

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Xochitl-Julisa Bermejo: The Sun Was Cruel Like That

Xochitl-Julisa Bermejo · Thursday, July 25th, 2013

Xochitl-Julisa Bermejo is the creator and curator of Beyond Baroque's monthly reading series HITCHED, a founding editor of *The Splinter Generation*, and was nominated for a 2010 Pushcart Prize. Her work has been published in *The Los Angeles Review*, *PALABRA*, *CALYX* and *The Acentos Review*, and she is the winner of the 2013 Poets & Writers California Writers Exchange.

The Ascension of Josseline

Two small, blistered
and bleeding feet dipped
into one of the stone pools
pocking the ravine
like the face of the moon.
That same orange moon eaten
by the sun, eclipsed.
The sun was cruel like that, gulping
anything flamed tongues touched,
and since they licked nearly everything,
nearly everything was licked,
including Josseline.
She removed one jacket,
before removing the second,
removed the right green shoe
before the left,
removed one sock
before the next,
rolled up each leg of her
now-impossible-Hollywood-dream pants
and washed her feet
in sacred stone pools.
This is how she prepared
with ritual and prayer
and waited for her ascension.

Our Lady of the Water Gallons

Un mensaje a mis compañeros

Arivaca, Arizona

I etch black line Sharpie Virgenes
 on plastic water gallons: one arc,
 Ichthys in the sand at travelers' feet;
 one post carving, hobo's mark
 on the road. The Virgen speaks to faceless
 shadows traveling when the land is dark.
 I etch black line Sharpie Virgenes
 on plastic water gallons. One arc
 is the bridge between L.A. and Arivaca,
 liquor store murals and water drawings,
 dogs on lawns and dogs trained to attack a
 man and woman darting up Hippie Mountain.
 They've hiked this far from Guatemala
 on one plastic water gallon, one arc.
 Ichthys in the sand at traveler's feet
 is the tale of a man left shirtless and shoeless
 beside thorny mesquite. Como un pez sin agua,
 he is fished off the road limp and nearly witless.
 In the arms of compañeros he asks,
 "¿Es esto sentir la muerte?" Barely conscious
 he is Ichthys in the sand at traveler's feet.
 One post carving, hobo's mark,
 would mark our "angel food" with a cross,
 but cross signs feel wrong to fingers
 wanting a symbol with less power, more loss,
 like desert flower blooms, or a growing belly
 beneath blue robes of water and gloss.
 I need one post carving, hobo's mark.
 On the road, the Virgen speaks to faceless
 suffering. A woman seven months pregnant
 hikes with garlic-lashed calves (snake safe-guard).
 Bleeding and cramping, body bent
 to ground, she makes mud salves and prayers
 to Our Mother: keep my unborn daughter radiant.
 On the road, the Virgen speaks. To faceless
 shadows traveling when the land is dark,
 I say, I see the fresh footprint in the riverbed,
 the torn blanket ditched on the hillside.
 At a rest stop shaded by oak, I tread
 slow, count empty gallons, read what remains.
 I promise you are not invisible, nor discarded,
 people traveling when the land is dark.
 I etch black line Sharpie Virgenes
 to cloak rocky paths in stars
 and hope one will guide you home.
 When muscles spasm and farm lights appear too far,

know that I built this poem with safe spaces.
But because no words can erase your scars,
I etch black line Sharpie Virgenes.

Note from the Poet: Josseline Jamileth Hernandez (“The Ascension Of Josseline,”) was a 14 year-old girl who traveled through the Arizona desert in January 2008 with her younger brother in order to reunite with their mother in Los Angeles, CA. Along her journey, she was abandoned by her coyote and group after complaining of sickness and died alone in the desert. While on a daily patrol, a No More Deaths volunteer found Josseline’s body lying at the bottom of a canyon with her naked feet dipped into a pool of water. Her remains were identified by the green shoes she had beside her and the emblazoned “Hollywood” sweatpants she wore.

Cultural Weekly is proud to premiere these poems.

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