

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Loretta Oleck: Three Poems

Loretta Oleck · Thursday, June 8th, 2017

Loretta Oleck most recent publication is *Songs from the Black Hole* (Finishing Line Press 2016). She was nominated for a 2016 Pushcart Poetry Prize, and her poetry and photography have been published in dozens of publications. This past year she volunteered at a Syrian Refugee Camp in Ritsona, Greece, where she wrote poetry as a way to process and document her deeply felt impressions. She hopes her work will help spread awareness about this profound humanitarian crisis.

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Outlines

The children draw outlines of their bodies,
then sketch depictions of their feelings inside.

One boy illustrates batman and superman.
I am tough, he says, flexing his little arm muscles.
He scrawls the word, *strong*, on each bicep.

One dark haired, dark skinned girl draws a princess
with blond hair and blue eyes, then names her, Lydia,
the name of a Swedish human right's worker.

Write- I am beautiful. She hands me a crayon
like handing me a question.

One quiet boy depicts a clock as his face-
time imprinted inside his features, worn like camouflage
over impermanence. Then, he draws a zigzag across
his forehead, slicing through the hands of time.

One angry boy smudges black across his outline,
crumbles the paper, then shoves it fully into his mouth,
gobbles himself up whole, destroying all evidence

of his existence.

Samina

Samina worked as a landscape painter in Aleppo.

Now, she stands tall amid the field of tents. The irony not lost on her- that here, at a refugee camp, there is an endless supply of canvas.

Her shelves of colored paints are buried deep under rubble, splattered across shards of bone and mixed with shattered vials of turpentine and broken bristle brushes.

And flesh buried, too, bathed in a wash of paints- the color of plump berries and springtime. Lush earth. Emerald. Jade. Lime. Sublime hues too fertile, too vital, to be found running through the cold veins of a refugee camp.

Nothing and no one has stayed the same.
The remains of her paint camouflage the dead.

She would no longer recognize friends if she saw them.

Fathi

Fathi is easily overlooked, showing one face but owning another. One face says, *don't touch me*. The other one, is the face of a clock striking 5 pm- the time when Fathi arrives, daily, at the Children's Friendly Space, to seek me out.

Most children don't attach to volunteers because they come and go, leaving every few weeks, reminding the children of all their other losses.

Fathi is no different. His mother is dead. His grandparents- in Aleppo. He lives, now, in a tent with his father and uncle, sleeping on thin blankets atop of plastic tarps, choosing to keep their tent sparse so it will not feel permanent.

In the corner, a scorpion hides in a crate of red apples.

Fathi winds and knots a colorful beaded necklace around my neck. He gives me a pocketbook cut out from cardboard, stuffed with paper stars and hearts.

I wear the necklace daily, and although I wedge the pocketbook between hard journal pages, for safekeeping, the hearts and stars tumble everywhere- forging a trail, like in a fairytale, leading me straight back to Fathi, to say my goodbyes.

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