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Learning to Kayak

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Learning to Kayak

Like the Inuit boy, stitched
roll-tight by a proud mother
into the cockpit of his hunting bark,
sealskin stretched around a whalebone frame,
before you can brace the swells
that have come a thousand miles to meet you,
before you can even launch or land,
you must learn to idle
in what elders called the soup,
hold fast in the liquid wilderness
brewed by the shore and its nearest wave,
last to feel the earth and give up shape.
Bow pointed fiercely into the break line,
here you must find the fluid switch
between headlong plow into the final spill
and full-out backstroke against the undertow,
make short work of comings and goings,
until your body and its body are drunk
with the ways of swash and backwash,
after long days of trial, hardly paddling at all.
Here is the furious lull, the simmering meal,
the endlessly rocking means to all ends,
where the current is lost
and the moon has let go of the tide.
The ocean at samba, the surf's foam baton.
Stay here as long as you can.

-Ken Haas
San Francisco, CA