

PSF

PARKS STEWARDSHIP FORUM

# Humanizing the Seas

A Case for Integrating the Arts and Humanities  
into *Ocean Literacy and Stewardship*

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**Plastic Catch** • Susan Schultz  
porcelain and wood sculpture



## VERSE IN PLACE

JOHN FREEMAN

### The Gargantuan Arm

Let us remember liberty was not popular,  
seven years it took Laboulaye to convince  
Bartholdi a gigantic statue was  
what New York Harbor needed. Ten  
years later the Frenchman  
arrived in Philadelphia with her gargantuan arm.  
Thirty feet high, nearly two tons of torch.  
Displayed at the peak of America's backward  
slide into Emancipation, it looks now  
like a statue sunk in sand. So  
were its finances. The same month  
Jo Reed was dragged from  
his cell in Nashville, Tennessee, and  
hung from a suspension bridge by  
an angry mob. "Hardly had Reed  
been lodged in jail than the subject  
of lynching him had become general  
conversation," the *Memphis Daily  
Appeal* reported.

Their fund-raising tour in Philadelphia  
complete, Bartholdi and crew dismantled  
the appendage, packed it into  
crates, and loaded her on a train to New York City.  
For five years the arm sat in Madison Square Park  
as *Harper's* railed against Americans  
having to pay for its pedestal. Raising pennies.  
Coins. You could climb up inside of Liberty, it  
was grand, a view. But the person taking  
your ticket couldn't. People loved it. Workers  
on the project back in France got married,  
had children, died. Kipling came  
to Paris in 1878 when Bartholdi showed  
the head and was told he'd peered  
through the eyes of Liberty herself. That  
same month Michael Green was dragged  
from his cell in Upper Marlboro, Maryland,  
a noose thrown round his neck, and his  
body raised fifteen feet from the ground.  
Left there until the following morning.



## VERSE IN PLACE

In May of 1884, an American  
businessman in Paris hosted an opulent  
banquet in Bartholdi's honor, all of Parisian  
society there in clothes pressed  
and washed by others. Black servants  
moving through the room swiftly.  
Did any of the guests regard the arms  
that swept over their heads to whisk  
away the china and cutlery  
before a new course arrived? Did they  
marvel at the strength of a human-sized  
arm that can carry a tray weighing thirty or  
forty pounds and remain unseen?  
Not spill a drop of wine or sweat.  
And did any of the men waiting that  
night pause for a cigarette, or  
stand outside looking in at the glass  
banquet hall, with its crystal  
chandelier and its small-scale  
model of Liberty, and know it  
was not for him?

John Freeman, "The Gargantuan Arm" from *The Park*. Copyright © 2020 by John Freeman.  
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**JOHN FREEMAN** is the editor of *Freeman's*, a literary annual which features new writing by Louise Erdrich, Olga Tokarczuk, Robin Coste Lewis and Haruki Murakami, among others. He has written three books of nonfiction, *The Tyranny of Email*, *How to Read a Novelist*, and *Dictionary of the Undoing*, as well as two collections of poems, *Maps* and *The Park*, both published by Copper Canyon. A child of California public schools, he lives today in New York City, where he is artist-in-residence at NYU and executive editor of The Literary Hub. Between 2014 and 2020, he edited a series of anthologies on inequality, concluding this year *Tales of Two Planets*, which focuses on the collision of the climate crisis and global inequality. Freeman's work has been translated into more than 20 languages.

