Kenneth M Cale

Nostalghia

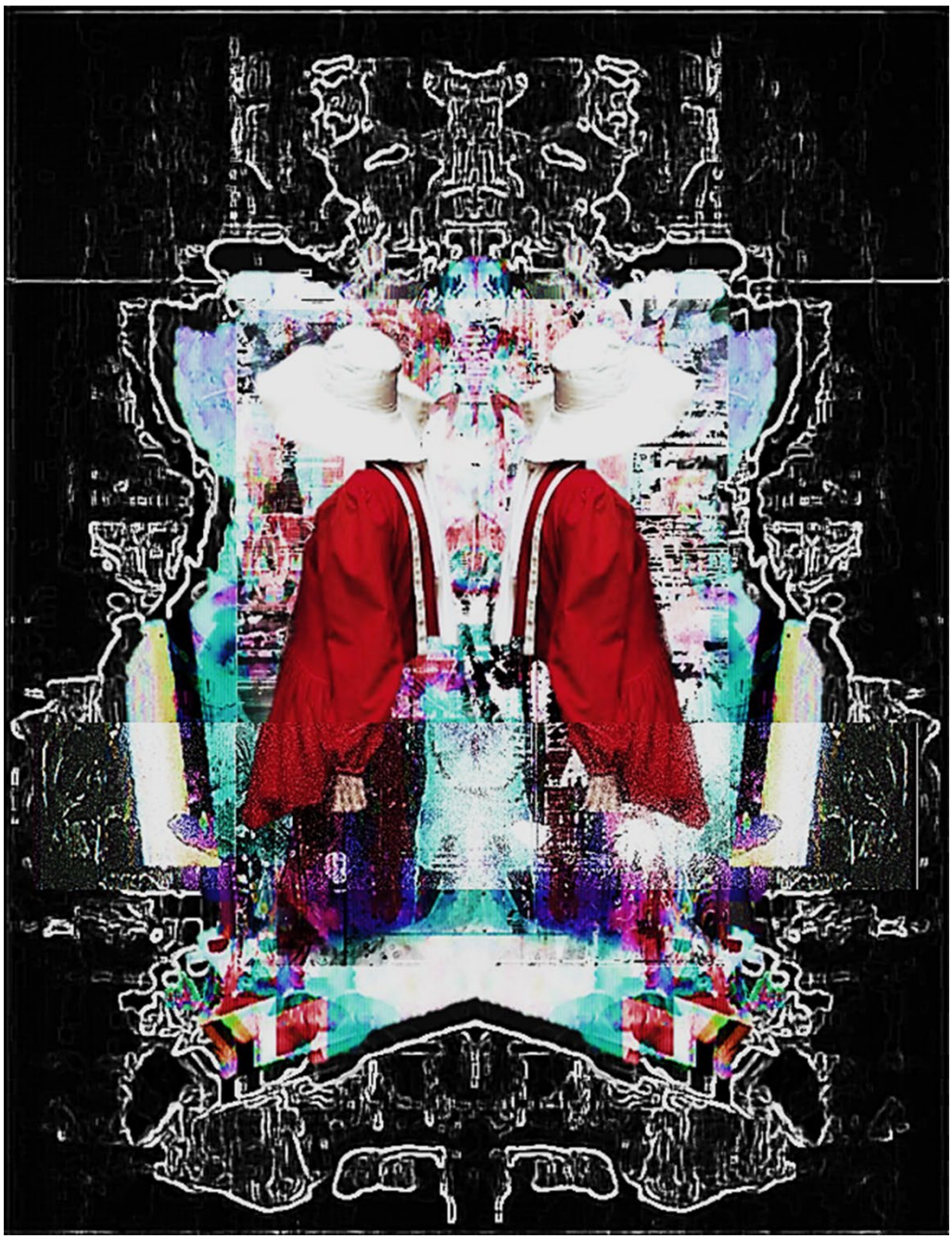
Introduction

During the second decade of the Peace Wars, USV(R) leader, McConnell Blankenship III, iniated phase IV of the Great Masculization. Women's particpation in society - already limited - was reduced further, and the achievements of women like Marie Curie and Barbara McClintock were reattributed to right-leaning men. These policies sparked civil disobedience. Defying the "No Public Gatherings" decree from the Department of Recreation, citizens crammed into disused cafes for illicit screenings of ancient cine-texts by directors like Andrei Tarkovsky, whose work, it was felt, venerated women. His film, "Nostalghia", in particular, touched a nerve. Inspired by its images, some people produced their own paintings and poetry. Others took it further. Activists, longing for the civility and equality of the early 21st century, protested by reenacting certain scenes from "Nostalghia" in front of government offices. A crackdown ensued. However, resistence continued to spread through the USV(R). The uncredited works presented here are a testimony to the dissenting spirit of that time.

