

P O E T R Y

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MAROONED

I'm fooled by the tall turbaned, white-shirtjacked fellow,
bouncy in his white Nikes: an imposter who tries to pass
for the noted artist Ras Ishi... When Ishi does appear, shy

and wavering
in his glance, I just know I've

met him before. So elusive was
his face in the self-portrait *Isolation*, I
hardly knew I'd taken it in

until now. The man before me, in loose-
fitting caftan and spare sandals,
near-speechless at first, as I, throws

me back into the face-

silhouette at painting's center.

His living visage, at a glance,

gives me the key to reenter

the all-but-hidden dotted-line

features of a lonely tranced

Being on the free-floating cosmos. *Marooned*, he

says he is. Black artist in his island
element. Whoever he may be seems

a void, in need of filling. And here,
the space of himself is invaded
by sparkly points & slivers & jewels

of varicolored lights: glittering
tiny bodies—stars or planets
(a few satellites & meteors
among them perhaps): all those
celestial luminaries of night-
sky pageant

EDITOR'S NOTE: The painting on this issue's cover, Ras Ishi's *Isolation*, is the painting Lieberman had in mind when he composed "Marooned," and not the Ras Ishi painting labeled as such in Lieberman's previous book of poetry, *Hour of the Mango Black Moon*. (Leeds: Peepal Tree P, 2004).



flow in and out of his dim-lit demeanor as if his flesh be
immaterial and transparent. Vast distances of outer space,
we come to feel, are filtered and woven into his palpable

vision. Austere
calm gaze reveals he's not squelched

by the invasive planetary masses,
nor robbed of his overt physiognomy—an exterior
crust of flesh and hair.

Rather, his transparency shows he can contain
this fiery and pulsing cosmos
in Mindscape. The eye he brings to his weave

of many colors is a prism:

it renders himself near-invisible

and rechannels the Heavens back

to us through his high cheeks,

wide forehead, angular facebones

and cadenced downward spiraling

of his dreadlocks, outlined in visibly dotted chain

lengths: much as portraits of Sagittarius
(centaur & archer), Capricorn

or Scorpio might be limned in semi-hidden
dotted silhouettes, chalk-drawn

by an astronomer to portray those starry

constellations. But here, the one

embracing figuration is Ishi's

own cheek-and-jawbone perimeters

and bedazzling loops or braids

of his dread ringlets. His hair-

locks and face

might be spun out of gaseous trails and spumes of light...

As we brood over the portrait, the fleshly outlines loom
close and recede in the distance, by turns. His features

may seem fixed
in one plane, a mere two dimensions.

Or they enter flux of unbounded
space and time: layers and terraces of shadow
and light, the many levels

moving between hair curls, sliding to & fro...
This work seems totally porous,
a barometer of the maker's Spirit. The base

color of night sky, space
blue-black with turquoise flashes
Solar, sidereal and lunar bodies
deeps, is a surface of textured
of underpaint showing through.
(dots & diamonds & ministarfish
shapes), wanly aglitter, are drawn in reds, yellows,
whites and pallid greens. But hinted purplish
halos circle each star or planet,

quavering in resonance with magenta-tinged
patches on lips, under-eyes and lower
hair bands in the emergent sculpted head.

Is the near-submerged face portrait
a lost soul, rudderless vessel
awash in great sea of outer space?
Or does Ishi contain & command
the abyss of star clusters, man
a guiding center

to galaxies—his emptiness filled with riches of jewelled
other worlds? Surprise gateway! He has voyaged from finding
himself lost to losing himself found, at a single cosmic leap.