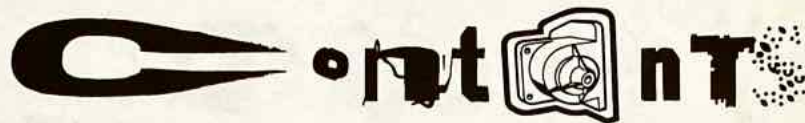


# Poetry Project

NEWSLETTER



April / May 2001 Issue number 184



**News and Announcements** 3

Newsletter Editor: Ange Mlinko  
Design: Dirk Rowntree  
Cover art: Alex Katz, "Portrait of Edwin Denby"

**Collaboration** 4

"Surrealist Horoscope"  
by Prageeta Sharma & Dale Sherrard

Distribution: Desert Moon Periodicals, 1226 Calle de Comercio, Santa Fe, NM 87505  
• Small Press Distribution, 1341 Seventh St., Berkeley, CA 94710

**Interviews** 6

Anne Waldman  
Alex Katz

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**Calendar** 11

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[poproj@artomatic.com](mailto:poproj@artomatic.com)

**Questionnaire** 16

Our interactive feature.

Board of Directors: Dianne Benson, Rosemary Carroll, Michel de Konkoly Thege, Ted Greenwald, Steve Hamilton, Siri Hustvedt, Greg Masters, Gillian McCain, Elinor Nauen, Paul Slovak, Vicki Hudspith Turbeville, Edwin Torres, Hal Willner, and John Yau.

**Reviews** 21

Philip Whalen, Lisa Jarnot,  
Bill Kushner, Nada Gordon,  
Eileen Myles, Lynn Behrendt,  
and Jim Behrle.

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**Books Received** 30

A mere sampling.

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*(The editor wishes to thank Vincent Katz and extends a belated thanks to Susan Noel for last issue's interview with Nathaniel Dorsky.)*



# News and Announcements

Thanks to everyone who contributed a couplet last issue. Please note that some came in too late to include! No doubt I will be receiving responses to the latest questionnaire long after this issue goes to press: I did not know that by posing these provocative questions about public readings I was actually providing a public service. Apparently this was a good time to review do's and don'ts and desires.

Here goes:

*How important to you is the idea of being "amusing"—as in Ted Berrigan's definition of amusing work ("your muses respond to its muses")? Is it important to amuse your readers?*

So few people answered negatively on this one that I became interested in the few who did:

**Ed Smith:** Personally, I don't want to amuse

my readers, I want to make the reader think about their situation in their auto or life of a factory worker and how hard it is to make a dollar in the U.S., a capitalist world.

**Joseph Torra:** Not very.

**Gregory Altrenter:** The lines I write to a muse earn her wan smile, a tepid simile of response.

Most poets seemed to agree that amusing (often conflated with *entertaining*) is the essence of our job:

**Tony Towle:** You had better esthetically entertain (amuse) your audience on some level or you soon won't have one.

**Murat Nemet-Nejat:** One muse responding to another muse is all there is.

**John Dooley** (a poet "who's never read his work in public because he is afraid, but is

considering it"): Gertrude Stein said something about the work having to be entertaining, and it does.

Mr. Dooley goes on to mention **Bob Perelman** as a terrific reader, the only respondent who named any names!

Some poets had other ideas of what it means to be amusing:

**Marcella Durand:** I prefer "funny," such as when Groucho asks Harpo who he is, and Harpo rolls up his sleeve to show his face tattooed on his arm. Also when the dog comes out of the doghouse tattooed on Harpo's stomach and barks at Groucho. I wish my work could be so sublime.

**Lisa Jarnot:** I prefer Spicer's idea of "correspondence"—the poem at its best is a meeting place—community can be built through language.

(continued on page 19)

## Daniel Krakauer 1923-2001

Poet Daniel Krakauer died "dying is like being very sick / only more so" on January 3 at his home in the East Village, after an extended period of ill health. He was 77. Danny was born near Breslau, Germany, in 1923, the son and grandson of rabbis. His family, Jews in Nazi Germany, escaped in the late 1930s, a year before he was able to get out. And so he spent a teenage year on his own in Berlin, passing as a Gentile and once hearing Hitler at a rally. He then went to Israel, where he lived until emigrating to New York in 1952. His poetry was published early on in such distinguished journals as *Locus Solus*, edited by Ashbery, Koch, Matthews, and Schuyler. He worked as a postal worker and for a long stretch was a heroin addict, "losing himself / in the middle of his life," unplugged from poetry. In the late 1970s, in his fifties and clean, Danny started a new life in poetry at the Poetry Project, making it his home and finding peers among poets half his age. "perhaps your poems should be / like the notes a prisoner / smuggles out of jail / if they fall into the wrong hands / they'll just look a bit weird / but won't give away / the obvious message" His books include *Poems* (Frontward Books, 1979) and *Poems for the Whole*

*Family* (United Artists, 1994). His plays were produced at many poets' theater festivals. Perhaps his most remarkable characteristic is that he was able to write such good poetry—with a sly European sensibility, wit and emotional directness—in his third language.  
—Elinor Nauen

### PEACE

i brought air from the holy land  
bottled in jerusalem  
somewhere between the wailing wall and the via  
dolorosa

if you uncork it in an era  
where strife is rampant  
—harsh recriminations leading to blows—  
sweet peace will descend on the combatants  
surprised and with a blissful look  
they'll embrace—  
so far i haven't used it yet  
it's my secret weapon  
and i'm saving it for an emergency  
—Daniel Krakauer



# SURREALIST HOROSCOPE

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Aries  
(The Two Bones)



If there are uncomfortable battles on the way to your local paper if you touch the leper fishwife

Cancer  
(Toothache Over Bible)



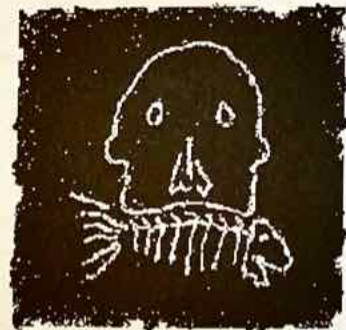
Fortune success and wealth were a dinner plate away yet required some explanation.

Taurus  
(Festering Heart)



a cultural installation sat on their window sill announcing: there will be a test monday

Leo  
(Skullfish)



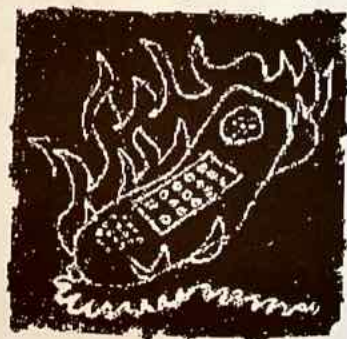
Shish-kebab drums the hunger away from all envy Envy ignores the implications

Gemini  
(Pizza Slice With Sevens)



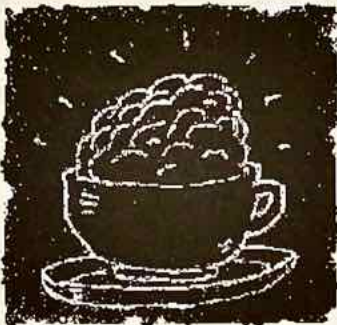
The preface was extolled and the laundry played the drumsolo from "In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida"

Virgo  
(Burning Phone)



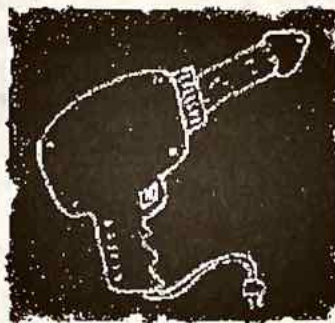
The ukulele was the last remaining blind spotdamned spot here spot, spot me twenty

Libra  
(Brain in Cup)



Please respond by responding by ringing  
your ears dry-humping the phone

Capricorn  
(Phallic Hand Drill)



bah, bah, bah, said the spy to the idiot  
(see 17 across)

Scorpio  
(Ox Testicles Over Billings, Montana)



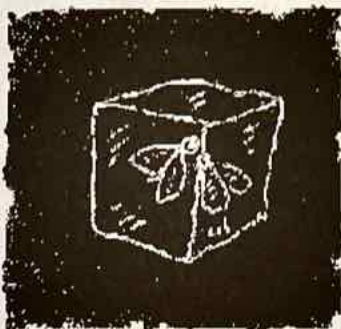
This alternative reality insisted that I fight  
four sick devils Pistols were issued.

Aquarius  
(Chopsticks and Diaphragm)  
[or parsley-Old English]



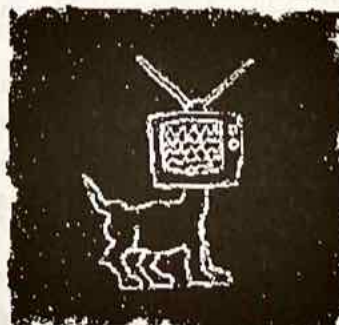
The pear fruit guarded me, my pulpy  
centurian left here on location for some  
future vacation.

Sagittarius  
(Frozen Maggots)



One-Night stands with destiny is all I  
have left and destiny has ordered drinks  
that I cannot afford.

Pisces  
(T.V.-Headed Dog)



A lava lamp not too heavy and not too  
protesting found me goofing by the  
stairwell, reeking of sherry



## “Surprise Each Other”: Anne Waldman on Collaboration by Lisa Birman

The following is an excerpt of two interviews conducted on December 4, 1998 and February 23, 1999 in Boulder, Colorado. The interviews are part of an ongoing project investigating the history of collaborations between painters and poets, and will be included in Anne Waldman's forthcoming book *Vow to Poetry* (Coffee House Press, June 2001).

**Lisa Birman:** When did you start collaborating with artists? Were Joe Brainard and George Schneeman the artists you most often collaborated with in those early years?

**Anne Waldman:** Well, collaboration was always there as a possibility. I'd already started co-editing a magazine, working with others in performance contexts, writing with other writers. Yes, probably I began collaborating in the "art realm" in the late sixties, early seventies after I met Joe Brainard. We did a cartoon entitled "White Noise". And I also began working with George Schneeman around the same time. Collages, cut-ups (a la Tristan Tzara) with words are a kind of collaboration. There was the Surrealist "exquisite corpse," applied both to words and pictures. The anthology *The Dada Painters and Poets*, edited by Robert Motherwell, published in the fifties was a major "statement" including various trajectories of collaboration. Of course the lineage and legacy of the New York School poets and painters was exciting, compelling. The poets always had outstanding art covers on their small press pamphlets. Those folks had been having a conversation for years. It's as if they could speak through a contained "field" (the large canvas or sheet) that also came alive in the way poetry does—off the page.

Composition by field was an important poetic stance. You also had Gertrude Stein's attention to the methodology of artists, as a writer.

**LB:** So you knew about a lot of the other collaborations going on?

**AW:** Somewhat. It was part of the induction into the so-called New York School of poets. And there were lineages to consider. Marcel Duchamp's works, which hover between poetic and plastic and have witty ideas in them. There was Frank O'Hara and Larry Rivers's famous "Stones". Kenneth Koch's collaborations with Larry Rivers which included sets for his plays. Alex Katz liked to have poets pose for him. There was also on the West coast—the work of Robert Duncan and Jess. Yet so many of the artists I first encountered personally seem inimically bound up with the praxes and thinking of the so-called New York School poets. They did covers for them, references to them and their work appear in the poems. Barbara Guest seems a particularly painterly poet. James Schuyler as well. Think of O'Hara's ode to Michael Goldberg, his ode to Anthony Machado, his "On Looking at La Grand Jatte, the Czar Wept Anew," his poems for the painter Jane Freilicher, Larry Rivers, Joseph Cornell. And a landmark poem.



"Why I Am Not A Painter" in which he describes the resonant process of Mike Goldberg's naming his painting "Sardines" and his naming a poem "Oranges". Neither have sardines or oranges of course IN the finished work.

LB: So in the past, collaboration was more connected with a social setting?

