

Death rock

Rita Wong

Emily Carr University, Vancouver, Canada

the big sacred fire burns, night & day,
despite the radioactive waste leaked by
dada-thay, Dene for “death rock,” uranium

open-eared, open-hearted
i arrive in Wollaston Lake
home of the Hatchet Lake Denesuline
walk lightly, gratefully, here on the edge of
Saskatchewan’s biggest lake
one of its hundred thousand lakes
a treasure of water
overlooked & underestimated
by those down south
who miss the water for the mines

further north
a village of widows
mourn husbands
lost to the brutal vision
of atomic warfare
they understand responsibility
when western governments don’t
they apologize to the survivors
of Hiroshima &
Nagasaki for death rock
taken from their homelands
without knowledge
of the consequences

further south
cancer-ridden
the Navajo
with over 1300 abandoned
dada-thay mines
refuse to allow any more
death rock mining
on their homelands

in contrast to Saskatchewan
the “Saudi Arabia” of uranium mining
digging & burning up
what rightfully belongs to the future
leaking its deadly mess
into our nervous, watery bodies