

Honolulu 1997

Hybrid Rusti

Rusti Orangutan slowly duck-walks
on short, bent legs,
foot-hands curled under,
dragging his great flowing coat
and pendant flesh,
a great red dust mop.

He stoops beneath
his magnificent hair,
abundant and shaggy
as a buffalo robe
of fine copper wire.

Behind the leather mask face,
like a deflated basketball,
all pads and pouches,
bright eyes miss nothing.
Rusti waits in there.

Rusti Orangutan is a half-breed hybrid.
Orangutans from the island of Sumatra
are considered a race apart
from the orangutans of Borneo.
Hybrid Rusti comes from both stocks.
Hybrid genes are not wanted
in pedigree conscious genetic conservation.
Rusti takes up space.
Rusti has to go.

Rusti Orangutan, half-breed hybrid.
Wild orangutans hide in trees,
hang from foot-hands and
care nothing for ground people.
Rusti grew up on concrete floors
with leaf-painted concrete walls
under a burlap head rag
at the Seattle Zoo.

Rusti played with people,
learned people ways,
loved people,
didn't learn orangutan ways.
Half-breed hybrid, orangutan-person.

Rusti Orangutan ignores me
at the Honolulu Zoo.
Rescued from a half-buried cage
in New Jersey,
Rusti awaits sanctuary
on the Big Island.
No, not Sumatra. Not Borneo.
A hybrid island, Hawaii.

Nature made Rusti orangutan.
People made him almost human.
Can he soon live
a high hybrid life
with arboreal friends,
ape and human,
a life part forest,
part playroom,
neither nature's wild
nor peoples' pet?

Which life would Rusti choose?