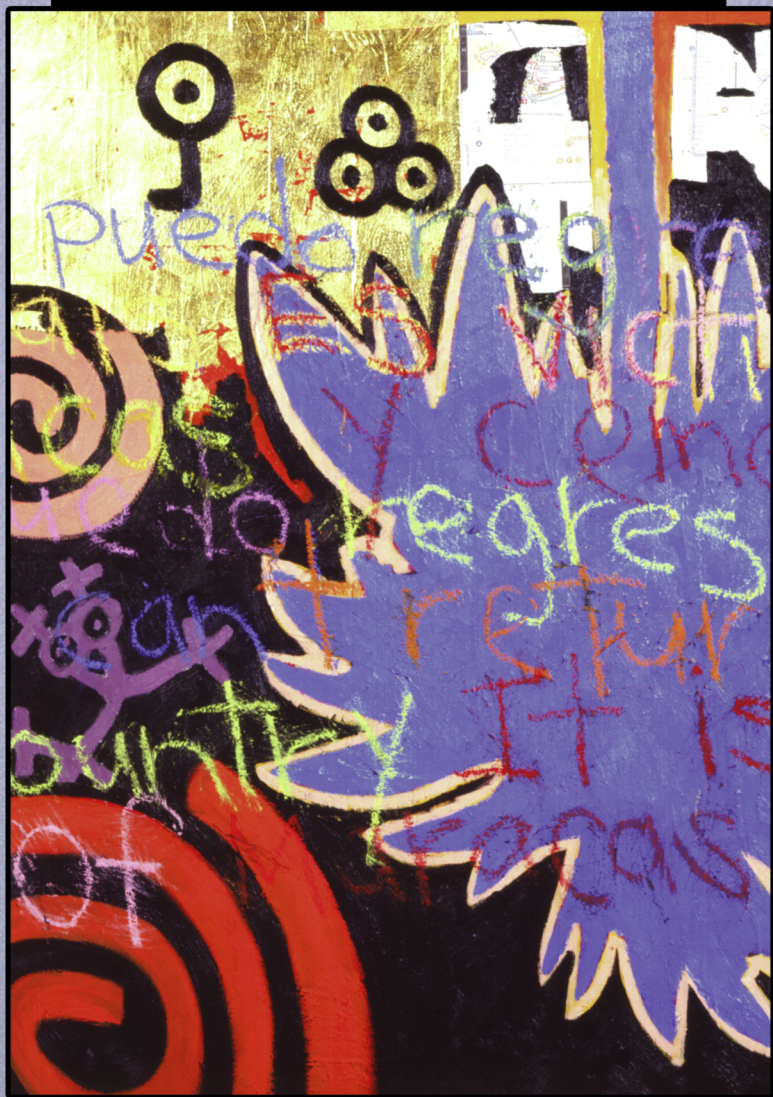


# Diaspora

Selected and New Poems



Frank Varela

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*Recovering the past, creating the future*

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*Elizabeth and Vincent and Ben and Anna  
Family*

*Egberto Almenas, Juan Rivera, Ramón Vila and Carlos Cumpián  
Friends*

*Serpent Underfoot*  
1991

## Manhattan 1958

### *I*

In Carmelite solitude, my aunt lived in a neighborhood  
of big-finned Plymouths, old-rusted Chevies.  
Every Sunday, Mamá paid a sisterly call on Lady Solitude  
In whose flat, spirits gossiped about the dead.  
It was an autumn day, and a raw bluster  
urged us forward to shelter and darkness.  
The deluge made the streetlights go supernova.  
“Mind your step,” admonished Mamá,  
as we crossed rain-dampened streets,  
but other travelers, impatient with our journey,  
jostled past us and faded into vapors.  
I kept telling myself I was all of six almost a man,  
but one still held in the clutches  
of shadows, disembodied whispers.  
My papá raged, who never came,  
“It isn’t safe.”

### *II*

A man died execution style in Auntie’s lobby.  
I read the news, pictures and text tucked away  
on page twelve beside an advertisement for hair removal.  
A cop, looking for all-the-world like Errol Flynn,  
hunkered down beside the body,  
grimly staring at the wages of sin.  
A handprint of blood was all that remained  
to spark images of mayhem,  
unspeakable violence told within the meticulous helixes  
of a dead man’s fingertips.  
I could feel Mamá’s pulse beat  
through the leather of her glove:  
“Up, up, upstairs.”