Epiphany

By Angela Manno

Out of the depths I cry unto you,
Oh Presence, Maker of this perfect world
Out of this silence but for my own breath

Out of the darkness and weightlessness
The black infinite night
Encrusted with countless stars, cool, distant, white.

I turn my gaze, not ready fully to take in
The Spectacle below:

A slow procession of green and earthen landmasses
Mountains undulating
Grazed by gentle, drifting clouds "
A miraculous harmony of soft and brilliant hues
Vast oceans
Shining with sunlight

From a well of tears
Come flooding . . . a sense of Being,
Connection, and yes Love
It’s all alive, life within Life.

Garden of Eden
Suspended in space,
Nothing holding it up
No fulcrum upon which it spins

But wait . . .
Two new continents have come into view
And now, suddenly
The other side of the world is before me!

I must think:
Have I some special right to gaze upon such Beauty,
The living host of all we know: all of history and music and poetry
And art and birth and death and love and tears?

What have I done to merit this moment?
This glimpse of Divinity,
Devastating Beauty,
Mother of us all?

Though I float miles above,
I am a part of that Life,
Tied to her through her breath
Which I take with me
In a tank on my back

I am afloat in the infinite sea
My heart races
There is no up or down . . .
But there is worship
There is the bursting of my heart
There is the cry from the most profound depths:

See where you live, Humanity!
See your own Self!
This tiny, miraculous island of life
Adrift in the vast cosmos

We are so alone, so fragile.
There is nothing more glorious

So said the Saint:

“Because the divine could not image itself forth in any one being, it created the great diversity of things so that what was lacking in one would be supplied by the others and the whole universe together would participate in and manifest the divine more than any single being.”

And the writer of Hindu texts: “I am Beauty among beautiful things.”

For all eternity there is but one Earth.
I will tell them, I will make them understand . . .

Plunging back into you in a ball of fire,
I will not forget your face,
I will remember you, Jewel of the Universe,
Most Holy Ground, Home.

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Commentary: In beginning a new body of artwork, I looked for inspiration in the ever-expanding file of quotations I had gathered over decades from numerous sources: world literature, spiritual traditions, physics, cosmology, indigenous wisdom, and ecology. In my search, a quote from Michael Collins, pilot of Apollo 11 (the first lunar landing) command module, struck me to the core: “I think a future flight should include a poet, a priest, and a philosopher ... we might get a much better idea of what we saw.”

Sensing a new urgency to Collins’ point, particularly as we continue to unravel the biosphere at an ever-increasing rate, and realizing that such a flight crew would probably not be forthcoming any time soon, I thought to myself: I will try my hand at it. After all, as a visual artist, I interpret and condense experience into images like a poet, I approach my art as a form of ministry/service, and I am a natural philosopher, prone to the pursuit of wisdom. Plus I have spent many hours in conversation with the astronauts and in reading what they have written and absorbing what they witnessed. Their accounts have been a deep and abiding source of inspiration to my art and have an urgent message for the world.

This poem and commentary were originally published in the book, *Held in Love: Life Stories to Inspire us Through Times of Change* (Ed: Molly Young Brown and Carolyn Wilbur Treadway).

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