

Carouk

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# Out of the Trenches

## Generating Conversations with Les Fignes



### INTERVIEW BY SIMONE WOLFF

Boog City writer Simone Wolff speaks with Andrew Wessels, managing editor of Les Fignes, about book design, politics, and literary/artistic conversations.

**Boog City: When I think of Les Fignes, I think about the tall, skinny, matte-cover books—I believe from the TrenchArt series. These books have created a distinctive look for the press. What is the origin and significance of this design?**

Andrew Wessels: Yes, our TrenchArt series has a distinct trim size (9.25" x 4.25") that, over the years, became somewhat synonymous with Les Fignes. When we started publishing in 2005, the TrenchArt series was our core and sole publishing project. The series was itself made up of annual mini-series within the larger project consisting of four books each. Each year, we selected a theme (Materials, Logistics, Surplus, Recon, etc.) and then curated book projects around that theme. The idea was to build a publishing series that encouraged conversation and cross-talk between/across literary projects. Each book was in conversation with the other books, though at the same time entirely distinct: like works of art in a gallery show. One could certainly read one book and enjoy it on its own. But if one were to read two, three, or all four, let's just say that *interesting things might happen*. In addition to the four books each year, we asked our authors to write an aesthetic statement, which were gathered into ephemeral, hand-bound limited editions distributed to Les Fignes members and subscribers. This year, following the 2014 retirement of the TrenchArt series, we are gathering those aesthetic statements to make them widely available for the first time in the capstone anthology *TrenchArt Monographs: hurry up please its time*, to be released this summer.

**Les Fignes's "L'Histoire" specifically mentions WWI trench art as an influence, and publishes a series called TrenchArt. What is trench art, and how has it inspired Les Fignes?**

Trench art is art made by soldiers while embedded in the trenches. The term typically refers specifically to the art objects made in the trenches of World War I. These objects were crafted from bullet and shell casings, bone, and other scrap objects that could be found at hand in the trenches. We started publishing the TrenchArt series while the United States was at war. Initially, the idea was to publish the series until the conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere ended, in some sense as an act of literary protest. Of course, this was something of a silly notion, as America is perpetually in a state of war. Trench art provided another parallel in that it's made from the leftover scraps, whatever is lying around waiting to be transformed into a new object. This seems a good, general description of what our authors do: take the detritus of contemporary society and reform it into something that both highlights its originally intended use and simultaneously presents it as its own unique object, something utterly original (or utterly unoriginal, as the case may be).

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**Les Fignes actively "embraces a feminist criticality and editorial vision." What has that meant over the many years (10!) Les Fignes has been publishing? Has it changed over time?**

This has been a constant principal throughout the history of the press. It would be nearly impossible to detail exactly how it's affected the development of the press, as the idea informs every decision we make. It is the fabric of the press, so to speak. That said, I think an easy way to discuss it is to say that the principal has led us to curate/publish with an eye toward conversation, as opposed to an eye toward making a final statement (the patriarchal model of publishing). There is no final answer here, because there is no question. Some of these ideas can be seen in our anthology *Feminaissance*. What leaps out immediately upon opening up the anthology is that each page is a shared space with multiple authors. Rather than dividing, categorizing, and separating each piece,

the space of the page is divided so that multiple pieces run across the page, encouraging readers to see the cross-talk between the pieces, to see how each affects the other, to see (and participate in) the fruitful conversations between the texts.

**Dodie Bellamy's Cunt Norton is a "cunt-up" of erotica and poems from the Norton Anthology, and Divya Victor's Things To Do With Your Mouth won CA Conrad's sexiest poetry award. Is Les Fignes an especially sexy press?**

I looked up some synonyms for sexy, and got: provocative, risqué, kissable, sensual, mature, inviting, suggestive, libidinous, delectable. Yes, to all of these.

**Les Fignes doesn't just put out books—far from it. Among other thing, you also curate Q.E.D., "a series of performances curated around issues of affinity, influence, and provocation," as well as Mrs. Porter's Salon, "a bi-monthly feminist art salon in Los Angeles." Why is it important to Les Fignes to reach beyond the role of the traditional press, and what have been the results?**

As I mentioned previously, we are particularly interested in creating literary/artistic conversations. So, while publishing books is certainly a core part of that mission, conversations can (and must) also happen outside of the text. From early on, we were interested in the space of the event as a medium or platform in itself that needed to be both interrogated and actively utilized. Many of our events we classify as "writing as event," in which writing "becomes a performance, an engagement, a point of participation" (to use our own, official description). The event is a text, and the text is an event. Hopefully, in both our "texts" and our "events," any so-called dividing line is shown to be what it really is: nonexistent. In one recent event, "Remaking Your New Image," a team of writer-artists re-animated the women's style guide *Your New Image Through Line and Color* using a toolbox of writing constraints to take apart, rewrite, and finally republish the book over the course of one weekend. The event was held at Monte Vista Projects, an art gallery in Los Angeles, and the entire proceedings were open to the public as a gallery show/performance. The event explored the difference, if any, between an image made on the page, through a book, or with a body; the social construction of image-making as a performance and as a creative act.

Andrew Wessels (<http://omniverse.us/barbara-claire-freeman-interviews-andrew-wessels/>) has lived in Houston, Cambridge, Mass., and Las Vegas. He splits his time between Istanbul and Los Angeles. He has held fellowships from Poets & Writers and the Black Mountain Institute. His poems, translations, and collaborations can recently be found in *Colorado Review*, *Fence*, *Tammy*, *VOLT*, and *Witness*, among others. A chapbook of his translations of the Turkish poet Nurduran Duman is forthcoming this summer from *Goodmorning Menagerie*. He is the managing editor of *Les Fignes Press* and edits the poetry and poetics journal *The Offending Adam*.

Simone Wolff (<http://www.splitlipmagazine.com/#!10-simone-wolff/c24xq>) is a second-year M.F.A. student at Vanderbilt University, head poetry editor at *Nashville Review*, and social media intern for *Coconut magazine* and *Kit Yan Productions*. Their poems and essays can be found in *Coldfront*, *Souvenir*, and *The Likewise Folio*, among other places.

## Before Thunder

### Quiet Lightning's Electric Community



### BY SARAH JEAN GRIMM

When he moved to San Francisco in 2009, Evan Karp hoped to find an active literary community. He began attending readings all over the city, recording and archiving them online. Before long, his involvement with the community led him to start his own reading series, Quiet Lightning. He used his favorite aspects of all the readings he'd been to and eliminated what he felt wasn't working. Leaving out introductions and author banter removed some of the ego of literary events and allowed audiences to focus purely on the content selected for each reading. Karp views each piece of writing as a spell and tries not to break that spell over the course of a Quiet Lightning evening. Indeed, the name "Quiet Lightning" supports his philosophy, a reference to the electricity that can fill a room in the moments after a reading, a charged silence like lightning before thunder.

The submission-based series is also marked by a rare inclusivity. Featuring all forms of writing without bias makes every reading into something of a literary mix tape, moving from one track to the next without interruption. Many of the readings have guest curators, and anyone can apply to curate a show. This keeps things fresh, and the community has noticed. Six years after their inception, monthly Quiet Lightning readings are like self-generating composite works of art, created for and by the community they foster. Each reading averages one hundred audience members, and about half of those are first time attendees. Humble and almost disbelieving of its sustained success, Karp says the experience is "like a miracle every month."

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In addition to the original reading series, Quiet Lightning now encompasses print journals, magazines, chapbooks, full-length collections, and collaborations involving art galleries, film, and music. Karp is tireless in his engagement with the literary community of San Francisco, at a time when the tech boom is challenging the survival of artistic spaces. And while the reading series makes a point of ephemerality, changing its location throughout the city each month from bars, galleries, theaters, and bookstores to print shops, hotels, and even a cave, it also generates more lasting artifacts.

Each Quiet Lightning reading has a corresponding print journal, *sPARKLE + bLINK*, which is made in installments of one hundred copies and distributed gratis on a first-in basis. The materials from each event are reprinted within, allowing

the audience to follow along over the course of the reading, or to revisit pieces afterwards. PDFs of the journal are also available online, embedded with video links (the Quiet Lightning website gives visitors the option to "read the book" or "watch the book"). If modern literary journals are forced to choose sides in the print versus digital landscape, *sPARKLE + bLINK* refuses preference, offering an interactive experience in each format. This seems to be what Quiet Lightning is all about: why do either/or when it can do both... or all?

Embracing hybridity, Quiet Lightning is frequently interdisciplinary and invites the participation of a non-writing community. Its latest undertaking, *Chemical Wedding*, is a bimonthly series combining music and literature. Collaborating with Name Drop

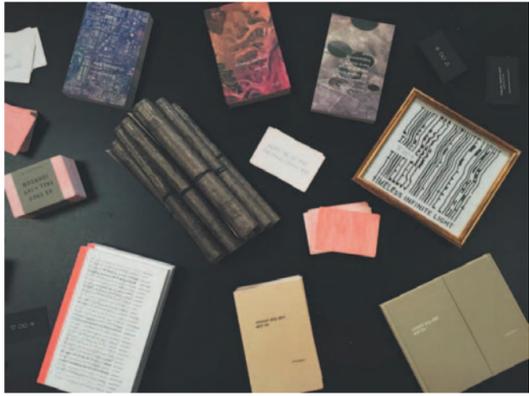
Swamp Records and The Emerald Tablet art center, Quiet Lightning archives video footage from these events online and collects the work from each in a biannual magazine called *vitriol*. Featuring writing and music from *Chemical Wedding*, along with essays, visual art, and other bonus elements, *vitriol* showcases a wide swath of work from each artist, offering something different than *sPARKLE + bLINK*.

Quiet Lightning is not merely a reading series or a small press, but is in fact the collected objectives of the readers and writers it serves. In creating a way to participate in the community that motivated him, Evan Karp has built an innovative literary amalgamation. Quiet Lightning is an outlet for individual expression, offering plenty of room for creative collisions with other artistic groups. Quiet Lightning showcases fiction, poetry, visual art, music, and film, and actively celebrates their convergence.

Sarah Jean Grimm (<http://www.sarahjeangrimm.com/>) holds her master's in English from Fordham University, where she also earned her bachelor's in English and classical languages. She works at Penguin Random House and edits the online journal *Powder Keg*. Some of her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Barrow Street*, *Coconut*, *Painted Bride Quarterly*, *Similar:Peaks*., *Sixth Finch*, and elsewhere. She lives in Bushwick, Brooklyn with her orange cat.

Evan Karp (<http://litseen.com/>) is the founder and executive director of Quiet Lightning and the founding editor of *Litseen*. He writes literary columns for *SF/Arts*, *San Francisco Weekly*, and *The San Francisco Chronicle*, and is the co-creator and -host of *The Emerald Tablet's Under the Influence and Call and Response* series, and is front of house and special events coordinator at *SOMArts*.