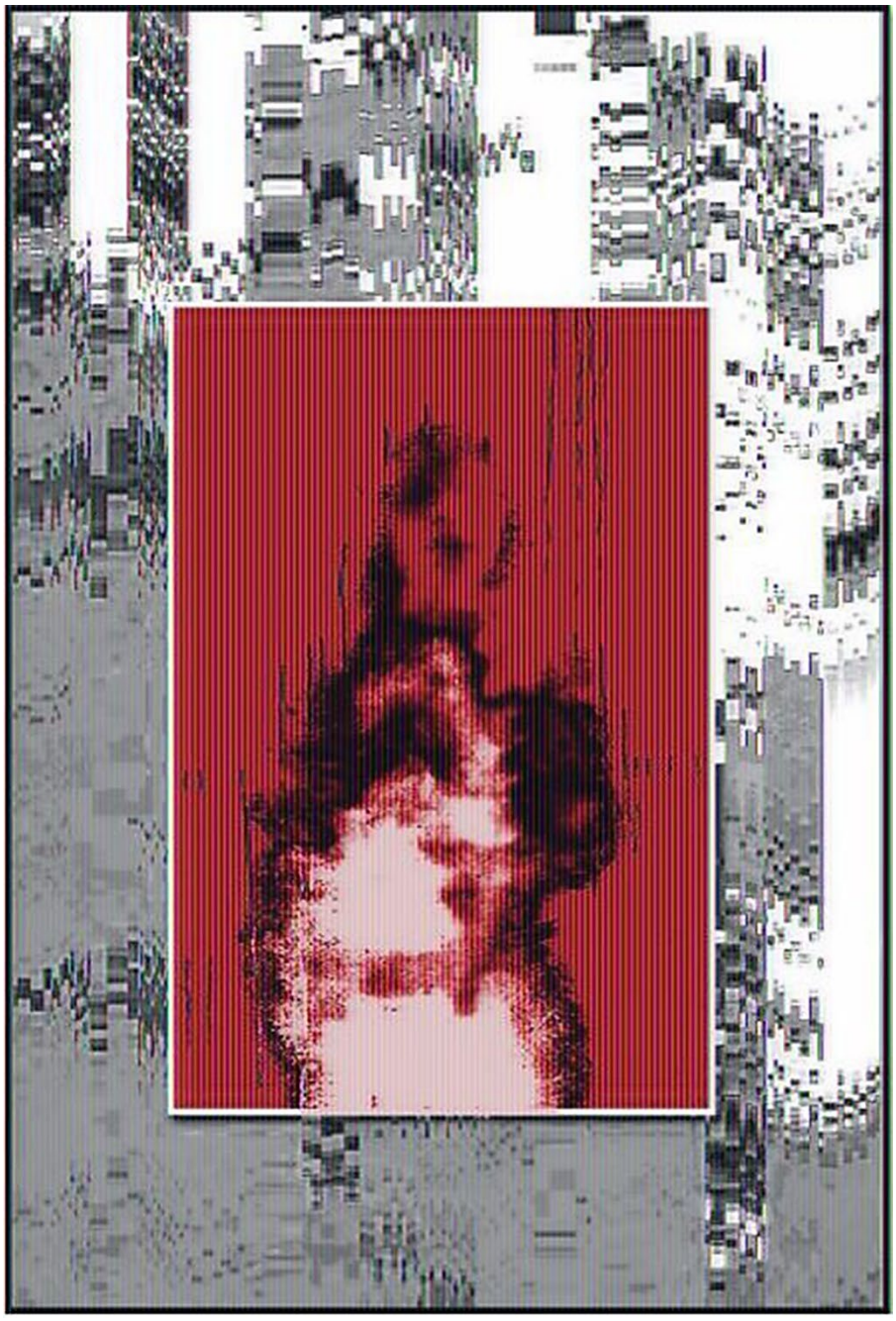
Reeling


godstrings cut we devolve
into nothing
but luminous frenetic narcissi adrift
in the ceaseless alarmbell reverberation
echoing in the holes
we drill
through the heads
of our children
THERE MUST BE A WAY

