

FALL 1999



Black Magazine of
Visual & Literary Arts

ЖУИ



by Ariana Wohl

Letter from the Editor

We, on the Executive Board, are proud to bring to you, our readers, The Fall 1999 Issue of Onyx. If there is one thing that this semester has taught us, it is that diligence, dedication and determination go a very long way in making up for a lack of experience. Were there a theme that we could use to sum up our efforts this semester, it would probably be *Together Through It All*. To say the least, the Executive Board performed their duties as a unit in which no one person wielded much more clout than the next. We are proud that we were (and are) a part of such a collaborative effort.

However, Onyx is not about the Executive Board. The magazine exemplifies a community effort. To everyone in the community who helped us along the way by participating in the events and endeavors of Onyx, Thank You. Both the Art and Literary selection committees deserve lauding commendations for their vital role in selecting the best from among the excellent. But what is a literary and arts magazine without the artwork and literature of its writers and artists?

These individuals deserve most, if not all of the credit for making Onyx what it is. They are the ones who afford us the opportunities to look view microcosms of their lives through their excellent and creative work. As usual, the submissions were all excellent. As was said earlier, it was hard to select the best from the excellent.

The literary piece that received Editor's Choice for this issue, *What is the Meaning of Revolution* by Anansi, is evidence of that excellence. The selection committee gave it raving reviews. It captivates the reader from start to end with rhythm, emotion and intrigue resulting in outburst of "Oh!" and "Damn, that was Good," to say the least. *For Patrick, Hair, In Your Arms, The Grandmother Story, Falling Out* and *I Am* were also favorites of the selection committee. We hope that you enjoy reading the literature and absorbing the art. Although we did not give an award for Artwork, the pieces were nothing short of stupendous.

To all who were not mentioned here, we are immensely grateful to you for your support. Thanks to you all and enjoy on behalf of the entire Executive Board of Onyx.

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ONYX

BLACK MAGAZINE OF VISUAL AND LITERARY ART

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*editor's choice

In Your Arms

I wonder why it is that every night I fall asleep
thinking of you,
why these sheets are so uninviting,
these blankets give no warmth,
why even sleep offers no solace
as my wildest imagination lacks the power.

I dream not while asleep,
but while awake.
I cannot conjure sweet images
Because my heart no longer plays
in my fantasy world.
It only rejoices in reality,
as real as truth can be.
It only beats in your presence.

My eyes reject the most beautiful
images of the mind,
as salty tears leave them dark and barren.
They demand so little, yet so much.
Needing the sun of your smiling eyes
as a blind man remembers the moonlight
which once showed him the way.
Why do I sleep clutching your
old white shirt so tightly?
A lonesome worn piece of cloth
that does not even
do me the justice
of carrying your scent
or a faded memory in the seams.

The word need leaves our lips
so easily,
so often,
so needlessly,
but has it ever left your heart?
I never needed anything before
lying in your arms
seeing love
feeling love
my whole world lost
its way
its meaning.
All that is
is chaos,
but there is the one place
where everything is right.

The world and all it contains
is only a poor attempt at replacing you.
The moon does not shine as bright as your eyes,
the sun cannot offer the warmth
of your skin,
the rain cannot wet my thirst
as your kiss soaks my soul and drowns all but you,
no song can bring the joy of your laughter,
an even the vast beauty of the stars
does not compare to the abyss of your love.

Lying in your arms
I understand why the world is ruled by love.
I understand why people spend a lifetime
wanting it,
needing it,
why people obsess over
the lack of it,
the loss of it.

I see why people search, why people die.

I know why no beauty in the world compares.
It is all an attempt to imitate love,
recreate it,
portray it,
remember it.

Our only purpose is to love.
It is our existence.
Love is all that was meant to be.
It is not fate, destiny, or God
that keeps us apart.
It is we alone.

It is what makes us human.
Our inability to accept what does not have
order and reason.
Its ability to encompass all
Baffles.
Its power to change all
frightens.
Thus we deny ourselves the only eternal thing
we have.

You cannot speak of love
because you know not how to define love,
but love cannot be defined
because love defines all else.
You think you do not know love,
but love is all you know.
Yet somehow it remains the only thing you deny
and try so hard to defy.

by Swati Mehta

I am Haïtien:

Stolen from the coast of West Africa,
 Brought to the island of Hispaniola.
 Made to slave under the whip,
 From my body,
 I watch blood
 Drip-drop to the black soil,
 And like hungry, bitter seeds,
 Acid-like, they eat their way down.
 Rooted, they rip their way out of the dirt
 As full grown black, slender, thorny, trees
 Like the one carved into my back.

I am a dancer:

Round and round I chant and grin,
 Round the vèvè symbols I leap and spin.
 Spirits are summoned,
 And delicate female bodies
 Convulse in grotesque masculinity,
 The Loa has taken hold, you see...
 Possession, that is...
 Amid the libations, the offerings,
 the sacrifices,
 Vodou gods traverse the boundless infinite.
 With them we converse,
 From them we draw meaning,
 With that secret language,
 Coded in the fluid waves of our dancing,
 Spoken in the harmonious tongues
 of our chanting,
 Pronounceable in the ebb and flow
 of our bodies.

I am prisoner to my history:

From one to the other and then the next,
 They pass the baton in an infinite loop,
 Perpetuating the unending circle of dictators.
 A mean first leg,
 A vicious second leg,
 A terrifying third leg,
 A deadly anchor.
 Each biting deep,
 Each striking hard,
 Each cutting clean,
 Amputating limb after limb.
 And at the end of the onslaught,
 They leave behind no more than

A defeated nation,
 Close to death.

I am a free, rebel-outcast:

The world fears my zombies and
 my louns-garroux,
 The Catholic Church once denied
 my existence,
 Great nations once renounced
 their alliance,
 They still find me rude and obstinate
 And they still frown upon my Vodou.
 How little they know of me.

What do they know of
 one-armed Boukman?
 And the fire that spilled out
 from his tongue,
 Igniting infernos in our hearts,
 Jolting rage and anger in our veins,
 Causing frenzies in our brains.

What do they know of the warm blood?
 Freshly spilled,
 Gushing out,
 Rich with power,
 Showering our heads and our bodies,
 Tasting so bitter, so sweet.

What do they know of that night,
 that awful night?
 The night of
 La Cérémonie du Bois Caymen,
 Where we became gods for a day
 And the chains could not hold,
 The threats of decapitation
 Could not distract,
 I am as proud as they come
 And of slavery, I would have none.
 Underfoot, I crushed its ugly head,
 Under my belt, I boast the title of
 "La Première République Noire."
 My freedom brings hope to some
 and dread to others.
 I stand defiant,
 I stand unbound.

by **G**oddanny **N**ormil

Revelation

I've spent 19 years with the light off
Tripping over my shadow and
Watching my back.
I've felt my way out clumsily,
Stumbling and stumbling again.
Laughing obligatorily to fill the darkness.
HEY! I call you.
I'm not waving but drowning, reaching for
The switch before anyone notices me
Noticing the dark.

Weighing opposing struggles... trying to be
better?
Or perhaps
Trying to conform...
My own half-baked ideals contradict
and fight each other in a
Ridiculous civil war inside my head
And the only certainty I know is that I want
To be.
Not to be a personality.
I want what I see
And all I see around me are people living
Unapologetically
But I don't know how, not yet

I stammer apology
For my geography
For my blackness
For my whiteness
For my goodness
For my badness

But look now
You've got to see this one...
I'm flipping that switch on
(Finally?)
I'll be.
Better than you could ever feign
And I'll be whatever
Whomever
However I see fit
No apologies

by Anonymous

Untitled

Here is the story of this girl's life, set in text
for all eyes to see
I was born bruised, but do not weep for me.

I was like a pebble in my father's shoe,
a curse he could not undo
So instead of giving me love,
he gave me black and blue.

