

Rice

by Dorothee Lang

"And now, step into the water," the tour guide says, "and plant your bundle of rice."

The group tour, it had sounded okay at first. At this point, I wish I could skip it.

"Such fun," someone says.

The guide waits patiently like a droid until all and everyone has planted their bundle of rice. There is neither escape from the ritual, nor from the obvious symbolism: our bundles will grow together from this day on, here, in this artificial paddy field.

We move on, to the next task points. We construct a paper bridge. The droid walks across it. We follow, one after another, like sentences in a story.

We learn to say rice in alternating tongues.

"Reis."

"Riso."

"Arroz."

"Riz."

"Baikoku," I add.

No one answers.

When we are finally done, there is a buffet waiting for us. White bowls, filled with steamed, stirfried, sauteed combinations of rice and other stuff. There are drinks, too. White wine and red wine. Neon cocktails and flavored beer. No Guinness.

We sit at round tables. I try to play along. I even pretend that I like the jackets we are all wearing now, a liquid green fabric with a pattern of solid white paisleys.

