poster) But voluptuous.
Emphatic. That sky.

LANDMARKS, LIGHT

The solstice
and such sun sprung
from heelstone, druidic

stolidity against
the Ionian mirror
as gods send searing
noonward, hot-footing it via

wild meadow, Delphic window, table a still-life
of honey, goat's yogurt, prone pencil — intent

upon their architecture, the hour's Acropolis
consecration of marble the colour

of moonlight. Enshrined

in the fine lines decipher
illusion of time
on our hands, bands

of high cloud, someone torching
the pyres, her sciatica
acting up where he alights

all eloquence, flies

in the face of Rendition. The Classics are easy compared with restoring these twisted French doors.

They almost close

and open to the mountain in the east
with one name

and the mountain westward
without one

the endlessly complex and changing
light on their heights and hollows, scarves
of mist and forest floating

song-scrapes on the flippant
little winds off the lakes

our way, elsewhere.

VARIETY

Evolution's baroque
period. Perpetual

elaboration our niche. And view-
point; Theresa tells of the male spider
with hook to hold a female's head

in place, mating. He's done for
but after he's done. As when I want her
to kiss me. And then I want her

to buy the cheap panties
of leopard-skin

print. For a change. One's
brief flourish. Jewish artisans
building Alhambra worked their star
into the Moorish motif. Far past

and forward stranger
to see the geese browsing —
shrugging back the grubs.
The thrust of it not

living but making

a complex compost.

US IN EVERYTHING

What to make of light
is issue

against the nay-
sayers, turners-away
but for them at length

who swim too in its puzzlement

raising their glasses
into its assurances, modest vocabulary

of qualities in and around and upon
definitives of objects and ethers, clarities

of isolation

but of itself
what is it, despite our successes

aslant here in the tulips, there
in the white flash blindness

commencing and concluding the opened
atom's invitation? Some simple telling

image drowns
in any human eye for it, a smile's
infusion, eddies of pollen
on the windshield

signals the singular singing again
of the invisible making us see and seen.

SURPRISED

Apex, high anchor
of an April sky mishandled
so to splash the night, sans moonlight

upon us freely to the lees —
we'll never see, listing

in frog pause, steep Chablis
of Narcissus sleeping nearly

how our wonder is undone, unravels
aimlessly
 how we've lost

you, locating Leo.

Or one said, "Ride
the dipper. It's nothing,"

and then above the racket
of the ratchets clacking
under our ascending car, peak

of that propelling climb
"You're gonna die."
 But didn't.

But done before we knew it. But hard
on the heels of mesh and meld
weld personal

a cooling song

of all things wants après

delirium
her rudimentary handle on
the far light, its libation.

TILL AGING

All our systems huge and old
even those determinedly
chaotic

crowd us
begging the questions
that are of us alone

and must be posed therefore
eternally in loneliness, constriction:

if created how
and why

and if not how
and why the burgeoning

flourishes, the DNA fanfare?
“that sentient beings could

be constitutionally numb
to the texture of reality?”

So confined the world grinds
forty, cog-captured, wobbling
into metaphysics. Venus

brightest these nights
in this half-century

wasn't missed, it's only
that the information followed
with some discretion upon

the event. Advent
of the cloudy evenings

brings her
I bring her
she comes in time

to mind.
So less on the horns

and more in remembrance
one's cognizant

QUIBBLE

Of the deep kissing stuff
moonish languor, foolishness
of locked-in sighs
O that we might try it sliding

open in luxurious surprise, operatic
from complacency, practical generosity
entirely upon memory and promise.

For such I would handle her however
she demanded or hardly imagined
she wanted, on one wet

fingertip, in slippery

handfuls, roughly
by the nipples

or do salad
and the dishes daily, gaily
pay off the family van, live with

the quirk of the key:
in pretty easy, happily
wriggling, still to be

novice to the fine
tolerances, secure

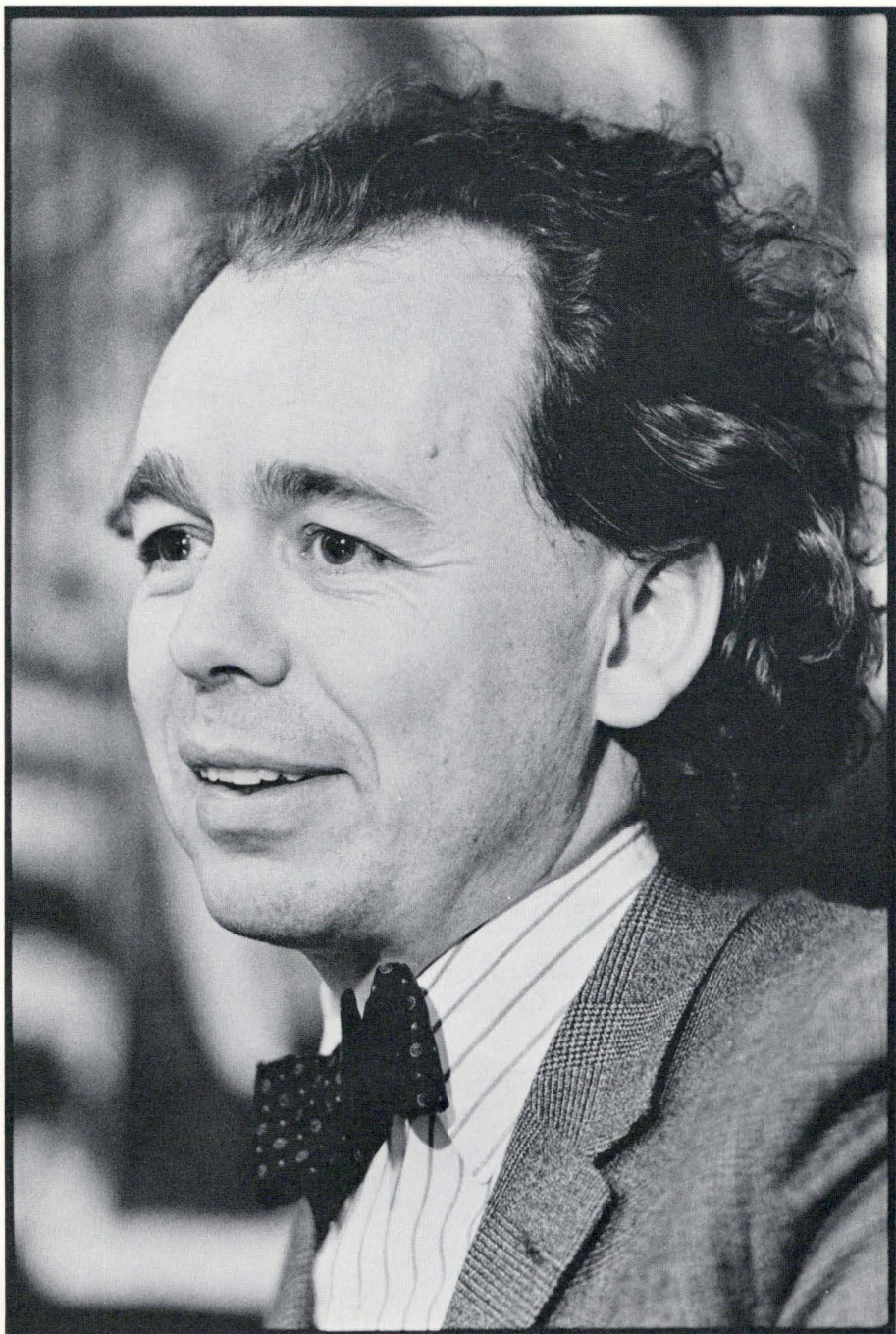
discrepancies
of moment, person.

