



# THE POETRY PROJECT

DECEMBER 2016 / JANUARY 2017 ISSUE #249

# THE POETRY PROJECT

## DECEMBER 2016 / JANUARY 2017 ISSUE #249

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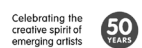
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New York Council for the Humanities





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*Cover image by George Schneeman*

*Untitled 1 (Heart Attack), 2005  
Collage on cardboard  
4 1/2 x 5 1/2 in. (11.4 x 14 cm)  
Colby College Museum of Art  
Gift of Katie Schneeman, 2011.030*

*The artwork on page 10 is used by permission of Katie Schneeman  
and courtesy of Pavel Zoubok Gallery, New York.*



# Letter from the Director

Hello Good People: it's nearing the end of October as I write this, my annual letter about our annual gathering of 150 poets and performers, the 43rd New Year's Day Marathon Benefit Reading. Or another time-marker is that the election is 14 days and 13 hours away. I've been following the political commentary of David Levi Strauss and somehow his insights have buoyed me enough to expect a decisive Trump loss on November 8th. I can't help but think of this Marathon, no matter who our next President is, as an opportunity for communal remembering, in the sense evoked by this passage from Alice Notley:

Poetry  
It is the Human difference  
Though we've forgotten  
But we are poets  
We must not forget That we are poets  
Ever again

from *Close to me & Closer... (The Language of Heaven)*

A high goal for the Marathon is to make the "Human Difference." I hope you will join for what will surely be a historic Marathon during our 50th Anniversary celebration!

## How the Marathon Works

The Marathon is, of course, our signature benefit event. Tremendous audience, volunteer, and artist support has made it so. As an event, it exaggerates what we want each reading during the season to do— to provide a site of collective agency, and create a communal and generative space for the audience and the poet to experience new work. The Project receives many requests to perform in the Marathon, and we feel fortunate that so many people want to help us meet our fundraising goals. We only have 150 spots and a seemingly unlimited artistic community to draw from. Here is some basic information about our selection process.

- The Marathon is a curated event, i.e. not run open-reading style where people can sign up. Invitations are issued by our Programming Committee, which is comprised of Poetry Project staff, a few board members, plus all of our series coordinators.
- The final schedule consists of people who are in one or both of the following broad categories: performers

who have a longtime connection to The Poetry Project and/or the Downtown arts scene (poetry, music, film, dance, but poetry in particular); poets who are actively participating in the NYC literary arts scene by giving readings, publishing books, organizing readings, editing journals, etc.; and/or performers who have never participated in a Marathon before.

- Each year we feature 30 to 50 first-timers, which means that many who performed in prior years aren't going to be able to participate again. If you are invited one year, it doesn't mean that you will get invited every year. This is not to be taken personally!
- Lastly, reading is just one way of participating in the event. There are volunteer opportunities (about 100 are needed) to help sell books, food and drink, assist in checking in readers, etc. We deeply appreciate your support and your understanding of the effort it takes to present this feat of a fundraiser.

—Stacy Szymaszek

# GIANT NIGHT: THE POETRY PROJECT AT 50

*This season marks the 50th Anniversary of The Poetry Project! While we are approaching the entire 2016-17 season as a giant celebration, "Giant Night" is a platform of 7 events that are retrospective, yet encourage us all to future-think our way into new lineages, pedagogies, and ways of seeing.*

Winter and Spring platform events are: **December 14: UMBRA: A Living Archive**, **March 1: The Omniscient Tape Recorder, Part 2**, and **March 6: Learning at the Project**. The celebration will culminate with a gala in late April to honor poet and former Project Artistic Director Anne Waldman, whose first book title *Giant Night* we have borrowed in homage. Look to the next issue of the Newsletter for details, and be sure to tune in to all late-breaking news by signing up for our weekly e-blast on our home page at [www.poetryproject.org](http://www.poetryproject.org).

## UMBRA: A LIVING ARCHIVE

UMBRA was both a literary collective and literary magazine founded by Black writers and artists living in New York's Lower East Side in the early 1960s, many of whom participated in proto-Project readings and influenced the formation of The Poetry Project. Scholar Tonya Foster joins The Poetry Project in celebrating the work of UMBRA poets. This evening traces the influence of Lorenzo Thomas, Calvin Hernton, Norman Pritchard and David Henderson on younger poets and artists they influenced, locating UMBRA's history in print and in person, past and present. With **Tonya Foster**, **David Henderson**, **Ammiel Alcalay**, **Genji Amino**, **Jace Clayton** and others TBA.

Spring platform events are: **March 1: The Omniscient Tape Recorder, Part 2**, and **March 6: Learning at the Project**. The celebration will culminate with a gala on April 27 to honor poet and former Project Artistic Director Anne Waldman, whose first book title *Giant Night* we have borrowed in homage. Look to the next issue of the Newsletter for details, and be sure to tune in to all late-breaking news by signing up for our weekly e-blast on our home page at [www.poetryproject.org](http://www.poetryproject.org).



# Notes from the Project

## David Antin (1932-2016)

We were greatly saddened to hear of the passing of poet, critic, and performance artist David Antin. There will be a memorial piece in the next issue of this publication. We were fortunate to host a remarkable talk by him in December 2014 where a main theme was living with Parkinson's disease. The event was a launch for his book of selected talks, titled *How Long Is the Present* (University of New Mexico Press). You can listen to the audio from that night on The Poetry Project's SoundCloud page at [soundcloud.com/poetry-project-audio](http://soundcloud.com/poetry-project-audio).

## Emerge-Surface-Be Fellows Announced!

In this fourth year of the Emerge – Surface – Be Fellowship, we were thrilled and honored to receive so many applications. The range and depth of the work illuminated how exciting this moment is for poetry in New York City, and reaffirmed our commitment to supporting its emerging poets. Choosing three fellows and six finalists was an extremely challenging task for our mentors, but they did it! It's an honor to announce that **Jayson P. Smith** will be working with **John Godfrey**, **Sasha Smith** will be working with **Marcella Durand**, and **Nicole Shanté White** will be working with **r. erica doyle**. The finalists are **Desiree Bailey**, **Marina Blitshteyn**, **Marwa Helal**, **Justine el-Khazen**, **Christopher Soto**, and **Chloe Zimmerman**. Congratulations to everyone!

## End of the Year Appeal

The Poetry Project has been a public forum and home for the most restless and challenging creative minds of the past 50 years. We're a scrappy arts organization run by poets. And we are proud that we've thrived on a shoestring budget with our core values intact: devotion to poetry as a way of life, supporting poets, inclusivity, curiosity, and community. By being subscribers, members, past-donors, readers, writers, and attendees, you have made it clear to us that you care about what we do, or we wouldn't have survived for a half-century! Please consider making a tax-deductible end of the year donation by **visiting [poetryproject.org](http://poetryproject.org) and clicking the blue donation button in the right hand corner**, or **sending a check to The Poetry Project, 131 E. 10th St. New York, NY 10003**. Your gift will help the Project sustain its legacy, plan for the future, and nimbly respond to the present.

# DONATE YOUR TIME OR YOUR THINGS TO MARATHON 43 DURING OUR BIG 5-0!

Feeling generous as the holiday season approacheth? Well, it's the perfect time to let your generosity shine upon The Poetry Project! January 1, 2017 marks the 43rd year of our Annual New Year's Day Marathon, which features approx. 12 hours of readings and performances by over 140 poets, dancers, musicians, and performers. All funds raised at our New Year's Day Marathon go toward putting on The Poetry Project's 65+ readings/events per season and— most importantly— to support the honoraria of the 130+ poets and performers who give us reason to host these events in the first place.

And where does your shining beam of generosity needeth most shine, you ask?

1. **Volunteering.** The Poetry Project staff needs your help— along with at least 119 others— to make sure our most prized, annual fundraiser runs smoothly, in order, and on time! Volunteer shifts are 2 hours in length and, in exchange for your time and hard work, you'll receive **free** admission for the day.

2. **Donations.** We'd be ever grateful for any donation of beer, wine, and/or baked goods to keep the audiences going throughout the day. We'd also love to hear from publishers (big and small!) who're interested in donating books and/or chapbooks to our well-browsed and shopped Parish Hall bookstore.

If you'd like to contribute in any way—as a volunteer, food, beverage, or book donor—please contact Laura Henriksen at [LH@poetryproject.org](mailto:LH@poetryproject.org).

See you at the 43rd Marathon!

# The Poetry Project's 50TH ANNIVERSARY PRINT PORTFOLIOS



The Poetry Project has published this limited edition (50) of portfolio of prints to celebrate our 50th Anniversary.

All prints are signed and numbered by the artists. Prints can be purchased as a full set for \$1,000 or individually for \$250.

All proceeds support The Poetry Project's programs!

The launch event, co-presented with The Song Cave, will take place in the Parish Hall on Friday, November 11 at 8pm.

See our event calendar for details.

*Frank O'Hara and Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) at The Living Theater, 1959*

Jonas Mekas

C-print, signed & numbered edition of 50  
9x14

*Untitled, 2014*

Mary Manning

C-print, signed & numbered edition of 50  
9x14

*Untitled, 2015*

Amy Sillman

Archival pigment print, signed &  
numbered edition of 50  
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Simone Forti

Archival pigment print, signed &  
numbered edition of 50  
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*Galaxy of Litter, 1989*

Cecilia Vicuna

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**To order email [info@poetryproject.org](mailto:info@poetryproject.org), call 212-674-0910, or visit [poetryproject.org](http://poetryproject.org) under "Publications" to order online.**

## December 2016 Master Class

### WRITING TRANSLATION / TRANSLATING WRITING

#### Master Class with Pierre Joris

1 Session | Tuesday, 12/6 6-9PM

Location: Neighborhood Preservation Center (232 E 11th St, New York, NY 10003)

This masterclass work- & talk-shop —Writing Translation / Translating Writing — probes our approach to “creative” (qua “original”) writing by inverting the traditional relationship of original text & translated copy, thus re-inscribing the activity of translation as core process of the act of writing. While starting as a public conversation, students will soon be simultaneously involved with writing & with translation from a language of their choice into English in a range of forms proposed by their own practice & cultural background.

Poet, translator, essayist and anthologist **Pierre Joris** has published some 50 books, most recently, *Barzakh: Poems 2000–2012*; and *Breathturn into Timestead: The Collected Later Poetry of Paul Celan*. With Jerome Rothenberg he edited *Poems for the Millennium, vol. 1 and 2: The University of California Book of Modern and Postmodern Poetry*. He lives and works in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, with his wife, performance artist Nicole Peyrafitte. They are currently at work on *Talvera: A Millennium of Occitan Poetry* (Poems for the Millennium, vol.6).