## There Is No Neutral Figuring Out the How and Why of Timeless Infinite Light



INTERVIEW BY NIKKI WALLSCHLAEGER

In December, Nikki Wallschlaeger spoke with Timeless Infinite Light Press about tarot and poetry, community response, and the recent civil rights protests across the United States.

**Boog City: I'd like to start with some basic questions. When was Timeless Infinite Light first conceived? What's the birth story and who was involved in the initial creation of the press?**

Timeless Infinite Light: It's hard to say when we actually began. The idea first appeared in 2010. We were living on opposite sides of the country (Emji in Oakland, Joel in Brooklyn). We were very much in love, so Timeless, Infinite Light became the conceptual vessel to frame around being in love. We didn't like the idea of falling into the typical tropes of a long-distance relationship. Moving across the country for love is tacky, but doing it for poetry is a no-brainer.

So Emji moved to Brooklyn under the auspices of starting this press. We had meetings, invited our friends, looked for a space to immerse ourselves in. It was harder than we expected. After some weird months living out of a car by the waterfront in Williamsburg, without anything to show except for a name and an intention, we decided to try again on the West coast.

So at the end of that year, we drove across the country. We got a studio in the Haight. We moved a letterpress into our tiny kitchen. We published one book, which has since been redacted from our catalog. We were generally depressed. The poet exodus had already taken place, and we were living in the desolation. We moved over to Oakland, in a warehouse with some friends. That was exciting for a minute. Then we broke up. We moved into different houses with other people or no people.

That slowed things down. Emotions kept getting in the way. We fucked each other on and off in this mutually destructive way for about a year. Somehow we managed to publish *As They Fall* during that time, and put up a simple website. We probably only stayed friends to keep the press alive, though it was mostly just an idea at that point. There were long stretches of cold silence.

We both semi-independently found our way into East Bay poetics—Emji through Mills, Joel by lurking at readings—and the press began to form, for real, around the culture, the concerns, the forms of this community.

We decided to jump in full-force at the beginning of 2014. We became platonic life partners. We got a tandem bicycle. We both quit our day jobs. There was a trust that partially allowed us to do so. We rented a tiny office, gave up sleep, and somehow put out five books this past year.

**I love the concept of a book being a source of divination, and poetry as a potent source of magic we can tap into for guidance and inspiration in our daily lives. Could you talk a little more about *As They Fall*? What are some of the experiences you and/or readers have had in communicating with this particular text? It's not something I've seen much in small presses, except for regular Tarot decks with themes, like the Emily Dickinson deck by Factory Hollow Press.**

The idea to release *As They Fall* as a deck of cards came directly out of Ivy's process at the time. She was writing individual fragments on hundreds of index cards and using aleatoric procedures to produce poems out of them. For example, when Ivy was living at the warehouse with us, she would scatter the cards across her room and roll around naked in them. Whichever cards stuck to her body she'd use for the poem. We wanted to create a book that mirrored her process, or at least left itself open to possibility.

While we were working on *As They Fall*, we were thinking of it in more of an Oulipian framework. A poem that could be read in any order, or an open source that is subject to any set of rules. The divination aspect actually came as a surprise. We brought a galley deck to the first East Bay Poetry Summit, and this poet Tony Dohr grabbed it and started offering tarot readings. He was able to pull so much interpretative and narrative accuracy out of these Sappho-esque fragments—it made us look at the deck differently. We didn't realize *As They Fall* was a magical object until the point when it left our control.

Since then the divination aspect has taken over how we think of the book. It can operate under the same rules of a Tarot deck without having much in common with one—no visual symbolism, no legacy, no reach for universality. It's everyday magic, but very potent.

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**I like that very much! That's my issue I've always had with standard Tarot decks—their claim to universality through the use of European symbolism. Poets can be the potency behind the decks or as a method of divination themselves. I'm reading *It's night in San Francisco but it's sunny in Oakland* and I am really enjoying it so far! It's such a great collective response of a community in crisis during the height of the Occupy movement. I feel there's a similarity between how that book is organized and how *As They Fall* is meant to be experienced, except the emphasis here is on the exploration of possibility of a more communal magic when we unite our individual voices. The cover is exquisite, how you chose to use the handwriting of the poets present in the anthology. I would love to hear about the process of putting this anthology together.**

Our hope with the anthology was to document this moment that felt urgent, if not emergent. We were attempting to take a snapshot, rather than creating a highly curated, exhaustive tome. The concerns are different. Our concern was sociality. We crowdsourced the curation. We sat around a kitchen table making a list of East Bay poets that we always see around at readings, at Woolsey Heights, Manifest, Hearts' Desire, Buuck's living room, and The Other Fabulous Reading Series. Thinking about who contributes to the culture of these readings, who we see over and over again, not so much the poets who are standing at the mic, though there is a lot of overlap. We included a few poets who live in San Francisco—the ones who end up crashing on our couches after readings because BART has stopped running. We sent this list to those curators and asked them who was missing. Some of them responded. We revised the list.

Our main guideline for the content was that the work be current—written within the last year or two. We urged poets not to create new work for the anthology because we wanted to tap into what they were already thinking through. There's such a wide gradient of forms and concerns, but the specter of Occupy definitely seems to loom from cover to cover, though whether or not it's addressed directly varies from poem to poem. Even when a poet isn't writing about the movement, they are writing in the context of it.

The framework for the anthology is simply an interrogation of this moment, and our relationality within it. And the question of what emerges in that proximity. I think that's where the sense of "communal magic" comes in. This isn't an anthology on a particular subject or poetics. In a way, *...It's sunny in Oakland* mirrors the experience of being at an East Bay poetry reading. Not the reading itself, but the conversations that happens in the moment just before or after the dance party.

**How have poets from the Bay Area communities been reacting to the decision not to indict Michael Brown's murderer? Also as I am writing this, I am reeling from what happened in New York City today with Eric Garner. I've been keeping an eye on the protests developing across the nation today, and I am seeing a lot of my poet friends responding with outrage. I am also seeing some of my poet friends not having the words anymore to express the depths of these brutalities sanctioned by white supremacist state violence. Do you see Timeless Infinite Light involved in any community response projects specifically involved with what's going on right now?**

There have been marches in the East Bay almost every night over last two weeks, since the grand jury's decision not to indict Darren Wilson for the murder of Michael Brown. We have been out in the streets. We have seen many other poets marching in the streets as well. When we are not there because of work or exhaustion, we are watching the marches via live stream.

The other day a friend said to me, "my Facebook feed has become an endless stream of news articles about dead black men." To have not had to look directly at this before is a privilege. We are in sorrow. We are outraged. Our attention as a community, and as a nation is turned toward this right now. In the United States, violence against people of color, and against black people in particular, is systemic, sanctioned, and has been happening for a very long time. Only the forms have changed.

Slavery has been replaced with the mass incarceration and the prison-industrial complex. Lynchings have been replaced with state-sanctioned police murder. All of this is made possible and sustained through the strong arm of the law, with Stand Your Ground and Stop-and-frisk, gang injunctions, and felon disenfranchisement laws.

The veil of post-Civil Rights Movement color blindness has been lifted. The racialized forms of oppression have been rendered visible. Even white people can see it now.

The poetry community in which Timeless, Infinite Light participates is for the most part very white. Racism within this community manifests primarily through exclusion, tokenism, and through micro aggressions, which can be hard to point to directly and are therefore more difficult to organize around.

I'm not sure if other poets have been writing in response to this or not. While immersed in action, we haven't been talking much about what we've been writing. It takes time for writing to emerge and to be published—a lot of Occupy poetry books are only just now coming out, three years later.

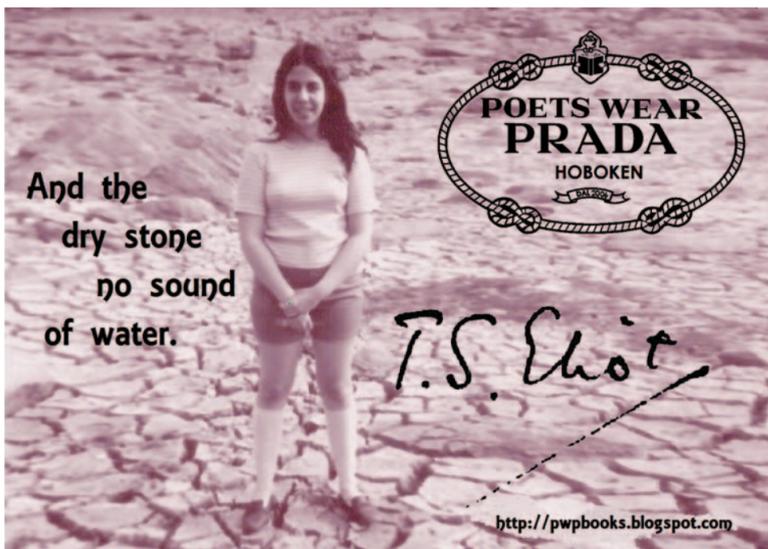
I feel like the role of publishing in the context of these ongoing crises is to act as the second responder. The first response of course is to take action, in the form of demos, riots, blockades, and other yet-to-be-imagined tactics. Writing and reflection begin to emerge from those actions, and publishing has the ability to keep that conversation going. Bodies get exhausted, books don't.

At the demos one of the really frustrating things is the white cis male activist who continually commandeers the megaphone. This is a synecdoche of the problem more generally, that the conversation is being dominated by white voices, by male voices. In a way, as a publisher, we are both the megaphone and the person handing over the megaphone. As individuals, we show up at the marches, we engage in difficult conversations, we are working on our shit. As a press, we have the power to amplify certain voices at the exclusion of others. We are aware of this. Curatorial decisions are always political. There is no neutral. The current crises around sexual, gendered, and racial violence in our community have forced us interrogate our role as megaphone. We are still trying to figure out our how.

Joel Gregory (<http://timelessinfinitelight.com/>) is a dropout of the New School M.F.A. program and a co-founder of Timeless, Infinite Light. He is a poet and visual artist living in Oakland, Calif.

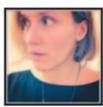
emji spero (<http://openhousepoetry.com/2015/02/16/our-books-are-spells-for-unraveling-capitalism-an-interview-w-timeless-infinite-light/>) is an Oakland-based artist exploring the intersections of writing, book art, installation, and performance. Their writing has been featured in *calmaplombpombombalm.com*, *Dusie*, *Jupiter88*, *The Vulgate*, *Tripwire*, and *Wheelhouse Magazine*. Their new book, almost any shit will do, published by Timeless, Infinite Light, uses found language, word-replacement, and erasure to strange the familiar and map the boundaries of collective engagement.

