



Decoding Beau Alessi's Matrix Trying to Live with our Mechanical Overlords in Robot Princess

ART

Meer Musa

COMICS

Ken Cenicola and Jessy Randall

POETRY

Buck Downs, Armando Jaramillo Garcia, Susan Lewis

SMALL PRESS

'To fall in-love with a form is to marry a very sexy history purged of eros'

Some questions and answers with Lo Kwa Mei-en,
author of *Two Tales*, and Caroline Cabrera of Bloom Books

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INTERVIEW BY SOHAM PATEL

"Chapbooks now run the gamut of design and content, from hand-bound volumes with a DIY aesthetic to elaborate objets d'art" writes Leah Silveus, Kundiman Fellow and Books Editor over at Hyphen Magazine. Bloom Books hand-stamps and hand-sews their chapbooks cleanly, softly, simply. On a snowy evening in April, Woodland Pattern hosted the penultimate event of a five-part series that features chapbook readings by Kundiman Fellows currently living in the Midwest. This time up, the majestically brilliant Lo Kwa Mei-en read from her Bloom Books (the chapbook imprint of Jellyfish Magazine) chapbook, *Two Tales*. Of Lo Kwa Mei-en's work, Woodland Pattern's new co-Executive Director, Jenny Gropp, couldn't have said it better: "[her] inner ear will level you as you experience how she's brought forth forms through her own sonic and assertive channels. Her work is battle, refusal to allow her speaking being to embrace without critique and awareness the typical time signatures and verse forms that, at their worst, have created an institutional memory of poetry and lyric prose that exists as sterile breathing—soulless measure that blindly reinforces the white, staid canon. Lo has come through those literary forms and arrived at her own vibrant reification of them." Here is a question and answer session with Lo Kwa Mei-en, author of *Two Tales*, and Caroline Cabrera of Bloom Books

'I like a book that feels like an invention—like twittering machines or automatons that, once pumped into motion, continue to run on their own energy.'
—Caroline Cabrera

Boog City: When, where, and how did Bloom Books begin?

Caroline Cabrera: I'm drawn to chapbooks from an editorial standpoint; their handmade quality, how the length lends itself to invention—so many things make them an exciting form for me. When I was managing editor of Slope Editions I started the Slope Editions chapbook series and contest. I already knew I'd be leaving Massachusetts and the managing editor position, and I thought the chapbook series would be something I could continue to do remotely, but the distance proved more difficult than we had hoped, so I left that series in Chris Janke's capable hands. Even then I knew I'd want to start a new chapbook series but didn't know where or how. Gale Thompson and Anne Holmes are my best friends and Philip Muller is my husband, so the fact that they edit a journal together (now with the also-wonderful Kamden Hilliard!) made Jellyfish a perfect place for me to seek a home. So sometime in 2015 I sent the three of them an awkwardly formal email asking if they'd want to help support me with a chapbook offshoot of Jellyfish, and they were on board.

What is the relationship between Bloom Books and Jellyfish Magazine?

Cabrera: Bloom and Jelly are best friends. Or maybe grown sisters who still borrow each other's clothes. I do most of the editorial work from soliciting and selecting manuscripts, to any actual editing, production logistics, plus printing, binding, fulfilling orders, etc., but I am always bouncing ideas off of the Jellyfish editors. I lean on Gale and Philip HEAVILY for design because they each have a genuine talent there, whereas I'm not super digitally minded. And while Gale, Anne, Kamden and Phil do the monstrous amount of work that goes into making Jellyfish Magazine, every once in a while I sit in on a Jellyfish editorial meeting and chime in here and there.

Are there definable qualities that you look for in the work you publish through Bloom? Is there something that, to your mind, unifies Bloom publications aesthetically or otherwise?

Cabrera: I'm interested in chapbooks that have a cohesive, of-a-piece quality to them, so I look for exciting ways manuscripts do that element. I like a book that feels like an invention—like twittering machines or automatons that, once pumped into motion, continue to run on their own energy. Also, we always prioritize making Jellyfish and Bloom platforms for a diverse range of voices.

