

Robert Fernandez

Nautilus and Hyena Men, Lagos (after the Photographs of Pieter Hugo)

The reality
is the curve of the wall
& the layer of glaze

as I follow
with my head hooked
into my shoulder.

The reality is
the wall yellows.
The wall yellows

from alpha-hydrangea to omega-white
(all laughter in between
is a breaking of knees).

The wall yellows and the sun,
muzzled, investigates my ribcage.
The earth explores, hyena

muzzled in the streets
of Lagos, the earth
explores my back,

wants to tear my back open,
wants to tear open
my shoulder blades.

In the streets of Lagos
they sell you stiff
black bulbs

like heads of wheat.
The hyenas pace and circle through their
heavy chains. We sell you

stiff little flowers this is
testimony we imagine we are

in this instant stating it.

I must enter the place.
I must stand and act.
I must hem closely to the wall, beak

sloping along my shoulders.
We have sold
our souls for tubs of bleach

we thought would
sanitize the campsites.
Like dry ice,

our souls watered, crushed
into terra cotta jars and released
in the street.

The motorbikes, the crowds drive
the hyenas crazy. The hyenas
enter our sleep muzzled

with smoke and see us
for what we are. My back
to the wall in the heat

of the day and trying
to shield my neck from the sun
but I cannot. In the street

with the leash,
the chain that's
as large as the thigh

of a child, with the muzzle
that's bright as a vase, dense
as a mullet net bundled up.

With my eyes fixed
& my will tacked inexpertly
to the floor, clasping—the wall

is not rough it is reflective.