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ABSENT ANGEL

Luke Fischer

*The angel —
three years we waited intently for him ...
We returned to our homes broken ... **
—George Seferis

How could art come into being
without the angel's presence?
Is absence enough a trace
of having been there—it sets
the search in motion—the footprint
left in the littoral sand
on the shore adjoining worlds,
indistinct but not quite washed away,
enough of a contour to render with a pen?

* * *

A year it's been since I last wrote
and again I've no precise idea
of what I'm seeking, but I can almost
remember how everything seems to make sense
when it's found.

* * *

I sit on an elevated balcony—
to my right a north-eastern shore
of the Aegean—in front of me
mountains of Lesbos
suffused with morning light,
the highest summit almost translucent
to the elusive blue.

* * *

Had Cézanne lived here
he would have painted this—
resembling but taller than Victoire—
a hundred times attempted to make visible
wings concealed in ridges of stone,
the Nike gazing across the sea
as far as the isle of Samothrace.

* * *

When through the sense of sight
one can almost taste the dawn of the world
and the shrill, inhuman cry of circling swifts
almost sing it, why am I abandoned
to the remains of youth's fire—
an unburnt log, sodden
and hollowed by termites?

* * *

Can I learn from Daedalus,
not to soar with his son's reckless
ambition, but with focus to lift
a few feet from the ground?
Would this suffice to release
the world's strings
like a palm raised from the neck
of a guitar, no longer dampening
the music of nimble fingers?

* * *

Two and a half thousand years ago
Sappho walked here, Sappho
who summoned the immortal beauty—
the angel of eros—Aphrodite
to ride her sparrow-drawn chariot
down from Olympus.

* * *

The summit is smudged by gray cloud.
Must I erase what I've written?

* * *

Cézanne spoke of how
as his vision
merged with the mountain,
the horizon enfolded him
in a second womb, his painting
an emerging embryo.

* * *

No art exists
outside relation.
But I must find a way
to build the bridge. And
if raised, whose light
feet might step across
its span of air?

* George Seferis, 'Mythistorema', *Collected Poems*, trans. Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard (Princeton University Press, 1995), 3.

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