Can you talk about your experience with chapbooks vs full-length collections (either by way of writing yours or reading both by other writers)?

Lo Kwa Mei-en: I tend to think and plan in terms of long projects that favor the full-length collection format, but the work of putting together *Two Tales* was fulfilling and growth-inducing in a way that I think was unique to its form and structure. I felt an urgency to make the thematic through-line visible to the reader in a way that I tend to complicate with interludes and detours in a longer work. As a reader, I love chapbooks that make me feel like I could not imagine the work within contained in any other form (such as Betsy Wheeler's *Start Here*) and chapbooks that so immerse me in their experience that I forget to think of their material genre (such as *Death by Sex Machine* by Franny Choi.) I like forms that involve constraint and murky definitions, and I have a hard time reading a high volume of poems in one sitting, so I very much love chapbooks, though I am terrible at purchasing things that belong to limited runs at the time they are released, so I often miss the chance to own them.

Lo Kwa Mei-en



'To me, Kundiman means magic. Space in which we might feel safe enough to grow together as well as individual artists. A chosen family whose love is powerful enough to transcend space and time. A collective that inspires me to remember the gratitude and the joy in the work of being an artist.'
— Lo Kwa Mei-en

Lo Kwa Mei-en is a poet from Singapore and Ohio. Her first book, *Yearling*, won the 2013 Kundiman Poetry Prize and is available from Alice James Books. *The Bees Make Money in the Lion*, a new book of poems, won the CSU Poetry Center Open Competition and is available from Cleveland State University Poetry Center. Other work includes *Two Tales*, a chapbook from Bloom Books, and *The Romances*, a chapbook forthcoming from The Lettered Streets Press

Caroline Cabrera is a poet and writer. She is the author of *The Bicycle Year* (H_NGM_N BKS), *Flood Bloom* (H_NGM_N BKS) and the chapbook, *Dear Sensitive Beard* (dancing girl press). She edits Bloom Books, a chapbook imprint of Jellyfish. She lives in South Florida.

Soham Patel is the author of four chapbooks, most recently *New Weather Drafts* (Portable Press at Yo-Yo Labs) and in *airplane and other poems* (oxeye press). Her first full-length collection of poetry, *to afar from afar*, is now available from Writ Large Press.



Caroline Cabrera:

Can you talk about writing *Two Tales*? How was it conceptualized / composed / edited?

Mei-en: *Two Tales* alternates between poems from two separate, longer projects: a formalist sequence titled "The Nightingale" (which was written as a response to Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale of the same title) and an epic narrative book re-telling of *Pinocchio*. The prose poems in *Two Tales* follow the character Pinnochia as she journeys through the underworld after her death, and the verse poems are both autobiographical and written through the persona of the first (flesh and blood) nightingale of Andersen's fairy tale. The nightingale's tale unspools songs that result from the living death that accompanies violence, abuse, and hierarchical oppression, lyrics that respond to the origin text and also pull deeply from my personal history of surviving sexual abuse and assault from white men. Pinnochia's poems are about life after death, the experience of starting over after trauma and loss, and the generative lonesomeness of fighting for subjecthood in an objectifying world, which is also the creative loneliness of recovery. The arrangement of the two threads is where I hoped the book's energy comes from, and I composed it with the hope that it would be read from beginning to end, like a storybook, though the narrative(s) aren't linear.

Two Tales was the inaugural Bloom chapbook. What was the selection process / publication conversation like?

Cabrera: I solicited Lo. I really admire her work and she had been published in Jellyfish, which made it feel like she had a heritage with the press. She already had *Two Tales* written and sent it to me nearly immediately, and I loved it right away; it was a pretty charmed process!

Mei-en: Caroline reached out to me in the winter of 2015 with incredibly kind, attentive words about my work in general, as well as a poem I had published in Jellyfish. She invited me to submit a manuscript for consideration as Bloom's inaugural chapbook, and I sent over *Two Tales* pretty quickly. I did not expect her to say yes—I was just so happy to be invited for consideration. But Caroline wrote back with enthusiasm and love for the project and things took off from there with nothing but visionary, comforting support from Caroline throughout the process.

