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E Lele Ka 'Uhane

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E Lele Ka 'Uhane

JESSICA ANUHEA CARPENTER

Eco Poetry Seminar
Mentor: Professor Craig Santos Perez

Artist Statement

When we think deeply about where we have come from, what we have done, and where we are going, a lot of reflection is required. Remembering and reflecting are fundamental to growth and paving the way for future prosperity. There are so many pieces of one's self that are easy to forget; culture and the environment may be two of those pieces for some of us. I have come to look at both of these in tandem: as one growing, breathing entity. I write poetry in response to the past, current status of, and future of my culture and the environment. As our care for Hawaiian land and resources declines, so does the prosperity of Hawaiian cultural practice. To prostitute the land is to prostitute the culture that nurtures it, and we are left with a painful lack of authenticity and a dry, silent, and abused Earth. My poetry confronts the issue of separating culture and 'āina while urging readers to ponder their hand in the current condition of Hawai'i. I approach the matters in a personal way and share my perspective in hopes that it will start a conversation and lead to action.

A ruby heart
Caged in frosty ribs of snow
With each pluck of this soft thorny gem
Falls a crackling flood
A blessing, a cry, a breath of life to wash away drought

A pale opal pearl
Encased in grey, brittle shell
For every fall
A feather dusts the pine below
With the absence of a single pluck
With the silence of a chant
With the stifling of a breathe
To put out every fiery cheek



I write poetry because it is how I heal. My writing is my way of contributing to the health of our ancestors. I do my best to remove as many filters between my eyes, my mind, my heart, and my hand in order for them to work as one.

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Your crowns fall down
 Constant as the rain it causes
 And silent as a slap from an axe is brutal
 Its quiet, roaring passionate fiery 'eleu mana
 Plummets to a flatline
 What used to be a beautiful sunrise
 To hō'ike the blossoms of life you laid to birth
 Is now shameful exploitation
 To the tune of excruciating silence

A dry dark congregation
 As each bone laid to rest
 After each bud has leaped
 Lele nā 'uhane

AN OPEN LETTER TO PAPA HĀNAUMOKU LĀUA 'O WĀKEA

The epitome of selflessness and the embodiment of sacrifice
 She breathes, he lives and pulses
 Holding her breath to let us climb her ribs
 Immersing herself in the silence of swallowing sea
 To let us swim through her blood
 Birthed a son
 And wept to plunge him into the warm earth
 To wait patiently in excruciating atmosphere
 For us to feed and eat and nourish and live
 He quivered in exhaustion to split the sky and open the heavens
 Just to give us hope and show us more
 He dedicated his only son
 Exposed him to the suffocation of Earth
 In hopes of birthing a populace of men women
 Children
 I chant to Papa and Wākea
 Hānau moku
 I will plunge the placenta of my child into mother Earth near the dwelling of my past
 I traced my lineage back to Chief Keawe of the island of Hawai'i
 I will birth a prince
 And keep his head below the clouds
 Under the rule of Wākea
 And above Papahānaumoku to care for her
 I will teach him to churn the dirt beneath kalo
 So he can see and feel and smell and taste
 Reciprocity.