

June 6th at 6:30 pm
Inter American Development Bank Staff Gallery
1300 New York Avenue NW,
Washington, DC

Tirzo Martha
Antonius Roberts
Glenn Roopchand
GA Gardner
Angelica Barrow
Clayton Rhule

Genevieve Lahens
Nikolai Noel
Marielle Barrow
Andrae Green
Beatrice Mellinger
Marie-Denise Douyon

IN THE SPIRIT

An Exhibition of Caribbean Artists



The Allspice Festival of Arts & Humanities



PROGRAM

Welcome

Dr. Claire Nelson- ICS & Allspice

Mr. Michael Nelson-Director

IDB Staff Association

Feature Speaker

Mr. James Early

Antonius Roberts-Director Public Policy

Smithsonian Center for Heritage & Folk Life

Gallery Talk

Curators;

Marielle Barrow

Mahsa Javid

Refreshments


Marielle Barrow

CONTEMPORARY QUESTIONS

In the Spirit...in whose spirit...in what spirit?
Where does spirit dwell?

In the Spirit...
In changing our narrative
from romance to that of tragedy
In adapting our questions
to our present reality

In the Spirit...
Recognize our blindness
and address it
Transgression and transition
constantly happen in our present space
Constant transgression and transition
are necessary
so that we can address contemporary blindness



his exhibition seeks to present Caribbeanness as a sensibility that extends itself within and between spaces. As Caribbeans we inhabit a continuum of spaces, identify ourselves by movement rather than fixity. We continually transgress boundaries and are often in transit. The ideas of transgression and transition taken together suggest a process of unravelling within the continuum of spaces that we inhabit. Through methodical experimentation, artists attempt to unravel the knots of our past in the contemporary moment. In so doing they are compelled to confront the condemning circumstances of our material history that persists, transposed on the modern moment. Material circumstances of the past and present influence a current blindness, a masking of our contemporary reality.

“In the Spirit” invokes the questions: Whose spirit? What spirit? How and where does that spirit dwell? A Caribbean, Caribbean-

American voice emerges through a process of internalization or introspection that causes and co-exists with externalization, a compulsion to look outward. The movement of looking and simultaneously inhabiting space from inside to outside along a continuum is perhaps exemplified in the title of Caribbean scholar and artist Rex Nettleford’s text- “Inward Stretch, Outward Reach”. The voices of the artists in this exhibition encourage us to look deeper into ourselves to facilitate an inward reaching rather than simply reaching outward to the spirit of another. “In the Spirit” strives to be a space where intra-Caribbean expressions that are not insulated (James Early) are made accessible. The exhibition is in celebration of Caribbean-American Heritage Month with a thematic emphasis, which resonates with the commemoration of 2011 as the United Nations year of African Descent. It is at the same time commemoration and working

through of our Africanness and Caribbeanness: always in a process of transgression, transition and transformation.

Counter- Intuitive Narrative

The exhibition proceeds through a perhaps counter-intuitive logic, an ad hoc arrangement of works that obviate a fixed narrative progression. It addresses the themes used as narrative structure in Gordon Rohlehr's anthology "Transgression, Transition, Transformation",

but these modes are part and parcel of all the works rather than a linear narrative along which they progress. The pieces are informed by these processes of transgression, transition and transformation as motivation, and are informed by them (these processes) as content. Rohlehr uses transgression in the sense of "crossing over into forbidden territory, penetrating barriers" (Rohlehr vii). He quotes the final essay in his anthology "Where is Here" which says that "New World History has been a history of transgression; of the crossing over of people into each other's ethnic spaces". The Caribbean as New World is "an open, plural and infinitely transgressive theatre of overlapping spaces, ethnicities and traumas" (Rohlehr 489). Transgression then, rather than housing the single valence of negativity or positivity in this context is rather like the contradictory forces of Caribbean history and identity of which Fanon speaks, a polyvalent dynamic. Transgression within "In the Spirit", references the antagonisms of the colonial ethic-historic and current while celebrating the 'transgression' of Caribbean peoples—their boldness in breaking down boundaries and crossing over to new spaces, new knowledge. It celebrates their daring spirits in confronting the forces that have transgressed their own shores.

