

LIGHTLY LACQUERED WOOD

by Abel Folgar

This one's not a dark dream – it's hazy and I'm inside the Camoruca harp shop, following sounds.

I mean, it's dark inside the old concrete building, moist too: I can feel it in my lungs now that I quit smoking
and there's a radio in here somewhere, a crackled, omni-directional cacophony comes through in spats;
they blame the weather – these indigenous luthiers – they say it hasn't rained
this hard in the llanos since Florentino

beat the Devil in a duel and that was a long, long time ago. They're all old,
all three of them,
old enough to begin recollections slowly, closing their eyes, how their fathers taught them
the catgut stretch, the gentle, even hand that sands the cedar and pine... The
one closest to the door
tells me there are thirty-two strings of varying widths and that the best players, the ones who pluck as if graced by God,

can't read music. I'm looking in a box of tuning pins and pulley wheels when it begins to fade,
and I know he's real happy with what he told me – real orgullo artesanal and the fading
gets stronger... but for this part, the part where the harp is completed, he
doesn't have to tell me a thing:
I help him stand it up, an enormous, bottom heavy pie wedge; the string mast rising out like a sundial.

When I'm gone, vapor-broken in their charged atmosphere, they'll apply a thin lacquer over the wood,
just enough for shine, but so thin those pores will breathe pure tonal excellence.

When it dries I'm fully awake.
Awake in Miami, light rain outside, little pools forming in the mulch – summer, finally.
It hadn't rained here in a while either; not since the Devil demanded a rematch, and that wasn't so long ago.

A CLASSIFIED COLOMBIAN
by Jesse Tangen-Mills

What's this?, Wilmer.

HOTEL
WILMER

I had to, to get Wilson back. Look:

WOMAN
: body
negotiable

Inglich Ticher
Wuntd

SWM seeking to SWF to
LOL with. No n00bs.

Not there. Here:

WANTED WIL1 perSON? \$1,000,000,000

They were everywhere; missing persons haven even taken to the classifieds.
Not without the help of their kidnappers (at least it's pesos).

EXVOTO
by Oliverio Girondo

The girls of Flores have sweet eyes like the sugar-encrusted almonds of Café Molino and they use silk ribbons to suck in their butts at the altar of the butterfly.

The girls of Flores stroll arm in arm to transmit their trembling, and if someone looks them square in the pupil they clamp their legs shut—afraid that their sex will fall on the sidewalk.

When it gets dark, they hang their “green” breasts over the steel balconies so that their dresses bruise them in the nude. At night, towered by their mothers, they stroll through Flores Park so that men may ejaculate words into their ears and light up their breasts like intermittent light bugs.

The girls of Flores live with the anxiety that their asses will rot like apples left on the radiator and the desire of men suffocates them so much that they would wish to abort that desire as if it were a corset.

Because they have neither the courage to cut their bodies into morsels nor the gumption to distribute samples to those who stroll the boulevards.

FATHER'S HEART
by Yaddyra Peralta

When they opened you, sawed
through breastbone, did you feel
the exerted, two-handed rending
of your ribs?

So much work to see
that knotted muscle:

that strutting heart
of the mambo, the hustle, the punta,
that heart of NYC, old Chelsea, dancing
the night away. Fighting heart skulking
through the jungles of Vietnam,
truculent heart that hardly knows me now.

After the surgery you let me feed you,
you start to tell me about *el indio Lempira*,
the Lenca killed in ambush by the Spanish;
the school kids in Honduras re-enact it every year.
Despite your dark skin, you were often a Conquistador,
the one who swiftly shot an arrow through the chief's heart.

LIGHTWEIGHT CHAMPION OF THE WORLD
by Daniel B. Johnson

Same year I asked my dad for boxing gloves,
Boom Boom Mancini killed a man

with his hands. A Korean boxer in yellow trunks,
who went down twice in the twelfth and didn't get up.

I got the gloves anyway, ruddy leather mitts
weighing a pound a piece. Georgie and I

could barely keep them aloft
as we circled each other in the basement,

an egg timer ticking away on the ping pong table.
We'd duck, bob, and duck

to boos from the stands and flying beer cups.
Lazy hooks sailed wide. Jabs died short.

