

The Cabbage Palm: 'Lessen You Cut it Down'



I tell you, there's no tree like the cabbage palm.
It never dies of old age, and you can't see the end of it lessen you cut it down.
from *Palmetto Country* by Stetson Kennedy

With a crown piercing the ferris wheel sky, cabbage palm
cartwheeled across the swampland, in olden days, or poked shadows
in the understory.

These ribbons were a green rollercoaster that folded and wove through twilight.

In the hands of the Calusa, the climb and drop of days brought
sleeping mats, chickee thatch, heart-palm meals, battle spears.

Now cabbage palms are planted in queues down a thousand miles of interstate.
In Tampa, heart of palm salad is served with key lime sherbet.
In Disney World, the storied trunks tack down corners of a new town square.

But in spring drought or summer flood, salt marsh or tidal pond,
the green-gray pinwheels still prickle against sunrise and in tilt-a-whirl
winds and rain, they just give.

Even now, against the back-lit streets of Harbor Island,
air ferns clasp blackness inside the old leaf stems on the trunk,
and a black snake curls there in moonlight's sideshow.

The fronds stab at clouds drifting on the river or slice shadows on the Everglades.
Wish-you were-here fronds that seem tipped with stars,
like lights strung across a midway.

based on the work of photographer Lori Ballard published in The Blotter, Summer, 2008

The Big Question

The anhinga are still as monks,
their heads tucked in meditation.

Like deep seas divers or winged mermaids,
they swim, swim on a wish and a breath,
searching for something to fit the bill.

But when they soar up and land on the foot of the dock,
they turn into glossy black question marks,
sun-worshippers asking *where, where, where?*