The lack of a teleological narrative structure is predicated on the argument articulated by David Scott

in his recent text *Conscripts of Modernity*. In an interview discussing the text, Scott reveals that it expands on his argument from his first book *Refashioning Futures* (1999). He suggests “not that we give better answers to the old questions, but the questions themselves are no longer relevant”. (Scott argues that our questions are contingent upon their relationship to the historical past and that this relationship needs to be differently narrated in order to draw attention to different aspects—struggle rather than freedom. The rhetorical structure of emancipation narratives is problematic and each class has a particular relationship to this narrative, which is no longer productive of any good. The current narrative is certainly not wrong but rather unproductive for our current conjuncture. Scott maps out the romantic narrative of history, stating that the narrative has a teleological impetus that tends toward totalization. He then offers the possibility of a new direction through tragedy, through a reorientation of politics and aesthetics. Tragedy presents a moral conflict, where the distinctions between good and evil are obfuscated and embodied within a single figure (he points toward Hegel’s reading of Antigone). Because tragedy is not guaranteed by a “progressive dialectical resolution it is more willing to recognize the frailty of will and the dark underside of mastery, the reversibility of all achievement” (3). The focus of his book is on the ‘problem-space’, which he defines as, “first of all a conjunctural space, a historically constituted

discursive space. This discursive conjuncture is defined by a complex of questions and answers—or better, a complex of statements, propositions, resolutions and arguments offered in answer to largely implicit questions or problems” (4). How does one locate oneself within or between spaces as esteemed artist and curator Christopher Cozier attempts to do?

The usual sense of temporality and definition invoked by the term ‘contemporary’ are potentially

shifted when used in conjunction with tragedy.

Through an identification with the mode of tragedy within the current conjuncture, the sense of temporality, representation and definition invoked by the term contemporary are shifted. ‘Contemporary’ becomes somewhat disputed as the past continues to be replicated

in the present. In essence, 'contemporary' is a contested term as historical relations of power are not yet past. Thus for the Caribbean, 'contemporary' signals tragedy, a space for the arresting of time and renegotiation of historical relationships to the present. At the same time, the term contemporary in a Caribbean context calls for a re-institution of transgression as a mode of action for the Caribbean person. 'Contemporary' in association with tragedy, adduces ideas of transgression. The artists in this show reveal the perpetuation of the past into the present. At the same time, in various ways, their works transgress boundaries of representation in the present and in so doing allow our transitioning to a new thought-space which we hope can be transposed to the material reality of a larger public.

What kind of new questions do these works help us to ask or do the works provide answers to questions asked by the artists? What is the form of the current struggle or what form could it take? Stuart Hall, in his article "New Ethnicities", notes the incremental nature of change and its effects or form. Change requires displacement, reorganization and repositioning of cultural strategies. He discredits binary language of oppositions to describe the shift. Shift is best described as a "struggle over the relations of representation to a politics of representation in itself" (165).

What resources and capital have we accrued from the struggles of our past that we neglect in our present? How

do we "struggle over the relations of representation"? The narrative of this exhibition is one of struggle over contracts or relations of representation. It is figurative narrative and one of recognition. It suggests dual temporalities, allowing vision through the recognition of masks. It asks the question, why do we condemn ourselves by allowing others to continue in their condemnation of us? The images impel this question through myriad means, but all through the recognition of who and where we are in the current conjuncture.



With Out Wings

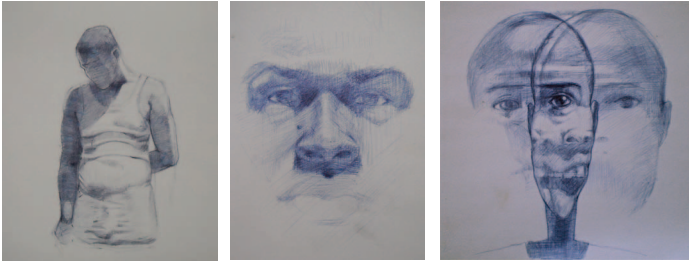
ANTONIUS ROBERTS

“You interpret what you see. Each piece should be surveyed based on your experience and what you bring to the work... **”**All of us need to use whatever talents and/or resources that we have to deal with the concerns that are prevalent in our society today. Most of my exhibits are about making a social statement, **”**

Roberts continually speaks from the standpoint of heritage to an impulse of preservation. Working mostly with discarded materials, his art signifies a resilient spirit underscoring a tribal warrior-consciousness through grooved markings. The strength of mask-like visages and rhythmic slits are juxtaposed with the sensual contours of the lower body and the smoothness of the wood. While *With Out Wings* hearkens to the images of an enslaved past, it speaks of current enslavement where condemnation of our heritage and 'blackness' is central to the tenets of development. Notions of progress allow for the discarding of the very trees (of which this is one), that are the lifeblood and contain the stories of the past. This is one of the practices of development/ progress that determines our current existence and our future. As a Bahamian, Roberts specifically speaks of tourism as marker of development. *With Out Wings* begs us to question not simply development but our acceptance of its definition.

