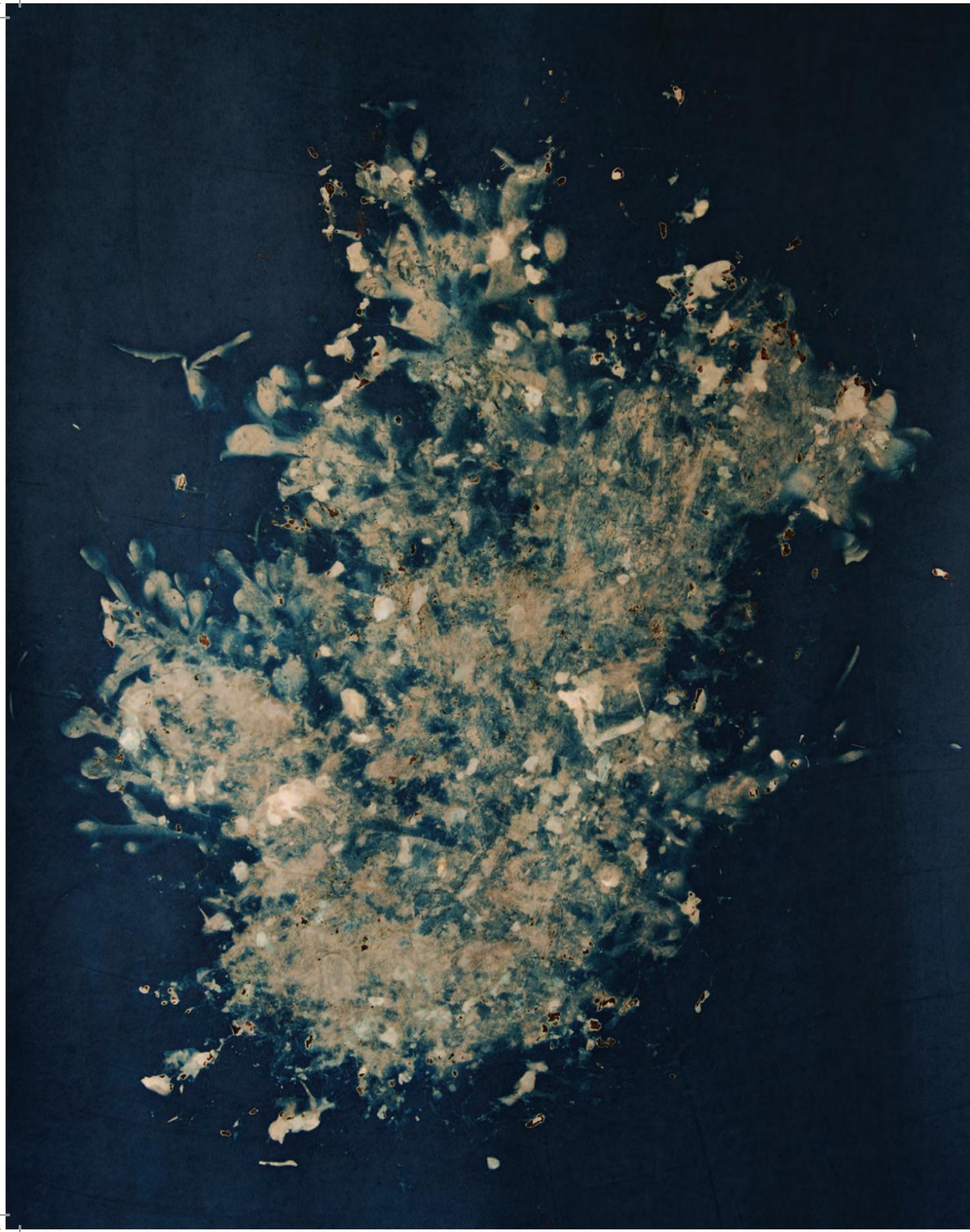


heavy the sea

esther teichmann



in search of lightning

It had been dark for several days now; day turned to night and night to day without there ever appearing to be but brief glimpses of light, flashing momentarily. The skies rolled by furiously, swelling in a strange twilight, crashing in waves that burst into pouring showers. Water ran in tiny rivers, steam rising upon impact.

I come here almost every day – the glass roof amplifying the raindrops, comforting in their dramatic overtures. At least the weather seems to hear me, the rage, the grief.

Inside and outside collide here, within this forgotten corner of the city. Birds fly in and out of the tipped panels – only the black blue sky and a blurry grey outline of the city visible through the sweating, dripping glass.

The orchids, ferns and palms, with their Latin names on carefully placed signs, bloom proudly, oblivious to their lack of audience. I sound out these unfamiliar words, forgetting them as soon as they form a shape in my mouth. The air is so thick here it feels solid, acrid, sharing the vegetation's breath. The silent statues look on with their artificially dismembered limbs, copies of gods and goddesses from another time.