Nikki Wallschlaeger's (<http://nikkiwallschlaeger.com/>) work has been featured in *Coconut magazine*, *Dusie*, *Elective Affinities*, *Fanzine*, *Horse Less Review*, *Spork*, *Storyscape Journal*, *The Account*, and others. She is the author of the chapbook *I Would Be the Happiest Bird* (Horseless Press). Her first full-length book of poems, *Houses*, is forthcoming from Horseless Press in 2015. She is also an associate poetry editor for *Coconut magazine*.





## Risk and Beauty The Textural Realities of alice blue books



BY DARA CERV

Alice blue is hand-made from the ground up. In 2005, Amber Nelson and Will and Sarah Gallien launched the online journal *alice blue review* because they wanted to cultivate something specific. Feeling frustrated with what felt like the stuffiness of print journals, and emboldened by the quality of online publishing they were seeing, the trio set about publishing writers whose work they weren't finding elsewhere. The journal was born from the best kind of turmoil: from the beginning, the editors have published things that uncompromisingly challenge one another's tastes and personal aesthetics in

order to form a united front of risk and beauty.

Risk, beauty, challenge, and uncompromising are all words that can be applied to what happened a few years later, when Amber brought print to *alice blue*. She and her co-editors always wanted to produce something physical, and while browsing the chapbooks at AWP Chicago, Amber intuited their niche. Because Will and Sarah couldn't commit to another project she took it on herself, stitch by stitch in her studio apartment in Boise, Idaho.

In her search for the first two *alice blue* chapbooks, Amber asked fifteen writers who had been published in the online journal to submit manuscripts. From these she chose Lucas Farrell's *The Blue-Collar Sun* and C. McAllister Williams' *William Shatner*. She enlisted the help of Naomi Tarle, a visual artist with letterpress experience, and Valerie Hayes, a woman who taught a bookmaking class from which Amber had seen intriguing pieces produced. Together, the three of them made a print run of one hundred copies of a standard chapbook and ten limited edition art books. Amber still works with Naomi on the handmade paper used for *alice blue* books and continues to bring other artists on board for the special pieces. (Though she adores the DIY quality of the work and the ability to express externally what appears for her in the written work, Amber admits to not being able to draw a believable tiger or deer to save her life.) The books include stamping, stenciling, letterpress, hand painting, and other specialized techniques. Each book is lovingly made with elbow grease and delicate fingerings, and likely a lot of swear words. These objects are meant to be touched, taken time with, and treasured, reflecting the way *alice blue* feels their content should be treated.

The birth of the recognizably formatted "shotgun wedding" series almost broke Amber's book-making spirit. A book project fittingly named *Monster: A Glotachronology* (Tyler Flynn Dorholt and Thomas Cook) required a special amount of craftwork. From the space the material needed on the page, to the double signature in the binding, to the paper cutout on the cover revealing red vellum beneath, the book was a tremendous undertaking. After its completion, despite feeling as if she might never un-hunch from the kitchen table, Amber still wanted to make books, but with less intense physical labor. This led to a graduation to an easier format that still manages to capture the unique spirit of the press. It consists of photocopied chapbooks, with content from only the Pacific Northwest. Each run is made up of six different writers, each one color-coded by cover. When fanned out on the table, the collection looks like a literary bouquet. One set is all neons, another is neutrals with a touch of iridescence. Both poetry and fiction are featured in these simple but noticeable collections.

What perhaps sets Amber apart from many publishers and editors is that she specifically chooses writers whose manuscripts make her a bit uncomfortable and who have low visibility. She picks those who have appeared in only a few online journals and haven't previously put out books of any kind. Happily, she's found that *alice blue's* authors go on to have greater literary successes. Though different from each other, each author possesses a similar quality of risk, push, and intrigue, which should always be at the heart of small press publishing. The latest addition to *alice blue* is *The Tahrir of Poems: Seven Contemporary Egyptian Poets* (Maged Zaher), for which Amber collaborated with Rona Frances of Tahrir Square and book designer Corinne Manning. Forthcoming is a chapbook by Brooklyn Copeland and a double-issue of shotgun wedding.

Despite the stressful and intense nature of book making, Amber works ultimately to "serve the writers." Each book is a testament to the care taken in selecting what rests inside. The next time you see *alice blue's* books at an AWP conference or elsewhere, be sure to read one. But be more sure to stop and please, please touch them.

Dara Cerv (<http://realpants.com/want-answers-dara-cerv/>) lives and writes in Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts. Poems appear and are forthcoming in *apt*, *Jellyfish*, *The Volta*, and *Whiskey Island*. *Sixth Finch* will publish her first chapbook in 2015.

Amber Nelson (<http://htmlgiant.com/author-spotlight/im-a-bad-feminist-etc-talking-with-seattles-amber-nelson/>) is the co-founder and poetry editor for the online journal *alice blue review*, and the founding editor of *alice blue books* (<http://www.alicebluereview.org/>). Her first book, *In Anima: Urgency*, is available, and her second book, *The Human Seasons*, is forthcoming, both from Coconut Books.

**Each book is lovingly made with elbow grease and delicate fingerings, and likely a lot of swear words. These objects are meant to be touched, taken time with, and treasured, reflecting the way *alice blue* feels their content should be treated.**

## An Urgency Will Declare Itself The Role of Relationships in Dirty Swan Projects



INTERVIEW BY CHRISTEENE ALCOSIBA

Boog City writer Christeene Alcosiba talks with *Dirty Swan Projects* Founder Evan Kennedy about self-preservation, vanity projects, and community—about how intensely subjective and preferential creative and editorial processes are, how infused and informed they are by friendships and identity politics. It is no mistake that *Dirty Swan Projects* describes itself as "a publisher of books and initiatives." Kennedy's projects challenge and grow our interpretations of the canon, gender, pornography, war, and our relationship to beauty.

**Boog City: How did you arrive at the decision to start your own press?**

Evan Kennedy: I needed an aegis under which I could do my own projects. An authority to confer upon myself and my work. Then I decided to embark on projects to publish other poets' work since they were not as visible as I desired.

**How did you actually make that happen, or alternatively, what were some of the lessons you've learned along the way?**

I learned that after a while, it's possible to outsmart the process even when I didn't have experience. I've looked at enough, attended enough, and inquired enough. I now can strategize around just about anything within my humble means.

**What influence, if any, does place—San Francisco—have on the types or quality of projects you're selecting?**

San Francisco is dear to me. Most of all, the local poets' DIY approach has influenced the *Dirty Swan*. Poets here always want and usually make materials for free. Out east, I've encountered the expectation that money should exchange hands for slicker product.

**What kinds of things do you look for in selecting a manuscript to publish? Are there any guiding aesthetic principles or...?**

I can't say I've done the same project twice. I did one play, one poetry/porno zine, one chapbook, one homemade mixed-media conglomeration, and one full-length, perfect-bound book. Oh, and many vanity projects.

**If you weren't doing this, then what would you be doing?**

I would be doing what I'm doing while working on the projects. I would be listening to baseball games on the radio, bicycling (I once sewed twenty chapbooks riding a bike from Macarthur BART to the Bay Area Public School), and looking out for my self-preservation.

**Why poetry and not, say, books about Zambonis or urban farming or Amish romance novels?**

Nico Peck is a friend of mine and happens to be an incredible poet. I published *The Pyrrhiad*, which is a terrific queering of *The Iliad*. I happen to have a lot of friends who are incredible poets. They have awful manners at times, and I could do myself a favor by befriending those communities you mention, but I'm trying to design an affirmation within my present community, which happens to have poets. It's a matter of exercising care and watchfulness among those of my alignment despite all the lapses in etiquette.



**What's next or on the horizon for Dirty Swan Projects?**

It's exhilarating to report with certainty that an urgency will declare itself, at some point.

Christeene Alcosiba (<http://bodyliterature.com/2013/01/28/christeene-alcosiba/>) is a writer, editorial assistant for Coconut Books, and a librarian at the Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library at Emory University. Her poems and articles have been featured or are forthcoming in *B O D Y Magazine*; *English Journal*; *Forklift*, OH; *New York Quarterly*; and *Rattle*, among others.

Evan Kennedy (<http://electiveaffinitiesusa.blogspot.com/2014/09/evan-kennedy.html>) is a poet and bicyclist who lives in San Francisco. He is the author of *Terra Firmament (Krupskaya)* and *The Sissies* (forthcoming from *Futurepoem*, and founder of *Dirty Swan Projects* (<http://dirtyswanprojects.blogspot.com/>)).

**I needed an aegis under which I could do my own projects. An authority to confer upon myself and my work.**

# What a Feminist Looks Like

## How Switchback Books Combats Poetry's Gender Gap

BY TARA BOSWELL

Switchback Books is a small (but mighty) press publishing poetry by women, including all transsexual, transgender, genderqueer, and female-identifying folks. In this Q&A, managing editor and all-around badass Colleen O'Connor discusses their mission, being a fan girl, and publishing as a feminist act.

### Boog City: How was the press born? Where in the history of the press did your involvement begin?

Colleen O'Connor: Switchback began in 2006 when our founding editors, Becca Klaver, and Brandi Homan, decided that they wanted to do something about the gender gap in poetry publishing. This was pre-VIDA count, but the gap was still there—women were publishing fewer books than men for no discernible reason other than the patriarchy. Our founding editors started the press to combat that.

I became involved in 2010, initially as an editorial assistant, eventually transitioning to managing editor. I had been a fan girl of the press for some time, so when our current executive director Whitney Holmes invited me to come on board I jumped at the chance. I'm still a fan girl, by the way. It's sort of embarrassing how big of a fan girl I am.

### Is Switchback what a feminist looks like?

Switchback is absolutely what a feminist looks like, as a feminist can look or sound or be anything at all. It's one of the most exciting things about feminism, I think—its inclusivity. Not that this inclusivity is inherent—I think it's important to examine our feminisms and make sure that we're doing our part to be inclusive, to not limit our own understandings of feminisms so that we shut out, further marginalize, or dismiss.

It's one of the most exciting things about Switchback too—our books are so vastly different and varied. It's thrilling to read a meditative poem from Cynthia Arrieu-King's *MANIFEST* and then switch to Marissa Crawford's *The Haunted House* for what I like to call grotesque slumber party poems. We publish full-length collections of poetry by women writers—the books, the poets, the poems are incredibly nuanced and different—the publishing is the feminist act.

### What do you think of the word aesthetic? Is it possible to define your aesthetic? Could you try?

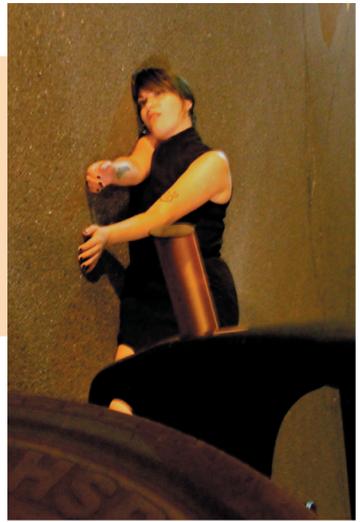
I believe aesthetic is a very important word for a writer and a reader, but I'm honestly not sure what it means for a publisher. Our books, for example, are so incredibly different, and I am so proud of the variety in our catalogue. I suppose if I were going to define a Switchback aesthetic, I'd use a word like fluid—it's definitely not something that's fixed. We believe that publishing work by women writers is a feminist act, whatever the aesthetic.