Daughters of the Postdemocratic Phallacy



Lost Ikon / Lost Ikon



This Cellophane Night

(1)

into this **cellophane night**

where's frailty's gauze unspools

revealing you as you

and I'd better let you go

but Disneyland is too full

and your wings are not quite right

shed memories like latespring saxurabloom knowing the ending

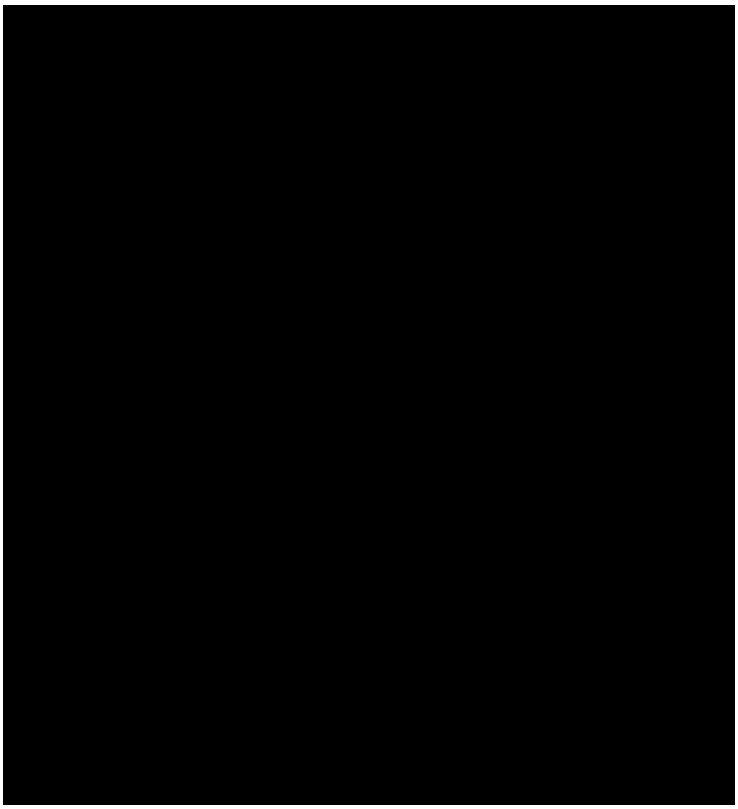
momentarily misjet a a begi- [illegible]

misplaced

[illegible] just a beginning

is just a beginning

(2)



