

TUUMBA 13

# JANUARY

by Paul Kahn





JANUARY

1950

1951

1952

1953

15-

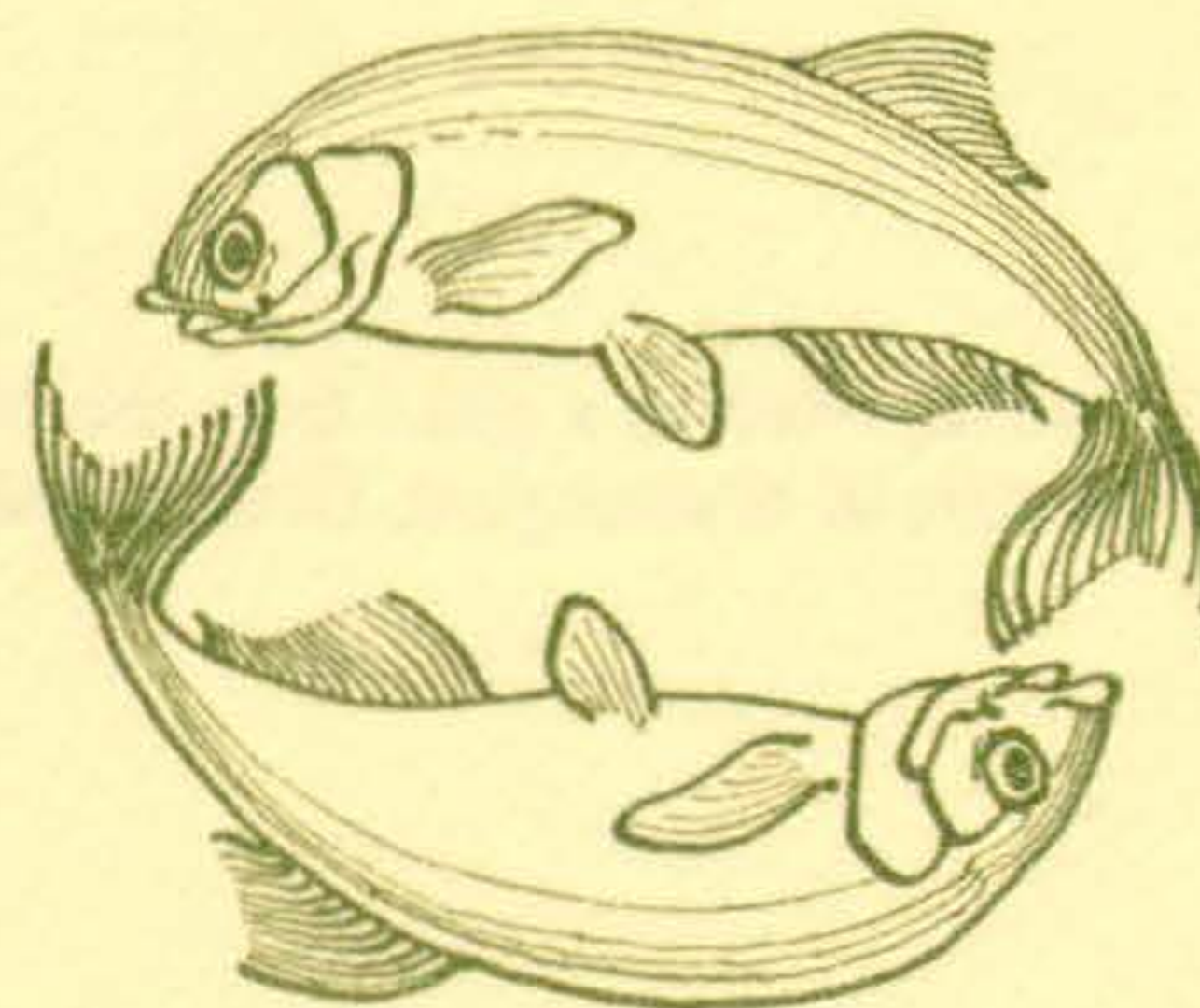
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by Paul Kahn



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**JANUARY**



*Memi-Sabu and his wife*

*Dynasty 5, c. 2360 B. C.*

*This group statue apparently comes from the cemetery west of Cheops' pyramid, along its northern edge. The Steward Memi-Sabu places his arm affectionately around his wife in an unusual position.*

He stands there with his wife, she is shorter & stands stiffly,  
his right arm is draped  
so his hand comes down & covers  
her bare left breast

affectionately. His name spelled out beneath it  
in 9 glyphs: *Memi-Sabu.*



*Cylinder seals at the Metropolitan Museum of Art*

the oldest things people made out of stone  
after tools      a signature?

making the picture by incision of the space  
a picture fills  
a repeating pattern that must fit into itself

an endless rhythm

Signature

or toy?      the play of it.

I see Orion rising over the houses  
for the first time this winter

the figure of a hunter holding a shield and club poised  
made by the mind from shape blocked out by  
points of light

a star is repetition of light

On one group of seals there is the stick-like figure called The  
Nude Goddess. She rose above the ground, hovered in the air.  
She holds her robe open, a line arching from hand to hand a-  
cross her back like the curve of a rainbow. The next wall is a  
group of seals depicting Ishtar, a full-bodied woman enthroned  
or carried, robed but showing full breast- and buttock-round-  
ness.

a poem could begin with an image of the land 400 and 77 years ago  
what did it look like then      how can anyone who lives and thinks now  
know such a thing      no one remembers such an image  
there is only the image of wilderness      a world where  
people do not live and can not live unless  
the things worth money on the land are sold to places  
where there is money to be spent on them

looking out to sea from the coast      flat rocks  
backed by oak and low twisted pines      waves  
pushing into the rocks sloshing long seaweed  
on the horizon a sail is visible      a white  
sail

applying the Imagination is also useless      I wasn't there  
how do I know what it looked like  
why does it change everything if Scandinavian people  
saw this part of the world  
900 years ago

900 years ago is suddenly distinguished from all other time past  
all other time past is a dark and unknowable brown mass of opaque matter  
in which nothing seems to live other than objects made from stone and bone

outside there is lots of snow

inside people  
making it thru  
the day      so  
complicated &  
my body      is  
having trouble

I CREATE THE WORLD YET EVERYTHING IN THE  
WORLD I CREATE IS ALIVE CREATING THE WORLD



*Personality dis integration*

I tried to fix myself somewhere  
conjuring up memories of past situations

How do you feel about yourself?      a question often  
mumbled at      that fellow

who left Ohio with all he owned loaded in his car  
moved himself into the condemned house beside the football stadium

lived here      lived there  
wakes up from the same dream?  
wakes up in the morning? says *I love you* repeatedly

always to the same person?

I went where I felt like going  
wanting to feel comfortable somewhere

now so without comfort I cannot fit myself back together

*some nights*  
*wakes up to the same pain*

vague & undeniable

Leave me,      leave me,      and alone      alone.

I usually read something on the bus.  
The man seated in front of me  
reads *Computer World*. Beside him  
a woman holds a romantic novel open,  
judging from the cover. Magazines, mostly newspapers  
to my left and rear.

I read  
a book of prose-poems by Stratis  
Haviaris, who works as a  
librarian. Another woman twists her head  
to read the title on the cover of the book.  
Curious. That he is a librarian is totally  
unimportant, but that is how he manages  
to survive. I usually read  
books of poems on the bus.  
I rarely feel I understand what I read  
under these conditions. This book is no exception.  
But I try, knowing I will probably not understand.  
Unlike the newspapers these prose-poems  
do not convey the sense you can know what happened yesterday today.



11:25 p. m.

So comfortable to lie  
my leg over your leg

is it worth saying out loud?

relaxing to give the self over  
to sleep, leg over a leg  
not my own, that comfortable

I almost couldn't get up to write this

I would never have remembered it otherwise

Some evenings  
staring out the window of the train home  
stopped on the bridge over the Charles  
looking back at downtown buildings thru my reflection

lights  
flashing red lights on top

Is John Weiners insane as I write this  
in the back of his book I can't read any longer?

Philip Whalen complains of Charles Reznikoff's *Testimony*  
in a letter I got today "*harping all on*  
*one string*" yes, is it worth saying?

He is so popular in New York now  
and so dead.

Philip, may you too be so popular  
before you die.

May you be so popular all of New York  
wants to buy everything you ever wrote at any price,

so popular everyone offers to marry you!

lights  
atop the building

35°

5:24

36°

5:25

It's getting warmer all the time



*The dead were mummified, given masks, and finally buried together with a doll, almost as large as a man, which, if we may go by modern parallels, may have been carried about for some time by the widow to mitigate her grief. It was still the practice to include among the funerary gifts miniatures of weapons and objects in daily use.*

How uncomfortable we can be  
with each other

loneliness

when I leave you

or when I stay and we

have nothing to say, to each other.

A relief. Love can be that.

Release, of shoulders held,  
back tight, hands that pick  
at worn places.

Let go, done  
with love, so  
received.

You are born  
with all the eggs you'll ever produce.

A man makes new sperm constantly.

Today's lesson  
concerns the mechanics of muscle fibers,  
molecularly what makes them move.

I listen,  
not knowing what to make of it. Your face  
interests me. What could I do

without your face?



I go into the bathroom, the bathtub is clogged, draining slowly, as usual. I reach into the trap to pull out the hair that clogs it. The black hair-ball floats from my hand and forms into an infant with elongated head, floating up and back in the room, toward the far corner. I am horrified and dream that I awake with a scream to tell Barbara what I've just seen. I tell her, and go on, dreaming, very upset now. I leave our house, which is now on the first floor of a building. After leaving I turn back, wanting to leave the door unlocked. I unlock it with my key, but a woman comes to the door, about Barbara's size, slightly different hairstyle and face. She closes the door, repeatedly, silently, gesturing that I have no right to open it, despite the fact that my key works. I leave to the street, very upset, deeply depressed. Scanning the signs of motels, movies and bars, I wonder where to go, feeling I'm about to go mad. Music from a bar, country & western music, makes me go in. It is a relief to feel drawn toward somewhere. People are sitting at tables, at a bar, tvs on the walls showing some static and empty scene, conversations all around me that sound relaxed. I move into the room, sit at a table with two seats, facing a tv overhead with no sound on. A waitress moves past me and I order a dark beer. She smiles, yes, we have dark beer, and moves on by me. I realize everything will be all right.



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