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NINA SERRANO

Nina Serrano: (USA, 1934) Her poetry publications include "Heart Songs: The Poetry of Nina Serrano" Serrano's poetry is widely anthologized most recently in "Under the Fifth Sun: Latino Literature from California" (Hey Day Press) and "Farewell to Armaments: Poems for Peace" (Estuary Press). She is an Alameda County Arts Commissioner.

ALL MY LIFE THERE HAS ALWAYS BEEN A WAR

At five, my first movie
There were men on horses killing each other
Lots of men and lots of noise
Lots of dust from horses' hooves
It was the Frontier War to own America
But I didn't know that then
Only knew that I didn't like the killing
I left the dark theater
But the killing never stopped.

ON THE SHORE ON THE EVE OF WAR

The edge inclines
bringing you deeper
into the water's embrace
Enfolds you
in its powerful flow
How strong the water is
So quick to change
with the wind
and the electro magnetic pull of the moon
and the movements of fish below birds above
I feel like one grain of sand on the shore
One grain in the sea of time
One grain in this vast universe
of stars galaxies and infinite space ever changing
One grain compacted with others
One moist grain on the edge where the water
stretches to touch
to be carried with currents
and returned with the tide
like love everlasting
that washes in waves
the shore
with divine grace.

ON FACING YOUR FACE

Fraudulent facelifts
stretch pure wrinkles
earned by worry
spontaneous smiles
false smiles formal smiles
smiles from deep inside
smiles to cover embarrassment
smiles welcoming
smiles enticing
smiles disarming
Frowns winks
Eyebrows raising in surprise
Mouth wide open in horror
Lips puckering for a kiss
kiss puckering for lips
Nose sniffing flowers
Ears wiggling to impress friends
Crying scrunching up the whole face
tears falling down
All this and more make a full life full of pure wrinkles
Fraudulent facelifts stretch them flat.

May 1996

VOICE OF THE TURTLE

(In Biblical times the turtle dove's song was the herald of spring.)
One day Walt Whitman, Langston Hughes, and Emily Dickinson drove with us
We parked in a pleasant spot
and they waited patiently in the car
with a bag of oranges
Oh –the words they emitted
words that spurred the newly appearing buds to burst
towards bloom
By the time we returned they were restless and urged us the sea
They took up space in the front seat although others driving by would think I was sitting in the passenger seat
But you told me later that you could see my face by looking in the rear view mirror though I sat next to you
At the sea shore they took off as mysteriously as they came
But they left these words
that bounce between us
All these words
Walt, Langston, and Emily hijacked the car
But we were too polite to mention it
What control did we have in celestial company
Dispossessed by the first lady who evicted them from her lah dee dah symposium
they found refuge with us attracted by the oranges
They felt war brewing and needed to rest their age-old souls
Looking for mouths to set words free
Looking for peace
They left because they could not find peace here in this dimension
And the next day death dropped bombs and limbs and heads and lives shattered
Words rained from the media a bloody red to a marching tempo louder than poems
until war pretended to cease
and foreign soldiers stalked the streets
and threats of new and permanent war shadowed the lands
even though it was spring
I await the voice of the turtle.

MYSTERY OF DEATH

You stand in frightless wonder
in the darkness
as unseen animals rustle
brushing against you
Behind bushes branches snap
strange shapes pass
as clouds cover the moon

Elemental and ancient
life moves over the planet
Everything was here before you
earth, wind, water, air and fire
Recycled elements join and un-join
in new configurations of matter
Death & Life as different as a simple breath
as flowing blood circulating
as simple as complex connections
as taking in transforming and letting go
So simple that you know death when you see it
the icy feet the empty stare
But how can you explain it?
To grasp death is to understand the twinkling of star
that once existed
and shines down to guide you in the dark
of existence
Long millenniums ago
many elements interconnected to create a star
But even after all those connections disintegrated
you still see it as a star
as that moment in time that it was
Where are those particles now?
Are they you?
Are they me?
They say you are composed of star dust
When you look up
at the sky
are you seeing elements of yourself
in an earlier configuration
Do you see with your current eyes
your earliest ancestors?
In the light of the dead
you find your way through darkness
frightless and full of wonder.

COPING WITH PERSONAL EUPHORIA AT THE SAME TIME AS A GLOBAL WAR IS ABOUT TO BREAK OUT

It feels like
I am walking a tight rope
but in reality solid earth
holds my feet
and the mixed up load above them
My head in the clouds
looks down
and sees the grass
growing in the sidewalk cracks
My head dancing in the ballroom
of castles in Spain
looks out a window and sees further
than the rainbow's end
where the cement street
leads me home.

LONG HAIRED POETS

Alameda Poets for Peace Reading 3/5/03

Long haired poets like angels send hymns
on vibrating sound waves
caressing ears in the margins of language
Soft vowels rub against hard consonants
reaching deep into the psyche
and out into the cosmos
Moods and meanings mingle like intertwining souls
like throbbing hearts flying like comets
on wings above white capped waves
on the skin of the sea.