

## Double Self Portrait

Aaron Lee,<sup>1</sup> Singapore



*Double Self Portrait* (1959), by Howard Taylor, Art Gallery of Western Australia

Give me back my broken night, my mirrored room, my secret life  
(Leonard Cohen)

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<sup>1</sup> **Aaron Lee** is a pilgrim poet, writing mentor, community organiser and ethics lawyer. He has authored three books of poetry. He also co-edited several books including the best-selling *No Other City: The Ethos Anthology of Urban Poetry* (2000), which contains an introduction by Prof. Dennis Haskell of UWA. Lee's work is studied at schools and universities, and he was featured international poet at the Perth Poetry Festival in 2018. Lee and his wife, the national artist Namiko Chan Takahashi, are co-founders of the Laniakea Culture Collective. Email: laniakea.la@gmail.com.

As children we'd make believe we were soldiers,  
fighting a war for reasons no-one could explain.  
Whether pointing a stick gun or chasing another on a bike,  
each of us always deemed ourselves on the side of right.  
Years later, I visit a museum and see myself in a painting of a man.  
He looks back at me through weary hands forming an open mouth,  
exhausted from life's vicissitudes. His own mouth is turned down, a reproach  
poised on his lips. His singular gaze and forbidding face  
betray how hemmed in he must feel – by side lines, sight lines,  
life's constant deception of eye and brain. On his head blue-gray  
hair parts, a puzzle of ocean waves. Body robed in green and yellow  
like a cross-sectioned tree, his raised arms are struts that hold up a mystery  
under my machine-gun questions: What do you live for?  
Who do you love? What fresh or hackneyed futures encode  
your existence, and mine? This portrait concedes nothing,  
while heated words curl and flow between us, invisibly.  
It is late afternoon in the museum. I step back from the wall and think  
once more. As the light changes, where will we find ourselves?  
This man is me – a trite tree standing, but on which faraway shore?