

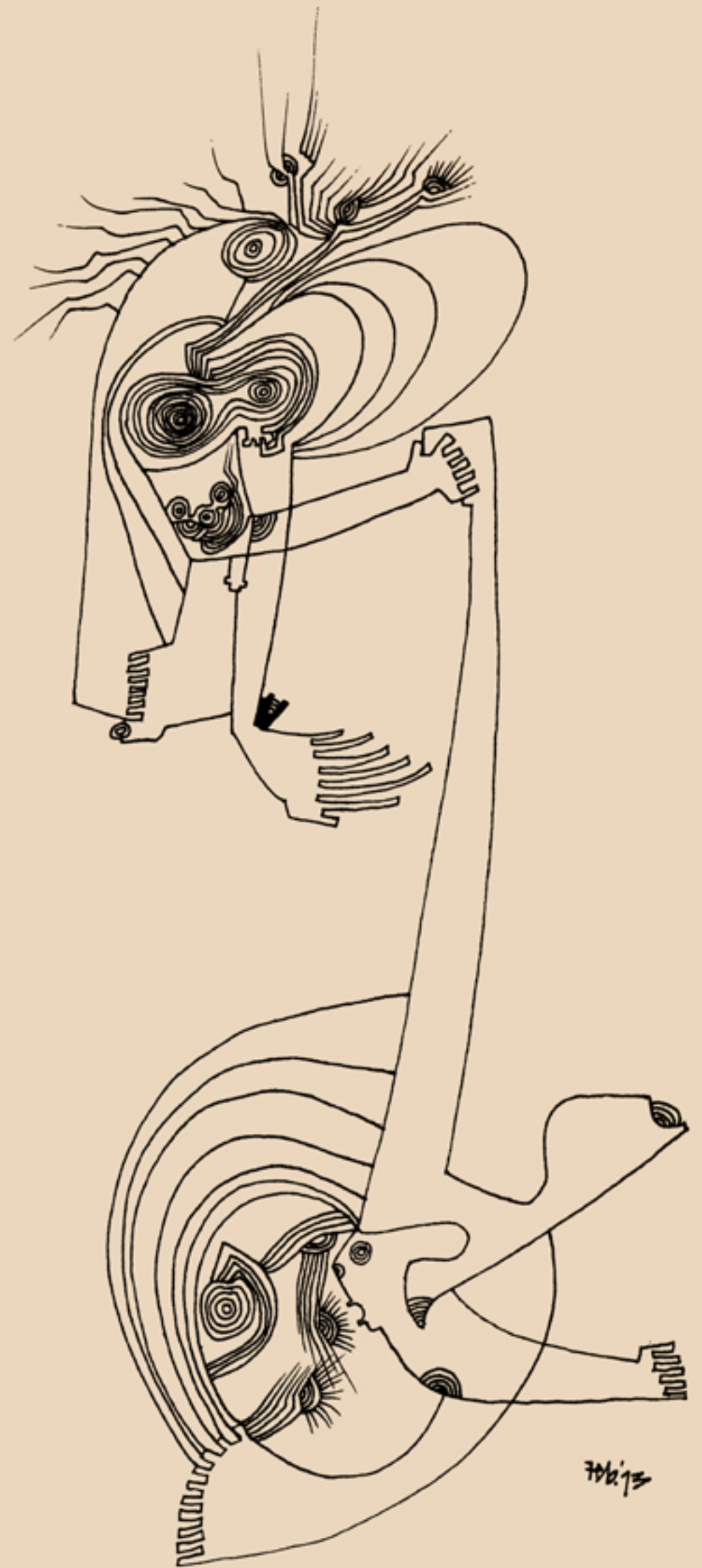
CRIPPLED BEGGAR

Broken in the seed,
asleep in the womb.
A crack splits to the knock of light
to usher a cripple to a crippled life.
Is she armed with a heart, unyielding
to the passion of this throb-charged world?

She will never attain the heights of her kin,
for the earth is her quarry
and she must mix with it
for she is a selfish mother,
for she claims beginnings and ends,
why not that which spans between
be also within her grasp?

Writhed to the spit-patched passage
of forty years or so of dawns and dusts
that fails to dim the hope
which lives like no other claw,
her hacked-born body
bites into the crowded hill of life.

The brisk pomp of the traffic
must occasionally glance
to meet the tale,
scrawled past the raised gorged brow
to the deep socketed eyes, flooded



with bloody overgrowth, she smiles.

We do not fathom her depth

but surface at her etched palm,

pushed up like the skeleton of a stormed pier

from the secret of her calm bay.

The suspected murmur, splashes at the stones edge.

- a voice compels almost wizardly -

'anything for the poor?'

Is it fear that stiffens the heart to slices,

or smelts a generous core to yield

a while so short

and rush with deaf pace, squinting?

Do we hear her blessings flavoured in grief

long after we have changed our shoes?

Was her mite which tarried in the wind

exacted to the weight of the copper coin?

Another traveller on the beach

stamping her marks,

where the waves are not impressed.

She drags the jungle-floor of its filth

rubbing her face against pressing-on kneecaps

singing thanks for the remnant sunshine

filtered through the shadows of her towering brothers.

But each life is alive in its own voice,

and hears only the echoes of other lives, passing.

LeRoy Clarke

9th Dec. 1966.