



In What Disappears
Poems by John Brandi



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A World of Voices



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Letter From Katmandu

Friends, let us wake with disbelief,
bare our souls, tell our stories, lose our eyes,
become vagrants of the Sea.

Let us seek the heat
of the kernel that feeds in the dark
and step aside of men whose twisted lips
pretend to lead, but are not real
in their pursuit of war.

We've already seen years
of massacre, hydrogen light the night,
children with ruined eyes, tortured by what
no one should ever see.

Let us leave our security,
open our memory, bring flowers
from the storm, write letters that become
sanctuaries, so that we ourselves
may become sanctuaries.

Friends, a dream
runs up to me smiling. I call on you
to see in the dark, to finish
the song inside you.

In What Disappears

Sometimes my tongue wanders
among ruins, feels a word lost under the skin
wants to define the touch, the abyss
the whole nervous theater
as seen from within.

Sometimes my eye exists
without me, and I am carried
everywhere at once until the center is far away
and in the blackness, distant as an undiscovered star
you are closer than you've ever been.

You are my life, my death, my limb.

Like an ocean turned to blood
I find you in what didn't exist—
the moment is carnelian, it runs from the painting
back onto the brush, and I am with you
completely with you without me.

Sometimes there is no punctuation
to the land at the end of the point.
The surf doesn't pound, the shore only speaks
when we leave. It is you, then—in me, under
and around, who opens into a burning page
and fills the storm with silence.

It is we who write our names
purposely close to the tide's edge
that we may find ourselves in what disappears,
leaving the world to begin, far outside
the painting's frame.

After Li Ch'ing~Chao

The river disappears into haze,
a wet brush swells with oxide and pearl.

How to paint the taste of fine rain
or the small of your back through prised silk?

Over and over, point the tip.
One after another, tear sheets from the pad.

In twilight, beyond the open door
a slippery path glistens.

Far below, the trail twists.
Hill after hill recedes into mist

The lamp grows dim, the wind
beats steady on the shutters.

My hand shakes
as it traces your outline on the page.

The wine has spilled, the brush is too far
and I am too close to see.

Every Road Out Is the One Home

The taste of wood smoke
in high mountain tea. An unfinished path
swept clean by the breeze.

How far out to find the way back?

Five hundred steps
up the pass, three hundred hidden in mist.
Over the top, clouds fill the crags.
Cairns rattle, tumble their stones.

No word for the missing ledge
that carries the feet.
Nothing to mark the way.

Only the moon-washed deck
of love's consent, a few gifts in the trunk,
the path set straight

No matter how crooked
the road I take.

Confession

Bless me father
for I have sinned. I was dull to myself,
dull to my wife, dull to my friends, dull to life
three times last week, and once before confession today.

In trying to behave
I have strayed from the path of imagination,
curiosity, spontaneity, consideration
and wild uncalculated drifts into the impossible.

Bless me father
for I have tried to get every line 'right'
and in so doing have reworked, reworded,
overorganized, and remodified life.

So, have me do penance,
kneel for undetermined hours
eye level with Inspiration, her body meeting
mine with the all-sublime feature of Redemption.

Let me be remarkable—

Let the sun shine
backwards from astounding mirrors
in which I make unsurpassed erotic rotations
in the face of small talk. Let my professional self
wither, my character strengthen.

Please, reinstate my doubt
in the face of those who constantly talk
and think they know, who posture
and bite back at themselves in the courts of law.

Bless me father
for I have failed to swim. I have
been timid at the prow of the sinking ship. I have
not pissed from a bridge nor pinched an ass for forty days.

I have not let my fingers wander
in the dark, nor approached the sweet eye
of a narcissus without expectation. I haven't listened
through a motel room wall, nor triggered a department

store alarm since my last confession.

Father, I know you
are the Great Mother in disguise.
Help me hang the dirty sheets, open my heart
with sabotage, free the enduring
words I want to speak.

Bless me, for I have given you
all the details of my outrageous behavior.
May light strike my body from your thundering tongue,
may the charm be released, the monsoon begin.

In the lucid epiphany,
in the warm conversation of your sea, give me courage
to lose direction, drown in the churning undertow.
With absolute clarity let me surrender.

first day of spring, 2001

