

SUSAN MOORE

Likeness #7, 2014
Oil on Panel, 8 x 12 in



COURTESY THE ARTIST

FRANCES LEFKOWITZ

West

Finding Solace in Ocean Places

Given the choice, I'll take west. Of the directions, of the ways we can face, of the locations for windows and doorways. Not that east doesn't offer rosebuds, even the astonishing bluebird. Also, if you keep heading east you will get west, and vice versa. Such is the physical logic sewn into a globe. Here I am on the very day of the year that the tilt edges back up from its most extreme and fragments of seconds get added onto light rather than dark. I have a window on three directions, all but north—which is a very good direction, one of the best for getting things done, but not so good for letting in brightness or warmth, so if you're going to have a window not facing somewhere, north would be the where. I choose the west window day or night, regardless of sunrise or streetlights or neighbors or my landlord making his rounds around the grounds on his golf cart. If I were to get in my car and drive in this direction, I would hit the end of the continent in twenty-five minutes, and that's with twists in the road. If I were then to board some sort of craft that could withstand many, many days of open ocean—we're not talking a cardboard raft here—and continue due west, I would eventually end up in Asia, a continent that houses countries we call Eastern. In other words, I am so far west the next step is east.

My landlord, who lives next door, catches me staring west and weaves himself through the stones, shells, and

pots in my garden to tell me about his medication. He's really talking this stuff up, as if he wants me to join him in these particular pills, as if we could synch our chemistry as well as our geography. We don't vote for the same people, but I'm a good listener, he's a good talker. No conversation with him lasts less than twenty-five minutes. My collar is twisted and my heart is shredded after each one, because I've clocked it and know without a doubt that in the same amount of time spent nodding in mild agreement with whatever he says, I could be at the sandy edge of the continent on my way east by west.

I don't play my cards right; I never have. Rather than crab, I'll order the pollock, cheaper by a dollar a pound. Same with men, jobs: I choose the much worse one to save a buck. Then it takes forever to unsnare me from the trap I laid for myself. That's how I ended up here, alone, at this age: by taking too long to get out of bad situations. I am living and facing west, the direction of optimism, but I am having a hard time getting it to go from the landscape into the bloodstream.

My landlord will not shut up about the drugs, two of them, the way they help him get out of bed and DO STUFF. His message must be for me. No one could be this interested in hearing himself—not even a man, not even an old person. He has daughters my age living far away and a wife divorced long ago. He has no one left to hammer for, no female to curate. He sees me facing west day after day, sometimes heading there with or without my surfboard or my kayak. He watches the mailbox, the driveway: he knows I've received neither letter nor visitor in some time, and I'm not doing much to encourage either.

One afternoon he caught me crying, and he stood there looking at the air just off to the side as my sadness emerged in thin streams. He was wearing a padded flannel shirt and a cap to protect his bald head from the chill. "It'll be all right," he told me, though I had not told him what "it" was. If you spend most of your adult life with daughters and a wife, even if they are no longer in the picture, that phrase must come automatically. And it works, as well as anything. As well as drugs. As well as ocean. As well as west.

SUSAN MOORE

Likeness #4, 2014
Oil on Panel, 8 x 12 in



COURTESY THE ARTIST

FRANCES LEFKOWITZ

My Ancient Self

Finding solace
in eternal things

If it were up to me everyone would be sunken safely below pain, underneath the possibility of scars. Our shoulders would boast, our wombs would brag, we would not keep our bellies or anything else in the closet or under towels. Right now, this evening, I'm in the country alone and it's too clear and quiet. Last night I was in the city and it was too loud and crowded. A few minutes ago I poked my head out to see the misshapen moon, round on the bottom, flat on top. It is winter, though it was seventy degrees today. In the summer, does the moon get round on top and flat on the bottom? I am ashamed to say I do not know.

If I were my ancient self, I would have more patience; I would watch and listen and I would know about the shape of the moon and the season of the year because I would not have a clock or a calendar and the world around me would be my way of telling time and weather and when to do what. Also, I would sleep when the sun went down, wake when it rose.

Because the moon is low tonight, I can see Orion. I think of him as a friend and enjoy watching him traverse the sky in a night's time. He helps me get through winter, and perhaps that is why I moved from the city, where he and his dependable journey get drowned out by all the other lights. Orion can walk on water, a gift from his father, Neptune. But he is best known for hunting. He had

a friend or possibly a lover, depending on which version you go by, who killed him, accidentally or out of jealousy—again, it depends. Diana, of course, was a damned good hunter herself.

Once when I was very close to the equator, I looked up to the sky and saw Orion, my friend, who remains alive in the stars. His thin self was resplendent with stars, and it was then, in this tropical country, wealthy in darkness, that I saw his bow for the first time, a solid arc that curved around him like a halo, like a force field.

When I closed my door just now, I slammed it on my toe, making a bastard out of the poetic moment of mythology and memory, moon and stars. Then I logged onto the computer to eavesdrop on other people's steamy operations and found a picture of a friend, a friend in the virtual as opposed to the celestial sense. She was in a flowered sarong in front of palm trees in the very same equatorial country where I had seen Orion's bow. "Look up, look up," I whispered, but my voice made no indentation on the screen.

Frances Lefkowitz is a writer and editor and the author of *To Have Not*, a SheKnows Best Memoir of 2010. *To Have Not* is the story of growing up poor in 1970s San Francisco, getting a scholarship to an Ivy League college, and discovering the downside of upward mobility. Her flash fiction and micro-memoir have appeared in *Tin House*, the *Sun*, *Fiction*, *Rick Barthelme's New World Writing*, and many other publications, and her essays have been Notable Mentions for the Pushcart Prize (twice) and Best American Essays (twice). Founder of the grant-funded Community Memoir Project, which teaches free memoir-writing classes in public libraries, Lefkowitz also teaches workshops in fiction. She is at work on a second memoir, about learning to surf at age thirty-six.