

Eileen Tabios – Three Poems

From The Ashbery Riff-Offs

*—where each poem begins with 1 or 1-2 lines from “Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror”
by John Ashbery*

Witnessed in the Convex Mirror: The Temporal

Here and there, in cold pockets
of remembrance, whispers out of time
A man howls from “La Traviata” in
a room whose walls of ancient teak
once formed an explorer’s ship
A blue peeks through clouds as
a promise I can no longer remember
except for the involvement of
a broken pearl necklace loosening
its cloudy orbs. I am exhausted
from living in the dim shadows
of a movie forged from the margins
of capitalism. Where are the arms
in which, like Violetta, I can revive
for a moment, though it be eternal
only in a painting. So much beauty
exists in the temporal—it glows with
the warmth of a perfume’s baptism

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Witnessed in the Convex Mirror: Hiatus

The point. Aping naturalness may be the first step toward achieving an inner calm. A street implodes buildings crash toward a sinkhole, creatures run and your face is a sniper’s mask with eyes lasering to the point of weakness which began the latest devastation. Always lurking is the next “latest devastation”—a president gives in, with a shrug, to winking lobbyists forcing their bellies into conversations began by scientists, the views begin to brown, and for the first time the capital’s cherry trees fail to produce the white flowers which account for 10% of global tourism. Yet the absence of clicking cameras fail to cease the Atlantic ice shelf’s spawning of icebergs Thus, you pack for a mountain cabin in, say Montana. In its solar-powered refrigerator carrots will never lose their crispness from your lack of attention, huddle though they may in the farthest recess behind a six-pack you use to take off the edge when evenings begin and the cactus releases the day to bloom It’s another day, just one more day, before...

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by John Ashbery

Witnessed in the Convex Mirror: The Now of Heaven

Pope Clement and his court were “stupefied”
by it, according to Vasari, and promised a commission
But religious promises are consistent (and tiresome)
with exhortations to look to the next life for earthly
rewards. As if the poor peasant’s child will not become
another poor peasant. As if the ill-educated parent
will not bear ill-educated children. As if billionaires would
still contribute to charities without tax-deductions. Don’t
get me wrong: exceptions always abound. But cunning
strategists—especially the Machiavellian operators at
the Vatican—don’t develop policies based on exceptions
As if “St. Barts,” “airport friction,” “Bulgari Magsonic
Sonnerie Tourbillon,” “Casa Antica” and “Exeter” are mere
words instead of codes for belonging to a “1%” or their
wannabes. We can learn from European oenophiles
and forest rangers: acquire *Vitis vinifera* for your children
and drink those dusty bottles intimate with cobwebs in
ancestral cellars; or plant two saplings for every tree taken
down. Do good *and* reap the rewards for good deeds
now. “Heaven Is A Place On Earth,” sings Belinda Carlisle
a belief that increases the ranks of unemployed priests—
but such is an effect to applaud, and attainable: as Belinda
sang, “in heaven love comes first / We’ll make heaven
a place on earth // ... in this world we’re just beginning / to
understand the miracle of living / ... I’m not afraid anymore”

Eileen R. Tabios loves books and has released over 50 collections of poetry, fiction, essays, and experimental biographies from publishers in nine countries and cyberspace. Her 2018 poetry collections include *HIRAETH: Tercets From the Last Archipelago*; *MURDER DEATH RESURRECTION: A Poetry Generator*; the bilingual edition (English/Spanish) of *One, Two, Three: Selected Hay(na)ku Poems*; and *TANKA: Vol. 1*. She is the inventor of the poetry form “hay(na)ku” whose 15-year anniversary in 2018 will be celebrated in the United States with exhibitions and readings at the San

Francisco Public Library and Saint Helena Public Library. Translated into eight languages, she also has edited, co-edited or conceptualized 15 anthologies of poetry, fiction and essays as well as served as editor or guest editor for various literary journals. Her writing and editing works have received recognition through awards, grants and residencies. More information is available at <http://eileenrtabios.com>