Stretched out Christs in the hundreds drape the walls of the adjacent museum – gaping mouths, silent cries. Pain veiled and unveiled in burnt gold, petrol, umber, the same story told and retold. Walking through these empty rooms to get to the glasshouse, silent guards sit immobile at every corner as though cast, or carved, echoing the bodies they protect.

Presumably this could go on forever, this wandering, the emptiness, the iron taste of apathy that coats my tongue.

Language will return eventually, I know this, remember the last time, recall the dragging of feet, the pain along my spine, the flood of dread upon waking. This prior knowledge, this bodily remembering, this physical infidelity in the repetition of mourning, brings no relief. What was automated just last week, is now a complex chain of actions, requiring a will I no longer possess.

The black of the storms have folded into night and the caretaker is locking each section of the glasshouse, maintaining their different temperatures and humidities.

A girl at school had stopped speaking. Did not speak for years. Maybe whispering these words, reading the names of plants imported by an emperor, is an attempt to stop language leaving entirely. Grief takes hold anew each day, as though the fall of sleep withdraws all memory, and every day upon waking you die again and I with you.

Like a knife he is lodged inside me.
I read these words somewhere.

Days spent in saunas, steam rooms, the world disintegrating in water vapour. Here within these other glasshouses, I lie back into the burning heat. This self-induced fainting, this willful drowning, delivers the delirium of falling away, of dissolving. *- evf*



like a night-blooming cereus

carol mavor

Photogen

was born into
bright
full
moon
light.

One of three Hesperides
the daughters of the night.

The middle girl,
mouth large and finely curved
crescent moon-smile.

Legs pumping up and down on the pedals of her bike,
a village
in the arms of the
Black Forest
a lake
ice cream

all clean.

She knew the lake so well
that
she
pedalled
pedalled
pedalled
around and around and around
its very pretty edges
with her eyes
shut tight.

She's a bicycle girl.
Shaken by
Bataille's
Simone
pleasured by
Proust's
Albertine.

If not, winter,
Photogen basked in the full splendour of the sun
until she could bear more of it
than any dark-blooded African

and
resisted being dressed again.

As she grew, Photogen's eyes
grew
darker
and
darker.

Until they were as dark as vespers
as black as apples.

Nycteris

was born
under
a full moon
shrouded in gloomy
Mombasa cloud.

His Taita mother fed him black milk
and wine as dark as carbuncle
and pomegranates and purple grapes
and birds that dwell in marshy places.

At boarding school
Nycteris developed his boyish charm
convincing younger boys
that it was
truly
an honour
to iron
his white shirts crisp
to polish
his black shoes shiny.

And it was.

Sappho

George Macdonald

Paul Celan

George MacDonald

Nycteris's skin
darkened silver
the purest tint and grain.

Nycteris's helical hair
whirls
scrolls
holds tight

like tiny black fists.

Nycteris's mouth
less beautiful,
if more lovely,
from sadness.

Nycteris's eyes
stop short
only
of being too large.

He's a pretty boy.
Tinted
with Persephone
stained
with Antigone.

A sweet sorrow
perfumes his air
like flowers in the night.

Like a night-blooming cereus
blooming just once a year
and only
at night.

Like the strained slow click of Photogen's camera shutter.

When Photogen
first
watched him
bloom
that night
under a bower of ferns
bougainvillea
orchids
her soul was penetrated by light
(ning).

Dante

The measured motion
so extended,
her mind lost in dreaminess
in following it.

Dorothy Canfield Fisher

'Had the last petal moved?'

With that,
Photogen's pupils became mydriatic
(two black moons).

Photogen gazed within
took her fill
of stamen and pistil.

Dorothy Canfield Fisher

And there is Photogen
waiting.

Like the sweet apple turning black
on the top of the topmost branch,
and he did not notice it,
rather,
he did notice,
but could not reach up to take it.

Sappho

sleeping beauty underwater

Oh how easy it is,
at first.

The branches of coral,
part like thighs
and the sticky leaves of seaweed
lick
his cheeks
and his lips
like tongues
pleasingly rough

a taste of seawater molasses.

He plunges deeper into her underwater coral thicket
cylindrical tubes trembling
beneath
undulating waters

The coral calyxes take alarm
their petals re-enter
their cases
and
right before his eyes turn to stony
knobs.

Out of touch
wrapped in seaweed
ribbons of silk loosely entwine
rump and thighs

water life fabric
like water in water
puddles at your feet
mermaid tails for the street

Underwater Sleeping Beauty
subaquatic Briar Rose

one hundred years ago
and 20,000 leagues under
you fell into a kind of somnolence
in the middle of an oceanic
dream.

One hundred years later
while swimming at the bottom of the sea

I found you.

And

I whispered into your ear what you had forgotten.

