

*Magic hands are the hands of the people.*

—Franz Fanon

*They could kill him, but they couldn't kill his songs.*

—Joan Jara

## LAS MANOS DE LA PERUANA

*For Marie*

Leticia Hernández-Linares

*La muñeca* arrived wrapped in striped pink plastic,  
everyday mercado accessory for a gathering  
of fruit, vegetables packaged  
even in the open air.

La muñeca unloaded 4x6 memory of walks  
through rows of stands en la ciudad de Guatemala,  
Quetzaltenango—just what fit on our backs,  
palms tracing commemorative walls, scavenging hidden  
altars, refusing children who offered pictures for a dollar.  
In our birth country they covet our silhouettes too.

Later, this doll came knocking, made bottom heavy  
and dark, looking like old chocolate. Disembarking  
through layers of Peruvian postage demanding a loud  
circumference, like our caras—moon like. Strangers mistook,  
pointed out the angles insisting our faces cast from the same clay.  
Traitor to our plaster, I stashed her away.

Years later, decluttering the edges of our lives,  
she rolled out from four walls of detainment, humming  
her solitude under my recently birth-marked curves.  
Sorting her into the could-be-broken, let's-store-it pile,  
exiled from postcards capturing compelling moments  
bags woven by sun deprived prisoner hands  
seeds resprouted into necklaces  
this piece of earth shaped into my likeness  
waited for her moment.

Hands half asleep, sore from use, seven years stuck  
in a tunnel of pain, I proposed to box her, fingers powerless  
against her escape, upon descent—the only thing breaking, her hands  
falling from my failing grip  
my tingling broken-spirited fists.

All of this so far from long night pláticas  
in a Philadelphia flat, the smell of our lonely  
platanoeo Sundays, recuerdos of the mirrored house  
we built in a city that couldn't see us, recuerdos  
thousands of miles nine years  
away from you.

Settling into her rightful place,  
dead center in front of the poetry books  
among the first things you see when entering  
la muñeca joined the vigil, surgeon sharpening blade,  
about to open my hand—my most prized possession.  
This round doll humming to herself, about earth  
and bones to the sound of shattering.

Old Jara song for the worker, mold  
for my writer prayer, an offering en memoria  
of broken hands, sobreviviendo  
las manos mágicas de la gente  
magic hands of the people.

*levantaté y mirate las manos para crecer*  
*estréchala tu hermano*  
*juntas iremos unidos en la sangre\**

\*lyrics from “Plegaria a un labrador,” a song by Victor Jara.