



Image from Astro Butterfly: Venus's Descent Into the Underworld

Ivan Argüelles

Venus in the Pandemic

*"... et dictis divinum adspirat amorem"*  
—*Aeneid, VIII, 373*

code calls for calm across the many seas  
battered and broken the boats sails ripped  
from masts and hands upheld in appeal

to the divine forces who imbue the soul  
with glimmers brighter than salt-crystal  
mid afternoon sun-swell agonies and grief  
misspelled on banners torn in the wind  
will nothing chasten the world's torment  
devoid of presence the elements rush  
in a turbo-jet of frenzy and nymphs arrayed  
on beaches of black sand keep singing  
through meshes of radiography and alchemy  
humans upended in their reading of history  
jade and basalt ledges where they teeter  
weeping hard into the leaf and calling out  
names only half remembered as the list  
increases in length and breadth of vowel  
and tonic accent and notions of tea-time  
and hours spent translating the abacus  
of obituaries in rooms quickened with sorrow  
do you know them ? quizzes on electricity  
and drumheads and porphyry and shells  
blown into the eastern quarter of sky as  
if to summon from the ossuary horses  
slain in enigmatic wars around the bend  
*I have nothing to show for it* faded voice  
cries out from its newspaper wrapping  
earth is convulsed whether to re-enter  
the ice-age or throw chance to the abyss  
mountains and jungles of liana grass burn  
exclamation marks and proportion of smoke  
*spirit world* nothing more than a graph  
showing the spike in covid-19 fatalities  
it will never be tomorrow again ! suffer *all*  
the map is withdrawn the texts deleted  
fingers scrawl the words for grass and time  
on a lunar slate fallen from the heaven  
of asphalt and envy listening for the small  
echo of sleep interred in the marble ear  
where it whispers the eternal child is gone  
forever from the counterpoint of memory  
++++  
if only Venus would prosper again in  
her perjured skin and kimono of red gesso  
her thought a labyrinth of desire and heat  
recalling heroes whom she bore blazing  
through generations of epic hexameter  
her mind the hazard of a temple ruin  
in her fleeting glance the turbulence of light  
yet does she with glyphs of rumor instill  
divine love into the mortal ruin  
a dazzle despite the day's futile end

as she steps deftly among the fireflies  
and asterisks aglow in deathless night

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Iván Argüelles is an innovative Mexican-American poet. His many books of poetry include *“That” Goddess*; *Comedy, Divine, The*; *Fragments From a Gone World*; *Looking For Mary Lou* (for which he received the 1989 William Carlos Williams Award); *HOIL* (an elegy for his late son); and *Twilight Cantos*. His most recent book is *Testamentum: Two Alphabets*. In 2010 he received an award from the Before Columbus Foundation for *The Death of Stalin*; he also received a lifetime achievement award from that Foundation in 2013.