

## NEVER SURRENDERED: KLEE BENALLY (1975 - 2023)

By Kevin Tucker

I still feel raw. I feel cheated. I feel unbearable loss.

But I feel the fire, just as if Klee was standing next to me.

There isn't a context for Klee Benally that I was prepared for. I'm not ready to speak in past tense, so you'll have to bear with my struggle.

Klee is a warrior. Uncompromising, and innately fierce.

His voice echoes with unshaken fury and love. You could hear it coming: Klee was about to lay it out, nothing left off the table, nothing left unturned.

The challenge we face is to fill the void of unfinished conversations now left lingering. We have a tremendous ferocity and just unwavering commitment to fill. To step up to and act upon.

Klee had a voice that made you feel like he could ignite cop cars just by speaking.

Let's cut to the point here: Klee was more than what activist or anarchist or whatever circles might want to call him. He's infinitely more than the memorials pouring out from those who refused to listen to his words, no matter how clearly and intently he said them. The words we spill for the fallen, they aren't enough.

The words Klee spoke, sang and wrote are ceremony.

He spoke of it, but there is little in the settler imagination that is prepared to hear it. It's not another concept in the battlefields of theory and ideology. It's one thing to believe the Earth is alive. It's another to hear it, to feel it: to know it.

Klee saved me. It's easy to make that sound grandiose and overly dramatic, but it's true. It's not easy for me to say it. He is never one to let things slide, but he is always there too. It's a rare quality, one I'm not prepared to acquiesce too.

It feels like irony, he was almost disappointed that I wasn't upset about the nihilistic leanings in his undeniably crucial new book, *No Spiritual Surrender*. We talked about hope. But I could talk to him about my struggles with despair. It's another unfinished conversation, but the punchline is this: context matters, that's where ceremony lies.

You see, Klee spoke his truths. He wasn't here to educate settlers, as he consistently made clear. What stood out to me about Klee, even when I first saw him touring with *Blackfire* in the 1990s, was that Klee has one of the rarest traits: Klee knows who he is.

He was never selling anything. That's the difference. When you argued with him—and he wouldn't have had it any other way—you were finding terms for mutuality or disagreement and agreement. There was no time to mince words, and if you did, he always pulled it right back into the light.

Uncompromising, ungovernable. Klee dictates his terms, with a dangerously sharp clarity.

And still, he was my friend. He was there for me. He gave me medicine. He guided my own healing and gave me my own terms for it.

Klee has always been all the things we speak of about warriors, but it's not something the colonizers' language has the terms for. You see, we could talk about community. Not just humans, but trees, insects. No

ideology or theory will ever give that. Ceremony, between us, could be accepting that a mantis could speak, and that, very likely, it could be saying fuck you.

Ceremony, as Klee was never afraid to embody it, can say fuck you too.  
Klee is a Diné anarchist.

The child of a healer, whom he spent so much time holding close to. Klee is a writer, a friend, a sibling, a relation, an unshakeable and fierce protector, a husband, an artist, a game maker, and an unbelievable agitator. Klee has more life than anyone I'll ever see or ever know. He embodied the punk ethos, carrying it internationally with his siblings in Blackfire, then more recently with his Appropriation project.

He wasn't afraid at all to call shit as he saw it. And I feel we recognized that in each other. That's why I'm writing this for the Journal, feeling him sneer about it, but also knowing my last words here were calling for the dissolution of Earth First! and moving onto something new.

That's the spirit Klee carries: it's never, ever time to give things a pass. If it's not working, then what will? Everything demands scrutiny if the resistance we intend to carry is to be ceremony. There is no point to ceremony if you're not bringing your entirety there. You cannot lie to the sacred, nor can you hide from it.

Ceremony does not imply comfort. And, to be clear, comfort is far too much of what the anarchist and ecological resistance movements have been willing to lean into.

No compromise, for Klee, is a promise. It's the promise that led to the torching of Vail. It's the promise that has been found time and time again on the frontlines of Indigenous led fights against resource extraction. This isn't something Klee ever just dabbled in; it was his life.

I met Klee when I was fighting against Peabody Coal, in their campaign to destroy the sacred Black Mesa. I came to this, but there was Klee's family. He was born into it. His language was different than mine, and I listened. The sacred would never be surrendered. And those struggles continued to come.

Fighting uranium mining, fighting uranium hauling, fighting against racist mascots, fighting against the pigs, fighting for unhoused relatives, fighting on the frontlines of resource extraction on so many fronts, fighting against the desecration of the San Francisco Peaks with wastewater to make fake snow for settler tourists. Speaking before the UN. Staring down the heads of security. Shouting down councils. Banners and banners, posters and art and some of the most incredible contributions to the dialogue. Making movies, art, jewelry... It goes on.

He was just so fucking alive.

A few weeks ago, he told me he owed me a favor. I don't have remorse in what I never told him, because he was there and I told him what he's meant to me and the world. But I'll ask him here and now: you've become ungovernable, you've become an ancestor, Klee; you deserve the rest, but I know you won't take it.

Just don't take the fire with you.

We needed Klee. We need Klee.

So, let me say this with absolute clarity: we need resistance as ceremony.

Cut the bullshit. Call the bullshit out when you see it. Learn who you are beyond the confines of a world dictated by civilization and all of its categories and cages. Don't wax poetic about the Sacred Earth, feel her. Embody her.

Pull down the statues of colonizers. Tear the settler's framework from your understanding of what you think anarchism, as defined by Westerners—settlers and colonizers both—and stop trying to find easy ways to box up and check off your ideologies and credentials. Let mutual aid dictate your days. Make Earth Night every night.

Stop looking to the confines of Leftist trajectories as the path ahead. Liberation comes only from all of us. Our world. Our home. Our place.

Find the places that make you uncomfortable, and learn to look at them. Not defensively, but to heal. What voices are you not hearing? What erasure are you taking part in? What part of yourself are you not yet giving over?

What is your ceremony?

Because, while Klee is gone, and while I struggle to accept it, he has given us more than we deserve. And he will forever be larger than any of us are able to imagine.

Unrelentless in the face of colonialism, imperialism, cisheteropatriarchy, and all of those vile and brutal tentacles that civilization has imposed in our lives. Find the cop, the preacher, the politician, the settler, the imperialist, the productionist, the failed revolutionary, and the layers of bullshit covering our vision, making us unable to see and to feel the living Earth. Pull up their roots, make a bundle, and then start the fires.

Dance to the sound of infrastructure burning. Sing to the flames licking the sky of the next precinct. Face the horrors that civilization has unleashed upon us, and the lives they have taken and cut down. Listen to the stories of perspectives you can't have lived. Don't just find the trauma, find the beauty. Stop allowing settlers to run the conversations, myself included.

Find the work Klee leaves behind.

Support Indigenous Action and Táala Hooghan Infoshop.

Read No Spiritual Surrender. Play Burn the Fort.

Listen to his music and poetry, find his fire anywhere you can.

Find your despair, and like Klee, like the mantis, say fuck you too.

I LIKE CRITICAL HOPE • I LIKE FIERCE HOPE

I LIKE HOPE

THAT BURNS  
COP CARS

-KLEE BENALLY-

