

May 2003

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Alix Olson

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Recommended Citation

Olson, Alix (2003) "Dorothea Tanning," *Seattle Journal for Social Justice*: Vol. 2: Iss. 1, Article 48.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.law.seattleu.edu/sjsj/vol2/iss1/48>

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Dorothea Tanning

Alix Olson

There's this Dorothea Tanning painting
and the arm of the artist is barely breaking through.
There's a gash in the canvas
and that's how I feel standing here in front of you.
It's a furious grief,
it's fear scoping out the mad,
it's this submarine of artists all launching towards their shore of sad.
See, we were all eagle-spread under America's weight that day,
eyes starry, striped in steel bars, hate-studded
with the slogans and logos of manifest destiny,
shoulders slumped in homage to our shrivelling, shuddering century.
As retaliation became our password,
and the username: three thousand lives spent
and the message sent was in jingoistic text
and we all got sick fast from the war-nacular virus attached.
As F-16's quickly colonized our city
and Brown deli owners scrambled for flag mercy,
and activists gambled with emotional heresy,
and the budget of the death toll was quickly tabulated,
and balanced against capital and CIA fabrications.
See, that day grabbed us all by the collar of our questions
and held us hostage there.
And to second-guess the quarter truths was a sudden
double dare.
And still, we hacked up history like hairballs,
quiet cats on tiptoe
reaching towards subversion,

flip-flopping on our tiny block
generationally uncoached in our courageous contortions.
And sometimes it seems, there is nothing left to protect,
liberty de-civilized, freedom kept in Dow Jones check.
As Donny and George grab the reins
and steer us clear towards nuclear brink,
well I guess I thought life was meant to be lived, then again,
I ain't been asked to think.
Since that day my sister crept from her publishing house
across the bridge and towards the highway,
and my best friend balanced on a Brooklyn roof
as the silvering slipped towards a charcoal skyway.
And my station wagon, for once, hushed her rush,
surrendered firetrucks to the freeway.
And this hot head leaned on her cool hood,
and calculated harm's way.
And her radio was mumbling and her cell phone was buzzing
and some guy somewhere was screaming something
and all she could think was "my god, are they okay?"
But she was one mile of water away
from where she could do anything.
See, there's this Dorothea Tanning painting
and the arm of the artist is barely breaking past
and the media screams "She is cruel, duped, and crass!"
But I squinted, saw her fist, it was not clenched up to swing.
It was a gesture towards dissenting hearts, it was beckoning us in.
There's this Dorothea Tanning painting
and the arm of the artist is barely breaking through.
There's a gash in the canvas,
and that's how I feel
standing here in front of you.