### What are your biggest challenges with the press? What are your greatest editorial pleasures?

Challenges! I'd say the biggest challenge is always time. We are a staff of volunteers who live in multiple cities in the US, so timing can be a real issue. We are all so committed to our work and our books, but we also have day jobs. It can be difficult to reconcile the two.

One thing we have no shortage of is editorial pleasures. I cannot emphasize how much we love our books. A story I love to tell is how, during the copyediting phase for Stefania Heim's *A Table that Goes on for Miles*, executive director Whitney Holmes and I constantly texted each other poem titles from the manuscript. It was thrilling. I'd be sitting at work or at dinner or out with friends and my phone would buzz, I'd look down and see that Whit had just said something like "Considering the Limitations of the Force of my Will" and I would respond with "Would You Like to See My House." That's how much we love the work.

*I suppose if I were going to define a Switchback aesthetic, I'd use a word like fluid—it's definitely not something that's fixed. We believe that publishing work by women writers is a feminist act, whatever the aesthetic.*



### What do you see in Switchback's future?

I cannot wait for Switchback's future. I cannot wait for what we're going to do next. In April, we have two new books: Morgan Parker's *Other People's Comfort Keeps Me Up At Night*, a book that makes me gasp every time I read it, and *And/Or* by Jenn Marie Nunes, one of the most complex and nuanced collections I've read. Later this year we will publish Alysse Knorr's *Copper Mother*, which is so smart and compelling we knew the minute we read it we wanted it.

I know that for me, I would love the future to include raising Switchback's visibility. I want everyone to know about us—our books are just that good.

Tara Boswell (<http://ilkjournal.com/journal/issue-seven/tara-boswell/>) lives and makes art in Chicago, where she is the founding curator and programs director for *The Swell*, an art cooperative and performance series. She also serves as an assistant editor for *Phantom Limb Press*, an online poetry journal and print chapbook press. Her first chapbook, *Don't Come Crying to Me*, is forthcoming from dancing girl press in the spring of 2015.

Colleen O'Connor (<http://pankmagazine.com/piece/colleen-oconnor/>) received her M.F.A. in nonfiction from Columbia College Chicago. Her work has appeared in journals such as *Another Chicago Magazine*, *Columbia Poetry Review*, and *Pank*. She lives in Chicago where she is the managing editor of *Switchback Books* (<http://www.switchbackbooks.com/>).

## FILM

# The Fantastical Faccinto

## Depraved Delectations of Animation

BY JOEL SCHLEMOWITZ

Hierronymus Bosch was painting the triptych of *Paradise, The Garden of Earthly Delights, and Hell* about four centuries before the motion picture apparatus emerged upon the world. But it's not too difficult to imagine these splendid medieval hallucinations as a distant relative of the early animated films of Victor Faccinto. An opportunity to make such a comparison arrives on April 19 at 7:00 p.m. with a visit by the North Carolina-based artist and a screening of his works, as part of *Mono No Aware's Connectivity Through Cinema* series presented in cooperation with *Spectacle Theater* at 124 South 3rd Street, Williamsburg, Brooklyn.

"A Sheep Without a Shepherd: The Films of Victor Faccinto" surveys animated works produced with 16mm film in the 1970s through analog and digital pieces combining costumed human subjects and experimental animation made in the decades following.

*The fantastical realm of Bosch-like bedlam in the early films here becomes more enigmatic: in the most intriguing moments of these later works it is hard to know where the performer's movements leave off and the animator's intercessions begin.*

In a world of colorful paper doll cutouts we are introduced to Video Vic, an anonymous figure whose face is covered black shroud with two round holes cut for his cartoon eyes to peer out at us. This gumdrop-shaped hood seems as if it should be covering the head of a penitent in an old-world Catholic procession. But rather than sackcloth Video Vic awakens groggily in colorful yellow pajamas and garbs himself in black suit jacket and matching trousers. His actions are accompanied by sound effects produced in the human beatbox manner, although when something more elaborate is needed the sounds of kazoo and slide whistle will accompany Vic as he journeys through an animated bildungsroman of sexual excess and sadistic pious penance, neither of which seems too far removed from the other.

The Bosch-like universe in which Video Vic's misadventures are chronicled in the films *Filet of Soul* (1972) and *Shameless* (1974) is full of diabolical imps behaving wickedly. We rise through a diagrammatic landscape of elevators, winding ramps, and geometric buildings whose facades appear as faces—windows for eyes, and a doorway as a devouring mouth—to visit strange, powerful deities presiding over the heavenly realm, via a control panel of levers, blinking lights, and buttons. The lords of heaven turn out to be just as wicked in their own right. Video Vic himself does not always shy away from mischief by occasionally solving some dilemma or another with the aid of a little spontaneous knife throwing. Flying blobs of paper-cutout blood stream from the neck of the unlucky recipient. His veiled face now seems rather that of a black-hooded ninja in making these pointy retorts. A "whisssh!" voiced on the soundtrack accompanies the stiletto through the air.

Sex is unabashed between the animated creatures of the worlds of delights and hellscape visited by Video Vic. In this respect we see a clear connection between the underground comix of the 1960s and Faccinto's fantastical tableaux. An enormous erect penis appears emerging from the open trousers of some demon or mortal—and naturally enough we hear an ascending glissando played upon the slide whistle to accompany this salacious protrusion. Vaginas (and other orifices) are not only portals of earthly pleasure but can quite literally be portals for entry and exit of various dramatis personae.

Faccinto would later go on to put together elaborate projection performances using 16mm film and kaleidoscopic beam-splitting lenses to create images not unlike the abstracted and geometric overhead shots in Busby Berkeley dance sequences. This continued into the digital realm with works for both the film screen and the art gallery. A blending together of human action and animation is at the center of these pieces, the cowl of Video Vic now echoed in the ski-masked sprites and writhing, entangled flower-creatures in various states of dress and nakedness.

The fantastical realm of Bosch-like bedlam in the early films here becomes more enigmatic: in the most intriguing moments of these works it is hard to know where the performer's movements leave off and the animator's intercessions begin.

<http://www.victorfaccinto.com>  
<http://mononoawarefilm.com/special-engagements/connectivity-through-cinema-with-victor-faccinto-in-person/>  
<http://www.spectacletheater.com/>



Still image from the animated video *Nightmare* (2009) by Victor Faccinto.

Joel Schlemowitz (<http://www.joelschlemowitz.com>) is a Park Slope, Brooklyn-based filmmaker who makes short cine-poems and experimental documentaries. His most recent project, "78rpm," is in the final stages of post-production. He has taught filmmaking at *The New School* for the past 15 years. Schlemowitz photo by Robyn Hasty.

# Inside the Bubble or of the Bubble Joanna Fuhrman Emerges from the Cocoon



BY LAUREN RUSSELL

**The Year of Yellow Butterflies**

Joanna Fuhrman

Hanging Loose Press

In Joanna Fuhrman's latest collection, *The Year of Yellow Butterflies*, images layer like nesting dolls, and sometimes I don't know if what I'm looking at is a current or imminent reality or its funhouse mirror image.

In the multi-part title poem, a series of surreal and speculative worlds unfold, and some of their attributes are all too familiar. "It was the year those photographs appeared everywhere: big-toothed Americans smiling next to naked, hooded, bound dark men" immediately conjures up images of Abu Ghraib abuses. But in the next sentence torture becomes yet another marketing ploy:

We'd see the images printed on T-shirts, embossed on popcorn cartons and caught in the silver, cinematic underskin of our eyelids.

We thought the image would cause a rearrangement of our dormant atoms, that the lion sleeping in our waterbed would wake and burn a rapturous path out of its oceanic nap.

But hyperawareness of (someone else's) torture and our own complicity in it is not the transformative experience we had sought. The poem ends, "Instead, the powder on our nacho chips stayed the same blunt orange, the ballet dancers remained perched, spinning forever on their lovely, bloody toes." Despite continuous, almost voyeuristic, exposure to graphic images of other peoples' pain, our own lives remain remarkably unchanged, in all their prosaic ugliness and beauty. It's a kind of surrealistic realism, an answer to Ilya Kaminsky's "we [forgive us]/ lived happily during the war."

If ubiquitous distribution of torture photography is a kind of voyeurism, its flipside may be found in the faddish exhibitionism of an elaborate cyborg striptease. One section of the title poem begins, "It was the year young women wore blue jeans with carefully ripped holes, holes revealing leggings, and in the knees of the leggings, little rips, glimpses of neon paisley tights." The poem focuses in closer and closer, taking us through layers of knee-makeup, skin, "a surgically implanted transparent window revealing veins," which in turn make way to expose muscle and bones, within the bones, tubes, and finally, "inside those tubes there was the beginning or the end of language." I am reminded of social media, how we allow (and sometimes even invite) near strangers to look through the minutiae of our lives, to take increasingly more intimate views. But the final keyhole reveals not memes or Instagrammed photos but the raw material of language that is somehow at the center of this exhibitionist construction.

In "Rain Turns the Sky the White of an Old Wedding Dress," the boundaries blur between the nest and the nested, movement and stasis.

**The multiplicity of experiences in *The Year of Yellow Butterflies* is like landing in a world of infinite stacked realities, the Matryoshka mirror funhouse of reflected possible futures and pasts.**



Jimmy Schuyler

wrote,

People who see bubbles rise  
may be swimming, not drowning.

but what about us kids  
inside the bubble or of the bubble,  
made of bubble?

Are we moving? Floating?  
Breaststroke? Swimming?

Can those unbound by gravity escape the dichotomy of "sink or swim"? Inside or of the bubble, boundaries are porous. We are constructed from our own transparencies, made of permeable matter.

The final window unlocking infinite self-reproductions is the sheer Matryoshka doll of the book itself. In "Song for Future Books," Fuhrman writes, "The book is made of glass and I look/ through it and see more books./ Many glass books." I've been trying to convince my students that a poem need not be pieced together like a puzzle or deciphered like a code; a poem may be entered, felt, and navigated as an experience. The multiplicity of experiences in *The Year of Yellow Butterflies* is like landing in a world of infinite stacked realities, the Matryoshka mirror funhouse of reflected possible futures and pasts.