AW: I think of most of the collaborations I've been involved with as social occasions. You know something of the artist's work, you may even have a shared sensibility. But you are also willing to "wing it" without any agenda. You aren't thinking about the concept, the finished product, making money. That was true in the early days. So you surprise each other. During the sixties and seventies collaborations were made possible by a particular bohemian lifestyle. You dropped in on painters at work, they dropped in on you. Donna Dennis was living across the street when she worked on the cover for "Memorial Day". There was a reading coming up. You needed a flyer. If you were publishing small press editions, as I was, you needed the artists for covers and drawing as well. Joe Brainard had been doing wonderful comics with Kenward Elmslie, O'Hara, Ron Padgett. He did the cover for the first Angel Hair book—Lee Harwood's *Man With Blue Eyes*. I was posing for him and we'd have an idea about a project. Likewise, George Schneeman. After George moved next door on St. Mark's Place in 1968 he was generous and available to me and others as well. His studio, a small back room on the 4th floor was filled with cut out images from old magazines. Various crayons, paint, pens, paper. Much like Joe's studio which had a plethora of cut-out images arranged in piles according to color and subject. George was also doing a lot of portraits of poets at that time, covers for mimeograph editions. We would get to work, have a tea break, and then his wife Katie would make a delicious Italian dinner. Afterwards we would swoon and fuss over our brilliant productions. There's a collaboration I did with George in 1971 on the wall here.

LB: Do you remember anything about how this was created?

AW: Well the usual procedure (and I continue to collaborate with George) is having the open sheet—usually a quality Arches type paper—where George begins to dab a little color on (paint, gauche, crayon, ink), or

actually draw an object, sometimes a cut-out image. I have a few lines mulling about, sometimes I'll go into a notebook. Or I riff off his shapes, pictures. Recently I worked with him using lines from Italian translations of my poems done by a mutual friend Rita Eposti—we did a series of eight pieces—and then, even more recently, some lines from *Marriage: A Sentence* (we were making a wedding present for friends) played in two other drawings. I call this older piece you see here "Amerigo Vespucci". I think he introduced the tomato first, floating in the space like a planet or star. I then wrote "vegetable love" and "egg love" most likely, and then "I I I I / it's a celestial little BODY". There's a postcard here, looks hand-tinted, possibly from Italy, with children in an ordinary street setting, and underneath George inked "Spoleto: Festival Of Two Worlds". He changed "little titties" into "little ties" and I think we both agreed on imbedding "A merry go around" inside "Amerigo Vespucci". You have in the way of readable images: a car mirror, stars, a partial map of America, a zipper and tomato in the sky. Also "the afterlife" "goes on singing" "workers of the world unite". It's a very American work, you could say, about space, aspiration, discovery, and it's a field composition. My handwriting, however, seems very primitive in retrospect.

LB: Did this all happen in one sitting?

AW: Perhaps there were other works from that same day. We often work on a couple of things simultaneously. Knowing George, he probably touched up things a bit.

LB: Did he actually compose any of the words in the collage aside from the changes?

AW: George majored in literature actually, he reads Dante all the time, and I think LIKES to add some of his words (or Dante's) on top of mine. Likewise, I've put a few brushstrokes and images on the "canvas" and the handwriting is very visual. I mean the words register as "art". Then there's the "Homage To Allen G." project...

LB: From what I understand they're tracings of Allen's photos.

AW: Correct. We worked on this within hours of Allen Ginsberg's death in New York. George already had the series of tracings he had made off Allen's photographs



which he had planned to have Allen write on. In fact we visited Allen at his loft so that George and he could discuss the project, and although nobody knew—the cancer had not been diagnosed yet—Allen was dying at that point. He lay prostrate on a sofa, then got up to cook us lunch. The project took on a different tone after his death—ghostly, haunted you could say. It was consoling to have a place to put the grief which also included the literal traces, as well, of Allen. I stayed up all night sitting in front of George's tracings, and wrote a few lines at a time. The text is quite spare. Both text and tracings: black ink on white.

LB: And then he wrote the words in?

AW: Yes, it's George's handwriting, although I had placed the words in pencil on the xerox copies of the tracings. *Homage* feels more of a piece in that the words seem extensions of the artist's own hand, his own line which in a way continues the line of the photographer's (Allen's) eye. One page I like is a drawing of a mendicant Gregory Corso holding a stick. The lines read "A BOWL"—"A ROD"—"A STAFF"—"Poetry's (large letters) accoutrements"—"stabilize"—"THE VOID". I was thinking perhaps of Gandhi's possessions at the time of his death, as well as Allen's particular modesty. Steve Clay, the mastermind, scholar of small press behind Granary Books, was interested immediately in publishing the project.

LB: How do you find that the process differs in working, for instance, with Susan Rothenberg or Elizabeth Murray?

AW: Well I know George better personally. And we've worked on many collaborations over the years. The environment of his modest home is less formal. He is also a master collage maker, collage being a medium poets feel at home with. We also go back and forth quite spontaneously with fewer inhibitions. I worked with Susan Rothenberg through the mail and the project—finally entitled *Kin*—was being sponsored and produced by Granary Books as well. We actually started with my manifesto "Kali Yuga Poetics" which Susan couldn't relate with. She wrote to me that she spent a lot of time going out and drawing "animals in the barnyard" (she's on a ranch in New Mexico) and the tone of Kali Yuga was too heavy. That was amusing to me actually, and being an admirer of her work and in particular the mythic quality of her horse paintings, I was com-

fortable taking her lead. The animals she drew were provocative as "subjects". And I wrote a suite of eight poems I probably would not have written otherwise. I worked off her drawings primarily, but with my own thoughts about animal-realm dualities. I wanted to go along with her sense of a light touch, almost comedic at times. Her charcoal drawings in this project are quite lush. Whether it's two cats, crows, two horses, or a horse and a man in relation, the images have a "talky" presence and I picked up on that for the text. *Kin* is elegantly printed by Philip Gallo—each poem opens out into a triptych with the drawing placed at the center. Here's a little sample of the text which includes the footnote "in winter they gather at night by thousands in communal rooks":

peck.

then head. along. home

pecking order  
obviates  
transmission  
or cowpoke  
kind of bliss  
    flies thru here  
to take scraps for supper  
hungry  
extemporize a 'caw'

transfer of bird

.....  
light

feather-headed  
a literal p.o.v.  
for literary manners

.....  
doggerel dodges the wind

The project with Elizabeth Murray began when I visited her studio. I made some notes in a little notebook from seeing some work-in-progress and must have sent them to her. She had been asked to do a project with Universal Art Editions Limited, or at least they were available for her to work with a poet. So that was the "seed" for "Her Story". She had also given me a couple of "discarded" scraps.

LB: So you'd send her poems and she'd send drawings?



AW: The initial notes lead to the ur-text and then it was back and forth a bit and I was decidedly responding to her drawings (she'd sent color xeroxes). At one point I revamped the text entirely, sent it to her and she responded that she had been counting on the earlier version. In a way I was pleased that she felt strongly about the words and liked them enough and didn't want me to keep messing about. I probably thought I was improving things, but she seemed to have a better grasp on the situation. I remember thinking the text was too simple compared to the complexity of the drawings. Her palate—eleven colors?—is grandiose. The drawings are coils, bursts of energy, fantastically witty, like cartoons gone awry yet made elegant in their transformation. She seems to be located in "things", but what are they?

LB: As you were working on it, did it begin to take shape in a linear sense as a book or were you simply working on the individual pieces?

AW: I read the text as a kind of serial poem. It had a narrative

logic. It embeds being female, being pregnant, being in a kind of humorous, hormonal situation vis-a-vis the world, the "male". It's a contest, a struggle. Her drawings suggested a story, not necessarily hers or mine but the story of a state of mind taking shape. In fact her work, generally, is very hieroglyphic from some point of view. In that the "imagery" which is suggestive, not literal, takes place in a kind of zone of subtext, imaginatively wild. The finished product is very atmospheric—you could say it has a strong feminine quality—our signatures are in the watermark of the paper, which adds a kind of authorial depth to the whole creation.

LB: Whom else have you collaborated with?

AW: There's a piece I did with Red Grooms that is a triptych of Madonnas and sons. Jack Kerouac and his mother, William Carlos Williams and his mother, and Marianne Moore and hers. It's quite beautiful. And quite funny.

LB: So with that one did you come up with the concept of the piece first?

AW: Yes, the idea was to depict these writers and their long-suffering mothers as Madonnas, as icons. Red has worked with depictions of artists, heroes, writers for years: Gertrude Stein, Pablo Picasso, Fats Domino. The idea of these particular writers and their mothers was simultaneously amusing and poignant. You had the whole Madonna tradition to play with, and then you had the legendary stories about these odd "couples". William Carlos Williams is wearing glasses and he has a grown head on a baby's body. Stella Kerouac is looking quite weary. I drew on the description in Ann Charters' biography of Kerouac of their drinking and fighting and her doing the laundry in the middle of the night and his pulling out a knife and threatening her. Marianne Moore and her mother are going to the circus. The idea draws on an anecdote Elizabeth Bishop tells somewhere. The triptych is a bit dark perhaps, but the three distinct worlds work together beautifully. It's clearly an homage to the mothers. I used my own language as well in the "tales". Red did the lettering on

each panel in gold, in gothic letters. Susan Hall did mysterious fine line drawings for the book *Invention*

**We were working to surprise ourselves...sometimes to show off and get closer to one another, like birds in an elaborate mating ritual.**

published by Kulchur Foundation in which we exchanged ideas back and forth quite a bit. Yvonne Jacquette and I worked on a piece for the Poets and Painters Show some years back. I responded to one of her "on the wing" pastels, drawings she does from airplanes, from terrific heights. So the poem, too, is from an aerial perspective.

Most recently I collaborated with Richard Tuttle and the Chinese Opera director and performer Su Chen on an "object"—a magic box, really, that includes a lantern, text, photographs and a performance video. Richard had heard me read the poem "Makeup On Empty Space" in New Mexico and he said it stuck in his head and became the basis for making literal "makeup" designs that would adorn the actor Su Chen's face. I also wrote a text "off" the designs Richard had made that he had sent me color xeroxes of. I had been boning up on Chinese opera makeup and these were a distinct departure. We all went to the home of the printer and designer Gunnar Kaldeway in upstate New York and had an entire weekend to create a kind of art-word-performance-theatre piece. An elderly makeup artist from China applied the designs



which include, for example, a tiny paper boat as a kind of mustache, and what could be almost a traffic sign image—or warning—sign over a sideburn. We also had a video camera crew, a still photographer, Gunnar's wife, who is a composer, others. Quite a production. I took the role of director at one point, while we were filming, giving commands/suggestions to Su Chen who would be up in tree, or in the pond, or crouching behind a rock. It was filmed entirely outside. It has a wonderful elemental quality. I also took notes during those days and wrote more after the event that is, in part, included in the final adventure. In a way, it is an opera. At one point Su Chen is singing an old Chinese shaman song upside-down in the tree.

LB: Collaboration seems to have entered into your poetics in various ways—with other poets, visually, and maybe most often with performance. Could you comment on the different types of collaborations, how they interest you and ways in which they are similar or different?

