

MICHAEL SCHLICHTING

Cormorant Cleft, 2010
Acrylic on Paper, 12 x 12 in



courtesy: Hawk Creek Gallery, Neskowin Oregon

JOHN STRALEY

Dance Music for Suicides

The rain on the blue tarp becomes a gamelan of rain on the waves, all of it tumbling and splashing, drenched by the sizzle of the cresting seas. The baby in the bearskin is him, the canoe is him, the paddle is him, even the riled up sea is him, though he sees and feels them as distinct in the dream. He as his mother pulls against the storm and the gray-green waves break into the cedar canoe that he had created tastes like condensed milk and his baby self laughs and laughs as his mother pulls and pulls out into the storm. He feels the swells rising and falling like hills and valleys leading to mountain peaks. The sea ducks yowl like gut shot cats, and his mother's strong back pulls the sharp painted paddle toward herself through the water. The sky is blue-black and the wind rumbles in the golden brown bearskin, and the naked baby he is in the dream claps at all of it, happy, happy, happy to be out in the storm.

Then she stops paddling and lifts the naked baby that he is in the dream and there is no land anywhere around and she sets him down into the wild North Pacific Ocean. The water bites him to the bone, and he wants to cry out to the mother that he is in the dream but he smiles and claps his hands and she lets him go and he sinks.

His first breath is filled with a narcotic blush of warm, waxy letting go. Death like heroin. He begins to relax, floating down. He sees the outside bottom of the cedar canoe that he had created. He sees the storm swells pushing the woman who holds the painted paddle in the direction from which she had come. He sees a brown bear swimming behind the paddle and an Orca whale, he sees an Eagle flying above the canoe and a Raven standing on the turned-up stern. Totem animals of his mother's people. He is gliding down to where there is less and less light. The fish look stranger, and their eyes are larger and more yellow. He still has warmth coursing through his veins but now feels cold water needling into his skin. He is drifting into the dark, his bones hurt, and he finally bumps into a coral formation on the rocky bottom, on the flat bottom of the sea, where nothing lives but fish that are white on one side and invisible brown on the other, where both eyes are on the brown side. The coral is as soft and wet as a catcher's mitt left out in the rain.

But the oddest thing was that the catcher's mitt said, "Hey ... hey, you can't stay here no more. Wendell, I'm