ForeWord Reviews

POETRY

Sin Puertas Visibles: An Anthology of Contemporary Poetry by Mexican Women
Jen Hofer, editor
Jen Hofer, translator
University of Pittsburgh Press
978-0-8229-5798-0
(Apr 13, 2003)

Forget butterflies. Forget apron strings, broken hearts, and the anomie of a perpetual teenage romanticism that many readers still expect from Hispanic women's poetry. In her introduction to this unusual assemblage of poets, the editor celebrates the rare event of a collection to be regarded not as "women's poetry" but as poems by women: "It is, astonishingly, not unusual even today to read an anthology, the lengthy table of contents of which contains fewer than five names of women (sometimes as few as none) in a list of perhaps thirty or forty writers."

From submissions garnered through announcements in Mexico's leading newspapers, literary magazines, and the state-run cultural centers of all thirty-one states of the Mexican Republic, Hofer has assembled an anthology of eleven women poets writing today in Mexico. Each poet is given enough space to offer the full sweep of her vision, and in every case the poems themselves are followed by a précis of the poet's impression of, and ambition for, her own work, along with biographical data including her place of origin, education, and published works. Hofer, herself a poet from the San Francisco Bay Area, has published translations in Cross Cultural Poetics, Rhizome, and The Transcendental Friend; her work here is brilliant.

Beginning with "Third World," by Cristina Rivera-Garza, the reader is treated to a rush of surrealism, of brilliant, cacophonous, shocking images that put Dada to shame:

> *There maniacs brought their treadmill-needy eyes, their plain*
> *index fingers*
> *which traced a countenance on the left side of chaos.*
> *There little girls practiced that proclivity for proclivity*
> *while men extolled the cawing of imaginary birds.*

Multitalented poet and dramatist Carla Faesler ends a sonnet about a Mayan human sacrifice:

If they don't want to go up, they are forced
by their hair. In this way, they are dragged,
though it's hard work. It's infuriating,
but with all the festivities, later you forget.

Youngest of the represented poets, Dolores Dorantes, just now thirty, with an impressive range of already published work, favors the short line:
"I say bad words and topple / the tapestry tedium knits / I touch the depths of / all that's confessable."

A ground-breaking for Hispanic women poets to speak of something besides the personal had already been accomplished by a series of intrepid Central American women in their collective cry for liberty and for a whole generation's demand for a decent life; but the poems in this collection, and throughout their wider publication, are inspired not by a political stance but by a deeply individual sense of personal empowerment that runs the gamut of strengths from the esthetically sensitive to the brutally daring, in language, in image, and in form.

Sandy McKinney