

Ma Lan

Translated by Martine Bellen and Charles A. Laughlin

Autumn Words

I feel a little hungry, but don't know
If I should eat something. Tonight autumn has already begun.
Perhaps, for you, this is dry information—
Volition and grief of a shattered drinking glass—
Maybe it's as inconceivable as options to spare.
Just now, I draw open the window and stand before it.
The curtain grazes me, wanton and blithe.
Autumn bears wind,
Adornments half-hidden, partly concealed, from the eye,
Eyeing each other as we reap crops,
The crops we sowed alone, the wind-blown crops,
Arousing crops, flitting into view
Having lost one's way with a fluid border.
Did Eve eat mango or an apple?
Fruit does not transfer,
Fruit makes women's lips ripen.
But I get hungry, when I'm loitering in the past.
I drape a floral tablecloth around my body,
Paper napkins line up to conceal my breasts,
I think: gazing at plums quenches thirst, sketching small cakes satisfies hunger.
In this harvest season nothing's inconvenient.
Before I know it, my body's covered in tears,
My tears have fallen into another's hand, or
They lie in wait in my mouth.

It Is Raining

Let it rain. I relax on his lips.
I am flexible—look at my fingers,
They are nimble enough to play music.

Let this man utter his intended destination.
I depart from his lips.
I know he will set off quickly,
But how to get from the left to right ventricle?

Not enough time to spend with the sick font I am visiting
Who is skin and bone.
Long ago I was on the road. Tearful reproaches are relatively potent.
Let it rain, now! Restrain,
Protect me.

Though the clothes I wear touch my body, a thick mist
Separates me from the fabric.

Lotus Blossom Girl

A meditation bench, empty.
Girl embosoms a lotus blossom,
Sits on the bench.
A lone goose flies wounded over the mountain ridge.
Old man by a lake prophesies the flood.
A girl sees
People floating on the current.

The girl sits perfectly still.
Her posture reflects forgetfulness.
The girl swells out from water.
Water overflows without border.
A gushing cascade floods the land,
Its area increases exponentially.
The world's realm, increasingly a mirror, a level surface.
Discrete plants and animals are hard to distinguish.
Even lotus and girl fuse.

A wooden bench, empty, cleaves to
Lotus girl, the lotus girl
Is in the world under water, she cannot surface.
The world belongs to water, and the land is beneath.
The empty bench is proof of it, a way of living.

Lotus girl,
Tragedy of the flood belongs to men, not women.

Where to Sit

I sit on a block of ice,
Water beneath me.

I sit in his house.
To the left and right are years carried by the wind like confetti.
I touch some books that are crawling across the floor.
They grow thinner as they trek, form groups,
Collect dust.

I sit outside his house,
Raise my eyes and see the blue sky, white clouds.
He is behind me, criticizing,
“Your beauty has become tears that choke.”

I sit in my own mind,
Remain there for so long
I become a package, a bundle of herbs.

I sit on a wooden fence,
“Mark the boat to find a sunken sword”*
And then return to sit on the block of ice,
The current flowing beneath me.

** This idiom originates from an ancient story of an idiot who drops his sword from a boat, and to recover it, he marks the spot on the boat from which the sword fell, anchors the boat, and dives in (of course he does not find the sword). The story has been interpreted philosophically as a critique of the tendency to apply fixed standards to changing phenomena.*