

Transcript

BLACK BALANCE

Poem by Britta B.

I am only a portrait
when they practice their aquarium eyes
on my blackness

I might have spoken
but the shutter's flash froze my mouth
I am not the thought that counts

And the betrayal is not that I stick out
like a windswept umbrella
but that I appear invisible

Had I been born with all my tongues
I might have been preoccupied
with the warmth of some banality

I might have stopped to gaze the clouds
or found a profit
I could take for granted

But I leap across the page
the wall, the room, the globe
and somehow, I am only the barrier they build upon me?

Is this blackness too much?
Is this blackness real?
When I have attended their tables

I might have fractured the ceiling
with my lack of regard
for their heelprint of dominance

Why aim skyward
when what is hidden and ancient within me

is the will to live wide?

I funnel my fury that lives
within the voice within me
and feel its roar finding traction

like the wingspan of a railroad
zipping the cleavage
of a quarantined city

to puncture this portrait
to bloom what is alive in me unspoken
I must interfere with wonder:

Had my ancestors been given today's future
who might I have been?
Between red margins

and white edge of page
I flicker my rage
and fix my aperture back at you

We don't have to touch
for you to recognize my betrayal as your own
We do this to each other

This anger can poison
or it can invent new songs of poise
Against the hum of history

I will arrive
and I will not live without language or luggage
any less precise

I meet you to recover
the dream not deferred but survived
behind every black poet's pen, every black painter's palette

every black musician's axe, and every
black photographer's eye
Life, giving life giving wide, wide life

[Applause]

Thank you. I hope you're enjoyed my poetry. I want to give a quick thank you to the folks at Agnes Etherington Art Centre for inviting me to have this honour of using my voice as part of the Black Portraitures Conference. I hope you all enjoy the rest of your week and take good care. Peace.