

THE POETRY PROJECT NEWSLETTER
No. 56 June 1978
Frances Lefevre, editor
St. Mark's Church, Second Ave
and Tenth St New York 10003

EVENTS AT ST. MARK'S CHURCH: Wednesday Night Readings at 8:30 (contribution): June 7 Lyn Hejinian & Keith Cohen...June 14 Mary Ferrari & Jack Collum...Monday Night Performance Series at 8:15: June 5 Open Reading...June 12 Mary Nell Hawk & The Bowery Bumettes...June 19 Tom Weigel, Mike Sappol, & "Free Rein"...June 26 Reading by Poetry Workshop members...Free Writing Workshops at 7:30 PM: Johnny Stanton (prose) June 6 & 13 (final)...Mary Ferrari (poetry) June 2 & 9 (final)...Special Workshop by Tom Veitch June 1...Community Meeting June 3 at 2 PM...Danspace Concerts at 8:30 PM: "The Plateau Series" by Meredith Monk June 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9 (contribution \$3 or TDF + 50¢). Call 212-254-6621 between 3 & 6 PM for reservations. Note: The above schedule winds up this season at the Poetry Project. Offices will be closed from June 15 to early September. Programs will resume in October. After the July issue of The Newsletter (#57) there will be none till October 1st.

OTHER NYC READINGS: Bragg Times 165 Duane St (at Hudson) 7:30 PM \$1: June 5 Robert Kelly...June 12 Robert L. Smith & Barry Wallenstein...June 19 Jean Baur Walling & Elliot Figman...CAPS Award Winners in Literature Donnell Library 20 W 53 St 12-5 PM June 26 (free). Poets include Ann Lauterbach, Jamie MacInnes, Sharon Mattlin, Paul Violi, others...Ear Inn 326 Spring St--all the way west, a new series Saturdays at 4 PM (contribution): June 3 Laurie Anderson & Kenneth Deifik...June 10 Dick Higgins & Peter Frank...June 17 David Shep & Lucio Pozzi...June 24 Kenward Elmslie & Stephen Paul Miller...Viridian Gallery 25 W 57 St 6:30 PM \$2: June 8 Alice Notley & Neil Hackman...June 15 Vicki Hudspith & Ted Greenwald...June 22 Paul Violi & Yuki Hartman...West End Cafe 2911 Broadway (114th) 2:30 PM June 4 Open Reading (last program till after Labor Day).

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AROUND THE EDGES

The poem by Sam Abrams which follows is one response--a cynical one--to the question raised in the May issue about poetry and politics. Three letters on the subject are printed further on, and several people also have reminded us that Blake said, "When Nations grow Old, The Arts grow Cold."

In this connection it is interesting to read a comment Frank O'Hara once made in a letter to Ned Rorem, quoted in the excerpt from Rorem's Final Diary in Homage to Frank O'Hara (see review in this issue by Jean Boudin):

"...Why deal with a melting snowman when a cocktail party would be a great opportunity for great music? I don't mean to harp on modern subject matter; of course the subject counts for little or nothing sometimes. But it doesn't hurt a great gift to have a significant subject either...I really believe that an artist cannot be in his best work more mild than the time. It harms the work's conviction...."

Rorem also quotes Mary McCarthy as pointing out that "artists possess a higher intuition and are good at smelling rats," and he adds, "Frank O'Hara smelled rats. And from the common rats about the house he made his poetry, as Auden had a generation earlier."