AW: Certainly the Poetry Project and the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics at Naropa have been

huge collaborations. I always work with the people around me including the person I'm living with. It's a way to be in the world together and to make something that has intrinsic value because it is a statement of connection, of camaraderie, and it also goes beyond particular relationship or duet and becomes what William Burroughs has called "the third mind". So something new, or "other" emerges from the combination that would not have come about with a solo act. The collaborations from the earlier days, with a whole range of poets, including Ted Berrigan ("Memorial Day") Bernadette Mayer ("Rattle Up A Deer"), Eileen Myles ("Polar Ode") were necessary as a way of manifesting our "poetics" which includes a sense of community and collaboration. These writings weren't being sponsored or produced the way some of the later art projects are. We were "going on our nerve", getting inside each other's heads. We were working to surprise ourselves, each other, sometimes to show off and get closer to one another, like birds in an elaborate mating ritual. Editing magazines or books involves compromise, give and take, and it's going to provide, usually, a broader range, a more interesting mix. Working with a

(continued on page 27)

# burning deck



## 40th Anniversary

### Susan Gevirtz: *Hourglass Transcripts*

What is legible? How can the uncountable, unaccountable find the page outside of measurable time? To approach the preverbal, the unspeakable, it may be necessary to make an incision through the center of a line, to as it were hyphenate thought. Or, in "Hollowed Out Book," the names of shipping lines float across the water like gigantic book titles, telling much about the distant and the up close. And so about the act of seeing. Form is motion through place — toward the not yet imagined: its fabulous possibility and the full extent of its previous demolition. Poems, 80 pages, offset, Smyth-sewn, ISBN 1-886224-40-4, original paperback \$10

### Jennifer Martenson: *Xq28<sup>1</sup>*

A satiric response to the so-called "gay gene" that made headlines in 1993. Mock-scientific inquiries into the biology of lesbianism get ensnared in footnotes and seemingly endless regress. More concerned with codes of conduct than genetic codes, *Xq28<sup>1</sup>* does not take sides on the nature/nurture question as much as it plays around in the ideological context of the debate. Poem, 20 pages, offset, saddlestitched ISBN 1-886224-42-0, paper \$5

### Ernst Jandl: *reft and light*. Multiple versions by Charles Bernstein, Lee Ann Brown, Norma Cole, Tina Darragh, Kenward Elmslie, Anselm Hollo, Julie Patton, Joan Retallack, Cole Swensen, Craig Watson, Marjorie Welish, John Yau et al.

"Ernst Jandl who died this past June at 75 has proved to be the most difficult poet of the Vienna Group to translate, with his punning convolutions stringently (and mockingly) resisting all comers equally. *Reft and Light*, which was in preparation at the time of his death, brings together an extraordinary group of English-language poets who take multiple shots at each Jandl poem."—*Publishers Weekly*

Poems, 112 pages, offset, Smyth-sewn, ISBN 1-886224-34-x, original paperback \$10

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## Interview with Alex Katz

by Vincent Katz

Alex Katz met Frank O'Hara in 1954 when the poet and critic came to his studio to preview the work for his upcoming exhibition at Roko Gallery. O'Hara wrote about Katz's show in *Art News*: "Color is used sparingly and tellingly in a structural way, though the representation of the subject is not neglected. Refinement and an almost Oriental quiet in the perception are the predominant qualities." Thus began Katz's personal involvement with contemporary poets.

Known for his portraits of friends—artists, dancers, critics, and poets—Katz in the 1950s and '60s painted those people who made up his segment of an intimate coterie. His cutout portrait of O'Hara (oil on wood, 1959-60) was seen recently in the exhibition *In Memory Of My Feelings: Frank O'Hara and American Art*. He has also done portraits of John Ashbery, Edwin Denby, Kenneth Koch, and James Schuyler. Throughout the '60s and '70s, he consistently came back to poets as subjects for his work, portraying Ted Berrigan, Bill Berkson, Joe Brainard, Jim Carroll, Kenward Elmslie, Larry Fagin, John Godfrey, Dick Gallup, Ann Lauterbach, Michael Lally, Frank Lima, Gerard Malanga, Alice Notley, Ron Padgett, Anne Waldman, and Lewis Warsh, among others.

Katz has also collaborated extensively with poets, doing books with Ashbery, Robert Creeley, Koch, Harry Matthews, Padgett, and Carter Ratcliff. I



wanted to know what attracted him to contemporary poets and why he felt compelled to paint them and collaborate with them. This interview took place at his studio on January 17, 2001.

VK: *When did you first collaborate with a poet and what made you want to do that?*

AK: I had a show of painted cutouts at the Tanager Gallery in 1962, and Kenneth Koch approached me. He asked me to do cutouts for his play *George Washington Crossing the Delaware*. I read the script, and I liked it a lot. It seemed two-dimensional, so I said, "Let's make a stage that's only three feet deep and do the whole thing flat." Kenneth thought it was a great idea, but when I got to the theater I found the director was a conventional director, so we were in 3-D.

VK: *Later, you and Kenneth did the book Interlocking Lives [Kulchur Press, 1970].*

AK: Yes. Kenneth came over one afternoon and said, "Let's make something." So he started doing the stuff he does with Larry [Rivers]—you know, I draw and he writes on it. And I thought, "I'm not going to have some poet mess up my drawings!" but I said, "Wait a minute, Kenneth. This isn't working. Let me think about it." A little later, I sent him these cartoons with empty balloons and said, "You fill in the balloons." It took him a couple of years, and he came back with the idea of leaving the balloons empty and distorting their meaning by repeating the same images with different texts on the facing pages. His solution was brilliant. It was a real deconstruction.

VK: *This is an approach you've consistently taken to books, in which you have a limited number of images that you repeat over and over.*

**[O'Hara] had a strict sense of what's right and wrong. He was basically a Catholic who got turned around somehow.**

AK: Well, Kenneth repeated them. I just had a set of 21 drawings, and it was his idea to do use them five times in different sequences. It is a deconstruction because each time the image means a different thing. And finally the image means nothing.

VK: *You also repeated images in your collaboration with Harry Mathews, Selected Declarations of Dependence [Z Press, 1977, reprinted by Sun and Moon Press, 1996].*

AK: Harry repeated nursery rhymes and proverbs in variations. The work was based on repetition, so I thought it would be appropriate to use the same illustration in recurring patterns in three different tones. I knew his text was mathematical, so I gave him the artworks and said, "You put them in. You

sequence them any way you want." He sequenced them, and I was very pleased with the result.

VK: *How did Fragment [Black Sparrow, 1969], your collaboration with John Ashbery, come about?*

AK: I thought John's poetry was fabulous! He has lots of different visual images that just flash, and there's no narration to them. That meant I could make images whose relationship was indeterminate. In fact, I didn't even have to put them into sequence. I took a lot of images I'd already done as oil paintings and reduced them to a simple form so they would work as illustrations. I did them very roughly from photos in gouache or tempera, and then I did them over much more accurately. I gave them to John, and he took a martini and sequenced them.

VK: *I've noticed that you like to do things that are extreme on occasion.*

AK: You don't want to be passive in a collaboration. You really have to come up and out at it. I spoke to Rauschenberg, and we thought the same way. When you do stage sets, you make that set so if that dance isn't real good, you're going to kill it. If the dance is real good, it's going to be unreal. You don't want to be a mere decorator.

VK: *How would that attitude apply when collaborating on a book?*

AK: I don't want to explain the writing. I want to do something that has as much juice as the writing, that isn't a passive illustration.

VK: *A lot of the second generation New York School poets were involved with publishing books and magazines, and they would often ask you to do covers. How did you get the idea for the cover of Kenward Elmslie's Motor Disturbance [Columbia University Press, 1971]?*

AK: From the title. A bunch of cows just seemed like the craziest thing you could put with it. I ran out in a field and drew a lot of cows. A lot

of cows seemed perfect for "Motor Disturbance" and Kenward Elmslie! I did a cover for Kenneth once for his book *The Pleasures Of Peace* [Grove Press, 1969]. That's an early one. I also did the original cover for Jimmy for *Freely Espousing* [Doubleday and Co./Paris Review Editions, 1969], based on a collage.

VK: *How did you decide on the image of the flag for The Pleasures Of Peace?*

AK: The first image I came up with the publisher wouldn't use. It was much too minimal for them. It was just a line that made a curve, like the earth. It was pale green, and the title was on the bottom. A salesman said, "They'll never see it on the rack."





Carol Gallup, Dick Gallup, Par Padgett and Ron Padgett in front of Alex Katz' *Mr. and Mrs. R. Padgett and Mr. and Mrs. D. Gallup*. New York, 1971. Photo by Rudy Burckhardt.

It won't sell." Which to me seemed so insane I couldn't believe it! A poetry book, for Christ's sake! It isn't going to sell in a drugstore. So I had to come up with a different idea, and I got the idea of the flag, since it's heraldic.

VK: *I like those punchy colors.*

AK: These are the second colors. The first colors I chose were very fugitive. People would call them "gay" colors. Violet and pink. I think the salesman was homophobic. Then I just threw up my hands and said, "Make it yellow, orange, white and black." I got away with using orange.

VK: *Let's talk about some of the projects you've initiated. What motivated you to do suites of prints in collaboration with poets?*

AK: I always wanted to get away from the European model of beautiful things that end up on shelves. Any time I did a portfolio of prints with poetry, I also wanted to make a catalogue so that it would be affordable. The first one was *Face of the Poet* [14 aquatints with 14 poems in an edition of 25, published by Brooke Alexander and Marlborough Graphics, 1978]. I chose the poets and asked each to contribute a poem. We made a portfolio of prints and poems. I thought I could make cutout prints that wouldn't have a rectangular border around them. The border would follow the contour of the poet's head. That

would make it less materialistic, less like an old print. So we selected the poems, and Prawat Laucheron printed it. It was a modern looking book. Then I spoke to Brooke Alexander, and we made a catalogue with all the images and poems in it. That turned out real nice. We didn't have access to any distribution, though.

VK: *In the '80s, you did Give Me Tomorrow with Carter Ratcliff and Light As Air with Ron Padgett. For Give Me Tomorrow [13 soft-ground etching and aquatint prints with texts by Carter Ratcliff in an edition of 40, published by Alex Katz and Marlborough Gallery, 1983], you did have a book version of the print portfolio, published by Vehicle Editions. How did that project come about?*

AK: I like Carter's poetry, and I liked that suite, those gangster-type poems. It was out of the movies, a Humphrey Bogart thing. It seemed arch, so I thought I'd make up people who looked like they could come out of a movie, glamorous people. We did the aquatints with Aldo Crommelynck in Paris. The kind of printing we were doing no one had done before. They don't look like typical etchings. The next project I did with Aldo was a suite of soft ground etchings, where we made it look like charcoal. That was *Light As Air* [12 aquatints with texts by Ron Padgett in an edition of 30, published by Aldo Crommelynck, 1987]. I made all these drawings and handed them to Ron. He had to write something to go with them, and



he was really ingenious. He wrote in the person of a girl. What he did was sensational. You give him a problem when you hand him a bunch of drawings and say, "Write some poems!"

VK: *Epecially when they're all portraits of your wife!*

AK: Every one was a portrait of my wife with her hands in different gestures! It really puts him in a box! But when you're given a restrictive problem, you have to work, and you can arrive at something with some energy. It pushes you around.

VK: *Your most recent collaboration is Edges [a book containing 13 etchings and a poem by Robert Creeley in an edition of 60 copies, published by Peter Blum Edition, 1997]. How did you get to know Creeley and decide to do something together?*

AK: Raymond Foye told me to look him up in Maine, because he lives about an hour from us. I've always liked his poetry, and we got along real well, so we decided to do a collaboration. This time, I wanted to make something that was the equivalent of one of those great European portfolios. Really simple and tough like the books Miró and Picasso did. Super elegant and really materialistic. But I wanted it to be tough. I didn't want it to be soft. When you look at it, it's like there's nothing there. You don't have any gushy tones. You don't have any color. It's just black line on white. The etchings were based on drawings.

VK: *Did you choose that stark, black-and-white line approach because of Creeley's poetry?*

AK: It seems appropriate. His poetry has a restrained elegance. I must have been influenced by his poetry to come up with those techniques. The drawings are severe. I don't think they are seductive or charming.

VK: *I know Frank O'Hara's poetry has been important to you, and I'm interested in the idea of the interaction between poets and visual artists...*

AK: Frank's temperament was completely different from mine, and he was almost in a different time period. He had a problem with God, and he liked the older painters more than I did, and in a different way. Pollock, de Kooning, Kline. I liked them a lot, but the difference is he could adore them whole-heartedly, whereas I wanted to get rid of them.

VK: *But that's because you're a painter!*

AK: Yeah, I'm a painter!

VK: *It's easier to think they're great if you don't have to compete with them!*

AK: If you're a painter, you say, "I want to dump you." That puts me in another time period.

