

The Feeling of Ants in Your Basement

Arvo Leo



FIRE

Fire works an established sequence: to begin with, all flames make off in one direction...

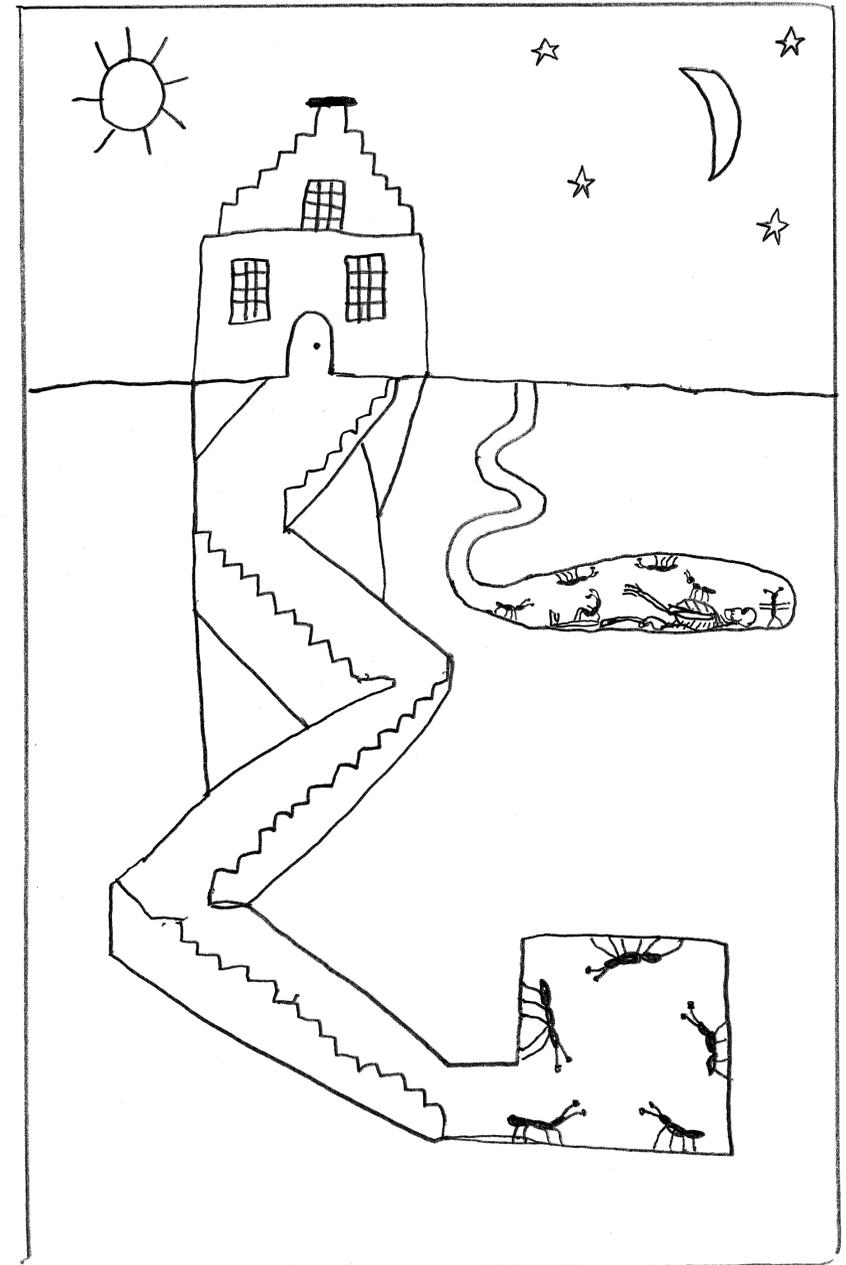
(Fire's gait can only be compared to that of animals: it has to leave one spot to occupy another; it moves like both an amoeba and a giraffe, lunging forward with the neck, trailing along with the feet)...