## Spring 2017 Workshops

### CONTROVERSIES IN POETRY: LEGISLATING THE WORD AND THE WORLD

#### Workshop with Lisa Jarnot

10 Sessions | Saturdays, 2-4PM | Begins 2/4

Location: Neighborhood Preservation Center (232 E 11th St, New York, NY 10003)

Are poets unacknowledged legislators? Does poetry make nothing happen? Should poets be picking roses or agitating on the front line? These are the questions we grapple with as we dip into the long history of poetical warfare (Catullus's invectives, Ezra Pound's World War II radio speeches, Ed Sanders and the Investigative Poetry Group's *The Party: A Chronological Perspective on a Confrontation at a Buddhist Seminary*, Jennifer Dunbar Dorn's "Rolling Stock: A Chronicle of the 80s", Kevin Killian's "Activism, Gay Poetry, AIDS in the 1980s", Claudia Rankine's *Citizen* and *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*, Vanessa Place's "Miss Scarlett," CA Conrad's "From Whitman to Walmart," Kenneth Goldsmith's performance of Michael Brown's body, Cathy Park Hong's "There's a New Movement in American Poetry..." and more). We will observe, analyze, and see what it's all about. We will also write poems, invectives, rants, and well-reasoned arguments inspired by our readings and discussions.

**Lisa Jarnot** is a gardener, homeschooling mom, and author of several books of poetry and a biography of Robert Duncan. She lives in Jackson Heights, Queens, with her husband and daughter.

### ZAUM — BEYONSENSE, TRANS-SENSE POETRY, TRANS-RATIONAL LANGUAGE LEARNING FROM TRANS POETS

#### Workshop with Matvei Yankelevich

5 Sessions | Tuesdays, 7-9PM | Begins 2/7

Location: Neighborhood Preservation Center (232 E 11th St, New York, NY 10003)

The Russian Futurists posed a utopian project for poetry to overcome linguistic barriers through a new language of personal and indeterminate meaning. What can we hear, learn, and write from reading foreign voices trans-rationally? Can the *zaum* part of a text (the untranslatable) be translated, and if so, how? Translation also attempts to overcome the boundaries of time, nation, linguistic difference. By revealing our biases, prejudices, received literary notions, Translation — as process, procedure, and metaphor — calls on us to make crucial aesthetic and political choices, thus recuperating our volition and agency in the encounter with the authority(ies) present in any given text. Through a wide range of *zaum* practices we'll explore the generative aspects of translation and "mis-translation": how translating might open up new reserves of language for us to mine; how it might loosen our grip on our own "voice" and let in others; how our own language might affect our encounter with a foreign or faraway voice. We'll examine several zones of freedom and choice available to the translator as agent, far from a silent medium for a text, and we'll experiment with homophonic translation, revelatory redactions, variations on a theme, and devious deviations, translating against contemporary taboos with wild interpretations and trans-creations.

Knowledge of a foreign language is not required.  
Some reading of exemplary and theoretical texts will be assigned.

**Matvei Yankelevich's** books include the long poem *Some Worlds for Dr. Vogt* (Black Square), a poetry collection, *Alpha Donut* (United Artists), and a novella in fragments, *Boris by the Sea* (Octopus). His translations include *Today I Wrote Nothing: The Selected Writings of Daniil Kharmis* (Overlook), and (with Eugene Ostashevsky) Alexander Vvedensky's *An Invitation for Me to Think* (NYRB Poets), which received the 2014 National Translation Award. He has received fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the New York Foundation for the Arts. He is an editor at Ugly Duckling Presse, and teaches at Columbia University's School of the Arts and the Milton Avery Graduate School of the Arts at Bard College.



# Paul Blackburn & an urban ecology of poetry

As a city kid, as an early and devoted ecological activist, and as a poet at first it was difficult for me to see how to write, particularly with ecology in mind, into the human environments with which I was most familiar. Freightened by the traditional binaries of city/country, nature/human, civilization/wilderness, I wasn't initially able to apprehend, explore or articulate the complex values, poetically or ecologically, of city spaces. The idea that the city— with all its humans and all their various negotiations— might actually be as much an ecosystem as any other ecosystem was, has been and still is very controversial. That's where Paul Blackburn in his innovation of form and subject— the city and the details of such— was a huge influence in my own development of an urban ecopoetics.

These ideas aren't completely new, of course, and for centuries, humanity has been trying to separate itself (very problematically) from where we came from and where we are now. Raymond Williams, in his great book, *The Country and the City*, aptly identifies the pastoral as a forever vanishing point, each pastoral poem referring to other pastoral poem just preceding— never quite in the here and now, but rather a looking back, a reaching behind in what turns out to be after all a deeply conservative poetic mode. Williams also identifies the city as not much more than a capitalist space of acquisition and transaction: Direct quote:

I am then very willing to see the city as capitalism, as so many now do, if I can say also that this mode of production began, specifically, in the English rural economy, and produced, there, many of the characteristic effects—increases of production, physical reordering of a totally available world, displacement of customary settlements, a human remnant and force which became a proletariat— which have since

been seen, in many extending forms, in cities and colonies and in an international system as a whole. It then does not surprise me that the complaints in Convent Garden [or Brooklyn or the East Village...] echo the complaints of the commoners, since the forces of improvement and development, in those specific forms—an amalgam of financial and political power which is pursuing different ends from those of any local community, but which has its own and specific internal rationale—are in a fundamental sense similar, as phases of capitalist enterprise. (pg. 292)

So, I'll move from there, holding Williams in mind, toward Blackburn's poem, "Meditation on the BMT," in which Blackburn seems almost to respond directly to Williams' perceptions of the city's formidable "forces of improvement and development." I'll read the first two stanzas:

Here, at the beginning of the new season  
before the new leaves burgeon,  
on either side of the Eastern Parkway station

near the  
Botanical Gardens  
they burn trash on the embankments, laying  
barer than ever our sad, civilised  
refuse.

1 coffee can without a lid  
1 empty pint of White Star, the  
label  
faded by rain

1 empty beer-can  
2 empty Schenley bottles  
1 empty condom, seen from  
1 nearly empty train  
empty

empty

empty Repeated often enough,  
even the word looks funny.

How many contrasts are held  
within these two stanzas

written at the barest point of the year? Just outside the Brooklyn Botanic [the correct title] Gardens, already a precious and artificially constructed space, are people burning the remnants of everything spun off by the "system," revealing the reality of what we leave behind, what we add to our environment, how we truly organize our spaces, which includes abandonment, neglect, mountains of garbage, plastic bottles spinning endlessly in the ocean, gleaning.

And then, I hear echoes of Shelley (from "Julian and Maddalo"): I love all waste / And solitary places, where we taste / The pleasure of believing what we see / Is boundless, as we wish our souls to be."

Blackburn too I think saw in waste a different sort of insight into why humans are so very alienated from our own environments. "Poor Brooklyn soil" he laments,

poor american earth  
poor sickening houses  
poor hurricanes of streets, both  
your subterranean and your public  
lives go on  
anyhow, beneath  
refuse that is a refusal, with  
alienated, uneasy, un-  
reflective citizens, who will be  
less un-  
happy, more contented and vacant,  
if they  
relieve their bladders against some  
crappy wall or other.

In that stanza is a world of complexities— almost the entire history in microcosm of American inhabitation, the uneasy citizens who need after all solitude, abandoned spaces— the "crappy wall" (and I don't think I've ever seen a more stunning use of "crappy")— on which to perform natural functions, and within whose refuse is a deep refusal. Even more, Blackburn does not condemn, instead he ays, in ode-like form, O I love you, to these conventionally

unattractive spaces, the spandrels thrown off by urban development and existence, the backyards, the "barren, littered embankments." He is "grateful" that "men tend you" (again, in interesting contrast to the manicured space of the Botanic Garden), "still will rake your strange leaves, your strange leavings."

The spaces where the city falls apart into abandonment is where natural systems may today operate most powerfully— like Chernobyl, where the worst of human activity has led to a resurgence of animal life, or for a more gentle example, the Gowanus Canal, where one may see alongside asphalt crumbling into rainbow-sheened water scented with benzene, egrets, osprey, and the shapes of fish under the murk. But that's not to ignore the species who continually shadow our existences, driving us crazy in their symbiotic reflective behaviors— the rats, feral cats, cockroaches, mosquitoes, ticks, deer, and coyotes.

At this point, some conservationists may likely think how crazy I am to find ecological value in the detritus of industrialized existence, but "Meditation on the BMT" is such a clear-eyed capture of human/nature at its basest/ barest: to pee against a crappy wall. If we can identify it, and articulate it, then perhaps we can accommodate and work around/against that bare winter urination against a neglected wall surrounded by waste. This too is part of nature, more perhaps than the botanic garden requiring constant pruning, pesticides and mowing just a few blocks away— where one has to pay to enter and where peeing outside is most definitely prohibited.

Blackburn was so very good at those juxtapositions, at weaving deep history and profundity, held within poetic

# Marcella Durand

form that, while innovative, joins content just organically enough not to outweigh the clarity of Blackburn's apprehensions.

"Meditation on the BMT" is one poem that I chose to discuss with an ecological sensibility, but over and over Blackburn's acute perceptions of life even within the most interior of spaces is evident in, for example, a smaller poem like "The Routine" where he chronicles the green shoots of an onion within his refrigerator

Each day I open my  
cupboard  
& the green shoots of my  
last onion  
have in the dark grown  
higher

A perverse &  
fairly final pleasure  
that I love to watch him  
stretching himself

secretly, green sprouting  
shamelessly in  
this winter, making a  
park in my kitchen, making  
spring for a moment in  
my kitchen

that, instead of eating  
him  
I have watched  
him grow

Or a larger poem like "The Watchers," where he situates a Civetta Link-Belt within a continuum of human history. Again, like the word "crappy," this seemingly unpoetic object ripping up the street becomes an indelible element of a great poem that reworks form into a page-space that can accommodate a much fuller spectrum of civic experiences.

earth / debris / &  
schist, the stud/stuff of the island/  
is moved by this  
PASCO

CAT-933  
Oregon 6-

Here was an urban phenomenon I observed almost every day—a crane shoving the dirt of Manhattan island around— but what to make of that? Before reading "The Watchers," or "Meditation on the BMT," how could I have understood how to understand that dirt, which I had hardly even known actually existed under all the concrete, as something to write into—that the dirt I saw was actually the grains of so much that had occurred right up to this point, all the plants, trees, people, dust, trash, waste that had gone ahead of me standing there, watching that crane shove that dirt around as part of the larger process of forever rebuilding the city and watching it fall down again. And what is more natural than that process?

Originally delivered as a talk on September 26, 2016, at *InOn. Or About the Premises: A Celebration of the Work of Paul Blackburn* hosted by The Poetry Project at St. Mark's Church and Lost & Found: The CUNY Poetics Document Initiative. Many thanks to the organizers, moderator Stacy Szymaszek and my fellow participants, George Economou, David Henderson, Basil King, Carolee Schneeman, Simon Smith and Robert Vas Dias.

Marcella Durand's chapbook, *Rays of the Shadow*, a collection of interlinked poems based on the alexandrine, is forthcoming this February from Tent Editions. Another chapbook, *The Garden of M*, is currently being translated by Olivier Brossard into French and will be published in December by Joca Seria Editions.

