

**JEWELLE GOMEZ**

# Alcatraz Reunion

*for Dolores Has No Horses LeClaire*

Mother is a tourist visiting me as I did her  
when I was a child being raised elsewhere,  
always worried she'd forget me.

Now we pretend she taught me  
how to read or ride a bicycle;  
that she waited by the door for me  
to arrive after school or watched me  
dress for my first dance.

We act as if we shared secrets  
when I was a teen, anxious then  
the world would see me  
for who I am... a child separate  
from a mother.

Boarding the ferry  
we are not exactly strangers;  
nor are we a fragrant recollection  
of worlds lived side by side  
giving shape to each other.

We are two aging women  
buying memories from  
the souvenir stand  
damp by the gangway,  
taking snapshots that will  
remind us how alike we are.

It's a cold ride and perverse  
to be among those eager to  
peer through prison bars and

glimpse long-passed misery,  
the ghosts of anger pacing and  
fear caged so close to city lights.

Only when we land does the spark  
of Wampanoag and Ioway fill her eyes  
as it did with her mother, as it does with me.

Prairie dust and Atlantic sea grasses  
embrace this precipitous shoreline—  
harsh and familiar;  
mapping the beginnings.

Others stroll past us up the path toward  
prison lore. We go deep, beneath  
the thick, crumbling walls where  
rock meets rock. Sacred space, not prison.

We cross the distance between us  
on that hard, stolen place—  
Ioway and Wampanoag meeting  
Ohlone, Pomo, Yurok, Hupa, Shasta and  
Hopi, Modoc, Sioux, Paiute,  
Inuit, Choctaw. A nation of nations,  
the soft shuffle of their feet on stone  
in a dance meant to  
bind all together.

Sitting on a bench finally we hold hands  
as we might have done when I was a child.  
Clinging tight as if the pressure  
of our palms will allow us to  
read each other's pasts.

*—This poem is part of the permanent installation in  
the Native American exhibit on Alcatraz.*

**Jewelle Gomez** is the author of seven books, including the double Lambda Literary Award winning novel, *The Gilda Stories*, which will have its twenty-fifth anniversary publication in 2016. Her dream play about James Baldwin, *Waiting for Giovanni*, premiered in 2011. Her new play about singer/composer Alberta Hunter premieres in 2016. Her forthcoming collection of poetry is entitled *Still Water*. [www.jewellegomez.com](http://www.jewellegomez.com); @VampyreVamp

**PETER RUDOLPH**

*Islesford Abstraction: Wake, 2014*  
Acrylic on canvas, 48 x 60 in



COURTESY: MCCLEES GALLERIES