

BRUTAL MIRAGE. By Guillermo López-Prieto

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Translated by Barbara D. Riess.

It's all ready. You've gotten rid of everything. Even that vinyl tablecloth—faded and now almost unrecognizable—from your first birthday party. Even the family photos. Except that one that you've carefully wrapped in plastic so that it'd be safe from the salt water and maybe even float. Even your porn. Except that mag you'll use for toilet paper when you're out in the middle of nowhere surrounded by salty air and threatening jaws. Even your college textbooks and notes. Except that pirated copy of the detective novel that Cuco sold you from his corner stall.

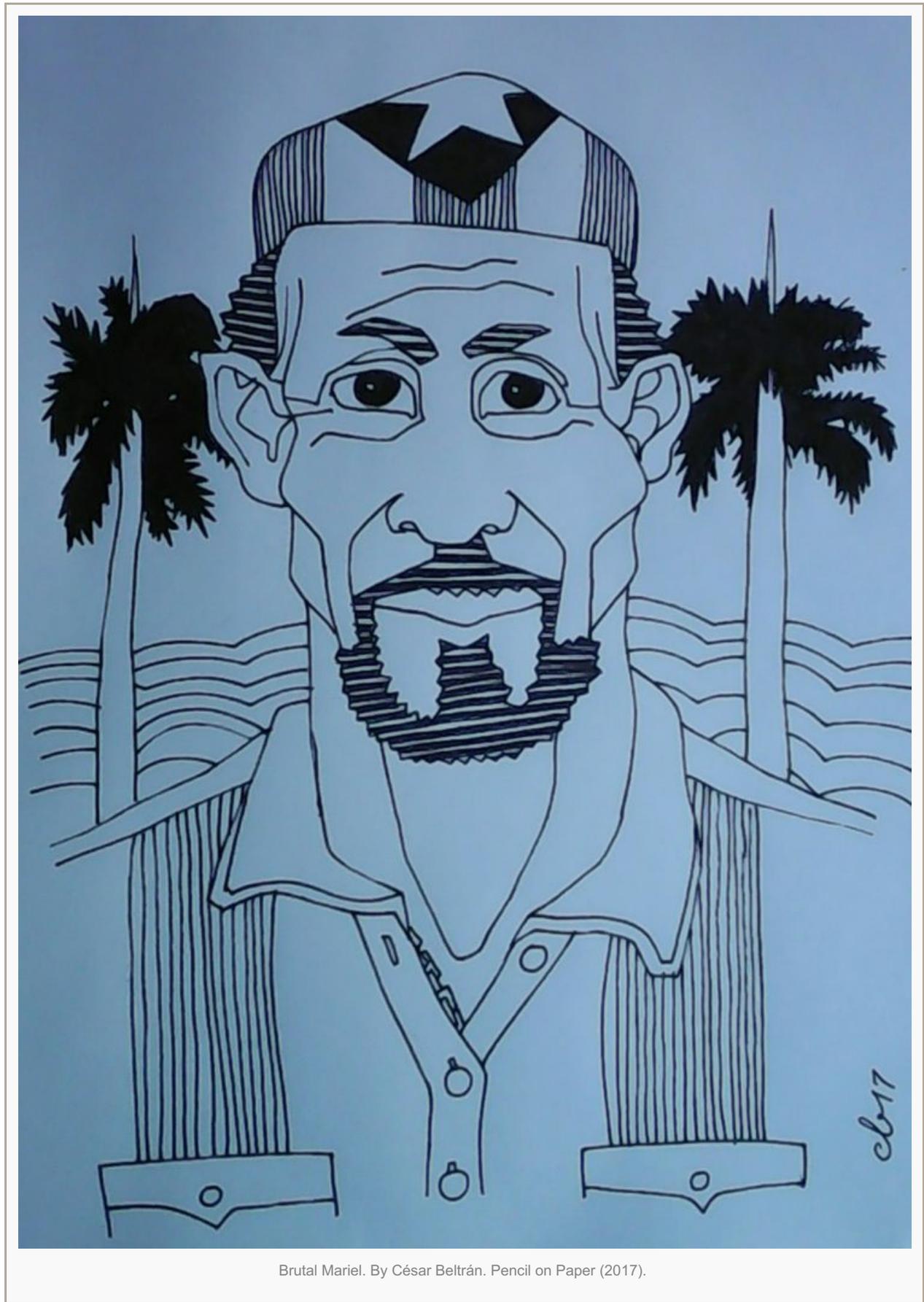
You keep up your routine. You don't want anyone to suspect. Just you and your idea know what you're about to do.

Today's the day. You leave without saying goodbye. You forget the saran-wrapped picture, the porn, the novel. You won't be coming back but it doesn't matter; your memory's enough. You leap into the salty emptiness. Your only course set for a dry arrival. You can't stand the burning in your core and that one that eats at your skin from the outside in. You'd give what little you have left, even what keeps you going, for some hydration. You'd douse the blisters that have stolen your voice and paralyzed your hands and feet. You want to drain them, but you can't. You remember—just keep them dry. A dry arrival, even if it kills you.

Far-off, the oasis where you can soak again. You spot it but repeat to yourself that for now, despite your yearning, you need to keep dry. What's changed? You, and everything along with you. You ignore this; you're nowhere now. Your blisters burst. You take off your shirt to dry them. No good. No way to stop the viscid liquid leaking from each one. You've become a sea of unruly secretions.

What a waste. To find yourself so close to that brutally dazzling mirage with such wet feet.

And no way to dry them, ever.



Brutal Mariel. By César Beltrán. Pencil on Paper (2017).

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Guillermo López-Prieto was born in Cuba in 1984. He is a second-year Ph.D student in Hispanic Literature at Indiana University, Bloomington. He is additionally co-founder and editor of the literary and arts publication *Hiedra Magazine*.

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