HOLOCAUST

"What do men and women need?
Incitements to illimitable greed."

the rules used to be there
never were any
just illusions to trap
the unwary

a buzzing blooming
confusion
and greed
winning and losing

are real
and besides that
reality there is
no other

poet tell them what
they want to hear
no one's getting fat
on truth

--Sam Abrams

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

The "under 30" issue of the Poetry Project's literary magazine, THE WORLD #31, with Steven Hall as guest editor, will be ready and available in local bookstores towards the end of June...MAG CITY #4, edited and published by Michael Scholnick, Gregory Masters and Gary Lenhart, 437 E. 12 St., NYC 10009, is just out, with works by the editors and Simon Schuchat, Steve Carey, Bonnie Bremser, Lewis Warsh & Bernadette Mayer, Tom Savage, James Sherry, Ted Berrigan, Harris Schiff, and Klimeck, \$1...Poets & Writers Information Center now has a WATS line to serve you if you need writers' addresses or general information about the literary world. If you live outside N.Y. State call toll-free 800-223 -0384/0385 if busy. If you live in the state call collect 212-757-1766...Poets' new babies: to Charles and Pamela Beach Plymell, a son, Willie Joe; to Bob Rosenthal and Rochelle Kraut, a son, Aliah. Congratulations to all...Large, airy 5-room apartment (with shower) in the neighborhood of St. Mark's Church is available for sublet July through September. Call the Rosenthals, 212-477-2487...After a hiatus of 48 years Charles Henri Ford is planning a 10th issue of BLUES, the magazine he founded and published in 1929 and 1930. Some of the contributors to the original 9 issues will appear in this one: Kay Boyle, Paul Bowles, Kenneth Rexroth, Edouard Roditi, and there will be a little anthology of works from those days. Manuscripts from young (or any other) poets are invited, but they will not be returned. Payment on publication, deadline October 1, publisher to be announced. Address: Charles Henri Ford, GPO Box 829, Kathmandu, Nepal...Full Court Press will issue 3 new books on Monday, June 5th: I'll Be Seeing You, poems by Larry Fagin; Selected Plays by Frank O'Hara; and The Luis Armed Story, a novel by Tom Veitch. Newsletter readers are invited to a publication day party on that date at the Gotham Book Mart Gallery, 41 West 47, NYC, from 5 to 7 PM. Full Court has also published I Remember by Joe Brainard, Collected Poems by Edwin Denby, and First Blues by Allen Ginsberg and recently added the Rebound Series to their list--books which other publishers have dropped from their own lists but have not remaindered. Titles so far are the 5 Frank O'Hara Award for Poetry winners: Spring in This World of Poor Mutts by Joe Ceravolo, Highway to the Sky by Michael Brownstein, North by Tony Towle, Motor Disturbance by Kenward Elmslie, and Domes by John Koethe, plus Where I Hang My Hat by Dick Gallup. All Full Court Press books are priced at \$3.50 paperback, \$9.95 cloth, and may be ordered with pre-payment and received postpaid from Full Court Press, 15 Laight St., NYC 10013. The 3 new titles may be ordered now in advance of publication... Although the offices of the Poetry Project will close for the summer, brief reviews, comments and poems may still be sent for consideration here, with SASE if return is desired. Editor reserves the right to do minimal editing for space and clarity. Donations towards the cost of production and postage are always gratefully received.

"PLEASANT PRESSURES"

Homage to Frank O'Hara edited by Bill Berkson & Joe LeSueur. 1978. Big Sky 11/12, Box 389, Bolinas, California 94924. \$4.00.

My father always said, Thanks, God, I am very well liked! Frank O'Hara could have said, Thanks to the Arts I am very well loved. Homage to Frank O'Hara is a tribute from many lovers of this remarkable person. And I am in love with the book.

First, it is a visual pleasure: cover, size, layout, print, reproductions, and selections. It is a pleasure just to turn the pages and a pressure to linger over each one. This word-play--pleasure/pressure--is O'Hara's own. I had a workshop with him, a fringe benefit as I linger over the book and read its riches gathered from those who loved him. But the fringes are long.

Like many other New Schoolers I learned in Kenneth Koch's courses year after year about two great contemporary poets, John Ashbery and Frank O'Hara. So with a push from my friend Ruth Krauss, whose "Notes on Frank's Workshop at the New School" appears in the book, I made my way into FO'H's overcrowded workshop in a year when Kenneth was taking time out.

Around the margins of one of my poems he wrote, "You may be amused that I read your 'present pleasures' as 'pleasant pressures.'" I wasn't amused at the time, I was merely anxious. Ignoring the marvels of the "mistake"--a "New York School" preachment--I pursued his total criticism and went on crossing out and rewriting.