Nostalghia

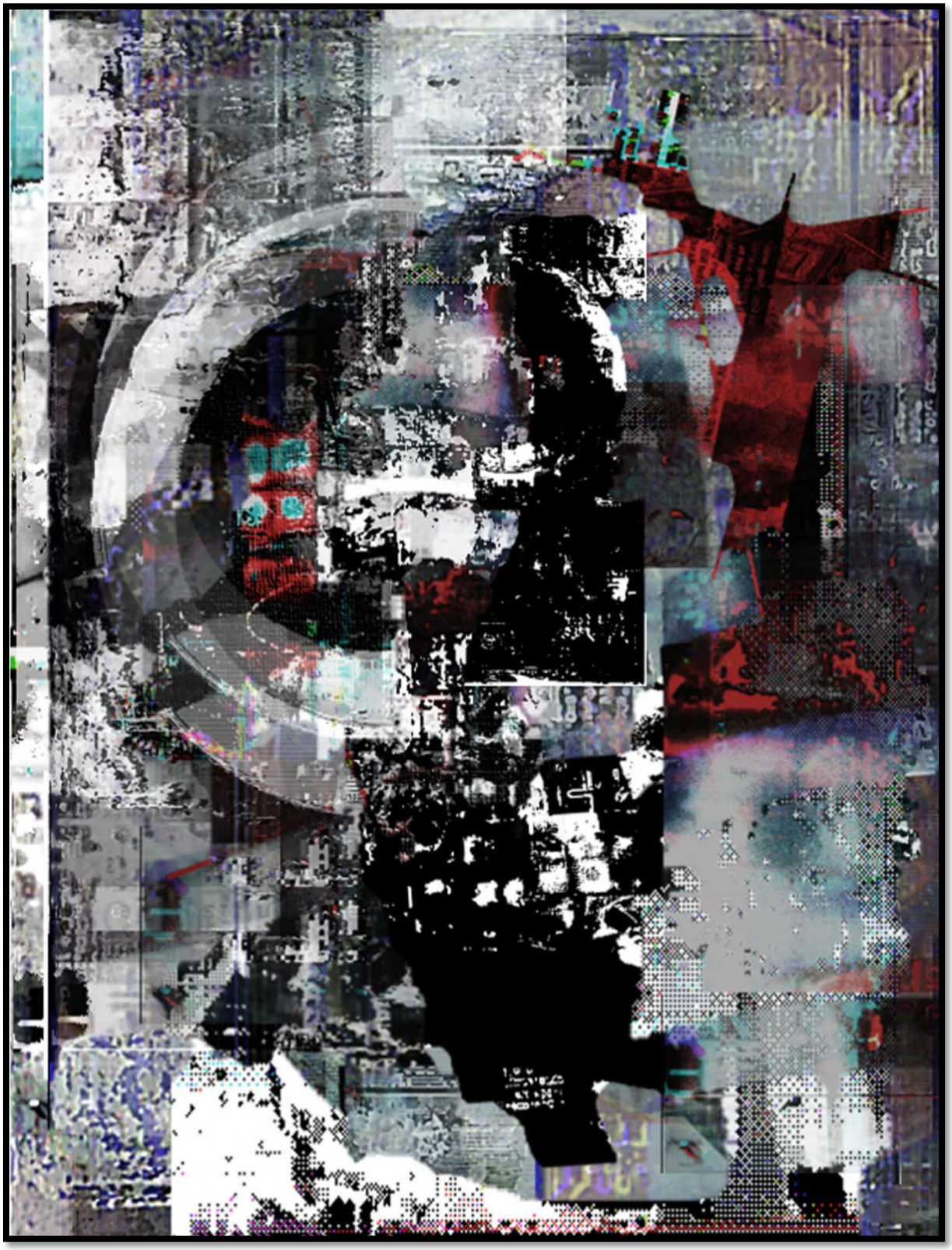
(1) “Meet me in the ruins of the old cathedral,” says Mira, appearing at the edge of our bed, “in the unkempt grasses, near the dog and shopping cart.” I reply, “How can I? I live in the unlit corridors between nations where all doorframes are toothed.” “Fever doesn’t last forever” she replies. I splay my fingers and she clasps my hand, leading me through the rooms of my own house. She labels the flaking paint, *longing*. She takes polaroids of the yellow leaves heaped upon the lawn and stencils *reticence* on each one of them. She tallies my empty cupboards and prescribes me vitamin D. I swallow a coin and spit out a tale – a fraction of a fragment of a halftruth. When I hand her my story, she gives me a receipt with *regret* scrawled across it in black ink.

I'm no longer scared of the sacred

cows/resolve swells like song within me

(2) “Blessed are those who breathe birds,” she says, “who warn of Rome and its follies.” A glass rolls off the dresser and shatters. Mira groans and clasps her belly. Water pools on the floor between her feet. I ease her onto the bed and lift her dress. A midwife joins us. She hoists Mira’s feet into makeshift stirrups and urges her to push. The midwife then reaches down and receives a small, blood covered bird. “A swallow?” I ask. “Yes,” says the midwife, “I’ll swaddle her.” She wraps the bird and hands it to me. “Keep her warm.” Outside, I hear the putter of an engine. I peek around the curtains. The car is here.