Robert Blake / O CANADIANS

IMAGES

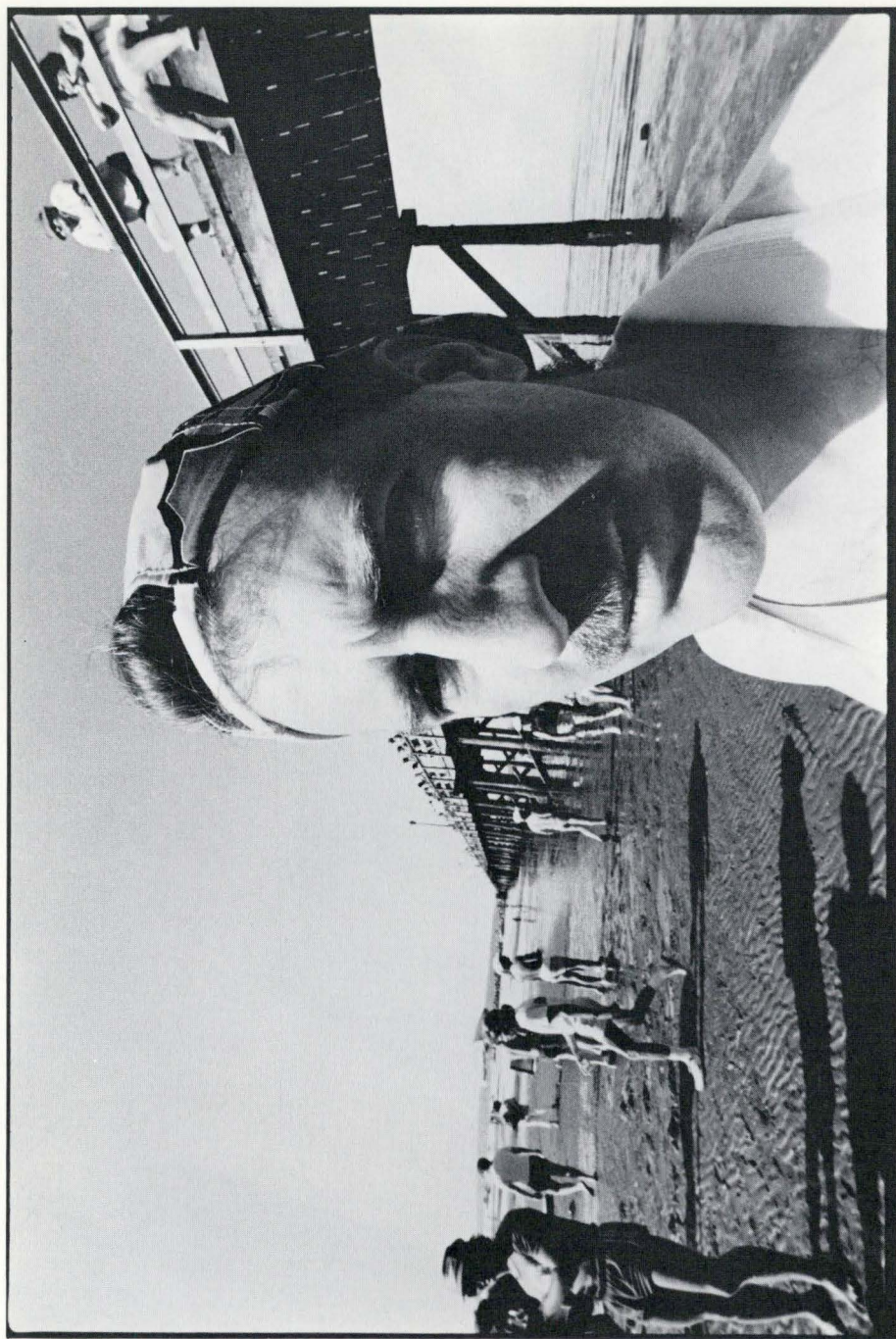
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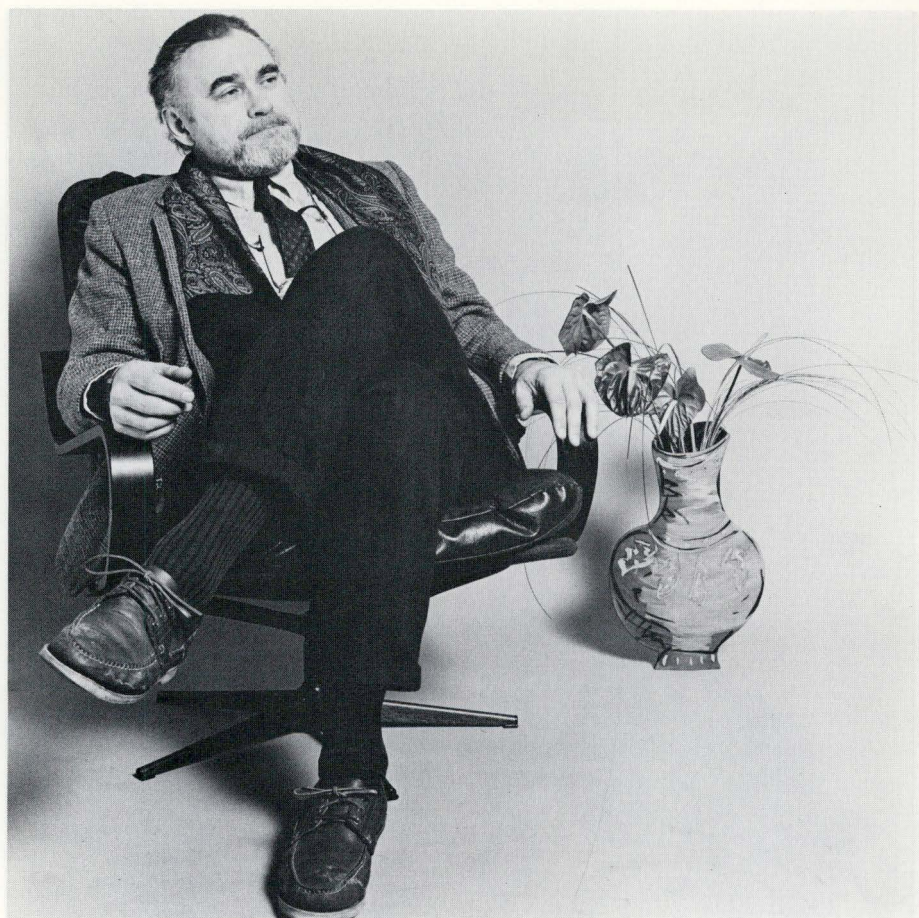




