

Under Our Own Wings

Nellie Wong

Do not despair, my sister, of a brother's process.
Laughter connects to self-examination.
Laughter can be an opium poppy spreading
its poison first among ourselves. Our selves
our whole selves fragments chopped liver
in a goldfish bowl.
To remain private with change is to self-destruct.
To go public with change is to begin
to challenge the forces of white supremacy.
Yet good fortune the good fortune of battles is not
simply opening red envelopes containing coins or paper
money.
To believe that change comes about is to keep working.
As someone said, dear sister, as someone said
you are always working, working
hammering away at lies myths distortions
water hyacinths clogging
the canals of Asian America.
Yet we are not property
to be sold disposed auctioned.
What is antique what is held valuable
is not necessarily unbreakable. A sea of faces stare
at our invisibility our supposed assimilation. A man believes
simply that to err is to be human
and we sit and stare among whites yellows
a few friends.
Ears and tongues perceive
the images of history swallowed in antiseptic schoolrooms
on the battles of Vietnam
in the bedrooms porno movie theaters magazines TV screens
of America.
Any wonder, dear sister, any wonder
that sisters and brothers must exorcise through ritual form
poems songs stories essays plays
at its own pace
the malaise of white America

To create our own histories culture
restore our bodies to red health
to battle with every warrior beneath our pores.
Though we try because we must
Though we try because we want
to control our own destinies we are mirrored
in the windows of clouds
in the shattered glass
of our race and our sex.
How can we separate our race from our sex our sex from our race?
And we hear again and again we must struggle against racism
at the exclusion of sexism.
And we hear again and again we must struggle against sexism
at the exclusion of racism.
These tactics. These words I must use, this language, this
tiresome but necessary chant. We in the midst of struggle
would love to ski downhill and breathe nothing but fresh air.
And I must ask: how can we stand in isolation how can we blow
away the blasts of destruction bombarding us from every direction
because we are
women because we are
colored because we are
feared?
The sagas of long steam ladies.
The sagas of long steam men,
the talkers the orators the dancers
they are here before us we are here among them
brimming with language music air.
We birth ourselves, our privacies exposed
proud, seemingly free and yet devils nag
poke at our very bones
to steal the art that is our lives
the music that is our source
the spring that is our imagination.
To truly create is to struggle.
To truly struggle is to present
our selves our process of living learning
and unlearning the garbage of self-contempt of self-defeat
heaped at our own doorsteps. Sometimes we rein in
the blinders sometimes we see no farther
than our own skins sometimes we prick
ourselves savor the cactus of our own pains.

