


1992

Astarte 2 (Complete Issue)

Astarte Staff

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Greetings,

The goddess Astarte was worshipped for at least a millennium before Christ. She was named and revered in different ways among the cultures of the ancient Middle and Near East; the early Hebrews called her Ashtoreth. At first she was worshipped primarily as a goddess of abundance and fertility, but as her cult spread, her aspects multiplied, and she became a goddess of maturity, of love, and of war. She was identified with Aphrodite, Ishtar, and Venus by their own followers.

In the twentieth century, the search for the goddess is on again. Women have asserted themselves in many ways, and have discovered the plurality of their own being. They struggle to recognize and assimilate these aspects, spiritual and sexual, nurturing and destructive, intuitive and rational, and they struggle to gain the means and confidence to balance these aspects in their daily lives. In this spirit of adventure and crisis, Astarte was conceived and dedicated to a goddess who was among the most ancient, many-faceted, and universal in history.

The magazine's goal is to hear and represent the voices of both men and women describing these struggles and discoveries. It seeks to represent the visual and verbal arts as well as the humanities, including such disciplines as history and philosophy. Its focus is local, reflecting the founders' desires to represent the voices to be heard in their own place and time.

Another of Astarte's goals is to sponsor readings, performances, and similar events in the hope of nurturing a spirit of community among local artists, writers, and scholars. The magazine hopes this will provide a forum for sharing between painters and poets, historians and sculptors, professionals and students.

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Principles of Flight

You ask what I know about it.
I gain momentum, am off
and afloat on currents. Birds
flip past on jaunty wings.

I have been practicing
the etiquette of the traveler,
the grace of the grateful guest
as she takes her leave.

The backyard garden grows richly,
I know. Have you seen
the runway lights
how they bud at dusk?

In the middle of goodbyes,
I still can see the blue hydrangea,
full against the white brick porch
on the street where flight began.

Here is the resolution
to my departure, a worn toothbrush.
Leaving, I savor the thought
of return to your clean sheets.

Jennifer Horne

Power Play

Today
you rule this turf, old man
but I'll outlive you.
Be vigilant
as age and time catch up, for
that chill in your bones
as the sun goes down
will be me,
unraveling your shadow.

Arlene Hampton

The Barnacle

The sea rises, white foam
buries my toes in sand;
seaweed between.
A boat nearby is belly up,
barnacles drying in the sun.
I scrape away a shell,
peer inside as if the animal still
alive might with one lone golden eye
accuse me: a wrecker of homes.
I drop the barnacle in the sand
watch it wash away in the receding tide.
I pluck the seaweed from my toes,
watch the sun set orange, blowing
clouds to me.
I taste the brine on my lips.

Emily Grimes

Biological Clock

We turn everything clockwise in our culture,
the corkscrew in a quart of burgundy,
the on-and-off switch on a Windex bottle;
we wind our watches and walk in circles.

Things are best when they're not static,
when they move like starlings flocking,
three birds taking the place of three in a line
on a fence, in a puddle on the ground,
orbiting black electron clouds of feathers.

Sometimes it's good to slow down, the times we need
time to sit among the trees and think,
sit in the shade and watch the sun circle.

She never sits around. She gets in her car and goes.
Her caprice never carries her far.
But when she is capricious I can almost smell it,
smoldering like a pile of leaves, musty,
her words like names of perfumes, subtle
like a thin film of scent on a glass stopper.

Sometimes I talk in circles like a tribesman
rhapsodizing around a snapping fire, singing
my song again and again. I vary the story
to suit each audience, speaking the same way
as the ones I want to impress. Sometimes
I don't remember what I say.

I often feel awkward at her house, sitting around
not knowing what to say like a date that overstays
his welcome. Visiting me she never stays too long.
She comes and goes. Her smell on the sheets lasts
longer than the visit.

They say she's had a lot of men. I met one once.
To her he was only one in a crowd, a passing man
she wouldn't recognize or know how to describe,
a man she could not identify in a line-up.

Sometimes I think of her and wonder where she is.
I see her sitting on the sofa wondering where to go.
The music's loud, the lights are low, the wine is cold.
She hears her alarm clock tick, watches the second hand
circle the dial, and wonders why she never had a baby.

Robert McDuff

A Madness of Two Minds

It isn't love that keeps them together
but symbiotic insanity.
A perfect match where drinks are spilled
with one hand,
and wiped up with the other.
Where one insults and one accepts the blame
for deeds undone.
Eventually they scream and shake
or soothe and smooth the mess away.
But in split seconds sanity strikes,
doe-eyes freeze,
as door-bells ring,
and there's no time
to hide the scars and splashes
that mark their madness.
Their lives are spent like bootleg money,
unearned, unworthy, and secretly stashed.
Waiting and waiting,
as if some store bought solution
could solve this dual dilemma.
She wakes from his stupor
and cries in church
the too familiar words
"Oh, Lord I am not worthy . . ."
and accepts inebriation
as garden-sin justification.
She bears her penance with lighted candles,
paid for with held-back money,
knowing she's betrayed his trust.
She chooses between the liquor store cash register,
and the collection plate.
As the sins of Adam were thrust upon Eve,
so he accuses and she concedes,
bearing this blame
without a name to justify it.
She thinks of Eve in an ancient garden,
withholding the fruit.
Would Adam have hit her?
or cursed her?
or left her?
Would he have understood
Eve's need to keep the faith
at his expense?
He pours his hand into her purse
leaving her to face the unpaid rent,
while somewhere
in a dirty chair,
he unscrews the cap
of the chalice and washes away his sins.