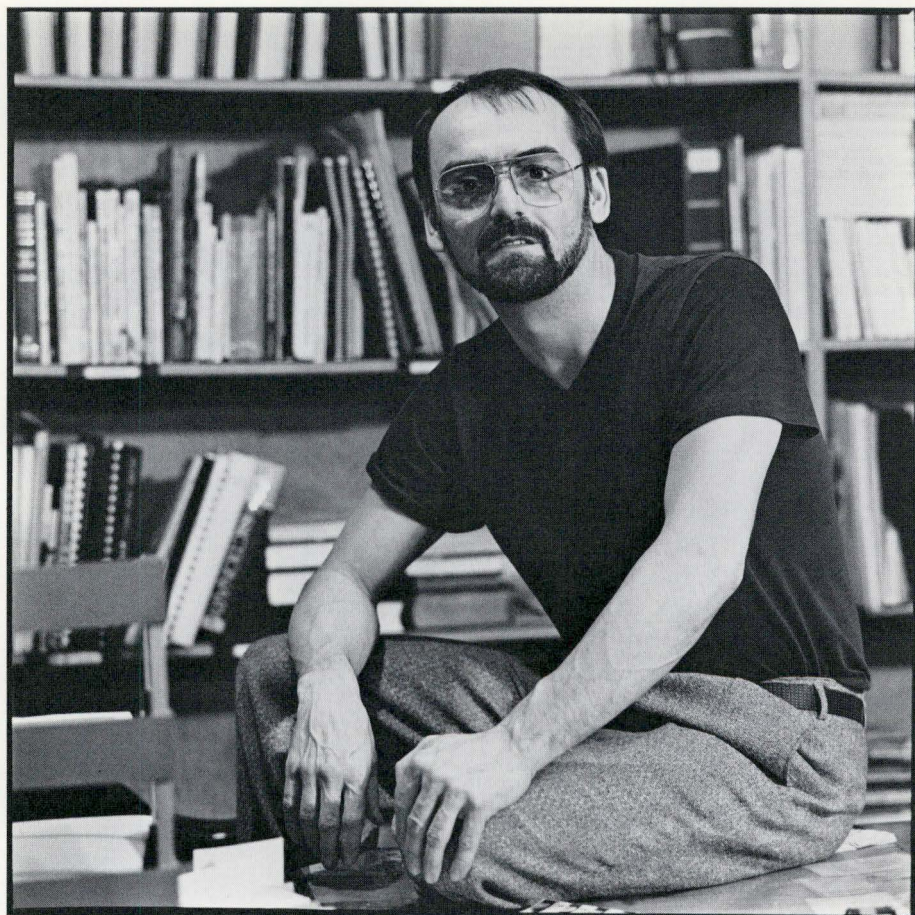




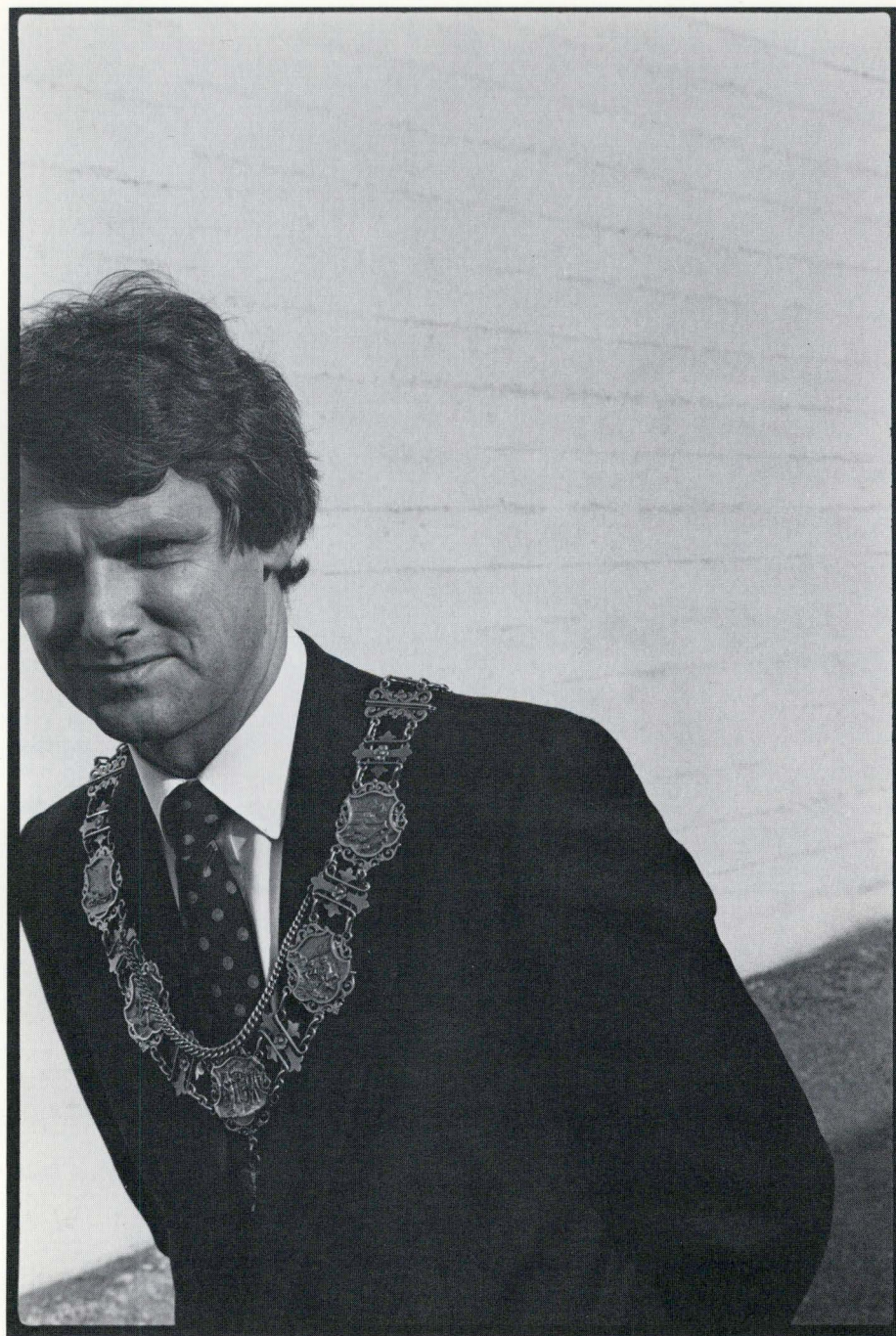




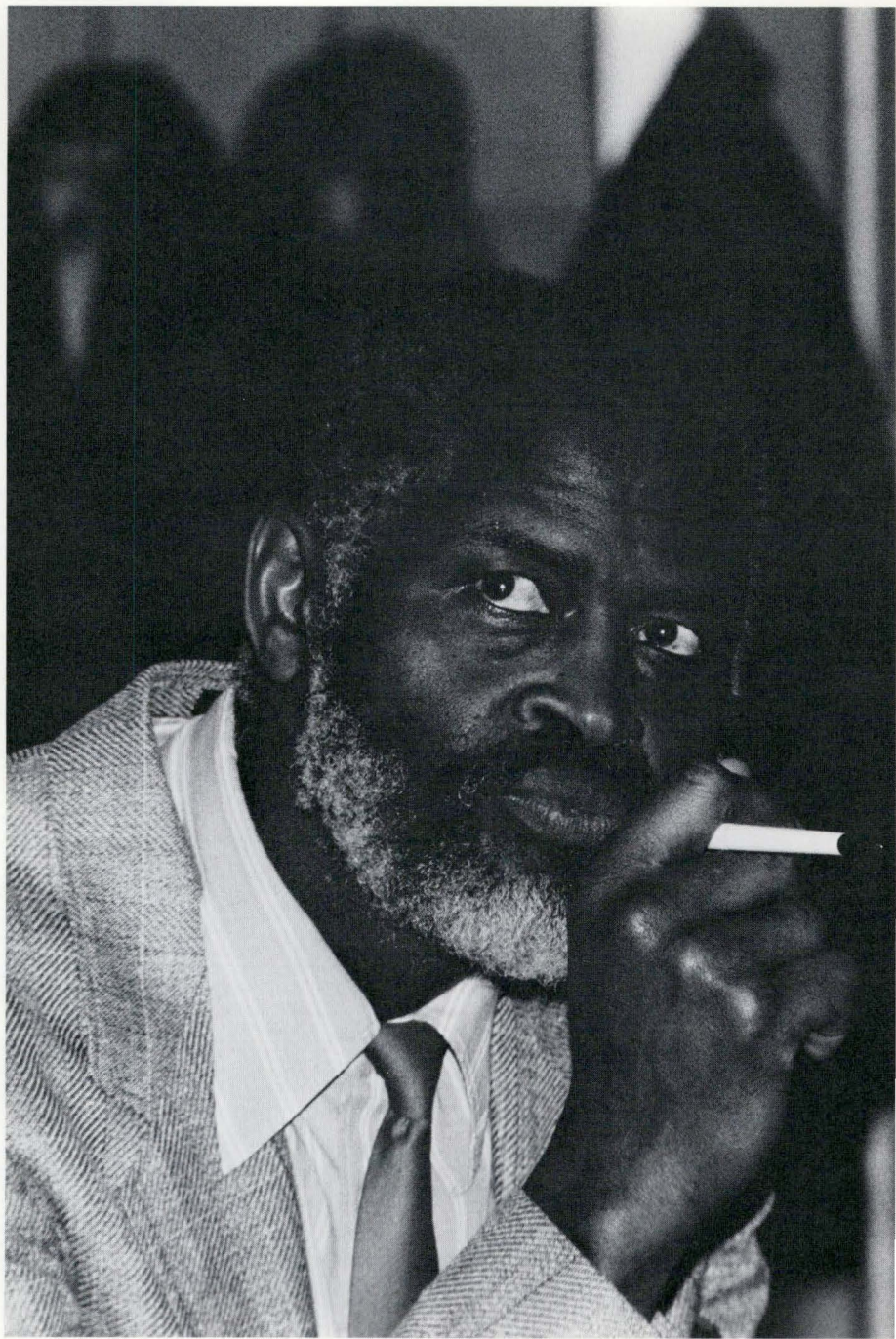












Hart Hanson / LITTLE PANES

My room isn't really a bedroom at all—it's a glassed-in sunporch. I did it myself back in the early fifties soon after setting up my permanent optician's practice. Back then I lived alone and soda lime glass came cheap, all sworley windows in small five-by-seven panes. Ten years ago Lisa came back home with my two grandsons and I gave up my bedroom to her and moved into my self-built room. That's when I noticed how hard it is to look out those windows; there's always a flaw or discolouration or a misplaced frame warping the view. You have to close one eye as though you're looking through a telescope. It's best to mistrust most of what you see through that soda lime glass, I've known that for years.

Maybe that's why as soon as I saw Boyd, head down, striding up the front walk like he was fighting his way through snowdrifts, I told myself to hold onto some vestiges of hope. After all, that glass had fooled me before—only a week previous I had seen my grandson Fletcher lounging on the corner and thought for a mad moment it was my brother Carl, young and resurrected—but no, even taking into account the convolutions, I could see Boyd's eyes set down and hard on the packages under his arm. I saw the way he knocked on the front door instead of just poking his head in the back and hollering, and I knew that despite the rosy auspices of the last year, he was really just another flash of light about to reflect off us into infinity, like a flashlight beam aimed at Alpha Centauri. Boyd was no different from the others. Poor Lisa was about to be waived again. "Fooled," I thought. "We were all of us fooled."