Can you talk about how *Two Tales* was made / printed / distributed? How were layout and design choices made?

Cabrera: First Lo and I discussed any visions or preferences she had for the design. I took those ideas to Phil and Gale and they each made a handful of mockups to present to her. From there we tweaked her preferred design until we had something that felt perfect for the book. The books are hand-bound and covers hand-stamped with a custom-made rubber stamp, which gives us a lot of freedom in the design process. I like the human quality of handwork; it allows Lo's work and Gale's and Phil's design to come together into these beautiful, and individual and flawed and varied objects.

What's your experience like living in the midwest?

Mei-en: I did most of my growing up in, and have lived for the last four years, in Cincinnati, so part of my Midwestern experience is wondering whether I am actually in the Midwest! I love Ohio so much. Especially the river valley corner I live in. There is a particular loneliness that accompanies being an Asian immigrant person living here.

What does Kundiman mean for you?

Mei-en: To me, Kundiman means magic. Space in which we might feel safe enough to grow together as well as individual artists. A chosen family whose love is powerful enough to transcend space and time. A collective that inspires me to remember the gratitude and the joy in the work of being an artist. I am so grateful for Sarah Gambito and Joseph O. Legaspi.

Decoding Beau Alessi's Matrix Trying to Live with our Mechanical Overlords in Robot Princess

BY JONATHAN BERGER



Robot Princess
Apocalypse + Bullshit
Jam Eater Records

How do you define a band's sound? Reviewers do it by looking at their handy list of adjectival descriptors and randomly picking three with a dart, a spinner, or whatever. Reviewers can cheat by looking at what other writers have previously published (The Deli called Robot Princess "unabashedly eager garage rock.") Obviously, it's much harder for musicians to figure out what they're gonna sound like in the first place. Their own promotions list Robot Princess as "the only rock band in NYC," so they've kinda got that under control.

Beau Alessi, founder, lead singer and primary songwriter of the pop group, admits to absorbing influences and cherry-picking what tricks and techniques to bring to the band.

"I think I pick up a lot just from whatever I'm listening to at the time," he explains, "I'll hear a line or riff that gets stuck in my head, and sometimes that kind of opens up a whole song idea for me."

Still, Robot Princess isn't mired in any one sound. "Good artists copy; great artists steal," someone once said (it was me; I'm certain it was me), and from myriad influences, Robot Princess forms an excitable punk rock concoction that has its own identity that's always worth experiencing.

Example of that borrow/theft paradigm? Taking a phrase, I'd bet, from fellow scrappy little East Village band Coach's "Big Dumb River," Alessi pulls together the first lines of "Love and Volleyball," one of the more introspective numbers on *Apocalypse + Bullshit*: "Swimming in this asshole ocean right after eating will make you throw up emotional stasis vocational crisis you're dying to do it but it's not enough to be righteous."

If you're not entirely sure what this means, you may not be alone. Alessi, who usually brings the songs to the band as acoustical skeletons, has an extended process when it comes to lyrical narrative.

"I usually have a lot of words or phrases or ideas floating around," he explains, "and I try putting them together in different arrangements until one seems like it could be a coherent idea. Sometimes it's feelings or ideas that come from my life, other times it's things I've observed or been inspired by. Usually I mash together three or four of those and I start to see a character or story I can tell."

This latest record, along with the last studio release, *TENTACLES*, have been released via Jam Eater Records, a small NYC indie about which Alessi can't say enough good things. "I feel like we've barely kept up our end of the bargain in not playing out of town at all to support the record... but they've been very supportive of the band, did great work putting together the art and package, and I'm so happy to have found people who care about my music enough to try and get it out there."

