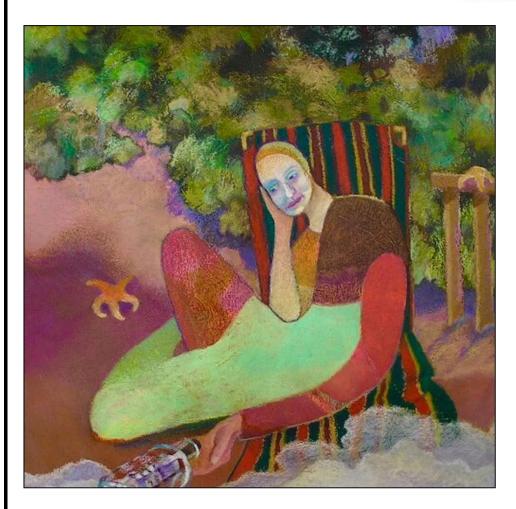
MICHAEL STRAND

Starfish



You sit alone as a painted asteroid, folded. Your name sounds like one, both floating in from the unknown.

Sidelong asteroidea,

do you carry a fresh message about love or conquest, one we have not heard before, perhaps the secret lyrics to a song that solves low tides

and war when sung?

Is the secret paper folded into your long limbs, your skull-shorn head, bare as having returned from the great war between cockle and nautili?

Do you cup a past of seawind encased in glass, floating the sundried future into shore like a fragile mandala

of many-colored sands?

Retelling our histories that sometimes took place, or didn't. Was it a red tide of blood waves, ocean stars falling and left out to rot like so many corpses?

After the battle the world denied existing, did you cradle the survivors in your pentaped, your astral gaze, your face-cradled palm?

Were they like abandoned children in need of cradling — your painted cheek, your sidelong star?

A grande odalisque

in the reverie of their adoration, were you tragic?
Did they know you are toxic to those who try to catch you, eat you,

but grow stronger every night submerged? Do they know we see our reflections in your body,

that you do not need us to create, as we do you?

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