

Snow over Kyoto

When will I see you in Kyoto?
I thought we met last winter
in Kyoto in the deep snow.
So you noticed?
I wanted to help you with your bags that day.
Bags filled with fruit and vegetables.
I was frazzled
looking for incense
for my mother's memorial.
There were things I wanted to tell
my mother before she died.
She loved yellow orchid in winter.
She said I was a little flower when I was born.
It snowed all night.
My mother placed a blanket over me.
I wish I was there on her last day.
How do I stop my memories from melting?

Miho Kinnas & E. Ethelbert Miller

The River Steam

Are you just a winter wind?

I cover myself and try to stay warm.
When we take our shower together
the steam covers everything.

I write our names
across the mirror.

You smear body oil on the back of your hands.
Your hands becoming your mother's hands.
Bones and veins spreading like a growing forest.

In the steam, your skin softens.
I bite your shoulders.
You turn and watch water flow between
my breasts.

I wonder if this is what Langston
meant when he said - I've
known rivers.

The heat from my delta
calling your name.

Miho Kinnas & E. Ethelbert Miller

A Sympathy Card from Hong Kong

Where is my guardian poet during
these days of destruction and despair?
I once received a sympathy card.
It came from overseas. Hong Kong I think it was.
The corners were bent and it took weeks
to reach me.
I am slow when it comes to opening
letters. I often just stare at the postage
stamps.
It is like reading a book of poems.
I hold the letter up to the light.
I am a translator trying to see
what might be hidden.
How do I hide my thoughts?
My husband wants to know who I know
in Hong Kong. Why a sympathy card
in Autumn? Has our marriage died?
How did my lover find my address?
I had never seen the songbird on the postage stamp.
Ominous or auspicious?

Miho Kinnas & E. Ethelbert Miller

Korin and Stovall

From behind the screen Ogata Korin emerges.
He asks for Lou Stovall's phone number.
They will talk about erasure and abstraction.
They will go on a picnic next weekend.
Birds and trees will follow these artists
back to paradise.
The coral-pink moss spreads.
The ink indigo springs into a well.
Lou Stovall's studio is filled with students.
Korin stands in the doorway nodding his head
and nourishing the idea for kimono design
with autumn blossoms.
Both men move across history like paintbrushes
on fragile paper, a tender rustling touching
the hands of a clock.

Miho Kinnas & E. Ethelbert Miller

Songhua River

Is history a river or a boat?
The sandbags along the Songhua river
made my mother remember the time
she almost drowned a lifetime ago.
Water and memory is what connects
me to her. When I swim I believe
in the possibility of love.
She did not know how
to swim. We are all made
to float. Do you believe it?
Our mothers are keepers
of creation myths. They share
secrets and perform magic.
They tell us they drowned
so we might walk on water.
Lately the mother in me longs
to build a boat with things washed
up onto the beach after the terrible
storms.

Miho Kinnas & E. Ethelbert Miller