Carol Case



Untitled

Karen Graffeo

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Zach

The most emotionally and physically agonizing event in my twenty-four years of life was the birth of my wonderful, and now three-year-old son, Zachary. I have told the story over and over again to siblings, to unmarried childless friends, to friends with children, and to my husband. I told the story, but I didn't divulge the feelings that are yet buried deep inside of me; the guilt and the unflinching feeling of being a failure.

Childbirth is a wondrous natural phenomenon. I always believed this, and I still do. I dreamed of having a child of my own. A year after I married, I was told by a male doctor that I would probably never be capable of becoming pregnant. This strengthened my marriage, but made me angry that I could not choose to have or not to have a child. I suddenly wanted one more than ever. This resolve began a year-long drama that climaxed each month with me in tears as my period arrived.

I felt hopeless until my second semester of college when a ten-dollar home pregnancy test turned blue. We were elated (I won!) and worried as hell. We left school, packed up our belongings, and moved back to our hometown in my fifth month. My husband Drew found a full-time job and I called all over town looking for a female obstetrician that we could afford.

What we could afford, I soon found out, was a government-subsidized health clinic. When I mentioned this to my "I'd help you if you weren't married" father, he replied, "You get what you pay for." How can this tried-and-true all-American adage apply to living or dying?

What I saw there crushed me. Forty to fifty pregnant women (all with the same appointment time) sitting alone in small orange plastic chairs waiting to be herded to the bathroom, Dixie cup in hand, like bloated cattle. Drew stuck out like a sore thumb, since he was invariably the only male there. He stayed with me as we were force-fed films with titles like, "How to Hold Your Baby." It was assumed that if you are poor, you are also dumb. By my seventh month I had read at least twelve books on childbirth and the first year of life. I would almost cry sitting through those movies—not only because they made me feel stupid and unimportant, but also because I'd hear women say, "Hell, they made me watch this same movie when I had the other five." I felt alone and humiliated. When groups of ten were gathered into the lab area to stand in line for blood tests, the nurse would ask, "Didja take any drugs over the weekend?" As I shook my head no, a woman across from me said, "Some Quaaludes. Three or four." I wanted to scream to reassure myself that I was better than all of them. The thought made me feel worse. We were in the same boat; I knew that if I had not educated myself on pregnancy, my child would have had three times the chance of dying or having birth defects than a child born to a mother with a personal Ob/Gyn. I never saw a doctor; not until I went into labor. The person who helped to bring my son into the world was a man that I never had, and never did, even speak to: a total stranger.

Outside the clinic I was hell-bent on "doing this right." I felt confident. I had all my books, and Drew and I were one heck of a breathing team. We did LaMaze classes and spent nights talking to our baby in my belly. I ate cheese and wheat bread and forced myself to drink milk at least once a day. We cried (along with five other couples) as we watched wonderfully brave women give birth on film. By the time I was six days late, we felt more than ready.

I was actually at the hospital having a sonogram when I went into labor. They gave me a room. While Drew went to the car to get our "birthing bag," I settled back on the comfy white bed and called a friend who had courageously given birth two months previously in her home with a midwife. I was excited and proclaimed to her that the contractions didn't even hurt! She laughed, told me she loved me, and wished me luck. Then Drew and I waited. A man in a white coat and gray hair (I didn't see his face) came in and told my husband that he was going to give me a drug to speed up labor. That seemed like a good idea at the time. The rest is a fuzzy blur of waking up, asking questions that were never answered, going to sleep, screaming, crying, begging for drugs to ease the pain, seeing the worry on Drew's face, watching unknown men in white coats probing around my vagina, seeing red stuff (Betadine) all over my thighs and thinking horribly that it was blood, nurses coming and going and instructing Drew to "make her push."

He tried, but my legs were leaden. He'd hold them up for me, wake me up, and ask me to push. I'd scrunch up my face, thinking and hoping that I was pushing, but felt nothing. Then I would go back to sleep. Finally hearing the all-knowing voice of the lab coat saying, "We'll have to go the other way." In my drugged stupor, I crazily thought, "What other way? How else can you have a baby?"

Then I was wheeled into a cold room without Drew. I kept screaming for him, but they just said that he'd be brought in before the baby came. I was so cold. I begged for a blanket, and for Drew. They finally brought Drew in, but I never got a blanket. My hands had been shackled on either side of me and my entire

body was trembling. Drew was rubbing my shoulders and head as they cut into me. Suddenly, I felt something being pulled out of me; it felt as if my back was being bounced on the table as they pulled by son out of me. I heard someone say, "It's a boy," then I saw something gray in a nurse's hand moving across the room. I wondered, "Is that my son?"

Then the shakes hit me hard—my teeth were chattering and my body became uncontrollable. I thankfully heard the voice of Drew, very softly saying, "Jenny, look at our son." It was Zach, so big and gorgeous and peaceful in his father's arms. Then I vomited all over myself and nearly choked until the anesthesiologist turned my head. I had ruined the moment. Later, in the recovery room, Drew brought Zach to me and took pictures with me holding my son for the first time. I don't remember it ever happening. I woke up at 3 a.m. in my room, completely alone. I called the nurse and she brought my son for me to nurse. It was an indescribable feeling, seeing him at my breast in the quiet hospital in the middle of the night. I finally felt rewarded.

I try not to think of myself as a failure. I have a million excuses, including "Well, Zach was so big" (that's right, blame it on the baby). There are no real excuses and there probably shouldn't be blame; but, I do place blame. I blame the man with the gray hair in the white coat who took my childbirth experience and turned it into a fuzzy, psychedelic nightmare. I blame people who see Caesarians and giving birth as two separate events and who think that my beloved brown-eyed boy will grow up to rob convenience stores because we didn't "bond" the first few hours. And, I blame a society where caring and even uncaring people are treated as less than human simply because they live below the poverty line.