That spectacular cover art comes from returning illustrator Em Scott, with another adorably horrifying image of destruction, this time depicting the literal end of it all, with animal tourists in the foreground calmly watching out for catastrophic comets. The entire package is great, though the CD misses mention of the fantastic track "Marky Moon," wherein the two band vocalists (Alessi and keytarist extraordinaire Catherine Anderson) take turns on the verses, telling some kind of a Bonnie and Clyde love story, sounding at moments very much like a reverse-gendered Blake Babies. In describing his writing process, Alessi says, "I think I work the most to find the balance between something being too dumb/funny and too sincere/feelingsy. I rewrite lyrics a lot until I feel like they're right somewhere in the middle." The first line of each verse seems to represent that very split: "I get dumber as I get older... Marky Mark. Mark E. Smith. Marquee Moon." All through his verse, though, Alessi's trademark plaintive vocal shows a specific soulfulness rarely found in white boy music (and Anderson's amazing vocal fry in her reading? Hot damn).

"Busybody" features Anderson taking on solo lead vocals, and sings, like on so many songs in *Apocalypse*, about great destruction. "There's a lot of guys who think that when they die the world ends. They've got it in reverse if they think that it'll be worse without them. When the world ends we'll be fine without them." The word "guys" make me curious if the Anderson lead for this piece is intended to make the number a female empowerment anthem, but Alessi has already stated, "Every time we do a record we try harder and harder to find parts Catherine can sing on, just because we love how she sings," so I'm afraid I've already got my answer. Other things I daren't ask: is the title, along with the thumping claustrophobic rhythm of the verses, some purposeful funhouse reflection of Elvis Costello's "Busy Bodies"? It's so subtle; are these guys that clever?

"Wizards + Mystics" provides the (almost) eponymous album phrase at its end. After a lengthy description of all the dire predictions of all those devilish sorcerers, the narrator sings to an old friend, "Maybe this whole thing sounds foolish. I don't know nor do I care / if it's apocalypse and bullshit, I really hope you're with me there" before going into an extended coda where Anderson's keytar gets a real workout. On most every track on the album, tales of chaos and destruction bring us down while buoyant music lifts us up. This song makes it clear how oppositional these forces can be.

"Some Ghosts" spends its runtime, unsurprisingly, listing off the different types of ghosts you can find in the world, all bracketed by the delightful chorus of "G-g-g-ghosts!" I do wonder about the status of the peer-reviewed research that went into the song, but that surely, is a critique for another day.

Unlike other releases, every song on the latest was, though credited and arranged by the band, composed by Alessi. As per usual for the artist, the themes run the gamut from the fantastic (song titles not yet mentioned include "Time Travel" and the especially sweet "You and Your X-Ray Glasses") to the macabre (uh, remember the title?).

This looks to be Robot Princess' biggest release to date, other than the cassette-combination 2015 release *Teen Vogue LP + Action Moves EP*, but be warned: a couple of tracks on *Apocalypse* are little over a minute, and one, "[bullshit]," is kind of just that, an instrumental of a band falling over each other trying to be the last one to end the song, only there's really no song - it's just the tail of the prior "Blood and Bones." You ask my opinion (and if you've read this far, you implicitly have), you're better off with the physical copy of the album, where anyway, you get to see the colorful cover in all its splendor.

The band's pretty tight, and no wonder; the core membership has been on-the-go for five years now. "Peter [Ingles, drummer], Catherine, and I have been playing together non-stop for a long time," Alessi explains, "so in one sense, I feel like the three of us know each other very well and have a very easy time collaborating on new stuff at this point."

The latest addition to the band, the alliterative Bob Black on bass, has hopefully left the group with a more permanent line-up, primarily because of his excellent ability with the instrument. "Having Bob join us was good because there's a fresh perspective," instructs Alessi, "and it was valuable to have a new point-of-view while coming up with this stuff. We came up with the entire album with this lineup/configuration of members."

Black, former co-leader of the lamented *Soul Candy*, was glad to be involved on *Apocalypse*, including the process of helping to develop his bass lines in the studio. Black describes the process. "There were parts that they had in mind, but Beau only gave me the basics and I kinda shaped/molded them to better fit the sound of the songs."

