
Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Pichchenda Bao: Three Poems

Pichchenda Bao · Friday, May 12th, 2023

On Not Knowing You, a Cambodian American Legacy

You would think I would know
what to do with loss—

remote like a prayer,
urgent like a country.

This can't be grief.
I'm never sad enough.

Even when I eat my parents' memories,
my palate cannot place them.

The names of fruit, vegetables, people
dissipate before I can fix my mind

to that task of holding on to them,
what grew in the ground by their homes,

and who lived there,
and who died.

Once, there, I walked through
a grove of low trees with wide leaves.

Mango, they said, which I believed,
though I saw none.

They could have said anything,
and I would have believed them.

In the distance, coconut trees,
iconic and swaying,

framed the horizon
I only recognized just now.

*

One Poem

More than 120,000 people in the world have died today,
but I haven't.

Sometimes having no faith is a blessing.
I wake up each day without warning.

I know I'm not alone.
Just lonely.

Like this one poem that keeps
composing itself while
I'm in the shower
where I have no pen.
The words keep slipping
down the drain, finding their own
wet kin in the pipes.

Should I feel grief
or relief? That I am still
making poems out of nothing.

On a panel, I heard a poet say,
the poems don't belong to you anymore.
They have their own lives to live.
That's what makes it art.
This makes me nervous.
All the living things I have made
are all destined to die.

*

This Winter

There has been
no snow
in New York City.
So the baby
only knows
this half-
hearted chill,
the naked
streets
with its trash
exposed.
We still
bundle up,

but against
what?

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