## NEW! FROM KELSEY STREET

FORTY-TWO YEARS PUBLISHING LITERATURE BY WOMEN

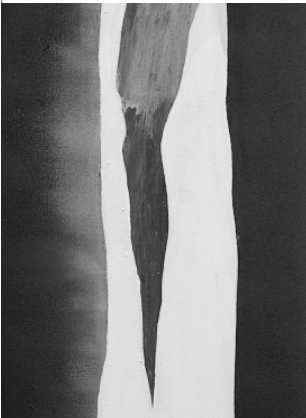
# 42

### Tell Me Every Anchor Every Arrow

by **Steffi Drewes**

"Precious few poets go so undaunted by the extravagant plastic possibilities of syntax..."  
— Brian Teare

2016, 86 pages \$16.95



### PREMONITION

by **Etel Adnan**

A mixture  
of jazz  
and Iraqi  
takseem.

"There is always a conductive thread through space for untenable positions."  
— Etel Adnan, "Premonition"

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FORTHCOMING:

**recombinant** Ching-In Chen, 2016  
**The Selected Poetry of Cecilia Vicuña (1966–2015)**, 2017



**NESTS & STRANGERS:**  
On Asian American Women Poets  
EDITED BY TIMOTHY WU

"this is where the heart of our current contention over race and poetry lies—"  
— Muriel Leung 2015, 116 pages \$16.95

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# PLOT

There's always a pretty girl in the plot,  
but nowadays she calls me "Sir"

Samuel Beckett '57



The art work of **George Schneeman** (1934-2009) was shown at the Fischbach Gallery, Holly Solomon Gallery, the Tibor de Nagy Gallery, the Istituto Italiano di Cultura, the Pavel Zoubok Gallery and at numerous museums in the U.S. and Europe. It graces the collections of the National Portrait Gallery, the Museum of Modern Art, the Minneapolis Institute of Art, the Berkeley Art Museum, and the Colby College Gallery of Art, among others.

Recently Poets House mounted a large exhibition of his collaborative work with poets. Schneeman was a friend of the downtown arts community and The Poetry Project for more than 40 years, and his art was frequently featured on the cover of this publication, as well as many Project flyers and posters.

During this 50th Anniversary year, the Project continues to remember and celebrate George Schneeman's spirit, art and grace. You can view his work at [georgeschneeman.com](http://georgeschneeman.com).

# Poetry

## VIVARIUM

The chameleons look like miniature robots made of paper.  
I wait for my phone to light up.  
You said you were moving somewhere very far from here.  
Rain tormented, irregularly, some thin sheet of metal just outside the window;  
a beginner practicing snare drum.  
Something again about waiting.  
What motherfucker is it  
hangs on my shoulders from the inside, kicking my ribs.  
Rugs in the living rooms of the houses I visited  
as a teenager, as a kid. A mom who insisted  
we remove our shoes before stepping on the clear  
plastic runners laid over cream-colored carpet.  
Faces I will never see again, hideous sateen couches.  
I must go slowly toward you  
by going alongside you, you say.  
Later, there will be another word for this.  
Not the black eyes of a snake  
that looked in a direction that included me.  
Not the white and yellow patterned body of a  
python the circumference of my thigh.  
White stickers slapped on the tanks read  
proven male  
tailless females  
The stippled scrotum of a pink gecko smushed against glass.  
A man emerges from the back room with a giant lizard  
clinging to him like a drowsy toddler.  
Beside the register, three plastic bins of live mice  
huddled in wood shavings.  
When we drove along the coast, deer cropped  
the grass “peacefully.” The sudden urge to hurl one of those

# *Ari Baniias*

enormous pythons at them. Inside me  
some holy and unaccountable force  
that cannot be detached entirely  
from its source.

One pillow under your head, two under mine;  
a lover who ruined Maryland, red sauce, certain songs;  
the brother you speak of seldom.

Sand dollar whose sand falls out slowly on the dresser.  
Unrelenting grey of a highway underpass.

Shouted where no one listens, precisely  
because no one listens,  
that sort of privacy.

A turtle repeatedly butts its head  
scrambling against plexi  
that rattles like plastic dishware against itself.

Awake long after you're asleep, I think  
the I is a ladder the self climbs  
out of its hole. One chameleon  
suspended by its spiral tail from a twig.

In the parking lot, a woman behind me  
won't reverse to make room for me to reverse.  
She wants to just sit here; fine, I can sit here.

For you I have  
thunder inside me for years.

Great willingness to bow into the wind  
and into the tremendous force of your palm.

The particular hollow metal note of your trunk when it slams with its extra clink  
a sound whose brokenness I will come to remember  
as I will the voice you use to show kindness to your nervous black dog

I walk alongside now.



## GAY BARS

| Best Friends Club | Hideaway | Chameleons | Just Us |  
Somewhere in Time | There | The Edge | Nevermore  
| Someplace Else | The Other Place | Utopia | Cell Block |  
The Other Side | My Sister's Room | Crossroads | Sugar Shack  
| Lion's Den | Stage Door | Maneuvers | Questions |  
Tramps | Legends | Brothers | The Flame  
| One Love | After Dark | Heads Up | Panic |  
Buddies | Innuendo | In Between | Out of Bounds  
| Backstreet | Masque | Wild Card | The Odds |  
Club Detour | Vice Versa | Outskirts | Above and Beyond  
| Uncle Elizabeth's | Five Cent Decision | Chances R | The Park |  
The Right Corner | Paradise Inn | Temptations | The Trapp  
| Bambi's Bottoms Up | Manhole | Charmers | Blendz |  
Alias | Alibi's | The Backdoor | Faces  
| Touché | Temple | Nutbush | Club Try |  
Monkey Business | The Closet | Hush on Congress | Why Not III  
| Bubby and Sissy's | Drama Club | Different Seasons | Oz |  
The Eagle | SideKicks | A Man's World | 'Bout Time  
| Equals | Exhale | Esquire | Exile |  
R House | Ain't Nobody's Business | Heaven | Crazy Fox

## PUBLIC LIFE

The roses in the Bank of America parking lot  
clumped on a landscaped island  
spent heads nodding to the ongoing, know.  
At the ATM the set of terms I hesitate at—  
Empty Burger King bag I kick for no reason  
People standing in the small blob of a locust tree's midday shade  
A dog barks because another dog barks  
—I press agree to make go away.

**Ari Baniás** is the author of the book *Anybody* (W.W. Norton, 2016) and the chapbook *What's Personal is Being Here With All Of You* (Portable Press @ Yo-Yo Labs). His poems appear in *Boston Review*, *The Offing*, *Poetry*, *A Public Space*, as part of the exhibition *Transgender Hirstory in 99 Objects*, and elsewhere. Ari lives and works in Berkeley, CA.

“Gay Bars” is reprinted from *Anybody* (W.W. Norton, 2016).

# Calendar of Events

All events begin at 8pm unless otherwise noted. Admission \$8/Students & Seniors \$7/Members \$5 or free. The Poetry Project is wheelchair accessible with assistance and advance notice. For more detailed information about St. Mark's and accessibility, visit [poetryproject.org](http://poetryproject.org) or call 212.674.0910.

## FRI 12/2

### A Semblance of Humor:

#### Karen Davis, Cathy de la Cruz & Jes Tom

**Cathy de la Cruz** is a filmmaker, performer and writer born and raised in San Antonio, Texas. Currently she resides in New York City where she teaches Creative Writing to kids and is also a Contributing Editor for *Weird Sister*, where she writes the column, "Funny Feminism." Her first collection of poetry, *Libido* is forthcoming from Spooky Girlfriend Press.

**Karen Davis** has been tearing up backrooms and independent theaters for years, lost count. It's been a wild ride. Short on rehab, long on self-doubt. Join Karen for her first abbreviated set since last Friday when she monologued at her latest roommate, Tina Slatter, on proper bathroom etiquette when you got a clogged drain and no wire hangers in sight.

**Jes Tom** (they/them) is a weird queer stand-up comic with but one goal: To hurt the feelings of The Oppressor. Born & raised in San Francisco and now established in New York, Jes Tom is a fresh voice in stand-up comedy, gleefully providing the nonbinary queer Asian American radical cyborg perspective that everyone never knew they wanted.

## MON 12/5

### Aziza Barnes & Marwa Helal

**Aziza Barnes** is blk & alive. Her first chapbook, *me Aunt Jemima and the nailgun*, was the first winner of the Exploding Pinecone Prize and published from Button Poetry. She is a poetry & non-fiction editor at *Kinfolks Quarterly*, a Callaloo fellow and graduate from NYU's Tisch School of the Arts. She is a member of The Dance Cartel & the divine fabrics collective.

**Marwa Helal's** poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *Apogee Journal*, *Day One*, *The Offing*, *The Recluse* and *Winter Tangerine*. She is the winner of BOMB Magazine's Biennial 2016 Poetry Prize, a Cave Canem fellow, a Brooklyn Poets fellow, a mentor in the New York Foundation for the Arts Immigrant Artist Program and received her MFA in Creative Writing from the New School.

## WED 12/7

### Robert Glück & Luc Sante

**Robert Glück** is the author of eleven books, including two novels, *Margery Kempe* and *Jack the Modernist*, a collection of stories, *Denny Smith*, prose poems with Kathleen Fraser, *In Commemoration of the Visit*, and, most recently, *Communal Nude: Collected Essays*.

**Luc Sante's** books include *Low Life*, *Evidence*, *The Factory of Facts*, *Kill All Your Darlings*, and *The Other Paris*. He teaches writing and the history of photography at Bard.

## FRI 12/9

### Torkwase Dyson & Sharifa Rhodes-Pitts

**Torkwase Dyson** has traveled to Africa and South and Central America to participate with artists and activists on human rights issues of natural resources, historic visibility, and spatial equality. Dyson distills the language of architecture and landscape architecture to generate an idiosyncratic language that is both meditative and structural.

**Sharifa Rhodes-Pitts** is the author of "Harlem Is Nowhere: A Journey to the Mecca of Black America". She has received grants and awards from Creative Capital, the Whiting Foundation, the Rona Jaffe Foundation and the Lannan Foundation. Rhodes-Pitts organizes projects through The Freedwomen's Bureau.

*This event is co-sponsored by the Belladonna\* Collaborative. Chaplets by the readers will be for sale for \$5 each.*

## MON 12/12

### Sara Larsen & Hanif Willis-Abdurraqib

**Sara Larsen** is a poet living in Oakland, CA. Her previous book, *All Revolutions Will Be Fabulous*, was released by Printing Press in 2014. Other chapbooks include *Riot Cops en Route to Troy* (Little Red Leaves Textile Series), *Merry Hell* (Compline Press; Materials Press), and *The Hallucinated* (Cannot Exist), among others.

**Hanif Willis-Abdurraqib** is a poet, essayist, and cultural critic from Columbus, Ohio. He is a Callaloo Creative Writing fellow, a writing fellow at Yale University, and a columnist for MTV News. His first collection of poems, *The Crown Ain't Worth Much*, was released by Button Poetry in 2016.