I heard Boyd knock, and by putting my right cheek tight against the glass, I could make him out waiting at the door. It's dangerous, I think, seeing everything in two dimensions through one eye like that—especially when you're getting old and the universe is flattening out anyway. I sighed and walked through the livingroom to where Sebastian and Fletcher greeted Boyd with their usual bounce and jostle.

This was the first one to leave my daughter with any kind of formality: he brought parting gifts—the boys each got an expensive jacket—no doubt a significant financial outlay for a subcontractor specializing in the waterproofing of basements. I quelled an urge to tell Boyd that it didn't make good sense to make an investment in something you were going to—as my grandsons might say—*trash*. In a way, I supposed, he was different: he wasn't sparing himself any of the hurt. He didn't look away from the boys. Fletcher's jacket was grey, too wide in the shoulders. It ballooned over his chest.

Sebastian took longer to figure things out, but Fletcher grasped right away what was going on. Boyd wasn't surprised by Fletcher's reaction, the dropping of the coat, running away upstairs. Knowing Lisa, she had prepared Boyd. She was always saying that Fletcher had some sort of abandonment syndrome when it came to the men in her life. She blamed it on the early trauma of being abandoned by a loud-voiced father, the shock of sudden silence.

Lisa, meanwhile, stuck fast to the kitchen. Boyd looked that way a couple times while Sebastian made appreciative noises about his jacket—black leather, shiny, festooned with silver buckles and snaps. I prayed that he'd go in and say something to her, stop all this from happening.

He presented me with a wallet. He must have gone into that leather store with his credit card waving like a flag of surrender, thinking he could assuage us with new, improved thicker skins. He didn't say anything, just looked pained. From the first Lisa had been charmed by his silent demand that nobody speak to him at all unless they were saying the whole message, upfront and clear.

"Tell Fletch I'm sorry, Sebastian," he said finally, and pulled the front door ever so quietly shut behind him. He didn't mean about the jacket being too big.

"What?" Sebastian said, looking up. He regarded the way I was standing, favouring my arthritic knee, holding Fletcher's buy-off jacket under my arm. It came to him then, what was happening.

"He's running out on us? Jesus! What'd she do now? I *liked* Boyd."

Past tense: *liked*. Eleven year olds make up their minds fast once they see how things are. How can you explain anything to them?

"Don't blame your mother," I said. I wondered if he remembered the last time I told him that. Or had that been Fletcher?

Fletcher slouched into my room after the eleven o'clock news. I was playing with the round, many-faceted prism he'd given me at Christmas, throwing coloured diamonds of light from my desk lamp across my work table. I don't really *work* there anymore—just write letters and take care of family finances and handle the Accounts Due portion of Lisa's florist shop. Fletcher was wearing his racing car pajamas, which meant he was upset. My daughter calls them his "regressive vestments." Fourteen year olds don't like pajamas, she'd told me once, reading from some single-parent pocket guide; they like to explore their burgeoning sexuality by sleeping naked.

"Some fob off," he said, "a lousy jacket."

"It's the best he could do," I said, holding the prism to my eye. "You think it's any easier for him?" How do you explain these things?

"A *suede* jacket," Fletcher said. He pressed his nose to one of my little panes of glass, crossed his eyes at his reflection. "Sebastian keeps asking me why Boyd left."

I limped over to my bed, sat, patted the yellow quilt. He slumped beside me, rested an elbow on my thigh and plucked at my trouser seam. He's done that since he was two years old. All my pants have a dull gap in the crease where Fletcher's ruined the cut.

"And what do you tell him?"

"I told him Boyd's a jerk. Really, Grampa, he's no better than Rick."

I grunted. From Fletcher, this is the ultimate insult. Rick was my daughter's boyfriend a few years ago. He'd moved in for a while—unlike Boyd who, when he stayed overnight, noisily and clumsily snuck out before light and sat listening to the radio in his truck until one of us fetched him in for breakfast. One afternoon, barbequing in the backyard, Rick had smacked Sebastian across the face with a greasy burger flipper. When I objected, he offered to toss me up onto the roof and Fletcher called him a douche-bag. Lisa told Rick to leave so Rick overturned the barbeque—there's still a scar on the lawn—and stalked off. Lisa hadn't spoken to any of us for a week. As though it were *our* fault. "And what did Sebastian say to that?" I asked.

"He says I'm wrong, wrong, wrong. He wanted to know why I never know the answers for anything."

"You know answers, Fletcher," I said, pushing him off my bed, toward the door, waving him in the direction of the bedroom he shares with his brother. "They just don't suit Sebastian. He doesn't think any of us know as much as we should."

My daughter was still sitting in the kitchen drinking Ovaltine and white wine at one in the morning. She was planning a quilt, sketching with a blue lead pencil poised over yards of brown tissue paper. When she heard my slippers shush the buckled linoleum, she looked up and said, "This one's for you, Dad."

"I *have* one, thank-you," I said. I hate it when she gets out her quilt making kit; it means months of grumpiness.

"It's old. Hell. I made that one when . . . when *Eugene* left."

"It's fine. I like it. I've just gotten it broken in. Give this one to Sebastian."

"Sebastian got a new one when Rick left," she said. "Please, Dad, don't be difficult. I liked Boyd. You liked Boyd. The boys liked Boyd. Even Boyd liked Boyd — the only time, I might add, that I was ever with a man who liked himself without thinking he was Mick Jagger or God."

"Make it blue then," I said, seating myself across the kitchen table from her. "Eugene's quilt is a horrible yellow."

"Yellow is the colour of intellect and cowardice," she said, "and suited Eugene to a tee."

"And what is blue?" I asked.

"Blue is equilibrium, foresight, and balance," she said, "and it is very sad."

"Lisa," I said. "Maybe Boyd wasn't as perfect as—"

"Why," she asked, turning to her quilt — my quilt — *Boyd's* quilt, "is it that an old, retired, gamey-legged optician thinks he can see everything so much more clearly than an attractive, recently abandoned 38 year old divorced florist?"

"When I finally leave you," I said, "to go on my last journey . . ." I pointed straight upwards, "... what colour will you make my quilt?"

When I looked back down at her, I saw the little girl I'd left behind over thirty years before, left with another family for a while after her mother died. My throat closed up.

