CREATING MORE JUST & RADICALLY CONNECTED COMMUNITIES WITH LITERATURE

KORE PRESS INSTITUTE

Raw, Urgent, and Unflinching Poetic Debut Stares into the Heart of Atrocity

June 6, 2022: Award-winning Denver poet Jessica Lawson’s first full-length collection, Gash Atlas, portrays the nightmarish cartography of life in and beyond the Trump era. Through poetic and visual “maps,” this new work, selected by Erica Hunt for first place in Kore Press Institute’s Poetry Prize, surveys the cultural present while folding back nested histories of personal and cultural violence. Emerging from this horrific landscape is the character of Christopher Columbus, a simultaneously historical and surreal figure of colonial and sexual terror who has become omnipresent, infiltrating multiple institutions including the White House, the police, the TSA, the university, and the family home itself.

As the book’s speaker, a young white mother, works to resist her own complicated entanglement with Columbus, she becomes increasingly aware of her complicity in the violence he performs. A terrifying catalog of cultural wrongs leads to an intimate examination of the speaker’s relationship with her Black family. Lawson remarks “there’s no way to make an uncomplicated step in a conversation with white supremacy, colonialism and the histories that they invoke.”

Combining the visceral images of Sarah Kane and the formal play of Douglas Kearney, Gash Atlas pushes the boundaries of poetry and politics in a voice that is at once raw, urgent, and poignantly human.

Jessica Lawson (she/her/hers) is a Pushcart-nominated writer, teacher, and activist. Raised in the Midwest and now based in Denver, she holds a B.A. from Smith College, a Ph.D. from the University of Iowa, and an M.F.A. from the University of Colorado-Boulder, where she served as an editor for Timber Journal. Her chapbook, Rot Contracts, (Trouble Department 2020) examines the heated aftermath of family rupture through the cold lens of the law, and her other writings have appeared in The Rumpus, Dreginald, Entropy, The Wanderer, and elsewhere. She is a queer single parent of three children. Visit her at www.lawsonlit.com.

Praise for Gash Atlas

“Actual and symbolic horror, borne and delivered through the tender precarity of motherhood and violently performative femme-presence, show us the unsustainable cost of institutional force.”—Khadijah Queen, author of I’m So Fine: A List of Famous Men & What I Had On

“Lawson has given us poems that strike a balance between daring to ask the urgent questions and posing them with the care of one who knows how language often operates as a colonial mode.”—Raquel Salas Rivera, author of lo terciario/ the tertiary and while they sleep (under the bed is another country)