

Skeleton Architecture

On Risk and Refuge

ROOF

after a week of daily heavy snow I want to praise my roof first
the acute angle at which it descends from the ridgepole
and second that it is black the color absorbing
all the other colors so that even now as arctic air
blows in from the plains my roof burns off from underneath
the dazzling snow dense layers of particles which are tiny
specks of trash sheathed in wet cloud
what chance do they have against my roof even at night
the snowpack over my head breaks apart and slides on its own melting
down from the eaves as though my roof had shrugged I hear snow
thump to the ground a cleansing sound the secret of my roof
is standing seams the raised ridges
bonding the separate panels to one another an old
wound that has healed no lapped shingles catching the wind
no ice jam at the eaves no sending my beloved out with an axe
no roof caved in from the weight of snow as happened in 1924 only
another thump as a slab of snow lets loose leaving my roof
gleaming in the wet residue it takes what it needs
from the life source and sheds the rest a useful
example if I were starting over

Ellen Bryant Voigt

From "Shelter"

...
I thought of it looking
for shelter, coming only into the porch
to a nest at the corner the door made
where it met the jamb, the whole of it
carved with leaves and varnished
in the summer when the landlord repainted.
Or flying into the shapes of blowing trees
in the door window.

And I thought of three tame trees where I walk that
had brushed my head and filled it with dreams that
fell in the summer
to be cut for firewood.

I found a broken shovel
that sits at the side of the house
and buried it bare in a break in the clouds.
Beside the house, under the hawthorn.

As I walked back to the stairs
the box fell open, and chips
shaped like esses and ees
flurried out on the wind like flakes of snow. . . .

Laura Jensen



Poetry Is Not A Luxury

July 10 - September 27, 2020

Curated by
Maymanah Farhat

Highlighting artists who approach the
book arts as experimental media with
the aim of drawing attention to
sociopolitical issues

Poetry Is Not a Luxury considers how book arts have contributed to the recording of oppositional subjectivities in the U.S. The exhibition is titled after Audre Lorde's 1977 essay on the intersections of creativity and activism that were not only essential to her own work but to a diverse group of feminist thinkers at the time. Recognizing that both creative work and activism are driven by subjectivity, Lorde argues that for women poetry is not a luxury but a vital necessity, as it provides a framework through which survival and the desire for change can be articulated, conceptualized, and transformed into meaningful action.

Poetry is Not a Luxury features artists who approach book arts in a similar way, namely as experimental media that foreground subjectivity and lend to intimate aesthetic experiences with the aim of drawing attention to sociopolitical issues. Since the mid twentieth century, artist books, broadsides, mail art, and zines have been essential to artists seeking to bring greater awareness to ongoing marginalization and oppression (e.g. incarceration, gentrification, immigration, and war), arguably due to the widely recognizable and accessible nature of these art forms.

... poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence. It forms the quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action.

Audre Lorde

A LITANY FOR SURVIVAL

For those of us who live at the shoreline
standing upon the constant edges of decision
crucial and alone
for those of us who cannot indulge
the passing dreams of choice
who love in doorways coming and going
in the hours between dawns
looking inward and outward
at once before and after
seeking a now that can breed
futures
like bread in our children's mouths
so their dreams will not reflect
the death of ours:

For those of us
who were imprinted with fear
like a faint line in the center of our foreheads
learning to be afraid with our mother's milk
for by this weapon
this illusion of some safety
to be found the heavy-footed hoped to silence
us
For all of us
this instant and this triumph
We were never meant to survive.

And when the sun rises we are afraid
it might not remain
when the sun sets we are afraid
it might not rise in the morning
when our stomachs are full we are afraid
of indigestion
when our stomachs are empty we are afraid
we may never eat again
when we are loved we are afraid
love will vanish
when we are alone we are afraid
love will never return
and when we speak we are afraid
our words will not be heard nor welcomed
but when we are silent
we are still afraid

So it is better to speak
remembering
we were never meant to survive

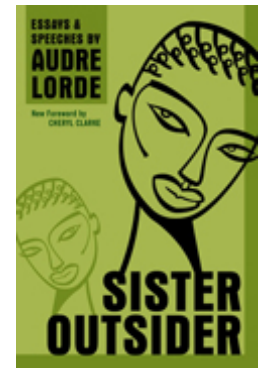
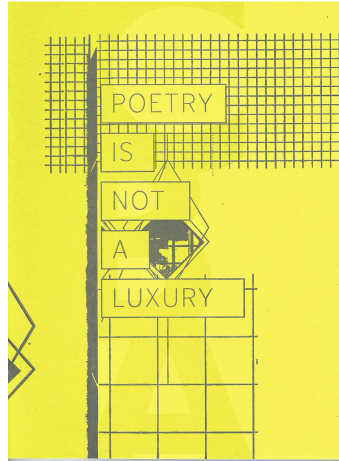
Audre Lorde, *The Black Unicorn* (1978)

The strength of women lies in recognizing differences between us as creative, and then standing to those distortions which are inherited without blame but which are now ours to alter.

“The Uses of Anger”

<https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/speeches-african-american-history/1981-audre-lorde-uses-anger-women-responding-racism/>

What we must do is commit ourselves to some future that can include each other and to work toward that future with the particular strengths of our individual identities. And in order for us to do this, we must allow each other our differences at the same time as we recognize our sameness.” “Learning from the 60s”



Lorde was a polymath, a poly-mother. She made you want to invent new words. She created unique forms and encouraged a generation of people to fuse the personal and the political. She was passionate about the body as well as the body politic.

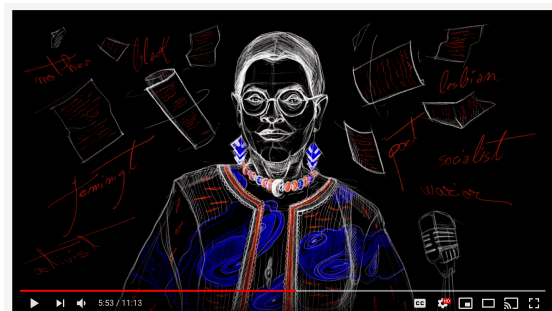
Jackie Kay

<https://www.newstatesman.com/culture/books/2017/09/feminist-lesbian-warrior-poet-rediscovering-work-audre-lorde>

Poetry is the way we help give name to the nameless so it can be thought...Poetry is not only dream and vision, it is the skeleton architecture of our lives. It lays a foundation for a future of change.

The quality of light by which we scrutinize our lives has direct bearing upon the product which we live, and upon the changes which we hope to bring about through those lives.

It is within this light that we form those ideas by which we pursue our magic and make it realized. This is poetry as illumination, for it is through poetry that we give name to those ideas which are, until the poem, nameless and formless-about to be birthed, but already felt. births (precedes) understanding. Audre Lorde, “Poetry is Not a Luxury” (1977)



A screenshot from “A Litany for Survival in Pandemic Times—after Audre Lorde” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i6quZqXUOLA>

We live in a world full of the most intense contradictions, and we must find ways to use the best we have—ourselves, our work—to bridge those contradictions, to learn the lessons that those contradictions teach. And that is the work of the poet in each one of us, to envision the world that has not yet been. And to work with every fiber of who we are to make the reality pursuit of those visions irresistible.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3IfDLEb_n4w