

HOWARD KANEG

Atlantis, 2010
Acrylic on Canvas, 65 x 65 in



COURTESY THE ARTIST. PHOTO: DAVID REESE

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.