

*ALVARO BARRINGTON, DIKE BLAIR,  
MARLEY FREEMAN, ZENZABURO KOJIMA*  
KARMA, NEW YORK, 2020.

by Jim Lewis

In another version of the story, Odysseus didn't come home, never did come home, and spent the rest of his days out on the waters, skipping from island to island, calamity to calamity. In time, as happens, he became an old man and tired but this was his lot, and home was what he made of it: and what he made of it, after his raids and his imprisonments, was that solid land is a suspicious place, a cornering, a cage, so if from the deck of his ship (which curiously had no name) he approached a shore and perhaps even touched it, if there was ever or even a night he slept on a surface that never moved, still always he untied his ship at daybreak and pushed off towards the pinkening horizon, his hold stuffed with things he's taken in the night (and some of them were given to him) trinkets and treasures, magic tricks and philosophical stones, Circe's wine-cup, the fruit of the lotus, a bag of winds, the tooth of a serpent, a book of prayers in a language he couldn't read, potsherds, coins, a lens made of fish scales, little boxes, a curious flower with an enlarged stamen, which the crew joked about but which they viewed with some reverence, too; and so on. And so he made of them, the things that he collected, a tower on the very deck of his unnamed ship, cobbled together of this and that. And added to that were bits of the boat which had broken off, and cuttings from the sky, like torn-off strips of wall-paper, more blue than anything has ever been: he returns to these again and again. A tower, then, a sort of ziggurat, a form he learned in Babylon on one of his many undocumented journeys, the ones that were never written down, a tower dressed in blue.

Odysseus the resourceful, the guileful, a small man who got by on his wits and wins. Perhaps island people are often that way: wily, polyglot, inventive, ingenious, belonging to no one and to everyone, making do with whatever comes to hand. As Derek Walcott, cock of the Caribbean, once said, "Either I'm nobody, or I'm a nation."