Selected Poems and Photos

Wayne Amtzis

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The poems in this series
were written as walking meditations
wide open views, dispassionate discourse
relying on concrete images
and the recusal of self
from recollection and accounting
While writing I referred to these poems as sketches
but now refer to them as photo-poems
direct reflections of city-scapes,
like the photos I took,
black and white portraits
that anyone would see
if they looked

Cassandra, New Road, Kathmandu, Nepal.
(Wayne Amtzis, 1988)
HE CAN'T MAKE IT

The bullet-faced man leans into his stride. Rope-straddled, head taut with a boxed refrigerator, skull and spine brace each foot forward. As the refrigerator drags and hurries him past women nestled between centuries-old statues, with handfuls of garlic and ginger or dirtied heads of cauliflower and piled radishes spilling onto the street, a rickshaw porting glass and motorcycles gunning their motors veer into the intersection.

The rope ridging his brow pulls back... feet slip, head lunges.

Eyes stinging, lungs knotted with exhaust, he can't make it! past shouts and shattered glass, he can't make it! past the last step he made.

Kiligal

National Refrigerator, Gairidhara, Kathmandu, Nepal.
(Wayne Amtzis, 1991)
PURCHASE

Start with the girl in the gutter.
Her mat of plastic spread on the sidewalk
just past the shop where porters
bend to take boxed refrigerators
on their backs. Start with the lockets
and locks she’s set out for sale.

If not her, then the boy ringed with satchels
standing like a coat-rack in the circle
where roads cross. Forget the passersby,
no matter how drawn their faces
Forget pale-faced mannequins
draped with shawls or silk.

Wait till the fifteen-year-old leans
into the weight of it. Catch his eyes
grimace to take that first step
led on by a lean mustached man
who fears for his purchase.
Then turn to catch the coconut man
unaware; fruit sellers unsuspecting.
Hands held close to the chest:
RRUUPPEEEEESSEES clutched

and counted. Faded, folded wads
tucked in at the waist.
Dead-end where the road does.

Behind a low wall topped with barbed wire,
a girl, with child, reaches
for payment. Ranged along the wall,
dime novels proffer women,
leering, lurid, like her fearful
for their purchase.

Indrachowk; Kastamandap; Sundara
Key Chains and Combs, Rani Pokhari, Kathmandu, Nepal.

(Wayne Amtzis, 1994)
IF BODIES HAVE VOICES

Wrapped in rags, flies
all about you, matted hair,
vein-gnarled hands,

a man’s strength locked in your jaw,
squint that narrows
to the distant enemy we all are.

Whirlwind voice, screams
that claw back into the throat.
If bodies are to be held,

yours is falling...
Walls/Pavement/Cardboard
Bundled clothes

Your home is where we spit and squat,
where gears shift, motors grind
and their scattershot fumes

blossom above

Bhotahity

Wayne Amtzis is the author of the poetry collection *Sandcastle City/Quicksand Nation and Days in the Life*, translations from Nepali and Nepal Bhasa. His collection of photos and poems, *City on their Backs*, is forthcoming.