Then, even as the masses of systematically tainted material crumble, the escaping gas progressively transforms into a single flight of butterflies.

— Francis Ponge

Now a bewildered nocturnal butterfly comes within range. Will he overlook it? No, he catches this, too. His tongue is transformed into a butterfly net and he pulls it into his mouth. Will it all fit? Will he spit it out? Will he explode? No, the butterfly is there in his throat: it flutters, in a sorry state but still itself, not touched by the insult of chewing teeth; now it passes the narrow limits of the neck; it is a shadow that begins its slow and troubled journey down along a swollen esophagus.

— Italo Calvino



A thing is a hole in a thing it is not

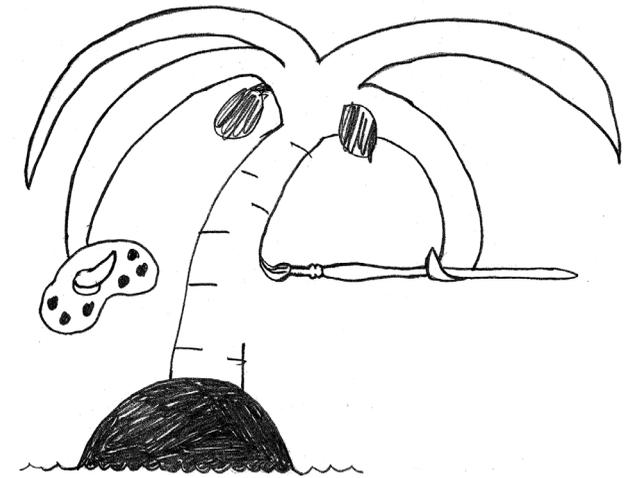


Photo by Cameron Kerr, 2005.