Only once did I stand over Georgie,
the way I'd imagined. Blood

wormed out of his nose. His eyes fluttered shut.
I raised my gloves above my head,

then ran from the house.

WINGS
by Marco Alejandro Bravo

My country
Acts in the
Weirdest ways.

At times, a
Dragonfly in
Silk nylons trapped
In a plastic bag,
Waiting to be
Released.

But also, a
Switchblade with
Nets, catching us,
Las mariposas de
Mañana, echos of
Yesterday's
Heart-beat.

Clipping our
Wings as we
Leave one home
For another.

I want to be the
Gamble. The *Xochitl*
Of paradise.

Instead, they call us
Cockroaches with
Wings. Toilet beasts, rattlesnakes
Plowing the land.

Tucked away,
Like an accordion,
I know I belong.

I know I'll be
The red balloon
That flew
Away.

ASCENSION

by Luivette Resto-Ometeotl

We lay on the hood of your '96 Terrel
watching the planes land underneath
an unusually clear LA sky,
imagining heading off to lands
where money is abundant
like sand and possibilities.

And when "Love Song" by The Cure played on the radio,
you dragged the tops of your fingernails
up and down my forearm,

as we shared the same early memories of
smoking bidis for the first time
in your step-mom's basement,
watching 1970s porn like it was a documentary,
reciting each other's fortunes from Chinese takeout.

Logic dictated that you wouldn't like me,
allow me to touch the scar on your right eyebrow
and ask for its story.
But you did.
You confessed to enjoying the silence of
libraries, funeral homes, churches.
Became an atheist when your parents divorced,
left you wondering if you would ever be a good father.

Feeling the coldness of metal on my back
I inched closer to your side of the car,
listened to the unevenness of your breath
between the sounds of jet engines.

IDENTITY PROPERTY OF ONE
by Daniel B. Johnson

Naked, asleep, I could have been anyone,
you said, lying in the center of your bed,

smoky, half-drunk, and borne aloft
by a swell of sheets. You went through my pockets

twice— pants, jacket, backpack, and shirt, inside and out,
and counted my money: seventeen bucks.

Reeking of gin, I could have been anyone.
When you found no ring, no needles, no summons,

no stash, you studied my body by streetlight,
for scars, scabs, tattoos, love-bites, who knows what else.

Naked, asleep, I could have been anyone.
Sweatered, fidgety, and sipping tea, you sat awake

at the side of your bed, clasped in your palm
you wouldn't say what.

PERSISTENCE OF VISION
by Abel Folgar

Caracas flashes in the window's frame.
I'm pretty sure Plácido's driving this
yellow bucket too close to the precipice

that flanks all dreams and every mountain
road surrounding the valley – the sea
of red tile blurred into a pulsating

organism – its movements broken by
the seashell sound of the subconscious,
the occasional tree branch flicking the

rearview, and a growing huddle in the back
seat. One of the older kids holds
a cow's eye in a wrinkled bundle of

aluminum foil. Nobody wants to touch
and Plácido knows something's up
cause he keeps looking in his visor-mirror,

the bus jerking slightly with his visual shifts.
Absent are the oohs and ahhs of tittie pics
or the cigarette smoke we were too dumb

to believe we could actually hide;
he doesn't know much, but he knows
that silent kids probably means trouble.

OLD, BROKEN-DOWN RADIO
by **Marco Bravo**

I shouldn't keep listening to that
Song on that old broken-down radio,
A *Nacatamal* lullaby,
In which they all return.
Plus, it's just a song.

But
This song,
The song I can never sing right,
Because the words clog my throat
As if every emotion was rolled
Together in a ball of *masa* wanting
To explode like a loose bottle rocket.

Everyone, all of them, *todos*
They are all at fault for leaving
That old broken-down radio.

And
The melody keeps me
Like a wild disease,
It keeps me,
Like my neighborhood street
with those clumsy mailboxes, filled
With lost love letters,
and my heart
Hangs like a *piñata* in the
Back porch of this song.

Then at times I hear it and it's
Just like when there's fire
In that cave or when I'm
Standing on that bridge that
Glowes like a fever, and my soul
Bounces like a red little ball thrown down an
empty *arroyo*.

That song on that old broken down radio,
It was the last one, the old one, the one that brings
Me back. The language I never planned.
The one I'll never forget.