Joanna Fuhrman (<http://www.joannafuhrman.com/>) is the author of five books of poetry, most recently *Pageant* (Alice James Books) and *The Year of Yellow Butterflies* (Hanging Loose Press), as well as the chapbook *The Emotive Function* (Least Weasel Press). Her poems have appeared in many journals, including *Conduit*, *Court Green*, *Eleven Eleven*, *Fence*, *lit*, *New American Writing*, *Puerto del Sol*, *Quarterly West*, *Talisman*, *The Believer*, *The Brooklyn Rail*, and *Volt*, and featured in anthologies published by *Bloomsbury*, *Carnegie Mellon*, *HarperCollins*, *NYU*, and *Soft Skull*. In addition to teaching poetry writing at Rutgers University, she teaches creative writing through *Teachers & Writers Collaborative*, at *Sarah Lawrence Writer's Village* and in private workshops. Image by Toni Simon.

Lauren Russell's (<http://www.readlauren.com/>) second chapbook, *Dream-Clung, Gone*, came out from Brooklyn Arts Press in 2012. She is the 2014-2015 Jay C. and Ruth Halls Poetry Fellow at The Wisconsin Institute for Creative Writing.

# A Manifesto on the Ephemeral Niina Pollari Beats a Dead Horse



BY KIELY SWEATT

**Dead Horse**

Niina Pollari

Birds, LLC

I'm sitting in the room I grew up in at the vanity mirror trying hard not to blink. I'm hoping this time I will see the flesh melt away from my face in an attempt to get a better glimpse of what I might carry around with me in my later years. It is in this mental space I am reading *Dead Horse* for the first time; "under the skin/ The soft skin I allegedly own that is disappearing from me everyday."

Pollari's debut poetry collection is beautiful, haunting, and at times vulnerable, self aware and bleeding.

In a way it feels like a teddy bear being thrown at [your] face  
Yes, like with fat and fur in your fingers...

Before we move into the first of three sections of this book, we are faced with the speaker "skinless in a limo." So when we get to section one, titled "Bone," there is "no fucking with what happened."

In the poem "To The Bone" Pollari's verse is quirky and dark. The poet writes:

Call me when you want to scrutinize someone  
Because I am it/The girl who heard there'd be drugs  
and showed up earnestly/Not even "the girl" but "a girl"/  
And now I'm nothing/But a massive garbage mountain/  
...And all I want to know is/Do you love me  
Now that I can dance

The imagery of these poems, and many in this section, is horrific, funny, and unforgettable. In poems like "I Want" the poet "make[s] a cake out of the stuff that falls off [her] body."

In section two, titled "Blood," Pollari relates to some of the most vulnerable experiences of being a woman. In my favorite poem, "Personal Pain," the speaker goes on about the experience of getting an IUD insert and describes pain as "an oddly personal one."

Just like this  
My devices insertion  
At the second flash of sear, the nurse heard  
My inhale and looked at me and said "Are you OK"

The pain was not that of transcendence, which was what the speaker wanted.

Wanting transcendence through pain is a deep wish I always have  
I know I am not alone there

She's right. She's not alone there. When I think of transcendence I imagine a way to get beyond what is, what we can feel. Pain then becomes a portal, a means to an end. But to what ends? One wonders. For me it is in the times I feel least able to cope with, a particular emotional experience that I yearn for the pain in which the poet refers to. Like the times I got my tattoos or sat in front of a mirror with safety pins at my ears, stomach, and nose. I never thought of those times as merely a release of pent up teenage angst. I did them because I enjoyed the physical pain of these acts. I assume Pollari had a similar understanding when she wrote this poem.

In the last section of the book, "Money," themes range from therapy and art to smartphone data plans, Smart car men, footballs, pictures, and even self-love. The poems are less corporeal unless we are picturing "a skeleton holding money" or the parts of us that are made up of money and the other parts that are a "shadow-money of debt." For me these poems are more of a manifesto on the ephemeral, a "workshop on trust," or the ridiculousness of defining oneself by our possessions.

Even the format of her poetry creates a similar awareness between itself as a body of text and the reader. On first read of longer poems like "Dead Horse," and "No Emergency" they feel as though they could work as one long poem or a series of broken-bodied poems.

To put it in the words of Depeche Mode, if you want to "strip down to the bone," it's with this book. *Dead Horse* puts Pollari among the ranks of some of the top female voices on the scene right now; hotly recommended.

Niina Pollari (<http://heartbarf.tumblr.com/>) is a poet and translator. *Birds, LLC* just released her first book, *Dead Horse*. She is also the author of two chapbooks, *Book Four* (Hyacinth Girl Press) and *Fabulous Essential* (*Birds of Lace*). Last year *Action Books* put out her translation of Tytti Heikkinen's *The Warmth of the Taxidermied Animal*. She coordinates the yearly *Popsickle Festival* in Brooklyn.

Kiely Sweatt (<https://www.facebook.com/kiely.sweatt/>) is a writer, performer, and producer based in Greenpoint, Brooklyn.

**In my favorite poem, 'Personal Pain,' the speaker goes on about the experience of getting an IUD insert and describes pain as 'an oddly personal one.'**



# Celebrating Contraband Ross White's Trip from Old World to New World and Back Again



BY CATHERINE WALD

**How We Came Upon the Colony**  
Ross White  
Unicorn Press

This 24-page volume, *How We Came Upon the Colony*, Ross White's first chapbook, makes a compelling argument for the vitality and viability of the art form. It is a beautifully designed, perfect-bound gem in which the typography is well-suited to the subject matter at hand, but, even more importantly, the individual poems have been selected to complement, amplify, and comment upon each other. Chapbooks like this combine the substantiality of self-contained books with the ability to explore deep questions from a variety of perspectives:

- \*How do echoes of our colonial history intrude upon and persist in contemporary American consciousness?
- \*How can we explore issues of imperialism, racism, and guilt that don't necessarily proceed from our personal histories?
- \*How do humans make transitions from Old World to New World?
- \*How can we make peace with our exploitation of other species, civilizations, and habitats?
- \*What can or can't be salvaged?

"Cargo," the first poem in the volume, introduces the reader to a world where the past and the present constantly impinge on each other, where human emotions are projected onto historical events and history reveals a surprisingly vibrant and contemporary emotional life. It begins:

"For a time, I was a stowaway aboard a great ship,  
hidden in great coils of rope."

and later picks up the narrative:

"I was beaten by the captain when he found me,  
though now I am a midshipman."

Throughout linger shadows of nostalgia and lost love:

"What care we take not to disturb the albatross.  
What care I take to keep the sight of you  
contraband in my heart all these years later."

**In this book's poetic universe, we are all colonists or pilgrims of some sort, struggling to resolve needs for growth and expansion with the need to live humanely as individuals.**



In this book's poetic universe, we are all colonists or pilgrims of some sort, struggling to resolve needs for growth and expansion with the need to live humanely as individuals. Again and again, we learn that beauty is intense and expansive, but also desperately fragile.

From "Birds in the Colony":

"Swifts stitch the trees with flight; operate air as artisans. The  
distanced observer, were he to paint lines over their ethereal  
paths, would illustrate the complexities of all movement."

This book, happily, gives the lie to advice I was once given by a small press editor that all the poems in a volume should look alike, meaning have the same form and format. From that perspective, you could call this book a hodge-podge, since there are poems in couplet, blank verse, list poems, a prose poem, even a ghazal or two. But the thematic unity of this work is so tight that it easily encompasses these different forms.

Ross White is as tender as he is unsparing. He forces us to confront harsh and painful realities without renouncing the desire for transformation. The last line of "Westward Expansion," the last poem in the book, reads:

"When there is no light, the farmer smokes his pipe  
and waits patiently to be possessed by hope."

<http://www.unicorn-press.org/>

Catherine Wald (<http://newversenews.blogspot.com/2015/03/only-in-my-room-not-in-gaza.html>) is a poet, journalist, translator, and author whose books include poetry (*Distant, burned-out stars; Finishing Line Press*), nonfiction (*The Resilient Writer: Stories of Rejection and Triumph From 23 Top Authors, Persea Books*) and a translation from French of Valery Larbaud's *Childish Things* (*Sun & Moon Press*). Her poems have been published in *American Journal of Nursing*, *Buddhist Poetry Review*, *Chronogram*, *Exit 13*, *Friends Journal*, *Jewish Literary Journal*, *The New Poet*, *Society of Classical Poets*, *The 5-2 Crime Poetry Weekly*, and *The Westchester Review*.

Ross White (<http://rosswhite.com/>) is a poet and teacher living in Durham, N.C. With Matthew Olzmann, he edited *Another & Another: An Anthology from the Grind Daily Writing Series*. He was the 2012 winner of the *James Larkin Pearson Prize* and the *Gladys Owings Hughes Prize*. His poems have appeared in *Best New Poets 2012*, *New England Review*, *Poetry Daily*, *The Southern Review*, and others. He is a four-time recipient of work-study and administrative scholarships to the *Bread Loaf Writers' Conference*, and teaches poetry writing and grammar at the *University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill* and *The North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics*.

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**Donald Ilich**

Rockville, Md.

**The Labors**

I was prepared to meet my obligations.  
 To salt a lake until it was ready  
 to boil eggs. Send a satellite  
 into subversive orbit. Run a kissing  
 bandit ring, stealing lips in the darkness.  
 Except I broke my skeleton  
 when I missed the sky.  
 I stumbled around, my skull cracked  
 in half, nerves on fire. The authorities  
 told me I had no excuse.  
 They promised to dangle me over a pool  
 of alligators, which hadn't been fed,  
 which would like a taste of humanity.  
 They mentioned a firing squad  
 that was waiting to fill me full of holes.  
 So, I pulled my castle of salt to the edge.  
 I put the rocket on my back,  
 fired it into the cosmos.  
 My chapped lips could hardly stand  
 another face. They stopped threatening me.  
 They asked me if I'd ever been in love.  
 No, I said, and I never will.  
 The sky is prepared  
 to snap me in half again.



**Steve Orth**

Oakland, Calif.

**Poem 10/14**

I never was one  
 for abstract thinking  
 walking into traffic  
 with the radio on.  
 There's a tube amp  
 somewhere in Santa Rosa  
 A combo with 30 watts  
 a 1x12 Celestion speaker  
 comes with a footswitch  
 comes with new Russian tubes.  
 Drinking shit coffee  
 at Doughnut Palace  
 6:46 AM.  
 If I ever decide  
 to kill myself  
 I might do it here.



**Peter Longofono**

TK, Brooklyn

**Druthers**

Good and courteous eleven P.M.  
 ended in rout, nether  
 hour ignifying as if it  
 wasn't right after ten.

The powers carled upon  
 zagged, though plaster,  
 Sebastianal in their Of  
 Course, interred  
 of course in onionskin.

We were disconsolate, —  
 ———, in six-  
 year-forgotten color, alsoest  
 of fire's patronyms. Rome,

nude and dwarven astride her snail,  
 meant to neuter us before dawn.  
 There was wet bridge philosophy  
 back then. A cordial stab at "how."