The juxtaposition of smooth contours and grooved markings seem to reference the splitting of self, the conflictual inner workings where the black man identifies with visions of the elite white while wearing his black mask. It resonates with the double consciousness spoken of by Dubois and the issues of "Black Skin, White Mask" by Fanon. The form thus acts as a double symbol, the amputation or crucifixion of our cultural authenticity through development and the 'cutting off' in which we must engage, the elimination of the current, popular notion of progress.

Untitled I, II, III



A constant of ghostliness pervades these images in a tone of warning rather than an invocation of trepidation. Their haunting is through an alternating blindness, dumbness and deafness, imaged through erasure of features. The deconstructed self is presented as self with multiple facets, multiple possibilities for succumbing to an ambiguous reality, rather than a fractured or incapacitated being. The translucence of features, strangely suggests blindness, self-denial, and introspection. In Untitled I the dizzying

ANDRAE GREEN

“Moments of ambiguity, ghostliness and double-vision are often found-searching for the essence that confirms a colored existence.”

shifting and displacement of self is like a double existence, a self emerging and submerging causing an inner turmoil, insecurity and narrowing of strength and foundation in the tapering of the neck upon which this triple image is precariously bobbing. The multiple facets of this self are joined by one eye of clarity and defined presence. Like Robert's work, the drawings seem to suggest a process of masking and unmasking that can be likened to processes at work within the making of Fanon's "Black Skin White Masks".



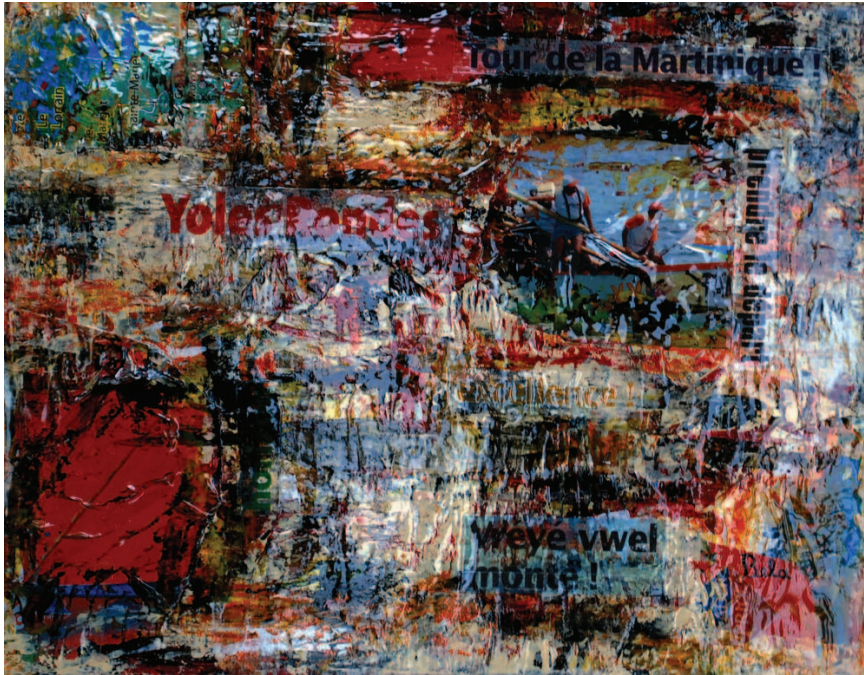
Golden Steel

ANGELICA BARROW

“ The steel pan emerges naturally as an apt symbol of self-determination. The pan here is paradoxically redefined from the empty discarded containers of black gold, refined through the pain of nakedness, dispossession, disintegration and the strength of human passion and determination. ”

Golden Steel plays with the idea of replication through the myriad images and facets of the pan. The pan and its circularity become almost figurative and certainly echo the spherical iconography begun in Douyon's Cycle, Recuperation. Golden Steel structures a formidable architecture of the Caribbean self through ellipses which enclose almost corporeal, cavorting yet somewhat tumultuous movements of light and earthly shadows. The forms of the seemingly larger than life instruments almost engulf the dark figure as his body leans into, and his limbs emerge from, the steel pan. Barrow presents a Caribbean identity as intricately linked, even growing out of the only instrument created in the 21st century that has graced the world stage. It signals a historical stepping-stone that should figure extensively in the questions we formulate through transgression toward transition and transformation. The pan is both a beginning and means to an end. The celebratory impetus and spherical mode of Golden Steel reverberate with the content, and

BEATRICE MELLINGER



sentimental tone of Roopchand's works.

