

Phyla of Joy

Poems by Karen An-hwei Lee



“Karen An-hwei Lee’s third book is a beautiful and sustained meditation on the impermanence of humanity’s essential components: memory, spirituality, emotion, thought...”

Contemplative and linguistically sophisticated, *Phyla of Joy* is simply exquisite – ‘ink and stanza / flow like wind on grass.’”

– Rigoberto González

There’s an undeniable audacity in a poet using the word “joy” in our modern world. In her new book, Karen An-hwei Lee combines scientific precision and an appetite for far-flung vocabularies with a fascination for the sources of rapturous emotion.

In poems that roam from the intimacy of prayer to the art of brewing tea, from bamboo-related famine to quasars, the globe’s minor seas, and the nuptial flight of ants, *Phyla of Joy* reaches toward ecstasy.

Karen An-hwei Lee

is the author of *Ardor* (Tupelo Press, 2008) and *In Medias Res* (Sarabande Books, 2004), selected for the Kathryn A. Morton Prize by Heather McHugh and chosen for the Norma Farber First Book Award by Cole Swensen. A former writing resident at the MacDowell Colony of the Arts and the Millay Arts Colony and recipient of a National Endowment of the Arts grant, she currently chairs the English Department at a faith-based college in southern California, where she is also a novice harpist.

from *Phyla of Joy*:

Prayer for the Underground Supplicant

Remember old flowers cast in your rustling arms,
liverwurst wrapped in newspaper, one blistering pound

or the moon’s cracked birch bark
frail as a dollar on a blind woman’s face, pale hydrangea

shredded and falling in rare archives, a paper subway
in a supplicant’s underground darkness, swaying,

and a melanin-rich flower in this fluorescent tube
translocating water to and from unassailable air.

This is your graduated body, no ordinary
engine in the night.



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