Friends kept asking me, So how's the new poeteacher in your life, whatsisname? Well, I would say, he's funny and he knows a lot. But I feel I don't know him... I bought his Second Avenue when it came out. I never read it--I was much too busy rereading all my things with Kenneth's scrawls on my early heart's blood, words we were forbidden to use in a poem unless we wanted to.

I would tell askers, Frank's handwriting is much clearer, so I don't go into a sweat reading his comments, and his voice is calmer. Anyway, I might add, nervously casual, Frank's a homosexual, so he's more interested in the boys... Some of them in that class are kooks. They read poems a mile long, he listens, he's very gentle and encouraging with them and with me too. Right after class they crowd around him in a circle, so I feel kind of left out.

There I was, like Ms. Average, blocked in the myths and misconceptions of my days. But gradually I do learn. And this book adds to the brightness that gives vision while the mysteries continue. I envy everyone in the book because they knew him better than I did. I'm lucky because I did know him, with these pictures and writings informing my recollections.

"Frank O'Hara in others--that is what this book is about," editors Bill Berkson and Joe LeSueur tell us. A series of essays, poems, drawings, photographs, and reproductions which spell the most important life-giving word of them all, love.

In summary I could offer a part of one of Frank's poems quoted by Bill:

I am a Hittite in love with a horse. I don't know what blood's
in me I feel like an African prince I am a girl walking downstairs
in a red-pleated dress with heels I am a champion taking a fall...

or the lead of Bill's piece: "Poet, art critic, museum curator, conversationalist, party-goer... He died on July 25th, 1966, almost a month after his 40th birthday... run down by a car on a beach," or, from Joe LeSueur's moving bit of biography: "On good days so much sunlight flooded the place... Then there was the cockroach problem. But Frank said, 'The cockroach and the gingko tree are the oldest things on earth,' as though that made everything all right..." Actually, no summary is possible.

In a recent phone conversation with a poet friend I asked, What are you doing this minute? Lying in bed reading The Unknown Craftsman, she replied. It should be Craftsperson, I said. Not necessary, she told me, the writer has achieved Buddhahood. So what's with Buddhahood? I asked, snobbishly ignorant. He says it's realization of non-dual entirety. I'm going to use that line, I told her, because it describes Frank O'Hara. In fact, I added, it describes the whole book.

--Jean Boudin

BOOKS RECEIVED (poetry unless otherwise noted): 2 from Black Sparrow Press, P.O. Box 3993, Santa Barbara CA 93105: The Break-Up of Our Camp by Paul Goodman, Vol. I of collected short stories. Cloth \$14, paper \$5; The Convections by Robert Kelly. Cloth \$15, paper \$4.50...6 from New Directions, 333 Sixth Ave, NYC 10014: The Dark Room by Enrique Lihn. Cloth \$8.95, paper \$2.45. Bilingual edition of selected works by the Chilean poet; Garh City by Robert Nichols, \$3.95; A Seneca Journal by Jerome Rotherberg (poetry and prose) \$3.95; In Dreams Begin Responsibilities by Delmore Schwartz (short stories). Cloth \$10.95, paper \$3.95; Myths & Texts by Gary Snyder. A re-issue of the 2nd collection of Snyder's poems, published in 1960 by Totem Press/Corinth Books, in a revised format. Cloth \$6.50, paper \$1.95...Film Noir by Bruce Andrews. Language constructions. Burning Deck, 71 Elmgrove Ave, Providence, RI 02926...Entrance to the City by Rachelle Bijou. Buffalo Press, 15 Laight St., NYC 10013, \$3...There for the Taking by Ilka Scobie. Four Zoas Press, Boston, Massachusetts, \$3.

