

**MATTHEW KELSEY**  
**Nuestro Pueblo**

—for Will Camponovo

*Why I build it? I can't tell you. Why a man  
make the pants? Why a man make the shoes?*

— Sabato Rodia

After the Wide Awake Gang pried away,  
after *Los Traqueros* laid their sleepers down, long  
after China left town, he build the tower.  
After the gandy dancers arrested beds with ties,  
bolts, steel that bled in slick silver plates. For the hand  
to mouth to hand and back to god, for the god the strong-arm  
pulls and four-beat chants, all dogging drawls  
for the doppling down.

The tower stood before the night  
that lasted for days—the night of Frye and Price—  
before the errant wave of Thin Blue Lines' batons, before  
blockbusters, knuckledusters, Grape Street Crips,  
toy drives lame at the feet of Bloody Christmas.  
Before zoot suits were black and white and all hung out  
on the line to dry, before the blur of claw bars, blues bars, rebar, death  
of the difference in *de jure* and *de facto*. The tower stood  
and the tower remained.

Because a barely-five-foot man had it in mind  
*to do something big*, out of sight. Out of the blue. Out of being  
out of place, character, fashion, control. Out of hand  
and shallow pocket: seashells, mortar, perlite tiles,  
rare ware. With the help, here  
and there, of mothers who sent their children with the broken blue  
glass of milk of magnesia. A man build the tower  
because it's not enough, because it's not enough to pretend to be  
untrained and clumsy—it takes nerve to commit  
to naïve. Because we're all outsiders  
for now. He climb, he glue, he stammering hammer, he  
*good, good, good over bad, bad, bad* all day for the divorce  
from home. For mnemonic device, vice, for fear the sled  
is drifting away with Marie. For *art*  
*brut*, no law but the raw and the rough, because it is  
absolutely enough to be alone and silent  
and must be, whether we like it or not.