VK: *What is your total assessment of O'Hara, from your first meeting with him until his death? What would you say was his impact on the art world?*

AK: He had an involvement with so many people, trying to help them with their art. And his sense of style was the strongest thing around, period.

VK: *In his poetry or in his opinions?*

AK: His poetry comes from a philosophic base about art. You want to make something that has some real life to it, so therefore someone like Tennessee Williams is okay. It's got life to it. That's the first thing, and then you try to go over that. There's a certain amount of style, a certain amount of risk a person has to take to get into that. O'Hara's sense of style in terms of art was really strong. He exerted a lot of influence on everybody.

VK: *When you talk about his style, it sounds like you're talking mainly about his own poetry.*

AK: It went into painting, too. He told me once at four in the morning which way I should be painting. He was a real pain in the ass! I was ready to throw him out of the studio. He thought my painting *The Red Smile* [now in the collection of the Whitney Museum] was great, and he thought these wet-on-wet studies I was doing in Madison Square Park were "Chelsea," and I should stop them. Actually, I could never get those studies to work big, but I developed a technique from them. I liked *The Red Smile*—that was where I was going—but you can't repeat it. He didn't want me to become a Chelsea realistic painter.

VK: *It's unusual for someone to be so involved in what you're doing.*

AK: It's a big risk to the friendship to tell somebody something like that. But he did that to all the poets—all his contemporaries and all the younger poets. He had a strict sense of what's right and wrong. He was basically a Catholic who got turned around somehow. He was a real moralist.

VK: *What about Edwin Denby's criticism?*

AK: Edwin's writing relates to Frank's in that it comes from a position in esthetics, and you don't have to be interested in the dance to get something out of the writing. It's like

The dropping out of English poetry gave the younger poets' poetry a new look. With Ron Padgett, there's no English poetry in his work.



Eisenstein on movies. That's terrifically useful for a young painter or anyone in thinking about what art should be. Edwin is one of the strongest estheticians of his time. He was a Classicist—and by Classicism, he meant de Kooning—but he was very involved with the avant-garde at the same time.

VK: *How does one reconcile those two things?*

AK: The Classicism he was talking about wasn't like Winckelmann. It was like de Kooning, who had an open linear style. Denby was unsympathetic towards Clyfford Still, Rothko, things that were more aggressive, but he could take the avant-garde, because the avant-garde of Cage and Cunningham was like the old-fashioned European avant-garde. Edwin could relate to that, because he grew up in that. Frank's writing has the sense of what art should be, and it's more open than Edwin's.

VK: *Do you feel there's an esthetic counterpart to your clean, hard-edged style of the 1960s—in which you portrayed Ted Berrigan, Dick Gallup, Ron Padgett, and others—in the poetry of those writers?*

AK: I suppose the plainness and the use of the vernacular, and vernacular images, are similar. Those poets somehow seem to come from France and Oklahoma, whereas the previous generation of poets came from France and England and the United States. The dropping out of English poetry gave the younger poets' poetry a new look. With Ron Padgett, there's no English poetry in his work. The words are more American than English. With Frank, there's a lot of French Surrealism, but basically it always seems like the roots are in Elizabethan English. The energy of it always seems Elizabethan to me. It's frothy and verbal. It hasn't got that tightness of a French language or the plainness of American images.

VK: *And you sense that more in the second generation New York School poets?*

AK: Yeah. I think Ted Berrigan's language is amazing. It was so new.

VK: *Does it still seem new?*

AK: Yes. If something has a style edge, it never loses it.

VK: *Why is that?*

AK: It's a kind of energy. If you look at a Rubens, it still looks like a jazzy object. I always said a Rubens looks like a 1965 Cadillac. It's the newest, flashiest thing in the world. And I think Ted's language, although pills are gone and all, was an adventure into language that was really quite sensational.

VK: *Does all art have personality?*

AK: I think so. Every artist has his temperament. That's the

personality of the artist. The thing is to make your temperament fit. When I was starting to paint, everyone was Dionysian. All these macho guys around. It was really alien to me, all that excessiveness. There was no way I could function like that. I had to function as me. You like people because they have a personality different from you in some ways and in some ways similar.

VK: *What would you say is the role of the person in art, keeping in mind O'Hara's essay "Personism," in which he wrote that he could as easily make a telephone call as write a poem to someone?*

AK: He was connected with the French avant-garde. I'm quite some distance from that. I think a painting's a painting, and at its best it's a high art object. The telephone is like a malted. Holy malted, holy chair, where art is life, and everything's art. I don't feel it. I feel a painting can be a unique art object.

VK: *Do you think there's a difference between visual art and poetry? Poetry doesn't have a physical object in the same way.*

AK: It has a similar effect. A work of poetry is a unique experience. A work of literature is something you never forget. It's not like a sunset. A sunset is beautiful, but you can't remember one from another. After a while, they disappear. But the poetry that's really affected you is a unique experience. That's one of the qualities of poetry, literature, music, painting and sculpture.

VK: *The weight toward evidence of a specific life or lives, as opposed to the literary, is present in O'Hara's work, but in your work too, which uses subject matter from daily life.*

AK: There are different forces of energy trying to determine what you're going to do.

VK: *Which forces?*

**But when you're given a restrictive problem, you have to work, and you can arrive at something with some energy.**

AK: The forces of "great art." "Great art" shouldn't be personal; it should be impersonal. When I was a kid, the line was, "Art should be abstract; it's modern." I always felt, "Who the hell are you to tell me what to do?" The self has to do with instinct. You like something and you do it. It's not a strategy. You adapt your instincts to the world, and you try to make something that has some relationship to what other people are thinking and what other people are doing and what other people are sick and tired of. I've always had a sense of getting

*(continued on page 27)*



# Event

at the POETRY PROJECT

## APRIL 2, MONDAY

### Open Reading

Sign-up at 7:30 pm [8:00 pm]

## APRIL 4, WEDNESDAY

### Patricia Spears Jones and Maggie Nelson

Patricia Spears Jones is the author of *The Weather That Kills* (Coffee House, 1995). Her poems, frequently inspired by great blues and jazz musicians, are clear-sighted, generous, and compassionate. Maggie Nelson is the author of *Shiner*, forthcoming from Hanging Loose, and *The Scratch-Scratch Diaries*, featured in AGNI/Graywolf Press' *Take Three: 3 New Poets Series*. Robert Creeley writes, "I love the way all [Maggie Nelson] says keeps moving, insistent, often abrasive, like they say, and always specific."

## APRIL 6, FRIDAY

### Kenneth Rexroth's *Swords That Shall Not Strike*

A celebration of Beat movement critic/promoter, anarchist, and poet Kenneth Rexroth (1905-1982). Readers include Grace Paley, Eliot Weinberger, Eileen Myles, Ishle Park, Robert Nichols, and Geoffrey Gardner. Poets will read selections from *Swords That Shall Not Strike* and then follow with their own work, with the aim of illustrating Mr. Rexroth's claim that "the poet, by the very nature of his [her] art, has been an enemy of society." [10:30]

## APRIL 16, MONDAY

### Michael Magee and Eddie Bell

Michael Magee, editor of the poetry journal *Combo*, is the author of a dissertation entitled "Emancipating Pragmatism: Emerson, Jazz and Experimental Writing" and two chapbooks. Eddie Bell is an alumnus of the Ragdale Foundation's Artist Residency Program, where he began writing his first book of poems, *Capt's Dreaming Chair*.

## APRIL 18, WEDNESDAY

### Alan Bernheimer and Tim Davis

Alan Bernheimer, the author of *Billionsque* and *Café Isotope* (The Figures) and *State Lounge* (Tuumba), lives in Berkeley and works in Silicon Valley. "These poems, like life itself, are filled with the joy of doubt," writes Lyn Hejinian of Mr. Bernheimer's work. Poet and photographer Tim Davis is the author of a book of poetry, *Dailies* (The Figures), and two chapbooks. Writes Charles Bernstein, "Dailies is bright, teasing, and with enough sass to light up the Brooklyn Bridge and large parts of the Palisades."

Marty McConnell, Travis Montez, Caridad de la Luz, Tim Arevalo, Romero, Latasha Natasha Diggs, A.B. Lugo, Andrew McCarthy, and others; and a Mini Poetry Ball produced by The House of Xavier. The winner of the Poetry Ball will receive a cash prize and a featured performance at The House of Xavier's Glam Slam 2001, to be held this fall. Admission is \$10, \$7 for students and seniors, and \$5 for Poetry Project Members. [9 pm; sign-up begins at 8 pm]

## APRIL 28, SATURDAY

### Allen Ginsberg's *Spontaneous Mind: Selected Interviews 1958-1996*

A book party to celebrate the release of Allen Ginsberg's *Spontaneous Mind: Selected Interviews 1958-1996*. In conjunction with the book party, plaques will be installed in the East Yard of St. Mark's Church commemorating the Allen Ginsberg and Ted Berrigan trees. Composer John Moran, whose operas include *The Manson Family* and *Mathew in the School of Life*, will perform. This event is free and open to the public. [3 pm]

## APRIL 30, MONDAY

### Chris Edgar and Graham Foust

Chris Edgar, Publications Director of Teachers & Writers Collaborative, co-edits *The Hat*. Some of his recent poems can be found in *The Portable Boog Reader* and *Best American Poetry 2000*. Graham Foust co-edits the online magazine *Lagniappe*, a journal of poetics. He is currently working on a manuscript, *As In Every Deafness*.

## MAY 2, WEDNESDAY

### Eleni Sikelianos and Tony Towle

Eleni Sikelianos is the author of several poetry chapbooks. *Earliest Worlds* (forthcoming from Coffee House Press) is her first major collection. Writes Henry Gould of *Earliest Worlds*, "These are mysterious poems, by turns modest, graceful, and spacey." Tony Towle's most recent book is *The History of the Invitation: New and Selected Poems 1963-2000* (Hanging Loose). Towle's work displays "elegance of style, lush imagery, lofty diction, transparent use of metaphor, and numerous devices of wit and rhetoric," writes Charles North. Mr. Towle was the editor of *The Poetry Project Newsletter* from 1987-1990.

## MAY 16, WEDNESDAY

### Ed Friedman and Lorenzo Thomas

Since 1987, Ed Friedman has served as Artistic Director of the Poetry Project. His books include *Mao & Matisse* and two 2001 publications: *Drive Through Blue Cylinders* (Hanging Loose Press) and *Umbra* (Granary Books). Lorenzo Thomas, a member of the legendary Umbra workshop in the 1960s, is a widely published poet and critic. His collection of poems, *Chances Are Few*, is "fresh, individual, and alive. ... An excellent book," writes Stephen Stepanchev, author of *American Poetry Since 1945*.

## MAY 18, FRIDAY

### Fundamentalist Prophecy, Homoeroticism, and Candles

Our beloved Friday night coordinator Regie Cabico is celebrating his birthday in Late Night Reading Series Style! Performers include poets Henry Flesh, Lex Lonehood, and Shakespeare's Monkey. Help Regie blow out his candles (he'll need it!). [10:30]

## MAY 21, MONDAY

### Diana Rickard and Roger Snell

Diana Rickard's poems, which lull the comfortable reader into the completely unexpected and oddly delightful, have appeared in *Ixnay*, *Mungo vs. Ranger* and *Bombay Gin*. Roger Snell, co-editor of the journal *Mungo vs. Ranger*, has a letterpress imprint, Sardines Press, which produces an ongoing Broadside series.

## MAY 23, WEDNESDAY

### Wang Ping and Lewis Warsh

Wang Ping was born in Shanghai. Her works include a book of poems, *Of Flesh & Spirit*; a novel, *Foreign Devil*; and a short story collection, *American Visa* (all from Coffee House Press). Lewis Warsh's books include the novel *Agnes & Sally* (The Fiction Collective), the autobiography *Part of My History* (Coach House), and numerous books of poems. He is the editor and publisher of United Artist Books, a small press which he founded in 1975.