## WED 12/14

### GIANT NIGHT: UMBRA: a living archive

UMBRA was both a literary collective and literary magazine founded by Black writers and artists living in New York's Lower East Side in the early 1960s, many of whom participated in proto-Project readings and influenced the formation of The Poetry Project. Scholar **Tonya Foster** joins The Poetry Project in celebrating the work of UMBRA poets. This evening traces the influence of **Lorenzo Thomas**, **Calvin Hernton**, **Norman Pritchard** and **David Henderson** on younger poets and artists influenced, locating UMBRA's history in print and in person, past and present. With **Tonya Foster**, **David Henderson**, **Ammiel Alcalay**, **Genji Amino**, **Jace Clayton** and more.

## MON 12/19

### Mare Liberum & Kaia Sand

**Mare Liberum** is a collective of visual artists, designers, and writers who formed around a shared engagement with New York's waterways in 2007. The collective is currently led by **Jean Barberis**, **Ben Cohen**, **Dylan Gauthier**, **Sunita Prasad**, **Kendra Sullivan**, and **Stephan von Muehlen**. More information at: <http://www.thefreeseas.org>.

**Kaia Sand** is the author of *A Tale of Magicians Who Puffed Up Money that Lost its Puff*, *Remember to Wave*, *interval*, and co-author with Jules Boykoff of *Landscapes of Dissent: Guerrilla Poetry and Public Space*. She works across genres and media, dislodging poetry from the book into more unconventional contexts; she documents work at [kaiasand.net](http://kaiasand.net).

## SUN 1/1 3pm—2am

### The 43rd Annual New Year's Day Marathon Benefit Reading

The New Year's Day Marathon is the Project's largest fundraiser and provides support for what we do best — serve

as a public venue for the substantial presentation of innovative writing!

Featuring: **Hanif Willis Abdurraqib, Jaye Bartell, Jennifer Bartlett, Jim Behrle, Rijard Bergeron, Anselm Berrigan, Emily Brandt, Marie Buck, CACONrad, Chia-Lun Chang, Church of Betty, Cheryl Clarke, Todd Colby, Lydia Cortes, Joey de Jesus, Francesca DeMusz, Ted Dodson, Marcella Durand, Andrew Durbin, Will Edmiston, Mel Elberg, Ernie Brooks with Peter Zummo and Jeannine Otis, Betsy Fagin, Dia Felix, Jess Fiorini, Foamola, Tonya Foster, Ed Friedman, Hafiza Geter, John Giorno, Che Gossett, Adjuja Gargi Nzinga Greaves, Whit Griffin, Anna Gurton Wachter, Lonely Christopher, Laura Henriksen, Chanice Hughes Greenberg, Tony Iantosca, Baz King, Martha King, Ben Krusling, Rachel Levitsky, Phoebe Lifton, Matt Longabucco, Brendan Lorber, Filip Marinovich, Shelley Marlow, Yvonne Meier, Jonas Mekas, Sharon Mesmer, Tracie Morris, Dave Morse, Eileen Myles, Edgar Oliver, Dan Owen, Penny Arcade, Simon Pettet, Tommy Pico, Reno, Ariel Resnikoff, Bob Rosenthal, Sarah Schulman, Purvi Shah, Pamela Sneed, Patricia Spears Jones, Sara Jane Stoner, Steven Taylor, Nurit Tilles, Edwin Torres, Tony Towle, David Vogen, Asiya Wadud, Nicole Wallace, Lewis Warsh, Simone White, Martha Wilson, Wendy Xu, Don Yorty, Jenny Zhang,** and more TBA.

**MON 1/9**  
**Open Reading**

Open readings have always been an integral part of The Poetry Project's programming. They provide a time and space for writers of all levels of experience to test, fine tune, and work out their writing and reading styles in front of a supportive audience. Sign-in at 7:45pm.

**WED 1/11**

**Kenward Elmslie's *The Orchid Stories***

The Song Cave presents a new edition of Kenward Elmslie's out-of-print masterpiece, *The Orchid Stories*, with a night of readings from the book, featuring **John Keene, Ann Lauterbach, Michael Silverblatt, and Anne Waldman.**

**FRI 1/13, 8:30PM**

**Grace Dunham & Cecilia Gentili**

**Grace Dunham** is a writer and prison abolition activist from New York City. Their first chapbook of poetry is available at

thefool.us. Their current project, Support.FM, is a crowdfunding platform to help trans and gender nonconforming people in jail and detention raise money for bail and bond. They live in Los Angeles, where they are developing Support.FM with Jodie.

**Cecilia Gentili** has worked at the LGBT Center, Apicha CHC and currently serves as the Assistant Director of Public Affairs at GMHC. She was a contributor to *Trans Bodies Trans Selves* and is a board member at Translatina Network. She is very passionate about advocating for her community, and mostly for transgender women with a Latino background, sex work history, drug use and incarceration history.

**WED 1/18**

**Mike Lala & Lucy Ives**

**Mike Lala** is the author of *Exit Theater* (2016 Colorado Prize for Poetry, selected by Tyrone Williams) and a few chapbooks including *In the Gun Cabinet* and *Twenty-Four Exits (A Closet Drama)*. [www.mikelala.com](http://www.mikelala.com)

**Lucy Ives** is the author of five books of poetry and prose, including *The Hermit* (The Song Cave, 2016), a collection of aphorisms, lists, dreams, and games. In summer 2017, Penguin Press will publish her first full-length novel, *Impossible Views of the World*, about the travails of a young curator.

**FRI 1/27**

**Justin Allen & Diamond Stingily**

**Justin Allen** is a writer and performer from Northern Virginia. He has written for *Mosaic Literary Magazine*, The Studio Museum in Harlem's *Studio Blog*, Lambda Literary, and *ARTS.BLACK* among others. Since 2015 he has been performing in artist niv Acosta's episodic work DISCOTROPIC. He lives in New York City.

**Diamond Stingily** is a writer and artist from Chicago, Illinois living in Brooklyn. Her journal from when she was eight years old was published through Dominica

Publishing titled *Love, Diamond*. Her second solo exhibition "Elephant Memory" was at Ramiken Crucible (NY) September 18- October 16 on the Lower East Side.

**MON 1/30**

**Isabel Sobral Campos & Mary Walling Blackburn with Che Chen**

**Isabel Sobral Campos'** poetry has appeared in *Bone Bouquet*, *Gauss PDF*, *Horseless Press*, and the *Yalobusha Review*. In collaboration with Small Anchor Press, No, Dear recently published her debut chapbook, *Material*. She is the co-founder of the Sputnik & Fizzle publishing series and Assistant Professor of Literature at Montana Tech of the University of Montana.

**Mary Walling Blackburn** works in New York City. In 2016, the work handles and is handled by optics (the lazy eye), contaminated logics (diagrams), and politics (the Miscreant Class). All is amputated/ shaped by the Capitalocene. Walling Blackburn's work and writing have been featured in *Afterall*, *BOMB*, *Cabinet*, *e-flux journal*, *Pastelegram*, and *Grafter's Quarterly*.

**Che Chen** plays guitar in the band 75 Dollar Bill and makes sound with various instruments/things in other spontaneous and ongoing configurations. He currently runs the label, Black Pollen Press, which has published works by Eliane Radigue, Pauline Oliveros and Yoshi Wada. The label will release composer Catherine Lamb's shade/gradient on LP in early 2017.

## "HOW DO I GET A READING?"

Participation in all series is by invitation from the series coordinator. It helps to be familiar with the Project's schedule and what the current series coordinators are interested in. While the series are curated, we are always CURIOUS. If you want to get our attention, mail your books and poems to the office at 131 E. 10th St. NY, NY 10003 or email us at [info@poetryproject.com](mailto:info@poetryproject.com). Your email will be forwarded to the series coordinators. Coordinator appointments change every two years to ensure diversity of perspective.

# Anselm Berrigan interview about interviews

At the end of October, I met up with Anselm Berrigan to talk about the upcoming release of *WHAT IS POETRY? (JUST KIDDING, I KNOW YOU KNOW): INTERVIEWS FROM THE POETRY PROJECT NEWSLETTER (1983–2009)* with Wave Books. Enjoy the resulting interview in the *Newsletter* about an anthology of *Newsletter* interviews!

**Betsy Fagin:** What is that?

**Anselm Berrigan:** These are the proofs of the interview book... I thought I would... obviously you can't sit and read it, but I can...

**B:** This is not the way I planned this interview. Wait. This is cool. When is it going to be done?

**A:** We're working on permissions, photos, photo credits, some final permissions for some of the interviews...

**B:** You know what? I'm not going to look at this... If I just look it's going to eliminate my questions.

**A:** It looks like it'll be ready to go to print before the end of the year and that we'll have copies back in January or February. Though it will be released officially in the spring, copies will be circulating and out and about in the early part of 2017.

**B:** Back to my first question... I hear you're doing an interview book. Why are you doing it? Let me interview you about your interview book.

**A:** I was interested in doing this book back when I was Director of the Project in 2004-05 actually. Back in 2004-05 we put together a photocopy of everything that had ever been in the *Newsletter* that was an interview or interview-like, because I wanted to see if there was a book there. My suspicion was that there was, and that even if it was unlikely to get published any time soon it would be fun to put the manuscript together. I knew that in the 90s there were a lot of good interviews, and at the time, Marcella Durand was editing the *Newsletter* and putting an interview into every

issue, so they were still coming. I'm fond of the interview as a form and I like interview books when they have a little bit of life to them. I found out a lot about my father from this book, *Talking in Tranquility* which is a book of interviews with him that came out 7 or 8 years after he died – around the time that I started writing poems and really thinking about the art more particularly – and so there's this way that I've always looked at interviews as a potential source for information from poets specifically. I thought if we have enough good material we can make a book that will be useful and show a side of the Project's history made of people talking, which is sort of what invented the Project in the first place.

**B:** I was reading through a lot of the interviews yesterday and what struck me is that there were a lot of moments that came through in the interviews where people were really working out their poetics by talking to each other. What's interesting to me about that also is seeing what relationships exist: *ah, they knew each other, they hung out and talked, I didn't know.* There's a question in there somewhere.

**A:** It's true. And that was one of the things that was of interest to me too, starting with the fact that certain people who had been around the Poetry Project a long time had just never been interviewed until they were interviewed in the *Newsletter*. Or had rarely been interviewed.

**B:** At all?

**A:** At all. Like John Godfrey or David Henderson or Ted Greenwald. And then moving forward a generation or two,

people like Akilah Oliver or Brenda Coultas, all of these people who show up in the book, Edwin Torres. They're sort of ready to tell things and to say things and they're not in a position of being talked to so frequently in public that they've got a rap they've pre-prepared or anything like that. And then you do find out certain things. You find out that Ted Greenwald and Lorenzo Thomas knew each other really well early on in the 60s, or you find out more particularly about the overlap between say UMBRA and the downtown scene and how that was filtered back and forth through certain individuals. And you find out how rowdy and competitive the Project was in its early days.