"You're the oldest vanisher of them all," she said. "Yours would have to be transparent."

"Okay," Lisa said, clapping her hands. It was Saturday morning and Boyd had been gone for four days. The boys and I were gathered in what Lisa rather grandly calls the Breakfast Nook,

eating peanut butter toast and drinking grape juice. The material for my new quilt was jumbled in the corner. There was a scribbled sign pinned to the blue damask: "Touch Me and Die." Lisa clapped again. She has always been able to produce a sharp, painful sound with the palms of her hands, and today it reminded me of my brother Carl being whipped by my father for lying to my mother. I remember, Carl had told my mother that he was doing his school work in the library after school but when Mom checked, he wasn't there and a neighbour said he'd thought he'd seen Carl around the E-Z Shot Billiard Hall. Dad led Carl to the basement and took his belt to him. Nobody said a word. They never did find out that Carl had been working as a sweeper to make enough money to buy my mother a Pomeranian dog she'd admired. She never did get her Pomeranian. Years later, I told Carl that if only he'd told *me* about what he was doing, I could have told *them* and our family might not have died out so sour.

"All someone had to do was ask," Carl told me.

Lisa said, "There're going to be a few changes in this household." The boys groaned. I snorted.

"Hobby time," Fletcher whispered to me.

Lisa pulled a list from the back pocket of her jeans, unfolded it with a belligerent flip and started to read.

"Sebastian—"

"Yo," said Sebastian. He'd been up for hours already, the family rooster. He was working on his second breakfast with an eye toward lunch.

"You start piano lessons next week. Miss Schuster will take you on. I have your practice schedule worked out. You are also going to start soccer."

"All *right*," said Sebastian, pounding mock piano chords on the table top. "Keyboards." He turned up the collar of his black leather jacket.

"Fletcher—"

"I don't want any activities," Fletcher said. It occurred to me that Boyd had spent quite a lot of time with the boy, taken him to worksites and ballgames and such, taken him to the airport, gotten him interested in planes and jets.

"It's your decision of course," Lisa shrugged. "But here's what I'm offering. Canoeing and guitar lessons."

"Hey Fletch," Sebastian said. "We can form a band."

"I want a skateboard," Fletcher said. "I want a BMX bike. I want a Mohawk and an earring."

"An earring?" I said.

"He doesn't really, Dad," Lisa said. "He's being dramatic."

When Lisa left the Breakfast Nook to fetch me a brochure on lawn bowling and bridge at a seniors' drop-in centre, Sebastian asked Fletcher, "Why is it that when we get dumped, we have to start learning all this new stuff?"

"She wants us well-rounded," Fletcher said. "She wants us to know more than she does."

"No," Sebastian said, sliding beneath the table, "that's not it. That's not it at all."

One week to the day after Boyd left, the boys read comic books over on the other side of the couch while Lisa and I played Scrabble. She was killing me on account of the strategic placing of the word *vilify*.

"You're not fitted with the right lenses to help me through this, Dad," she told me. She'd recently finished a book on how to interact with people using language which reflected their own frames of reference. We'd all been slotted according to a series of twelve key questions. She decided I was a Visual—because I had been an optician—and so peppered our conversations with *vista*, *view*, *outlook*, *magnification*, *focus*, *resolution* and the like. Sebastian was declared a Kinetic. Fletcher, a Tactile. Lisa herself was an Uncategorizable.

"Oh," I said, "and I suppose Marna is better fitted?"

Marna lives two doors down. She is blowzy and fat and has a perspiration problem which she is dealing with through electro-acupuncture. A little younger than Lisa, very sympathetic and happily married to a fireman named Nelson, Marna is always trying to get pregnant, rushing off to collar Nelson at peak times. Every time I see Marna she is wearing Playtex gloves and no socks.

"Marna makes a good cup of coffee," Lisa said, ticking back her fingers and inadvertently letting me see that she had a *q*; "sometimes she does the dishes, she listens in a non-judgemental manner, she's a bit psychic, she's a woman—praise Jesus—and none of the men in my life have ever fooled her for a minute. She knew they were flighty right from the start."

"Sometimes," I said, "I do the dishes."

"Me too," Sebastian said.

I spelled *kinetic* on the board. It didn't bring me up as far as *vilify* but it boosted me to within striking distance and there was no way for Lisa to use her valuable *q*.

"I'm going to stay overnight somewhere," Fletcher said, rising from behind the couch. "Go for dinner too," Lisa said. "I have only five hamburger patties. . . ." She spelled out q-u-i-l-t on the board. ". . . and I hate it when you and Sebastian fight over seconds."

"Fletch can have it," Sebastian said quickly, grabbing his brother's ankle and hugging it to his chest. Fletcher had to hop to keep his balance. "C'mon, Fletch, don't go. Stay here in our house tonight, will you? Let's not *anyone* go anywhere."

After the eleven o'clock news, I paused outside the boys' bedroom, unseen, leaning on my good leg.

Sebastian asked, "Why did Boyd leave us, Fletch?"

"He found someone else," Fletcher said. "Younger than Mom. Prettier. That's what always happens."

"No," Sebastian said. His voice was frustrated, irritable, determined in the darkness. I could picture him lying on the bottom bunk staring up through the slats, through his brother's back, the roof. "That's not it. I don't know what it is but that isn't the right answer. You never give me the right answer."

"Then don't ask me," Fletcher said, his voice fading. "Go on to sleep and dream of a place where nothing ever changes."

Boyd had been gone for twelve days and we were celebrating a big wedding contract for Lisa's florist shop by eating pizza and drinking Hire's root beer on the floor of the livingroom in front of the broken TV set. Lisa liked the warm blue light the pictureless tube now gave off on channel five, intimate and friendly, and so refused to get it fixed. She also said that we'd talked more, all of us, since the TV had been ruined by Fletcher's running into it trying to escape Sebastian with a mouth full of water.

"How's about the Holy Rollers?" Sebastian said.

Lisa winked at me. To the boys it was a funny story, just a little scary, and maybe it benefitted from the vision of their mother as a small child. Between Lisa and me it was a testy and mawkish reminder of desertion. I shrugged. When it comes to parental reproach, she and I share it all.

"I don't like that story," Fletcher said.

"Liar," Sebastian said. "You like it. What made you change your mind all of a sudden?" He wasn't looking at Fletcher. He was looking at the last piece of pizza.

"Well then," Fletcher said, "fine. I don't care."

"When I was a little girl of seven," Lisa said from around her bottle of pop, "my mother died and my father couldn't take care of me."

