Apa’s Painting

By Mehnaz Turner

1.

I ask my mother about Apa’s painting in English, she answers in Urdu, then it’s my turn to speak, but there at the crosswalk between Lahore and Los Angeles, I pledge allegiance to nothing though sometimes I mix the two languages, even throw in a little high school French, or the Arabic I learned reading the Quran, my nine-year old head draped in a scarf pulled from my mother’s dresser. I peer up at the canvas: ocean waves thrash an archipelago of rocks. My mother tells me Apa painted it before I knew how to say fish or pani or Pakistan, before I became this chest of torn up maps. In my body the Pacific edges into Islamabad, Hollywood’s lodged in the throat of the Punjab. My grandmother’s painting lives in this garage in Woodland Hills, propped up against a box of fashion magazines. The image speaks in twelve shades of blue, like a storm of languages without a tongue. The sight engulfs me, unpledged. The coastline shadowed–no words, no light.

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