



THOMAS CAMPBELL

Large Quilt #4, 2013

Paper, Acrylic, Packing Envelope, Thread, Acrylic,
Spray Paint, Pencil, Rice Bags, Money, 53 x 37 in

ANDREW MCINTYRE

We Will Find Our Way Shipwrecked in Algiers

I was down on my luck in Algiers because I had lost my job on a ship, the M.V. Antwerpen. Jrovnic, a shaven-headed Serb, had been trying to get into my pants for a week or so. The next stop was Tunis, and I just couldn't stick it any longer. We got into a fight, and I jumped ship. They'd thrown my gear overboard, so I had nothing. Algiers, where you could be killed if they thought you were French, and I didn't speak a word of Arabic. In the way of things that sometimes happen when you are at rock bottom, someone comes along, and I had met Muhammad, a Berber. He had been looking after me because he didn't know anyone in Algiers, he was from Oran, and we were both on the skids. In his denim jacket pocket he carried a small hatchet. Together we were strong. We had been trying to sell clothes Muhammad had smuggled from Morocco, to make ends meet.

In an uneasy silence we sat contemplating. We had been in the Kasbah for two hours, and we hadn't sold a damn thing. At this rate, we weren't going to eat that night. Muhammad spat into the dirt amid the dusty calloused feet and rotting vegetables, grinding the phlegm into the ground with the sole of his shoe. The phlegm curled, rolling in the grime, attracting ants.

"Let's go. Let's get out of this filthy place. I hate the Kasbah."

"Yes. Where to?"

"The other side of the bay. Perhaps we will have luck there."

Turning his back on the chaos, he stalked towards Bab El Oued, the bag over his shoulder hanging like a gigantic pale scrotum. He seemed completely untouched by fatigue.

"You are not tired?"

"Non. I have not slept in a bed for a month, maybe longer. I don't know. The train is enough. The train, you know, for many it is the dormitory. The Oran-Algiers train. Sleep to Oran for four hours, and sleep all the way back. Soon we go to Morocco to get more clothes."

"That is where you always get the clothes?"

"Yes. Across the border. We go to the mountains over the border to get them and bring them back in. You can't get clothes here. It is dangerous. You can die in the snow or be shot by the guards."

"How long does it take?"