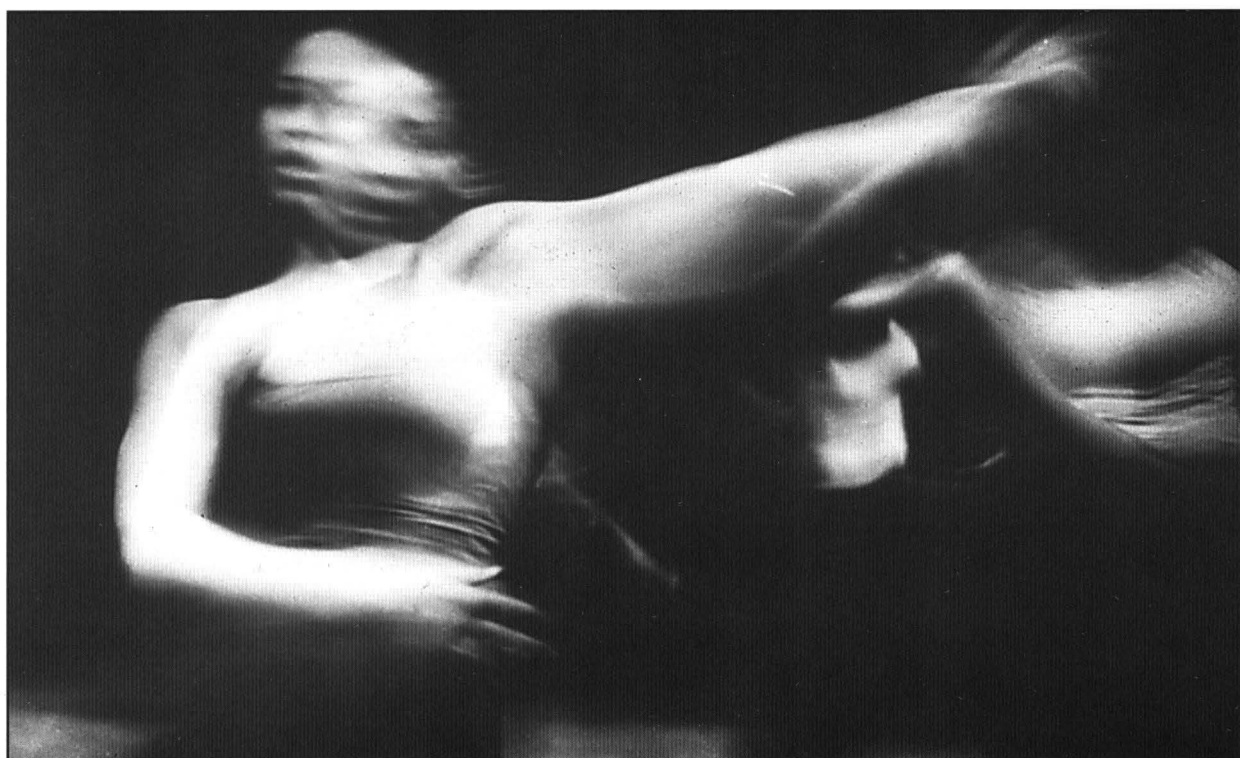
I grew into my anger, as baby grows in womb,
it became my only Comforter
My confidant, and soon my tomb.

Thoughts of life's mortal sin flashed
before my eyes
A way to end the struggle,
myself a human sacrifice.

That is who he made me, this is who I
became
A force stronger than nature,
able to surpass the pain.

So yes I was born bruised, but do not weep
for me
For as Luke 4:18 writes, I was set at liberty.

by Jamila M. Moore



by Scheherazade Tillet

Falling Out

Fearing the situation
that might lead to my elimination
without me solving the e-craze-tion
that is the problem of my life called racism
Perpretrators are pilferers
whose sole purpose is to steal life from others
who, unfortunately, are different and feared
therefore misunderstood
Theives who know not why,
how or when they steal
for they fail to see that racism is real
Dangerous because that racism does have
mass appeal
Heaven better have a "Hood!"
or I would...
a 'hood
where "perps" can experience what I experience
(Conventionally, that doesn't make sense)
have lost all touch with their inner humanity
conquerors also holding themselves in captivity
Hiding behind media, money and majority
supplying superficial solutions
that in reality are simply suggestions
to be used against us in the future
Giving a dollar to take back three
"We hold these truths to be self-evident
that all men are created equal..."

I'm wondering what they meant
because if you live "here" life is still dismal
but like a man once said
"there's a difference between definition
and demonstration"
Ever heard of "affirmative action"
the evolved racist screams
reverse discrimination
Some of our own say the same
blinded and glaciated by fame,
money and fake status
while their relatives still live in the barracks
of "har-hell-em"
forgetting from whence and who
and how they came to be
and what and where they would be currently
minus the mirage of money
Why does the success of a few have
to hurt us as a whole
Souring of the soul

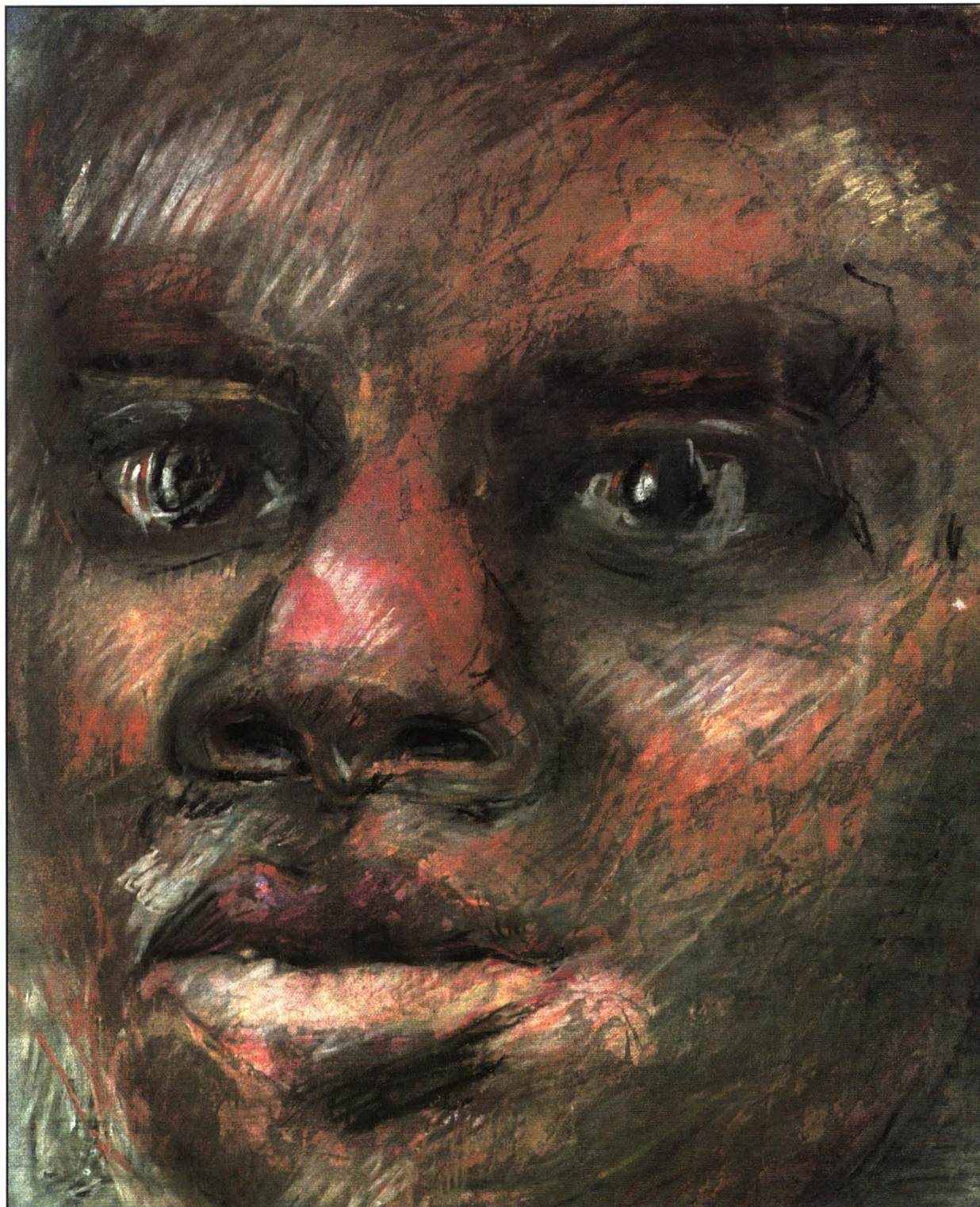
our Strong Nubian Queen did and does wail
aloud to no a-veil
because she cannot find her king, her
brother, her
son for there he sits (not in college) in a-jail
besides being black—what have most really
done