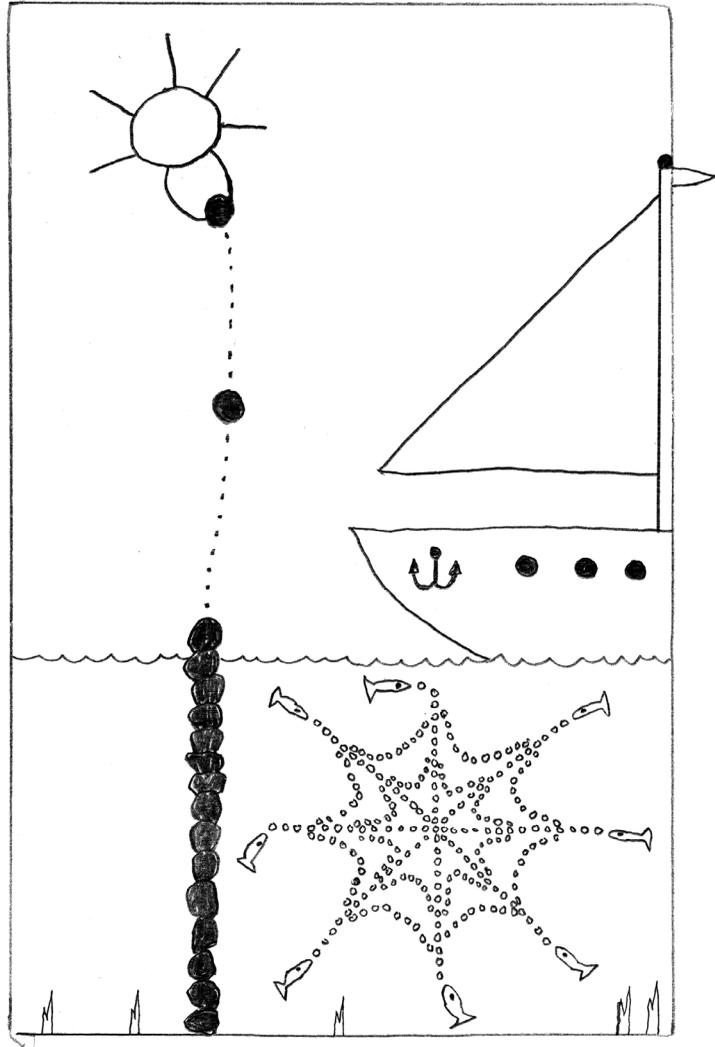
ACCIDENTAL ANT HILL SCULPTURE

Made in 2003 when a forest fire melted the transmission of a Ford Mustang, and the hot liquid metal found its way down into the underground tunnels of an ant hill.

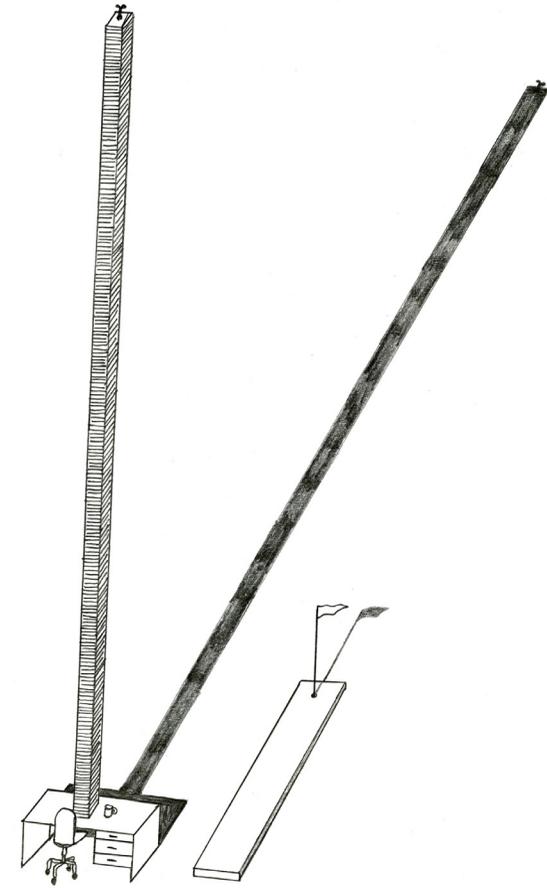
The ants built some intestines for the earth so the earth could digest the Mustang.



Nature painting itself into existence



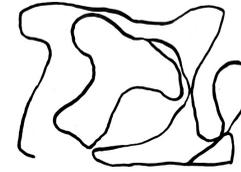
The ant hill sculpture was made while the forest fire was burning through the small town of Barriere; a town which some say got its name from the fish traps made out of rocks and nets installed in the river by local indigenous people. Accidentally, or with purpose, these fish traps became wonderful obstructions in the flow of colonial movement and trade. Yet I also believe that the sun often helped build these rock walls while the fish made spiderweb nets out of thousands of tiny bubbles.



And in consideration of the forest fire's aftermath, the trees created the ant hill sculpture so it could be used as a purposefully purposeless paper weight; to sit on top of a tree-high stack of legal documents that they knew would pile up in the wake of this event.



A drawing from 2004 that I recently found in my parent's basement.



ILLUMINATIONS

v

Let them rent me this whitewashed tomb, at last, with cement lines in relief,—far down under ground.