LEARNING TO READ
by Yaddyra Peralta

A set of signs in a fixed order, the alphabet
represents the basic sounds that humans make;
When combined these make glorious words:
tree, cloud, snake, hermit, light.

My second graders grip pencils to write the words I say.
Ebin shows off her *bridge* spelled like *breach*
and Gary argues when I say that though wrong,
she has made a word.

I say, imagine a man who wants to be so alone,
he spends seven years building obstacles around his little house.
Then I must explain obstacles, so with their help
I draw a hut surrounded by a wall

of overturned chairs, desks, around that a moat,
and then Gary requests spontaneous balls of fire.
Now, I tell them, close your eyes. Whatever
you do to get inside means *breach*.

And with their silent tunneling, flying
and karate-kicks, I hope
they make it in.

NO MORE TACO IN GWINNETT COUNTY
by Luivette Resto-Ometeotl

--July 2006

When the last brown footsteps
walked out of Garfield High School
for the second time,
Gwinnett County, Georgia declared
death to the taco stand.

No more dollar corn tortillas
satiating the appetites of
housekeepers, gardeners, leaf blowers,
waiters, peach pickers, janitors, nannies.
Giving them all a five minute taste of Juarez.

The tacos migrated to Philadelphia with hopes
of finding a friendlier and hungrier crowd.
Instead they found picket lines with
Philly Cheesesteaks holding signs.

A sub owner had followed Georgia with a sign of his own
“This is America. When ordering, speak English.”
In the kitchen, Manuel and Juan
diced peppers and onions in silence.

Paranoia and sign making spread to the Midwest;
a Butler County, Ohio jail had a sign pointing to it:
“Illegal Aliens Here.”

The steel bars shivered
because hunger for
revolution and absolution
only existed here.

ISAAC'S TERRITORY
by Abel Folgar

Some might say you haven't lived till
you see an Anhinga dry its wings in the sun.
They might even say you're too dumb
to step right on a mangrove's root.
You watch too much TV, smoke too much hash,
dress sloppy, and eat unpronounceable foods.
But tonight – tonight after you wash up
and get something hot in your stomach,
you're gonna call that Chilean girl
because no matter what they say,
you want to take her out to the Everglades
and go on a canoe ride.
You want to get close enough to her neck
to taste the petals of her father's floral shop.
And you'll hold that soft hand,
giving gentle squeezes with the sway of the craft.
Even if you miss the bird and manage
to twist your ankle, dipping your ass in brackish
muck, you're gonna get in that neck,
and inhale every last bit of pollen;
no matter what your romantic detractors say,
you're going to teach them a few things.

END SCENE
by Daniel B. Johnson

What plays on a train car window
but sunspots and silhouettes,

pigeons, statuary, ads, and clouds?
The lives of the dead, I've heard,

flickered at night in empty cars,
a cut-rate penny arcade.

When the el train sparks into a turn
a man in a porkpie hat appears

again, on the porch with his wife,
swizzling something-on-the-rocks.

She knits. Neither talks.
He raises a pipe to his lips,

the scene cuts off. Diner lights
glare on the railcar glass.

Night into night, the dead parade
as if playing to a packed house—

twin sisters double dutch,
a hunter raises a quail. Yesterday's

newspaper blows around.
Train doors open and close—

a suicide in a swimsuit
waves from an inner-tube raft.

SKETCH IN THE SAND
by Oliverio Girondo

The morning is passed on the beach, dusted by the sun.

Arms.

Amputated legs.

Bodies that reintegrate.

Floating craniums of tire tread.

As the bathers turn their bodies, the waves elongate their nautical shavings
over the beach of sawdust that is the beach itself.

Everything is gold and blue!

The shade of the tarps. The eyes of the girls that inject themselves with
novels and horizons. My happiness, of shoes with rubber soles, which make
me bounce on the sand.

For .80¢ photographers sell the bodies of the women who bathe.

There are bodegas that exploit the dramatic nature of the breaking. Broody
maids.

Irascible siphons with sea extracts! Breakers and rocks with algaed breasts
of mariners and hearts painted with a fencer's foil.

Gangs of seagulls that fake their flight, destroyed by a white piece of paper.

And, before everything, that sea!