My grandfather cannot rest in peace
knowing that I might not be the only human
with the lease *to my life*
Giving us "change" only when it benefits you
folks

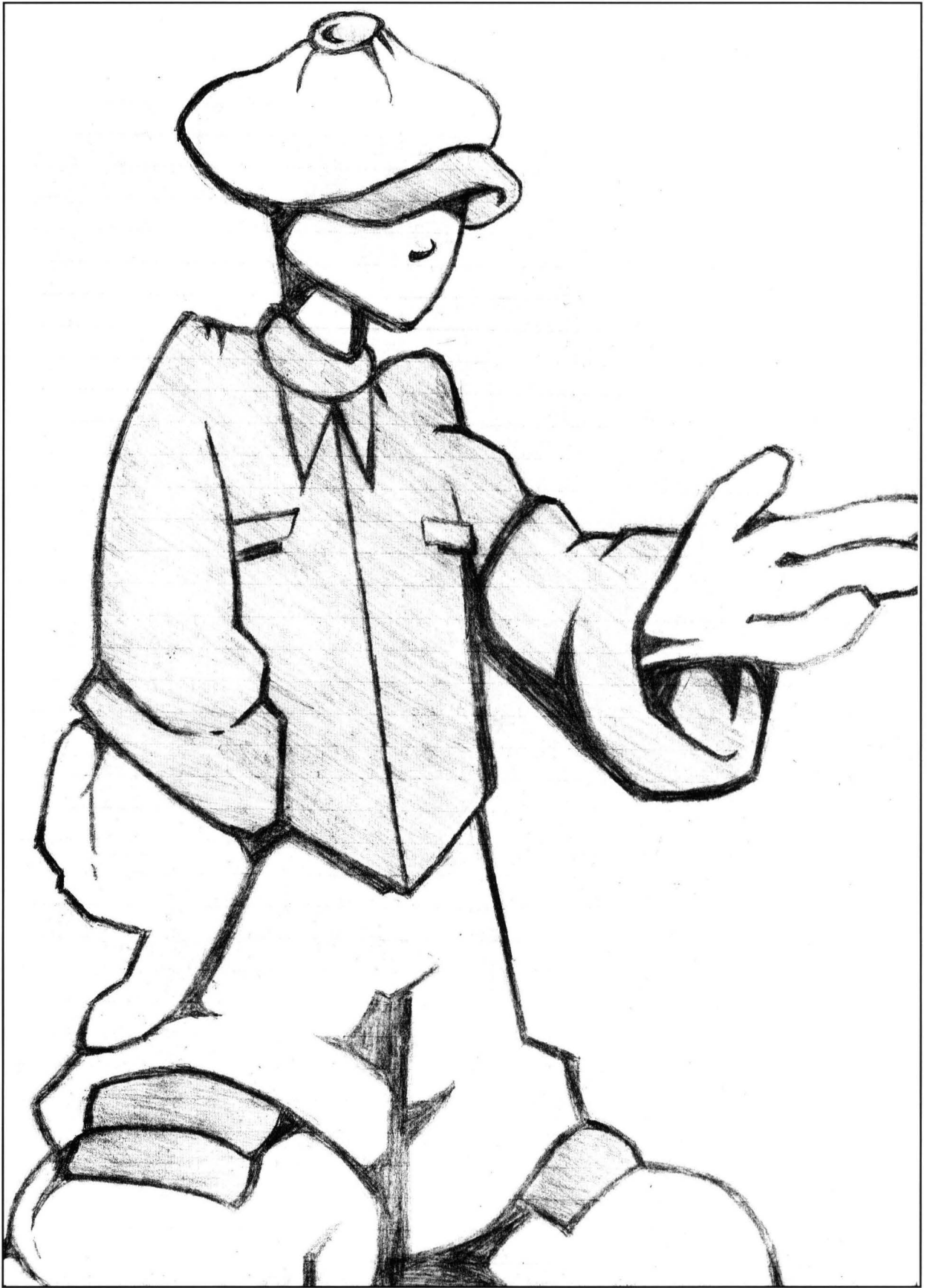
now our life is the brunt of jokes
that unfortunately we also make
allowing people to mask their hate for us
Singing songs using the word that, ironically,
for so long kept us united
"Nigger that, Nigger this, Kill Nigger";
we get all excited
same songs supporting our steady and
slow sink into slavery—
economically and mentally—
Death, more than just physically,
is the inevitable reward for bravery
"but to live, you must be willing to die
only the true are willing to try"
Sisters dignifying and glorifying the word
"bitch"

Three hundred years and
we're still not out of the ditch
The shit is even deeper
Not supposed to sleep under water
Laughing at and mocking the brother and
sister
screaming at you so you wake up
Think that all of this is shit they make up
so that they can promote our their agenda
and goals
The bucket of freedom, a-me-rica, has
holes!
We're the only ones falling the fuck out!
We're the only ones falling out!
The only ones falling out!
Only ones falling out!
Ones falling out!
Falling Out
Falling
Out!

by Alwin A.D. Jones



by Amanda Bornstein



by Tijan White

BLACK JEANS

My baggy black jeans, and dark brown shoes, red hooded sweatshirt and gold earrings continue to create a new form of artistry. As poems and sound tones propel with technology. C.d.'s and tapes take shape in other countries, and it is so priceless that it could easily be the global currency of the 21st century. Like food for thought and clean water when it's hot or herbal remedies sold in a shop. There is one global culture and it's name is Hip-Hop.

And it's growing, from cities to neighborhoods and the nightlife feels good. Such a welcomed relief from the sad world I thought I came from. Now much bigger, brighter, and fun, pulsating with colors, and golden rhythm. Hip-Hop has so much potential it's incredible, but first the writers of the verse need to be careful with their pencils. Create life using precise strokes with your pencil, and positive words will inspire minds to higher levels.

Maturity is patient wise and stable, so balance your judgement when mixing on the turntable. B-boys and B-girls be one as you twirl, spinning and locking on the floor without stopping. I see break-dancing enhancing abstraction through expression and releasing the stress, trapped in the chest and body so from a circle in the party. Or line the wall as the music places for all.

Is it the artist or the scientist the saving grace for humanity? And if religion blends with culture does Hip-Hop have place? And if there is no competition who will run the race? If the Earth is round can there be a first place? These are the questions you will all have to answer as Hip-Hop cultures grow faster.

Graffiti artists, you have to be the smartest, whenever spraying cans of colored paint, doing futuristic art or staying up late. Your expression is illegal and jail may be your fate, because so many can't relate so they hate what you create. Don't lose hope when following your path as others laugh. You just stand tall and don't fall. No one owns the bricks that covers all the malls. If your body came from the earth, you have every right to write of the rocks or write on the dirt. Now bricks and mortar I think most are clueless. Graffiti is illegal but advertisers have the "right" to do it.