## MAY 25, FRIDAY

### Kiss It Up to God: Poetry, Funk and Gospel, with Nadine Mozon and Friends

Nadine Mozon leads from her new book of

## MAY 7, MONDAY

### Open Reading

Sign-up at 7:30 pm [8:00 pm]



or doubt, writes Lyn Hejman of Mr. Bernheimer's work. Poet and photographer Tim Davis is the author of a book of poetry, *Dailies* (The Figures), and two chapbooks. Writes Charles Bernstein, "Dailies is bright, teasing, and with enough sass to light up the Brooklyn Bridge and large parts of the Palisades."

**APRIL 20, FRIDAY**  
**Ha Ha Ha! Stand Up Poetry Night**

New poets explore humor in poetry. Featuring comedic poets Jason Schneiderman, Cristin O'Keefe Aptowicz, Carol Rosenfeld, Rob Neill, and F. Omar Telon. An open mike will follow. [10:30]

**APRIL 23, MONDAY**  
**Keith Roach and Deborah Richards**

Poet, curator, and arts organizer Keith Roach was Ceremonial Master of the Open Room at the Nuyorican Poets Café's Friday Night slam. Deborah Richards is a poet, performer and director. She is currently completing her book, *Long Way Home*.

**APRIL 25, WEDNESDAY**  
**Yukihide Maeshima Hartman and Carol Szamatowicz**

Born in Japan and long prominent in the New York poetry world, Yukihide Maeshima Hartman is the author of several collections of poetry, including *Ping*, *New Poems*, and *Coloring Book*. "Yuki Hartman orders his images around with temerity of a lion tamer. He's as gifted a poet as they come," writes Charles North. Carol Szamatowicz is the author of *Cats & Birds* (Stuyvesant Press, 1998) and *Zoop* (forthcoming from Owl Press). Her recent work has appeared in *Canada Review*, *The Germ*, *The Hat*, *Lingo*, *Sal Mimeo*, and other journals. She writes in the afternoon.

**APRIL 26, THURSDAY**  
**Tribute to Gregory Corso**

An evening of talks and readings featuring Patti Smith, Jim Carroll, David Amram, John Giorno, Bob Rosenthal, Ann Charters, John S. Hall, Paul Violi, and many others. Gregory Corso died on January 17, 2001. Born in Greenwich Village in 1930, he hooked up with Allen Ginsberg and the other Beat poets at Columbia University in the 1940s. He moved to San Francisco in 1956, quickly fitting into the Beat scene there. Among his books are *Gasoline* (1956), *The Happy Birthday of Death* (1960), and *Mindfield* (1991). In the words of Allen Ginsberg, "Corso is a poet's poet, his verse pure velvet, close to John Keats for our time, exquisitely delicate in manners of the Muse." Admission is \$7, \$5 for Poetry Project members. Proceeds from this event will be donated to the Gregory Corso Fund.

**APRIL 27, FRIDAY**  
**Loose Lips: A Spoken Word Celebration and Mini Poetry Ball**

Featuring an art installation by Kabildo del Arte; hip hop performance by Morplay; music by DJB; performances by spoken word artists

**MAY 7, MONDAY**

**Open Reading**

Sign-up at 7:30 pm [8:00 pm]

**MAY 9, WEDNESDAY**

**Diane di Prima and Gary Lenhart**

Diane di Prima is considered by many to be the most important woman writer of the Beat movement. Her works include *Earthsong Poems 1957-1959* (1968) and *Pieces of a Song* (1990). Gary Lenhart is the author of several collections of poems including *Light Heart* (1991). "Tender heart, nimble wit, and tough mind radiate throughout Gary Lenhart's poems ... poems that are so well made that their craftsmanship is invisible—the ultimate graciousness of art."—Ron Padgett

**MAY 11, FRIDAY**

**The Art of Listening: Poems and Criticism**

**A Writing Workshop taught by Gary Lenhart**

[See bio for May 9th reading.] Public service announcement, short cut to publication, pedantic gloss, frantic jumping up and down for attention—criticism can be all these things, and boring too. How does one make it something closer to heart, less declamatory, and more responsive? This workshop has been made possible by a generous grant from the Jerome Foundation. [7-9 pm]

**MAY 11, FRIDAY**

**The Poetry Event Schedule Reading**

A presentation by the Poet to Poet/Medicinal Purposes Literary Review staff on behalf of the Poetry Event Schedule. Featured readers include Robert Dunn, Thomas M. Catterson, Leigh Harrison, Anthony Scarpantonio, Jacqueline Annette, and Evie Ivy. [10:30]

**MAY 14, MONDAY**

**Luisa Giugliano and David Kirschenbaum**

Luisa Giugliano lives in Providence, RI. Her chapbook *Chapter in the Dayfinch Journal* is available from Cuneiform Press. Poet, publisher and man-about-town David Kirschenbaum is the power behind Boog Literature, a publishing venture that has turned out more than a hundred zines, chapbooks and broadsides in the past decade.

**MAY 15, TUESDAY**

**"Deep-Talki": The Griot's Poetics**

**A Writing Workshop taught by Lorenzo Thomas**

[See bio for May 16th reading.] Looking at what Henry Louis Gates, Jr. calls *Signifying* and what Stephen E. Henderson termed *mass-cons* in Black poetry, this workshop will connect these concepts to aspects of African folktales and oral poetry as well as works by Aime Cesaire, Melvin B. Tolson, and Amiri Baraka. This workshop has been made possible by a generous grant from the Jerome Foundation. [7-9 pm]

**Kiss It Up to God: Poetry, Funk and Gospel, with Nadine Mozon and Friends**

Nadine Mozon reads from her new book of poetry, *Kiss It Up to God*. The themes in this collection of work comb entangled hairitage kinks and tissues, wrestle with womanish ways, and revel in a determined spirit. Ms. Mozon will be accompanied by the jazz-funk/gospel sounds of Darren Hicks on bass and special guest poets. [10:30]

**MAY 28, MONDAY**

**El Gran Final de Las Estrellas de Lunes**

Poet's Plays & Party: Regie Cabico, Betsy Andrews, Roberto Tejada, and others in a romp through the past and present of American Poetry Theater á la Gertrude Stein, Samuel Beckett, Camille Roy, and Kenward Elmslie.

**MAY 30, WEDNESDAY**

**A Hal Willner Event**

A poetry and music spectacular produced by legendary music producer Hal Willner. Mr. Willner has worked with some of the music industry's most illustrious artists, including Iggy Pop, Marianne Faithfull, John Zorn, Keith Richards, Diamanda Galas, Michael Stipe, Peter Frampton, and Kate Bush, to mention only a few. He is the musical director for *Saturday Night Live*, and produced the soundtracks for the Robert Altman films *Short Cuts* and *Kansas City*. Among poets and writers, Mr. Willner has produced CD boxed sets by Allen Ginsberg, William Burroughs, Terry Southern, and Lenny Bruce. Admission price and starting time to be announced.

**JUNE 1, FRIDAY**

**You Better Pay: The Spring 2001 Workshop Reading**

Participants from the Poetry Project's spring workshops, led by poets Prageeta Sharma, Maureen Owen, and Larry Fagin, will read their work. [10:30 pm]

**The Poetry Project**

is at St. Mark's Church in the Bowery

131 East 10th Street, New York City 10003

[www.poetryproject.com](http://www.poetryproject.com)

All events are \$7.00, \$4.00 for seniors and students, \$3.00 for members and begin at 8PM unless otherwise noted. Programs are subject to change. For information call 212 674 0910



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## News & Announcements, cont.

**Nada Gordon:** I have impudently dubbed myself "an entertainer", going back to the root meaning of "entertain" that is, "to hold between" the writing being an opportunity for inter- (and intra-) subjective movement. ...wit, seductiveness, viscerality, complexity, song, and theatrics are devices I use in my struggles to do so.

*Are your judgements about poetry really "about the work" itself, or does it inevitably involve judgements about the poet's appearance and lifestyle?*

Some people owned up to the fact that a poet's wardrobe and style affect reception of the work, but we'd prefer not to examine that too closely:

**Joseph Torra:** It's about the work itself. A poet shouldn't be required to do anything more than be free to write as best and truthfully to his/her own life and vision as can. Why should they have to?

**Nada Gordon:** No, my judgments about poetry are about me, my experience and knowledge and ideologies and proclivities and associations. I admit I do make judgments about poets' lifestyles and appearances just as I might of anyone else [hangs head].

**Catherine Daly:** I love blurbs and jacket copy: the object of the book, the book establishing context for the text.

**John Dooley:** I think it is impossible to not make judgments about a person's appearance, etc. BUT, it should always be about the work. This all becomes more important as virtual "entertainment" creeps more and more into our lives.

**Murat Nemet-Nejat:** A few poets I admire, who even inspired me, I find to be personally bores. Let's keep hero worship out of poetry.

**Ed Smith:** I wear a Trenton Thunder baseball cap and I dig poetry.

*Do you really like to go to readings? What makes a good reading?*

It came somewhat as a surprise to me that no one complained about too many readings. You seem to really love them! Here are some suggestions to make them *even better*:

**Marcella Durand:** A good reading also includes a good audience—when everyone does funny heckles and is nice to each other and hands out books and chapbooks.

**Lisa Jarnot:** In my utopia only **Bob Creeley**, **Bernadette Mayer**, and **Amiri Baraka** are allowed to read for more than 40 minutes.

**Gregory Altrenter:** Perhaps in a loud voice or a flushed aside there'd be more applause.

**Nada Gordon:** Poets should imagine (whether it's true or not) that the audience is there by choice to hear them, and put away self-deprecation. I would like to see/hear more: free gifts (i.e. wine, chapbooks, souvenirs), audience participation, duration pieces, voice

projection, collaborations, post-reading Q & A sessions, and elaborate costuming.

**Catherine Daly:** Wine and cheese make a good reading.

**Murat Nemet-Nejat:** What I like in poetry readings is to be surprised, particularly by someone whom I'd never heard of.

**Tony Towle:** A good reading often results when any of the following does *not* occur: 1) The poet takes no notice of how many people are on the same bill and reads 15 minutes or more, say, rather than the appropriate 5. 2) A great deal of time is spent in internal or external monologue at the podium regarding what he or she should read next; and/or excessive riffling through books and manuscripts. 3) The introductory and anecdotal explications are not more extensive (and/or interesting) than the poems themselves. 4) The poet is inaudible; or so gratuitously theatrical and overwhelmingly self-possessed that that is the work's only substance. A great deal of the above can be forgiven if the work actually has some *literary merit*, in that you didn't comprehend it completely from the one hearing, but it has piqued your interest to the point where you might like to see the poems sometime just lying silent on the page, and read them by yourself, and hear them with your own voice.

**Ed Smith:** Any reading at St. Mark's is a treat for me.

\* \* \*

**Lee Ann Brown** writes:

The Poetry Project has the good fortune to be housed in the same church as Richard Foreman's innovative Ontological Hysteric Theater. This is appropriate since Foreman is himself a great poet, whose new play *Now That Communism is Dead My Life Feels Empty* is not to be missed, especially by those who love "poetic" theater that questions and disturbs the boundaries of the wor(l)d.

Among the sound barrage of machine gun spray, tape loops of cock crows and Bulgarian women's choirs, the audience experiences the delicate flutter of what's "inside" the very pupil of the sky as it expands and contracts. But whose eye is it? Go see the play—several times if you can. Its dense, polyvalent structure is profoundly satisfying upon initial encounter, and reveals itself upon multiple encounters, much as a poem can. But unlike most poems, Foreman's radical theater also layers elements of sound, light, narratives, bodies in motion, sculptural elements and actors with amazing interpretive skills.

The two main characters Fred (Jay Smith) and Freddie (Tony Torn) subtly enact a constantly shifting co-dependant power dynamic that is political, vaudevillian and Beckettish. Both brilliantly play a start-and-stop allegory of \$350 shoes as privatized fetish object, and Jay Smith reveals the secret of what's *really* inside the core of all those half-black apples. As "Big Fred," Fred sounds like he's smashing glass as he's "walking the dog," and all that implies, while Freddie dances wildly around him. "I saw something flashing by," Torn draws, like someone out of *Easy Rider*. ("Because what has no name vanishes.") His eyes constantly shift as through a



# Questionnaire

What is your favorite biography (of a poet), and why?

