

## NINA SERRANO

Nina Serrano: (USA, 1934) Her poetry publications include "Heart Songs: The Poetry of Nina Serrano" Serrano's poetry is widely anthologized most recently in "Under the Fifth Sun: Latino Literature from California" (Hey Day Press) and "Farewell to Armaments: Poems for Peace" (Estuary Press). She is an Alameda County Arts Commissioner.

### ALL MY LIFE THERE HAS ALWAYS BEEN A WAR

At five, my first movie  
There were men on horses killing each other  
Lots of men and lots of noise  
Lots of dust from horses' hooves  
It was the Frontier War to own America  
But I didn't know that then  
Only knew that I didn't like the killing  
I left the dark theater  
But the killing never stopped.

### ON THE SHORE ON THE EVE OF WAR

The edge inclines  
bringing you deeper  
into the water's embrace  
Enfolds you  
in its powerful flow  
How strong the water is  
So quick to change  
with the wind  
and the electro magnetic pull of the moon  
and the movements of fish below birds above  
I feel like one grain of sand on the shore  
One grain in the sea of time  
One grain in this vast universe  
of stars galaxies and infinite space ever changing  
One grain compacted with others  
One moist grain on the edge where the water  
stretches to touch  
to be carried with currents  
and returned with the tide  
like love everlasting  
that washes in waves  
the shore  
with divine grace.

## ON FACING YOUR FACE

Fraudulent facelifts  
stretch pure wrinkles  
earned by worry  
spontaneous smiles  
false smiles formal smiles  
smiles from deep inside  
smiles to cover embarrassment  
smiles welcoming  
smiles enticing  
smiles disarming  
Frowns winks  
Eyebrows raising in surprise  
Mouth wide open in horror  
Lips puckering for a kiss  
kiss puckering for lips  
Nose sniffing flowers  
Ears wiggling to impress friends  
Crying scrunching up the whole face  
tears falling down  
All this and more make a full life full of pure wrinkles  
Fraudulent facelifts stretch them flat.

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## VOICE OF THE TURTLE

(In Biblical times the turtle dove's song was the herald of spring.)  
One day Walt Whitman, Langston Hughes, and Emily Dickinson drove with us  
We parked in a pleasant spot  
and they waited patiently in the car  
with a bag of oranges  
Oh –the words they emitted  
words that spurred the newly appearing buds to burst  
towards bloom  
By the time we returned they were restless and urged us the sea  
They took up space in the front seat although others driving by would think I was sitting in the passenger seat  
But you told me later that you could see my face by looking in the rear view mirror though I sat next to you  
At the sea shore they took off as mysteriously as they came  
But they left these words  
that bounce between us  
All these words  
Walt, Langston, and Emily hijacked the car  
But we were too polite to mention it  
What control did we have in celestial company  
Dispossessed by the first lady who evicted them from her lah dee dah symposium  
they found refuge with us attracted by the oranges  
They felt war brewing and needed to rest their age-old souls  
Looking for mouths to set words free  
Looking for peace  
They left because they could not find peace here in this dimension  
And the next day death dropped bombs and limbs and heads and lives shattered  
Words rained from the media a bloody red to a marching tempo louder than poems until war pretended to cease  
and foreign soldiers stalked the streets and threats of new and permanent war shadowed the lands  
even though it was spring  
I await the voice of the turtle.

## MYSTERY OF DEATH

You stand in frightless wonder  
in the darkness  
as unseen animals rustle  
brushing against you  
Behind bushes branches snap  
strange shapes pass  
as clouds cover the moon

Elemental and ancient  
life moves over the planet  
Everything was here before you  
earth, wind, water, air and fire  
Recycled elements join and un-join  
in new configurations of matter  
Death & Life as different as a simple breath  
as flowing blood circulating  
as simple as complex connections  
as taking in transforming and letting go  
So simple that you know death when you see it  
the icy feet the empty stare  
But how can you explain it?  
To grasp death is to understand the twinkling of star  
that once existed  
and shines down to guide you in the dark  
of existence  
Long millenniums ago  
many elements interconnected to create a star  
But even after all those connections disintegrated  
you still see it as a star  
as that moment in time that it was  
Where are those particles now?  
Are they you?  
Are they me?  
They say you are composed of star dust  
When you look up  
at the sky  
are you seeing elements of yourself  
in an earlier configuration  
Do you see with your current eyes  
your earliest ancestors?  
In the light of the dead  
you find your way through darkness  
frightless and full of wonder.

## COPING WITH PERSONAL EUPHORIA AT THE SAME TIME AS A GLOBAL WAR IS ABOUT TO BREAK OUT

It feels like  
I am walking a tight rope  
but in reality solid earth  
holds my feet  
and the mixed up load above them  
My head in the clouds  
looks down  
and sees the grass  
growing in the sidewalk cracks  
My head dancing in the ballroom  
of castles in Spain  
looks out a window and sees further  
than the rainbow's end  
where the cement street  
leads me home.

## LONG HAIRED POETS

Alameda Poets for Peace Reading 3/5/03

Long haired poets like angels send hymns  
on vibrating sound waves  
caressing ears in the margins of language  
Soft vowels rub against hard consonants  
reaching deep into the psyche  
and out into the cosmos  
Moods and meanings mingle like intertwining souls  
like throbbing hearts flying like comets  
on wings above white capped waves  
on the skin of the sea.