

KUSUDAMA

POETRY AND TRANSLATIONS BY ERIC SELLAND

The Condition of Music (2000)

Inventions (2007)

Still Lives (2012)

Arc Tangent (2014)

Beethoven's Dream (2015)

Object States (2018)

TRANSLATIONS

Takagai Hiroya, *Rush Mats* (1999)

Takashi Hiraide, *The Guest Cat* (2014)

Genki Kawamura, *If Cats Disappeared from the World* (2019)

Kiwao Nomura, *The Day Laid Bare* (2020)

KUSUDAMA

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translated by Eric Selland

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KUSUDAMA

ROOSTER

The rising sun beyond the top of the pines
like looking up at a popular picture scroll
Calls to mind a line
from the mythical accounts –
‘Collect the birds of sudden darkness and make them sing,
bring the Goddess out’
rooster that walks
rooster that sleeps
Upon examination, the powerful figure undoubtedly holds
slime, slender tubes and feathers collecting
Gold claws and dynamos
imitations
On the earth of straw and annihilation of living things
the somersaulting cock
tells the time
Rushes at the water’s edge sway
and the jar of jam breaks
spring that quivers in the diaphragm
Hairpins fall
from the jet-black hair of mothers and daughters
Make ready the cooking knives and camphor
inside a hut dreamed while napping
ready the chamber pot for father sitting on the moss
A meditative darkness
the blacksmith’s bellows (womb) contracts
chicken pecking at vegetables
chicken that lays an egg

Is this a world of grace –
in the cornfields
on the icy peaks
‘The men are fighting faraway’
brightness of the sparks
Without looking up at the empty sky
like a hen
strangled
‘The women straddle an open grave and give difficult birth’
things abundantly dispersed
Types of seeds and dried leaves
and now some feathers
like amulets
Dance lightly up in the watery sky of evening

SHADOW PICTURES

Disappearing
in the shadows of the dried grass and underbrush
the children playing hide-and-seek

At a crossroads
frightened by the eyes of a dead horse
choked by the smell of marvel-of-Peru

A young girl also hides inside of something
'there is boiled-down fish glue
and rice gruel'
at the far side of a hut covered by cedar bark

Her kimono loosened, falling over her shoulders, mother mounts
not the aging father
but something that looks like the water god

The thunder becomes distant
and the green corn stalks stand up
darker than the surface of the earth

Damselflies
and paper images float off
to a rustling bamboo grove

Summer's end
'the ruby
grows a bunch of grapes'
the young girl conceives the spirit of things

Like a line in a poem

KUSUDAMA

I

Within a hedge fragrant with chrysanthemums
The banquet has begun
Grandfather slits a chicken's throat
and grandmother soaks a mouse nearby
My father has carried the spirits of the ancestors
to a grassy river bed
And questions, voice raised
what is it mother carries of her own will
The neighbors glance furtively
undoubtedly bathed in light
she employs a pair of large testicles
raise three cheers and sing the national anthem
My sister, all dressed up like a battleship,
bites into a plum
its simplified interior
throbs
the crimson gate opens onto the world
Beyond a plate of brass
the one dying
is my elder brother
The darkness of a far-off field in spring
with heat waves oscillating
grows like fingers of bracken
This is my little sister
anyone would feel like applauding
The night the family line is set straight
and banquet trays set straight in a row

I toddle all through the house
and secretly desire a daddy longlegs
A model of the family's bodies is complete
divided into blue, yellow and red
its most sublime points still shine like gold
A portrait of the emperor Jimmu
a cry rings out:
the kusudama has split open
and the sacred farm implements are lost
in the mundane ...

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I cut the water inside the pot with a sickle
and shout for it to retain its severed surface'
The autumn of disastrous St. Elmo's fires
my father stops vomiting
Look out the bay window
and drop tears onto the rocks
One great auk
A brandished
fuse
Within a circle
which passes into infinity
The plump ridge of a shipwreck's belly can be seen

Waves waves semen shed
 Static electricity is produced in the inner wall of a jelly fish
 Which swims around the belly of a pregnant woman and sinks
 into the swirling waves
 sense exchange irradiation peeling termination
 the sound and raw smell of death

 Oh merciful Buddha
 I am unable to conclude
 that this was my sister

 Certainly at dawn
 a diamond-shaped piece of land filled with the dead will be found
 Sipping up their bowls of hot soup
 mother and little sister cheerfully
 set out to pick chamomile flowers

 On the periphery of the sundry goods
 is a deep blue garden

 Where swans float dreamily
 a man can be seen screaming in the flames
 a bundle of sutras are folded up

 A horned serpent
 is held hotly in his hand
 sentences studded with diamonds and word-spirits
 Clipping off the chill dry leaves
 mother and sister venture toward the cliffs
 look at their cat-feet
 a winter mist enshrouds them

 I am fighting from day to day
 figuratively speaking, or calligraphically

The enemy may be hiding in a snow dugout
Language
 or form
On top of some fresh straw
Several eggs have been laid and left behind