Jenny Duwall



Untitled

Jenny Pearce

Thurisaz*

I recall our house in Babylon
listening to the sea without/within
knowing myself alone with fatherless child
weeping beneath the goose down quilt
a grief that could not share itself
or show itself entirely yet to me

My mother
who never cuddled or diapered or sang
who mothered me from boardrooms
and hotel rooms
from cocktail parties
and airport lounges
from pages of letters and books she sent
who left that life for a man who would betray her
and now lived her days displaced and bewildered
so silent in that darkness
wordless
she crept into my bed
held me, rocking in the nightwomb
rocking in that archetypal rhythm that speaks woman
crooning that ancient song of mourning and life
that binds generation to generation

Upon that bed the three of us
till daybreak:
one unborn
one who would bear
one who had borne
all fetal
all curled in that classic pose of submission
knowing birth inevitable
fearing that rough hands
would drag us forth
and make us breathe.

*Thurisaz is the Viking Rune meaning "a gateway to new life."

Carla DeLane Wood



Mama...Show Me The Way

Linda Barton

Astarte 9

At Circe's Farm

Bohemian rednecks smoke, drink and spit
in the flatbeds of pick-ups papered
with Grateful Dead emblems. The other ones
stomp bootsoles in the pasture, mindless
of cow shit and fleeing crickets, dancing
to the whirring rhythm of a near-by hay-baler.
I spit
thick globules of tobacco juice
into a plastic Pabst cup and rise
in a rush of nicotine, alcohol, and marijuana to join
in dance with a howling girl spinning in the bed,
catching the rhythm we begin a waltz
without structure, dipping and leaping, rocking
the truck to our own time. Our limbs become
entangled, losing control she slides into me,
and I flail on the edge and try to pull back
until I am forced to release
myself to gravity and mud.
Snorting, I attempt to get up again
only to fall back, further bathing in manure,
loam, and water. Her milk hand grasps mine, muddied,
and pulls me up from the cess. She laughs
at my pigness and leaves me
snorting
with the rest of the herd.

Matt Layne

Emily

That autumn the flowers faded early,
The grass turned tan, then brown,
The prayers for rain unanswered.
She saw her spring's labors all undone
By forces she could not fathom.
She, too, entered a brown study
And liked not at all the texts she found.

Tom Brown

Apology

My fingers would have knitted
a time-hallowed gift, but for
the Muse.

It was she who decreed
that my adoration of you
must not be domesticated,
that my favors be only
inked praises
speaking softly from a page.
I dared not adore you
in the customary way
for the Muse would have
wrenched me from your side
to sew lyrics
to simmer dreams
on nights when your
bones were cold and
your belly roared for stew.

