

## FLORA DAVIS

*Have Much & Be Confused*, 2009  
Patinated metals, gold leaf, on paper, 23 x 30 in



## CANDACE CALSOYAS

### Song for Each Other Who Will Decide for Bhutan?

*Who has decided—who has the right to decide—for the countless legions of people who were not consulted that the supreme value is a world without insects, even though it be also a sterile world ungraced by the curving wing of a bird in flight? The decision is that of the authoritarian temporarily entrusted with power; he has made it during a moment of inattention by millions to whom beauty and the ordered world of nature still have a meaning that is deep and imperative.*

—Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*

I am in Bhutan to talk about environmental awareness, encourage indigenous organic farming practices, and inform the Bhutanese about the successes of the California organic movement. Bhutan is a poor country, but one with a unique mix of sublime beauty, Buddhist values, and respect for the environment. It is a country that appreciates its indigenous ways and culture. Flanked by China, India, and Nepal, its rarefied atmosphere, carved-painted wooden buildings, few roads, and pervasive quiet attract Westerners willing to pay \$250 a day for the experience of being there.

Elsewhere, we have seen how rapid modernization—economic development, industrialization, and commercialization—can have a devastating effect on tradition. Can Bhutan go forward while maintaining what is worth preserving? To illustrate the evils of corporate farming, I start a lecture to middle-school teachers by quoting Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*. “Who has decided?” she asked. And I wonder, who will decide in Bhutan?

Bhutan is a musical country, filled with festivals and dance. But most striking is the quiet that reigns. Prayer flags strung in unscalable canyons: how did they get there? They flap, suggesting inaudible secrets known only to spirits. The colorful flags punctuate narrow river valleys that are strangely quiet, with no buzzing city noises. As I lecture, my thoughts emerge from that silence to form what I think of as a “song for each other.” I’ve been sent to Bhutan on a Fulbright Scholarship so that, as Lhundup, my sponsor from the Royal Education Council (a think tank appointed by the king), says, “We can learn from each other.” But can we?

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*America has lost so much, and Bhutan has everything to lose. Bhutan is pristine in its quiet, with no high-rises, neon, malls—it’s the world as it is... a beatific country, with whispers of sound and not an ugly picture in sight. Its constitution mandates preservation of 60 percent of the forests, and prohibits killing of wildlife, including fish. Can we learn how Buddhist principles protect your land?*

*You can learn from us: we lost our land, our bears, our wolves, our birds, the wild plants... and out of that came activism—angry people who raged at watching forests fall with a snap and a thud. Americans mad while watching*



*rivers and streams flowing with debris and knowing that these places once knew no debris.*

*We look at your land and remember, oh yes, it looks familiar—with no billboards, freeways, parking lots, or Safe-way stores. We remember a land of quiet, with no Burger Kings, Kmart, and ugliness. Land that we could see, not having to imagine what's underneath the asphalt. We need to learn from you: how did you keep your land as it has always been, with your prayer flags everywhere reminding you of spirits sailing in the wind?*

*How did you keep traditional dress, your robes under which your legs freely breathe? Men and women in robes fastened at the side. Jeans, what good would they do here in Bhutan with nowhere to go, nowhere to be seen, no mall, no movie, no concert hall? Only the festivals, the carnivals of dance, colorful costumes and masks, with no grand orchestras, just simple instruments—a horn, a drum...*

*What can we learn from you? We have looked back to planting real food, tomatoes that don't bounce with hardness, lettuce that is furred with bright green. We've learned about wine, garlic, goat cheese, but do you need to learn about these? You laugh at goat cheese as a specialty item and ask: what's special about goats?*

*What can we teach each other? We love your land, and you would love ours—that is, what's left of it, and there's a lot. Can you show us? Why is it that, with subdued light, the atmosphere is tranquil? Why is there no bustle and noise on rocky roads limited to ten miles per hour traveling speed?*

*Can you tell us why you've never been colonized? Like us, you seem new, and yet you are ancient. How can we learn from you to respect our ancientness? We are both newborns in this way.*

*Who has decided, asked Rachel Carson. But wait—your authoritarian god did something different from ours. Why? How did it happen? This is what I want to learn from you. I want to know: how will you keep your wisdom, this secret, if you are dazzled by the modern—something unfamiliar—that you crave? Who has decided? asked Carson.*

*You have. And yet you must decide again.*

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When I met with the Ministers of Health, Education, and Farming, I asked them to write their definition of nature. They wrote: "Nature is everything and everything is con-

nected." Would any American politician even come close to this truth? How can they know so much about ecology? And yet appear to know so little about modern science? Lhundup says, "We need to learn not to make the mistakes made in the U.S." But who will decide?

Don't most countries rush to become as modern as quickly as possible? Will Bhutan be different, safeguarding its essence, culture, and untainted land? Do they know that we eat chemicals on our food, breathe chemicals in our air, and drink water that is no longer pure? Who has decided this for us? asked Carson.

*But you can learn from us just as we can from you. We have gone forward by going back to traditional farming without chemicals. Not all farming in America is chemical-free by any means, but in the last few decades, we have had a renaissance of farmers' markets in which farmers sell produce directly to consumers. Though in many parts of the world, including Bhutan, traditional markets have always been a part of food culture, they are new to America; 8,000 farmers' markets nationwide serve consumers so they are not strictly reliant upon supermarkets. Many Americans pay extra for organic produce, and our culture now honors farmers: organic farming is a respectable, lucrative occupation.*

Bhutan can learn from us how to preserve their land traditions and yet go forward with awareness and knowledge. Can we listen and learn from each other? They like that we have gone forward by looking back to organics—traditional growing methods with manures and compost. Do they know why? That it was poisoned food, rivers, and wildlife that produced the environmental movement. Will they even need activism? Who will decide?

**Candace Calsoyas** has a long history teaching environmental subjects at UC Santa Cruz. As a Fulbright Scholar, she has taught environmental literature in Albania and Bhutan. Calsoyas was a founding member of California Certified Organic Farmers, and has maintained a wildlife habitat Christmas tree farm for thirty-five years in the Corralitos area of the Santa Cruz mountains.

# JULIE HEFFERNAN

*Self Portrait of Boy with Growth, 2011*  
Oil on canvas, 77 x 66 in



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