

Toba even you can find in the stratified mud
of the aqueous body nearest you,
but Sais Lake just
twenty kilometers above Batang Toru
denies our bikes a fair chance:
we grind out two miles
in an hour over desiccating roadway ruts
before we turn back past the plateau planted
With palm oil
futures to hear above the conversation
at a roadside cafe the whoop
of gibbons, to see them
stretched on scraggles of the canopy,
and there two rare yellow hornbills follow
the webs of our ancient brothers
to the lake we do not now need to see
nor want to touch.

ANCIENT BROTHERS

Except for the waters of Toba
fulfilling the supervolcanic
explosion that killed one hundred thousand
years ago all that lived on Sumatra
and with its ashen eclipse
of the sun almost all that lived on earth,
we never found the natural lakes
that we are heir to
on this jungle island

Bamboo branches are not easily moved
by the day's fluctuations of light and air.
They trust foundations firmly dug in,
grounded, and so resist
the easy titillation of breezes
while they inhale deeply the climax
of a shimmering jungle sun
after the all-night storm;
they respond
respectfully, reservedly,
with the applause of leaves
open now to enlightenment.

LEAVES OF BAMBOO

The gray swirls of its coat
still starting in the daylight,
the wildcat's
guts spill across the Sumatran highway
and confirm its determination
in this jungle
to survive.

ON THE ROAD

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Origami Poetry Project

SUMATRAN HIGHWAYS

JAMES PENHA

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RIVERWALK

We slip on jungle river stones back, rock
by rock, year by year, till we are
immersed in yesterdays swimming mightily
against the flow of time. We grasp
at corners of the past
in the crooks of ancient boulders and crawl
through eras to epochs and edens
where we are the first humans
rubbing our eyes to find
ourselves born to blue butterflies,
green mansions, and infinity falls
in cascading canyons pristine, primeval,
untouched until this singular moment
when we are aboriginal, indigenous.