Arlene Hampton

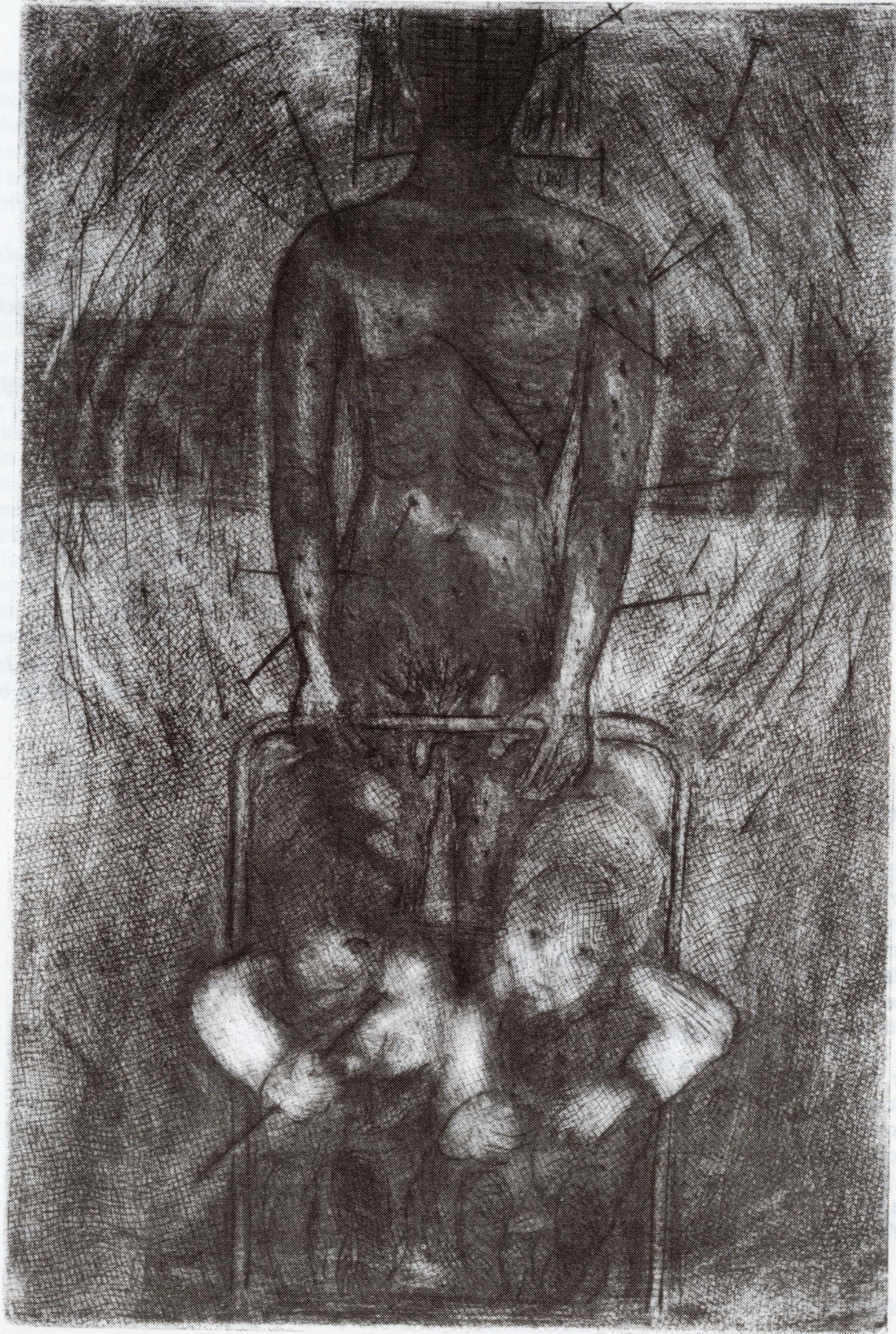
Must

MUST read
Darling
Simply must read
Simply must
This is my gay friend speaking
Over the phone
With laughter in his voice.
He laughs at all of us
For what
Reason
I do not know
Though, I'd hazard a guess . . .
if I thought he'd tell me
the truth.
He's very snotty about these things.

Hulsey

Looking out of
terrible wrinkles
are surrounded by
eyes
enclosed in crow's feet
from too much
smoking
And not enough laughter
in her life.
Her face
Spoke of bitterness
But her
eyes do not miss
a thing
Watching
crowlike
vulturelike
henlike
She broods over her facts
and religion seeking ever
to change your
Mind
over to the way
She thinks
it
ought
to
be.

Hulsey



Sins of Thy Father

Linda Barton

12 *Astarte*

Screaming for Nipples

The kettle is screaming for nipples;
as its voice dissolves in quiet, I
can hear mama's calling.

In the room where I learned how
to put my hair in a bun, where I learned
of Mrs. Shatayev, Mrs. Rosenberg, here
she lies, and under the window,
my baby girl, tired from the flight.
Mama is hungry.

Sixty years ago she was a child, hungry;
she was raised on dreams and resentment
and "You mustn't. It isn't ladylike."
A young woman, she defied and stood,
demanding her rights
equal
in clear certain words;

and now, her daughter misses
mommy, aches to remember soft
aproned women, ages of women
who were never present
when she came of age in a world
shattered like a bottle of sour milk.

I raise my mother a little and pour
Ensure and raspberry compote over her shaking
lips. I pick the gnarls out of her thinned hair,
and wash her scalp with a rag. And as I soothe
her forehead with a cool damp palm, rest
slight weight against my swollen breast,
I manifest what I thought I've never seen.

And my newborn baby cries for dinner as
mama falls asleep, sinking into the ashes
of her first self.

Angela Lazarus

Forty/Love

When you reach forty,
one morning you wake to find you are wearing
someone else's face
(it is not an improvement),
and you come to suspect
that the Jane Fonda Workout video
was created and produced by
Steven Spielberg and George Lucas
in a special effects studio
somewhere near Silicon Valley,
and you come to know
that you are no longer Persephone,
and the dashing Lord of the Underworld
has no interest in
dragging you away by your fading hair
to his enchanted kingdom,
nor would you dare ingest the seeds of
any fruit without first knowing
the calorie and sodium content thereof.
It also comes as the supreme piss-off
that the dashing Lord of the Underworld
is himself well past forty,
but on a man's face, age rests well with society,
as long as his chariot holds out,
and the world applauds!

Meanwhile, behind you,
in a psychedelic, tie-dyed undergrowth,
you hear the voices of babies you have borne,
men you loved,
men you left and who left you
songs of roads not taken
and moments not celebrated
of tears wept and contained
of laughter (not enough):
All that chaos five minutes ago was future,
and is now distant past.

Then, if you are wise, you realize what you have become,
and richness of that
and you will go out into the sunlight
and dig fertile fingers into winter earth,
for you are Demeter,
and from you issues forth Spring.

Carla DeLane Wood



Untitled

Kelly Grider

Astarte 15

Dead Ends

The questions come up again:
The country or the city?
build a house or buy?
Europe or Hawaii
for
 the
 honeymoon?

We live at home
don't have jobs.

Dreams stretch out our faces in lines
which fit the middle-aged
the last day before payday.

and I tell secrets to my parents
and he drives his grandfather's yellow stationwagon.

I found a roly-poly in my room today
a moving black dot on my indian rug;
Too old for tolerance of bugs
I threw him out into the basement.

When I was young I made roly-poly houses
from sticks I arranged in little mazes
closed at both ends.

My mother pays for my birth control.
I always hate my jobs.
Graduation still looks blurry
and everyone knows you can't make a living writing.

We'll have a skylight in every room
so we can own the stars
A jacuzzi in the bathroom
He insists

We'll have about a hundred years
to watch the moths gather
on the back screen door in the summertime
when the sun exits like the last drunken
guest at a party
and the fireflies echo back and forth
in lamp language.

My roly-poly never saw the exit signs
when I set him free from my prison prank;
he was curled into a tight ball of fear.

If you do not pass GO
Do not collect two hundred dollars.

Landscape

"She lived, but her face was completely
burned, scarred beyond repair."

