



HARVARD UNIVERSITY

David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies

DEMOCRACY
& memory
IN LATIN AMERICA

ARTS@DRCLAS

ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF POEMS FEATURED IN THE ARTS@DRCLAS FALL 2013 EXHIBITION:
MEMORY AND DEMOCRACY IN LATIN AMERICAN POETRY

Translated by Erin Goodman

Roque Dalton (El Salvador)
Poetic Art 1974

Poetry
Forgive me for having helped you understand
that you're not made only of words.

Octavio Paz (Mexico)
Mexico City: The 1968 Olympiad

Clarity
(perhaps it's worth writing across the purity
of this page)
is not clear:
it's a fury
(yellow and black
accumulation of bile in Spanish)
spread across the page.
Why?
Shame is wrath
turned against oneself:
if
an entire nation is ashamed
it's a lion poised
to pounce.
(The municipal
employees wash the blood
in the Plaza de los Sacrificios).
Now look,
stained
before having said anything
worthwhile:
that's clarity.

Alejandra del Río (Chile)

Make a country for yourself, of skins, rooftops and shipwrecks
make it for your feet to feel the tickling of the stars.
Gather the taste of its cities along the way,
the confused word of its roads
and fit out garb to take you in.

Give your country that strange fruit of a flag
for every junction deserves an icon
of wood or metal or of the wind of pilgrims
to preach in stories a patchwork land.

Your country feeds and shelters the thirsty and the hollow
in the vastness of your own body
unknown bends will always be springing,
gestures of hunger and shreds prodding
the permanence of every second, every certainty, every caress.

Keep the wise pored over the task of deciphering and dwelling
in the arms, streets and legs
the rivers of yellow honey, the bird of the ravenous mouth
and the eye of course that to all things brings its watermark
the eye that never leaves a single plaza.

Don't build cemeteries and trust yourself long-lasting for in
your country
life makes every instant recovered from death cost dearly.

And raise your country like a tower precisely in the place of
weeping.

Enrique Lihn (Chile)
Alice in Nightmareland

In the land of nightmares, poor Alice
didn't have a chance to test out her logic:
she was really belittled when she shrank in size.
There the awful Queen of Hearts meant nothing
terror, the flip side of apathy
dulled inventiveness rather than building it
and, behind her, a broken mirror through which it was impossible to return,
it abandoned her to seven years of bad luck
in the world of divorce of poetry and of the absurd
(because delirium, too, comes in prose).

The girl, which due to her situation was no longer such, reached an early maturity
for until then she hadn't seen the slums of London
of the beginning of the industrial age, nor brothels nor hospitals
where the dying
line up

That and other London influences were what she saw now in an undeveloped country
and saviors of saviors of saviors of the homeland, useless like the king
or fascinated by beheadings, like the queen.
Pools of blood in place of roses painted red.

She wrote a diary that was stripped from her when they dragged her to the violence
to the torture.

Augusto de Campos (Brazil)

WANTED
TO CHANGE EVERYTHING
CHANGED EVERYTHING
NOWAFTEREVERYTHING
EXEVERYTHING
I CHANGE

Nuno Ramos (Brazil)
Tombstones

Little by little we forget about them, our dead ones, while they sink into the earth or while they're burned, or thrown, weighted down, into the sea. They disappear from our sight and we transfer them to concrete capsules, to the marble of their tombstones, to emblems of stone or laid out on the grass – wooden crosses, oriental hexagons, fish eyes, hawk wings, two-finger amulets – which would be sheer despair. We build landmarks and monuments, small roadside altars, miniature citadels to try to forget them. I wonder if each little hovel is actually a foreseen gravestone, and if ever a single brick was laid with a purpose other than this one – if everything that would seem to be for practical purpose, shelter from inclement weather, cozy interiority, isn't actually a stone of future death, bellowing nearby. Tombstones pave forgetting, allowing life to do what it is supposed to do, to go on without the dead (which will include us all).