MAGAZINES: Ear Magazine, a new music/literary journal edited by Beth Anderson, Michael Cooper, Richard Spiegel. Submissions with SASE welcome. Subscriptions: \$6 for artists/students/unemployed, \$10 regular. New Wilderness Foundation, #2B, 26 Second Ave, NYC 10003...A Hundred Posters #27 (long poem by Lewis Warsh) & #28 (poems by Susan Howe, Michael O'Brien, James Sherry, Steve Benson), P.O. Box 415, Kenmore Sta., Boston MA 02215. Contribution...Koffi 2, Consumptive Poets League, 27 First Ave, NYC 10003, \$1. Poems, collaborations, graphics, by familiar names like Reverdy, Kadison, Kushner, Dubris, and others, plus a nude center spread of Lewis Warsh...Open Places #25, Box 2085, Stephens College, Columbia MI 65201. Basmilr Brigham, Constance Urdang, Charles Vandersee, James Camp, others. Photographs. \$2...The Oxford Literary Review Vol 2, No 2. Poems by 5 poets living and working in NYC: Kenward Elmslie, Brad Gooch, David Shapiro, Rachel Trubowitz, Bill Zavatsky, and articles on Lowry, Bloom, Barthelme, Steve Reich, others. 30 pence/\$1 from Parchment Press, 60 Hunt St, Oxford England...Precisely: Two edited & published by Richard Kostelanetz, P.O. Box 73, Canal St. Sta. NYC 10013, \$2 per issue. This one contains critiques of the prevailing grants policies of established literary institutions, especially with regard to experimental writing...Urthkin 1. Prose and verse, edited by Larry Ziman. New Works by 62 writers, among them Franz Douskey, Opal L. Nations, Dr. Marguerite Bouvard, Lillian Morrison. PO Box 67485, Los Angeles, CA 90067. \$4, + 50¢ handling. Submissions with SASE invited, any subject, any style.

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AGAIN, for Annabel

The going
back, or
moving on-

not the
nagging sense
of how
it will be
later on

or what
it was,

but now
or never

endless
as in went,

circular

not quite
relief

not what
I get

or can
satisfy,

or what
I call ease

not myself
only--

but something
else, finally

a sense of trust.

--Gerard Malanga

"ORDINARY WOMEN"

Ordinary Women: An Anthology of Poetry by New York City Women edited by Sara Miles, Patricia Jones, Sandra Maria Esteves and Fay Chiang. New York: Ordinary Women Books, 1978. \$3.95.

4 women poets, White, Black, Latin, and Asian, have made an anthology. Each editor assembled a collection of poems from her own ethnic group and then passed these along to the other 3 for approval or not, and Ordinary Women is the result.

It's a nice red book with the title printed in English, Spanish, and Chinese on the cover. All 16 of the enclosed poets appear in a photograph, seated on a stoop probably located somewhere in lower Manhattan. Adrienne Rich introduces, tells us these women are young, vital unknowns; no token stars here of the male scene or super-stars of the feminist scene. (Though Adrienne has been both.) Then "Sandy," "Patricia," "Fay," and "Sara" tell us how it came about, what their expectations were, they say it was a lot of work.

Each poet makes a statement which introduces her own set of poems. I loved these; often a poet who left me flat wrote a pretty dazzling or simply funny or just well-written intro. I guess the mini-interview form brings out the star in everyone. Some of the better poets were dull and factual. Smartly they decided not to outshine their own work.

On the whole, Ordinary Women is a highly personal anthology. I mean "personal" as in "personal expression." The editors proceeded from a sense of whom they wanted to hear from and then went and listened to what they had to say. The gathering of these poems seems to have sprung from a sociological impulse, not an aesthetic one. The poem as a vehicle for social change, the poem as the bark of freedom, this poem will redeem my muzzled sisters. Well no, it won't. A poem changes the poet, and whatever else is lucky ripples. Great poets do change the world, but that's because new perceptions can't help but make waves.

That's why all this "ordinariness" bugs me. It is enough to be a woman, it's definitely enough to be an ordinary woman. My mother is one of them, and I don't really consider myself a rare specimen. But being an ordinary poet isn't enough. Perhaps it's therapeutic or it may be of sociological interest, but it's just not important to people who care about poetry.