Can't you see that land ownership has left this world cursed, scared invisible borderlines it hurts. Live for your art and travel to other countries. Spread your vision of life and your creativity. Progression is the key to the 21st century.

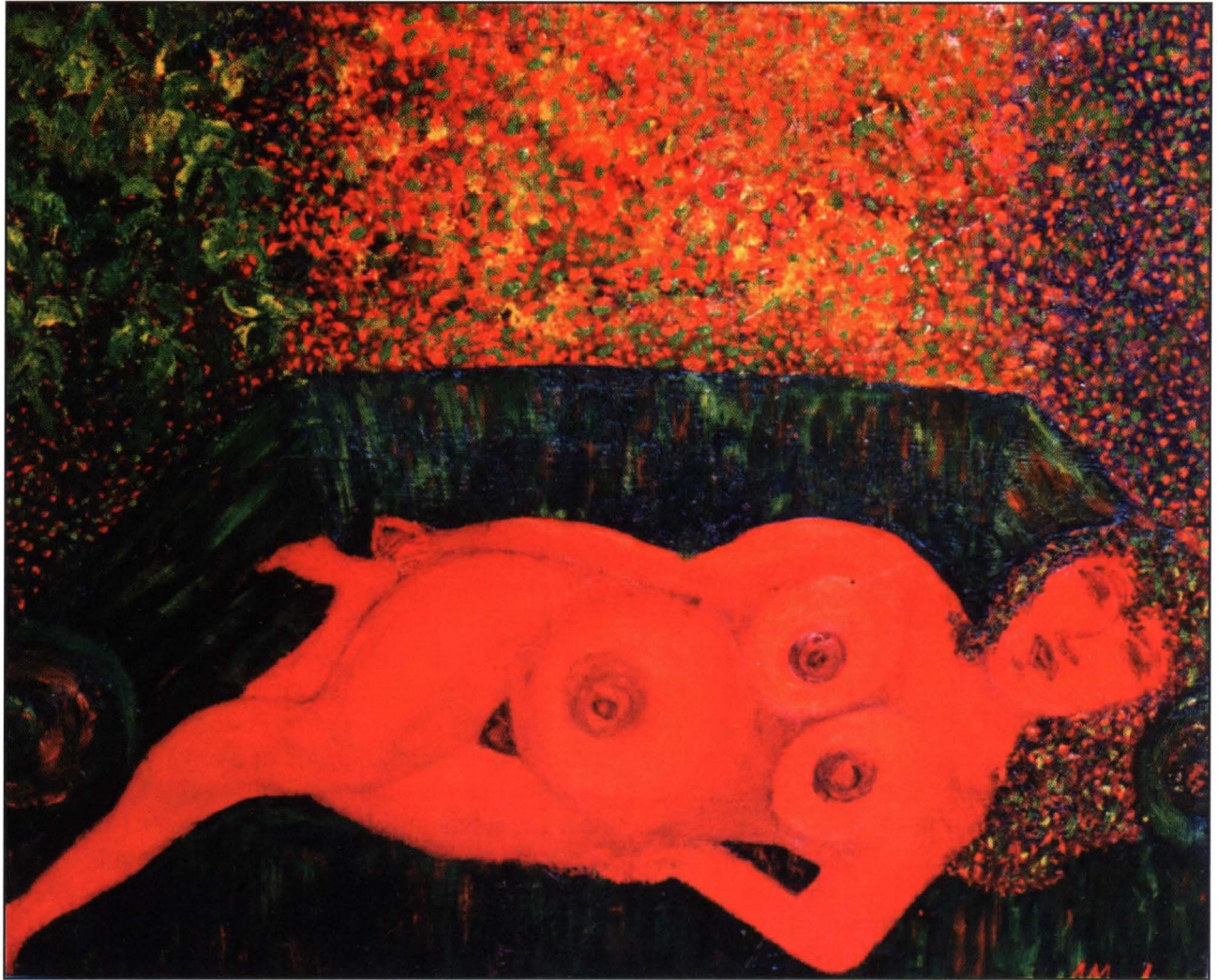
Now our hands hold a passport or green card, and our mind is asleep with common sense dreaming. Help up in customs I can't believe what I'm seeing. A fear Hip-Hop, and that's why we're stopped and searched by force, and of course we find it difficult leaving the airport. If you want unity why doesn't it seem to work? I am sure deeper reasons hide and lurk.

Nonetheless we'll inherit the world with hands holding cracked mirrors and shattered glass. Our parents' generation came and then passed like the same grains of sand falling through the hour glass. Isn't it ironic? So mush so it makes me wonder. Will we be forgiven by Our Beloved Earth Mother? I am flooded with images, sounds and feelings, whenever I dream in the dark regions of space and hear her moans. Maybe this world is not our permanent home?

But I am the continuation of 3.5 million years of evolution and now I'm standing here. From cave walls to white walls hieroglyphic-graffiti art covers all. And it's happening again. I hope you're listening. And if your have children who knows what they'll be experiencing. How will they relate? And what will they express? **The world is changing fast!!!** North to South and East to West.

And for this reason, the 21st Century, will be very interesting to see. It came so fast it's moving so swiftly. To the children of Earth now grown men and wombm. Before baby boys and before baby girls, now the inheritors of a very old blue world. Know that everything is really as it seems. One needle and one thread has sewn and held the seams. From Hip-Hop culture to baggy black jeans.

by Tera Okanta Singh Ofori-Atta



by Ayanna McLean

Hair

I stared at her hair for a long time—
That woman on the train.

It was the headband that gave her away—
Just a camouflage of red spandex
holding the synthetic halo in place.
Unreal luster glints too readily
and my pupils widen to examine
the texture-resistant veil slung over her
shoulder
like a damp towel.

She shivers and I pull myself away—
Offering privacy. She pulls her body
inward for warmth,
and I tone down my glance—
looking only briefly—
letting my eyes only nibble at her sturdy
calves
and sweep casually over the black slashes
that adorn her eyes
and point politely towards her temples.

But my eyes keep traipsing back
to the curly sprigs that burst intermittently
from her hairline.

I suppose someone told her
when she was young enough to believe,
that “good hair” ought to be
tamed... submissive...
and that better hair just lies
limp and defeated.

Yet, she seems confident—
This woman who wears her hair
like an expensive chapeaux,
Letting it move and gesture with her as
though it were an integral part of her
“self.”

With incredible resolve,
I coax my stubborn eyes
from her purchased and force-fed
crown of beauty,

and catch myself before I suck my teeth in
disdain.

In the periphery,
I see a young, Chinese girl
pushing her way through the crowd...
She brushes me as she passes,
dragging my eyes with her.
They follow her off the train and onto the
street—

Focused solely on the long, ebony
dreadlocks(!)
that hang like waxed cords down her back.

by **Natasha N. Marin**

Tender

Big,
almost massive,
but
still - so sexy
in their power,
in their warmth
that they let pour,
rain down
from beneath
the smooth,
rough
flesh of your fingers.

I look to the left
and there you are,
eyes closed,
caressing,
letting them careen
across your head,
down your neck
like two
who
comb the deserts
deep in Siberia
to find that
one, that
bit of lost gold.

I want to ask,
to feel them
find the treasure
within me,
but rather
I sigh
and speak
Are you warm too?