**B:** In its early days. Not now?

**A:** Not in the same way. People are much more internal, or indirect, about their standards, and maybe not even aware they might have them sometimes.

**B:** I was wondering about how the interviews reflect on the state of the Project also because looking through the early interviews, at least what's online, it was very intimate – a really close scene where people were together and knew each other and now maybe... What's your sense of that? I feel like there's that thing that we keep going back to that the Project was this site, a central site that helped make these relationships happen and helped people develop their craft and their thinking about poetry and now? Now what is it? I'm curious about whether that still happens.

**A:** It's like that still, to a degree, but there's all this other stuff to consider. There are way

more people writing. And at the same time New York isn't affordable. Lower Manhattan isn't at all affordable the same way. People aren't moving to this neighborhood and then going to the Poetry Project because it's right there. There isn't the same kind of schism between uptown and downtown that there used to be. There isn't the same sense of class division that was worn less lightly from what I can tell. The mid-80s is roughly the point at which the Lower East Side gets divided into the East Village and the area below Houston, by real estate forces, and people start getting priced out. Now there are more places to go to have "community," however one chooses to define that. I think it's a slippery term at this point.

The thing about the interviews, there don't actually start being longer interviews in the *Newsletter* until you get a few of them in the 80s and they really kick in in the 90s. Earlier on the *Newsletter* wasn't actually long enough for them, and I think that people lived in such close proximity to one other that it maybe wasn't quite as necessary.

**B:** And it came out really frequently at the beginning didn't it?

**A:** It came out – maybe it came out a little more frequently at the beginning, but when it was a 4 page newsletter, when it first started, I think it still came out every 2 months because it was about the calendar. Everything revolved around the calendar and letting people know what was going to be happening and then there was this kind of bulletin board of notes, news, events, people coming and going, things like that. If somebody left town, that was noted.

One reason why it was interesting to me to put this



book together is that when you start to get the interviews in the 90s, particularly when Lisa Jarnot was editing the *Newsletter* circa 1996-98, the interviewers are talking to specific people who've been around the Project for a number of years and getting them to talk about both the present and what's led them to the present. That's when you get these interviews with David and with John, you get an interview with Bernadette Mayer which is a second interview with her. There had been one in the early 90s when the *Bernadette Mayer Reader* came out and I included both of them because they do different things. There's an interview with my mother around that time too. There's an interesting interview with Victor Hernández Cruz that gets into aspects of his development in New York and how one could become a poet by, in his case, coming over from Puerto Rico and then dealing with English and Spanish together and working his way forward from there. There's a lot of history in there, but it's live history, it's talked about in terms of a continuum that's always leading to and through now, and the question of what are we doing now. The interviews felt and feel active to me. At that point the Project is getting up to and past 30 years old, so there's been enough history for that to be a tangible part of the conversation on several levels without it being self-serving.

**B:** What do you think makes a good interview? Also, what's the difference between an interview and a conversation, or an interrogation?

**A:** That's a good question. I did actually make a point of leaving out most interviews that were done via email – that kind of interview that purports to be a conversation, but is often just two people sending long emails back and forth to each other. I found that those did not hold up very well in the context of a book of interviews, most of which are two people in a room having a conversation and one

person is asking questions to direct the conversation or to give the person room to speak. It's a conversation with an understanding that one person may be going to do most of the talking, but that person has been invited to do so. And then there's the chemistry factor. There has to be some fluidity between the two people or there has to be some tension that's actually interesting – that comes up in a of couple cases. Most of the interviews are actually two people in a room talking to each other and I came to the conclusion that an interview like that, a live interview, is a conversation that becomes writing. The problem with the email interviews, for me, is that they're often two people writing to each other but working parallel to one another, constructing an affect of conversation.

The interview book goes from 1983 to 2009. I had to draw a line at 2009 even though there were some interesting things that came later. And I left out some other things that were very short just because structurally they also didn't quite hold up in the context of an interview book made of relatively longer interviews. Vicki Hudspeth did this really great series of 16 super-short phone-call interviews in the late 70s and I tried to figure out what to do about them. I thought they either all have to be printed together or they can't go in. The problem is that some of them are really terrific and then some of them are not. Some are just so brief they don't go anywhere and a couple that I really wanted to work are slightly incoherent, but I think if they were all published together on the website that would make a really interesting piece. There's this really weird moment where she calls up Robert Bly and he declares that if plants could write poems they'd write prose poems.

**B:** Do you have a favorite interview in the book?

**A:** No, it's too hard to say. I like

things for different reasons. The book begins with this interview which has been printed in a couple of places otherwise, which is Charles North basically coming up with a list of questions about New York, about the New York scene, about the Poetry Project a little bit, but about poetry in New York in general at the time. It was originally for a British magazine and all his questions were addressed to Paul Violi who I guess was going to answer them, but then the questions were actually so detailed they took care of the answers themselves, so Paul didn't have to do any work. That's a really nice piece, it sets the stage. It's also where the title of the book comes from: *What is poetry (just kidding, I know you know)*. That's a one of a kind piece, none of the other interviews are like that.

But then early on there's also this really fine, concise interview of Paul Schmidt by Tim Dlugos. Paul Schmidt's talking about his translations of Rimbaud and Khlebnikov in advance of a reading he's going to give, and in a very short space he works through some really interesting questions and details about translating, and about translating difficult work in particular. I have a soft spot for that also. I quite like Ken Jordan's interviews with Bernadette and David Rattray. I really like Dale Smith's interview of Lorenzo Thomas. There's a really great interview that Marcella does with Will Alexander. It's possible that I'm gravitating to those right now, in answering the question, and saying I don't have a favorite, because these interviews are of the type that may slightly alter whatever one's idea of a conventional interview in the context of the *Poetry Project Newsletter* might be.

**B:** Ah yes, I see. Tell me more. How do you feel about that? And then what happened?

**A:** Actually the funny thing is that "and then what happened" is the problem in talking about

the book.

**B:** Why?

**A:** Because the book has a chronological order, but each interview is a self-contained piece. And there's a lot of circularity— things that get referred to early on come back again, people come back again, the FBI comes up in funny ways...

**B:** That's funny.

**A:** Ed Sanders had something to say about the FBI in relation to Allen Ginsberg and in relation to the files kept on certain people, himself included. Then Ron Padgett has something else to say about the FBI later in relation to the research he was doing when he was writing his memoir of his father, who was a bootlegger in Oklahoma while Ron was growing up. Ron requested his FBI file through the Freedom of Information Act. At first they sent it to him with something like the vast majority of it redacted, and then he got them to release a little more information. But they did things like redact names of his family members, things he obviously already knew. It was silly.

There are little bits like that but you also get a lot of glimpses of the Project in the 60s, you get them from different angles, and you get some things that move back into the 50s. There's a really lovely silent interview of Samuel Delaney, so he's interviewing himself, and he's talking about listening to Auden on the radio in the 1950s as a kid and then using that as a way to jump forward and talk about some things that are current at the time of the interview. So in my sense the book has a shape that isn't exactly narrative, but if you believe that narrative can have a kind of circular formation moving forward in a book that is an assemblage of oral materials, I think it has that. And in that sense can be read as a set of stories and sub-stories that coincide with history by adding to it and

# New Omnidawn Fall Poetry



## Molly Bendall *Watchful*

6" x 9" 80 pages 978-1-63243-021-2 \$17.95

"A zoological refraction, *Watchful* asks how we see from within the structures we've built to separate ourselves from other animals."—Cathy Wagner



## Elena Karina Byrne *Squander*

6" x 9" 80 pages 978-1-63243-022-9 \$17.95

"This is Byrne's deepest exploration of language yet; there's no one writing like her and her voice is an essential one in American poetry."—Victoria Chang



## Jennifer S. Cheng *House A*

6" x 9" 128 pages 978-1-63243-023-6 \$17.95

One of *Publishers Weekly's* fifty "books we predict will make a splash" "investigates the tones and textures of immigrant home-building by asking: how is the body inscribed with a cosmology of home, and vice versa?"—*Publishers Weekly*



## Jean Daive translated by Norma Cole *White Decimal*

5.5" x 7" Pocket Series 144 pages 978-1-63243-028-1 \$11.95

"Cole has captured all the spare force and all the uncanny grace of Daive's ground-breaking poetry in phrasing that renders the whole both immediate and inevitable."—Cole Swensen



## Rebecca Gaydos *Güera*

6" x 9" 72 pages 978-1-63243-024-3 \$17.95

One of *Publishers Weekly's* fifty "books we predict will make a splash"

"Edgy, energized, and sexually frank, this debut collection explores identity, representation, and racial and gender exploitation through the image of the güera, Mexican slang for 'white girl.'"—Barbara Hoffert, *Library Journal*



## Robert Andrew Perez *the field*

5.5" x 7" Pocket Series 64 pages 978-1-63243-029-8 \$11.95

One of *Publishers Weekly's* fifty "books we predict will make a splash" "Perez's debut addresses the perils of love in an age of persistent angst, or the virtues of love from a persistently anxious mind."—*Publishers Weekly*



## Martha Ronk *Ocular Proof*

6" x 9" 80 pages 978-1-63243-025-0 \$17.95

One of *Publishers Weekly's* fifty "books we predict will make a splash" "Ronk's ekphrastic pieces on black-and-white photographs wring insight from the smallest compositional details."—*Publishers Weekly*



## John Wilkinson *Ghost Nets*

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messing with it and correcting it. And occasionally running from it.

**B:** Is there anything else you want to say about the book or about putting it together?

**A:** I'm only working with what went into the *Newsletter*. I wasn't interested in commissioning new interviews to go with it, I didn't want to do that. I didn't want to create material for the purposes of the book. If the book was going to work, it needed to work in terms of what was already, what had already been made and happened for the *Newsletter*. It was necessary to honor the constraint that is the printed *Newsletter*. Because the job of the *Newsletter* editor is a rather difficult one, for the most part, I was aware of how much work goes into a single interview actually: reading, researching, thinking of questions, arranging the time, getting to the place, doing it, typing it up, editing it, cutting things to fit the space, going back and forth with the interviewee, all that... I want the book to strike a certain balance between recognizing that all of these materials come out of this relatively small publication that has always been done on the fly and that has served a slowly, steadily growing audience over the course of more than 30 years. I think it's just over forty years. I think the first issue was in the early 70s.

But then also recognizing that taking the interviews out of the *Newsletter* and putting them into a book makes for a different kind of reading experience and a different kind of structure. That's why this book is not a reflection of the *Newsletter* specifically so much as it is a gathering of voices that were given room to speak in the *Newsletter* originally, and I think there's enough weight there to make a certain kind of book that has a number of different functions and an odd singularity to it. There's a part of me that believes a book of interviews is the best way to start to get inside the odder

collective history of the Poetry Project. Because that's a history that has a lot more instability to it than the organization now gives off, in that it's 50 years old and has this sort of institutional quality to it which is both useful and irritating. I guess that lends itself to a definition of significance.