"It's really fun. The whole group has a really positive and creative atmosphere."

Neither Ingles nor Anderson could be reached for comment. Though the group has lost the double guitar live sound provided first by Daniel D. Lee, and then Joe Reichel, that absence is not heard on the recordings. "I overdubbed a second guitar over 90% of our album," Alessi admits. "I always want to hear a second one."

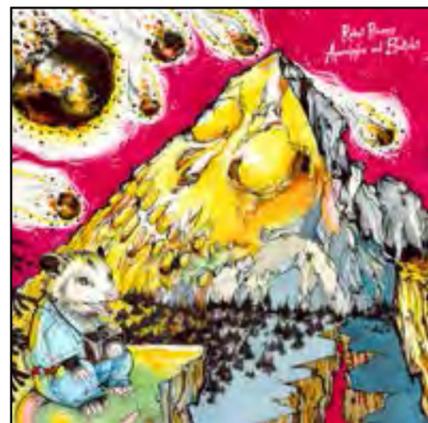
Robot Princess has been unable to find any lead guitarist willing to live up to their grueling once-a-week rehearsal schedule. Alessi is somewhat more diplomatic in his explanation. "Historically, we've never been able to find a practice time that works for five people."

"So, for logistical purposes, it's been a lot easier managing a band with four people."

They're constantly playing the New York area, so check the band out live. And you should probably get this album. If you don't like it, they have a bunch of others you might like more. If you don't like any of them, I'm not sure I know what I can do to help you.

<https://robotprincess.bandcamp.com/>

Jonathan Berger used to edit the music section of *Boog City*. Now, apparently, he can be found again, for the time being, editing the music section of *Boog City*. Just when he thought he was out, they pulled him back in again. You like that phrase? He wrote it. Sometimes, he writes other things: <https://jonberger.com/>



NEW FROM LITMUS PRESS

THE SUPPOSIUM EDITED BY JOAN RETALLACK

Thought Experiments & Poetical Play in Difficult Times

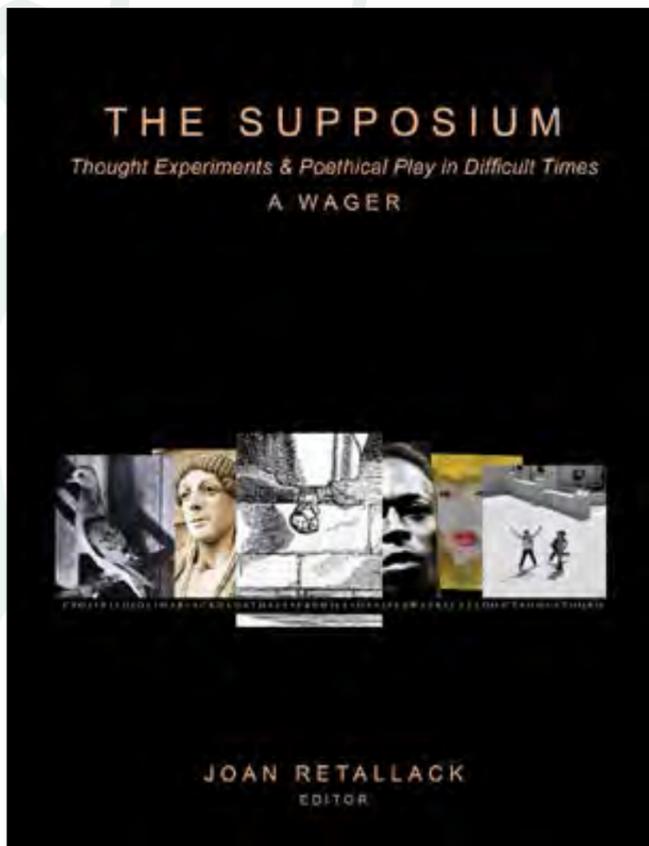
The gamut of intellectual and imaginative; performative, visual, and poetic experiments and interventions in this volume enact poetical responses as seemingly divergent as decolonizing architecture in a Palestinian refugee camp while rethinking socio-political geometries of the global refugee crisis; Black Dada vis-à-vis Black Lives Matter; misogyny as Feminist Responsibility Project; the art of *If*; Miles Davis's and another's *s'posin*; and of course Fall Guys. *The Supposium* is a polyvocal attempt to edge beyond default geometries of attention as we address the state of emergency that has become our space-time on this planet. The implicitly conversational sequence is homage and play on Plato's *Symposium*—Socratic dialogue on the nature of love (erōs) with its humor, gravitas, and improbable feminine swerve out of a prototypic masculine culture.

