

Frankfurter Buchmesse 2021, Opening Ceremony, 19.10.2021, 5 p.m.

The spoken word is valid.

Speech of Josephine Bacon

A white night
The hours, the minutes, the seconds
Have never been so near to me
In your invisibility
A breath, your presence
You are there without being there
Your first steps
Are a gift to the sunrise

Respect comes first
Seated on lichen
You accept your fate
The vastness of your people's lands
You lift your head
To the aurora borealis
White green, mauve angels
Take you under their wings
They lead you
There where you will stay alive

The echo murmurs an ancient song
I take the drum
I search for a lullaby
That I do not know how to sing

You are my long dream
I've begged for years to know you
My wrinkles now have no age¹

Ninipepin
Pishakuana tipishkau-tipaikana
Eka nepanuti
Apu uapamitan
Tshimatenimitin
Miam tain anite
Petapan
Uapatamu e ussi-pimutein
Eukuan ishpitenimitun
Tshiminu-utinen eshi-minikuin
Uapitsheushkamikut tshitapin
Tshitshitapaten eshpitashkamikat tshitassi
Ishpimit tshitaitapin
Uashtushkuan tshiminiku
Anisheniua
Uapishinua, shipekunua, apitshiminenua
Tshutinikuat
Tshititutaikuat
Anite eka nita tshe nipin
Sheueu nikamutak tshashi-nikamunnu
Nutinau niteueikan
Ninatu-tshissituten katsheshkaimaushun
Apu nitau katsheshkaimaushuan

Tshin an ka puatitan
Ninatueniten minekash tshetshi inniuiian
Tshui nishtuapamitin
Atshinu tshe tshishenniunakushian

¹ From *A Tea in the Tundra*, trans. Donald Winkler (Bookland).

Thank you for having me, although I am not there. I am very honoured to be invited to this great festival and to share with you the poems I have written, especially since they have now been translated into your language.

It is a great thing to share. Whatever *Uiesh*, whatever “someplace” I find myself in, my traditions and my culture are always present in my soul. In these months of solitude we have lived through, my people have chosen to return to their tradition as hunters in the Nutshimit, the interior of our lands, rather than look at four walls. The Nutshimit is a pure land, where sickness does not exist. The trees protect and care for us. The lakes and rivers will always be our paths of water that guide us toward the masters of the animals.

The poems I write are for those to come, so that they do not forget their origins in a land that will recognize their footsteps.

my riches are called
salmon
my house is called
cariboo
my fire is called
black spruce
my canoe is called
work
my dress is called
lichen
my headdress is called
eagle
my song is called
drum
call me
human²

Joséphine

² "Je m'appelle humain," in *Nous sommes tous des sauvages* (Mémoire d'encrier); trans Phyllis Aronoff.