The two boys swivelled around on the hardwood floor. They looked at me perched on the ottoman. Fletcher in particular, I thought, scowled. In the blue light of the TV it was impossible to tell what exactly had changed.

"It wasn't easy for an optician in those days," I said.

That's the truth. I was on the road as much as any door-to-door salesman, me and my '47 Buick. My circuit extended from Osoyoos down to Spokane, Washington, in the States, and on back up to Kamloops in the Interior, sometimes as far as Cranbrook in the east. Frames, optical glass and a grinding machine in the trunk, all swaying from canvas supports, working out of barber shops and bars and doctors' waiting rooms and even a post-office outside Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. It was no great life. One time, when Lisa's mother was still alive, I returned home four days behind schedule and she hit me with a baseball bat, right in the knee — the knee which is now arthritic.

"I *wanted* to go with him," Lisa was saying. The boys turned their attention away from me, back to their mother. It was a relief. "But my father thought it better to leave me with a good, decent, upstanding religious family."

"They never beat you or anything," Sebastian said, leaning over his crossed legs. "They never laid a hand on you and there was always plenty to eat. They didn't make you work too hard. But..."

"... they made you sleep under the pictures," Fletcher said.

"Above my bed," Lisa said, carefully speaking to her sons, not to me, "were the pictures of two children who had died in infancy. The only two children Mrs. Sylvius was able to have. They were oil paintings commissioned after death so the eyes were all wrong. They were dead fish eyes and they used to watch everything that went on in that room."

"They never blinked," said Sebastian. He'd always enjoyed this part more than Fletcher. He relished those paintings, the very idea of dead child spies.

Lisa shuddered. She had told me once, I think it was after Eugene left, that the children's faces had always been so goddammed patient, waiting to see what would happen if *she* died mysteriously in the night, as though they wanted to satisfy some lingering curiosity about what had happened to *them*. But that wasn't the most frightening thing.

"At night," Lisa said, "after I'd been asleep for a couple of hours, the Sylviuses would come into my room and kneel at the end of my bed. They'd seize the footboard and talk to their children as if I weren't there at all. They'd yell at God. They screamed and wailed and shook my bed and pulled out their hair. . . ."

Lisa's arms still betrayed her: they goosepimpled.

This was the point where the story had always ended before, with an admonition to the boys to appreciate their homelife even with a single mother, a broken TV, and bunkbeds.

"I didn't know," I said. "I was working." I burped from the root beer; usually Grampa belching is a fool proof way to make the boys laugh. But not this time. Lisa, still smarting over Boyd, I suppose, remembered this earlier abandonment with more than usual fervour.

"You left me there for so *long*," she said. A tear beaded in the corner of her eye, the first I'd seen since Boyd left. The boys glared at me as though I were *their* father too, as though I were the mysterious traitor to the family Sebastian had never met and of whom Fletcher could have only the dimmest memories of parade drill bellowing. Sebastian put an arm around his mother. Fletcher just shrank into himself, raising his skinny shoulders like bulwarks. I wished he would come over to the ottoman and ruin the crease in my trousers but he just looked down at his thumbs.

"The Sylviuses used to say it wasn't fair that the child of a dead mother should live while two perfectly good Christian parents went to waste. Waste was sinful, they said, devil's delight. That's what they shouted over me every night. They told God to take me and give back one of their children. They prayed for me to die every night in my sleep."

"How did you escape?" Sebastian asked. "Fletch—how did she escape?"

"She ran away," Fletcher said, hugging his knees. "She ran away and found a better place to live, a real home where people stayed."

"No," Sebastian wailed — and *his* eyes teared. "That can't be right."

"It isn't," I said. "I came home and took her away and never left her alone again."

"I don't remember that," Lisa said — and then in a placating tone which completely contradicted her words, "though I'm sure it's true." She dabbed at her eyes with her t-shirt and managed a smile.

I was flabbergasted. We'd never talked about it, never ventured this far, but I'd always assumed that she remembered my half-noble, half-shameful rescue.

"More pizza?" she asked brightly, though it was all gone.

"Wait a minute," I said. "Hold on. Yes you do remember that night, hot. July. I came home well after midnight. I'd been gone almost five weeks. I couldn't wait until morning to see you so I went over to the Sylvius place intending only to peek in the window at you and I saw them. I heard them."

Lisa looked hopeful, her raised eyebrows making furrows in her forehead. She made a clicking noise in the back of her throat.

"And I barged in the front door and I picked up Sylvius by his necktie from where he was kneeling and I shook him — and when Mrs. Sylvius stood up I grabbed her whole face and shoved. She fell right back onto the bed."

I can still remember how her nose and chin felt, greasy and cool, her eyes hot on my fingertips, her teeth hard against my palm, her breath wet through my hand.

"It's hard to remember," Lisa said. "Were you wearing your hat?"

"Grampa handled things," Sebastian said. "I knew he would. People do the right things when they know what's what."

"You ripped down the pictures," Lisa said. She laughed and rocked forward. "And put your foot through them."

I laughed too, the only time, I'm fairly certain, that anything about that episode has seemed in the least funny. "The Sylviuses called me a murderer and a ruffian and I punched Mr. Sylvius in the throat and he couldn't speak or pray for a month."

Actually, I remember, I had some half-baked notion to bust the bastard in the nose but I was at least four inches shorter than he and completely inexperienced at slugging people.

Even Fletcher unfolded a bit as his mother giggled and hid her mouth behind her hands.

"All this time," she said, "and I thought you just left me there."

Now I couldn't stop talking; I guess Boyd got to all of us. I think I just wanted to defend my own significance in my daughter's life full of insignificant dutiless men.

"For two years," I said, "you had nightmares. And we had a song. Do you remember, Lisa?"

I can still hear her child's high voice:

*In the shade of the old apple tree
Where the love in your eyes I could see
When the voice that I heard
Like the song of a bird,*

She laughed and said the words with me:

*Seem'd to whisper sweet music to me;
I could hear the dull buzz of the bee
In the blossoms as you said to me
With a heart that is true,
I'll be waiting for you,
In the shade of the old apple tree.*

My mother taught me that song and I taught it to Lisa's mother and we needed them here now, Lisa and I, because neither one of us could remember the melody. We kept singing it to the tunes of other songs; it wasn't right. It was close but it wasn't quite there.

Fletcher said, "You have to tell a story all the way or it's worse than not telling it at all."