And it is then,
the two
fade beneath
a flutter of fingers
as you
cock your head
crooked to the right
and smile soft
under the lights
glowing intense and sublime

and you say
Only next to you

by Shani Jordan-Goldman

Untitled

i'm addicted.
craving the sound of Him
dependent on each word tumbling
from His lips
He seduces my intellect
He plays with my thoughts,
molds them in His hands
He changes me - into who i want to be -
and i let Him
He knows me, knows my heart,
knows my soul
and i know when He's thinking of me
and i know when He needs me
i need Him constantly
i'm infatuated
i want to be what He wants me to be
He wants me to be me - but i don't
know how
i know how to be us
we defy words together - we defy
explanation
not best friends - not lovers
we are **each other**
in front of the mirror i see His eyes
shining back at me
and alone in my silence i hear His voice
running through my head, calling my name
but i wonder what people will say
when they finally see us together -
what will they think of me?
what will i think of me when the
addiction wears off?
have i sold out?
because He's **not** the black man that
i **should** be dating
am i a hypocrite after years of
never wanting to look another way?
or have i finally opened my eyes?
because there He is
His hazel eyes loosing themselves in
the deep black pools of my own
and here we are
picnicking in the park,
me on a pedestal,
having everything i ever wanted

and i'm scared
because my mother won't accept it,
she doesn't even want to hear about it
and i'm scared
because my father is
anti-anything-that-isn't-black
and i can't explain to them that He's
the only man who has ever given me
His heart and **never** asked for
anything in return.
i can't tell them that i've given Him
mine and we've never even touched
He's so far away
but i can feel Him in every breath i
bring into me
and i'm breathing for Him
i had given up on love because **my**
men didn't want me
but He never gave up on me,
no matter how difficult i was and
no matter how distant i could be and
and no matter how much attitude i gave
Him
He pursued my love and I gave it to Him
He earned it
He deserved it
He makes me feel like i'm worth something
He makes me feel like i deserve better
but i'm scared
because i can't break the habit
because i can't keep myself from falling
and i'm going to loose myself soon
but i can't stop
and the room is spinning
and i'm high
and i'm remembering
remembering what **they** did to me
remembering how i felt when **they**
loved me
and remembering **their** hands all
over my body
i don't want that from Him
i want compulsion
i want obsessive need for his love
i want to inhale His fumes
i want to stay addicted.

~s.d.d.

What Is the Meaning of Revolution?

If I were to
question the real that reveals the surreal in
chrome steel
would it entice my senses into
something I can see touch and feel
?

Maybe in...
Time is the change that mocks the true
meaning of
revolution has become commercialized into lies
covering the eyes
and minds of those who wish not to take action
and those who simply wish
to fight stereotypical wars

We fight wars
Of black on black in black and white
Fighting against and for
girls who become whores
who pay rent on the penises of slum lords
We fight WARS where
boys wish to become men
with no fathers there to guide and show them
when
they cast kissed pennies, dimes, nickels and
quarters
into city sewers that become wishing wells for
their innocence
((nothing coming true))
only that sweet residue that lingers in smoked-
filled tomorr-woes
therefore the next wish casts the child into a
predicament
on what he should clutch
the coin that is a dream that will soon drown
with his innocence

or the gun he can see feel and touch?
I got 2 black fists begging for black gloves with
the fingertips cut off
Black leather jackets
Sawed off shot gun hands on pumps and
triggers
Aiming at sleeping niggeroes
Suppose I pressed down to waken their souls?
But it's pointed at their heads
This is no longer a wake up call
This is population control
And here we go down,
down,
down,
down

to the fiery depths of my own insanity that
breeds the anger that feeds
The need to be free
Violently

Silently I take matters into these same gloves
That camouflages the blood that camouflages
the love
that precious love we must have for life

TWICE I let me shotgun go 'BANG!'
spraying pain for on tagged and bombed
trains
with R.I.P's after the name
so it will forever reign in my memory

I am your modern day freedom fighter
Fighting mistaken enemies
Before I went into stealth mode
I attempted to pour libations for my ancestors

with water
But they got pissed off because I wasn't
pouring hennesty
Or champagne
This sham is pain
This pain is a sham
A sham pain
From trading sugarcane to slanging crack
cocaine
—Elmina to San Quentin—
Then till now, YOU tell me what still remains
the same?

Malcolm said there ain't no such thang as a
non-violent revolution
And to me Malcolm was a genius is Jesus
Coming?
YES! Jesus is coming!
Humming tunes of KRS yelling
"Fresh for zero zero you suckeeeeeers!"

If you listen real close you can groove to the
sound of machine gun fire
(Shhhh! Are you listening?)
to
The steady beat
The rat ta tat tat
Tat tat
fills the streets creating theme songs for
warfare
weeps and sorrows spread like cancer to kill
the tomorrows
until there are no more tomorrows
only prolonged nights that substitue for the
loss of daylight
Those are our songs of liberation
Vibrating in the palms drenched in perspiration

We sweat the gun smoke that blinds the
meaning of our creation
One nation! One aim! One destiny!
By any means necessary
I had a dream until the balcony...ahhhh!

((the I FLED
left my niggaz for DEAD
"You bleed. I bleed"
Together we've BLED
Tears SHED
tainted RED rivers into the Nile's blue river
BED
shot the shit with mother AFRIKA AND SHE
SAID

nothing))

Some say the
Revolution cannot be won without the gun
And I am desperately trying to be one with
God
which is Odd
because taken together they come out even
as breath becomes life, I inhale infinite sums
exhaling none
of these fresh breaths to my withered lungs

only finding answers in what
we
have become

by Anansi

Sometime Distraction

You know
I'd hate to think you felt any emotion besides lust
Because
Well to be honest
It was neither your warmth nor your humor I preferred but rather
The curve of your spine and lips
Really
And, I realize you feel the need to get gone
I understand that
But I wanted to pause
To thank you for never feigning any false sentiment
Thus absolving me from that same burden
A wordless pact on both sides to feel with the hands and not the heart
What a relief
Cause 'tis better to have never loved at all
And I really must admit I prefer
Empty to poured out

That tear was purely for your visual benefit
You must not have realized I'm an actress
Good thing
If you ever suspected the depth of my shallowness
Well
I would be crushed by guilt

And this is my sometime distraction,
That which I practice thinking and
Writing.
At very least, this pen keeps my eyes from meeting yours
Truth is
When I walked in today I sensed them
Your eyes, I mean
Behind my back, penetrating my coat
Picked up a slip of paper to avoid conversation
And its
Funny that
While writing I hardly even noticed how much I
Love
You

by Anonymous



by Tijan White

Fall 1999

COLOR PROBLEM

I seem to have a color problem,
I see everything in black.
When I walk down the streets at night,
I don't see all the neon lights,
During Christmas, I don't dream of white.

I seem to have a color problem,
I see everything in black.
Black dungeons, black ship holes,
Holding black tortured bodies
To be sold on the black-market for a black
price.

I seem to have a color problem,
I see everything in black.
Out of a black womb I came,
To enter this twisted and black world
Filled With black-hearted devils
Doing all sorts of black deeds.

In the darkest comers of my mind,
I am unable to forge anything of color.
My benighted soul, sowing seeds of ugliness
To grow into crooked trees
Casting shadows of old, unforgotten,
unforgiven pains.
Bad luck keeps knocking at my door,
I have been blackmailed, black-listed
For speaking-out against the great red,
white, and blue
While with my Naya bing-bing drums,
I play discordant hosannas to the motherland,
the black continent.

I was always taught that black was not a color,
That color could never be black,
And that I was humanity's black sheep.
But then, aren't Malcolm X, Sammy

Davis Jr., and David Walker black?
Aren't Frederick Douglas, Olaudah
Equiano, and Queen Latifah black?
Aren't Thelonius Monk, Charlie Parker,
and Harriet Tubman black?
Aren't Phyllis Wheatley, Charles White, and
Aimé Cesaire black?
Aren't Jean-Michel Basquiat, Toussaint
L'Ouverture, and Augusta Savage black?
And on, and on, and on....

From the heights of the peak Macaya,
And the rugged savannas of Kenya,
To the cotton fields of Alabama.
From the bush-lands of Zimbabwe,
To the depths of bayou country Louisiana.
All of them:
Black heroes, black champions,
Black artists, black scholars.
Black after black, black on top of black,
Rising, transcending, revolting,
Refining, redefining, empowering.
Isis, Osiris, Umoja, Kuumba, sweet
mother Africa.

