

# First Casino on the Moon

BY ANSEL ELKINS

It's happy hour at the tiki bar, and even the moon has lost its luster—the drinks, the strippers, the lunar gravity. In the casino at the Sea of Tranquility my sleepless nights seem labyrinthine; I roam the slot machines among tourists and newlyweds honeymooning, just married at the neon blue crucifix of the Elvis Wedding Chapel. There's no clocks, no calendars here. I'm drinking alone among retirees in Hawaiian shirts. A man trying to sell me a time-share says real estate on the moon is on the rise—*Location, location, location!*

Two hundred thousand miles away in this ashen desolate terrain you could almost forget our gun-smoked globe, the wars raging like wildfire back home. The roulette wheel spins, surrounded by businessmen—red and black in their meteorite eyes.

A bone-white, blue-haired prostitute named Amnesia visits me at the high-rise hotel; the glowing barcodes of her eyes change to disco balls as I pay for the hour; I request a Milky Way; I like the way her breasts bounce in one-sixth gravity. You can call me Bob, I say.

Commerce on the moon was only a matter of time; already there's electric billboards saying CHEAP FLIGHTS; we can see them from Earth, looking up at the night sky. All of us have lost something here. A man died last week and a robot read him his last rites.

It's quieter on the far side of the moon. I get stoned in my spacesuit and go out into the Descartes Highlands. Buoyant, blissful, lightfooted in the ghost-gray landscape I listen to space—silence threaded with vibration. A deep blue note I feel in my bones and I think suddenly of phoning my mother but she died years ago. I remember our nighttime drives down country roads back home when I watched the moon through my window; *Mama, the moon follows me through the trees*, I said. I felt less alone.

At the floating poker table a gambler lays his two kings against my last, lonely ace.

So this is the future. Here we are. I'm back on the barstool broke and drinking alone just like I was back home. On my third martini I feel the great gulf of space's infinite blackness when I see it there in the mirror—the bright Earth rising in the window behind me.



Untitled (1993) by Royal Robertson. Markers, ballpoint pen, gouache, and glitter paper. Courtesy christian berst art brut, Paris