Lisa and I were working in the yard five weeks and three days after Boyd left. She'd decided that she wanted to move the compost heap from near the incinerator to behind the potting shed that was now used to store bicycles and the snowshovel, the lawnmower, the barbecue, and a dog house we kept meaning to find a tenant for some day.

"I'm wondering, these days," I said, "how I got to be so old and still I can't seem to figure what's going on around me."

Lisa sat back on her heels the same way her mother had done. She cocked her mouth the way I had as a boy when I was nervous, the way Fletcher does when he's annoyed. When Lisa does it, it means she is thinking.

She said, "It got to that point. You know. That point where all this intensity was just impossible to maintain and it's impossible to get rid of without some forward motion and you just can't go back to easy living."

I remembered the way her mother had swung the bat, her eyes on the exact point where it hit me as she said, "You think I'm blind?" in a reasonable, conversational voice. I shovelled some of the compost into our wheelbarrow. Not too much, my leg was hurting me.

"Easy living," I snorted. "Is *that* what we're trying for around here?"

Lisa stood and flung a small clod of dirt at me. It made a mark on my knee.

"You see? Do you Dad? I come as a package. It must be like loving a schizophrenic. When Boyd left, he got a gift for everyone but me. I live in a house surrounded by males—two sons and a father. I'll betcha I could urinate standing up and make less mess on the toilet seat than you guys do. Yes, dammit, easy living is all I want right now. Sometimes I'm afraid I really don't give a flying fuck about what the rest of you are after."

"There're lotsa fish in the sea," I said rather stupidly, not knowing whether to be flattered or offended that my daughter had actually spoken to me like this. It had never occurred to me that *we* might be Lisa's problem, we boys.

"Oh Dad," she said, pointing with her trowel, not ready to laugh, "The ocean's thataway—about six hundred miles."

* * *

After forty-three days, Boyd came for a visit. When we saw the pick-up with his name stencilled on the side, the boys and I hid in my room—if you can hide in a place with clear walls. We all three of us, Sebastian, Fletcher, and me, hovered over the hot air register, straining to hear what was going on in the kitchen.

“I figure we should do it *right*,” Boyd said.

“As opposed to what?” asked Lisa. I recognized it as one of her delaying techniques and wished I could get word to Boyd somehow.

“Be *nice* to him,” Fletcher whispered, clutching the hated suede jacket to his chest.

Boyd clammed up. I groaned. He never knew how to answer questions like that. He is one of those men who consider that dumb silence covers a multitude of inadequacies. I couldn’t see Lisa putting up with *that* for long. She coughed. I breathed again. *She* was going to save *him*.

“Fletcher’s moody and sensitive,” she said. “He can’t stand ups and downs. He needs some stability.”

“He can stand ups and downs,” Boyd said.

“And Sebastian,” Lisa said. “He has to know everything and he never believes a single answer anyone gives him and he’s suspicious all the time.”

“You name a kid Sebastian,” Boyd said, “and you got to expect troubles like that.”

I laughed: Sebastian is my name.

“And Dad. . . .”

Obviously, Lisa intended to save us all.

“He’s an old optician,” Boyd said. “You make allowances.”

“Jesus, Fletch,” Sebastian said, turning my prism round and round in his hands, the colours launched out through the walls of my glass room. “Is all this crap worth it?”

I watched Fletcher. He was putting on the suede jacket, breathing deep to fill the oversized shoulders, expanding like something porous being released from a fist, and for once in his life, I knew he was going to give an answer Sebastian would accept.

Gary Hyland / TWO POEMS

CASE HISTORY 3

The man who thinks his wife's a hat
has an extreme paranoid syndrome
marked by the most bizarre delusions.
Weeks earlier, convinced she was
a dish of butter, he bruised her
trying to spread her on a muffin
(which of course was not a muffin
but the *Sunday New York Times*).
And while she was a Dodge he nearly
drove her crazy changing her oil.
When she was a hat he merely wanted
to brush her off and hang her in a closet.

Meanwhile next door Roger just-wed
thinks his Lynn's an angel on a bun.
And Lori in the condo opposite
wakes beside a dashing knight of neon
even while his white horse, tethered
out front, shits upon her lawn.

SELF-DEFENCE

On the white flesh just below his jaw
the blood blossomed warm, a rose
with roots around his heart.

Each breath, a frothing in his mouth.
At last he could not speak.
And that was all she wanted.

He had known, but could not stop
the words like wings in his lungs,
exciting his tongue.

They flew against her battlements
and died in feathered heaps,
too deep, too thick to sweep away.

The nights of soft concussions
were a torment she could not bear,
and so the knife.

He would live, the scar a second smile
beneath his smile. And she would live,
no less wounded, beneath her smile.

John Donlan / TWO POEMS

PEASANT LIFE

You long to touch the sacred object but the vision
of paint and gilt flaking under your finger, falling
from the darkened wood restrains you. And
isn't watching TV evangelists somehow the same,

or at least as good? That woman's a fool; she won't
live on a man. They met at a dance near the card catalogue
and vanished into another century, intoxicated
with pheromones, evading dark media fantasies

in favour of deeper meanings words can't hold.
The Silver Maples' scarlet flower cases
burst with possibility, a crammed engagement book
flings open its pages, recovering

the sweet lost holiness entombed
in objects of desire. You yearn for these things
even as they ignore you, one of nature's gentlemen
coaxing a chipmunk with food you forgot to bring.

SLEEP

A rattle of ladders in the alley wakes you
to make love in a crib with one side down
by a high open window, the awful drop
if you forget where you are. That was after

you conquered falling at last by letting yourself fall
without fear, so that you never land but shift
back to the clear interval of bedsheets
and daylight, where there is so much control

you dive into another breaker.

The Sea Queen swims to meet you, but her stove
can't be repaired until you find your toolbox, you're
late for the examination, you didn't know

you were taking this course, you didn't go to class
all year. The freedom of empty halls seduces you
past the sweating desks, the rows of papers
on which everyone wants to write the same answer.

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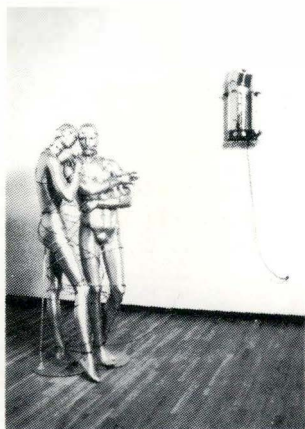
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DANDELION

and I, the anarchist who needed order,
wearing a dandelion at my throat

— Robert Kroetsch



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