

Seattle City Council

Public Safety, Government Relations, and Arts Committee Meeting

Friday, 2:00 PM, May 26, 2006

Words' Worth

The Poetry Program of the Seattle City Council

Curated by **Jeannette Allée**

Today's poet is **Duane Niatum**

Duane Niatum was born and has lived most of his life in Seattle, that was once upon a time an evergreen city. *The Crooked Beak of Love*, his sixth volume of poetry was published by West End Press, 2000. Duane's work has appeared in over a hundred magazines and translated into thirteen languages. He's the recipient of numerous literary awards, twice nominated for the Pushcart Prize. He's taught at several schools including Western Washington University and read at the International Poetry Festival in Rotterdam and The Library of Congress. Duane is an enrolled member of the Klallam Tribe (Jamestown Band) and his collection of stories based on Klallam legends, as well as, his new poetry collection, *The Pull of the Green Kite* is currently making its rounds with publishers.

Drawings Of The Song Animals

by Duane Niatum

I

Tree frog winks without springing
from its elderberry hideaway.
Before dusk buries the day
I will trust the crumbling earth.

II

Foghorns, the bleached absence
of the Cascade and Olympic mountains.
Elliott Bay sleeps in a shell of haze.
Anchorless as the night,
the blue-winged teal dredges moonlight.

III

Thistle plumed,
a raccoon pillages my garbage.

When did we plug its nose with concrete?
Embed its eyes in chemicals?

IV

The Columbia Basin, a jigsaw of dams.
On the rim of a rotting barrel, a crow.
The remains of a cedar man's salmon trap
and a woman's river song of fins weaving up river,
each season the current wrote the story.

V

Deer crossing the freeway —
mother and children of alpine meadow—
don't graze near us, don't trust our signs.
We hold your ears in our teeth,
your hoofs on our dashboards.
Believe our journey digs the world's grave.

VI

Shells, gravel musings from the deep,
worm dwellers from the labyrinth.
What do you say to the crab crawling
sideways to hide in a blacker layer of the reef?
Does it know which family
member will vanish next?

VII

Bumblebee,
husk of wind and summer's
black and yellow desires.
I join your dance through the field
when the void blooms.

VIII

A lizard appears,
startled by my basket of blackberries.
In the white stream of afternoon
we are lost to the heat.
Forty years to unmask the soul!

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