

JOHN STRULOEFF

The Shadow Waters

He did not know there would be a break in the railing on that particular corner. He did not know that he would veer his car into that gaping mouth and soar, suddenly weightless, out over the foaming Pacific waves, the battering bodies reaching beneath the surface, only a glassy green fabric between him and these spirits.

He hit the water like a wall, and for a moment he was a boat, the sea outside his vessel, a glimpse of the green black of the deep at the bottom edge of his windows, a strange aquarium view. Then the cold rush of water onto his legs.

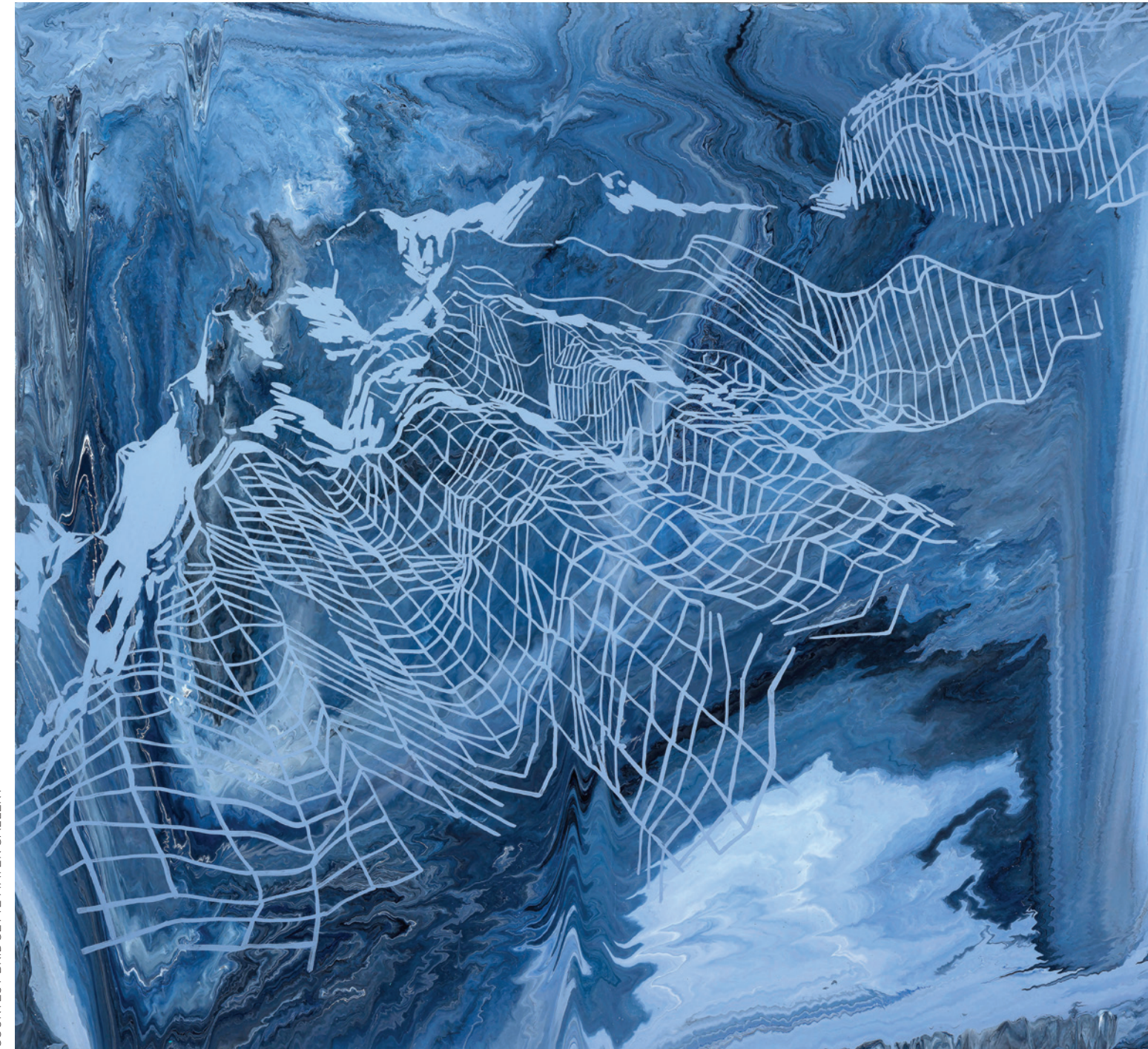
Somewhere in that soaring descent—beneath the momentary rush of awe and wonder as he passed in low orbit—his churning feelings went from self-pity and heartache and a rage about the difficulties of his life to utter fear. A small animal of panic began leaping, caged, in his chest. At that moment, the vessel he was in tilted downward, and he watched the curtain of ocean as it was drawn up his windshield until he was within the shadow waters.

It was a serene place of mindlessness, and if it weren't for that leaping animal that seemed to be beating out a message in his chest—*what was it saying?*—he would have followed the weight of his ridiculous life through the shadows and into what may be the peace of death. Instead, he pushed out into the brine, his breath choking him, and swam back up toward the painful, unrelenting light.

John Struloeff is the author of *The Man I Was Supposed to Be* (Loom Press, 2008) and has published poems in *The Atlantic*, the *Southern Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *ZYZZYVA*, *PN Review*, and elsewhere. He is a former Stegner and NEA Fellow and now directs the creative writing program at Pepperdine University.

REBECCA RUTSTEIN

Galapagos V, 2017
Acrylic on canvas, 60 x 66 in.



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