Well then now,
Can you tell me?
Is there really no sense in being black?

Black Out.

by **Goddony Normil**



by Lisa Lindo

A Poem dedicated to Ralph Ellison

"I am an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allen Poe: nor am I one of your Hollywood-movie ectoplasms. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids- and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me."

i escape to the confines of my underground
surround myself in a house of illumination
reading Ellison's sacred scrolls
(i book-marked my bible
and placed it within the dust covered
stacks of my bleak library
for reasons of searching for something
with a little bit more substance))

i write poetry for political sake
and make believe that i am an artist

starving
orphaned by my art

i paint words on lined paper canvases
making sure my subject's vibrancy
catches the attention of a third eye

this picture is of children
playing under the moon's creation
one child is scraping his bony knees on a yellow
marked curb
that he believes to be first base

they can't see me
or pay no attention to the presence of a
stranger

i make delicate strokes of pig tailed girls
on skin padded knees
holding pieces of broken chalk
they retrace the lines of faded squares
cursed by yesterdays hard rain

to catch the essence of it all
i'd rather
use color pencils or magic markers or water
colors or spray paint
instead of the charcoal
that fingerprints my fingertips
and innocently smudges the bent corners of
my portraits

i'd rather do a lot of things

i'd rather fill my portfolio with
images of a Gold Coast
and intimately trace it's skyline
blending it with the red layered horizon
that sprinkles dust particles
upon

the heads of lost sons and daughters

((they have returned to be nourished by
their birth mother who claims they were never
abandoned))

i want my head to wear that same crown

i've realized struggling is for the birds
or for those desperate vultures
who impatiently wait for their dying meal

i desire to leave my friends and family
and foes whom i assume would surely miss my
presence

but i've come to grips with the transparency
of my being
me

 simply due to God creating me in His
image

therefore.....

i let them be

the soul of a young black male
carries no distinct definition
it will forever be lost in silenced questions
and bold plated question marks

the soul of a young black male
travels alone in darkness in light
in daytime in night
embracing havens of solitude

you claim to have eyes
you would think they could serve as a benefit
at least once in a while
they handicap your consciousness
and convince you of the reality
of my invisible self

you see nothing
hear little

if it were my choice
if i had the power
i would crucify my works of art
in a single squared room of ivory

and present you
 me

you could shuffle your feet in my gallery
stroke the long hairs that dangle
 from your chin
contemplate the pathos of it all
in a nodding fashion
and then simply move on

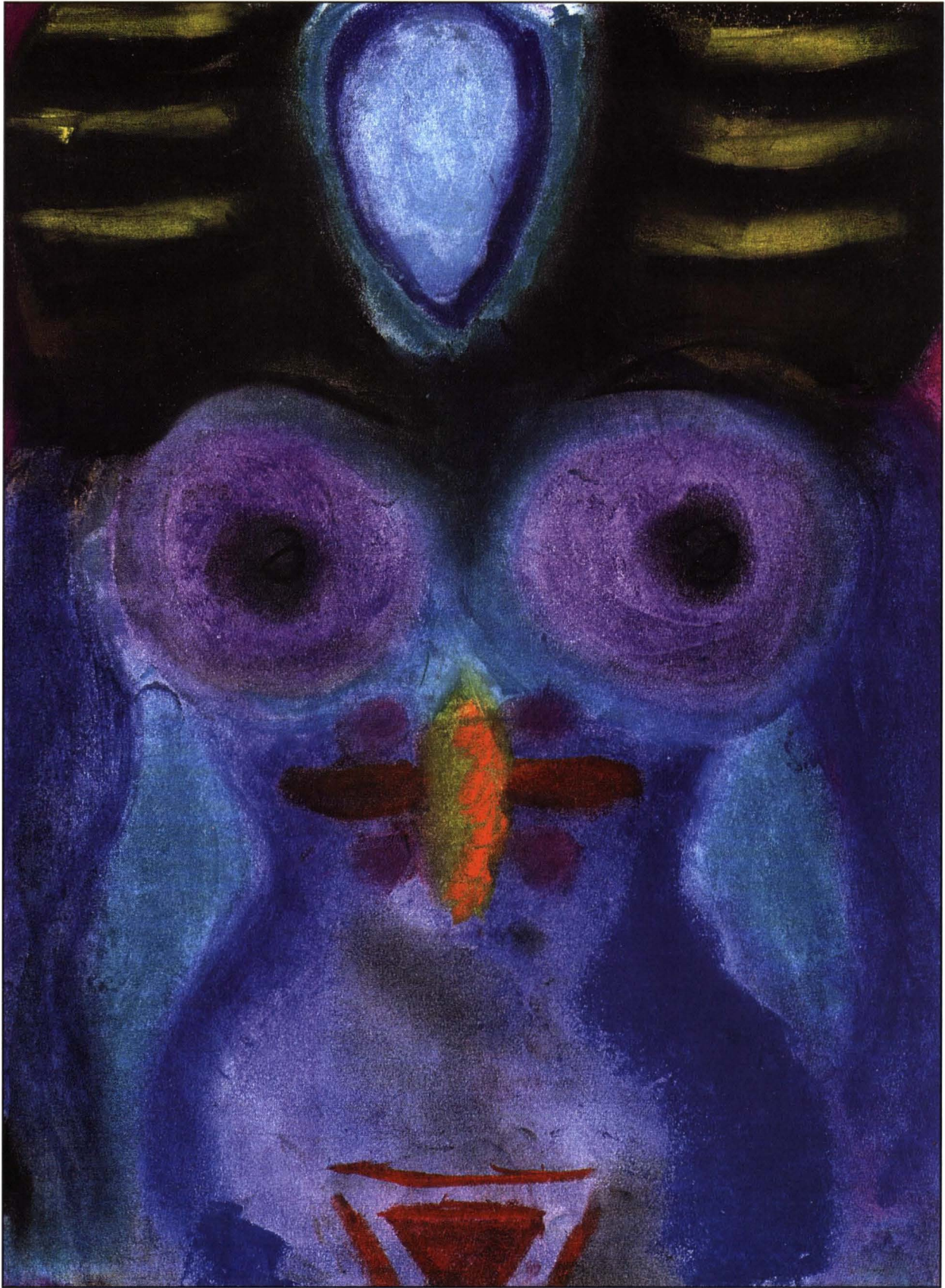
to shed this dual life
probably takes more than a cry

and a fist raised in destined protest

i ask you to rate my works of he-art
and answer that lingering question:

What Is America To Me?

by Anansi



by Tera Okanta Singh Ofori-Atta

For the God of My Spine

I will not be tired anymore.
I will not look back at
you and him and her
and it with eyes bagged and sore.
You may bite at my heels but,
I am learning to fly.

I have learned how to hold my spine
now it carries my weight
I am stiff, I am bone
I bend for no one.

I am making me my center, my goal, my opus.
I lust my own body.
I am in love with my own mind.
I am learning.
I am learning.

I have decided to owe myself the world.
I have decided to take what I deserve—nothing
will be left.
I have decided to claim eternity
and save myself
for myself.

The sun rises for me.

I have found the secret to happiness
on my own fingers and behind my own eyes.
You will know - -
That I am blood, and sweat
and flesh and steel and soul and earth.
I can never die.

I do not know how
to shuffle my feet.
I plant them hard ... my foot steps
are left in stone.
They are too big for any one else.
You cannot follow me.

Do not try.

I am beyond you.
The world is in me
Is me.

I steal stars from the sky
and put them in my eyes.

I have realized that when I stretch my arms
I am more than you can see.
More than you can fit into your mouth and
bite a part.

And so I have taken the weight of my moth-
ers
And balanced it on my head.
They bleed into me.

I have won.

