

Cartouche

Dipika Mukherjee¹
International Institute for Asian Studies in Leiden
The Netherlands

You ask, after many years,
any regrets?
I say *None! I'd live*
life ex-act-ly again;

Yet there are nights when
something breathes in the room,
shadowing the mirror
it jerks me awake –

in hotel rooms that envelop so
precisely; the family sedan's
pale leathery embrace,
is tumescent

all spaces
where it would deface
the excel spreadsheet
of my life.

I am in an ancient cartouche.

Chiselled into the hieroglyphic
spelt *I love you;*
I am the woman kneeling
below the oval eye.

¹ Dipika Mukherjee was born in India, then educated in Switzerland, Indonesia, New Zealand, Malaysia, and the USA. She has edited two anthologies of short stories: *Silverfish New Writing 6* (Silverfish, 2006) and *The Merlion and the Hibiscus* (Penguin, 2002). Her poetry and prose have been published in literary journals in the US, Canada, the UK, India, Singapore, and Hong Kong, as well as broadcast over Singapore Public Radio.

The Craft

I saw the angel in the marble and carved until I set him free
Michelangelo

On an island, only a hundred
yards long, an old man carves
ships – not those that sail, but toys
to light up a little boy's eyes –
he slices a wooden stick
to open a schooner,
ramrod straight mastline
piercing the sky,
sails taut in the breeze,
with ruffled edges.

This man and his craft, hewn
for perfection; the cutting
and slicing, the gashes
on his thumb, the wrinkled wrist
scarred, severe with precision
to unfurl a thing of beauty.

© Copyright 2009 Asiatic, ISSN 1985-3106
<http://asiatic.iium.edu.my>
<http://asiatic.iiu.edu.my>
International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM)