



Laksmi Pamuntjak is an Indonesian writer who lives in Jakarta.

ROBERT GENIN (1884–1943)

Balinesin (II), um 1926

Im Obersteg Foundation, Inv. Im 1208

Permanent loan to the Kunstmuseum Basel since 2004

THEOMEIER (THEO MEIER, GENANNT MEIER AUS BALI) (1908–1982)

Kopf einer Balinesin, 1938

Kunstmuseum Basel, Inv. G 1978.116

Legat Dr. August Meyer, Basel 1977

I See Her as if She Were Glass

They say it is the highest honor to be plucked from one's youth this way—to be singled out, molded, made more special; indeed, to put one's stamp on time itself. I was all of five, and yet they—my father, the raja, the *pedanda*—had seen all they needed to see: how agile I was, and how oblivious to the magic I could conjure within the span of my little hands. Being men, they had no use for that thing called ego, other than their own, and I had none to offer.

Tenderly they sent me off to meet my destiny, and through the rooms and corridors of the temple I grew in my eyes, my feet, my fingers what I missed in my childhood—my mother, my siblings, my home—and as I held them there I learned a new language. With a mere flick of my wrist I am able to summon the most dastardly of demons and glue them to their seats. Command the gamelan to make music out of the beat beneath my feet. Occasionally someone in the audience might yell how pretty I am even with my headdress askew, and I would just burn him down with my gaze.

Lately however, I have come to covet the sight of a girl who comes to our temple to help us welcome guests. She's no dancer, but I am felled by her proud unfettered womanliness. I see her as if she were glass. The poise with which she holds her head, so different from mine. The coral hair a besotted painter might fan into a flame, the downcast gaze that apologizes for nothing, not even for wearing those hideous studs that make her ears look like mangoes.

I am envious of the stillness of her movements, of her being, as if a gift from the gods bestowed only to the unchosen. Is there is a hint of sorrow in her eyes—has she perhaps love to give but nowhere to go? I might only have dreamed it. What is greatness if you are not allowed the grace of your own making.

There are many kinds of desire, and I wonder if there is between my eternal motion and her ethereal worldliness a place where we can meet in full, where the men are not.