

Seattle City Council

**Finance and Culture Committee Meeting**

2 p.m. Wednesday, May 14<sup>th</sup>, 2014

**Words' Worth**

The Poetry Program of the Seattle City Council

Curated by **Judith Roche**

Today's reader is **Elizabeth Austen**. Today's poem is by **Kim-An Lieberman**.

**Elizabeth Austen** currently serves as the Washington State Poet Laureate.

**Kim-An Lieberman** was a writer of Vietnamese and Jewish American descent, born in Rhode Island and raised in the Pacific Northwest. She studied interdisciplinary humanities at the University of Washington before earning a Ph. D. in English from the University of California, Berkeley. Her poems and essays have also appeared in many journals and she has published two books.

Kim-An was the recipient of awards from the Jack Straw Writers Program and the Mellon Foundation for the Humanities, and was a finalist for the 2009 Stranger Genius Awards. *Breaking the Map*, won her the 2008 First Book Award from Blue Begonia Press.

Sadly, Kim-An passed away last December. The poem Elizabeth will read is from, *In Orbit*, Kim-An's final book, published by Blue Begonia Press last January.

The Anti-Chinese Riot at Seattle, Washington Territory, Drawn by W.P. Snyder, from Sketches by J.F. Whiting of Seattle (Harper's Magazine, March 1886)

By Kim-An Lieberman

A century's span—candles to streetlights,  
horsecarts to highways, entire city blocks  
mounting and crumbling, razed and remade—  
but surely that morning was Seattle as ever,  
drizzle and damp, cool salt-cornered air,  
sun not yet risen between sheets of grey.

One man graved this image, line by line,  
carved out jackets, shirtfronts, collars, fists,  
a dark throng of hats. We do not need captions

to understand the crowd's clamoring roar,  
the police troop swashing rifles overhead,  
or the begging, frenzied figures at the center.

Their billowing black sleeves, their slippers.  
Their long Manchurian braids. Loudly limned  
even in miniature, faces oval and eyeless,  
absent any tint to warm the honey of their skin.  
Some stand in profile, arms reaching outward.  
Some run, but not far. Some kneel as if to pray.

But no hurried fear in the artist's arrangement.  
One strong line sweeps sharply left to right,  
cordonning the bullies, confining the victims.  
The reporter's type tells how shanty doors  
yielded to simple shove, to a shivering multitude  
dragged from sleep and herded to the harbor.

Decades shy of the flashbulb, the halftone,  
we can only imagine the truths of this tale.  
A terrified boy stuffing his bag, no time to find  
the silks that his sister loop-stitched to fit.  
A pile of gambling counters, an upturned chair.  
Blood and breaking. Cold tea in half-empty cups.

All we have here are faint echoes of memory,  
an after-hours geometry, a footnote on the fold.  
And just one clear face frozen in the scene—  
low, corner right. Thick mustache, dark felt hat.  
He is cheering the mob. Or protesting. Or simply  
bearing witness, pencil in his upraised hand.

*--end--*