

**RIMBAUD'S CITIES I / MAGIC LANTERN SLIDES**

Its true acropolis, beyond the wildest ambitions of latter-day barbarism— Indescribably bleak, this day it makes— Immoveable clouds, imperial mansions built on lasting snow— With a fetish for the grandiose, they've reproduced catalogues— Every classical monument— Hampton Court, the size of a replica under glass in some regional gallery— But what paint! Some Nebuchadnezzar of ice dreamt up these ministerial staircases— Civil servants vanishing into the background of their status—bureaucrats and overseers with faces of stone— A city of squares, courtyards, walled terraces closing its drifters out— And its parks, perfected replicas of wilderness— Overhanging it all, strangely, a strip of sea, deserted, unrolls its canvas of soft hail between two piers hung with oversized candelabras— A narrow bridge, a side gate opens directly into the Cathedral— 'This vaulted dome of fine-wrought steel, fifteen thousand feet around'—From certain angles on its gilded walkways, viewing platforms, the spiral stairs enclosing its marketplace and columns, I had some idea that I could see into the city's depths— Always something out-of-scale, though, in its dissolving views— What existence do they have, these other suburbs layered over and under the acropolis? Strangers to the present, its incomprehensible city— A shopping centre, or circular showground of arcades—its wares stay hidden, though the snow is marked— The odd magnate, rare as early risers on a London Sunday, hurries himself off to his glittering transports— Sofas of red velvet, drinks of arctic ice—it costs eight hundred rupees—it costs eight thousand rupees— No need for theatres here—the shops stage its dramas, dingy enough— It must be policed, this realm, but what kind of chancer could break the laws which govern this?

A realm as elegant as a boulevard— Its air is made of light— A hundred kind souls comprise its picture of the masses— Here, too, the houses come to a stop— Its city opens directly into a landscape— That idea of the natural, extending woodlands and vast fields across its permanent backdrop, out where pitiless aristocrats hunt down their histories in its invented light—

**Lisa Gorton**—*translated from Arthur Rimbaud, 'Villes I', 1886*

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