Send your answer via email ([poproj@artomatic.com](mailto:poproj@artomatic.com)) or postcard to the Poetry Project (131 E. 10th St. NYC 10003) by April 15, 2001.

hallucinogenic fog as giant puppets and symbolic apparitions crash and float around the action. Torn delivers great, loaded lines: "This is here / right now / an unrecognizable environment . . . I feel *terrible* about all these unconscious people." As he gazes around the stage at bodies strewn around him, we know this "unconsciousness" extends to much more than sleep. When a stage hand thrusts her hand into the trussed-up Freddie's pants pocket, he replies, "That deep-dish pocket action is a little too *intimate* for this post-teenage punkster over here." Both actors play the layers of interaction with the audience well, sometimes speaking from within a vision, then breaking the plexi boundary between stage and audience to directly question us.

The rest of the cast consisting of six actors, a harem-swarm of grrrrl band types plus one guy listed as "stage crew," *do sweep* props on and offstage, but more often provide a human wave of eye-rolling, ass-wiggling, tango-dancing provocation and wordless commentary. And there's the Deus ex Machina of Foreman himself. The self-reflexive, authoritarian voice of the playwright/creator punctuates with, "Red Communism is dead, my friend," "I'm losing control" or "I wonder what I'm going to say next." At those moments it's as if everything stops and we realize that we are *all* sitting on the writer's desk, waiting to see what comes next. Foreman creates a multiplicitous hyper-allegory that alternately links and backtracks scenes, slowly exploding to a multi-staged climax.

This, the 49th play by Richard Foreman, is co-produced with the Vienna Theater Festival where it will travel in May. Don't wait until April to see the NYC staging of the show. The final few weeks will be too crowded! (Call for reservations at (212) 420-1916 or visit [www.ontological.com](http://www.ontological.com) for more information.)

Marcella Durand writes:

On Tuesday, May 15th at 6:30 pm, the Rotunda Gallery as part of its art exhibition, "Cities & Desire," presents a reading of poets published in *Venice (the invisible city)*, an anthology of work inspired by Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities* (Erato Press). Readers will include **Edwin Torres, Anselm Berrigan, Karen Weiser, Joe Elliot, Marcella Durand, Kristin Prevallet, Laird Hunt, Pattie McCarthy, Kevin Varrone**, and others. The Rotunda Gallery is located at 33 Clinton Street in Brooklyn Heights. For more information, call 718-875-4047 or visit [www.brooklynX.org/rotunda](http://www.brooklynX.org/rotunda).

Finally, **Nada Gordon** sent this curious news item she found:

from the *LA Times*: Acid Words Burn Innocent Readers  
Updated 9:33 AM ET February 6, 2001 VANCOUVER, British Columbia (Reuters)—Two innocent readers had to be hospitalized after they were burned by corrosive acid that leaked from a poem's hyperbolic language, a literary official said on Monday.

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police were investigating how a poet was allowed to compose the acid-filled poem, in violation of safety rules, on a Canadian Regional Linebreak flight of fancy on Sunday.

A poem stored with other creative language in the compartment above their heads apparently broke during the flight and the acid escaped after poem was read and readers began to interpret their meanings, officials said.

Two of the 10 readers were splattered by the corrosive substance and had to be hospitalized, including a woman who had third-degree burns to the face, a cultural spokesman and medical officials said.

Canadian Regional, which is a unit of Verse Canada, prohibits dangerous substances such as acid from being written in poems in any language.



# R VIEWS

## Some of These Days

by Philip Whalen

Desert Rose Press (Box 50, San Jose, NM 87565). \$35 (unpaginated)

The master printer Clifford Burke has made a beautiful book of Philip Whalen's fugitive poems, poems that somehow escaped—we are not told how—previous collections. *Some of These Days* is beautiful to hold, to read and once read to look at lying face up on the table. Such craftsmanship and high style would honor most poets. Whalen is perhaps more deserving of this treatment than most because many of his poems are designed on the page by his active hand. A printer of Burke's quality will amplify Whalen's poems so that they are more totally revealed.

By amplify I mean that Whalen's love for one word all cap lines "COMBUSTION", for words and phrases in quotes, for ampersands, parentheses and brackets, for spacious leading, ruled lines, indented lines arranged, it seems, for the eye-music and his signature dating—21 XI 83—Burke brings to the fore. "COMBUSTION" is spread with a little kerning to "COMBUSTION." The type is Frederic Goudy and the effect throughout is pure delight. And, I suppose a bit of instruction: look at what you are reading and enjoy it. The pleasures of sight in poetry are not alone that of the image in the mind's eye, but of words and symbols for themselves artfully arranged on the page. Whalen's pages are certainly examples of what Charles Olson meant by "FIELD COMPOSITION." You feel he plays the typewriter like a piano and gets more out of the space bar than some poets get in pages of poems marching in lock step. The bonus in this book is various drawings, an eye in profile, a sea anemone, and several diamonds, printed in brilliant red.

For fans of Whalen a new book is more than welcome, more than we could hope for. His poems are where Clark Coolidge and James Schuyler meet, where Emperor Nicholas Romanov is followed by "Bebe" Rebozo. Yelps of joy, bursts of anger, a voice that demands:

Say that you love me say  
That you will bring me  
A delicious cup of coffee  
A topaze cup! From Silesia—

Phil

The plum-lacquered woven Japanese basket Phil  
lately back from Kyoto gave us,

Juliet's baby bed on Nymph & Cherry

The year Phil dwelt over on Larch with Don  
Beyond the shimmering silver dollar eucalypti,  
Sometimes strolled two dirt road blocks to visit,  
People mad at him if he came over, if he didn't  
he later recollected.

Toting his laundry downtown, two sad sacks.

Later on camped down on Terrace tender  
dear heart crotchety and alone

In the same town with the vivacious Muse  
Not quite on the outs & not quite on the ins w/ her,  
impatient

amid nasturtiums

One day on acid sternly informed me, Thomas Clark,  
Poetry will never get written this way.

—Tom Clark

Property of the Hapsburg Emperors  
The better crystal is upstairs

What an omnivorous appetite the man has and how resilient are his big, no matter how short, and bouncy poems. They careen and thwack around in your consciousness like so many superballs. Clifford Burke and Martha Little, who hand bound fifty copies of this book which Whalen signed, have done the poet and his readers proud. And in the process presented Alice Norley, to whom the book is dedicated, a wonderful birthday gift. —WILLIAM CORBETT

## RING OF FIRE

by Lisa Jarnot

Zoland Books, 2001. 80 pp.

I am happy to report another milestone in the exquisite corpus of the work of Lisa Jarnot. When I first read the title of Jarnot's new book I knew it must refer to something other than or in addition to the legendary Cash ballad. Lisa has a massive repertoire and history as songwriter and as member of "one of the greatest rock and rock band of all time," VOLE (refig-



ured EVOL, and LOVE), so I immediately went intertextual, yielding the alchemical circles or rings of fire, of earth, of air, of water. Poems, like rituals, are magical spells that can make things happen. "Ring" and "Fire" are also symmetrical, four-letter words that mirror each other soundwise and are joined by the great surrealist, combinational linking word "of." "Of" points to the fantastic, inventive way Jarnot's poems join disparate elements, as in: "I am barbecuing eucalyptus pigs of hills." The two elements that are strongest in the book are fire and water, directly alluded to by two of the book's three sections. Section three of *Ring of Fire*, "Heliopolis" (the city of the sun) is also the title of an earlier chapbook originally published by the Cambridge, England-based REM press. That chapbook serves as almost a seed text of the restructured and expanded *Ring of Fire*.

There are set lists of fires set in "What in Fire, Did I, Firelover, Starter of Fires, Love?" In "Suddenly Last Summer" Jarnot writes, "Sun worshipper, I in the absence of the sun, in the /things I don't remember, the unfriendliness of night, / ... Suddenly, to remember the sun/ ... a worshipper of Apollo's, in the lavender, / beside mergansers at the sea's night shore." To remember the sun at night evokes Harry Crosby's "Black Sun" poems, especially "Madman": "When I look into the Sun I sun-lover sun-worshipper sun-seeker when I look into the sun (sunne sonne soleil) what is it in the Sun I deify-". But here it is overlaid with a cinematic mythos.

In the second section, "Sea Lyrics" (originally a Situations chapbook), Jarnot's "I" sings, elevated and exploded. These are tales of life from another life on another coast "in avocado night."

The first section, "The Book of Providence," begins with the poem "Bridge" which is a musical bridge, and a radically exploded self-portrait. This sensibility and project continues throughout the work as does the sense of always being present in each word of the poem. "Dictionary" also joys in this. *Ring of Fire* also includes "The New Life," which references Dante's *La Vita Nuova* but is a fresh, specific, obsessive catalogue of the heightened dailiness new love can bring to the most perverse and prosaic urban circumstance. "I as an addict am an addict and the street below is below / and my lover has countless hairs on his head and the poise / of living on the big neon avenue where I cut myself and / cooked the dark steak, emerging from the folds of lavender" is, as Bernadette Mayer would say, "Newer than even Dante."

What is a ring of fire? A sexual metaphor? "a burning ring of fire" of erotic longing both for physical union and metaphysical knowledge? A "Wonder Ring"

of Catullus' "Odi et Ami..." (the book's epigraph: "I hate, yet love: you ask how it is so. Who knows? But I'm in torment: that I know"). Jarnot's epigraph reminds me of the faint penciled-in inscription in the back of my great-grandmother's prayer book: "Women either Love or Hate." This speaks to the transformative ring of fire that poetry casts, to the extremes of negative capability that human beings have to face in order to endure this world and to flourish in it. Poetry as a place for transformation.

On songsearch.com I learned that there are 43 entries for "Ring of Fire" as recorded by Johnny Cash. Additional artists and groups who covered it include Eric Burdon and the Animals, Big Bertha (Cozy Powell), The Bobs, The Carter Family, Ray Charles, David Allan Coe, Controlled Bleeding, Dick Dale, Def Leppard, Henry Boy, Sleepy La Beef, Tom Jones, Jerry Lee Lewis, Country Joe McDonald, Mr. Cranky, Olivia Newton John, Lee Perry, Wall of Voodoo, Dwight Yoakum and Frank Zappa among many others. Great that Lisa finally got the poets in on the act. And I was very impressed to learn, on the 1999 disc, "Press On" that this legendary song was actually written by June Carter Cash in response to falling in love with Johnny.

Towards the end of the book there is a series, "The Eightfold Path" ("Right View," "Right Aspiration," "Right Speech," "Right Action," "Right Energy," "Right Mind," "Right Labor," "Right Meditation") that are very original takes on Buddhist terms and concepts. It begins with the acknowledgement the "the human animal that I am / is the human animal that I am." These poems sparely and elegantly address, describe and invoke the human animal in all its sadness and forms of splendor, "the human moth exists / against the human lamp." They trace the search for, and recording of, transitory moments of realization, of love, of freedom from pain that poetry is a trace and source of. Maybe the acknowledgement of humanness having aspects in common with animal nature connects to the ecstatic animal catalogues in the work. They remind me a little of Marianne Moore's animal portrait-poems, but they are hotter. Among the catalogue is aardvark (the animal Malcolm X discovered as he read the dictionary cover to cover in quest of self-education, and envisioning foreign Africa). Here it's "the burning rocks of aardvarks that connect to aardvarks that connect up to the rain"). There are birds, cows, prawns, magpies, shrimp, sheep, squirrel, dogs, deer and many more in her invocational quasi-bestiary.

The book ends in fire but it is the "Specific Incendiaries of Springtime" which evoke to me Christopher Dewdney's "Night Trances in the Spring Cenozoic" where, here too, scientific exactitude and



word erotics coalesce and incandesce into a language chain reaction.—LEE ANN BROWN

## Understanding Objects

by Vincent Katz

Hard Press, 2000. 142 pp.