**Poetry Bios**

**Donald Ilich** ([http://www.authormark.com/article\\_733.shtml](http://www.authormark.com/article_733.shtml)) has published poetry in *Cold Mountain Review*, *Fourteen Hills*, *LIT*, *The Iowa Review*, and other journals. He won honorable mention in the Washington Prize book contest and was a "Discovery"/Boston Review 2008 Poetry Contest semifinalist. **Peter Longofono** (<http://www.notintentionarriving.com/2014/02/writer-wednesday-peter-longofono.html>) received his M.F.A. from NYU, where he edited international content for *Washington Square Review* and served as a Goldwater Fellow. His poems and criticism have appeared or are forthcoming in *Coldfront*, *H\_NGM\_N*, *Luna Luna Magazine*, *tenderloin*, and *The Bakery*. **Steve Orth** (<http://summerbfpress.blogspot.com/>) publishes the magazine, *Where Eagles Dare*. With his partner Lindsey Boldt, he co-edits Summer BF Press and writes, directs, and performs plays in the style of "Oakland Poetic Realism."

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# Judy Rifka

## Lower East Side



### Artist Bio

Judy Rifka's (<http://www.judyrifka.com/>) career spans over 50 one-person shows and countless group exhibitions. Her work can be seen in numerous public collections in museums and foundations, throughout the United States and Europe. Her work has been featured in major exhibitions at the 1983 Whitney Biennial and the 1975 Whitney Biennial; Documenta VII, Kassel; The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York; and The Brooklyn Museum to name a few. Rifka has been widely written about, and featured in, among other places, *Art in America*, *Art Forum*, *Elle*, *Flash Art*, *Kunst Forum*, *New York magazine*, *Tema Celeste*, and *The New Yorker*.

### Artist Statement

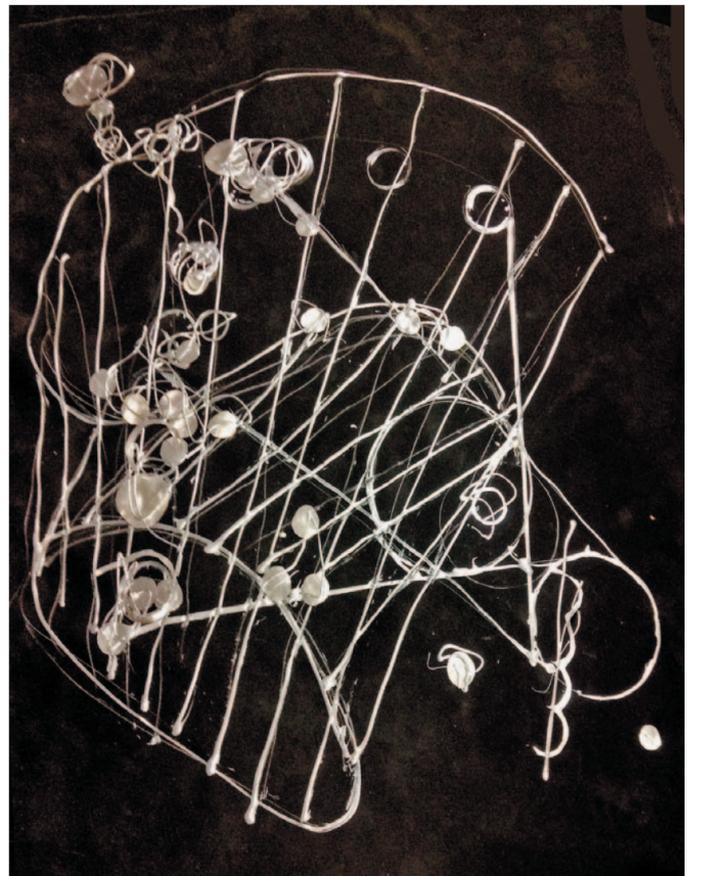
These works are about mapping my movement in paint. They conjure multidimensional association. In painting, I articulate the space with a record of my intention and concomitant motion. They shift from emotion to motion. Two dimensions look like three dimensions are about four dimensions, and more. They are a dance.



**Nebula Skittle** paint on canvas, 72" x 63".



**Look into the Orbit** paint on canvas, 72" x 63".



**Metronome** paint on canvas, 72" x 63".



**The Iron in Irony** paint on canvas, 72" x 63".

# To Stroud and Back Again: Serena Jost's October English Tour

BY SERENA JOST



Serena Jost and Amanda Thorpe in London, October 2014.

Playing music in the UK has always been a dream of mine. It's amazing to be on the road, and while organizing a tour takes some legwork, it's also a lot of fun. My plan was to make it to England for the Fall of '14. One easy flight, right? Well, at least three musicians I've heard of were returned to the US on the next plane. UK visa requirements for musicians are very strict, and when people are vague about what they're doing in the country, a quick Google search by customs can do them in. I worried about my plans prior to departure, but on October 3rd set out for JFK on the subway, with my new Orchard Street wheelie, a big handbag, and a very small Baby Martin guitar. I had on my camo cords for comfort, a bar of chocolate, tour supplies, and most importantly, my Swiss Passport for easy entry into the UK. I am very lucky to be the holder of two passports, and had established with certainty I was in the clear: I could perform shows as long as I entered the country with the red passport instead of the blue one. The box with my merch had been sent to England, and I would meet my tour mate and dear friend Brit, Amanda Thorpe, in London at the Hertz rental. A cello would be rented the afternoon of my arrival.

After dozing during the flight on a full row of seats, we touched down. It felt good to be back on the other side of the Atlantic. Clean bathrooms, orderly hallways, English vowels. The Tube into the city was much as I remembered it; steep escalators, reminders of "the gap," and sharp men in beautiful suits. At Russell Square, we got the very large rental car (an upgrade), and set out for Derby, pronounced with its former spelling, Darby. As we headed out of London, we got into a little pickle with the car (enough said). One tire was totally gutted, another gouged. We were all right, but waylaid. The service vehicle would be coming. We began waiting. After some more waiting, I pulled out the Baby Martin, and we started in on some songs from my latest album, *A Bird Will Sing* (produced by Anton Fier): "If I take your hand, will you walk with me?" and "A buried heart, a steady rain, air gets in and hope remains." We decided I would set out on my own to Thwaites, the cello rental shop, since it would otherwise close before we got there. Jetlagged and purposeful, I got the Overland train, and rushed into the shop 20 minutes before closing. "Cup of tea?"

**'See the world, touch the sand, soft and new, old and kind.'**

Cellos, cellos, choices. Thwaites is a lovely string shop on the slope of a hill in Watford, a suburb of London. The place is full of instruments, unusual music stands, and conductor's wands. Bill, who ran the shop, took me to the back area, a narrow space full of cellos and basses. He brought one cello to me. Great sound, but the action was higher than usual. Another very affable Czech instrument immediately felt great in my hand. And another, more introverted Dutch cello. I sang with each of them, and chose the second as the best match for my voice. We put the Czech cello into the car.

In Derby, I woke up to the sounds of Amanda's family, and rain. It was cool and damp. In the afternoon, we reviewed songs, and learned new ones for our first gig that night, a Saturday house concert in Ashbourne. Half the inhabitants of this small village came out to the show, and they all brought amazing food. They were eager to hear us, and to have a good time. We closed the drafty door to the patio, and started. The songs felt spacious, and the attentive audience was excited, not only to listen, but to sing with us. Music, strong voices, drinking, and then a feast.

The high-ceilinged venue with a low stage hosts a lot of jazz gigs, and we did a two hour set in Derby's Five Spot Jazz Bar on Sunday. As fans entered the club, I felt my body arrive from across the Atlantic. This would be a concert with a seated audience. Pete Sharratt was our soundman. Amanda and I played and sang on each other's songs, mixing guitars, cello, percussion, and voices. I started to be able to play my rental cello, and I began to enjoy myself. How could I draw sound out of this instrument? How was it different than my own 1910 cello? Inspired, I took a nice solo on Amanda's song "Bar Tabac." After the show, there was a flurry of CD sales. Backo, a seasoned DJ, got me a nice, warm beer, and put one of my tour birds above his booth.

On Monday, I hit the Charity Shops in Ashbourne. We had the day off, and I was not only cold, but getting colder. My priority? Warm things for low prices: first coffee, then clothes. Unlike some second hand stores, charity shops have really good things in great condition. I felt more human with my new vest, sweater, wrist warmers, and hat. I needed to be warm during gigs. October in England is formidable.

**'If we find a lake, will you swim with me? What if the water's clear, but freezing?'**

Johnny Livingstone opened for Lucinda Williams last year (a big deal), and we opened for him at the Kitchen Garden Café. Maybe a little bit of a smaller deal on a Wednesday in Birmingham. I'd heard from my banjo king friend Curtis Eller, KGC was a great place to play. Sort of like the Park Slope venue Barbès, with a café and food. What a sweet place indeed! Johnny, who looks like a Scottish Christopher Walken, is a great musician, and played a dynamic set on keyboard and guitar. I preferred his more abstract songs, and felt the New York inside of me: how much of what we make is residential, of a place? Has spending a lot of time with poets dissolved my appreciation for certain kinds of narrative? Who will like my music? Questions aside, I have Johnny to thank for pointing us in the right direction for after gig eats: beyond words, simply amazing Indian food. Probably the best I've ever had. Apparently, it's some of the finest in the world, including India. I resolved to spend more time in Birmingham.

We were meant to play Leamington Spa's LAMP on Wednesday, October 8th, but the community board shut down the venue as we arrived. Too bad. But my generous and wonderful friend the writer and poet Jonathan Skinner (<https://soundcloud.com/ecopoetics>) instead offered to host a house concert for us! His home is amazing, the kind of space where every object is chosen and beautiful, or if not beautiful, at least means something. This environment is further amplified by his welcoming and generous way. His artwork, and the familiar and unfamiliar books in handmade bookcases felt like an oasis. He set up a special spot for us by the window, with one candle for each singer. Jonathan's friends and neighbors, and even an Irishman with the last name Joyce (yes, related), came and enjoyed a lovely spread. We played acoustically, and had a great exchange with the rapt audience. After years of hearing my music sounded like bands from the British Revival (Sandy Denny, Fairport Convention), I felt my music connect to something bigger. Somehow I was part of a tradition I'm not really part of. Audience and performers went together into moments and unknowns. Sensing it was right, I pulled out my new song Bloom, about the question of Manna from Heaven. Amanda sang her lovely songs, some from her Yip Harburg (<http://amandathorpe.com>) record. Afterwards, we were very lucky to hear a spellbinding song by Lewis J. Smith and Charlotte (<http://lewisj.smith.bandcamp.com>), local musicians with clear voices, possessed of an ineffable beauty.

