

The Bridge 2009 – Honorable Mention

George Held - New York, NY

Homeless in Hawai'i

For Carlos Andrade

Take the 2 Bus / "School Street"
from your Waikiki hotel.
As it travels' Ewa, feast your eyes
on the densely packed shacks
along Beretania, clothes hung on lines
like the '20s on the Lower East Side,
cluttered yards the size of a lanai -
that is, if you can take your eyes off
the jungled Ko'olaus
caped by clouds that will bring
liquid sunshine late afternoon.
By the time you reach Hotel Street,
storefronts will block your view
and you'll see the druggies and drunks
slouched in doorways or in the shade
of awnings and signs, and the exotic
hookers in super minis preening
on their turf, once the pristine land
by the mouth of the Nuuanu
before the breathless whites
made contact with the native.
The buildings passed, on your right
is Aala Park, home to the homeless,
living in the open now the big yellow
tent's been taken down. Almost like camping
out in summer back on the Mainland,
what with the warm weather year-round.
But try sleeping out in Hawaiian winter
when the temperature dips to 60, the wind howls,
and squalls drench you with subtropic chill.

(stanza break)

Soon you'll get off at Bishop Museum
and get lost in (authorized) history.
But tomorrow morning don't set forth
too early for a stroll toward Diamond Head
-so you can see it beyond the sprawl
of high-rise hotels-or when you reach
Kuhio Beach Park you'll see them,
huddled in blankets or sleeping bags,
the brown homeless ones lulled
by the murmuring surf, lost in dreams
of their ali'i majestically riding the crest
completely at home.