Women's anthologies will keep coming and they should, there just isn't much history for us ordinary women writing poems so we've got to consider what's going on now as history, "the tradition." But the editors of women's anthologies should consider their sex as a fact and their poems an act, otherwise the result winds up condescending to themselves: "It's not that they do it so well, it's a wonder that they do it at all."*

Finally I recommend you spend \$3.95, read this book. Charlotte Carter, Lois Griffith, Teru Kanazawa, Rota Silverstrini, Janet Sternburg, and Molly Vaux make big waves.

--Eileen Myles

* Boswell or someone about a group of dogs who walked on their hind legs.

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LOUIS ZUKOVSKY

Louis Zukovsky, admired by Eliot, Pound, and Williams, died May 12 aged 74. In 1931 he, Williams, and other poets--Lorine Niedecker, George Oppen, Charles Reznikoff began calling themselves "The Objectivists," taking poems as objects to be dealt with in terms of structure rather than meaning. Zukovsky's A-24, a long poem he worked on for over 40 years, will be published next fall. In scope it compares with Pound's Cantos and Williams's Paterson. He and his wife, Celia, collaborated on a translation of Catullus, actually a punning transliteration, closer to the sound than the sense of the Latin originals and of interest to language-oriented poets. Of her husband Celia Zukovsky has said, "He felt his work was deserving of wider recognition, but it was not in his nature to complain or express envy of others."

HERO SANDWICH

Witnessing: The Seventies by Sidney Bernard. Horizon Press, \$12.95.

Sidney Bernard's on the move. So when he refers to himself as "Roving" in these pieces of personal journalism the nickname fits. The locales stretch from London to California, but the reader never loses sight of the fact that Bernard belongs in New York City, where he is caught (in the best of these essays) making the rounds, ever alive to his experiences. There's even a graphic account of his being mugged on his own street (75th), equalled only by Ginsberg's poem "Mugging."

Interestingly, Ginsberg weaves in and out of these pages. There are "felt" descriptions of listening to him (and Corso and McClure) read at St. Mark's. The Church itself assumes a cultural identity second only to the "hero sandwich of culture" that is the larger city.

Bernard celebrates life in New York when other writers seem to have given up on it. One particularly poignant section is an "Open Letter to an Arizona Congressman." In it Bernard asks how many places allow for "constant play of imagination, challenge, (and) expression of individuality," and he describes a ship sailing out from the South Seaport Museum, asking the congressman to "fix on it as if in a frame, for permanent hanging in the gallery of the inner eye."

The lucky reader will be able to construct his own unforgettable gallery from these pages, for no other single work of the seventies captures as well the highs and lows of the time.

--Arthur Winfield Knight

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SAMOAN BEAUTY

the lore of the coast
reed boats
boots on a hunter
mud-slopped and pocked
vibrating double play
the pajamas of a kind
fluted crimson cotton
detectable flaws beckon

the best quality glass
warm kansas gold
sunblazes eyes
imagine east snowed in
the lily in this iris
yellow at the center
well spoken of

Annabel Levitt

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NOTE: The following letters are in response to the question raised in our May issue: Should the Poetry Project (and by implication poetry) be more political?

To the Editor:

If I live to be thirty-two, I'll never understand why the term "political poetry" drives so many white poets to a frenzied hallucination of censorship. It does seem that poets who holler the loudest against "political poetry" are coincidentally the loudest appreciators of what I see as racist, sexist, wishy-washy, or just plain silly poetry.