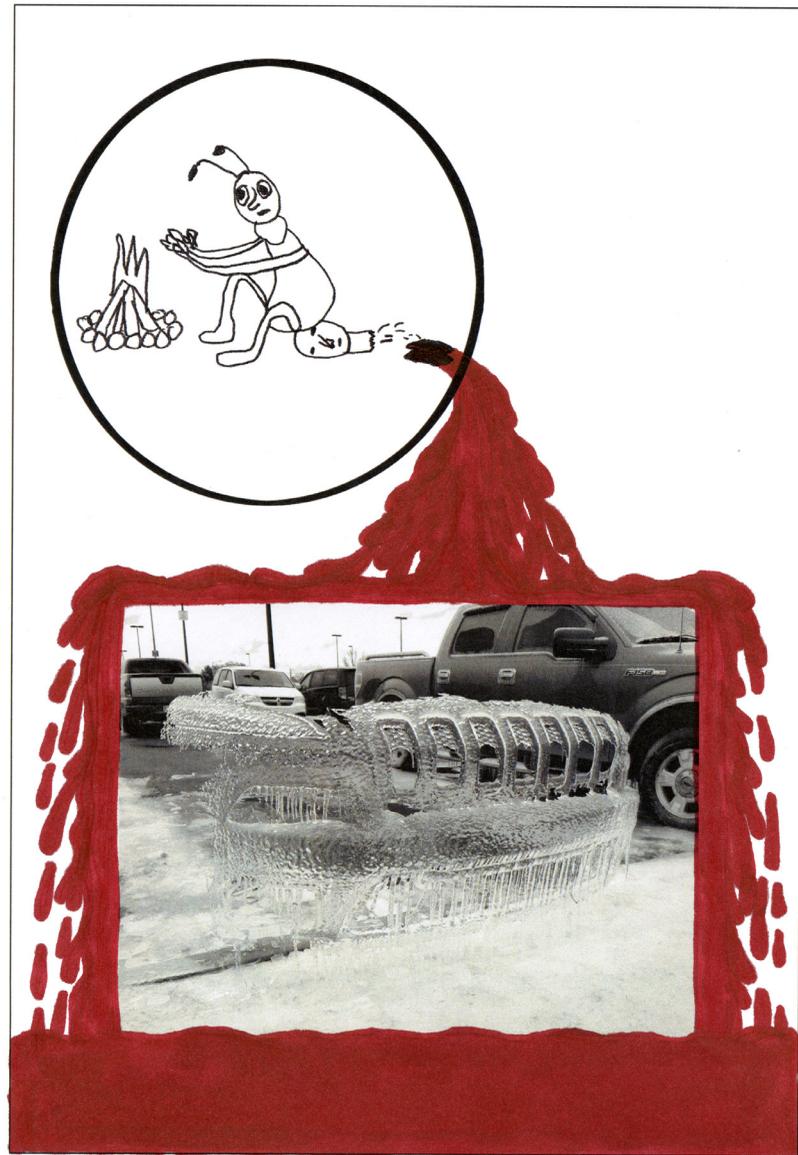
I lean my elbows on the table, the lamp shines brightly on these newspapers I am fool enough to read again, these stupid books.

At an enormous distance above my subterranean parlor, houses take root, fogs gather. The mud is red or black. Monstrous city, night without end!

Less high are the sewers. At the sides, nothing but the thickness of the globe. Chasms of azure, wells of fire perhaps. Perhaps it is on these levels that moons and comets meet, fables and seas.

If all material were transparent—the ground that supports us, the envelope that sheathes our body—everything would be seen not as a fluttering of impalpable wings but as an inferno of grinding and ingesting. Perhaps at this moment a god of the nether world situated in the center of the earth with his eye that can pierce granite is watching us from below, following the cycle of living and dying, the lacerated victims dissolving in the bellies of their devourers, until they, in their turn, are swallowed by another belly.





Ode to the Maggot

by Yusef Komunyakaa

Brother of the blowfly
 And godhead, you work magic
 Over battlefields,
 In slabs of bad pork

And flophouses. Yes, you
 Go to the root of all things.
 You are sound and mathematical.
 Jesus, Christ, you're merciless

With the truth. Ontological and lustrous,
 You cast spells on beggars & kings
 Behind the stone door of Caesar's tomb
 Or split trench in a field of ragweed.

No decree or creed can outlaw you
 As you take every living thing apart. Little
 Master of earth, no one gets to heaven
 Without going through you first.