"to see oneself going by, self going into other selves" Vincent Katz' new book of poems spans twenty years' worth of work, and twenty years' worth of selves "going into other selves" as well. Katz' poetry is unabashedly autobiographical, oriented sensually to New York City, and deeply shaped by the works of poet Frank O'Hara and photographer/filmmaker Rudy Burckhardt, among others. These are surface aspects of Katz' poetry, and while the making of a surface is undoubtedly one of Katz' primary poetic interests, underneath there is a sensibility that is self-questioning, strange, and resolutely "in love" with words.

It can be disarming to witness Katz recite his poetry. I watched him give a thirty minute reading with his hands behind his back and his face scanning the room without once looking at a written word. He has a kind of classical diction that works to elevate the situation of each of his poems out of time, even when he places himself as a guy drinking a beer on a Chelsea rooftop, or standing on Eighth Avenue using his imagination to blend in. Much of the work in the first half of the book fits into the tradition of walking, seeing, and speaking through New York City, with an emphasis on arrangement, and the possibility that anything might be made of use in a poem. Katz has a more deliberate tempo in these poems than one might anticipate, but it is his slowed down, somewhat awkward sense of urbanity that actually characterizes his poems in contrast to their admired, oft-alluded to models, as in "June in Progress":

June is not only a time  
but a place  
lit up towers of fecundity and lineation  
water dripping off the roof  
and in the sky, stars!  
fucking Big Dipper! Points  
to North Star, it's  
in Tribeca...  
Going down,  
I hear wind chimes outside  
roof door diminish, long fade

When Katz delivers the lines, "I don't know what's expected of me nor by whom / I'll continue to make poetry," he creates an effect of determination and semi-confusion that is deceptively open-ended. As

*Understanding Objects* progresses, Katz' poetry starts to move away from the pure surface of literal clarity and towards a deeper level of implied meaning. The culmination of this progress may be the poem "Painted Life," a dense, nine-page accumulation of words written in the studios of four different artists, but there is also a surprising sonic fluidity to some of Katz' smaller, short-lined poems, such as "Siphon":

a greedily rampant  
sub-urge mind template  
orgone stomach-ouch ear  
grain disentangle John Henry  
what he the washed-out  
news gas on treatise labels  
succinct pear gut wine dawdle  
in bars we got along  
restituted firegram exposed  
z x4's at least till Friday  
young Jimson thrives on debates  
I'll bring young Wiggins, as well  
he's a top-notch wit with a  
honey cake bum

"Rain Date," Katz' elegy for childhood friend and fellow poet Elio Schneeman, who died in 1997, contains a description of Schneeman's poetry that anyone familiar with the work may find painfully accurate: "poet published by poets / you lived in a mist / made literal by your/demise." It is at this point in *Understanding Objects*, when writing directly to a lost friend, that Katz' occasional penchant for the elegiac statement becomes full-bodied, and sadly true. It is also one of several places where this fine collection of poems becomes remarkable.—ANSELM BERRIGAN

## That April

by Bill Kushner

United Artists, 2000. 94 pp.

## He Dreams of Waters

by Bill Kushner

Rattapallax Press, 2000. 112 pp. + CD

Full-length collections of Bill Kushner's poetry began appearing in 1980. He begins his third decade of publication with a tour de force: two excellent new books published within months of each other. One of the books includes a CD so you can hear for yourself how Kushner wraps his voice around the words—even if you don't live in New York where you can experience in person the poet's hot but measured breath!

These new books share certain things in common. Steady footfalls of mortality echo throughout, intensifying the passion and *joie de vivre* that are hallmarks of



Kushner's work. Awareness of mortality doesn't haunt Kushner; it reminds him and that makes him sing harder. As always, there is immense fluidity. Even with his first book, one had the sense that Kushner's natural flow of thought was in poem-form 24 hours a day. But now there is also a greater rigor to the overall structure and emotional thrust of the poems in both collections.

That said, each book is distinct. *That April* continues the narrative, chronological journal-entry poetry that Kushner presented in his 1990 collection *Love Uncut*. This type of poetry is a challenge: In the wrong hands, it can seem casual and throwaway. In the hands of an expert it can still appear casual, but ultimately cut deep. *That April* cuts deep.

The book chronicles an aborted three-month love affair in 1987 with a man half the poet's age. Issues of aging are in the foreground; the spectre of AIDS is barely relegated to the midground. Kushner adopts a simple device: most of the poems begin with the month of composition, which is gaily / ruefully exclaimed: "April! & he tries like a windswept fool to / catch my good eye & he tries too hard..." "May! 8:02 a.m. hard to remember a dream / & in it a man is smiling, I count his teeth..." "June! lots sun, little warmth / But where was I going? as usual, nowhere...". This creates an obsessional urgency, a sense of harried repetition that neatly leverages the book's theme.

*He Dreams of Waters* has a different sort of momentum. Here, an omniscient auteur is arranging the energies of the poems to create a composite picture. This book is not chronological, it's phenomenological. It's a carefully constructed canvas, a study in universal consciousness filtered through Kushner's specifics. The poet beautifully articulates his trademark modes: "UFO's" is the latest addition to the Kushner canon of sexcapade poems, but this time the tale has a sci-fi setting; "Gerard" is a lovely example of his lyrics of fleeting connection and loss, which cast him as a conversational, postmodern Cafavy. However, this book also strikes a certain emotional tone that seems new to Kushner's work. It's derived from a moving everyman stance that's particularly striking in the title poem: "...I began to wonder where it is do the dead go, & fell asleep / and I began to dream. Water began to engulf us, water out of nowhere, it put out all our fires & brought the dead back / alive on waves upon more waters... / I began to recognize everyone & no one I went up to strangers, had you held me / once? But they were talking words out so excitedly why / they couldn't listen, & pushed me away... / ... & their / golden words they kept piling up & up & around & soon they were completely covered, shiny & golden, & lost

to me / again. Me, I'm still going backwards thinking still about / it, about the memory of words, & how we swim out into oceans / there to sink like tears."

*That April* and *He Dreams of Waters* serve notice to Kushner's readers: He's subtly turned up the volume, intensified his message and broken new ground that makes him even more welcoming and inclusive than ever before. —PETER BUSHYEAGER

## Anime

by Nada Gordon

Voces Perule (558 11th St., Apt. 1B, Brooklyn, NY 11215), 2000. 43pp.

*Anime* has an underground comics kind of look with a pow-wow aqua cover. Cartoons by Gary Sullivan and reproductions from "Manga" comics found on top of an East Village garbage can, and handmade touches throughout realize the delicacy and personal decorativeness of the chapbook aesthetic. But for all the book's fun tactility, the poem is a breakthrough for the author and a surprise to readers of her work in several ways. Gordon's work (which can be found at the Readme website, the East Village Poetry website, and the Howz website) has tended to longish, coiled sentences marked by an unusual, almost baroque vocabulary. The phrasing here seems very much in control, rhetorical in some instances.

*Anime* is a mysterious alchemical poem made of short couplets invoking numerous weird tangents whilst threading through an urgent message of erotic longing and memory. There is an almost chaotic pressure, a quickened selection of new materials at hand that makes this poem a charged reading experience. (The biographical background of the poem is generously included in the poem's afterward. I loved the self-disclosing tone of that because I'm always nosy about what brought poems into being.) The breathy compaction of the lines propose an intimate shorthand.

But here is a part of the mystery. *Anime* is a "willful hysterical misreading and deliberate hallucination." The form of the poem (and snippets of many of the lines) were borrowed from George Albon's long poem, *Empire Life* (Litoral Books, 1998). For example, Albon's:

What sustains  
me is current

sustainability,  
future without

what I  
wanted in the



past, walking  
fast both times

I saw the  
countryside

for seconds like  
a film thru

freight, trade  
in peace-

time, dry in  
their hot house

becomes in Gordon's poem:

What delights  
me is flowing

excitability.  
Future determines

what I  
needed in the

past, stopping  
to break lines

I saw the  
corny side

as seethru like  
a filmic

weight, bred  
in peace.

Limes pile up  
in the greenhouse.

There's something provocative about taking a poem and completely building another poem on its scaffolding. Of course, it's done all the time, but Gordon acknowledges the move she's made. A playful competitiveness that invites further replay. In some sense it's a huge compliment to the writer, playing the dozens without the dis. And working so closely, reading and responding to another's poem riddles the coupling that is one of the poem's themes.

Both Albon's poem *Empire Life* and Gordon's *Anime* bring to mind writing out of the West coast, the verticality of the poem's descent reminding me of work by Michael Palmer, Kit Robinson and Elizabeth Robinson. *Anime* investigates an objective architecture but pulses at an urgent speed. —KIMBERLY LYONS

## Cool for You

by Eileen Myles

Soft Skull Press, 2000. 196 pp.

One of the first things you notice about *Cool for You's* narrator, after you catch on that the narrator is Myles, and this story is *her* story, is that she doesn't fit in. As a kid, she's already neither here nor there: "It was a tiny world, like a toy, and I lived in it and longed to go away." Years later, sitting in a park San Francisco, she completely disconnects:

...slowly I seeped into this other thing. I was not connected. Something was sitting there but it was not "I." No I, not at all. I saw church, green grass, no I. I was not connected. Didn't know what grass was, didn't know what words were. The thing that had so delicately connected these things was gone and I was suspended in not being...

The reintegration of the narrator's self into itself takes place through her search for something that has also disintegrated—the story behind her grandmother's life and death, which exists now only as recorded by the State of Massachusetts. This quest, which mirrors the reader's search for the narrator's story, propels the novel forward. Scenes from the narrator's life are pasted together non-chronologically around this central theme. However, it's not clear why the scenes have been shuffled around in this particular order. The technique at times breaks the flow of the narrative and causes minor confusion for the reader. The narrator's quest for information about her grandmother is one thread that in each instance seems to have been deliberately placed, acting like the novel's spine, holding everything else together.

*Cool for You* appealed to me on many levels. The fact that it is, as the author describes it, a "non-fiction novel;" i.e., these things really happened, and, indeed, to *Eileen Myles*, provides goods enough for even the most enquiring mind. As a critic, I had a great time matching up the oppositions—inside/outside, male/female, sane/insane, public/private—and watching them cancel each other out, leaving behind enough to give us a story to read. As a poet and a poetry lover, I was moved again and again by her artistry. Here she describes a trip to the store on a summer night in the city:

I mourned the building and the sky and my warm change and my dirty hands, the fact that I needed a bath and a drink. I needed a drink. I needed a drink like mosquitoes needed blood. Sweat needs to get out. A phone has to ring. I had to get to that light. Inside was a man behind a wall of thick plastic. I'd like one of those. Slid it to me in a brown paper bag. Then I walked. I was clutching that bottle



right. I wouldn't drop it. The pads of the crutches jammed into my pits but I was swinging home. I always count. 63, 64, 65...

*Cool for You* is reeming with beautiful, unsettling imagery, complicated sounds, and risky structural arrangements—just like you'd expect a great poet's novel to be.—TRACY BLACKMER

## Tinder

by Lynn Behrendt

Situations (NY, NY), 2000. (unpaginated chapbook)

Not that it takes guts to have love be the central concern of your poems, but these days it is so seldom encountered. So when I pick up Lynn Behrendt's elegant letterpress *Tinder* with its vanilla pages and crimson cover, the fierce love in her poems not only feels risky to me, but singularly ambitious for so slim a book. More ambitious, in fact, than anyone's shortlist of Ashbery heirs.

There's "My First Love"; "love for my son"; "Am I a slave to love?" But sentiment is checked by austerity. Behrendt gives her readers the bare outlines of a story, and fills it up with essences. I must be thinking of sener, censor and censer all at once: there is a religious sensibility here (Catholic, I'm guessing) and the grief of a woman whose loved ones have died. So it gives her major preoccupations, love and search for meaning (or God), a force that goes beyond the literary. For instance, it might seem corny to have a poem titled "A Conversation with the Devil" but the fury and longing behind it are compelling. Fury at indelible loss is cut with a shaking fear that there is a force out there "plotting [her] heart's demise." In "Fiction," a mini *via negativa*, she writes, "My diminutive stature and blond hair seem to be somehow disarming to men and they often believe me to be sweet, even while I am being a shrew, which I often am, due to chronic pain for which there is no known cause or cure."

