

Mirror

MARIE-ELIZABETH MALI

What I remember from that first dive,
about nine hundred dives ago,
was the gray brain coral
sixty feet under water,
lobed like my brain. Fish shimmied
past elephant ear coral—
bright orange auricles—
and tube sponges—clusters
of purple arms, reaching—but I kept
returning to the coral
that mimicked my brain.
In my thrill, I used up my air
in half the time. After that, everything
started to show up in everything
else: The hermit crab's shell
in Romanesco broccoli;
in the delta, a lightning bolt;
bony hands in a winter tree.
Down at sixty feet,
I peered through a mask
at the alien and familiar world.
I wanted to stay where my brain
had its own life,
surrounded by sun-shimmer.

MALI

I wanted to stay where the human clamor
was replaced by the crunch
of parrotfish beaks eating coral—
once digested and excreted—
the way fine white sand gets made.