**B:** Standing the test of time – printing things in books... I think those stapled and mimeographed things were pretty beautiful though. I like the quick and fast, I like that transient quality. It's not like that anymore, but it is. You know how the *Newsletter* gets put together (*laughs*). It's the same. I hope it has the same underlying energy...

**A:** One thing that's very different now, generally speaking, in my sense of "American poetry," is people are so much more accustomed to and dependent on different notions of poetics, of having an articulation for their work that's outside of their work or that's alongside of their work or that they lead with before the work can begin to breathe. So the rap about the work gets given a certain kind of sanctity.

That's something that the earlier waves of people who were around the Project regularly were suspicious of, were against, or deemed academic. And it is academic, but you can make a case that what's changed about experimental poetry in the States over the last 20-25 years is that it has become more comfortable residing inside of certain academic zones. I don't necessarily think that's entirely a negative, but I do think there are some problems there that haven't really been looked at very closely. A lot of folks are very willing to stand on that ground of specialization without examining it.

And so it's interesting, at least to me, that the interview book is largely a set of cross-generational conversations. It's not entirely that, but a lot of these interviews are younger

poets interviewing poets who are 10, 20, 30 years older, and those gaps are where the questions are being directed from, and that's part of the reason why so many of the interviews are expansive in their examination of things, or at least opening their arms widely to try to take on a number of subjects at once. Because these are poets talking, they're going to take on a lot of subjects anyway, they're mostly people who've trained themselves to speak and move across an array of materials. For a lot of these folks, talking and conversation was where ideas got put in play, where they got mapped out, where things that are called poetics now flowed through, though it mostly took place in the poems.

In that sense the interview book is a way to get a little closer to what some of these writers were and are thinking about in relation to making their work. For some people that's talking about composition and for other people that's talking about sources; for others that's talking about some combination of both. For some folks it's about moving over here and talking about their life and talking about their work and how that slides into allowing the writing to happen, when it can happen. The way that John Godfrey talks about doing his very intense work as a nurse driving around the city in the 90s in particular, into the 00s, and maintaining his writing practice through this very intense schedule that had him up at 4:00 or 5:00 in the morning on most days. That exists there. It doesn't exist anywhere else. He's not going to sit down and write an essay about it. Maybe he will someday, I don't know. John, I'm not trying to put any ideas into your head. But I can still do this interview knowing that he is going to read it, which is nice, that's a real thing about the Poetry Project.

**B:** Yes.

**Anselm Berrigan** has been a volunteer, workshop leader, Artistic Director, Monday night series coordinator, Wednesday night series coordinator, occasional secret random event organizer, reader, and audience member at and for The Poetry Project.

# Reviews

## The Tortoise of History Anselm Hollo

Coffee House Press, 2016  
Review by John Godfrey

Anselm Hollo (1934-2013), Finnish born, assimilated American, won honor and love from me for his long and deep body of work. His work in particular, and that of his generation, has led to the assimilation of new freedoms that young writers might presume without knowledge of their heritage. Anyone who has not yet surveyed his work, in the next seven days acquire the book under review and one of the several, non-identical selected collections. *Notes on the Possibilities and Attractions of Existence*, selected from 1965-2000, is convenient. *Corvus* (1995) and *Rue Wilson Monday* (1999) represent him at his most rigorous mastery of ideas of the sonnet he furthered, inspired by his poetry brother, Ted Berrigan (born later in the same year).

Hollo writes in real time. His self-awareness and natural mindfulness come into focus when you read him chronologically. He believed in his “one continuous poem.” One sees that for all his technical freedom, erudition and rebellious mischief, the real esprit of the continuum is the commutation of his character, as it is – it always seems to stay “is” – into poems, in a humanly precise way. Pound and Williams taught him standards of clearly defined writing and open-ended scholarship. He learned freedoms of laying the poem out, of meter, of the patch construction of poems. He was predisposed to learn the vulnerability of digging deep. His is a Williams-like regimen: 1) Look deeply at the natural world, without sentimentalizing it; 2) Look deeply into your interior world, however saddening and conflicted the discoveries; and 3) Report in words that are

chosen accurately and, as when riding a motorcycle, with the adequate amount of fear. He is also movingly gentle, even sweet. He lived a domestic life with the woman he loved and wrote undomesticated poems. He reasons in a few words. He will not reason-out all the way. His “precise non sequitur” accustoms the reader to Hollo’s synaptical completeness.

Dominant parts of Hollo’s character are the elegiac and the indignant. These effects have power in proportion to how literate the poet is. In Hollo they exude love of loving above, most of the time, the shit. That means, for him, coming back to his live surroundings, to the charms and puzzlements of best intentions, where sense and compassion arise. Wisdom.

*The Tortoise of History* (2016) contains poems of Hollo’s best rigorous style and last, simpler poems of intimacy. He is old, has been stricken and foresees his death. In the end, looking deep yields milder, laconic returns. There is a valedictory note. As a note of character, indignation gives way to gratitude.

Standing apart to conclude the book is “Hipponax, His Poems,” collected only once before in a small edition in 1995. Hipponax was a poet in Ephesus in mid 6th century BCE, known by reputation as brilliantly impious and rude. Only fragments, shreds of papyrus, remain of the poems themselves. Hollo arranges the fragments in three sets. They perfectly suit his own proverb/aphorism/expletive manner (see *Near Miss Haiku* (1990) and the “Some Greeks” section of *Corvus*). His preface to the poems is scholarly and full of his high-casual style.

A third of the poems are short, the migrations simpler, but with the capacity to take the reader to enhanced complications. Intimate surroundings and the

devotion he shares with his wife, Jane Dalrymple-Hollo, focus his attention on that which does not cause him indignation.

but She Who Must Be Obeyed  
She Who Laughs at Your Jokes

love them both as one  
as best you can

(conclusion of “Wildly Tangled”)  
And  
this me years ago  
says the cigarette

lame old prick  
blurs into hills  
light has brushed

poetic, what?

un poco cheek  
rest desert flame on Moss

or shyly dream  
inspiring tufts

drummer, remember  
(conclusion of “Broken  
Flowers”)

Of the very brief mysteries:

WHY NOT  
put the book mark  
at the wrong page

Concrete, seed of an  
anecdote, and metaphysically  
mischievous.

“Reading Joanne Kyger” is a poem of sober sentiment. (Kyger is surely his sister in poesy.) Hollo desists from jacking the poem up craftwise in writerly vanity. But note how the last two lines, “on memory gardens/ in your brain,” reflect back over the sober feeling with cosmic spice and modesty.

My favorite poem, “Rides with Bob Creeley,” does the Hollo migration masterfully: anecdote, admission to the writing process, meditation, image, to “let’s get real.” This poem includes:

and the poem takes you  
to a love of the kind wisdom  
refuses to abandon

the endlessly  
contradictory  
human heart

for grand abstractions

Born in 1934: Hollo, Berrigan, Kyger, and also John Weiners and Amiri Baraka. Dissidence, revolt and bohemian alternatives were socially expensive risks in the 1950s. Study them for how they inhabit their times, the better to inhabit your own.

**John Godfrey** is the author of 14 collections of poetry, including *The City Keeps: Selected and New Poems 1966-2014* (Wave Books, May 2016). He has lived in the East Village of Manhattan since the 1960s.

## LOOK Solmaz Sharif

Graywolf Press, 2016  
Review by Sara Jane Stoner

There is something naked about the human cost, value, and urgency of this book—beyond the obvious explanation that comes with reckoning its subjects: war in Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran; the American language of war; the interminable prosecution of individual and massive injustices in the name of the “war on terror”; death, so many deaths, intimately imagined; displacement; and loss, of meaning, culture, and individual freedom. *LOOK* feels like a formal and substantial answer to so much poetry of the present, particularly that which seeks to more literally engage the politics of war, racism, and sexism: Sharif embodies the lyric with the kind of intelligence, feeling, and perspective that allows her to structurally wield a conceptual strategy and vocally extend the individual’s experience to a broader shared experience, while constantly pushing the



end-goals of formal acuity or imagistic beauty through and beyond aesthetic satisfaction.

*LOOK* takes its title from a word lodged in the U.S. Department of Defense's *Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, a 5,900 term volume that is accessible online. The word "look" in this dictionary defines "a period during which a mine circuit is receptive of an influence." The rhetoric of this definition complacently masks the reality that human beings, most frequently civilians, are the "influences" that commence this "period," which is actually a murderous explosion. (N.B.: The U.S. remains absent from the list of signatories on the most comprehensive U.N. mine ban, known as the Ottawa Treaty of 1997.) Sharif's wielding of this Department of Defense language throughout the book, set in small caps and found as titles and within poems, constitutes a conceptualism grounded, unlike so many conceptual poetic projects, in the consequences of its abstraction. Redeployed in small caps throughout the book, these words operate like poetic fulcrums, interruptions, retributions, and misfires as they are re-contextualized, redefined, and personalized, meaningfully homed in intimate relationships, spaces, and encounters. Here, from "Deception Story":

After explaining what she will touch, *backs of the hands at the breasts and buttocks*, the hand goes inside my waistband and my heart goes dormant.

A *dead fish*. The last *female assist* I decide to hit on. My life in the American Dream is a downgrade, a mere *draft* of home. Correction: it satisfies as *drag*.

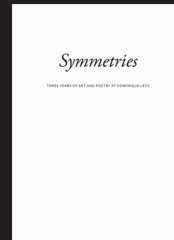
Incorporating this both mundane and militarized language into a poem about the self's affect or "disposition," that self is shaped and defined by this language and the

procedures and violence that substantiate it, even as the poet works to torque or flay its meaning—laying out a kind of exegesis of the conditions for her experience of feeling. Here: detained by airport security and subjected to a physical search, the speaker's heart gone still, inactive, becomes a mine designed to delay its detonation; her existence within the "American Dream" is not "home," but something with a classification that's been lowered, a version that's lesser, incomplete, even legally coercive to violence; her life in this context, "satisfies as *drag*," which (working from the D.O.D.'s dictionary) is the force of a phenomenal atmospheric resistance to the force of an explosion, but also reads as indicating this life as a kind of imitative performance supposing a fictitious "real."