And you
may live on my heels

by Tiphonie Yanique Galiber Gundel



by Amanda Bornstein

Untitled

My grandmother was a little girl once. She wore pigtails and pink dresses like little girls do. She was the most beautiful child many had seen with skin so black that it glowed purple in the sun. Her hair was so thick and long and untamed, jet-black strands of it blowing wild and free in the sun. Her eyes, wide and innocent, black pools, watching and waiting everyday for something better to come along.

Ernestine came. She was pretty. Everyone thought so. Her skin was smooth and creamy, yellow like butter. She too had long, wild hair, but hers was straight and silky - never kinky. Ernestine had an attitude from her first day on the planet. She never struggled when learning how to walk; her first steps were solid, unquestioned. As a baby she never cried; the look in her eyes asked for what she wanted.

"How you doin today, little Ms. Ernestine?"

"Fine, I reckkkun, Mr. Charlie," she replied with a sideways grin. "But I spose I not a little miss no mo. I be tree years old today and Daddy say I gets all the spect in da world. I a big girl."

"That you is, Ms. Ernestine. That you is."

When my grandmother was 4 and Ernestine was 3, Big Ma used to dress them in matching outfits and take them out. Everyone in Waycross thought they could have been identical twins, except my grandmother had been left out in the sun too long. That's what they said, the Black people anyway. The white people could care less.

"That Ernestine got the prettiest skin I ever did see."

"Ain't that the truth. Mildred sure done right by keepin her inside. She the prettiest yella gal I seen in a long time. Don't understand about that Gladys though."

"You right. That there gal got two problems: she burnt as the inside of my oven and she let that Ernestine do what she will."

My grandmother never really liked school. She went because she had to. She learned what she had to. Ernestine was the bright one. She had a gift for school. Every subject was easy for her. By the time she was 11, she was two years ahead of my grandmother and getting rave reviews from all her teachers.

"Mama, guess what Miss Roosevelt said today?"

"What baby?"

"She said I's, I mean, I am the brightest student she has had in her presence in a long time. She said I don't have to stay in that ole backwards sixth grade class. She said I could go to eighth grade, if that ain't no bad thing to you, Mama."

"Sure, baby. Whatever you want."

"Know what else?"

"What is it?" her mother replied softly.

"I got more sense than Gladys now. She not gifted in school like I am. She not a thinker like I am."

Their daddy disappeared one day. He didn't die; he just disappeared down the Georgia dirt road that ran through the middle of town. Big Ma never cried. She just left the big pink house on the corner where they lived early one morning and she crossed the tracks. She walked into the first well-built sparkling house and asked the woman in charge if she had any work for a young girl.

"My daughter knows how to take orders, maam. She don't give no back talk, and she'll work just as hard as you need her too. She can be here whenever you need her?"

"Can she be present tomorrow morning at nine?" asked the white woman in a severely haughty tone.

"On a school day, maam?" asked Big Ma somewhat reluctantly.

"Do you want your daughter to work here or not? There are plenty of nigra girls running around here, and I could surely find someone else."

"Yes, maam. My daughter'll be here."

At thirteen, my grandmother was no longer a child. Each day before the sun woke up the sky she was on her way to work. Her daddy had left a space that she had to fill. Ernestine wanted to stay in school. Somebody had to pay for books and new clothes. So my grandmother sacrificed dignity, time, education, and crossed the tracks every morning to the white side of town. She washed their clothes. Her hands separated delicate whites worth more than she would make in a year. Her little fingers scrubbed so hard that she had to unbend them from their scrunched position every night on her dark way home. She hunched over that ironing board for hours, creating perfection. They never knew her name. They never even saw her face. They kept her in a room that was no bigger than the length of the ironing board. Every Friday she found her money on the floor by the iron. Twenty-five cents for working from dark morning to dark night six days a week. The money went straight to Ernestine; it always would.

"Gladys! Where's that ten cents?! I need it today for school. You don't go to school no mo, so just give it to me."

When my grandmother was nineteen she got tired of Waycross, tired of the old pink house, tired of the dirt roads. She wanted to go to New York. Ernestine wanted to go too; she wanted to go to college, and she was smart enough to. My grandmother would pay for her tuition. So they went, away from all they knew, away from the slow paced south. They shared a one-room apartment just big enough for one bed. They ate what they could afford, which wasn't much. People were friendly back then, even in New York. When the two girls would walk down the street together people would stare. They wondered about these two young, beautiful black girls. They could have been twins. One was so light and so pretty, the other so dark and exotic.

"That Gladys is so beautiful, but she works like its going out of style. Why she works so hard? That's gonna be the death of her yet."

My grandmother met a man. He was handsome and young. They both worked at the same house. He built things, fences, steps, anything that the white people needed made. She was still washing clothes. She was still bending over ironing boards. He thought she was perfect and she knew he was the love she always wanted. They got married and moved to Connecticut. Ernestine was still in school. She stayed behind in New York. Alone. My grandmother still sent her money, weekly, religiously. She was so proud of her sister. Everyone who saw her pictures said that she looked just like my grandmother, only lighter, happier, maybe even a little bit more carefree. They could have been twins. Everyone thought so. My grandmother was just the darker one.

"Gladys, I can't wait to meet yo' sister. The way you raves about her so, make a person think she's the best thing since washing machines. You could be her splitin image if you smiled some of the time."

Ernestine always got what she wanted, without question. When she got married she wanted down home cooking and my grandmother cooked food for hours. Corn Bread, Collard Greens, Rice, Chicken, Steak, any kind of food Ernestine desired. She didn't have to be thanked. Ernestine didn't thank her. Their love was like that.

"My wedding day is going to be the happiest of my life. Everything is so perfect. Everything is the way I have always imagined it. And my husband-to-be will love me as much as your husband loves you, Gladys."

My grandmother got old one day. She just couldn't work anymore. She couldn't slave for people who never knew her name, who never appreciated the ache she got in her elbow from holding an iron all day. They never knew the veins stuck out of her legs because she had spent a lifetime on her feet, doing laundry. Ernestine never asked. She never asked why my grandmother worked so hard. She never knew that my grandmother wanted her to do everything she couldn't do, wanted her to succeed the way my grandmother didn't know how to.

My grandmother died. While she was alive I never understood the comments people used to make when Aunt Ernestine used to come and visit. My grandmother had aged well, she didn't look that much older than Aunt Ernestine. You could tell the two of them were related, but everyone kept saying how much they looked alike. I never saw the resemblance between the two of them, until I saw my grandmother's face in the casket. Her face was relaxed, calmed, without a care in the world. I had never seen that look on my grandmother's face before. But in death she had found what Ernestine had always had in life. No worries, no one to depend on her, just free of care, like Ernestine had always been, like Ernestine still is.

by Shayla Donald

Reflections

Don't you recognize me, I'm your sister child
Though our times for entering this world are different
You and I are of the same blood and of the same flesh
I was thinking of you when you wasn't even thought of

I tried to pave a smooth way for you through the bumpiest of times
I opened up big shops for you ignoring the smallest of minds

You still don't recognize me? Look at you and look at me
We two are alike. In your hands see my labor, in your eyes see my pain
In your womb feel my sacrifice and in your body feel my shame

All this and you still turn away from me, you dare to feel
Embarrassed by the sight of my kinky hair, broad hips, wide smile,
And full lips. You say I am ugly and not fit to view-that you
Are a better breed, a better woman and perhaps they should
Look towards you.

Have you forgotten who you are
Have you forgotten from whence you came
You are the only bright spot in an era otherwise marked with shame

Rejoice, for I am your sister child, you should love me as I've loved you
And be proud for we have accomplished so much,
Those things no person can undo.

by Jamila M. Moore

Untitled
For Patrick

He came to me like a song from far away
heard first in the mind like nostalgia
I saw no notes
but one day I woke up singing

He entered me through my ears
taught me how to shut my eyes
and love tongues and fingers
and that cleft in a man's shoulder

I am beautiful.
I know that now.