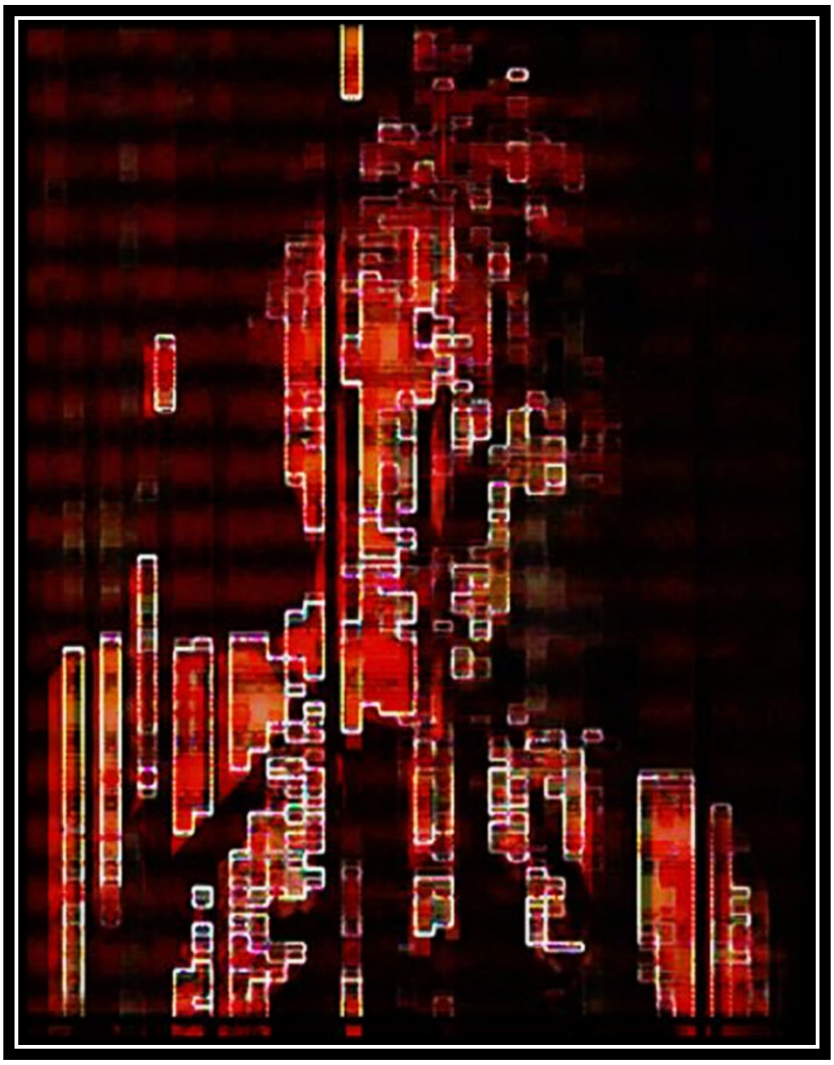
(3) The car motors through town, and I see men ablaze in protest, desperate for justice on this endless night unstarred by silence and complicity. Flaming bodies twist and writhe by the roadside. The driver sighs and asks, “Who’s burning now?” It’s then I realize I have almost no memories left of my homeland. The remaining recollections play like a VHS cassette left to the elements, its brown tape dappled with dirt, the images all pocked and warping. Still, a mirror. I gasp: How long have I been exiled from myself?



(4) Later, I see bodies within bodies of water. Synchronized swimmers in matching suits and caps. In the lake, they spin and flail and dip, submerging and resurfacing, performing their harmonies of motion with meticulous abandon. As I watch them, I hear a gunshot-like sound: a flock of birds, spooked, snapping into flight. Mira, I whisper. When I look back at the water, the swimmers are gone. The surface of the lake is calm and glassy.

(5) Within what's left of the cathedral, a dog runs in tight circles around the upturned shopping cart, biting its own tail. Blood leaks from the bite onto the stones. I see my mother, Katherine, nearby, dressed in the midwife's scrubs. On her knees, oblivious to the dog's blood, she cleans the dais where statue of Christ used to be. It begins to snow. The dog turns into a horse and trots off. I notice I'm holding a doll in tattered cloth. Looking again, I see that it's the swaddled bird. I cradle the swallow against my chest and listen for its heartbeat. It's faint, hard to hear in the flustering wind. I recall the midwife's words, so I further wrap the bird with my jacket, and shelter in a dark nook between the cart and altar. Out loud, I say: "Is this what it means to be a father?" There's no response. I count the falling flakes and wait out the whiteout. I repeat Mira's name like a mantra.

(6) Leaving a kiss upon my lips, Mira buttons her blouse and pins her hair. She walks from the cathedral to the lake, a lit candle in her left hand. She becomes Mother becomes warm, radiant light streaking through the blind slats into my room. I feel the bird within my chest. Its heartbeat becomes my own. “Take flight,” urges Mira. I no longer feel cold.



Who's burning now?

Credits & Acknowledgments

Most of the photographs used in the collages are available under the CC0 license and can be found here: pexels.com. Additional photography by the author.

Thanks to Laura, Isla, and Connor; to Josh Martin; and to Seth and the petrichor editors for asking me to be involved in this series and for featuring my work in this series. A special thanks to Matthew Kinlin for his eleventh hour advice and suggestions.

Kenneth M Cale is a lapsed Scot who lives in Oregon and makes word/image things. His work has been published in numerous online and in print journals, and his chapbooks include *Greater Vegas Bleeds into the Dreams of my Cryogenic Slumber* (Steel Incisors, 2022) and *Midnight Double Feature* (C22 Press, 2025 / Sweat Drenched Press, 2020). You can find him on bluesky: @kennethmc.bsky.social

petrichor editions

#1 Catherine Vidler – *Chaingrass*

#2 Abby Minor – *Watershed*

#3 in8 iD – *U/X 010-101: doG-one*

#4 Roberto Harrison – *Tropical Lung: Mitologia Panameña*

#5 Kenneth M Cale - *Nostalghia*