And

you awakened with open eyes: swept clean.

And

you swam away, weightless with desire.

Nothing more than
your own reflection in the water.

André Breton
Wendy Ligon Smith





fractal scars, salt water and tears

A giant camera stands on the edge of a cliff overlooking the sea. She walks into its dark belly, eyes adjusting to the change in light. The lens in the center of its conical roof focuses the image outdoors onto a mirror, projecting it upon the concave circular dish in the room's middle. The eggshell-lacquered projection bowl now holds the most exquisite image - tiny crystalline waves break silently over jagged cliffs, water droplets spray in minute detail.

Its circumference would fit a curled-up body almost exactly. She could sleep here, waves crashing upon skin, dancing across eyelids, covering her with their continual circular motion. She will come back here one day and he will stand behind her. Together they will inhale the image in silence, breath suspended, waiting for that moment when the late afternoon sun hits mute waves, flooding everything inside her in an overexposed glow of too much light.

He comes to her room, above the cliffs and the sea, surrounded by a thick jungle garden. She tastes her saltiness in his mouth, the taste of the ocean, the sweet smell of swamps. Deep-sea diving, eyes open, swimming from luminous turquoise into dark blue, towards almost black waters. Unafraid, she swims down, through ocean caves, under waterfalls, no longer needing to breathe, past and with all the women who are a part of her. The soft downy hair of his armpit feels like the cradle next to her mother's breast in which her head still fits exactly.

She wraps herself around him the way she and her sisters used to sleep entwined – no longer homesick. He sleeps arms outstretched as though crucified, wrists upturned, chest exposed. She watches him,

tracing his veins with her eyes, until they disappear beneath flesh, thinking of the bodies that have been as familiar as his is becoming, the strangeness of intimacy.

Her gaze falls upon the fractal scar beginning at the base of his throat, in that soft indentation between two arteries. From this tender point it spreads out and down like the finest of seaweed, fossilized upon him in one violent moment. Touching his lightning scar, reading the strange map etched into him. It glistens a coral pink, like the inside of the seashell she holds to her ear, listening to the ocean to fall asleep. She keeps a thicker kind of seaweed in the bath, the brackish salty smell reaching her boat-bed when a breeze moves across the room. She keeps these washed up branches of slippery leather, so as to bathe within their drowned mermaids' embrace, lowering herself into their tentacles as he sleeps oblivious, a few feet away. – *evf*



heavy the sea

She wakes to find herself within the moon's spotlight, a warm breeze moving across them. Breaking waves echo rhythmically, curtains billowing a strange dance.

They arrived late in the night too tired to drive on, a journey without destination or end. Days of driving through winding rainforest roads, warm afternoon rain lashing against the steamed-up windshield. She slides from under his arms, holding her breath. Slipping out, she closes the door softly.

The moon seems larger, closer to earth – everything feels alive in this too bright night. Her mother had told her she had been born at full moon, the maternity ward so crowded babies were delivered in hallways. She imagines the symphony of cries like baying wolves, the moonshine bathing bulging stomachs and writhing, blood-soaked-pink flesh in opalescent blues.

Still warm cement turns to sand as she runs towards glittering waves, eyes never leaving their hypnotizing call. One long inhale calms the cold sting of their crashing against shins, then thighs. Slowed only for a moment, she dives into blackness. A perfect arch with a force much greater than her body usually allows. Hurling into and through dark water, everything inside her breathes with strength and relief. She swims down and away from land, eyes open, seeing nothing, saltwater entering every pore. Life swirls beneath and around her, invisible to human eyes.

And then the depths push against her, releasing her to the light above. Held firmly in the sea's grasp, she bathes in the moon's glow.

Something is shifting, changing. Waters churn faster, a low rumbling rising from a far off place. Black clouds plunge this otherworldly stage into momentary darkness, their edges of deep cyan and petrol blue, backlit as the spotlight re-emerges.

Low groaning escalates into distant cracks of thunder. Slivers of light flash with a precision and force that betray their seeming delicacy. She thinks of his scar, of the almost ecstatic joy spreading across his face as he told her of the night he swam in lightning.

The rolling waves turn violently, breaking rhythm, no longer a gentle embrace. She should leave now, return to the rapidly diminishing shore, come back to her body, her separateness, lie beside him as though she had never left. Reluctance lingers and she hesitates too long. Raised up and recaptured, dragged under by a raging weight, her body sags, resistance futile. Every part of her is penetrated, pummelled by the howling sea. Seaweed strangles and binds her limbs. She gives in to the fury, knowing only then will it release her.

The skies turn upside down and as suddenly as she had found herself drowning, she is now expelled, thrown towards land. She lies motionless, half submerged, eyes closed, returning slowly. Rain pours down, washing the salt away. And still it clings to her, seaweed in hair, Medusa writhing. - *cut*





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