Prendre le Depart

Mellinger's work is built on a framework of fragmented images and text sutured by deeply textured, frenzied rhythms of colour. Text and text signify an inner conflictual space. Inner turmoil parallels the challenge of the physical process that circumscribes departure when Haitians are compelled to flee their homeland and take on refugee status. Mellinger's work speaks specifically of the Haitian dilemma but references the global effects of civil war, famine, genocides and myriad other circumstances that plague our world.

Sunset III is deeply poetic in its simplicity. Paralleled only to Prendre le Depart in color

intensity, the brushstrokes here are broad and smooth, the marks of generalization. Tumult rather than peace is depicted through the juxtaposition of intense fiery bands of color of the sunset sinking under an ominous black cloud. The colours rest heavily on a smoky obscured landscape, a fragile city structure of shaky houses, somber in their disappearance. Both works reference a historical and contemporary material reality, a continued transgression of geographic borders in the case of *Prendre le depart* (the departure) that Haitians choose in lieu of the dim reality of a moral or emotional erasure, obscurity or obliteration through poverty and oppression. This oppression is imaged in the disappearance of the physical evidence of the Haitian's basic existence—the home in *Sunset III*



Sunset III



CLAYTON RHULE

Rhule's work is marked with a de-personalizing, universalizing aesthetic in its abstraction. It maintains a sense of intimacy through its smooth surfaces and gentle figurative contours. However, the form cups inward in a rough surface allowing its imaginary contents to spill through a suggestive opening.

While the pieces mirror each other in their smoothness the second piece portrays a bolder, masculine form that projects sensuously into open space. Like a clenched fist, but also bearing the form of a shell, it simultaneously represents a grounded material discourse of a touristic fascination with the exotic and the Caribbean man's angered and energized response to this commoditized image of the Caribbean. The movement of this segment of the sculpture is synchronized with a supporting form. The sense of unity between the two forms, suggest a somewhat tenuous concord. The form stirs a dialogue concerning synchronization: synchronizing forms while seemingly harmonious are not necessarily nurturing.





GA GARDNER

Fo Day Morning and RR 103 both symbolically depict the settings evocative of masking. The tenor of Fo Day Morning on one hand seems celebratory with warm colors and an almost blinding spotlight. However, the technology generated greyed, and blinded or masked figure reveals an alternative reality. Like the Othering series, the streaked imprints of light pattern the masked visage and the pupil-less face mimics Green's Untitled II. RR 103 meddles with a presence/absence dialectic. The almost obliterated and obscured whitewashed masks are anonymous, blinded figures staring incredulously at the audience.

Nude is bare visibility: nude to self and dressed by the images and glossy magazine facades of the Other. The

headless figure is subjected to voyeurism, and its visage is only in its populated body becoming Othered. This invasive population within the singularity of the image is raw and daunting. It begs the question: Whose is my body? Gardner's works speak to processes of Othering that seem to be at work within Green's featureless faces and my own series of Othering. Resilience resonates with a historical imaginary and fortitude





Resilience

“ with noble as well as common materials that mix , establishing a rapport tinted by ritual, attracting other gestures, other glances. These different objects put together are no longer indifferent. All of this conjugated in a playful space. An often exotic game doubled by a real reflection on life and behaviors. This game serves as the ideal vehicle for the materialization of her existential anguish; nature, others, the gods or God.”

Edvard Munch on Genevieve Lahens

GENEVIEVE LAHENS

imaged through the gathering of the three figures. A sense of community is raison d’être for the resilience of these masked figures. What seems to be a gun in the embrace of the middle figure suggests the armed resistance of the gang. The placid whiteness of the background and the disappearance of these images into a textured white suggests a tenuous—almost ghostly—presence of these beings in the present, but the structure of the three huddling figures seems reminiscent of hope. This resonance with both past and present through allusions to typical structures that suggest hope places us within the mode of tragedy in the contemporary moment. These figures are somewhat confrontational and their masking suggests opacity, their identities are unknown.