By political I do not mean that all poems should submit to a strict M-L-M line. I'm not suggesting repression, I'm suggesting relief from repression by a poet's own choice. Does not poetry imply new perspectives on vision and emotion not supplied and dictated by presiding cultural "norms"? What do I mean by sexist poetry? Guess. No, but seriously, folks, when a person views a person of another sex as a member of the OPPOSITE sex and poetifies that person as if he/she were a member of an entirely different species or an object like a Grecian urn or a spittoon, when a poet gives pen-service to the culturally imposed dichotomy between human genders, I call that poet sexist, sometimes to his/her face. What do I mean by racist poetry practices? When one night a year is set aside in a reading series for some Puerto Ricans to read "Puerto Rican poetry" I get the feeling that "Puerto Rican poetry" is seen as "special interest poetry," as if the rest of the series

featured "normal" or "real" poetry. Ditto for "Black poetry," "Feminist poetry," "Indian poetry," "Jewish poetry," "Political poetry," and "British New Guinean poetry." Is "regular" art only white American art and all other art something else? Am I to believe that the horror going on does not complexly interlock all people? It's "normal" white art that is most concerned with a hierarchical placement of art and artists. One need only notice how the art institutions of New York try to dictate their idea of art to the rest of the world as ART and other art as "Third World art" or "Women's art," etc.

Of course literature must justify itself if it is to survive. It must justify itself--justify us, really, not only to other present humans but also to future humans. Yes. We all feel a division, isolation, and despair. But is this division Divinely ordained according to gender and ethnic differences, or might there not be comprehensible forces behind it? Would it not be in the interest of these "forces" to define non-white, non-male art as "Something-else art"? Why is it that "Something-else art" is conscious of the need for/the possibilities of/(and often) the dynamics of change, while at best "normal" art suggests our culture has a few flaws and calls this political insight? Will we be seen by a future reader as "Poets of Capital," concerned only with articulating our sexual and cultural horniness and unable to see past our individual wazoos? I would like a poetry that breaks through the culturally instructed concepts of "THE nature of MANKIND" to conceive of more pleasurable lives for all humans. There are no eternal human themes. Ask some Neanderthals. We make our themes. We make poetry. We We. Weeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee.

Barbara Barg
New York City

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Dear Poetry Project:

...Poetry, to me, is universal and exceeds all boundaries, and by that definition is political by being!

Celia Cerrato
East Keansburg, N.J.

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Dear Frances LeFevre:

The reason why poets & poetry projects aren't more "political" is that poets in order to practice humanism, love, communication, and a number of other job prerequisites find it hard to direct their "energies & contents of their works towards the solution of social problems before everything else." Poetry demands unemployment (remember?) to get away from the cesspool of caustic interpersonal relationships and brutally repressed collective political movements. Exceptions (Neruda) are too monumental for emulation. Many (Ginsberg, Ferlinghetti) go into such "real" matters and out again. Some (Bly, Waldman) struggle with "real" matters always. Others stay away almost all the time. I was around for Angry Arts Week in NYC in 1967 as well as such historical tribes as the 9th Street Neighbors For Peace, Fifth Avenue Viet Nam Peace Parade Committee, and successor organizations. Poets contributed their poems and their bodies with escalating desperation as the Johnson/Nixon governments continued the slaughter in Asia. But many people, poets among them, felt that political agitation was not their life's work, in fact resented having spent years & years, and fears & fears, and tears & tears on Viet Nam. We were denied (typically) a peace of reconciliation with the Vietnamese, Cambodians, and Laotians. An ignorance of their literature as a whole (not just their poetry) remains total in our country. An ignorance of our literature remains total in their country. For older people, older poets, I imagine the déjà-vu with Russia, Germany, China, Korea is present. "Feeling pleasure, knowing oneself better" (Vargas Llosa) are exaltations only in the present "me" era. (Though they are necessary in all eras!) The real question is which poets are leading us out of the "me" era and into the world of the "us" era once more.

Larry Bensky
San Francisco

AN UNHEALTHY DIET

I am eating with my knife.
With my fork and spoon
I am shoving my knife
into my mouth like lettuce.

I am eating my fork
as if it were celery.
My spoon is a carrot.

I am eating my stoneware,
dry as Brewer's Yeast.
My tongue is spread
with crushed rock from England.

I am drinking this cup.
Over and over
I am living the life
I was living.

--Paul Bengtson

The Poetry Project
St. Mark's Church
10th St. & 2nd Ave.
New York, N.Y. 10003

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