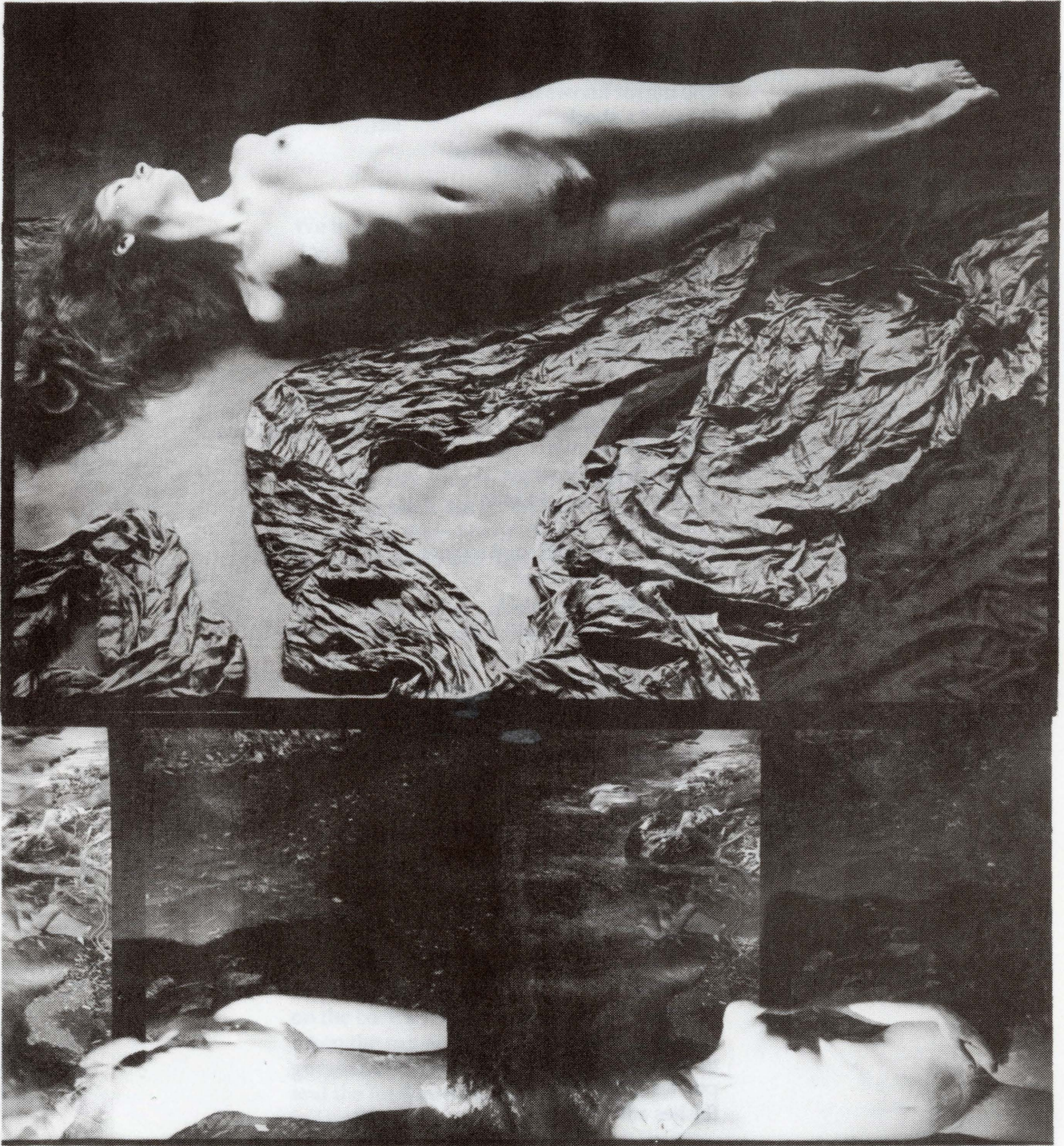
—News item

The mirror knows me now.
I am not a shock
in the morning.
The house cats will love
whoever feeds them.
I feed them.
The gar I catch
from the river bank are ugly,
some say junk-fish.
Still, their flesh shines
under the knife's blade.

I live my outer life
by mail. Catalogs
pile on the mantle
like cards at Christmas.
Once a week the old man
brings my groceries.
He is kind. He does not see me.
Hours, I have studied
my face with my hands
as a lover might. I try
to take each smooth patch,
each rough scar
for what it is. If beauty
exists at all,
it must be found
in all things.
My father's hands
cupped my face. He said,
child, you are beautiful.

My gray eyes
haunt this landscape
every day until I see
one thing to save. This day
I claim the bird
who grubs for food
in the water oak. His red skull
pushes at the bark,
flashes and blurs.

Jennifer Horne



Untitled

18 Astarte

Karen Graffeo

Isa

When my mother died
a polar chill began
that shuddered its way
from my solar plexus
to each compass point
so that I filled a tub
with scalding water
sinking into it
to my chin
and did not find warmth
although it was the 10th of August.