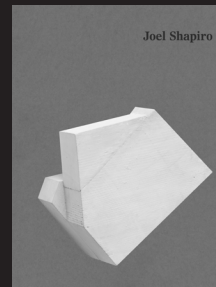
The layering of subjects, the poetic investigation of power and experience through multiple interdiscursive meanings makes these poems critical spaces for embodied thinking, exemplified by the title poem, as well as "Break Up" and the long penultimate elegy to her uncle, "Personal Effects." These poems are formal, but entirely agile, spontaneous; they are pointillistic in their material evocation of affect and structurally sweeping in their claims and revelations; they are recursive and effortful, returning to feel again, think again. In the language of official or semi-official documents Sharif assembles the rhetorical and material conditions of her Iranian-American identity, and more broadly, passive and active American complicity in the violent oppression of human beings near and far:

Whereas it could take as long as 16 seconds between the trigger pulled in Las Vegas and the Hellfire missile landing in Mazar-eSharif, after which they will ask *Did we hit a child? No. A dog.* they will answer themselves The poems unfold and draw through into critical intersections of optics

## New Publications



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and politics, war and individual life. In her labor of looking, redefining, and re-contextualizing, Sharif brings things closer together, linking mutual but different devastations, suturing together the violence's effects on the individual, their extended family, the perpetrators of that violence, performing the bending and hashing of time and space that I believe is one of poetry's most important definitional powers. Concomitant with this manipulation of time and space is the shifting "you" of this book: a lover, present and lost; a beloved and/or mistrusted stranger; an interrogator; the inhabitants of the replica plantation home of America, with their white-soap-washed hands, their circles of concertina wire; an inmate of Guantánamo named Salim, a reference to Salim Hamdan; an uncle killed by war; a reader, somewhat equally anonymous and known; anonymous veterans and casualties. Simultaneously, within this numerous "you," we read a complex brutality and tenderness that sees to, and implicates, something that tries to approach us all.

After I saw Sharif give a bone-hollowing reading at her launch at the Asian American Writer's Workshop in July, an audience member asked how the poet

sustains herself through the reading of these poems, through her repeated physical engagement with and delivery of the grief, violence, anger, and lived knowledge that her reading of them both demands and expresses. Sharif's answer was, simply, "I can't." I am thinking about the power in this poet's admission; that what she brings to these poems in performance is unsustainable, though that word feels safe in comparison to her ongoing act of bravery and generosity in giving herself to what these poems contain, giving the feeling to the grain of her voice. In the poet's admission, and in her book, is the full truth that what these poems describe cannot be escaped or survived—when so much contemporary poetry seems to function toward its own sustenance and extension, this book, in part, so fully desires an end.

**Sara Jane Stoner** is a writer, editor, and teacher working on her PhD at CUNY Graduate Center, and her first book, *Experience in the Medium of Destruction*, was nominated for a Lambda award.

**Ban en Banlieue**  
**Bhanu Kapil**  
Nightboat, 2015  
Review by Zoë Bodzas

Although I am interested in errors, perhaps it *is* more accurate to say I wrote a book that failed—and not in the interesting vulnerable way that books sometimes fail—but in this other way —“the way of the species that isn't registered or described; that does not emerge.”

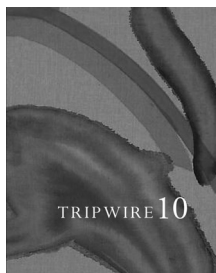
The semi-autobiographical speaker of Bhanu Kapil's *Ban en Banlieue* forms a distinction between “the interesting vulnerable” variety of failure and her speaker's error-laden struggle to cohere, register, emerge through a novel-like vessel; this distance between artful vulnerability and the desperate, passionate false-starts of the novel forms a central tension in Kapil's book.

As a work that shares the necessity of hybrid forms with Kapil's previous books, *Ban en Banlieue* meshes poetry, fiction, performance, autobiography, biography; beneath the breaks in narrative, repetition, fragmentation, and perspective shifts, we are told that this is the story of a brown girl walking home from school in London, 1979, April, and in the first moments of a race riot, lies down on the ground. This is Ban. Ban, simultaneously, is also “looping the city... a warp of smoke” and “both dead and never living: the part, that is, of life that is never given: an existence.” The essence of Ban,

it seems, shares something profound with the shape of this book. Bhanu Kapil tackles the novel form in *Ban en Banlieue* and, through thematic reverberations and a deliberate approach to structure, inflicts Ban's corporeal message in errors, failures, and fragmentation.

In the world of this work, the novel is a form and the body is a form and both forms can fail. A novel is an approach to story, and the writer fills its form with sentences. In the case of *Ban en Banlieue*, this project features approach after approach to the story, colored by a critical intensity to capture, to register fully the essence of Ban among the poetry of performance and autobiography, among real-world martyrs: Blair Peach, Nirbhaya. Writing, in its filling, in its bulk, forms a body. How does the living form of the novel, this “infantile bank,” fill itself? Kapil's speaker describes “a book that repeats a sentence until that sentence recuperates its power to attract, or touch, other sentences.” A form filling itself through magnetism and momentum. Kapil's speaker, accumulating, draws attention to structural and thematic fragmentation and failure. Nevertheless, these breakdowns and misfires do justice to the spirit of Ban—we cannot fault the speaker. Our impression of

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Ban feels blurry but visceral and that seems right.

Structurally, Kapil builds a tension between a meticulously sectioned and subtitled novel and the actuality of its fragmentation. At first, there is a semblance of an outline-like backbone in the novel. However, the speaker's impassioned editorialization and tireless reworking soon challenge the readers' expectation of story: there is overlap, there is repetition, there is fragmentation, there are non-linear skips between reality and surrealism, present, past, and never. Here are the approaches, many of which the speaker labels "failures." That said, the array of attempts also opens the reader to a collage-like interpretation, a productive chaos, a cumulative but critical vision of disparate parts, as per the epigraph's warning: "One thing next to another doesn't mean they touch." The disparate parts are true at the same time, without sharing a skin, without a need for the cohesion of story.

Is this a novel of failed approaches or one of resurrection? How can a body of writing effectively contain the body (non-body) of Ban and its precariousness? In a collection of sentences that do not touch, a late section of the novel ends with both an offering of failure:

I feel bad for you, having read this far into the nothing that these notes are. / And must be. / Neutral. / Stupid. / Bland and then bright, searing immolation: "Just as skin is bland and eases off the bone at the least touch. / Or tongue. / Of flame."

The flame that "eases" bland skin from the bone offers a sense of the body's ultimate transience beyond the worldly, imperfect mundane—an awareness that the answers may simply be inexpressible in language. This "failure" to explicitly communicate Ban's essence in its entirety necessitates a different channel: "I feel ashamed that I could not

make Ban an amazing book. I feel grateful that Kapil Muni came anyway, as the color and light that a novel contains. I transmit this light: to you. Can you feel it? I am sending it right now!!!!" If *Ban en Banlieue* falls shy of complete portraiture and embodiment, then this is one vibrant product of its efforts: an emission of light through the speaker's voice, a hotspot within a sprawl of glowing notes for a novel. In its accumulation of approaches, its repetitions and fragments, its network of image and theme, *Ban en Banlieue* suggests the power of reincarnation, a new life possible in each enumerated attempt at expression; though we are told that this work is full of errors, the body of the novel and the body of Ban leave their full impression on the ground.

**Zoë Bodzas** studied creative writing and linguistics at Hamilton College and now lives in Brooklyn.

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### **Cannibal** **Safiya Sinclair**

University of Nebraska Press,  
2016

Review by Yanyi Luo

*Cannibal* begins with an epigraph about its title: the same historical root for the term "cannibal" also created "Caribbean"—the Carib people of the West Indies, whom Columbus imagined ate human flesh. This serves not as a reminder of West Indian savagery but the history of its imagining. In *Cannibal*, Safiya Sinclair works inside and against this imagination that others and oppresses whole populations.

The first poem of the collection, "Home," speaks longingly of remembering that "wild conch-shell dialect, // black apostrophe curled / tight on my tongue." This longing, this homesickness, is not what you think. Home is not Jamaica. Home is not the body. *Cannibal* asks what home is in a colony, when one's life is contingent on

another's power; it asks what home is in womanhood, when one's body may grow too much one way, too little another, unsuitable for patriarchal power's standard of woman. There is no place to return to when home, as assigned, is imagined against you.

Sinclair's preoccupation is personified in the character of Caliban, a native islander and the son of a witch and the devil in *The Tempest*. Caliban, whose words introduce three of the five sections of the book, is forced into slavery by Prospero, an exiled duke of Milan. Caliban is both vengeful and privy to another description of his island, which he calls an "isle full of noises," sometimes "a thousand twangling instruments" and, at other times, voices. In an essay for *The Poetry Foundation*, "Gabble Like a Thing Most Brutish," Sinclair recounts how her preoccupation with Caliban emerged from a sense of likeness with his plight, that Jamaica and her house growing up was "borrowed space, that [they] could never truly be [themselves] there."

Like Caliban, Sinclair's speaker is forced to engage and respond to the imaginations of American whiteness, patriarchy, and Eurocentrism. Her lines are often rich with reference to the images and logic systems of those cultural powers. She doesn't name exactly what she's critiquing; rather, she uses images and metaphor to reveal whole patterns of violence; she builds arguments and likenesses through amplifying associations with proximity. In "America the Beautiful," a black groundhog is asked to stand in judgment before twelve white men in dark cloaks. In the tradition of Groundhog Day, the groundhog is supposed to determine the beginning of spring by its actions, but in Sinclair's version, the groundhog is reduced to mere performer under the white men who each ask a question "for which they've long chosen an answer." Sinclair brings cultural images closer

to cultural images, so that a question about "the secrets of finches" might summon *To Kill a Mockingbird* when it follows this jury of white specters above a groundhog. The women who "squeeze through / the thin mirror of Hollywood" have "birds make gowns for them" (Cinderella) while also "slurping at their cocktails for the last scraps of pomegranate," likening glamorized, feminized luxury to the fruit that brings Persephone captivity.

Sinclair writes in the aforementioned essay that "being a woman was the original site of exile." The speaker in poems like "Elocution Lessons with Ms. Silverstone," may be "that girl too furred in dialect," differentiated from "the girls—b londe / and burning to a bitch-fever." Language, too, is part of this exile, where high school boys "hissed about / your dick-sucking lips." Sinclair herself wields language with musical deftness to highlight what she wants, working through assonance and rhyme to connect this vulgarity between "hissed," "dick," and "lips" in that instance and "As if. *Fishlips*" in another. Sinclair uses phrase length and the rhythm of words to the same effect, where the sibilance of "Virgin falling through / your silence // your sky impaled" is jammed by the hard, stopped sounds of "mouth a crooked Valkyrie." This music welcomes the dialect of "wadder" and "priddier"; this music calls for the inventions of "bitch-fever" and "mastabatorium." Combined with her skill in choosing images, the effect for the reader is a tightness between melody and meaning.

As the book captures these many lenses of identities, it is tempting to conclude that *Cannibal* is therefore Sinclair's personal lyric, a collection only possible through a careful assemblage of individual experiences. Yet, what *Cannibal* reveals in its storm is the imagination required to exile someone else; that

the mechanisms required to isolate and ensnare people in an oppressive system might blur together and are not quite different in how they exiled women, immigrants, and colonized peoples from their own homes, though they are enacted differently. When the speaker of “Home” was struggling to remember and find home, she meant a place where she is truly free, not longing for the one that was given to her. “Home was a place I carved out in my head,” Sinclair says in “Gabble Like a Thing Most Brutish,” “where the words were always the right words, where I could speak in English or patois, could formulate a song or a self.” *Cannibal* puts into poetic action Sinclair’s understanding of the imagination as the first site of violence and the first site of freedom for the self.

