KALEHUA KIM

Ηā

when I was born I was a girl

I was a girl with a cord wrapped around my neck

I had a cord wrapped around my neck and no breath

I had no breath because until that moment, no one had hit me

no one had hit me and it took time to unravel the cord

it took time to unravel the cord but I feel its weight every day

every day there is a weight, although its source changes

the source changes because matter changes

matter changes by transforming molecules

molecules are in constant motion

the constant motion of children, whose voices echo

children's voices echo across canyons, leap from cliffs

we leap from cliffs when we stretch to seek balance

we stretch, balancing the past behind us and the future ahead

the past of us and the future crawls across an x axis

crawling across an x axis is only one way to look at time

the only way to look at time is to refuse to see time

to refuse time is to refuse everything you ever felt wrapped around your neck

unwrap the cord around your neck

unwrap the time it takes to catch your breath

catch your breath

catch your breath

that is your voice

2023 JAMES WELCH PRIZE

VVINNER

selected by Heid Erdrich

Art by Lehuauakea



J. K. TSOSIE

Brown Anthropocene

part i:

i don't know why i deny

myself tenderness. so, i lay

the lavender on my bedroom shelf

he gathered with calloused hands

i trace with my fingers

their wandering boundaries.

he is wilderness, the sacred loam

untilled new mexican landscape

big bluestem, wolftail, & sand lovegrass

virgin earth caressed

only by soft female rain

níłtsą bi'áád.

his eyebrows thick

midnight briar

his eyes quiet

flickering summer monsoon

his mouth a desert prayer

that created the universe itself.

so, i give in

i give way

into his constellation

blue room, blue bodies,

& blue haematoxylin-stained

nucleus.

part ii:

we are slow

the weight of our bodies

pinning time in place

my skin against

yours, brown

nahasdzáán

my mother's mother

my home.

the lineation of

stone compressed

over time

i am reinvented

—auxochromic

an incantation

the absorption

& reflection

of light.

your skin against

mine, brown

mine, brown

like piñon husk

d careesing

maternal cord caressing

our histories meet.

i am reinvented

—as revelation

two lost ends

fastened together

now, whole

finally knowing itself.

yours, brown

mine, brown.

a geography of flesh

& tributaries of perseverance

fill to the brim

silver canyons

of wounds left

by conquests past

we are brown anthropocene.