"Joan Retallack is a master teacher of the thought-experiment. With magically generative aplomb (it is not magic—it is thoughtful attunement to the method of questioning and long experience in it), her prompts nestle in the mind and things flow out. In this loose, beautiful and unlikely collection of writings, conversations and exuberances, we find more evidence of how much more work there is to do on the question Adam Pendleton asks: 'How can we have productive public conversations and exchanges?' So simple. Impossible? *The Supposium* is, therefore, an optimistic accumulation of successes at the one-second-of-attention-at-a-time level. I think this is the level at which the true future can be glimpsed and made."

—Simone White

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Bushwick, Brooklyn

<http://www.memuart.com/>



Artist's Statement

Meer's creativity comes from a spiritual space. Through his meditation practice he explores his subconscious mind. The drawings and paintings manifest as a result of his practice.

In the Human Spirit paintings, Meer created a combination of people and nature to express his understanding of the interconnections between the two—the philosophy that all things coexist and we are all one. He believes all conscious beings are interconnected directly or indirectly. His interpretation of interconnection is expressed in his paintings. For these pieces he used a variety of paint mediums and mixed media.

Meer is fascinated by people and nature. He loves to reproduce them in his paintings and drawings. He uses videos and animations as further mediums for him to explore, as they give him freedom to express his creative nature.

His creativity keeps him healthy and helps him stay centered. Meer feels very fortunate to reside in Brooklyn in the heart of a vibrant artist community.

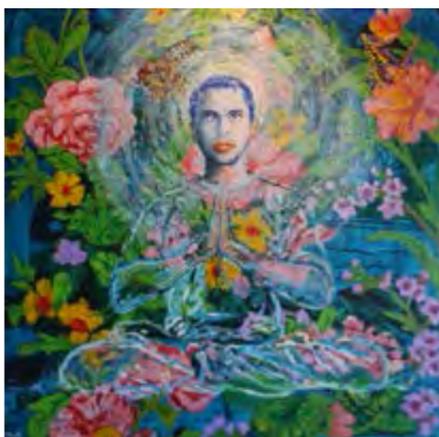
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meerspacestation@gmail.com



Indian Eyes
Oil, acrylic on wood
20" x 24"



The Gardener
Fabric paint, acrylic on canvas paper
9" x 9"



Seeing Things As They Are
Oil, acrylic, gel media
22" x 22" x 1.5"



A Midnight Summers Dance
Oil, Acrylic, and glow in the dark ink
20" x 26" x 0.75"



One
mixed media on wood
24" x 31.5"



The Listening device
Oil, acrylic on canvas
30" x 30" x 1"

BOOG CITY

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Buck Downs

Washington, D.C.

South Central

after Niedecker

don't shoot the moon

playing hearts all night
until two, pulling in
the big pennies

my card-sharp buddies
cover the world
with vocabulary

my make believe budget
is blown all on waiting

[here we last]

my friends were like
we been waiting for you
to come to your senses
and stop trying to be
who you think you are

[hoopla]

as we painted
the town, melted
down the statues

these heroic
losers crowded
jackson square,

made it round.

we melted down
their statues
to bronze a new
futura.