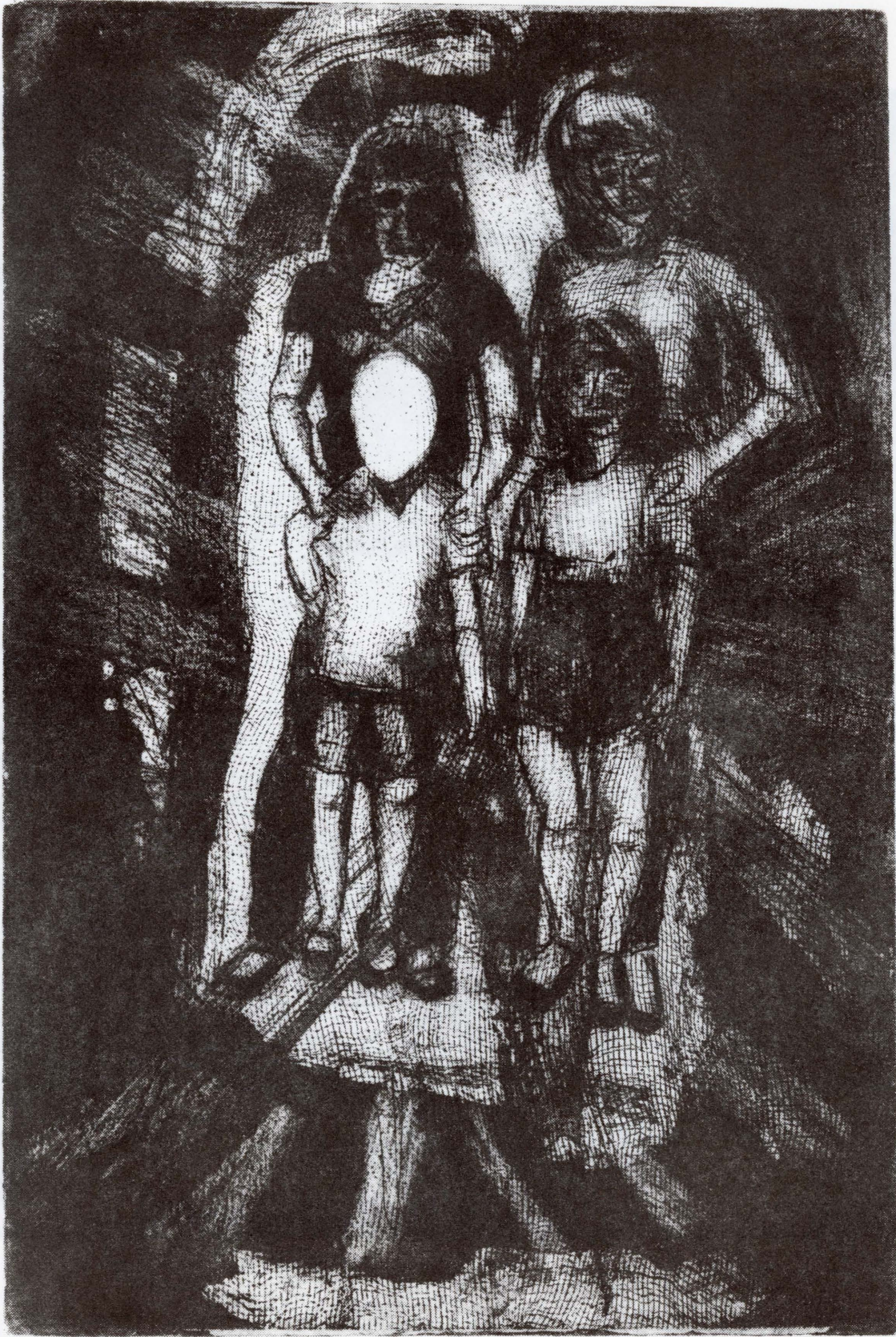
Winter mourned a path into my soul
howled at its center
keening and cold
scattered realities
leaving life dry, brittle
without juice or meaning.

I recalled
an amputee I met
who had a dark obsession
concerning the fate
of his missing leg.
He swore he felt it moving
late at night and could not sleep.

The dead are like this
I thought
and sank a little deeper
into the water
cold as winter earth.

*Isa is the Viking Rune meaning "standstill," "ice,"
"the frozen time."

Carla DeLane Wood



We and I

Linda Barton

20 *Astarte*

Back to Normal

Alison had not driven her car since she returned from Guatemala. The turquoise Karman Ghia remained parked in front of her apartment building half a block down from the record store. I watered her plants and took in her mail while she was gone, and so I had expected her to stop by or call. Not only had she not come by the store, I never saw her enter or leave the apartment. She wasn't answering the phone either. After a couple of days I had called her mother in New Orleans who told me that, yes, Alison was home from the trip. After a week I had had enough. Friday after work I let myself in with my key.

"Hey Alison, you home?" The apartment smelled thick with cinnamon. I put my keys on the counter and looked into the saucepan. She was making what looked like rice pudding, white with chips of stick-cinnamon. "Hey Karina," she called from the living room, try some of that."

I took a bowl of the hot rice and found her on the sofa. "What is this?"

"Arroz y leche - rice milk. But it doesn't taste the same. Their milk has more cream in it, and their sugar is less refined." I noticed cigarette butts in the ashtray.

"Did you start smoking?"

"Yeah, terrible, huh? I couldn't keep saying no. Everybody smokes there, and they are very generous. I felt like I was in a Bogart movie."

"So what have you been doing all week?" I decided not to press her about the phone and the car. She has circles under her eyes and the skin around her fingertips is red and picked at.

"Nothing. Just thinking about things." She was taping an album and watching TV at the same time. "I was such an idiot not to take my tapes to Guatemala. I didn't think it was possible, but their radio is even worse than ours. It's all the same four or five songs over and over. Soft rock crap and each song has the words, "love," "dreams," and "city" in it. The worst."

Our friendship was founded on a mutual hatred of commercial radio. A few months earlier she had helped me take inventory of the used albums and all night long we had kept holding albums up to each other asking, "Now how come they won't play this?" I had told her my fantasy of winning the lottery and having my own station, where the DJs have full control to play absolutely anything they want from any sphere as long as they never broadcast their own voices. She said I was a genius.

The tape deck switched off. She nodded to the television. "And TV! It's amazing! It changed a lot for just a month. Everything looks so polished, like art." The Budweiser Clydesdales galloped powerfully across the snowfilled screen. "Wow, it's actually working on me." She took my bowl into the kitchen and called back, "Let's go drink some!"

We went to Joe Bar and sat near the piano. "Anything," she said pouring her beer, "ask me anything and I'll tell how different it was."

"All right, how was the beer?"

"Warm. The bar I went to only had a cooler. But all liquids were sort of lukewarm there. Milk, water, coke-and there wasn't any ice. If you asked for ice, the waiter would just smile. I think they're having a freon shortage or something. The beer tasted good enough, there was just one brand, in regular or dark. Toward the end though, it started tasting salty to me and I stopped liking it."