Faille III



Faile III's earthy tones are punctuated by net like textures and Amerindian markings. The monk-like figure in dialogue with the sun/moon becomes entangled in its connection with sun and earth. A cyclical nature is suggested by the movement of the markings, from man resting on Amerindian markings caught up in an egg-shaped structure below to less apparent engravings in the earthy colors beside the figure. The cycle however is deemed a failure, somehow positive resolution does not result from the richness of these connections,

rather the forms and images become tangled in nets.

En Partance

En Partance brings us to the realm of personal, intimate relationships and their figuring in the Caribbean landscape. A tactile surface helps to render an urgency of longing and belonging between the couple. With taut stretches and grasping fingers, the sensuality of the union is consummated. But Lahens illustrates a more insidious reality through the strength and visibility of the body of the female form and the virtual invisibility of the male with the exception of rounded head and grasping arm. Circular forms near the woman's breast and on the arm of the male are suggestive of a young life birthed by the couple and the reality portrayed is of the disappearance of the male from the family unit.

His presence is grasping, lustful but otherwise invisible.



GLENN ROOPCHAND

While Noel's work deals with the psychology of the male, Roopchand accords his focus to the feminine principle. Set in floral, edenic abstraction, the stylus-fallopian tube connects the pulse of the landscape to the brain and the breast of the erotic silhouette. As a veiled mimicry of the

tropical paradise, these abstracted tropicalities of land and sea are more complex than imagined by the Other. Growing out of the depths of dark abysses are imprints of profiles, tribal images, fetal positions, the steel pan, veined imprints of hands and leaves. The work is a



process of revealing and concealing, emerging and submerging form and meaning in waves of color and light. Material processes and semiotic meaning are seamlessly integrated in re-presenting the Caribbean.



MARIE- DENISE DOUYON

Recuperation- Cycle 1

Cycle I is simultaneously a physical process of recycling re-memering. The circular iteration and warm coloring focal point of this structure is a historical image: a low-a foundational image positioned to be the nurturing A shifting horizon line is the boundary between past vision and veneration.



materials and images as well as a recycling of thought, a are suggestive of the form of a breast. The nipple or keyed photograph of a negro with head covering. It is pinnacle of the illustration. Sight is created from trash. and present, trash and sight. The image is one of layered

Othering Series I



M A R I E L L E B A R R O W

Othering presents the dilemma of the transplanted Caribbean person. Through venetian blinds the figure is imprinted with marks of the Other, brands in the form of white light. The marks seem imprisoning of the largest figure in a surreptitious way. Seemingly unaware of this covert exercise, the large figure basks in the light while smaller selves peek from the perimeters and peer out of the darkness. The

series plays with issues of voyeurism and surveillance and the replication of the self through surveillance. The series presents a double narrative, simultaneously presenting in movie montage fashion the multiplicity of self that is fashioned in this process of Othering. The camera, while obviously documenting this process of Othering, seems unable to present a clear image: it is unable to capture

the real self. The camera simultaneously is pointed at the audience so that both the other and the Other are under surveillance.

Like, Green, I play with the replicated self. While Green reveals the effects of erasure and displacement, I reflect on mechanisms of erasure (the blinds) and displacement.

The idea of failure in *Faille III* resonates with the erasure of home in *Sunset III* and the disappearance of Nikolai's Figure I as it slowly melts into the ground leaving but a trace. The synchronized patterns of light seem to match the synchronized grooved markings on Roberts' works.



NIKOLAI NOEL

// The smile becomes the silhouette of a boat and the shape of a cutlass. //

Noel's silhouetted sugar daddy is a bold and real commentary on the Caribbean male. With nonchalance in his 'sweetman swagger', a carefully crafted voice emerges from the shadowed form. Distinct but messy, with a temporality based on consumption (sugar), the image is both secure in its darkness while slowly disappearing after the night of its appearance. Applied to the wall of the gallery, Noel's male figure drips with the sweetness of its medium. Made of the rich molecules of brown sugar, the figure is literally crafted of the historical material beginnings of our enslaved past. (Slaves were imported from Africa to work on the sugar plantations.) It's constant dripping as the week of the exhibition wears on is an active and present haunting of the erasure with which this rich form is threatened.



Mononucleosis of the kissing disease or long kiss goodbye is a series of works prompted by the artist's imminent move from his homeland Trinidad to the US to study. The works express a melancholic yet critical perspective of the island.





