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POETRY NORTHWEST



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Two Works

The Sky Forever

I should learn how to shoot a gun. The shooting range is baptismal. I'd reborn as an Asian American Texan. A gun could marry me to this land, whispering to me to defend it from the alien, the immigrant, Black, the brown, the queer, the trans and gender nonconforming. A Filipino American student of mine grew up riding in the back of a Ford emblazoned with a Confederate flag. *Filipino* is pride and heritage. *White* is surviving and benefitting from anti-black segregation. Self-defense.

I moved here a month before 9/11. With another Asian American woman hired straight out of a Midwestern graduate program, I was one of two (sometimes three) full-time faculty at the Center for Asian American Studies, which came into existence as the University of Texas' begrudging response to Asian American student activist demands. Without a

permanent director, we were tasked with building a nationally prominent ethnic studies program befitting a tier-one research university.

Students, however, demanded a program director who understood them and their communities. *We need someone who can help define what it means to be Asian American in Texas*, said a young Muslim Pakistani American man. I will never be this someone.

Here we are with our plentiful jobs, housing stock, robust churches and myths of innocence. This city rapidly turns over as mostly young, mostly white people move in (an estimated 150 arrive per day) while Black and Latino families in need of affordable housing move out. Alamo Drafthouse and Tito's Vodka, now exported everywhere. This city evangelizes its fun capitalist brand and attracts more and more people with festivals and "affordable" condominiums. I want to defend it.

Several brown writer-friends post beautiful summertime images with the hashtag #texasforever. Forever the Republic founded by white men the Mexican government forbade from owning slaves? Forever the Republic established by lynch mobs and the law to steal Tejano and Native land, raise cattle and grow slave plantation cotton?

I could become the kind of Asian American Texan who stands for fairness. Alignments with racial capitalism gain extra flavors of regional patriotism, Confederacy nostalgia, Bible Belt fervor, agribusiness land expansion and open carry laws. The oldest Chinese American family in the city spans five generations and raises Black Angus. Asian American boys have been the only libertarian conservatives in my classrooms filled with other children of rich Texans. Even the alien, the immigrant, Black, the brown, the queer, the trans and gender nonconforming can surely uphold white, Christian

hegemony. But I am a resident alien in Asian American Texas. Defend the land from my desires, defend the land from myself.

I wait in line at the optometrist as a Latina office manager explains to two Southeast Asian men that their refugee program changed their insurance and the clinic doesn't take their version of Medicaid. Sitting side-by-side, I also slip my brown foot out of my flip flop to swing. I get close to home in the historically Black and Latino district created by a 1920 city segregation plan and my shoulders relax. I'm sometimes Latina-passing. Nobody cares what I am. No one stares at me, an alien Asian American. No one extends the liberal camaraderie embracing the Asian American Texan.

I pick up cigarettes from the convenience store down the street and joke with the Black man behind the food counter and the South Asian man at the cash register. Outside, the clouds sprawl above, a huge canopy. Lorine Niedecker writes that all the elements of a place make up our bones and fill our lungs. I can talk to you about what it means to be Asian American on the Blackland Prairie ecosystem. It means: I want to defend the sky.

Lungless and the Petiole at the Barton Springs Run-Off

sand shipped in submits to fine spore
blond wheat combs the water's edge
electromagnetic hum and flat bone
a pocket's dirty souvenir

horse raiders had their steer and fence
here a no-entry sign curls steel
your arm akimbo keyholes the evening
moony-skinned tattoos bob along

drainage highways from hills risen above lava
salt cedar bluestem giant reed chinaberry
kids throw algae
loose dogs knock canoes bonk to hollow

a full diaper floats
Chinese silver grass cogon grass Japanese climbing fern
white and pink taro flesh dries the mouth
breathe through leafstalk at the dam

waving woolly lobes to heaven
two-sided hearts starch roots
pod and frond wide-roof before any yam or poi
water beading on velvet peltate

in the cavities of any underwater city
locals teethe on rings of native seed
tongue and gum lag the time zones
would rather drown than cross

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SELF-ARTICULATION AND SOLIDARITY

Asian Americans Writing the South

Kimberly Alidio wrote *After projects the resound* (Black Radish, 2016), *solitude being alien* (dancing girl press, 2013) and poems which have appeared recently or will appear in *Entropy*, *HOLD*, *Nat.Brut*, and *Texas Review*. She is a poetry fellow at Kundiman and VONA/Voices, a Zora Neale Hurston Scholar at Naropa University's Summer Writing Program, and the Center for Art and Thought's inaugural artist-in-residence. She received a doctorate in modern U.S. history from the University of Michigan, held a tenure-track position at the University of Texas's History Department, and postdoctoral fellowships from the National Academy of Education/Spencer Foundation and the University of Illinois' Asian American Studies Program. She is a U.S. East Coast-born second-generation Filipinx tenure-track dropout currently living in East Austin, Texas.



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In Case of Emergency

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June 12, 2023