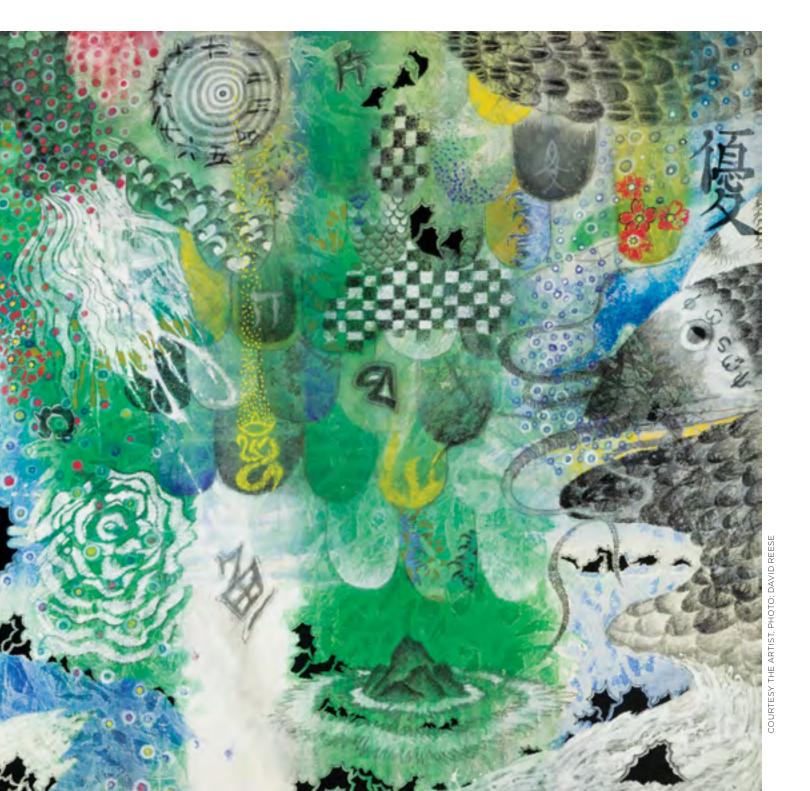
HOWARD KANEG

Atlantis, 2010 Acrylic on Canvas, 65 x 65 in



ASTRID CABRAL

Scales of Call

Immense, the ship beyond my reach. My toddling step cannot get to bow or stern. In my little gaze, confronted by horizon all around, just the feeling of an island, rocking. I, to the waist of tall shapes, beside my mother wrapped in mourning and in tears. My grandparents told me, you're going to trade the blue sea for the Rio Negro. You're going to live in Manaus. Strong hands led me along the deck rocking between two blues a seesawing of clouds and waves. Sea, sea, on all sides sea, in all the round and bulging porthole eyes. Clinging to the gangplank ropes I leave Recife behind, the house with pigeons the tamarind tree at the end of the alley, beaches, animals and familiar voices and enter the strange universe of the steamship: whistles, machinery and engines purring, the smell of paint, cinnabar, pine, soap and sea breeze, wind freezing my fingers and my nose, ballrooms, corridors, cabins, steps and, on deck, the sea framing the world while the hours stretch out endless interlaid with dawns and dusks.

and moonlight and eyes glistening in ocean dark till disembarking in Belém I see the port spangled with boats masts sails. Unknown people greet me and on terra firma bring me beneath a canopy of leaves to where enormous metal tortoises crawl along the cobbled streets, lumbering automobiles. I walk close to the rough wall and soon am facing a great shop window glistening with varnish and high panes. And behold, there, as small as I myself, a model ship, divine, is anchored, a replica of the steamers sailing the backs of rivers, channels, a distant reach. Finally my gaze can take it in. Finally I come to land reconciled to my dimensions. I intensely wish to touch it, enter its space, insert myself in it. However, they drag me away from there. Stymied, I cry. I return to ocean solitude, hours on end. I stand there watching bubbles burst, bubbles burst, as the sea bears me off to the river.

—Translated from the Portuguese by Alexis Levitin

Astrid Cabral has had a long career in Brazil as a poet, teacher, and diplomat. In the USA, her work has appeared in numerous magazines, including Confrontation, Cincinnati Review, The Dirty Goat, International Poetry Review, Metamorphoses. Poetry East, Two Lines, and Review: Literature and Arts of the Americas. This poem is taken from her book of memory and loss, Gazing Through Water.

Alexis Levitin has placed his translations in well over two hundred literary magazines, including Grand Street, APR, Kenyon Review, and Catamaran. His most recent books are: Brazil: A Traveler's Literary Companion, Tapestry of the Sun: An Anthology of Ecuadorian Poetry, Eugénio de Andrade's The Art of Patience, and Ana Minga's Tobacco Dogs. He published Astrid Cabral's Cage in 2008.