**Yanyi Luo** is a poet and critic based in Brooklyn, New York.

**The Year We Turned Dragon Metta Sáma**

Portable Press @ Yo-Yo Labs, 2016  
Review by Adjuva Gargi Nzinga Greaves

Metta Sáma writes like a palette knife sunk sure into a vat of dreaming, the substance lain

with precision long down the page or broad across it. We touch these eight folded sheets, this supple card covering gently slicked with a clamor of rainbow bodies writhing up against one more central, hydroponic, and arboreal than the rest. We catch glimpses of slight twin metals puncturing the precious object at its core in order to hold it so and feel at once that this work is fable. This work is fable, and we hope perhaps it is also talisman, for if the dire gloom of our own disorienting reality can be broken by a literary object, this is just the sort of narrative gem through which the light of our Murderous Epoch of Rigorous Insanity is refracted and the story of our times made plain by the home Fable makes of the extremes to which we fear we are headed — extremes our broken collective feels, yet which we are still unable and unwilling to name in unison. So we hold Sáma’s creation close — in heart in hand — as “our” “candidates” “debate”. We read and reread before and afterwards hoping perhaps this dive into Sáma’s dreaming is the one that will lift us out of these our poison veils.

Waking from *The Year We Turned Dragon* (Yo-Yo Labs, 2016) we stagger toward a page of our own and try to find a way to talk about these

nineteen poems full of the strangest birds, the wettest realms, the hypnotoxic villainy of ominous storybook rule. We have awoken from a dream full of galliform fowl acting so much like ourselves we wonder at the delineation of species — here where a conceptual biomass of body and being promise and seem to smother and obliterate previously known scientific classification. This book is a world of dirt long damp, of eggs like jewels. It is a world of delicious confusions and frightening familiarities. It is a world where the erotic chaos of some unknown intimacies reveal that we wanted to feast on / each other first wanted to put our own / limbs in our bodies bite into our elbows / and knees crack every joint between our / teeth we were hinged teetering / between upright and indirect flight.

Here *laughter is leather* and titles often rest inside the works to which they refer, sometimes skimming the surface sometimes calling out to us from deep within.

In these worlds, a concentricity of crows envelopes a speaker’s community with *diaphanous wings*. In these worlds, suddenly a voice tells us *my words once ink now pebble and boulder roll from the page*. From another voice we learn *Before Leader took me into his / mouth I had my own*

*name, a clean holy name*. This slim, dank work is charged through with the arid and spirit deadening electricity of Leader — monstrous Leader — a predator serene in the autonomy of his fascism. Here we are in a muck distinct from our own ruinous zeitgeist; where ours insists upon its perversions of justice and progress, no such concerned hang-wringing strains the telling of this world. We read Sáma and sift tentatively through the nourishing detritus offered in these pages, sift hungrily through the margins of this fringe-borne place. Here be *blood days*, and a *flimsy hardness*, and *paws beginning to thunder*, and *coins pressed into your / temples & cheeks & jaws*.

Here we waft through *the bottom of a world* and pledge anew to call upon its depth-birthing gifts to guide us up out of the dungeon state We of 2016 CE must — for now — call home. With this work Sáma has — in a textvoice roiling with adjacencies — cast the terror of context into intoxicating relief trusting us all to quest through a kin-like chaos of scarce punctual markings and find our ways toward the urgent making of new — and honorable — Lands.

**Adjuva Gargi Nzinga Greaves** is an artist primarily concerned

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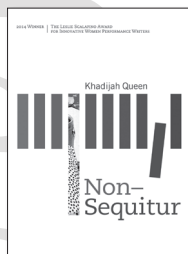
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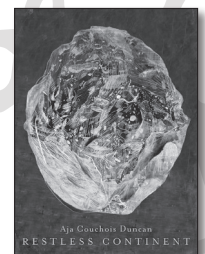


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**Extracting the Stone of Madness: Poems 1962-1972**

**Alejandra Pizarnik**

(trans. Yvette Siegert)

New Directions, 2016

Review by Matt Longabucco

One of those books you know is going to mean something to you the moment you pick it up, as if it somehow emitted a signal whose transmission is powered by an unthinkable pure resolve. Another review of this volume praises its lack of an introduction, the better to allow long overdue English-speaking readers to come to Pizarnik's poetry without what the reviewer considers the distracting details of the poet's biography attached. Too late — Pizarnik's suicide at 36 inevitably travels alongside her work, and if we grant her the agency she deserves, we must deduce she wanted it that way. All her life she worshipped writers like Rimbaud, Lautréamont, and Artaud, of whom she claimed (in her 1965 essay "The Incarnate Word"),

These poets, and a few others, are linked by having annulled — or having tried to annul — the distance society imposes between poetry and life.

In poems of great nuance and force, Pizarnik records her lifelong obsession with, and questing towards, the utmost edges of invisibility and extinction, places where those imposed distances vanish and a voice may approach and expose the emptiness hidden near the heart of speech.

Pizarnik was a Russian Jewish immigrant born near Buenos Aires. While looking to her French heroes, she worked beside and joined a generation of Argentinian giants: Julio Cortázar, Adolfo Bioy Casares, Silvina Ocampo. She traverses a spare and idiosyncratic landscape:

a place / I didn't say a space / I'm speaking of what / I'm speaking

of is not / I'm speaking of what I know / not of time / but of all instants / not of love / no / yes / no.

The poet describes scenes of desire and loss from the perspective of her inner space, mostly concerned with how a sense of self fills and empties, builds toward meaning or drifts toward the anonymity of creaturehood and death. Here's all of "Daybreak":

Naked and dreaming of a solar night. / I've lain through animal days. / The wind and rain erased me / as they might a fire, or a poem / written on a wall.

Elsewhere she writes,

I am not the one who speaks. It is the wind, which makes me flail my arms, which makes me think that the chorus of chance, shaped by this flailing, are words that come from myself.

Language, as poets who pare it down this severely often notice, is an alien presence — it passes through us, and our personalities are subject to its unpredictable action. This is especially visible in the experience of madness, which appears repeatedly in these poems, as both a hollowing-out but also something requiring violent removal (this book's title, one of Pizarnik's, refers to the medieval practice of drilling into the skulls of mental patients to relieve their symptoms, as memorably depicted by Hieronymus Bosch). No wonder one of Pizarnik's recurring images is the doll, an object that alternates between uncanny animation and sudden slackness. "Nothing more intense than the terror of losing your identity." Then a hundred pages later, "Nothing more dangerous than to need help and actually get it." Then I flip back to the beginning: "Help me not to ask for help." Poems written across years dramatize a running internal conversation with all the resolutions and reversals of Shakespearean soliloquy, and the act of asking for help — acceding to the world others deem constant in exchange for their aid, or refusing such consolation at the risk of disintegration — is one crucial hinge in Pizarnik's

existential reckoning.

The book collects work from the poet's final decade, and concludes, hauntingly, with lines she left written on the blackboard where she often composed her work. She writes, "I want to go / nowhere if not / down into the depths." Such are her stark poetics. In the essay cited above, she quotes André Gide, who once watched Artaud read poetry alongside a crowd left speechless by the event.

Afterward, Gide wrote, we felt ashamed to take up our places again in a world where comfort consists of compromise. Pizarnik, it's clear, would like us to look up from her poems with the same shamefaced recognition, and if she's occasionally playful (especially in the latter parts of this book) she is unrelenting in both her intensity and her insistence that intensity is the mode of our true existence. (In a rare reference to contemporary culture, Pizarnik writes a poem to another woman gripped by thanatos, Janis Joplin.) For her, it's all or nothing, or rather, all and nothing, the paradoxical canceling of the self by its own longing and imaginative exertions. Again and again she takes interiority to its limit — she appears to be both the "I" and the "you" here:

A mournful vision, splintered, of a garden of broken statues. Your bones ache on the brink of morning. You split open. I am warning you and I warned you. You disarm. I tell you and I told you. You undress. You divest. You come undone. I had predicted this. All of it dissolved, suddenly: no birth. You carry yourself off, you overtake yourself. Only you know this jarring rhythm. Now for gathering your remains: you collect them one by one, and the great tedium, where to leave them. If I'd had it close at hand, I would've traded in my soul to be invisible. Drunk on myself, on music; drunk on poems and (why not just say it) the void of absence. In a ragged hymn, the tears rolled down my face. Why doesn't anyone say anything? Why the great silence?

Those last questions emerge from a tumultuous but principled solitude to challenge

and provoke us, her readers, to imagine a response worthy of her vision.

**Matt Longabucco**, a former curator at the Poetry Project, is the author of the chapbooks *The Sober Day* (DoubleCross Press, 2016) and *Everybody Suffers: The Selected Poems of Juan García Madero* (O'Clock Press, 2014).



## ***Art: Katharine Betty (KB) Jones***



KB Jones "Chair," 12" x 12" watercolor on paper, 2015

Errata: apologies to KB Jones, whose "Chair" was poorly handled in the previous issue.

# Community Letters

As true now as it was when Ron Padgett wrote it in the first newsletter back in 1972,  
“Readers are invited to contribute information interesting, relevant or useful to poets and friends of poetry.”  
Share your news and views here by emailing [nleditor@poetryproject.org](mailto:nleditor@poetryproject.org).

This issue hosts notes from Corinne Fitzpatrick and Maureen Owen.

When trying to reconcile the disparately profound emotional responses to witnessing my dear friends' city hall marriage on the morning of October 12, and learning of David Antin's passing later that evening, I was comforted by thinking that David himself is exactly the writer to turn to. His mind could hold it all. I had no idea who he was when I signed up for his “Vis III - The Structure of Art” at UC San Diego, where he taught for more than twenty-five years. (As I recall it, every potential minor or major in Art and Art History had to get a B or higher in his five-times-a-week combo academic and studio course in order to enter the department; he was the gatekeeper.) His lectures were, as you might imagine, long, meandering, capacious— ricocheting across history and the news of the day and perhaps what he ate for dinner (and who was there, and what they talked about, and the drive home) the night before. I learned the foundations of art history that quarter, but more importantly I learned that knowing is at its finest when curious, tangential, hop-scotched, funny, extemporaneous. I have never taught a class without teaching David Antin's work, because when I think about what I most want to pass along, and what I most want to revisit again and again, it always comes back to tuning.

-Corrine Fitzpatrick

everyone has lost a memory

she pokes me as  
the altar boy hoists a  
long poled crucifix “look  
Jesus has a broken arm”

the snapped forearm swings rhythmically  
on it’s pinning

Marilyn Monroe never takes her gloves off  
through the whole performance  
the other singer has to do all the finger  
snapping

time to get out the thread  
the swishing of a detail veers  
perhaps our brains do all the guesswork winking

we see the nose and upper mouth piece of the iron war mask  
fastened with tiny latches shaped as doves

& know  
heat thick & soundless  
baffles the leaves but

the tree shades itself

**for Bill Berkson 6/16/16  
1939-2016**

-Maureen Owen

# Word find

WORDS HIDDEN IN THIS PUZZLE ARE TAKEN FROM ARI BANIAS' POEMS ON PAGES 12-15.

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