"What was your family like?"

"Incredible. The mother is an English teacher; I lucked out there, and the father is a big guy at the town hotel. We had free passes to the pool. They have five kids, three girls, two boys. Also the grandmother and an uncle and the maid with her family and two dogs, two roosters, two hens, lots of chicks and a pigeon. I slept in the girls' room. They are third generation direct from Spain, real proud of that. Marina and Tony have blue eyes.

"I need to send them a can opener. My first day there the mother, Fabiola, got out a can of black beans and a butcher knife. She called me over, she wanted me to hold the can steady. But I couldn't figure out what she was asking and she had to physically place my hands around it. And then she took the knife and hammered the point through the lid and sort of wiggled the blade around till she had it off. Scared the shit out of me, I thought she was going to slice her thumb. Once we went to this department store in Guatemala City and I looked for an opener. There were all kinds of little kitchen things, jar openers, church keys, and weird looking knife sharpeners, but no can openers."

A group of office women were at the next table. One of them had bummed a cigarette off Alison and so we didn't feel bad eavesdropping. They were talking about Florida and the woman with the gin and tonic was saying, "We did have a nice time. The weather was perfect. But I just did not like where we stayed. When I'm on vacation I like things to be a little fancy, and the closets in this condominium had pieces of fabric instead of doors. I wasn't real happy with that..."

Alison mouthed "closet doors?" and shook her head. "She wouldn't have lasted too long."

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"And how well are you doing? Since you came home you haven't gone outside, 'til tonight. You won't answer the phone. You look shattered. All you can talk about is Guatemala this and Guatemala that."

"Karina..."

"What? I'm worried, damnit, because, okay, culture shock is one thing but this is weird."

"Well, I want to go back." She lit a cigarette. She was still learning and squinted from the smoke. I sipped my beer and looked at the ceiling. "I don't want to get used to things here. See, nobody told us how people live on the outside. Out there they pour you coke into a baggie so they can keep the bottle. You can't put toilet paper in the toilet. And the Indians!" She was getting loud and started tapping her foot. "We didn't kill all the Indians, Karina, Guatemala is full of them. And there is a slow war of cowboys and Indians only in Spanish and nobody told us. If I stay here I'll end up worrying about my grades and closet doors!" Our corner was heating up. She stood up, the watchful underfed companion to poets, and sighed, "You ready?"

I drove. "Ah ha, Alison, the radio demons know you're back." I said and turned up the volume to "House of The Rising Sun."

"Please god no - come on, don't make me listen to this crap."

"I love this song - and I still don't understand why you don't like it."

"It sucks, okay?"

When Allison and I were just becoming friends, I was driving us somewhere when it came on.

"This has got to be the worst song ever written," she had said.

I had raised my eyebrows, "The worst?"

"What did The Animals know about New Orleans? They were British! You know and I know they didn't know shit! It would be like me singing about... Blackpool. Goin' down to Blackpool, Blackpool. With me bloody old mum now to Blackpool." She had started hopping on the seat, singing in a painful attempt at Cockney. I had pulled over. I was laughing so hard at the memory.

"Oh stop it, Karina. That's not funny anymore." She lit a cigarette.

"Since when? Guatemala was hell on your sense of humor, you know that?"

And at that she laughed, low and to herself. "Karina, don't take this the wrong way...but could we sleep together tonight?"

"Don't tell me, you're having nightmares in Spanish."

"No, it's just I can't sleep. And I figured out that it's because I got used to sharing the bed with Marina. I never did that growing up, sharing a bed. It's good, you know? You roll over and there's this person to curl into. I miss it."

"Well I should warn you, I grind my teeth."

The bed was covered with a heavy red and gray spread. "After I bought this, the Indians thought I was rich and wouldn't leave me alone. Compared to them, I was." The spread smelled faintly of far off chickens and diesel fuel. Around two in the morning, I sat up to fold it back and laid down again. Alison layered herself to me. "One night there was a tremor," she said, "I thought at first it one of those times when you get that flash like you're falling through space. I woke up and the shutters were slamming and the chickens were screaming. And I whispered to Marina to see if she was awake and she said shh and covered our heads with her pillow. No one told me that Guatemala has earthquakes all the time."

I was fading but she kept on. "Something else I didn't know, the women hug and kiss each other all the time. It was something. Good morning kiss, leaving for work kiss, home for lunch, back to work, home after work, goodnight, and any comings or goings in between. Also any women who came to visit got a kiss. At first I thought it was ridiculous, like curtsying, but after a few days I felt funny if I forgot to kiss every last one of them. And get this, they hold hands too. The grandmother especially, she always held my hand, patting it and smiling and talking to Fabiola about me.

"One night Marina said to me, 'Let's go out.' Through the dark streets she held my hand. We went in this huge yellow cathedral by a side door. I was scared because it was so dark. Part of the church was a ruin. We went up some stairs to the roof and then I understood. The stars were out and the town lights looked like more stars. The choir was singing."

She stopped. We were quiet and still I was almost asleep again when she asked, "Do you think I'm turning into a lesbian?"

"Is that what you're so messed up over? It is, isn't it? You stay with this loving family and now you think they made you gay. You're crazy."

"But what about..."

"How old is Marina?"

"Sixteen."

"Think about it. If you slept with a gorgeous Guatemalan teenage girl for a month without going crazy I'd say you were as straight as they come. Besides, if you were gay you would have fallen in love with me long ago."

"I do love you."

"Hey, I love you too. And if we want to sleep together, we can sleep together. If you get the urge to hold my hand, I'm not going to wonder if that makes us lovers. Nothing has to mean anything." I reached and took her hand. "See? I mean, even if both of us *were* lesbians we could still sleep together and not have it mean anything, right?"