// The natives who behave good may get a spot in the entertainment of the so called tourists, the new conquerors. //

Caribbean for Sale

Caribbean for sale presents the contradictions in paradise. Martha's satirical commentary is visually aligned with Ian Strachan's prose in *Paradise and Plantation* and Lloyd Best and Karon Polanyi Levitt's arguments in *Theories of the Plantation Economy*. Lloyd Best submits that the historical

T I R Z O MARTHA

context of colonialism has produced "Caribbean society as an historical artifact of western Europe" (Best 2). Martha illustrates how these contradictions—inversions of values and belief systems inconsonant with the cultural climate of the Caribbean yet by which the Caribbean situation is largely determined—are the result of this continued status. While this Western model of tourism supposedly promotes 'wealth' and 'progress', it exerts a cultural pressure of Othering and an economic pressure of dependency under the umbrella of 'globalization'. Within historical and current articulations of labor and political economy the muddy terrain and pervasive effects of the total institution of the plantation and now tourism arise as an explanatory framework for societal ills. Colonial force has only shifted in its physical application but continues to be expressed through a distinct and traceable ideological narrative. As emphasized in Martha's work, the evolving institutional structure of the plantation survives in the - the epitome of globalization and exploitation.

ENOUGH

Razor cane cutting skin
in fields that whisper the old
names
was enough
Dirty drawers left there like a
mockery
of backs too tired, too young
was enough
All the double-edged smiles
shielding daggers
destined for those who
Posses the Secret of Joy
is enough.

We've been on a mission
pricking stones
for signs of life
but they only hurl themselves
and their misgivings
at the living to draw blood

in search of the answers to that
question
wedged in their minds:
What is God?

So, no more gluing together
mosaics with cracked glass
for future perfect worlds
They only diffuse the light
distort the picture

It ends now.

The Earth is tired
of sending symphonies
through the breasts of birds
that will be only felled by hunters
for sport
and left to rot
near hungry belly children

She is tired of swallowing her
beautiful
incarnations too soon
because boredom is remedied
by squeezing the trigger
at whatever threatens
to become a man
Enough wailing mothers
and pundits lull-a-buying
sleep walkers

Let the Earth quake
and absorb its anomalies
who only see through
the prism of the dollar
Let the waters swell and
sink the machines
that dig our graves
Let the tempests inhale and
throw their bosoms
onto glass fortresses
skirted by weary men
with only
the skin on their backs

and sewer grates for blankets

The floodlights of a new dawn
must incinerate the cobwebs
of consciousness
so that the Real
can shed its shapes
and be eternally itself
So that new colors
can come once again
into view
for those who have been forced
to hide their sight
So that the wheel can
lets us off and
we can finally leave
this carnival

It's time for time
to end and for
Life to begin
There has been enough of
droplets falling from the one big sky
and bouncing into

civil wars

There is more to this
than a full stomach
and stock options
There is a splendor waiting
to explode from inside
each willing body
There has been enough suffering
and too many forgotten questions
This is the final chance
to find the road map home

Will we step off
the precipice
into eternity
or keep treading in the
big sea?
The die tumbles forward
as the snake returns
When the water jumps up
it's time to burn

3-24-11

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CROSSING

Tell me, what do you keep
in your green glass heart?

What salvaged ice from forgotten
moons,
what rusted joints thrown up
from the wrecked night
of your wanting?

And when the tides of your sleep
ebb,
what masks permit you
to cross the continent of waking?

Whose arboreal arms will bear
you
beyond these highways of stolen

sand
and purpling death?

Ours is a dwelling you have
found
too broken for words.

You must plant this poem
slowly
when you find home.

Danielle Boodoo- Fortune

UNTITLED |

Simone was born at age 37. It was a difficult birth, what with she having to connect every bit of tissue, blood vessel, check the functioning of each cell. Almost on a daily basis she has to knit the heart that keeps splitting open. It's a strong heart, just swells too large sometimes. She realises that being born at 37 is a delicate process. All the parts have been used, misused, run-over, squashed, suffocated. The valves and receptors that connect the liver, the lungs, the brain, tend to malfunction

sending sudden surges of electricity throughout the system. Dying is not an option. So instead she moves very slowly, aware that this apparatus is going to need lifelong repair.

The doctors clamour for an answer. It's a classic case of misalignment. We've seen this before. Just take these pills, look in the mirror and say - I am sooooo fly! She hates to tell them that the only problem here is life. But nobody's going to pay

\$500 for a sugar pill. So they tell her it's her mother, and last children are always so isolated. Or Saturn and Pluto happen to be in a bad cycle. Perhaps it's her tainted genes.

Maybe it's just more difficult being born at 37, she thinks: to bear one's own original sin, to labour one's own evolution. It's harder that way. Obviously.

Simone Leid

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