"Titles on My Bookshelf" may be my favorite poem here, and the least likely to fit into any of the categories mentioned above: it is not a poem about God or love or death, but an endurance that is as solid as books. Then why does it feel so fragile?:

new creatures  
in the roots and branches  
an hour  
to read charlotte's web

Novels and children's books, poetry books and mystical texts, lend their titles to her hovering meditation on home, or being *bound*.

In the short, final testament "I Do Not Believe That Poetry Heals," Behrendt compares poetry to a "recently bombed city." The way she can go from calm to agony in a heartbeat brings to mind David Schubert and the outbursts erupting amid his courtly diction: "I hate / Triumph and victory. The other's loss!" When this bewilderment at life is finally voiced, a wonderful agitation ensues.—ANGE MLINKO

## City Point

by Jim Behrle

Pressed Wafer (9 Columbus Sq., Boston MA 02116), 2000. [unpaginated chapbook]

The experience of seeing Jim Behrle read in Boston was unexpected: there was a constant animated dialogue with the audience, as opposed to the quieter tones in his first chapbook, *City Point*. But in these poems he still seems to want to connect directly with his readers, as if he wished to reach through the poems and grab them (which he actually did several times during his reading). "write a poem on my leg / and I will write / a poem on your leg". While lamenting neighborhood changes, offering tones that both pine and giggle, and sort of glowing through it all, Behrle is prone to show the bedlam beautiful, with the oh-so-bloody after thought: "I have broken into perfect pieces, shining up from the kitchen floor."

The poems have a fragmented eye, between the lines and the occasional punctuation, and comprise their own space, resting comfortably in it, with echoes of Schuyler in their delicate tones, and Whitman in their urban sensibility.

without water  
the long pool of the Christian Science Center  
a concrete rectangle  
taking a nap stretching  
to the Symphony stop.

Behrle's poems are full of shadows, streets, veils: unexpected joinings lead to surprising dislocations: bringing things together, legs, breaking them apart. Behrle's work presents to us within its mysterious passings. Back when I enjoyed the delusion that progress implies improvement, I imagined a future peopled with characters resembling Jim Behrle—citizens of the world with generous sympathies, who betrayed the limits of their locale only through accents formed by purposefully broken English and past loves. Now that we seem to be progressing headlong into the new dark ages, I appreciate even more Behrle's cosmopolitan art.  
—EDMUND BERRIGAN



**Katz, cont.**

sick and tired of conventional Modernism. Early on, I said, "I know one thing, I'm not one of those conventional Modernists, and that might be good, and it might be bad." It's like the way you dress.

*VK: Would you say a young person has a duty to be aware, as much as is possible, of what's going on in all the arts?*

AK: No. I don't feel that. Whatever interests you, you follow. Things interest you, and you follow them. I was with Paul Taylor in Paris, and Bob Rauschenberg was there with some young dancer, and the dancer said, "Paul has sold out and gone Broadway," and I said, "He may very well have, but I hear bells, and when you hear bells, you just follow them." And Bob agreed. That's what it is. You hear bells, and you say, "Hey! Let's go!"

*Vincent Katz is the author of Understanding Objects (Hard Press, 2000), a book of poems (see review on page 23 of this newsletter). He has collaborated with Alex Katz on A Tremor In The Morning (Peter Blum Edition, 1986) and Smile Again (Jablonka Galerie, 2000).*

**Waldman, cont.**

fine letter press printer is also an opportunity to slow down, to appreciate the work and its presentation—letter by letter. When Reed Bye and I worked with choreographer Douglas Dunn and his dancers on "The Secret Of The Waterfall," which was a live show as well as a video (directed by Charles Atlas), we tried to see the parallels that exist or come about spontaneously between gesture and word that aren't literal, that again, create a third possibility. That may also incorporate an almost mystic sense of the "other". Musicians are often solipsistic, set in their ways. You need to get them to hear the words, respect the words. I've been fortunate in being able to work with Steven Taylor, for example, a classically trained musician, a punk rocker, a fiddler, also a poet, and who is willing to make things up on the spot. Or Claud Brown with whom I've collaborated on the John Cage performances, also a fine musician and a Cage aficionado. Or Steve Lacy, master composer/sax musician and Irene Aebi, chanteuse and vocal interpreter extraordinaire. So often there's no time to rehearse and you are about to get up on that stage in front of hundreds of people (in a stadium in Italy or wherever) and you have to trust the other person to be as vulnerable yet as fully prepared and as capable as you feel you are. Sense of humor and the beauty of mishap help. Fundamentally, collaboration is a calling to work with and for others, in the service of something that transcends individual artistic ego and as such has to do with love, survival, generosity and a conversation in which the terms of "language" are multi-dimensional.

*Lisa Birman, native of Australia, is currently the Coordinator of The Summer Writing program at Naropa. Her books include Some Things—Poems and Translations (Dristil Press, 1998), Copycat (in collaboration with Josepha Conrad) (Movie Star Press, 1999), The Geography of Color (in collaboration with Debra Horowitz and Julie Kizershot) (Chroma Press, 1999), and AS IF - fibonacci • s (a movie) (in collaboration with Josepha Conrad) (Movie Star Press, 2000).*

# HAMBONE 15

**Poetry and prose by  
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Geraldine McKenzie,  
Jeff Gburek, Eric  
Baus, Jena Osman,  
Hank Lazer, Andrew  
Mossin, Gustaf Sobin,  
Kamau Brathwaite,  
Paul Naylor, Ronald  
Johnson, Carla  
Harryman, Ed  
Roberson, John  
Taggart, Fanny Howe,  
Paul Hoover, Michael  
Ives, Timothy Shea,  
Ted Pearson, Elizabeth  
Robinson, Will  
Alexander, Drew  
Gardner, George  
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— Laurel Speer.

Paper, \$13. Hardcover, \$21.

### Ha Jin

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### Tony Towle

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Paper, \$17. Hardcover, \$26.

### Hayan Charara The Alchemist's Diary

A strong debut, featuring poems of family and Michigan's Arab-American community. "Hayan Charara is a star — follow him."  
— Naomi Shihab Nye. Open to "both the wonder and terror of this world" — Jim Daniels. "Sense and feeling... The ethics are true and are tough." — Lawrence Joseph.

Paper, \$13. Hardcover, \$21.

### And remember these other recent titles:

**Sherman Alexie**, *One Stick Song*. Paper \$15, hardcover \$25; **Joanna Fuhrman**, *Freud in Brooklyn*. \$13 and \$21; **Merrill Gilfillan**, *Grasshopper Falls*. \$13 and \$21; **Robert Hershon**, *The German Lunatic*. \$13 and \$21; **Sharon Mesmer**, *The Empty Quarter*. \$13 and \$21; **Chuck Wachtel**, *What Happens to Me*. \$13 and \$21.

### Hanging Loose Magazine #78

George Schneeman, David Wagoner, Vicki Hudspeth, Terry Stokes, David Lehman, Michele Somerville, Keith Taylor, Steven Schrader, Charles Wyatt, Virginia Terris, Harley Elliott, Sheryl Noethe, Xue Di, Douglas Goetsch, Frank Murphy, Kathleen McGookey, Robert Gregory, Cornelia Veenendaal, Mikhail Horowitz, Beth Enson, Simon Perchik — and many more. \$7.

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**Joe Brainard: A Retrospective**  
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**The Lake**  
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**Poetry Plastique**  
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—Charles Bernstein

**A Smell of Printing**  
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Price: \$15

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# BOOKS Received

## Books Received

Emily Bernard, ed.

**Remember Me to Harlem: The Letters of Langston Hughes and Carl Van Vechten, 1925-1964**

Knopf, 2001.

Darrin Daniel

**Harry Smith: Fragments of a Northwest Life**  
Elbow Press (Box 4477, Seattle, WA 98104-0477), 2000.

Kenward Elmslie

**Blast from the Past**

Skanky Possum Press (2925 Higgins St., Austin, TX 78722), 2000.

Barbara Guest and Laurie Reid

**Symbiosis**

Kelsey St. Press, 2000.

Lyn Hejinian

**The Language of Inquiry**

University of California, 2001.

Burt Kimmelman

**First Life**

Jensen/Daniels, Publishers (Jersey City, NJ), 2000.

Martha King

**Little Tales of Family and War**

Spuyten Duyvil, 2000.

Joanne Kyger

**Strange Big Moon: The Japan and India Journals 1960-1964**

North Atlantic Books, 2000.

Ann Lauterbach

**If in Time: Selected Poems 1975-2000**

Penguin Poets, 2001.

Ron Padgett

**The Straight Line: Writings on Poetry and Poets**

University of Michigan Press, 2000.

Claudia Rankine

**Plot**

Grove Press, 2001.

Elio Schneeman

**A Found Life**

Telephone Books (109 Dunk Rock Rd., Guilford CT 06437), 2000.

Anne Waldman

**Alchemical Elegy: Selected Songs and Writings (CD)**

Fast Speaking Music, 2001.

Craig Watson

**Free Will**

Roof Books, 2000.

Charles Weigl

**How to Write Love Poems That Don't Suck**

dELIA's, 2000.

Bobbie West

**Open Heart Surgery**

Blue Press (386 Madeline Ct. Palo Alto CA 94306), 2000.

Lissa Wolsak

**Pen Chants**

Roof Books, 2000.

Kevin Young

**To Repel Ghosts**

Zoland Books, 2001.

## Magazines Received

**Big Allis #9**

Edited by Melanie Neilson and Deirdre Kovac

Contributors: Deanna Ferguson, Steve McCaffery, Judith Goldman, others.

**Brown Box #1**

Edited by Jamey Jones and M.A. Armstrong (2005 Escambia Ave., Pensacola, FL 32503)

Contributors: Phil Good, Bernadette Mayer, others.

**Kenning Autumn-Winter 2000/01**

Edited by Patrick F. Durgin

24 Norwood Ave #3

Buffalo, NY 14222-2104

Contributors: Juliana Spahr, others.

**The Pleasure Beast #1**

Edited by Patrick Doud

(redgowan@yahoo.com)

Contributors: Gerrit Lansing, Lee Chapman, Patricia Pruitt, others.

**Sal Mimeo #1**

Edited by Larry Fagin

(437 E. 12th St. #18, NYC 10009)

Contributors: John Godfrey, Jennifer Moxley, Alan Bernheimer, others.

In the next issue of *The Poetry Project Newsletter*...

Daniel Kane interviews Larry Fagin  
Darrin Daniels on Gregory Corso  
Sherry Brennan on C.S. Giscombe  
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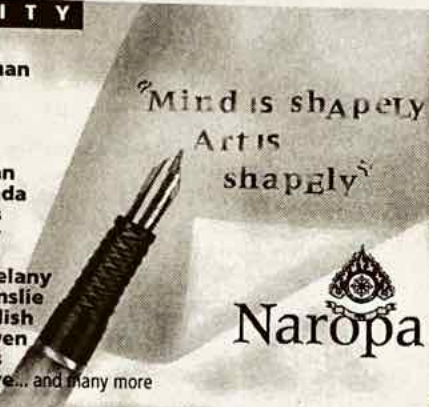
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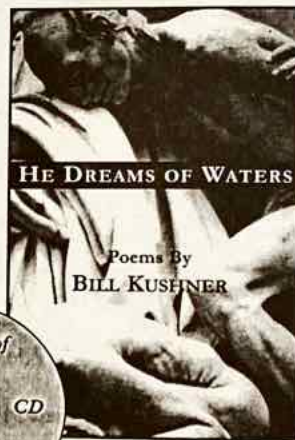


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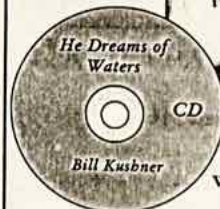
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