"Right."

The phone rang at quarter to eight. I kicked Alison's foot. "No," she muffled into her pillow. "Answer the phone!" I tried to sound angry. She exhaled dramatically through her nose and reached past my head to pick up the receiver. "Hello? . . . No, I figured it was you . . . Yeah, I know . . . I'm sorry, I wasn't trying to get you worried . . . I just didn't feel like answering—see, mom, nobody had a phone down there and . . . well but it's like we're slaves or something y'know? . . . I know, you're right you're right . . . I am . . . Yeah I will . . . Okay . . . I love you . . . Bye-bye."

She handed me the receiver and I hung up. "She says it's like I'm still there." She pulled the spread over us and held me so close I could feel her breath on the back of my head. "Hey, maybe that can be my reason when I tell her I'm going back."

Rachel Clark



Untitled

Brian Hall

Sybil

Madrigal in C Major Modal For Melody

Sybil, shepherdess, undermate of petty souls
resolution, empress of peace, bloodshed, liberation.
Restoring the blood of her kinsmen through Feasting
the Eyes on her Sort of Ethereal Station:

Brown eyes and deep brown hair
Distinguished ears and smile

Shoulder bent to what is fair
Lips that silent speak only gentleness
Or strength, creature of hope,
Whose knees are bent, and eyes are open
To the sun and sea

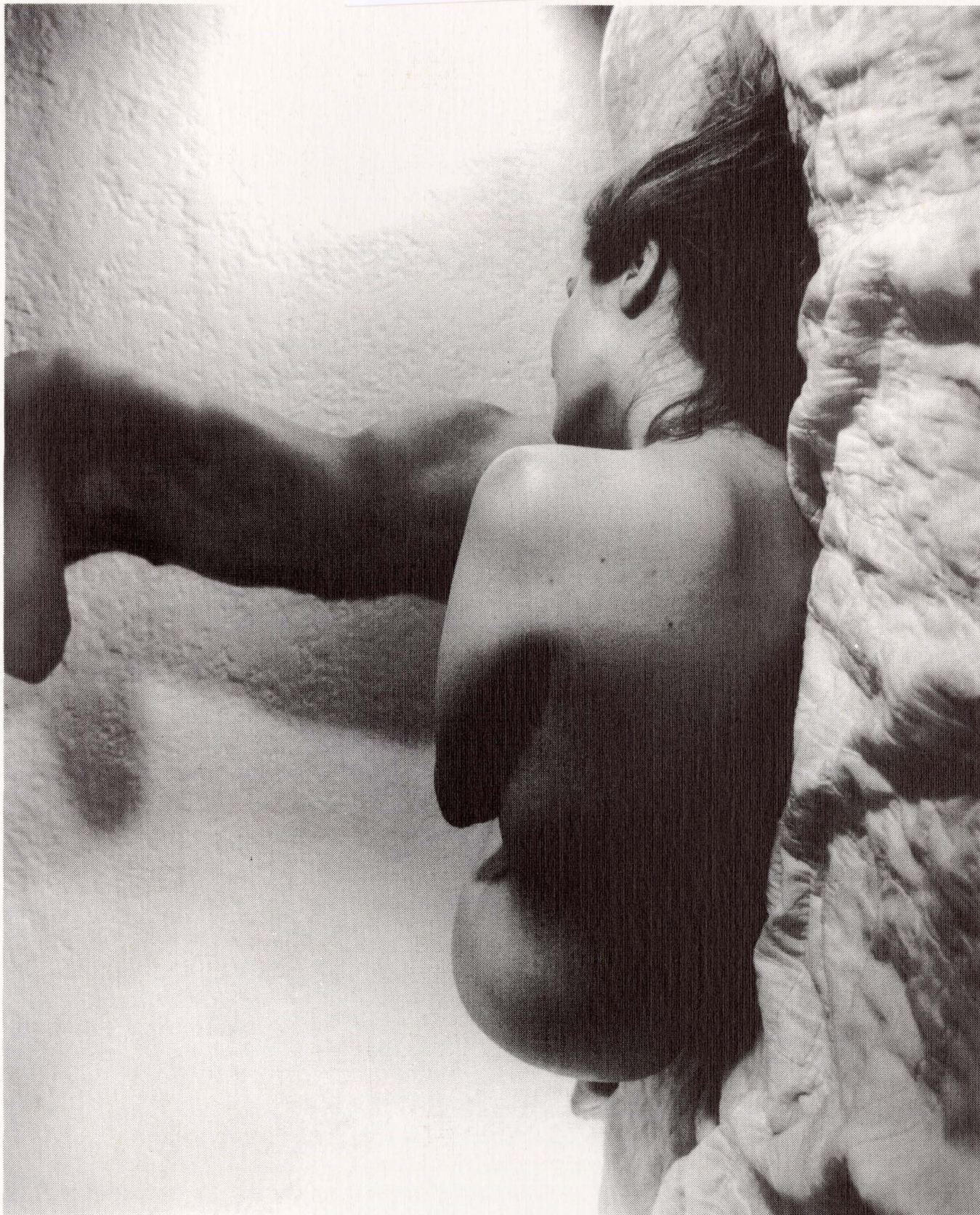
Sybil, protectress of Evening Divination,
Gynella would worship you upon her throne
the seat of ecstasy.

Lee Weldon

Sic Transit Gloria Mundi

Last evening, just past sunset
Mary lifted her head,
saw Venus cradled by a
crescent moon.
She wondered if the sight
might be an omen,
the heralding, perhaps, of a
new Messiah.
She wondered, too, if a new
Messiah
could keep the buses
running on time.
She knew, certainly, that
her feet ached
and that the bus was late.

Arlene Hampton



Untitled

Richard Giles

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