

VOLUME 1/3

**POEMS
FROM THE FIRST ANNUAL
ARTISTS THRIVE SUMMIT**

SEPTEMBER 6-9, 2017
BEREA, KENTUCKY

**KAVINDU
“KAVI”
ADE**

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ADE

“What is the noise in the way of artists thriving?”

How seldom silence is, the whole world is busy
with something and we are no exception.

We think our work can save a nation
and maybe that's its own tragedy.

But today we walk out into the fields of Berea,
remember that somewhere there is a quiet
river running through everything.

That there was this -- a forest painted in green
before we were even here.

The sun breaks through the trees
and we watch some strange creature unfurl
its white web, and if only for a moment
the city inside us, sleeps.

The facilitator reads a quote:

It's something like *"enemies are people
whose stories you haven't heard, or
whose face you haven't seen"*

It's nice - I guess. In a liberal "we are the world way,"
something I would have believed in another time.
But I'm 27 and I don't need to know the face

behind the boot on my neck to know that I am losing
air beneath its weight. I don't need to know why
you burned the crops to know the field is on fire

and a family will starve.

I know this like I know justice is just a word to be chanted,
and the news story will never say we were innocent

even when we were children laughing on a playground.

Here in this room, we are laying ourselves bare

The woman on my right says "I am tired of being betrayed"

And I know exactly what she means.

*I come from/
I stand for/
I thrive when/*

I come from I stand for I thrive when
This is its own kind of mantra,
to name something is to make it holy
and this is another way of saying

We are here,
present; grounded in the work,
we call it forth,
acknowledge its weight.
We hope that someone will bare it with us,
hope that there is a shoulder to lean on
when each burden outgrows
the smallness of our hands.
We all came from a different world
into this one, where we must stand
and create and yell and yell and yell
until there is no voice but this one,
until there is no void in any of us
and all that needs to be made whole — is.

**“Who is expendable?
Who will be sacrificed?”**

Appalachia sits beneath the Heartland of America
and what is more American than greed —
than building empires with bones?

In Appalachia there is coal to be plundered
which means there is blood
to be sown into the soil.

Beneath the mountain, the poor cover their lungs
in stone and soot, in pursuit of promised dreams,
and the rich have never even seen the soil.

In Kentucky the bathroom wall says “all niggers die,”
and the etching is also on my flesh
and I shrink back into some ancient blackness
some silent shuffle to conceal the wound.

In the gift shop the mammy doll mocks me
and none of the white folks even notice,
and I’m not supposed to be offended
because this is just southern nostalgia.

Don’t you want to strum a dulcimer?
Don’t you want to string up a nigger?
Somewhere close I know there’s a white sheet
blowing on a clothesline.

The facilitator charges us
to stand in each other's bodies
and make conclusions about who is in front of us.

What stories we each have to tell
based on a perception of posture,
I am the mannequin first.

I try not to smile in my awkwardness,
my partner begins a study of my face,
my arms, folded across my chest.

She imitates my position
and channels what she thinks is my voice, says:
"I can't believe they made me work with this white woman"

And this is the pinnacle of white imagination of Black thought,
I wish I could conjure disappointment
but that would have required an expectation.

Later, she apologizes with her self conscious mouth
if she "may have offended me,"
but I'm too busy laughing inside myself.

We talk about justice
and do not count who is missing.
A conversation is only as good
as the voices at the table.
Everything is theory now,
there are no answers
We talk about justice in the abstract,
but who is willing to give up their seat at the table?
We all know the rhetoric
But who knows the community?
The most amazing artists — have no access,
And there can be no revolution in their absence.
All the gates are locked
and no one will admit to keeping the keys.

“What has shaped the person you are today?”

A woman draws a body of water,
tells how each wave could have dragged her beneath.
I think of arms that fight until a shore is found
“I was learning to swim, learning to survive.”

A woman draws a body engulfed by something sinister,
speaks of a marriage that rose and fell like the current,
how it was its own kind of drowning, “a darkness
that could have killed me.”

I draw a body stolen by the bullet,
tell how the verdict came and kicked us in the chest,
how my life has never been the same since,
just something split, into a before and an after.

BIOGRAPHY

Kavindu “Kavi” Ade is a Poet, Activist, and Arts Educator of Afro & Indigenous Caribbean descent. Kavi received their BA in Social Justice with a concentration on Art for Social Change & Gender Justice. Their work confronts the many manifestations of violence perpetuated against the Black-Trans-Queer body. Through poetry they navigate despair, rage, and grief, but also joy, wonder, and becoming. Using art as resistance they create transformative dialogue and space for healing communities that falls outside of the realms of whiteness, patriarchal power, and cis-heteronormativity. Kavi is a 2016 Leeway Transformation Award Recipient, Brave New Voices Alum, and Watering Hole Poetry Fellow.

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