**'The bird flies high, swoops up, dives down. The bird's wings burn, it flies and burns.'**

With some free time in the afternoon of October 9th, we unloaded our gear, and went to the Tower Of London to see the poppies. The installation of 888,246 poppies at the tower is one of the most incredible things I've ever seen. It is a beautiful carpet of flowers, of blood, a commemoration of World War I's dead. Each flower (made by <http://paulcumminsceramics.com>) is made of ceramic, and planted into the earth around the tower. I felt completely awed and touched, and found it incredible to think each flower there represented one person. What an enumeration. One month after my return to The States, I wrote "888,246," a song reflecting the piece.

**'Fields of goodbye, for all to see, to have, to weep, to hold.'**

If you've been missing the East Village of yore, head to London's 12 Bar. Rock n' roll, neon, old school bathrooms. It felt like home, in a gritty nineties NYC way. The owner, Andy, was beyond nice. Usually clubs of this kind are a cellist's enemy: will the sound be okay? Amazingly, it was beautiful, luscious, and inspiring. Singing with a cello in this kind of club makes me feel like a special punk queen. I sang my heart out, taking chances and pushing the music. I felt like I was catching waves on the worn carpet of the stage, and sensing all the people who had ever played there.

**The wind in a city, a leaf in a storm, the size of a footprint, arrival of dawn.**

Saturday, our Bristol show was cancelled, so Stroud in Gloucestershire was our last date. The Star Anise Cafe was delightful, and small enough that we decided to do the show unplugged. The event was featured in three local papers, and we had a big crowd: children, older people, and teenagers. My sweet friends Marc and Tatia came out, and brought their kids. Stroud is a special place, and it was a really sweet way to end our tour. The audience was delighted with us, and we were charmed by them. I played my new cello song, "The Cut":

**'Blood flows, the cut is deep, oh yes, oh no, the cut it is deep.'**

It rained before the show, and during the show, and kept on raining all night. Our tour was finished. The next evening, I caught another wonderful local band, Edd Donovan and The Wandering Moles (<http://edddonovan.co.uk>), and saw an 80 year old birthday girl grab the mic to sing center stage at their pub gig. So many discoveries and delights! I felt very thankful to meet wonderful people, to hear great bands, and to make my music with Amanda.

My last day in the UK was back in London. I was finally on my own, and glad to let my legs take the lead. I wandered and got lost, saw Richard Tuttle's exhibit at The Tate, found green things to eat, and went to hear some more music (<https://www.facebook.com/TheBookshopBand>) that night. A few hours of sleep later, I was bound for NYC. I would come back for more of all of it soon.

*The songs of Serena Jost (<http://serenajost.com>, <http://serenajost.bandcamp.com/>) are at turns seductive, edgy, affecting, and otherworldly. A dynamic singer and cellist with a hauntingly beautiful voice, Jost is a unique performer whose music evokes vivid emotional landscapes. Her new album, *A Bird Will Sing*, was exquisitely produced by the legendary Anton Fier (Golden Palominos) and recorded with her band: Julian Maile (guitar), Rob Jost (bass), and Robert DiPietro (drums). The album moves from spare art songs to whimsical ballads to cello-led rock tunes.*

# Thomas Patrick Maguire Has It In The Bag



BY JESSE STATMAN

**In The Bag**

Thomas Patrick Maguire  
Weemayk Music

Thomas Patrick Maguire (or TPM) has been making unique punk-inspired folk tunes on and around the New York antifolk scene for over a decade. *In The Bag*, released last December on Brooklyn-based label Weemayk Music, is Maguire's latest album, and one of his best releases so far.

As with most of TPM's musical output, the 10 songs on *In The Bag* are packed with surprising and poetic lyrics that could stay stuck in your head for a week or two after a listen. Like a lot of antifolk artists, Maguire has a knack for crafting unique, entertaining songs about drinking and nightlife, in addition to political and cultural songs touching on viewpoints and topics deemed controversial by mainstream society. The opening track, "Oh, America," is a hard-hitting, multidimensional rocker about the destructive nature of capitalism and classism.

"House of Rain," inspired by Lieutenant Colson from the HBO series *Treme*, is another highlight of the album, with its haunting refrain "There is no law, you are not safe, the powers piss upon you in the House of Rain." There are also a good bunch of songs about late nights spent drinking and partying around New York, like the cheerful, nostalgic "Brooklyn Nights" and the nervous, depressive "Whiskey Morning."

The songs are at times uptempo and enraged, at times slow and ghostly, and always dark and intense, yet humble and grounded. They're complemented nicely by his simple but striking guitar work, and melancholy baritone vocals, frequently compared to Kurt Cobain by fans. The backing band on the album is tight and driving, and adds new instruments like accordion to the mix, bringing out new sonic flavors we haven't heard on previous albums like 2004's sparse release *Pissing Streams*. He could easily play all these songs without a band, as he's known for captivating solo performances, but Maguire's band on *In The Bag* adds exciting dynamics and density to his sound, without overshadowing the raw power of his songs.

*In The Bag* was produced by Tommy Bones at Studio Bones in Staten Island. It features several musicians from Staten Island's growing antifolk scene in

TPM's studio band, including Joey Patches (drummer from Phoebe Blue and the Make Beleaves) and Julia Simoniello (guitarist and singer from Yeti). This record is just one of Maguire's many collaborations with New York's forgotten fifth borough, where a good mix of antifolk musicians and poets has surfaced in recent years, often sharing stages and collaborating with Manhattan and Brooklyn-based antifolk artists.

*In The Bag* can be read about, listened to, and purchased on the Internet, from TPM's website, or on CD at his live performances around New York.

*Like the best American singer-songwriters, Basement Folk artist Thomas Patrick Maguire (<http://thomaspatrikmaguire.bandcamp.com/>) tells stories. Influenced equally by melancholy troubadours like Elliott Smith and Nick Drake, and by iconoclastic '90s alternative rock like Sebadoh and Nirvana, he sets his low-key*

*tales of working-class life to deceptively simple stripped-down melodies that haunt the listener long after they've first heard his music.*

*Jesse "Cannonball" Statman (<http://www.cannonballstatman.com/>), a native Brooklynite, is a frequent performer and organizer of shows on and around the NYC antifolk scene. Often performing solo, with an acoustic guitar, his music aims to present more intensity and energy than that of a five-piece rock band. He is Boog City's music editor.*



**The songs are at times uptempo and enraged, at times slow and ghostly, and always dark and intense, yet humble and grounded.**

# Yara at 25

## The Experimental Theater Group Marches On



BY OLENA JENNINGS

This January an exhibit chronicling the history of the Yara Arts Group opened at the Ukrainian Museum in the East Village. The Yara Arts Group is a resident company at the La MaMa Experimental Theatre Company. Yara's mission is to work with little known cultures of the East and create collaborations between them and American artists.

The genesis of Yara was the creation of a piece called *Light From the East*. It came together due to many serendipitous circumstances. *Light From the East* was a docu-drama that was fused from excerpts from Les Kurbas's diary and the aspirations of the actors. Part of the production took place at a landmark of the East Village, the Kiev Restaurant. Les Kurbas was an avant-garde theatre director who was born in Ukraine in 1887 and inspired many of Yara's shows with his unique use of acting and rhythmic techniques, and ensemble play developed at his theatre company Berezil, the old Ukrainian word for the month of March.

During the creation of *Light From the East*, Yara became officially incorporated in 1990, a huge step in the establishment of the company. The name was chosen for the group when its members were bouncing ideas for names off of each other. Wotoku Ueno, Yara's set designer, suggested "Rice and Wheat." Everyone thought that sounded more like the name of a food coop, but Wanda Phipps, Yara's dramaturge and translator, pointed out that it was a great idea that reminded her of a word that Virlana Tkacz, Yara's artistic director, and she were translating. "Yara!" Tkacz exclaimed and that name stuck. It meant something different and precious to everyone. "Arrow into target," Wotoku said translating it into Japanese. "Spring wheat," Tkacz said translating it into Ukrainian.



Yara founders Wanda Phipps, Virlana Tkacz, and Wotoku Ueno around 1992

has traveled and performed in Ukraine, the Buryat Republic, Kyrgyzstan, and China. Yara's most recent travels were to Ukraine to present *Dark Night Bright Stars*, a show about the relationship between well-known Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko and African-American actor Ira Aldridge. Yara's actors traveled to Ukraine and performed this piece during the tumultuous events created by the Russian incursion into Ukraine at that time.

Yara's pieces are all created in workshops. Some of them were created during Harvard Ukrainian Summer Institute, working with Ukrainian poetry. Others were created abroad. Still others were created at La MaMa. Whatever the venue, the making of the piece is always a collaborative process.

Yara has created 29 original theatric pieces over its 25 year history. Yara's artistic director Tkacz has been the one constant and driving force over Yara's existence since it became incorporated in 1990.

The exhibit at The Ukrainian Museum in the East Village, chronicled the history of the Yara Arts Group through exhibits of artifacts from some of Yara's productions over the past years. The exhibit was designed by Volodymyr Klyuzko and includes video from five shows (*Swan*, *Er Toshtuk*, *Circle*, *Fire Water Night*, and *Capt. John Smith Goes to Ukraine*.) The scope of Yara's work is also documented in posters, newsletters, and slides.

### **Pink dress and a wreath around head, costumes by Keiko Obremski and Alexandra Baczynshkyj.**

This was the costuming used for the forest nymph in Yara's *Fire, Water, Night* (2013), a performance based on the work of Ukrainian poet Lesia Ukrainka. It is the love story between a human Luke and a forest nymph. The forest comes alive as trees are played by actors. Tkacz made use of every inch of space in La MaMa's Ellen Stewart Theater, encouraging the audience to move with the actors through the theater and lobby.

### **Black dress with flower at shoulder, costume by Keiko Obremski.**

This dress was used in three shows including *Winter Light* (2014) as a costume for Death. *Winter Light* includes the koliadnyky, winter song singers from the village of Kryvorivnia in Ukraine, scenes from the current crisis in Ukraine, and 18th century baroque nativity folk opera. The voices of the koliadnyky are haunting as they sing songs after the low bellow of the trembita or mountain horn.

### **Fabric wrap-around dress, costume by Rachel Comey.**

In *Circle* (2000) a husband and wife, decide to steal fire from the spirits so that they can make a wish come true. They wish their son gets married and immediately he shows up with a bride. Ghosts come to their wedding because they want the fire back. The ghost costumes unwind to envelop the bride and take her off to their world, but a shaman comes to the rescue in beautiful red and gold.



Masha Pruss as Death in dress by Keiko Obremski in Yara's *Winter Light* at La MaMa, December 2014.  
Volodymyr Klyuzko photo.

group of young people in Donetsk, Ukraine and the realities of war in Ukraine. It was created in Donetsk in 2013 as part of an art installation that was to be developed as a full theater piece until the venue was seized in June 2014 by separatist forces backed by Russia. It compares how the young people's dreams were affected by the current conflict in Ukraine. It also incorporates the poetry of Ukraine's most important contemporary poet, Serhiy Zhadan, who was himself attacked and beaten by Russian sympathizers in eastern Ukraine.