I know that my lips make veins grow
and my voice heals wounds continents away

I know that my thighs hold
the heat of volcanoes and that
he can erupt me into sheets and oceans
where we create worlds of first paradise

He came careening
Asking to kiss my back
Licking my breast instead
Now I know how he fills me inside

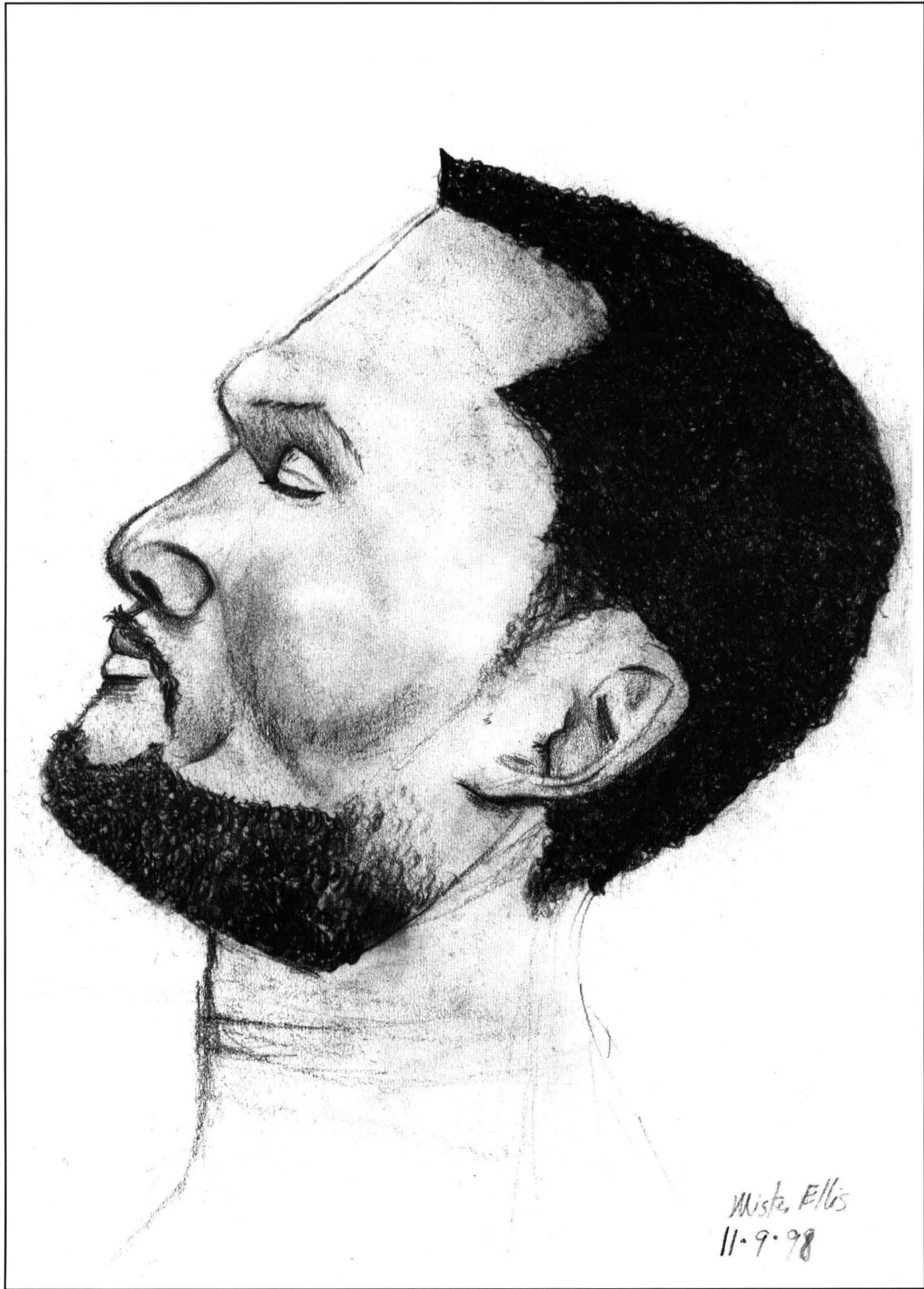
I do not understand loneliness
Even his memory makes love to me
gives me ink and wood so that I lie
belly swollen with his music in and out of me

I am more magnificent than sunsets
And I know this as I know that life never ends with death
And that he and I see God in each other,
know holy scriptures in each others voice

I speak of the almost impossible love of
the Sky and the Earth
Fog seems lovely now
and I feel blessed to be a woman

I wake up, for lives to come,
Singing,
always singing

by Tiphonie Yanique Galiber Gundel



by Lisa Lindo

Not Now, ma Lady

Oooh baby, you came a little early
Ain't quite ready to welcome you yet
with arms open wide
Ain't quite ready to go inside
your infiniteness, mystery, intriguing maze
Know that you can take me to places I ain't been
to yet
Know that I want you in my life, sure bet
but like I said, I ain't quite ready yet
I wanna find out what life would
be like after I meet you
but like my relationship that I have right now
Hope that you not mad at me or nothing of the
sort
See I wanna go back to Africa,
connect with my ancestors minus their so-called
savage image
I wanna love my other glamorous woman
Wait your turn
Please
They keep saying that you'll enter my life
soon cause you like young black men
We got that good stuff, huh?
Yeah, I heard about you
Ain't quite ready yet
Gotta tell my Momma that I love her mad more
times fore I meet you
Gotta show poppa what I have become
know that he'll smile with false and unearned
pride
All he ever did was contribute to one-half the
potion
that made me and caused commotion
in the life of My Momma
Ain't ready to marry you
Gotta get and see ma little son
and be a father for him
Least that I could do is be something for some-
one
that I never really had
Gotta tell That Girl that I love Her
What?
You jealous?
Nah chill out, relax
I gonna be in your arms, eventually
For Forever Too
but I wanna risk loving That Girl
and have her love me
Wanna know what That's like
See I gotta prove all those statistics wrong
Gotta represent for my brothers who ain't here
They either in your arms or in the boondocks
behind metal bars
Some here behind bars that are invisible to the
eye
You took all of them waytooeary
But, you just punishing some of them
teasing them with your ubiquitous essence
while they still in this form

'Nother thing, gotta see Ma Lil Bro grow and be
a man
and prove them statistics wrong too
Don't you dare take him too early either
He ain't no way near ready for marriage to you
I stay praying that your Mother and Father
put you on punishment and ground you
so that you don't take anybody that I love
Why you keep coming for us folks?
Don't your parents love you enough?
Just kidding
Gotta show That Girl the Big Dipper from ma
roof first...
She don't believe that I could see it here in
Brooklyn
I'll give you my paycheck if you go away
(Didn't mean to insult you)
You're the only sister that I know definitely
loves me
You're fine, just beautiful, but you know that
already
Men and Women and Children never leave you
once they have tasted your love
Got that good "Sugar Honey Ice Tea" I guess?
I'm cheating on you
with your sister at that
Actually everybody is
You too are opposites; people seem to like you
both
That's wrong the cheating bit?
Hey I didn't make it that way
Talk to your Parents
I love you and Her
But I'm enjoying Her right now
I'm not mature enough for you...

But when you do come
Please follow protocol:
Get Close To Ma Family Assuring Them That
You Are The Best Thing For Me
Ask Ma Family For Ma Hand In Marriage
Get My Consent
Take Me Like A Princess Bride
On A Carriage Ride
With Purple and White Flowers
Led By An Elegant Black Horse
Followed By A Gothic Carriage

But right now,
Ain't ready for you yet
Not Now, ma Lady
Death.

by Alvin A.D. Jones



by Scheherazade Tillet

