

AMBER

Kachin State, the northernmost province of Myanmar, is the land of mountains and tigers. It is also the home of legendary amber and jade mines. In its dangerous streets paleontologists scour the markets for amber that contains ancient insects. Last year a Chinese scientist, Lida Xing, found a piece that contained a pristine bird wing, along with a claw and soft tissue, from 100 million years ago. He later discovered that the feather structure was almost identical to that of modern robins. No one had ever imagined that birds as we know them went back to the age of dinosaurs. If it weren't for this stunning find, we wouldn't have been so persuasively reminded of how little we know about the ancient world, or any history, right up to the present day.

Remembering history is one of the most important things humans can do, and yet we are becoming increasingly bad at doing it. Even honest brokers—who don't have an ideological, cultural or racial axe to grind—have a hard time making sense of history from the data and records we have. But the media, particularly television, is all about echoing popular narratives rather than doing the hard research necessary to ascertain the facts. Many times they are just making it up to support a political agenda of one sort or another. So decent, sensible people must struggle on a daily basis to remember what they know, even to remember what they have witnessed or experienced personally. This is exactly what George Orwell predicted in 1984:



history is recast by the media every day in order to fit Big Brother's changing alliances. Yesterday's enemy is now our friend. Yesterday's friend is now our enemy. Even more, the country in question has **always** been our friend or enemy. So the struggle to keep sane in this whirlwind of lies and half-truths keeps the conscientious very busy. And yet this struggle makes it even more difficult to get a grip on actual history: there is so much we don't know. Our energies should never be wasted on swimming through the garbage-clogged waters of intentional misrepresentation. We should be searching for pieces of amber that contain the ancient truths that might illuminate many of our current struggles. At the very least, those artifacts could give us a much clearer understanding of the long sweep of our world's history.

What is amber? It is evidence buried in archeological sites or in myriad caches entirely unknown to us, or frozen into glaciers running through mountain ranges. But there is also psychic amber, with precious entrapped pieces of the collective unconscious. There are many hints of these secrets in our oldest stories: Gilgamesh, the Dreamtime of

Australian Aborigines, Quetzalcoatl from Central America, the Journey to the West of the Chinese Monkey King, the Bhagavad Gita of India, the Tibetan Book of the Dead, the Egyptian Book of the Dead, Homer's Odyssey, and many other stories, known and unknown, from Asia, Australia, Africa, the Americas, and megalithic Europe, going even farther back.

All great writing and all great works of art are amber, holding spiritual truths within. And that is true regardless of the public reception of those works, their apparent success or failure. Even if they have fallen into complete obscurity, they can always be found again, like the treasures of Kachin State in Myanmar. We should never give up the urge to create new amber in books, paintings, musical compositions and all of the other arts. Let the most resonant of what has preceded us mix with the radiant energy of the new. Lida Xing bought his remarkable piece of amber from a jeweler who had planned to make it into a pendant entitled "Angel Flight." Let those ancient wings be freed from their sleep of 100 million years and let us find a way to rise with them.

CALIBAN'S BOOKSHELF

Calibanonline announces a new project. We are taking early, out of print books written by our contributors and offering them free to our readers in three formats: epub, kindle, and PDF. We hope to do one or two books a year, by invitation only, for the foreseeable future. Our first book is Silvia Curbelo's *The Geography of Leaving*, originally appearing in 1991. I have been publishing Silvia's work since the late 1980s, when I was introduced to her dazzling lyrical style. The poems in *The Geography of Leaving* are filled with deep passion and their language transports us to amazing places. Enjoy.

THE GEOGRAPHY OF LEAVING



Poems by Silvia Curbelo

Reminder: ideologically pure protest votes gave us Richard Nixon and George W. Bush, and neither of those catastrophic presidencies led to a revolution.