Yara will continue their tradition of collaboration to create performances at La MaMa and other venues around the city. No matter where Yara travels and performs, they have called New York home for 25 years!

Olena Jennings (<http://olenajennings.com/>) has published translations of poetry in *Chelsea*, *Poetry International*, and *Wolf*. Her poems can be found in *Poems by Sunday*. She has read her poetry with Yara Arts Group, at the *Shevchenko Scientific Society*, the *Ukrainian Museum*, and other venues. She has published fiction in *Fawlty*, *Joyland*, and *Projectile*. She completed her M.F.A. in writing at *Columbia University* and her M.A. in *Ukrainian Literature* at the *University of Alberta*.

Yara Arts Group (<http://www.brama.com/yara/>) is a resident company at *La MaMa Experimental Theatre* in New York. Since 1990, Yara has created over 30 international collaborative cultural projects with contemporary and traditional artists from Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and Siberia. Favorite shows include *Blind Sight* about a blind Ukrainian writer who became a Japanese writer in 1914, *Circle* with Buryat artists from Siberia and *Gogol Bordello*, *Swan* and *Raven* based on poetry by *Oleh Lysheha*, *Er Toshtuk* based on a Kyrgyz epic, *Scythian Stones* with *Nina Matvienko* and artists from *Kyrgyzstan*, and *Capt. John Smith Goes to Ukraine*. They have also created numerous events with poetry music and art; put out books and CDs; and produced films and videos.



**Actors read the poetry on stage in English so that Tkacz and Phipps can see how well it flows and whether any changes are needed.**

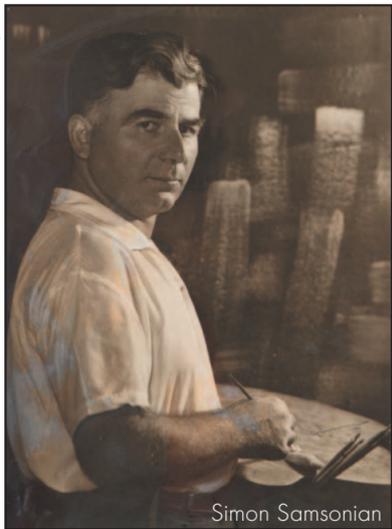
# Some Pause to the Calendar of Forgetting: Reflections on the Armenian Genocide's Centennial



BY ALAN SEMERDJIAN

At some point in the middle of the 20th century, my mother's parents married. I imagine it wasn't a very large wedding but one filled with plenty of love. In my mind, I picture my grandfather peering over his shoulder away from the bride for a moment of reflection while the Armenian priest is making his punctuations. On one side he sees his wife's family, the latest patterned dresses, men in half-pressed suits adjusting their collars in the Egyptian heat. Children impatient with wild imaginations everywhere else but there. Plenty of love. And as he scans over to the other side, with the exception of a schoolmate or kind neighbor, nothing but empty pews.

I'm dramatizing here, of course, but not that much. My grandfather was a childhood survivor of the Armenian Genocide, a tragic period of world history that many have come to understand as the usher at the door of a century of human rights violations. Somehow it has become the blueprint not only because of the horrific implementation of deportations and death marches carried out by the Young Turk regime at the onset of the first



Simon Samsonian

World War but also because of the devastating effects of erasure and systematic denial ("Who here remembers the Armenians" spoke Hitler to his military commanders on the eve of the Holocaust to assure them of victory).

My grandfather's family was killed in the spring of 1915 or thereabouts. We're not quite sure. First the males and then the others. All but his older sister. One of his earliest memories was of her urging him, a little boy of four or five, onto a line that led him to series of orphanages, a proclivity for art, a scholarship of sorts to a school in Cairo and, ultimately, meeting his pupil, my grandmother, and getting married and starting a family. Along the way, he became Simon Samsonian, the painter, the cubist-impressionist, the survivor from Samsoun. Not the only one with the ghost of a city for a last name.

The great irony is that the atrocity of the Medz Yeghem ("great crime" in Armenian) was committed by a group of officials who were riding in the name of democracy and freedom against the Ottoman Empire just years before. People for the people. Reports vary. Somewhere between one million and two, and all in the name of another blind and unthinkable cleansing. Turkey for the Turks, it became. A distorted fundamentalism polarizing on the basis of class, religion, economics. You name it. There will always be a reason for this kind of thing, I tell my students. There will never be a reason for this kind of thing, I tell my students.

Those who don't know or know a little about the Armenian Genocide can't understand how the world doesn't know. They don't understand why the Turkish government still shakes its head and looks the other way. Perhaps they don't understand shame or what's at stake. They don't understand these kinds of denials, these renamings ("it was a civil war," "both sides lost," "but the Russians ... but the border"). They can't imagine textbooks erased, children growing up a few miles apart taught different material in similar-looking classrooms. The same printers, for god's sake. They both love backgammon, for god's sake. They both play the oud (in different keys), for god's sake. Genocide doesn't just change history; it perverts it.

Those who do know talk about it, yell at high volume, get in fistfights, pull their hair out. Some write letters and call in during fundraising campaigns. Some dismiss it as antiquated, old, not relevant. Use it to create subdivisions in a plot of green and other great ambiguities. Some find the microphone. Or some stay silent and work away each day until the sunlight shuts off like a faucet as if painting is a way to store up energy for the inevitable darkness ahead that all of us must face.

"Slow walking is an art," my grandfather said. We were crossing the border back into New York from a visit to Montreal. My mother and father were already inside the duty free shop at the douane shopping for deals. Here we were, two only children, in another place of transition, one holding the door for the other. He always liked to take his time, do it his way. There was never really any rush, especially as he got older and his legs didn't work as well. The mind didn't work as well either. But he kept on painting and drawing until the end, even when the eyes couldn't connect the lines and the cubes never quite sealed, the faces never fully formed. He painted fiercely, methodically, and in response to. He painted for reconciliation. If the world wasn't going to help him heal, then he would figure out his own way to do it.

That Montreal visit was right around the 75th anniversary of the genocide. Many Armenians around the world were contemplating how far the efforts for genocide recognition had come at that point and what would happen in another 25 years. It had been and still is a slow walk.

It's 100 years later and I'm thinking of his words as I write this. There is a holdup, perhaps not at gunpoint but something in the pocket unrevealed and threatening, that exacerbates the very visceral need for reconciliation. It's the final trick in the genocide magic show. It's the disappearing act. Not only is the woman cut in half, but the box is empty. There is no trap door. The audience either believes it for real or is entertained enough to suspend disbelief. The real demented tragedy is that the woman thinks she's gone too.

The thing about 100 years is that it's a century away, and coupled with the complexities of a Diaspora away, that's a lot of territory to traverse, despite the efforts of thousands of scholars, reputable organizations, and academics and citizens—Turkish, American, Armenian, world—who know what really happened. "What is it that Armenians want?" my friends ask, as if I can speak for a people. "Is it retribution? Is it a memorial? Is it a school holiday?" The answer may have more to do with an open and very real conversation about global politics with regard to the positioning of American and western interests than it is about a statue that will never be built or a national day of remembrance that will never be honored. What do we want? Let's start with the truth. Out loud.

My grandfather and I never quite made it into the shop.

A couple of years ago at a talk on "survivor meaning" involving Peter Balakian, Marianne Hirsch, and Robert Jay Lifton at Columbia University, I wrote down these words on the way to a poem called "Writing About It Again":

I know it's not sexy and smells like  
something old. I know the trendy  
will mock this rotting flesh, but

we're approaching the hundredth year  
of the counterfeit universe  
and the survivors still seek some form  
and space to reverse erasure,  
some pause to the calendar of forgetting.

The poem is still not finished. I have written a lot about my grandfather and family history in order to understand it. That is really the only reason anyone writes—in order to understand something incomprehensible. Every time I feel myself walking away from it, I circle back. "The artist carries death with him like a good priest his breviary," wrote Heinrich Boll. Turn the corner and there it is. On a screen in a classroom.



Armenian Genocide, 50th. Kenny Janosick photo.

In the alley an alpine lake, persimmons, split open. Under the streetlight, a man holding a child at a certain angle, the loneliest patch of shadow on a bowl of fruit, boats on the Nile, an almost lover, a distance to one thing or another, a centennial.

Later, this:

My grandfather dead now, almost  
a dozen away, and I'm documenting  
his paintings, one by one, stacking  
the decades, unearthing the shapes.

This April, I will welcome into the world a child with my partner, our first and only. And I know that one day, years later, the child will step into a room of easels and in that room will be tens of brushes wet with memory. They will be stiff with life too, so much rich and naked life, still poised for what we will not know.

Writer, musician, and educator Alan Semerdjian's (<http://www.alansemerdjian.com/>) poems and essays have appeared in over 50 print and online publications and anthologies, including *Adbusters*, *Diagram*, *Ararat*, and *The Brooklyn Rail*. He released a chapbook of poems called *An Improvised Device* (Lock n Load Press) in 2005 and his first full-length book *In the Architecture of Bone* (GenPop Books) in 2009. His songs have appeared in television and film and charted on CMJ. He earned his M.F.A. at Goddard College in 2002 and teaches English at Herricks High School in New Hyde Park, N.Y. He resides in New York City's East Village.

Semerdjian will be speaking and reading at the Armenian Genocide Centennial Commemoration Vigil at the United Nations Dag Hammarskjöld Plaza at E. 47th Street and 2nd Avenue in New York City. This event is free and open to the public. Semerdjian photo by Mike Bloom.

Simon Samsonian (<http://www.rediscoveredmasters.com/Artists/ShowArtist/42>) was one of several Armenia Diaspora artists living in Cairo, Egypt in the 1950s and 1960s. Like his contemporaries Onnig Avedissian, Achod Zorian, Gregoire Meguerdichian, Hagop Hagopian, and Puzant Godjamian, Samsonian's work is heavily influenced by the Genocide. He himself was a child survivor and grew up in orphanages throughout his childhood. What sets Samsonian's art apart from that of his contemporaries is his love of the modernist cubist aesthetic established by Picasso and Braque among others and his fierce and unrelenting desire to invent a kind of Armenian cubism. He won several awards, distinctions, and honors for his fierce yet delicate vision during his life and amassed a tremendous body of work. Samsonian passed away in 2003 on Long Island, where he lived among his family, friends, and decades of work. His work survives all over the world in private collections, galleries, and famous art institutions such as The National Gallery of Art in Yerevan and Museum of Modern Art in Cairo.

**My grandfather was a childhood survivor of the Armenian Genocide, a tragic period of world history that many have come to understand as the usher at the door of a century of human rights violations.**