

Sistine Geometry and the Tasman Sea

for Amy Fay

Horizons proved the harshest lines to face,
Ethereal asymptotes conspired to trace
The sea soul's rocking, icy drift,
The sky soul's vast and vacuous lift.

Still, storm fronts blurred that steely-stencilled arc,
Geometry careened, colliding, dark,
And pelting rhythms drew him to the shore
To see the sea, through severed skyline, pour.

Could she feel storm-stretched digits bind them tight,
Enmeshed as theirs had been on that last night?
Could she, in crashing worlds, as she reached West,
Know that his East-thrust clutch had passed the test?

No sky that linked two lands could bleed more pain,
But who would trace their hands, if not the rain?

Tom Richards

Battle Mountain

There was a place, it wasn't long ago,
called Battle Mountain, and there the Kalkadoon,
a warlike people, fought against invaders, and there
were quickly driven back until a chain
of cool-eyed rifles circled them, and there
the Kalkadoon attacked,
uselessly, using wood and stone
against possession, script and steel.

In recent times the name,
Battle Mountain, has been removed
from maps that public servants use.
Even so, some nuns who camped the night
and were, perhaps, about to pray
around their well-tongued fire for the dead,

heard instead the breeze, 'Kalkadoon', then saw
the bread they'd baked for eucharist
shudder as a body does in death, and heard
every roll of bullets dice
the Kalkadoon for flesh.

And now they cannot help but see
the victors walking back to posts
and property, see their barrels, warm
along the furrows of their arms, shift the light
as a ship, tall and confident,
to carry them through the rifled air.

Peter's Mother-in-Law

Long before dawn, he leaves my house.
I am awake and see him go, for sleep
has been impossible. All night I have
watched my heart pace the room, resist
the dark, and put its hand into the soft-bodied side
of moonlight. Today I have a strength
I never thought to find again. My blood is clear,
is out and running through the grass, is sending trees
flying. I cannot slow it down. And all
since yesterday. Before, those dreadful days
of wide, dry, and high emptiness. Not a flower anywhere,
and cattle kneeling down to die. If I read the papers, news
was always bad: people stabbed or starved,
leaders taking bribes, the best and biggest weapons yet.
I was not surprised to learn a baby, wrapped in blue,
was microwaved. The paper said his hands were sticking out.
What cure for all of that? There was a cure,
so small I hardly noticed it. I know I got up.
I know I cooked a meal, taking extra care with onions, beans,
and lamb, respecting them, and was, for the first time,
not annoyed to see the sick and wounded when they came
that evening crowding to my door, to him. Perhaps
it was the way he told of exiles coming home, perhaps
it was the care I gave that simple meal, perhaps it was
the smell of rain coming, or perhaps, after all, a miracle.
It was something small, that's all I know, watching how
he stands precisely where the night and day
intersect. I see him stop and lift his arms, and then
it's raining, at long last breaking crusty gardens back

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to life, geraniums are letting go their peppermint,
cinnamon and rose, and country women everywhere
are throwing open doors and running fast
to get the washing in, to grab the driest first,
stumbling through the water verticals. Leaving lines
vibrating long enough to play
at cracking open waterdrops, they raise across
their back verandahs other lines, of cheerful linen ghosts.

Visiting the Zoo

My mother said my eyes
have changed, turning grey where once
they were blue, and I can only reply,
'It's because I've lost my innocence',

having read a learned article which shows
the tissues of the human skin, unrecognizable
under stereoscan magnification, resemble
a tropical swamp, but with all those mosquitoes

waiting, perhaps it's best not to go further in,
not confess it isn't sin,
nor even knowing love has died,
that hurts the soul, but growing tired,

instead, remember how, visiting the zoo
one day, I saw a snake whose every slide
was satisfied, saw it smile at me, as if it knew
where innocence was, but if I'd asked, it surely would have lied.

Noel Rowe