Structure in the Sea

Some distance — a hundred feet, say — from the rocks we are on, a mysterious structure protrudes out of the water. Far, but close enough to see in detail, if we look closely, which paintings invite us to do. A structure in two sections, about the height of a two story building. The bottom half that comes out of the water is a rectangular block. Some 15 x 20 x 15 feet high. Concrete. Black where the block is damp: from the water's surface, up to the many heights of passing waves. The rest, an algae green gray.

And sunbathing on the block are some 15-20 sea lions.

The upper half of the structure is made up of concrete beams raised vertically, spaced out incrementally along the perimeter of the block's surface, and capped up high by a horizontal rectangle of four beams, (running parallel to the water's surface, parallel to surface of the block). In a phrase, the whole structure looks like a block with a cage on top. Or the Lincoln Memorial, should we neglect it for centuries. Or the ruins of the Parthenon — the beams like columns, the block like the flat-topped hill that rises from the sea level city of Athens.

And perched atop the columns, along the horizontal beams of the structure's "roof," some 50 birds.

A dense pack of sea lions, and a dense pack of birds, resting peacefully on this mysterious, mostly concrete structure.

The viewer naturally wonders what this structure is. What it once was. Perhaps it once supported a pier. But what happened to that pier? What did that pier look like, or what did whatever was there before look like? You cannot tell just by looking at this picture. Just as, if today, you were to visit the ruins of the Temple of Zeus, you could not tell what it once looked like there just by looking at it. Too many clues have been cleared

away. You would need to be told, shown an artist's interpretation, visit the Acropolis Museum.

You wonder what the sea lions think. Do they realize this "island" is the ruins of something man-made? Do they care? What do they think of man, who hunts them for their fur, and yet who inadvertently creates for them the perfect oasis of land in the middle of the sea?

The birds — seagulls, Peruvian pelicans, and more — that aren't perched atop the structure, glide around it. Up and down, round and round. Look for fish. Wet your head. Caw-caw your friends. Fly back and rest at any time.

A ship far off in the distance, behind the structure, near the far right side of the canvas. From the left side, the coastline extends, and then terminates halfway across. A ship along the coast that says SOCIBER. Another ship that says MSC. Rainbow houses on the hillside.

What a paradise for birds, this port city of Valparaiso!

But how about for these sea lions, in this concrete temple, in this rare, man-made structure that they may call their own? Does paradise exist for them? Or is this the closest they'll ever get?

Anyway, to hell with existential questions. That block's pretty high — how'd they all get up there?