I used a string
of asterisks
to fence off
my little things

star-flowers
of the cali-
fornia job case

later I learned
that was chartjunk
and it added
nothing. double
white space and
half size tabs
are all the division
my pages need.

ex goose

butt hurt
puppet

no one has ever
written more than me
without knuckling under
and turning to prose -

giving up
on managing
the flood -

my next goose
will be nothing
like my ex goose -

my next goose
won't be
a goose at all -

mean streaks &
hot flashes

all you coca-
cola patriots
can learn to kiss

my ass

I shall write
a book to teach you

a tiithe of tobacco
my gods all smoke

just look at the earth
if you don't believe me

buck in broad daylight

trying to be discreet
about just how much
stuff I pick up
off the street -

unused gift cards
half-cigarettes
articles of clothing
poetry

nothing special,

just keeping up -

>>>

you think you can wear
your body out
with bad behavior

and maybe you can
but not as fast
as you think

a lot of ass
chasing ass
this year -

blowing tobacco
and following
the news

television has set
all manner
of unrealistic
expectations

wendell-berry

has gotten the penny
he sought in this life
and will get his
come-uppence
in the next

for the servitude
of his typist wife

walking in wet
boots full of sweat
half-man
half-fossil

there is this man -
I shall make him
a thing - through my use
of punctuation -

little brown jug

god's earthly father
could use a little hit

don't worry
about
what you don't
understand -
there's trouble
enough
in what you do -

another slice
of this odor

anchored here
in the stink
of life -
getting clean
is not the point -
it's getting
clear, about
what you rose
from - and
what you
rise to -

family legend

pappaw's last car
had a hole in the floorboard
on the passenger side
from where mammaw kept trying
to step on the brakes

my people have always been
a little bit out of control

we are a nation
who has never
thrown its leader in jail -
maybe we never will -

every american
is a bag of shit
in shoes -

this is the basis
of our great power
to forgive -



Susan Lewis

New York City

One Cusp

over the lip of
this
maw
beyond the dark wall
braided through the burning current
oily tides lick you
raising faces seared by ice
& molten scorn
storied & abandoned
like mother love
of any other
lipped masks agog
sunk by tilt
drowned by silt
— this dearth of sweet fume -
or probe the shrunken womb
of this raked
& raging
ragged
future



Armando Jaramillo Garcia

Ridgewood, Brooklyn

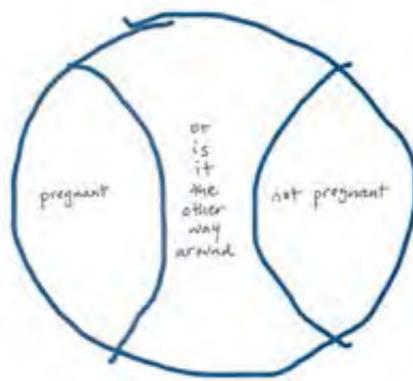
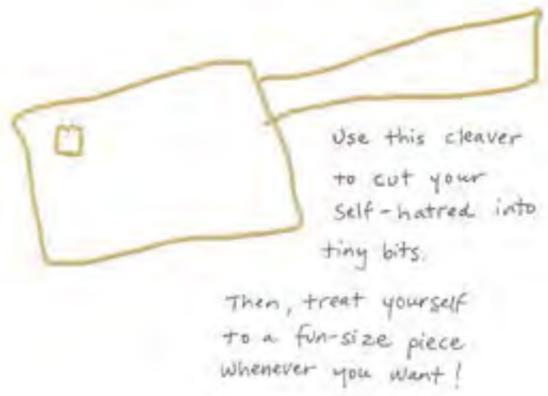
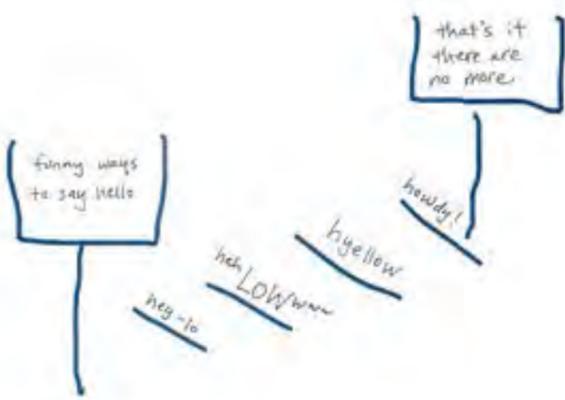
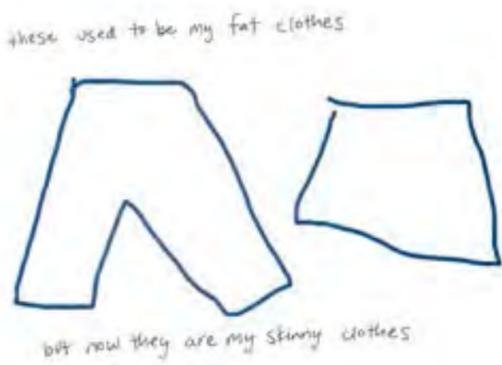
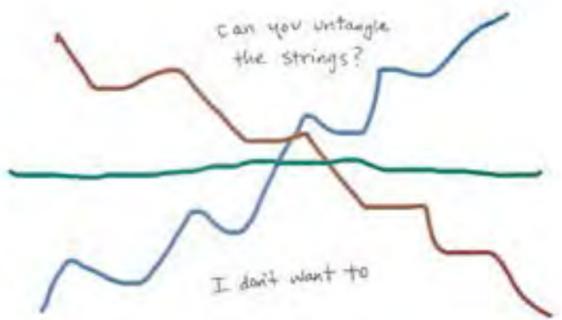
Uranium Cafe

