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WATER BODIES

OTIS BOOKS

THE MFA WRITING PROGRAM

Otis College of Art and Design

LOS ANGELES  2019

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We are the ship; all else the sea.

– RUBE FOSTER,
Founder of
the Negro
National League

*I was drowning, but now I'm
swimming /
Through stressful waters to relief.*

– MAC MILLER,
Artist

GRASSY CREEK

my aunt's husband took us fishing
cut off levis and muscle shirts
we piled into his long beat up car
like canned fish
bamboo canes with orange floats and
silver weights positioned to not hook us

toothy red/black man – tall with freckles
my new uncle with an afro
laughed in a way that made grasshoppers leap
into his oversized palms
sunward – they offered themselves to fish –
wires of their legs cadillac-stretched
like my aunt
who kicked dandelions
as a crooning voice lifted like mountains
over a grassy creek

ADOLESCENCE

face full of craters like sponges
skinny-legged flamingos
awkward blobfish pufferfish
we so badly wanted to grow old

many did
 some didn't

occupational hazards accidents
God's work hell bent

FLORIDA

news of a drowning

someone who looked like you

i prayed and ran through
tunnels of memories – bug-eyed
fast/slow feet
stomach knotted like rope

when i found you
i wrung your neck like a dishtowel
didn't / couldn't fight back the tears

NINETEEN-EIGHTY-SOMETHING

summer

all the cousins piled in the back
of aunt bev's blue and white rattler pickup
early morning
headed to the public pool
chests like birds
best of friends

wind blew too hard
embarrassment turned blood orange
swim trunks shared private conversations

ELECTRIC SLIDER

coolers packed with p b & j
it was the first time the boys had gone
fishing
day permits off the choppy side of the pier

stopped for pounds of bait
for what promised to be pounds of fish
...and we sat and waited – impatiently
as if our mouths were hooked and our
bodies had no choice but to flounder:

rods and reels snagged
caught jagged rocks
nothing biting – until something took hold
parted the water like a knife
headstrong in currents
more fight than fish
an eel thrashed like a whip

wrapped itself on twine
tail-slapped weights with the power of a bull
fire from its belly
eyes bucked with venom

we had to slash its throat

kill the whale of a water beast
that ate the contents of a tackle box:
determined to make peanut butter and jelly
our last meal

NO BETTA

never liked that betta
face pressed against the bowl
beady eyes like a watch dog
watching
bubbles blown like smoke
salty expression – hot as fish grease
when i pressed behind you in the kitchen

was glad when it died
fins clamped close
cock-eyed
a surrendered royal flag of beautiful colors

hummed sade at the funeral
proceeded to embrace with a lover's rock