

WE  
DRAFT  
WORK  
SONGS  
FOR  
THIS  
CITY

**JASON MAGABO PEREZ**

SAN DIEGO POET LAUREATE 2023-24

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*This poem was performed at San Diego Mayor Todd Gloria's State of The City Address at the San Diego Civic Theatre on January 11, 2023.*

*Special thanks to Lara Bullock and Christine Jones of the City of San Diego Commission for Arts and Culture.*

*for the many communities of San Diego, California*

whenever we stretch grammars of worry past the Pacific  
whenever another blackout gifts us much needed stillness

whenever the surrender of this quiet is typhoon enough we  
draft work songs for this city mighty we of rough draft

futures mighty we in river-mouth of rush hour traffic we  
of protest chant & scrapyard syntax we draft on the corner

of Black Mountain & Mira Mesa here on a sidewalk of torn  
shoelaces & lost grocery lists we draft blueprints for survival

we survive on the smell of beef broth the smell of basil of  
turmeric of cilantro of carne asada of freshly cooked rice

of steamed bok choy of freshwater fish of deep-fried rice  
paper we work song at this bus stop for students we work

song at this bus stop for tech workers this bus stop for lolas  
y abuelitas we work song in tin drum glottal syllables of

distant motherlands we draft litanies at every streetlight  
altar we draft verse on napkins & reused plastic grocery

bags wherever there are elders playing chess & waxing  
geographic outside the donut shop whenever much needed

stillness promises a new hour whenever the Pacific knows  
to rupture the shoreline whenever typhoon is fractal hum in

chest we draft work songs for this city we raw material  
literatures we distillation of afterdreams we swapmeet

philosophers we draft work songs on the corner of Genesee  
& Clairemont Mesa we draft of gutters scattered with pink

boba straws & dried palm leaves we draft for mothers & children  
hustling bouquets of carnations from the bicycle lane we draft

for parolees in orange vests selling local tribunes from the center  
island we draft on Murray Ridge where a family sells roses &

chocolate from a white bucket whenever the small hour calls  
collect whenever ruptures in the line set us free whenever hum

in chest arrives as ghost in throat we draft work songs we whose  
hands wash sky we who grow gardens & gardens against worry

we whose mighty ache remakes history we draft work songs here  
in the alley off University behind 49<sup>th</sup> we draft of a perfectly

reusable red plastic slide of a car full of birthday balloons of a  
small hill of middle grade paperbacks a gold purse full of fresh

broccoli & rubber gloves a black tote bag stuffed with wet lettuce  
& white surgical masks we draft at the backyard family parties

& block-wide barbecues we work song where it smells of fresh  
tires & flour tortillas where dried lemon rinds stick to pavement

work song of cleaned chicken bone wrapped in foil work song of  
rainsoaked boxsprings work song for the infamous hot cheetos

burrito brushfire fabulous work song work song on the graveyard  
shift survivor song song of the parking lot nail salon work song

of the underfuture heavenly pho outside between two buildings  
work song we draft as patrol cars cram the alley we draft as protest

medics cram the alley we draft as Muslim cabbies double-park their  
Priuses outside the mosque outside the taqueria work song of a child

chasing mosquitos with a hammer wherever a community of uncles  
gathers in the shared parking lot of the banh mi shop & Somali

restaurant wherever we feel that lived intensity of interior traffic here  
sings the lettuce-picker here sings the strawberry-picker here sings

the bellhop the postal worker the custodian the hotel maid grounds-  
keeper landscaper gardener construction worker nurse teacher waiter

dishwasher bus driver grocer labor organizer mechanic therapist here  
sings the nanny here sings the refugee here sings the Native here sings

the migrant O, what work! O, what song! O, what city! when our utterance  
is archive when there is historical reckoning when we demand nothing

short of collective joy & here we are on Native land we draft work songs for  
this city we draft work songs for this city we draft work songs for this city

Jason Magabo Perez serves as the San Diego Poet Laureate 2023-24. Perez is the author of the books *This is for the mostless* (2017) and *I ask about what falls away* (Forthcoming 2023), and the chapbook *Phenomenology of Superhero* (Red Bird Chapbooks, 2016). Perez's prose, poetry, and poetics have appeared in various publications such as *Interim*, *Witness*, *Entropy*, *Eleven Eleven*, *The Feminist Wire*, *Faultline*, *The Operating System*, *Kalfou*, *ASAP/Journal*, *TAYO*, *Mission at Tenth*, and *Marias at Sampaguitas*. Perez has written, developed, and performed three staged multimedia performance works: *The Passion of El Hulk Hogancito* (2009); *You Will Gonna Go Crazy* (2011), which was commissioned by Kularts, Inc. and funded by a Challenge America Grant from the National Endowment for the Arts; and *Blue Bin Improvisations* (2018), which was commissioned and presented by MexiCali Biennial and Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions. For over 20 years, Perez has performed, delivered keynote addresses, lectured, and convened and facilitated dialogues, panels, and workshops in public libraries, community centers, and K-12, college, and university classrooms. A founding member of the San Diego-based Freedom Writers Spoken Word Collective, Perez has been a Featured Artist at the New Americans Museum, Community Scholar-in-Residence at the San Diego Public Library, and Artist-in-Residence at the Center for Art and Thought (CA+T). Perez has been a featured performer at notable venues such as the National Asian American Theatre Festival, International Conference of the Philippines, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, Asian Art Museum, San Francisco Public Library, Galoka, and La Jolla Playhouse. From 2007-2016, Perez taught writing, performance, and ethnic studies at several college and university campuses throughout San Diego; and from 2016-2019, Perez was Assistant Professor of English and Creative Writing at California State University, San Bernardino. Alumnus of the Voices of Our Nation Arts Foundation Writing Workshops for Writers of Color, Perez holds an M.F.A. in Writing and Consciousness from New College of California and a dual Ph.D. in Ethnic Studies and Communication from University of California, San Diego. Perez presently serves as Community Arts Fellow at Bulosan Center for Filipino Studies, Associate Editor at *Ethnic Studies Review*, and is a core organizer of The Digital Sala. Perez is now Associate Professor and Director of Ethnic Studies at California State University San Marcos. Perez currently resides in Clairemont Mesa.

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The City of San Diego Commission for Arts and Culture serves in an advisory capacity to the Mayor and City Council on promoting, encouraging and increasing support for the region's artistic and cultural assets, integrating arts and culture into community life and showcasing San Diego as an international tourist destination.

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