Some men down the
block entered The forest
and as the doors shut
leaves Shook down from
the sleeve of air Hidden
loudspeakers spoke
their peace Recycled
wonderment made stiff
Diorama of bison falling
off a cliff
Assistant grips on a break drank
and smoked Behind the scenes
propping up the action
Of art a cloudy affair on the passage
to residuals And behind that the vice
of premature death Clamped hard on
those on the cusp
The avant-
garde in full
armor Trained
by nature to
shock With
the honesty
of suffering
White noise
gradually
increases
Somber animals once pets
depart en masse The census or
senseless charlatan gives chase
For what would they do without their deadly
sentiment Plans for wealth emerge but first
there's war
At the uranium cafe where
the makeshift Shack a cadet
photographed remains intact
After the blast the x-ray of
ourselves
But only in the ghost-seeing squint of a cat

Poetry Bios

Buck Downs' (<http://furniturepressbooks.com/books/buckdownsunintendedempire/>) latest book is *Unintended Empire* (Furniture Press Books). He works as an executive writing coach. **Armando Jaramillo Garcia** (<https://preludemag.com/contributors/armando-jaramillo-garcia/>) was born in Colombia and raised in New York City. He graduated from Aviation High School and attended Hunter College. Prelude Books published his debut collection of poetry, *The Portable Man*. His work has also appeared in the *Boston Review*, *Public Pool*, *Prelude*, *Horse Less Review*, *TYPO*, and *Inter|rupture*. **Susan Lewis** (<http://www.susanlewis.net/>) is the author of 10 books and chapbooks, most recently *Zoom*, winner of the *Washington Prize* (*The Word Works*). Her work has appeared in *Boston Review*, *The Brooklyn Rail*, *Diode*, *The New Orleans Review*, *Raritan*, *Seneca Review*, *TAMMY*, *Verse*, *VOLT*, and many other journals and anthologies. She's the founding editor of *Posit* (<https://positjournal.com/>).

Ken Cenicola and Jessy Randall



Ken Cenicola and Jessy Randall have known each othersince 1990. Their collaborations have appeared in Ohio Edit, Pilgrimage, Press 1, and Robot Melon. Ken tweets at <https://twitter.com/kcenicola> and Jessy's website is <https://personalwebs.coloradocollege.edu/~jrandall/>