

Draw me a Veve—*Fe yon Veve Pou Mwen*
Poems about Haitian Vodou

Draw me a Veve:
Guede Fatigue Zonbi

When I say no
this cross I bare
the earth to dig

I am already breathing
from beneath
disgrace

Pulsing dead weight
my body dry and cold
as if I were breathing
through a plastic bag
in a paper world
floating unevenly

My mouth rattles like I'm not sure
I'm here

My throat becomes
this wormhole to nowhere
I am looking for a pulse

on this papier-machee
body of mine
stinking from the rib

My feet stubbornly cling
to the ground
sticky eyelids half shut
inviting no ritual
no tribal gesture
The world my eyes see
tastes of burnt coffee

And I give in to the
the slushuice
of sinking earth
dryly
making a joke of my heart
like theoretical teeth
or the idea of rest

I chew dry spaces
and distant skin
then spit them out
like paper balls
My hands shrink
to create new habits
to write about things
to believe I am not dead

My unwilling body
can only see space
*I want to show you
what it means to breathe.*

Draw me a Veve:

Light on the Machete

“Kabrit Manyen Fe”—Racine Mapou De Azor
“And the iron hit the goat” translated from Creole

Sunlight on the machete
that cuts the coconut
The juice wets my cheek
Thank you sir
for that sound

When you’re not shaping up
you’re sharpening up
Ovid my coconut vendor
for a year who taught me
how to use a machete
and break fruit
Now I break glass to this

Between Port-au-Prince and Miami
what’s seen?

The rhythm
of cutting coconuts
how they pop open
after the machete drops
a goat's head
cut the same way
marks the ritual

Does the light
on my kitchen knife
in Miami
shine the same
Is my reflection the same
on the blade
chopping meat
or Miami avocados
purchased not straight from vendor

You have to clean the guts
after you yank them
from the animal
It's why my mother
always hates eating tripe

I like the stench
hiding below
whether the soil

erodes with rain
and floods streets with trash
or
the road gets clearer after
and stretches into wet emulsions
on paved streets
drained
over swampland

Cut a pineapple with a machete
and you see the cannibal
'suck me dry
you'll still come back
even if it stings
even if it tastes the same'
my golden slice
my work says to me

*When the light hits the shrubs
we speak pineapple*

Draw me a Veve:

The Beach Breeze and The Saturday Bug

Aida Wedo E Guede Nouvavou

There is always something to remember
some task
some tribulation

some joke
some past
how violent the cumulus
of memory and anticipation

Today the sky looks moist
with dreams and death
Two days and almost no sun
like I was walking
through cotton

But here, now
an air of promise
on the beach breeze
the sky a blue bowl
holding marshmallows

And
some room for a surprise
a rainbow sharp
as a blade
cutting through fruit
through the violence of things
and narratives

It's like I can smell it
the smell of mother
the rainbow's moist generosity

the new view
the new luck.

Draw me a Veve:

House cleaning blues in Black and White

In my dealings with the dust
I had to be diplomatic
My bathroom mirror cleaned
the face staring
acquiescing
that I could not love
beyond intention

This face weighed in fear
need, rage and doubt
that I could love it
I could love anything

To the injured butterfly
I pick up from the floor
to sound of sink water
down the drain
what am I?

I have been
to the point of no return
broken every ritual

I know of crimson and violet
of the mystery of volition
pulling my innards apart
to the taste of crime and bile
inside a hollow thorax
like I had nothing to begin with

Whenever a ritual is destroyed
a new one must replace it
or an empty space takes hold
and bares the fruit of death
this loneliness
just another vanishing act
in space
the stink of shame still coiled
and staring back from the toilet

Now these smudged eyes again
that thing they seek and avoid
and the cockroach near the can
I'd like to befriend
'ay you
crawler
don't we all run
from the same
mistake'

It always grosses me

to kill them.

Draw me a Veve:

The fruit and the conch

Between sea and sky
shades of blue
fading
as in a charcoal drawing
a two-sided mirror
revealing depth
and nothing
nothing and depth
but for a rich surface
shaded with blue
like cold soot

Skin, veins and coconut
milk
in the crowd
Pearly, lusting eyes
cautious with their ripeness
tucked flesh moving briny
skin holding weight
like fruit
the whole thing
smelling of human juice
an atmosphere the flavor

of pineapple, harkened
through its core

Shades and tones
of yellow and red
fun and funny
and hungry
parceled with purple
but for a blue
sky and ocean
this concert on the beach
heads and skin
just a darker red
called brown
glowing
under black and yellow
hair and the hot sun
like thick peppers

Harbor this secret:
how the waves slipslap
on these shore rocks
tells of the chorus of the cave
of how depth comes
from the same timeless
hollows
that betray hunger.