

Glass Buddha

According to the guide books there was once a Buddha in the temple. The Great Glass Buddha, seven meters high, the focus of devotion for the whole city. Some sources say it was called 'glass' because it was so smooth, gold polished daily by the touch and tears of the devout. According to another story it was the gaze of the statue that was like a reflecting glass. You looked up at its eyes and the shiny chakra point jewel and you saw yourself as the Buddha saw you, tiny but distinctive, one shiny event among millions in the pulsing hall.

It was dawn when I went there, hours out of my time-zone and unable to sleep. The day was at the point where colors begin to protrude through the grey speckle of early dawn. That moment doesn't last long there. I wandered around inspecting the place and came inevitably to the great central hall. It was very quiet; I was tired and alert; and I just sat as the light developed and real shadows began to form. Between the shadows rays of light were defined by sparks of dust floating in the air. Birds flew through the temple, their wings spreading to flashes of bright color. In the middle of the hall, in the air, a reflection glittered. I shielded my eyes with a hand, against the rays creeping over the bottoms of the windows, and my hand framed a curved light in the air. I slid my hand around the curve, my eyes followed my hand. It was a sensation of both sight and touch. I felt a round shape in the air, felt and saw, pressing with my eyes a pattern of dim glimmers and occasional flashes. I felt along the contour beyond the sphere, and then, just for a moment, I saw, as if pressed into shape by my looking, a whole enormous seated shape, defined by highlights and reflections. I held it in my sight - I held it by my sight - not breathing, a presence at once delicate and overwhelming.

And then bright daylight.

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